Chapter 6

Collective Autonomy in Action: From the Autonomous Social Centre to Building 7

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George Katsiaficas identifies two recent episodes of the international eros effect: the alterglobalization wave and anti-war protests at the end of the 1990s and early 2000s, and the Arab Spring and Occupy Movements of 2011 and beyond.[1] The eros effect, following Katsiaficas, "is crystalized in the sudden and synchronous international emergence of hundreds of thousands of people who occupy public space and call for a completely different political reality," based on "their common belief in new values," oftentimes in several places, at the same time (2011: 1). My work with the Research Group on Collective Autonomy (CRAC) demonstrated that that "collective unconscious" also erupted in the urban centers of Quebec (Sarrasin et al. 2016), manifesting in the anti-MAI, anti-FTAA, and anti-war revolts at the turn of the century (Dupuis-Déri 2008). In 2012, in the wake of Occupy (Ancelovici 2016), the city was the siege of massive student revolt (Ancelovici & Dupuis-Déri 2014). A general strike disrupted everyday life in most universities, colleges, and even some high schools. Daily (and nightly) snake marches, blockades of the port, and attacks on symbols of capitalist greed made headlines for months on end.

While not as widespread or historically anchored as in Europe, these moments of revolt share certain characteristics with the autonomous movements documented by Katsiaficas (2006). In Quebec, scholars of contention talk of the antiauthoritarian movement (Breton et al. 2015; Sarrasin et al. 2016) or

contemporary anarchism (Bellemare-Caron et al. 2013; Jeppesen, Kruzynski et al. 2014). Affinity groups, collectives, and networks share a common political culture. They present (1) a political stance against exploitation and oppression in all its forms (including the state) and for respect, mutual aid and solidarity; (2) a two-pronged approach to social change that is operationalized, on the one hand, by confrontational and direct tactics to disrupt the status quo and, on the other, by the experimentation, in the here-and-now of subjectivities, relationships, and institutions coherent with the antiauthoritarian compass; and (3) a decentralized and non-hierarchical organizational form. The CRAC called this collective autonomy self-determination and self-organization; but in effect, we could have called it simply "autonomy" as does Katsiaficas, because the meaning is the same.

These movements are the training ground for many activists, myself included, who chose to channel our "hate…vis-à-vis external forces" (Katsiaficas 2001, citing Jung) and pour our "human solidarity and love of freedom" (Katsiaficas 2001, citing Marcuse) into the Autonomous Social Centre (ASC) of Pointe-Saint-Charles. Pointe-Saint-Charles, a post-industrial, traditionally working-class neighbourhood of Montreal, renowned as a bastion of strength, solidarity, and resistance, has managed to slow down the forces of gentrification in ways that adjacent neighbourhoods have not (Kruzynski 2020). Well-known, for example, is the successful campaign run by grassroots community organisations in 2006 to stop the plans of a capitalist developer to move the Montreal Casino to Pointe-Sainte Charles, along with a large-scale international conference center. In 2007, inspired by the Centri social in Rome, the Bookchin-inspired anarchist collective La Pointe libertaire put out a call to folks wanting to squat a vacant industrial building: "We want to open a space for collective autonomy to flower and for direct democracy to earn its reputation for excellence."[2] Hundreds responded to the call, and the ASC was born.

In this paper, using the example of the ASC, I will show how, at the local level, the activists transformed "public participation into something completely different from what is normally understood as political" (Katsiaficas 2006:6). I will discuss how they subvert politics, but also how they subvert economics and culture. To accomplish this, I will begin with a short chro-

nological description of the story of the Autonomous Social Centre. Then, I will explore the political, cultural, and economic practices that were/are enacted by the ASC, bringing in different authors to feed the analysis. I will borrow from Katsiaficas and Marina Sitrin (2012; Sitrin & Azzelilini 2014), an engaged scholar of contemporary autonomous movements in Argentina, to flesh out political and cultural processes. For the economic processes, I will borrow from Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson, writing under the pseudonym of J.K. Gibson-Graham, who have developed a theory of economic self-determination based on over 30 years of empirical work in communities who are engaged in "taking back the economy" (1996, 2006). I will conclude by reflecting on revolution as process and on the necessity to document creative autonomy that already exists but is oftentimes hidden from view.

Before delving in however, a quick methodological note. The analysis herein is based on my personal experience within the ASC, on both internal and public documents produced by the ASC, and on the book written by my affinity group, La Pointe libertaire (2013), on the initial phases of the struggle. In addition, it is important to share that several of the activists at the core of the ASC participated in the research project conducted by CRAC. Given this, it is impossible to untangle my analysis from that of my comrades. I want to recognize their invaluable contribution to this work.[3]

My Story of the Autonomous Social Centre

Phase 1: The Squat

Following the public assembly that launched the ASC in 2007, hundreds of activists got involved in a two-year mobilization campaign that would lead to the squat of Seracon, an abandoned candle factory on the Lachine Canal. In order to gain support from our neighbours and local community organizations, many of whom were not convinced that squatting was a good way to counter gentrification,[4] we reclaimed public space, here and there, and did what we wanted to see emerge in our permanent space. Itinerant creative spontaneity (Katsiaficas 2006) by what we called "autonomous projects," actively "reclaiming the Point," mobilized hundreds of people who participated in bike repair workshops, open-air film screenings,

dumpster-diving and food transformation, poetry readings, and concerts. On May 29, 2009, 500 people participated in the demonstration that enabled the opening of the squat, officially supported by 70 organizations across Quebec. Within 24 hours, we had set-up a kitchen, toilets, dormitories, and a stage. Just before the concert, the police force, snipers and all, evicted us *manu-militari*.

Phase 2: Peoples' Expropriation of Building 7

The sense of injustice and anger that was triggered by the eviction of Seracon was channeled, as of 2009, into a campaign to expropriate, for the collectivity, a 90,000 square foot industrial building on the CN rail yards, from capitalist developer Vincent Chiara (Mach Group). The ASC joined forces with grassroots community groups and more mainstream cultural organizations to form the *Collectif 7 à nous*.[5] After three years of struggle, we successfully pressured Chiara to donate Building 7 to us, decontaminated along with $1 million for renovations (La Pointe libertaire 2013; Kruzynski & Silvestro 2013; Triollet 2013). Unheard of in the recent history of Quebec, this peoples' victory was the result of a combination of factors. Most notable was the force of the outrage in the neighbourhood at the sale of the CN rail yards for $1 and the convergence of a diversity of actors who were able and willing to engage in a diversity of tactics (Silvestro 2012). While the well-connected and influential Darling Foundry engaged in direct negotiations with Chiara, the concerted-action round table Action-Watchdog, composed of 30 grass-roots community organizations kept on the heels of local politicians and organized symbolic actions to mobilize neighbourhood residents. The ASC, more confrontational, reclaimed Building 7 in the here-and-now, making it as though the Building was already ours. Without asking for permission, we squatted this private property for an afternoon, and then an evening.

Phase 3: Holding Down the Fort While Waiting for the Keys

From 2012 to 2017, the *Collectif 7 à nous*, now with legal status as a non-profit organization, valiantly held down the fort during the long and tedious negotiations involved in the transferring of the property. During this time, most activists involved in the ASC became disillusioned, bored, or simply fed up, and therefore pulled back. In 2013, in a general assembly, it

was decided to put the ASC on standby until we had the keys to Building 7 in hand. A few anti-authoritarians from the inner circle remained involved in the *Collectif 7 à nous*, as board or committee members, or as paid staff. During this phase, architectural plans were drawn up, investments were sought out, a documentary film was made and cessation was negotiated.[6] The Building was officially transferred on April 28, 2017.

Phase 4: Manufacturing Collective Autonomy

It's winter 2017. Three million dollars has been scrounged up and renovations have begun! 150 people show up to a general assembly and the excitement is palpable. A *capharnaüm* of people from all walks of life, with tons of ideas, different experiences, who all want to be part of this historic moment: the "manufacturing of collective autonomy"[7] in a space of our own, Building 7. In the wake of this, the ASC emerges from hibernation, familiar faces long-time absent are back, as are new activists who got their feet wet for the first time in the wake of the student uprisings in 2012 and 2015. Three "autonomous" projects carried by anti-authoritarians are at the heart of the first stage of development of Building 7; the grocery store/café Le Detour; the brew-pub Les Sans-Tavernes; and the artistic foundry Coop La Coulée. Not to mention, on the one hand, the arcade and upcycling project by the youth-led cooperative Press Start, and, on the other, the 12,000 square feet of collaborative spaces (bike, auto, wood, ceramic, photo, printing, and silk-screening shops) and "the commons," a multi-function space with meeting rooms, a kitchen, showers, and storage.

Stage two is the services axis (childcare, birthing, family, and alternative health centers), stage three is the food production/transformation/distribution axis, and stage four is the contemporary art axis carried by the Darling Foundry (artist workshops and production space).[8] Although the official opening happened in May 2018, the Democracy circle, of which I was a part until spring 2020, is continuously facilitating the enactment of a horizontal, self-managed organizational structure for Building 7.

Political Practices

From its inception, the ASC enacts "an organisational philosophy based on decentralisation and autonomy; that is,

direct democracy, self-management, self-organisation, hinging on individual and collective responsibility."[9] This political project is not about taking political power through the electoral process, but about experimenting in the here and now with political practices/institutional arrangements that enable people who are affected to control their own destinies.[10] True to the principle of self-determination, those active in the ASC invent organizational structures, experiment with them and adapt them on an as-needed basis. The open general assembly that worked well during the first few months, morphs into a spokes-council model as the structure evolves into a loose federation of autonomous projects. Each project has its own mission—popular education, café-bar, itinerant-cinema, media, free bike, and "digestive-tract" (food-related)—and is self-managed by its members. During this phase of intense mobilization and outreach to others in the community, delegates from each of these projects meet at the spokes-council on a regular basis to share, plan, and strategize.

After this, as we focus on the organization of the squat, we return to the general assembly, but this time it is not open to all. It regroups those involved in the autonomous projects and others who agree with the principles of the ASC and want to participate in the opening of the squat. During the campaign to expropriate Building 7, different people are chosen, on a rotating basis, to be our delegates to the *Collectif 7 à nous*. Delegates have enough experience with the ASC to be able to participate in certain decisions without having to get an explicit mandate. It is expected, however, that any decisions that the delegate thinks will generate debate be discussed in the general assembly.

Like the autonomous movements described by Katsiaficas (2006), whatever the organizational structure of the moment, decisions are made by consensus and internal mechanisms are put in place to manage power dynamics. These include speakers lists (first, second turn) to make sure everyone has a say, hand signals to improve efficiency, speaking in "I" statements, vibes-watching, as well as check-ins and check-outs which create space for people to share their emotions and for conflicts to be named and later resolved. Marina Sitrin's analysis applies here. She explains that:

> One of the many reasons that *horizontalidad* is not only so powerful but is being used by millions around the world, is that it is a form of making decisions together that is based on each person speaking and listening: it is a politics of listening without judgment rather than creating power over one another. (2012: 70)

Cultural Practices

Horizontal structures and facilitation mechanisms are necessary but not sufficient to enable the emergence of non-authoritarian social relations and different subjectivities. ASC activists were sensitive to the fact that each of us, anti-authoritarian or not, has been socialized in a differentiated and stratified society, and must therefore engage in a conscious effort to get rid of the "master's tools" (Audre Lorde) and replace them with ways of being, thinking, and doing that subvert authoritarian tendencies. Understanding that collective autonomy is an ongoing cultural process, the ASC also experimented with alternative educational, media, and kinship practices.

Education

Both Sitrin (2012) and Zibechi (2010) stress the centrality of *formation* to movement strength and longevity. In order to share its political stance with the most people possible, both the pop ed autonomous project and the *autoformation* committee organize trainings that are open to the general public. Workshops are organized on the history of community organizing in Pointe-Saint-Charles, Parecon (Participatory Economics), collective transportation, squatting, but also, following the solidarity imperative (Katsiaficas), the struggle of the Tyendigaga community against the CN and on direct solidarity with resistance struggles around the world. Internal trainings for members include workshops on emancipatory economic processes, strategic planning and organizing 101. In addition to those types of more formal training moments, the ASC put in place mechanisms for knowledge/skill sharing/learning such as accompaniment for new members, task rotation, and twinning of a more experienced with a less experienced person on a specific task. ASC members refine decision-making processes by experimenting non-authoritarian forms of leadership and by trying to reduce dominating behaviours. To decentralize access to information, the ASC produces a certain

number of tools, including a guide, which includes its principles and code of conduct.

Media

Autonomous movements the world over are critical of mass media and put great effort into self-representation (Jeppesen, Lakoff & al. 2014; Katsiaficas 2006). The ASC is no exception. Since it was happening before the widespread use of cell phones and social media, the *médias libres* project invested a lot of time in setting-up media production infrastructure equipped with networked computers and audio-visual materials, as well as a portable antenna that could capture internet signals in different strategic spots in the neighbourhood (which was meant to aid the squat). Moreover, ASC members were constantly disseminating information to sympathisers and the public through various means like the production and distribution of flyers, brochures, and zines during events; plastering the neighbourhood with posters; graffiti; blogging; publishing on the Indy media website (CMAQ) and email blasts.[11]

Media activists also produced a series of short documentaries to use for mobilization purposes,[12] but also to use in our media strategy during the Seracon squat.[13] This media strategy was well thought-out and collectively planned:

> Given the nature of our project, and in order to protect ourselves from mainstream media's tendency to misrepresent [activist actions], we prefer to interact with alternative media. In the event that media coverage is biased, it will be possible to respond effectively by referring to publications produced by alternative media. In order to foster coherence and boost the integrity of our message, a committee of spokespeople will interface with the media.[14]

This committee prepared a cue card so that the different spokespeople could become familiar with the message and be better prepared to face often hostile mainstream media.[15] They produced a video report to share the story of gentrification in Pointe-Saint-Charles,[16] our public declaration, and our critical stance towards mainstream media.[17] Against stardom, and to highlight the collective and horizontal aspect of the squat, the five spokespeople wore colorful carnival masks. The media

strategy was effective. Mainstream media wanting to cover this "sensationalist" story had to abide by these rules, and the DIY photos, audio, and video reports circulated widely.

Kinship

> *We need folks who are motivated, versatile, who are sick and tired of interacting in a patriarchal, capitalist, racist society that is voraciously materialistic. We want social relations that are rich, egalitarian, that allow us to meet our basic needs, our desires in love, friendship, culture, and art.*[18]

The personal is political in the ASC, and efforts are made to create safe(r) spaces that are welcoming, respectful of difference, and accessible for all. We eat together, we take care of the kids, we talk about our personal lives, we fall in love, we party. We share beautiful moments as well as conflict and intensity. We try to be in tune with each other's needs and desires. We build a sense of belonging: a group of friends, roommates, an affinity group, a crew, an intentional family. The ASC is built on relations of trust, attention, and mutual responsibility, or *politica affectiva*:

> The new subject is the new person formed as a part of these new relationships; a subject grounded in *politica afectiva*—a politics of affection, love and trust. Along with this new individual protagonism, a new collective protagonism arises with a need for new ways of speaking of *nosotros* ("we/us"), and *nuestro* ("our") as these relate to *yo* ("I/me"). This aspiration is a genuinely new conception of the individual self through new conceptions of the collective. These new relationships, compelled by the notion of dignity, are the measure of success for these revolutions. (Sitrin 2012: 11)

This is not naïve pretense that all is hunky dory. This is about making visible the cultural processes enacted in the here-and-now that contribute to the expansion of kinship relations that break with authoritarian norms.[19] Also these types of relations bind us together, they are the cement that holds together the spaces we build, where we dare be ourselves, and that feed the courage sustaining us through thick and thin and over time.

Economic Practices

For the ASC, collective autonomy is also about subverting the economy, that ensemble of activities people engage in to

produce and distribute goods and services they need to survive (Gibson-Graham et al. 2013). The conceptual tools developed by J.K. Gibson-Graham are particularly well suited to demonstrate how, at a local scale, the ASC contributes to the emergence of a political economy based on economic self-determination (Gibson-Graham 1996, 2006). They suggest that the post-capitalist project is about enacting community economies, those spaces "of decision making where we recognize and negotiate our interdependence with other humans, other species and our environment" (Gibson-Graham et al. 2013: xix). They propose five coordinates to guide ethical deliberation around a diversity of economic practices that are compatible with socially just and ecological livelihoods: taking back enterprise, work, transactions, property, and finance.[20] In this section, I show how the ASC engages in this process of recognition and negotiation, and, in doing so, becomes a community economy.

Taking Back Property or Commoning

In a community economy, enclosed or unmanaged property, irrespective of its legal status, can be "commoned" (Gibson-Graham et al. 2016). Instead of framing commons as a "thing" associated to public or open access property, always subjected to enclosure, these authors suggest that we open up the horizons of possibility in the here-and-now by conceptualizing the commons as a process. Following this reasoning, the verb "to common" refers to those conflictual relations amongst humans, and between humans and the more-than-human world, with respect to these things, material and immaterial, specifically with respect to access, use, benefit, care and responsibility. In addition, it is through this process of commoning that community—or what I refer to as commons-community—is created, self-constituted (Gudeman 2001, cited in Gibson-Graham et al. 2016).

Commoning is at the heart of all ASC activities (Kruzynski 2020): "We believe that it is entirely legitimate and even essential to occupy, renovate and use existing buildings to meet the needs and aspirations of the community."[21] By squatting a factory that was to be transformed into condominiums, the ASC pried open public access to that private property. During the 24 hours that the squat was tolerated by officials, the members negotiated its use and took care of it. Today, only half the site is

condominiums, the other half is a public park. A half-victory then. Similarly, during the campaign to expropriate Building 7, the ASC again created the conditions for public access to enclosed private property by organizing mini-squats on the site: sugaring-off (making and distributing maple syrup lollipops), BBQ, public market, movie screenings, to name a few.

By opening these spaces of autonomy, the ASC resisted enclosure, and in doing so built up a counter-power vis-à-vis municipal authorities and capitalist developers who had claimed the site to make a profit. The authorities oftentimes did not know which leg to stand on; they were constantly having to react to a determined and unpredictable adversary who did not hesitate to use direct action to reclaim the site (La Pointe libertaire 2013). Over time, municipal authorities came to tolerate the commoning as practiced by the ASC, as the following anecdote relates:

> The councillors, following the Mayor's request, granted a permit to the ASC for occupation of space at B7… In a conversation with the Mayor, an ASC spokesperson said they did not want a permit. The Mayor retorted that he is aware of the ideology of the centre and that he even told the police chief that "it is not in their habits to ask for a permit, especially when, according to them, the property belongs to them."[22]

With time, our neighbours came to feel "at home" in many of these spaces, Building 7 at the forefront. Through these moments of collective appropriation of property, people were "learning to be affected," a shift in subjectivity that is essential to the emergence of a "commons-community" (Gibson-Graham et al. 2016).

This commons-community has also been consolidated by the multitude of charrettes, assemblies and popular urban planning events organized over the years; in doing so, spaces of ethical deliberation were created in which access and use for Building 7 were discussed and agreed upon. At the heart of these discussions was the preoccupation that the benefits of use be distributed in ways that took into account the wellbeing of all neighbourhood residents, but also the environment. The commons-community, knowing that our neighbourhood is a food and cultural desert, and an urban heat island, developed plans

for culturally and financially accessible local services, cultural activities, food production, and green space, to name a few.

Taking Back Work, or Surviving Well Together in Equality

In a community economy we take ethical action by acknowledging how our survival relates to other people and the environment. Surviving well is about "the combination of our love for what we do each day, the quality of our relationships, the security of our finances, the vibrancy of our physical health, and the pride we take in what we have contributed to our communities. Most importantly, it's about "how these five elements *interact*" (Rath & Harter 2010, cited in Gibson-Graham et al. 2013: 21). It is about creating the conditions to experiment and value different forms of labour, achieving a balance that feeds personal well-being—material, occupational, social, community, and physical—without hindering planetary well-being or the well-being of other people.

Understood as a space of "solidarity and mutual aid," the ASC is about the "construction of relations that aim to abolish exploitation in all its forms (human-human, human-nature, other?)."[23] There is an explicit critique of the capitalist practice of wage labour, a valuing of household tasks and a conscious effort to engage in non-capitalist forms of labour, namely volunteering and self-provisioning. There are also debates about inequalities that exist within the ASC. For example, some people have more time to engage in this type of labour because they enjoy excellent material well-being, while others have less time because they are forced to work full-time at minimum-wage and/or cannot count on support from a network of friends/family. Members thus made an ethical decision that complicates the ideological stance for the prioritization of non-capitalist labour practices. Once Building 7 opened, a diversity of labour forms would be available, including wage labour. We would also set up mutual aid practices, such as providing support to those who cannot afford to be properly housed.

There is also a conscious effort to share/rotate tasks that are oftentimes taken on by women, namely domestic and caring labour. During our itinerant phase, the ASC always makes sure that childcare is collectivized. Similarly, at the beginning, the autonomous project Digestive-Tract made the

food, and later this task was decentralized with different teams taking it on at different times. Without a doubt, the socialization of housework enabled women to take on interesting and visible tasks that are most often executed by men. A poignant example is evidence of this: two women, each with a baby on her breast, facilitate an assembly of the 80-plus commando on strategy and tactics for the squat.

Taking Back Markets: Encountering Others

In order to take back markets, J.K. Gibson-Graham encourage us to experiment and expand with the ways we exchange goods and services, so that we break with the alienating logic of supply and demand inherent to capitalist markets. They encourage a diversity of transactions/encounters with others that take into account the needs of the people/organizations at the receiving end of the transaction, but also those of the producers and of the planet. These types of encounters are more transparent and are based on the understanding that our survival is interdependent with that of other humans and the natural environment.

The ASC is clear about its position on this matter: "the ASC aims to reframe the relationship between production and consumption (get rid of the culture of blind and irresponsible consumerism)."[24] From its inception, most of the ASC's transactions are gift-based. People are invited to make a voluntary contribution to participate in ASC events. In addition, following the principles of "salvaging, upcycling and creative use of energy sources,"[25] the ASC has developed relationships with local merchants who set aside "ugly" food for pick-up. ASC members also do not hesitate to dumpster-dive containers in public markets and in the parking lots of large grocery chains (a transaction qualified as theft in the capitalist mindset). Gleaning takes time, but reduces the cost of buying food, and, at the same time, it salvages food wasted by capitalist market processes. For example, during Reclaim your Point, the ASC fed 500 people over a 2-day period, for a total of $89.07.[26]

In addition to gleaning, the ASC has established protocols with allied organizations who share their means of production with us, enabling us to DIY instead of renting or buying what we need from capitalist markets. We produce promotional materials using the silk screening and button machines at the Ste.

Emilie Skillshare; we print posters and flyers on the colour photocopy machine at QPIRG-Concordia or AFESH;[27] we borrow the sound-system from Café Paradox to produce concerts; we brew beer for events in a local underground brewery; and we transform food for collective meals in the industrial kitchen at the Club populaire des consommateurs.[28] Similarly, several organizations have gifted products/services to the ASC, including organic vegetables produced by a workers' cooperative or a stand-up comic show by a group of renowned activist-artists.

Although these types of gift-based transactions have been flowering over the years, we are keenly aware that we cannot depend on them for the long-haul. As the ASC projects finally set-up house in Building 7, there is a need to engage in other, more durable, forms of transactions. The ASC is keen on developing encounters with suppliers that are reciprocal, and, when needed, to purchase on ethical markets. As the CSA explains, "imagine a federation of self-managed cooperatives…purchasing supplies from allies—direct (those who we know) and indirect (those who share our ideological stance)."[29]

Reciprocal transactions, based on equivalences negotiated between those involved (Gibson-Graham et al. 2013), might take the form of an alternative currency within Building 7 and eventually beyond, but could also take the form of a local exchange trade system. There is already talk of establishing a protocol that would formalize the transactions between projects within Building 7. For example, organizations within the food production/transformation hub would supply the grocery store Le Detour and the brew pub Les Sans-Taverne; the brew pub would supply other organizations with beer; and producer members of Building 7 could use the woodworking shop and tool library without paying a membership fee.

Taking Back Finance or Investing for Our Futures

Following JK Gibson-Graham, to reclaim the economy for humans and the planet, we need to reframe financial institutions and instruments not as ends in themselves (i.e., the capitalist logic), but as means to enacting better futures. The goal is to find ways for funds to circulate while taking into account individual and collective interests, as well as the health of the planet, and to always consider the well-being of future genera-

tions. We must also think outside the box by exploring and experimenting non-monetary forms of investment. We must put forth the time, energy, and imagination to invest in human memory, art, culture, social networks. These types of investments can also circulate, be stored, and amplified.

Investment is a subject of lively debate, namely with respect to investments needed for Building 7 renovations and for the start-up of businesses that the ASC wants to incubate. Mainstream market investment is out of the question, but even alternative market forms of investment—from credit-unions and the state—are considered potential threats to collective autonomy. The ASC creates spaces of ethical deliberation to discuss these touchy issues. Such issues include the pressure organizations feel to engage in capitalist market practices and to expand at all costs in order to reimburse capital to the credit-union, or, in the case of state-funding, the pressure they feel to adopt a legal-status or hierarchical organizational form in order to be eligible for grants, and the perverse effect of professionalization that oftentimes follows.[30] The ASC is not against institutionalization per se, defined as consolidation and longevity, but it aims to avoid professionalization and "the formation of a 'coordinator class.'"[31]

> [These are the] causes and effects of professionalization: lack of rotation and specialisation of coordination tasks; operations become less collective; waning of the political project; wage-labour; difficult access to information needed to make informed decisions; jargon (increased complexity of organisational structures and language); elitism.[32]

In light of this, the ASC considers that non-market and non-state forms of investment are more compatible with collective autonomy. During the first two phases of the ASC's journey, investment took the form of donations as many a student association gave funds and allied organizations donated tools, materials, and infrastructure (e.g. the local reinsertion enterprise Formétal donated bike racks). Anti-authoritarians involved in the collective enterprises to be housed in Building 7 are running socio-financing campaigns and are collecting investments in the form of interest-free loans from the community. That being said, true to its DIY ethic, the most common form of investment is sweat-

equity by ASC members and its allies. This is much more than a volunteer contribution. It represents a serious, long-term investment of time, energy, and creativity. As this know-how is invested over the years, it is accumulated and shared with others; in doing so, we are re-investing it in the Building 7 commons-community.

Members of the ASC were keenly aware that once the time came to develop the ASC within Building 7, it would not be possible to depend solely on non-market forms of investment. The ASC thus creates tools to facilitate ethical debates on the matter. The ASC is a ZAF (zone of financial autonomy)[33]—a zone open to the rest of Building 7 and the wider community, but at the same time protected from outside forces "that threaten to derail the ASC from its mission, making it into a social economy project, that is, in the current context, integrated into the logic of capitalist cost-efficiency".[34] Concretely, the ASC has adopted a guiding principle to: facilitate debate on a case-by-case basis and refuse any funding from State, religious, or banking institutions if it comes with strings attached that will constrain the ASC to go against its principles, values, or horizontal organisational form.

Conclusion

Almost two decades later, Katsiaficas's words still ring true:

> As the present world system crashes down amidst us in the next 50 years, we must have a substantive alternative to offer that is a collective creation. In my view, autonomy is that collective creation, and we should study its already existent forms and seek to apply them to our own situation. (Katsiaficas 2001: 555)

The analysis that I have shared herein is one of autonomy, of collective creation, albeit partial and incomplete, as is the revolutionary process. I have chosen to focus on how the ASC invents and enacts subversive practices, without going into challenges, obstacles and conflictual relations that are part of the journey.[35] What this analysis does, is allow us to grasp how the ASC subverts politics, but also culture and economics, by enacting, in the here-and-now a diversity of practices that are coherent with an ethics of self-determination, responsibility, mutual aid and respect for human and non-human others. In this type of revolution, there is no master plan, no grand nar-

rative. The Zapatistas' "asking we walk" provides us with an imaged way of understanding revolution as process (Khasnabish 2010). Following our ethical compass, we walk, together. Sometimes we arrive at an obstacle on the road, or a crossroads. We stop. We take out our compass. We discuss. We decide. We might go on together. We might fight. We might negotiate. We might part ways. We continue.

Today, within Building 7 we are developing a permanent space that will enable the continued subversion of oppressive and exploitative norms and practices in all spheres of life both within the initiative and beyond (Kruzynski 2017). This ethic, these practices, enlarge the spectre of possibilities, as neighbourhood residents and organizations encounter eros, that feisty and energetic force at the heart of the project. Through this process, different subjectivities emerge, norms and values shift, and emancipation becomes possible.

And, importantly, this is happening, simultaneously across the planet. The past 15 years have been marked by a proliferation of economic and political initiatives at the margins of the mainstream (e.g., Alteo 2015; Carlsson 2008; Dixon 2014; Frémeau & Jordon 2012; Grubacic and O'Hearn 2016; Healy 2015; Maeckelbergh 2011; Parker et al. 2014; Sitrin & Azzelini 2014; Solnit 2010; Zibechi 2010). Such initiatives include:

> ...worker, consumer and producer cooperatives; fair trade initiatives; intentional communities; alternative currencies; community-run social centers and resource libraries; community development credit unions; community gardens; open source free software initiatives; community supported agriculture programs; community land trusts and more. (Miller 2010: 25)

These moments of autonomy, of collective creation, are linked together, not by a formal mechanism, but by a web of signification, a process of ubiquity (Gibson-Graham 2006), and, for some scholars, they point towards a large-scale revolutionary shift that is already under way (Graeber 2014).

Endnotes

1 This paper is an adaptation and translation of Kruzynski, A. (2017). "L'autonomie collective en action: du Centre Social Autogéré de Pointe-Saint-Charles au Bâtiment 7, " *Nouvelles pratiques sociales, L'action communautaire: Quelle autonomie? Pour qui?,* 29(1) : 139-158.

2 Centre social autogéré de Pointe-Saint-Charles (CSA). (2009). *Vers un Centre social autogéré: Mémoire*. Consultations sur l'aménagement des terrains du CN, Montreal: CSA, p.4, my translation.

3 Some of my comrades commented on earlier versions of this paper, including Marcel Sévigny, Judith Cayer and Margot Silvestro.

4 CSA. (2009). *Déclaration publique d'appui au Centre social autogéré*. Montréal.

5 This is a play on words. Seven (7) sounds like "c'est" which means "it is" and "nous" means "ours," thus: "Collective It Is Ours."

6 Lamont, E (2016). *Le Chantier des possibles*. [DVD]. Montreal: Amélie Lambert-Bouchar and Sylvie Van Brabant (producers).

7 A slogan.

8 Bâtiment 7 (s.d.) *A propos.* Retrieved on 30 May 2017 from www.batiment7.org, my translation.

9 CSA (s.d.). *Principes du CSA*. Montreal. My translation.

10 Because of space restrictions, I focus here on internal political practices. For a detailed analysis of social relations with other actors and institutions, and the building of power, see Kruzynski (2020).

11 A local version of Indymedia, named Centre de médias autonomes du Québec (Autonomous Media Centre of Quebec).

12 CSA (2009), Historique du CSA: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1K9UmkX-wHw; CSA (2009). See, by Amy Miller: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DzjzEHrr1pw.

13 See, among others: Finalement un centre social autogéré à Pointe-Saint-Charles, CUTV, 2012: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fiT7wyw7b1o.

14 CSA (Octobre 2007). *Procédures de groupe : Comité d'installation du Centre social autogéré*. Montréal : l'auteur, my translation.

15 CSA (2009). *Petit pense-bête concernant les relations avec les médias*. Montréal.

16 Centre des médias indépendants. (2009). *CSA message médiatique*. [Web]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwGxf_2fpzk.

17 Centre des médias indépendants (2009). CSA message médiatique: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwGxf_2fpzk.

18 Margot Silvestro (2012). Op. cit., my translation.

19 CSA. (2011). *Vivre ensemble*. Montréal.

20 I will discuss here only the last four because I did not have access to the deliberations within each of the three businesses that emerged out of the ASC network. These collective enterprises are workers' or solidarity cooperatives.

21 CSA (2009). *Déclaration publique d'appui au Centre social autogéré*. Montreal, my translation.

22 La Pointe libertaire (2013). Op. cit., p.42-43, my translation.

23 CSA. (no date). *Explorer les possibilités quant à l'application de processus économiques alternatifs*. [preliminary working paper], Montreal, p. 6.

24 Ibid, p. 7., my translation.

25 CSA. (2011). *Lignes directrices pour l'ouverture du CSA*. Montreal.

26 CSA (no date). Réclame ta Pointe : Entrée et sortie des bidoux.

27 These are both social justice organizations run on university campuses: QPIRG is the Quebec public interest research group and AFESH is the social sciences and humanities student association of Université du Québec à Montréal.

28 There is no English name for this organization; roughly translates as Peoples' Club for Food Security.

29 CSA, Explorer les possibilités..., Op. cit., p. 7, my translation.

30 CSA—Marcel and Pascal (18 November 2011). *Maintenir et consolider notre culture antiautoritaire (boussole éthique) : en lien avec les impacts du financement de l'État, trouver des mécanismes pour éviter le dérapage.* [preliminary working paper]. Montreal, p. 6.

31 Ibid, p. 3.

32 Ibid, my translation.

33 Referring to TAZs (*temporary autonomous zones*) (Bey 1991).

34 CSA—Marcel and Pascal (18 November 2011). Op. cit., p. 2, my translation.

35 See Kruzynski & Silvestro (2013) for a discussion of challenges and Kruzynski (2020) for an analysis of conflictual social relations and building of power.

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