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—Marina Sitrin & Dario Azzellini



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**MARINA SITRIN
DARIO AZZELLINI**

MAY DAY

THE SECRET RENDEZVOUS

WITH HISTORY AND THE PRESENT



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BY MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

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Marina Sitrin & Dario Azzellini

May Day

The Secret Rendevous with History and the Present

Dario Azzellini is an activist, writer and film maker. His latest film is *Comuna Under Construction* about local self government in Venezuela, and latest book, together with Immanuel Ness, *Ours to Master and to Own: Workers' Control from the Commune to the Present*. He is a lecturer at the Institute for Sociology at the Johannes Kepler University in Austria. (www.azzellini.net)

Marina Sitrin is a participant in the Occupy movements, the editor of *Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina* and author of the forthcoming, *Everyday Revolutions: Horizontalism and Autonomy in Argentina*. She is a postdoctoral fellow at the CUNY Graduate Center's Committee on Globalization and Social Change. (www.marinaitrin.com)

Produced by Greg Ruggiero

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It was September 19, 2011, a group of twenty participants in Occupy Wall Street were standing in a circle in Liberty Plaza (formerly known as Zuccotti Park, named after John Zuccotti, CEO of the park's owners Brookfield Office Properties, in 2006), discussing what it means to facilitate an assembly, and what the role of facilitators is and can be. At one point it was suggested that, "our role is to help create the most horizontal space possible." In response, a young woman asked, "what does that mean; horizontal?" Another young woman responded, "you know, what they did in Argentina," and then another asked what that was.

Later, in a university setting in New York City, a discussion was taking place with regard to the Occupy movements, then just two months underway, with assemblies organized in more than 1,500 towns, cities and villages in the U.S. alone. A young participant in the Occupy movements spoke of how the assemblies are horizontal, using horizontalism. A well-known academic responded that it was amazing how the creation of horizontalism in Occupy Wall Street had spread so quickly around the world.

Over the days, weeks and months in the plaza, and now throughout the country, so many conversations and relationships being developed were and are reminiscent for us of the past twenty years of autonomous creation within movements in Argentina, Mexico, Bolivia and Venezuela, as well as the U.S./European Global Justice Movement.

In Spain and Greece, where we have recently traveled to meet with people in the movements, we also found that people are both speaking and organizing in ways that are so similar to what we have seen in Latin America, yet it is often without any knowledge or reference to those movements. At one point we began to wonder if there was a way to share some of these experiences and stories from Latin America so as to put them in dialogue with the movements in the US and Europe. And then Dario and Marina met with Greg, and decided to create a book in an attempt to do just that. This pamphlet is an introduction to the book – with a particular focus on May Day.

Happy May Day!



Elizabeth Knafo and MPA, Brooklyn

AN INTRODUCTION AS AN INVITATION TO A GLOBAL CONVERSATION

With our forthcoming book, *Occupying Language*, we hope to help ground what is new and beautiful in our social creation today in relationships and concepts that have been developing and evolving in Latin America over the past 20 years in particular. There are of course many similarities with preceding forms of organization, especially most recently with the globalization movement of the late 90s and early 2000s – however we are choosing to ground the discussion with movements that arose and are comprised of more “regular” people, rather than movements and groups that came about and were made up of more intentional “activists.”

Explored are concepts such as Territory, Assembly, Rupture and Popular Power, and relationships such as Horizontalism, Autogestión (self-administration), and protagonism. These forms of organization and ways of relating are described based on more than two decades of practice and experience in Latin America, from

the spreading of horizontalidad with the popular rebellion in Argentina, to the concept of Territory, grounded in Bolivia and Brazil, or the construction of Popular Power in the Consejo Comunales in Venezuela and the understanding of our many diversities, creating a world in which many worlds fit, of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico.

Now, onto what the new movements are doing and where newness meets history...

THE WALK OF THE NEW

Kefaya! (Enough!) is declared in Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt.

In Syntagma Square in Athens, Greece they hung banners declaring, in Spanish, *Ya Basta!* (Enough!)

Democracia Real Ya! (Real Democracy Now!) is the framing in Spain.

We are the 99% is announced in the United States.



Melanie Cervantes, Oakland

NEW SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND A NEW COMMON LANGUAGE

We are living in a period of uprisings, movements and moments, all against an economic crisis and the politics of representation. *Kefya! Ya Basta!* and *Enough!* are shouted by millions against an untenable situation, and simultaneously they are met with *Democracia Real Ya!* and *We are the 99%*. All of these are powerful affirmations. The use of the exclamation point reflects the passion. It is the shout of anger, the manifestation of collective power and the strength of people's voices in the songs of joy in finding one another.

There have been numerous historical epochs where something massive and "new" sweeps the globe, moments such as the Revolutions and revolts of the mid 1800s, the massive working class struggles of the early 1900s, and the massive political and cultural shifts and anti-colonial struggles of the 1960s, to name only three. We believe we are in another significant historic epoch. This one is marked by an ever increasing global rejection of representative democracy, and simultaneously a massive coming together of people, not previously organized, using directly democratic forms to begin to reinvent ways of being together. These global movements are connected in ways not possible in the past with the use of immediate technology, such as the Internet, twitter and facebook. These new technological forms have helped for something that in Latin America is often referred to as "contagion," a spreading of an idea in a horizontal way, more like a virus than a political program. This should not be confused with a "social network revolution," a description many in the media have used. The communication tools helped, but the essence and the "new" in the movements is the collective construction of new social relationships – creating new territory – and the similarities of this phenomenon globally.

Also new, with the directly democratic forms, are similar global ways of speaking about this new social creation. The word "horizontal," for example, is used in English, Spanish, Arabic and Greek, all as a way of describing aspects of these new relationships. People organize in assemblies, calling them "assemblies" and "gatherings" over terms such as meetings, and use similar forms in these assemblies, as well as all share the experience of doing so in public space, often taking it

over and occupying it, even if for only a period of time. Many of these occupied spaces then organize internal forms of conflict resolution, from the mediation group in Occupy to the “security” teams in Egypt and Greece, and a group with a very similar intention called “Respect” in Spain. To look at the images from Tahrir Square in Cairo, Syntagma Square in Athens, Zuccotti/Liberty Plaza in New York, or Puerta del Sol in Madrid, to name only a few of the thou-



R. Black, Oakland

sands, is to see a very similar occupation, including everything from libraries, child care, health services, food, legal, media and art. The forms of organization and relationships created in the space, all using direct democracy are massive, growing and globally consistent, not the same of course – but so similar as to be a new global phenomenon.

Also similar globally is a reterritorialization of the movements after a few months. Since the intention of the movements is not to only change a plaza or square, but society as a whole, the plaza is more of a starting point, and over time people begin to move more and more into spheres that relate more directly to beginning to retake and control their own lives. Thus, around the world there has been a shift into neighborhoods and workplaces, to focus on local needs, yet at the same time come together to coordinate. As, for example, in Athens, where there are now a few dozen neighborhood assemblies that then come together each Sunday to have an assembly of assemblies to coordinate the resistance and refusal to pay newly imposed taxes. Or the powerful eviction preventions that are coordinated throughout Spain, based in neighborhoods and then networked regionally. In the U.S., there is also an increase in neighborhood based organizing as well as neighborhood and city-wide eviction preventions. People continue to use the plazas and squares as places to gather, have assemblies, and sometimes occupy, but the form of territorial construction is shifting, and again doing so in a way that is globally consistent.

RECUPERATING LANGUAGE AND VOICE

Many words and phrases have come into common global usage through common processes of rejection and creation. While many of the words and phrases that are used in the current global movements are new for movements, or at least in their current usages, they are often, if not always, with a history and context. And in this case, the history of the “new” language also emerged from movements seeking to describe what they were creating and doing in ways not previously used, again, also often drawing on words and phrases with histories, but ones that then, as now, have taken on new meanings based on the new context. The retaking and rediscovering of words and language is a part of the same process of the people finding their own voices with the new usages of direct democracy. As people recuperate their voices, having not had them under representational forms of democracy, they find themselves as well. The movements recognize this new agency and protagonism and name it, as naming things is a powerful process in the retaking of history and life. The claim for voice and language is a claim for real democracy.

RUPTURE

For example, the emergence of the new movements is seen by many as a rupture – a breaking with a past way of doing things, as reflected in the widespread use of versions of *Ya Basta!*, *Kefaya!* And even the language of *ruptura*/rupture itself. We are breaking with past forms of organization and social relationships – and in the break creating new ways of being and organizing. This break creates new landscapes, which includes a shift in power relationships, witnessed in multiple ways, from new ways of seeing and being from within movements and society at large, to different dynamics with regard to institutional power. And this is new. While at the same time, there is a long history in many parts of the world where this same framework was and is used to describe this experience, from the Zapatistas emerging onto the world in 1994 declaring *Ya Basta!* to 500 years of colonialism and domination, to the popular rebellion in Argentina singing on December 19 and 20 of 2001, *Que Se Vayan Todos* (They All Must Go!).

DEMOCRACY AND HORIZONTALISM

One of the most significant things we believe the new movements around the globe have accomplished is making democracy a question. They are simultaneously challenging and refusing the privileging of economic interests over political and social ones. Even challenging the separation of the economic, political and social into different and autonomous spheres. This also implies a challenging of politicians rule over society, and an

assumption that the people can govern themselves. Most of the new movements over the past year are practicing forms of direct democracy, and are doing so in public spaces, from Tahrir Square in Egypt, to the plazas and parks of Spain, Greece, Europe and the United States. Consistent with the similar forms of organization is a similar language to articulate these new forms. What the movements declare is “Democracy First!” This is

not how the political system under which we live functions. Under neoliberal capitalism decisions are made by those with economic power, related to issues of property and the economy, and then political decisions follow to support the economic decisions that have already been made. The Occupy movements turn this on its head and say, No! First is democracy, first people decide, and this is inseparable from economic and social issues. This re-linking of the political, social and economic relationships is at the heart of the Occupy movements. This embracing

of direct and participatory democracy is one of the most visible “new” things in the global movements, but one that is grounded in a long global history, from many of the movements in the 1960s and early 1970s, to the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico, from 1994 to the present; the widespread use of *horizontalidad* in Argentina beginning in 2001, to the rupture created by the popular uprising in Venezuela in 1989, the *Caracazo*, where autonomous popular movements in the 1990s expressed their will in the slogan, “We don’t want to be government, we want to govern.” And going back further to different Councilist movements in the first half of the



Imnop, Brooklyn

twentieth century, from the Council Communists in Europe, the Anarchists and POUM in the Spanish Revolution and the anarcho-syndicalists in Latin America and Europe, the desire and practice was forms of direct and participatory democracy.

RECUPERATION

The new movements do not first look to others, or expect others, to solve their problems, but together are finding ways to take back – recuperate – what they consider to be a right. This is done, for example, in the United States and Spain, through the disruption of foreclosure proceedings and occupying people’s homes so they are not evicted. In Greece they are occupying the cashiers of the hospitals so that people do not have to pay the newly imposed cost of health care. And sometimes the result of this is laws are changed or rules modified, but the point of the movement is to create new ways of relating – not waiting for institutional power to act, but instead creating popular power. Recuperation is a manifestation of this “new” way the movements are looking at power and autonomy, taking back what is ours, and while new now, it is also a form that has been used from the Landless Movement (MST) in Brazil, beginning in the 1980s, taking over land upon which to create new societies, with schools, clinics and the growing of crops, to the workplaces in Argentina, originating as a movement in 2001, recuperando (recuperating) their workplaces, using the slogan of the MST (Occupy, Resist, Produce), and putting their workplaces back to work, with horizontal forms of workers control.

TERRITORIO

The new horizontal social relationships being created are generally taking place in geographic space, from neighborhood assemblies in Greece and Spain meeting on street corners, to the constant attempts of Occupy to gather and take over public spaces, such as parks. While there is a long tradition of gathering and using public spaces in Europe, this does not take away from the idea that the current use of public space as a base for the new political social relationships and construction is relatively “new” in these countries. This experience, however, goes back decades in Latin America, when people who (increasingly) were not based in workplaces organized mass

protests, and often did so by occupying major road arteries. Simultaneously as they occupied and shut something down they opened something else up – organizing horizontal assemblies, and creating prefigurative survival structures, such as food, medicine, child support and trainings. This form of organization took and takes places in regions throughout Ecuador; with the struggles of the Unemployed Workers Movements in Argentina; with the MST in Brazil; and in El Alto Bolivia, among other cities and towns and in small forms in the thousands of indigenous landless settlements, from the Aymara, Quechua, Mapuche, Ayamara, to many other native communities. Often these new spaces of autonomous construction are called *territorios* (territories), speaking to the new landscape that is both physical but also expansive conceptually.

WALKING, WE ASK QUESTIONS

One of the many beautiful things in the new movements is the multiplicity of paths created and desired. There is not one stagnant or pre-stated goal, but instead we are about the process of walking towards our desires, and doing so pre-figuratively, meaning creating the future we desire in day-to-day relationships. This is not to be confused with seeing only the process and momentary social relationships as the goal, not at all, but seeing the fact that as the movement develops, as assemblies take place, people involved in the process change, and as individuals change the group and territories of construction change; the movement changes, then again individuals are changed. This dynamic of change has an effect on the politics and choices that assemblies and movements make. An ultimate goal and strategy are not predefined, but worked toward, consistently, necessarily changing as we move together - walking. Previous movements in Latin America, especially those connected to Liberation Theology, used the framework of “Hace el Camino al Andar” (Make the Road by Walking), and then decades later the Zapatistas speak of this similar process as “caminar preguntando” (walking, we ask questions). Reflecting again our multiple histories that help us create multiple paths.

THE SECRET RENDEZVOUS WITH HISTORY AND THE PRESENT

Walter Benjamin wrote of memory and history as a “secret rendezvous between past genera-

tions and our own” (Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, 1955). The secret is not something that is known and not told, but something a great deal more subtle and ambiguous. When we speak of things being “new” in the movements, it is a reflection of our experiences. And when we write various histories and groundings to these experiences, which we argue are often very similar and sometimes so remarkably so it seems as if one is just taken directly from the other, we are in no way expressing that this takes away from newness, or that the people in the movements don’t know what they are talking about. The opposite really, we are trying to find a place where the new meets the old in a live and useful interactive conversation. We do not challenge newness, but offer places of encuentro, of meeting, of the new social relationships and our many hundreds if not thousands of years of experimenting with the various forms of relating.

We offer this meeting place so as to best learn from one another, and especially so as to learn from our various positive experiences as well as the negative ones. It is not about fearing a repetition of history, since history does not repeat, but so as to see more clearly some of the many places from which the movements come so as to walk along further together, from different parts of the world and our many generations. Caminar preguntando.

We offer only the slightest of glances, and only into the past twenty years of creation and resistance in Latin America. This could be a multi- volume project, especially considering the radical and revolutionary history is not often available to us, and particularly the more autonomous movements and understandings of our collective history.

So let us retake our history and bring it with our present, so as to learn more, and find more places of encuentro and rendezvous that can be less secret.

MAY DAY

Openly Defined: May Day is International Workers’ Day. It is celebrated every year by tens of millions of people in most countries around the world. It originated with the struggle for the eight-hour workday, and in particular with the experience of the police repression against workers in Chicago in 1886. In the 1980s more diverse movements began organizing around May Day,



Pancho Pescador

and since 2001 the concept has shifted to one not only celebrating workers, but also for immigrant rights, social justice and against capitalist globalization and war.

Over one hundred people fit into a room meant for fifty, it is a union hall and we are planning for May Day 2012 in New York. The air is stale, but the energy high. The room is filled with Occupy movement participants, immigrant rights groups and communities, progressive labor organized in unions, and those from labor not representing their unions, or without unions, but identifying as labor, and a few people from neighborhood workers centers and other community based groups. The form of organization the May Day planning has taken is a spokes council. (Inspired by the global justice movement, and rumor is also the Spanish anarchists of the 1930s.) It is a directly democratic form of organization that can be used so that decisions are made, or ideas shared, based on those people

speaking who are already involved in some form of organizing, reflected in things such as working groups, affinity groups or organizations. No more than one person from each group has a formal “voice” though everyone has “ears” and contributes to the idea of what their voice, technically a spoke, says to the group. Often there are constant whispered conversations up and down the line of a spokes to figure out what the “voice” should say, based on what others in the group feel and think. Consensus or agreement is reached in each group before ideas are shared and proposed. It is only early March and the people in the room are confident there will be at least tens of thousands of people on the streets of New York for May Day. And we know from our very composition that it will be organized and unorganized workers, the precarious, immigrants and all sorts of radicals.

This is not a “typical” May Day, or better said, it is not being planned to be typical, but rather is a vision of May Day coming from the new movements, together with the changing concepts of May Day and work that are described below. This is just one of countless examples of a current form of organization and practice that has antecedents, though most of those organizing do not know of the various histories. Below we share a glance at some of it with regard to May Day.

While May Day began as a day of struggle that included the mobilization of all sorts of workers, immigrants, leftists, socialists, communists, anarco-syndicalists and anarchists, since WWII, particularly in Europe and the U.S., it became characterized more by reformist union marches. In 1958 in the U.S., the government even tried to hijack the date designating it as Loyalty Day and attempting to physically obstruct mobilizations. With the decline of the industrial labor force in the later 1970s in the global north, May Day seemed to be increasingly less a point of reference for movements, especially in the global North.

Instead of losing its importance in the past decades however, May Day has begun to be re-signified by the movements and has begun to move again into one of the centers of massive mobilization.

One thread of the re-appropriation of May Day can be found in the “Revolutionary May Day” demonstrations in Germany and parts of (mainly) Northern Europe. They trace back to May First 1987 when police stormed a peaceful street festi-

val organized by revolutionary collectives and neighborhood organizations in the Kreuzberg neighborhood of Berlin, an area characterized by a strong immigrant and leftist population. Radical activists and inhabitants of Kreuzberg started to fight back against police attacks, setting up barricades and burning police cars. It was then that the battle turned into an urban uprising, which eventually forced the police out of the neighborhood for the night. That night the streets in the heart of Kreuzberg were filled with massive street parties, while simultaneously there was looting of shops and grocery stores. The Kreuzberg uprising became a symbol, and ever since “Revolutionary May Day” demonstrations are held in Kreuzberg, often with up to 20,000 participants. The police mobilize for every one, and there is almost always repression and skirmishes. Over the years “Revolutionary May Day” has spread to other cities in Germany and throughout Northern Europe.

Another appropriation of May 1st by the more recent movements is with the EuroMayDay. EuroMayDay began in 2005 in dozens of European cities, including Milan, Naples, Berlin, Hamburg, Paris, Helsinki, Seville-Malaga, Lisbon, Vienna, Maribor, Zurich, Copenhagen, and Liège, and then spread to other cities around the world, such as Tokyo and Toronto, losing its prefix “Euro.” The May Day Parade emerged from the global justice movement in October 2004 during an autonomous event organized parallel to the European Social Forum. The basic idea was to unify the struggles of precarious workers and migrants for social rights and the freedom of movement across borders, as well as to create a trans-European network for mobilizations beyond the, up until then, one day of mobilization focus. The first coordinated EuroMayDay was held in 2005. Its origins go back to 2001 in Milan, Italy, when an alliance of labor activists of precarious workers, Rank-and-File Union Committees (CUB) squatted social centers and migrant organizations unified efforts for a May Day of the “precarious”. The term “precarious” refers to all people living with income and work insecurity, uneven or a total lack of access to social services and/or often being subjected to repressive migration laws. One of the central characteristics of May Day is to understand the diversity of the subjectivities engaged as an enrichment of the struggle – therefore the concept of unity is a different one than in

traditional workers and leftist organizations, where the concept is based more on homogenization. This diversity is often expressed in the form of a parade, drawing upon the tactics of the global justice movement, where joy and celebration were core, as shown with groups such as Reclaim The Streets and The Pink Block, but also simultaneously mixing this joyous celebration with direct actions, such as temporary occupations of institutions, expropriation of food and other goods from chain food stores, and the use of public transport without paying. Some of the May Day networks became places where precarious workers, migrants and other workers, came for support around particular issues, struggles and actions, not related to May First actions. The rubric and actual networks of May Day became central places for organizing around issues such as the struggles and protests of precarious workers, such as those in call centers or short time contract workers in the service industries, as well as struggles against deportation and detention centers, against copyright and for general access to services understood as commons. The different May Days around Europe met regularly for discussion and coordination and made transnational calls for demonstrations. As of 2010 this form of organization began to shift, and while they still exist they have also again begun to change form.

The practices that grew out of May Day spread beyond the mobilizations for May First with, for example, satirical inventions, such as the popular icon of “Saint Precarious” or the “Precarious Superheroes” who would appear in other campaigns and movements. The “Precarious Superheroes” for example stand for the amount of “super hero capability” precarious workers have to have in their jobs and lives. Dressed in colorful fantasy clothing, like traditional super heroes, the “Precarious Superheroes” have been participating in demonstrations and direct actions. For example, in Hamburg, Germany “Precarious Superheroes” expropriated expensive food from a luxury store and distributed it for free to unemployed, homeless and poor workers in the days preceding May Day in 2006.

In 2006 in the U.S. May Day was again placed on the national agenda as day of struggle. Migrant communities and organizations called for a May 1st national boycott and in some places a “Day Without an Immigrant,” with many millions of immigrants and migrants participating across



Nina Montenegro, USA

the United States, from the major cities to small towns. In Los Angeles alone close to one million people were on the streets. Solidarity actions were organized in Mexico as well, with a “Nothing Gringo Boycott,” intending to show the cross border solidarity with migrant communities. Since 2006, every May Day in the U.S. is one where immigrant rights and power are core.

And then in 2008, in the U.S., the West Coast Dock Workers Union (International Longshore and Warehouse Union ILWU) called for a strike on May Day, demanding “an immediate end to the war and occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Middle East.” 30,000 members and tens of thousands of other supporters, shut down the port that day. This resulted in bringing back the

question of class, as a possible militant force, into May Day.

In most of the global south May Day never lost its appeal as a significant day for struggle, both with militant resistance, as well as joyous celebrations. While in the global north it is only in the past decade being increasingly reclaimed, from below, as the day of the struggle for dignity of the oppressed, the silenced and marginalized. May Day is also being recuperated as day of joy, of celebrating together the vast diversity of protagonists and participants, and of the changes to come – it is a moment where one catch a glimpse of tomorrow. What began as a recuperation of May Day’s radical tradition by activists of political groups and precarious workers, has increasingly turned into a broader movement, with May Day as a central symbol.

Now, in 2012, the planning for May Day is a combination of all of the above. There are traditional workers’ unions, especially the more progressive segments, there are immigrant rights organizations and communities, and many working groups from Occupy, such as: Mutual Aid, planning to make a prefigurative day with food, some directly from local farmers and producers, child care, tutoring, medical consultations and direct medical aid; Messaging, making sure our message is the one that gets out, interacting with mainstream media as well as creating our own media; Direct Action, planning to shut down major road arteries, but doing so theatrically and with joy; the Plus Brigades, also planning direct action as clown blocks; Art and Culture, organizing so anyone can create art that day, as well as making the action beautiful.

The conversations about strike, what it means to be a worker, and even the meaning of “stopping business as usual” is a changing one, and one that now encompasses work as precarious, using the language of precarity, including various migration statuses and abilities to risk a work strike. The call for a General Strike takes all of this into consideration and is interpreted as many things, from a labor union shut down to a non consumer day, or one without housework. Already, as we write this in March, coming from Europe and the U.S. we can see the influence of the global south and our own history on our current practices – not linearly perhaps, but nonetheless, there exists many aspects of the past twenty years of a shifting May Day in the New

York and U.S. planned May Day. How did this happen? This is part of our many questions.

ONE STORY/WORD

(excerpted from our forthcoming book, *Occupying Language*)

RUPTURE

Openly Defined: A break, actual or in the imaginary, where previous ways of being, seeing and relating change, in this context, opening the way for more emancipatory and solidarious relationships. Ruptures can range from economic crisis and “natural” disasters, to rebellions and uprisings.

Families sat at home, many before their television sets, in a night that began as so many others, what to watch, what to make for dinner, the regular nightly questions. Then a TV newscaster appeared on every channel and announced that from this moment on all bank accounts were frozen. Silence in the house. The economic crisis was here. People sat in silence, stared at the TV ... they waited, they watched and they waited. And then it was heard, outside one window and then another, outside one balcony and another, neighborhood by neighborhood ... tac!, tac tac!, tac tac tac! ... People went to their windows, went out onto their balconies and saw the sound. The sound was people banging spoons on pans, spatulas on pots, the sound of the cacerolazo. The sound became a wave, and the wave began to flood the streets. We heard it, and then on the television sets accompanying our solitude, we saw it, newscasters dumfounded, captured the first cacerolazos, people in slippers, shorts, robes and tank tops, with children on their shoulders, entire families, out in the streets, tac!, tac tac!, tac tac tac!, hitting their pots and pans. What they were saying was not expressed in words, it was done, bodies spoke, and spoke by the thousands and hundreds of thousands. Tac!, tac tac!, in slippers tac tac!, old people, tac tac!, children, tac tac tac!, the cacerolazo had begun.

The institutions of power did not know what to do, they declared a state of emergency in the morning, falling back on what had always been done. Law and Order. But the people broke with the past, with what had been done, and no longer stayed at home in fear, they came into the streets with even more bodies and sounds. And then the sounds, the tac tac tac! turned into a song. It was

a shout of rejection, and a song of affirmation. Que se vayan todos! (they all must go!) was sung, and sung together with one's neighbor. It was not just a shout against what was, but it was a song sung together, by the thousands and hundreds of thousands. People sang and banged pots, and greeted one another, kissing the cheeks of neighbors, really seeing one another for the first time. It was a rupture with the past. It was a rupture with obedience, and a rupture with not being together, with not knowing one another. It was a rupture that cracked open history, upon which vast new histories were created.

Rupture can come from many places. Sometimes it comes upon us, surprisingly or seemingly surprisingly, as is the case in Argentina or the Caracazo in Venezuela, and sometimes we create the rupture, as with the Zapatistas in Chiapas or the Occupy movements.

Rupture can be a break that occurs because of outside circumstances, those not of our creation, things like earthquakes, floods, fires or economic collapse. These ruptures often inspire thousands, even hundreds of thousands to come together and help one another. When massive collapse happens, often those formal institutions of power also collapse, or go into crisis. People then look to one another, begin to try and find solutions together, and often do so in such ways that are more “effective” and definitely more empowering, “affective,” then had it been done elsewhere or by others.

In the current movements, arising in 2011, Rupture came upon us, seemingly surprisingly, though at the same time, in many places around the world there was some organization in advance, from the New York City General Assembly organizing throughout the summer in response to the *Adbusters* call, or *Democracia Real Ya!* in Spain meeting and gathering others for the first assemblies, before the occupation of Puerta del Sol, though, as with New York, not imagining that there would be a real occupation. Rupture can be when many things break open, our imaginations, societies imagination, the idea of the possible and impossible, and in response this can often shift the public dialogue as to what is possible. Central to the idea of rupture is that our ways of seeing things fundamentally changes, and in response we being to organize and relate with one another differently. To speak with move-

ment participants around the globe now, in 2012, many use the same language to describe what took place with the Plaza and Park occupations, the same word even, translated everywhere as rupture. From *ruptura* in Spanish (literally rupture) to (*Kefaya* — enough!) in Arabic.

Throughout Latin America the language of rupture is used to describe the decisive moments when things break open, freeing new relationships, creating new landscapes, and shifting relationships of power. For Venezuela, the recent rupture that has led to the current process of struggle and creation began on February 27, 1989, with the explosion of El Caracazo. This rebellion was the break, a rupture from an ever increasing crisis of real poverty in people's day to day lives. Inflation had reached 100%, there were shortages and speculation with regard to food and most all basic necessities; poor people were hungry. This was a result of President Carlos Andres Pérez', having implemented a program of austerity and structural adjustment, following International Monetary Fund (IMF) guidelines, leading to such things as changes in labor laws, allowing more leeway in the hiring and firing of workers, the privatization in state owned services and enterprises, such as the telephone company, and then the final detonator was when on the morning of February 27, people went to take the bus in their neighborhoods and found that the prices had doubled overnight. People responded throughout Caracas by breaking bus windows, and then setting them alight along with some of the bus stations. From there, people began to walk down the hills surrounding Caracas, where the poor neighborhoods are, and took from the stores what they needed and wanted; looting. The rebellion spread to all Venezuelan cities, including over a million participants. In response, the government ordered the police and the army to suppress the uprising, which led to many thousand deaths. It is said, even if not officially confirmed, that the government had left the country and came back after the uprising was suppressed. The Caracazo was a rupture in that it made the people suddenly realize their potential power when united — they could even chase out a government. But it also showed that if they where not organized enough, and could not build their own structures of self-administration, old forms of institutional power could again return.

The middle ranks of the army were the ones

chiefly responsible for implementing the massacre. The outcome enforced the conviction among the already secretly organized leftist “Bolivarians” in the armed forces that it was necessary to act quickly to stop the regime. And the experience of having been ordered to shoot their own people convinced thousands of soldiers to join the different secret leftist and revolutionary groups inside the army, especially the group led by Hugo Chávez and other young officers. In February and November of 1992, there were two civil-military uprisings. The militaries coordinated their uprisings with leftist groups and organizations from poor neighborhoods and even some armed revolutionary militias and former guerrilla fighters. The civil-military uprisings failed and hundreds of soldiers were killed by loyal troops, hundreds more were imprisoned. But knowing that at least a part of the army was with the people and ready to risk even their lives on a path with no possibility of turning back, like an armed uprising, gave the people hope and strength. A fundamental change in Venezuela was that revolutionary change seemed no longer out of reach. This meant another important rupture. Together with the Caracazo, the civil-military uprisings were constitutive of the Bolivarian process. In the midst of the crisis of the established powers, popular movements adopted more and more autonomous positions, moving from specific demands around concrete problems to demands for self-determination, self-management, and constituent power.

CAMINAMOS LENTOS PORQUE VAMOS LEJOS

We walk slowly because we have a long way to go.

As we began this short intervention into what we hope is a global conversation with an invitation, we will close similarly. We invite the reader to reflect with us on the how what the movements are creating is new, and yet also see where and how it might be grounded historically. We also invite the reader to think together with us about the role of history and where the importance of newness meets history. Questioning how we can both learn from history, but not prescribe or overdetermine the present based on it. Perhaps imagining the role of past movements and ways of speaking as a sort of encuentro, a coming together, where nothing necessarily has to be decided, but where we listen and engage with one another



and in the process become that much stronger in what we are thinking and creating.

The Zapatistas say *caminar preguntando*, and they also say: *y caminamos lentos porque vamos lejos* (we walk slowly since we are going far). This pamphlet, and our forthcoming book, *Occupying Language*, are meant as only tiny parts of a long, diverse and powerful history of struggle and creation. By no means are we intending to summarize where words and phrases come from, but to open the beginning of a long and wonderful journey of thinking together about the past, present and future.

Con amor y revolución,

Marina & Dario

LINKS AND RESOURCES

On our websites you can find links to articles, films, websites and other resources:

www.azzellini.net and marinasitrin.com

Books and Films on Latin America and the Globalization/Global Justice Movements:

Latin American Movement Reference Books:

Sitrin, Marina, *Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina* (2006) AK Press

<http://www.akpress.org/2006/items/horizontalism>

Marina Sitrin, *Everyday Revolutions: Horizontalism and Autonomy in Argentina* (2012) Zed Press

Immanuel Ness and Dario Azzellini eds.; *Ours to Master and to Own: Workers' Control from the Commune to the Present* (2011) Haymarket Press
<http://www.haymarketbooks.org/pb/Ours-to-Master-and-to-Own>

Immanuel Ness (ed.) and Dario Azzellini (ed. for Latin America, Spanish Caribbean and New Left in Italy) "International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest, 1500 to the Present" (2009) Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell
<http://eu.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-1405184647.html>

An online electronic version is also available in many libraries.

Marina Sitrin & Dario Azzellini, *They Can't Represent US! Real Democracy of the 99%* (Winter 2013) Verso Press

Lavaca, Sin Patron: Stories From Argentina's Worker Run Factories (2007) Haymarket

Geraldine Lievesley and Steve Ludlam, *Reclaiming Latin America: Experiments in Radical Social Democracy* (2009) Zed Press

Gary Prevost, Carlos Oliva Campos, and Harry E. Vanden, *Social Movements and Leftist Governments in Latin America: Confrontation or Cooptation* (2012) Zed Press

Ben Dangl, *The Price of Fire x Bolivia* (2006) AK Press

Oscar Olivera in Collaboration with Tom Lewis,

Cochabamba! Water War in Bolivia (2004) South End Press

Gloria Muñoz Ramírez, *The Fire and the Word: The History of the Zapatista Movement* (2008) City Lights Press

Subcomandante Marcos, *Our Word is Our Weapon: Selected Writing* (2002) Seven Stories Press

C.A.S.A. Collective and Diana Denham, *Teaching Rebellion: Stories from the Grassroots Mobilization in Oaxaca* (2008) AK Press

Raul Zibechi, *Dispersing Power: Social Movements as Anti State Forces* (2010) AK Press

Raul Zibechi, *Territories in Resistance: A Cartography of Latin American Social Movements* (2012) AK Press

JoJo Farrell, Michael Fox and Carlos Martinez eds., *Venezuela Speaks! Voices From The Grassroots* (2010) PM Press

Global Justice Movements Books:

Tom Mertes ed., *Movement of Movements: Is Another World Really Possible?* (2004) Verso Press

David Solnit ed., *Globalize Liberation: How to Uproot the System and Build a Better World* (2003) CityLights Press

Midnight Notes Collective ed., *We are Everywhere: Irresistable Rise of Global Anticapitalism* (2003) Verso Press

Links to books published by a diverse non corporate presses:

http://www.akpress.org/2005/topics/latinamerica?query=&by=release_date&order=descending&search_key=&page=8

Films:

Pino Solanas, 2004, *Social Genocide* (Spanish: Memoria del saqueo), film, 120 min.

Dario Azzellini and Oliver Ressler, 2010, *Comuna*

Under Construction, film, 94 min,
<http://www.azzellini.net/en/films/comuna-under-construction>

Mike Fox and Silvia Leindecker, 2009, *Beyond Elections: Redefining Democracy in the Americas*, 114 min.

Web pages for information on movements in the Americas:

www.Nacla.org
www.upsidedownworld.org
www.workerscontrol.net
www.Venezuelaanalysis.com
<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/benson/zapatistas/index.html>
<http://soaw.org/>

Spanish:

Albatv.org
<http://www.aporrea.org/>
<http://asambleapopulardelospueblosdeoxaca.blogspot.com/>
www.ezln.org.mx
www.Lavaca.org
www.lafogata.org
<http://www.policiacomunitaria.org/>
<http://www.redcolombia.org/>
<http://www.sinaltrainal.org/>
<http://www.somossur.net/>



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Occupying Language

Marina Sitrin & Dario Azzellini

While the global Occupy movement is widely seen as unprecedented, its language and organizing practices are shaped and inspired by diverse historical precedents in the United States and around the world. Sitrin and Azzellini introduce the reader to the theory and practices of the movement and explore linkages and connections toward the dream of a common language of struggle, justice, democracy and liberation.

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