A CALL TO FARMS

Continental Drift through the Midwest Radical Culture Corridor

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Continental Drift through the Midwest Radical Culture Corridor

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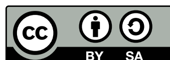

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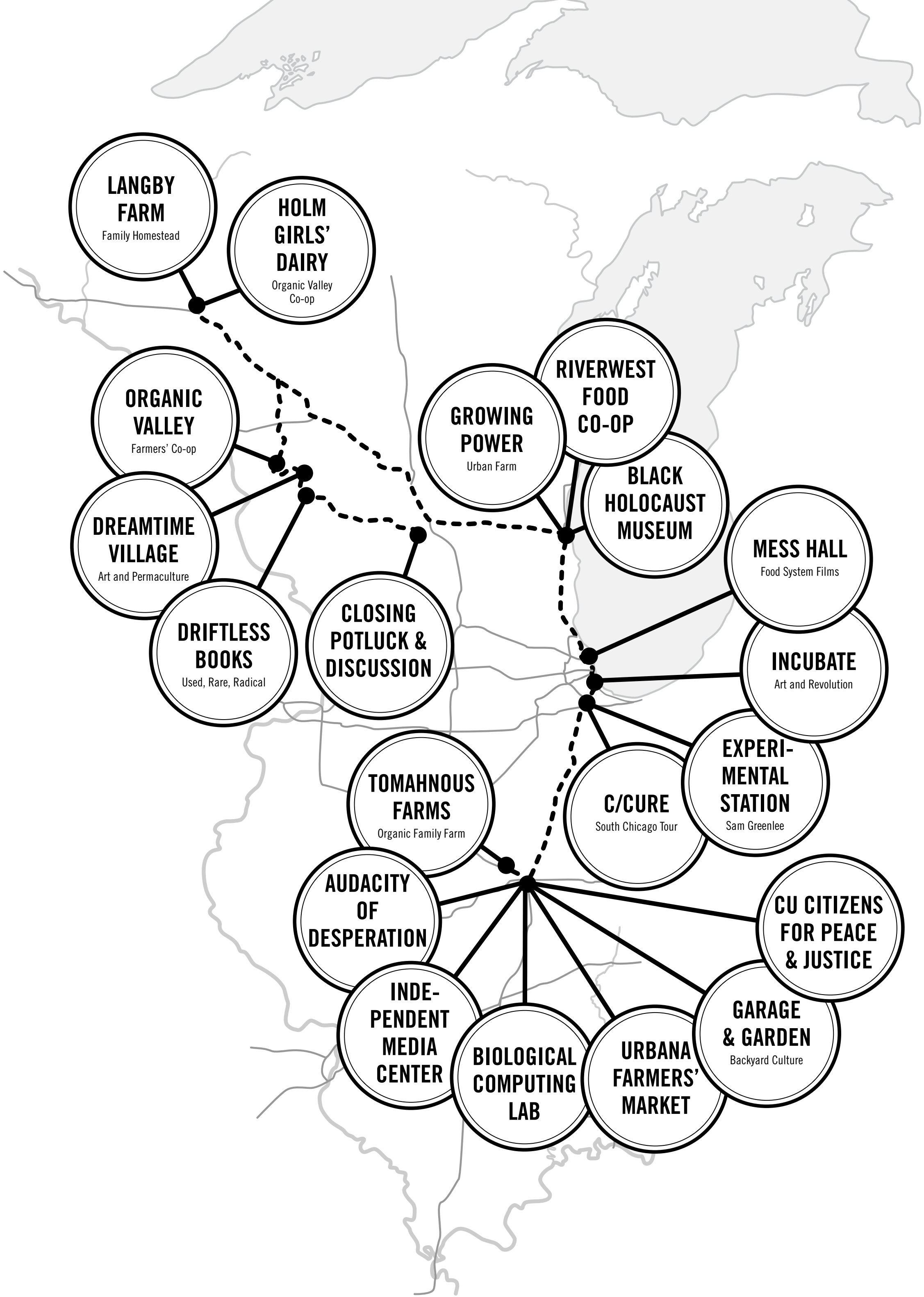

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INDE-PENDENT MEDIA CENTER
BIOLOGICAL COMPUTING LAB
URBANA FARMERS' MARKET
GARAGE & GARDEN
Backyard Culture

INTRODUCTION

Sarah Kanouse

From June 4 to 14, 2008, a group of people traveled through Illinois and Wisconsin in search of a Radical Midwest. Starting in Urbana, Illinois and winding our way through Chicago, Milwaukee, rural Wisconsin, and Madison, we visited places where alternate pasts and futures sprout up and grow roots in the stress-fractures of a society built on violence, exploitation, and environmental destruction. We visited community groups fighting power companies for decades of environmental racism; learned about preserving Underground Railroad sites in Chicago; watched a 35-year old film about revolutionary black street gangs with the man who wrote it; cleaned a flood-damaged bookstore; and passed the time on many, many farms. The group gained, lost, and regained members along the way, and when we parted ways we decided to put together a book to better understand—for ourselves, by sharing with others—what felt so urgent, so profound, and so joyful about the experience. This is that book.

The trip was called Continental Drift and extended the seminars of that name organized by Brian Holmes, Claire Pentecost, and the people at 16 Beaver Group. The name proposes a radical geography that thinks place, culture, and economics simultaneously and contends that neoliberal capitalism and American militarism—as well as the international social movements that counter them—are radically reshaping the world on scales from the interpersonal to the geopolitical. The Midwest gathering doubled this sense of the word "drift." Through the mobile exploration of the geographies of capital and resistance in a particular place, the seminar also became a dérive, favored as an affective, embodied research tool by the Situationists of fifty years ago. In contrast to earlier seminars, this Drift unfolded over ten days, 725 miles, and several rainy nights spent in tents, fostering a level of familiarity, even intimacy among the travelers and those we visited.

The Midwest Radical Culture Corridor is another name attached to the trip, this one describing the terrain through which we traveled and the diverse activities we found. Like Continental Drift, the MRCC is a provocation to think differently about the relations among culture, politics and geography, particularly in a region often written off as a backwater. Although we often wondered "what exactly is the Midwest Radical Culture Corridor," the trip indicated that for now it may be best considered something that is done rather than defined, an action or a way of thinking that seeks out the connections—and conflicts—among different, broadly resistant efforts. It's more a process than an organization, more a verb than a noun.

As the assembled reflections and proposals of some seventeen people who became part of the Drift, whether for one day or ten, this book refuses easy definition or classification. It also defies easy editing, straightforward design, and the cursory reading. It is organized very roughly in chronological order, with pieces describing particular stops on the Drift placed in the sequence in which they occurred, but this chronology is interrupted with texts that reflect on the experience more generally or discuss the before- and after-lives of the Drift, the people who went on it, and the ideas it brought together. More than a record of an event, it is a handbook for a potential—one which you are welcome to join.

First corn
Photo, Bonnie Fortune.

MRCC Communique #10

Midwest Radical Culture Corridor

If you attend potlucks

If you live in a co-op

If you grow your own greens

If you conceive of art practice
as a form of social justice

If you speak against the settled history of a place and work to expose its hidden and haunted histories

If you have have lost your house to neighborhood speculation run amok

If you farm food not fuel

If you attend letter-writing campaign meetings

If you want to shut down prisons

If you oppose the military industrial complex in all forms

If you seek to create and sustain alternative economies

If you live in an area that has been written off as a cultural backwater

If you actively seek to gain and grow knowledge from the people and places around you…

then you are already part of the Cultural Corridor of Midwest Radicals!

The Midwestern counterculture today grows out of generations of radical democratic practice. In the 1880s, farmers and laborers organized against the coastal cartels; in the 1910s and 20s Midwest radicals used song, art, and performance to organize labor unions and farmers cooperatives. In the 1930s and 40s they were at it again, building unions in Detroit, Gary, and Chicago. In the 1960s and 70's, political organizers and civil rights activists took to the streets to demand social justice. Each movement fertilizes the next: a palimpsest of imagined alternatives to "business as usual" in the land of corn and greed.

The Radical Midwest Cultural Corridor is an infrastructure of support for long term change, beyond spectacle. Standing in opposition to the monoculture, greenways and open fields are our models. Here is where new, hybrid cultures and critical ideas can be planted. This is a call to farms.

We've had enough and now it's time to start relating to each other:

How do we connect cities beyond roads?

How can we collectivize sustainable energy?

How can we create social exchange
instead of capital extraction?

How can the highest stakes be our
own community and everyone in it?

What does it mean to practice
democracy on a deep level?

Photo, Claire Pentecost.

Hooks and Loops: Reweaving the local

Claire Pentecost

I live in a laptop, I live in the Internet, I live in airplanes and airports, I live in my library, in radio broadcasts, I live in my camera and often in other people's cameras. As much as these virtualized sites levitate and excite me, I suspect they are eroding my vitality. Even as they put me in proximity to a wide variety of realities, they make others elusive. All these life-links occur in a similar kind of time. Perhaps I could call it info-time: the time it takes for information to travel electronic connections, for books to arrive by UPS, for jet fuel and other forms of credit to burn. Perhaps most attenuated of all is the time it takes me to comprehend what I am receiving.

There is so much to understand and it all feels so urgent. Urgency occupies a very tight temporal zone, and I find it spatially cornering as well. In the field of urgencies I have so many ways to contemplate my world at a distance—distance determines the macro and there is also a distance in the abstraction that delivers the micro. I am missing the velcro, the experience that sticks, the tactile weave of loops (needs? desires?) and hooks (invitations? exigencies?) that orient me both physically and conceptually.

In fact, I live in the Midwest, a real place. Here burdock grows vigorously in "disturbed soils." The seeds of burdock are not airborne but are designed for contact: covered in microscopic hooks, they stick to passing loopy textures (fur, hair, cloth) to be dispersed further down the path—loosened in another touch between mobile and sessile. Growing up in Georgia, we knew "beggar's lice," a similar hitchhiker on socks and sweaters that became a toy or miniature building block for tiny worlds in our fascination. Legend has it that burdock inspired the inventor of velcro, George de Mestral of Switzerland. Burdocks, stickweed, tick trefoil, a panoply of hooking seed designs populates temperate, tropical and subtropical zones of the globe. How do I know this? I live in a computer, a library, a world of stories. Living in layers of narration is rich and pretty inevitable for the humans. But signs abound that we have lost touch with something.

The designers of our government's interrogation policy (the one that advocates torture as a counter-terrorism necessity) cite Jack Bauer more than they do the U.S. Constitution. Who is Jack Bauer? The fictional protagonist of Fox television's "24," as in 24 hours, the always urgent time frame in which Bauer must prevent terrorist attacks, mostly by torturing suspects into giving up silver bullet answers. How do I know this? From books and news articles. People in power operate in a selective and sensational media world, a spectral bubble where they cannot feel the consequences of their own acts. Having little power myself (despite inexplicable privilege), I am eager to understand consequences.

One of the themes of my attention that evolved as we traveled together through the Midwest was people's hunger for reality, for making lives in which ineluctable reality is the teacher. We encountered a variety of attempts to localize, to build collective knowledge and purpose through material and social engagement, through specific experience and experiments that necessarily unfold in time and place. The localization I am seeing coexists with global awareness and habits of broad-based connection. At the same time it is also about overcoming parochialism. Maybe I should call it *relocalization*, because it is about repositioning the local, with sophisticated insight into how the local fits into larger schema.

At the Frederick Douglass branch of the Champaign public library we met with members of Champaign-Urbana Citizens for Peace and Justice, a group formed around the unfinished business of a former manufactured gas plant that left a legacy of cancers and displacement in a poor black neighborhood. Criminal environmental degradation unfailingly occurs in the spaces of segregation. This is one of the ways the wealthier beneficiaries of industrial progress are protected from its ongoing catastrophe. From Bhopal to Aniston, the worst side effects (so far) happen elsewhere to the seats of power. At our meeting Professor Ken Salo summed up the objective thus: if you want environmental sustainability, work for social justice. As long as we segregate the risks and rewards of environmentally toxic industrialization, sustainability remains a specious marketing idea.

At Growing Power, the last farm in Milwaukee, we saw a 20-year-old, intensely local experiment in community development, food security, vermiculture and radical permaculture. The nine greenhouses and grounds combine the year-round cultivation of fish, sprouts, greens and other horticulture in intensive, low-impact systems that maximize local resources. Those resources are not only material—composting wastes from local breweries and coffee roasters for instance—but also social, including training programs for low-income youth and immigrant populations, and maintaining relationships throughout the region to produce and distribute healthy food.

When I asked Julie, our guide, about a comprehensive training document, she replied that although they do make handouts for their courses, their approach emphasizes the coordination of the needs and surpluses specific to local contexts. There is no master manual because a Growing Power-type operation in another city would have to be different. But the model is inherently transferable. Will Allen, the founding director of GP is invited all over the world to advise urban agriculture projects; the Milwaukee site is visited by international delegations all year long. The experiments constantly unfolding in situ are undertaken in full cognizance of local and global problems begging for solutions.

In western Wisconsin we visited many people applying the skill of commitment to long-term processes in a particular place. Growing fabulous children and vital communities, finding ways to lessen the American burden on the rest of the world takes time. We saw this at the Holm Girls Dairy, a family farm run by Sarah, Erika, Andrea, Laura, Rachel, Mary, and their parents Doran and Mariann. Originally from the area, they were living in California when they decided to buy a defunct dairy farm in the late 90s. They have spent the last decade improving the soil and cultivating organic pasturage for their herd of 70 or so charismatic Jersey heifers. They are part of the Cooperative Regions of Organic Producer Pools (CROPP), known perhaps to you, the conscientious buyer, as Organic Valley. CROPP is an example of a new existential scale: networks connecting one localized form of integrity to another.

In the anarchic process of planning our drift, we didn't decide to focus on resistant practices of food production and distribution. In the end, almost half of our planned events and many of our ad hoc stops revealed ways that food is inspiring new approaches to natural and social interdependency. I think we drifted this way because food is currently one of the most invigorated and invigorating vectors for expanding autonomy. Creating mutually beneficial, sustaining relationships to the natural world and to other humans requires us to engage in many kinds of time. Most valuable things in nature and human development can't be rushed. Worms make perfect

soil from plant-based garbage. You can set up optimum conditions for them to do their job, but in the end it takes as long as it takes.

In his 1994 book, *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time*, landscape historian J.B. Jackson elucidated the degree to which community, or richness of place, is a function of both space and time. Community as defined by place is aggressively marketed to us, because that seductive fiction can be packaged as real estate by opportunistic developers—one of the forces that makes place-based community suspect. Time, on the other hand, is sold to us in the form of technological devices to speed things up or at least to relieve the drudgery of survival in a punishing world. We can also buy time in the form of lower-status, lesser-paid labor. But the kind of time required for a livable world can't be bought. We have to make it ourselves, in collective experiments, with no guarantees. We can continually work on creating optimum conditions, but it takes as long as it takes.

Not all our events were food related (though most included potluck). In Chicago we invited author and filmmaker Sam Greenlee to a public screening of the 1973 film *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, adapted from Greenlee's 1966 book of the same name. A Chicago native, Greenlee spent 1957–65 in the Foreign Service "rubbing shoulders with successful revolutionaries in the new states of Africa." His fictional protagonist is the first black man recruited to the CIA, where he is basically shelved for five years. But his training in counter-insurgency is not lost on him; he returns to Chicago posing as a social worker in the rising black bourgeoisie while secretly organizing street gangs to prepare for disciplined armed revolt. Acerbically funny and breathtakingly radical, this work basically shut the door on Greenlee's future employment and further publishing opportunities, though it hasn't stopped him from writing and from fearlessly speaking his mind. In the Q&A, Greenlee mentioned that while his character could infiltrate the world of Washington yes-men, a street gang is almost impossible for outsiders to infiltrate because you have to be "from the neighborhood." Faking a sympathetic ideology, idiom or style is not enough. He didn't have to point out that the U.S. faces a similar obstacle to infiltrating terrorist organizations today.

But to recognize the tenacious power of pre-modern foundations of identity—clan, turf, religion, race, ethnicity, nationality—is not the same as advocating such identifications as a fitting solution to the devastating deracination that afflicts us all, in different ways, today. The draw of such structures reflects a desire for traction in shared lived experience. But the choice is not between the twin alienations of insular protection or rootless anomie. The current gravitational pull of localized experience gathers extended connections in a deeply textured world. Drifting or settled, let the hooks and loops multiply.

The Audacity of Desperation exhibition installation,
Urban-Champaign Indymedia Center, June 2008.
Photo, Sarah Ross.

The Audacity of Desperation: Notes on an evolving stage

Jessica Lawless and Sarah Ross

Barack Obama tells us the current political landscape can change if we are willing to have the "audacity of hope." Yet, to those of us skeptical of electoral politics being the stage where social change is actually carried out, hope is not that easy to resuscitate.

For many of us born after the assassinations of JFK, MLK and Malcolm X, our first political memory falls somewhere between Nixon's resignation and Bill Clinton's lies about having sex with Monica Lewinsky. Although suspicious of politicians, we have found ourselves seduced by Obama's oratory style, feeling nostalgia for movements we can't remember. We were also glad to see Hilary Clinton go up against men still weighing down the glass ceiling. But this is countered by the hype around Nancy Pelosi being the first woman Speaker of the House and her miserable failure to radicalize the senate and end the war in Iraq. The potential for our government to be made up of firsts is not enough. The Republicans know the power of representation and they delivered: Condoleeza Rice, Alberto Gonzales, John Yoo, Clarence Thomas and Mary Cheney's gayby. Choosing to vote based on narrow concepts of identity has led to more exclusive tendencies, not less. As Harry Bellafonte said in a 2007 interview with Amy Goodman, "No one [has] stepped to the table as arrogantly as George W. Bush and his friends have done and said, 'We legally want to suspend the rights of citizens, the right to surveil, the right to read your mail, the right to arrest you without charge." The hopes of getting those rights back, or getting those rights for those who already lack them, has been removed from the national stage, far from any candidate's electoral platform.

Cultural producers, scholars and activists alike say we have reached a collective state of depression, as organizing, protest, and dissent still falls upon deaf ears.[1] It seems all we can offer is critique from the sidelines, as if we are unwilling voyeurs watching the worst performance ever. With the 2008 elections looming near, we need more than rhetorical hope.

Intellectually, we know the collapse of our socio-economic infrastructure cannot be fixed by any one president or political party. Emotionally, we want to watch somebody bring a house down on the wicked witch so we can wake up from this globalized nightmare. As political depression goes manic between high energy for Obama and disgust for simple reform being packaged as systemic change, we turn to desperation as a source that might ignite the change we've needed. We don't need a leader, new technologies, or more consumer products to produce long-term change. We need each other. How can we connect communities, select alliances, establish coalitions? Is it possible to be so reckless that desperation can be re-imagined as a tool for political organizing? Do we need to delve fully into an emotional crisis or can we wallow in our desperation and find creative possibilities for effecting social change?

"The Audacity of Desperation" was one stage for such connections. An art exhibition, action, and on-going dialogue, the show aimed at unraveling states of desperation. Activists, artists and very concerned people created posters, manifestos, DIY kits, postcards, stickers, buttons and multi-media projects for free distribution. The show opened in May 2008, at the Independent Media Center—a community-run space in a former turn-of-the-century post office in Urbana, Illinois. The IMC hosts an open space for shows, exhibi-

tions, meetings and the like, and is also home to permanent organizations such as Book to Prisoners, The Bike Co-op and WRFU a community radio station. At the IMC the show hosted a video screening and discussions. In June 2008, “Desperation” was reconfigured to fit into the new Demo Space gallery at PS 122 in New York. At this stop, along with the take-away artworks, Steven Lam organized three days of performances and workshops addressing the theme of desperation in regards to the upcoming elections. When the election finally arrives, “Desperation” will be at Sea and Space Explorations in Los Angeles. Here, we will collaborate with “Exchange Rate, Election 2008,” an international performance project organized by Elana Mann.

We don’t know what will occur on November 4, 2008, but we do know that we’ve talked a lot about it! Our intention with the show and these various formats was to foster relationships and dialogue around the desperate state of affairs laid by a disastrous administration, complacent congressional leaders and a un-empowered populace. In each location, we aimed at carving out a space for collaborations with artists and organizations for points of connection to be made visible and seeds for growth, planted.

[1] *for more information on political depression see* Feel Tank Chicago http://www.feeltankchicago.net/

Creating a People-Powered Food System

Lisa Bralts-Kelly

The best way to be hopeful for the future is to prepare for it.

–James Howard Kunstler

Those who say it cannot be done should not interrupt those who are doing it.

–Chinese proverb

Clean and healthy food should belong to everyone. It currently does not.

Instead of healthy food, what *do* we have here in the United States? We have food safety problems with factory-farmed meat and vegetables arriving tainted to grocery stores. We have farm worker deaths and other food-related labor issues. This spring brought climate change-related 500-year flooding to the nation's breadbasket. Water and fossil fuel depletion becomes more obvious every season; every year brings more topsoil degradation and loss. Today's rising food prices lead to greater reliance by more people on struggling emergency food programs. Conversely, we have increasing rates of diabetes and other ailments related to poor diet and malnutrition, especially among the poor, but certainly among the middle and upper classes as well. Each year, hundreds of thousands of acres of tillable land are lost to sprawl and development, and hundreds of thousands of acres of existing farmland are used for biofuel production instead of food crops. It's getting harder to convince young people to get into the farming business—any kind of farming—and we're experiencing a potentially catastrophic loss of diversity in agriculture, with genetically-modified varieties of plants not just replacing native varieties, but contaminating them and altering them forever. Our mainstream media believe wholeheartedly in sensationalism but not balanced reporting of facts, making it hard for ordinary people to make choices or to speak out.

Oh, and we have high-fructose corn syrup. Lots and lots of high fructose corn syrup.

No, clean and healthy food does not belong to everyone. And the U.S. is by no means alone…

It'd be too easy to keep our collective head in the sand; mainstream American culture encourages—nay, demands—an interest only in the current moment, with little regard for consequences! As our current food system —including even existing local distribution models—grows increasingly unsustainable, people become unhealthier and more disconnected from their food—which is, after all, the most basic and essential part of life.

Truly mainstreaming clean and healthy food isn't a small job. It will require taking down giant agribusiness, changing the food distribution model, changing the role of food providers, and eventually changing the culture. If we're lucky, we have some time to ease into these changes without a lot of problems, but if the center cannot hold, we're all in trouble. So… how do we start?

Localize. I believe that local action is key. Communities, with or without the support, blessing, and occasionally even the knowledge of their governments, are able to accomplish much in short periods of time. My own community, Urbana-Champaign, IL, is one place where education and organization are making positive changes in the food system, regardless of involvement by the local governments. There are other communities throughout the U.S., including many in the Midwest, that have embarked on similar journeys, some with more support from citi-

zens and government, and some with greater success. But Urbana-Champaign is unique because it's located in the Great Corn Desert – that part of Illinois covered in feed corn and soybeans, a place that is, to paraphrase a local T-shirt artist's favorite design, desperately flat but insanely fertile. It lies on some of the best topsoil in the country, and lots of activity quietly brews here.

People are connecting with local growers in many ways. Local farmers' markets have sprung up in every town, and the Saturday market in Urbana is one of the largest in the state. Many shoppers seek out local produce in grocery stores. Common Ground Food Co-op was facing an uncertain future just two years ago but now, thanks to its membership, is relocating to a much larger and more central location that will help it better fulfill its mission of promoting local and organic production, fostering conscious consumerism, and building community. Even the local mainstream press has taken notice, running generally positive, if occasionally factually incorrect, pieces about changes consumers are making in their purchasing habits. And all this is happening in an area where corporate agriculture has been firmly entrenched for decades.

It's not just about buying stuff, of course.

Networking and idea exchange has led to the development of a community kitchen, completely certified, that can be rented by people or organizations to cook or preserve food on a large scale.

The regional food bank, located in Urbana, is seizing the opportunity to educate people about food security in our area; progressive leadership and innovation have led to the development of more relevant programming in the face of decreased donations from Big Food.

Best of all, on my frequent walks through my neighborhood I'm seeing more gardens—from a few humble tomato and pepper plants to vast experiments in What Grows Here. Neighbors are talking to each other over fences and are wandering into each others' yards. It's not just garden-variety (ha!) chatter about what's wrong with the tomatoes this year or what to do about those damn squirrels. No. This involves tossing around ideas like cooperative gardening and January seed-swapping and concepts like neighborhood self-sufficiency vs. individual self-sufficiency, conservation, greenhouse-building, chicken-raising (legal in Urbana) and other simple collective actions.

At the risk of sounding alarmist, I believe we're at *the* pivotal point—as the world begins to burn, we're in a place where, if we cannot stop the burning entirely, we can certainly live lighter, adapt, and work together. But why wait for the worst to happen? Every time I work with a group, I point out that everyone eats—that even though it's something we have the luxury of doing as many times as we want every day here in the U.S., things might look incredibly different a year, two years, five years from now. The choices we make right now as individuals and communities regarding our food supply—what we buy and who we buy it from, what we grow, how we spend our time—are extremely political and have a huge impact on lives as well as the health of the planet.

So get out there… and grow something.

Lisa Bralts is the director of Urbana's Market at the Square, one of Illinois' largest farmers' markets. She also serves on the board of Common Ground Food Co-op, is an avid gardener, and has been involved, somehow, in food system work for almost a decade. She lives in Urbana with her husband, two kids, and lots of great neighbors.

Let's Re-Make the Neighborhood

Brett Bloom and Bonnie Fortune

Can a shift happen? Are you preparing for a shift? Would you welcome one if it came? A shift might entail reduced dependence on petroleum products; eating food that you grow, or that was grown within 10-100 miles of your house; learning beyond schools with one-size-education-fits-all agendas; opening up a regular neighborhood to do and support these kinds of initiatives, altering the fabric and texture of our daily travails. We think that is how shifts can happen; by starting the discussions and actions that will transform our neighborhoods.

The Continental Drift was a mobile seminar discussing possibilities of transformation and major shifts that global neoliberal capitalism have forced on us, but also how we resist them and cause our own shifts. It explored scales of relationships, large and small, asking how what we do on an intimate level affects the larger world and vice versa. The CD spent time with people and communities that are involved in creative and sustaining initiatives, moving between city and countryside. Some of the projects had an impact on a large number of people; others were operating between a handful of neighbors. The latter proves to be an important mobilizing force as we look at ways we can connect people in the Radical Midwest.

To participate in this mobile seminar, we opened our garage and garden to the public for an evening of potluck and discussion. In our garage we made a presentation space. For what was the inaugural exhibition at Garage & Garden—what we call this space of neighborhood knowledge and sharing—we selected images from the Library of Radiant Optimism for Let's Re-Make the World, our ongoing project that catalogs how-to books and attempted world-changing activities from the late 1960s and early 1970s. The images showed different instances of collectivization and integrated ecological design and food production within neighborhoods.

We wanted to begin conversations for building neighborhoods that look and function differently. Really differently! We wanted, along with a handful of folks, to join and push the growing number of people who are unplugging their households from various systems. Our garage was an obvious starting point because it joins the pre-existing garage culture in our town of Urbana, opening up a private home as a business or public meeting space thereby shifting the boundaries of how a neighborhood can function.

Putting rain barrels on the side of your house or planting vegetable gardens in the right-of-way strips next to the road, even building green houses that take up your driveway instead of accommodating a car, are just some of the visual indicators that something different can happen in a neighborhood. It doesn't take long to notice that something is bubbling under the surface—something that might spill over from homes and into a more public reality, disrupting capitalism as an all-encompassing social given. We want the strange to co-habit with the numbingly repeated, so we are organizing with our neighbors to make visible changes in the local landscapes and acknowledge pre-existing modifications.

We know there is potential in the collective energy of multiple households. In Urbana, there is a high level of owner-occupied buildings and fairly loose zoning laws. This gives people great freedom to modify the space immediately surrounding their houses. This is a hugely untapped area of exploration for public and political visual practices. Within the space of a few square blocks there are a large number of "free stores" on curbs, container

gardens on roofs, greenhouses made of cob and old windows, and large "bird nests" made from yard waste. This is a good start, but we desire eight-story towers made from bamboo grown in someone's back yard. We can't wait for a neighbor to build a waste treatment facility for herself and five surrounding neighbors. In our backyard we grow corn to eat, purple pole beans, zucchini, cilantro, beets, lemongrass, four kinds of peppers, potatoes, strawberries, and more. We plan to join together with several neighbors to create a backyard farm to produce shared crops to feed multiple households. We will support bartering and underground economic systems that keep money and resources moving more freely through our neighborhood.

These modifications move contrary to the prevalent notion that there is not much but soybeans and corn to be seen outside of Chicago or other large cities. Most folks traveling through Central Illinois are moving by car—occasionally by train or bus. The CD was largely navigated by car. Driving on the interstate from Urbana to Chicago and beyond, you see an unrelenting monocropscape. The repetitive, hour-after-hour, monotonous green barrage makes you think that soybeans and corn are all there is out here. And it is important to know that these crops don't feed us: Illinois imports 90% of its food. We are besieged by signs of abundance that obfuscate our deep food insecurities. But through this, we visited places that showed culture to the contrary. There is more.

During the CD, we mapped a small part of this region with our bodies, ideas, and movement. We gave physical witness to pockets of resistance both purposeful and innate around the Midwest. We included a map of Urbana-Champaign from 1973 in the exhibition in our garage and in this book. It was made by a group of artists and activists who were trying to mark out points of resistance in what for the most part was (and still is) a conservative college town. The map—with a compass made from a peace sign, and arrows on the edge of the map pointing to other major cities and spaces of countercultural activity —does several things simultaneously. It spatializes, visualizes, and socializes resistance to received social reality and city space. It reminds us that possibilities for resisting the dominant culture existed and remain here in the Midwest. We think that this little town in the middle of the prairie is a good place to practice interrupting the texture of monocultural city planning and spatial experience and to generate creative pockets of resistance. There is no one way to do something, and that is the constant that we stick to: no more monoculture!

Notes on Calling Before Digging

Ryan Griffis

When most people speak of racism going "underground," they are referring to changes in social norms that make the overt racism of the Jim Crow South and Northern redlining unacceptable, while less obvious racism permeates the cultural unconscious. The fact that people of color are disproportionately affected by pollution, much of it contained in the soil and groundwater under homes, schools, and neighborhoods, gives another meaning to this language, however. Two studies—one in 1987, another in 2007, both commissioned by the United Church of Christ—found that race is the single most significant variable in locating where toxic waste facilities are located. The racialized geography resulting from this overlap of chemical and social toxicity has been called "Human Sacrifice Zones," where both "waste and people are articulated as unnecessary, undesirable, and contaminating." (Phaedra Pezzullo, Toxic Tourism, 2007). Increasingly, these Human Sacrifice Zones have become active battle zones as community groups, organizers, health care advocates and interested residents demand access to healthy surroundings and work conditions.

We visited one such battleground, a location in a neighborhood known as the North End of Champaign, Illinois. Through a discussion with educators and community activists Aaron Ammons and Professor Ken Salo, we looked at an immediately grounded example of the intersection of neoliberal globalization and localized environmental racism. The geographic focus was a site located at the intersection of 5th and Hill Streets, a former Illinois Power coal-to-gas manufacturing plant that operated from 1897 to 1955. Currently owned by utility company Ameren, the site underwent a massive, yet incomplete cleanup in 1997, removing 200,000 gallons of an extremely toxic substance known as coal tar. Ten years later, the site sits vacant, surrounded by a chain link fence. A succession of inadequate signage, none of which mentions the possible toxic nature of the site, has progressed from a placard warning against digging, to "No Trespassing," to the current one announcing it as a former coal-to-gas plant.

Investigations by community organizations (C-U Citizens for Peace & Justice, Champaign County Health Care Consumers) and organized students uncovered that knowledge of the site's toxicity was as barren as the site itself. The party responsible for the site, Ameren, made no, or at most minimal, efforts at informing the neighborhood residents of their potentially still toxic neighbor. Interview after interview with those living in the area revealed how little Ameren had reached out to the affected community. Only after more than a year of direct pressure and community involvement did Ameren provide a highly technical and hefty document that essentially dismissed any threat posed by the contamination - a position they have maintained through their public relations. As I write this, Ameren has supposedly finished a comprehensive series of tests on surrounding soil and groundwater and is beginning another round of remediating actions. For some, the battle is now shifting to concerns for what will happen to the site, and by extension, the neighborhood. One of the graduate students involved in the initial research of the site, Chuck Allen, has pointed to development plans for the City of Champaign that suggest that the current residents of the North End may not be the beneficiaries of any "improvements" to the neighborhood.

As Ammons and Salo have consistently made clear in their work to make this site visible,

the toxicity experienced by residents is much more than chemical. Relations here have been plagued by regular police violence that can only be understood as reflective of racial inequities. Douglass Park surrounds a local public library, where we held our meeting, and is only a couple of blocks from the Ameren site. The library here has served as a headquarters of sorts for community meetings to discuss how to handle the abandoned, contaminated lot. Until recently, the park's sign announced its closure at "dusk"—that vague term for the time between sunset and darkness. In this predominantly black neighborhood, the uncomfortable allusion to what James Loewen has called "sundown towns" is cause enough for concern, especially given that other parks, in other parts of town, don't close at sunset. The change to the sign came only after public outcry over a brutal and unwarranted assault by police on a local 17 year old leaving the park, ironically from a facility that is within, yet open later than, the park itself. One year later, the young man, Brian Chesley, was convicted on counts of resisting arrest and obstructing an officer. Chesley was stopped, according to the arresting officer's testimony, simply because he lived in the North End. The park sign has since been changed, and residents can now be in the park until 9 P.M. before expecting harassment from the authorities.

Public health scholar Mindy Thompson Fullilove uses the familiar gardening term "root shock" to describe the often catastrophic effects of upheaval when people are forcibly removed from their homes due to urban redevelopment and housing policies. Given the heavy agricultural focus of our drift, this language seems appropriate to employ here. Plants, however, also require nutrition and healthy conditions if they are to remain and thrive in a place. The racism underlying U.S. economic policies, responsible for the relocation programs discussed by Fullillove, is also responsible for polluting the ground upon which many African Americans live and work. Racism may be underground, metaphorically and chemically, but its impact on our collective roots is all too visible.

To listen to a collectively produced radio program about the work being done around the Ameren site in Champaign, and environmental racism in general, point a web browser to:
radioliberacion.org/audio/Fifth_and_Hill.mp3

Beginning the Long-Term Project of Making an Imprint on a Region

Mike Wolf

Where I'm drifting from

For about seven years I lived in a certain way in Chicago, as many people of my cultural and socio-economic background do, with a nine-to-five job. As is easy to understand, the job was necessary to pay rent on the yearly lease for my one-bedroom apartment, and give me spending money to feed myself and fulfill my other needs. However, for over a year now I have lived with neither a lease nor a regular job, partly in Chicago, but mostly along a kind of messy, mutable corridor of affections and accommodations that connect Chicago and where I grew up, St. Paul, Minnesota. I am depending more on—or contributing to—a human-scale economy of hospitality and generosity to fulfill my day-to-day needs than on a job and a lease and the economic forms that tend to accompany these things. By this I mean the overwhelming universe of consumerism: take-out food, the daily commute, bars, to-go cups, shopping, movie rentals, office supplies, vegetative image consumption, advertising, packaging/litter, parking, and so on. This economy of hospitality and generosity while in one way more ancient than the market economy, is in another way nascent, underground and still becoming. It is a project of generations.

Living in an apartment with a day or night job is a very common arrangement, of course. I expect that most folks reading this either currently live this way, or have done so at some point. If you think about it for a moment, too, it is clear that this arrangement and the forms it takes in our culture have a history, which is to say it has changed over time and that things were not always this way. For me in particular, being an artist, this history is inextricable from the fantasies and dreams of modern bohemianism. But for everyone, bohemians and squares alike, the history of this way of living is inextricable from urbanization and industrialization, the need to concentrate labor in the city, and maintain the perfect balance of happiness and distraction so that labor sticks around. (If you're turned off because this sounds like Marxism, please, be a little more imaginative and don't assume that I am working towards an argument for communist or socialist revolution. In fact what I am working towards is your imaginativeness and more importantly the embodiment of your imaginativeness, which must have the freedom to collage any and all ideas it comes across, in whatever form it fancies. I hope you can grant me the courtesy of that same freedom.)

This daily cycle lent itself to an accumulation of misery that I felt I couldn't really live with much longer. I began to experiment with another bohemian tendency, that of traveling and drifting. Though one could argue that this tendency serves the same interests as urbanization, that is, the interests of imperialism, I self-consciously undertook my travels, in part anyway, to scrutinize the effects of imperialism and my place in it.

These things (my life) are working on multiple levels of relation: from the desires and tendencies within my body, outward between the bodies I come in direct contact with, to far beyond my body, around the world, where, for example, there are people who have sewn the clothing I wear or mined the toxic materials that form the computer I type on. In the two years before I finally quit the job and the apartment I made two forays, traveling by foot, in two distinct areas of what we understand, in manner of speaking, as the Mid-

west, here in the U.S. The first, with a travel partner through downstate Illinois and the second, alone across southern Minnesota. Indeed, these were pilgrimages, efforts to touch and be touched by the mundane landscape of these rural areas in extra-mundane ways, without the mediating effect of motorized, petroleum-fueled transportation, and to know the experience of moving my own body such a distance. These pilgrimages were the experiential foundation that allowed me to drift free of my nine-to-five circuitry, or at least to begin to distinguish between which circuitry was the nine-to-five circuitry, and which has just established itself as inherent in me, mine to confront and live through.

One major difficulty

> One major difficulty which non-Indians face in trying to make an imprint on the North American continent is the absence of any real or lasting communities. Non-Indian Americans, not the Indians, are the real nomads. White Americans are rarely buried in the places they were born, most of them migrate freely during their lifetimes, living in as many as a dozen places and having roots in and accepting responsibility for none of these locations. There is, consequently no continuing community to which they can pass along stories and memories. Without a continuing community one comes from and returns to, land does not become personalized.
>
> –Vine Deloria Jr.
> *For This Land*

The problem is in not being able to leave an imprint on the continent. I like this way of putting it. Clearly non-Indians have had an impact on the continent—an unfathomably powerful and destructive impact—but the implication is that this is distinct from making an imprint. What would this imprint look like? How can non-Indians make a lasting imprint rather than a self-destructive impact?

The problem is in not having a personalized or intimate relationship to the land, or the solution to the problem of not being able to leave a lasting imprint is to establish an intimate relationship with the land. And having an intimate relationship to the land is not possible without understanding that the land is a community. It is the place *and* the life as expressed by the peoples in that place (people, animals, plants, insects, micro-organisms, and beyond). This is the beautiful implication in the Deloria quotation, that land is not just an empty space to be filled, but that it is already full and vital and it is up to us to find our place and establish a lasting rapport with everyone and everything there.

I guess it is merely a faith I have that establishing an intimate relationship with a place can be done in such a way that it would not lead to provincialism or nationalism and the jingoistic, hateful feelings that seem to accompany these tendencies. I have a faith that an intimate relationship with place, carefully established over the course of generations, can produce a fertile compassion that undermines these tendencies.

The Midwest Radical Culture Corridor and the Continental Drift, among many other things, are efforts to establish a rapport with a region, to begin to make a lasting imprint as opposed to a destructive impact.

Where we're drifting from

The group of people involved in conceiving of the notion of the Midwest Radical Cultural Corridor and this nomadic seminar, the Continental Drift, through a portion of that territory, are a kind of reformation of relationships previously established in a particular urban context. I described some of that context above. But beyond that more individual

experience there was this group of people, a social constellation working with particular concerns. As much as possible, I threw as much of myself into this constellation as I could. To me, I was moving toward people who seemed to want to question everything, who were disturbed when they weren't looking critically at the social boundaries of their work, relentlessly considering the ways that power was determining the ways their work would be used and looking for ways of resisting it. Understandably, in this historical moment, this leads us to avoid working within the commercial art world and to find ways of distributing our work through the cracks of the economic forms of capitalism. When these networks reached beyond Chicago they mostly lead to other large urban centers, towards the coasts or sometimes Europe. Within the past two or three years it has occurred to us to begin asking what a regional cultural network would look like. Admittedly, this is directly related to a series of outward circumstances, namely the dispersal of many of the people involved in this network beyond Chicago, yet still in the Midwest. In one way it is the continuation of the self-critique of the social boundaries of our practice that began in Chicago. In another way, it can be seen as the beginning of Copernican revolution in the conception of the cultural world, which for hundreds of years has focused on urban areas as the source of culture.[1] It is through this remapping and rescaling of our own network and our concerns across a larger territory or region that we are starting to establish intimate contact with places beyond the city. We are being touched by these places and it is changing how we understand our culture.

[1] *Copernicus seems almost too closely related to the rationalized power structures that we're trying to question to be a good metaphor here, but it's still potent for me. If you ask me, what we are doing is working to understand that the center of our cultural universe is not in the cities but it is the land and our relationship to it that determines the shape of our culture.*

Spiritualist Roadside Meetingplace
Film still, mIEKAL aND and Camille Bacos.

Raising Spirits! Mission statement

Martha Boyd and Naomi Davis

The Raising Spirits! Initiative is a local proposal for rebuilding healthy, self-sustaining human communities in the context of climate change and pervasive ecological and economic dysfunction. The project commits to creative problem-solving out of the challenges and opportunities in a particular community and place: in this case, Chicago's Riverdale community along the Little Calumet River on the far South Side—in our own 'lower 9th ward.' Naomi Davis and Martha Boyd started the Chicago/Calumet Underground Railroad Effort (C/CURE) as a vehicle for linking cultural and ecological tourism with community health and wealth. Environment, enterprise, history, policy, education, infrastructure—and ultimately: survival.

C/CURE Creed The journey continues...

Martha Boyd and Naomi Davis

To explore the Underground Railroad is to explore our birth as a nation and our staggering journey toward a more perfect union; to witness bonds of slavery transformed to bonds of partnership and collaboration; to face the paradoxes in ourselves and our history; and to challenge the perceived limits of our compassion, courage, and capacity to share.

We are strengthened and humbled when we honor the price paid for freedoms to which we still aspire.

In honoring our ancestors we honor ourselves; and so may our efforts be worthy of our mission, and may the hallowed ground we celebrate result in Raising Spirits!—now, and for generations to come.

Notice posted on the entrance to
America's Black Holocaust Museum, Milwaukee,
in the season of disasterous rains, June 2008.
Photo, Claire Pentecost.

Beyond the Sit-in, *The Spook*

Rebecca Zorach

On the evening of June 8, the MRCC convened at the Experimental Station in Woodlawn (just south of the University of Chicago) for a potluck dinner and screening of *The Spook Who Sat By the Door* (1973). The film was introduced and discussed by its writer and co-producer Sam Greenlee, who is also the author of the book that inspired the film, and proudly (as he put it) "older than dirt." Greenlee discussed the genesis of his 1969 book and the production of the film, part of which was filmed just a few blocks away at 63rd and Cottage Grove, before Mayor Richard J. Daley forced the crew out to the more hospitable location of Gary, IN. This is honestly a difficult film and I think that's true regardless of race. From reading and watching with students, I know that it's hard for people to get their heads around the idea that either the novel or the film might have been meant as a serious guide to revolution; not because it doesn't seem practically possible, but because it's hard to believe such a film would have been made and especially hard for most people to identify with the film's point of view. You have to deal with the question of violence. When, where, and under what conditions is it justified?

Both the book and the film were clearly viewed as dangerous when they first appeared: the book's publication was initially blocked in the U.S. and the film was almost immediately and systematically pulled from distribution on its release. Discussions of it often begin by seeking a different way to understand it—as a thriller, as comedy, as irony, as more complex than just a simple revolutionary blueprint. One can say that it shows how gangs might be politicized, how government counter-insurgency training might be used against the government, how effective propaganda and militancy might be combined, and how a black bourgeoisie might betray the revolution to preserve its still-tenuous grasp on material comfort. In the discussion on June 8, though, it was refreshing that we started with the premise that the film was fully sincere. As I remember it, much of the discussion revolved around the moment of revolutionary possibility represented in the film—what a different world (that is, different from today's) is depicted in that hope and that practical plausibility. Even if you're not ready for revolutionary violence (as I imagine many of us there were, and are, not), the sheer optimism of the moment, in contrast to today, is striking.

One thing that's not different enough is the social and economic divisions that mark the neighborhood where the event was held. One participant asked about the context of viewing: what does it mean to watch this film about black militancy in a group of mostly white people, at an independent cultural center where gatherings are often (though not always) mostly white, in the neighborhood of Woodlawn, which is overwhelmingly poor and black? This question belongs to an ongoing discussion that I'd urge us to continue pursuing, both in Chicago in general and as part of the MRCC.

Image of the former Illinois Power coal-to-gas manufacturing plant on North Fifth Street in Champaign as it looked in 1951; Sanborn map of the location; warning sign on the fence enclosing the site; map of site contamination; flyer announcing a community meeting to discuss the contaminated site, Champaign-Urbana. Photo, Ryan Griffis.

Growing Radical Culture: Questions and thoughts from an MRCC host

Nicolas Lampert

What is the Midwest Radical Cultural Corridor? A seed of an idea, a call to action, a call to inspire, a network of artists and activists, a safety zone, a cultural vacation, all of the above?

I throw out these questions because when I first learned about the project and listened to the early dialog before the trip, I was ambivalent to what the project was and what it might seek to accomplish. And after hosting the MRCC in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, I was no closer to any type of concrete answer. Yet, for me, someone who often looks for the immediate practicality of projects and actions, this lack of concrete answers made the MRCC all the more intriguing. More so, the question of what the MRCC might evolve into was a concept that I kept revisiting.

As I delved further into these questions, I started to view the MRCC as some of the following:

- The start of a process based upon an idea.
- A means by which to connect people in different towns and cities to become more aware of one another's work.
- A "field study" to learn and ask questions on how and where change is best manifested.
- A project whose results may not become visible to those who participated in the first MRCC event.
- A question of the local as it relates to the national and international.
- A radical cultural corridor that is not about one specific location.
- An idea that is inclusive.
- An idea that has been practiced by many others in the present and past.
- Horizontal organizing rather than vertical organizing.

These sketches of ideas stemmed from our conversations and the places that we gravitated to during the two-day visit in Milwaukee. During the Milwaukee visit, it was apparent that the dozen-or-so participants in the MRCC, myself included, were all deeply inspired by Growing Power, an urban farm in Milwaukee that has become internationally renowned for its ideas and practices in urban agriculture, environmental job training and workshops that attract visitors from all over the world.

I can only speak for myself, but I gathered that the inspiration came not just from the site itself and Growing Power's work in urban agriculture and community building, but in the model and the ideas that they provide for radical artists, authors, and educators.

Growing Power's website (www.growingpower.org) shines some light on this concept. Their mission statement reads:

> Our Vision: Inspiring communities to build sustainable food systems that are equitable and ecologically sound, creating a just world, one food-secure community at a time.
>
> Our goal is a simple one: to grow food, to grow minds, and to grow community. Growing Power began with a farmer, a

[1] www.growingpower.org

> plot of land, and a core group of dedicated young people. Today, our love of the land and our dedication to sharing knowledge is changing lives. Growing Power's projects fall into three essential areas:
>
> Grow—Projects and Growing Methods—Growing Power demonstrates our easy to replicate growing methods through on-site workshops and hands-on demonstrations. We have farms in Milwaukee and Merton, Wisconsin, and in Chicago, Illinois. Growing Power has also established satellite-training sites in Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Massachusetts, and Mississippi.
>
> Bloom—Education and Technical Assistance—Growing Power's educates folks through local, national, and international outreach for farmers and communities. We also run multiple youth programs, have an active volunteer base, and actively work on policy initiatives regarding agriculture.
>
> Thrive—Food Production and Distribution—Food production occurs in the organization's demonstration greenhouses, rural farm site in Merton, and urban farms in Milwaukee and Chicago. We also distribute produce, grass-based meats, and value-added products through the activities of over 300 small family farmers in the Rainbow Farmers Cooperative, and the organization's year-round food security program the Farm-to-City Market Basket Program.

Comparing the vision statement and the work of an urban farm that has evolved over the past ten years to the MRCC, a project that has just begun, may be foolhardy, but perhaps not. For why wouldn't an urban farm's mission statement be applicable to the work of activist artists? More so, are the differences between the two practices that great? I would say that they are not, and the affinity that the MRCC showed towards Growing Power demonstrates, above everything else, a sense of common ground.

I would venture to guess that some commonalities between Growing Power and the MRCC include, but are not limited to:

- A focus on the local, while reaching out to the national and the international.
- An emphasis on teaching and experimentation.
- Placing activism at the forefront of what one does, regardless of the field of work or study.
- Challenging corporate power and the failure of governments to provide basic needs by providing alternative models.
- Producing a positive and hopeful message.

In closing, my thoughts on the MRCC operate very much as a work-in-progress, which is akin to the project's spirit. Still, my practical side would like to see some type of harvest from the MRCC in the future. But for now, I understand that in these early stages, it is vital to plant the seeds.

When the Drift Dropped in

The Langby Family

I found that I kept having really interesting conversations with people. One time, I discussed bright colors with Brian for quite a while. Later, Ricky and I discussed fruits, and I talked with several people about our new kittens. Another thing I liked about this visit was that everyone treated me like an equal—not an adult, discussing things that wouldn't be interesting for a kid, but like an equal.

—Alice

I was a little nervous to have the Continental Drift folks drift to our house. I spend most of my days consumed with the details of my daily life—family, work, garden, house, food, friends. Sometimes, my intellectual self seems to be in hibernation while I get about the business of living in the best way I know how.

So, the thought of a group of people with the intellectual power of my friend Dan descending on my house was a little daunting. My brain was busy thinking about the million-and-one tasks at work, the kittens in the barn, all the cooking I needed to do to prepare for a party—just about everything BUT theoretical frameworks for understanding this crazy world.

I found that the conversations while cooking and late at night, crammed into our small living room, were stimulating, accessible, friendly, and full of hope. It was lovely to meet a group of people, all busy living life in the best way *they* know how, with different daily concerns, but the same general goal. I loved the easy way folks pitched in to help out, and I enjoyed seeing my kids treated with so much respect by everyone here. While these may seem like prosaic things, they are at the core of making change in the world, and it was fun to watch it happen right in my kitchen.

—Leah

One result of the Drifters coming over was a porch swing. I made it out of an old futon frame and oak slats, and I patterned it after the porch swing my grandpa had in Minneapolis in the sixties that my dad later took to Rochester, where I grew up. It took hours of time in the last two weeks of June—time taken away from gardening, which is how the Drifters fit in to this. They chopped down thistles, weeded flower beds, mulched garlic, rescued leeks and carrots, planted cover crops and other jobs, making it possible for me to complete a dream I had had since I lost that childhood porch swing some 15 years ago.

When I was in college I went to New York City with my girlfriend Barb and had a memorable experience walking down the street with her and a doctor friend of her family. An older man who had seen hard times asked us for a little money, to which the doctor replied something like, "How do I know you won't go and spend it on liquor? I'll buy you an apple if you like." It took a few years to sort out the right and wrong of this, and really, I haven't. But now, I'm of the opinion that feeding the soul is as basic a human need as feeding the body. One makes life possible, the other makes it worth living.

The weeds came back, the pumpkins overran the potatoes, more thistles came, but every night we sit on the porch swing and eat ice cream, or read *The Penderwicks*. And who would better understand how I spent this generosity than the ones who are in the business of feeding the soul?

—Dean

Alice Langby and her friend Sage,
from the progressive homeschooling network
around rural Elk Mound, June 2008.
Photo, Claire Pentecost.

Moving Toward Freedom

Eric Haas

I had trouble sleeping throughout most of April and all of May. Stomach cramps, dizziness, sweating for no reason; college was ending and the specter of a meaningless post-graduate existence lurked like a beast in my mind.

It seemed as though everyone at my school suffered from similar fears in one way or another and we all coped as best we could. Most of us decided to chart out our future lives so that they would head toward clear, easily acceptable objectives—money, social justice, prestige, comfort—we made decisions that we could explain with pride to our parents and friends. I saw what was happening, or I thought I did, and I decided to do the opposite. (I like to think of myself as a unique individual, and being a contrarian often helps me to maintain the fiction.) So I left California with a plan only to wander, to explore the Great Unknown. "This is independence," I told myself. "This is freedom."

But "independence" from what, exactly? "Freedom" in which sense of the word? I wasn't sure how to answer these questions. Was I simply escaping the petty obligations imposed by work routines and bosses, by bills, debts, and rent? Was I seeking a life free from the dictates of a capitalist economy? Or was I seeking something more profound, perhaps, like liberation from the dictates of others' whims in general? Either way, was such a thing even possible? These were the thoughts that filled the pages of my Moleskine, but even as I wrote them they seemed distant and somehow divorced from reality.

As I moved through the deserts and plains of the West, the isolation of traveling came to feel more like loneliness than independence, something closer to oppression than freedom. Long hours in roadside cafés and rest stops quickly eroded the romance of my intentional lack of planning. What was I moving toward, and why? I felt lost, but unsure of what I could be doing instead. Would I simply travel without a purpose forever, moving through life in a perpetual state of exploration? The beast of meaninglessness returned, but I kept moving, largely for reasons that I now suspect motivated my journey in the first place, as a way to distract myself from acknowledging its obvious presence.

When I got to Chicago, I met Mike. Tall, big beard, pretty eyes, a former art student about 27 years-old. He was setting up a projector at a small "space" called Mess Hall to show a documentary about the evils of Monsanto. I found an advertisement for the event by chance online; it was a potluck, so I decided to go.

Mike told me that he had been wandering for a few years now; that he was establishing a network of places he could call home. He said he was building a sort of cross-country matrix that would allow him to migrate indefinitely, rather than being tied down to any fixed location. I was lost in an image of birds flying over the globe, leaving delicate patterns like lacework on a map. It was a poetic formulation of my own desires and when he told me he was part of something called the Drift, I decided to join in.

The Drifters seemed to be intelligent, interesting people. They were part of a world I had only read about or seen online, a world populated by people like Reverend Billy and The Yes Men. They called themselves artists and activists and they all seemed to be seeking something that eluded easy definition —people like me, I told myself. So I asked if I could join their group, and they let me "Drift" with them for a few days.

I slept in their houses, rode in their cars, drank their wine, and joined in their conversations; as we toured a small section of the

Midwest together, I realized that what I really valued —more than the cities we went to or the places we saw—was the generosity with which they included me in their lives. They gave, I realized, without a thought of receiving anything in return. And what was even more surprising was that this seemed to be normal; almost everywhere we went, we were greeted with equal kindness.

I began to see the Midwest as a place populated by enormously generous people—it's a cliché, I know, but I think it's true. Not that the Midwest isn't full of assholes and bigots like anywhere else, but it also seems to be full of extreme, unusual kindness.

I think the Langbys probably provide the clearest example we met on the Drift. They're a family of four and they live an intentionally simple life in rural Wisconsin—they grow their own food, they reuse their plastic bags, they drive their car as sparingly as possible—for reasons they explain as a mixture of habit, frugality, and environmental concern. They live their lives according to a consciously-crafted mixture of choice and necessity, in other words, and they clearly make generosity a large priority. They let us camp in their backyard, they fed us delicious food from their garden, and they generally accommodated us in any way they could.

I was awed by the apparent fullness of their lives, despite the limits imposed by a small house and a sparse income; I was eager to learn what I imagined as their formula for happiness. I asked if I could stay a bit longer while the rest of the group moved on.

I lived with the Langbys for a few days, and they ended up introducing me to some friends who were looking for help on their farm; I worked there for about a week in exchange for room and board. I began to travel from home to home around the Midwest, moving according to friendship and chance. I quickly learned that I could trust in the generosity of strangers, that I never had reason to doubt I could find a smile, a warm meal, or a place to sleep for the night.

Eventually, I began to internalize the generosity that I received from others, reciprocating it as best I could. Why withhold anything, I realized, why hoard or hide anything, if I could know on some basic level that things would somehow be OK? My optimism reached a dramatic peak when I read a book I'll recommend only in passing—the collected works of a woman who calls herself Peace Pilgrim—and I gave away most everything I had brought with me. I began to approach the world with a conscious expectation of kindness and my expectations were seldom disappointed. As I moved north to Minneapolis and east toward New York City, I realized that I needn't confine my optimism to the Midwest, or to any specific geographic region; I saw that almost anywhere I went, so long as I traveled with genuine friendliness and interest I would be greeted with the same.

I think I've begun to trace the outlines of a new kind of freedom for myself. It has very little to do with the concept of independence. What I mean is that I'm no longer seeking to define my uniqueness in opposition to the world that surrounds me; I've found new joy in my relationships with the people I meet, and I see our exchanges not as evidence of my own weakness or dependency, as they once seemed, but instead as evidence of our mutual humanity. It's wonderful.

In my better moments at least, "meaninglessness" no longer threatens me with its beady eyes and "anxiety" seems like an alien concept, a foreign disease. I smile more frequently than I ever have before, I laugh more readily, and I generally wake up with a feeling of pleasant ease. Maybe this won't last for long. Maybe it's just a phase. But for now, at least, I've put my faith in the generosity that I found while Drifting, and I'm almost completely convinced that things will only get better from here.

Tent drying at Dreamtime.
Photo, Claire Pentecost.

Milking the organic Jerseys at 7 am,
Holm Girls Farm, rural Elk Mound, June 2008.
Photo, Sarah Kanouse.

So Blessed

Sarah Holm

"Beep, beep, beep," blasted the alarm clock next to my head.

Six a.m. already?! Time to get up and go take care of the cows. I groaned as I dragged myself halfway out of bed so I could turn off the alarm. Then, I immediately fell back into bed, exhausted. "Why do I always have to get up first?" I complained to myself bitterly, "Why can't Laura take the initiative once in awhile?" Laura is my 12-year-old sister; we are very close, even though I am four years older. After a few more complaining thoughts to myself, I took a deep breath and hoisted my tired body completely out of the bed. I immediately felt better.

I walked over to the window and looked outside at the cows. Our brown Jersey cows looked so beautiful lying in the green grass with the early morning sun shining softly on them. My tiredness forgotten in the anticipation of going to see the cows, I turned from the window, saying, "Come on, Laura, get out of bed." The bed was empty. Laura was gone, already dressed and into the bathroom first. "Why does she always do that to me?" I grumbled, as I got dressed. Laura was back in a few minutes. "Come on Sarah, let's make the bed." "Oh well," I thought, as I began to arrange the covers, "I'll get in the bathroom first next time."

Laura and I went downstairs, laced up our boots and went outside. I could hear Dad coming down the stairs as we went out the door. That is our schedule: Laura and I go out at 6 o'clock one day, then my 15 year old twin sisters Andrea and Erika go with Dad the next day. My eight-year-old sister, Mary, joins Laura and me at 7:30, and my nine-year-old sister, Rachel, does the same with Andrea and Erika the next day. Sometimes, Mom comes out to help at 6:30 and goes in around 8:00 to get breakfast started.

"Here bossy, bossy" I called to the cows as we went over the hill to get them. "Come boss, co' boss, come on girls." The cows hoisted themselves up, groaning and stretching. I grinned and said to Laura, "They don't like getting out of bed either."

Laura protested. "We wait on them hand and foot, or hoof, rather. We are their slaves!" she cried dramatically. She walked up to an old cow named Susan and bowed low with a flourish. "I apologize Your Majesty Queen Susan, but it is time to wake up and have your royal breakfast." Susan just lay there looking at her.

"She has no idea what you're saying," I laughed. "Come on girl, get up." Susan sighed and got up.

As Laura and I walked the cows to the barn, I soaked in the morning sights and sounds: the door to the house slamming shut as Dad came out with the milk pitcher, the sound of the cow's hooves in the dusty cow paths, the ducks excited quacking as they climbed into their swimming pool for their morning swim and the rooster's haughty crowing as he daintily led his chickens out of their small shed to find some bugs. As we came over the hill, I heard a wild male pheasant honking down by the gravel pit and felt the same thrill I always get whenever I hear it. I saw the barn swallows teaching their chubby little babies how to fly, and the starlings sitting on the fence singing their bubbly song of pride and contentment. I looked over our land and a feeling of love welled up inside of me and stuck in my throat. I felt so grateful for my land, my life and my family. I thought of all the people who have nothing and of all the people who have everything, and yet are not happy, and I felt truly blessed. "We are so blessed," I thought, blushing over how I had grumbled at getting

out of bed. A killdeer shrieked, startling me out of my dreams. I realized I had stopped and saw that Laura was ahead waiting for me, respecting my solemn moment. The cows were already far ahead. The lights were on in the barn and I could hear Dad setting things up for the milking.

"Hey! Want a piggy-back ride?" I called to Laura as I jogged toward her. Laura's solemn face lit up as she ran to me and leaped onto my back. "Oof," I grunted as her weight knocked the breath out of me. I pretended to stagger forward a few steps, then I groaned, "Man, Laura, you are heavy."

"I am not!" She protested laughing, "I'm as light as a feather." Then she kicked her heels into my sides and pleaded, "Come on Sarah, run!" I laughed and jogged down the hill to the barn with Laura's comforting weight pressing into my back. I felt alive and strong. I couldn't wait to stretch my muscles moving the milking machines and to smell the sweet smell of cow and grass as I washed the cow's udders. I sped up and my boots pounded the path, chanting, "So blessed, so blessed, so blessed."

Further: Wisconsin and Dreamtimes West

Brian Holmes

Wisconsin has the largest number of registered cooperatives in the United States. It's home to back-to-the-landers, Mennonites, Amish people who don't drive cars, anarchists and fundamentalists on the lam from civilization, as well as plenty of plain old conservative dairy farmers who keep the roads plowed in the winter. Our first meal, at the Langby house out near Elk Mound where Dan Wang arranged our stay, was the site of a spontaneous potluck dinner put together by the Langby's friends from thirty miles around, mostly involved the home-school network that educates the wonderfully creative children who were frolicking in the grass everywhere you looked. Those of us sleeping in tents somehow survived the night of drenching rain and we all got up at 7 a.m. to go see the Holm girls' dairy farm, part of the Organic Valley cooperative. The cleanest farm and the sweetest cows I have ever laid eyes on, kept by two California dotcom refugees and their daughters who were making their dream come true, with a lot of conviction and I think, some difficulty, because the people who put the milk in your coffee rarely have life easy. We weeded the Langbys' garden, hung out in the house sheltering from the rain and cooked another great dinner before Claire and I were lucky enough to find deep sleep in an empty room, while others tented their way through the Greatest Downpour of Them All… The rivers ran high the next day when we visited the Organic Valley headquarters in the town of La Farge, also known as the CROPP cooperative.

Someone should write a book about this place, if they haven't already. It's a farmer-owned cooperative, now doing half a billion dollars worth of business annually, sending vegetables, eggs, meat and above all, organic dairy products out to people around the USA. They now have members all over the country, but Wisconsin is where it all began. 350 people work directly for the co-op, making it by far the biggest employer in the area, although notice carefully that the labor end of the company is not cooperative, that's only for the farmers—among whom I'm afraid you'll find plenty of arch-Republicans. The CEO of the outfit, George Siemon, is apparently an old Rainbow Tribe member (ah, who remembers those mythical Rainbow Gatherings back on the West coast in the '70s?). I was fascinated to see elements of the counter-culture that I had known and left behind in California now scaling up, trying to keep some integrity and simplicity while doing $100 million more worth of sales every year. If they can keep growing at this pace without losing the reality of their idealistic values, we will witness a quiet revolution: cooperative business at a continental scale, able to out-produce and displace the corporations. Sounds like a fairytale in the capitalist USA, but it has already come partially true, with the usual contradictions. Let's see how this one develops over the next few years.

At first sight it is impressive. While we were received and given a fascinating explanation of how it all worked, the Organic Valley HQ was busy coordinating some volunteer relief efforts and the free distribution of dairy products for people flooded out of their houses in the Kickapoo River Valley, where the town of La Farge is located. Hoping to get more insight into the complexities of the cooperative, I asked some questions about the function of advertising in this kind of enterprise, where the quality/price ratio isn't the only value that computes; but there was no easy answer, and we were encouraged to seek out other people in the company for clearer ideas. Maybe what I really wanted to know was how the unsay-

able things make it through the media filter: that moment of uncertain communication where nobody's exactly sure what the relationship really runs on. But these questions take time, lots of time. And here was the obvious thing about the whole drift: the only real limit to understanding your territory is the time and curiosity and energy you can put into it.

Dreamtime was the last stop on our travels. Dreamtime Village is an anarchist colony, poetry treasure trove, permaculture garden and half-ruined heterotopia consisting of a few buildings, a decaying schoolhouse and a piece of cultivated land in the unincorporated town of West Lima, founded in the early '90s by mIEKAL aND & Elizabeth Was. At the time it must have been a lively and fantastically interesting place, overflowing with permaculture workshops in the summertime and all kinds of wild artistic explorations in the old schoolhouse. Now it's a calm, surrealistic and no-less fantastically interesting place, with a smaller permanent population than in its heyday, but a rich trove of knowledges for those who seek them. mIEKAL aND Camille Bacos greeted us in the big house at nightfall with conversation and a bottle of homemade currant wine, which was exotic, delicious and had never traveled on a truck, train or airplane. A block away is the Hotel, another chaotic building with lots of rooms, one of which is decorated by the amazing schizophrenic collage art of Malok. Upstairs in the big house we would discover four parrots in a fabulous video-poetry-hypertext workspace. Never forget that Dreamtime is the home of Xexoxial Editions, aka Xexoxial Endarchy Ltd., initially based on xeroxed DIY books and now shifted to print-on-demand. Among the authors in the collection is the mythical Bern Porter, about whom mIEKAL, sensing an interest, was willing to regale us with stories.

Bern Porter, it turns out, is among the very few original beatnik poets to have worked on the Manhattan Project. The legend we heard is that he was lied to consistently, having no idea what was really coming down the pipe until the day of the explosions in Japan, whereupon he quit his job with the government. This story gave rise to vivid debates about whether we are all being lied to every day, just the same, or whether there is now a significant difference, namely they don't even bother to cover up such things any more, because people just tolerate it. Bern Porter went on to do fantastic cut-up poetry with fragments of advertising telling you what to do and what not (*The Book of Do's* and *Here Comes Everybody's Don't Book*). He's the author of one of the more famous titles in the Xexoxial collection, *The Last Acts of Saint Fuck You*, plus what's maybe his political masterpiece, the allegorical autobiography *I've Left*. Right now I'm still waiting for the combined efforts of the U.S. postal service and some Abebooks affiliates to come through with surviving copies of that last title, plus *Where to Go, What to Do, When You Are Bern Porter*, the biography by James Scheville, where I hope to learn something more about the Manhattan Project story…

What to do with the leftover leftist cultures of the last two centuries? Wisconsin is the junkyard of dreams, an inspiring place for those with a salvage aesthetic. We didn't make it to Dr. Evermore's Forevertron, an enormous would-be spaceship disguised as a piece of outsider art, located an hour away from West Lima. However, it seems that many egalitarian futures could be invented at ground level in the Midwest, which, when you think about the relativity of maps and compasses, is clearly here and everywhere. The Forevertron of the Present could take off with the formation of more ad hoc exploratory collectives, digging deeper beneath society's spectacular

crust to get at whatever might still pass as the Proving Grounds or Ground Zeros of existence. Some future destinations and forms of investigation have already been suggested. I'm impressed with the possibilities of this kind of group research, which could be more focused, aiming for hard facts and significant patterns, and at the same time more speculative, inquiring into the dreams we live by—the ways both societies and individuals shape their worlds. Obviously, it will all be different next time.

Opting for place instead of space on the last sunny day of the westward drift, a few of us went down to the town of Viola, where Driftless Books and its tenant—the U.S. post office—had just been washed out again by the Kickapoo River, which had done the same the with the historic floods of the preceding August (like climate change in your own basement). The urgency was to save the post office, and with it, the viability of the whole building, which entailed stripping off the soaked paneling and linoleum, clearing out all the heavy metal filing cabinets, pulling the remaining nails out of the floor and mopping more or less everything that was covered in smooth brown silt. Eddie the anarchist bookseller was an excellent guy to meet, however briefly, and we were happy to lend an afternoon hand, pushing mops, hauling cabinets and pulling a few hundred nails. Meanwhile, others worked in the garden back at Dreamtime, or fetched water from the spring. But when the immediate emergency is over still everything important remains to be done: and the end of the story can only be further…

Artist Camille Bacos and feathered friend,
in the Post Office at Dreamtime Village, West Lima.
Photo, Claire Pentecost.

More Reflections on the MRCC / Drift: Driftless Area

Dan S. Wang

For years I had driven back and forth between Minnesota and points east, past that corner of southwestern Wisconsin which is the Driftless Area, without ever slowing down to explore, even though that part of the state had been on my mental map ever since its countercultural reputation had somehow reached me in the late Eighties. I think my first inkling of there being something unusual about the area culture came through some friends who attended Pagan Spirit Gathering when it was still held in Grant County. Sometime in the early Nineties I read about Dreamtime Village, and that became a place I wanted to visit. After my letterpress printer peer and occasional collaborator Mike Koppa moved with his family out to Viroqua from Milwaukee in 2004, I actually had a friend to see and a place to overnight. For the past four years I have been finding reasons to make periodic trips out that way.

Through my slow acquaintance with the Driftless Area's progressive culture and character, partly I feel myself rediscovering my non-city qualities and history, coming from when, in my young adulthood, I saw myself one day homesteading in a group living situation. This was the dream with the huge garden, food preservation projects, baking bread, making music, living barefoot. This was the same life vision that I analyzed, critiqued, and more or less abandoned as I became immersed in the urban neighborhood life of Chicago's South Side for eleven years, and the attendant negotiation of colliding cultures that saturate the global city. Since what Viroqua and the Driftless Area scene offers, for many, is a hippie way of life, my getting back in touch with this mode and mindset was not really a surprise.

What I did not expect to find there were fresh angles on the ongoing obsessions that came later in my education and personal history that are informed by historical developments not obviously connected with the Sixties counterculture and which I previously associated mainly with city life. One of those obsessions is a concern with the dynamics and impacts of global migrations. Out of the Driftless Area that fascination of mine takes actual shape in the person of Camille Bacos, a filmmaker and media artist who moved from Romania to take up residence at Dreamtime Village. Just by her very presence, Camille reminds me that the making of diasporic groups always manifests in individual trajectories. Still more, when we have sat down to chat, we talk, for example, about what life in Ceauşescu's regime was like, how it was working as a media worker and artist in post-'89 edge Europe, and what it means to now work and live almost entirely in one's second language. Being around Camille is a reminder also that a newer arrival is just that, one who got there after the others, themselves having also come from somewhere else. It is a good reminder to have in the rural areas where migrations can be less visible than in cities and nativist sentiments often build easily. The utter contemporaneity of these circuits—by most conventional measures Dreamtime is out 'in the middle of nowhere'—was made crystal clear when it turned out, and perhaps not surprisingly, that two of our MRCC/Drift traveling companions, Claire and Brian, had just been in Romania two weeks earlier.

Similarly, it was something of a revelation for me when Koppa called me up to invite me to an event in La Farge, at CROPP headquarters back in the fall of 2007. CEO George Siemon was to deliver a presentation to the employees on what he and two others of the co-op's

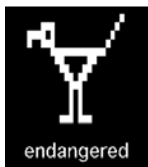
brain trust had observed and learned about organic farming practices in China, having just returned from a three-week trip to East Asia. Being at once curious about the Driftless counterculture, including the company culture of CROPP, and a total China-watcher, of course I had to attend. The presentation was informative, the travelogue incredibly thoughtful, the interest sincere, and the event atmosphere was free of all pretension and open to conversation. One of the three travelers, Jerome McGeorge, a CROPP co-founder and barefoot philosopher, displayed a serious interest in the Chinese Revolution. He spoke with the sparkling engagement of the first-time visitor whose imagination had been long enthralled by the intensity of China's twentieth century socio-historical narrative. He helped to educate the employee group by contextualizing his comments with basic historical information. The third traveler was a CROPP marketing executive, Theresa Marquez, who visited family in the Philippines as one leg of the trip, bringing a personal dimension to the presentation. Encountering in the Driftless Area these connections to and curiosities about faraway places—in fact, the same places, in regards to China, only from different starting points—reveals the myth of the countryside (or at least of this countryside) as standing at a remove from the global circuits that define life in the early twenty-first century.

Finally, I must look at myself. In the images documenting our days in rural Wisconsin, I see that in most of those pictures I am the only person of color. For those people who notice such things (I always do), how do they read those situations? If they do not know me, would they assume that I as the lone person of color was marginal to the project? Would they be surprised to find that I was centrally involved in the planning of our foray into the most racially homogeneous territory covered? Perhaps such questions, even as lingering, idle wonderings, now do more to reveal my attunement to the kinds of slights and stereotyping quietly suffered by Asian Americans in a white world. Or maybe they date my politics to a time when identity concerns reigned. The slightly younger hip hop/millennial generation certainly takes the mashup mode as an almost universal condition, including in the arenas of race and ethnicity, so maybe there is a generationally specific perception going on. No matter, I believe my presence in the images can function as another reminder of the puzzle we all need to be solving. And that is, how did we—Indian folk, included—get to be here, and lay claim, in what I call the Upper Midwest? We were all once strangers to the place, never mind how many generations removed. Could admitting this help to jumpstart the construction of a common claim, which in turn begins the making of a class? Perhaps the regional, as an intermediate spatial scale between the global and the individual, is where various personal and social histories, local and global citizenships, can finally find logical—if not comfortable—coexistence in a class construction with new political potential. The proof will be in the kinds of engagement—social, political, and spiritual—such regional positioning enables.

SUSTAINABLE HYPERKULTURE: the conservation of the anarchist spirit-state

mIEKAL aND

If we take as given, the assumption that otherground media is the element of noise in big brother media's stream of information & that such noise introduced to a system provokes changes & distortions; & that the accumulation & collectivization of these cells of noise will slowly erode the consensus quo. Then, isolated individual information cells will eventually snowball into a global information avalanche. If sides are drawn & there is an us-media & a them-media, then each is a metaphor for the other. If ambiguity is pervasive then the combined spectacle is theatricalized. Being such inefficient human animals we can only hold our breath underwater (read underground) for so long. We cannot expect to seize the media from the deep dark recesses of the underworld. We must inhabit the media with a polymorphic & long-lived presence.

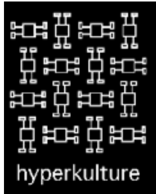


In the dreamtime of the hyperculture, there can be no single line of thought, no immanent thread of action but a simultaneous enlivening of all networker cells & the suggestion of unlimited possibilities. In a state of oppression the dream is an escapist relapse but once the motive for activity has expanded into the unthinkable on its own accord, in its own time & power, a vision of hyperculture will appear that doesn't appear so chaotic & fragmented. Instantaneous access to the growth of information. Cassette, computer, copier, fax, telephone, radio, cable TV, satellite, tourism, festivals. Already cheap technology access to the electronic smorgasbord is widely available in western countries. Just as the corporate information machine can manufacture influence over us, we can register our opposition by publishing images, data & sound, by dragging the monolith down & replacing it with ten thousand different & contradictory realities.

We can begin to understand hyperkulture as a fully integrated ecological, biological system. As with any system, the chaos, noise & disintegration are organically inseparable from life & creativity. Only since the pasteurization of science & art has our understanding of information & events been dictated by aesthetic taste. This is the cultural mentality left from the age of imperialism. Divide, conquer & place the known universe inside a specimen jar. With the advent of info technology all that has really changed is that social power is a result of the exploitation of information, where in previous ages it was people & land that were victimized.

Hyperkulture has a unique status in the mainstream world view. From its point of view, it regards all forms of marginalized dissent & experimentation as PURE NOISE. & consequently non-processed information has no value or use. (Or so they think!) There are those whom argue that it doesn't matter how radical or "noisy" the media; it will nonetheless be coopted by the mainstream as mere curiosities & eccentricities. This may be true in the short term but most of the undermedia lives on. If fact, because those on the periphery are perennially ignored, the culture of oth-

erness has unlimited territory in which to evolve (or mutate) in isolation. Not an isolation of removal & quarantine but a high-powered isolation in the midst of the barrage, in the eye of the hurricane.



The ability to accept and understand noise as untapped resource will enable all hypernauts to install the mechanism which will eventually replace the genericized 2-dimensional view of information & events. It is a mistake to target the mainstream for seizure & overthrow when it has become painfully obvious that the imperialistic mentality which constructed the prevailing information conglomerate also planted the seeds for its entropy & eventual destruction. It cannot & will not be able to contain the natural diversity of the gobe.

There are several relevant axioms perpetuated by permaculturalist Bill Mollison. "The problem is the solution." / "Make the least change for the greatest possible effect." / "The yield of a system is theoretically unlimited. The only limit on the number of uses of a resource possible within a system is in the limit of information and the imagination of the designer." / "Everything gardens, or has an effect on its environment." / "Work with nature,...so that we assist rather than impede natural developments."

According to the Gaian hypothesis the earth is a self-regulating organism. Can the same be said of information? Does it lead a life of its own or is it merely a disposable by-product of culture? If we continue the analogy of agriculture, can the information glut be composted & recycled? Wait a minute! For centuries artists scientists & inventors have been reusing the detritus of society for their own benefit. Further, by maintaining a consciousness of infinite hypertextual links between all information, the fragmentation & oppression of our daily lives can be reordered into a meaningful globally oriented lifestyle.

In the dreamtime of the hyperkulture, milleniums pass without the continual division of action into specialization & virtualistic ego-play. In some traditional African cultures there is no separate word for music, dance & planting. The impulse to fragment the radical media / information interface by terminology is certain deevolution. To sustain the info/action/object dialectic, bury your roots deeps into the global information matrix & ....

More Radical Midwests, or, Some Alternate Routes

Sarah Kanouse

This summer marked ten years since I moved to the Midwest. I arrived in Urbana, Illinois with a full complement of stereotypes about the region my father's great-grandfather had left to sell pianos and support the Socialist Party in turn-of-the-last-century Los Angeles. Like many people raised on either coast, I was hazy about the geography of the nation's midsection; the relationships among Iowa, Idaho, and Ohio seemed particularly obscure. I had never seen, let alone tasted, Jell-o mold, and the first time I heard the hog report on NPR, I fell out of bed laughing.

Fifteen months later, I found myself sitting in the basement of a Unitarian Church taking in anarchist cabaret at a fundraiser for local activists traveling to protest the World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle. Men in prom dresses painted with anti-capitalist slogans performed a skit explaining the intimate relationship between U.S. agricultural and foreign policy. I began to realize that the Midwest was already radical, and the hog report was no laughing matter. Radical in the oppressive sense that, far from being peripheral to the globalization of capital, the Midwest formed an important part of its root system. Radical in the liberatory sense that, far from silently accepting it, Midwesterners of all backgrounds and quite a few political stripes were contesting and finding cracks in the totalizing narrative of empire.

Over the last ten years, I've learned a lot more—from people and books alike—about how the Midwest is and might be radical. This radical midwest of experience and imagination has grown and contracted with the contours of my life. Organizations formed or dissolved; places lived and visited; friendships made or drifted apart; things learned, forgotten, or remembered; ex-lovers who became friends and others who did not—even the apartments I inhabited and the gardens I tended are part of this personal, or rather interpersonal, geography. My experience of the radical midwest outlined in this book is no different: my partner and I set out on the Drift barely a week after our wedding, which took place on land his family has owned for twenty-five years, located just a stone's throw from Dreamtime Village. This coincidence in time and space no doubt colored my perceptions. The Drift followed territory at once familiar and imbued with a sense of new potential, flowing organically across the most intimate and most public commitments of my life so far.

As a process of making meaning in space, any geography is—often delightfully—embodied, affective, and social. It also, however, necessarily reflects the limitations of experience and imagination, the insularities and prejudices, and the inconsistencies and blindspots of those who describe it. With this in mind, I offer some alternate stops in another radical Midwest, the radical Midwest of my invention, as partial and flawed as it is densely rich in possibilities. Some of these sites are radical in the oppressive sense—they allow you to grasp a piece of the problem; some are radical in the libratory sense—they allow you to glimpse a possible society; but most are an uncomfortable mixture of the two. I've worked with some of these places, puzzled over the meaning of others, and just barely have heard of a few. Arranged roughly from west to east, these alternate routes cut across time: some places do not exist anymore and may never really have, while others have not yet been realized. Take these places as jumping off points for your own trajectories.

Southern Route: St. Louis to Evansville

In the century and a half since Dred Scott sued John Sandford for his freedom in a St. Louis courtroom, the city grew to the fourth largest in the country; saw the founding of chemical and biotech giant Monsanto; hosted the first-ever Olympic games in an English-speaking country; refined the uranium used in the Manhattan Project; built, then more famously demolished, the Pruitt-Igoe housing project; pursued several rapacious and highly contested urban renewal schemes; and contracted to its present rank of 18th largest city in the U.S. In some ways, the history of St. Louis is also the history of American modernity. Presently, the residents of the Bolozone, an urban permaculture collective housed in a building purchased from the city for $800, are awaiting the outcome of a lawsuit against the St. Louis Police Department for a raid and eviction that "just so happened" to occur while they were helping to organize the anti-biotech Biodevastation Conference in response to the 2003 World Agriculture Forum. Also in the neighborhood is the Community Arts and Media Project (CAMP), which hosts the green-anarchist publication Confluence, the Indymedia Center, various urban sustainability initiatives, and art and music events. Bolozone founder Dann Green also runs the CAMP bikeshop and shares a connection to Urbana's School for Designing a Society with Mark Sarich, of the nearby Lemp St. Neighborhood Art Center—St. Louis's home of electronic, punk, experimental and noise music.

Just across the Big River in Illinois, the East St. Louis Community Action Network has been fighting environmental racism, police brutality, and organized abandonment for decades. Organized abandonment is, in fact, the dominant impression left by much of southern Illinois, from the acres of rusting trailers that can be surveyed from the largest mound at Cahokia (capital of the vanished Mississippian Civilization) to blocks upon blocks of vacant buildings in Cairo (pronounced Kay-Row), where the local white business establishment chose to shut down and leave rather than integrate and accede to civil rights boycotters' demands. Cairo's largest civil rights coalition, the United Front, carries on as a human services agency, but its leader, Charles Koen—once a subject of a character assassination campaign by COINTELPRO—has faced a series of legal problems, including an arson conviction and a recent indictment for defrauding the organization he helped to build.

Organized labor was instrumental in the development of southern Illinois, and periods of prosperity and harmony largely map onto the price of coal. Unions quickly organized the region's mines, despite companies' ongoing efforts to harness racial antagonism against worker solidarity. Shootouts between strikers and company guards over the importation of black strikebreakers, who were usually misled into accepting the job, were common in the small mining towns of Illinois; one particularly bloody confrontation prompted legendary labor organizer Mother Jones to request burial in the Union Miner's Cemetery in Mt. Olive so she could "sleep under the clay with those brave boys." Notwithstanding significant instances of racialized strike violence, the United Mine Workers maintained its commitment to integration, electing black miners to leadership positions at a time when other unions remained white-only.

Down the road in Anna—a nearly all-white city whose historic fondness for lynchings and more recent intimidation of black visitors earned it the nickname "Ain't No Niggers Allowed"—an improbable group of Sufi converts from New York are building a permaculture settlement called Dayempur Farm. They also operate a vegetarian coffee house

just north in Carbondale, where various seeds from an earlier back-to-the-land movement have taken root. Like many college towns, Carbondale saw mass student protests in the late 1960s and early 1970s against university paternalism, military recruitment on campus, and racial segregation in the community. Founded in 1968, the Black American Studies Program at Southern Illinois University Carbondale was part of the first wave of such programs at U.S. universities, but efforts to offer an undergraduate major continue to be met with resistance.

Across another river—the Wabash—is Indiana, home to quite a few 19th century utopian experiments. New Harmony clearly has banked on its architectural charm and idiosyncratic history to become a regional tourist destination. Founded in 1814 by German Pietists who wanted to live out the Last Days in a highly structured, industrious, and celibate community, Harmony (as it was then known) was sold ten years later to Robert Owen, a Welsh businessman who wanted to create a model Socialist village. Despite his critique of marriage, rejection of religion, and emphasis on education and a "scientific" approach to social problems, Owen's vision of utopia was no less structured or paternalistic than the Pietists who preceded him. The New Harmony community, as Owen christened it, lasted only two years—in no small part because his version of communal property really meant that he owned everything. Although cultural and intellectual life briefly flourished in New Harmony, in many ways it shared more with the company towns that sprang up in the Midwest later in the century—and that he had previously operated in England—than Owen would have liked to admit. For those interested in learning more about these and other Midwestern utopias, the Center for Communal Studies at the University of Southern Indiana, located in Evansville, is an archive and clearinghouse for information about historic and contemporary intentional communities.

Central Route: Rutledge to Indianapolis

The tiny town of Rutledge, Missouri (population 103) may have the highest per-capita ratio of intentional communities in the world. Nestled in the surrounding rolling hills are Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage, Sandhill Farm, and Red Earth Farms. Sandhill is the smallest and longest-lived community; organized like an anti-authoritarian family, the commune has been living off the sale of honey, sorghum, tempeh and other farm products for more than 30 years. Dancing Rabbit is the largest of the group with over 50 people on 280 acres organized into several sub-communities, including a biodiesal co-op and an income-sharing commune. Dancing Rabbit was made fleetingly famous by a 2005 episode of the reality television show 30 Days, in which a New York couple spent a month living at the ecovillage. About a mile up the road, Red Earth Farm is the most recent addition to the back-to-the-land scene in the area, purchasing property in 2005 and incorporating as a land trust in 2007. Rutledge residents who are not involved in these three communities (and who sometimes look askance at their new neighbors) may, in fact, have been the true trailblazers: many of the town's remaining inhabitants are active members of the Rutledge Mennonite Church, which has its own tradition of pacifism and back-to-the-land simplicity.

Just to the north, Fairfield, Iowa is home to Maharishi University of Management and is the world capital of Transcendental Meditation. The Maharishi crew has created its own, 21st century religious utopia at the Maharishi Vedic City (incorporated in 2001), which despite being designed in the Maharishi school of architecture looks remarkably like an ordinary subdivision. Except everything in this subdivision is organic: Iowa's newest city banned the sale of non-organic food in 2001 and the use of synthetic pesticides and

fertilizers in 2005. Ninety miles to the north, an earlier religious community has given way to pure commerce. The Amana Colonies, another Pietist settlement (this one not celibate) settled in 1854 near the then-capital of Iowa City. The communal life survived until the 1930s, whereupon The Amana Society essentially became a corporation, managing the former commune's land holdings and developing a successful appliance brand, while heritage tourism generates most of the income on Amana's former community farms. A more recent attempt at organization along the principles of co-operation and mutual aid, the Blooming Prairie Co-operative distributed organic and natural foods to scores of Midwestern food co-ops from 1974 until it was bought out in 2002. The co-operative's archives, which are housed at the University of Iowa, no doubt reflect many of the changes, adaptations, and internal conflicts of the most recent co-op movement's thirty-year history.

More fragmented religious utopias lie across the Mississippi in Nauvoo, founded by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints following their violent expulsion from Missouri. Soon after the Saints were forced to continue their own westward migration by hostile—even homicidal—neighbors, Nauvoo became home to the Icarians, French utopian socialists who emphasized secular education and the free choice of religion. After the expulsion of most of their group, a few Mormons remained under the leadership of Joseph Smith's son and formed the Community of Christ. Today, religious tourism and residual, if only simmering, conflict between Mormons and Catholics dominate the town.

Further east, in the Illinois capital, the citizens' group Springfield Reconciliation is commemorating the 100th anniversary of the 1908 Springfield Race Riot with a series of "Solemn Assemblies," while other civic institutions, such as the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, are holding a number of conferences and educational events. Like most other race riots that took place during the lynching era, it would probably be more accurate to call it a "white riot," since the local white community was really the only one that was rioting—the black businessmen and families they targeted only fought in self-defense. The NAACP was formed in direct response to the events in Springfield.

Further east on Interstate 72 are the cities of Decatur and Champaign-Urbana. Decatur gained national notoriety briefly in the 1990s for a series of militant strikes. Locked out by their employers and abandoned by their company unions, the Decatur workers self-organized into a genuinely grassroots, democratic, and progressive force. Their solidarity was met with brute force and violence by the police and company guards, earning Decatur the moniker The War Zone. Home to the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana has a high level of activism for a town of its size. To sample; longtime civil rights activist John Lee Johnson took the Champaign school district to task in the 1990s for institutionalized segregation and radically unequal educational outcomes for black and white students. Though he died in 2006, the schools are still governed by a court-monitored (and community enforced) consent decree designed to make public education in the city more equitable. Another recent success was the retirement of the University of Illinois's mascot "Chief Illiniwek" following eighteen years of activism that brought the issue of racism in sports mascots to national attention. The School for Designing a Society has been fostering autonomous radical culture since the 1990s by teaching classes in street theater, performance, experimental composition, and cybernetics. The School is just one occupant of the Independent Media Center's repurposed U.S. Post Office building, which hosts various art, activism, and community media efforts—including the low-power station Radio Free Urbana—with

a law office tenant or two thrown in to pay the bills. The Kalyx Center for Creative Experience, in nearby Monticello—pronounced with a soft "c," not the "ch" of Thomas Jefferson's estate—is a hub for permaculture education and the networking of urban permaculture gardens in Champaign-Urbana. Kalyx founder Bill Taylor was also a co-founder of Champaign community radio station WEFT, and he remains active in establishing low-power community radio stations throughout Central and South America.

Finally, the easternmost stops include the document-rich Eugene V. Debs Foundation in Terre Haute and the scantily archived Tribe of Ishmael winter settlement. A major figure in American socialism and a co-founder of the IWW, Debs is the only person known to have appeared on the ballot for president while in Federal prison on an espionage conviction, which stemmed from his opposition to World War I. Terre Haute also lies along the annual migration route thought to have been taken by the semi-nomadic group of poor whites, escaped slaves, and displaced Indians known as the Ishmaelites. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the group traveled annually in a triangular formation between the Kankakee area, Mahomet (now a suburb of Champaign) and their winter home in what would become Indianapolis. The Ishmaelites were so reviled by white settlers of Indiana that the state passed the first and some of the most draconian eugenics sterilization laws in the world, which were only fully repealed in 1974. The state commemorated the centenary of these laws in 2007, issuing a legislative apology, holding a bioethics symposium, and unveiling a historical marker on the state capital grounds.

Northern Route: Decorah to Detroit

Seed Saver's Exchange Heritage Farm in Decorah, Iowa may be the most biologically diverse vegetable farm in North America. In contrast to the doomsday seed bank model of storing seed in climate-controlled underground vaults, Seed Savers believes that the best way to preserve genetic diversity is to do what agricultural peoples have done for thousands of years: plant it. The organization grows more than 24,000 varieties of vegetables on a ten-year rotation, maintains a public orchard with 700 varieties of apple trees, and grazes 80 breeds of cattle on less than 900 acres of certified-organic farmland.

A very different side of agriculture is on display down the road in Postville, site of the largest immigration raid in U.S. history. Hundreds of meat packing workers, mostly from Guatemala, were arrested en masse in May 2008, but rather than being immediately deported have been sentenced to Federal prison for providing false employment documents, an unprecedented and unintended use of identity theft laws. Immigrant solidarity activists have mobilized to care for the workers' children and to expose the hypocrisy of the government, which knew of the plant's abusive and dangerous working conditions—in some instances approaching slavery—but chose to arrest the victims. Government investigations and the activist campaign are ongoing.

To the north, sesquicentennial celebrations of Minnesota statehood are being protested this year by Dakota activists who demand an honest accounting of the genocide that brought the 32nd state into being. Dakota resistance to U.S. colonialism has been continuous since at least the 19th century. One form it has recently taken is a biennial 150-mile march commemorating the forced removal of the Dakota people to concentration camps at Fort Snelling following the Dakota War in 1862. This Dakota Commemorative March, first held in early November 2004, will be repeated every two years until the 150th anniversary of the Dakota War in 2012. Each year on Christmas day, a 100-mile run com-

memorates the 38 Dakota warriors hanged in Mankato on December 26, 1862—the largest mass execution in U.S. history, signed off by President Abraham Lincoln. Some descendents of these warriors never left Minnesota: they fought for and finally received federal recognition (in 1969) and have invested proceeds from gaming in a variety of businesses, tribal community services, and environmentally sensitive infrastructure improvements.

Several hours north of the Twin Cities on Lake Superior, Duluth is home to the Fond-du-Luth Casino, the first-ever off-reservation Indian gaming venture. Off-reservation gaming is one way that many tribal governments are putting into practice the guarantees of sovereignty and usufruct rights enshrined in 19th century land cession treaties but largely violated by the U.S. until the present day. Infamous for the brutal 1920 lynching of three black circus workers, Duluth also has a significant radical labor history from the same time, including the *Industrialisti*, an IWW newspaper published in Finnish, occasionally on a daily basis, from 1918-1975, and the Work People's College, a free labor school operated by Finnish socialists and the IWW from 1904-1940.

Further east along the south shore of Lake Superior, Wisconsin's tribal nations have been successfully resisting present-day colonialism and exercising their sovereignty rights. From winning the Walleye Wars, to putting an end to plans for the Crandon Mine, to using casino receipts to rebuild the Ho-Chunk tribal land base or fund Milwaukee's Indian Community School, Native Americans in Wisconsin have been able to work within and outside of dominant governmental and social institutions to achieve some tribal and inter-tribal goals. At times, this has meant taking on state functions, such as water and land management, alongside the official state government, thereby redefining not only what a state is and how it operates but also challenging a technocratic approach to social and ecological issues.

Wisconsin's Driftless Area, home to a new generation of countercultural organic farmers, natural builders, and homeschoolers (discussed elsewhere in this book), also experienced a much earlier and differently pigmented "back-to-the-land" movement. Before the Civil War, free blacks and escaped slaves began moving to the Cheyenne Valley, near Hillsboro, attracted by Wisconsin's defiance of the Fugitive Slave Law and the possibility of securing an education for their children. By all accounts, Wisconsin's most (only?) integrated farming community was unremarkable in every other way, and the settlement disrupts assumptions that rural America was always and forever "naturally" lily-white. Though the valley is now home to predominately Amish farmers, the beautiful round barns of African American architect Algie Shivers remain.

Although they may not have heard of the Cheyenne Valley, organizers of the Open Housing Marches in Milwaukee in 1967 were similarly dedicated to what should have been an unremarkable goal: "the right of people to live where they want," as they described it. The inter-racial coalition, which included progressive white Catholics and the NAACP's Youth Council, used direct action to pressure the passage of equal housing legislation. Some remarkable documentary photographs of this era are displayed at America's Black Holocaust Museum, a truly grassroots educational center about race and injustice that was founded by activist and lynching survivor Dr. James Cameron. Today, Milwaukee is another gentrifying, post-industrial city with extreme residential segregation, but the Juneteenth Celebration is one of the largest in the country.

Chicago is home to more radical culture sites than can possibly be listed here. In addition to its rich 19th and 20th century labor history

—Haymarket, the Pullman Strike, the Steel Strike, etc.—Chicago was significant in the recent rebirth of May Day as a demonstration for immigrant rights. Efforts continue to recognize more militant political histories despite consistent police opposition. The Haymarket Monument, Honorary Chairman Fred Hampton Way and Lucy Elia Gonzales Parsons Park have all recently been in the limelight, and activist responses reflect a wide range of thinking on the politics of official and grassroots memorials. For a picture of present day activism and culture in Chicago, pick up a copy of *AREA*, a publication that covers art, research, education, and activism in the city.

Curving around Lake Michigan, the industrial corridors of northern Indiana and Michigan open up routes rich in radical history and creativity. The nationwide Steel Strike of 1919 reached a crescendo in months of anti-immigrant red-baiting in the press met militant strikers in Gary, Indiana. Federal troops were called in under a declaration of martial law and raided the homes of prominent radicals and strike leaders in an operation that foreshadowed the Palmer Raids that were to come. Repression like this could not stop the ongoing struggle for workers' justice in the upper Midwest. In 1936, a lunchtime meeting of autoworkers led immediately to the seizure and occupation of the factory. The Flint Sit Down Strike held the plant for six weeks and led to the recognition and explosive growth of the United Auto Workers.

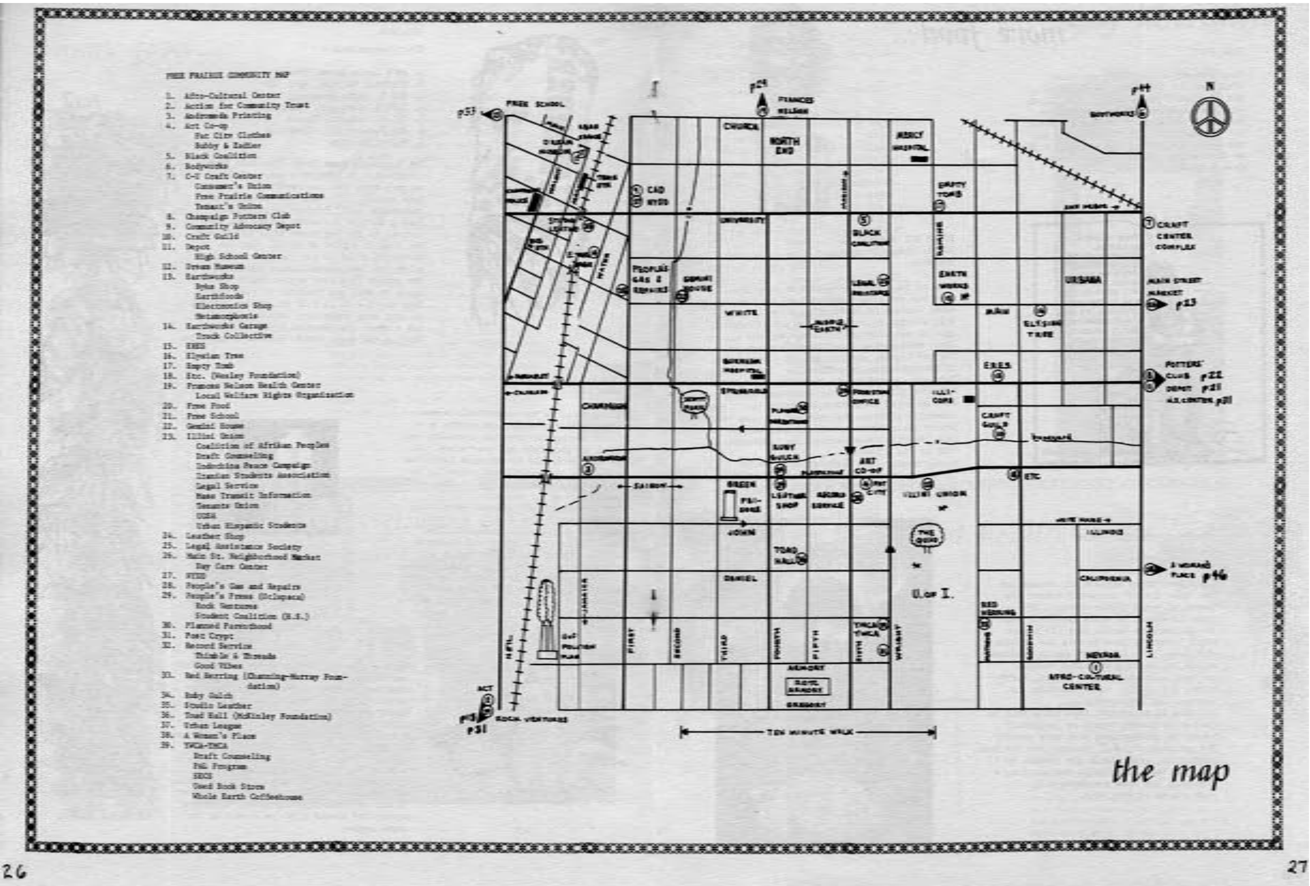
Port Huron lies east of Flint on I-69 near the Canadian border. The town was the site of the 1962 SDS retreat that produced the Port Huron Statement, the document that animated much of the New Left student movement. The spirit of the text is less dated than one might expect, even if some of its terms and particulars are, and the SDS itself has recently been revived for a new generation of student activists. In fact, the New SDS held its 2007 convention just down the road at Wayne State University in Detroit, whose own legacy of 1960s radicalism included the teaching and research of social justice geographer William Bunge and the Detroit Geographical Expedition.

It is impossible to speak of the Detroit tradition of social engagement without noting the work of James and Grace Lee Boggs, who over their long years of civil rights, labor, feminist and environmental justice work practically blazed their own tradition of radical thought. Their home has become the Boggs Center, a grassroots space for activists of all stripes to plan, think, play, and create. A rather more short-lived Detroit organization that addressed the complexity of racism and labor politics was the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. Primarily formed by workers who were sick and tired of the dual evil of exploitation by the company and the marginalization of black workers by the UAW, the League grappled with the relationship between broader radical cultural and educational efforts and pragmatic, in-plant organizing. The Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement, pulled off a wildcat strike—almost unheard of in the United States—in 1968, focusing on many of the same problems of racism that would motivate the formation of the Leave. Though many of the Detroit factories that spawned these movements have closed, issues of institutionalized racism are still being addressed by urban farmers and environmental justice activists through the Detroit Agricultural Network, a coalition dedicated to fixing the "food desert" syndrome and remediating decades of industrial pollution with grassroots community gardens.

The stalwart revolutionary publication *The Fifth Estate* got its start in 1965 in Detroit's Cass Corridor neighborhood, long renowned for its artists, activists and free spirits. Its status as North America's longest continuously running anti-authoritarian publication is (anti-?) authoritatively conferred by the

fine team at the Labadie Collection, the unreal archive of anarchist, anti-authoritarian, and extremist political material at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. The personal archives of anarchist printer Joseph Labadie formed the basis for the collection, which has had only three curators in nearly a hundred years. Along with the musty-but-ever-growing Labadie, Ann Arbor continues to support a high concentration of co-operatives, especially housing co-ops geared to the University of Michigan's sizable student population. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, to find the North American Students of Cooperation headquartered in that city. And here we will choose to stop for now because this list, like radical culture itself, will forever grow.

Note: Thanks to Dan Wang, Michigander extraordinaire, for the great suggestions in his home state and others.



Map of the Free Prairie Community, Earthworm II: Community Directory of the Free Prairie Community, self-published, Champaign-Urbana, 1973. Courtesy Brett Bloom and Bonnie Fortune.

A note on the type: All typefaces appearing in this book—Century Old Style (with italics), Trade Gothic Bold Condensed No. 20, and Trade Gothic Light—are digitized versions of designs conceived by Morris Fuller Benton, native son of the Midwest.

OUR GALAXY

MAGELLANIC
CLOUDS

SCULPTOR

FORNAX

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ANDROMEDA
GALAXY AND
COMPANIONS

M 33