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Autonomy in the city?

Reflections on the social centres movement in the UK

Stuart Hodkinson and Paul Chatterton

This paper is about the emergence of social centres and their role in both the development of autonomous politics and the growing urban resistance movement in the UK to the corporate takeover, enclosure and alienation of everyday life. In European terms, social centres are not new and, as Montagna in this issue demonstrates, have played a particularly important role in the political and cultural world of Italy's autonomist scene. Previously marginal in British radical movements, since the eruption of global anti-capitalism in the late 1990s, the number of occupied or legalized social centres and other autonomous spaces in the UK has been on the increase, playing crucial roles in confrontational politics from reclaiming public space to mass mobilizations such as the G8 summit at Gleneagles. This paper, written by action researchers heavily implicated in the social centre movement, critically examines the experience of social centres so far and offers some thoughts on their future development.

Since the dawn of capitalist society in the late 1400s and the beginning of land enclosures in the UK, the (re)claiming of space from private ownership by popular movements to re-collectivize their lives and fight the commodification of land, labour and life has had a long and rich history (see Thompson, 1980; Coates, 2000; Ward, 2002; Morton, 2003; Diggers and Dreamers, 2005). Key tendencies of these popular movements have been 'autonomy', defined here as the desire for self-legislation for both the individual and the collective at the level of social institutions, and 'anarchism' the desire to live free of government rule (see Castoriadis, 1991; Souza, this issue; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2007; Chatterton and Hodkinson, 2007). Many resistance movements have borne these imprints such as the Diggers of the 17th century and proto agrarian and intentional communities (see Pepper, 1990), as well as more confrontational urban movements such as the mass post-war squatting movement (see Wates, 1980) or the Stop the City demonstrations of the early 1980s (Hoffman, 1983), Reclaim the Streets and the 'J-18' Carnival Against Capital in the late 1990s (Jordan, 1998) which sought to consciously confront capitalism by shutting down financial districts in mass street parties.

This experience contrasts starkly with urban resistance movements in other European countries who have politicized and confronted the use and control of public space as part of a broader contestation to the enclosure of *everyday* life. The most spectacular has been Italy's Occupied Social Centres movement, which, as Montagna details in this issue, was founded in the mid-1970s by the non-parliamentary 'antagonist' youth movement seeking to improve their social conditions but rejecting both 'capitalist work' and the socialist parties who had abandoned

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working-class struggles for a share of state power. Occupied social centres (OSCs) turn unused or condemned public buildings and factories into self-organized cultural and political gathering spaces for the provision of radical social services, protest-planning and experimentation with independent cultural production of music, zines, art and pirate micro TV (see Wright, 1995; Klein, 2001; Mudu, 2004). The social centre idea has gradually spread across Western Europe with the exception of Britain where autonomous movements have been weak and the socialist left has generally refused to embrace the practice of physically reclaiming public spaces for political, cultural and community use.

Since the emergence of what has become popularized as 'global anti-capitalism' since J-18 and the Battle of Seattle in 1999, a discernible growth has occurred in the number of occupied and legalized social centres in the UK, along with dozens of other self-organized, radical spaces that we cannot include here due to space constraints (like infoshops, squat cafés, protest camps, convergence centres, eco-villages). Yet with the exception of Lacey (2005) and a small number of activist debates (Anon., 2003a, 2003b; Rogue Element, 2004; Text Nothing, 2005) virtually no critical understanding or engagement with this phenomenon exists. The aim of this paper is to begin to address this deficit by discussing the origins and role of social centres. We begin by briefly reviewing the social centre scene in the UK since the early 1980s before identifying the main activities and political orientation of contemporary spaces. After moving on to some of the key challenges facing these spaces, we conclude by offering some propositions on their future strategic direction in the development of autonomous social movements in the UK.

Social centres and their precursors in the UK

Although the term 'social centre' does not appear to have been used until the past few years, in the early 1980s a string of similar experiments emerged out of the intense and confrontational anarcho-punk movement. Generally known as 'Autonomy Clubs', these radical spaces were both the symbols and centres of punk's second wave, which fused anarchist politics with a wider DIY counter-culture among an angry and non-conformist youth generation alienated by the political project of Thatcherism (see Martin, 1994; Bash Street Kids, 1998; Antagonism, 1999). Key political struggles revolved around the Claimants' Unions and the unemployed, anti-fascism and animal liberation. Set up and run by collectives of anarchists or communists and strongly politicized anarcho-punk bands like Crass and The Apostles who helped fund their existence, Autonomy Clubs mixed live music with 'book fairs, fanzine conventions, discussion groups, films, debates and political workshops' (Martin, 1994). Probably the first was the rented Autonomy Centre in Wapping (1982–1983); others included The Station in Gateshead (early 1980s), squatted spaces like the Centro Iberico (1982) in West London, or collectively owned premises such as the 1 in 12 Club in Bradford and the Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh (ACE) both of which still exist today.

The 1990s brought another surge of social movement mobilization around the injustices of the Poll Tax, the repressive Criminal Justice Act and the Tory Government's road and airport expansion programme. A new generation of activists emerged more focused on deep green politics fused with the 'party and protest' attitude of rave culture (see McKay, 1998; Wall, 1999). Organized around the ecological direct action network, Earth First!, and inspired by Hakim Bey's (1991) idea of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ), numerous squatted rural protest camps appeared with the aim of halting road building such as at Newbury and Twyford Down. In the urban environment, precursors of social centres sprung up in the form of Squat Cafés like the Anarchist Teapot in Brighton (1996–1999), the OKasional Cafés in Manchester (1998–2003), and Eclectic City in Newcastle

(2000–2002) offering cheap organic vegan food, DIY cultural events and a living example of anarchist politics. Some collectives also sought to establish more permanent self-organized spaces in their own communities such as the Kebele Kultural Project in Bristol, which began in 1995 when a small group of residential squatters gradually opened up a disused charity office to the working-class neighbourhood for benefit parties, donation-based vegan food and a range of facilities for activist groups. In 1998, the occupiers negotiated an affordable lease with the owners.

By the late 1990s, the destructive effects of neo-liberal globalization and multinational corporate power saw the groups and networks behind a decade of 'party and protest' morph into the much wider global anti-capitalist movement that directly targeted the institutions of the global elite (the Group of 8, EU, World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund and World Bank) while supporting myriad struggles worldwide. The success of 'J-18'—the global day of action against capital on 18 June 1999 when 10,000 people shut down the City of London in a 'carnival against capitalism'—energized the Reclaim the Streets idea and brought a huge surge in interest and involvement in autonomous politics. It also impelled the need for more permanent and secure bases to 'put down roots, be visible, hold meetings and have some of the resources needed for action' (*anonymous interview*), particularly in London whose size naturally dispersed activists around the city at a time of increased police repression and intolerance of squatting. The result was a sudden explosion of new legalized social centres across the country. In East London, activists bought a run-down rag-trade lock-up and opened it as the London Action Resource Centre (LARC) in 2002. Similar collective-ownership initiatives, but with the added dimension of a housing cooperative, were established in Nottingham in 2002 (The Sumac Centre) out of the ashes of the eco and peace focused Rainbow Centre (1985–2001), and Brighton in 2003 (The Cowley Club). The momentum was given a further boost in mid-2004 through the creation of a £70,000 activist fund to set up more social centres across the country with the primary aim of helping to mobilize all those wishing to take direct action against the G8 at Gleneagles. Since then, half a dozen rented social centres and activist resource centres have sprung up in Leeds (The Common Place), Manchester (The Basement), Oxford (OARC) and Glasgow (Chalkboard), with ones planned in Liverpool, Newcastle and Cardiff.

This move to create stable activist bases in the form of legalized social centres has not been universal. Since 2001, a series of overtly anti-capitalist, confrontational and high-profile OSCs have also been set up all over London by activists from or linked to the anarchist/libertarian communist group, the Wombles.[1] Taking their inspiration from the daily militancy and innovation of the occupied social centres and autonomist movement in Italy, between late 2001 and 2003, the Wombles occupied a small shop in a residential area of Stoke Newington in Hackney, naming it the Radical Dairy Occupied Social Centre. Their aim was to build up longer-term relationships with local people on an everyday basis and experiment with alternative ways of living without self-marginalizing, escaping or acquiescing to capitalist property relations. The Radical Dairy galvanized relationships that underpinned a number of subsequent OSCs such as Ex-Grand Banks in Tufnell Park, RampART in Whitechapel and the massive central London university centres, Institute for Autonomy and The Square. Table 1 summarizes the main centres which have existed since 1980 and Figure 1 shows the current extent of autonomous spaces (including social centres, radical bookshops and info shops).

The role of social centres: orientation, purpose and praxis

How should we understand social centres and the political spaces they represent? From

Table 1 Social centres and autonomous spaces since 1980[a]

Name	Era	Location	Type
1-2-1 Centre	1980–1997	London	Occupied
1 in 12 Club	1981-present	Bradford	Coop-owned
Autonomy Centre	1982–83	London	Rented
Pad	1982–85	Dunfermline	Rented
The LMC	1982–83	London	Rented
Centro Iberico	1982	London	Occupied
The Recession Club	1983–84	London	
The Station	1980s	Gateshead	Rented
Counterpoint	1984–87	Bletchley	
Giros/Warzone	1985–2003	Belfast	Occupied/then leased
Rainbow Centre	1985–2001	Nottingham	Rented
Blackcurrent	1988-present	Northampton	Coop-owned
Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh	1991	Edinburgh	Rented
Kebele	1995-present	Bristol	Occupied/then owned
Anarchist Teapot	1996–1999	Brighton	Occupied (several)
OKasional Café	1998–2003	Manchester	Occupied (several)
A-Spire	1999–2005	Leeds	Occupied (several)
Button Factory	1999–2001	London	Occupied
Eclectic City	2000–2002	Newcastle	Occupied
LARC	1999-present	London	Coop-owned
Radical Dairy	2001–2003	London	Occupied
Atherton Nursery	2000	London	Occupied
Sumac Centre	2002-present	Nottingham	Coop-owned
Hackney Wicked	2002	London	Occupied
Cowley Club	2003-present	Brighton	Coop-owned
Ex-Grand Banks	2004	London	Occupied
Maelstrom	2004	Leeds	Occupied
RampART	2004-present	London	Occupied
The Circle Community Centre	2004–06	London	Occupied
Basement	2004-present	Manchester	Rented
Institute for Autonomy	2005	London	Occupied
Common Place	2005-present	Leeds	Rented
Matildas	2005–06	Sheffield	Lent then occupied
ASBO	2005-present	Nottingham	Occupied
Nursery	2005	Birmingham	Occupied
OCSET I, II, III	2004	Oxford	Occupied
Printworks	2004	Glasgow	Rented
OARC	2005-present	Oxford	Rented
Chalkboard	2005–06	Glasgow	Rented
The Square	2006	London	Occupied
Everything for Everyone	2006	London	Occupied
Shearbridge		Bradford	Occupied
The Cottage of Content	2006	Birmingham	Occupied
Lost and Found	2006	Manchester	Occupied
Viva Six Fingers	2006	Preston	Occupied

[a] Table compiled with help of Martin (1994) and the Free Spaces wire on the Indymedia UK website (www.indymedia.org.uk)

our personal and active involvement in a number of political squatting projects, occupied and legalized social centres, and wide-ranging discussions and interviews with social centre activists across the UK, we see a number of common tendencies that appear

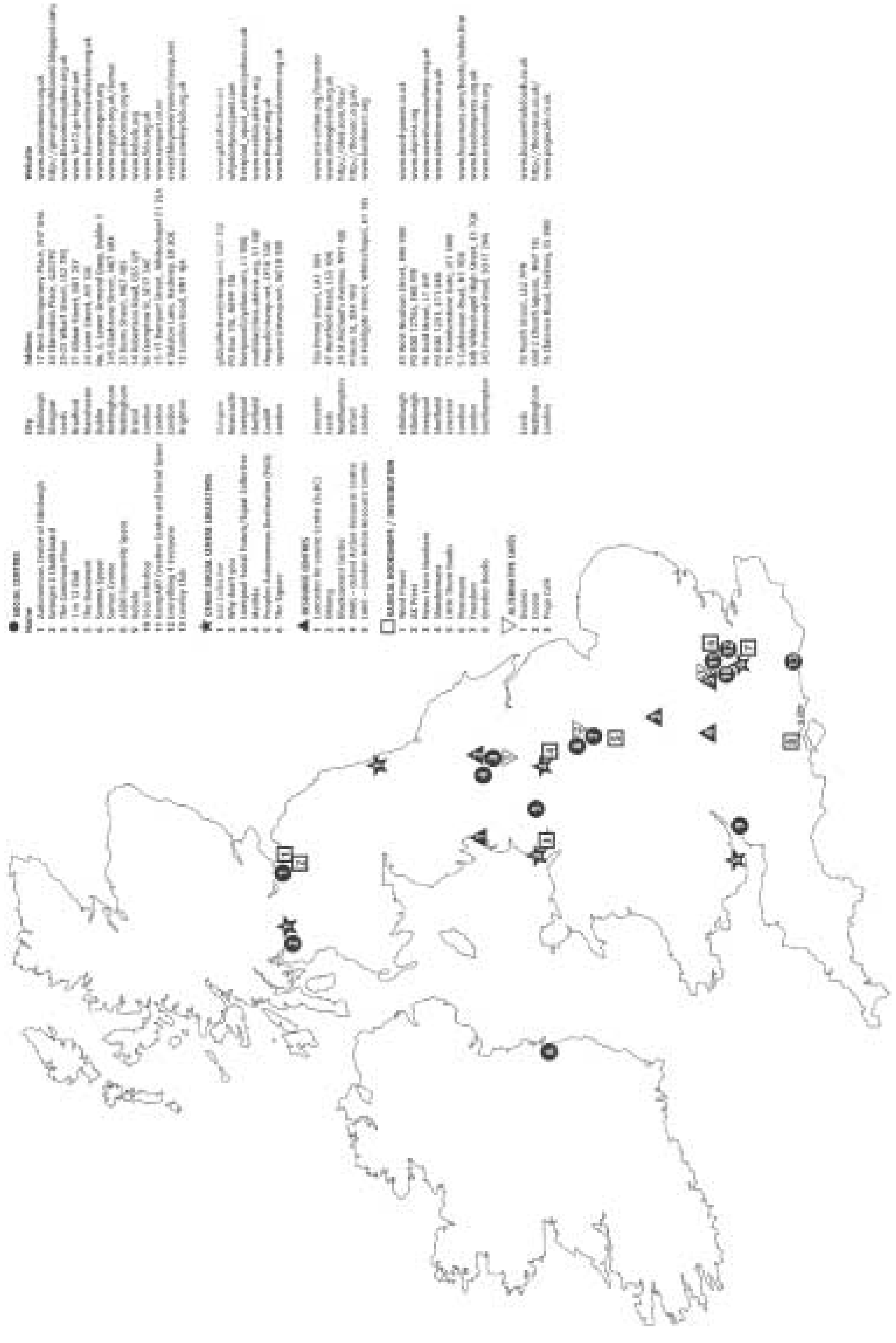

Figure 1 Autonomous spaces in the UK. *Source*: The authors.

and define, albeit to differing degrees, the social centre experience. The emphasis on diversity and difference is key. Although all social centres belong to the broad 'autonomous movement', each space is unique in origin, character and focus reflecting the era and socio-political context in which they were founded, the peculiar mix of philosophical currents, personal histories, local cultures, and even the very physical contours of the building itself. Some began life as squatting projects as a solution to a material need for housing (Kebele), others are overtly anti-capitalist and anarchist in identity associating themselves with the more confrontational Occupied Social Centres movement (Grand Banks, The Square), while others are more like independent community centres (Sumac). Those that are more limited in size often prioritize a particular aspect such as providing resources for activism and campaigns (e.g. LARC), giving advice to claimants (e.g. ACE), being a 'radical bookshop' or 'vegan café' (e.g. The Basement).

Confronting and resisting the neo-liberal city

What sets social centres apart from residential squats or housing cooperatives is their simultaneous politicization of the very act of reclaiming private space and opening it up to the public as part of a conscious refusal and confrontation to neo-liberalism and the enclosure of urban space. As in Italy, a common theme of city or town-centre-based social centres is their opposition to gentrification, which starts again from the material loss of free or cheap places to meet and socialize through the corporatization of entertainment and the closure of community centres and local shops and their regeneration into corporate chain stores and luxury flats. Social centres represent an open challenge to this neo-liberal process by taking these buildings emptied or abandoned by capital and regenerating them *back* into non-commercial places for politics, meetings and entertainment. In the face of rapid changes to the urban fabric, social centres constitute a new claim to the city—a demand that land and property be used to meet social needs, not to service global, or extra-local, capital.

An activist hub: widening, strengthening and uniting social movements

Reflecting on the Italian experience, Montagna explains how the *centri sociali* act as 'politically autonomous' nodes in broader 'regional and national networks based on self-help, shared identities and tactical alliances for specific campaigns' (see this issue). This experience does benefit from their historic relationship to the rich and varied revolutionary tradition of Italian autonomism (see Wright, 2002). In a similar way, social centres in the UK create free political meeting places or 'hubs' where activists and other concerned citizens can have political exchanges, network and organize to further the social struggle against capitalism. Almost every day, these buildings are in use, be it for meetings, workshops, film nights, solidarity benefits, pamphlet writing, banner making, reading groups, drumming practice and large-scale gatherings. Although the campaigns and groups making social centres their home differ from place to place, it is rare not to find anti-war, environmental, animal rights, independent media networks (like Indymedia), Palestine and Zapatista solidarity and anti-corporate activism at the heart of any space. A clear emerging focus for all social centres is solidarity with asylum and migrant struggles through the No Borders Network, which fights for freedom of movement and against -detention, destitution and deportation (see Kopp, 2001; No Border Network, www.noborder.org).

Social centres thus bring the various fragments of social movements together under one roof where a process of dialogue, contamination and greater unification can take place. By organizing public events and running a cheap café, a wider section of society also circulates through the space, leading to further contamination and the strengthening of social activists. This supports Lacey's (2005, p. 297) view of social centres as 'both part of a network and a network facilitator'. However, the contribution of social centres to wider social change is unclear as they remain weak social actors and are largely unconnected from each other and wider civil society.

Re-making citizenship: horizontality, self-production and constructing the social commons

Surrounded by the exclusive, fleeting and often brutalized interactions promoted in the chain stores and designer bars of the corporate city, social centres play an important role in re-thinking and re-making 'citizenship' by bringing people together in spaces whose very *raison d'être* is to question and confront the rampant individualism of everyday life. Lacey (2005, p. 292) sees social centres as 'concrete manifestations of activist networks' bonded by an emotional desire to 'seek connections and community at the same time as pursuing activism' (p. 287). This notion of collective security finds echoes in the writings of the Free Association (2005) who see social centres as primarily 'safe spaces' for activists to retreat to after large-scale mobilization where they can re-group, experiment and enable those going at different speeds and coming from different directions to 'compose together'.

A core part of recreating social bonds is the oft-used concept of 'horizontality' that goes beyond liberal notions of equal rights and instead encompasses all aspects of human relations (see MTD Allen and Khorasanee, 2004; Nunes, 2005). Horizontality means cooperation, solidarity and mutual aid. It is intolerant of racial, gender and sexual discrimination, opposes hierarchical power relations, and is open to the participation of all in collective decision-making through direct democracy through a mixture of regular open meetings, semi-autonomous collectives and consensus decision-making in large groups—social centres have no leaders, committees or any other permanent structures.

Horizontality is also reflected in the practice of 'self-production' or 'DIY politics' wherein participants voluntarily give their time and energy to create a 'social commons' that plugs the gaps left in service and welfare provision as the local state retreats into the skeletal functions of neo-liberal management.

In the Italian case, Ruggiero (2000, pp. 176–177) emphasizes the efforts of the youth to 'reclaim the city' from capital and bourgeois opulence and create alternative, independent, small-scale economies for the 'pro-sumer' where 'work serves the immediate needs of those inhabiting it'. These activities can be understood under the broader articulation of *autogestione*, which encapsulates ideas of self-production, self-management and self-financing of social, political and counter-cultural events, free of state or capital (Mudu, 2004, p. 925).

UK social centres have developed similar functions and host meeting rooms, radical bookshops or libraries, cheap cafés, cinema/gig spaces, recording studios, concert/cinema spaces, free shops and Internet; they also offer computer lessons, benefit advice, language classes, bike workshops and crèches. Several also provide temporary refuge for the homeless, international activists and destitute asylum seekers out of both solidarity and the hope they will politically self-organize in the space. What is produced is normally offered by donation—if you can't afford the suggested price, you give what you can. But this social commons is not about recreating traditional public services on the cheap—it is instead about inventing alternative economic models based on need not profit and respect for the planet. Most social centres use only fairly traded, local products, minimize waste and energy, recycle as much as possible and do not serve meat. They thus relate strongly to Adamovsky's (2006) definition of 'anticipatory' spaces that 'embody in their own shape and forms the values of the society we are striving to build'.

Challenges, tensions and contradictions

As with any political entity, social centres must confront numerous challenges, tensions and even contradictions in their everyday existence. Many simply reflect the reality of practising radical, self-organized politics simultaneously 'in and against' capitalist society, and the difficulty of putting into practice the values of anti-authority, horizontality and solidarity. We now briefly discuss some of these controversies and future strategies for UK social centres.

The limits to openness: 'breaking in' to the activist ghetto

A frequent refrain of many activists involved in UK social centres is the desire to 'break out of the activist ghetto' by connecting with 'ordinary people' and creating welcoming, accessible public spaces attractive to a wide diversity of groups, especially from traditional working-class backgrounds and different ethnic communities. In reality, however, all social centres become ghettoized around fairly homogenous class, race and cultural identities (middle class, white, sub-cultural) and putting the emphasis on those on the outside to 'break in' to what can often appear as a closed, private space or club for activists and their friends. At times the aims and ideas of social centres are poorly explained to the public and there is often a breakdown in language especially when talking about ideas of autonomy and anarchy. This is repeated in a frequent failure to advertise and communicate outside immediate networks and circles. A particular weakness of legalized social centres is their tendency to be closed during the day as those involved tend to have regular jobs and run the space in their 'spare time'. While this makes them less momentarily intense and possibly more sustainable over a longer timeframe, it also reduces the dynamism and diversity of people involved, and fails to engage with people in their everyday lives. This is the flip-side of the 'safe space': '[r]ather than being doors to other worlds, they've become gated communities with limited horizons: "safe" in the sense of "sheltered" and "risk-free"' (Free Association, 2005).

Horizontality, or survival of the fittest?

As living, breathing spaces of relatively unregulated social interactions, social centres routinely face the challenge of how to put horizontality into practice through structures and participation. The opposition to all forms of hierarchy can often translate into a failure to put in place any workable decision-making procedures to protect plurality and enable greater input. As Adamovsky (2006) argues, in this context, 'horizontality' becomes 'a fertile soil for the survival of the fittest'. Running such vast and complex entities through mass open meetings can lead to hours of unstructured, draining discussions which is unwelcoming to newcomers. Paradoxically, the desire to avoid specialization and role hierarchy by making everyone responsible for everything means ultimately no one is accountable for anything and spaces can rapidly either fall apart as essential tasks remain undone, or those with more resources and/or commitment take on more work, creating a de facto oligarchy. What Jo Freeman (1972) coined the 'tyranny of structurelessness', where hierarchies form around those with more experience or knowledge, can be tempered through the creation of collectives responsible for running a certain aspect of the space (e.g. bar, café, finance, maintenance), but this can also create a new layer of bureaucracy. The reality is that despite hundreds of people circulating through social centres each week, only a handful actually make that space happen, leading to burnout, resentment and inefficiency.

Legalization, social enterprise and the perils of co-optation

One of the major political tensions within and between social centres anywhere is the question of legality. Illegality and conflict are central to OSCs: activists deliberately break the law by occupying buildings to militantly reclaim what has been denied whilst politicizing the waste of public land (Mudu, 2004, p. 923). But when dozens of OSCs in Italy began accepting legalization by the state in the mid-1990s, a war of words broke out as several OSCs called them 'fools' for believing that 'antagonistic struggles can still be conducted from the centres that are legalised, restructured, regulated and controlled by the state' (El Paso Occupato and Barrochio Occupato, 1995).

A similar critique has recently emerged from within the UK social centre movement in response to the current wave of rented and bought social centres (Anon., 2003a; Rogue Element, 2004). While acknowledging the logic behind the search for continuity and permanency as opposed to the short-termism of the squatted space, these critics argue that once 'legalized', their priority at all times becomes *legal compliance* and obeying private property relations to avoid losing state-sponsored licences or being closed down. The constant need to find the rent/mortgage rapidly transforms social centres into 'social enterprises', creating the same alienating, authoritarian structures as capitalist society and making radical groups feel unwelcome or forced to limit their radicalism in order to protect the space (Anon., 2003a, p. 186). This diverts a huge investment of activist time, energy and resources away from the real fight for public space—squatting—to an 'essentially non-radical and liberal project' built upon compromise, constrained by legal hurdles and enshrined in unnecessary bureaucracy (ibid., p. 185).

This critique undoubtedly resonates with the experiences of all UK social centres in some shape or form. The logic of spatial revolt comes up against the logic of spatial enterprise as the pressure to maintain a legally conforming social centre can turn a nominally 'free' space into just another consumption-oriented, revenue-generating city nightspot competing for market share and disposable income. Entrapped by the burden of chores, responsibilities and service provision, a semi-permanent staff of unpaid volunteers find less and less time and space for communication and critical reflection on the direction of the social centre, and direct action in civil society. However, while squatting allows people to break free from the constraints and compromises of obeying the rule of private property, OSCs are still caught 'within' capitalism. They too can easily be overtaken by the desire to constantly fill the space with people and activities to raise funds for solidarity appeals, costs and debts. By creating a false binary opposition between the evils of legalization (compromised/co-opted) and the radical purity of the OSC, critics fail to understand the dialectical relationship between them.

Many of today's rented or bought social centres are run by the collectives behind the squat cafés and protest camps of the 1990s who grew increasingly tired, frustrated and burnt out, the clampdown on squatting in the city and being evicted just as they start to build up relationships with local people. This desire to create more 'stable bases' as a reaction against the ghettoization of radical/libertarian politics goes hand in hand with the conscious strategic move to create more open and accessible spaces to get people involved in challenging neo-liberal policies and respond to the historic weakness of confrontational social movements. Buying or renting private buildings might be far less confrontational than militantly occupying them, but it should be seen as a tactical compromise with the property system towards the same goal of re-collectivization. Legal spaces have more control over their own destiny and use of resources. Far from being in competition with each other, squatted and legal places in the same locale are in fact deeply interconnected and interdependent, feeding off and supporting each other as part of the same political network.

Conclusion: towards a social centre strategy?

Over the past three decades, the UK has seen three distinct but overlapping periods of social centre activity: the 'autonomy clubs' of the early 1980s anarcho-punk era; the 'squat cafés' of the 1990s party and protest era; and the more permanent and larger social centres of the global anti-capitalism age. Each space has been a unique weave of different strands of conformity and resistance, but has also shared a common language of 'autonomy'—self-organization, self-production and horizontality. Unlike in Italy, most UK social centres do not have a collective memory of radical and violent struggle against the state and those current today are thus more pragmatic than idealist. Yet they also attempt to be living alternatives to neo-liberalism by practising, as much as possible, their politics in the everyday, being 'the change they want to see'. At the same time, social centres must also confront their own problems of ghettoization, participation and recuperation. While many take on the provision of services abandoned by the state, few make any inroads into creating a self-managed city. These limitations stem partly from the concrete reality of putting radical, self-organized politics into practice in capitalist society. But they are also rooted in a far more serious condition affecting social centres and autonomous movements in general—the absence of a shared strategy for how social change will occur. This rejection of top-down politics and the all-knowing certainty of the Leninist tradition within autonomous movements are their strength. However, social centres are in danger of throwing out the baby with the bathwater unless they address the urgent question of how to develop infrastructure which can promote autonomy from capitalism while preserving a diversity of perspectives.

A first step must be to move beyond largely symbolic actions against capitalism's worse excesses and instead organize active and sustained resistance to the growing enclosure and precarity of everyday life. This means fighting on more 'bread and butter' issues like welfare cuts, job losses, casualization, housing privatization, gentrification and hospital closures. Social centres must also change from being relatively closed 'activist hubs' to open centres of what Waterman (1993) termed 'social movement unionism' encompassing more traditional and hierarchically organized social movement actors such as trade unions, tenants groups, NGOs and progressive parties if broad, popular coalitions against neo-liberalism are to emerge. Further down the line, existing social centres could help activists to establish similar spaces in every city, town and community, creating a dense network of autonomous nodes that could rapidly mobilize people across cities and bring radical politics into communities. To make this possible, there is an urgent need for a genuine social centres network to emerge that develops means of mutual support and regular political exchange, and mobilizes participants to defend evictions of occupied spaces and engage in political actions against neo-liberalism as a movement.

Note

1 Standing for White Overalls Movement Building Libertarian Struggles, the Wombles began in 2001 as a coming together of anarchists and communists inspired by Ya Basta! in Italy who wanted to support social struggles through direct action.

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Paul Chatterton (p.chatterton@leeds.ac.uk) and Stuart Hodkinson (s.n.hodkinson@leeda.ac.uk) are both in the School of Geography at the University of Leeds. This paper stems from a research project called Autonomous Geographies (see www.autonomousgeographies.org).