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Table of Contents

List of Figures

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Introduction

A Different Kind of Place?

If I propose something distant, you may say: interesting but utopian. If I propose something close, you may answer: feasible but trivial.
—Roberto Unger (2001: 29)

November 2011. The Governors Island ferry coughed up a cloud of diesel as it pulled away from the 10th Street dock. Sian[1] stood at the stern, peering back at the night sky. A yellow glow emanated from lower Manhattan. Chants from the Occupy Wall Street encampment at Zuccotti Park echoed off glass and metal. Minutes earlier, Sian was shouting slogans—*Banks got bailed out! We got sold out!*—arms locked with strangers staring down a phalanx of New York's finest. Imminent violence still coursed through her shuddering frame. As the ferry moved into open waters, the chants receded and then were gone. Sian was being pulled between two worlds. One: an artist's residency on Governors Island. Her own studio. First ever. Quiet. The methodic, focused pleasure of brushwork. The smell of castor oil drying on canvases. The recognition of an invited exhibition. Two panels of a large triptych complete, awaiting varnish. Her dream to be an artist. Explaining the dream to her immigrant parents, in vain. The planning. The commitment. The time. The isolation of an MFA studio program. The debt. The promise of a career in the NYC art world. How else would she pay off the debt?

The other world: cantankerous, unpredictable, exhilarating. An unruly throng of warm bodies, each with its own thoughts, wishes, and desires, defiantly occupying a sliver of space in the symbolic heart of global capital. A zone of temporary autonomy. Bending the future to receive the dreams of the present through a pragmatics of experimentation. New content

[1] Pseudonyms are used throughout.

appearing in old forms. A general assembly. A library. A kitchen. An archive. The breach creating new forms. Strangers negotiating everything from scratch. New forms making new content. New ways of seeing, speaking, sharing, caring. A human microphone. A working group dedicated to Comfort. A sense of community born from a community of sense. Greater than the sum of its parts. The pull and promise of prefigurative politics. Being the change one wants to see. Sian had never felt this way before. Forging a path to a new world in the small things. The vitalness of throwing herself *into the unknown to find the new*.[2]

In the waning days of Occupy, as Zuccotti Park and the other encampments around the country were being cleared by authorities, Sian made a decision. She couldn't go back to the path of a solo art career. Something had been awaked within her. She had become more attentive to what moved her. If she was going to be true to herself, to that which resonated most deeply for her, she had to heed this feeling, to find a way of realizing its potential. Several months later, she went to an exhibition at Interference Archive, a social movement culture space, organized and run entirely by volunteers that had recently opened in Brooklyn. Soon after, Sian attended an organizational meeting at Interference Archive, and before she knew it, she was spending several hours a week at the space. For Sian and the other informants in this story, the project at its center, Interference Archive ("IA" or "the Archive" hereafter), generates a pull and promise similar to the Occupy movement. Formed in the co-production of Occupy, the Archive attracts an equally heterogeneous assortment of bodies and desires. What draws *these* people to *this* place? Why does Mariana, a labor organizer, devote her weekends to producing an audio podcast about squatter networks in London? What compels Carla, an unemployed librarian in her mid-50s, to

[2] This is an interpretive reconstruction (an ethnographic fiction) composed of fragments from interviews and impromptu conversations Sian and I had over several months.

spend her afternoons scanning and cataloguing obscure political pamphlets from the 1970s? Why would Diego, a high school student from Queens, make the three-hour round trip on public transit to staff the Archive on a school night? Why, or how, do any of them, who live in one of the most expensive cities in the US, do this work for free? There are, after all, many other arts and cultural organizations in the city where they could enact their sociopolitical values and commitments while getting paid.

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This introduction locates IA, my primary field site, in the time-space of NYC, circa 2016-2018. The chapter is organized as a series of constellations that move peripatetically—geographically, temporally, thematically—around the Archive, its methods, practices, and the lives of some of the volunteers. This peripatetic movement mirrors the way a given volunteer (myself included) might learn about and interact with the Archive, in fits and starts—"A friend of a friend mentioned I'd like what they do here," "I had a few spare hours to staff today before going to work," "I'm good with right angles so I thought I'd help put up labels for the exhibit." Many volunteers told me their experience of the Archive was discombobulating at first—"I didn't know where to begin," "No one really told me what to do. I had to figure a lot out on my own." And no matter how long someone had volunteered, there was a lingering sense that the Archive was "constantly in flux," and "never settled." As we will see, this dynamic is the result of operating a publicly accessible space on all-volunteer labor, flexible participation, and a horizontal organizational structure in which an individual's responsibility to the collective is derived autonomously, rather than through a set of rules that govern/structure practice.

We Are Who We Archive

Eva was very ill when the Occupy movement ignited in October 2011. She had been diagnosed with stage four cancer earlier that year. The community of friends and colleagues that came together to care for her during her treatment was a huge material and emotional support for her and her long-time partner Daniel. This care community embodied the anarchist and autonomist principles of mutual aid, reciprocity, and self-actualization Eva and Daniel had cultivated during their years of involvement in DIY subcultures and radical social movements—Eva, as an experimental videographer, street performer, and co-founder of the feminist dance troupe Pink Bloque, and Daniel, as a graphic artist, printmaker, writer, educator, and co-founder of the Just Seeds artists collective. Over two decades, they had amassed a small mountain of movement ephemera—posters, stickers, zines, pamphlets, banners, books, t-shirts, videos, records—that lined the rooms and hallways of their one-bedroom walk-up in Brooklyn. Some of these objects figured in their co-curated exhibition and publication, *Signs of Change: Social Movement Cultures, 1960s to Now*, in which they introduced the term 'social movement culture' to signify both the processes and products of creative production and the social relations that arise from struggles for social transformation. They wanted a concept that could articulate "alternative ways of existing, both within movements and society at large whose resonance can be found in social formations that movements create, such as public protests, demonstrations, encampments, affinity groups, collectives, and solidarities."

As Eva's illness got worse, care for her life turned to preparation for her death. A steady stream of friends and collaborators passed through their apartment day and night, bringing meals, books, offering massages, playing ditties on the guitar, and recounting stories from their experiences at Occupy encampments around the country. They breathlessly described the

Archive Working Groups that had organized to collect the torrent of signs that overflowed the encampments, the spontaneous mounting of exhibitions, the visitors who spent hours combing through the materials, and the lively discussions that ensued. The seed was sown. Together with Regina and Isaac—artists, activists, and long-time collaborators who also identified with anarchist and autonomist traditions and had equally substantial personal collections—Eva and Daniel envisioned a space that would preserve the legacy of creative activism out of which their combined collections arose by making them accessible to public use. Based on her experience working in various institutional archives that champion access in discourse while circumscribing it in practice, Eva called the method this new archive would employ *preservation through use*.[3] By collecting the ephemera of social movement culture—objects, histories, and communities that are often marginalized or excluded at institutional archives—and providing unrestricted access to their use, this archive would democratize access to a resource that was created for and should be held in common. Following bell hooks' (1994) claim that radical content does not guarantee radical pedagogy, Eva and the others recognized that radical content does not necessarily create a radical archive. Radical archives are defined not only by the materials they contain, by aesthetic objects that represent, but by the dynamic processes—effervescent encounters, epistemological experiments, and meaning making—they engender. This methodological approach to the archive as a site of knowledge production would "interfere" in the ideology of archives as neutral repositories from which objective knowledge is retrieved or extracted (Stoler 2002). Regina, who had recently received a degree in archival science, described her early involvement:

> I was invested in the idea of creating an autonomous archive … it was important to preserve culture we were actively producing, and that an archive would be a way to have agency to tell our own stories from a radical perspective. As an archivist just entering the

[3] Eva borrowed this concept from Rick Prelinger (2007), a pioneer of open access in archival studies and founder of the Prelinger Archives, a collection of "ephemeral" advertising, educational, industrial, and amateur films (housed at the Library of Congress since 2002).

> field, I was actively exploring how an archive could be an overtly political space. I was thinking about the ways history is controlled by those in power, and how this manifests in archival traditions—in terms of what is collected and preserved, how it is described, and how it is made accessible.

In contrast to museum and university archives where politically progressive librarians and archivists (many of them friends and colleagues) were increasingly seeking to expand access and welcome materials from movements that have been rendered invisible by standard histories and collecting practices—while at the same time working within institutions that maintain a veneer of neutrality and objective comprehensiveness—operating independently would allow this new archive to articulate a shared set of political sensibilities, experiences, and goals. And unlike museums and universities that "archive activism" by drawing on the efforts of institutions—the Fales and Tamiment Libraries at NYU, the Political Art Documentation/Distribution archive at the MOMA, the Labadie Collection at the University of Michigan, the Newberry Library in Chicago, the All of Us or None archive at the Oakland Museum of California, to name just a few—this archive would enact a form of "activist archiving" (Flinn and Alexander 2015) by utilizing the efforts of the subjects/producers of archival materials themselves. Those who identify as activists would engage in archival activity, not as a supplement to their activism, but as an integral part of their work in social movements. Eva and the others took inspiration and ideas from friends and fellow travelers at other activist archives, including the Lesbian Herstory Archive in Brooklyn, the Never the Same archive in Chicago, the Freedom Archives in San Francisco, the MayDay Rooms, and the Rukus! Federated Limited Black LGBT Cultural Archive, both in London.

The four of them pooled their savings, rented a space in a converted warehouse a few blocks away, and moved their collections in. Interference Archive was born. A few months later,

Eva died. As a way of honoring her and "channeling [their] grief into something productive," her care community transitioned into a support network for the Archive. The crowd fund that had been set up for Eva's medical care—5-10 monthly donations from fifty or so people—was redirected to help cover rent and the costs associated with building out the physical the space. They salvaged the material resources they had and asked others to donate whatever they could—used flat-files, shelving units, catalog cases, storage boxes, de-humidifiers, coffee makers, brooms, hammers, scissors, tape. No donation was too small. They built out the space over several months, designing and redesigning as they went. As word of the Archive spread, donations began flooding in. At first, these materials came from the NYC area—a box of Stonewall buttons, a set of Close Rikers flyers—but the radius quickly widened to include photocopied zines from Philly's queer subculture scene, early twentieth century Industrial Workers of the World lithograph songbooks, screen-printed posters from The Poor People's Campaign, the Zapatistas in Chiapas, the Medu Arts Ensemble in Botswana.

An early attempt to model the relationship between the objects and the people in the space took place during the exhibition and event series, *We Are Who We Archive*. The exhibition brought together a plurality of international movement ephemera—1950s pamphlets and broadsheets from the Chicago Surrealist Group, 1960s poetry chapbooks and zines from by the anarchist Bound Together Bookstore in San Francisco, buttons and stamps from the 1970s Wages for Housework movement, samizdat[4] newsletters from the Polish Solidarity movement of the 1980s. Many of these materials were created by the donors themselves and entered IA's collections through their personal relationships with volunteers. For example, the Wages for Housework materials had been entrusted to Eva and Daniel by the movement's co-founder, the

[4] Russian for "self-published."

autonomist Marxist feminist writer and activist Silvia Federici, a long-time friend and collaborator. The outlines of a nascent methodology were articulated in the exhibition's promotional pamphlet:

> As an "archive from below," Interference Archive's content is not determined by a scholar or expert, but by the same community that supports the archive. In many cases, an object's donor is also its creator, or was an integral part of the movement that produced it. By keeping, maintaining, sorting, and ultimately donating radical movement ephemera, our donors determine which documents have lasting value—taking on the role of archivist of their own movements. Rather than focus on a specific movement or idea, *We Are Who We Archive* serves as a portrait of a growing archive and highlights the role of individuals in preserving collective history.

Figure 1. Screen-printed posters for the *We Are Who We Archive* exhibition.

Activating the Archive

Figure 2. Interference Archive's current location on 7th Street in Park Slope, Brooklyn.

IA opened to the public in late 2011 in the Gowanus neighborhood of Brooklyn and relocated to its current location a few blocks away in Park Slope in 2017. IA's mission to "explore the relationship between cultural production and social movements"[5] manifests in archival collections, a library and study center, and an exhibition and event space. The posters, fliers, pamphlets, banners, zines, photographs, books, t-shirts, buttons, stencils, video and audio recordings in the collections come from a diverse array of historical and contemporary local, national, and international movements—from racial, gender and sexual liberation to economic,

[5] "Our Mission," Interference Archive, https://interferencearchive.org/our-mission/

migrant, and climate justice, from anti-imperialism, anti-war, and anti-austerity to indigenous sovereignty, housing rights, and prison abolition.[6] To encourage and facilitate the use of its collections, IA operates on a model of open and free public access. During regular operating hours anyone is welcome to explore the 'copyleft' collections, to physically handle and photograph any of the objects—no appointment, identification, credentials, or white gloves required.

Open access to the collections is mirrored in open access to the project.[7] Anyone can ostensibly become an active participant, manage the collections, propose and facilitate events and exhibitions, and thus shape what the Archive is and could become. In contrast to archives whose collections are determined by institutional experts and access is restricted to "qualified researchers" (Eichhorn 2012: 31), IA practices a form of "participatory recordkeeping" (Upward et al. 2011: 221) in which the subjects of archival materials—who are often the creators and/or donors of the materials—decide what materials to collect, how they will be accessioned, classified, and made accessible. This method of self-historicization is designed to allow IA's community to collectively decide how to shape and organize what counts as history, how history is interpreted, framed, and understood, and whose histories will or will not be told.

Donors enter this community by giving movement ephemera to the Archive because the value of the objects will be "preserved"—made publicly accessible and open to reactivation through another's related or different use. Said one donor: "The idea that material knowledge from all times can be preserved in an autonomous and public space to be used as data,

[6] While most of the collections come from the political left, a small number of records are from the right. Aside from these few materials, there is not an active attempt to collect anything from the political right. This issue is discussed below.

[7] Many of the Archive's volunteers, particularly those who trained as archivists and librarians, were involved in the broader "open access" movement which advocates forms of self-archiving and the provision of unrestricted online access to scholarly research.

inspiration, context, and in general, a free resource for social problem solving right now is made a reality at Interference Archive." Donors understand that, unlike at institutional archives, they cannot stipulate restrictions to access. The programmatic desires of the Archive's community supersede any aspirations an individual donor may have about the use of the materials they donate. Volunteers collectively decide which donations they will accept or decline and the criteria they use to make these determinations.

IA is collectively run on all volunteer labor. No one is paid. Many of the material resources needed to maintain the space are acquired through solidarity economies—sharing, gifting, and bartering networks in the NYC region that operate to the greatest extent possible outside the money economy. Through the direct exchange of goods and services—food, cooperative housing, legal advice, psychotherapy, childcare, open-source software development, etc.—these solidarity economies also help sustain the lives of many volunteers, allowing them to subsist in NYC on comparatively little money and contribute their time to the Archive. Operational expenses such as rent, utilities, and insurance are generated by monthly $10-$50 "sustainer" donations from a network of local, national, and international supporters,[8] donations from visitors and class tours, the rental of three co-working spaces, and self-published book and tote sales. As a 501(c)3 non-profit with an "Educational" status, the volunteers will occasionally apply for small grants to produce an exhibition, but they are wary of becoming reliant on foundation or state funding that could compromise their ability to operate autonomously.

The typical volunteer identifies as an artist, activist, archivist, librarian, designer, filmmaker, student, educator, academic, 'militant researcher,'[9] or some combination. The total

[8] While this is a crowd-funding model, the vast majority of IA's "sustainer" donors are not anonymous, but people with whom the volunteers have established relationships: friends, colleagues, collaborators, and fellow travelers.
[9] 'Militant research' was a term I heard across my field sites to describe an orientation and process that disavows positivist knowledge, indicating a researcher's self-reflexive critique of their own ongoing complicities with power.

number of volunteers at any given moment varies based on the number of active projects. The space is organized and facilitated by self-selecting, non-hierarchical, de-centralized, consensus-based working groups—Admin, Exhibitions, Cataloguing, Education, Audio, Born Digital. The demographic composition of the Archive is constantly changing. Of the approximately twenty "core" volunteers who comprised the working groups during the period I conducted research, most were in their 20s and 30s, a handful were people of color, while a slight majority were white women, many with degrees in archival/library science. It is the work of these core volunteers that sustains the Archive—staffing during open hours, providing reference assistance to visitors, hosting events, planning, curating, and producing exhibitions, developing an open-source online database, cataloging the collection, accounting and grant writing, maintaining the website. The larger volunteer base, hundreds of people who contribute on an occasional basis (e.g., staffing once a month, working on a specific event or exhibition) is more diverse and reflects the heterogeneity of the organizations that host events at the space, and the visitors—as many as 300 people a week from around the NYC area, the US, and abroad.

IA's volunteers mobilize the materials in the collections to connect historical struggles for social justice and transformation with ongoing struggles in the present through exhibitions, artmaking workshops, talks, tours, film screenings, podcasts, lending, and collaborations with "like-minded" organizations. As polyphonic processes, these collaborations produce polyphonic knowledge. For their exhibition and event series, *We Won't Move: Tenants Organize in New York City*, IA's volunteers collaborated with housing rights activists and organizations from across the city's five boroughs to explore the history and present of collective actions for

For the militant researcher, there is no analytical or 'outside' position from which to know a given phenomenon, only situated and partial knowledge(s). Rather than the social science of transmitting truth qua knowledge *of*, research becomes the process of producing tools one can fight with, i.e., research as knowledge *for* (Russell 2015; De Genova 2013).

affordable housing. Bringing together materials from various tenant organizations, including other community archives, the exhibition examined historical and contemporary campaigns against predatory equity, luxury housing, and gentrification-driven policing. These materials, which were later used to create a booklet highlighting the strategies and tactics of various housing rights groups, presented multiple and diverse narratives, struggles, people, and moments connected to one another and to the present in complex and often contradictory ways.

Figure 3. *We Won't Move* exhibition, Interference Archive, 2015.

The kinds of people who collaborate on a given exhibition/event are usually reflected in the visitors it attracts. While *We Won't Move* brought together a heterogeneous public, the majority of collaborators on a given exhibition/event and the publics it makes already identify in some way with the topic. *This is an Emergency!*, an exhibition on reproductive rights and gender

justice, was curated and attended almost exclusively by women, while *Serve the People: The Asian American Movement in New York*, curated by a Korean-American arts writer and organizer, was attended predominantly by Asian Americans. However, the public *Serve the People* constituted was far from monolithic. The exhibition assembled a motley assortment of objects, stories, and histories from Asian-American activists in 1970s NYC—a moment when a politicized Asian-American identity was forming. It brought together an intergenerational cross section of Asian-American artists, cultural producers, labor organizers, students, and sectarian revolutionaries, many who had been directly involved in the production of the objects on display but had never been in the same space together. Older attendees were able to make connections between groups whose disagreements over ideology, tactics, strategies, and goals had previously kept them apart. The exhibition's organizers explained how this "helped to mitigate the effect on historic internal conflicts and provided a more neutral forum to voice [differing] perceptions of shared past experiences," and revealed how "Asian American" was and remains a highly contested and strategically essentialized category, particularly for younger attendees who were unfamiliar with these histories and were able "to better understand how their own activism is part of a continuum."[10]

[10] Wong quoted in Sellie et al., 2015, pp. 466-467.

Figure 4. *Serve the People* exhibition, Interference Archive, 2014.

Several volunteers told me they do not view the identity composition (gender, ethnic, racial, sexual, etc.) of the publics that attend exhibitions/events as a problem that needs to be fixed. Homogenous spaces, as one noted, "are often perceived as safer or more conducive to the goals of a particular group or event." Said another, "Most people don't want to be in spaces that are full of people they don't identify with in some way." In contrast to community archives that emerge from and respond to the conditions and concerns of an established group of actors rooted in a particular history, place, or identity formation (e.g., the Lesbian Herstory Archives), the volunteers conceive IA as a space "at the cross-section of many disparate communities that share a unified goal to interfere with the status quo and to change the political, economic, and environmental systems in which they are enmeshed" (Almeida and Hoyer 2019: 21). By connecting geographically, organizationally, and temporally distant movements within a broader

network of actors, IA resembles what Francesca Polletta (1999) calls a "transmovement space"—a place for interactions, crosspollination, and the sharing of experiences, tactics, and ideas across the boundaries of distinct social movements. As one volunteer put it, IA seeks "to create a network of activists and communities that will be genuinely interested in learning from and with one another."

Prefiguring a Political Community

While the Archive is situated across multiple movements, it nonetheless engenders its own kind of political community. Volunteers described this community as "non-sectarian," "pan-left," and "a political pluralism that recognizes intersectionality and affirms a diversity of political struggles." This conception of pluralism is not synonymous with diversity, but the engagement with diversity, the active seeking of understanding and connection across difference; it is not a form of relativism, but the encounter of different, and often contested, commitments within the context of a shared ethos. As the volunteers write, "the general ethos of [this] community leans towards different degrees of anti-authoritarianism and anti-capitalism" (Almeida and Hoyer 2019: 22). Consistent with this pluralist ethos, the volunteers have never produced a document that articulates a unified conception of their politics. Whatever terms they used to define a common orientation, a sense of community, what was clear is that there is an elective affinity between these shared political sensibilities and the methods they employ to enact them—open access, flexible participation, horizontal organization, voluntarism.[11] Thus, while IA's sense of community is shaped by a shared ethos, one that attracts certain kinds of publics,

[11] In philosophy, voluntarism is the doctrine that the will is fundamental to agency, self-determination. In a vernacular sense, voluntarism refers to a reliance on volunteers to support an institution or achieve an aim, while volunteerism is often used to indicate a reliance on volunteers to perform certain functions (social, civic, educational). My use of voluntarism in the context of the Archive suggests all three of these.

this ethos is not a predetermined structure that is reproduced, but rather, emerges in and through the practice of the Archive's collectively determined and regularly re-evaluated methods.

Importantly, the affinity between political sensibilities and methods did not indicate agreement about what constitutes the political. The volunteers expressed differing conceptions about the formation of the political and the ways these conceptions informed their investments in the Archive as a space where post-capitalist subjectivities and relations could emerge. For example, Makayla, an African American student in her early 30s who began volunteering at IA in 2012, told me that IA's flexible participation has allowed her to contribute "when and how I want." She went on to explain, though, that the majority of her activism is devoted to

> political work that is about engaging with forces out in the world, like abolishing prisons… To the extent that I'm interested in political organizing, it's more identity-based than this space has ever been … I mean specific demographic markers like women, trans people, queer folks, black folks. Something I appreciate about Interference, that is also at odds with identity-based organizing, is that there isn't an explicit endorsement of any politics here. But I do think there are politics at play here—that I subscribe to as well—like working towards a non-hierarchical organizational structure that creates a broader and more inclusive radical community.

Makayla suggests that IA offers an approach to the enactment of politics that contrasts with identity and its representation as an organizing principle of political collectivity. Her comment draws a distinction between two ways of doing politics: one that confronts and seeks to change structures of power "out in the world," and one that constitutes a "more inclusive radical community" through the social relations IA's methods engender. I approach this latter image of politics as a form of *prefigurative politics*—creating in the present the image of a future one wants to see. Prefigurative politics are characterized by "ethical strategies" and "generative temporalities" that seek a "unity of means and ends" (Gordon 2018). This suggests that the pursuit of the non-authoritarian, post-capitalist world the volunteers seek is recursively built into

the Archive's daily operations: self-directed and voluntary actions that are aimed at, as one volunteer said, "changing something real, whatever the scale." By experimenting with horizontal participatory and organizational models, volunteers learn how to govern themselves in a manner that reconfigures the way power operates (Maeckelbergh 2011).

While the image of prefigurative politics Makayla conjures was shared by most volunteers (albeit expressed in different ways), it was not shared by everyone in IA's community. For example, Nina, a lawyer, educator, and land rights activist in her late-30s who assisted IA with legal matters (e.g., setting up and maintaining the non-profit status), agreed that IA was creating a more inclusive community. But when I asked her if she considered the Archive's horizontal methods and the kinds of relations and subjectivities they engender as constitutive of something she would call "politics," she was dismissive:

> What I think is really interesting about the Archive is what they're doing, because nobody else is doing that… their anti-institutional archiving of historical material… the ephemera they're keeping in a place that's accessible. Maybe that's really boring to say, but that's what's radical about it. Everything else is just survival … or angst.

Nina saw IA's political valence, indeed its raison d'être, in the democratization of access to the collections. None of the volunteers or anyone in the Archive's orbit would dispute this. It was one of the IA's founding principles. What they might dispute is *how* the democratization of access is achieved—the methods employed in its realization and the social relations and subjectivities they engender—as something beyond "survival … or angst." Nina's characterization implies a worry or anxiety created by the realization that whatever relations take place at the Archive, they are insignificant, trivial, of little import in the "actual world" of consequentialist politics.[12] I don't want to suggest the absence of anxiety at the Archive. Some

[12] Each time I interacted with Nina she performed this image of politics. The first time I interviewed her in her office at Fordham University, she had her laptop open—chatting away blithely as she multitasked, occasionally looking up

volunteers expressed what Bürge Abiral identifies in her ethnography of political activism in Turkey as an "anxious hope," the grain of anxiety that always attends the "belief that small actions matter" (Abiral 2015: 93).[13]

As a volunteer who consulted IA at Admin working group meetings and attended exhibition openings, i.e., someone not involved in the day-to-day running of the space, Nina had little experiential basis for dismissing IA's internal processes. She couldn't know, for example, how these processes, as I discuss below, might involve possibilities for self-expression and self-transformation, and engender new ways of seeing, saying, and doing—new *political* subjectivities. Nina wasn't alone in her assessment. I heard similar comments from visitors, sustainer donors, and activists who, like Nina, had more peripheral relationships to the Archive, those who witnessed the effects or results of IA's practices, the products of IA's collective efforts, but had little knowledge of how the Archive operated, the processes involved in its (re)production. For example, in 2016, when the volunteers learned that IA's rent the following year would be doubled, they asked Nina and several other supporters with experience running arts and culture non-profits in the complex NYC real estate market to provide consultation to them in the process of transitioning to a more sustainable location.[14] At the first meeting, three of the six volunteers present—Renee, Mariana, and Daniel—described how the Archive was structured and the kind of space they were looking for. At one point in the discussion, when the issue of funding was raised, the following exchange took place:

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to emphasize a point—and frequently interrupted our discussion to take an "important" call. She even questioned my choice of research sites, suggesting that some of the other projects she works with—women and people of color organizations whose participants are "less privileged"—would be more salient sites for ethnographic inquiry into radical social relations, and solutions.

[13] Abiral develops her notion of anxious hope from her reading of Ernst Bloch's theory of concrete utopia in *The Principle of Hope*.

[14] At the time, the Archive was located in Gowanus, a light-industrial area of Brooklyn that was experiencing what city officials and real estate developers were calling an "economic and cultural revival." From 2005-2015, property values had risen 85% and the median income had gone from $45,000 to $100,000 (Krisil 2015).

Renee: In 2015, our total revenue was just over $80,000.

Consultant A: Wow! It's incredible you're able to operate a publicly accessible space with such amazing programming on that budget.

Consultant B: We have volunteers at [our organization], and they're great, but I couldn't imagine our programs being run by volunteers.

Consultant A: Are you interested in applying for operational funding?

Renee: If the orgs are aligned with IA and won't limit what we do with the money.

Consultant A: Who's the point person for dealing with grants?

Mariana: Since we're all-volunteer, these responsibilities shift.

Daniel: The key to IA is desire. People do what they want to do. The people that come and stay as ongoing volunteers are not the kinds of people that need to be told what to do, they're self-driven. Some people come for formal reasons—an anti-hierarchical accessible archive. For some it's social—meet like-minded folks to chat with. Some for the events and exhibits—having people with very different interests and desires keeps the programming and events diverse and attracts different visitors.

Mariana: We're a DIY space. That's the ethos of the people who organize IA. We try to balance more flexible ways of working with more formalized structures. Each person has their own reasons for putting their time into the Archive. We want to have autonomy with our programming, events, and…

Nina: [cutting Mariana off] Can we get back to talking about space concerns? I didn't come here to have a convo about IA's internal processes. If that's what we're doing, I'm out.

Consultant A: [taking up Nina's redirect] I think you need to consider operational funding.

Renee: [curtly, and somewhat dismissively] Thanks, we'll consider it.

As I observed the perplexed expressions on the faces of the consultants—*You asked us to help but you don't seem to want our help*—I had the impression this assemblage of people offered the volunteers a "teachable" moment, the chance to force a kind of "political" recognition—*What does it say about the world we live in that we can operate a public space in*

NYC with "amazing programming" on self-directed volunteer labor? Daniel and Mariana were suggesting that IA's practices and the kinds of relations that emerge at the space have effects that are consequential for its participants—they produce good outcomes, however small. After the meeting, the volunteers told me that in the past they had applied for operational funding from a variety of state and NYC-based granting agencies but didn't receive any because, as Daniel said, "IA is in a liminal space between arts and political activist funders. We're not 'effective' enough to get political activist money and we're not art world enough to get that money." It was clear that they would accept outside funding only if they could maintain their autonomy.

For Gabriel, a Peruvian-American experimental videographer in his early 40s who was active in the Education working group, IA's processes *were* its politics. While Gabriel was a champion of open access to IA as a project, he was ambivalent about the objects in the collections. The objects and the struggles they represented offered no path to the post-capitalist world he envisioned: "I could basically care less about all the posters and banners." A trained filmmaker, his aesthetic interests lay in the formal aspects of moving images, in, as he put it, "the open-ended play of the editing process." This experimental ethos was present in the way Gabriel conducted himself in meetings—mentally racing, flitting from thought to thought, but intensely emotionally present.

> I'm very process oriented. I like to hang out with my queer black feminist organizer friends and talk process. I wish we talked more about process at the Archive… I guess you could say I'm political on a cultural level. I'm instinctively anti-authoritarian. Whenever I see any kind of formation start to happen, I throw up in the back of my throat.

The political for Gabriel emerged in the deliberations between volunteers during working group meetings, in the ways they collectively devised methods for maintaining leaderless, non-hierarchical relations and building transparency and accountability into their communication. His

approach aligned most closely with Linda, a white tenured professor in her 50s, also in the Education working group, who had written her dissertation on the EZLN's local autonomy project in Chiapas, Mexico:

> There's this way in which everyone always needs to be so busy getting things done and we don't reflect enough on our process. The Zapatistas had a process called "auto-critica" … they were very reflexive about asking what's working and not working.

Gabriel and Linda frequently voiced disagreements about IA's group process and demanded that more deliberation was needed if the Archive was going to truly embody its horizontalist methods. While other volunteers often agreed with them in principle, they didn't have or desire to contribute the time to address the bases of their interventions. As we will see, disagreement only alters the Archive's processes when there are volunteers willing to commit the time necessary to address the nature of the disagreement.

As Makayla suggests, working at the Archive need not substitute for a more consequentialist politics. Doing politics "out in the world" and at the Archive are not mutually exclusive, but sites of political world-making she engages simultaneously. This pluralist approach to the enactment of the political was evident in the ways the volunteers engaged other kinds of politics. For example, many were involved in local initiatives such as the Brooklyn Anti-gentrification Network as well as national initiatives, e.g., some did volunteer work for the Bernie Sanders campaign during the 2016 presidential election. If one's aim is to experiment with group process, the Archive will likely frustrate. Conversely, if one's aim is to change policy (e.g., abolish prisons), IA is not the place. But if what one wants is a concretely locatable space where the democratization of access to resources is realized in collectively determined methods that prefigure, no matter how small, a vision of the world one wants to see, the ground floor of a two-story brick building in Park Slope, Brooklyn may be one place to find it.

Wayfarers in the Metropole

Mariana

I first met Mariana, a labor organizer in her late 20s, at an Admin working group meeting. She was direct, didn't mince words, but was always looking for a laugh. Mariana grew up on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Her parents had emigrated to NYC in the early 1980s. As a Guatemalan in a city with a Latinx population that is overwhelmingly Puerto Rican and Dominican, she "felt like a minority within a minority… my Spanish was so different from theirs." She and her three siblings shared a single bed with "a constant stream of visiting cousins" in their two-room apartment in the basement of a multi-unit building, a stone's throw from Lincoln Center. Her father was the building supervisor, "the only way an immigrant family could afford to live in that part of town." There was never a quiet moment. Each morning, a queue of white tenants would bang on their front door, imploring her father to change a lightbulb or unclog a drain. With his fledgling English, she watched him bend over backwards to oblige them. "I hated white people. I still kinda hate em." Mariana went to an all-girls private Catholic school on a need-based scholarship. When she was fifteen, she transferred to a public high school on the Lower East Side where "social justice-oriented Jews taught me how to think." She excelled in her final year of high school and received a full scholarship to an elite university in Connecticut.

The first person in her family to attend college, Mariana had trouble relating to the other students of color—"privileged middle-class kids who wore their identity on their sleeves." She dropped out after two years and moved into her partner's mother's house in Brooklyn. With the money she saved not having to pay rent, she was able to finish her bachelor's degree and soon after found a job at NPR's oral history project, StoryCorps, where she came face-to-face with

liberal America's white savior industrial complex.[15] "I tried to be patient, I really did, but I just couldn't do it." She promptly quit to take a job as an immigrant organizer. She first visited IA during the *We Won't Move!* exhibition and immediately after began attending organizational meetings. "Something was different. There was no hierarchy, no bosses. They made decisions collectively, which is anathema at my day job."

Mariana immersed herself in volunteering, sometimes spending as much twenty hours a week staffing and participating in two working groups, where her interventions on the intersection of race and class were welcomed. Mariana is neither an archivist nor a maker of objects. While she clearly valued the materials in the Archive's collections, her concerns swirled around issues of access and group process. During meetings, she would often raise questions about the relationship between volunteer labor and representation qua inclusion—*Who is able and/or desires to spend their free time working at an activist archive? How did they get here? What pathways exist for others to get here?* But she was a vocal critic of suggestions that IA should devise ways of remunerating volunteers and outside collaborators as a way of including more diverse voices. For example, during a discussion about whether the Archive should pay academics of color to write introductions for an exhibition pamphlet, Mariana argued this would de-value the labor of non-academics of color who perform myriad types of labor at IA—cataloguing, translating, printing, cleaning—without being paid. *Why should academic/intellectual labor be singled out? Either all the labor that reproduces the Archive is paid—an impossibility—or none is.*

[15] Coined by the Nigerian-American author Teju Cole in the March 21, 2012 edition of *The Atlantic Magazine*. Cole characterizes this complex as a modern-day version of Rudyard Kipling's 1899 poem "The White Man's Burden."

Carla

A white librarian in her mid-50s, Carla had recently lost her position at the NYC Public Library. She was "living off a meager pension and sleeping on friends' couches" while she looked for a new job. A fellow librarian and housemate of a volunteer mentioned IA was looking for new volunteers. Carla started staffing at the Archive on Thursday afternoons. "I figure if I have time, I want to help out." She usually kept to herself—focused, diligent, efficient—cataloguing the endless pile of ephemera in the "accession" box. A noisy discussion in her midst didn't distract her, and she rarely interjected. I would often sit across the table and help her catalog, notebook open, ready to record bits of our conversation. If I angled a question just right, she would give a thorough response, end on a dime, and pivot back to the task at hand while awaiting another question. Carla grew up a red diaper baby in the south Bronx—first generation Ukrainian father, second generation Italian mother. "We were economically lower-class and culturally middle-class. All the public cultural institutions in the city make that possible." It was open access to the collections and the project that compelled her to get involved. "I've never encountered an archive like this ... and I've been to a lot of archives." Before she lost her job, she was a union rep at the public library, and although she was an early convert to labor union organizing—"Ever since I can remember I was taught that class is everything"—in time she grew to resent the dogmatism and sexism of the mostly white Socialist Workers Party stalwarts who controlled the union leadership.

In the late 1990s Carla went to a Reclaim the Streets rally in midtown Manhattan where she befriended several anarchists from the Direct Action Network (DAN), a confederation of anti-corporate and anti-authoritarian affinity groups that formed during the anti-globalization protests in Seattle. "I naturally gravitated toward DAN's anti-ideology stance … and they

weren't humorless like the union Trotskyists!" She quickly became frustrated with DAN's lack of class analysis. "They saw everything in terms of the personal is political." After a brief stint with the Wobblies—"puppets weren't going to do it"—she joined the North Eastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists, a predominantly white, poor and working-class anarchist organization that rejects Leninist democratic centralism while embracing ideological unity and federalism. "But the optics were so bad. We tried to recruit people of color. It's a relief there are now black women leading social movements. It's a relief to step back. There are librarians of color coming to IA to archive movements of people of color. I do think intersectional politics will save us." I closed my notebook to signal that I needn't take any more of her time. Carla returned to cataloguing. A moment later, she spun around in her chair: "Anticapitalism without intersectionality is class reductionism. Intersectionality without anticapitalism is liberal identity politics." I had the sense that Carla was tying it up in a bow for my benefit, telling the researcher what he wanted to hear. These kinds of summary statements were rare at IA. It wasn't that other volunteers didn't or couldn't think them and occasionally make them, rather, they didn't have much use in a given situation. Their lack of any pragmatic value made them ring hollow, pedantic, academic.

Diego

I first met Diego, a sixteen-year-old high school student, during the planning and production of *Soñamos Sentirnos Libres*, a collaboration between the Archive and the multiethnic youth arts collective Mobile Print Power (MPP) that culminated in an exhibition and event series at IA in the summer of 2016. Diego was very shy and didn't speak unless asked a direct question, and when he answered, he used as few words as possible. An MPP youth

organizer told me he was non-verbal until the age of ten. Diego grew up in the bustling immigrant neighborhood of Corona, Queens. His parents—Dominican mother, Puerto Rican father—had a "turbulent relationship" and split up just before he stopped talking. He carried a sketch book with him everywhere he went (his fingertips were usually covered in lead). Drawing was a coping mechanism, it centered him, and he was good at it. When he was fifteen, his mother took him to an event at Immigrant Movement International (IMI), a community arts space in Corona, where he was introduced to the members of MPP. He began sharing his drawings with the group and learned how to generate screen prints from them.

MPP is organized out of IMI, a collaboration between the Cuban-American performance artist Tania Bruguera and the Queens Museum of Art that opened in 2006 with funding from the Museum.[16] It was conceived as an instantiation of Bruguera's concept *arte util* ("useful art"), which she describes as "a way of working with aesthetic experiences that focuses on the implementation of art in society where art's function is no longer to be a space for 'signaling' problems, but the place from which to create the proposal and implementation of possible solutions" (Bruguera 2011). To link cultural production with the "practical needs of the surrounding community" (Ibid), IMI offers free visual art, dance, ESL, and legal assistance workshops in partnership with local immigrant rights and social service organizations and hosts several community arts groups (Bruguera had invited MPP to IMI). Bruguera's framing of IMI as a space where aesthetic experiences do not merely represent but prefigure the change one wants to see clearly resonated with IA. While their specific methods and organizational structures differed, IA and IMI (and the projects IMI hosted, e.g., MPP) shared an approach to the political and publics.

[16] As of 2014, Bruguera and the Queens Museum were no longer involved in the project.

Figure 5. Immigrant Movement International, Corona, Queens.

MPP is comprised of about fifteen majority Latinx students between the ages of 12 and 17 from high schools around Corona. The project is coordinated by Jonathan, a white artist-educator in his 30s who works at an area museum. Jonathan had conceived the project during his graduate studies as a way to "empower historically underserved youth" through "collaborative and participatory public sphere cultural production" (a foundational tenet of "social practice" art). He had been living in Egypt when the Arab Spring erupted in 2011 and was deeply moved by the outpouring of visual forms of expression in public spaces. A devotee of Paulo Freire's dialogical pedagogy, Jonathan was a genuinely empathetic teacher. The students really took to him. He would always do whatever he asked them to do, from completing the same projects to cleaning up. Invoking Bruguera's image of prefigurative politics, Jonathan would say, "The

process *is* the politics." Over several months, as a I observed the planning, production, and implementation of *Soñamos Sentirnos Libres* at IMI, the Archive, and events at CUNY Queens and the Brooklyn Museum, it became clear that the group's structure and methods—the ways the youth participated and the ends to which their participation was directed—were largely prescribed by a framework and an accompanying discourse about art and social change Jonathan had devised.

Figure 6. *Soñamos Sentirnos Libres* exhibition event, Interference Archive, 2016.

I witnessed this play out in different ways. One of the more subtle instantiations involved the process of developing screen prints from the students' drawings. In group discussions facilitated by Jonathan and another MPP youth organizer, the students would identity a set of shared concerns and develop corresponding prompts that became springboards for creating

images, e.g. *What does solidarity mean to you? How do you imagine the future of Corona Plaza?* The images the students created were wildly heterogeneous. Each student had a different drawing and compositional style. Some were more graphic/flat, others used crosshatch and shading to create tone and dimensionality. They represented their ideas and emotions in different ways, some more literal, others more metaphoric. They had different ways of talking about their drawings, the terms they used to describe their artistic process, why they chose a particular image and what it meant to them. In the process of "translating" their drawings into screen prints—a process of revision and refinement Jonathan oversaw—this aesthetic plurality all but disappeared. The prints had a similar aesthetic quality, a more homogenized graphic uniformity that made them appear as if they had been created by the same hand. Typography that in the students' drawings had the look of graffiti tags and interlocking three-dimensionality had become an unembellished hand lettering. Where the drawings had a dissimilitude, the prints had a brand.

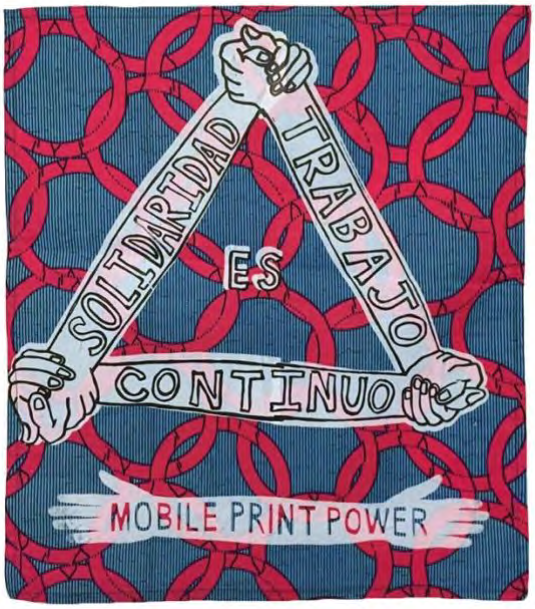

Figure 7. Atelier Populaire, "Workers, French, Immigrants, United," 1968.
Figure 8. Mobile Print Power, "Solidarity is Continuous Work," 2016.

It was unclear to me if the students were familiar with this aesthetic, but I certainly was. It was of a piece with the imagery produced by the Atelier Populaire in Paris and the Taller de Gráfica Popular in Mexico City in 1968, the Taller Popular de Serigrafía in Buenos Aires in the early 2000s, and the École de la Montagne Rouge in Montreal in the 2010s—all student led initiatives whose aesthetic had emerged from the urgency of its moment, while recursively indexing its predecessors. This aesthetic has become a standard-bearer of Western protest movement art, championed not only by artists and activists, but by art historians and academics (Considine 2015; Josephson 2011). Was Jonathan, whether consciously or not, attempting to locate MPP within this institutionally recognized and historicized—legitimate, valued—aesthetic tradition? Was he reactivating this archive in an attempt to give a small group of teenagers in Queens (and himself as lead organizer) some aesthetic bona fides? Would this aesthetic allow MPP's work to better resonate in institutional art spaces? For *which* publics was it intended, and *which* publics would it make? [17]

Several months after the *Soñamos Sentirnos Libres* exhibit at IA had closed Diego would still make the long trek from his mother's apartment in Queens to the Archive, sometimes with a friend, but usually on his own. Ostensibly he came to help staff or catalog, but he didn't seem that interested in the collections. Having observed Diego in various settings, I noticed there was something different about his behavior at the Archive. He was more relaxed, animated, playful. He would spend hours hanging around the space, occasionally sketching or doing homework, but more often just chatting with volunteers and visitors. In these encounters, he seemed to exercise

[17] The standpoint I adopt here was not immediately available to me because I too valued this aesthetic as beautiful, authentic, powerful. I only recognized what was occurring in the process of "translation" at MPP when I gained some distance from my own aesthetic proclivities, when I was able to adopt what Alfred Gell (1992) calls a "methodological philistinism," an attitude of indifference towards the aesthetic value of objects.

a degree of autonomy that was absent in other settings. The volunteers would ask him questions—about his drawings, youth culture, music, life in the city—and when he answered, they listened, but not too intently, with the requisite amount of ambivalence and disinterest a self-conscious teenager requires. Their ethical stance made discursive room for him; the volunteers engaged him on equal footing; his intellectual equality was presupposed. And Diego reciprocated with his own questions and patiently listened to their responses. It was a two-way street, and he was driving. There were no authority figures—youth organizers, teachers—with knowledge to impart, actions to oversee. No project or plan his body and time were instrumentalized to accomplish. No pre-determined mode or terms (discourse, forms of sense perception) for participation. In the encounters between Diego and the volunteers, there was more a mutuality of becoming, what William Mazzarella (2017) calls a 'constitutive encounter,' than a pre-determined structure that was being reproduced.[18] I was especially struck when Diego showed up by himself to an annual IA fundraiser at Verso Books in Dumbo, the only kid his age, shuttling with a confident swagger between groupsicles, greeting people he knew, introducing himself to those he didn't. For a teenager who was non-verbal until he was ten, I felt like I was witnessing a metamorphosis. This traumatized, socially awkward kid was throwing himself into social relations and subjectivities that were new and exciting for him.

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These sketches illustrate how volunteers from different generations and backgrounds, and with different knowledge/expertise, are drawn to, and have different investments in and experiences of the Archive. In one way or another, they had arrived at IA after struggling to "fit" in other organizations, social relations, and subjectivities. What they seem to share is a desire for

[18] I elaborate on constitute encounters in Chapter 2.

maintaining a sense of self-directed agency within collective processes, and an almost allergic reaction to hierarchy, institutional authority, and liberal logics/discourse. In contrast to Mariana, Carla was not involved in any working groups. Her investment in the space—the time she spent there and the tasks she performed—were specific to her training and skills as a librarian. Where Carla spoke about her involvement in relation to her history with specific left tendencies/groups, Mariana framed her participation in relation to her education and job experience as a second-generation immigrant. Where Carla and Mariana explicitly voiced the elective affinity between their political sensibilities and IA's methods and practices—an affinity that comported with the kind of relation between the individual and the collective they desired—Diego didn't appear to be conscious of this relation. What seemed significant for him was that its concrete effects could be experienced, lived.

Did Diego experience some kind of personal transformation at the Archive? Was he able to work through his traumatic experiences to find his own position in the larger collective? Had his capacity for self- exploration, expression, and transformation been limited by Jonathan/MPP prescribing a collective structure from the outset, one with pre-determined forms of participation and corresponding forms of discourse? Did Diego's experience with MPP risk negating a plurality of experience and thus the development of his autonomy as a subject, as a potential *political* agent?

Thrown Into Use

I want to suggest, following Heidegger, that perhaps Diego was throwing off his thrown condition by acting in a concrete situation and seizing hold of its possibilities (Critchley 2008). For Heidegger, being "thrown into existence" (1962: 276) implies a passivity at the heart of our

lives; it is not something we have done but something we find done to us; we are not the agents but the recipients. A "throw" suggests a momentum to our lives that we did not choose; it is existing in a world into which one is born, with already existing norms, values, and culture. For Heidegger, if we are capable of understanding how to do something, how to operate or act in a given situation, to grasp its possibilities, we can throw off this thrown condition. To act in this way is to be authentic, free, to take responsibility for oneself. Indeed, Darshan Cowles (2017) suggests that thrownness offers a way of rethinking what it means to take responsibility for oneself. Against the notion that taking responsibility lies in the *power* of the subject to find their basis for existence in themselves, to gain control or to determine themselves, he argues that taking responsibility should be understood as "being attentive to [the] movement in which we find ourselves, to be attentive to ensure we are moved in a way that is good, true, meaningful." (Ibid: 221). On Cowles' reading, then, we could say that Diego was taking responsibility for himself by throwing off his thrown condition, his traumatic childhood experience, not by finding a space within or outside his thrownness from which to gain leverage against, but by being attentive, observing in himself what resonated most deeply, and acting in a way that felt authentic, true.

Throwing and thrownness captures something about the texture of the experience of volunteering at the Archive. Like Diego, Mariana was thrown into the world and struggled to fit. When she found the Archive, she dove headlong into the space. Recalling the opening passage, Sian had thrown herself into the unknown of the Occupy movement to find that which resonated for her more than a solo career in the art world and was drawn to the Archive for the same reason. These volunteers had chosen to throw themselves into the Archive as a way of being attentive to what moved them most. Extending Heidegger's notion of thrownness, I suggest that

while volunteers choose to work at the Archive, they are frequently thrown into situations they did not choose, and it is the world of the Archive that is doing this throwing, and at the same time, creating the conditions of possibility for throwing off this thrownness.

To illustrate what I mean, I want to consider an experience I had early on in my research. As part of my quid-pro-quo arrangement with the Archive—granting me access to conduct research in exchange for my labor—I helped staff one day a week. This involved opening and closing the space, welcoming and assisting visitors, and helping out with anything that needed tending (cataloguing, cleaning, etc.). One morning, on a day when I was scheduled to staff, I received an email from a volunteer asking me if I could lead a tour for a high school history class that was coming in that afternoon.[19] I responded that I'd never led a tour before, didn't think I was the right person, and asked if there was a more experienced volunteer who could do it. *You're the only one who's available to staff today. Everyone else is busy. Don't worry, you'll do fine.* This didn't inspire confidence. I spent an hour cribbing notes from the Archive's website and some online articles and ran to the train. When I got to the Archive, I started looking for some materials to present. A few days earlier, a volunteer had excitedly shown me some pieces he'd brought back from a recent trip to Indonesia—two large cloth banners and a small printing press disguised in a suitcase that had been made by students in the Indonesian Pro-Democracy Movement. These materials were still sitting on top of a flat-file, waiting to be accessioned.

As I was pondering how I could use them, another volunteer, Ariel, showed up. "I had a few spare hours to staff today before going to work." An art student in her early 20s with a raven black bob and matching lipstick, I had seen Ariel once before at the space but we'd only

[19] The volunteers give regular tours to publicize the collections as an accessible resource, to outreach to potential volunteers, and as a source of revenue. Schools are asked to donate either monetarily or in-kind (e.g., with material resources) on a sliding scale based on their student income status.

exchanged a few pleasantries. I mentioned the class was coming soon for a tour and asked if she could help. “Sure! But I have to warn you, I’ve only been here a few times and I don’t really know much about the collections and how everything works.” I explained that I had recently begun conducting research at the space and that I too was a novice. “We’ll figure it out!” she exclaimed. I unrolled two of the Indonesian Pro-Democracy Movement banners on the floor. “What could we do with these?” “They’ll look amazing hanging from the ceiling.” We found a ladder and went to work. Extending the entire height of the space, the banners were indeed arresting visuals. Their intricately carved detail gave them a tapestry-like quality—throngs of bodies engulfing a building (a school?), arms raised, mouths open, expressions of trepidation and determination. Several phrases in Indonesian twisted rhizomatically between the bodies. “I wonder what the type says,” Ariel remarked. My confidence took another hit.

Just as we were putting the ladder away, the class arrived. Thirty or so students shuffled into the space, bantering boisterously, cajoling for a chair, their young teacher pleading with them to behave. As I scanned the faces in the room—expectant, ambivalent, sleepy—I had the uncanny sense of being thrown into the Archive. Standing beside me, arms clasped, Ariel seemed similarly bewildered and was clearly looking to me to get the ball rolling. I thought: *Should we be doing this? We had chosen to participate, but the situation before us was not our choice. Not only are we neophytes, we hardly know each other. This archive is the result of years of collective efforts, hundreds of people we’ve never met, processes in which we played no part. We don’t have the requisite knowledge of the space, its history, the materials in the collections, how they got here. No one has trained us in what we should do or say. Why were we being entrusted to represent the Archive?*

The sensation I had was similar to learning a new language. I wasn't sure where to begin. "Where do I begin?" was a refrain I often heard uttered by volunteers, and visitors. In *The Claim of Reason*, Stanley Cavell describes cracking open Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* and having no idea how to enter the text, the style of reason was confounding. There was no approach to safely guide him. He simply had to throw himself into it "without an approach," to begin by finding a "blur or block from which to start" (Cavell 1999: 6). While the Archive is no Wittgensteinian text, the incommensurability of its style of reason, particularly in relation to the spatial and discursive logics of archives at museums and universities, can often be confounding. But we had begun. We had been thrown into a concrete situation and had to act, to seize hold of its possibilities. What were these possibilities? We had already activated some when we hung the banners and were presently about to activate others. I had the strange sense that we were being supported, even cheered on, by the all objects that were ready-at-hand. We could call on these objects, animate them, make them speak, in whatever way we chose. This was equally exhilarating and disconcerting. *What if we mispresent the history of an object, or the wishes and desires of those who made it?*

After welcoming the class and saying a few words about the space, I reached for the tattered leather suitcase with the printing press inside. I knew nothing about the Indonesian Pro-democracy Movement or the history of the token object in my hands. But I knew its type. I knew that under many autocratic regimes, forms of mechanical reproduction were banned. I knew that in Romania, where my partner grew up during the dictatorship of Ceaușescu, there was no public access to photocopy machines and printing presses in universities were strictly monitored. I knew that dissidents in the former Soviet bloc countries had developed a form of clandestine self-publishing or "samizdat"—copying subversive texts or literature by hand or some form of

analog printing and distributing them within a network of dissidents. Held quietly in peoples' homes, samizdat constituted a kind of de facto public sphere for collective deliberation and action that had been circumscribed by the state. In the last decade of Hungary's communist regime, the philanthropist George Soros imported hundreds of Xerox machines into a country where only twelve had existed, allowing for samizdat to proliferate.

I opened the suitcase and set it on a table. The students gathered around. The smell of rancid ink wafted out. Inside was an ingenious apparatus. A wooden frame the size of a standard sheet of paper with a silk screen stretched across it was mounted on a hinge to the floor of the case. The screen was stained with the ghosts of several prints, a palimpsest of illegible Indonesian words and images. A rubber ink roller, a hand-sized squeegee, and several tubes of dried ink were tucked into side compartments. Like the case, the materials inside were heavily worn. Smudged ink and fingerprints covered everything. This clandestine press had clearly seen a lot of action. "Does anyone know what this is?" I asked. "Looks like some kind of printing press," a student responded. "Why is it in a suitcase?" No one responded. I launched into my impromptu history of banned forms of publicity.

When I finished, Ariel, who had been quietly deferring to me until then, took the objects out of the case and, pantomiming the screen-printing process, described how one would make a print. Grabbing a pamphlet from a nearby table, she explained how "many of the objects in this space were made using similar techniques." Flipping through the pamphlet, she drew the students' attention to its materiality, the compositional elements of its design, the interplay of image and typography, the tactility of a block print as an index of its maker's affect. She explained that in places where there are few resources, artists make do with whatever they can find. She pivoted and pointed. "These banners were probably printed using a single piece of

cheap plywood." After explaining how to carve a woodcut with rudimentary kitchen tools, she told the students that, as an artist herself, she is deeply invested in how artistic resources and forms of creative expression and dissemination can be made accessible.

> My sister and I spend a lot of time tooling around the city on a tricycle we outfitted with a printing press. We go to different events—art openings, book launches, protests—and offer pop-up printing lessons to anyone interested. In less an hour, we can teach someone how to make block prints from a few quick sketches and then stitch them together in small booklet. Let me know if you're interested in participating.

Ariel was clearly contributing with what resonated for her in the moment, and her enthusiasm was contagious. What ensued was a lively discussion about access to the means of publicity, propaganda, dissent, and the production of knowledge in the digital age.

In the situation I describe, hermeneutics did not depend on prior knowledge of the object. Neither Ariel nor I had any knowledge of the suitcase's history. Whatever this history was, it was not part of its meaning in that moment. I imagine the volunteer who brought it to the Archive knew something of its provenance, but this information had not yet been entered into any record. Like many of the objects that enter the space, it was just sitting on a flat-file waiting to be accessioned, at-hand, open to use. We were interpreting its meaning in the context for which it was made and used *indexically*, through the visual, tactile, and olfactory traces embedded in its materiality. From these traces we could tell a story about the necessity of its concealment, the inventiveness of its construction, its deployment as a tool for "self-publishing." And just as we were making the suitcase speak, its maker was speaking through us. As an index of its maker's agency, the suitcase was mediating (informing, influencing, interfering with) our thoughts and actions (Gell 1998).[20] Its use to us in that moment *was* its meaning, and this meaning was not

[20] I'm thinking here with anthropological theories of object agency (Gell 1998; Van Damme 1996) that foreground the practical mediatory role of cultural objects in social processes over the interpretation of them *as if* they were text. In the relationship between people and things, the cultural object acts as an extension of its maker, it embodies the

knowable in advance of our interpretations. Using the suitcase, we had found an approach. It had aided us in throwing off our thrownness.

This use-centered approach to objects builds from ordinary language philosophy's (Wittgenstein 2009; Austin 1975; Cavell 2002) approach to words, an approach that rejects the idea that language is fundamentally a matter of naming or representation. Paraphrasing Toril Moi's (2017) lucid reading of this philosophy, the notion of "meaning as use" indicates that "the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (Wittgenstein 2009: 25e), that is, there is no meaning that adheres to words in isolation from their use; words only gain meaning in use. Use is an infinite, open-ended form of action that is not bound by rules. What governs use is the application of shared criteria. In the context of the Archive, these criteria are the forms of visibility and patterns of intelligibility that entail a given "style of reason," a way of thinking and doing, of getting something done. As we will see, there is a defined set of (re)productive tasks one can undertake at the Archive, tasks that, like the tour, involve varying levels of skill/expertise. But the nature of these tasks—*how* one performs them and the meanings they generate—is not prescribed by a set of guidelines or protocols. Volunteers often experiment with a given concept or task without codifying an identifiable and thus repeatable "best practice." While the practice of "tour" Ariel and I performed that afternoon had a family resemblance with tours led by other volunteers I observed later, it was a different tour, it had emerged from the situation. Thus, rather than a determinate structure, I conceive practice at IA as a multiplicity that engenders countless different kinds of use. Rather than a logic of structural causality, there is

maker's intentions; their agency is transmitted through an indexical relation; history is not merely *represented by* the object, rather, cultural objects, as indexes of agency, exist in what Gell calls a "system of action, intended to change the world rather than encode symbolic propositions about it" (1998: 6).

what I call, following Wittgenstein, a *pragmatics of experimentation*[21]—an open-ended process of material-conceptual bricolage in which the limits of knowledge correspond with the limits of what is possible in a given situation, the interpretations and meanings that emerge from a given assemblage of people and objects.

In *The Utopia of Rules,* David Graeber (2015: 96) writes: "Putting yourself in new situations constantly is the only way to ensure that you make your decisions unencumbered by the inertia of habit, custom, law, or prejudice—and it is up to you to create these situations."[22] It's difficult to imagine how one would put themselves "in new situations constantly" if we conceive these situations as pre-existing, static, fixed structures that one enters or throws oneself into. I take this to be the Heraclitian spirit of Graeber's claim. While the Archive is a concretely locatable place, the people in it are rarely the same from one day/week to the next. Each time one enters the space one finds different volunteers (and visitors). As the lives of volunteers change—they lose interest, get engaged in other projects, go back to school, move out of town—new volunteers replace them. Some people volunteer for a day and are never seen again. Others become permanent fixtures, suddenly disappear for six months, and then reappear as if they'd never left. While a small nucleus of core volunteers has remained at IA since it opened, many, including Regina, one of the four co-founders, have left. Several of the core volunteers during the period of my research are no longer at IA. With this shift in people is a corresponding shift in objects. In contrast to institutional archives that close their collections to new additions (Sholette 2011: 49), as we will see, IA's collections remain open, always receiving (and sometimes

[21] I develop this concept from Steven Shaviro's (1986) discussion of the relation between theory and practice in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*.

[22] Perhaps throwing oneself into new and unknown situations is just another way of describing the ethnographic method. In her essay, "Ethnography in Late Industrialism," Kim Fortun (2012: 458) suggests the anthropologist becomes attuned to thrownness "because she knows how to listen, how to discern discursive gaps and risks, how to tolerate truly not knowing where one is headed. We are trained and positioned, funnily, to tolerate the unknown, we have an affordance for unimaginable futures."

shedding) objects. Had Ariel and I given the tour a week earlier, no suitcase. We would have alighted on other objects, and different interpretations, meanings, and knowledge would have emerged.

Given our use of the suitcase, we might ask: what is the value of knowing the history of an object, the context for which it was made and the meanings it had for those who made it, if this knowledge is not necessary for making meaning, for hermeneutics? And what was being "preserved" through our use? Mieke Bal (1996: 69) argues "the act of preservation is by definition a decontextualization, which is tantamount to killing the object." But in using the suitcase, hadn't we made it "live"? Is the question of the archive, then, a question of memory, of recalling historical context or consciousness? Is the goal of an archive to preserve and provide access to history? Or, as Derrida suggests (1995: 27), is the question of the archive "not a question of the past," but rather, "a question of the future … of a response, of a promise, and of a responsibility for tomorrow." If so, to what or who were we responding? Were we, following the archival turn's methodological move from "archive-as-source to archive-as-subject," reframing the archive not as a site "of knowledge retrieval, but knowledge production" (Stoler 2002: 87)? Were we, as MayDay Rooms, a filial activist archive in London claims, creating a space where "the future can be produced more than the past contemplated"?[23] These are some of the questions I turn to next.

[23] From MayDay Rooms' Mission Statement: https://maydayrooms.org/archives/

Chapter 1

Preservation Through Use: Reactivating the Mimetic Archive

Every sign by itself seems dead. What gives it life?—In use it lives.
—Wittgenstein (2009: 135[e])

Just around the corner from the busy commercial corridor on 5th Avenue in the leafy Park Slope neighborhood of Brooklyn, a hand-painted sandwich sign on the sidewalk hails passers-by: *Interference Archive: A Library and Social Center*. IA occupies the ground floor of a two-story brick building with residential units above. Inside a large storefront window—in a previous life it looks like it may have been a deli or a barbershop—an entry area serves as a gallery. The white walls of the high-ceilinged shotgun space reverberate with the signs of social movement culture—screen-printed posters, hand-painted banners, photocopied fliers and zines created in, by, for, and about communities of struggle—*All Lives Will Matter When Black Lives Matter; Everybody's Got a Right to Love; Fight Poverty Not the Poor.* This is the material ephemera one usually sees pasted on walls and utility poles, passed out at demonstrations, carried in a march, tacked to surfaces in community centers, squats, and union halls. While the vast majority of this ephemera is relegated to the dustbin of history—left to fade on streets, thrown in the trash, stuffed in shoeboxes and forgotten in closets—a vital ratio enters IA's heirship. No object is too trivial or too ephemeral to be invested with significance, carefully collected, and offered as a resource.

On any given day, a heterogeneous mix of people mills about the space. As bodies and objects crisscross, they form assemblages that generate encounters. A library-science trained volunteer gives a tour to a group of area high school students. Shuffling through the space, the

students pass a visitor sitting on the floor flipping through a box of Riot Grrrl zines.[1] A volunteer standing beside her describes Riot Grrrl's influence on her evolution as a zine maker in Philly's feminist punk scene. Their conversation is occasionally interrupted by a lively exchange between a visiting academic researcher from Israel-Palestine, an *Indigenous Sovereignty Protects the Land and Water* poster in hand, and a volunteer who was involved in the poster's production and deployment at the Dakota Access Pipeline protests. Piqued by their contrasting images of settler-colonialism, one of the students peels away from the tour to offer a competing perspective.

Figure 9. Interference Archive, front gallery.

[1] Riot Grrrl is a feminist punk subcultural movement that emerged from the underground music scene in the Pacific Northwest in the early 1990s.

People, Objects, Encounters

One afternoon while I was staffing at the Archive, Imani, an African American college student on winter break, came in to do research for a paper she was writing on visual representation and race politics. Imani grew up in the Bronx and had visited the Archive once before on a high school fieldtrip. "I remember thinking," she said with an unmistakably brassy New Yorker cosmopolitanism, "this place is lit." After mulling around the collections for a while—poking through posters in flat-files and flipping through zines—she came across several boxes of 1970s Black radical feminist newspapers that had recently been donated and were stacked against a wall waiting to be catalogued. She opened a box and sat down. Within a few minutes she was deeply ensconced and taking furious notes. Coming up for air a while later she started a conversation with an elderly volunteer who was also staffing that day. To her surprise, she discovered the volunteer had been involved in the editorial production of one of the newspapers. Separated by two generations and a table strewn with dog-eared newsprint, the two women spent the next few hours locked in a lively tête-à-tête.

While I wasn't privy to their full conversation, I overheard Imani and the volunteer energetically discussing the production of one of the newspapers from the 1970s. At one point the volunteer mentioned "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," an influential and still much debated 1972 second-wave feminist essay that argued the lack of structure in radical feminist collectives often disguised an informal, unacknowledged, and unaccountable leadership.[2] "Even though we were pretty informally organized, we needed a modicum of structure to ensure that we were democratic, that everyone's voice was included." She described the newspaper's organizational structure and said that while it allowed for "a healthy group process," it also

[2] Jo Freeman's "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" first appeared in a 1972 issue of *The Second Wave*.

generated "challenges and pitfalls." As the volunteer elaborated how they addressed these challenges, Imani, like a hummingbird fixed on her object, was visibly rapt. The volunteer was translating the organizational tactics and discursive strategies of the objects in terms that clearly resonated with her.

When she wasn't busy writing notes, Imani took cell phone photos of the newspaper mastheads she was interested in reusing. At one point she paused to rub her fingers gently back and forth over a masthead with the debossed imprint of a Sankofa, the Akan symbol of a long-necked bird with its head turned back, egg in its mouth, feet facing forward. The tactile quality of the printed graphic seemed to invite her touch, it captivated her momentarily, as if, as an index of its maker's affect, wishes, and desires, their handprints had merged. The volunteer smiled and nodded in recognition of this kinaesthetic connection. Sankofa, which means something like "go back and get it" in the Twi language of Ghana, symbolizes a relation to history in which one gains wisdom, power, and the hope of a better future through knowledge about and reflection on the past. Imani and the volunteer didn't discuss the Sankofa's history as an African Diasporan phenomenon (Temple 2010) or its widespread use as a totem of Black identity, belonging, and aspiration in the Afrofuturist and Black Speculative Arts movements (Barber 2018; Anderson 2016).[3] But there on the table in front of them, its material presence seemed to absorb and focus their energy. The resonance between Imani, the volunteer, and the image-objects had created a kind of poetic calibration: Imani had gone back—to New York, to the Archive, to the 1970s—to discover and reactivate that which would carry her forward. By the time Imani left the Archive she was crackling with enthusiasm, convinced she was on her way "back to school to start a campus newspaper" modeled on what she had learned.

[3] The Ghanaian archaeologist Wazi Apoh (2020) develops the notion of "sankofatization" as form of decolonization.

The Archive's volunteers refer to this experiential context as *preservation through use*. The objects in the collections are only "preserved" when they can be put to "use"—when the fullness of their sensuous materiality and social lives is discoverable, and open to reactivation in the present. Only through another's use, through direct physical access to the object, can its value and significance be reactualized—live on in another form, in another's use. If use of an object presupposes access to it, preservation through use is only possible, the Archive's volunteers contend, when archival objects are physically, intellectually, and socially accessible.

Reactivation is my term to refer to the ways the objects in the collections—a pamphlet passed out at a demonstration, a banner carried in a march, a video of a street performance—as the volunteers write, "provide a strategic framework, including the organizational tactics, ideas, lexicons, and symbols used in past social movements, which can be translated and adapted to serve the needs of ongoing contemporary struggles" (Almeida and Hoyer 2019: 21). I understand "translation" as a hermeneutics that depends to some extent on prior knowledge about a particular object. Who made it? How was it made? What meanings did it have in the context in which it was originally produced and circulated? While translation need not involve others—some users prefer to consult and make sense of records on their own—the Archive is designed to make translation a collective process. Preservation through use—discovery, translation, reactivation—is what happens when strange (unknown) objects and strangers are placed, thrown (or throw themselves) into a shared field of emergence, into a relation of mutual becoming. Like a particle accelerator, when these entities collide, they generate energies and resonances that have the potential to create new uses—interpretations, meanings, knowledge, and purpose.

Reactivation can be further elaborated through William Mazzarella's (2017) rethinking of culture as a *mimetic archive*—the virtual site or medium in and through which the resonances

and reverberations of past lives, of history, are taken up and reactualized. Combining Durkheim's understanding of mana as the resonances that serve to constitute the social bonds in a community with Adorno and Benjamin's notion of the *mimetic faculty*, "a sensuous, transformative ability to resonate with the world" (Ibid: 4-5), Mazzarella develops his concept of 'mimetic' or 'constitutive resonance'—the self-other constituting nature of encounter as a relation of mutual becoming rather than an already determined structure two or more people "reproduce." While the vast majority of constitutive resonances exist "virtually yet immanently in the nonsignifying yet palpably sensuous dimensions of collective life," they also exist as traces or residues of elements "embedded not only in the explicitly articulated forms commonly recognized as cultural discourses but also in built environments and material forms"—the signs (physical spaces, images, discourses, texts, utterances) "that signify in more or less overt ways" (Ibid: 8). Like Durkheim's totems, these signs serve to absorb, focus, and organize the otherwise diffuse resonances—the collective effervescence—of a community by providing a locus and point of reference of affective intensity and enjoyment that invests its bearers/users with the status of those who belong to a "clan."

On Mazzarella's reading, the mimetic archive is "preserved" as "incipient potential" *and* "takes the form of all the explicitly elaborated discursive and symbolic forms through which the potentials of a mimetic archive have earlier been actualized, each actualization then proliferating and returning new potentials to the archive" (Ibid). Where Mazzarella develops his framework to analyze the mana-like power of brands in political and commercial publicity, I employ it here to think how a left social movement culture archive constitutes its community through similar, often ambivalent seductions. By approaching IA as a concrete, physically locatable, bounded, and partial instantiation of Mazzarella's mimetic archive, we see how the resonances that

constitute its community, such as the resonances between Imani and the volunteer—the configuration of people and objects in the physical space, leftist cultural discourse, textual and visual signifiers, the traces embedded in the material objects in its collection—establish diachronic links with practices, desires, aspirations, and unlived potential of prior moments and movements.

IA is open to the public four days a week and anyone is welcome to freely enter the space and browse the collections, no identification or appointment necessary. The space is open through the middle and there are no physical barriers between the gallery, the collections, a gender-neutral restroom, and a library/study area (with approximately 2,000 donated books) lit by a broad set of windows at the back of the space where meetings, talks, screenings, and art-making workshops are held. While the space is clean and carefully organized, it feels informal, welcoming, no area is off-limits. The collections are stored in mobile flat-file units and rows of floor-to-ceiling metal shelves that line the long walls of the space. Between these storage units are wooden stands arranged with exhibition pamphlets, hand-made stickers, buttons, and tote bags, some for sale, some free. Like the ephemera the Archive collects, the objects in the space are disheveled, used. The physical infrastructure is a stylistic mishmash constructed piecemeal over several years by the volunteers or donated by other archives that closed or updated their facilities. Second-hand cardboard boxes with hand-scrawled post-it notes indicating their contents comingle with professional-grade uniform grey acid-free storage cases with printed labels. Surfaces reveal traces of past, repeated use—a name etched into the rusted metal of a flat-file drawer, a note penciled on the side of a catalog case, smudged by fingerprints.

Figure 10. Interference Archive, screen-printing workshop. Author photo.

While there are no barriers to entry or the collections, there are a few simple rules. Signs posted throughout the space ask visitors not to take any items out of the Archive,[4] to handle items with care, to remove one item (case, folder) at a time because table space is limited, and to re-shelve the items they use. The collections are arranged by media type (posters, pamphlets, banners, buttons, pins, zines, video, and audio files) into flat-files, catalog cases and boxes, and within each, the items are sorted into subject folders and arranged in order of alphabetical subject title. This classification system is driven in part by necessity, like objects are grouped together based on their medium, shape, and size to economize space. This taxonomy prioritizes the type of object (its media/form) as an index of its production and use in context over its subject (its maker, content/message, location, date, etc.). Because only a fraction of the collections have

[4] Materials are frequently loaned for outside exhibitions and publications, but nothing, including books, circulates.

been digitized and entered into a searchable internal database—a slow-going process due to the capricious nature of volunteer labor and the sheer volume of backlogged and newly donated materials—a quick search to cross-reference materials from a particular subject, movement, group, or region is effectively impossible. For example, to search for materials from housing rights movements in the US, which, based on media type, are located in several places, one can either consult the ever-changing subject lists posted on each storage unit, peruse individual drawers, boxes, and catalog cases, or ask a volunteer for help.

Figure 11. Interference Archive catalog system.
Figure 12. Interference Archive catalog system detail.

Most visitors I observed found IA's classification system intuitive and enjoyed navigating the space on their own. While many first-time visitors came, as one said, "just to poke around," some were initially uncomfortable opening files themselves and handling objects

because they are prohibited from doing this at other archives. Academic researchers in particular would come equipped with a list of subject terms they had used to search databases at university or museum archives and were initially frustrated when they couldn't conduct a search to quickly find exactly what they were looking for. I often witnessed this frustration transform into discovery and expanded inquiry when, crisscrossing the space during their physical search, a researcher came upon related materials that were unknown to them or when, like Imani, they engaged a volunteer with direct knowledge about the history of the materials. "Having to search through boxes of actual objects definitely slows me down," one researcher explained. "Other stuff catches my eye and I wander … but I like what happens … I like being introduced to new materials by people who made them or know something about them."

One afternoon I observed a twenty-something visitor perusing a case of buttons in the library. Each button was affixed to an index card with a textual description. As she came across buttons that interested her, she took them out of the box and set them on a table. All of them were black with white type. The first was from ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) with the slogan "SILENCE=DEATH" above a pink triangle. The second was from the African National Congress and had an image of a woman with her arm raised beside the phrase "Now you have touched the women, you have struck a rock!" The third, from the Black Panther's, was just type: "LEGALIZE BEING BLACK." As she studied the buttons, another visitor sitting across the table asked if she knew what the pink triangle signified. "No," she responded. "ACT UP took it from the Nazis who pinned pink triangles on homosexuals, like the yellow stars they pinned on Jews. ACT UP re-made it into a symbol of militant power." "Wow! Thanks … I think it's pretty amazing how these buttons communicate systems of oppression and resistance to it so simply and effectively … I'm designing a button for [an event] and I came here to get inspired."

As they continued their conversation, it struck me how locating these seemingly disparate movement objects together in the same catalog case allowed the distinct cultural experiences they represent to resonate with each other, revealing parallels in the representational, visual, and rhetorical strategies used across temporal and geographic struggles. Seeing how past movements communicated an idea iconically or symbolically in the space of a button revealed an aesthetic sensibility, a way of approaching a problem that becomes a resource for the present.

IA's navigational architecture and classification system compel visitors to physically search through the collections, encounter like objects by, for, and about different subjects, and interact with others in the process. Organizing objects this way effectively forces visitors to operate at a pace and with a style of bodily comportment that is distinct from searches at institutional archives. This loosens the instrumental nature of a search by reconfiguring its temporality, introduces a dimension of play—curiosity, exploration, spontaneous interaction—into encounters between objects and people, and generates new associations among strangers who engage in dialogue about and often beyond the material itself. In this dynamic context, knowledge about how and why an object was produced is never fully determined by the object, concentrated in any one individual, or final. As an all-volunteer project staffed and visited by people with diverse skill sets and subject knowledge, participants have different ideas about and investments in the personal, social, and political valences of movement culture, and different experiences with and interpretations of the same objects. For example, if you visited on a Thursday, you might interact with two people who dispute the political valence of a given object. Where Carla, a librarian, would contextualize the history of a movement or organization, skillfully unspooling a rich, textured analysis of their class, race, and gender relations with reference to the text of a pamphlet, Ariel, an artist, would draw attention to its material qualities,

the tactility of a linocut as an index of its maker's feelings, the kinds of printing processes involved in its production, and how one could gain access to them.

As we saw in the encounter between Imani and the volunteer, a visitor will often come to IA with a specific research project and leave, not only with new knowledge, but new purpose. Thus, we might say that a "successful" search is not determined by the Archive as a source or repository from which knowledge is retrieved or extracted, but contingent upon *who* is at the Archive on a given day and the kinds of collective resonances and epistemological experiments different assemblages of people and objects generate. "The goal," as one volunteer explained

> is not to lock this stuff away, but to keep it in circulation—if not physically circulating, intellectually circulating … It's not just about wanting to get a look at an old pamphlet. It's about coming and being able to talk to three other people about that old pamphlet.

An Aesthetic Economy

This way of configuring the physical space, the objects in it—and the kinds of encounters, epistemological experiments, and sociality this configuration entails—is what I refer to as IA's *aesthetic economy*. This aesthetic economy is designed to include and provide access to people and objects whose participation and representation in institutional archives is proscribed by an aesthetic hierarchy that serves to maintain archives as systems of statements and rules of practice that give shape to what can and cannot be said. Aesthetic hierarchy proscribes the encounters and forms of sociality that can emerge in institutional archives, allowing them to function as sites of exclusion and monuments of power (Foucault 1972). I suggest that IA's aesthetic economy attempts to collapse aesthetic hierarchy, and thus prefigure the collapse of social hierarchy. I conceive aesthetic hierarchy in several ways, all of which relate to how physical spaces are perceived and experienced through the senses. It refers to the

ways institutions assign value to certain kinds of objects, practices, and experiences. The largely unambiguous 'political art' at IA is often marginalized or not collected by art world institutions. Social movement culture's DIY modes of artmaking and didactic forms of address are disparaged by an art historical and theoretical discourse that privileges the irony, ambiguity, and discomfort of formally or *aesthetically* political art over the declarative or propositional objects made by ethically, socially, or politically "committed" artists. Marginalizing the objects of social movement culture on an aesthetic basis effaces the histories of the people and communities who make them and discounts these people as legitimate subjects of history, as political subjects that have a part, that "count."

Aesthetic hierarchy refers to the ways institutional archives that house activist and social movement ephemera will often restrict access to these materials. For example, access to the Riot Grrrl collection at NYU's Fales Library, which houses 18th-20th century radical artwork and literature, is limited to "qualified researchers" (Eichhorn 2012: 31), those with institutional affiliation and credentials who have been trained in archival methods and the proper handling of archival objects. Gaining access to records can be prohibitively difficult without the knowledge necessary to navigate complex bureaucratic structures. This presupposes a search that is largely instrumental, that is, a visitor must know that a particular archive exists, make a request in advance for the records sought, and set an appointment. Once one learns that a particular archive exists and is able to gain entry, aesthetic hierarchy is built into the physical space itself—the navigational architecture of identification, security checks, front desk clerks, austere antechambers, waiting rooms, and closed stacks. This aesthetic hierarchy can be intimidating, even for highly trained scholars. For example, in *The Allure of the Archives*, Arlette Farge recounts how, during her research at the National Archives in Paris, she struggled with "the

confusion of getting a reader's card, having the required identification, finding the right office, knowing where to line up for a seat, discovering what the best seat is, and hoping one day to get placed there" (Farge 2013: 2-3). And rules of practice, such as stated or implicit injunctions on proper etiquette, proscribe certain forms of sociality. The required silence in the reading area limited Farge's encounters with others to "the impromptu conversations that occur between fellow researchers over coffee in the break room" (Ibid). I am not suggesting the discovery of unknown records and "translating" these records with others is foreclosed in these institutional spaces. Rather, the experience of discovery and encounter are structured and thus limited by navigational architecture, closed stacks, and sanctioned spaces of encounter.

Aesthetic hierarchy also operates through what Scollon and Scollon (2002) call "geosemiotics"—the material placement of signs and discourse (textual or verbal) that communicate social meaning and have material consequences for visitors. This includes everything from the images that are displayed in the space and the kinds of people and experiences they represent to the categories and terms the staff and visitors employ in their interactions with others to gender-segregated restrooms. For example, recounting their experience conducting research in institutional archives, the transgender scholar K.J. Rawson describes being

> forced to argue for my right to use the bathroom on the special collections floor … which obviously made me feel unwelcome in that space. In turn, these bathroom interactions increased my anxiety while doing research, and may have even changed the amount of time I was willing (or physically able) to research in the archives (Rawson 2010: 127).

Rawson develops the term "environmental accessibility" to denote the "feel" of a space, how welcome or unwelcome a person feels and the way they are treated by others (Ibid: 126). Environmental aesthetics shaped how the Indian scholar Malea Powell describes the interplay

between the intellectual and bodily experience of a being in a colonial archive where she was both the object and subject of research: "As I sat there and thought about empire, I started to get very cold—felt myself grow puny and insignificant in the face of imperialism and shivered at the impossibility of it all—me, an Indian, a mixed-blood, here in this odd colonial space" (2008: 120). The important point here is that while neither of these scholars were denied access to these institutional archives, they nonetheless *felt* excluded or insignificant, which, I argue, limits the potential of these spaces to function as sites of resonant encounter, effervescent sociality, and knowledge production.

If these are the kinds of institutional experiences the collapsing of aesthetic hierarchy at IA attempts to obviate, what about the experience of someone unaccustomed or perhaps even opposed to the social values and political movements represented on IA's walls, in its collections, and in its discourse? Wouldn't IA's highly coded aesthetic economy be just as intimidating or off-putting for someone on the political right as the barriers to entry at institutional archives might be for an undocumented immigrant, or the colonial archive for an Indian scholar?

As a publicly accessible space located around the corner from a busy commercial corridor, IA attracts a lot of passers-by. I witnessed several occasions when a visitor entered the Archive, briskly perused the space, and promptly exited. They may simply have been incurious, but their silence, avoidance of eye contact, and tentative body language conveyed what I imagined they were feeling: *this is not* my *place, these are not* my *people, this is not* my *community.* They had entered a world(view) that made them apprehensive, that they perhaps even feared a little, and didn't have or desire to muster the moxie to investigate. These were moments when the aesthetic economy of the space generated an anxious resonance, moments

when "Welcome to the Archive" was met with the acknowledging nod one gives a salesperson at a clothing boutique around corner: *Just browsing. Leave me alone*. For such a visitor, it was unlikely any amount of aesthetic reconfiguration—the absence of barriers to entry, closed stacks, or white gloves—would draw them in. These were moments when the material placement of signs and discourses generated, at best, an ambivalence, moments when the Archive's aesthetic economy functioned as a known unknown, a competing brand, or a totem of an enemy clan. As Mazzarella (2017: 5) points out, "Not all people and things are capable of resonating with each other."

When I asked Renee about these moments, she told me, "Interference is not a neutral space … While anyone is welcome, most visitors already identify somewhere on the political left and that's the kind of community we're interested in supporting." This made it all the more puzzling when, cataloguing some donated materials one afternoon, I came across a copy of the Aryan Resistance comic book *White Will* and a series of KKK fliers from the 1970s. I later learned that these objects had entered the Archive the through personal collections of Daniel, one of the co-founders. He explained that they were part of a larger collection of materials he'd gathered over the years, a few of which had migrated to IA early on. Daniel believed it was important to study and deconstruct the organizational strategies, tactics, ideas, and symbols employed by the political right in order to "better understand and more effectively combat them." In ongoing discussions about developing a 'safe space' policy, there were concerns about whether IA should house these materials. How could IA be an inclusive 'safe space' for everyone in its broader community with these kinds of materials lurking in its collections? But as far as I know, these materials are still in the collections. Not because concerns about harm were overridden by Daniel's approach to these kinds of materials, but because no one had devoted the

time to locating and removing them. As I discuss in the chapter that follows, this was an example of how the logic of labor time, a crucial determinate in an all-volunteer space/project, superseded archival/curatorial logics.

Permanence, Impermanence

To facilitate the constant handling of objects, IA prioritizes the collection of materials that were produced in multiples for public dissemination/consumption and will often have several copies of an object (e.g., poster, pamphlet), allowing one to be used and the rest stored for future use. But even in cases when an object is unique, such as the clandestine printing press I discussed in the previous chapter, no limits are placed on its use beyond requesting that it be handled with care. "While this means that the physical integrity of some items may be compromised by constant handling," a volunteer explained, "this policy honors the original intent of creators who hoped to widely disseminate ideas and incite social change." We see from this comment how "preservation" is imagined and resignified. Because use may lead to the destruction of the physical object, what is preserved is not the object itself but the history that is objectified in it. While this history includes the meanings an object had in its original context—the ideas, wishes, and knowledge it *represents*—it is the public, political, and ephemeral nature of an object's use that is primary.[5] Public use is understood to be identical with the intentions, wishes, and desires of its maker(s). Public use is social movement culture's 'inalienable' essence (Weiner 1992). Only through another's use can an object's value be "preserved"—reactivated in the present in the form of a new object, a new use. If an object is materially consumed, and no

[5] We might also suggest, following W. J. T. Mitchell, that the objects of social movement culture "want" to be used. In *What Do Pictures Want?* (2005), Mitchell shifts Gell's (1998) emphasis on things from *doing* to *wanting*, from secondary indexical agents to primary willful agents, and from the relative boundedness of the image-object to a more existential and uncertain positioning of the desiring image-object.

multiple exists, it has served its purpose, its use-value. Thus, the meaning of an object is identical with its use. It is because there is use that there is meaning. Use is what is done with objects. If objects cannot be accessed and used, they remain dead, they no longer have a vital relationship to the present, they become objects that "owe their preservation more to historical respect than to the needs of the present" (Adorno 1967: 175).

IA's approach to the categories of preservation and use radically departs from how these categories are conceived and practiced in institutional settings. One of the primary aims at museum and university archives is to preserve an object in its original or existing condition at the moment of donation/accession, or to improve its condition through restoration, before providing access to use (Cook 2005). "Use" of an object refers to the specific ways of interacting with it that will protect or conserve its physical integrity in perpetuity. By using an object repetitively—handling it, turning its pages, exposing it to heat, light, oil, dust, humidity—the object is not preserved but destroyed. For a host of reasons—e.g., an object is one-of-a-kind, deemed too fragile/valuable to handle, a donor has stipulated restrictions on use—institutional archives limit physical use, both in kind and duration, to the materials in their collections (Greene 2007). In institutional settings, "preservation" refers both to the physical condition of an individual object and to the archival collections as a whole—including administration, storage and environmental conditions, disaster and emergency planning, insurance, etc. (Stevens et al. 2010).

I had assumed that, like institutional archives, this latter approach to preservation, the preservation of archival collections as a whole—as a physical space and an ongoing project—also held at IA. It came as a surprise, then, to learn that "IA need not be considered a failure if its collections are not preserved forever … a controversial suggestion in light of the fact that archives are generally conceived as permanent and reliable" (Sellie et al. 2015: 463). This

statement, from an article co-authored by several volunteers, seemed to contradict my experience of the Archive. It was at odds with the desires, dedication, and huge investments of time I witnessed at the space on a daily basis. The question of the Archive's potential dissolution had never come up in any meetings I attended. The vicissitudes of maintaining a publicly accessible space on all-volunteer labor and a shoe-string budget tended to push questions of longevity or permanence to the next meeting. I was somewhat mystified by the implications.

Could the cumulative results of years of collective efforts—the myriad objects gathered and tended with care, the collaborations that produced powerful exhibitions, an ever-expanding community of users and supporters—simply disappear one day? What about the responsibility the volunteers clearly felt to the movements represented in the collections—the hopes, wishes, and desires embodied in the objects? And what about their responsibility to the donors who had entrusted their personal collections to the Archive? Or the myriad fellow travelers who, like Nina, had volunteered countless hours to the space? Would these people have donated their materials and time had they known there was a chance the Archive's volunteers might scatter, like a murmuration of starlings, just as miraculously as they had formed? If their shepherding of this heirship ceased, would their covenant with the past be broken? What would happen to all the materials in the collection? Would they be returned to their donors? Entrusted whole to a single organization? Broken up and dispersed to multiple organizations? Thrown in the trash? And what would precipitate IA's dissolution? Internal conflicts? They had weathered them. Disinterest? New volunteers and visitors arrived each day. External pressures? Rising property values had forced them to relocate once already and they managed to stay open through Covid.

One of the article's authors, Renee, told me she wanted

> to challenge the dominant view among institutional archivists that impermanence is synonymous with failure. Is there value in impermanence? There is. We're still doing a

> really good thing right now and of course we come at it with the intent of it continuing, but if it doesn't continue does that devalue what we're doing right now? Absolutely not.

This approach has led some of the volunteers to call IA a "living archive"—a term scholars of the archival turn use to characterize a participatory, open, flexible, and adaptive infrastructure (Rudy 2010; Wareham 2002) that is inclusive, never complete, and in which the archivist is anyone who is an "active participant" in constructing the history that is archived (Hall 2001). What makes the Archive "live" is a context in which different people and objects are thrown into resonant encounters. In these crosscurrents of informal unlicensed knowledges, "living histories, bodily records, and imaginaries" take precedence over documented histories and published texts (Almeida and Hoyer 2019: 18). As "living" entities, the activist archive and the social movement are seen as homologous. Said one volunteer: "Interference will ebb and flow like the social movements whose objects and histories we collect." Mirroring these movements, the collections and the project remain open, always receiving new objects and new participants. This fluid, on-going, never-completed assemblage of people and things—that, based on the needs, desires, and aspirations of those who make, collect, and use them—may dissolve at some point, reemerge in the future in some other form, or not.

In his hugely influential 1995 lecture "Archive Fever" (1996), Derrida proposed a psychoanalytic reading of the concept of the archive premised on the negotiation of two conflicting forces. On the one hand, there is a "conservation" or "archive drive," linked to the Freudian notion of the pleasure principle, in which the archive affirms and embodies the promise of the present to the future by preserving the objects of the past. On the other hand, there is an "anarchic" or "death drive" that eradicates this principle, a primal urge toward destruction that "incites forgetfulness, amnesia, the annihilation of memory" and "the eradication ... of ... the

archive" (Ibid: 10). Rather than representing the failure of the present in its responsibility to the future, I want to suggest that IA's approach to its potential dissolution—its challenge to the ideology of archival objects and collections as permanent—is captured in Chinua Achebe's description of the art objects in the ritual contexts of the Igbo people of the Niger Delta:

> The purposeful neglect of the painstakingly and devoutly accomplished *mbari* houses with all the art objects in them as soon as the primary mandate of their creation has been served, provides a significant insight into the Igbo aesthetic value as *process* rather than *product*. Process is motion while product is rest. When the product is preserved or venerated, the impulse to repeat the process is compromised. Therefore, the Igbo choose to eliminate the product and retain the process so that every occasion and every generation will receive its own impulse and experience of creation (Achebe, 1984: ix).

Among the volunteers, conceptions of the Archive as *product*—a collection of objects that *represent* a political community—were often in tension with conceptions of the Archive as *process*—the methods and practices that constitute this community. In these contested conceptions, the Archive and the collections are not identical. If an archive, as Peter Fritzsche writes (2005: 16), is not a "comprehensive collections of things" but rather, "the production of the heirs, who must work to find connections from one generation to the next ... a cultural group that knows itself by cultivating a particular historical trajectory," an understanding of the Archive as a collection of material objects that could simply be boxed up, relocated elsewhere, and still be the same archive, cannot hold. Like Heraclitus's river, it would be different archive, it would produce different heirs, a different (sense of) community.

As we have seen, IA's sense of community is shaped by shared anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist sensibilities and the methods the volunteers employ to enact them: open access, flexible participation, voluntarism, preservation through use. Alongside this sense of community, I want to suggest that the aesthetic economy I have described above creates configurations of experience and modes of sense perception that constitute a "community of sense" (Hinderliter et

al. 2009; Rancière 2009)—a cutting out of space, time, and experience that links forms of visibility and patterns of intelligibility by putting objects and practices together under the same *meaning in use*. This community of sense suggests that the enactment of *the political* at the Archive involves a kind of aesthetic ruse. A social movement culture archive that collects and preserves representational objects, "committed" art, propaganda—the 'aesthetics of politics'—reactivates these objects through the redistribution of socially-configured sensible experience, "the transformation of the sensory fabric of 'being together'" (Rancière 2009: 56). That is, the image of the political that emerges at the Archive is not reducible to the representational objects in its collections, to the conventional practices and institutions through which a more just order or new world is proposed, demanded, or declared in propositional signs (posters, pamphlets, banners, zines).[6] This is a conception of the political that does not lie solely in exposing contradictions in hegemonic logics and discourse or in making what is invisible—a marginalized community, a structural inequity—visible *qua representation.* Rather, there is what Rancière (2004) calls a 'politics of aesthetics'—the political emerges in and through the Archive's aesthetic economy, the ways the volunteers collect, arrange, and provide access to the objects in the collection. These acts, which involve collectively gathering, studying, interpreting, and reactivating are aesthetic in principle because they entail the renegotiation of the terms—the

[6] This aesthetic ruse occurs when the democratization of access to historical objects (aestheticized politics) is viewed as the primary way in which a social movement archive "does" politics. Walter Benjamin (1968) argued that fascism's 'aestheticization of politics'—Nazi media that appealed to style over substance, affect over reason, manufactured illusion over reality—was a form of mass deception that culminated in war. In contrast, communism's response to fascism, what Benjamin called 'the politicization of art,' held out the possibility that forms of aestheticized politics can be democratic rather than fascist or totalitarian. Following this distinction, we might characterize the social movement culture the Archive collects as a kind of 'democratic aesthetics' (Simons 2009), those 'popular' (Bourdieu 1984) or 'grounded' (Willis 1990) aesthetic practices that may not call themselves art. In art theoretical discourse these practices have been referred to as 'anti-aesthetics' (Foster 1991), the idea that aesthetics, as the putative basis of art's formal and institutional autonomy within a capitalist division of labor is an 'ideology' (Eagleton 1990) that conceals a socioeconomic and political reality.

forms of sense perception—in which what is called "politics" is staged and its subjects are shaped.

While the Archive's volunteers desire to create an autonomous space/project—a community of sense that operates as independently as possible from the world outside—they recognize that IA's relationship to this world is always already heteronomous, always mediated by the capitalist logics in which it swims. As an all-volunteer run space/project, one of the primary ways this mediation occurs is through the categories of work and labor. How the volunteers conceive and practice these categories is what makes the Archive a particularly salient site from which to further consider questions and autonomy and postcapitalism.

Chapter 2

Working at Interference Archive

Not everyone makes it … Not everyone lives to jump the clock or outwit the gaze that would turn us into stones.
—Erica Hunt (2020: 117)

Maintaining a publicly accessible space with regular programming on all-volunteer labor in "the most expensive neighborhood [relative to income] in the US" (US RealtyTrac 2017) is immensely challenging. Some volunteers have full-time jobs with benefits. Others string together part-time, freelance, or project-based work and participate in regional sharing/bartering/gifting economies where they exchange various goods and services. Synchronized to the flexible and precarious labor practices of NYC's gig economy, the volunteers are vigilant about how they balance paid time with unpaid activist time, that portion of the day/week devoted to enacting their sociopolitical values, commitments, aims, and desires. IA's open access and flexible participation allow for commitments based on one's (disciplinary) skills, desires, and availability. No minimum hours or set schedule are necessary. You could volunteer to catalog new donations for an hour or participate in a day-long "accession-a-thon." You could staff for a single day or on an ongoing basis. You could participate in one of several working groups that facilitate daily operations and programming—exhibitions, talks, screenings, workshops—and propose your own.

Figure 13. Interference Archive, “accession-a-thon.”

In general, volunteers do the kinds of work they enjoy and the kinds of work they are skilled at. For example, Sian was part of IA’s Audio working group, where she used her digital editing skills to help produce an ongoing series of podcasts on topics ranging from radical community libraries to sound as a political act. She also participated in the Admin working group where she helped with fundraising, external communications, social media, scheduling events, and where her expertise at her job as a grant writer for a non-profit arts funder could be put to use. “I do this work whenever and wherever I can. The 15-20 hours a week I spend on Archive work might involve attending a meeting at the space, editing a podcast during my commute on the train or at my apartment in the evenings.”

Because the amount of time volunteers are able and/or desire to contribute in a given day/week varies, the Archive’s reproduction is realized in a polytemporal manner. Working at one’s own pace, not by the regimentation of linear clock time or an imagined ‘socially necessary

labor time,' is crucial to how autonomy is imagined at IA. Volunteers perform tasks for varying amounts of time and with varying degrees of interest, focus, and intensity. A task that takes thirty minutes for one volunteer might take two hours for another. The same task may take a volunteer thirty minutes one week and two hours the next. When a task is ongoing (e.g., accessing donated materials, organizing flat-files, cleaning the space), it is largely self-regulated, accomplished by everyone and no one. It gets done when it gets done. I often observed volunteers who were staffing engage visitors or other volunteers in impromptu conversations that would last several hours and whatever task they were performing was left for another day or another volunteer. When the work was clock time sensitive and/or bound by external factors (e.g., communicating with donors, responding to outside inquiries, posting announcements) or for a specific project that involved outside collaborators and deadlines (e.g., an exhibition or event) the polytemporal and capricious nature of volunteer labor meant that certain tasks often fell to the core volunteers.

Several volunteers told me they engage in some form of stealing time at work. While stealing time on the job (coming in late, leaving early, taking long breaks) is socially pervasive and often unconscious, e.g., socializing or napping (Henle et al. 2010), the Archive's volunteers were intentional about the ends to which this stolen time was directed. Renee, a white librarian in her 30s who has been volunteering since 2013, frequently performed Archive related work at her job as a public librarian. She explained: "I absolutely think of this as a way that I can redirect resources [time and office supplies] from one institution, the one where I'm technically 'at work,' to another." She described the time she steals at work as those moments when she has "a few minutes to kill, or I need a mental break from whatever I'm doing … This is one of the reasons that it's pretty difficult to quantify how much time I spend on archive work."[1] Some

[1] One of the accounting measures I implemented involved distributing a questionnaire to volunteers that, among other things, asked how many hours a week they spend doing Archive work. The number ranged between 5-30,

volunteers were aware that others steal time at work and that this stolen time constitutes some portion of the overall labor time that reproduces the Archive. However, this time remained largely unacknowledged, it was neither accounted for by individual volunteers nor coordinated on an organizational level. The redirection of labor time from the production of capitalist value toward use-values for different ends was a component part of the overall volunteer labor time that helped to sustain the space. Stolen time functioned not as a tactic, which depends on temporality and mobility,[2] but as an informal and tacit strategy for holding onto physical space in the ever encroaching "revanchist city" (Smith 1996).[3] As an uncoordinated tactic practiced by individuals, stealing time at work has been characterized as an act of 'everyday resistance' to a dominant order (Stevens and Lavin 2007; Scott 1985; Certeau 1984). But resistance, e.g., 'cultural resistance' (Duncombe 2002; Ong 1987), was not a term the volunteers used to characterize this particular practice, or their practices in general. It was too reactive, vague, underdetermined. One resists that which *cannot* be changed. The way the volunteers imagined the Archive constituting *the political* was more concrete, literally. It was the fact that such a space existed at all.

Refusal to Measure

Of the core volunteers, Renee was recognized as someone who contributed more labor time to the Archive than any other volunteer. This investment of time and the nature of the tasks she performed (participating in the Admin working group, managing the cataloging system,

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depending on the week and the number of projects, but no one could tell me a definitive number because they do not (care to) keep track.

[2] I am using the distinction Michel de Certeau makes in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) between *strategies*, what institutions and structures of power use to define and control the production of space, and *tactics*, which are employed by actors in circumscribed space to resist power.

[3] In 2017, IA was forced to relocate due to rising property values. Because their $5k/month rent increases roughly 20% a year it is unclear how long they will be able to stay in their current space.

sending emails and announcements, responding to inquiries, helping maintain a social media presence) gave her the status of de-facto archive administrator. As a self-described "enlightened library-science trained technocrat," she happily, and, as we will see, sometimes reluctantly (when her voice became too central/authoritative), embraced this role. Renee imagined her time working for the Archive as qualitatively different from the clock time that structures her paid work at a public library. She recounted an organizational meeting some years prior where a volunteer suggested turning the space into a worker-run cooperative that would quantify and thus render transparent all the labor time that reproduces the space.[4] The thrust of the volunteer's suggestion was that labor at the Archive would become *directly social labor*—labor that is not mediated through commodity exchange (monetized and driven by the profit-motive) but is still measured.[5] Renee pushed back. "I don't want anybody counting how many hours I work here, because that's not what it's about to me." She elaborated:

> I would probably cry if I thought of how many hours I spend working here. I don't think of it as hours. I think of it as things I love doing so that it doesn't make me cry [laugh]. If I added up all the hours it would be shocking, like you know [more self-conscious laugh], that's the only way IA could function. No, this is not the kind of convo we're going to have here.

Renee's refusal to count the hours she spends working at the Archive was clearly motivated by both personal and collective concerns. In contrast to her paid job, the work she performed at the Archive was a "labor of love"—(re)productive work she performed freely

[4] A "cooperative" is a business that is owned and controlled by its workers, who share in its financial success on the basis of their labor time contribution (e.g., housing cooperatives, agricultural-producer cooperatives, consumer cooperatives, credit unions). IA is a "collective," a group in which organizational and management decisions are made democratically through consensus, but where there is no ownership or profit-sharing; any revenue is expended in the administration of the space (rent, utilities, insurance, etc.).

[5] While the idea of turning the Archive into a worker-run cooperative had been rejected, the desire to make labor at the Archive directly social labor clearly animated how the volunteers imagine their labor practices as autonomous. The idea of directly social labor was first introduced by the nineteenth century socialist thinker Pierre-Joseph Proudhon with his concept of 'time credits' and has stirred lively debates about postcapitalist possibilities on the left ever since. A contemporary descendent is the practice of 'time banking' (Cahn 2004).

without compensation that embodied her investment in and commitment to her co-laborers and their collectively-determined principles and practices. Based on our conversations, Renee clearly understood how the volunteer labor that undergirds so much grassroots cultural production is rationalized as a "passionate effort" (Ross 2013: 26), how lovingly compelled free labor, and women's unwaged (immaterial, affective) labor in particular, winds its way into circuits of capital accumulation.

While there was a general awareness among the volunteers that Renee spends more time than others doing Archive work, counting and rendering these hours transparent would reveal to her and everyone else the stark centrality of her individual labor time in the (re)production of the space. Renee seemed worried that this could have the effect of destabilizing the significance of the project as a collective endeavor, that a transparent account of the exact hours she works would risk exposing, at the very least, the thinness of the *co-* (together, with, jointly, mutually, shared) laboring (time) in collaboration, and possibly even exposing it as ideology. Renee seemed to disavow this knowledge. Like refusing to disclose how much money one makes, especially with those who make less, in order to maintain a semblance of equality and avoid feelings of guilt or resentment for oneself and others.

The refusal to measure time was not Renee's alone. I observed how it is collectively enacted at an IA retreat, the biannual day-long gatherings where volunteers take the Archive's temperature and look ahead. The retreat took place on a Saturday in Dumbo at the spacious loft offices of Verso Books.[6] Outside the panoramic windows, the underbelly of the Brooklyn Bridge arced magisterially toward Gotham, giving the gathering an auspicious air incongruent with IA's DIY digs. One of the exercises they conducted was called "popcorning." The approximately

[6] Verso Books offered their space to IA for retreats and fundraisers. Founded in 1970 by the staff of the *New Left Review*, Verso Books is today owned and distributed by the multinational conglomerate Penguin Random House.

thirty volunteers present shouted out the different kinds of tasks they perform, someone wrote these tasks on a giant whiteboard at the front of the room, and then everyone placed red dots next to each of the various tasks they perform. The cluster of bodies that swarmed around the whiteboard—arms extending, elbows bumping, talking, laughing, drinking coffee—made it difficult to discern who was placing red dots where. After everyone had taken their seats again, the image that emerged—an abstract expressionism in red and black—revealed the different types of labor volunteers perform. It was an impressive image: a collective visual representation of the "doing" that makes the Archive.

The image revealed that some types of labor, those with the fewest red dots around them—grant writing, drafting email announcements, re-shelving, working on sustainer accounts, paying bills, bookkeeping, managing the co-working spaces—are done by the fewest volunteers. The obvious interpretation was that these tasks tend to fall to those in the Admin working group, and by extension, often to Renee, though no individual was mentioned by name. In the lively discussion that followed, it was clear that in order for volunteers to safely state how "people in the Admin working group are feeling burned out" and devise ways to "distribute labor to other volunteers," laboring activity must remain largely de-personalized and temporally unquantified. Moreover, the knowledge the exercise created did not appear to be experienced as a weighty directive. Rather, it floated like an aspirational wish that could be fulfilled by anyone during the retreat, at some point in the future, or never. No one was called out or pressured. Nothing was assigned or delegated. Autonomy means making one's own law. No one's labor will be chosen for them. No one's hours will be counted. No one's body will be made productive without their consent.

There is a long history on the left of refusing to measure one's labor time as a way of operating outside the immediate capture/control of capitalist valorization and commodification. During the crises and restructuring of the 1970-1980s, thinkers on the autonomous left (Tronti 2019, Negri 1988, Federici 2012, Caffentzis 2013, Katsiaficas 2006, Cleaver 2000) began theorizing that the old left's definition of the working class as the waged proletariat had become obsolete—all forms of labor (waged and unwaged) had been integrated into the valorization process and thus it was becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish production from reproduction, the sphere *inside* capitalist production from that *outside* it. To understand how the capitalist mode of production is a specific social form of imposing work rather than simply a system geared towards surplus-value/profit-making, autonomist theorists sought to move beyond exploitation and alienation to interrogate the overvaluation of work. Because, as Marx had shown, "moments are the elements of profit" (Marx 1976: 352)—it is command over the labor time of others that gives capitalists the initial power to appropriate profit as their own—autonomists advocate the clawing back of these moments through the *refusal of work* (slowdowns, stoppages, strikes, sabotage, detournement). If (labor) time is money in capitalism, the refusal to measure one's (labor) time is anti-capitalist. Where liberalism champions the representational paradigm of parliamentary politics, and critical theory tends to fixate on capitalist domination and the foreclosure of praxis in the absence of an international socialist movement, the autonomist left emphasizes forms of self-valorization/actualization and a diversity of struggles for alternative ways of thinking, being, and doing. The autonomists argue that because capital is totalizing, every nook and cranny, particularly those in the sphere of "culture," is a potential site of struggle, and every individual in the "social factory" (Tronti

2019), including those marginalized by the old left (women, people of color, sexual minorities), is a potentially revolutionary subject.

Kathi Weeks (2011) describes how the autonomists depart from two apparently conflicted but actually connected strands of productivism: the modernization model in which socialism perfects the capitalist mode of production, and the humanist model in which socialism offers freedom for individual self-expression and creativity but does not challenge work nor productivity. In contrast, the autonomists' *refusal of work* names work itself—"not private property, the market, the factory, or the alienation of our creative capacities" (Weeks 2011: 97)—as the central concern. While the volunteers' refusal to measure time at the Archive and stealing time at their job align with autonomist critiques of the overvaluation of work and the stranglehold of capitalist (and socialist) productivism, there was nonetheless a productivist logic at the Archive. On the one hand, in practice, qualitative experiences of time—the subjective intensity of performing a given task—defied reduction to clock time and seemed to reinstitute a more qualitative lived experience of natural temporality as the norm at the Archive. On the other hand, the volunteers' anti-capitalist imaginary was still structured by a benign dependence on clock time. Like the professionalized labor of the multitasking academic—what danah boyd (2012) calls the "always-on lifestyle" in the digitally-networked era—a given volunteer's hyper-kineticism seemed to function as a Weberian 'sign of election' to others in their community. Indexing a work ethic that internalizes the idea that time at the Archive should not be wasted (Weber 2010), this sign of business existed uneasily alongside the reconfigured temporality of the encounters I mentioned in my discussion of the Archive's aesthetic economy above. Unlike

critical theorists who rail against the 'tyranny of clock time,'[7] the volunteers' relationship to time in the metropolis was far more ambivalent (cf. Simmel 2004).

Working and Laboring

Participants at IA refer to themselves as "volunteers" (as opposed to "members") to signify both the collective nature and purpose of their labor time, and that this time is given willingly, freely, under no constraints, and with no expectation of a return. Said one volunteer "We're interested in what it looks like when everyone involved in doing the work is taking part because they want to, and not because it's paying their rent." In a co-authored article, several volunteers write, "Since no one is a paid contributor, the more intangible rewards of being part of and building a community project must suffice as compensation" (Sellie et al. 2015: 462). That these comments were made by white volunteers with degrees and full-time jobs with benefits exposed an ideological capillary that ran through their articulations of voluntarism: the different resources an individual has (access to), resources that enable them to volunteer (education, employment, housing, food, healthcare, financial support from family, etc.), were not recognized at a collective/organizational level. As friends and colleagues, the volunteers were certainly aware of the ways fellow volunteers reproduced themselves, but in general, how a volunteer

[7] The 'tyranny of clock time' narrative is foundational to critiques of modernity (Marx 1967; Lukács 1971; Thompson 1967; Postone 1993) that distinguish between time that is measured by labor and time that measures labor. The distinction occurs historically in the development of European capitalism when "time expenditure is transformed from a result *of* activity into a normative measure *for* activity" (Postone 1993: 214-215). The former—event-, process-, or task- oriented time—is qualitative, focused on the concrete "natural rhythms" of social activities, bodies, and the environment. The latter—linear clock time—is abstract, quantifiable, empty, mechanical, and decontextualized. This approach views task-oriented time and clock time as fundamentally different ways of "doing" time. Task-oriented time is an anthropological organic temporal culture that encourages leisure, spontaneity, and play, while historically specific clock time encourages the hyper-rationalization of social life, intensifies laboring activity, and alienates us from our own nature and the natural world.

finds time to work at the Archive, and the extent to which they participate in the various resource sharing/gifting/bartering networks in the Archive's orbit, were not part of collective deliberation.

Figure 14. Interference Archive, Admin working group meeting.

The relationship between a volunteer's (access to) resources and the time they have for unpaid activism is not as straightforward as one might imagine. Participation at the Archive was not limited by one's (access to) resources alone. For example, Makayla, one of three black core volunteers, was less involved than she had been in the past. She was getting a degree in library science at an area university and working part-time jobs at two different non-profit social justice organizations. While she told me she volunteers at the Archive because she believes in IA's mission and methods, the majority of her activist time was devoted to Books Through Bars, an all-volunteer collective that provides donated books to incarcerated people across the US. For

Makayla, the Archive was both a "radical democratic experiment" and a resource to develop (access to) other resources, a "space to build and expand a professional network … to get some kudos to put on my resume."

While no one else told me that they expect any kind of material return, the experience, knowledge, skills, and confidence volunteers gain working at the Archive certainly translate into reputation, exposure, access to social networks, and new affiliations and organizational connections that are helpful in acquiring paid employment and building a career outside the Archive. The handful of academics who volunteer at the Archive certainly generate forms of symbolic/cultural capital (authenticity, artistic, archival, and activist bona fides, reputation), make new affiliations and institutional connections, and gain access to social networks that benefit their career/institution. For example, volunteers were regularly invited to give talks, participate in conferences, write articles, and teach courses at area schools. The expectation that participants contribute only "because they want to," because it is the kind of work, as Renee said, "I love doing," and therefore do not need to be paid, is predicated on the largely disavowed knowledge that these intangible forms of cultural/symbolic capital can be converted into economic capital (Bourdieu 1993). While Renee is a trained librarian, her ability to publish academic articles about archival activism cannot be separated from the authority/expertise (knowledge/power) she gains working at IA. Characterizing volunteer labor at the Archive as disinterested, selfless, altruistic, and/or untainted by the incentives of professional access or financial remuneration speaks to the anxiety this aspirational desire generates when navigating NYC's highly competitive gig economy, and the field of cultural production in particular, in which many of them operate.

Nevertheless, the basis of an asymmetrical relationship in which one party is able to economically exploit the other is seen by the volunteers as inoperative in the context of the Archive. Against the prevailing exploitative social relation of a liberal subject "freely" entering a contractual relationship based on self-interest and the exchange of putative equivalents, the Archive's labor practices are predicated on various ways of *sharing*—enabling others to access what is valued on the basis of shared sociopolitical commitments, aims, and desires (Widlok 2017; Ferguson 2015). This sharing economy differs from sharing economies in which the peer-to-peer exchange of services is mediated through the money form, such as forms of "collaborative consumption" (Botsman and Rogers 2010), the non-monetary reciprocal giving-receiving in gift economies (Mauss 2002), and related community-based initiatives such as 'time banks' (Cahn 2004)—none of which involve those in the exchange being bound by a common covenant or cause.

The more time I spent at the Archive the more I realized that labor was one of, if not *the,* central categories through which the volunteers imagined themselves to be creating autonomous social relations and political subjectivities. While they commonly used the terms "work" and "labor" interchangeably, in interactional contexts where work/labor was the object of discussion, they tended to use "labor" when they wanted to signify the social character of "work." "Work" referred to a more self-conscious and sensuously particular activity that makes life both meaningful and possible, an unalienated source of enjoyment, an end-in-itself. In contrast, "labor" referred to a socially general activity through which "work" is organized; it indexed a division of labor. That is, they tended to use "labor" when they wanted to politicize "work," to index its socially-mediating character.[8] No volunteer ever used the terms "labor time" or "clock

[8] Labor in capitalism functions as a socially-mediating activity through the process of exchange: we sell our labor on the market in order to purchase the labor—the socially necessary labor time (value) congealed in the products and

time," these are my analytic heuristics. As what follows will elaborate, there were two forms of labor time at play: capitalist labor time and labor time at the Archive, which individual volunteers may or may not (want to) measure by the clock time that structures their lives. The important point is that, while both abstractions, clock time and capitalist labor time are not the same. Capitalist value is not determined by the clock time of the labor directly employed in production. The clock time of production has a tangential relation to the value of a commodity, which can only be determined when the average labor time required to produce a typical commodity in all the branches of industry is determined, that is, it is affected in a thousand different ways that cannot be measured locally (Caffentzis 2013).

Much of the literature on alternative economies (Williams 2014; Gibson-Graham 2006, 2008) characterizes the type of labor at IA as 'non-commodified,' i.e., *outside* capitalist value production. Leigh Claire La Berge's (2018) conception of 'decommodified labor,' which indicates a type of work that is not compensated through a wage or available through market purchase, is a more apt description. While not an historically new phenomenon, decommodified labor refers to those forms of cultural labor that mushroomed in the post-Fordist era in which work is not mediated through the money form, but commodity exchange and the formal organization of work—its rhythms, commitments, and narratives (e.g., clock time)—is still in place.[9] We can recognize decommodified labor in those jobs that are unpaid (volunteerism, internships, civic engagement) but could potentially lead to a paid job, as in the example of

services—of others. Thus, the objectifications of laboring activity (commodities) are both concrete labor products and objectified forms of social mediation. What structures capitalist society is this underlying level of social relations that is constituted by labor (Postone 1993).

[9] In La Berge's historicization, decommodified labor emerges as a response to shifting compositions of value in the late 1970s—the neoliberalization of the state, financialization, etc. She develops the concept from Gøsta Epsing-Andersen's analysis in *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990), where decommodification refers to "the degree to which individuals, or families, can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living independently of market participation." Epsing-Andersen maps decommodified labor on a security-precarity cline, with Scandinavian welfare states at one end, the US at the opposite, and the UK in the middle.

Makayla. It is especially prevalent in the arts, where insecurity, flexibility, and deferred economic rewards are endemic. For example, 'social practice' art, which attempts to make art more inclusive/relevant by blurring the artist-audience distinction, often involves the unpaid labor of non-artists (people "from the community") in its production. Decommodified labor captures the blurring of the working day and the metrics used to mark working and non-working time, including biopolitical forms of production, such as when a volunteer described "waking up in the middle of the night with a solution" to a problem that eluded her during the formal working day and "cracking open the laptop."

It was not clear to me to what extent the volunteers were self-consciously operating in the autonomist tradition. As I have noted several times, theory was not something that was discussed at IA. While the co-founders and a few other volunteers identified with aspects of autonomism, it was never explicitly referenced in any working group meetings I observed. Several of the younger volunteers I interviewed had never heard of it. However, it did seem to serve as a kind of atmospheric ethos that animated some of IA's programming and events. The NYC-based autonomist academic-activists Silvia Federici, George Caffentzis, and AK Thompson, who were friends with several volunteers, occasionally gave talks at the space, and the independent publisher Common Notions (an imprint of PM Press in Oakland), which publishes these and other autonomist writers, rented a co-working space at the Archive.

Activists and Academics

As a part of IA's Audio working group, Sian used her digital editing skills to help produce an ongoing series of podcasts on topics ranging from radical community libraries to sound as a political act. Over the course of several months, I observed some of the planning and

production of a podcast she collaborated on with other volunteers. Working across their respective disciplinary/expertise divides, they decided on a subject, conducted research and interviews, wrote a script, and recorded and edited an audio file. Throughout the process they had to negotiate their divergent research methods, approaches to the subject material, ways of framing their concerns and questions, and their commitments to and investments in different politics, communities, and publics. While this critical intellectual work frequently involved contested knowledge, disagreement, and debate, it was ethical—each collaborator made the discursive room for others to speak, be listened to, and learned from, before reaching consensus. As I sat watching their interactions, I was reminded of the subjects in Setha Low and Sally Engle Merry's examination of "engaged anthropology" in the US, who "employ anthropological concepts and engage in theoretical debates about what they mean … [t]hey [were] self-reflective, analytical, and participate[d] in the same intellectual world as anthropologists" (Low and Merry 2010: S211).

It came as somewhat of a surprise, then, when I observed the following exchange between four of ten volunteers during an Admin working group meeting:

> Renee: We received an invitation to write an essay about the Archive that would be included in an edited volume on international activist archives. It would be published by Routledge, the academic press.
>
> Daniel: No way! Routledge books are way too expensive.
>
> Timarie: How much?
>
> Renee: [After tapping out a quick search on her laptop] $150… $95… $130…
>
> Mariana: What? Fuck them. Who can afford those prices? And academic books are pretty inaccessible. We have almost none in our library.
>
> Renee: Does anyone want to write this essay, either alone or with others?

No one raised their hand. They immediately moved to the next item on the agenda. As I sat quietly observing this interaction, I was reminded of Paula Serafini's ethnographic study of activist art practices in the UK, *Performance Action: The Politics of Art Activism*. Published in 2018 by Routledge, it lists for $125.[10] While Serafini's prose is lucid and largely jargon-free, I imagined the dense tangle of political, aesthetic, and social theory she mobilizes in her development of an interdisciplinary theory of art activism would be considered inaccessible by the volunteers. I imagined this was the type of "luxury [knowledge] production" (Gilmore 1993) the volunteers imagined my research would produce—a book written for an academic audience (intellectually/epistemically inaccessible) and sold by an academic publisher (physically/economically inaccessible).

Then I recalled reading an article about the Archive in the journal *Archival Science*, co-authored by four volunteers—Renee, two other professionally trained archivist/librarians, and a sociology professor.[11] Wouldn't this article, which relies on equally sophisticated theory, be just as epistemically and economically inaccessible? (The academic publisher Springer charges $40 for a single pdf and $99 for the full issue). And regardless of who the authors were, if they were writing articles for *Archival Science*, aren't they, like me, comparatively privileged, certainly in terms of access to education and their position within the international division of labor? Is our

[10] As evidenced by the marketing of Serafini's book on the Routledge website, academic publishers are keenly aware of the contradictions the question of access gives rise to: "[the book] is aimed at both specialist and non-specialist audiences, offering an accessible and engaging way into new theoretical contributions in the field of art activism" (https://www.routledge.com/Performance-Action-The-Politics-of-Art-Activism/Serafini/p/book/9780367862541). Ironically, this sales blurb recapitulates the very academic-activist, thinking-doing dichotomies Serafini calls into question. Serafini told me she had originally pitched the book to a commercial publisher so it would go straight to paperback but was declined because she was a young academic with no track record. Before Routledge printed a $50 paperback version in 2019, Serafini gave PDFs to friends and colleagues, a common practice in academia to create an open access version.

[11] The article is framed as an "ethnographic case study" that juxtaposes IA, "a community-based archival project … conducted by and for activists themselves," with the "veneer of impartiality" that masks "the inherently political nature" of the archival profession and the neoliberal institutions it serves (Sellie et al. 2015: 453-454). Of the four co-authors, only Renee is still an active volunteer.

laboring activity really so different? Don't some of the volunteers, particularly those who are students or adjunct faculty at area universities, have the same cruelly optimistic expectation that the material benefits of our unpaid labor are imminent, on the horizon (Berlant 2011), that, as long as we keep doing what we love, the culture of sacrificial labor in academia and activism promises that "we will eventually be financially rewarded through (continued, or better) employment, scholarships, research grants, etc." (Cowen and Rault 2013: 478)?

Renee later told me she regretted writing an article that "sits behind a paywall managed by Springer."[12] As a librarian who often wants but is unable to access scholarship published in academic journals through her job, she feels it is "hypocritical to contribute to these kinds of forums." She continued:

> There are barriers to what academic writing can do and who it can reach … [it] requires a formula that is limiting … I'd honestly rather put my intellectual labor into forums that value open access … I'm most interested in working with folks outside academia, whose knowledge and experience is just as valid as those within academia.

She described how she and another volunteer co-wrote an article about the Archive in the form of a manifesto "in order to break down those limiting academic forms and propose solutions that could be practical for the real world." It was eventually published in the open access journal, but only after Renee and her co-author agreed to a major overhaul. Said Renee: "It turns out that peer review hits back hard on manifestos." The article makes a distinction between writing that proposes practical solutions and critiques "voiced by scholars and published in academic journals that people outside affluent institutions cannot even access, let alone read" (Almeida and Hoyer 2019: 9).

[12] They decided to publish the article in *Archival Science* only after Springer agreed to make it freely available in the CUNY institutional repository after one year.

The idea that at academic writing should offer actionable solutions was voiced by academic collaborators in the Archive's orbit. For AK Thompson, a social movement scholar at an area college and frequent presenter/interlocutor at the Archive, what sets academic writing apart from the kind of writing that would resonate within the Archive's community is

> the absolute reluctance displayed by so many left academic writers of advancing anything like prescription or a proposition regarding what should be done in light what they just spent 200 pages describing. The absence of either a willingness or the feeling that they're entitled to or have the capacity to give advice based on what they've found makes the writing very irrelevant to people who are trying to figure out what they should be doing. (Thompson 2019).

Thompson's comment implies a distance between academic writers and their objects that separates knowledge *of*—knowledge that "merely" describes its object—from knowledge *for*—knowledge that can be instrumentalized to some end—a distance between *knowing* and *transforming* the world.[13] This dichotomy imagines a separation between activist (as "real world," practical, solution-oriented, political, altruistic) and academic (as detached, distant, critical, theoretical, self-interested). The activist-academic dichotomy the volunteers make figures in much of the literature on activist anthropology. For example, Charles Hale, who founded the now defunct Activist Anthropology sub-discipline at the University of Texas at Austin, contends that ethnographic cultural critique, while characterized by the "energetic deconstruction of powerful ideas, institutions, and practices," strives toward "intellectual production uncompromised by politics" (Hale 2006: 102). Against a distant, knowing, and unencumbered intellectual critique, the import of activist anthropology is that it affirms

[13] Hannah Arendt writes that when modern science assumed its active form a "dichotomy between contemplation and action, the traditional hierarchy which ruled that truth is ultimately perceived in speechless and actionless seeing, could not be upheld" (1993 [1961]: 39). The longstanding distinction central to the Aristotelian worldview, a fundamental distinction between knowing and doing, or concept and action, no longer applied.

closeness, "collaboration, dialogue," and "accountability" to "the principles and practices of people who study outside the academic setting" (Hale 2006: 104).

Contra Hale, Margot Weiss argues that when activist anthropologists renounce critique, they "locate politics out there, on the ground, in the field, rather than in the academy, or in the spaces we inhabit together." For Weiss, who studies queer activist cultures in the US, when "academics locate in our objects the radical politics we wish for ourselves…we seek to overcome that distance between our objects and ourselves by surrendering critique and, instead, identifying with or as our object, we end up affirming that very distance, a distance that disguises the conditions of its production" (Weiss 2015: 88). The turn away from critique enacts the kind of "false humility" (Ibid: 91), alluded to in Thompson's comment, that can reinforce the authority/superiority of the academic and allow them to bypass their own embeddedness in the global division of labor that shapes academic knowledge production.

Informed by the poststructuralism of the 1980s and 1990s, the image of academic cultural critique Hale and Thompson implicate, rejected prescription in favor of a more diagnostic approach that would avoid totalizing, moralizing, foundationalist, and essentialist forms of critique because they necessarily exclude or marginalize those with alternative ideas/projects. As Jane Bennett has written, by leaving his own normative commitments tacit in order to minimize their moralizing effects, Foucault's general strategy was "more invitational than insistent" (Bennett 2002: 19-20).[14] Referring to feminist uptakes of poststructuralism that "decried the passive subjects of overly deterministic analyses," Kathi Weeks suggests that affirming any explicit normative project "was, and in many ways still is, more often rejected as an integral

[14] Despite his frequent writings to the contrary—"to imagine another system is to extend our participation in the present system" (1977: 230)—Foucault was engaged in many forms of political activism (e.g., the Prisons Information Group) and had embraced the "political spirituality" of the Iranian revolution in the late 1970s as a counter ethics/discourse to Western liberalism (Afary and Anderson 2005).

component of critique and abandoned as a way to avoid the risks of political proposition" (Weeks 2010: 184-185).

Hale's desire to collapse the distance between academics and their objects as an index of their accountability to those outside academia certainly implies the inherent risk of the collaborative process, a risk Weiss's more critical approach also implies. But when Thompson locates this risk in the prescriptive or propositional content of the writing itself—an author offering no indication of 'what is to be done'—he treats critique/theory as a set of instructions for action. Lurking within his conception is a language ideology—the widely held idea that, independent of context, language is an autonomous denotational-referential medium that is identical with its object. Perhaps an indexical semiotic relation better captures the theory-practice dichotomy, as when Adorno writes, "the false, once determinately known and precisely expressed, is already an *index* of what is right and better" (1998: 288, my emphasis).

Voices of Value

I want to return now to the exchange about the Routledge invitation. To understand what was being communicated, we have to look beyond the denotational text. When Daniel refused the invitation to write the article—"No way! Routledge books are way too expensive"—his statement landed like an anvil because he is recognized by those present to have expert knowledge in the matter at hand. Daniel is a white artist, designer, curator, writer, and educator in his late 40s with three decades of experience in US and international social movement activism, community organizing, direct action, and an extensive list of non-academic publications. As one of the Archive's co-founders, he is cognizant that his voice can be dominant

and his input over-valued, so he tended to sit back in group settings and to interject only when he felt strongly about a given issue.

The evidence for Daniel's rejection, the cost of Routledge books, was corroborated by Renee, the Archive's de facto administrator and occasional author of academic articles. The rejection was then supported by Mariana—"Who can afford those prices? And academic books are pretty inaccessible.[15] We have almost none in our library"—someone who, as a Latina, can ostensibly make authoritative claims about epistemic inaccessibility. The basis of the rejection, its heterogeneity/plurality (the diversity of expertise/authority enacted by its speakers), and thus its truth content, was effectively beyond reproach. If someone really wanted to write the article, especially one of the younger, less experienced volunteers who were present, they would have to make a compelling case on the spot, an intimidating order, given the opposition, but not impossible. Indeed, Renee later told me she had demurred—"Does anyone want to write this essay, either alone or with others?"—not because she agreed with the basis of the rejection (she continues to write articles about the Archive for open source academic publications) but because she wanted to decenter her expertise/authority and create space for "less experienced volunteers to represent the Archive."

This social indexicality reveals how an implicit labor theory of discursive value[16] is partially structuring the interactional context. What a volunteer says counts—has value—as an index of their ongoing investment of labor time in the Archive. This labor time is constitutive of

[15] Embedded in this idea of the epistemic inaccessibility of academic texts is the idea that "the same" ideas could be expressed in more "straightforward" language.

[16] While I call this a "theory," a more apt characterization is Wittgenstein's notion of "description"—an example that lays out the articulations of one region of the crisscrossing strands that make up a concept. Rather than a theory capable of subsuming under itself all the possible features and phenomena of how labor time mediates an interactional context, there is instead a family resemblance across situations at IA, my other field sites in NYC, activist scenes around the US more broadly, and historically. For example, during her involvement with the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Civil Rights leader Ella Baker would often say, "those who do the work, make the decisions" (Cantarow 1980).

the (disciplinary) skills, experience, and knowledge—expertise—a volunteer is understood to "have" about the nature of a matter at hand by the others in the interactional context. I say "have" because, as E. Summerson Carr (2010) has shown, this expertise is something people do, not something they have or hold. The enactment or performance of expertise is inherently interactional and "always ideological because it is implicated in semistable hierarchies of value that authorize particular ways of seeing and speaking as an expert" (Carr 2010: 18).[17] That is, it only appears to emerge autonomously from its speaker. While Mariana's statement about epistemic inaccessibility has value as an index of her identity[18] (her historically marginalized subject position) and her experience as a labor organizer, like Daniel and Renee, she is an active and long-time volunteer—she has "put in" the labor time.[19]

This labor theory of discursive value is not the only form of discursive value that structures interactions at the Archive, but it does reveal how their interactions involve relative degrees of ideologically motivated hierarchy/authority that are not rendered explicit in the interactional context. IA's consensus-based deliberation and decision-making practices afford participants the space and time to speak, be listened to, and learn from one another across their disciplinary/expertise divides. Lack of consensus requires that only one volunteer objects to a

[17] Carr explains how the enactment of expertise takes the form of what Michael Silverstein calls "second order indexicality" (2003), "historically constituted and contingent metadiscursive practices (e.g., rationalizations, evaluations, diagnoses) that mediate between would-be experts and some set of cultural" objects (Carr: 2010: 18).
[18] This linking of the value of an idea with the speaker's identity contrasts with their principled separation in philosophical discourse, such as when Kwame Anthony Appiah states, "When people speak, they speak ideas, not identity. The truth value of what you say is not indexed to your identity. If you're making a bad argument, it's a bad argument. It's not bad because of the identity of the person making it" (quoted in Malik 2017). In my experience in activist scenes in the US, the value of what a speaker says (which is always relational, i.e., the value it has for others) is almost always indexed to their identity. This identity is not limited to race, gender, sexuality, etc., but is based on a host of indexical status markers, only one of which is how the speaker self-identifies and how they are perceived and identified by others.
[19] The speaker's background or reputation must be known to those present. For example, Daniel told me about an experience he had at an Admin working group meeting. He had been out of town for several weeks away from the Archive for an extended period in which he made a statement about procedure that was met with silence and sideways glances by everyone present, all new volunteers he had never met before. "They were clearly wondering, 'who's this guy?'"

given matter at hand. But when someone voices disagreement with an existing practice or principle, the degree to which the substance of, and basis for, the disagreement will be *heard*—taken up, collectively debated, and thus have the potential to affect the Archive's principles and practices—is contingent upon how much labor time the volunteer voicing the disagreement is understood by others to have invested in the Archive. This is often evinced by the extent to which the speaker has actively sought to redress past concerns or disagreements, i.e., how much time/effort they have expended, as one volunteer said, "fixing actual problems and not just making critiques."

If a volunteer expresses a strong desire to work on a project, and crucially, is able to find others willing to collaborate with them, it is assumed the project has collective value, that it aligns with the Archive's collectively determined methods and practices, otherwise no one would invest the labor time necessary for its realization. The absence of anyone willing to write the article indicates that it is not significant enough to merit someone's interest and time, given their other commitments at the Archive or elsewhere. But while the Archive's principles and practices are shaped by an individual volunteer's interests and desires, and these interests and desires are in turn shaped by the Archive's principles and practices (i.e., the individual and the collective are dialectically entailed, mutually constitutive), it was difficult to determine how (a)symmetrical this entailment was when disagreement remained unexpressed in group interactions. I would often learn about a disagreement a volunteer had in private conversations I had with them after a meeting.

The interaction reveals how labor time mediates the Archive's deliberation and decision-making processes. This mediation occurs through a kind of *sedimented* consensus—a form of tacit consensus in which agreement is not created anew through ongoing deliberation but by the

absence of expressed disagreement with an existing principle or practice—*things have been done this way, and no one objects, so we will keep doing things this way until someone does*. Sedimented consensus does not indicate the absence of disagreement per se, but rather, that disagreement, once expressed, only alters the Archive's practices when there are volunteers willing to commit the labor time necessary to address the nature of the disagreement. Newer volunteers might assume existing practices are "best practices"—the amalgam of past expressed consensus—when they may just be default practices that are *sufficient* for getting things done. But the origin of a particular practice is not immediately relevant and may not even be knowable. One of the ironies of working in a social movement culture archive is that a volunteer may have more knowledge about an organization's practices thirty years ago than they do about the Archive's practices three years ago. Unless a long-time volunteer takes the time to explain the evolution of a particular concept/method and its corresponding practice to a newer volunteer, which I witnessed on occasion, this knowledge/institutional memory remains largely opaque.

One further example is in order. At the retreat I described above, Linda, an academic in the Education working group, raised concerns about what she saw as a lack of transparency that was undermining the Archive's horizontal decision-making methods. She was concerned about what she described as "knowledge and power siloing in the Admin working group," and suggested the Archive overhaul its methods of communication in order to increase transparency and accountability. While many volunteers agreed this was a problem, they disagreed about the cause, and the potential remedy. The reason for the lack of transparency was not, as Linda seemed to suggest, that those in the Admin working group were operating as the Archive's de facto representatives and using this power to make decisions unilaterally. Rather, the problem was expressed as one of expediency. "There are time constraints involved in managing day-to-

day tasks, like responding to requests for materials or groups who want to host an event at the space," a volunteer in the Admin working group responded. "This makes it almost impossible to communicate and reach consensus with the entire volunteer base before making a decision." Another volunteer, who captured the spirit of many of the comments that followed, responded:

> I feel good about the Admin group making decisions for the Archive. But if others don't feel good about that, we need to talk about it. I can't be at every meeting, so I relinquish my control in making decisions. It would be unproductive for me to flag my own personal slight disagreements with decisions that get made because I trust people in this collective to produce decisions that push the thing forward.

This volunteer later told me he agreed "with some of Linda's points about our process, but if she is not willing to step up and do the work to fix the problem, it's just talk." As we see, the day-to-day tasks become the responsibility of those who are immediately present, those who are both willing and able to find the time to perform them. Disagreement, once expressed, only alters the Archive's practices when there are volunteers willing to commit the time to address the nature of the disagreement.

While it may be obvious to the reader that an all-volunteer project would live or die based on the amount of time participants are able to contribute, it is puzzling how the historically specific form of socially-mediating labor indexed by the Archive's volunteer labor practices escapes the inquiry of activist anthropologists, whose ethnographic inquiry—in its quest for historical justice—ostensibly seeks to reveal the organizing forms of social life that are evident in the quotidian textures of collaboration. I turn to this next.

Chapter 3

"Col-labor-ation": The Politics of Working Together

If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.
—Lilla Watson

In the1970s, rosy visions of a post-industrial knowledge and information society emerged in which creativity and high-skilled cognitive work replaced alienated and exploited labor (Bell 1973; Porat and Rubin 1977; Toffler 1980).[1] The 'culturalization' of Western economies in the post-Fordist era (Harvey 1989; Yúdice et al. 2003) precipitated enthusiastic calls for the rise of a 'creative class' (Florida 2002)—hip, innovative, and ethical social entrepreneurs, programmers, artists and designers would propel economic development in the 'creative cities' (Landry 2000) of the twenty-first century. Cities were re-zoned with 'creative' sectors. "Creative" industries were deluged with venture capital. But "the problem of work"—the fact that the vast majority of work is highly regimented, alienating, meaningless, and underpaid—persisted (Schor 2020; Weeks 2011). The 2008 financial collapse and the ensuing economic recession shifted the discourse around creativity to an equally robust discourse around sharing. Digital technologies (open-source software, algorithms, data sharing, crowdsourcing) could solve the problems of

[1] These prognostications were clearly wrong. The alleged post-industrial economy was built on the continuing production of the industrial infrastructure, much of it off-shored, that was necessary for 'creative' industries to thrive, evidenced by the low growth rates that characterize service economies and the fact that distributional conflict over wages, employment, debt, and healthcare have only increased in the past thirty years, a period in which the stock market has quadrupled in value while wages have remained largely stagnant. Capital still extracts value through the absorption of workers' time. Workers may work more or less, be unionized or not, capture a greater or lesser percentage of the total surplus, and have health insurance and retirement benefits, but the social organization of the basic appropriation—more time for capital than for oneself—continues. As the economic historian Bethany Moreton writes (2015), "Since 2000, rising American productivity has become de-coupled from job growth: Despite sizzling profits and the ever-receding horizon of a brighter future for all … the celebrity industries of Silicon Valley and Wall Street are hollowing out middle-class jobs. When anything at all is filling the void, too often it is the cruelly misnamed sharing economy or hourly work for minimum wage, both greased with record levels of household debt."

minimum wage, increased debt, and economic precarity—not by replacing people with machines, as prophesized by "end of work" narratives (Aronowitz and DiFazio 1995; Ford 2015)—but by reorganizing economic activity, the bulk of it in services, through direct person-to-person transactions. The emerging "sharing economy" would empower individuals over corporations—especially young adults who had become economically independent just as the global system collapsed—and render bosses, the puppets of the greedy 1%, redundant. In 2017, the *Wall Street Journal* declared "The End of Employees."[2]

In this sharing economy collaborative ideals and practices proliferate—from municipal agencies, scientific laboratories and universities to community centers, art spaces, and social movements. In their popular study on "collaborative consumption," Rachel Botsman and Roo Rogers (2010: xvi) argue that technology-based peer-to-peer exchange is transforming society by "reinventing not just *what* we consume but *how* we consume." Resource sharing, goods and services bartering, reuse markets, and co-working spaces (Airbnb, Uber, Etsy, TaskRabbit, Lending Club, Fat Llama, Olio, TimeRepublik, Craigslist) are providing new forms of (self)employment and new opportunities for people to work together in "creative entrepreneurial endeavors." These innovative sharing networks "increase efficiency, mop up the surplus created by over-production," reduce waste, and diminish the impact of consumption on the environment (Ibid). Characterized by economists as the "biggest change in the American workforce in over a century" (Reich 2015), the sharing economy is expected to reach a global market value of $335 billion by 2025 (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2015).[3]

[2] https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-end-of-employees-1486050443 (accessed July 2021)
[3] The economic sociologist Juliet Schor argues (2020) that in spite of how the largest platforms (Uber, Lyft, Airbnb) have intensified the worst aspects of global capitalism by paying poverty wages, destabilizing urban neighborhoods, and accelerating carbon emissions, the promise of the collaborative sharing economy to heal social disconnection, inequality, and environmental degradation is still within reach.

While collaborative consumption is celebrated as the benevolent shepherd of a kinder, gentler, and greener capitalism, collaborative production is imagined as capitalism's grim reaper.[4] The market-driven self-interest and privatization of previously shared resources now yielded the possibility of 'commons-based peer production' (Benkler and Nissenbaum 2006) through the networked technologies of the sharing economy. In a 2015 *Guardian* article, "The End of Capitalism Has Begun," the journalist and activist Paul Mason writes that post-capitalism is now possible because of the spontaneous rise of new ways of working together—"collaborative production: goods, services and organizations are appearing that no longer respond to the dictates of the market and the managerial hierarchy" (Mason 2015). The utopian promise of modernization—production in the East, consumption in the West—is no longer.

Mason gives the example of how Wikipedia, arguably the largest knowledge/information project/product in the world, "is made by volunteers for free, abolishing the encyclopedia business and depriving the advertising industry of an estimated $3 billion a year in revenue" (Ibid). As a continuously written and rewritten global encyclopedia of over 50 million articles in 300 languages, Wikipedia is fueled by a faith in "the wisdom of crowds" (Surowiecki 2005) and an ethos of radical democratic participation—every collaborator is anonymous and every action is transparent (Madrigal 2018).[5] In a survey of 5,200 Wikipedia contributors,[6] the overwhelming majority cite the number one reason they contribute is because they "Like the idea of volunteering to share knowledge." A slightly lesser number cite "It's fun," indicating to

[4] At the 2016 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Klaus Schwab, the Forum's Contributing Founder and Executive Chairman stated: "Capital is being superseded by creativity and the ability to innovate—and therefore by human talents—as the most important factors of production. If talent is becoming the decisive competitive factor, we can be confident that capitalism is being replaced by 'talentism'…" Source: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/end-of-capitalism----_b_1423311 (accessed July 2021).
[5] Each time someone contributes to Wikipedia, the software records the text added or removed, the time of the entry/edit, and the IP address, geographical location, and username of the editor.
[6] https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/76/Editor_Survey_Report_-_April_2011.pdf

Wikipedia's co-founder Jimmy Wales that they don't experience the time they spend contributing as work: "It's a misconception people work for free, they have fun for free."[7]

But while "collaborative" is the watchword Wikipedians use most often to describe their activity, like the tech world in general, this collaboration, and the knowledge it produces, is alarmingly provincial, gendered, raced, and classed. 77% of Wikipedia's articles are written by 1% of its contributors (Matei and Britt 2017), the overwhelming majority of which are cis-gendered white men from the global North (Mandiberg 2020). A rather small crowd. Not surprisingly, global participation is limited by similar factors: low education, high poverty, and lack of internet access and free time.[8] Wikipedia's massive cognitive surplus—by 2012, over 100 million hours of labor time had been logged by contributors (Mandiberg 2012)—belies how participation qua representation skews along a digital division of labor. Africa, which has almost twice the population of Europe, contributes only 15% of Wikipedia articles, and only a median of 5% of articles about Africa are written by Africans; most are written and edited by contributors outside Africa (Graham et al. 2016). The image of Wikipedia as "living proof that an entirely new type of intellectual project could be created through decentralized, peer-to-peer organizing and good-faith individual effort" (Madrigal 2018) is troubled by the women, people of color, and non-binary contributors who report frequent trolling, doxing, hacking, and even death threats from fellow Wikipedians (Cooke 2020).

The problem of participation qua representation Wikipedia presents has its roots in the encyclopedic form. The first edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* was written by approximately

[7] https://hackernoon.com/jimmy-wales-of-wikipedia-2335c43f1204 (accessed July 2021).
[8] 20% of contributors globally spend three or more hours a day, and 50% one or more hours a day, writing new articles and/or editing. In the US, which accounts for nearly half of Wikipedia's total contributors, low-editing-density areas are concentrated in poorer, rural counties. The vast majority of contributors live in urban areas (northern and coastal areas predominate), have higher levels of education, incomes, and access to broadband, both geographically and financially (Mandiberg 2020).

150 mostly Scottish men between 1768 and 1771. Developed in reaction to the French *Encyclopédie* (France was Great Britain's chief imperial rival at the time), it was designed to disseminate "foundational secular knowledge" and serve as a tool for the educated elite to communicate with one another (Saunderson 1984). Like the Enlightenment itself, the technology of the modern encyclopedia is entangled with the history of colonial expansion. Those nations that once comprised the bulk of British Empire—UK, US, Canada, Australia, and India—account for nearly 75% of all contributions to Wikipedia (this includes new articles and edits). While this empire has officially dissolved, its vestiges perdure. 92% of all Wikipedia traffic in India is to the English language site. Indians "have little interest in editing the Hindi or Bengali Wikipedias" because of "the colonial legacy of English and its contemporary role in social and economic mobility" (Mandiberg 2020).[9]

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Enter Anthropology. Since the crisis of representation in the 1970s, anthropology has been wiping the blood and dirt off the collaborative relationship at the heart of the ethnographic encounter. Heeding calls to 'decolonize' the discipline (Harrison 1991), anthropology's 'collaborative turn' (Strohm 2012)—roughly coeval with the socioeconomic shifts I describe above—insists that in order for anthropologists to redress the discipline's historical complicity with power, the ethnographic collaboration between researcher and researched must be *ethically* reconfigured. Working across impossible differences and distances, researchers must not only listen to and learn from, honor, and embrace the other without speaking for them, they must work with and at the behest of communities to collaboratively examine, define, and interpret

[9] This ambivalent relation is evident in postcolonial theory, for example, in the way Spivak's work (1988) mobilizes French poststructuralist thought (Foucault, Derrida) to argue that colonial discourse functions as a form of "epistemic violence" that silences the subaltern.

evidence (Lassiter 2004, 2005, 2008; Fluehr-Lobban 2008). The active flip-side of the discipline's passive "Do No Harm" ethical code. Only when the presumption of an ontologic and/or epistemic inequality between researchers and historically marginalized subjects is replaced by "a thick solidarity [that] layers interpersonal empathy with historical analysis, political acumen, and a willingness to be led by those most directly impacted" (Liu and Shange 2018: 196) will the production of ethnographic knowledge challenge the discipline's historical complicity with colonial/imperial power and bend the arc of history toward justice.

Lilla Watson's opening epigraph is often invoked by anthropologists to characterize the liberal democratic contradiction at the heart of the ethnographic encounter. This contradiction has had many names. One that has gained traction in activist and academic quarters recently is the Nigerian-American novelist Teju Cole's *White Savior Industrial Complex*. As Cole (2012) writes, "The white savior supports brutal policies in the morning, founds charities in the afternoon, and receives awards in the evening." Writing from her indigenous Murri standpoint in the Australian settler-colonial context, Watson suggests that if you, non-indigenous Gutmensch, are able to recognize and understand that our *collective* freedom is inextricably entwined and mutually interdependent, precisely because we share the contradictions of our historical conditions—ethnic genocide, slavery, settler-colonialism, imperialism, "Anthropocenes" (Tsai 2019)—even if we do not suffer the consequences of these conditions equally, "then let us work together" to create new conditions. Interrogating the history of the present in the interests of unlearning your privilege and decentering yourself marks the beginning of an *ethical* relationship with the other. Collaboration in the absence of this recognition only serves to assuage your guilt and maintain structures of domination.

Building on the preceding chapter's analysis of the laboring practices at my primary field site, Interference Archive, this chapter takes up the question of working together—collaboration—as a problem of *the political* from within the discipline of anthropology. As anthropologists increasingly look to collaboration "as a purported panacea for the ethical challenges of ethnography" (Weiss 2016), how is the political distinct from the ethical concerns that motivate ethnographic collaboration? In what follows, I argue that by framing ethnographic collaboration as an ethical commitment to the other, enacted when working across cultural and disciplinary/expertise boundaries, anthropologists overlook how labor time in capitalism functions as an historically specific socially-mediating activity that cannot be understood with reference to anthropological (transhistorical) conceptions of "working together." At the same time ethnographic collaboration, as both a method and a problem, sheds light on the discipline's ongoing concerns about (asymmetrical) knowledge production,[10] it reproduces the very structures/logics it putatively seeks to challenge.

Collaborative Anthropology: A Very Brief History

To some extent, ethnography has always been collaborative. Those being observed cooperate with the observer by explaining their world, confirming or refuting the observer's interpretations and offering their own. Indeed, the anthropologist's relationship to their subjects in one of utter dependence. The breakthrough of the modernist genre is usually situated in Malinowski's move "off the verandah" to discern the "native point of view" as a participant-observer in the everyday lives of his subjects (Clifford 1983). But the precise nature of the cooperation between anthropologist and informant in this genre was often expunged in the

[10] What Clifford and Marcus (1986) identified as the discipline's "epistemological crisis."

writing of the ethnographic text (Stocking 1983; Briggs and Bauman 1999). The research subject was typically re-presented as a passive source from which the "raw material" of scientific data was extracted through the colonial relation and later refined into anthropological knowledge by the anthropologist—a process that objectified, exoticized, and "othered" the subject (Said 2014). The positivist illusion of a value-neutral, transparent, scientific—"objective"—process/product required disenchantment.[11]

This disenchantment[12] took the form of the reflexive/hermeneutic and literary turns of the 1970s and 1980s (Crapanzano 1977; Dwyer 1977; Rabinow 1977; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fisher 1986) which sought to correct the discipline's distorting methods and make ethnographic representations more accurate (Said 1989; Nencel and Pels 1991) by rendering the ethnographer's always situated and partial standpoint (Haraway 1988; Harding 1998) transparent through the writing process. Inaugurated by the rise of neo-Marxist, feminist, and postmodern theory (deconstructionism, intertextuality), the heterodox 'cultural critique' that emerged was concerned with how the ethnographer's representations are shaped by their social and historical circumstances and the ways fieldwork experience is transformed into a text. The critique of representation shifted the emphasis from a more sociologically grounded politics of perception, how one sees, to a politics of presentation, how one constructs a narrative about what one has seen for those who were not present.[13] These were two temporally distinct moments—the

[11] In the development of Americanist ethnography, Franz Boas and his Kwakuitl translator George Hunt, and Alice Fletcher and her Dhegiha Siouan translator Francis La Flesche took collaboration a step further by co-authoring ethnographic texts. In his studies of the Meskwaki of the Great Lakes region, Sol Tax developed "action anthropology," a form of ethnographic collaboration in which an anthropologist's research priorities are defined in consultation with their subjects, on whose behalf the anthropologist works *with* and *for* to resolve community problems (Stapp 2012).

[12] Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1970) was the quake that got "the epistemological boulder rolling down the hill and into practically every academic field" (Argyrou 2002: 11).

[13] This would shift back to a politics of perception/sociology of knowledge as new ways of perceiving emerged under new social and historical conditions. For example, the Euro-American feminist movements in the 1970s led to new perceptions and understandings of gender and female subjectivity that made women of other societies visible

process of discovery and participant observation, and when the data is processed and made to speak back to disciplinary or theoretical concerns, when it is transformed into a recognizable text, a fiction, "in the sense of something made or fashioned" (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Since Clifford Geertz (1973) recast fieldwork as an act of interpretation, the strict separation between observation and "data collection," on the one hand, and interpretation and theoretical reflection, on the other, became harder to maintain.[14] As Geertz would write, "now that such matters are coming to be discussed in the open, rather than covered over with a professional mystique, the burden of authorship seems suddenly heavier" (1988: 138).

But this more reflexive auteurism continued to cast anthropology's ossifying gaze as primarily a metropolitan White Man's Burden. In order to adequately address how knowledge from ethnographic encounters is produced, commodified, and put to use, critical feminist, race and ethnic scholars (Harrison 1991; Behar and Gordon 1995; Gottlieb 1995; Tuhiwai Smith 1999; Mutua and Swadener 2004) insisted that ethnographic authority had to be displaced not only in the writing process, but at the site of its production, the collaborative relationship at the heart of the ethnographic encounter. Faye V. Harrison (1991) and Angela Gilliam's call to decolonize the discipline[15]—expand the academic anthropology beyond the narrow discursive field of its Eurocentric origins by confronting how ethnographic knowledge functions as a form of political and epistemic violence that fixes and prolongs the colonial relationship—would

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and opened up new fields of ethnological interest, e.g., Annette Weiner (1988) placing Trobriand women's reproductive work at the center of her investigation as a corrective to Malinowski's "oversight" in the 1920s (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

[14] As Geertz (1973: 9) put it, "What we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to."

[15] Harrison and Gilliam called for decolonizing the discipline at the first invited session for the Association of Black Anthropologists at the American Anthropological Association conference in 1987. They based their conception of decolonization on the Kenyan novelist and post-colonial theorist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986), which emphasized the role of language in the development of subjectivity, building from Frantz Fanon's notion that decolonization implies an awareness of the sociolinguistic and socioeconomic conditions that led to the internalization/epidermalization of a Black inferiority complex.

require interrogating the politics of collaboration by reconsidering the relationship between the observer and the observed *in situ* (Vasco Uribe 2002).

With its renewed focus of questions of race, gender, and political economy, this "decolonizing generation" (Allen and Jobson 2016: 129) focused attention on centuries-long processes of colonial expansion and capitalist domination "glossed over by facile invocations of globalization in the late twentieth century" (Ibid: 131). If "[c]lassic colonialism represented the appropriation of natural resources and a people's labor for the economic benefits of another nation," Angela Gilliam wrote, "Decolonization, above all, meant participation in the disposition of the resources in one's country and some control over the price of one's labor" (Gilliam 1991: 184). For some in this generation, global forms of accumulation, dispossession, and exploitation could only be interpreted and changed[16] when the ethnographic gaze was reversed and the site of encounter became "home" (Nader 1972; Ntarangwi 2010), when Western anthropologists' preoccupation with other cultures was transferred to their own (Said 1989). This shift ran counter to the discipline's more allegorical tradition of ethnological writing qua politics—e.g., Mauss's study of gift exchange in 'primitive' societies as a response to the breakdown of solidarity, generosity, cooperation and reciprocity in European societies during WWI, or Mead and Benedict's work in Southeast Asia and Japan as a response to struggles with diverse values, the loss of established traditions, and fears of social disaggregation during the inter- and post-war periods in the US (Clifford 1986).

There is an affinity among anthropologists who frame their practice as advocacy for the powerless that ethnographic collaboration must be predicated on what Nancy Scheper-Hughes, in

[16] As Jafari Allen and Ryan Jobson write, the decolonizing generation was marked by a "yearning for liberatory potential in a political and intellectual field seemingly bereft of potent challenges to Euro-American capitalist democracy after the fall of the Soviet bloc" (Allen and Jobson 2016: 134), i.e., Thatcher's 'TINA' at Fukuyama's 'end of history.'

an influential 1995 essay, called "the primacy of the ethical" (1995: 409).[17] Defining the ethical as "responsibility, accountability, answerability to 'the other'"[18] (Ibid: 419), Scheper-Hughes argued that the tradition of activist anthropology, which can be traced back to Boas and his associates (e.g. fighting scientific racism), is structurally incapable of addressing the politics of collaboration. She equates Boasian cultural relativism with a moral relativism that reifies our understanding of culture, thus "suspending the ethical" (Ibid: 409). Scheper-Hughes argued that cultural relativism lay at the roots of an ascendant Foucauldian image of power in the social sciences in which "circuits of power are seen as capillary, diffuse, global, and difficult to trace to their sources" (Ibid: 417).[19] The possibility of politics in this "imagined postmodern, borderless world" becomes meaningless. "It can be either nothing or anything at all" (Ibid). In reality, Scheper-Hughes insists this world is

> a Camelot[20] of free trade that echoes the marketplace rhetoric of global capitalism, a making of the world and social science safe for "low-intensity democracy" backed by World Bank capital. The flight from the local in hot pursuit of a transnational, borderless anthropology implies a parallel flight from local engagements, local commitments, and local accountability (Ibid).

[17] Scheper-Hughes based her "primacy of the ethical" on Emmanuel Levinas's (1987) notion that the ethical exists prior to culture, that human existence as social beings assumes the presence of the other: the "generative prestructure of language … presupposes a given relationship with another subject, one that exists prior to words in the silent, preverbal 'taking stock' of each other's existence" (Scheper-Hughes 1995: 419).

[18] Note how Scheper-Hughes' understanding of ethics differs from Spivak's ethical singularity as "an experience of the impossible" (from the Foreword in Mahasweta Devi's *Imaginary Maps*, 2019: xxv).

[19] Richard Wolin (2001: 184-185) similarly, and unconvincingly, argues this "ethical relativism" can be traced to postmodernism's anti-Enlightenment/anti-humanist *mentalité*, e.g., Foucault, Derrida et al.'s embrace of "antidemocratic" Nietzsche, and Heidegger's "fascist ontology" which based "ethical and political judgments on *factical* rather than *normative* terms," opening the door to essentialized ethnocentric notions of being-in-the-world that resemble fascism.

[20] Scheper-Hughes may be cryptically referencing "Project Camelot," a 1965 US military-sponsored study of the social contexts that gave rise to left insurgent movements, particularly in Latin America, that revealed controversial collaborations between North American social scientists and US government counterinsurgency efforts during the Cold War. This controversy precipitated the AAA's first attempt in 1967 to articulate a set of ethical research standards, the Statement on Problems of Anthropological Research and Ethics.

To the extent that anthropologists deny the power to identify injustice because it implies a privileged position in Camelot, Scheper-Hughes suggests "they collaborate with the relations of power" (Ibid: 419) that allow systems of exploitation and domination to continue. If anthropology was going to take up the concerns that arise from local communities, indeed if it was "to be worth anything at all," it would have to be ethically grounded—"politically committed and morally engaged" (Ibid: 409) with its ethnographic other. Scheper-Hughes insists that anthropologists have a moral duty to act in situations of suffering, even when participants in their field sites object. The discipline's injunction to "Do No Harm" masks its historical complicity with power. The primacy of the ethical Scheper-Hughes placed at the center of her "militant anthropology" shared an emphasis on social responsibility with the earlier tradition of applied anthropology (Bennett 1996). It would become a foundational principle in the methodologies of its close cousins—engaged, activist, and public anthropology (Hale 2007; Sanford and Angel-Ajani 2006; Low and Merry 2008, 2010; Checker et al. 2010; Borofsky 2004).

Over the past two decades, scholarly interest in collaborative ethnographic methods has been steadily increasing, as reflected in the pages of North American anthropological journals. Writing in *Collaborative Anthropologies*,[21] Luke Eric Lassiter and Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, two of the collaborative anthropology's most vocal proponents, contend that because the ethnographic encounter involves asymmetrical power relations based in race, class, sex, and privilege that can generate misrepresentations, the anthropologist has an ethical responsibility to consult with subjects in order to verify, validate, and modify their interpretations. This ethical

[21] Founded by Luke Eric Lassiter in 2005, I consider the *Collaborative Anthropologies* journal as exemplary, though certainly not exhaustive, of the discipline's theoretical and methodological concerns with ethnographic collaboration.

commitment to the other "transcends all other agendas, including the more scientific principle that all is, or should be, knowable" (Lassiter 2004: 1). If anthropologists are going to confront the discipline's deep-seated anxiety about social relevance (Bunzl 2008), they must plan and execute the ethnographic process with their research subjects—from "co-designing" (establishing a research question and methodology) and "co-researching" (collecting data) to "co-interpreting" and then "co-authoring" the ethnographic text (Lassiter 2004; Fluehr-Lobban 2008). Collaborative ethnography "invites commentary from our consultants and seeks to make that commentary overtly part of the ethnographic text as it develops. In turn, this negotiation is reintegrated back into the fieldwork process itself" (Lassiter 2005: 16). Indeed, without this ethically conscious form of "collaborative reading and editing, especially when it pushes toward co-interpretation" (Ibid: 146), anthropology may be doomed:

> In the twenty-first-century, postcolonial, "emerging markets" global context, collaboration is the key to the sustainability of anthropological fieldwork and research, and perhaps for anthropology as a discipline. Voluntary, informed, negotiated, open, reciprocal research, based on locating a common ground of mutual interest and benefit between researcher and research populations, is increasingly supplanting the individual, self-generated, and externally funded research of previous generations … a central goal of collaborative research is to work *for* as well as *with* research communities (Fluehr-Lobban 2008: 177-178).

Rather than a consequence of multiple and diverse anthropologies, collaboration is designed to challenge the conventional power differentials between researchers and subjects by including subjects as "co-intellectuals" (Lassiter 2004) or "co-citizens" (Fluehr-Lobban 2008) who "co-theorize" (Rappaport 2008)—go beyond participant observation to actively engage local viewpoints in the construction of anthropological theory. In order to challenge anthropological authority/expertise and forge democratic practices that will benefit the community, the ethnographic text should reflect the intersubjective and dialogic processes of

collaborative fieldwork by being "clearly and accessibly written" (Lassiter 2005: 117), with the understanding that benefits to a community are enacted in the *process* of research itself, not only in the dissemination of its findings.

Labor Time

While there is a shared commitment to contest scholarly enclosure and advocate for a more engaged practice, much of the scholarship on ethnographic collaboration brackets the fact that "co-designing," "co-researching," "co-interpreting," "co-theorizing," "co-authoring"—the *practice* of an ethical relationship—are forms of co-laboring activity that require a significant investment of time from research subjects. When the issue of labor time is thematized, it is often pitched in the terms of anthropology's "liberal settlement" (Mazzarella 2019), the post-WWII imaginary of a liberal democratic "free world" whose hegemonic norms and forms maintain the "myth of perfectibility through the progressive incorporation of historically subordinated peoples into the comforts and privileges of property and citizenship" (Jobson 2019: 7). In prescribing a set of normative conditions upon which ethnographic research should proceed, conditions enshrined in various institutional Codes of Ethics (cite), anthropological framings of collaboration as co-production fail to account for how this co-laboring activity is imbricated in an historically specific form of socially-mediating value, one that cannot be understood with reference to the clock time expended in "working together" *as such*.

Anthropologists who champion collaboration often make an implicit assumption that because the research is embedded in a community, is "*for* as well as *with*" a community (Fluehr-Lobban 2008: 178), it will it benefit the community, thus some members of a community will desire to participate, to contribute their labor time. The assumption of an automatic reciprocity is

more pronounced when a researcher's methodology attempts, as in my case, to emulate a community's methodology (non-hierarchical, horizontal, decentralized, egalitarian) as an index of the researcher's solidarity with or ethical commitment to a community. This is especially the case when the collaboration emerges within the framework of close bonds, as when Lassiter's *The Power of Kiowa Song* (1998) "unfolded as an ethnography of a conversation among friends." However, many of Lassiter's "consultants did not have the time, energy, or desire to invest in [his] project on the same level as the principal consultants, who read the entire ethnography several times as it developed" (Lassiter 2004: 141). And Angela Valenzuela writes that "native" or insider ethnographers may have to "march to the beat of a different drummer." Our ethical commitments to our subjects/political allies may compel us to be collaborative in more spiritual and less procedural, methodological ways. "Our differences suggest that there are a number of ways of being collaborative. Each ethnographer ultimately develops her own notions of collaboration, positionality, and authorship" (Foley and Valenzuela 2005: 31).

Feminist and women of color anthropologists, whose critiques have shaped collaborative methodologies (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974; Reiter 1975; Carby 1982; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983; Abu-Lughod 1990), have shown that these communities are never monolithic. The asymmetrical power relations that exist between researcher and subject also exist between subjects; the asymmetries that exclude women, people of color, and sexual minorities from positions of power in society are the same asymmetries that exclude them from participation in ethnographic collaboration. Given these asymmetries, Christa Craven and Dana-Aín Davis ask, "how do we promote inclusivity and equity through collaborative participation when some participants have more power, time, and/or ability to engage in our research than others?" (Craven and Davis 2013; 10). But in warning that anthropologists "run the risk of highlighting

only the struggles of some participants…with more power… [thus] masking the struggles of those with less power" (Ibid), Craven and Davis questions about labor time's "phantom-like objectivity" (Marx 1976: 128) are subsumed in (still necessary) concerns that exclusion functions as a form of harm that produces misrepresentations and re-entrenches existing asymmetries.

A Fair Return

One way anthropologists have sought to address the harms that forms of exclusion based on power, time, and ability generates is by paying their collaborators. Increasingly, scholars express the concern that while "anthropologists often discuss collaborative writing and how collaborators might benefit from adequate representations, we also have to talk about basic needs; that is, money, remuneration for those with whom we work" (Killian 2017-18: 119). Accounts by Malinowski (1967), Rabinow (2000), Barley (2000), and Guber (2013) have shown how, depending on the context, the practice of using money or gifts as incentive and/or reward for participation can have the effect of fostering or corrupting reciprocal relations of trust, solidarity, and friendship. In their overview of compensation practices in the social sciences, Juan Cajas and Yolinliztli Pérez write that while anthropologists have historically assumed the "altruistic, voluntary, and unpaid participation of informants" (Cajas and Pérez 2017: 145), many Latin American anthropologists increasingly view monetary compensation as "a strong ethical element of good practices" (Ibid: 147).

Remuneration as an ethical practice is increasingly reflected in institutional guidelines that frame research subjects' uncompensated labor as a form of economic exploitation. For example, the 2011 ethical guidelines for the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK & Commonwealth state: "There should be no economic exploitation of individual informants,

translators, groups, animals and research participants or cultural or biological materials; *fair return* should be made for their help and services" (2011: 6, my emphasis). Similar European Union guidelines state: "Researchers themselves normally get paid for doing the research so why should the research subjects remain unrewarded?... If research participants are paid too little (or not paid at all) would this not be a form of exploitation, or a case of unjust underpayment?" (2010: 38). In contrast, the frequent invocation in the 2012 American Anthropological Association's Code of Ethics that anthropologists should "Do No Harm," e.g., "to the dignity, and to bodily and material well-being" of their subjects (2012: 2), stops short of including economic exploitation as a form of harm. And similar Canadian guidelines stipulate that researchers may not use institutional research funds to pay/incentivize non-academic collaborators (cite).

But how, Raul Pacheco-Vega and Kate Parizeau (2018) ask, can money be used to incentivize the participation of research subjects, particularly those in vulnerable communities, without being coercive and extractive? Moreover,

> if the economic gulf between the researcher and [subject] is so fundamental, is a token payment in acknowledgment of the [subject's] time meaningful? While such payment may allow for the [subject] to meet some daily needs, it will not transform the underlying structures that contribute to the vulnerability of low-income [subjects] (Pacheco-Vega and Parizeau 2018: 8).

Pacheco-Vega and Parizeau would seem to suggest this type of token payment functions as a symbolic form of liberal (vertical) charity that reinforces the colonial (extractive) relation.

The liberal subject presupposed in ethical guidelines that advocate a "fair return" for participation—an individual "freely" entering a contractual relationship based on an exchange of putative equivalents (labor time for money)—is the basis of many collaborative dilemmas. In an assessment of her "failed collaboration" with an artist and fellow German compatriot, Cassis

Killian explains how her decision to pay her collaborator more than a token sum (1,000 Euros), placed her "in the role of an employer" (Killian 2017-18: 113). "I had the feeling that to my collaborator, I represented an institution putting pressure on her" (Ibid: 112). Her collaborator found it increasingly difficult to maintain the academic rigor—speech register, clarity of categories, standards of aesthetic value, work schedule—that Killian sought. To remedy this, Killian "invented all sort of tricks to motivate her, to find a way out of this downward circle of suggestion and negation" (Ibid). She likens her collaborator to the character Bartleby in Herman Melville's story who labors eagerly at first but eventually refuses to do any of the work his employer requires. Her collaborator "would prefer not to" (Ibid).[22] She became more and more convinced the collaboration would only benefit Killian. This resulted in Killian asking less of her collaborator, doing more of the work herself, and feeling "fully responsible for a project for which both of us should have felt responsible" (Ibid: 109). "How," Killian asks, "can anthropologists convey the possibilities academia offers but also its requirements without being perceived as dominant?" (Ibid: 95).

If economic compensation was an index of Killian's ethical commitment to her collaborator, it would seem the responsibility and accountability to the other she had expected in return had been corrupted in part by the introduction of money and the institutional authority it represents. Had Killian not adequately communicated the rigorous expectations of the collaboration she sought? Had she not paid her collaborator enough? She knew her collaborator needed money, and as an academic employee with a part-time position, fixed-term contract, and

[22] In Melville's short story, "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street" (1963 [1853]), when Bartleby, who is hired to copy legal documents by hand, eventually refuses to do any work and sits staring out the window all day, in spite of his employer's attempts to motivate him, his employer does not have the heart to kick him out and instead relocates the business, leaving Bartleby in the empty office. Bartleby's refusal is often used by autonomists as an allegory for labor's self-negating capacity, the refusal of the worker to be realized as labor in a contractual bond, the refusal of work (Caffentzis 2013).

no institutional funding, 1,000 Euros was the most Killian could afford to pay out of her own pocket. While Killian would prefer not to be "solely responsible for an agreement that is situated in an environment shaped by capitalist logic, harsh working conditions, and postcolonial entanglements" (Ibid: 120), she recognizes that many academics, just like their collaborators, "live in precarious situations that more closely resemble the situation to which Bartleby is reduced" (Ibid: 113-114).

Killian's disquiet seems to arise in part from the tension between paying a symbolic amount that would be (perceived as) extractive, coercive, exploitative, and a fair amount that would be sufficient for her collaborator to subsist for the duration of the project. This amount was not arbitrary but based on Killian's own subsistence. That is, her ethically motivated desire to overcome the asymmetries between academic researchers and non-academic collaborators was mediated by her own academic reproduction within the division of knowledge labor, which is overdetermined by the abstract labor time that structures the global division of labor.

Equality, Ethics, and Politics

Anthropological inquiries into the mobilization of expertise as political agency beyond the practices and spaces of state/institutional governance frame collaboration as a process in which academics and members of the public cross disciplinary/expertise divides to create "unforeseeable knowledge, events, and encounters" (Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón 2019: 221). In their oft-cited re-imagining of the classic scene of fieldwork encounter, Douglass Holmes and George Marcus (2005; 2006; 2008) argue that co-production shifts "the purposes of ethnography from description and analysis" to collaborators' "modes of knowing" so that anthropologists can draw on the "analytical acumen and existential insights of our subjects to

recast the intellectual imperatives of our own methodological practices" (Holmes and Marcus 2008: 82). Taking the form of an ensemble theatre production (Westbrook 2008), this "refunctioned" or "paraethnography"[23] replicates the "experimental ethos…built into the structure of the contemporary … from alternative art spaces to central banks, from communities of climate scientists to communities of Catholic political activists" (Holmes and Marcus 2008: 82). Integral to the function of these "epistemic communities" (Ibid) is a broad conception of research that undermines the anthropologist/informant, expert/activist, theory/practice dichotomies in which academics think or critique and activists do or act (cf. Osterweil 2013; Hale 2006).

For Kiven Strohm, who studies the relation of art and politics in the settler colonial context of Israeli/Palestine, not only do the disciplinary/expertise crossings of collaboration "reveal an elaboration of research methods by those with whom we work," they invalidate "the very notion of a division of knowledge labor upon which anthropology has been founded" (Strohm 2019: 251). This radical horizontalizing is putatively achieved when anthropologist and artist, scientist, "lay expert" (Cook 2019), and so on, find themselves in situations where they are "confronted with different (and at times opposing) ways of seeing and thinking" (Strohm 2019: 251). With the anthropologist's expertise one among many, the time spent "working together (though not necessarily sharing a goal)" generates "new relations, entities, subjectivities, worlds" (Ibid).

In his intervention into the primacy of the ethical, Strohm (2012) argues against starting from the premise that the ethnographic encounter involves asymmetries of race, class, sex, and

[23] Paraethnography denotes the ethnographer's understanding that they are using a "found" ethnography and helping to occasion its further articulation. The ethnographic subject is a builder of the ethnography, and the ethnographer discovers their topic working together.

privilege. He suggests the ethical commitment at the heart of collaborative anthropology presupposes an inequality between anthropologist and subject that the anthropologist, as an ethically responsible actor, is meant to remedy. Conceptions of collaboration as "leveling the epistemological and ideological space between ethnographer and research community or consultants" (Cook 2008: 109) presuppose this inequality and imply that in order to decenter ethnographic authority and the knowledge it produces "equality has to be given or provided by the anthropologist considering the very real inequalities within the ethnographic encounter" (Strohm 2012: 103).

Strohm's counter-intuitive move is to argue that because the presumption of inequality "perpetuates the very colonial vestiges that anthropology has been working to undermine since the 1960s, and … reproduces the vertical relationship of anthropology with its other" (2012: 102), anthropologists should *presuppose an equality* between themselves and their research subjects. "[T]o the degree that it is the condition for understanding between two or more people … in order for me to understand you, and vice versa, we must both first assume our equality as speaking beings" (Ibid: 105).[24] Following Rancière's discussion of Jacotot in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991), Strohm frames equality as intelligence—not the equality of manifestations of intelligence (i.e. knowledge)—but an equality or non-hierarchy of *intellectual capacity*, an equality of all speaking beings. This understanding of equality must be approached as it is practiced, it has no value in itself, i.e. it is relational not ontological. Equality can be a source of politics to the extent that in practice it exposes (renders visible) an injustice between different groups in a society or community:

> If anthropology is to take accusations of misrepresentation and its distortions seriously, accusations that come from those being studied, it is the voice of the ethnographic other, in affirming their equality, that becomes a potential political gesture and threatens to

[24] Note on similarity/difference with Spivak's 'ethical singularity.'

> break with the hackneyed notions of a "politics of representation" wherein politics is reduced to power (Ibid: 104).

When a research subject asserts her "desire to be heard," she asserts her "own equality as a speaking subject" (Ibid: 103). This desire to be heard, before making any moral or ethical demands of the anthropologist, affirms her equality—an equality that "precedes the anthropologist's responsibility to ensure or protect it" (Ibid). And yet, Strohm recognizes that the "very real inequalities within the ethnographic encounter" cannot be wished away (Ibid: 103). In the colonial context in which anthropology developed, the "geo-politics of knowledge" would appear to be "always already unequal" (Field and Rappaport quoting Walter Mignolo, 2011: 4). Certainly, this kind of equality, an equality of access, privilege, and power—and here we should keep in mind the distinction between *equality* as sameness and *equity* as justice—cannot be asserted by a researcher. This kind of equality does not depend on a researcher's presuppositions or her good will as an ethical stance toward her subject, but rather, as Spivak (2002) points out, on the given social conditions, the facts on the ground:

> The problem of the [capitalist] world is more a political problem than an ethical problem. When you plan to change policy, we are not talking about ethics, but of a political calculus … just creating the possibility of relationship is not going to solve these kinds of problems. Ethics … are a problem of relations, not knowledge. Politics are a calculus … The solution toward extreme injustice is political, and not just ethical. The two must work together. It is not a mind-changing situation, but a fact-changing situation" (Spivak quoted in Sawhney 2002: 214).

It is difficult to see how the intellectual equality Strohm suggests anthropologists should "assume" is not simply another way of saying it should be "given or provided" by them. That is, Strohm's presupposition of intellectual equality, while less one-sided because the research subject has both assumed the researcher's and asserted her own equality as a speaking subject, is still a call to a certain kind of relationship, a problem of ethics.

In overlooking the practice of ethics as an expenditure of labor time, anthropological theories of collaborative ethnography fail to consider how labor in capitalism constitutes an historically specific kind of socially-mediating activity, one that cannot be understood with reference to the time expended in co-laboring activity—"working together"—*as such*. It would seem, as Nicholas De Genova (2012) has suggested, that because abstract labor assumes the form of mundane, homogeneous, and ubiquitous activities—buying a coffee, taking an Uber—its *social objectivity* tends to fall from the purview of anthropological inquiry. "[A]nthropologists neglect what ethnographic inquiry has always purportedly sought to reveal—the organizing forms of social life that are evident in the quotidian textures of everyday life" (Ibid). While I agree that labor time (abstract labor) remains a theoretical and practical blindspot for engaged, activist, and collaborative anthropologies, I don't think this results from capital's fetish form as much as the "myth of perfectibility," the promise of anthropology's "liberal settlement"—equality, reciprocity, and a 'fair return' between researcher and researched.

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In the past decade, "the problem of work" has slowly edged itself into artistic discourse, e.g., "socially engaged" or "social practice" art (cite La Berge, Sholette, Bryan-Wilson, Roberts), At the same time, labor as a site for investigation of social relations has receded from cultural critique and is often under-interrogated in ethnographic inquiry/theory outside the subgenre of anthropologies of work (cite). While enmeshed in academic institutions that perpetuate precisely what we seek to undo (Ferguson 2012; Chatterjee and Maira 2014), how, as Margot Weiss asks, can we think with and alongside our subjects without "mistaking social justice knowledge practices for ethnographic ones?" (Weiss 2016); and, as the Archive's approach to collaboration

in the next chapter suggests—without mistaking social justice knowledge practices for anticapitalist ones?

Refusal of "Col-labor-ation"[25]

Not long after I began conducting fieldwork at the Archive, I was riding the G train back to my apartment in north Brooklyn when I ran into Sian. I had interviewed her for the first time the previous week and knew how deeply she was committed to IA's mission and methods. A white painter and experimental video artist in her 30s who had emigrated to the US from Ireland as a child, Sian had initially been drawn to the Archive through her interest in "the complex mix of histories it collects" and her desire, sparked by her involvement in the Occupy Wall Street movement, to make her artistic practice "less artist-as-genius market-oriented" and "more rooted in collectivity."

After some innocuous questions about her commute, I brought up the idea of doing a collaborative ethnography at the Archive. I explained that this would involve more than our original arrangement of granting me access in exchange for my time staffing one day a week. The Archive's volunteers and I would develop and execute the ethnography together—from the project's conceptualization and methodology, to gathering and interpreting data and collective writing. Our collaboration could involve shifting degrees of involvement based on an individual volunteer's desire and availability to participate. As a polyphonic process and product, this co-produced ethnography would address the politics of representation—what I imagined at the time

[25]*Collaborare* (Latin: to work with); *com*-, which derives from *cum* (with), + *laborare* (to work); in compound Latin words the prefix *com*- becomes *col*- when it precedes words that begin with "l" (colleague, collect, collide).

to be one of the Archive's motivating concerns—by decentering (my) ethnographic authority and the knowledge it produces.

I had been investigating the collaborative methodologies I discussed in the previous chapter and thinking about how I could include the Archive's volunteers as more active participants in my research. I saw a parallel between their repudiation of the art world's commodity-driven star system and my own desire that a collaborative ethnography be, in the words of Luke Eric Lassiter, one of collaborative anthropology's most vocal proponents, "a kind of risky ethnographic behavior that diverts attention away from the age-old academic focus on stars, a focus that exemplifies the hyperindividualism that has been central to the academy's rewards, prestige, and even its history" (Lassiter 2005: 149). I imagined that a closer collaboration would not only strengthen the breadth and depth of my research, but it would also align with the volunteer's horizontal methods. It would be a sign of my ethical and political commitment to my research subjects. I imagined that it would benefit the volunteers by providing a framework for sustained reflection on their process and would offer a rich and nuanced account of activist archival practices that would benefit them and those in their solidarity network. But I had not seriously thought through how a collaborative ethnography would work, how it might be structured, who would or could be involved, and how we would approach the issue of collective authorship.[26] I was feigning competence, testing the waters, and hoping Sian might throw me a rope.

[26] As a graduate student writing a dissertation, I was fairly certain that such a project was not even possible from the standpoint of my department, that the exigencies of academic training and professionalization preclude this type of collaboration. Like the graduate students and early-career faculty members writing in *Collaborative Futures: Critical Reflections on Publicly Active Graduate Education* (2012), I was thinking about the professional trajectory aspiring activist scholars confront: "To become university-based public scholars, young people [*sic*] may have to put their ambition in cold storage for a decade and a half, go to graduate school, write a conventional dissertation, get a tenure-track job, publish in academic journals, give papers to small groups of fellow specialists, and comply with all the requirements of deference, conformity, and hoop-jumping that narrow the road to tenure while also narrowing

After stoically pondering my pitch, Sian looked back at me with pursed lips and then deadpanned, "Why would we do that?" Her flat affect and staccato delivery caught me off-guard, and I groped for an equally confident riposte. "Why not?" Her answer schooled me:

> Our methods—how we organize and operate—are decided collectively and oriented toward our shared goals. Why would we put our time into a project whose primary purpose is to further your individual career? If other volunteers want to work with you, that's their choice. I don't have the time or interest.

The following week I pitched the idea of a collaborative ethnography to another volunteer and got a similar response:

> You're a funded academic. None of the labor at the Archive is compensated. We're all volunteers. That's like asking us to help you do your research for free. People don't volunteer at the Archive to work on someone's dissertation.

Based on these rejections, I decided against making a formal proposal to the full volunteer base. I could not have known at the time—my ego was bruised, and I felt personally rejected—that a less "engaged," less "participatory," though no less "ethical" ethnography would afford me an interpretive positionality I would not otherwise have had.

The volunteers' rejections were of a piece with the ways conceptions of ethnographic refusal and disengagement structure possibilities, and produce subjects, histories, and politics. Audra Simpson writes of refusal as shedding light on something the anthropologist has overlooked: "There was something that seemed to reveal itself at the point of refusal—a stance, a principle, a historical narrative, *and an enjoyment in the reveal*" (Simpson 2014: 107). While the volunteers' refusals were theoretically and methodologically generative (McGranahan 2016), they did not implicate the politics of recognition or representation of decolonial anthropology. It

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the travelers on that road. Then, once tenured, these people will take up the applied work that appealed to them in the first place" (Gilvin et al. 2012: 89). Would that it were so.

was not the kind of refusal Audra Simpson describes in *Mohawk Interruptus* (2014)[27]—a refusal to let others set the terms of engagement, to let the anthropologist embed colonizing approaches into ethnographic work. It was not a refusal that is about reclaiming one's voice to define one's cultural identity. The volunteers' refusal was more akin to the refusal Savannah Shange describes in *Progressive Dystopia: Abolition, Antiblackness, and Schooling* (2019) when a black student told her, "You can follow me, but I'm not gonna talk to you" (Shange 2019: 16). As Ryan Jobson (2020: 266) writes, this is the kind of refusal that troubles the "impulse to pursue ethnographic data against the protests of [one's] interlocutors … a refusal to profit from the affective interiority of ethnographic subjects. … Rather than an enterprise predicated on the circulation of ethnographic data in an academic marketplace," Shange advocates a "thick solidarity" with research subjects that "[u]nlike thick description … involves a refusal to profit from the affective interiority of ethnographic subjects."

In the volunteers' refusals I heard: *Who creates what type of value for whom? Will our co-laboring activity generate use-values for our community, or will it generate exchange-value for someone or something else?* The volunteers were refusing to participate in the reduction of their values to value. Our collaboration would implicate their labor time in the production of a form of value that perpetuates the capitalist social relations and institutions the Archive's volunteers seek to undo. They were refusing the appropriation of their labor time in the production of academic knowledge that would serve as symbolic capital in the development of

[27] Simpson describes the Kahnawà:ke Mohawks' refusal of political recognition by the US and Canada as a refusal of national sovereignty and thus as a claim to tribal sovereignty. Refusal appears in her scholarship as both subject and method: the politics of refusal become a way for Simpson to demonstrate allegiance to her community by refusing to ask some questions and relate some answers. Refusal points to the everyday acts of indigenous peoples and refers to a scholarly mode of inquiry and analysis: "ethnographic refusal" is an anthropological methodology that "acknowledges the asymmetrical power relations that inform the research and writing about native lives and politics" and in turn refuses to write in a way that might compromise hard won and always precarious tribal sovereignty (2014: 104-105).

my career and exchange-value (access restricted articles, expensive books) for an institution (university, publisher) in the division of knowledge labor.[28] They were refusing the exploitation that occurs when the production of value in the workplace is separated from its realization in the marketplace.

The volunteers must have (correctly) presumed that my responsibility and accountability would primarily be to the professional requirements of my degree conferring institution—academic training, tenure, promotion—requirements that, as Jobson writes (2020: 267), "hinge on a possessive investment in authorship that values … individualism above collaboration, and the sequestration of knowledge above its open circulation." Moreover, my academic affiliation implied that my research was funded, that during our collaboration only my labor time would be compensated,[29] thus undermining the Archive's policy of not remunerating any of the labor that reproduces the space. But they had not rejected my proposals because I was not offering to pay them. While economic exploitation was clearly a concern, as we will see, it is not viewed as problem in the context of an all-volunteer project. The underlying premise is that if no labor is remunerated, no one can be *economically* exploited *at the Archive*.

For a space/project hell-bent on autonomy, IA's relationship to society is always already heteronomous, mediated by the world outside. And remuneration, particularly for unpaid cultural labor, is a crucial site of struggle for social movement activism in the present, a form of redistributive justice, a bulwark against economic exploitation—the material and emotional

[28] In the past few decades, as academic labor has become increasingly commensurable with other forms of labor, it produces value and valorizes capital. The exchange-value of my labor (the symbolic capital of my unpaid research/writing and the salary/wage I might one day command) reflects the cost of my education. Through my research, publishing, and employment, capital appropriates not only the value I produce, but also the value produced by my teachers, advisors, and colleagues, embodied in me (Harvie 2006).

[29] Technically, my fieldwork had not been funded. My applications for fieldwork funding had all been rejected. I was using the final year of my university stipend and borrowing money to cover living expenses. In this sense, perhaps we were more alike than they'd imagined.

exploitation of people of color in particular (Williams, Bryant and Carvell 2019). Why would an activist archive that collects objects, many made in, by, for, and about historically disenfranchised communities, insist on operating on all-volunteer labor in this political moment? IA's critics suggest its voluntarism is predicated on the race and class privilege of its co-founders and the majority of its core volunteers—whites from educated middle class backgrounds with access to resources. As we will see, this was an anxiety that haunted the volunteers during my research, many who suspected that if they were able to compensate participants, IA would likely attract more non-white volunteers.

The questions that animate this chapter build from the preceding chapter's investigation of collaboration within anthropology and the nature of collaboration—working together—as a problem of *the political*.[30] In what ways is the political not reducible to the ethical concerns that motivate ethnographic collaboration? I suggest that IA's approach to valuing all the labor that reproduces the space equally offers a way to re-think the politics of collaboration. While IA is not unique to activist collaborations that cross disciplinary/expertise boundaries, it is a particularly salient site for my inquiry because of the ways it foregrounds the labor at the center of collaboration.

Ethnographic Collaboration "for as well as with" IA

In our initial discussions about how my ethnographic research at the Archive would be structured, the volunteers insisted on a quid-pro-quo relationship—labor time for labor time. My labor would help reproduce the Archive and in exchange I was granted access to observe

[30] I'm following the distinction Chantal Mouffe (2005) makes between 'politics' as a set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, the manifold practices of conventional politics, and 'the political' as a dimension of contestation; novel forms and sites that are not reducible to spaces of institutional governance.

working group meetings and interview volunteers (with their individual consent). Our "contract" was agreed to verbally through my informed consent process. In keeping with the Archive's self-regulating principles, no ledger of my time was kept, a balanced reciprocity was assumed. Each party trusted the other to be ethically responsible and accountable, to uphold the agreement in good faith. This trust was initially extended to me through my friendship with Daniel, one of the Archive's co-founders.[31] During the ten months I conducted research at the Archive I performed regular volunteer tasks. I "staffed" one day a week (opening and closing the space, welcoming and assisting visitors, cataloguing, leading school tours, organizing storage files, running errands, cleaning), "bottom-lined" events (facilitating presentations, book talks, workshops, film screenings), and helped produce exhibitions (screen printing, installation). My involvement was largely limited to these material (re)productive tasks. I participated in deliberative and decision-making processes such as working group meetings strictly as an observer.

Early on in my research I had participated in group discussions by offering my own thoughts and reflections. However, I quickly realized that because I had a strong egoic attachment to my contributions—whether and how they resonated with others, how I was being perceived by others—that produced an increasingly distracting internal dialogue. A less participatory method allowed me to remain attentive, to focus on actively looking, listening, and taking interpretive notes (I was asked not to use a recording device in group settings where I could not obtain prior informed consent from all participants). This method limited my intellectual influence on the substance, dynamics, and direction of group interactions and

[31] As a friend and key informant, Daniel was an invaluable source of and gatekeeper for all things Archive-related and often acted as my conduit to the broader NYC art activist scene. In our regular discussions—walks in the park with his new-born son and dinners at his apartment—he provided me with access to people and information, explained the Archive's history and processes, confirmed, and refuted my interpretations, and offered his own. During the write-up of the dissertation, I shared an early draft of this chapter with him. His willingness to spend time reading written material and engage in a co-interpretive process was certainly based in our friendship, but he was also curious see to how I interpreted and framed a project he has invested so much of his life into realizing.

afforded me a critical distance from my objects. This ethnographic stance was both an intellectual positionality—a constructive and interpretive mode—and a bodily process in space and time (Ortner 2006). I consistently tried to sit, stand, or move on the periphery of bodily clusters, not outside them. I came to see this stance as a kind of *value-neutral lite* that—as long as I remained vigilant about its ideological pitfalls (positivism objectivity)—allowed me a more critical vantage on an evaluative frame or style of reason, an epistemological toolkit I shared with the volunteers. My methodology contrasts with collaborative ethnographies of art and social movement activism that emphasize a researcher's participation in every aspect of their subjects' practice, collapsing the distance between academics and their objects as an index of their ethical and political accountability to those outside academia, e.g., Serafini (2018), Juris and Khasnabish (2013), Osterweil (2013), Maeckelbergh (2011).

While I had a unique relationship with the space as an academic researcher,[32] I was effectively a volunteer like any other. But while I identified as a volunteer, this did not mean the volunteers identified with me, and certainly not that they wanted or liked to be studied by me. Most treated me kindly and were generous with their time, sitting for interviews and occasional impromptu discussions.[33] But they were largely ambivalent about the nature of my research. Few asked questions. They had their project(s) and I had mine.[34] That I might one day publish a text that distorts or misrepresents the Archive did not seem to concern them. They certainly had no interest in decentering ethnographic authority and the knowledge it produces.

[32] My privileged position gave me access to experiences and knowledge no other single volunteer had. But even though my position was situated/partial, there were occasions, e.g. during interviews with individual volunteers, when I had the sense that I was accessing the Archive's collective conscious.
[33] I developed closer relationships with a few volunteers, spending time with them outside the Archive. But the intimate and highly personal relationships between researcher and researched that characterize many accounts of collaborative ethnographies did not materialize.
[34] This was certainly conditioned by the hyperkinetic, always-on lifestyle of activist culture, which in NYC, where many activists identify as "militant researchers," produces its own genus of disinterestedness.

There was one exception. Linda, a white anthropologist in her 50s in the Education working group and a tenured professor at an area college, was anything but ambivalent about my research methodology. Linda insisted I redo my informed consent process (which I did),[35] refused to allow me to observe several meetings when she was present, and during the ten months I conducted research at the Archive, repeatedly agreed to but never sat for an interview. She may have simply been too busy. But I also suspected her recalcitrance had to do with our shared (contrasting? competing?) disciplinary and methodological commitments.[36] As a fellow activist academic, these commitments intersected with my own. Linda's PhD dissertation on gender equity and power relations in the EZLN's local autonomy project in Chiapas, Mexico involved theorizing and practicing collaborative research methods. Moreover, she had not been involved in my initial discussions with the core volunteers about the nature of our quid-pro-quo relationship, and, as a volunteer with knowledge about anthropological methodologies, was clearly seeking to intervene. She suggested that in order to make me and my research "more responsible and accountable to the Archive" I share my preliminary findings with the volunteer base at a future retreat, the biannual day-long gatherings where volunteers take the Archive's temperature and look ahead. As an academic versed in collaborative ethnographic methodologies

[35] My initial process involved gaining informed consent from the volunteers in the various working groups once at the outset of my research and repeating the process with any newcomers. Linda insisted that I acquire anew the consent of all the volunteers who would be present at a meeting *before each meeting*, either through email/text or in person at the start of each meeting. Initially, I imagined this might be difficult to do, as it was not always clear who may or may not attend a given meeting in advance, and I was worried that I might make the long train ride from my apartment to the Archive only to be asked to leave. But this was never borne out. Linda was the only volunteer who ever refused to give her consent, and only on a few occasions, before she had intervened in my informed consent process.

[36] Moreover, I suspected her push back had to do with our respective institutional affiliations. As an academically trained anthropologist and tenured professor, from several off-hand comments she made she was clearly aware that an elite cluster of programs are "responsible for producing the majority of tenured and tenure-track faculty in PhD-granting programs, with a very select few dominating the network," chief among these, the Anthropology Department at the University of Chicago (Kawa et al. 2019: 23).

and deeply invested in their processes and outcomes, Linda was clearly intervening in the production of academic knowledge at the site of ethnographic encounter.

The other volunteers liked Linda's idea. Said Gabriel: "Yeah, how can Eric's work be useful to the Archive? How can it be a learning experience for us? What can we do to circle Eric's project back around to our community … to ensure Interference receives something back at the end of his work?" And of course, I enthusiastically agreed. While I imagined the scene of my report back with excitement and some apprehension,[37] I was reassured by the fact that the initiative had not come from me but from a volunteer and had been embraced by others—it sprang from their methodology as an "activist archive from the bottom up." The volunteers were setting the terms of our engagement, making demands of me and my research, asserting their equality as speaking subjects (Strohm 2012), and insisting that our collaboration be reciprocal, dialogic, horizontal (Stacey 1988; Behar 1996; Craven and Davis 2013). Sharing my preliminary findings with the volunteer base would not be the collaborative ethnography I had proposed, but it would create a framework for me to more actively involve the volunteers in a "co-interpretive" process (Lassiter 2005), to integrate their critical assessments of my preliminary findings into my ethnographic text as it developed. Their participation would not only strengthen my analysis and potentially be more useful/beneficial to them, but it would also allow me to draw on their "analytical acumen and existential insights in order to recast the intellectual imperatives of [my] own methodological practices" (Holmes and Marcus 2008). I believed this to be the good faith intention of Linda's intervention.

[37] I was concerned about being placed in the role of archive therapist. Having interviewed several volunteers, I was aware of some contentious interpersonal relationships that affected the daily running of the space and I did not want to be put in a situation of triangulation between two volunteers in which one might feel betrayed by my findings.

But by the time my research at the Archive was winding down, Linda was no longer an active participant. The volunteer who had insisted that our collaboration be based on an *ethical* commitment—that me and my research be responsible and accountable to my ethnographic subjects—was gone. More importantly, the initial enthusiasm around my report, back when I was a novel and relatively unknown entity, had waned. It was a hectic period. The volunteers were scrambling to open a new exhibition, and with the next retreat several months off, no one expressed interest in finding a separate time for the volunteer base to meet. It was apparent to me that the perspective of a single participant, a researcher in a unique and temporary relationship with the Archive, was seen by the volunteers as largely inconsequential to the running of the space. But in Linda's absence—and more importantly, the absence of anyone else's interest in spending the time to address the substance of her critical intervention—it withered on the vine of good intentions. As we saw in Chapter 3, it is the labor time required to address a given concern that overdetermines the shape and scope of collaboration at IA.

If I had hoped that my research would be read as a sign of my solidarity with the Archive's mission and methods—that, as activist anthropologists contend, I could have "dual loyalties" to my discipline/academic community and to an activist cause (Hale 2006; Speed 2006; Sanford and Angel-Ajani 2006)—my status as an academic working on a dissertation meant that my involvement was largely seen by the volunteers as instrumental and motivated by short-term self-interest. In contrast, the labor time volunteers spend doing Archive related work is imagined to be quantitively distinct and directed toward radically different ends. On one hand, it is seen as *directly social labor*—labor that is not mediated through commodity exchange (measured, monetized, driven by self-interest or the profit-motive). On the other, it is seen as increasing the autonomous *collective* capacity of the Archive as a 'counter institution,' not a

volunteer's *individual* capacity to reproduce an academic career within a neoliberal institution. Labor time at the Archive is directed towards creating new institutions, not reforming existing ones. Yet, like me, the academics who volunteer at the Archive certainly generate forms of symbolic capital (authenticity, artistic, archival and activist bona fides, reputation, etc.), make new affiliations and institutional connections, and gain access to social networks that reproduce their careers and the neoliberal institutions that employ them.

In practice, neither of these imagined worlds—the neoliberal institution and the "counter institution"—are autonomous. They are inextricably imbricated in the value form of the political economy they share. The ability for someone to volunteer at the Archive is predicated on a host of external factors—access to resources, education, paid employment, healthcare, housing, etc.—that shape who—as a category of race, class, gender, etc.—is able and/or desires to spend their time working at an activist space where no one is paid. Those volunteers who are able to spend more time at the Archive become its de facto "representatives." Not in a leadership or executive sense, but in the way that their investment of time determines practices/methods more than others. But if autonomy is an illusion—the Archive's relationship to society is always already heteronomous; its empirical reality is partly mediated by that reality—as we will see, it is a potentially generative illusion.

Given its relative autonomy, I characterize the Archive as a kind of 'moral economy' (Carrier 2018; Scott 1976; Thompson 1971) in which the volunteers' immediate interests, while utilitarian (maintaining the daily running of a publicly accessible space), are motivated by the long-term, transcendent (moral) values of creating a counter institution based on horizontal, non-capitalist social relations. As an academic, even one working on a dissertation about the Archive, I was seen as operating outside this moral economy.

Collaboration With the Archive

For their 2017 exhibition and event series, *Finally Got the News: The Printed Legacy of the U.S. Radical Left, 1970-1979*, IA's volunteers collaborated with Dominic, an independent collector of social movement ephemera who works as an archivist at the University of Pennsylvania Libraries. As the exhibition's co-curator, Dominic wanted to pay several people to write introductions for sections of the exhibition pamphlet that addressed the representational, visual, and rhetorical strategies employed by the Black Power movement, Pan-Africanism, the Puerto Rican Young Lords Party, and others.

Figure 15. *Finally Got the News!* exhibition pamphlet cover and inside spread, 2017.

The issue of compensating these contributors came up during an Admin working group meeting:

> Renee: There will be eight general themes with subthemes to the show and Dominic wants several women of color who really need the money to write the thematic descriptions for each part of the exhibit and he wants to pay them $50 each. I think this is

wrong based on IA's principle that no labor that reproduces the space is valued differently than others.

Mariana: We haven't paid any writers so far, like the *Mobile Print Power* publication … non-academic people of color volunteered to translate all that stuff. A lot of people Dominic has reached out to are academics.

Sian: If we pay it means we value certain labor, and certain kinds of people, like academics, over others.

Hannah: A lot of our volunteer labor is intellectual, like cataloging. This issue came up with the website and the question of the precedent paying some forms of labor and not others sets.

Renee: We paid an English-Spanish translator for the *Armed by Design* catalog. We've paid Stuart for printing.

Stuart: I agree. We need to evaluate on a case-by-case scenario. If someone wants to write a grant to raise money for some specific job, I'm fine with that.

Renee: We wrote a grant where we asked for money for website design and honoraria for event presenters, who often cannot participate because they're not paid.

Amy: We've helped pay for travel in the past. I don't see anything wrong if Dominic wants to pay the writers out of his own pocket.

Mariana: What about offering them some of the proceeds from the sale of the publication?

Renee: We use those proceeds to pay for our rent.

Hannah: I agree with what Stuart is saying in principle. At the website meeting, the issue of paid labor came up … it's a precedent setting thing … in terms of how my labor is valued vs web designers. Is theirs valued more? Dominic is not an active volunteer. There's room for pushback.

Mariana: Often people who do something at an event do it as a one-off, singularly, while we, the core volunteers, work on all kinds of things, different kinds of labor, multiply.

Renee: I'll tell Dominic that we need to have a larger conversation about how this relates to our practice of volunteer labor.

I was not privy to the discussions between Dominic and the volunteers that ensued, but I did see part of an email correspondence with him where the volunteers reiterated their policy:

> We've explored what it would look like to write a grant application specifically for funds to pay an individual or group to do work that our community does not have the expertise or equipment for (for example, professional translation, or printing promotional material), but when we work on projects together as a community, we do so from a standpoint that all our labor is equal and unpaid. In inviting individuals to contribute 500-1,000 words to our *Finally Got the News!* publication, we are inviting them to be part of this community and to contribute to the project that is Interference Archive.

When I asked Dominic what he thought about this policy, he explained he was "a little annoyed," particularly because one of the people he had asked to write an essay was an elderly African American activist who

> deserved and needed the money … I can understand not paying someone who has access to funding through their university, but this guy was super poor, he was homeless and sleeping out of his car … The Archive's policy assumes an equality that doesn't exist … It's tricky to have a principle set in stone that isn't flexible in certain situations … I was embarrassed, but I had to go along with it … This was not the hill I was gonna die on.

As we see from the exchange, the Archive's non-remuneration policy is flexible, even contradictory. Several collaborators, both inside and outside the Archive, have been paid for contributing various types of labor. While this appears to be on an ad-hoc basis, it is not (e.g., they have paid volunteers for travel expenses when they give outside talks). What seems imperative though—the hill the volunteers *will* die on—is that the intellectual labor of research and writing performed by institutionally affiliated academics will not be valued differently than any of the other labor that reproduces the space. If the Archive pays individuals on the basis that their intellectual labor contribution holds unique value, the labor of other individuals is de-valued. As Hannah notes, this would mean that other forms of labor, such as cataloging, are somehow not intellectual. And Mariana suggests that if the Archive pays individuals on the basis of a collaborator's race (the academics of color Dominic had asked to contribute), this would

mean the volunteer labor of non-academics of color (the Spanish translators of the *Mobile Print Power* publication) is of less value.

The upshot was that the elderly African American man was the only outside contributor who wrote a piece for the catalog. Dominic paid him, though he wouldn't tell me how much or why no one else contributed an essay. I assumed it was because the others he had asked to write essays were academics with institutional affiliations. Although Dominic did not agree with the Archive's non-remuneration policy, he nonetheless understood how the practice of compensating some collaborators and not others in the context of an all-volunteer project could quickly become problematic:

> It would change the culture of the organization … how fair it is. I actually think IA is in a unique position—I don't know of any other space like it—to address the tension between labor in capitalism and the mostly volunteer labor in intersectional social movement activism.

This would appear to be the kind of recognition the Archive's all-volunteer, non-remunerated labor is designed to elicit. That is, the tension Dominic refers to—how the conflict between two forms of labor (the commodified labor of academic knowledge production and the decommodified labor of the volunteers) is negotiated in the (re)production of the Archive—can become the site of *the political*.

Having observed similar deliberations about compensating collaborators, it was clear the volunteers were aware that their policy runs counter to social movement demands for redistributive justice such as reparations. As particles in the "dark matter" (Sholette 2011) of debt-strapped, just-in-time, under- or unpaid laborers that holds together NYC's arts and cultural organizations, universities, and other heterotopias, the volunteers know first-hand how this political economy "thrives off the 'sharing' values of communality [in] counter-institutional

subcultural scenes" (Cowan and Rault 2014: 471) and exploits free labor—particularly the material and emotional labor of people of color (Williams, Bryant and Carvell 2019; Lerma, Hamilton and Nielsen 2020)—as collaboration. They suspect that if they were able to compensate participants with funding from grants, as one said, "IA might attract more non-white volunteers." But they are reluctant to do this for the reason Dominic suggests. The existing divisions in society, another noted, "do not simply melt away under the roof of IA." Like ethnographic collaboration, the divisions that separate bodies, affects, desires, and identities in society are the same divisions that preclude someone from volunteering at the Archive.

Perhaps then, it is precisely because, as Dominic says, "the Archive's policy assumes an equality that doesn't exist" outside the Archive that a space of imagining or prefiguring something different opens up. What if, following Dominic's observation, we view collaboration itself as a contradiction in which a publicly accessible all-volunteer space/project sits uncomfortably within the social and institutional reality with all its implicit and explicit exclusions? Rather than trying to expel this contradiction, within the terms of the "liberal settlement" (e.g., racial/ethnic inclusion through remuneration qua representation), what if we regarded it as the foundation of *the political* in collaboration? Unlike Strohm's call to presuppose the *intellectual equality* of collaborators—as an ethical stance, a way of relating to others across disciplinary/expertise divides—this equality is grounded in the co-laboring activities that constitute the Archive, the labor of collaboration. The sensuously particular forms of laboring activity at the Archive, e.g., researching, writing, and designing an exhibition pamphlet, giving a class tour, sending an email announcement, sweeping the floor, caring for an emotionally distressed colleague—all forms of laboring activity that race, gender and class bodies in the global division of labor—are recognized as necessary in the (re)production of the space and thus

of equal value. Rather than focusing on the outcome of laboring activity—the typically gender- and race- blind category of *class*—the Archive's focus on the division of labor indexes the laboring activity itself, an intersectional and more concrete set of phenomena (race, gender, occupation, income, access, privilege). By emphasizing the labor at the center of collaboration, IA's methods emphasize *activity* over *identity* (Young 1981; Weeks 2011).

Indeed, the volunteers seem to locate the conditions of their relative autonomy in the necessity of co-laboring activity. Unlike traditions on the autonomist left, theirs is not an anti- or post- work imaginary. But neither is it haunted by essentialized/ontologized conceptions of work. Work is not something that must be either overcome or apotheosized. Adorno's inimitable aplomb captures the spirit in which volunteers see their relative autonomy as the recognition of necessity: "If the world were so planned that everything one does served the whole of society in a transparent manner, and senseless activities were abandoned, I would be happy to spend two hours a day working as a lift attendant" (Adorno 2011: 22).[38] While the volunteers acknowledge the enormity of the problem they are up against—said one volunteer, "a small community space in Brooklyn is not gonna solve the contradictions of capitalist exploitation"—their labor practices are nevertheless aimed at "changing something real, whatever the scale." The Archive ≠ society or a post-revolutionary utopia. In order to create a space in which the autonomous development of the individual is the condition for the autonomous development of the collective, volunteers understand they will have to clean the toilet.

[38] One imagines Adorno uttering these lines in a conversation with Horkheimer in 1956, safe in the knowledge that no one would ever take him up on it. Indeed, the fully automated elevator had already been precipitated by an elevator operators' strike in New York City in 1945.

Chapter 4

Recycling the Mimetic Archive

First they came for the Muslims and we said not today motherfucker!
—Cardboard sign at Philadelphia International Airport protesting President Trump's Executive Order 13769, "The Muslim Ban," 2017

If they take you in the morning, they will be coming for us that night.
—James Baldwin, letter to Angela Davis, 1970

First they came for the Communists and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist.
—Martin Niemöller, German Lutheran pastor, 1946

Walter Benjamin wrote eloquently about bringing the past into the present through the traces embedded in cultural artifacts, "in thousands of configurations of life, from permanent buildings to fleeting fashions" (Benjamin 1978: 148). Following Freud, Benjamin described how, "corresponding in the collective consciousness to the forms of the new means of production (mechanical reproducibility) … are images in which the new is intermingled with the old." In these images, "the collective seeks both to preserve and transfigure the inchoateness of the social product and the deficiencies of the social system…. These tendencies direct the visual imagination, which has been activated by the new, back to the primeval past" (Ibid). Benjamin believed these resonant images anticipate the future by recalling traces of a mythical pre-capitalist past whose promise has yet to be fulfilled. Their purpose is to index unrealized potential in the hope that their iteration in the present might allow them to come to fruition—"each epoch not only dreams the next, but also, in dreaming, strives toward the moment of waking" (Ibid: 157). Benjamin called these images *wish images*. But he offered no suggestions for how these images might be deciphered, used. Wish images provide no blueprint for

revolution, no model of utopia, only a doorway to the unlived possibilities of the past, through which one leaps into the future.

Every object in IA's collections is a potential wish image for someone. A jabbing provocation or a trivial madeleine. A trigger that solicits a response. A calling forth. The Sankofa printed on the masthead of a 1970s radical feminist newspaper. The ACT UP "SILENCE=DEATH" button. The Indonesian clandestine printing press. The phrase, *Migration is Beautiful*, etched into the rusted metal of a flat-file drawer. These wish images are housed in a physically locatable, partial, and bounded site. At the same time they exist as tangible objects that can be discovered and touched, they are also part of a boundless virtual repository of visual signifiers, discourses, and tropes in our collective cultural imagination—the *mimetic archive* in and through which the resonances and reverberations of prior forms of life can be taken up and reactivated (Mazzarella 2017).

In the previous chapters, I have described reactivation in the experiential context of the Archive, in the resonant encounters that take place between volunteers, visitors, and objects. In this chapter, I consider how reactivating the visual images of left social movement culture—the preeminent method by which the wish images of the past are brought into and kept alive in the present—functions as a form of preservation through use. The Archive's method of preservation through use defines a ritual practice that is central in social movement cultural production: the act of recalling the past through the continual re-use of its imagery.

When new generations of artists, activists and cultural producers recycle an image from the left social movement archive, they adapt the visual tropes of the past to the social conditions and aesthetic sensibilities of the present. This form of preservation through use locates an image, the community or context of struggle it emerged from, and radical politics as a meta-sign, within

a tradition of meaning in use. It invests old forms with new values. It pays tribute to a tradition of visual production by maintaining the ritual. It creates a symbolic-iconic continuity that seeks to counter historical amnesia by connecting contemporary publics with historical structures of feeling and reminding social movement actors that their struggles are rooted in a past that is alive in the present.

But, as we will see, reactivating the mimetic archive of social movement visual culture (preserving through use), while an immensely effervescent ritualistic practice, can also function as a form of naturalization that has consequences for *visual* epistemology. To consider how a reactivated image resonates, and the interpretations, meanings, and knowledge it entails, I want to look at some specific examples. The images I discuss below are produced by and circulate within IA's broader community of friends, colleagues, fellow travelers, collaborators, and supporters, and some of the images are included in the Archive's collections.

The Case of the Social Pyramid

In October 2011, three years after the sub-prime mortgage crisis crashed the global economy, Occupy Wall Street ignited in lower Manhattan and spread rapidly around the US. In Chicago, marchers weaved their way through downtown streets, past the Board of Trade and the Mercantile Exchange, and gathered in front of the new modern wing of the Art Institute. Renzo Piano's elegant glass façade, punctuated by vertical beams that jut skyward, created the effect of a crenulated roofline. From this castle-like perch, guests of a US futures industry trade group meeting sipped cocktails and gazed bemusedly down on the carnivalesque, self-proclaimed 99%. Suddenly, a human pyramid, three levels high, rose from the crowd. The tumblers on the bottom and middle layers were dressed in tank-tops, overalls, and service uniforms. A lone woman

wearing a white evening gown stood on top, her arm raised, fist pumping, a cheerleader for the elite (Figure 16). In response to the crowds' jeers—"Bring down the pyramid!"—the bottom layer began to shudder, the pyramid swayed precariously, and collapsed in spectacular circus-tumbler fashion. The tumblers repeated this "aesthetic revolt" (Zubrzycki 2013), building and collapsing the pyramid several times, to the intensifying thrill of the crowd.

Figure 16. Artist(s) unknown, human pyramid, performance at Occupy Chicago, 2011.
Photo: Susan Zupan. Reproduced with permission.

The image of a vertical structure rising from and then falling level with the crowd powerfully performed the idea of *horizontalism*—the reorganization of social structures for the equitable distribution of wealth and management of power—so central to the Occupy movement.

The hierarchical social stratification of the pyramid, with its simple message—*If those on the bottom remove their support the whole thing comes crashing down*—visually reinforced the Occupy movement's enduring message of the 99% as the agents of change. The same day another human pyramid was being performed at an Occupy rally in Los Angeles (Figure 17). One of the organizers of the LA pyramid told me these performances were not coordinated. The mimetic archive had been reactivated simultaneously at the same time, in the same form, to speak to a shared conjuncture.

Figure 17. Robby Herbst, *New Pyramids for the Capitalist System*, Los Angeles, 2011.
Photo: Robby Herbst. Reproduced with permission.

The image of society as a pyramid is one of the most enduring, ubiquitous—and, I suggest, critically overlooked—visual metaphors for the structural inequality of capitalism. What

makes it a salient object of study is not its pervasiveness—which is hardly surprising given its visual convenience and economy for depicting structural inequality—but that it is such an unusual kind of image: it presents a picture of a totalizing social structure in which every one and every thing is implicated. This way of visualizing the social whole is rare. As a discretely bounded iconic-symbolic image, the pyramid performs a specific kind of epistemic-aesthetic work. What is this work and how is it done? What is at stake for those who visually represent the idea of a capitalist totality? From the standpoint of social movement actors, does the possibility of radical change presuppose "knowing" the "system" in its totality? If so, what role can such a cartoonishly reductive image play in this knowing?

In what follows, I'm interested in thinking through how, unlike other images, the capitalist pyramid presents a problem: the difficulty of representing, in an agitationally successful form, the abstractions through which capitalism comes to do what it does. I argue the capitalist pyramid has a double nature. On the one hand, it renders the idea of a totalizing "system" epistemologically available in a mediasphere devoid of such images. On the other hand, by locating the source of domination in the transhistorical image of a society in which those on top dominate those below, it obscures a form of domination that is specific to capitalist social life. I analyze historical and contemporary pictures of capitalist pyramids to reveal this double nature. These pictures are produced and circulate as posters, banners, signs, and digital media. The primary audience for social movement culture is other social movement actors, but the image-objects they create resonate beyond movement formations into the broader mediasphere.

The Social Pyramid as Image and Imaginary

The image of society as a pyramid has a long history, from ancient Egypt to the Hindu caste system[1] to European feudalism[2] and up to contemporary global capitalism. The social groupings and power relations represented in a particular social pyramid vary based on the specific context, but what remains transhistorical—the same across time, space and culture—is the image of a society that is hierarchically structured according to social roles or divisions of labor, with a powerful few at the top, subordinate roles in between, and the laboring masses at the bottom. While the social pyramid is not an empirical object that can be found among other worldly things, it is "real" to the extent that it both reflects and constitutes an imagined social structure. Unlike Debord's 'society of the spectacle' or Adorno and Horkheimer's 'culture industry,' which represent an "(obscure) totem of an ingroup" for the left (Retort 2005: 10), the pyramid is a ubiquitously popular image-imaginary of capitalist modernity. [note on social theory's unit of analysis as "society" vs the powerful individual] The immediacy with which it communicates hierarchical power relations and structural inequality is well-suited to an age of pervasive media in which images are valued and exchanged according to their performativity and pragmatic efficacy.[3]

[1] An example of a pre-capitalist non-Western pyramid imaginary that does not assume domination is Louis Dumont's study of the Hindu caste system in *Homo Hierarchicus* (1966). Dumont develops a structural-functionalist analysis in which hierarchical Indian caste relations cannot be understood through Western notions of egalitarianism or oppression.

[2] The mythographer Georges Dumézil's trifunctional hypothesis in *Flamen-Brahman* (1929) postulates that prehistoric proto-Indo-European society was based on priest, warrior, and commoner castes that corresponded to the three functions of the sacral, the martial and the economic.

[3] The pyramid derives its pragmatic efficacy from the way it functions as an immediately recognizable and iterable iconic-symbolic sign. As an iconic sign of perceived likeness, it resembles another object, a socially constructed imaginary. As a symbolic sign, a conventional sign dictated by rule, every instantiation of it (poster, performance, utterance) sufficiently resembles every other instantiation, allowing it to become a repeatable and consistently interpretable code. Rounding out the Peircean triad, the pyramid functions as an indexical sign, a sign by cause and effect, because it exists in a relationship of co-membership in a class of objects that are like one another in some respect. These various iterations of the pyramid image (as tokens of a type) circulate in the mediasphere in an indexical relationship of what I call, following Silverstein (2015), *visual* interdiscursivity.

Popular use of the pyramid spikes in times of socioeconomic crisis. In his fireside radio chats during the Great Depression, President Roosevelt (1932) often spoke about "the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid." President Obama (2014) frequently invoked the pyramid to describe persistent economic inequality in the wake of the 2008 recession.[4] Leaders in the Black Lives Matter movement (Garza 2016) have used the pyramid to characterize contemporary white supremacy and the structure of race politics in the US.[5] But the social pyramid is not only mobilized as critique. A school of economic thought called BOP (Bottom of the Pyramid) seeks to develop the entrepreneurial market potential of the three billion people at the "bottom of the pyramid" who live on $2.00 a day.[6] Like Adam Smith's 'invisible hand,' BOP economists naturalize the pyramid as totemic rather than polemic, that is, as a collectively constructed image of society *as it is* and thus *as it should be*—rather than *as it should not be*.

One of the earliest pictures of Western society in pyramidal form[7] is *The Three Estates of the Realm*, a woodcut by the German artist Jacob Meydenbach from 1488 (Figure 18). It depicts a feudal European tripartite social hierarchy that identifies people with specific standings or stations, and Christ as the omniscient overseer. As propaganda produced and circulated by the German Emperor Frederick III, each caste is represented by only two figures to impart a sense of

[4] "Even though our economy has been growing for four years now, even though we've been adding jobs for four years now, what's still true—something that was true before the financial crisis, it's still true today—is that those at the very top of the economic pyramid are doing better than ever, but the average American's wages, salaries, incomes haven't risen in a very long time. A lot of Americans are working harder and harder just to get by—much less get ahead—and that's been true since long before the financial crisis and the Great Recession" (Obama 2014).
[5] "You have the opportunity to a be a part of the engine of this movement because what we know is we are not here to build black supremacy. In other words, we are not here to flip the triangle so that black people are on top and everyone else is on the bottom. Because in fact that is just a replication of the same old thing" (Garza 2016).
[6] For a critical assessment of BOP, see Julia Elyachar's "Next Practices: Knowledge, Infrastructure, and Public Goods at the Bottom of the Pyramid" (*Public Culture* 24:1, 2012, pp. 109-130).
[7] I say "pyramidal form" because if this image had not been created for the purposes of maintaining monarchical/ecclesiastical power, the commoners would be represented in much greater numbers at the bottom, making the image a clearly recognizable pyramid.

balance or harmony in the social whole.[8] Next to representations of the pope, the emperor, and the commoners, the Latin text reads, *Tu supplex ora*; *Tu protege*; *Tuque labora* (You pray; You protect; And you work). These groupings represent the social castes that would become social classes. *The Three Estates* presents a static model of 'hierarchical complementarity' (Taylor, 2004) in which membership in an estate was divinely ordained, and movement between estates was precluded by law.

[8] *The Three Estates of the Realm* was part of a series of forty-five illustrations for *Prognosticatio*, a popular book of prophecies, for those who could read Latin, written by Johannes Lichtenberger, court astrologer to the German Emperor Frederick III. In contrast to the visual symmetry of Meydenbach's 1488 image, the frontispiece for Hobbes's *Leviathan* from 1651 by Abraham Bosse represents the idea of the social contract anamorphically in the figure of the Sovereign King, whose body is both literally and figuratively constituted by hundreds of individual commoners. Of the many images of hierarchical complementarity that were created in the early modern period, the most well-known is probably the frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* from 1651 by Abraham Bosse. The structure juxtaposes various social stations—ecclesiastical authority on the right, secular authority on the left—below the figure of the sovereign king, whose body is figuratively and literally constituted by a mass of individual citizens. The image was a metaphor of the "body politic," illustrating the political basis of Hobbes's social contract theory in which, "A multitude of men, are made one person, when they are by one man, or one person, represented; so that it be done with the consent of every one of that multitude in particular" (*Leviathan*, I.16.13). At the time this image was produced, the powerful forces of modern capitalism that would bring the mercantile era to an end and reconfigure the role of sovereign power and the church's position within social hierarchy were still in their nascency.

Figure 18. Jacob Meydenbach, *Ständeordnung*, 1488. From the book *Prognosticatio* by Johannes Lichtenberger, Heidelberg, Germany, 1492. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Fast forward four centuries. One of the earliest pictures of modern capitalist society as a pyramid, *Pyramide à Renverser* (Pyramid to Topple) (Figure 19), was published in Brussels in 1885. A few decades later, in 1911, the international labor union the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) produced *Pyramid of Capitalist System* (Figure 20). The latter clearly references the former—each has a layer-cake structure with discretely separated groups denoting the monarchy, the church, the military, the bourgeoisie, and the workers—but the differences between the two pyramids are significant. *Pyramide à Renverser* is not titled a "capitalist" pyramid. Although "capitalists" are represented on the second tier, the image, which was originally circulated in the pages of the Belgian Workers' Party newspaper *Le Peuple,*

challenged the political power that rested in the hands of the monarchy, represented on top by a bust of King Leopold II of Belgium, who reigned from 1865 to 1909. In contrast, *Pyramid of Capitalist System* is explicitly titled "capitalist" and a sack of money sits on top. It is placed like a flag or cross on the summit of a mountain, an emblem of the highest social value, something worshipped. Money replaces the sovereign power of a king or the figure of Christ in earlier pyramids.

Figure 19. Artist(s) unknown, *Pyramide à Renverser*, Belgium, 1885. Source: *75 ans de luttes sociales et politiques travers l'affiche (1886-1960/61)*, Robert Flagothier, ed., Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels, 1983. Reproduced with permission.

The most significant difference between the two pyramids is the status of the workers, on whose shoulders the entire structure rests. In *Pyramide à Renverser* the workers—white northern

Europeans—are woefully resigned to their station. There is no sign of dissent. The workers in *Pyramid of Capitalist System*—various ethnic types (Italians, Serbs, Jews) who "became white" during the twentieth century (Brodkin, 1998)—are visibly agitating, waving a red flag, engaged in class struggle. People of color, as we use this term today, are conspicuously absent in both pyramids. There is no indication of slavery's brutal legacy, colonialism, imperialism or other forms of violent racialized oppression and dispossession. Finally, in *Pyramide à Renverser*, there are no women or children, whereas in *Pyramid of Capitalist System*, rather than occupying a place outside social labor, women and children are represented as an integral part of what constitutes society.

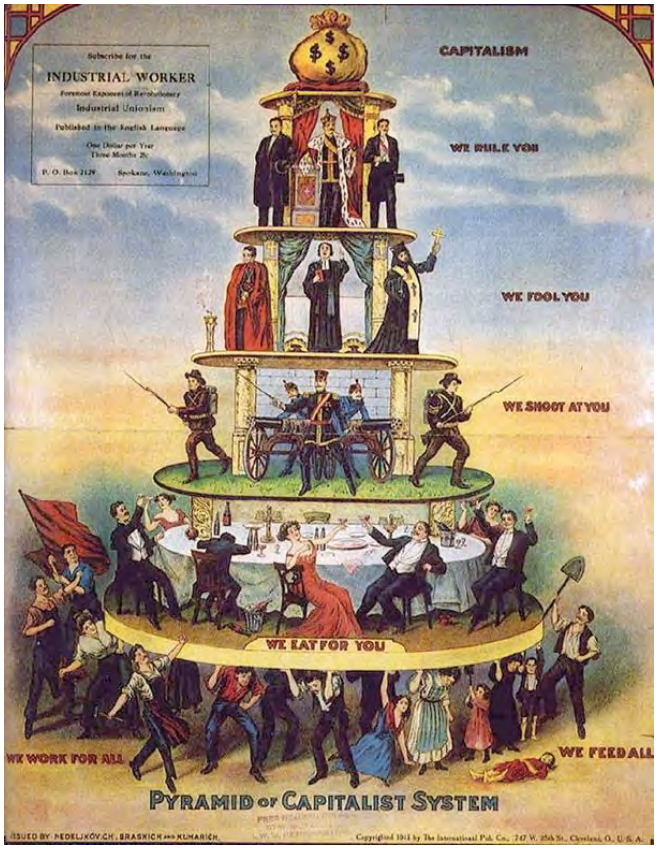

Figure 20. Artist(s) unknown, *Pyramid of Capitalist System*, 1911. Poster produced by Industrial Workers of the World. International Publishing Co., Cleveland, OH. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Viewing the 1488, 1885, and 1911 images side-by-side illustrates how, just as capitalist class relations emerged historically from pre-capitalist social castes, representations of society in pyramidal form, including textual labels to denote each social grouping, emerged from the pre-capitalist era—evidence that the image of society in pyramidal form has served as a structuring analogy that has informed both medieval and modern epistemes. It is significant that I have not found any pyramid images that were produced during the Keynesian/Fordist era in the US (roughly from the 1940s through the 1970s), which is often viewed as a period of more equitable redistribution, marked by a strong welfare system, a progressive tax structure, large and politically powerful labor unions, and jobs that paid wages sufficient to create demand for mass-produced consumer goods.

The Update

In 2011, on the centenary of the 1911 IWW pyramid, the anarchist collective CrimethInc.[9] created *Capitalism is a Pyramid Scheme* (Figure 21), a variation on "the original," that circulates in North American social movement contexts. CrimethInc.'s pyramid was made to serve as a "visual analogue" for their book *Work: Capitalism. Economics. Resistance*. "Together, the book and diagram outline an analysis of capitalism: what it is, how it works, how we might dismantle it" (CrimethInc. 2011: 6). CrimethInc. wanted its pyramid to be "more detailed than the original and updated to account for all the transformations of the past one hundred years" (CrimethInc. 2011: 6). While the 1911 pyramid depicts nineteenth century industrial capitalism, CrimethInc.'s pyramid presents the post-Fordist flexible labor practices of contemporary global

[9] Formed anonymously in the 1990s, CrimethInc. is a decentralized anarchist collective composed of independently acting cells located throughout North America "in pursuit of a freer and more joyous world." Along with opposing capitalism, the members of CrimethInc. advocate the total supersession of gender roles, violent insurrection against the state (several members are wanted by the FBI), and the refusal of work.

capitalism (Harvey 1989).[10] We see a 'post-industrial' division of labor based on information, innovation, finance, and services. With the exception of the automakers, industrial manufacturing labor has been outsourced. People of color are represented on almost all tiers, particularly on the bottom tiers, where we see marginalized low-waged workers, ghettos, and racialized state violence and incarceration. Environmental degradation is thematized, and religion, rather than occupying a powerful position, appears as an appendage outside the social structure. A Las Vegas style dollar sign and stock ticker on top, together with the word 'scheme' in the title, index the speculative gamesmanship of finance or 'casino' capitalism.

[10] As Giovanni Arrighi (1994) shows, when viewed retrospectively, capitalism has varied from the mercantilism of its emergence in seventeenth century Europe to the nineteenth century liberal capitalism of the Gilded Age to the state-managed capitalism of the postwar era to the financialized global capitalism of the present.

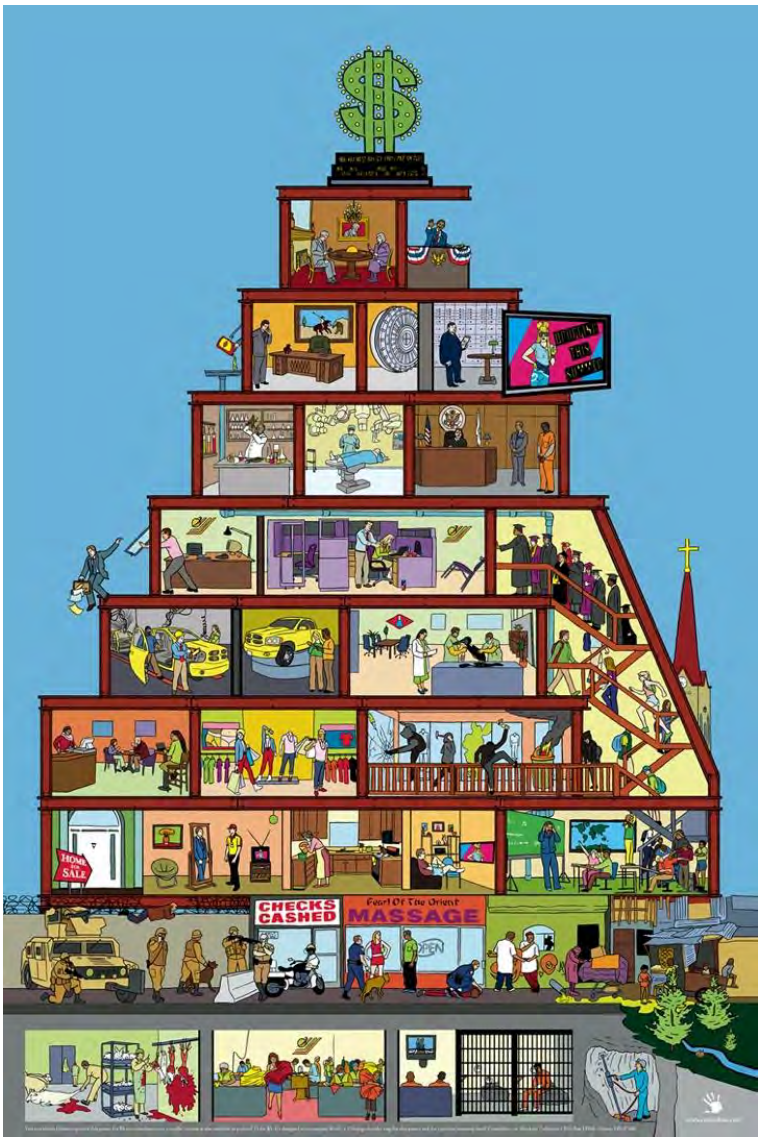

Figure 21. CrimethInc. *Capitalism Is a Pyramid Scheme*, 2011. Illustration by Packard Jennings for *Work: Capitalism. Economics. Resistance*. Reproduced with permission.

But CrimethInc.'s attempt to more accurately represent social reality has its drawbacks, as we see in the following comment: "I appreciate these tributes/continuations of the original but I think there is something missing in the newer versions. The original wasn't as literal—its metaphoric 'crushing' of the workers at the bottom made for a more emotional piece."[11] Viewers

11

http://www.reddit.com/r/IWW/comments/iavfy/the_historic_pyramid_of_the_capitalist_system/?already_submitted=true (accessed July 2021).

feel the weight pressing on those at the bottom of the 1911 IWW pyramid. They identify with their position. While the pyramid mirrors tacit social knowledge and experience through recognition, it seduces, lures and mobilizes through affective identification. The 1911 pyramid's continued popularity—it circulates widely on the internet and is reproduced on posters, calendars, puzzles, coffee mugs, t-shirts, and iPhone covers—clearly has to do with its ability to communicate the ongoing injustice of class relations, the idea that capitalism in the twenty-first century is, as Thomas Piketty (2013) argues, a new Gilded Age. Even as it presents an anachronistic image of capitalism, it powerfully indexes the structural domination of a class-based society *and* its revolutionary remedy: the majority can organize to topple a structure they themselves create and sustain. This is an image in which collective human agency can radically alter the social structure, or in Marxian phraseology, workers can transform from a class-in-itself to a class-for-itself.

In contrast, the people in the 2011 pyramid appear to have little if any awareness of, or communication with, those above or below them. We see signs of resistance in the hooded figures (black bloc anarchists?) trashing retail stores, but there are no signs of class consciousness, intersectional solidarity, or any other type of organized dissent. The image of a class or group of people on the bottom who are aware they hold up those above—an image of collective determination and agency—is gone. The structure does not appear dependent on the actions of those within it. If those on the bottom walked away the pyramid would remain standing. We are presented with an image of society that is deeply stratified and fragmented, and yet, like all the pyramid images, highly integrated as a whole.

Picturing Complex Wholes

The capitalist pyramid presents an image of society as a totalizing structure in which every one and every thing is implicated. This way of visualizing the social whole is rare. There are more prevalent images of social wholes such as earths and globes in the contemporary mediasphere. But whereas images of the earth present totality as the fact of a shared whole, and evoke the question of existence as a *spatial* concern, the pyramid compels a viewer to consider *how* the social whole is shared—the *form* of social organization—and powerfully poses the question of its reorganization as a structure-agency, and hence a historico-political, problem.

It does this by presenting an image that exists somewhere between "art" and "science," between what is popularly imagined as subjective and objective representation. As we saw in the comment above, the pragmatic efficacy of CrimethInc.'s pyramid diminishes the more "literal" it becomes, the more it moves toward science. As it attempts to more realistically represent social totality, it confronts poststructuralist and feminist critiques of totalizing visions as "essentialist" (Gibson-Graham 1996) or dangerous illusions or "god tricks" (Haraway 1988).[12] But rather than mounting these critiques of capitalist totality by denying its validity *tout court*, the attempt by social movement culture producers to know and visually represent a hegemonic or totalizing structure, as neither art nor science, is clearly a productive one—it has epistemic value.[13] Even as

[12] Totalizing discourse is understood as the subsumption of concrete particulars to abstract universals. The taboo on totality, relaxed since the 1980s and 1990s, was encapsulated in François Lyotard's postmodern epithet, an "incredulity towards meta-narratives," which emphasized the underlying contingency and difference inherent in social life, against the Hegelian-Marxist Georg Lukács's apotheosis of totalization as the all-pervasive supremacy of the whole over the parts, which treats the commodity form as an independent causal force that imposes its own pattern or logic on all social practices. For an excellent exegesis of the totalization narrative in relation to the production of images, see William Mazzarella's "Elaborations: The Commodity Image" in *Shoveling Smoke: Advertising and Globalization in Contemporary India*, Duke University Press, 2003.

[13] CrimethInc. account for their situated standpoint thus: "Like every attempt to construct a scale model of the world, this one is bound to be partial in both senses of the word. To present the whole story, it would have to be as vast as history. There's no way to be unbiased, either; our positions and values inevitably influence what we include and what we leave out" (CrimethInc. 2011: 7).

a highly reductive, cartoonish "view from nowhere," the pyramid poses for thought an objective form of interconnected and interdependent global organization that is subjectively experienced as the fragmentation, dislocation and alienation we see in CrimethInc.'s pyramid.

Since the late 1980s, the de facto method for interpreting and visualizing complex wholes in discretely bounded images has been the more scientistic practice of network aesthetics.[14] Among the various theories of networked society, it was Jameson's (1988) call for an "aesthetic of cognitive mapping" that resonated with social movement culture producers because it offered a method of representing theoretical knowledge about how increasingly abstract and networked global structures are linked with concrete practices and social imaginaries that orient everyday experience. Rather than a representation of totality per se, an aesthetic of cognitive mapping would connect the abstractions of capital to the sense-data of everyday perception, and the resulting epistemic shift would reveal and instigate reflection on the social whole, rendering an individual's place in the capitalist world-system intelligible.

By the mid-2000s, Jameson's goal of intelligibility was being eclipsed by network diagrams of overwhelming visual complexity. Paris-based Bureau d'études' *The World Government* from 2004 (Figure 22) is an ambitious attempt to visually "coordinate, accumulate and concentrate the means for defining the norms and determining the development of capitalism" (Bureau d'études 2004).[15] The visual decentering and flattening of power relations

[14] Network aesthetics have been around at least since the Austrian psychosociologist Jacob Levy Moreno used the network paradigm in the 1930s to create 'sociograms,' relational maps to plot the structure of interpersonal relations in group situations. By the 1980s, social network mapping was pervasive in the social, behavioral, and informational sciences (Wasserman and Faust 1994).

[15] Bureau d'études' networked diagrams were graphically influenced by the American neo-conceptual artist Mark Lombardi's intricate "narrative structures" of the 1990s. An early example of network aesthetics that became influential in social movement culture came from the American neo-conceptual artist Mark Lombardi's intricate "narrative structures." Like networked versions of Hans Haacke's 1970s institutional critique, Lombardi's rhizomatic drawings, which mirrored the emerging internet epistemologies, mapped the visual history of the world's shadow banking system and a global web of private intelligence and military firms. Lombardi's diagrams were based on extensive research of public documents he used to trace the alleged secret associations of financiers,

contrasts sharply with the rigid verticality of power relations in the pyramid. Like Foucault's (1978) diffuse image of power in the modern world, there is no command-and-control center, no single agent of history (the working class) that once removed, would precipitate the collapse of the network. If power has no determinate locus, dissenters claimed, it is not clear where one would intervene to effect change.

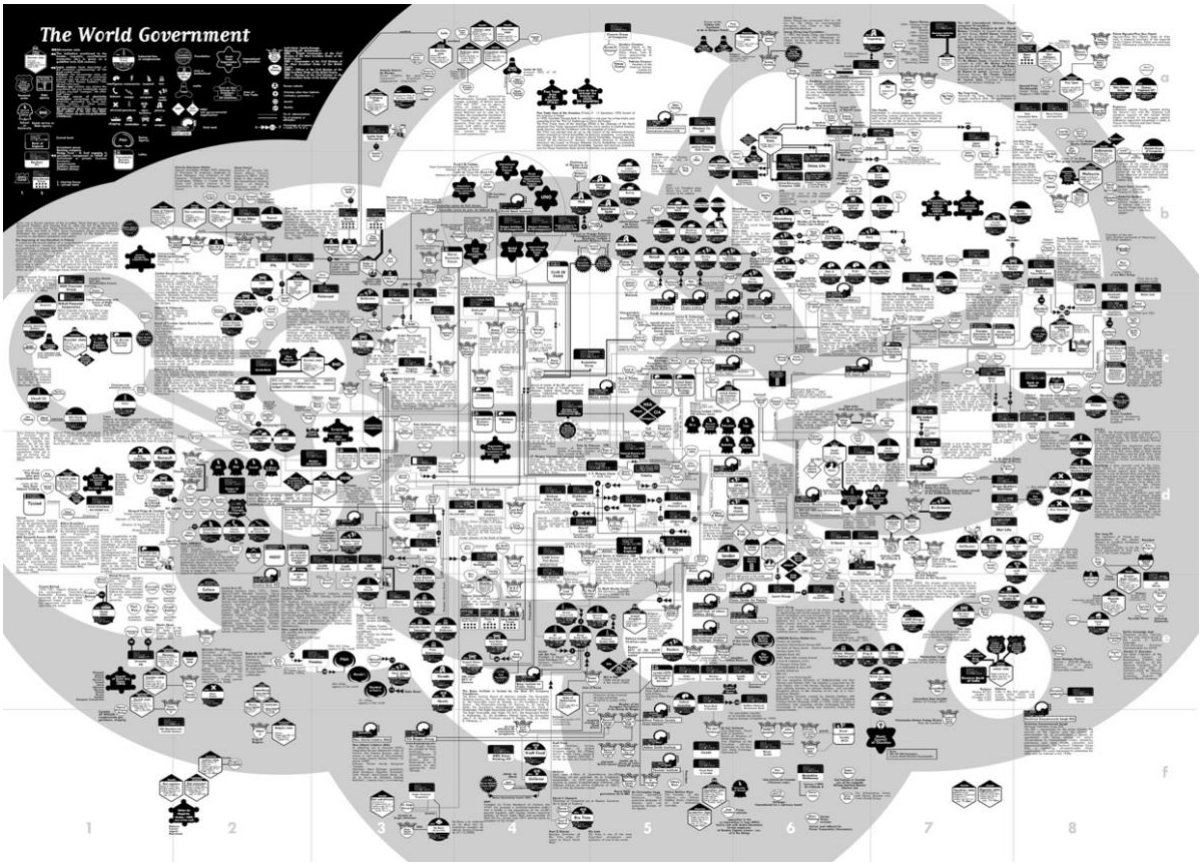

Figure 22. Bureau d'études, *The World Government*, 2004. Reproduced with permission.

In the image of a networked society, complexity itself can appear as the agent of history. This can reinforce the understanding that we live in an impossibly fraught and interdependent

politicians, corporations, and governments. His methods of archival research and investigative journalism prefigured the practices of the militant researchers, counter-cartographers, critical geographers and art activists of the global social justice movements of the 1990s and early 2000s.

social system that cannot be fundamentally undone without precipitating total collapse, echoing the ideological closure of the post-2008 recession mantra, "too big to fail"—which can in turn be interpreted as not only referring to the banking or financial system, or even the economy, but the whole "system," the totality of a capitalist *world*.[16] Rather than instigating reflection on the social whole, as Jameson had hoped, the "subjective shock" (Holmes 2003)[17] caused by network aesthetics could just as easily be experienced as a tyranny of complexity that "disorients under the banner of orientation" (Kurgan 2013: 11). The overwhelming abstraction and complexity of the networked diagram—its "technological sublime"[18] (Levine 2015)—can become a form of symbolic or epistemic violence, reproducing in figurative form the structural violence the diagrams are designed to render intelligible.

What the networked diagram gained in hermeneutic heft—a more "accurate" visual articulation of knowledge about the objective configuration of existing power relations—it lost in pragmatics—the ability to get the blood pumping, to mobilize, to hail its subject. As Durkheim showed long ago, the idea of a thing and the idea of its symbol "is much more complete and more pronounced whenever the symbol is something simple, well defined, and easily imagined" (Durkheim, 1995: 221). The more complex or abstract the image is, the less we are able to locate the source of the feelings, which we can comprehend "only in connection with a concrete object whose reality we feel intensely" (Ibid). In my experience researching cultural production and activism in the US, one is more likely to find images of networked society adorning the walls of

[16] 'Too big to fail' interdiscursively indexes Francis Fukuyama's 'End of History' thesis and Margaret Thatcher's 'TINA,' There Is No Alternative.

[17] This is the term the cultural theorist Brian Holmes uses to characterize how Bureau d'études' maps jolt a viewer into reflection on the social whole. Holmes is following Walter Benjamin's concept of the 'dialectical image,' a self-contained fragment that interrupts fluid capitalist time with the sudden (Surrealist) shock of juxtaposition, creating the necessary distance for critical reflection and allowing for the image to be examined out of context, against the totality.

[18] Kant's notion of the sublime—awe-inspiring natural objects such as vast landscapes or mountain ranges that exceed individual human comprehension—extended to the vastness of big data.

activist spaces or the offices of academics than at public protests. They are mobilized less as cognitive tools in the generation of knowledge and more as signs that index a desire to know and represent the complexity of a power-knowledge nexus.[19]

The images of the US-based Beehive Collective serve as an earthy antidote to the austere and abstract info-aesthetics of Bureau d'études. *The True Cost of Coal* (Figure 23) from 2008, replaces constellations of abstract lines and pictograms with recognizable entities engaged in recognizable activities. But rather than personifying by humanizing the actors in a complex network of relations, this massive Aesopian-like tapestry (the original drawing is twelve feet long) represents humans as anthropomorphized bears, foxes, frogs, turtles, squirrels, insects. This visual de-centering of humans foregrounds identity and the politics of representation. We see a social whole in which non-humans (flora, fauna, soil, air, water), the new subalterns in the age of the Anthropocene, are represented as both portrait and proxy—made visible in picture form and spoken for politically (Spivak 1988).

[19] During my research at IA, I helped facilitate a workshop on network mapping in NYC, "Constellations, Cognitive Maps, and Data Visualization: Mapping the Vocabulary of Struggle," moderated by the social movement scholar and IA collaborator AK Thompson. During the Q&A I asked if anyone in the audience of about sixty artists, activists, and militant researchers ever uses—consults, studies, acquires knowledge from, reproduces the information in—networked diagrams in their everyday practice. No one did.

Figure 23. The Beehive Collective, *The True Cost of Coal*, 2008. Source: The Beehive Collective Anticopyright.

In contrast to the scientistic visualization of information in *The World Government*, knowledge in *The True Cost of Coal* is meant to take the form of subjective experience. The Beehive Collective's tapestries ostensibly circumvent the taboo on totalizing visions by starting out as oral histories recorded from multiple and partial standpoints. They work as "*word-to-image translators* of complex global stories, shared with [them] through conversations with affected communities," that are then turned "into images that are complex enough to honor and represent real life situations" (Beehive Collective 2012). But where *The True Cost of Coal* generates affective identifications by illustrating more recognizable concrete objects, its overwhelming complexity creates the same problems as *The World Government*. Networked images do not lend themselves easily to the iconic-symbolic iterability and circulability of the social pyramid.

Personification

Pictures of social wholes that specify a form of domination are no less rare in publications associated with left social movement culture. To give this point some sociological weight, I want to briefly mention a study I conducted with several other researchers at the Alternative Press Center in Baltimore to document visual representations of "crisis" from 2007 through 2012. After combing through over 6,000 magazines, newspapers, and journals—from high circulation news publications like *The Nation* and *In These Times*, to cultural periodicals like *Adbusters*, to more niche journals like the Marxist *Historical Materialism* and the anarchist *Fifth Estate*—we compiled a database of 750 images.[20]

In the immediate aftermath of the 2008 recession, most of the imagery understandably deals with the effects of the economic collapse through the themes of employment, debt, housing foreclosure, gentrification, dispossession, austerity, state sanctioned violence and ecological catastrophe. The "cause" of these effects can be generalized as unchecked greed, corruption, or some other form of unethical behavior, often represented by the image of an individual Western, white, male CEO, banker, or politician in a business suit. The more allegorical images use the Monopoly man, Uncle Sam, or some other ubiquitously recognizable symbol of avarice and power. The visual images are often used to reinforce textual images, as, for example, the finance as parasite image of Goldman Sachs conjured by the journalist Matt Taibbi: "The world's most powerful investment bank is a great vampire squid wrapped around the face of humanity, relentlessly jamming its blood funnel into anything that smells like money" (Taibbi 2010). On the other end of the figurative spectrum, the most "abstract" images employ graph charts with red arrows that plummet downward, evoking the violence of a crisis in which the quantitative

[20] Crisis Image Archive. http://crisisimagearchives.tumblr.com (accessed July 2021).

financial rewards of the market trump qualitative human needs.

Most revealing was the absence of images thematizing the idea of a totalizing social whole. Of the 750 images we documented, two are 1911 IWW pyramids, and there are no networked diagrams. By far, the most prevalent representations of the social whole are images of globes—frowning, cracking, burning, melting, bandaged, sporting gas masks. These images index the "Blue Marble," the first image of earth taken from outer space in 1967 that opened a new dimension of visual epistemology (Diederichsen and Franke 2013). The image of a delicate orb floating peacefully in the infinite blackness belied the existential threat of nuclear Armageddon playing out on its surface.[21] Today, the image of an unhappy earth is a sign of the potentially irreversible effects of anthropogenic climate change.

In contrast to the "Blue Marble" as a damaged host or an "undifferentiated unity—beyond class, race, gender and antagonism" (Toscano and Kinkle 2015: 6), the image of the social pyramid compels a viewer to consider *how* the social whole is shared, a *form* of organization that structures social life for the vast majority of the earth's inhabitants, which further evokes questions about how this form has been constituted historically.

By calling itself "capitalist," the pyramid raises the question of historical specificity. But the answer to the question it poses—*How to overcome hierarchical social relations that concentrate power and wealth in the hands of a few who dominate the many?*—is transhistorical. The revolution the pyramid suggests is to make what is vertical horizontal. Social domination is represented as certain kinds of people in superordinate positions intentionally dominating other

[21] On seeing the earth from the moon for the first time, Edgar Mitchell, an astronaut in the Apollo 14 program exclaimed, "You develop an instant global consciousness, a people orientation, an intense dissatisfaction with the world, and a compulsion to do something about it. From out there on the moon, international politics look so petty. You want to grab a politician by the scruff of the neck and drag him a quarter of a million miles out and say, 'Look at that, you son of bitch.'"

kinds of people in subordinate positions. The dominators are token images of universally recognizable types. In the 1911 pyramid they are the gluttonous robber barons of the Gilded Age, with frock coats, champagne glasses, and cigars. In CrimethInc.'s 2011 pyramid they are the health-conscious twenty-first century corporate executive we see pouring toxic fluid into a pipe that winds down through the pyramid and empties into a ghetto and a sliver of wilderness at the bottom. We might interpret this action as the result of an individual white male making decisions that put shareholder profits ahead of certain communities and the environment. We might imagine that if individuals like *this* were removed from the picture, a source of domination would go away. These are the kinds of people one imagines when the anarchist labor organizer and folk singer Utah Phillips says, "The earth is not dying, it is being killed, and those who are killing it have names and addresses." The individual, a token of an unethical type—an Exxon Mobil executive, one of the Koch brothers—is domination personified in bad *subjectivity*. Something is wrong with this picture.

Picturing Theory: Representing Domination

CrimethInc. created their pyramid to serve as a "visual analogue" to their book *Work: Capitalism. Economic. Resistance*. Access to the textual (theoretical) analysis that informed the creation of the pyramid allows us to investigate the relationship between the pictorial signifiers and the mental images one conceives when viewing the pyramid. The following passage from a section of *Work* illustrates this relationship:

> Who wields the ultimate power in a capitalist system? Is it heads of state?... Is it the wealthiest ones… How about the Federal Reserve, the bankers, the ones who administer the system?... Or is no one in control? People speak about the economy the way they speak about God or Nature, even though it's comprised of their own activities and the activities of people like them… Capital appears to be autonomous. It flows one way, then another; it concentrates itself in one nation, then disappears capriciously overseas. From an

> economist's perspective, it is the subject of history acting upon us… Capital as we know it is simply a collective hallucination imposed upon the world, a socially produced relationship. What is capital? Broadly put, it is a product of previous labor that can be used to produce wealth… Capitalism is the system in which private ownership of capital determines the social landscape: in a sense it really is capital that calls the shots, ruling through interchangeable human hosts (CrimethInc. 2011: 51-52)

The passage evokes images of capital and capitalist domination that are at odds with what we see in their CrimethInc.'s pyramid. It is difficult to imagine that a viewer would interpret their pyramid as a social structure in which "no one" is in control and the individuals are "interchangeable human hosts," ruled not by those on the upper tiers where "private ownership of capital" is concentrated, but by a "collective hallucination" (a fetish form) and the dollar sign on top might convey the idea that money, not people, "calls the shots." The fact that the pyramid is free-standing could imply that the structure is independent of the practices of those inside. The way capital rules "through interchangeable human hosts," the way its "autonomous" character "flows one way, then another," resembles aspects of Marx's theory of capital as an "independently acting agent" (Marx 1976: 255).[22]

In *Capital*, Marx notoriously shifts the locus of subjectivity from persons to capital. Capital is a *social* process in which subjects become objects and objects become subjects. Individuals are dealt with "only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, the bearers … of particular class relations and interests" (Ibid: 92). Marx uses personification to characterize how capitalist social relations constrain individual agency:

> As the conscious bearer of [the movement of capital], the possessor of money becomes a capitalist … The objective content of the circulation … is his subjective purpose, and it is only insofar as the appropriation of ever more wealth in the abstract is the sole driving force

[22] In one sense, this is a striking analysis for an anarchist organization. Anarchist history is replete with notions of personification as the basis of conspiracy theory—the activities of powerful individuals or cabals can change the course of events. By contrast, social theory generally takes society as a unit of analysis. In structural (e.g., Marx's "dialectic") or post-structural (Foucault's "discourse") theories of social change, history unfolds due to *impersonal* forces (Lagalisse 2019).

> behind his operations that he functions as a capitalist, i.e. as capital personified and endowed with consciousness and a will (Ibid: 254).

Capital acts through the subject by compelling him to make only those decisions that will increase value (and profit). Rather than domination personified in the bad decisions of unethical individuals, the form of domination that emerges in *Capital* is abstract and impersonal,[23] as Marx writes, it "does not depend on the will, either good or bad, of the individual capitalist … Under free competition, the immanent laws of capitalist production confront the individual capitalist as a coercive force external to him" (Ibid: 381). The capitalist must obey the compulsion to increase profits no matter the social effects or cease to be a capitalist.[24] At the core of Marx's analysis of the commodity in *Capital* is the idea that the labor congealed in the things we produce and consume constitutes a form of social mediation in which very different forms of laboring activity are rendered commensurate as labor in the abstract—the average labor time necessary within the prevailing constellation of material conditions and social relations to produce the commodity. A global economy based on abstract labor results in a form of domination that is reconstituted every time someone's labor is sold/purchased (exchanged for a wage), or more commonly, when we consume the goods and services we need each day.

According to Marx's theory, capital subjects *everyone* to an imperative beyond their individual control. In order to survive, the vast majority of people must sell their labor. In order for capitalist enterprises to survive (compete in the marketplace) they must constantly grow (increase their value). In this social relation, no *one* is holding a gun to anyone's head. The figures on the bottom tiers of CrimethInc.'s pyramid, mostly people of color whose labor is

[23] This framing of capital as an abstract and impersonal form of domination is based on a critical re-interpretation of Marx's *Capital* by Moishe Postone (1993).
[24] For ethnographic accounts of how this compulsion operates in the world of finance, see Knorr Cetina and Preda (2005), Mackenzie (2006); in the world of big pharma, see Dumit (2012) and Sunder Rajan (2006).

worth little or nothing certainly experience the effects of this domination (as low wages, unemployment, poverty) far more than the mostly but not all white corporate CEOs above them. Like the Foucauldian image of power in a networked diagram, this form of domination has no single source, it cannot be identified solely with individuals or groups of people such as races, classes or state institutional actors or agencies. However, this abstraction rests on the determinate practices of people doing things to/with other people. It is a temporal form of domination that is experienced through concrete instances. It is precisely because the mediation of abstract labor assumes the form of quotidian and mundane social relations, such as working one's job, buying a coffee, or taking the train, that it can simultaneously appear and disappear from sight—from re-presentation and re-cognition—as a ubiquitous organizing form of social life. I want to suggest that CrimethInc.'s pyramid, and the pyramid form in general, obscures this impersonal form of domination, even as it attempts to represent it.

Emphasizing the abstract and impersonal character of capitalist domination does not preclude the simultaneous existence of concrete and personal forms of domination, such as colonialism, political oppression, state violence, structural racism, etc. Indeed, this is the type of domination that, because it involves more direct social relations, is more immediately representable by mutually intelligible and affectively charged pictorial signifiers, e.g., the police harassing people of color in CrimethInc.'s pyramid. Not thematized in their pyramid are less visible though increasingly prevalent relations of oppression and dispossession that generate economic inequality, such as the creditor-debtor relation, those that involve complex financial instruments such as derivatives and options, or opaque inheritance laws and off-shore tax havens. While these relations are more indirect and impersonal (faceless), to the extent that they do not require the employment of labor, they are not mediated through abstract labor, and thus would

not constitute the form of abstract domination outlined here.[25]

As we see, the abstract nature of CrimethInc.'s text does not readily translate into the pictorial images in their pyramid. Textual theoretical analysis generates multiple, spatially and temporally unfixed mental images that do not coalesce in a discretely bounded image. As an ongoing series of processes, and not merely an aggregate of people and things that exist in some spatial configuration (e.g., a network diagram), Adorno (1963) contended that capitalism can only be represented theoretically; the concepts of theory, which function as shorthand for process, elude concrete representability. Jameson is careful to point out though that just because it is "unrepresentable," one should not conclude that "capitalism is ineffable and a kind of mystery beyond language or thought; but rather that one must redouble one's efforts to express the inexpressible" (Jameson 2011: 7). While recognizing the truism that "realist representation fails to totally capture its object" (Jagoda 2016: 21), the members of CrimethInc. nevertheless acknowledge its necessity. They want to fail better.[26] As practitioners of direct action, they assert that while they would rather do away with most forms of mediation, visual epistemology persists as a strategic terrain of political action. As one member told me: "Visual representation remains a sort of necessary evil. We don't believe it can present the Truth, but we have to use it to intervene in the production of reality all the same." After pouring their time into honing its

[25] These forms of wealth accumulation, which David Harvey (2003) refers to as 'accumulation by dispossession,' generate inequality at a rate that appears to be increasingly independent of the 'productive' economy Marx analyzed. For scholarship that considers the form of social domination in the creditor-debtor relation, see Carson (2017); and on financial derivatives and options, see Meister (2016).

[26] A well-known example of failure comes from the Russian film theorist and director Sergei Eisenstein, who, after writing just twenty pages of notes, abandoned his attempt to make a film version of Marx's *Capital* that would reveal capitalism's inner workings by applying a dialectical materialist method in the film's production. Bertolt Brecht efforts to understand the Chicago Mercantile Exchange for his play Saint Joan of the Stockyards were similarly frustrated. Seeing how the catastrophic reversals of fortune Brecht put many of his characters through on stage—the temporal transition from beggar to miser and back again—could not explain the logic of capital, Brecht had to learn "the secret of this temporality, rather than the psychology of those who are submitted to it" (Jameson 1998: 151-152).

referential clarity, an ambivalence about its epistemic value remained. "The pyramid's an old symbol and it's easy to understand, we just wanted to make a version of it that's less dumb."

Theorists of capitalist totalization are not as equivocal as its picture makers. For Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle, authors of *Cartographies of the Absolute*, a survey of cultural artifacts that visualize social wholes, "[w]hat is at stake is the figurability or representability of our present and its shaping effect on political action" (Toscano and Kinkle 2015: 8). Toscano and Kinkle's analysis is animated by Jameson's aesthetic of cognitive mapping and his political goal of intelligibility through visibility. His call for a method and mode of representation adequate to "late capitalist hyperspace" defined a horizon that theorists of the social whole have looked to ever since.

In a 1995 article, written at the height of a postmodern malaise, Susan Buck-Morss takes Foucault to task for arguing that the modern economy, the engine of global capitalism, is "naturally non-totalizable" (Foucault 1979: 282) and thus "benignly opaque" (Buck-Morss 1995: 450):

> When Foucault praises the invisibility of [Adam] Smith's hand because it does not allow the sovereign sufficient knowledge to control the social field of individual desire, he forgets the other side, that the desiring individuals also lack this knowledge, and that such knowledge is vital for effective political response… [his] affirmation of the incapacity to envision the economy can play into the hands of a reactionary nationalism that thrives precisely on the condition of blindness to the objective determinates of contemporary social life (Ibid: 466).

Like Jameson, Buck-Morss advocates failing better: "The global system will not go away simply because we theorists refuse to speak about it" (Ibid: 466-467). Jameson, Buck-Morss, and Toscano and Kinkle are unambiguous: the link between "sufficient" knowledge and "effective" political action lies in the capacity to (visually) represent knowledge of the social whole. However, in the hot light of positivist hermeneutics these theorists train on their object, the

image is reduced to a vehicle for symbolic communication, a conveyor of meaning. Questions and concerns about the epistemic-aesthetic processes involved in creating the image, and how these processes themselves can be *political* (agentive), tend to wither. An understanding of the image as a mode of action, causation, and transformation—its pragmatics in context, its capacity not only to explain but to incite—is conspicuously absent.

Making Images: Meaning in Use

CrimethInc.'s pyramid, Bureau d'études' diagram, and the Beehive Collective's tapestry are the result of experimental, reflexive, critical knowledge practices that are contained within, and at the same time exceed, the aesthetic object. Each mapping project Bureau d'études undertakes involves years of investigation by an ever-changing group of academics, journalists, artists and activists who work collaboratively across multiple disciplines and regions. The Beehive Collective's geographically dispersed "hives of bees" collaboratively research and produce their images over several years, living and working in the communities they visually represent. While these practices result in images that make *imagining* other social arrangements or institutions possible, the organizational forms and social relations enacted in the creation of the image are meant to *prefigure* in the here and now the values and ideals—antihierarchical, decentralized, egalitarian, communitarian—the participants wish to see in a future society. The means-ends unity of prefigurative politics (Maeckelbergh 2011) challenges positivist conceptions of action as constitutively distinct from thought, knowledge as temporally preceding action, and "effective" action as that which takes place in an already existing field of politics whose constitutive elements are presupposed.

Ethnographic studies of social movement epistemology (Juris and Khasnabish 2013; Casas-Cortés, Osterweil and Powell 2008) reveal a crucial dimension in the politics of prefiguration. These studies frame the relationship between knowledge and action as inherently political because it produces subjectivities that know, think, and do differently. They suggest that the "open-ended epistemology" of social movements, "in which process and resonance are as if not more important than Truth, objectivity, and end-points" (Osterweil, 2013: 600), undermines the theory-practice, academic-activist, real-imaginary dichotomy upon which traditional leftist understandings of politics rely. This approach to epistemology is homologous with Jacques Rancière's (2004) notion that politics is aesthetic in principle because it reconfigures the common field of what is seeable and sayable. In his framework, *the political* lies not in exposing contradictions in hegemonic logics or making what is invisible visible, but in the constant renegotiation of the terms (forms of sense perception) in which what is called "politics" is staged and its subjects are determined. Following Rancière, the aesthetic acts of social movement culture—gathering, studying, analyzing, deconstructing, and visually reconstructing —"as configurations of experience that create new modes of sense perception" (Rancière 2004: 9).

While I am sympathetic to these anthropological and aesthetic theoretical understandings of the political, the specific claim that epistemic-aesthetic acts can create new subjectivities, and hence new forms of agency, is complicated by the *visual* epistemology of the social pyramid. The ritual practice of preservation through use entails the problem of transhistoricity. Within this venerated social movement tradition, the pyramid functions as an immutable form whose contents are updated from time to time, naturalizing the idea that social domination has always and everywhere been the result of a society structured hierarchically in the form of a pyramid. This ideological closure is further sealed by a comment that appears often in public discussions

of old and new pyramids—"Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose" (the more things change, the more they stay the same).[27] This comment suggests that, even when the internal composition of a pyramid changes to reflect social, political, economic and cultural differences, what remains the same is the structural inequality created by a society organized hierarchically. The internal composition changes with the times, but the rigid triangle, with the rich on top and the poor on the bottom, is as enduring as Giza.

Does this conception of the pyramid as an always already given sociopolitical order, reproduced through the ritualized aesthetic practice of preservation through use, foreclose critical reflection on a form of social domination that is specific to capitalist society? If the images of social movement visual culture are constituted by epistemic-aesthetic acts that have the potential to create new modes of sense perception, new ways of knowing, thinking, and doing, can these acts also recreate "old" (transhistorical) modes of sense perception, by reactivating old images? And what effects might this have for the potential of wish images, the possibility of recovering historical agency in the present?

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I have tried to show how visual epistemology has been and remains a crucial terrain of political struggle, and how the creation and resonance of the pyramid image in particular simultaneously opens and closes epistemic possibilities for an anticapitalist praxis in the present. The iconic-symbolism of the pyramid makes it at once a rare and powerful image of totalization *and* one that obscures the nature of totalization. While it evokes questions about *how* capitalist social life is organized and might be reorganized, it forecloses possibilities for critical reflection on a form of *capitalist* social domination. I have suggested that this critical foreclosure is

[27] http://www.democraticunderground.com/discuss/duboard.php?az=view_all&address=389x3548608 (accessed July 2021).

embedded formally in pictorial representability *and* in the ritualized epistemic-aesthetic practice of preservation through use, a significant meaning-making ritual in social movement culture. Like Duchamp's ingenious door from 11 Rue Larrey,[28] preservation through use opens on historical consciousness at the same time it closes on historical specificity. Images of networked society like *The World Government* and *The True Cost of Coal* may overcome some of these problems by offering a more apt method and mode of representing the diffuse nature of capitalist power relations. But their overwhelming complexity limits their pragmatics in context, their capacity to resonate, to animate praxis.

The paradoxical nature of the pyramid is certainly linked to the tautology of its perdurance: it continues to be used because it is so effective and is effective because it is so used. It is one of the foundational "metaphors we live by" (Lakoff and Johnson 2013) and have lived by for a long time. Even as it fails to "express the inexpressible" of capitalist social life, and thus obscures the abstract form of domination I have described, for social movement visual culture producers there is little doubt that it *sufficiently* expresses a desire to overcome the inexpressible in the absence of its "true" expression. As we have seen, the inherent insufficiency of visual representation coexists with the acknowledgement of its necessity in praxis. In the spaces of social movement culture, where knowledge is culled from signs and signs from knowledge, the pyramid is one of those rare signs that highlights the gap between the impossible and the necessary.

[28] https://www.are.na/block/1092343 (accessed July 2021).

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