

Writing in a movement: a roundtable on radical publishing and autonomous infrastructures

Anna Feigenbaum and Stephen Shukaitis with Camille Barbagallo, Jaya Klara Brekke, Morgan Buck, Jamie Heckert, Malav Kanuga, Paul Rekret and Joshua Stephens

Introduction (Anna)

In October of 2011 I hosted a roundtable discussion on radical publishing with editors from Pluto, Zed Books and New Left Review. The conversation, featured in Interface 3/2, engaged issues around the labour of radical publishing, raising questions about how we write and research as activist academics. Shortly after the roundtable appeared, I received a Facebook post from Stephen, a friend and colleague, applauding the roundtable but questioning where the autonomous press fit in with this rendering of radical publishing? Nearly a year later this inquiry moved from virtual critique to living room debate. In June 2012 Stephen, Jamie and I organised a follow up roundtable with folks working with Autonomedia, PM Press, AK Press, The Paper, Occupied London and the Institute for Anarchist Studies.

Participants

Jamie – I'm on editorial boards for some movement journals and I'm publishing a book with Minor Compositions at the moment. So I'm kind of a contributor more than a producer in the world of radical publishing.

Malav – I'm based in Brooklyn, NY. I'm Coordinator and Series Editor of a publishing and programming house called Common Notions. We've partnered with PM Press for our first few publications, and also work closely with a number of other left publishers, distributors, and programming efforts such as AK Press, Autonomedia, and artist cooperative Justseeds, as well as Bluestockings Bookstore and 16 Beaver.

Anna – I'm a Lecturer in Media and Politics. As a media producer I've done little bits and pieces, some zines. I research social movement history so I interact a lot with things that are produced autonomously by small presses.

Stephen – I work with Autonomedia. For the past three years I've been editing a book series called Minor Compositions. I also work at the University of Essex.

Camille – I'm Camille, I recently started working for PM Press in London. Before that, I, along with other people in the room, helped start *The Paper*, which was in response to the student uprisings and revolts starting in 2010

Coming out of that experience, we bought a risograph, which is really exciting, so we've now seized the means of printing.

Jaya – I'm part of a collective called *Occupied London*. We started doing some journals back in 2007. We did 4 prints of journals on theory and action, urban theory and action, so a kind of specific focus on the city, from mainly an anarchist perspective. In 2008 our focus kind of shifted and we started a blog instead, and that became the main focus for our project for a few years, and that's probably what we're known for because that was one of the few sources of information of what was going on in Greece available in English. And last year we published a book with AK Press called *Revolt and Crisis in Greece*.

Paul – I'm Paul, I was involved with *The Paper*, besides that I'm also involved in the production of experimental documentaries, and increasingly audio recordings and internet radio.

Morgan – I'm also based in Brooklyn. I've interned with two Left publishers, both in New York. I'm currently a member of Common Notions, as well as Antumbra Design, a design collective which works with a number of publishers and other organizations in New York and across the US.

Joshua – I'm based in New York. I work with the Institute for Anarchist Studies, I've a number of primary roles in that. One is that I've been doing some editorial consulting on our book series with AK Press. I'm currently playing managing editor-slash-whip cracker on an anthology the Israeli group, Anarchists Against the Wall, and I also edited the majority of the Lexicon pamphlet series that we did. In addition to that, I play curator to the workshop or teaching tracks that we do at various conferences, when we're invited, which feels a lot like editing sometimes.

Writing in a Movement

Anna – First we'd like to start by asking you about movements and how you see your projects as being situated in relation to movements – just listening to your introductions, and the overlaps between, it sounds like some projects are sparked by movements, other serve as a documentary or reflective space for movements. What do you think about these relationships?

Camille – I think that the experience that comes out of, like the rupture with the student movement, was around actually a rejection of the idea that all of knowledge production could happen online. When we were on the streets on a fortnightly or monthly basis, and particularly, the police strategy of kettling people, so people being contained for like, 8 to 10 hours, there felt like a crying need for pieces of paper again, because it was really boring being in the kettle. Movement analysis was happening in quite a snippy, bitchy, online bloggy culture where there was an anonymity, you didn't have to take responsibility, you didn't have to stand in front of someone and say, "This is what I actually think, and this is what I think we should be doing." *The Paper* came out of the

desire to have a material object. It only really made sense if there was somewhere to hand it out – it wasn't something that we wanted to have in bookstores or newsagents, we wanted to hand it out at demos or at rallies or in occupations. At the time we were able to print 3,000, and we were able to literally just rock up to a demo, distribute 1500, and then go around to the 6 occupations that were happening around London, and then an edition would just disappear really quickly. For a while we were producing them on a monthly basis. We had a collective of 10-20 people producing it. That collective changed over six months while it was being produced. We got into a bit of trouble, really quickly, which was good for a printing project, nearly got charges brought against us for the first edition. Which we didn't really think was possible, stupidly.

Anna – For what?

Camille – We reprinted an article from the student movement in Australia, which had been banned in the mid 1990's, called the 'Art of Shoplifting', which explains (in a political way) how and why to shoplift. We had erroneously thought that it had been through the courts in Australia, and the student editors has eventually gotten off, so obviously the cops here wouldn't be interested in getting into that sort of thing. It did end up in the High Court in Australia so it probably should have given us some kind of indication that people took it seriously. So they did that – they took it seriously.

Paul – So *The Paper* was a kind of boom and bust thing in the sense that there was a medium and there was an audience, and there was a willingness to produce this thing, and as the student movement was basically incarcerated, was the victim of oppressive apparatus, the medium disappeared, we found ourselves lost with who our medium was. In a sense, we tried, for that medium to be the Occupy movement, with little success. And we tried in various ways to engage that movement, and we can discuss the failures there. But also, in some sense the levels of engagement with people, because we didn't have a clear sense of responsibilities, it changed issue to issue, people's commitment changed issue to issue, relatively successful in some sense, but it seemed that when that movement started to deteriorate, levels of commitment changed, where people's commitment changed. In a sense we were quite tied to a particular movement, and as we tried to transcend that ... it paled out a bit.

Camille – And big arguments happened around editorial content, like proper big... which was good. It was a really rare opportunity of collective writing, like 5 or 6 people writing a text together, which a lot of us talk about doing and then I don't actually see that happening a lot of the time.

Paul – It was a life changing process for me, the first time I did it. I think I did 2-3 editorials, 6 issues. We would have a meeting which would be a planning meeting over the big issues, we would discuss what was going on at the time, really just open ended discussions without any real agenda, and on the back of that we would decide issue themes. And then on the back of that, we would discuss what was going in, we'd discuss pitches people had made, and on the

back of those meetings, 2-3 people would be tasked with writing the editorial, which would reflect not the opinions of those people, but the discussions that happened in those meetings. There wasn't always a consensus, in fact, rarely was there a consensus. One consensus was anti-capitalist, revolutionary support for the student movement, broadly as you can conceive of having it, and then on the back of that, it would be generally one person writing an editorial, and then handing it to 2 or 3 people who would then massively do hatchet jobs, and debates and discussions between those people, and then editorial would be presented to those people to do more hatchet jobs. The great kind of transformative thing for me was trying not to think of one's own position, but a relatively broad position on the left, on these things you'd been discussing, then justly representing those positions in 300, 400, 500 words.

Camille – We were attempting to make the mechanisms of production of the paper visible, so we would make the arguments we had in the collective visible in the editorial. For example, one was during the Wisconsin struggle, there was a banner that said 'screw us and we multiply', and we decided to use a really pixelated image of the town hall and the banner, and we put it in hot pink, 'screw us and we multiply', and we were handing that out at the major trade union demo that happened. And then there was a debate about what relation that had to radical feminism, and about rape, and so in the end, we wrote about that debate in the editorial. It wasn't about making those things disappear or have a collective front. It was about "we're trying to have a collective newspaper, we're not a party, and we don't have a line." But not in a self-obsessed kind of way, people are not interested in that.

Anna – Jaya, your project also uses a collective writing process, do you want to talk us through it?

Jaya – I was actually wanting to talk more about the relation with the movement, what we think we experience with the blog that we're running. It's this interesting situation that the fact that we're in London, made it much easier to have in depth reporting on what was going on in Greece, simply because we were outside the different factions.

Stevphen – What about the Institute for Anarchist Studies? It seems to me IAS is not connected to one particular movement, but bridges many of them. Would that be a fair impression?

Joshua – I think the function of the IAS has shifted in recent years, particularly as before the book series emerged, its role in knowledge production in anarchist circles was a bit more obscure, I think. There was a constellation of people who either came to the conference or came to things in New York, but the book series really kind of, really exploded the boundaries, particularly as the first book was a Cindy Milstein book which in my opinion is the best introduction to the anarchist tradition written in probably a century, and there hasn't been anything like that and a lot of people took that up. And the subsequent books that we've done, did the same thing in a really accessible way for a young audience, but also took up themes that weren't really being addressed and that

there was an appetite for. So now there really is a relationship with a movement, and the Lexicon series was a response to the Occupy movement. We were literally sitting around in a meeting as tweets went live that people were being tear-gassed in Union Square, and pepper sprayed. And we thought, “there’s a lot of confusion, there’s some really weird placards down in Zuccotti, there’s some stuff about JFK conspiracies even. It seems like these kids are righteously angry and frustrated, but have very little in the way of political or historical reference, so what could we do to try and contribute something there?” Some of us had already been down there a good deal and we heard kids throwing around terms, in a way that was really elastic and amorphous, and we saw that all the time, potentially creating a lot of confusion for process. So Josh McPhee came up with the idea of creating these sort of encyclopaedia entries for young people, or less politically mature people who were new to the movement; terms that it would be useful for them to have a sort of clear and consistent command of. And that’s exploded. That’s been huge.

Anna – And is the book series free?

Joshua – No the book series is not free. The book series is done through AK Press. It’s a small book series so it’s not as expensive as a regular book. The Lexicon series is free, we ran a Kickstarter in advance to finance that. People were really enthusiastic, and when we printed them, it was like, anytime we took them to an occupation, or to a protest, they were gone in minutes.

Morgan – They’re like little books, and they’ve got really cute covers...

Jaya – so there’s one little booklet for each word?

Joshua – We took five terms: power, anarchism, gender, white supremacy and colonialism. We tapped people to write them who we felt had some degree of expertise in each particular area of discourse. And I think, with regards to anarchism, power and gender, we felt those were terms that we’re already using a lot and sometimes misusing, so we wanted to create some clarification. And I think with regards to white supremacy and colonialism, those were terms we wanted people to have an awareness and a command of. We wanted to put them out there, and kind of contrive a momentum or lend them weight that would get young people interested and talking about them. Now, we’re talking about what the next five will be. Josh MacPhee was brilliant about coming up with it; like, it will be visually brilliant, it will be colourful, like cluster bombs. And this will be for younger people, and people who are new to movement, and this has been extraordinary.

Authorship and movements

Stevphen – So we've heard a lot about people from the periodical and the book end of things in relation to movements. Is this also relevant in terms of relationships with authors and how writing comes together, projects?

Jaya – That's a really good starting point to talk about the Occupy movement. At least 4-5 books have been printed specifically about Occupy from various publishers.

Joshua – Which I think raises the point about different temporality and writing composition with regard to this type of writing, and also a sense of relationship to the movement. **Are you writing from within the movement, or from without so you can intervene? Are you writing collectively? Are you writing anonymously? Are you writing for fame, and fortune and glory?** And there's been a whole mixture. In New York City there was a whole incubator for this sort of thing through Occupy. There's been the Lexicon series. There have been many others that were not necessarily geared towards propaganda, just really reflecting or steering. There are a lot of untamed elements when you go down to Zuccotti Park and see the sort of visual landscape, and the politics and aesthetics of it aren't always easy to digest.

Anna – I feel like, a couple of different types of books were happening. One was the *n+1* collection of pieces called Occupy! Some of them had already been published, some that had been written specifically, some that had been co-authored, pieces in first person from diaries, logs of text messages sent about the Brooklyn Bridge, and this was my experience about this.

Malav – Anna, yes, I thought it was cool for what it was, and sort of timely, with chronological narration. So what the book was trying to do was not all necessarily analytical. Because how do we produce a book length analysis about a movement that is only several months old? That is the kind of thing you do in a blog or an article. Books are meant to be produced in hindsight, after the fact, looking back. And actually the books that came out of the Occupy movement quickly really challenged that idea. What the *n+1* book was trying to do was not necessary meant to be analytical, the intention behind it was to speak to people that weren't necessarily a part of Occupy but that were sympathetic or were interested, or were from different cities, or weren't really at Zuccotti but would like to have known more about the day to day experience.

Joshua – One of the key things for me when I started to see the books coming up was that I felt like a lot of the books that were coming out of the Occupy movement were often targeting people outside the movement as a sort of explanatory mechanism. I actually think that was appropriate. For instance, my mom is a retired DOD employee who lives overseas and is still largely connected to people in the US military abroad, many of whom are deeply indebted and disgruntled, and all of a sudden, they're incredibly curious about this movement. When I was at my mom's in Spain two months ago, she had a brunch for people to basically ask me about the movement, and I think that

these mechanisms are quite a bit more necessary now than they were two years ago. We need to have these tools to communicate with people who aren't there, but not just activists who aren't there, also people with really disparate sorts of positions, who are either sympathetic, or curious. Because I think there is a curiosity, a more widespread curiosity. People like my mom, who didn't give a fuck about what we were doing two years ago, now they're incredibly curious. I think that is really profound. That orientation of those books, being explanatory and ethnographic, that sort of thing was actually... it was correct.

Paul – Is what we're talking about inherent tensions and contradictions of a kind of pedantic, vanguardism, and at the opposite end of the spectrum, a pure transparency of the movement, or are we rather talking about tactics, revolutionary tactics, in terms of what the purpose of these texts are? I bring it up because this was a constant tension in *The Paper*, who are we writing for, what's the purpose.

Malav – Like OR books, they're not movement publishers, they don't operate in the same way, there aren't the same things at stake for them. Same as a couple of other publishers. The Verso book sold tens of thousands of copies and managed to come out on the 3-month anniversary, the occupation had already ended, and they sold within a week or something. It was insane. I think there's something about that too.

Morgan – The actual movement publishers, they haven't intervened, and that's been a conscious thing because they're not necessarily embedded in the movement.

Jamie – Like the movement publishers still have the shutters open, as it were?

Joshua – That could be it, or like, the stakes are different.

Morgan – Yes, I think that's it.

Camille – Yes, you don't want to put out a shit Occupy book!

Morgan – Exactly, I only know the more motivational back-story to OR, it's like “we have our existing audience who isn't necessarily in the movement, and we're going to be the translator of this movement to the outside audience.” Whereas PM or AK are embedded in the movement and their readers actually are the movement, so they have a much different stake.

Joshua – So AK, they're actually organising in groups, doing talks, workshops, writing short pieces, getting pamphlets, doing all the organising work. That's important everyday work. And it's important that these are collected, edited collections as opposed to a single author saying, “I'm going to tell you how I invented the term 99%, and so on.”

Camille – I think what's interesting for me is that we had four books come out about the student movement in the UK. Occupy didn't really work here, it occurred but didn't actually generate the same energy as the US, it was not a movement in the same sense. I think it was a spectacle in every sense of the word. And the student movement, we similarly had an explosion, short and

sharp. **Before the paint was even dry on the graffiti, someone had brought out an edited collection on the student movement.**

Anna – Again, that question of temporality, what happens when you do something really, really quickly?

Camille - No, actually I think it's about opportunism. For sure I think things can be brought out really quickly. I think you produce a different work when you're producing it fast and rough; when you're producing texts with ideas that you think should be circulating because you're intervening into certain debates, I think that can be an article or an essay or a book, like, people can move mountains – you can copy edit shit in an incredibly short period of time.

Morgan – I think it's really interesting, having this conversation circling back on the question: **What is the role of book publishing at this moment, and why is it that most of the books that have been published have been for an external audience?** Is it because there is no way for traditional book publishing to intervene in this sense? Or is it that there are other ways like the Lexicon series that are autonomously produced materials, is that the vehicle? Or is it just that... I don't know. That movement publishers are just waiting for the right moment?

Joshua – Or the right proposal, like maybe no one's offered them a great contribution to the discussion.

Morgan – I think it's interesting, the mechanisms of publishing. It literally takes one year to publish a legitimate book. It's really difficult to crash through a high quality book. So it doesn't necessarily lend itself to timely interventions, like for example OR Books, their model is built on the ability to have print on demand.

Malav – They do all the development and then they sell the rights of the full-developed book to Haymarket or whoever.

Morgan – So their model is cutting out the distributor. It was meant to save money but it doesn't really, because contrary to what many believe, a lot of the cost isn't in the production, but the distribution side of things, there's a lot of overhead in the front end. So it's basically – write books very quickly and then push them through on a print on demand format, and then once books have been produced in that way, selling the rights to a more traditional publisher. It's interesting also, to think about their sort of model, which is partly to save money, but partly also to be able to intervene in political moments in a way that's more adaptable than traditional publishing where you have to announce a book in advance and have this cumbersome distribution model. But even then, it's still, it doesn't necessarily lend itself to relevant interventions.

Anna – That's also because it's a business. They're also trying to make money.

Morgan – Colin Robinson and John Oakes who run the company are both long time Left publishing veterans, and this is a new project for them, and for them it's very much in that world, and it's very much a business for them.

Anna – But the model's interesting.

Joshua – These are publishers that are businesses, they're trying to deal with that autonomy from the boss by earning a wage for themselves. I just think it requires a vastly different outlook to these discussions, you know, the book has to sell.

Anna – For AK and PM too?

Joshua – AK and PM on a different scale.

Malav – From like, let's say co-production, as more knowledge structure in publishing vs. a representation to the outside, that's a sort of model of production models, there's actually a much different understanding of what's being done altogether.

Camille – Yeah, like I, even though I work for a publisher and I really like books, and they're one of my favourite commodities in the whole wide world, I feel like, I'm not entirely sure about the book as a form - or in every instance. That's actually a reason I helped start a newspaper. I actually think there's different forms of publishing at the moment that lend themselves to different movements. I suppose with two hats on, I think there's a role for the newspaper in a different way.

Anna – Well, yes, I suppose that's what my question was in a way. Maybe books are only one way to be communicating?

Camille – In this question around Occupy or the student movement, I think there's a definite role around books. But in terms of this question around writing in movements, I would like to see hundreds of newspapers being produced again on a daily basis.

Paul – But even there, to come back to this question of the inherent contradiction within movements. We ran up against limits, for instance, because our meetings, they weren't invite only. I mean our editorial board, it was whoever showed up to a meeting, and so we started having meetings around the occupation at St Paul's. And we'd try to poster the event, advertise as much as possible, and there was some kind of desire for inherent explosion of the whole thing. But there were problems with holding public meetings at Occupy LSX. They attracted people with low degrees of commitment or interest to the project itself. And people that came from the Occupy Times group were not necessarily inherently anti-capitalist and were much more interested in replicating journalistic practices of the mainstream media with a slightly different message, though one that was not inherently anti-capitalist.

Camille – But I think that's more to say, it's easier to say 'we want to do co-production.', It's much fucking harder to think about what that means, because you set up a slight distance because you're with a group of people who want to compile a set of representations and that stuff... but I also think that's also got a lot to do with, here in Europe, people talk a lot about workers' inquires, and I see very little outcome from the vast amount of inquiries that are undertaken, and I see people tying themselves up in knots very, very quickly. So it seems like

everyone is inspired by the 70s Italian model, there's been some good books written about it, so everyone's like 'oh, wow, yeah we should do an inquiry!' then lots of people start inquiries, then I never hear anything about it.

Stephen – There's a passage in *Fire and Flames*, the new PM book, where [Geronimo] talks about how we suffer from the Italian illusion, where we're all like 'we'll do what the Italians did'...

Paul – So there was this dream of transparency, which dissolved really quickly.

Camille – I never had a dream of transparency!

Morgan – It's funny, even producing that OR book, just the question of co-production in the book-publishing world, was to me very confusing. It was very ambiguous, like it's produced by this amorphous, named but individual nameless collective, but also at the end of the day, it's just a book by a publisher. But the rights will be sold, because it's also like, non-profit, money's going to OWS, but what does that even mean? Six months later... it's just, it was a really weird experience. I guess I just wasn't in touch with the folks that produced it, afterwards, the body of people that were contributing to it.

Joshua – I'm increasingly coming to the understanding that we need a diversity of tools for these interventions. Have you seen that YouTube clip about consensus? That was beautiful, it was one of the most powerful sort of illustrations of anarchist politics I've ever seen and it never said the word. But I feel like we haven't caught up with how that movement has shifted, in terms of being able to talk about what those new forms convey and what the value of that is, and what the content of them is. And short of communicating the content, those things are invisible right now, because we haven't really figured out how to make them visible, or how to document them.

Anna – To me that brings up a newspaper again. I feel that something that gets lost in a blog, in an online newspaper context, is that idea of a newspaper creating an imagined community. Like in the 80s, just before the internet, movement newspaper editors would still go to each other's community assemblies, they would write a little paragraph about what was happening. But today there is also a question of can a newspaper have the same salience in a digital world?

Camille – I think that, really, they can have more impact, in some kind of weird way, because it's a real piece of paper, shoved into people's hands.

Autonomous infrastructures

Malav – Can we just take a step back and flag this entire project under the word infrastructure? Because we didn't really talk about how we push these different publishing projects around, so like distributions, keeping that, none of them have any ownership over. The thing that cuts through them all is the same corporate distributor that gets the stuff out. Printers or whatever. All these different publishing projects have different distribution methods, but whenever we're talking about a book, we're talking about largely distribution methods that we don't have any control about.

Jaya – As a publisher you don't really have necessarily a direct relationship with bookshops. Individuals can create relationships with individuals at bookstores, if you so choose and you have the capabilities. But as a publisher who is radical, you don't necessarily have a connection with radical bookstores or booksellers, so in a lot of ways, you are completely dependent on the distributor, on the individuals who are going to the bookshops, selling your books.

Stevphen – The thing that I found doing that in the UK, it was one thing coming around to these stores and getting them to take books, it was another thing having to call them 17 times and getting them to pay for anything. And the amount of labour that it took...

Anna – I think that's exactly the thing, there's so much labour that goes into creating and maintaining the relationships, even just the mechanical following up. It's really, really difficult.

Malav – I didn't mean for us necessarily to return back to this nuanced conversation about publishing, rather I was thinking about the different ways in which we employ technologies. We have different tactics or tools to do this, and they all come with tensions and challenges, and distribution models, and levels of transparency or whatever...

Anna – Can we also go back to the idea of a **radical media ecology** for a moment. I wonder if maybe you can write the way that works for you, maybe you can take these different positions at different times. Maybe now we are seeing possibilities for cultivating an ecological perspective towards the ways that we engage different audiences. Maybe one project doesn't have to do all those things in one instance, it can make a decision to do one and make a tactical decision to do another. I think the Lexicon project is a good example of this.

Joshua – I think that's actually precisely what has been so profound out of this movement, because coming out of this post-Seattle alter-globalisation stuff, myself and my peers who were organising that were like, if we didn't show up to a meeting, there was shit that didn't get done, there were real stakes to that, right? And in this movement, there's such a massive ecology to it, one person's participation doesn't make that much difference to it. There is the joke I've been making, things are so dynamic and vibrant that if I decide to stay home and watch *Boardwalk Empire*, the world's not going to end. But the flipside of that is

just what you said, like we can make tactical decisions, like this is the form of writing or the audience that I'm most adept at performing in or speaking to, and that's ok. I can make a tactical decision to devote my energy to that, and there are other people who can do other things. I think that's actually an asset and a real blessing to this movement.

Camille – I don't feel that way at all. Actually.

Anna – How do you feel?

Camille – I feel like we're in a moment of decomposition, I feel like all the gains we made in 18 months are being eroded, faster than we made them. We didn't win the demand about not increasing the fees, but like, I personally wasn't there just because I care about fees. ..I think that with the winter riots, the students created a certain terrain and in a complex way helped create some of the possibilities for the summer riots. So **winning for me was about the contagion that was going on.** And also, by being on the streets, with high school kids, who were picking up shit fast, burning stuff, and throwing stuff at the cops and having a real sense that actually things were shifting, and actually it was possible, what we could do.

Anna – And then it was shut down!

Camille – And the last demo we were on there was total policing, and there were 8,000 riot cops. And I was like, no one's going to do anything, we're all going to march with our one allocated riot cop.

Joshua – There was a buddy system?

Camille – There was! It was so fucked up.

Paul – There was definitely a sense of collective struggle, on the part of students, and it didn't feel like it was a massive leap for that to link into all the trade union struggles, and say, 'we're going on...' but they didn't.

Camille – You could feel the moment, it was like a membrane, coming closer and closer. And also everyone watching in the establishment had every understanding that if that membrane had been broken, we would have been in a completely in a different historical situation.

Paul – Which is precisely the conversation that is happening in Quebec.

Jaya – From a European perspective, the one thing that I find really difficult to deal with, given what's happening all across Europe right now, is the fact that the struggles are so nationalised, and the fact that there hasn't managed to be some coherent online or offline publishing going on, bridging all the different things,. People are aware of each other, but the focus is so specific in each moment, and so localised.

Camille – The return of the State.

Jaya – In a way, it is.

Camille – They thought it had gone away, but it came back...

Joshua – I honestly wonder, to some extent, how much is that linguistic? I was speaking to some Palestinian anarchists, there actually are Palestinian anarchists, they are very few and they are very young, and I was asking them, what was the sort of things that brought them to this political orientation? Was it books, were there websites? So they start rattling off, ‘there were these Egyptian anarchists, and these Syrian anarchists, and these Bahraini anarchists...’ who are these people? Now, I am friends with these people on Facebook and Twitter, and I’m seeing the stuff that they post, and I think the linguistic consistency across these different struggles, the fact that it’s all in Arabic, it generates less of a nationalisation, so I wonder how much of that sort of, fractured dimension in Europe is because of that?

Malav – We’ve got people from America and Canada, and Australia. There’s an Anglophone thing happening.

Jaya – I agree that it’s a challenge we need to meet right now, there’s a practical thing we need to solve in some way or another. But it’s not the reason for why nothing is there, because during the late 90s, early 2000s that was not a problem, there was organising going on all the time. And collectives sprang out exactly to serve that purpose.

Camille – I’ve presented at conferences before where there is a makeshift transmitter and everyone has a small radio for translations, there’s a team of translators working.

Jaya – Yeah, so it’s completely possible.

Camille – But it’s not in written form. And that’s the difference.

Jaya – People are meeting each other, and that’s the difference. But one thing I can’t help think is that things were easier because the struggles were less sensitive to people’s material conditions in their home countries. We were looking at a set of ideals, global capital...

Camille – It was summits.

Jaya – Exactly. And now, it’s like people’s workplaces, their education, their families, their health, that makes it really difficult to organise on a European-wide level.

Camille – But it is about national struggles.

Jaya – That’s the problem. It is and it shouldn’t be, it really shouldn’t be.

Camille – But that’s the critique of the summit protests, that we never succeeded in translating into to a material struggle, or able to engage it. So in some way this is the answer to our failure around the summit stuff, that people are embedded and located in places that they actually can affect change, however limited...

Malav – What about the disparity of material conditions. I mean, I’m not European, so I could be off the mark about this, but it makes perfect sense to me because part of the European crisis is the disparity of material conditions that

was flattened in the creation of the Eurozone, and how many countries had to take on massive amounts of debt in order to be part of that?

Jaya – Well it makes sense, but it's also exactly the danger. In Europe we are facing a real kind of situation of the rise of fascism and that's real. And part of the struggle against that is to move beyond the fact that it's Germany's fault or it's Greece's fault, or we were tricked by the people in France. That's really important.

The role of publishing

Anna – Do you think there's a role that publishing can play?

Jaya – Definitely. I really think that's an important thing for publishing at this point, to do something at this level. In our collective we've been thinking about newspapers, but on that level.

Camille – We had a page in *The Paper* called 'translations,' where we would take the editorial and translate it into another languages, and we would take stuff from other places and translate it into English. But also think about the political questions around translation, I think there's a lot around that stuff.

Jaya – That's again the difference between having a physical meeting with each other.

Camille – With a physical meeting, I don't have any problem, I know how to do it. With internet debates and large amounts of text, I don't know how to do it.

Joshua – One infrastructural question for me is the cultivation and mentorship of writers. I'm thinking particularly of one of the grants that the IAS funded recently; a group of Latino activists who were radicalised in the immigrant movement that galvanized around May Day in 2006. Back then, these people were teenagers, and now they're writing a piece about the Latino encounter with the Occupy movement. I think it's important to think about the process of mentoring and cultivating writers, as an infrastructural question, because it's not enough to communicate to an audience. There's value to carrying an audience *through* something; reading material ought to be an experience, not just a conveyance. Cultivating the capacity for that is an infrastructural question, like how we mentor and cultivate writers and transmit skill and things like that. And maybe we're uncomfortable talking about it, like it reinscribes dynamics of authority, but it seems like something we really ought to make explicit.

Camille – Because it makes the mechanisms of co-production visible, as opposed to notions of talent, merit, genius, 'Oh, she's just got a way with words! That's just so innate!'

Paul – There's some of us who've been trained to write in institutions, and who find it very easy to move into these other spaces and be already good at writing, in certain ways, either non-institutional or mixed mechanisms for nurturing writing. Does something like that exist?

Joshua – The IAS does that. Anytime we give someone a grant, one of us takes responsibility for accompanying that writer through that process and editing their work.

Paul – I think, especially if we're going to have things like newspapers and we're going to have people writing for those, and producing for those, or producing blogs, the editorial component is a part of the editorial process. There needs to be a degree of consciousness about that process, as a deliberate revolutionary strategy, that we're cultivating people who have access to skill and all that.

Camille – Like politicising house guides, and style guides. In terms of saying we write in a certain way, and these are the reasons we write this way. These rules are not mythical, we know what they are, and if we write them down, then they are public and they are there in terms of debate. We use these words, we don't use these words, and why do we do it in that way.

Jaya – Our collective recently talked about that's what we need to do. So it's happening slowly.

Paul – We also tried to do that, breakdown the division of labour with some of the student movements we were involved with, and do collaborative writing projects, especially in terms of young undergraduate students who lacked confidence for writing for a relatively broad audience. We did that with degrees of success, because of levels of commitment varied, but mostly because these things were so fluid, and it took time to organise these things, and by the time we'd organise and go to an occupation, the occupation had been busted, and we had to start from scratch.

Camille – And also the occupations we were interested in were the working class occupations, which were completely different to the ones I was involved in.

Paul – I remember comrades being at occupations at universities, where students would get a call, they want a press release, 'what the fuck's a press release?' And there's a role for us there, a pedagogical role. And the other side was breaking down the division of labour, in terms of production, and that was where the dream of a risograph came from, in part anyway, breaking down the division of labour between who writes and who doesn't write in the movement, but also who produces the actual material product that we have.

Camille – London's such a weird place, there's actually heaps of risographs, but no one would ever tell you about them, because you've got to be on this island for ages before anyone tells you shit, in that weird kind of way.

Anna – To me that brings up again the importance of material objects, of technologies and how we build infrastructures around them. And also the question of money, which is the word we're always skirting around, when we talk about what it means when we do these projects. **I'd love to hear about what you guys kind of think about these projects to acquire and share means of production and how things like getting a risograph can alleviate some of the problems of labour and costs.**

Morgan – It's interesting in New York, thinking about the risograph – a feminist collective in Brooklyn acquired a bookbinder a couple of years ago. It was by and large a personally funded operation, and it was really exciting, getting this bookbinder, owning the means of book production, it was phenomenal. It ended up though, no a failure because its not over yet, but as far as its life in New York was concerned it was a surprisingly challenging project to maintain. In the end we just couldn't generate projects for it, we couldn't generate energy for whatever was needed to make it useful social equipment. So ultimately, it seemed to just fizzle. And this extraordinary equipment that had so much potential for supporting the movement or supporting feminists, or producing really awesome radical material just sat dormant, costing money in rent, for about a year and a half.

Jaya – And printing is always an issue here in London. It's incredible; it's like every time there's a question mark.

Camille – I've been thinking about infrastructure for the last two years, in terms of what is lacking in London. We both lack it politically, in terms of organisation to build, and in terms of bits of machinery and equipment. And the other major infrastructure that we don't have is a space. Like, squats don't last very long anymore there's no bleeding between institutional space and movement space. Many other places have a whole variety of spaces, which London doesn't.

Anna – We don't even have social centres with kitchens, which drives me crazy.

Paul – And you end up eating hummus and pita every week.

Morgan – I don't know what it's like in New York, I feel like there is space, but you sort of have to carve it out for yourself and pay rent.

Joshua – One of the interesting things that has come out of the Occupy movement in New York is that working groups that were formed around these sorts of functions, over time, began converting to workers' co-operatives. I can't say for sure as I've been out of the country for three months, where those are at, but there is a dimension of them monetizing that service on the market, and using the margins from that to help materially support movement. So they're producing a livelihood for people, which is a propaganda win, beyond something merely oppositional. It's actually producing livelihood, which is something the state has failed to do. That's a win. But additionally, it puts highly-skilled people working in often apolitical professional spheres in the service of aspirations with no real capital; a worker cooperative can foster the relationship key to or even finance a really outstanding web-developer providing services to a movement project that would normally be out of reach, for instance.

Malav – It shows inside a movement what it is that moves people. They'll draw on something and offer something to it in their way. So you get your professionals, who are like, 'oh my god, my skills are useful for something other than making money!' And that is what publishing is about, about moving people.

Camille – I think the question round infrastructure is a really interesting one, it's bound with materiality, it's sitting around and talking about the kind of things we need to make something possible.

Jaya – With that, I feel there's an immense cynicism in London, especially in the squatting movement, where there's a shitload of people and there's a shitload of tools, there's no way in hell... they'll be like, 'no, no, no they've been through this too many times before, their shit disappearing...' there's all that history of cynicism.

Camille – But that bleeds into everything.

Paul – That poses another infrastructural question, what are the mechanisms of accountability that we can enact, that we can intervene on that particular problem, that we can allow us or enable us to cut through that cynicism?

Malav – but there's a way that accountability gets interpreted as domination, it's totally pragmatic but...

Joshua – That's a major problem in New York, like the GAs were live-tweeted, and all you had to do was sit and watch twitter, and you could read about someone getting head butted or punched, and then the person who was responsible, you would see getting quoted in the live tweets from the next GA. And it was like, on what planet is it acceptable for me to be seeing their name here after they decked somebody?? And people just really didn't have the confidence or the tools to get that, and again there's a cultivation and a mentorship that needs to be brought in, and say, it's ok to tell someone who head butts someone that they're not allowed in the next meeting. And I think there was a real hopelessness there, and an infrastructural failure on our part too...

Malav – I don't know if it was that stark...there was a lot of procedural work done.

Anna – A lot of it goes back to that thing, that shit we really don't want to talk about, that we find really uncomfortable, and we're like, "Is there a Lexicon series of the shit we don't want to talk about?" There are best practices but you have to poach them from all over, and I wonder what it would look like to have a publishing project on that...

Joshua – Cindy Milstein and I talked about how there are all these Occupy books that basically function to explain the movement to people who are on the outside in some way or another. And pondered what it might offer, instead, to draw on the voices of people who have areas of expertise or skills in some way, like what would it look like to create a textual toolbox for younger activists who have a lot of energy, and are resilient and haven't had their souls crushed. What would it mean to have tools for these people, analytic tools, tactical tools, in a textual form? So when everyone was saying, "Oh consensus process, it's so convoluted, mundane and banal..." somebody would respond, "5 years ago Mark Lance did this piece for the journal 'Social Anarchism' called Fetishizing Process, that really dove into this before that was really this widespread discussion."

Paul – I was going to ask, what is the role that publishing poses to that challenge of balancing outreach and building political arguments and tactics inside a movement? I'm not saying its going to be answered but I think that's the challenge, and I think it's every bit as much a question of form as it is a question of content.

Anna – And then again, I think, how do you have a dual strategy? We've talked alot about newspapers. Could you have one that was for the movement and one that was not? What are other possibilities for being multi-perspective and being multi-local?

Joshua – I think that's the great thing about New York, is that you see the same people distribute them simultaneously; like you have the *Occupy Wall Street Journal* and then you have *Tidal*. They are two very different forms. The *Occupy Wall Street Journal* is a more popular sort of mechanism, and *Tidal* is a more analytical, theoretical tool, and I'm not clear on the analytics of who's reading what...

Stephen – I found it really interesting in a way, people keep drawing lines, the lines aren't explicit but there are lines, and then we get back to what's the audience, and as soon as you start defining something as propagandist as opposed to intra intelligentsia...

Paul – You can write in different kinds of ways...

Stephen – I think the key component of it is that you're just speaking in different voices.

Malav – People do want different things, you can't put them in boxes. Acknowledging them and that people do read different things...

Camille – Yeah, I have a problem with the term accessibility, I have a knee-jerk reaction to it. There's some kind of general assumption that working class people are dumb. Which intersects with the critique that comes up consistently that we write too academically. There's also this idea that people have to understand everything that they read right away, but in many ways i think its ok to get a dictionary and look it up, the world is difficult and for some ideas and thinking you are required to do some work.' In that **there is no way I can deliver some McDonalds version, that you just get it, eat it, and shit it out.**

Morgan – That sounds like what the Lexicon series was about, like this is complicated, unabashedly this is a very complex topics, and that is why there are all these other tools, that in a much more straightforward way build up to...

Camille – There's this tension that, like there a certain terms like 'reproductive labour' that I refuse to let go of, because I use it in a specific way that actually means something. I'm also happy to spend a paragraph or two explaining what I mean by 'reproductive labour' so you don't have to go to your Marxist dictionary to work out what I mean, but nonetheless, you have to be willing and generous enough to go through the process of reading, because then **it's not just about a process of writing, but a training to read.**

Joshua – And that cultivation of reading discipline is of value. I'm always having to make the same argument with people: You have to be willing to learn things you don't know. If I hadn't, I never would have gotten through the first Bad Religion album I had, because there were scientific terms in half of their songs, and I had to go look them up in order to engage with that, and it was really compelling and I developed a discipline around that. That's of value.

Final thoughts - On the value of books

Jaya – I think the question I raised earlier is the one I'm still walking away with, which is what is and what will be the role of book publishing vs. all of these other forms, is there a way for publishing to be... in this movement, as opposed to other movements? What will be the role of the book publishing in creating useful interventions for the outside and also for us in the movement?

Camille – Despite all the amazing articles, blog posts, podcasts, despite all of those, the most important thing to me is books. There's a crisis in traditional publishing that I think is really productive for us to engage with, and there is a proliferation of infrastructure and tools coming out of the movement. And somehow, our publishers have not really harnessed the contradictions and the tensions between those two things. We're not really using a whole variety of different ways of engaging people, and dissemination. And the fact that we're still bound to this old distribution model – we need to be leapfrogging over these old problems, and confronting ourselves with new problems.

Jaya – I think that's exactly it, because the question isn't are books relevant, but how do we make them relevant?

About the editors

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