

Baltimore's

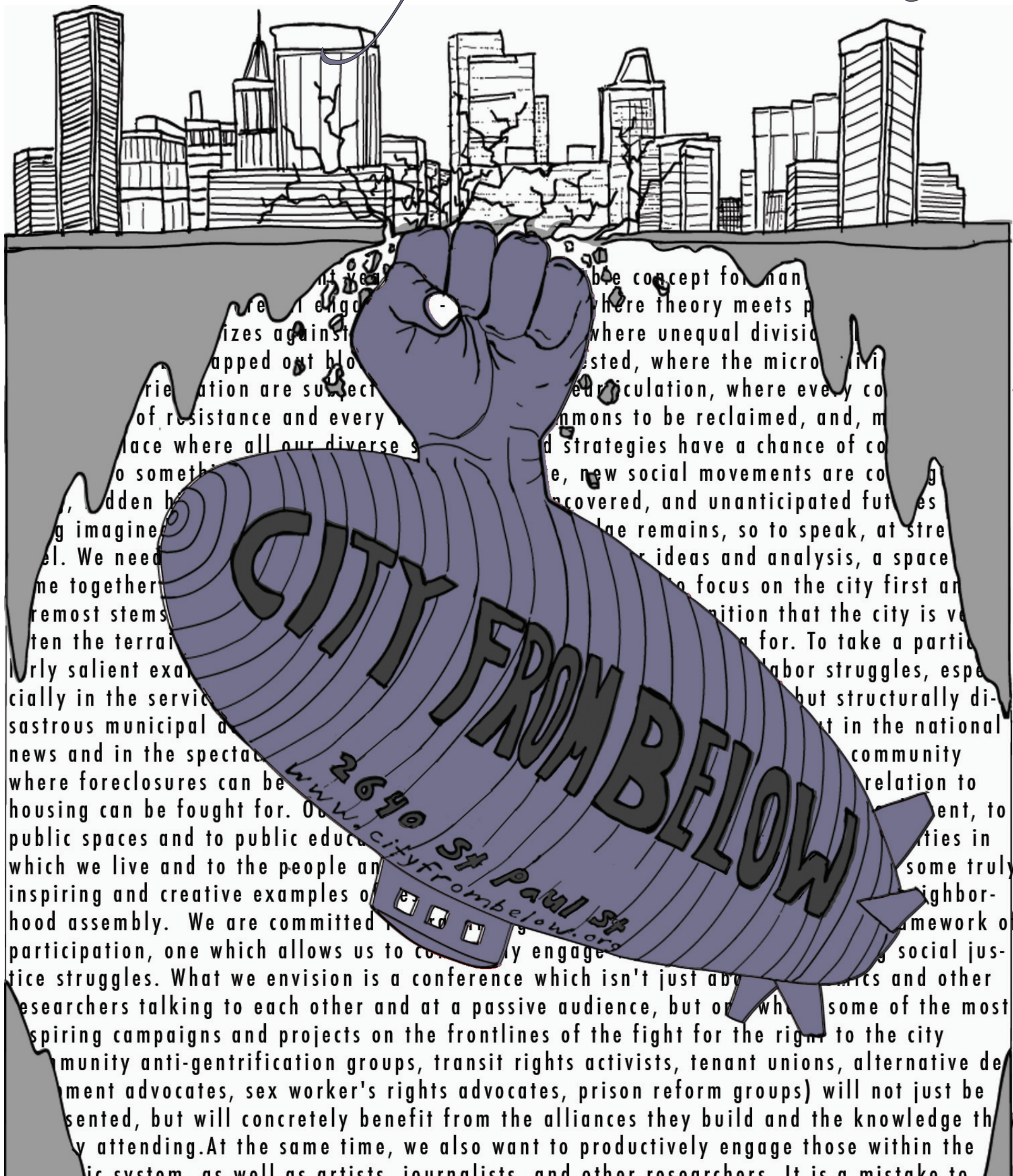
# INDYPENDENT READER

FREE

toward building a new society on the vacant lots of the old ...

Spring/Summer 2009 Issue 12

## The City From Below





## Indypendent Reader

*toward building a new society on the vacant lots of the old ...*

**www.indyreader.org**

E-mail: indypendentreader@gmail.com

The **Indypendent Reader** is a quarterly newspaper that aims to serve marginalized communities in Baltimore through research, communication, and organizing. The project began as a collaboration between the Baltimore Independent Media Center and CampBaltimore Project and now includes many others. We encourage people to "become the media" by providing democratic access to available technologies and information. We seek to bring to light Baltimore's rich tradition of social and political activism. The primary goal of the project is not merely to produce a newspaper, but to start a collaborative project in which people dedicated to social justice in Baltimore can speak for themselves and continue to organize forums, workshops, and other events. These events disseminate ideas, build solidarity, and help promote and increase the reach of the paper itself.

The Indypendent Reader Editorial Group is autonomous.

The **Indypendent Reader** is a project supported by Fusion Partnerships Inc. and is funded by benefits, donations, subscriptions, and advertisements from organizations and individuals with compatible missions.

### Address

Indypendent Reader  
2509 St. Paul St.  
Baltimore, MD 21218

### Staff

Charles D'Adamo, Umar Farooq, Seth Greenbaum, Eric Imhof, Teddy Johnson, Isaac Kaminsky, Michael Kaplan, Michael Lane, Nicholas Petr, Shaun Preston, Lauren Schneiderman, Corey Reidy, Erich Steiger, Ron Kipling Williams

### The City From Below Crew

Kate Khatib, John Duda, Nick Wisniewski, Scott Bersofsky, Emily Foreman, Mike McGuire, Nick Petr, Clayton Conn, Sine Jensen, Umar Farooq, Dane Nester

### Cover art by Nick Wisniewski

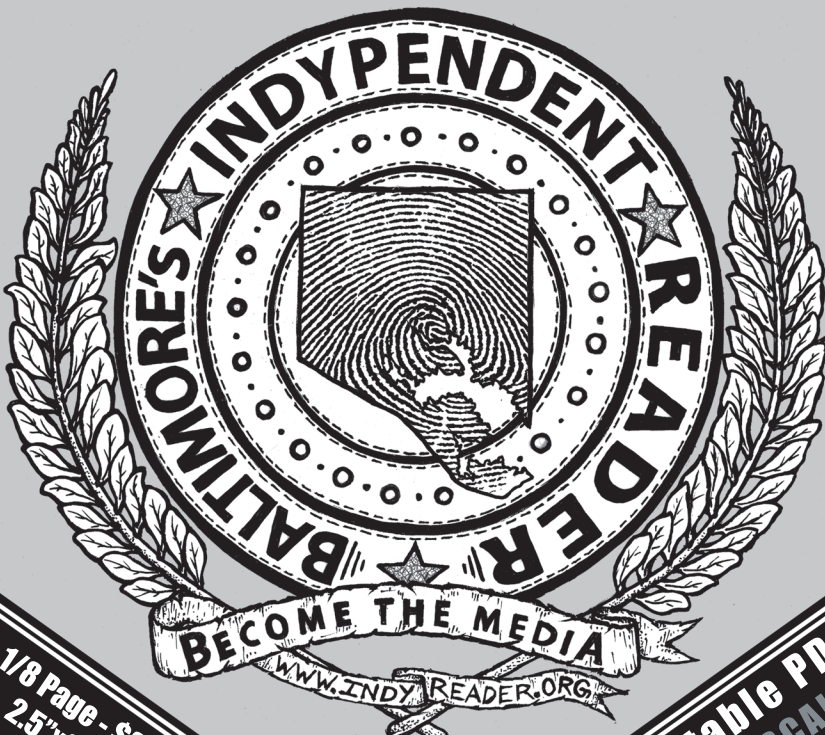
Interior Layout by Kate Khatib

Extra-special thanks to The Justseeds  
Radical Artists Cooperative

# Contents

- The City From Below: An Introduction John Duda page 3  
What Is the City From Below? Mumia Abu-Jamal page 4  
The Right to Tenancy in Baltimore David Kandel page 5  
The Metropolitan Factory Stevphen Shukaitis & Valeria Graziano page 6  
Defenders of the Land, Private Property Abolitionists Shiri Pasternak page 7  
Organizing Models for Social Justice Struggles in the City  
Betty Robinson, Steve Meachem, Max Rameau, Veronica Dorsey, Greg Rosenthal, Jean Rice, & Rob Robertson page 8-9  
Common Purpose, Uncommon Approach Tom Kertes page 10  
Fighting Foreclosure in South Africa: An Open Letter to US Activists  
The Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign page 11  
Community Land Trust Q&A James Tracy and Jim Kelly page 12  
The Perils of Public Space and Democracy in Athens  
Nicholas Anastasopoulos and Eleni Tzirtzilaki page 13  
Crisis and Resistance in the Neoliberal City  
David Harvey, Max Rameau, Shiri Pasternak, and Esther Wang page 14-17  
Trans-Caucus Ilana Goldszer page 18  
Whose City? Kid(z) City Sine Jensen, Harriet Moon, China Martens page 19  
Revitalizing Tired Terms Katie Mazer page 20  
"To Show the Fire and the Tenderness" Team Colors Collective page 21-22  
A Region From Below Midwest Radical Cultural Corridor page 23

## ADVERTISE WITH THE INDYPENDENT READER



**Ad Rates:**

1/8 Page - \$35 2.5"x3.5"	1/4 Page - \$70 5"x7"
1/2 Page - \$140 10"x7"	Full Page - \$400 10"x14"

**Must be a printable PDF,  
Full size, in GRAY SCALE**

**CONTACT: corey@redemmas.org**

**Your Contributions Make  
The Indypendent Reader Possible!**



# The City From Below: An Introduction

This special national issue of the Independent Reader comes out of a conference held in Baltimore this March called the City From Below, which was co-organized by the Indyreader, Participation Park (a political project centered around a community garden on a reclaimed vacant lot in East Baltimore), and Red Emma's Bookstore Coffeehouse, a worker-owned and democratically managed collective project in Baltimore's Mt. Vernon neighborhood. The conference came out of our recognition that all of our projects were in very concrete ways focusing their energies on what might be called a politics of urban infrastructure – working towards a media platform for Baltimore's social movements, creating a public space and sustainable urban agricultural alternative, building a business oriented not towards profit but towards social justice, and the distribution of radical information – and in a way such that all of our individual projects reinforce each other through the larger horizontal networks of social movements we all exist within.

For us and our projects, this kind of mutually reinforcing dynamic is one of the most exciting things about this kind of city-centric activism and organizing – it's not only that we're working to make the cities we live in a better place, but in some sense, it's the city itself that's working towards this goal. Taken to its limit, it's a vision of urban democracy where the city's inhabitants themselves directly control the way the city works and how it grows – not in the sense that they get to elect a mayor or a councilperson once every few years, but that they actively participate in a thriving fabric of locally controlled projects and initiatives which build and manage the urban environment.

And it's this that led us to put together conference we wound up calling "The City From Below." From the start, we worked under the assumption that "another conference was possible." We wanted to organize something that wouldn't solely consist of experts detached from – and above – social movements talking to a passive audience, but that we could really drive the conference "from below" – with social movements setting the agenda and the tone of the conversations to be had. We consulted with social justice organizations here in Baltimore as a part of the conference organizing process, in particular building a strong partnership with the United Workers as they ramped up the organizing for their own major event, the B'More Fair and Human Rights Zone March on the Inner Harbor. We prioritized inviting and funding the travel for groups that were working at the grassroots level in radical ways to address urban injustice, getting folks like Miami's Take Back the Land, NYC's Picture the Homeless, and Boston's City Life/Vida Urbana to Baltimore for the conference. And we did this all without any financial support from universities or big grant-makers, relying instead on the power and energy within our own social movement networks to pull it off. While there are many things we could have done better, overall we felt we did a good job of living up to the Zapatista slogan from which we drew part of the conference title – "from below and to the left" – a description of a politics which starts from the bottom-up, in which

the process of figuring out where we're going and how we're getting there is a dialogue, an experiment and a conversation in which we listen to each other and decide on our goals, our strategy, and our tactics together.

The response we received to our calls for participation (more proposals than we could accommodate in a packed three-day program) confirmed our initial assumption that there was something really productive about using "the city" as a way to think and act on a multiplicity of political concerns in a shared framework. As capitalism tries to give itself a green makeover, thinking about urban sustainability reveals the

post-Apartheid South Africa's enthusiastic embrace of neoliberal development policies, and at the same time, focused enough that a real conversation, productive for all parties involved, might just take place.

Perhaps nowhere was this ability of "the city" to draw together multiple strands of struggle and resistance into concrete problems and potential new avenues of collective action for social justice more apparent than in the multiple presentations which dealt with the impact of the current economic crisis on the city. While, at the national level,

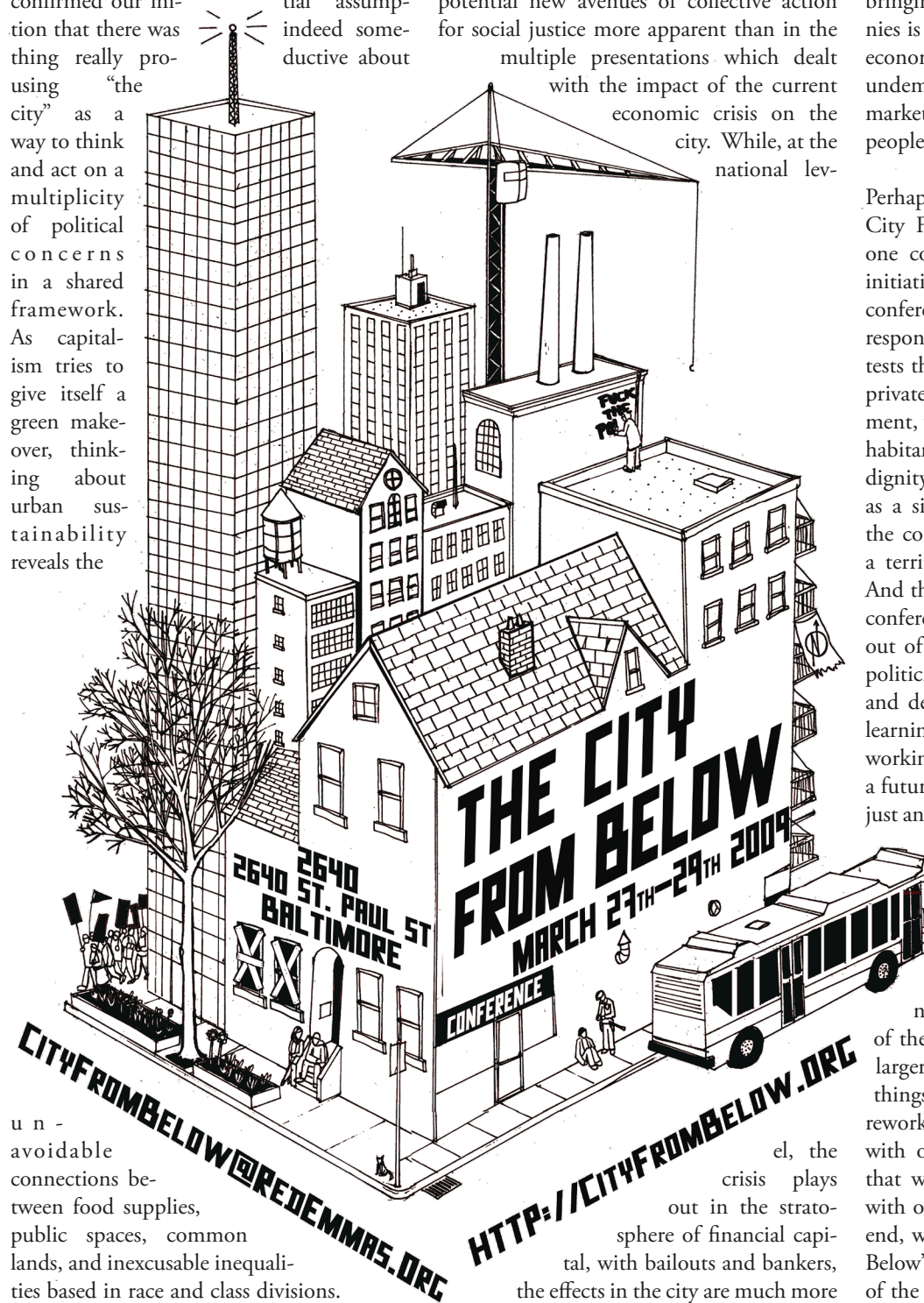
perhaps no where more evident than in the city, where the prevailing model of development "from above" and for the benefit of the already privileged has used imaginary property values to replace neighborhoods with condominiums, to subsidize private projects like hotels and casinos instead of public projects like schools and hospitals. The bursting of the housing bubble and the domino effect bringing down banks and insurance companies is just a symptom of the real crisis – an economy of privatization and dispossession, undemocratic to the core, which puts the markets and profit first and the real needs of people a distant second.

Perhaps the most inspiring thing about "The City From Below" was the way in which one could see, in the various overlapping initiatives and struggles represented at the conference, the glimmers of an appropriate response. This response is one which contests the dominance of private property and private interests in directing urban development, which asserts the right of the city's inhabitants to housing, food, and above all to dignity, and which reimagines urban space as a site of collective experimentation and the construction of alternatives rather than a territory to be controlled and managed. And this response, the outlines of which the conference helped us see, is to be constructed out of what makes the city beautiful – not politicians and bureaucrats or speculators and developers, but people living together, learning from each other, sharing spaces, working and fighting side by side, building a future together. It is a vision not only of a just and equitable city, but of the reinvention and reinvigoration of urban democracy it would take to make such a city real.

We wanted to make sure that the discussions and ideas that resonated with us so strongly the weekend of the conference continued to resonate in larger and larger circles; these are important things that need to be said, and heard, and reworked and reimagined, cross-pollinating with other ideas, with other organizations that weren't able to make it to Baltimore, with other perspectives on the city. To that end, we tried to document "The City From Below" as best we could – and in fact much of the weekend's sessions can be viewed online at [cityfrombelow.org](http://cityfrombelow.org). But over a hundred hours of video footage is not a way to bring someone into a conversation, and so we arrive at the object in your hands now – which combines material from the conference itself with further reflections by some of the participants and beyond, and is intended simultaneously for widespread distribution through the vibrant networks of creative urban activism across the country and beyond, as well as for the normal Baltimore audience of the Independent Reader. It's a single piece of a larger conversation, and we hope you find it interesting and useful. ★

—John Duda  
for the City from Below Organizing Crew

*Image: One of the many amazing posters designed for the City From Below Conference! We were particularly fond of this graphic by Alec Icky Dunn/Justseeds.*



unavoidable connections between food supplies, public spaces, common lands, and inexcusable inequalities based in race and class divisions. Thinking about art in the city leads you to think about the role that artists play in gentrification, and drives groups, like Brooklyn's Not An Alternative, to work out ways that cultural producers can involve themselves instead in urban social justice struggles. Thinking about social movements in the city leads you to think about how they communicate, what stories they tell themselves and others, how they preserve and transmit their own history, and how they use media to agitate and organize. Thinking about the millions of people in prison in the U.S. makes you connect the dots between a crumbling economy, institutionalized racism, and the militarized approach to policing exemplified by the "War on Drugs." "The City From Below" was broad enough of a platform to bring together insurgent urban planners and designers with the members of a social movement mobilizing shack-dwellers and other dispossessed communities to fight displacement and evictions in the wake of

the crisis plays out in the stratosphere of financial capital, with bailouts and bankers, the effects in the city are much more real. While fictitious assets vanish from the corporate balance sheets, real homes disappear as families are foreclosed on, real public infrastructure crumbles as budgets are slashed. Formulating an appropriate radical response to the crisis from below was a major concern of many who presented at the conference – how does a community stop foreclosures through direct action? How can foreclosed or abandoned properties be reappropriated to bypass now generally discredited market mechanisms and directly provide housing to those who need it? How do we build communities of care and sustainable food systems that provide what we all need to live, outside of disastrously unstable (and fundamentally exploitative) globalized financial systems? The economic crisis is not just an aberration, but points towards serious contradictions in the capitalist system – built on the creation of speculative wealth and the transfer of power away from the people who have to suffer the consequences, this is per-



# WHAT IS THE CITY FROM BELOW?

## AN OPENING NIGHT ADDRESS FROM MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

What is the city but the concretized collection of both wealth and poverty? It is formed by great aggregations of wealth and predominantly people by those at the polar opposite of that dynamic.

Baltimore, of course, is no different. In the structure of houses and the layout of its streets, it really resembles Philadelphia.

All cities are similar; and all cities have their own idiosyncrasies, quirks of history and tradition that sets it apart from other cities. Now I've never been to Baltimore, but I do know of it. How, you ask?

Have you seen the series "The Wire," and is that your source? Well yes, and no. I've seen the series; but my favorite source is none other than Frederick Douglass, who worked and lived in Baltimore. After escaping from bondage, he used the name Stanley during his stay there, and met his first wife among the city's free black population.

In his classic autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*, Douglass recounts his struggles and battles when working as a ship carpenter at the docks. He had to single-handedly fight a white mob of ship workers who objected to the presence of black workers.

Of course, this was 150 years ago, and the same thing could have happened in Philadelphia, or Boston, or New York ... but it happened in Baltimore.

It is part of our common history, whether we know it or not. But for damn sure, it's better to know it. For this allows us all to really see a city, warts and all. For only by truly seeing it can we hope to change it. And change it, we must.

What better opportunity could there be but now, when the economy is in free fall. This is the time to build, not buildings but movements, community organizations, coalitions of common interests.

That is the meaning of the City From Below; for there the people are, there the problems are, there the foreclosures are, there the layoffs are, there homelessness is, there repression is, there poverty is, and there, we are.

If we mean what we say, that almost all of our struggles have some element of unity, these aren't just problems, they're opportunities, as well.

I've said the economic problems are an opportunity. How so, you wonder? Well, one thing for sure is that the previous reigning paradigm, that the market is a "free" and self-regulating entity, is shattered. Similarly, the theory that the market knows best is yesterday's garbage. That means there's room for new ideas, ones that are more suited to human needs and not inhuman greed.

The economy, because it is so broad in its impact, affects things we've previously seen as separate and unconnected. For instance, Maryland, gripped in economic straits, is seriously thinking about nixing its death penalty; and it's doing so more because of the budget than protests. Several years ago, New Jersey came to much the same conclusion, and Kansas is struggling today over this same question.

The housing problems being faced by millions mean there's now room at the tables of power to build safe and affordable housing and also provide meaningful jobs to young men and women in the construction trades.

Consider this: what would the nation look like today, if almost six months ago, some 300 billion dollars or so was put into a mass housing and jobs program instead of some locked vaults of some banks and investment houses?

Yes, the City From Below is the site of some problems, but also the birthplace of a wealth of solutions. But that's only so, if you come together and fight for it. No election will do it. No politician will do it, especially from an imperialist, warmongering, capitalist political party.

New times call for new ideas, and new arrangements of social, political, and, yes, economic struggle. That means talking together across boundaries of race, of class, of education, of ethnicity, and of gender. But it means more—it means listening, and it also means working.

As a student of history, I'm often troubled by the tragedies that have turned the country towards paths of hatred, violence, and repression. I think of Bacon's Rebellion, perhaps one of the most impressive interracial rebellions against the lords, ladies, and elites. What followed is, of course, racialized slavery for Africans, to attempt to ensure that such unity would never rise again.

history wonders what if: what if those people of Nathaniel Bacon's 17th century insurrection in Virginia had won? Well, perhaps our entire history would have been profoundly different, and a lot of suffering, centuries of suffering, could have been averted.

When people come together, that's dangerous. For it suggests that they may begin to work together, to hope together, to struggle together, to fight together, for not crumbs from the master's table, but for change, for social justice, for environmental justice, for an end to empire and wars for lies, for an egalitarian economy, for a new order. It is our power to build a movement for social transformation; indeed, it is our duty to do so.

For within our common history is Bacon's Rebellion, the abolitionist movement, the Knights of Labor, the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Liberation movement, and beyond. Behind us is not only the genocide of Native Americans, the land lust that sent them to reservations to die slow and bitter deaths, or the vicious capture and enslavement of millions of Africans, or the exploitation of millions of workers to enrich the few.

There's also a long and distinguished history of resistance: from the heroic struggles of the red and black Seminoles as seen in the exploits of Wildcat and John Horse, to the resistance of Leonard Peltier, from John Brown to the SDS, from Fannie Lou Hamer to Angela Davis, from Martin King to Malcolm X, from the Deacons of Defense to the Black Panther Party, from the Mau Mau to MOVE. From those days to these days. Resistance is also our patrimony, if we claim it and if we join it.

The people of the city's bottom have never just accepted their repressive conditions. They organized. They worked together. They dreamed together for better day, for better way.

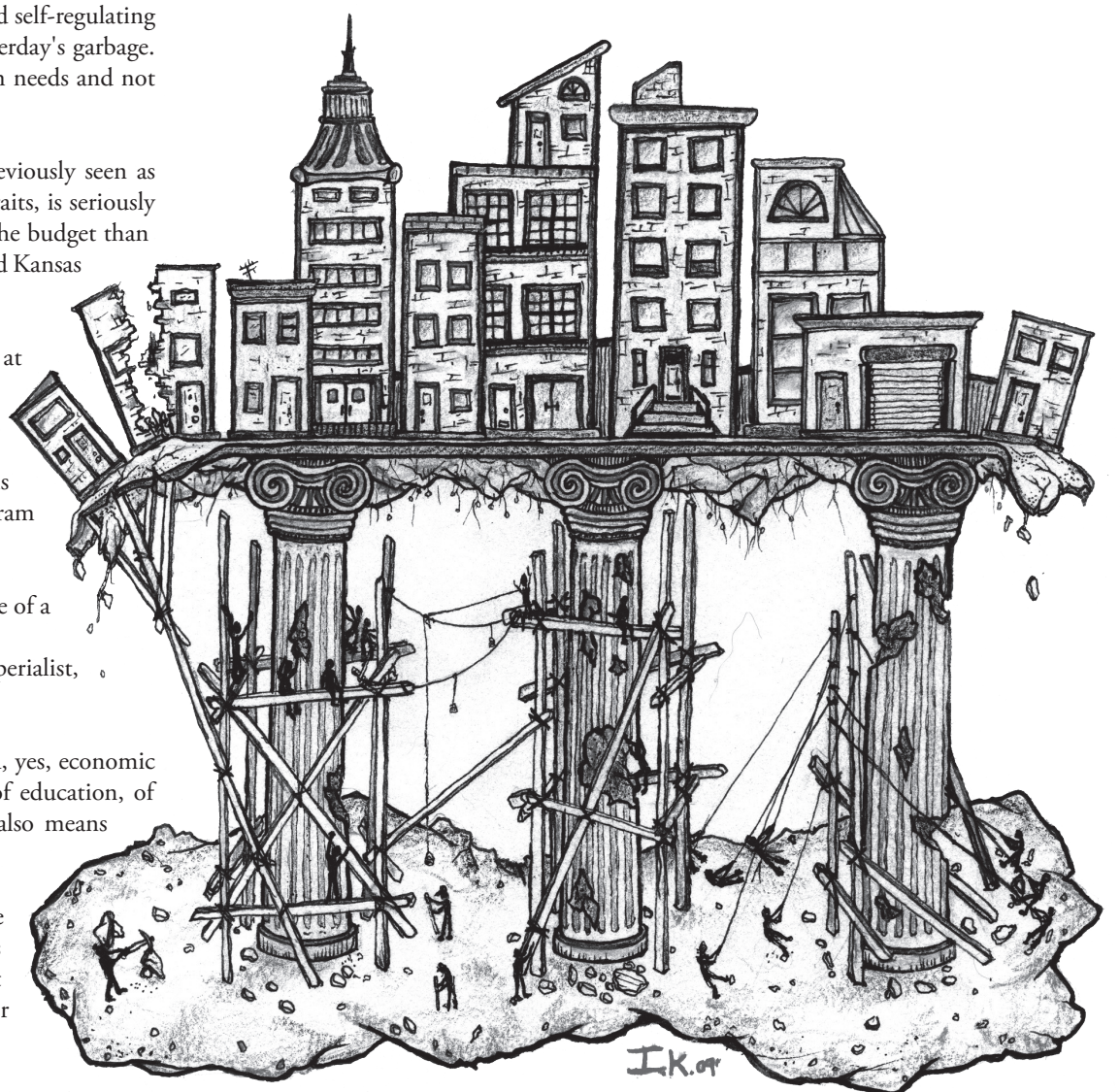
So, organize. Work and dream together, as you come together today to change the nation.

Your work is more precious than you know. The ancestors of the past dreamed of you today.

Those to come in the future will look back to see how you dealt with the challenges of today. Let them say, we did our best and made their lives better.

I thank you all for your invitation to open this conference. On the MOVE, long live John Africa. From Death Row, this is Mumia Abu-Jamal. ★

*Thanks to Prison Radio (prisonradio.org) and Alex Bennett for securing this recorded introduction to the City From Below Conference. Image: Isaac Kaminsky/Indyreader*





CREATE /// CONNECT /// TRANSFORM

# WE ARE READY NOW

MEDIA AND CREATIVITY TO TRANSFORM OUR SELVES AND OUR WORLD

REGISTER NOW FOR 3 DAYS OF:

- FOCUSED DISCUSSIONS
- SKILL SHARING
- HANDS-ON MEDIA LAB
- FILM SCREENINGS
- MUSIC
- BOWLING



the 11th annual

# ALLIED MEDIA CONFERENCE

July 16-19, 2009 DETROIT, MI

on the campus of  
Wayne State University

BE A PART OF IT AT  
[WWW.ALLIEDMEDIACONFERENCE.ORG](http://WWW.ALLIEDMEDIACONFERENCE.ORG)

WE COME TOGETHER TO SHARE TOOLS AND TACTICS  
FOR TRANSFORMING OUR COMMUNITIES THROUGH  
MEDIA-BASED ORGANIZING.



# Justseeds.org

## radical art cooperative

Over 300 political prints, posters, books and zines, as well as a destination to find out about current events in radical art and culture.

## A Short History of Private Property & the Right to Tenancy in Baltimore

By David Kandel

*based on a talk given at the City From Below Conference with Barbara Samuels and Michael Mazepink*

The 1979 Baltimore Rent Control Campaign (BRCC) was the last big city-wide political campaign the city has seen. A referendum was presented to the citizens of the city, organized by BCRC. The referendum called for limits in yearly rental increases, with no increases allowed if city property inspections revealed housing code violations. Drawing more votes than any politician running for office, the referendum politicized the city in ways it has never since been, and (at least temporarily) created a powerful city wide coalition, diverse in class, race composition and leadership, which defeated the landlord lobby and political and corporate establishments which supported the primacy of private property interests.

The BRCC was spearheaded both by the Baltimore City Tenants Association and concerned housing advocates. The BRCC waged a serious year-long grassroots organizing campaign. It dominated the media, the agendas of countless civic, social, and religious institutions as they were asked to sign on as endorsers of the referendum and then to turn out the vote on election day. The campaign was hard fought, with scare and smear tactics against the leadership of the BRCC and the citizens of Baltimore City. Under the leadership of the Greater Baltimore Board of Realtors, the landlord lobby hired outside consultants with a track record of defeating rent control initiatives in other large American cities.

After the tremendously successful election outcome, the landlord lobby filed a law suit. The courts found in favor of the landlords and overturned the people's victory. The court claimed that the referendum put a cap on rental property profit and this violated the rights of property owners, and such a change the charter violated state law. This was despite the fact that prior to the election, the State's Attorney General's Office reviewed the referendum bill and found it perfectly acceptable. The legal decision by the courts erased years of hard work by people on the streets. The only avenue left open was for the BRCC to take the case to the Baltimore City Council, to seek rent control legislation in that arena. After a painful year of behind-the-scenes politics, the drive for rent control and limiting profits from private property died a slow and painful death. More tragic than this though, was the disappearance of the Baltimore City Tenants Association.

Meanwhile, a squatting movement was spreading throughout Europe, as well as in the United States, in places such as Camden, New Jersey, representing a more active, even militant approach to securing the right to tenancy.

The People's Homesteading Group (PHG), an organization that formed shortly after the demise of BRCC, recognized that many people needed decent housing and Baltimore had tens of thousands of vacant properties. Many of these houses could be fixed up, mostly with volunteer labor, some expert supervision, and reasonable material costs. Thus the idea of homesteading developed.

After many years of redeveloping housing in the City, an assessment was made of the existing housing stock. Today, the remainder

of the housing stock remains in substantially poor condition. The PHG has created its own community based construction company, and it engages in planning, development, and organizing, all at once. Physical planning and development are not viewed as activities separate from the people for whom it is designed. In fact, the whole focus of PHG is locality development; keep money and expertise and sweat equity in and circulating through the neighborhood. The PHG has provided an exciting new alternative model for neighborhoods, showing ways in which their housing stock can be renewed and redeveloped. Baltimore has a long and sordid history of racial discrimination in its housing and real estate market. Although Baltimore is a city with a strong North/South historical heritage born out of the Civil War, many people are unaware of the extent of this discrimination, its pervasive effects on the entire real estate industry, and how it continues to shape the character and content of today's neighborhoods. It is one of the most highly segregated cities in the United States as measured in terms of the percentage of racial discrimination in housing tracts throughout the city. Data from the ACLU, Baltimore Neighborhoods Inc., HUD, and the US Census housing tract data portray a city deeply mired in historic patterns of segregation, which have not changed significantly over the decades.

During the last 50 to 60 years, the federal government has played an important part in perpetuating discriminatory practices in the design of neighborhood housing, rental markets and opportunities. The government as the great purveyor of funding for construction of housing has played an active role in helping perpetuate old patterns of racial discrimination. Money given to certain urban and suburban areas was conditional on whom the housing was built for. Even the advertising in the *Baltimore Sun* paper, over the decades, blatantly displayed these prejudices and gross misbehaviors on the part of federal policy makers in concert with realty and development interests and the local political structures which supported these activities. Urban *renewal* became for many a euphemism for urban *removal*. Entire neighborhoods were destroyed or redeployed as black-only to maintain highly restrictive and prohibitive patterns of shelter and dwelling. Last year in commemoration of the 1968 race riots, the ACLU put together an impressive history of patterns of racial segregation in Baltimore throughout the century.

Thirty years after the creation of the BRCC, Baltimore has failed to recreate a serious tenant organizing institution. In its stead has grown a robust emergency shelter industry. While this is an important piece of charitable work for those without housing, this avenue of social policy and social change will never transform the city into a more just community. Any city seeking fundamental change from below will need to institutionalize tenant organizing as a first line of defense against profit at the expense of tenants, and work towards securing the right of tenancy. ★

*David Kandel was an organizer in 1979 with the Baltimore Rent Control Campaign. Barbara Samuels has been a staff attorney at the ACLU for the past 14 years, in charge of Fair Housing Practices there. Michael Mazepink was involved in the Baltimore Rent Control Campaign, and founded the People's Homesteading Group.*



# The Metropolitan Factory:

By Stephen Shukaitis & Valeria Graziano

Standing on Federal Hill, looking down at the development of the inner harbor, one is struck by many things. Perhaps the most obvious thing, regardless of what one thinks of the process that led to its development, is that the buildings and their arrangement are rather ugly. Not just in the way downtown looks, but even more so in what it does: how the city operates as a factory, isolating people from each other, channeling social relations into prescribed routes, and preventing others from forming.

On March 27, 2009, David Harvey stood on the hill looking down at the inner city to revisit the arguments he made in an essay many years ago on the development of the area. He responded to this observation with the comment that it was “really quite a strange thing that the bourgeois has no imagination.” That is, it has no sense of creativity that can devise anything more appealing in its domination and transformation of the social space and the urban environment. This may seem like a minor point or a trite observation. What does it matter how aesthetically appealing or how well-designed an area is when there are more crucial questions and ongoing issues of communities being displaced, workers being exploited, and the nature of social life being shaped by the needs of capital? This question is a valid one to a degree. But what is interesting about such an observation is the process it hints at and what this can tell us about the development of capitalism in today’s post-industrial cities.

Whether or not the bourgeois has any creativity is debatable (Marx himself marveled at the inventiveness of the ruling class in transforming social reality, albeit usually for the worse). However, regardless of such a debate, what can be said with certainty is that the bourgeoisie is skilled at stealing the imagination and creativity of others. And, this is precisely what the history of the transformations of the city generally shows us. As soon as social/political movements and new artistic developments arise, they are seized upon by real estate developers, urban planners, and policy makers to create the image of a new ‘hip’ district that will boost real estate prices, attract “more desirable” residents, and so forth in a perpetual spiral of capitalist development.

This process of gentrification, led by or inadvertently spurred by developments in artistic and social creativity, is an old one. When Albert Parry wrote his history of Bohemia in the US he paid close attention to the relation between artists and the rise of the real estate market in the 60s and 70s. But in Parry’s case the decades in question were the 1860s and 70s. The point of raising this comparison is not to sulk over this process or mourn that so much creative energy fermented by social movements that are often antagonistic to capitalism gets turned into mechanisms for further capitalist accumulation. Rather, the goal is making sense out of it, and making sense in a way that further clarifies this process for political and social organizing.

In recent years a focus on the metropolis as both a space of capitalist production (and resistance to it) has emerged within radical movements coming out of Europe (Italy and France specifically). This focus is based on an argument, developed over many years within autonomous social movements, that states that we live in the social factory; exploitation does not just occur within the bounded workplace but increasingly encroaches upon all forms of social interactions

that are brought into the labor process. In the “social factory” our abilities to communicate, to relate, and to create and imagine are all put to work, sometimes through digital networks and communications, or through their utilization as part of a redevelopment or revitalization of an area based on the image of being a creative locale (the “arts district”). Given this argument, it becomes possible to look at the rise of the discourse of the creative city and the creative class, most popularly associated with its development by Richard Florida and then seized upon by large numbers of urban planners and developers. The rise of the idea of the creative class is not just a theorization of the changing nature of economic production and social structure, it is, or at very least has become, a managerial tool and justification for a restructuring of the city space as a factory space.

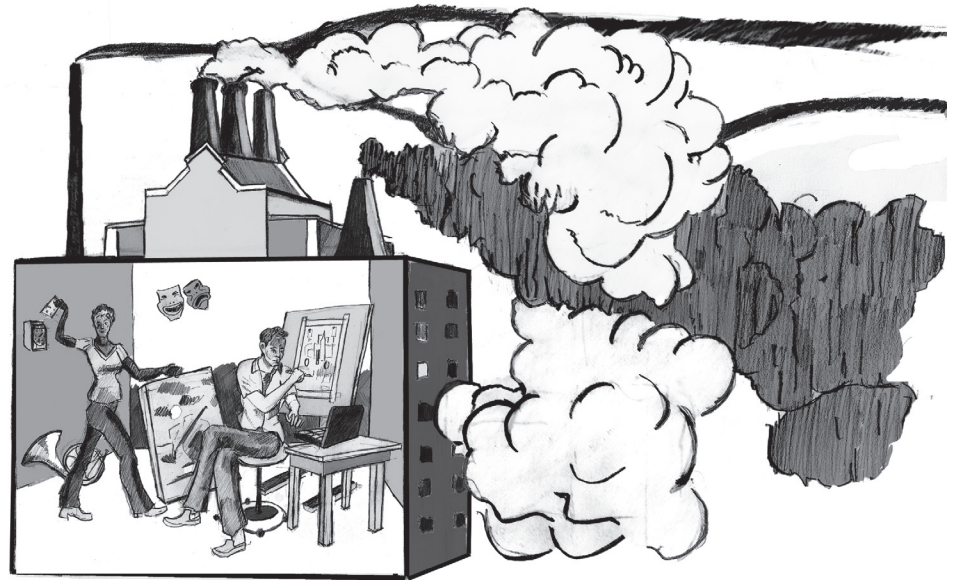
Yet, to read Florida’s arguments, such as in *The Rise of the Creative Class* or *Cities and the Creative Class*, is to encounter a very strange managerial tool. It is quite strange that while on face value his work seems to describe empirical phenomena, namely the development of an increase in prominence of forms of labor that are primarily premised on creating new ideas and forms rather than physical labor, the existence of such empirical phenomena is not the main issue. The creative class is not a homogenous or unified whole, but is itself, even in Florida’s description, marked by an uneven development of the forms of creative labor (for instance, he distinguishes between a ‘super creative’ core of science, arts, and media workers and the ‘creative professionals’ and knowledge workers who keep the necessary organizational structures running).

Perhaps it’s less useful to ponder about the intricacies of the creative class, or even whether it empirically exists, than to view its description as a form of mythological entity of governance. That is, groups that benefit from the belief in such a class bring it into being by declaring its existence.

In other words, the question is not whether the creative class exists as such, but rather what effects are created through how it is described and called into being through forms of governance and social action based upon these claims. Planning and shaping the city based around a certain conceptualization of the creative potential of labor, or the potential of creativity put to work, is not an unprecedented or unique development, but rather is the latest example of capital’s attempt to continually valorize itself through the conversion of antagonistic movements into ones that replicate wage slavery (much like a computer virus orders a system to make copies of itself and distribute them to other computers).

The argument that all of society and social relations are being brought into economic production leaves out crucial questions: namely, what are the particular means and technologies through which social relations are made productive? How are aspects of social life outside the recognized workplace brought into the labor process? What are the technologies of capture that render the metropolis productive? This is precisely what the creative class encapsulates: a social position that formalizes the process of drawing from the collective wealth and creativity of the metropolis and turning it into a mechanism for further capitalist develop-

## *How Capitalist Exploitation Extends Through All Corners of the City*



ment. In the industrial factory it was generally very easy to clearly distinguish between those who planned and managed the labor process and those who were involved in its executions - between the managers and the managed. But in today’s post-industrial service economy these distinctions become increasingly hard to make. The passionate and self-motivated labor of the artisan increasingly becomes the model for a self-disciplining, self-managed form of labor force that works harder, longer, and often for less pay precisely because of its attachment to some degree of personal fulfillment in forms of engaging work (or a “psychic wage,” as Marc Bousquet refers to it). In the metropolitan factory, the cultural worker who thinks that she is autonomous simply because there is no foreman barking orders is just as capable as an assembly line worker of having her passionate labor co-opted, perhaps all the more deeply because the artist’s discipline is self-imposed and thus the exploitative quality of the labor is made partially imperceptible.

To use the language developed by autonomist movements, what we see in the rise of the creative class is really a shifting of class composition. Class composition as defined here is made up of two characteristics: technical composition, or the mechanisms and arrangements capital uses for its continued reproduction, and political composition, or the ability of ongoing struggles and movements to assert their own needs and shape the conditions of the existing economic/political reality. The rise of the creative class is formed by a convergence of a set of dynamics, including demands put forth by workers for more fulfilling kinds of humane and engaging labor as opposed to repetitive and meaningless tasks.

The rejection of the factory line and factory discipline that emerged during the late 1960s was met during the 1970s by managerial attempts to create jobs that were more fully engaging for the worker while remaining equally if not more exploitative of the laboring capacity of the worker. Similarly, campaigns of community organizing and neighborhood renewal undertaken by social movements around the same time (such as in the lower east side of New York) were then used by real estate speculators to kick-start a renewed process of capital accumulation based on land values. The point of identifying and analyzing these relations of social contestation and capitalism is not to lament them, but rather to understand how the

city functions as an expanded factory.

What this comes down to is the realization that capital depends on a certain kind of glide (the transportation of ideas) for its continued development. Capital is not real. It has no body and certainly no imagination - it can create nothing on its own. Rather, what capital increasingly relies on today is the movement of ideas and creativity through networks of social relations, cooperation, and communication that are already in existence. What capital needs is a process through which this dispersed creativity, already in circulation, can be harvested and put to work in the renewed production of surplus value.

To adequately harvest this new form of productive power, the bourgeois takes the form of a new kind of factory owner - one who hides behind the scenes but still controls the means of production by rendering the diffuse productivity of the metropolitan factory into forms that can be exploited. The creative class and its dispersal through the rise of the creative city is the process through which the siphoning off of social imagination is managed by the owning class. It is through this covert process that the pleasure of being in common becomes the labor of living together.

Understanding how capital attempts to turn creativity’s glide through social space into capturing profits does not mean that there are no options left for interrupting and breaking these circuits of accumulation. If anything the number of points where capitalism is open to disruption has multiplied exponentially. The silver lining is that more space broadens the terrain for challenging the capitalist domination of social life. In so far as we are engaged in the labor of circulation and imagination necessary to keep a parasitic economy alive, we are also located precisely at the point where it is possible to refuse to continue to do so. The subversive potentiality of any creative art or artistic production then is not simply its expressed political content, but rather the potential it creates for interrupting the circuits of capitalist production that it is always already enmeshed in. Through understanding the social technologies of rendering the city as a unified social fabric of production, it becomes possible to develop further strategies of refusal and resistance that find avenues for creative sabotage and disruption all throughout the city. ★

*Image: Teddy Johnson/Indyreader*



# DEFENDERS OF THE LAND, PRIVATE PROPERTY ABOLITIONISTS

By Shiri Pasternak

*Shiri Pasternak lives in Toronto and is the coordinator of Barriere Lake Solidarity – Toronto and the co-coordinator of Abandonment Issues.*

Activists can play a critical role in guiding this light in a number of ways. I work with the Algonquins of Barriere Lake ([www.barrierelakesolidarity.blogspot.com](http://www.barrierelakesolidarity.blogspot.com)), a small community 3 hours north of Ottawa who

ued at US\$108 billion dollars. As no2010 reports: “All the expansion in transport infrastructure (highways, ports, railways, bridges, etc.) is meant to assist in greater resource exploitation, including ski resorts, mines, logging, natural gas, oil, etc.” The urban poor of Vancouver, which is comprised of one of Canada’s largest urban native populations, 2010 has already meant “hundreds evicted from low-income housing, more homelessness, criminalization, and increased police repression.” No2010 is also part of a broader Resistance 2010 campaign that will also challenge the exploitative resource exploitation, market expansion, and social control of the G8 summit and the Security & Prosperity Partnership (SPP) meeting in Canada that year.

Finally, challenging property rights is another way to challenge colonial policies in the urban context. I work with a group called Abandonment Issues, which is a Toronto-based project pushing for the adoption of a Use It or Lose It bylaw that would ensure all vacant/abandoned property would be expropriated and turned into affordable housing. One of the central objectives of this project was to push up against people’s understanding of private property rights and to pose questions about why some people got to have shelter, while other did not – what is the meaning of this distribution of ownership? What does it say about our society that we’d rather protect a land speculator, sitting on a vacant property with the hope that its property value will escalate, rather than see that building – not as an investment or a commodity, valuable only in the profits reaped by its transferability – but as a place where people could live, who are otherwise on the streets, or trading sex for shelter. If we can re-think how property rights reflect our relationships to one another – take it out of the realm of law and economics, into the realm of social justice and community control – we can unravel the social relations of power that govern through monopoly ownership and purely commercial interests.

Now is an important time in Canada for indigenous solidarity and resistance. The formation of a national network of indigenous leaders called “Defenders of the Land” is developing, and a growing awareness in cities across the country has meant more activists are rising up and taking action. The challenge upon us now is to enlarge the way we think of the city to include these spaces of resistance that underpin the subsistence of all of our lives. ★



**November 19, 2008: Algonquins of Barriere Lake (ABL) set up blockades on provincial highway 117 to demand a restoration of their customary government and that Quebec and Canada honour their agreements for a resource co-management plan on the ABL’s traditional territory. The government responded by sending in riot cops from Montreal.**

Indigenous peoples in Canada have marked the geographical limits of capitalist expansion through more than five centuries of permanent resistance. Due to the geography of residual Aboriginal lands, they form a final frontier of capitalist penetration for natural resource extraction, agribusiness, and urban/suburban development. While much of the focus of the economic crisis has centred on foreclosures and job losses in the manufacturing and service sectors, a renewed push for resources – e.g. tar sands, timber, fisheries, mining, suburban sprawl – may tread in the old vices of colonialism, but it has also been ushered in by a new political economy of indigenous dispossession, and with it, spurred a new phase of resistance.

The Zapatista uprising made headlines around the world in 1994, but all across this land, indigenous peoples were also rising up against an “opening up” of their territories for free-market investment. For example, by 1995, the resource industries of BC entered a new phase of expansion at the same point that Aboriginal people were in the midst of establishing claims to what would amount to 110 percent of the provincial land base. Confrontation in Gustafsen Lake by the Secwepemc Nation was accompanied by waves of blockades across the province. In Toronto, native protesters occupied a Revenue Canada office for 29 days, and the occupation of Stoney Pt Provincial Park in Ontario ended tragically with the death of protester Dudley George, killed by police.

A series of policies posing as solutions to self-determination struggles were also introduced. While “self-government” policies appear to promote political autonomy, they are designed to download the “Indian problem” onto native communities by reducing federal involvement and promoting “self-sufficiency” through competitive economic development – key features of the neo-liberal agenda – forcing cash-strapped communities to enter into “fiscal partnerships” with corporations to finance their reserves.

Despite an escalation of militarized responses

and assimilationist policies, collectively held indigenous lands continue to pose major barriers to capitalist expansion. The reclamation of a suburban development site in Caledonia, Ontario by the Six Nations of the Grand River Mohawk nation; the recently formed grassroots network to stop the tar sands that links indigenous communities, such as the Mikiwew, the Athabasca Chipewyans, and the Lubicon Cree, along the pipelines; the NO2010 anti-Olympics campaign led by the Native Youth Movement (NYM) and Coast Salish indigenous nations along the coast and interior of British Columbia; the jail time served by leaders of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI) and Ardoch Algonquin First Nations (AAFN) to stop destructive mining on their territory and by the Acting Chief of the Algonquins of Barriere Lake to gain back control over their forests – these stories of indigenous people defending their land are not clashes between the market and the state that dominate the news daily. These are struggles over property relations – over the jurisdiction of indigenous homelands and their struggles against *both* the state and market to maintain control over them.

As Deborah Simmons writes in *After Chiapas*: “From this perspective, Aboriginal resistance may be understood as a crucial aspect of the conflict over the process of continental restructuring and the emergence of a new capitalist order.” To suppress indigenous peoples’ struggles is to eliminate the great obstacle they pose to capitalist accumulation and to maintain the racist assertion that Europeans discovered this “primitive” land.

Colonialism didn’t begin with capitalism, but capitalism has always needed colonialism to survive. Canadian colonialism at home and imperialism abroad are dynamics at the heart of capitalism; they are regimes of state-corporate power that fulfill the search for new markets, new pools of labour, and new commodities. A spotlight must be shone on these frontiers of property – the “blood and dirt” sources of wealth and sovereign power governing this nation.

are fighting to have a governing say over 10,000 square kilometers of their traditional territory. Canada and Quebec signed a landmark resource co-management agreement with the First Nation almost 20 years ago, but has refused to implement the ground-breaking plan. Barriere Lake Solidarity provides support through fundraising, film-making (e.g. <http://blip.tv/file/1391794>), direct action, and political campaigning. Collective members have also set up a radio station in the community, Mitchikanibiko’inik Nodaktcigen (Radio Barriere Lake), and helped pilot a handicraft business of direct sales from the community to city dwellers.

At a recent conference in Toronto organized by No One Is Illegal (NOII) called *City is a Sweatshop*, BC activist Harsha Walia described how NOII-Vancouver was linking Aboriginal dispossession to migrant justice work – how indigenous communities were offering sanctuary on reserves to migrants threatened with deportation, as well as bringing communities together in protest for each other’s rights, and asking real questions about who gets to decide which settlers get to make Canada their home. This movement also highlights the common racial injustices in the treatment of brown-skinned migrants and the treatment of Aboriginal people as uncivilized and uncultured peoples.

But the most galvanizing indigenous campaign today is a nation-wide boycott of the February 2010 Olympics games to be held in Vancouver-Whistler ([www.no2010.com](http://www.no2010.com)). The campaign is led by the Native Youth Movement (NYM) and Coast Salish communities and their allies. In a province that never signed treaties with the indigenous nations and is comprised almost entirely of unsundered lands, the Olympics have provided an opportunity for the government to spur a construction and development boom in Vancouver, Whistler, and parts of the interior. According to the provincial government’s ministry of economic development, in the summer months of 2007 alone, 843 major capital projects were planned or underway throughout British Columbia, val-





# A Conversation on Organizing Models for Social Justice Struggles in the City

A Roundtable Discussion at the City From Below Conference, Moderated by Betty Robinson

## Participants:

Steve Meachem (City Life/Vida Urbana, Boston, clvu.org)

*City Life/Vida Urbana is a bilingual, multi-issue, urban social justice organization founded in 1973, which has recently been at the forefront of anti-foreclosure activism with its blockades against evictions in Boston.*

Max Rameau (Take Back the Land, Miami, takebacktheland.org)

*Take Back the Land, founded in 2006 in the creation of the Umoja Village shantytown, is a group committed to using direct action to secure self-determination through taking back land and empowering the Black community, who have recently been squatting foreclosed homes in order to move in homeless families.*

Veronica Dorsey and Greg Rosenthal (United Workers, Baltimore, unitedworkers.org)

*The United Workers is a human rights organization led by low-wage workers and focused on leadership development through education, reflection and action, with a multi-racial and bilingual membership base of over 1,000 low-wage workers.*

Jean Rice and Rob Robertson (Picture the Homeless, NYC, picturethehomeless.org)

*Picture the Homeless, founded in 1999, is a grassroots organization of homeless people fighting for the dignity and well-being of the homeless (and for an end to homelessness altogether).*

Betty Robinson started the discussion off with some very important questions:

**How do we create, build, and nurture organizations that can be in the forefront of our new social justice movement?**

**How do such organizations build capacity and leadership?**

**What does their strategic thinking look like?**

ORGANIZING FROM BELOW: GETTING PEOPLE INVOLVED, BUILDING LEADERSHIP

**Betty Robinson:** My sense is that we don't just need one type of organization, we need many. But most of them need to be where the people affected by the crisis are in the leadership and moving the agenda forward.



Banner at Take Back the Land's Umoja Village Shantytown. (Miami Indymedia)

**Steve Meachem:** We certainly have been involved in struggles and with organizations trying to recruit people who are sympathetic to a struggle – to recruit people who are morally opposed to gentrification, to recruit people who don't like the foreclosure crisis – but we certainly emphasize recruiting the people directly effected by the crisis – the folks who are getting the rent increases, the folks who are getting foreclosed on, the folks who are getting evicted after foreclosure.

We want to decentralize decision making as much as possible to those directly effected by the struggle. So we organize tenants' associations all around the city of Boston – in an average year we have maybe 150 meetings of tenants' associations across the city – and all of those meetings are making the decisions about their struggle. We are there to give advice, we are there to provide political perspective, we are there to link that struggle to other struggles, but when it comes down to whether or not you're going to pay that rent increase or not, how long you are willing to fight, when you want to give up, when you want to push forward, all those decisions have to be made by those people directly effected.

**Greg Rosenthal:** The mission of United Workers is to build a movement to end poverty. There's a reason you see Harriet Tubman on all our posters – Harriet Tubman was a leader in the movement to end slavery. We're building leadership to end another form of slavery, which is poverty. Within that, we have a focal point campaign, which is how we build leadership, how we build political power and bring resources and allies into the work that we do. So we started out with the day laborers at the baseball stadium, Camden Yards, and the process was organizers just going in and meeting workers. We organize through home visits. We meet people at their workplace, and then go to their home and go through a process of what we call 'reflective action' which is our form of human rights education. You understand that this one conversation, it could be someone who is the next leader of this movement – anyone could be a leader.

We had a victory at the stadium – we won living wages after a three and a half year campaign. It was a really concrete win – workers going from \$4.50 an hour as day laborers to having direct

employment and making \$11.30 an hour. Everywhere along the way, people said, you're not going to do it. But workers said, no, this is our lives, poverty can end, and we're going to be a part of a process that does this. It's not just a process of changing your workplace. This is the difference between transformative values and transactional values, having the understanding that it's not just about me, and whether or not I'm going to get a wage increase if I participate in this organization. That's not what it's about. A wage increase is something needed to survive, and of course that's really important. But the transformative value is believing that every person should have human dignity, should be able to live with dignity and basic human rights. And realizing that that's the process that I want to be a part of. Not because I pay a union due, and so therefore you're going to help me out. That's transactional – and if that kind of approach, the kind of approach unions use, worked, things would be different. Things would be getting better. It's not working. The greatest victory of the stadium campaign wasn't the wage increase, it was that there was 30 committed leaders in this movement who came out of the campaign, and are moving on with the understanding they've gained to new campaigns, like the one we're working on in the Inner Harbor.



Picture the Homeless during a building occupation action in March 2009 (Picture the Homeless)

**Veronica Dorsey:** We know that every low wage worker isn't at the same place. So we like to meet people where they are. There are a number of different projects we have going on simultaneously, and wherever the people are at the time in their lives, is the project that the staff helps them to get into to develop the skills that they already have, and once they develop them and they gain more self-esteem, then they'll ask questions, like we did this, what they can do next. We have retreats, where we sit down and discuss our strategies, the problems at the work site so we know what to do next, they allow us to broaden our own horizons, they allow us to come up with our own solutions, because we got tired of band-aid solutions people were giving us, because every time we went to the medic and got a band-aid, the next day that band-aid was dirty and we had to go right back to the same medic for the same kind of band-aid: we got tired of that. So United Workers helped us stop using band-aid solutions, and use our own brains and come up with our own solutions.

**Jean Rice:** We believe in participatory democracy at Picture the Homeless. We are led and directed by homeless New Yorkers. We believe in participatory democracy and transparency in government. Until that fails, we're not going to sign on to any centralized form.

**Rob Robertson:** We don't have a hard time building membership because a lot of folks are angry. They're angry because you're keeping me in a shelter every night. They're angry because you won't give me a rent subsidy that will give me permanent housing. You give me a rent subsidy that has no sustainable waged job training attached to it, and I wind up in the shelter system again because after the year when that subsidy is over I have no where to turn.

Our mayor in New York has an ambitious plan that in 5 years he's going to end homelessness, but we find that his numbers decrease by small percentages and when he started that plan almost 5 years ago – this June will be 5 years – there were 38,000 people in the shelters, if we were to take a look at that number today, I guarantee it's 35,000 in the shelters. So his system is failing miserably; we recruit membership based on that position. Folks are angry. We go to soup kitchens to do outreach. Folks are standing in line, they can't afford to get a meal. We do a soup kitchen called Holy Apostle in New York



City which is probably one of the largest groups of homeless people who get together on a daily basis. There are some 1600 meals served at this particular soup kitchen on a daily basis so it's pretty easy for us to find homeless people that are angry. You stand there, you start to have some conversations; before you know it, you're recruiting new members.

We retain membership and recruit membership by a combination of things. We have regularly scheduled meetings. We do this because it's difficult for members who don't have phones, who don't have a permanent place to stay, to be contacted. So the one thing they know is that that meeting will be there, and if they're hungry there will be meals supplied for them there, they'll have metro cards, transportation.

Our membership is involved in the decision-making process. We're a membership organization, all the members decide on the issues we vote on. The staff is there to support, to show a way how, and create processes. We select issues to work on basically by talking to homeless people, and we do that outreach. "What are you angry about?" "What bothers you the most?"

**Max Rameau:** Something we don't talk about enough as organizer types: because of material conditions and particularly now, exaggerated with the rise of the '501c3 industrial complex' there's a growing split between organizers and the masses. Right now we have a professional class of political organizers and it makes it very difficult for grassroots groups, native grassroots groups, to rise and compete in a real way with professional grassroots organizers who are trained in college, and who have particular political ideologies and are clearer on certain things because they have access to study those things. So there's times, as organizers, when we're thinking about the movement going in one direction or going at a particular speed or rate, and the masses aren't keeping up. But there's other times when the masses are far surpassing us. In 1992, after the not guilty verdict in the case of the police officers who beat Rodney King in Los Angeles, the people – without any planning, without any organizers getting there and saying let's have a meeting, let's discuss this – got up, rose together, and burned the city down. Without any level of organizing or planning, they took action on what they saw was an issue which directly impacted their interests. Organizers were not prepared for that, organizers were not leading that, and organizers were struggling to catch up to the people.



City Life/Vida Urbana helps block an eviction in January 2008 (jonathanmcintosh.smugmug.com)

TAKING ON THE SYSTEM: WHAT KIND OF POLITICS?

**Max Rameau:** Material conditions need to be taken into account in choosing organizing tactics: the fact there was this so-called housing boom which turned out to be a big bubble and a bust, and the level of gentrification in our community changed things. We could not have gone, say, five or six years ago, and tried to take over vacant houses, even though that's a great and exciting campaign – it's a great and exciting campaign that can only work when the conditions were right. You can't force a really cool idea into inappropriate conditions; the campaign not only has to be right, but right for the conditions that exist.

Given these material conditions, Take Back the Land tries to think about power in terms of how a community develops its own power rather than how the community holds power in relation to elected officials or other people. We don't think about power in the sense of how to meet with elected officials or get elected officials to concede to certain demands. We think about the capacity of our community, and how we can maximize and then expand that capacity? So we don't think in terms of what we can get "them" to do for us; we think in what terms we can do for us. What we could do was take over a plot of land and build the city that we could run ourselves and we were in fact able to do that [the Umoja Village Shantytown]. We never thought about, never wanted to, turn that into demands from the system or demands from the city or developers.

**Rob Robertson:** I've been struggling with Max's refusal to deal with elected officials. In the work we do with Picture the Homeless, we have to constantly confront elected officials. And a lot of our work is adversarial with elected officials, because as Max so eloquently put it, they're the ones who got you in the positions you're in. His reasoning for not wanting to deal with it, I love it – I think it's great, but unfortunately we *have* to deal with them – and we have to deal with them sometimes at a pretty high level. With homelessness in NYC, its shelter system has become a quasi-industry. The department of homeless services which runs homelessness in NYC has a budget of \$750 million a year. This is to keep people temporarily housed – it makes absolutely no sense. And so often our work is directed at them.

**Steve Meachem:** I would describe City Life's role as that of an organizing collective – we don't simply staff tenants' associations, we bring our organizing philosophy and our politics into it. There's this debate among organizers about whether an organizer should bring his or her politics into the work; we don't think that's the right question. We think an organizer always brings their politics into their work, it's just a question of what politics it is. When City Life goes to a meeting of people being affected by rent increases or foreclosures, our political perspective which we lay out at the beginning creates the moral space that allows certain options to be chosen that weren't even on the table before.

These new options help in linking individual struggles to the big picture. It's certainly true in our experience that individuals' defensive action on a really local scale can have offensive system-challenging consequences depending on how they are conducted. To give an example: when we're doing an eviction blockade of families in buildings that have been foreclosed on, these are defensive struggles to save the home of an individual or a couple of families. And they're powerful in part because the personal story of that individual or those families is on the table juxtaposed against the interests of the bank. But beyond that, the blockade has system challenging properties – first, we're taking a clearly collective response to those individual struggles – it's not that one person or one family plus a lawyer, it's that person or family plus a whole lot of other tenants who are willing to defend them. Second, it challenges the system because people are taking direct action; they're not simply going through legal channels, but are going outside of legal channels to defend an individual or a family's home, and insisting on their moral right to take those actions. And finally, it's a challenge to the system because when we bring publicity to these struggles, we're pointing out the contradiction



between banks getting giant bailouts and this person who is simply willing to pay rent or buy the building back at a real value and instead is going to be evicted from their home. ★

You can listen to the whole conversation from which these excerpts were taken online at: <http://cityfrombelow.org/content/session-audio-organizing-models-social-justice-city-0>

At left: Harriet Tubman on the poster for the United Workers' Human Rights Zone March and Fair. See page 10 for a discussion of the B'MORE Fair and the United Workers' involvement in the City From Below conference.

PM  
PRESS

• politics • culture • art •  
• fiction • music • film •

WWW.PMPRESS.ORG

igade • Banksy Locations and Tours • Becoming the Media • Behind the Mask • Beyond Election  
Citizen • Cook, Eat, Thrive • Daring to Struggle, Failing to Win • Demanding the Impossible  
04 • English Rebel Songs 1381-1984 • Fire On the Mountain • Geek Mafia: Black Hat Blues • Geek Mafia: Move Into the Light  
om of the Homeless • The Jena 6 • The Jook • Kersplebedeb • Labor of Love  
Incredible • Life Under the Tent • Lives Less Valuable • Lonely Hearts Killer • The Lucky Strike  
New Reform • Outspoken Authors • Paper Politics • Prison Round Trip • Reach • n  
Behind Bars • Revolution and Other Writings • The Rise of Disaster Capitalism • Sing For You  
• The Story of Crass • Songs of the Dead • Stuffed and Starved • Switchblade • Teaching Rebel  
vil Disobedience • The War of 33 • We Shall Not Be Moved • Wobblies and Zapatistas • 500 Years  
ena • Banksy Locations and Tours • Becoming the Media • Behind the Mask • Beyond Election  
Cook Food • Cook, Eat, Thrive • Daring to Struggle, Failing to Win • Demanding the Impossible  
the  
The  
aq:  
Roger • Lives Less Valuable • Lonely Hearts Killer • The Lucky Strike • Move Into the Light •  
This War Has Two Sides • Outspoken Authors • Paper Politics • Prison Round Trip • Reach • n

Independent Reader Spring/Summer 09 • The City From Below 9



# COMMON PURPOSE, UNCOMMON APPROACH

By Tom Kertes

Following the events of the B'More Fair and Human Rights Zone March held on April 18 in Baltimore City, Rev. Heber Brown III wrote some powerful words on his blog *Faith in Action* about the day, writing that “without exaggeration, [today] was the most organized, diverse, and strategic community activism event that I have ever been a part of in this city.” These are powerful words from an experienced and already committed community organizer and leader. Rev. Brown's words say a lot about the many people who made April 18 happen, adding meaning to the day's community fair and solidarity march from Carroll Park to the Inner Harbor, where low-wage workers demanded respect and dignity at work.

Rev. Brown's words are also humbling words for those who came together to carry out the work of the day's activities; humbling because the hundreds of people who made April 18 happen hold incredible responsibility as leaders and participants in the building of our history together. This responsibility is especially great if what we did moves the city to a new level of organizing and community

building. Rev. Brown's words call for deep reflection. We should be clear about what, why, and how April 18 happened. We should also reflect on what can and should follow next. If we are on the path to building some kind of power, if this is truly the case, then we should understand the implications that will follow from building this kind of power. Creating history together is sacred work and requires the deepest reflection, given the great power that can come from such work and the need for justice to be realized everywhere.

On first reading of Rev. Brown's reflection about April 18 I was reminded of a reflection posted by the United Workers on its blog following the Allies and Advisers Gathering, held on the Saturday before Martin Luther King Day earlier in the year, at which the planning process for the B'More Fair was set in motion. Over 90 community organizers from different organizations, faith communities, and unions met and decided on the theme and overall vision for the B'More Fair. Later that week the United Workers wrote that the gathering “may not have felt all that historic to those of us who were there as we prayed together, met in small groups, and ate

soup and sandwiches together. The day may have easily felt more mundane than momentous. But what we did on this day was build our future history, and on reflection that can be

nothing less than truly momentous.” Given that the gathering was held on the same day that then President-Elect Obama visited the city on his way to the inauguration, we can draw a distinction between these two events and ask the question: Which event contributes more to the future of ending poverty and realizing our city's full potential?

The planning, or the history building, for the B'More Fair and Human Rights Zone March started long before the gathering on the weekend before Martin Luther King Day. It started long before the Allies and Advisers Gathering, long before the City from Below Conference that helped kick off outreach efforts beyond Baltimore, and long before April 18 culminated with the announcement of the worst employer at Baltimore's Inner Harbor. The power that made both the Allies and Advisers Gathering and April 18 possible was created in thousands of small actions across decades of time, carried out long before the day itself or before it was even thought of in the minds of those who first proposed it. It was made by the members of the Red Emma's collective coming together years ago to start building a vibrant community space for reflection and action. It was made by the expansion of that collective to include the 2640 Space, providing more space for countless other projects and acts of solidarity. It was made in sermons by faith leaders like Rev. Brown and Rev. Roger Scott Powers. It was made in tens of thousands of house visits by unions and community organizers. It was made in peer to peer tutoring sessions, in protests to demand life in education and in a hunger strike to compel the mayor to respect the human right of this city's young people in need of humanizing education.

April 18 was made possible by SMEAC, Algebra Project and dozens of other community organizations who organize the poor as leaders. It was made by farm-workers in Immokalee Florida who are developing and acting on a model of community organizing that can be applied in Baltimore and elsewhere, by media makers in Philadelphia organizing to end poverty, by poverty scholars around the world thinking and teaching a way out of the conditions that cause poverty's continuation, and by visionaries in Pittsburgh standing in solidarity with workers in all parts of the world. The history written on April 18 was made possible by independent journalists creating spaces for sharing ideas and lessons learned with the community, who help bring all these forces together so that we can grow, adapt and act in unity and solidarity for the purpose of expanding unconditional love to all aspects of human existence. The many people and organizations who made April 18 happen, over decades of time and in thousands of actions big and small, is a reflection that community power comes in large part from community diversity.

We are stronger when we realize that common purpose does not require common approach. Regardless of outcome related to diversity, we also know that common purpose based on the inherent worth and dignity of life requires respect for diversity, because there is no humanity in everything being the same. For me, the value of diversity stems in part from my belief that each person is created not only in the image of God, but is also

blessed with the gift of free will. Having been granted the power to act in absolute liberty, even if in sin, there is diversity in thought and action, a direct outcome of this cherished and sacred gift from God. For myself and others, diversity is also valued not necessarily in one's belief on the origins of humanity, but from deep love for the uniqueness of each human being, or in the diversity stemming from the wonders of life's code and the intersection between design and experience. Moreover, growth is not possible without diversity, because construction requires conflict, sharing, multiple forms of expression, competing ideas, and the purposeful cultivation of diverse community.

April 18 was an incredible experience because of those who came together to make it happen, to express our strength, and to reflect on our diversity through action and reflection together. One look around at the B'More Fair and it was clear how strong and vibrant our community is, and how blessed we are to be part of this community. With over 50 community organizations tabling at the B'More Fair, from Team Trans to UNITE HERE, there was a lot to celebrate on that day. Walking through the fair, I heard conversations ranging from environmental justice to the abolition of the prison system. Groups present included those working in solidarity with soldiers standing up against the oppression of war, those building and expanding community radio to give voice to the once voiceless, and homeless persons fighting for equitable health care for all. People were engaging, listening, talking, sharing, and singing about shared purpose. Culture was constructed through song, puppet making, debate, food, and low-powered community radio. This was powerfully illustrated when students from Students for Worker Justice and members of a radical community marching band led folks to the start of the Human Rights Zone March after participants listened to testimonials about human rights struggles throughout the city. We asserted these values in the solidarity stops at Camden Yards, outside of the State Department of Education, at the City Center Sheraton, near the BGE offices, and at City Hall. Our voices came together in celebration as we marched from Carroll Park, through Pig Town and downtown, and to the Human Rights Zone at the Inner Harbor.

After the events of April 18, Veronica Dorsey, another member of the United Workers Staff Collective, told me that what was most powerful for her was that “friends in all shapes, sizes, and colors came together on April 18. We were all human beings on that day because we came together to make it so. We celebrated life, including having fun together.” Veronica also told me that for this to happen “there had to be solidarity and collective action so that our voice was heard. What we did on April 18 was get heard in this way, and I felt real community pride and also love amongst the people together, even with the people that I just met for the first time on that day.” April 18 was one step. It was taken by hundreds and was the result of the dedicated and sacred work carried out by leaders across color lines, classes, languages and all other barriers. Let's keep walking down this path together, in love and solidarity. ★

*Image: Human Rights Zone march, Baltimore by Sergio/United Workers*



## Chicago From Below

Read AREA Chicago online

to learn about social and cultural movements in the city that produced: Haymarket, Obama, Fred Hampton, Republic Windows Factory Occupation, Oprah, Mayor Daley, Kanye and the Cusak siblings!

[www.areachicago.org](http://www.areachicago.org)



# Fighting Foreclosure in South Africa: An Open Letter to US Activists

By The Western Cape  
Anti-Eviction Campaign

To: All poor Americans and their communities in resistance

No House! No Vote!" This is not because we are against democracy but because we are against voting for elites and for politicians who promise us the whole world every five years and, when they get elected, steal the little we have for themselves. Elections are a chance for those in power to consolidate it. We believe this is not only a problem of corruption, but also a structural problem that gives individuals and political parties the authority to make decisions for us. We reject that and we reject voting for it.

The privatization of land--a public resource for all that has now become a false commodity--was the original sin, the original cause of this financial crisis. With the privatization of land comes the dispossession of people from their land which was held in common by communities. With the privatization of land comes the privatization of everything else, because once land can be bought and sold, almost anything else can eventually be bought and sold.

As the poor of South Africa, we know this because we live it. Colonialism and apartheid dispossessed us of our land and gave it to whites to be bought and sold for profit. When apartheid as a systematic racial instrument ended in 1994, we did not get our land back. Some blacks are now able to own land as long as they have the money to do so. But as the poor living in council homes, renting flats or living in the shacks, we became even more vulnerable to the property market.

It is chilling to hear many people today speak with nostalgia about how it was better during apartheid--as if it was not apartheid that stole their land in the first place. But, in an obscure way, it makes sense. Back then in the cities there was less competition for land and housing. Because many of us were kept in the bantustans by a combination of force and economic compulsion (such as subsidized rural factories), the informal settlements in the cities were smaller and land less scarce.

But in the new South Africa (what some call post-apartheid South Africa and others call neoliberal South Africa), the elite have decided it is every man--or woman or multinational company--for him or herself. And thus, the poor end up fighting with the rich as well as with themselves. The elite use their wealth and their connections to all South African political parties in the pursuit of profit. There is very little regulation of this, and where there is regulation, corrupt and authoritarian government officials get around it in a heartbeat. People say that we have the best constitution in the world--but what kind of constitution enshrines the pursuit of profit above anything else? They claim it was written for us. That may be. But it obviously was not written by us--the poor.

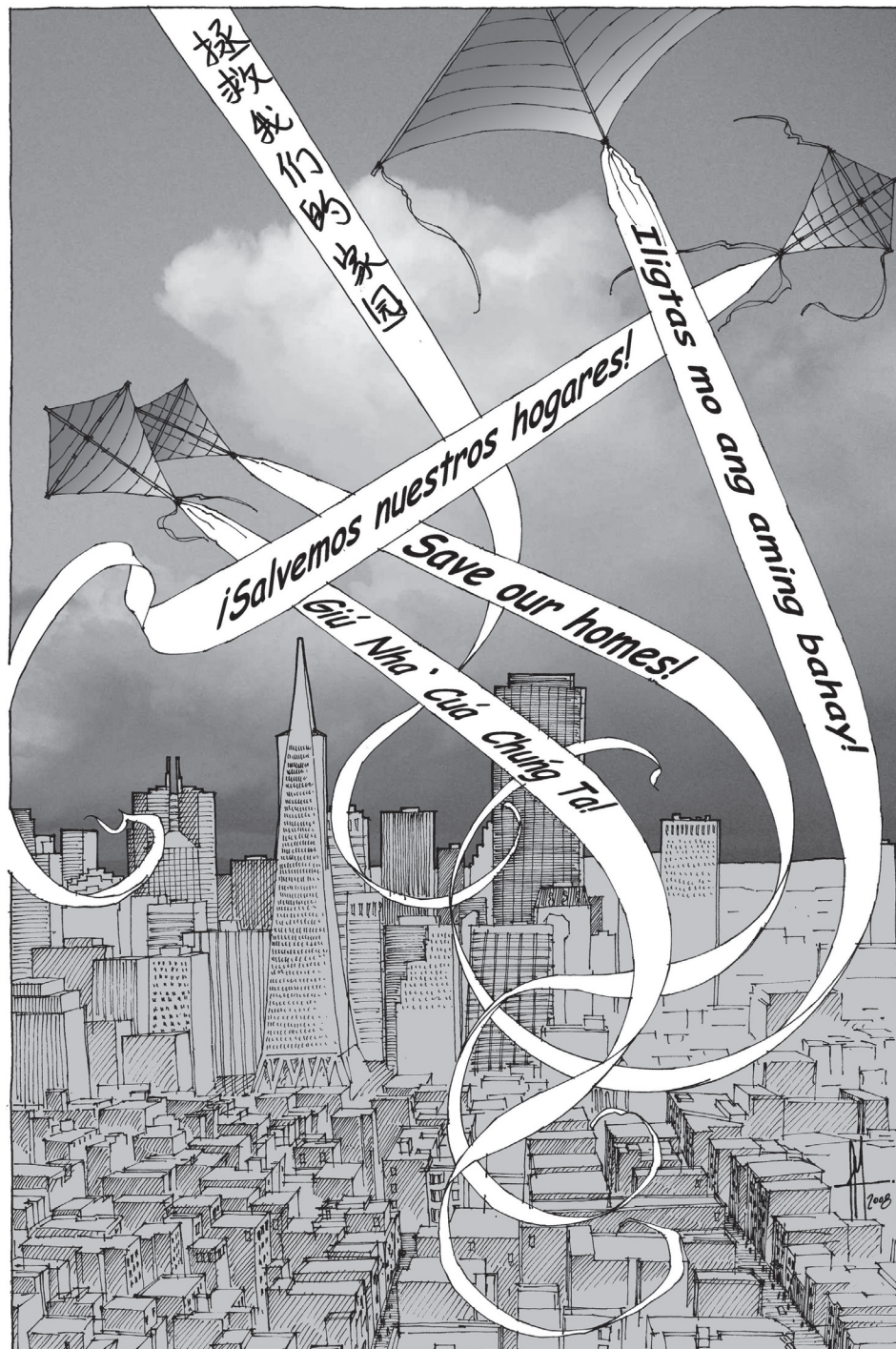
So, the recent realization that there is a financial crisis in the US (we think the crisis has been there a long time, but was hidden by economists) reminds us of where we ourselves stand. While our neoliberal government has touted growth and low inflation figures as proof of the health of our country, 40 percent unemployment has remained. While Mandela and Mbeki were in power and the economy grew, poor South Africans had their homes stolen right from under them. For our entire lives, we have been living in a depression, and at the center of this crisis is land and housing.

As the poor, we gave the African National Congress government five years to at least make some inroads towards redistribution. But instead, the land and housing crisis has gotten worse, inequality greater, and we are more vulnerable than ever.

So, in 1999, 2000 and 2001, farms, townships, ghettos and shack settlements all across South Africa erupted against evictions, water cutoffs, electricity cutoffs and the like. We have been fighting for small things and small issues, but our communities are also fighting two larger battles.

The first is embodied in the declaration we make to the outside world: We may be poor but we are not stupid! We may be poor, but we can still think! Nothing for us without us! Talk to us, not about us! We are fighting for democracy. The right to be heard and the right to be in control of our own communities and our own society. This means that government officials and political parties should stop telling us what we want. We know what we want. This means that NGOs and development "experts" should stop workshopping us on "world-renowned" solutions at the expense of our own homegrown knowledge. This means we refuse to be a "stakeholder" and have our voices managed and diminished by those who count.

In the 2004 national elections and again in this year's elections, we have declared, "No Land!



tion of the struggle. No politician or political party can or will fight the struggle for you. As a hero of your past once stated: power concedes nothing without a demand. Being in the struggle for over nine years, we have learned the following:

- Beware of all those in power--even those who seem like they are on your side.
- Beware of money, especially NGO money, which seeks to pacify and prevent direct action.
- Beware of media, even alternative media written by the middle class on behalf of the poor. Create your own media.
- Beware of leaders, even your own. No one can lead without you. Leaders are like forks and knives. They are the tools of the community and exist to be led by the communities.

When you build your "Take Back Our Land! Take Back Our Houses!" movement, build from below. Build democratically. Build alternative and autonomous ways of living within your community while fighting for what is yours. Build your own school of thought.

Make sure poor communities control their own movements because, as we say, no one can lead without us. Make sure you break the government's laws when necessary, but never break your own laws which you set for yourselves.

Most important of all, do not forget you have much to teach us as well. We all have much to learn from one another.

Amandla Ngawethu! Power to the Poor People!

The Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign, South Africa ★

Formed in November 2000, the Western Cape Anti-Eviction campaign is an umbrella organization for the coordination of poor people's struggles against evictions and cutoffs in basic services like water and electricity in an increasingly neoliberal South Africa. More info: [antieviction.org.za](http://antieviction.org.za)

Image: "Save Our Homes" by Fernando Marti/Justseeds ([el\\_compay\\_nando@yahoo.com](mailto:el_compay_nando@yahoo.com))



# Community Land Trust Q & A

James Tracy interviews Jim Kelly

## 1) What is a Community Land Trust?

A community land trust (CLT) is a democratically controlled nonprofit organization that owns and controls land to make sure it is used for permanently affordable housing or other purposes that benefit the surrounding community.

## 2) Across the United States, what are communities using it for?

Creating and sustaining permanently affordable homes has been the dominant focus for Community Land Trusts in the United States. CLTs offer a uniquely useful tool for bringing perpetually affordable homeownership to the single-family home. Many communities dealing with chronic distortions in their real estate markets are looking to CLTs as a way of fostering economic diversity among their homeowners.

CLTs, however, are also being used to control and sustain community open space and sites for productive activity. Urban farming and other sustainable businesses will be critically important for communities wrestling with chronic disinvestment that leads to vacant and abandoned parcels. CLTs can offer tools for communities to manage very different kinds of market failures.

## 3) Some point to the experience of New York City to prove that cooperative housing can't succeed in the long-term—that affordability and community control evaporates. How are CLT's structured to address this?

Many housing cooperatives are started by low and moderate-income tenants strongly committed to the ideal of decent housing that is controlled by the residents and forever affordable to people of limited means. As residents come and go and surrounding property values appreciate, the commitment to affordability can give way to a desire to allow the apartments to be sold to the highest bidder. Often the loans the coop received require them to stay affordable for a time, but once those restrictions expire, many affordable coops are free to convert to market-rate by a majority vote of people who will benefit financially from the conversion. If a cooperative apartment building is developed on community land trust land, then the cooperative will be subject to a permanent commitment to the whole community to remain affordable forever.

## 4) Beyond affordable housing and community amenities, how does this differ from the traditional non-profit Community Development Corporation?

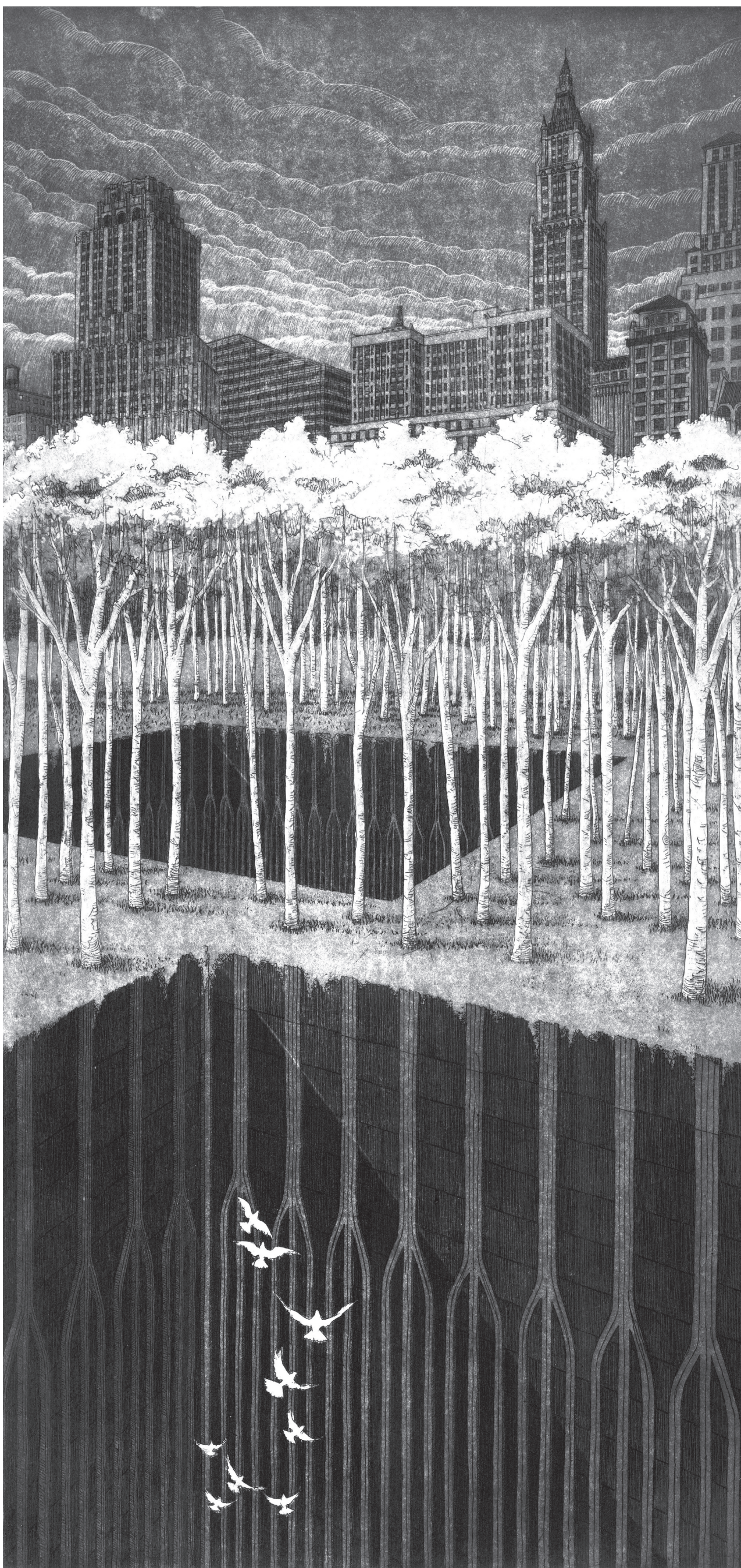
Community Land Trusts are oriented to the long-term good of the community. CLTs may become developers of housing or community-based business themselves, but their fundamental mission is to identify and protect the community's long-term interest in sustainable use of the land.

## 5) Do CLT's fit into a larger vision of land reform in the US?

Absolutely. For too long, the land in our cities, towns and rural areas have been divided almost exclusively between private, for-profit ownership and government control. Land trusts create a third way in which community members--residents, small business owners and social entrepreneurs--can enjoy the land in a way that builds the community and allows them to be accountable to a community organization of which they are an important part. ★

*James Tracy is a long-time economic justice organizer in based in the SF Bay Area, and a co-editor of the forthcoming book Dispatches against Displacement for AK Press. Jim Kelly teaches law and directs the Community Development Clinic at the University of Baltimore. He also works on laying the legal groundwork for community land trusts in Baltimore City.*

Image: "Vacíos" by Fernando Martí/Justseeds  
(el\_compay\_nando@yahoo.com)





# THE PERILS OF PUBLIC SPACE AND DEMOCRACY IN ATHENS

By Nicholas Anastasopoulos, Eleni Tzirtzilaki

The Pnyx is a hill facing the Acropolis in Athens. It is where in ancient times about 6,000 politically active citizens would stand and address the Assembly, exercising democracy at its birthplace from the 6<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. Today, Filoppapou Hill, the larger area where the Pnyx sits, has been under threat of privatization. Attempts were made by the Ministry of Culture to fence it up and eventually restrict access to certain opening hours with a ticket purchase to a space where Athenians have walked freely for more than two millennia.

Indeed, all open and public spaces, within the city as well as at its periphery, seem to be under attack in one way or another and face threats of extinction through deterioration, degradation, or change of status from public common good accessible to all to private property, often accessible only by payment. All of these transformations take place in the name of progress and sometimes safety. But, in reality, the process is about the financial gains of a powerful elite, and it undermines the people's civil liberties. The inalienable right of citizens' access to clean air and natural and open spaces in Athens hangs in the balance. Currently Athens is one of the most densely built capitals in Europe and has the lowest percentage of green area per inhabitant.

Despite its heritage as the birthplace of democracy, Greece in recent years appears to have a deficit in its handling of public space. The Olympic Games in Athens spawned several sports complexes surrounded by space

that, although paid for by the people, remained largely (and illegally) inaccessible. Many of these areas have already been privatized. A long list of such abuses of authority in the name of commercial development produces a grim picture of contemporary Athens. Such abuses include efforts to develop unneeded shopping malls at Elaionas, an area cited by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD geographer Pausanias, and the last remaining underdeveloped historic area of Athens, as well as at the Zografou estate, another dense neighbourhood of Athens.

The killing of 15-year-old Alexandros Grigoropoulos by a policeman in Athens on the evening of December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008 triggered massive uprisings that sent ripples everywhere, producing spontaneous expressions of support and sympathy and making international headlines.

In a sense the youth's death sparked a fire that was waiting to flare. These uprisings expressed the dissatisfaction of a large sector of society, especially the young generation, being a population that is among the prime victims of social dysfunction, poor education, and the economic crisis. Several other significant acts followed, including a series of protest occupations of major public spaces, such as the Opera house, universities, and many others as symbolic gestures against current political repression and a heavy climate of corruption.

Given this corruption, the concept of going green has recently become highly political

and controversial in the city. Every politician of every leaning claims to be the greenest and to be promoting sustainability in their own way. The current mayor of Athens was elected based on green policies that included the promise to buy lots in the city and to turn them into parks and implement measures for greening of roofs, etc.

Instead, two months later, in line with his scandal-ridden government that has a habit of making unfulfilled promises, the mayor sent government employees at 6 am without warning to cut down a grove of century-old pine trees in a small neighborhood park in a densely populated city neighborhood in order to turn the park into underground parking. Publicly, the mayor claimed this was done to alleviate traffic congestion, but in fact the purpose of the project was to yield a sizeable deal with the private company that would construct the garage.

More uprisings followed, further polarizing the population, and triggering other reactions.

In a proactive show of force, a neighborhood peoples' initiative took over a parking lot and in two weekends proceeded to transform it into the first community garden of the city, known thereafter as the Navarinou Park. The takeover came in response to an almost 20-year-old promise by the municipality that it would use the parking lot as a park for the public. After an open invitation sent by e-mail and word of mouth around March 3<sup>rd</sup>, people broke the parking asphalt, proceeded to plant donated trees and plants, and then cooked and sang. This activity continued and

became organized in the following weeks.

The Navarinou Park initiative appears to be a long-term one, and may have the most long-lasting positive effects for the area. The concept of immediate democracy is being reinvented and put to the test here just two blocks away from where Alexandros Grigoropoulos was shot three months ago. Planning and design decisions are being made by open working groups and by a people's assembly. The Navarinou Park case represents a promising and successful moment of collective action and decision-making, work, and learning. Unlike many other public spaces or neighbourhood parks, this is a place that remains alive almost 24 hours a day.

Locals as well as many coming from afar, curious about the experiment being conducted here, come to work, meet friends, learn about what is new, or attend an event. Time has transformed this land, as the notion of a community garden becomes introduced for the first time in the city and people of all ages begin to interact with each other.

The parking lot-turned-into-park has become the hinging element, that in a web of competing interests may contribute to the larger debate around public spaces in the city.

The binding of people that generates a collective experience and identity, what has come to be known as *civitas*, has remained for long at an embryonic stage. Only recently has it grown in response to the rapid and disquieting failure of efforts by Athenians to reclaim, defend, and transform their urban public spaces. ★

**Z**  
Magazine

Promoting Resistance  
& Alternatives since 1988

← a monthly reader  
on politics & culture



[www.zcommunications.org](http://www.zcommunications.org)

ZCOM projects include Z Magazine, ZNet, Z Video Productions, Z Media Institute, & Z Education Online. Thousands of articles and other content is available at our website. Besides subscribing, please consider signing up as an online Sustainer to support us.

## What others say about Z

**HOWARD ZINN:** "Z Magazine is a uniquely bold and powerful voice on the American left. It has an amazing range of interests. I have run into people in obscure places in the United States whose only piece of radical literature is Z Magazine."

**C.P. PANDYA:** "What truly sets Z apart from other news and analysis providers, independent and otherwise, are its unrelenting commitment to including diverse voices in the struggle for social justice and its accessibility to writers and activists."

**NOAM CHOMSKY:** "I travel and speak constantly, in this country and abroad. I constantly discover that the people and organizations I come in contact with are relying very substantially on Z projects for information, discussion, and opportunities for interaction and organizing, to an extent that is quite remarkable."

**BETSY HARTMAN:** "Progressive activists the world over rely on Z Communications not only for coverage of breaking events, but for deeper analysis of the challenges facing diverse social movements and successful strategies to overcome them. Z Communications is boldly visionary at a time when the Left needs new non-sectarian vision. It is a force for change and for hope. It is important that to the extent they are able, people who use it support it."

**NORMAN SOLOMON:** "In a time of constant media manipulation, every edition of Z Magazine comes through with key information and cogent analysis. This is an essential publication for people who refuse to be spun by evasion or euphemism and who want to help strengthen movements for social justice and peace. Z Magazine is present-day radicalism at its best."

## Special Subscription Offer

A YEAR OF Z MAGAZINE  
FOR ONLY \$19

NORMALLY \$33 PER YEAR / SPECIAL OFFER EXPIRES SEPT. 30, 2009

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Payment required to start subscription; offer limited to U.S. addresses & intended for new subscriptions (not renewals)

Paying by check or money order \_\_\_\_\_; Or

MC/VISA \_\_\_\_\_ EXP \_\_\_\_\_

If paying by credit card, please give phone or email contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Checks payable to Z Magazine. Mail form and payment to:  
**Z Magazine, 18 Millfield St., Woods Hole MA 02543**  
Or fax it to 508-457-0626. You can also order by phone, 508-548-9063; or email us at [zmag@zmag.org](mailto:zmag@zmag.org)



# Crisis and Resistance

A conversation with David Harvey, Max Rameau, Shiri Pasternak, and Ben

**David Harvey:** This foreclosure crisis, this financial crisis, has to be thought of as a crisis of the city, a crisis of urbanization – and if it's a crisis of the city and of urbanization, then the solution has to be a reconfiguration of the city and a redirection of what urbanization is about. The pattern of this crisis is not anything new; and one of the things that happens in the U.S., and on the left in general, is that we seem sometimes to suffer from amnesia as to what has happened in the past. I would like to recall that the last biggest crisis period of capitalism, from around 1973 to 1982, was a deep crisis of urbanization. It began with the collapse of global property markets in the spring of 1973, leading to the bankruptcy of several financial institutions, followed of course by the Arab-Israeli war and the oil price hike (which everybody remembers more than they remember the property market crash). This was followed by a crisis of municipal finance and the disciplining of almost all cities, not only in the U.S., but around the world, to a new regime of financial terror, what I'd also call "neoliberal politics." Understanding what this regime was about is crucial because it was part of the solution to the crisis of the 1970s, a solution which underpins the nature of the crisis we are currently in. This is a terribly important point to make, because how we come out of this crisis is almost certainly going to define the nature of the next crisis down the road – unless we decide to say, "To hell with capitalist crises! To hell with capitalism!"

In the 1970s it was clear that corporate America was in difficulty, economically and politically. Economically, it decided to try to get out of it by confronting and disciplining labor, big time, and it had a number of means to do that. First, it opened up immigration, for instance the 1965 Immigration Reform Act in this country. It's very interesting to remember that in the 1960s and the 1970s the Germans were importing people from Turkey, the French were actually subsidizing bringing in immigrants from the Maghreb, Britain was of course accepting people from the ex-empire, and the Swedes were bringing in people from Yugoslavia. Immigration became one of the capitalist class' main tools to try to solve the "problem" of the power of labor, the scarcity of labor, and the high level of wages. Second, they tried to use technological change to throw people out of work as much as possible, through labor-saving innovations. The third was the invention of interesting politicians with names like Reagan and Thatcher, whose main mission was of course to screw labor and destroy labor organization – they did it democratically while

Pinochet did it through military violence in Chile. And finally if this political assault on labor didn't work you could always offshore production to Mexico or the Philippines or Bangladesh or ultimately even to China.

By all these means, capitalists successfully disciplined labor in the 1970s and early 1980s, such that by the time you get to 1985 the labor question is no longer a serious barrier to capitalist accumulation. What that meant however, was that labor had very little power in the market, and as a result of that, real wages did not increase anywhere in the world, even in the United States, from the 1970s to the present day. We've been through 30 years of wage repression, guaranteeing capitalist profits, with a public policy which was actually oriented in that same direction. I always remember that Margaret Thatcher's economic advisor said in effect, sometime after he left the position, that he really believed that the fight against inflation was really a

the class structure. We went through deindustrialization in this country, through a reconfiguration of the nature of job structures and also of the kinds of people who can occupy those job structures. This was crucial to fueling the bubble that grew in the 1990s in particular. During that period, if you asked where to put your money, you were told to put it in property markets. It's important to remember that we've had many financial crises over these last thirty years, and many of those crises have been related to urbanization, and have been about property. We had the Savings and Loans crisis in 1987-89, when somewhere around 600 or 800 banks or financial institutions were declared bankrupt, and this was a crisis tied very much to commercial property. In 1992 the Swedish banking system went bankrupt over excessive property development. In 1989 the Japanese economy crashed around land market prices. What we've had is a whole series of asset bubbles and we seem to forget what these asset bubbles are about.

bankrupt. So at that point, the government stepped in, the treasury and the IMF got together, and they bailed out Mexico so that Mexico could bailout the New York banks. But they bailed out Mexico in such a way that the Mexican population suffered a drop in living standards of about 20% in the next two to five years. This is what's called saving the banks and socking it to the people.

Now I defy you to look at what's been going on in this country in terms of its public policy and say anything other than saving the banks and socking it to the people. We're the ones who are paying, they are the ones who are benefitting. This is a class project, it was a class project back in the 1970s and it continues to be one now. If we come out of this crisis with this class project intact then we are in deep trouble. We have to turn it around in such a way that government policy gets turned into support of the people, not support of the banks. The banks should be



cover to bash the workers and create an industrial reserve army so that capitalists could have easy profits ever thereafter.

What we've seen since then is of course a tremendous increase in inequality and a tremendous concentration of wealth in the upper classes. The story we're told is that the upper classes should have that wealth, after all, they invest, and as they invest they create jobs and aren't-we-all-grateful-to-them-for-doing-so. The idea that we could actually get jobs by other means is ruled out of the picture, of course. But in fact the capitalist class doesn't particularly care about creating jobs, it cares about making money. And it soon found, in the 1980s in particular, that it could make money by investing in asset values rather than in production, so it started to invest in the stock market, in property markets, in oil futures and so on. New markets were developed in which you could actually make even more money than you could spending your money on assets through purchasing derivatives of assets – and very soon you could buy on derivatives of insurances of derivatives of assets and so on.

What resulted was a financial asset bubble, rather than at real expansion of production and real jobs. The rest of us were reduced very frequently to service functions, reconfiguring

These asset bubbles are like Ponzi schemes: people put money in the stock market, the stock market rises, and people put more money in the stock market, and it just keeps going like that, the same with property markets, the same with oil futures. And this leads us to a point where, finally, the asset bubble breaks. It breaks big time this time, not like it did in 1987, which was sort of contained, but in a much bigger way, that becomes global immediately, as the 1973-75 crisis was global. That then poses the problem: what exactly are we going to do about this?

Now the answer to this lies in the way we came out of the crisis in the 1970s, when the New York investment banks acquired vast quantities of money from recycling petrodollars. Their big problem was where to invest it—the economy wasn't doing well, so where do you put your money to make a sufficient rate of return? One of the things they decided on was lending to developing countries—because the good thing about lending to countries is that countries can't disappear, you know where they are and you know you can go get your money. So in the 1970s they lent to places like Mexico. Then they raised the interest rates and Mexico couldn't pay, and was going to go bankrupt—which meant that the New York investment banks could go

nationalized, turned into public utilities which serve people, not capital. And this is something on which we really need to concentrate our ideas on, right now. In particular, the biggest danger of all is that the stimulus package which is being passed is going to be handed out to mayors, handed out to cities, handed out all over the place, in such a way that there is absolutely no control over exactly what's going to be done with it. So what's going to be done with it is that people are going to be use it to fund their favorite projects. Mayor Bloomberg's favorite project is to give \$45 million to retrain Wall Street executives, which seems to me an astonishing way in which to spend the money – but that's the way Mayor Bloomberg thinks. But I think we have different ideas; in New York, together with the some of the social movements who are forming the Right To The City group, we would like to suggest a whole different set of ways the stimulus package could be spent in order to benefit people rather than capital. Along with that, we have the supreme irrationality that you have tent cities arising in California and elsewhere, increasing homelessness, at the same time that you have all these vacant properties around. Is that a rational situation? And it seems that this is a situation where political activism can take very direct action—for instance, Picture



# in the Neoliberal City

## Esther Wang, live at the City From Below Conference in Baltimore

the Homeless in NYC tried to commandeer a building last week—and this is the kind of thing we need to be supporting publicly as much as we can.

**Max Rameau:** I think we've identified that most people here are here because we've identified that there is a serious and ongoing crisis, and that this crisis represents an opportunity. And while it's important to identify that, particularly for the social justice movement, it is insufficient to stop there. In addition to identifying the fact that there is a crisis, we have to identify the specific nature of the crisis, first, and then we have to craft a series of strategies and tactics which are specifically engineered to address the crisis given the way we would like the world to be at the end of the crisis.

We, in the social justice movement, need a theory of how real social change is made. Significant social change happens when there's a crisis and then as a result, there's a social clash,

going to tolerate the kind of treatment we've received, and as a result, you had the Great Society and the additional social safety nets, and you'd never think about race and race relationships in the same way in the US.

We argue that we are on the verge, the cusp, of entering into the fourth major social clash, and it is our job to figure out what the nature of this social clash is, now, as it begins, and make sure that we fight for the things that we want to come out of it in the end. We're talking about here "crisis and resistance," but most of the time oppressed people and supporters of oppressed people are already in a mode of resistance. When you think about resistance, you think about someone hitting or stabbing someone, and that person resisting, trying to stop that from happening. This is what happens the majority of the time for the social justice movement, we're resisting, we're fighting against the actions of the system. What's so unique about this moment is that we are enter-

empty for years on end, most people would still say yes. At the end of this crisis, I don't think that's going to still be the case: people will be thinking about land in a different way. But this isn't a foregone conclusion—things could take a significant turn in the other direction. At the end of this crisis, we're either going to think about land in a way which gives more rights to human beings, or in a way which gives even more rights to corporations. We're going to help determine in which direction this goes, but of course so is the system, and that's why we have to figure out where we're going and how we're going to get there.

We're asserting that this current social clash is made up of two fundamental ideas, two rights or perceived rights, which are hitting up against one another. On the one hand, we have the right of human beings to housing, and on the other, you have the right—or perceived right—of corporations to make a profit. And increasingly it seems that these two rights

This is the way that we're going to assert that the right of human beings to housing supersedes the right of corporations to make a profit—by taking vacant land, using it for the purposes we feel are most appropriate for our community, and not allowing the system to do whatever it wants to with that land. That's the way we're going to force this issue—and this needs to happen on a scale which compels a change in the laws on the ground about how land and land relationships are formed. These takeovers need to happen on such a large scale that it forces the system to realize that it is actually going to cost them less money to give all these units away than it's going to cost to take all these units back a second, a third, a fourth, and a fifth time from the people who are taking them over. That's how, on the ground, we're going to make the challenge that land belongs to human beings, rather than corporations.

**Shiri Pasternak:** I was involved in a project with David Wachsmuth called "Abandonment Issues" in Toronto. This was before the economic crisis hit. The scale of abandonment in Toronto is pretty small compared with what's happening in the U.S., and even smaller thinking about what's happening in the states now with the foreclosure crisis. But we saw that there was a problem of abandoned buildings in Toronto, and a problem of tens of thousands of people on an affordable housing waitlist, and we thought that there's a kind of math here that's really easy to

do from a social justice standpoint. If there's people with no houses, and houses with no people, we should really bring these two things together. So we pushed for a "use it or lose it" bylaw, which is before City Council this spring, and hopefully will get passed. If it is, that would mean abandoned or vacant properties in the city would be expropriated and turned into affordable housing.

One of the big challenges of this project is that it really forced us to think about property. There's an underlying question of the inequalities of how property is distributed, and so we thought that this was a project that helped resocialize the way we think about law and help think differently about who gets to have shelter, who gets to have property, and how property is distributed. In Canada, these questions are extremely salient right now. What I want to talk about tonight is one of the most powerful social movements happening in Canada today: an indigenous movement of resistance against colonialism and neoliberalism, but a take back the land movement that poses a challenge to urban activists: to think about how living in cities disconnects us from the resources we depend on, and also disconnects us from the histories of colonialism and the histories of expropriation that we're imbricated within and that we



David Harvey speaks on Federal Hill, photo by Ryan Patterson

a banging of heads of two or more ideas, and then, as a result of that social clash, a new reality emerges — something new is created. The job of the social justice movement is to determine (or play a significant role in determining) what that new reality is. Of course, the job of the system is to resist this new reality from coming into being, or to shape this new reality in such way that it benefits them, rather than benefitting human beings.

The reason why this so important now is because up until this point we have had three major social clashes in the US and we are about to head into the fourth. The first major social clash was centered around the civil war, where you had two economic systems battling against one another (slavery and emerging industrial capitalism), and the result was the era of reconstruction — and labor and the economic system in the US has never been the same since. The second major social clash centered around the crisis of the great depression, and as a result of the great depression and the demands made by labor, we had the New Deal, and you never would think about labor and the social safety net in the same way again. And then the third major clash was around the civil rights movement (and the anti-war movement). You had the black community standing up and saying we're not

ing a time of not just resistance, a time where we are not just limited to resisting, but where we could actually be *advancing*. We need to prepare for that. This is important, because if we're going to be advancing, we need to know where we're going to be advancing to, and what we are advancing towards: huge gains can be made, but also significant mistakes. We can learn, for instance, from the mistakes of the civil rights movement. According to the book *Black Power*, being black in the US consisted of two fundamental problems: one was being black and the other was being poor. Both problems had to be addressed by the civil rights movement, or at least should have been. Due to a number of factors, including the direction in which the media and those in power took it, but also because of the class makeup of those who were leading the civil rights movement, being black was addressed but never being poor. We can not repeat the same kind of mistake in this next social clash.

I'm arguing that the economic crisis we are experiencing here is fundamentally rooted in land—and therefore, that the clash that results is going to be about land. At the end of this crisis, people will be thinking about land in a significantly different way than we do now. Today, for the most part, if you ask people if a bank has a right to buy a house and leave it

are mutually exclusive. If everyone gets housing, corporations can't maximize their profit, and conversely if corporations maximize their profit, then everyone can't get housing. Take Back the Land asserts that the right of human beings to housing supersedes the right of corporations to make a profit.

How does this play itself out on a practical level? For us, Take Back the Land, it's very simple—on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2006, a group of about 20 of us arrived on a vacant lot on the corner of 62<sup>nd</sup> St. and Northwest Seventeenth Ave. in the Liberty City section of Miami. We seized control of the government owned lot, and we built a shantytown named the Umoja Village Shantytown there. The Shantytown stood for six months, and we housed over 150 people all together. We seized control of the land, and we decided what was going to happen on that land rather than allowing elected officials and developers to come in and decide what was going to happen on that land. The Umoja Village burned in a suspicious fire six months later, but we felt that the ideas behind the Umoja Village remained just as valid as they had been. Consequently, starting in October of 2007, Take Back the Land began identifying vacant, government owned and foreclosed homes; we entered the homes and moved homeless people into peopleless homes, and have been doing that ever since.



## What is "The Right to the City"?

Simply put, "The Right to the City" means that the people who live in a city have a right to it, that is, the city should in some sense belong to them, not in the sense that they own it like property, but that they have meaningful control over the way the city works (for instance, in deciding how public money is allocated or what kinds of development are permitted and/or encouraged) and that they benefit from the city as a common resource – with the ability to enjoy public space, live in dignified and affordable housing, and so on. While these may sound like quite reasonable and by no means revolutionary demands, the French social theorist Henri Lefebvre, who coined the phrase "The Right to the City" in his 1968 book of the same name, recognized that demanding these seemingly simple things was actually quite radical – since to do so poses a fundamental challenge to the system behind our cities, which are generally set up to maximize private profit and isolated complacency, not public welfare and active participation in redefining the urban environment.

## What is The Right to the City Alliance?

Over the course of the last decade, social movements, radical community organizations, and international human rights groups have picked up on Lefebvre's slogan as a new rallying cry for a global movement for a better city. In the U.S., a number of groups came together under the RTTC banner following an initial call in 2007 by the Miami Workers Center, Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (LA), and Tenants and Workers United (Northern VA). The RTTC Alliance was solidified at the first ever US Social Forum in Atlanta later that year, and today the Alliance is composed of over 40 member groups from across the United States. The Alliance is primarily focused on bringing together existing organizations which mobilize a membership base – drawn primarily from "low-income, working class communities of color" – around local struggles in the city. This commendable focus on bringing the least-represented, hardest-hit, and already organized communities of US cities together in a national network does mean that it's difficult to "join" the RTTC alliance, but it's nevertheless one of the most promising nodes in the emerging network of urban struggles, especially, as has started happening in New York and elsewhere, local RTTC networks of member organizations and supporters move beyond sharing strategies and resources towards city-wide organizing efforts.

## Further reading:

Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (2003)

David Harvey, "The Right to the City" *New Left Review* 53, September-October 2008. Online at <http://newleftreview.org/?view=2740>

Right to the City Alliance: <http://www.righttothecity.org>

"World Charter of the Right to the City" <http://hic-net.org/documents.asp?PID=62>

benefit from on a daily basis ...

*(Shiri's further remarks in the discussion largely follow the contours of the article she wrote for this paper on page 7.)*

**Esther Wang:** I am an organizer with CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities in NYC. I want to share a little bit about what CAAAV does, so you have a grounding in where what I'm saying is coming from. Next I want to talk a little about conditions both in Chinatown in NYC, not just in the current context of the economic crisis but over the past decade or so – what's it like to live in NYC, particularly if you're a working class or low-wage worker (and immigrant workers in particular.) And then finally I want to share some thoughts that I and others have had in NYC, both in CAAAV and in the Right To The City NY Alliance around what are some of the opportunities in the current moment that weren't present even six months ago and what are some of the strategies that we can use to actually create the world I'm sure that we all want to live in.

I think we all know that we're in a moment of deep economic crisis, and I know a lot of the focus in the media at least has been on how the crisis has been impacting the financial sector and the financial sector workers. As Professor Harvey was saying, Mayor Bloomberg in NYC has this multi-million dollar plan to retrain the now unemployed financial sector workers to be entrepreneurs, but where is the program for other workers, particularly low-wage workers and working class workers who don't have any of the social safety net that other folks do and who are really feeling the brunt of this economic crisis? As we all know, low-wage workers are often the first to be cut loose when there's any sort of economic crisis, whether they're nannies, service workers, construction workers, restaurant employees.

Like many people have said, cities are really the location and the site of the struggle against neoliberalism and against capitalism. They're the sites of production in the current moment that we find ourselves in. And especially in NYC, as a global city, it's really important that we organizers and groups and individuals in

NYC and other cities around the US really think of strategies that we can implement in this current time. As other people have said, there's a lot of ways we can leave this crisis, and it's up to us and others who do organizing to determine how it is that we are going to leave this crisis and what kind of society we're going to live in once that happens.

We know that people are feeling the brunt of this crisis – people are losing jobs, people are losing their homes, and we have to think of strategies that can address those key critical needs. But I think an exciting part of the period we find ourselves in is that there are possibilities for action and for organizing that six months ago or a year ago most of us in this room would probably have said: there's no way that's going to fly in this country. There's no way people are going to be able to do that, there's no way anyone is going to support this kind of work, the work of Take Back the Land, for example, the work of Picture the Homeless in NYC, or the work of the Republic Window factory workers in Chicago. All of those things would have been almost impossible to think of even six months ago. And yet now we're finding that there's a lot of popular support behind these movements. I think that's exciting, and I think that part of our job and our work as organizers is to really push the envelope in terms of what kind of organizing we do.

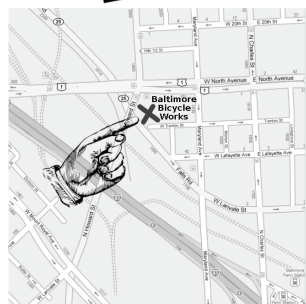
I want to start off by talking about a little bit about CAAAV. CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities was founded in 1986 by a group of Asian women to combat anti-Asian hate crimes in NYC. Over time what we've evolved to do is community based organizing work. So we do organizing work in the Southeast Asian refugee community that's in the Bronx that was relocated by the government in the 1980s, after the war in Southeast Asia. We also organize low income tenants who live in Manhattan's Chinatown to combat gentrification and displacement. Our work is about combatting really deep systemic institutional violence and racism against Asian immigrants and refugees in the United States. We also connect our work to the broader social justice movement in the United States and internationally, through a lot of the alliance and coalition work that we do, especially with Right

To The City New York and the national Right To The City National alliance.

Our work on a local level is to fight the displacement and gentrification that has occurred in New York City (and particularly in Chinatown) as a result of the neoliberal urban policies that were instituted in the wake of the crisis of the 1970s. What were the conditions in Chinatown? These conditions are not necessarily unique to Chinatown—if you go to any other working-class, low-income, community of color in New York City—Harlem, for example, Spanish Harlem, the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens—you really see the same things happening there. You see the same things in cities across the United States.

Neoliberalism in the housing market means, essentially, that private land developers and private land ownership trumps any sort of basic human rights. You see the free-market really making the decision over who gets housing and who doesn't. So, for example, there's no new public housing being built in New York City. Any sort of affordable housing that is built in NYC is almost completely market driven, driven by the whim of any real estate developer who is willing to take some sort of tax break if he includes 20% of affordable housing in his project—and by affordable housing we mean affordable for a family who makes \$60,000 or more a year—which is clearly not affordable for a lot of the working class folks that we organize and that make-up the majority of New York's population.

What do we see in Chinatown as a result? Chinatown to begin with is traditionally a community of immigrant, working class, low-wage workers. It's a huge community – about 100,000 people and that's just talking about Manhattan's Chinatown, not taking into account the other Chinese neighborhoods in New York City. Chinatown like many other low-income communities of color in Manhattan is surrounded by "luxury neighborhoods." It's bordered by SoHo, by Tribeca, and by the Financial District—which is rapidly becoming a residential neighborhood. It's a low-income community that amazingly has been able to survive given the skyrocketing of land values in Manhattan in the recent past. Housing conditions for low-income workers and tenants in



## Bicycle Retail & Repair

**1813 Falls Rd.  
Baltimore, MD  
21201**

**410-605-0705**

**[www.baltimorebicycleworks.com](http://www.baltimorebicycleworks.com)**

**worker owned, union organized**





Chinatown are really bad—tenants overwhelmingly live in really overcrowded conditions due to the fact that housing prices have gone up so much—people are forced to triple up, quadruple up, in small tenant apartments, and they still pay a thousand dollars a month (or more) for their apartment. The buildings in Chinatown are almost all overwhelmingly really old—some of them are almost 100 years old and they're not very well-maintained by their landlords. You see a lot of landlords, slumlords really, deliberately harassing their tenants in order to get them to move out of their apartments so that they can raise the rents to market rates and bring in wealthier tenants. Chinatown tenants have actually been facing a crisis for a really long time, a crisis that started long before this current economic crisis hit New York City and this country. These are trends that are actually getting worse now that low income workers are losing their jobs in mass numbers. And these trends have been accelerated by the financial housing bubble that created all this fictional wealth in this country—what we've seen in the past decade or so is that luxury development in the community has increased dramatically. You see condos sprouting up throughout Chinatown with apartments selling for a million dollars or more—you see luxury stores and restaurants opening up on streets where there used to be none. All of this development only increases the pressures that low income tenants and small businesses face in Chinatown.

I wanted to paint you a picture of what is going on in Chinatown to give you a framework for thinking about how we organize—how we prioritize our organizing and why we think the strategies that I'm about to layout are really the ways we can see this current crisis as an opportunity and as a way to move toward a society where housing is a human right.

There are different components to how we prioritize our organizing. First, we prioritize base building. What that means for us is really building a movement to scale with numbers made up of people that are directly affected by systematic oppression in this country. For us, that means the low income, working class residents of Chinatown. This is really relevant at this current moment because even though we have all this exciting organizing happening, our movement is still not big enough, still not to scale—we still don't have masses of people behind our work.

Related to that is doing really serious leadership development with our members. I want to echo what a group in San Francisco called Power said: "Our work is really about building conscious organizers and conscious organizers that are people of color." We take that to mean that leadership development is a key component of all of our work: our movement should be lead by the people that are most directly affected.

Another really important component of our work is waging and winning campaigns that make concrete changes in our community. And what's really exciting now is that campaigns that we thought would never have traction a year ago or six months ago now do and we can think of bigger and broader campaigns that are actually winnable and will actually make concrete changes in the lives and conditions of working class people of color in this country.

I want to end with some thoughts about the current moment. How do we really organize so we reach the masses of people who are feeling fucked over by the system, who've lost their jobs, whose homes are being foreclosed, who maybe aren't getting unemployment anymore, whose schools they send their

children to are getting cut, whose teachers are leaving, how do we really reach a mass number in the work that we do and actually win some concrete changes? I think that is the crux of our work in this moment and I want to echo what David Harvey said earlier: what we need to be doing is saying "to hell with capitalism!" I heard that and I thought that that's of course what we should be doing, but the hard part is, how do we get numbers and masses of people to say that as well?


Some of the things that people have been talking about in New York City, particularly Right To The City in New York, is definitely around the stimulus package. There's all this money coming to cities, with mayors getting a lot of the money. From what I can gather, mayors have a lot of discretionary authority to determine how they want to spend the money and what kind of projects they want to spend the money on. How do we as organizers and as people who work in low-income, working class communities—or no-income communities—think about the stimulus money? What are the projects we want to push our city or state governments to spend the money on? So one thing that has been floated in NYC as part of the RTTC New York alliance is getting the government to actually take that bailout money and either buy abandoned condo buildings that haven't been finished due to the credit crunch or actually build new affordable housing in NYC. That's one way that the federal money could actually go to fill a huge need in NYC for truly affordable low-income, low-cost housing.

What's really exciting about the period we find ourselves in is that we should be thinking about any and all tactics when we're talking about how to combat this economic

crisis. We can go the legislative route, we can push the government on the stimulus money they're spending, supposedly to revive the economy. But we can also do things like housing takeovers, land takeovers—let's actually take back warehoused housing and reclaim it for low-income or no-income homeless people. We can think creatively and actually begin to move towards the world we all imagine.

We've been thinking a lot about how different sectors can work together in this moment—for example, how can housing organizers work with unions? How can alliances of migrant workers work together with Right To The City? How can the National Alliance of Domestic Workers work together with Right To The City or with labor unions? It's exciting that these conversations are actually happening among all the national alliances in this country that organize different sectors. A really exciting thing about Right to the City is that it brings together people who share a common framework, and who all do anti-gentrification work in one form or another. But some of the groups specifically do housing work, some groups do more environmental justice work, some groups do health justice work—but everyone has a common analysis and through Right To The City we're able to think about campaigns we can all work together on.

I'm excited by the moment we find ourselves in. I'm not old, but I've read about past movements and been inspired by them, and what I'm hoping is that out of the times of really deepest crisis is when people can be really creative and do some really kick-ass, amazing organizing, and I think now is the time for us to do that. ★



**The IWW is a labor union devoted to taking back the world from the few who own it.**

**With our labor the world turns.**

**Why then, are we the ones losing our jobs and being kicked out of our homes?**


**Organize your workplace to win the dignity you deserve and the ability to control your life and improve the lives of your neighbors, coworkers, and family.**

**Baltimore IWW**  
baltimoreiww@gmail.com \* (240) 393-2955

**Starbucks Workers Union**  
www.starbucksunion.org

**Freight Truckers Organizing Committee**  
www.iww.org/unions/dept500/iu530

**Want to organize? Contact a local branch in your area. Don't see one? Start one.**





# Trans-Caucus

By Ilana Goldszer

Around the time of the City from Below Conference, there had been a great deal of trans-organizing happening in Baltimore. The energy was high for many transgenderists, queers, and allies as the end of March approached. The Conference was jam-packed with activists from in and out-of-town, and it seemed like an interesting space to not only meet those involved in similar struggles and organizing work, but to really sit down and discuss the reality of modern, radical, queer activism.

The Trans-Caucus was initially designed to be a space for transgendered individuals and their allies including, but not limited to, gender performers, fairies, transsexuals, intersex folks, gender pirates, genderqueers, people who identify as gender variant or non-conforming, butches, femmes, and others.

At first, there was the desire that the Trans-Caucus would be solely for a very particular group, with a limited focus. The hope was that this specificity might birth some profound conversations and crucial organizing.

However, there weren't any panels at the conference that clearly and explicitly discussed gender and/or sexuality. Whether or not any of the conference's panelists are trans, queer, or ally activists is inconsequential. The panels at the conference did not categorically discuss these subjects. Therefore it was up to the conference attendants themselves to create the dialogue.

So, originally Trans-Caucus was meant to be only for transgendered individuals. Yet, by the

second day, we opened up the discourse to all queers and allies.

It is important to stress that The City from Below Conference inspired us to discuss why trans issues are vital to the grassroots base of a city. Furthermore, from this inspiration, we realized that in order for the discussion to be complete, we needed to be inclusive to all of those who are queer and our allies.

On the first day, we began with introducing ourselves. We said our names and, if we desired, our pronouns. After that, we started exchanging information about the places we were from and the trans or queer organizing that had been happening in our hometowns.

Those from Baltimore, discussed Teams Trans and our recent efforts to get the local gay bar (The Hippo) to address a rather horrible transphobic event that occurred in their space.

Individuals from Louisville, Kentucky, talked about the queer movie nights they were hosting. The movie nights are very important for young queers in their town. The movies are something they had been putting a great deal of energy towards.

Most of us pointed to the need for more visibility and issue-awareness in our general and radical communities. Even in the different panels at The City from Below Conference, we all displayed the general sentiment that we felt alienated from many discussions, especially, discussions of communities where many transfolks are found in large number. It seemed that transgendered individuals were not mentioned when relevant. We also spoke about why transfolks/queers did not feel comfortable speaking at these panels. Only once did we hear the trans-

gendered community mentioned. This was during the sex worker discussion. Our community was only mentioned once throughout an entire weekend. This truth was difficult to swallow.

So, those at Trans-Caucus came together to ask ourselves: Why were we left out of the conversations, even when we make up a large part of the discussed communities? Trans/queers are part of the youth population, student population, worker population, sex worker population and we're deeply entrenched among those living in poverty. We are part of those communities and we should have been part of those conversations.

Trans-Caucus is not blaming the organizers or the panelists at The City from Below Conference for the lack of trans/queer representation. Instead, we look at the conference and it helps us notice our lack of visibility, even within our radical communities. It is up to us, to transfolks, queers and our allies, to change this fact. Hopefully, Trans-Caucus was part of that solution.

Trans-Caucus provided a space for many trans, queers, and our allies to articulate our experiences. Sitting in one room together allowed us to put a language and a voice to that which we're rarely given the opportunity. From where we get our hormones (food, alternative sources, etc.), to various awareness projects, to LGBT politics, to gentrification through the lenses of creating 'gayboorhoods', to being self-critical, to Bash Back, to the "Genderful World" discussion in KIDZ CITY, to FIERCE, to alternative economic strategies through queer theory, to resisting heteropatriarchy, and, finally, to gay shame.

The City from Below Conference was an amazing weekend that created a space for fundamental and thoughtful exchange about grassroots

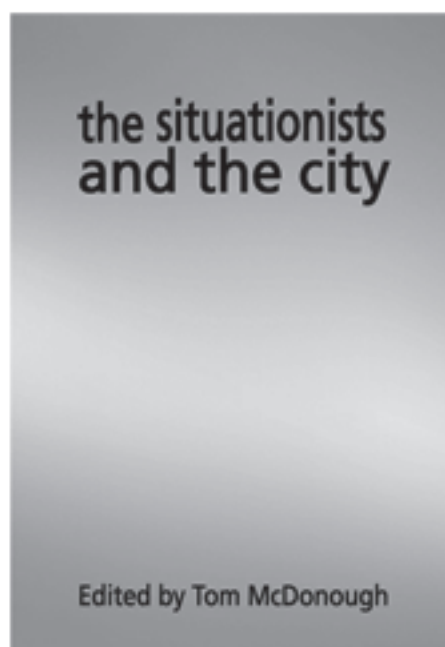
organizing in the city. From this created space, trans/queer folks realized our need to create a space for discourse about our own grassroots organizing in the city.

In each step we take to represent ourselves to the larger whole, we help ensure our visibility to our communities. It is important to let our radical communities be constantly aware of us. They are who will fight with us. They are who will stand beside us. We hope we asked for that awareness from our fellow activists, when we organized the Trans-Caucus at The City from Below Conference. After all, if we don't raise our hands in a panel discussion that doesn't, but *should*, include us... then no one is silencing us but ourselves.

Trans-Caucus was not originally on The City from Below Conference schedule. Nevertheless, we put ourselves on the schedule. By doing so, we did what organizing conferences are meant to generate. We organized. We gave ourselves a presence within our radical community. We decided to be visible and, so... we were.

As trans, queers and allies we say that the city from below is our city, too. We aim to reclaim it by refusing to be invisible. We refuse to be silent, waiting in the shadows. For every discussion that we should be a part of and are not... we will become a part of that discussion. Through creating Trans-Caucus we not only created a space for us to come together- we also stood up and stood beside every other activist that was and is fighting to reclaim the city.

We will not be silent. We will be seen. We ask you to stand with us, to fight with us, to organize with us. We're here. We're trans. We're queer. And we aren't going anywhere. ★



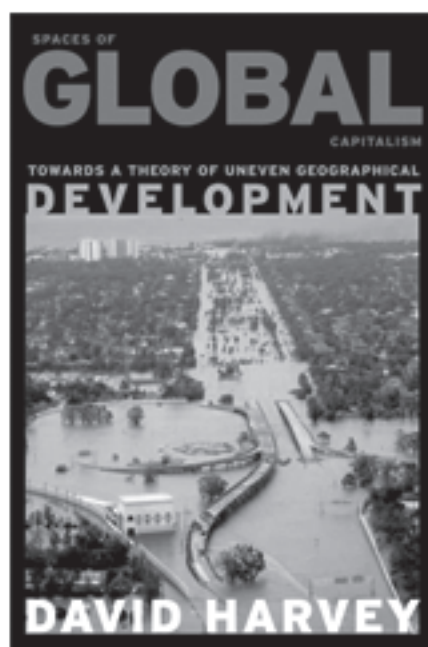
## THE SITUATIONISTS AND THE CITY

A Reader

EDITED BY TOM MCDONOUGH

The incendiary texts of the Situationist International on art and politics in the city.

2009 / Pbk / \$26.95  
978 1 84467 364 3



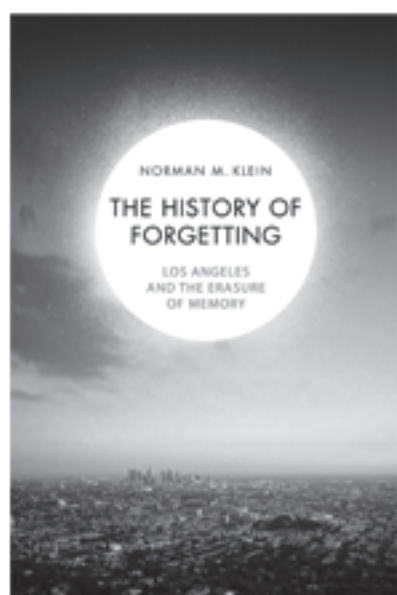
## SPACES OF GLOBAL CAPITALISM

Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development

DAVID HARVEY

A critique of contemporary capitalism, focusing on the development of neo-liberalism, the spread of inequalities across the globe, and "space" as a key theoretical concept.

2006 / Pbk / \$26.95  
978 1 84467 550 0



## THE HISTORY OF FORGETTING

Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory

NORMAN KLEIN

A fascinating study of Los Angeles and how its histories have been forgotten.

2008 / Pbk / \$23.95  
978 1 84467 242 4



## MAGICAL URBANISM

Latinos Reinvent the US City

MIKE DAVIS

An absorbing journey into the Latino struggle to gain social power, by the acclaimed urban historian.

2008 / Pbk / \$16.95  
978 1 84467 247 9





# Whose City? KID(Z) CITY!

A Kid(z) City Reportback from the Crossing Guard organizing committee

**SINE:** Early Saturday morning, St John's Church, also known as the 2640 Space, was beginning to hum with the sounds of the City From Below. People bustled behind book tables, served up food and coffee, began contemplating neoliberalism and resistance; everywhere was hustle and buzz. I didn't know what the day would bring, and I didn't know that Kid(z) City was actually going to be the best imaginable way to start it.

That morning, two kids were occupying Kid(z) City—Siu Loong and Pop. Siu Loong's mom, Vikki Law, author of *Resistance Behind Bars*, was participating in a panel about Prisons and Policing. And Pop's dad, Dayonan, a member of the United Workers, a worker-led worker's economic justice and human rights movement in Baltimore.

I spent the first few hours of Kid(z) City amongst the Zapatista bordados, Sheros coloring books, snacks and art supplies playing a pink guitar which was missing a string with Siu Loong. Later, I drew this strange picture of a flying cat creature and asked Pop to give it a name. He said with absolute matter-of-fact certainty, "His name is Butt Butt Booty Butt." It was perfect then that the first song I played for the radical singalong was Kimya Dawson's song, *Alphabutt*. We had so much fun singing about farts, we just played that song over and over!

Later, in the afternoon, I happened upon the Exploding Seed Time Machine story led by Tom Kertes of the United Workers. The room was packed! Donned with their one-of-a-kind time machine hats, the kids were making their trip with Harriet (Tubman) escaping the slave plantation. Later on, I also hung out with Kid(z) City outside for the Genderful World! workshop with Owen, Abby and Jacob. In a genderful world, boys can be ballerinos, we can paint pictures of our dreamelves, and we can wear whatever gendered clothing we damn well please!

The importance of Kid(z) City to building an inclusive radical conference was paramount. To me, exploring the City From Below meant exploring the ways in which marginalized city dwellers can be, not only a part, but in charge, of shaping their environment, their lives and their destinies. Sure, having childcare at a conference is about convenience, compassion, and kindness. But politically, it's about allowing the space for caretakers, especially womyn, to be a part of the conference and to actually involve, not just preoccupy, children in the struggle for Radical-evolution. It is power that allows us to choose which voices to hear, and which voices to silence. Children are not only the future, they are the present too. Their voices need to be heard, no matter how loud, weird sounding or disruptive they seem to be. It was unbelievably rewarding to work towards creating a space for those voices to boom!

**HARRIET:** The day before the conference we cleaned and rearranged the space for childcare. The space was in great need of some cheering up. Wind chimes, cloth hangings, posters, rugs, pillows, throw blankets and lamps were brought in to brighten and make the space more welcoming. We loaded the

room's only table with books, crayons, paper, markers, games, jump ropes, a frisbee, sewing supplies, paint (both for paper and faces) and other miscellaneous activity supplies. At the opening panel on Friday night, we claimed a part of the main room for KID(Z) CITY. The task was to make a banner that would announce our city to visitors for the next two days. There were two people who just arrived from Toronto, they were about an hour early for the panel discussion, so we chatted and sewed together. Many people's hands worked on our banner and made it the unique artwork that marked the entrance of KID(Z) CITY.

There was a special brunch Sunday morning that was supposed to take place at Participation Park. Unfortunately, it was raining too hard to hold it there. The worm bin show-and-tell and seed bomb making were to take place inside at the rain location. There were no takers for these activities. So we held the activities back at the main location a few hours later, after the regular conference was back in session. It was a lot of fun and there was some wonderful enthusiasm about the worms and composting and about seed bombing the neighborhood.

Later we held a sidewalk exploration fairyland extravaganza that was delightful. The energy from this workshop did not end until all the children went home. In some cases the children protested their leaving and said they couldn't wait to come back. All in all, it was a beautiful weekend!

I want to continue to think about access to spaces by parents and children. We should be thinking: how would our communities benefit or be different if these voices, that are so often missing in our conversations and our events, were heard? It's not a favor that we're providing as people without kids to those who do. It is our privilege, and it benefits us, too. Since the coordination of childcare tends to fall on the women of our society, women's voices, mothers' voices, but also father's and others' are missing from so many of the events I attend.

More and more I am noticing this absence, as well as my own ease in moving through my day not having to worry if spaces are unfriendly to children or how people will react to kids in my care. I think that as we seek a more just society using the principles of anarchism, feminism, racial justice and others we cannot leave out the voices of parents, aunties, uncles, grandparents, children and others. It will be difficult and it will require a lot of learning on my part (and maybe your part too), but it will be worth it.

**CHINA:** The Children's programming (7 workshops, 2 of them all-ages) turned out exceedingly well, and was enjoyed by all! We integrated the themes of the bigger conference into our own programs. It was also a chance for all ages to mingle and work together to share care and support everyone's needs. Said one local mother "I was impressed with how into it the children were and how into the children, the volunteers were."

During the rainy Saturday we mostly stayed

inside our basement headquarters. Jenny Sage's "Pockets and Patches" class had children and adults gasping "oh!" and "ahh!" as she showed how tennis shoes could become part of shirts and that pants could turn into skirts. "But no matter how wonderful something is," I said as I dragged out our collection of boxes into the tiny stairwells outside for two restless "bored" youngsters to create their robot/spaceship box city within, "not everyone is going to want to do it." Owen, another childcare provider, chimed in, "And that's OK, right?"

When the sun came out on Sunday, we were glad to expand into the courtyard where our workshops took place in the glorious spring sunshine.

KID(Z) CITY had constant Spanish to English translation throughout the weekend and one Spanish speaking girl, Lupita, who traveled from North Carolina with El Kilombo and her family.

We pushed the norms in other ways too. When a little boy tried to pull a pink ribbon off Owen's head, saying that he shouldn't wear it, Owen said that he liked to wear a pink ribbon and that boys can wear anything they like. This example soon led to the child deciding he would like to wear a pink ribbon on his head too. In such an environment, many different discussions came up and were explored in ways one doesn't always see in other places.

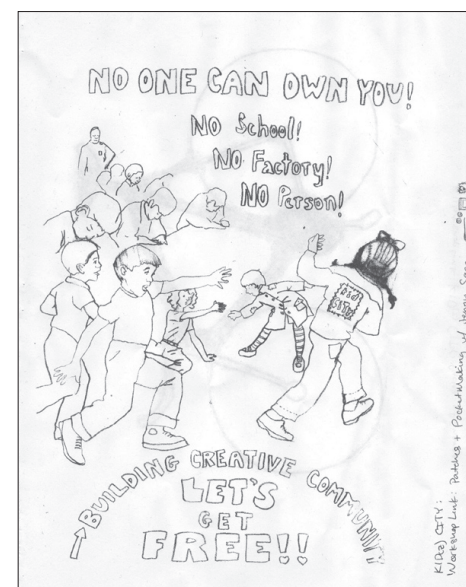
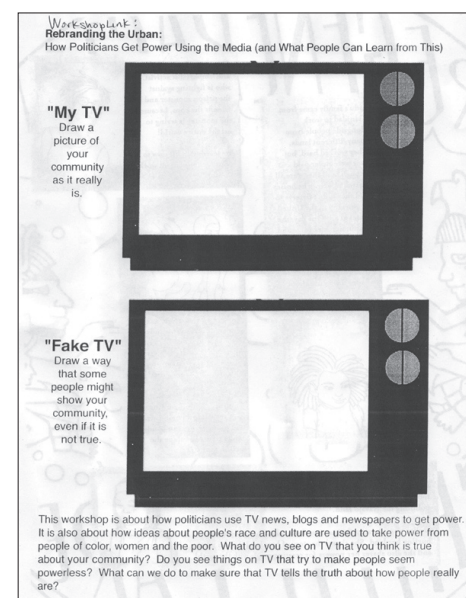
We had some difficulties of course. For example, (although translation was widely cited as something many were impressed with and enjoyed) we had to scramble to find Spanish translators for each shift: sending someone upstairs to ask for a translator or patching together what we could from other bilingual volunteers, or the friends around us. We also needed to be more organized in some ways. It would have helped to stress pre-registration, to have had a volunteer orientation, and to print out a set of guidelines for everyone. We've had a lot of discussions, on what worked and what we could improve for next time, which continued after the weekend was over.

In fact, organizing together contained so much excitement, inspiration, brainstorming new ideas and putting them into practice in ways that we haven't seen before that we have decided not to stop. We have decided to keep meeting as a radical childcare collective.

Like my co-presenter Elliot said, "Doing childcare is a chance to put your politics into practice." At the end of the conference, two people said to me, "Next conference I go to, I am definitely going to volunteer to do childcare!" ★

Contact: [childcarefrombelow@gmail.com](mailto:childcarefrombelow@gmail.com)

*At right: Pages from the Kid(z) City coloring book; Kid(z) City organizers asked City From Below participants and presenters to contribute coloring book pages based on their urban justice work or drawn from their conference presentations.*





# Revitalizing Tired Terms: A Language of Anti-Gentrification Planning

By Katie Mazer (Toronto)

Revitalization. Inclusion. Social Mix. Diversity. Vibrancy. This is the jargon of contemporary urban planning. While this kind of language is full of potential and promise, more often than not, these words serve simply as euphemisms for gentrification—for the displacement of socially and economically vulnerable groups.

We are a team of critical planners in Toronto who were charged with the task of developing a revitalization plan for one of downtown Toronto's last non-gentrified neighborhoods. We were approached by a neighborhood organization comprising two local Business Improvement Areas ('BIAs'—also called Business Improvement Districts in some cities) concerned about an active drug and sex trade, vacant commercial properties, a dearth of high-end stores and services, and their perception that the streets were under-populated and dangerous. These folks described their hope that, by improving the image of the street and the attractiveness of local stores, residents of the neighborhood (and Toronto in general) would begin to feel like the street had something important to offer them and begin to use it more frequently. As per the familiar logic of Jane Jacobs, this increase in pedestrian traffic would bring more 'eyes on the street', increasing safety, creating a more pleasant social environment, and improving business prospects. This would then further increase street traffic creating a virtuous cycle of growth and development.

The BIA model—now a global movement—was developed in Toronto in 1970. In response to the rise of the suburban shopping mall and the collapse of many neighborhood shopping districts, the City created legislation allowing the formation of local business associations supported by levies paid by each business on the street. In this way business owners in a defined geographic area could collectively contribute to the maintenance, development and marketing of their local commercial district.

The City of Toronto is now home to 68 BIAs. Not surprisingly, despite their humble origins, these public-private partnerships have joined the ranks of popular neoliberal urban governance tools and have become powerful agents of commercial gentrification in and of themselves. "BIAs Welcome Visitors to Toronto," reads the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas website. The *raison d'être* of these bodies tends to be more about revalorizing city centers with the aim of improving the business climate than about improving local livelihoods. Such was the landscape in which we set out to advise this local organization on how they could 'revitalize' their neighborhood's main drag.

Revitalization. This slippery concept tends to invoke unsettling images of market-driven 'improvement'—of out with the old, in with the new (stores, housing, people). With respect for the abundance of local safety concerns—for we are committed to the principle that everyone has

the right to feel socially and personally safe in her neighborhood—we had to find a way of moving beyond a discourse that equates safety with polarizing models of unfettered economic development. How could we challenge the unequal nature of mainstream urban revitalization and creatively re-imagine revitalization as a way to

about the recommendations' end products and more about the confrontations



improve the livelihoods of all people in the community?

There is something clearly contradictory about promoting economic upgrading while encouraging inclusivity. But this very contradiction would become our *strategy* for diverting what could have been a conventional economic development plan toward anti-gentrification ends. As people recounted their visions of a 'revitalized' neighborhood that remained 'mixed', 'inclusive', 'vibrant', we learned to capitalize on the ambiguity of this language. While these pop-planning terms are generally associated with the production of quaint middle-class neighborhoods—inclusive to those rich in cultural capital, but unlikely to welcome social housing, social services, or the poor—we made it our business to re-operationalize these important ideals—diversity, inclusion, vibrancy—in a way that gave them meaning.

After several months of speaking with residents, shopkeepers, politicians, and local agencies, we presented the business associations with a very conventional looking document: a plan for local economic revitalization. Our recommendations suggested conventional neighborhood revitalization tools: improve the BIA's structure, create a business recruitment office, create a neighborhood identity, develop an ethnic food market, and so on.

The creative and radical part of our plan lay in the details. We used the familiarity of these ambiguous recommendations to get people on board; the politics lay in the recommendations' subtle elements—in the strict sensitivity to *how* they were implemented. We cared less

and conversations that would happen during their implementation. They were designed in a way that would have social services working with businesses working with immigrant women working with affordable housing residents. To this end, while our recommendations did outline concrete actions for increasing local safety, their primary value were as *processes*: as platforms for revealing structural barriers that hinder the participation of certain groups in safe and secure social arrangements and for challenging the unequal nature of conventional development and urban revitalization planning. The broad strokes of our recommendations were meant to feel familiar to business, but also contained nuanced procedural aspects that made explicit the importance of including all groups in the neighborhood, especially those that are currently marginalized.

When we presented the final plan at a community meeting with business-owners, social service representatives, and residents, our presentation of the recommendations quickly descended into a dynamic discussion about the meaning of gentrification and its likely impacts on this neighborhood. As the shelter representatives began to describe the violent impacts of policing and 'safe streets' policy on their clients, perspectives began flying from the various interests in the room, and someone asked "what *is* gentrification, anyway?" Our little neighborhood planning project managed to open these questions and spark some critical exchanges; this alone left us with a sense of success.

The goal of our project had been to trigger a process of engaging the gentrification

question. At the least, we wanted to put in place an ongoing awareness of the issues. Ideally, we wanted to spark sensitivity about the decision-making processes that continue to happen in the neighborhood: we wanted to build a critical attention to *how* action is taken and to *who* gets to be there.

We were only able to do this by engaging a group we often overlook: the business community. While BIAs have been agents of gentrification in Toronto and elsewhere, they do represent well-resourced organized groups of local actors. We often overlook the possibility of tackling gentrification through the commercial realm, by engaging with communities whose work, services, and social spaces are threatened by commercial upgrading. BIAs actually have a hand in facilitating, opposing, or redirecting neighborhood revitalization schemes. In working with the business community, we found political possibility lurking in unsuspecting places.

Those doing anti-gentrification work should not dismiss a strategy that works with organized business communities to broaden their local relationships and collectivize control of local development. It requires a lot of—often difficult—conversation and education, but opens doors to resources and real decision-making forums.

More generally, our story is an experiment in re-operationalizing important language. We tried to refuse the disarmament that comes when meaningful language is used to make empty promises by agents of gentrification. This work is relevant to both activists and planners who work at the urban level: by giving these words meaning and using them to make space for those who might otherwise be left out of the decision-making process, barriers to progressive action can be overcome.

Of course, as much as anything, this type of project is a lesson in the limitations of tackling gentrification on the local scale. Ultimately, we know that most any 'improvement' that increases the quality of life in this neighborhood will contribute to the rise of residential and commercial property values that places many of today's residents and shop owners at risk. When the problem is generated by the systems of urban development that are inherently unequal, the type of community-driven defensive outlined here has its limits: it runs out of power, resources, steam. This scale of response simply does not stand up to the scale of the problem.

But firmly reclaiming language that lets us talk about doing development differently is essential nonetheless. It gives us space to challenge the meaning of cities and neighborhoods: of what they are for, who gets to be there, and who decides how they will change. It gives us the freedom to imagine neighborhoods and cities as places for practicing alternatives and exposing stories of common challenges and visions—for operating culturally, socially, and economically, outside of the normal order of things. ★

Based on a talk given by Katie Mazer, Edward Birnbaum & Dan Cohen at the City From Below.

Image: Shaun Preston/Indyreader



# "To Show the Fire and the Tenderness"

## Self-Reproducing Movements and Struggle In, Around, and Against the Current Crisis in the United States

By Conor Cash, Craig Hughes, Stevie Peace, Kevin Van Meter | Team Colors Collective

*(Team Colors is a national militant research collective. Our purpose is to explore questions of everyday resistance, mutual aid, the imposition of work, social reproduction, community participation, the commons, class composition, and movement building. For more information: [www.warmachines.info](http://www.warmachines.info))*

Our experience is that social support is crucial to community organizing and movement building; hence support is a central piece of radical community organizing. Contemporary organizing in many Left and radical currents does not adequately incorporate support or their own self-reproduction<sup>1</sup> into their work. This piece examines support in context of neoliberalism and current crises. Here we argue that self-reproducing radical community organizing efforts, which directly incorporate social support at their foundations, are more likely to sustain and build power—particularly in the current crises.

The major points we discuss are as follows: In order to cut the strength of the working class, and to establish control and generate profitability, capital utilized a number of tactics—including gentrification, enclosure, the prison industry, and precarity, among others—which the working class has been unable to defeat. In the U.S., workers experience the current crisis at a low point of composition<sup>2</sup>, in addition to numerous organizational and community crises. Much of the radical Left has also entered the crisis at a low point of movement composition.

Both working class communities and the radical Left have experienced the post-Keynesian, neoliberal period as whirlwinds of struggle: many major compromises and successful processes of capitalist and State co-optation, coupled with many macro-scale defeats and some victories. Capital is a process of struggle, and the working class can be decomposed and lose power, just as in the struggle the class can recompose itself and gain substantial strength.

In our analysis, we reject the subtle vanguardism that places Left or radical Left activity at the center of autonomous “working class” struggle—a practice that conflates movements which are often, realistically, divorced. More often than not, the radical Left seeks to render autonomous class activity as invisible—from claims of “apathy” and a “brainwashed population,” to claims that describe sects of the radical Left as “the active minority” or those capable of “educating” the class into “action.” Sometimes the two claims intertwine. In what follows, we want to challenge these assumptions.

### Capital, Movements, and Crisis

In response to the struggles of the late 1960s and early 1970s, capital went on strike. As an early part of the gentrification process, companies fled from many American cities, taking with them core industries and possibilities for employment in many neighborhoods. City governments engaged in simultaneous, corroborating efforts, known in New York City as “planned shrinkage,” and elsewhere as the more euphemistic “spatial deconcentration.” The objective, achieved with devastating consequences, was to quell a rebellious population, through tactics of displacement, starvation, and cutbacks in basic services. Such processes were key parts of neoliberal development.

Capital thus gained substantial strength, largely through

(1) Editor's note: The authors use “reproduction” to designate the whole spectrum of activities by which people are engaged in sustaining themselves and creating future generations. Workers produce things in factories, but they themselves are also reproduced — when they, or their families, tend to their needs for food, for shelter, for care of all sorts.

(2) Editor's note: “Composition” here refers to the way workers are “composed” as a class; in other words, what kinds of networks, organizations, practices, and ideas workers (and social movements) share. The more composed workers are, the better they can fight back against capital.

Image: “Madres” by Fernando Martil/Justseeds  
([el\\_compay\\_nando@yahoo.com](mailto:el_compay_nando@yahoo.com))



tactics targeting reproduction. The destructive reorganization of urban communities through gentrification fed a simultaneous capitulation of business unions and the growth of the prison industrial complex. In the U.S., capital was more successful in defining power relations than workers were. And much of the radical Left—faced with violence and co-optation by State and capital, and hamstrung by its own capitulation and a general condescension toward much of the working class—has often been impotent, if not an outright impediment to building working-class power.

In the development of neoliberalism, expectations of unpaid care labor have disproportionately fallen on women, who, due to the persistence of patriarchal gender relations, have been expected to provide care amidst the precarity of their own lives, their families, and their communities. The carving up of working-class neighborhoods, the displacement of families, the consequential disruption of social networks, and access to services have all drastically changed everyday life. These changes have largely been attacks on the reproduction and support that had served as major spaces of movement building.

As capital has torn apart communities in its search for control and profit nationally, it has also sought to do so internationally—through processes of enclosure, debt, and State violence. Interestingly, immigrant communities have been behind the strongest organizing for social change in the last decade, even from intensely precarious positions. At the base of these struggles are working-class communities organizing directly on the terrain of daily life. They utilize a multitude of tactics, engaging in radical community organizing projects that have very clearly built substantial power. The internationalism of such struggles during the past decade has been unprecedented. These efforts provide crucial lessons and a crucial foundation for future movement. Understanding past social struggles is crucial to understanding the struggles and movements we see now. During the formation of neoliberalism in the U.S, there were important organizing efforts, like the struggles of ACT UP during the early years of the AIDS crisis, that achieved substantial power and prevented some rollbacks (like maintaining basic reproductive rights).

We also want to focus on another key aspect: processes of co-optation, the most pervasive way that capital and State control the strategizing of our struggles. In particular, in the post-Keynesian period, the Non-Profit Industrial Complex (NPIC) has substantially limited our collective imaginations and strategies. Some struggles have carefully and intelligently utilized non-profits to increase their power, but more often than not, the NPIC has harmed radical movement building.

Simultaneously, the NPIC—often explicitly refusing to engage in radical organizing—has played a key role in parceling out fictitious scarcity, privatizing resources, and channeling struggle away from building power in cities—and suburbs—across the country. The radical Left has often worked to institutionalize through the NPIC before it has sought to support working-class struggles. The institutionalizing of radical intentions has resulted in substantially less-than-radical activities.

The impacts of capital's recomposition on the emotional and physical health of working-class communities have been profound. The gentrification process, the utilization of police to terrorize com-







# A Region from Below

BY CORRESPONDENTS FROM THE MIDWEST RADICAL CULTURAL CORRIDOR

In the summer of 2008, a group of drifters traveled in search of the Midwest Radical Culture Corridor (MRCC). They looked for the region’s counter narratives; they found evidence of small town organizing, prison resistance, and perma-cultural farming living right beside agribusiness, supermax prisons, empty factories, and Christian conservatism. They witnessed the reflections of cities, in the urban migrants seeking fairer futures on open land, in crop production that fuels and feeds the masses, and in the waste exported from cities. They met with urban and rural farmers, a citizen’s group, a radical filmmaker, a dairy cooperative, historians, and stayed at an anarchist commune.

Cities don’t act alone; they are bound to their regional outcroppings depending deeply on the land and people around them to survive. Areas outside the city are places where food is grown, energy is extracted, burned and transported, and trash is stored. In the Midwest, everything from water to coal moves to the city center, as prisoners, “culture” and waste flow out. The region’s infrastructure is dependent on all its parts. And like cities, our region is a site of unevenly distributed resources, material and human flows. In this way, our cities cannot afford to ignore these sites of struggle. Out here, giant multinational corporations own acres upon acres of land, millions of tax dollars are funneled into caging men and women, and small communities fight tooth and nail against police tasers, toxic waste dumping, and machine politics. The struggle for autonomy, rights to dissent, and rights to public spaces, extends to all of the region.

The occasion of the City from Below conference gave us time to articulate how and why regions are neglected in both consciousness and material. We asked ourselves, what are the many barriers that keep us from connecting to the bio-social-economic mesh in, around and outside of our cities . There are many spatial and conceptual barriers that hinder our thinking in or about the region. We are deep within what we have been calling The Petroleum Space/Time Continuum (PS/TC), witnessed by the ultimate abstraction of our sense of connectedness to a place, which stands in contradistinction to the scale and time that is bodily, not calculated in nanoseconds, but by the beats of our hearts and the sounds of our foot steps. City, suburb, countryside, wilderness and region represent different scales and kinds of place, and yet a movement for social, spatial, ecological justice needs to resist the isolation imposed by their jurisdictional separation.

The notion of the bioregion has helped us temporarily suspend the disorienting effects of the PS/TC, regional isolation and political boundaries at large. It has allowed us to pay attention to place, locale, and interconnected flows. The bioregion is an important conceptual method for re-imagining an area’s wealth and its power as a whole that casts aside artificial political boundaries. Bioregionalism emerged in the early seventies as a way to re-imagine place, by examining how topography, zones of life, and particularly watersheds form ecological and

also economic regions. The bioregional lens addresses social and political power as well as ecological systems. Internationally during the 70s, bioregional self-determination was an argument used by separatist groups such as the Basque, the Catalonians and even the Northern Californians.

In the US, an emergence of bioregional consciousness, part of a deepening of the environmental movement, was conceptually part of successful organizing against nuclear power plant construction. As affinity groups organized they chose names after local fauna, as part of seeing a place as more than its human inhabitants. Likewise, early 70’s cooperative movements in some places rose from a bioregional consciousness, particularly where new work cooperatives formed to fill extremely local labor needs. These include the Marmot Collective in Seattle that contracted with the US Forest Service, and the cooperating food provision networks in Seattle, New England and the Northern Midwest.

In 1981, four people from this movement developed a bioregional quiz called “Where You At?” to encourage familiarity with the interconnected web of life that makes up a bioregion. The quiz tested knowledge of weather cycles, land systems, the life networks and cycles of other species, and the social reality and historic rights of those who lived on this land before them.<sup>1</sup>

We think the questions in this original quiz are useful in making a conceptual bridge between countryside and city, and that they should be broadened to encompass contemporary conditions under neo-liberalism and other complicated factors that impact a region.

We should learn about the watershed, but also the waste-sheds, land-shed, food-shed, labor-shed, migration-shed, and all the other kinds of sheds that might help us understand the over-determination of political boundaries, and also how power is produced between countryside, suburb and city, regions, and nations. These forms of information offer tools for us to rediscover the autonomous subjectivity and connectedness that neo-liberal capital takes from us, leading us to a place of cooperation and mobilization. And as we learn where we are, and where others are in relation to us, we can better understand the complexities of the outlying places. By breaking down the existing jurisdictional lines, and creating new pathways for communication and cooperation, we can, perhaps, together find new pleasurable, radical ways to mobilize across these constructed spaces. ★

(1) Leonard Charles, Jim Dodge, Lynn Milliman and Victoria Stockley. In Coevolution Quarterly 32 (Winter 1981): 1. <http://www.dlackey.org/weblog/docs/Where%20You%20At.htm>

*At left: The Region From Below Quiz created for the City From Below Conference by the Midwest Radical Cultural Corridor group.*

## 34 Questions to Locate Ourselves

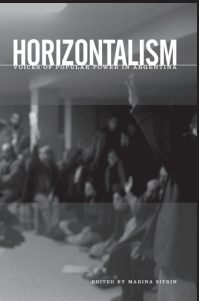
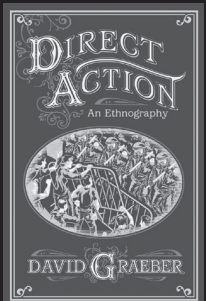
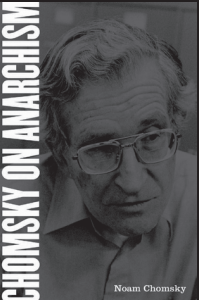
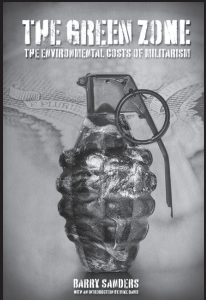
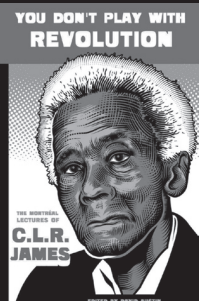
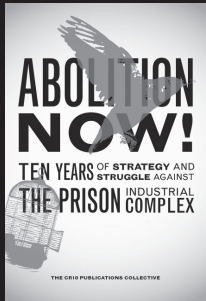
(Illustrate your answers above)

- How many days ‘til the moon is full? (Slack of 2 days allowed.)
- What impact do farm bill sub-sides have on your area?
- Do you know what soil series you are standing on?
- Name four economic engines in this region.
- Name the major plant associations in your region.
- Calculate the average distance people commute between home and work.
- What native peoples inhabited your region prior to white settlement?
- What labor unions have been important in organizing in your area, past and present?
- What did they eat?
- What human migrations have made an historical impact on your city/region?
- Are you aware of any unresolved claims by native peoples in your area?
- How has industrial and spatial development impacted the migration of people? Of animals?
- What is your/their livelihood today?
- How many prisons are there in your state?  
Name and locate three of them.
- Trace the water you drink from precipitation to tap to outflow.
- From which neighborhoods do the majority of people incarcerated in these prisons come from?
- Where does your garbage go after it is disposed?
- What percentage of your population is now in the military? Identify some local military sites (recruiting, bases, contracting).
- Where is the nearest power sub-station?
- Do you know what percentage of your population does not earn a living wage?
- Where is the power generated that switches through that station?  
Extra credit if you can make a pie chart of how that power is generated.
- What neighborhoods are you/they from?
- Locate the three superfund sites closest to where you stand.
- From where you’re reading this, point north.
- Do you know what groups are most affected?
- Who is moving in and out of your region?
- Are there disease clusters there in your region, eg. cancer, asthma, diabetes?
- Name five resident and five migratory birds.
- What foods are grown within 30 miles of where you live?
- What places do people now live where people never lived before?
- What farming methods are used to grow this food?



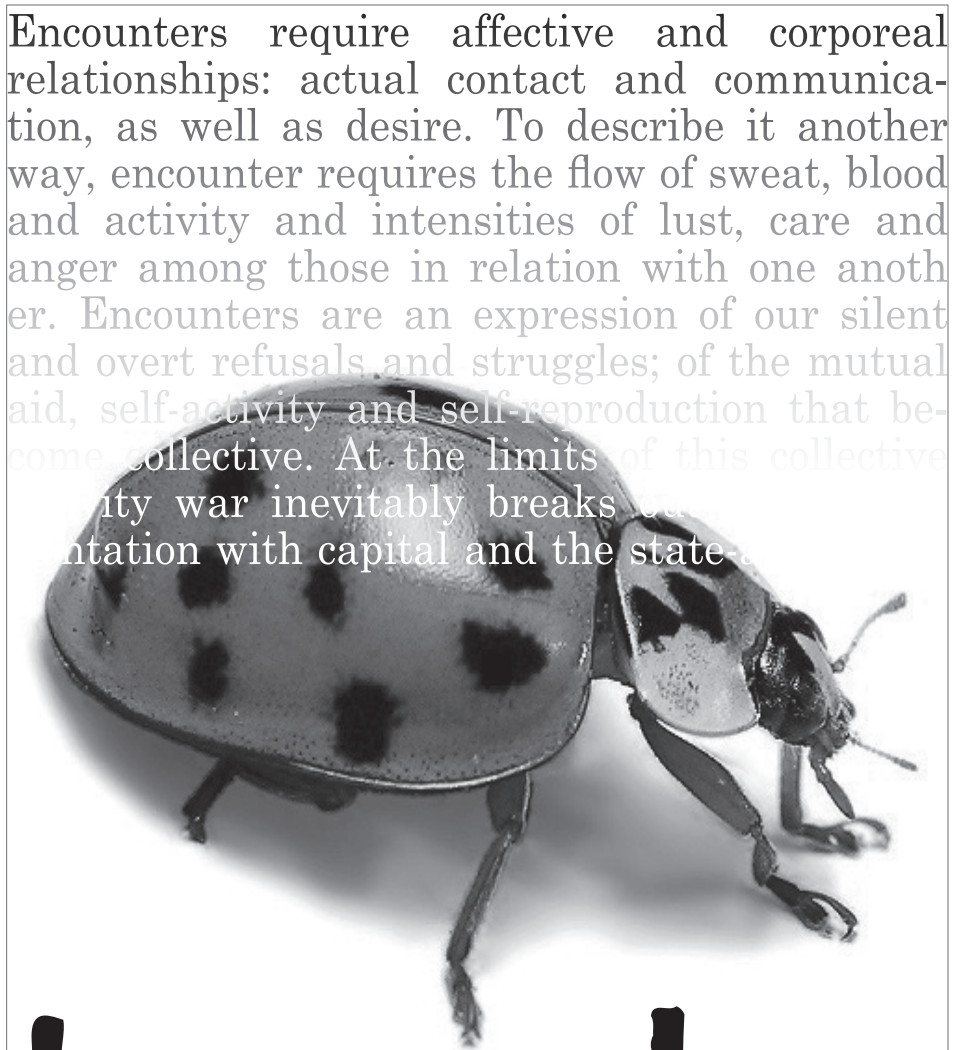


revolution by the book  
ak press



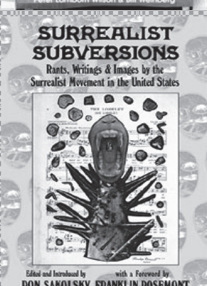
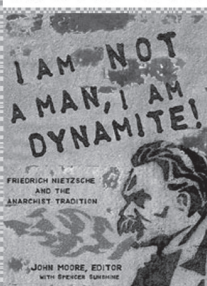
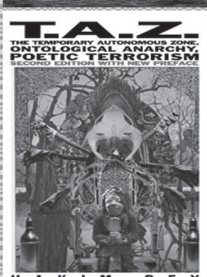
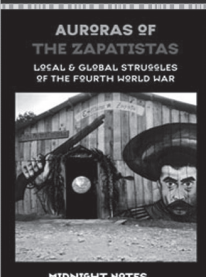
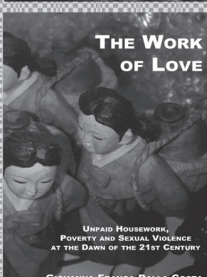
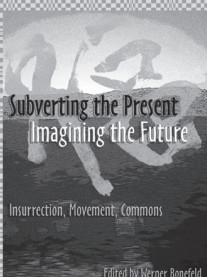
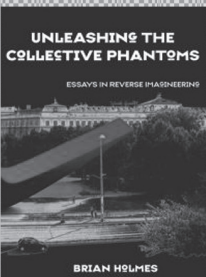
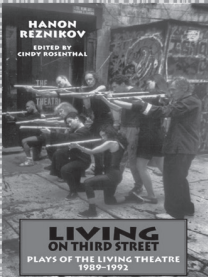
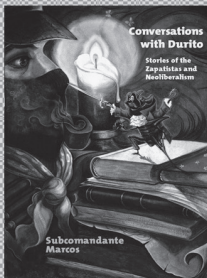
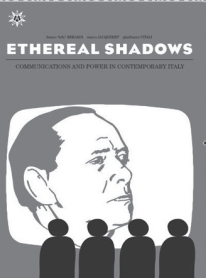
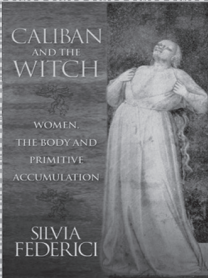
**ak press: your source for the  
best in anarchist publishing  
for 19 years and counting.  
now in baltimore.**

**<http://www.akpress.org>**



**team colors**  
[militant research collective]  
warmachines.info

# Autonome media *Seditious & Delicious*



http://www.autonomedia.org – info@autonomedia.org  
PO Box 568 Brooklyn, NY 11211

**red emma's  
bookstore coffeehouse**



**800 st. paul st. in baltimore, maryland**  
**(410) 230-0450 [www.redemmas.org](http://www.redemmas.org)**