

Space. Imagination // Rupture: The Cognitive Architecture of Utopian Political Thought in the Global Justice Movement¹

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Abstract: From 1994 to 2004 the global justice movement (GJM) has developed a multitude of forms of organization and practices of social resistance. The various strands of 'the movement of movements' have taken the space of the global sphere not as something to be achieved, but rather as the assumed starting point and terrain of contestation. Unlike older forms of social movement internationalism, the interwoven threads of the GJM do not have a fixed point or center, or location from which they are controlled or decisions imposed. Rather, ideas and practices are created, communicated, and diffused through multiple lateral networks and connections formed and maintained through forums, encuentros, and gatherings around actions that blur and redefine the nature of political involvement. This paper will look at these various spaces, networks, forms of organization, and processes of collective deliberation that have emerged within the GJM against a sociological backdrop framed by the ideas of Karl Mannheim and Max Weber. From this perspective, it will explore the formation of these spaces and the production of utopian thought within them, drawing from this analysis the beginnings of a framework for a dynamic comparison of how such spaces can be understood in relation to each other and the social environments in which they are situated.

Keywords: global justice movement, networks, utopia

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

Over the past ten years, from 1994 to 2004, there has been a veritable explosion in the multitude of forms of social resistance and radical political organizing in many parts of the world. From the Zapatista National Liberation Army of Chiapas to the No Border camps throughout Europe, from the World Social Forum as a gathering of the forces of an emergent international civil society to the glocalised politics of neighborhood assemblies, from the barrios of Argentina to the streets of New York, these years have borne witness to the emergence of a movement of many movements that take the space of the global sphere as an understood starting point of resistance, rather than the something to be achieved. Whether one is considering immigrant and labor organizing in the US, the landless farmers of Brazil, insurrectionary street parties from London to Genoa, or the truly massive outpourings of voices opposing the invasion of Iraq on several days of global action, these practices of social resistance function in a fluid and networked manner that requires a rethinking of concepts of space and utopian politics in relation to how these movements function. It is this relation, one that might be called the cognitive architecture of utopian political thought in the global justice movement (GJM), that this intervention will begin to explore.

This fluidity, or the construction of spaces of rupture through processes of resistance, and the formation of social connections and communities foregrounds the relation between how visions and language that motivate and underlie these diverse forms of social action emerge and are circulated. These spaces could be described as “free spaces” (Couto 1993), “protected spaces” (Tetreault 1993), “safe spaces” (Gamson 1996), “submerged networks” (Melucci 1989) and “laboratories of resistance” (Hardt and Virno 1996).² They form what *DeriveApprodi* has described as the formation of common places, as the “construction of a new sociality . . . [where] multiple threads of communication were being weaved and small practices of survival and resistance could be seen.”³ It is in this sense that I will discuss the GJM as a movement.⁴

As opposed to traditional notions of utopian politics and their spaces (and many forms of social analysis for that matter) constructed upon notions of unchanging, static circumstances unable to recognize or incorporate the unending flows of historical processes into themselves,⁵ utopia is conceptualized in the GJM as dynamic processes of relations that are constantly formed and reformed. In the GJM, the organization of these spaces and networks are constituted in a bottom-up and occasionally chaotic manner. This is counterposed to older models of internationalism such as those practiced by the Communist International (Comintern) of the 1930s, in that there is no central headquarters that coordinates and distributes the ‘correct line’ of resistance;⁶ it is coordinated through a networked process, and the construction of realizable revolutionary actions, forms of utopian politics, and collective social processes. As described by Luca Casarini, spokesperson for the Italian autonomist organization *Disobbedienti*:

*For me the movement of movements are a collective intellectual . . . This movement of movements is part of the communication society, part of the collection, the relation of communication technology. In all parts of world on the 15th of February there is one big demonstration . . . there is a collective intellectual that decides the sentences, the slogan and so on . . . And this idea in the movement of movements makes a collective intellectual—the rule of vanguardism is finished . . . We make a new conscience—we are all intellectual, we are all activists.*⁷

It is perhaps predictable that these changes in protest organizing and social resistance have been met with confusion and derision by those whose social positionality in either analyzing or working within the established matrix of social relations ties them to it, even if it’s the position of the loyal opposition. The responses to various manifestations of the GJM (even from allegedly sympathetic voices) have been much the same: decrying that such are composed of hordes of uninformed trust-fund babies who just want to party and break things, who don’t have a coherent political strategy, et cetera.⁸ However, this is far from the case and overlooks the complexity and subtlety of political strategy and understanding embodied in these movements. The various manifestations of the GJM, loosely and broadly defined, have evolved a complex system of exchanges, forums, and rituals that have come to sustain new forms of political thought, action, and networks of rupture within rhizomatically⁹ lateral networks. Using a perspective gleaned from the ideas of Karl Mannheim and Max Weber, and coming from the vantage point of an organic intellectual¹⁰ connected to the various tendrils of these movements for several years primarily in the New York City area, this intervention will begin to explore the networked forms and structures of producing utopian political thought in the GJM.

Autonomism Grows in the Cracks of a Decaying Rationalized Authority

A great deal of social movement theory and the traditional left have been confounded by organizing within the GJM, frequently complaining about the lack of any plan to seize state power, of a uniting ideological unity, and so forth.¹¹ Depending on one's political vantage point these claims may have varying levels of legitimacy, but they fail to appreciate the various underlying sources. The current state of organized resistance as embodied in the GJM, while perhaps confusing and inefficient on many levels, has in many ways developed as a response to the continuing historical experience and failure of rationalizing authority in revolutionary projects over the 20th century.¹² Most explicitly, these forms developed in response to excesses of rationalizing structures of authority and state structures as means for realizing revolutionary political change that did not end in the form of the Gulag or reformist politics co-opting revolutionary fervor only to be whittled away over time. For instance, when I asked members of unemployed workers unions in Argentina how they had come to the decision to organize in the way they do, trying to establish autonomous organizations outside of political parties, they would usually respond with a laugh and a comment about how their history has shown the every attempt to do otherwise always ended badly.

The autonomous politics and strands of thought running through the various parts of the GJM have grown in the spaces and voids created by the failures and disjunctures within state structures and modes of incorporation. In these spaces, the role of the imagination in creating and sustaining new forms of politics and creating varieties of non-alienated experience, spaces of the sacred in the present world and not in abstraction, of bringing moments of rupture to structures of daily life, becomes the most apparent.¹³ For myself, this has taken many forms, from efforts to build alternative economic practices in the form of a self-managed record label (Ever Reviled Records) to organizing events and gatherings such as the Life After Capitalism conference that occurred in New York City in August 2004. What connects the many diverse projects that I have been involved with is the process of drawing from existing practices found within our lives and histories in order to build new forms of radical political thought and action that are based upon the possibilities of the present rather than the imagined abstraction of what might be "after the revolution." That is not to say to abandon the idea of revolution, but rather to rework it by building forms of political action and constructing social relationships that prefigure a better world in the space of the present.¹⁴

From this perspective, these practices can be seen not as a failure of various movements to develop along an inevitable path leading from streets protest to the storming of the Winter Palace or the Bastille (as if such a moment could even be envisaged in the conditions of an increasingly globalized world—where would the Winter Palace be?), but as a response to the overwhelming evidence of the downsides of totalizing and top-down structures of resistance that have existed throughout the past century. The various branches of the GJM are united not through a grand statement of ideological unity, but through various realms of practice, communication, and forms of cooperation forged through alliances situated in finding a common ground for shared resistance rather than forming the vanguard of the coming and inevitable revolution. They are networks seizing upon the surpluses found in social life, or embodying the incipient forms of a forward-dawning consciousness that the Leeds May Day Group has recently described as "moments of excess."¹⁵

Such is reflected well in Zapatista slogan that it is a movement based upon "one no, many yeses." Many of the current forms of organizing associated with the GJM have

explicitly or implicitly incorporated many of the ideas essential to anarchist and autonomist political thought¹⁶: decentralization, horizontal social relations, direct democracy and consensus decision making, a stress on prefigurative politics and a rejection of the end justifying the means. One could consider this by looking at how the idea was described during the closing statement during the “First International Encuentro for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism” in 1996, a gathering that led to the formation of People’s Global Action, one of the networks which has been most tied in with the workings of the GJM:

[This network will be] an echo of this rebel voice transforming itself and renewing itself in other voices. An echo that turns itself into many voices, into a network that before Power’s deafness opts to speak to itself, knowing itself to be one and many . . . A network of voices that are born reciting, reproducing their resistance in other quiet and solitary voices . . . [as a] multiplication of resistances . . . which the many worlds that the world needs . . . recognizing itself to be plural, inclusive, tolerant of itself. . . consulted are five continents in order to become a network of voices and resistance.¹⁷

These ideas have not been adopted as rote formula or set line, but loosely embodied in various principles and practices such as spokescouncils, consultas, and networks that sustain and recreate these forms of organizing—through the incorporation and stress upon ethical forms of practice in the processes of resistance. It is useful to briefly trace the lineage of these ideas, the networks and paths through history and time that connect previous forms of organized resistance to present forms.

Before doing that it would be useful to begin with some sort of definition of what exactly is being held as utopian in this context. Turning to the work of Karl Mannheim for the purposes here, utopian thought will be held as a state of mind or social condition that finds itself incongruent with the current state of reality, generates and projects wish images of a different conception of the social order, and through aiming to shatter the present condition becomes potentially revolutionary; effective utopias cannot ultimately be individual projections but are closely related to and embedded in a social framework that is integral in turning them from wishes and projections to forms of social action:¹⁸

Only when the utopian conception of the individual seizes upon currents already present in society and gives expression to them, when in this form it flows back into the outlook of the whole group, and translated into action by it, only then can the existing order be challenged.¹⁹

Utopian projections become the most intelligible when situated in the context of their production and distribution. From such a view their social function becomes more readily apparent.

In particular, the kinds of utopian images projected by the GJM are closest in nature to what Mannheim describes as ‘chilianism.’²⁰ For Mannheim, chilianism, as opposed to other forms of utopian projection, is defined by “absolute presentness . . . the present becomes the breach through which what was previously inward bursts out suddenly, takes hold of the outer world and transforms it;²¹” it is the realization of the utopian wish image in a space of rupture, in the frame of the present. Chilianistic thought views revolution as a principle and value in itself, not just as a means to achieve some rationally set end or reorganization of society, but as the creative principle of immediate action, of the realization of longed-for aspirations in a sudden burst of dynamic social and political energy.

One could trace a historical lineage of forms of resistance that operate on processes and ideas similar to or related to this, one which would encompass movements as diverse as the Dadaists, Lettrists, Situationists,²² sections of the black cultural nationalism and feminism in the 1960s and 70s, the Italian currents of operaismo and Autonomia, German autonomous movements in the 1980s.²³ Yves Fremian, drawing all the way back from Greek Cynics and Roman slave uprising started by Spartacus through to the Diggers of the English revolution and the Diggers of San Francisco, refers to these various forms of uprisings, insurrections, and political outbursts as “orgasms of history.”²⁴

Robin Kelley, however, constructs something akin to this perspective to trace the lineage of black radical political thought, as does Howard Zinn to write a US history from below focusing and reinserting the agency of radical and progressive social movements in the flow of time. They both argue that the ideas that drive and motivate social movements are not created by the minds of isolated individuals but emerged through the processes of resistance.

Kelley argues that:

*Visionary dreams of a new society don't come from little think tanks of smart people or out of the atomized individualistic world of consumer capitalism where raging against the status quo is simply the hip thing to do. Revolutionary dreams erupt out of political engagement: collective social movements are incubators of new knowledge.*²⁵

The spaces that these dreams emerge from create a space for political action that is maintained and created by the networked cognitive production occurring within social movements themselves. They are above all, as described by Fournier, movements which are cultivations of possibility that fly in the face of the idea that there is no alternative.²⁶ The GJM, with its seemingly endless series of gatherings, encuentros, consultas, and other forms of process incorporate and make explicit these processes of collective deliberation and thought that create and maintain these spaces.

Of particular importance when considering these spaces is the work of Hakim Bey, whose notion of the temporary autonomous zone (T.A.Z.) has been very important in the networked models found within the GJM. Bey states that the TAZ is:

*like an uprising that does not engage directly with the state, a guerrilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to reform elsewhere/elsewhen, before the state can crush it . . . the map is closed, but the autonomous zone is open. Metaphorically it unfolds within the fractal dimensions invisible to the cartography of control . . . The TAZ is an art of life in continual rising up, wild but gentle—a seducer not a rapist, a smuggler rather than a bloody pirate, a dancer not an eschatologist.*²⁷

The GJM has employed concepts such as this to form temporary zones for political engagement, from actions at world economic summits to squats and community centers, in ways that are fluid, hybrid, and shifting so as to not be totally knowable or controllable by state power. It is these characteristics that have most confused and bewildered those trying to understand its processes as well as perhaps been one of the greatest factors in its success. This is not to say that all the movements and historical currents briefly discussed are in any way encompassed by the idea of someone like Bey, but that there are similar notions within them. But there is a need for more than just asserting that such happened or that these movements and spaces exist, but for finding a comparative method for considering how different movements conceive of themselves, project their goals and values, and the relation between

the project of collective self-making and the formation of new political structures and processes (or transformations of existing ones). It is through networked production of utopian political thought—both through historical time and current conditions that these processes of forming ruptures through radical thought and theory that serve as bases of social action (and are informed by them) become clearest.

Arthur Koestler's description of the intelligentsia provides an interesting perspective from which to consider the networked production of utopian political thought in the GJM. Koestler argues that the intelligentsia is a fairly homogeneous social texture that appears at the fringes of the social fabric, and is formed by a particular social process that drives sections of the population to independent and critical thought about their situation. It is this group that debunks existing structures and hierarchies of value. Through this role the intelligentsia acts as the "self-interpreting, introspective organs of the social body . . . [acting as] the liaison agents between the way we live and the way we *could* live;" it is a "kind of sensitive, porous membrane stretched between media of different properties"²⁸ that stretches not only between heterogeneous social classes and groups, but between the social body as a whole and the surrounding environment²⁹.

The spaces and voids created by lapses in the rationalized structures of authority and domination are thus both spaces that are fertile for the formation of autonomous politics and new forms of the intelligentsia that have been displaced, so to say, by their particular social experiences and positionality. The various networks and forms of collective communication found within the GJM thus can be seen as the functioning of the membrane-like structure that Koestler describes, interpreting the situation and circumstances and acting as a conduit between various levels of social reality that have been at least partially disjointed by the process of rationalizing authority and domination employed by state structures. Rather than taking this process of communication and the transferal of knowledge and political practice as a given or transparent, to look at the forms and methods of transmission between and within different organizations can draw out the particular "social optics"³⁰ of how patterns of perceptions are created and maintained in social movements. These shared cognitive processes are part of bringing together common orientations towards political and social action as well as developing explanations and coping narratives for turning experiences of displacement into bases for action. For the GJM, they are a part of creating what Cameron and Palan have called the "imagined economies of globalization," where it is how the process and idea of globalization are narrated that largely influences how people understand and relate to it as a process they themselves are partially involved in.³¹

But to show that there are lapses or spaces in social structures that enable and facilitate the formation of new political concepts and practices is not enough. What is the process through which the thoughts and practices formed in these kinds of spaces spread themselves? If the shift of focus has gone from forms of struggle that are validated by the inevitable progress of history to the creation of spaces of autonomy existing within the present, what is the process by which this occurs? Or, to be more blunt about it, how is it that spaces of dislocation and disincorporation come to be the basis for a renewed political or social engagement within the world, one that sees the direct seizure of the present in a utopian frame as its goals and reproduces such a mindset through networked social and intellectual production?

Useful points for the consideration of this can be found in the work of Halim Barakat who argues that alienation is a process of encounter between utopia and reality. Because

alienation is a process rather than a distinct set of variants it exists as a mode of experience characterized by the gulf between reality and what is desired. Barakat argues that alienation has three main stages, namely: alienation at the level of social and normative structures; alienation as a mode of experience and property of individual persons; and the behavioral consequences and outcomes of alienation. Moreover, all of these are viewed as circular, interactional and multidirectional.³² Because alienation is not a unidirectional process, “transfer from one stage to another is not automatic. What intervenes between them is a set of perceptions and evaluations on the part of individual persons vis-à-vis their societies and social organizations.”³³ It is the creation of these common perceptions, cognitive frameworks, and patterns of thought within social spaces and shared mental communities that determine whether spaces of alienation and dislocation lead to normlessness, withdrawal, or varying forms of increased social and political engagement. There is no set or inevitable pattern to such, but a fluid process varying across time and space that is dependent on a host of social and situational factors.

Harold Barclay, for instance, notes the fluctuating patterns in the formation of utopian and intentional communities over the past 200 years of US history. He observes a negative correlation between the formation of utopian communities and radically-inclined electoral action and organizing, arguing that as “major portions of populist-radicals in America have become disillusioned with trying to achieve the revolution through the ballot box [they] have tended to revert to the early nineteenth century technique of practical implementation of the revolution.”³⁴ In other words, the spaces of dislocation and disillusionment created by the failure to achieve meaningful change through rationalized state structures can in part be linked to efforts to create practical realizations of revolutionary activity through the creation of free communities that contain an “emphasis upon personal transformation as well as the transformation of the social order” through practical realization of it.³⁵

Imagining Spaces of Resistance and Their Charismatic Appeal

Revolutions thrive on utopian images, and without such images they will fail. Nihilist rebellions may be provoked for the single purpose of deposing existing rulers, but unless there is a kind of ulterior purpose, a positive rather than negative goal, institutions will not have changed and a revolution will not have occurred. Indeed a new set of rascals will have succeeded their predecessors.
 Wilbert E. Moore³⁶

Much of the organizing within the GJM has been motivated by an attempt to overcome the dichotomy between engaged political action and a retreat to utopian politics in manners that form utopian communities and spaces but withdraw from other forms of political engagement. This has been accomplished through the formation of temporary zones of autonomy and freedom within the process of resistance, that although seemingly amorphous and fleeting, have enabled and facilitated the continuation of resistance in manners transcending traditional bounds of political practice. It is these forms of political practice and the circulation of the spaces and struggles created by such that Routledge refers to as the “imagineering of resistance.”

Routledge, describing resistance to the construction of the M77 motorway in Glasgow, Scotland, identifies elements and characteristics that have become integral in the

working of the GJM. The particular example under consideration was the building of an ecological encampment and free space complete with ritualistic and creative destruction and partial burying of burned automobiles both as a symbolic and direct form of resistance to the construction of the motorway. Symbolic in the carcass-like images of the buried cars, direct in their placement precisely where construction was planned to proceed. He defines these practices of imagineering resistance as the postmodern practice of politics that eschews the seizure of state power and is both heavily symbolic and mediated through various communication technologies; it forms “an ‘imagined community’ of resistance [that] exists which engages with alliances and collaborations across divisive boundaries and involves a heterogeneous affinity across gender, generation, class, and ethnicity.”³⁷ These forms of resistance, assemblages of practices and forms drawn from the everyday lives of individuals involved, transcend these boundaries in hybrid and ambiguous manners that can be mediated, transferred, and redeployed through visual, symbolic, and other forms of communication.

This expresses the dual character of these forms of resistance, which can be seen as existing across many of the activities and actions associated with the GJM: both the direct seizure of space and time in a practice of resistance (whether a march, action, squatting a building, creating a community space, and so forth) and the ability of the images and description of these practices to be redeployed and circulated in context going far beyond their origin. It is arguable that the whole GJM began and sustained itself around the images and ideas originating from the Zapatista revolution of 1994, which through various networks and *encuentros* circulated political processes, images, and ideas.³⁸ This dual process of imagineering resistance “implies that both media-tion and the experience of reality as immediate . . . [they are] experiences of resistance that are lived as well as images of resistance that are consumed by the public and, indeed, by activists. Politics is thus both theatre and effect.”³⁹ It is the role of political imagination and utopian politics produced through the collective networking and communicative processes found within the GJM that draws out the nature of how they are reproduced and circulated in a global context, creating structures of rupture across continents and through time.

To clarify and expand upon the idea of imagineered resistance it would be useful to turn to Max Weber’s notion of ‘charisma’ and its routinization for how these processes work. For Weber, charismatic authority and politics (as opposed to bureaucratic, rational, legal, or traditional authority) emerges in response to extraordinary needs, or those which transcend the sphere of everyday economic routines. Charisma is the imbuelement of an individual with divine or supernatural power or gifts expressed through actions and deeds that compel those around him or her (well, mostly him) to action based upon the self-determining nature of the imbued charismatic power. Charismatic power, which exists in an inherently non-regulated manner and unstable form revolutionizes individuals from within; the purer its form the harder to explain the organization of its social manifestations. Charisma for Weber plays an integral role in political change: “it transforms all values and breaks all traditional and rational norms.” Charisma is thus important enough that Weber declares that it “is indeed the specifically creative revolutionary force of history.”⁴⁰

But charisma does not exist solely as the exceptional gift or province of a single individual. There are frequently attempts to harness charismatic power and transfer it into an institutionalized form, even if this does run counter to the nature of charisma itself. Through this process of routinization, forms of charisma that are involved in the rupture and transformation of a given political order come to be routinized and reintegrated from that

which exists by the gift of grace at extraordinary times to a part of everyday life; it is transferred into new forms of tradition or rationalized authority and structures of power. Weber argues, “From a unique gift of grace charisma may be transformed into a quality that is either (a) transferable or (b) personally acquirable or (c) attached to the incumbent of an office or to institutional structure regardless of the persons involved.”⁴¹ One could go as far as to speak of a cycle of charisma in transformation, where charisma shatters and transforms the old order, becomes routinized and integrated into forms of rationalized, legal, and traditional authority, which is then disrupted by newly emerging forms of charismatic power. It is this aspect of charisma, in its specifically creative revolutionary form, that is of interest in looking at the GJM. Arguably, forms of direct democracy and consensus process employed by the GJM resemble in some way modes of power found within the native tribes of South America like the Guarani ; for both “the permanent fragility if a power unceasingly contested impacts its tonality to exercise of office,”⁴² namely connected to the idea of positions of leadership as existing without hierarchal power relations, as resembling more the role of servants and facilitators of process than of leaders.

The various strands of the GJM are filled with examples of attempts to develop spaces, processes, and symbols that are imbued with a charismatic quality. The images and iconography that have become the most resonant communicative forms of the various movements, from the masked face of the Zapatista to the ghostly white figures of the heavily padded Tute Bianche marching through the Italian streets, are those which imbue a specific character of charismatic force not to an individual, but to a specific role and symbolic process that can be enacted by individuals in various situations and circumstances. Whether in the Argentinean tire burning piquetes, the direct actions of masked black blocs from Seattle to Prague, or in the colorfully insurrectionary dancing and feather duster-waving pink blocs, there is a shift in investing a symbolic energy and resonance not in a particular individual, but in the social processes and spaces that are created through acts of resistance. This is sharply opposed to the traditional Weber-ian notion of charisma, where it is attached to a particular individual and then routinized in some form. In contrast, with these manifestations in the GJM, the form and process itself is imbued with a charismatic force, and the routinization occurs as these processes and practices are repeated, reinterpreted, and redeployed on a global context as connected sections of organizers and activists reuse reemploy these forms of resistance.

This perhaps is close to what Debord had in mind when he wrote that:

*The revolutionary project of realizing a classless society, a generated historical life, is the project of a withering away of the social measure of time, to the benefit of a playful mode of irreversible time of individuals and groups, a model which independent federated times are simultaneously present.*⁴³

That is, the project of creating a revolutionary situation is not through the seizure of the mechanisms of power and regulation in the process of implementing and enforcing a new order, but through the generation of mutually federated notions of time, place, and the imagination and creation of community and social life in the present. In short, through the practices of everyday life, of multiple moments and locations of resistance, imbued with a charismatic power mediated between these various practices and locations.

The multitude of forms of social resistance found within the GJM—the street parties, festivals, colorful insurrections, banner hangings, squats, food distributions, and redecorations of public spaces—are not just ends sought for their stated goal or purpose (whose sometimes

lack of clarity itself has fueled the fires of detractors), but part of creating new spaces of sacred time and non-alienated experience that through their coordination and federation on a networked global level constitute the formation of an independent time and culture that is directly opposed to the standardized, rationalized, and imposed order of the state and the market.⁴⁴ Rather than laying down a blueprint of an alternative to the frameworks of power opposed by the GJM, the alternative is slowly spelled out in bits and pieces, in cooperative forms of practice and the building of forms of culture and networks that by their re-enchantment of the world create both a discursive and political space for social and political action that enable and facilitate resistance against these forces. As observed by Amory Starr in her field notes from an action in 2003:

*We also talked a lot about how the group was working and started to recognize that going to these actions is a week of opportunities to be accountable to each other. Increasingly, we're seeing that one of the things that's really radical about these actions is exactly that, figuring out how to be accountable in a whole series of settings.*⁴⁵

The question is then how the spaces and practices formed by the networks of the GJM enable and facilitate action that is ultimately accountable to some broader conception of the social order, and how this relation and interaction plays out.

Stumbling Towards a Framework for Comparative Autonomy

Progress knows nothing of fixity. It cannot be pressed into a definite mold. It cannot bow to the dictum 'I have ruled,' 'I am the regulating finger of god.' Progress is ever renewing, ever becoming, ever changing—never is it within the law.
Emma Goldman⁴⁶

It would be too easy, and not very useful, to leave one's analysis and understanding of the GJM simply at that point. Understanding at least in part the processes of networked production of utopian political thought and how they are utilized to create and deploy structures of rupture is a definite step towards gaining a deeper and more complex understanding of how the GJM operates. However, it also falls very easily and closely into the trap of idealizing this movement of movements. For it is one thing to understand the process through which thoughts and visions are circulated, how their formation creates a space for contestation of social, political, and economic forces of global capital and military structures that might not seem possible otherwise—but it would be unwise to leave it at that. Following William Thomas' dictum one can say that if these and practices are held to be real by social actors involved in the GJM they are real in their consequences *for them*. As for the rest of the world (and particularly those in positions of power and influence whose actions are generally being contested in the first place) who does not hold these definitions, it is a different case.

As argued by David Graeber, "The ultimate freedom is not the freedom to create or accumulate value, but the freedom to decide (collectively or individually) what it is that makes life worth living."⁴⁷ An examination of the collective processes of imagination, the spaces created by such, and how they are used as a basis for social and political action is an

excellent vantage point for analyzing the projection of utopian wish images by social actors within the GJM (and provides a useful models for considering other movements as well), but such still leaves the task of comparing how these collective processes of imagination and social action actually affect (or fail to affect) the changes they desire and work towards. By taking the creation of utopian political thought and its circulation within the GJM seriously, one is able to consider with greater depth and rigor the relation between how visions are dreamt and lives are lived. These processes of reshaping the social imaginary and political relationships are found through out the social fabric; social movements are the most obvious example of social processes going far beyond the realms of what is generally considered as the political sphere. In a period of time where the “war on terror” and permanent global civil war has led many to declare both from outside and within these movements that its time has passed,⁴⁸ an analysis of such diverging realities can only help to more clearly elucidate the political process of utopian projection and action within the world that are embedded within all social systems.

¹ This essay has grown out of many conversations with organizers and activists. Many of the ideas contained within thus are perhaps a result more of these conversations than anything else and should be credited as such. In particular, I would like to thank David Graeber, Yvonne Liu, Kernow Craig, Kat Lo, Sarah Daynes, and Stephen Dunne for the their insightful feedback, comments, and conversations from which this emerged. Extra thanks to Erika Biddle for her greatly appreciated assistance in revising and editing of this essay.

² Couto, R. “Narrative, Free Space, and Political Leadership in Social Movements,” *Journal of Politics* Number 55 (1993): 57-79; Melucci, A.. *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1989); *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*. Hardt, M. and Virno, P. editors (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996)

³ *DeriveApprodi. Common Places: the global movement as space for politicization* (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2003), 22.

⁴ However, this is not to say that the GJM functions as a unified whole or has anything which could be identified as a coherent subject position. Rather, it is through the process of constructing forms of collective identity and frameworks for shared action, forming and reforming relationships through which various movements can act as a concerted multiplicity, that one can understand the GJM as a movement. For a discussion of the historical development of networked forms of organizing see *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* by Michael Hardt and Antonion Negri (New York: Penguin Press, 2004: 79-95). Negri’s biography itself is a good example of the development of philosophy and theory with movements (such as autonomia and operaismo).

⁵ A concise overview of this kind of argument is presented by Ralf Dahrendorf, “Out of Utopia: Towards a Reorientation of Sociological Analysis,” *American Journal of Sociology* Volume 64 Number 2 (September 1958): 115-127. The majority of analyses of utopian thinking are primarily concerned with historical and literary sources, and explicitly or implicitly adopt frameworks of static and projected analysis rather than looking at the process of the creation and imagination itself.

⁶ As described by Eric Hobsbawm, “the state interests of the Soviet Union prevailed over the world revolutionary interests of the Communist International which Stalin reduced to an instrument of Soviet Communist Party, dissolving and reforming its components at will.” *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1997), 71.

⁷ Aronowitz, S., Casarini, L., Gabriel, J., Graeber, D., Hardt, M., Lehman, B. and Shukaitis, S. “Anti-Capitalism and Academics: Organizing In, Around, and Despite the Academy,” *Radical Society* Volume 30 Number 3-4 (April 2004), 89.

⁸ For examples of these kinds of arguments made by sympathetic voices, see Suan George's *Another World is Possible If . . .* (London: Verso Books, 2004), Paul Kingsworth's *One No, Many Yeses* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2004), and David McNally's *Another World is Possible: Globalization and Anti-Capitalism* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Arbeiter Ring, 2002).

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- ⁹ The concept of a rhizome, which is a non-hierarchical and decentered network, is borrowed from the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their book *A Thousand Plateaus*. For more information see: *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 3-25.
- ¹⁰ The notion of organic intellectual used here is roughly along the lines described by Antonio Gramsci, who characterizes the role as 'intellectuals who emerge within and from movements, who work with the concepts and issues faced by organizers, and attempt to bring into existence new forms of knowledge that are of use to those movements.' For more information see Gramsci, A. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971)
- ¹¹ There are, of course, several exceptions to this pattern. In particular see: Katsiaficas, G. *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997); Starr, A. *Naming the Enemy: Anti-corporate movements confront globalization* (London: Zed Books, 2000); and Graeber, D. "The New Anarchists," *New Left Review* 13 (January-February 2002): 61-73.
- ¹² See in particular: James C. Scott's *Seeing Like a State* for the problems of technical knowledge and hierarchical domination found in the history of the Soviet Union, but also more generally within centrally planned state-based political projects. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998)
- ¹³ It is interesting to note, for examples, that in many of the places where autonomous political tendencies develop (Argentina, Mexico, Italy), this occurs when the previous means for incorporating populations into the workings of the state (in terms of corporatist citizenship or mass based unions) are no longer capable of doing so. This is particularly the case when patronage and clientele systems of governance began to become infeasible as the state became stripped back from the 1980s onwards as a result of IMF and otherwise imposed austerity measures and similar plans.
- ¹⁴ For more information about projects that I have been involved in and writing about these, please see my webpage (<http://www.refusingstructures.net>) and the site for the Constituent Imagination Project (<http://www.constituentimagination.net>).
- ¹⁵ This phrase was used at a panel workshop during the 2004 European Social Forum in London. The accompanying pamphlet can also be found at <http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/free/wsf/london2004/moments-of-excess.htm> and the notes from the workshop are available at <http://esf2004.net/en/tiki-index.php?page=LdsNotesCreativeExcesses>.
- ¹⁶ This has mainly occurred through the various networks including People's Global Action (PGA) and the Continental Direct Action Network (CDAN), which have propagated and spread forth these ideas and processes through their application. It is interesting to note that the usage of these practices have become so common among GJM organizers that very often there is no need to refer back to their origin (for instance there are many groups in the US who have been founded upon PGA principles without any explicit reference to where these ideas come from).
- ¹⁷ "Tomorrow Begins Today: Closing Remarks of the 1st International Encuentro for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism," (August 3, 1996) in Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos. *Our Word is Our Weapon: Selected Writings*. Ed. Juana Ponce de León (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001), 107-115.
- ¹⁸ Mannheim, K. *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*. Translated Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1936), 192-193.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 208.
- ²⁰ For illustrative examples of chilianistic thought within the GJM see in particular the Curious George Brigade's *Anarchy in the Age of Dinosaurs* (Mosinee, WI: CrimeThinc Ex-Workers Collective, 2003)(2003); CrimeThinc's *Days of War, Nights of Love: Crimethink for Beginners* (Atlanta, GA: CrimethInc, 2001); and Hakim Bey's *T.A.Z.* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia Press, 2003 [1985]). It is somewhat ironic to use Mannheim's conception of chilianism to describe anarchistic-leaning tendencies within social movements, particularly given Mannheim's (as well as most academics for that matter) generally near hilarious misreading of anarchist political thought.
- ²¹ Mannheim. *Ideology and Utopia*. 215.
- ²² For information of the thought of the Situationists see: Debord, G. *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit, MI: Red & Black, 1983); *The Situationist International Anthology*. Edited/Translated Knabb, K. (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981); and Vaneigem, R. *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (London: Rebel Press, 2003

- [1967]), as well as the Bureau of Public Secrets website: www.bopsecrets.org. For more information about surrealism in the contemporary US, see *Surrealist Subversions: Rants, Writings, and Images by the Surrealist Movement in the United States*. Ed. Ron Sakolsky (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2002).
- ²³Wright, S.. *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London: Pluto Books, 2002); Katsiaficas, G. *The Subversion of Politics*.
- ²⁴Fremian, Y. *Orgasms of History: 3000 Years of Spontaneous Insurrection*. Trans. Paul Sharkley (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2002)
- ²⁵Kelley, R.D.G. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 8.
- ²⁶Fournier, V. "Utopianism and the Cultivation of Possibilities," in *Utopia and Organization*. Ed. Martin Parker (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 189-216.
- ²⁷Bey, H.. *T.A.Z.*, 99/101/132.
- ²⁸Koestler, A.. "The Intelligentsia," *The Yogi and the Commisar* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1946), 65-66.
- ²⁹*Ibid.*, 66/72. This is perhaps comparable to Simmel's theorization of the position of the stranger.
- ³⁰Zerubavel, E.. *Social Mindscapes: An Invitation to Cognitive Sociology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 24.
- ³¹Cameron, A. and Palen, R.. *The Imagined Economies of Globalization* (London: Sage Publications, 2004)
- ³²Barakat, H.. "Alienation: a process of encounter between utopia and reality," *British Journal of Sociology* Volume 20 Number 1 (March 1969), 1-4.
- ³³*Ibid.*, 6.
- ³⁴Barclay, H. "The Renewal of the Quest for Utopia," *Culture and Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 1997), 124.
- ³⁵*Ibid.*, 125. Barclay's use of the opposition of utopian communities and electoral politics is odd, especially considering that he himself is an anarchist. However, voting patterns are most likely used because the information is relatively easy to find. Trying to compare the formation of utopian communities against instances of strikes, marches, pickets, riots, and a whole array of possible forms of political action over a large period of time would be a vast and difficult endeavor.
- ³⁶Moore, W. "The Utility of Utopias," *American Sociological Review* Volume 31 Number 6 (December 1966), 769.
- ³⁷Routledge, P. "The Imagineering of Resistance: Pollok Free State and the Practice of Postmodern Politics," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* Number 22 (1997), 360.
- ³⁸Of particular importance is the Zapatista idea that to express solidarity with their efforts one should not only support them in the traditional sense of solidarity (although that is clearly appreciated), but also by being a Zapatista in one's own community.
- ³⁹*Ibid.*, 371.
- ⁴⁰Weber, M. "Charisma and Its Transformations," *Economy and Society* Volume 2. Ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Trans Ephraim Fischhoff et al. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), 1115/1117.
- ⁴¹*Ibid.*, 1135.
- ⁴²Clastres, P. *Society Against the State: The Leader as Servant and the Humane Uses of Power Among the Indians of the Americas*. Trans. Robert Hurley with Abe Stein (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), 28.
- ⁴³Debord, G. *Society of the Spectacle*, 167.
- ⁴⁴See for a good summary and overview of these practices see *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anti-capitalism*. Ed. Notes from Nowhere (London: Verso Books, 2003); *The Battle of Seattle: The New Challenge to Capitalist Globalization*. Ed. Yuen, E., Katsiaficas, G., and Rose, D.B. (New York: Soft Skulls Press, 2001) and *Globalize Liberation: How to Uproot the System and Build a Better World*. Ed. Solnit, D. (San Francisco, CA: City Light Books, 2004). For the relation of queer liberation organizing to see GJM see *From ACT UP to the WTO: Urban Protest and Community Building in the Era of Globalization*. Ed. Shepard, B. and Hayduk, R. (New York: Verso, 2002). For post 9/11 development in GJM organizing see *Implicating Empire: Globalization & Resistance in the 21st Century*. Ed. Gautney, H. and Aronowitz, S. (New York: Basic Books, 2002).
- ⁴⁵Starr, A. "J23 Sacramento Action Report/Fieldnotes." July 2003. Personal correspondence, 2.
- ⁴⁶Goldman, E. "An Address to the Jury," *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*. Ed. Shulman, A.K. (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1998), 369.

⁴⁷ Graeber, D. *Towards an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams* (New York: Praeger Publishing, 2001), 88.

⁴⁸ For one instance of a movement-based internal debate about this issue see Sitrin, M. and Morse, C. “The Life – or Death – of the Anti-Globalization Movement,” *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory* Volume 8 Number 1 (Spring 2004): 17-19.