

Introduction

In the winter of 2012, I sat on a rickety chair, huddled around a wood-burning stove ripped from an abandoned house, in a structure built with twisted boards, garbage bags, and other pieces of what many would consider trash, talking about Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. I was in the Occupy Flint encampment, and its inhabitants had dealt with the harsh Michigan winter by building a dense ecology of structures comprised of only what they could salvage to protect themselves from the cold. These shelters were much more elaborate and sturdy than the flimsy tents and lean-tos found in most Occupy encampments in U.S. cities—they had to be, due to the climate. The community the activists had constructed instead appeared as if it could have been found in the community-built, informal¹ neighborhoods of Caracas or shanties of Lagos due to the sturdy structures made of salvaged material. These scraps of what others would call waste were used to construct tools and buildings that served almost every need that could be found in a permanent neighborhood.

The permanence of the Flint encampment stemmed from the fact that it was located on an abandoned vacant lot, and thus it lasted much longer than other occupations—no police came to destroy it as they had in New York, Oakland, and so many other cities. So when the winter came, the campers faced the problem of the weather with greater freedom than other occupiers. Yet they still faced constraints caused by their poverty. On one side of the encampment, an occupier had pulled up a decrepit old yellow school bus that served as a wall to keep out the wind and any unannounced visitors. Activists who stayed overnight could sleep in tattered hammocks slung over its tattered seats. There was a media structure where occupiers composed their communications on laptops and phones they could recharge by connecting to portable electric generators. In the encampment's kitchen, activists heated dented

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pots on a wood-burning stove and served tea in chipped cups as they talked about both high theory and the mundane tasks required to keep the encampment going. It was like a small medieval hilltop village, but instead of terracotta bricks built by guilds of artisans and twisting streets that had slowly, organically developed over the years, it was hastily constructed with no greater plan (see figures I.1 and I.2), using salvaged rubbish collected by the students, the unemployed, the fast food workers, the veterans who comprised its ensemble of “citizens.”

Why were they there, especially after so many occupiers had gone home? Why did they sleep, eat, and work outside in the harsh Michigan winter surrounded by what most would consider trash? Whereas participants in Occupy Wall Street were brought together by general opposition to the increasingly wide gap in incomes and wealth between the “1%” and the rest of the nation’s population, the activists in Occupy Flint, while certainly decrying economic inequality, had a more local goal—to restore democracy in Flint. The State of Michigan had declared a “financial emergency” in Flint in the fall of 2011 and had appointed an emergency manager who would take over the functions of both mayor and city council in December. The activists were acutely aware of how this event was tied to what they saw as the conscious destruction of Flint by powerful political and financial elites. The lack of democracy caused by the Emergency Manager Law was to them an inevitable outcome of the general lack of democracy they saw in American political and economic life. They had hoped that their encampment would act as both an example of, and eventually an exemplary replacement for, the democracy



Figure I.1. Occupy Flint. Author Photo.



Figure I.2. Occupy Flint. Author Photo.

that Flint had lost to the logic of neoliberal austerity and the political forces in the state representing this economic program. In order to spark democratic culture, they held both small, internal general assemblies where more involved occupiers collectively decided the best way to undertake the tasks needed to maintain the camp, and larger, community-wide general assemblies that addressed how the citizens of Flint might re-start the tasks of governance of which they had been robbed by the state. As one activist put it, “We thought the general assemblies would *be* the city government after the state took it away.”² But the encampment was not only meant to replace established political institutions; it also acted as a laboratory where a diverse group of residents talked about, constructed, and reflected upon new ways of production, collaboration, and enjoyment that might assist them in fixing the numerous cracks within their broken landscape. They would refurbish the houses the city could not fix and the banks would not fund. They would provide energy through windmills because the residents could not afford their electricity bills. And they would decide these things together using the democratic voice of which the governor and emergency manager had robbed them. And because the

suburbs, state, corporations, and national government provided nothing, they would have to use only what they could find—like the camp itself, theirs would be a government built on salvage.³

The Occupiers of Flint were exemplary of a larger community of the disadvantaged being forced to use what others throw away to rebuild their lives due to the destruction wrought by neoliberalism. Reacting to this trend, scholars are beginning to articulate accounts of the greater social and political significance of salvage. For example, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, in *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, uses the foragers of the matsutake mushroom in the Pacific Northwest to describe an increasingly occurring way of life she calls “salvage accumulation” or “the creation of capitalist value from non-capitalist value regimes” (Tsing 2015, 128). She describes how these mushrooms, which grow especially well in forests damaged by intense industrial logging, are foraged by the “displaced and disenfranchised” (Tsing 2015, 5) who form transient, nomadic communities that converge around sites where mushrooms can be found. According to Tsing, foragers, at least the successful ones, develop a particular sense of where to find the buried mushrooms, reading the landscape to find hidden topological clues such as patterns of roots and trajectories of mounds that subtly suggest the presence of their hidden quarry. Furthermore, when actually searching for mushrooms their efforts exhibit a “rhythm both impassioned and still” (Tsing 2015, 242) that, while seeming chaotic to outside observers, actually is led by their careful senses of hidden clues within the landscape. And while these mushroom foragers might not see it as such, Tsing’s ethnography suggests that salvage is not simply a concrete set of practices for survival, but also a general orientation toward shattered environments that might lead to new practices of work, freedom, and community.

Accounts such as Tsing’s that remain focused on salvage in and of itself do not explore the many recent manifestations of salvage in explicitly activist contexts. From the squats of Berlin to the *favelas* of Brazil, the salvaging of discarded materials has become an important part of contemporary protests against capitalism. Furthermore, just as occurred in Flint, occupations of public space in Cairo, Tel Aviv, Athens and New York were marked by salvaged structures that housed activists for the duration of their protests. While many have focused on nonhierarchical decision making as the political essence of such encampments,⁴ very few have noted how the practice of salvage itself has accentuated the radical

political potentials of such activism. In a sense, the survival of these salvage protests constitutes a political act in itself due to authorities' aggressive efforts to evict them from spaces deemed off-limits. But my claim goes deeper, that the act of salvage—the abilities, attitudes, and perceptions that accompany this activity, when undertaken in certain contexts—both intensifies the radical potential of these forms of resistance and nudges that activism into realms of critique on which it might not have otherwise focused. To explore these connections I want to introduce the term *political salvage* to describe the increasingly occurring nexus between these two activities in contemporary radical activism.

But how does salvage particularly influence the anticapitalist politics of all of these diverse forms of protest and activism? In *Mushrooms*, Tsing herself bristles at the suggestion that salvage represents a revolutionary or emancipatory activity, an attitude shared by many who see salvage as a mere coping skill in the face of a physical and social environment increasingly damaged by neoliberalism. She states that what she calls the “latent commons” and other possibly emancipatory social forms that can form due to the activity of the foragers

cannot redeem us. Some radical thinkers hope that progress will lead us to a redemptive and utopian commons. In contrast, the latent commons is here and now, amid the trouble and humans are never fully in control. Given this negative character, it makes no sense to crystallize first principles or seek natural laws that generate best cases, instead I practice arts of noticing. I comb through the mess of existing worlds-in-the-making, looking for treasures—each distinctive and unlikely to be found again at least in that form. (Tsing 2015, 255)

Tsing here offers an ambiguous account of the practice of salvage. While certain examples might constitute “treasures” that offer the possibility for progress, she warns that theorists and activists should not try to look to such manifestations as blueprints for future action. Salvage and the latent commons that often coalesces around its practice should only be thought of as negative examples that offer up few if any guides for the future. Efforts to construct a political theory of “first principles” or “laws” betray the unique, contingent, and unstable nature of the social forms, values, and practice displayed by the salvagers.

But what if the characteristics of salvage that Tsing identifies as anti-utopian—the lack of complete human control, the arts of noticing and not acting, and the contingency of the communities it forms—constitute the exact characteristics upon which anticapitalist movements might rely? What if the “chaos” of salvage activity, its rhythmic as opposed to linear paths of construction and destruction, can be used to undermine the ideological separations upon which the alienation and reification produced through capitalist experience relies? I argue that as opposed to the pessimism of Tsing and others, her description of the actual practice of salvage points toward a normative kernel lying within its practice that stands in stark opposition to the contours of capitalist experience. This kernel is grounded in the lack that prompts the act of salvage itself. During the activity of salvage, its practitioners often find themselves led to acknowledge, respect, and open themselves to the new and unseen. One must focus one’s attention intently not only on what an object is, but what it could possibly be. The salvage environment calls upon a person, and if they heed this confusing call rife with possibilities it can lead them to seek useful materials in the most reviled places and ponder the unexpected possible uses of seemingly broken and repellent items. Therefore, this activity draws attention to the unique qualities of an object as opposed to its quantity or exchange value. Furthermore, to salvage is to think in terms of assemblage and combinations. During salvage one often asks, How can this new object be connected with this other thing with which it would normally not be associated? Instead of buying something new, one must scavenge what is around them, and use that to repair what is broken. I use the observations above to argue that within this activity lies an anticapitalist potential, that, while not constituting a classical Utopia that prefigures the best, or even a better society, does contain the outline of practices that can be useful in both resisting our commodified lifeworld and imagining new futures beyond that of our contemporary, increasingly ruined capitalist landscape.

Salvage does not solely embody a set of skills and practices but also suggests a particular form of political community. The contemporary practitioners of salvage, whether in Flint or Zuccotti Park, the barrios of Tijuana, or the squats of Amsterdam, use land and materials in new ways—taking possession of them as a group, not ceding to public government control yet not dividing them up into individual parcels, resulting in ownership neither public nor private, but common property. Also, such groups act autonomously, commonly, and collectively, reaching

solutions to their shared problems while salvaging the necessities of their own existence. Finally, they form communities comprised of shifting and novel relationships with both the human and nonhuman elements of their environments, so that the commons they build is generative and constantly becoming something new. While such relationships seem like weak reeds upon which to build a politics that could effectively counter the juggernaut forces of capital, they might play an important role in generating new habits and subjectivities, which activists might use in their confrontations with power.

This identification of the radical potential latent within communities of political salvage constitutes the main claim upon which I build my next argument—that salvage communities can be cultivated and the radical potential of their practices deepened through particular design innovations, spatial strategies, rituals, and habits. Salvage constitutes a concrete activity focused on the concrete materiality of items to be used in concrete spaces. As such, thinking about how particular informal communities, squats and occupied public spaces have activated, maintained, and strengthened these activities allows me to identify the characteristics of salvage communities that might be accentuated to further cultivate the anticapitalist characteristics present but underdeveloped in the examples I highlight. It is important to emphasize that by identifying practices that might intensify the political consequences produced through participation in such communities and then thinking about them as what I term “radical workshops,” I am not suggesting that salvage results in one particular strategy or that radical workshops must assume a particular institutional configuration. Furthermore, I am not claiming that each of these qualities I identify will necessarily lead to the generation of the others. My conceptualization is meant to act as a weak organizational form and a general political strategy. While such a strategy accentuates the political possibilities inherent within in salvage, the act of salvage in and of itself does not lead to anticapitalist attitudes and practices. Furthermore, the examples that I offer and the theoretical literature I use to analyze these examples are meant to highlight the conditions that might strengthen the radical power of combining salvage with certain types of radical political action. This means that there is no one example to use nor predetermined combination of innovations that will ensure success. Even if there were, and every possibility that I highlight were somehow implemented, episodes of political salvage would most likely continue to be fragile and perhaps fleeting. Instead, I aspire to articulate

this political theory of salvage to highlight the conditions which activate and sustain the manifestations of political salvage that increasingly rise up within the ruins left by neoliberal capitalism.

Before continuing, it is important to identify some things my conceptualization of a political theory of salvage is not. As one looks around the contemporary capitalist landscape, one often see spaces, buildings, and items that are “salvaged” by “artisans.” Artisanal vinegars, factories renovated into high priced lofts, rusted bicycles transformed into pieces of mobile art, are examples of the new hipness of salvaged items, especially among city dwellers.⁵ This work does not embody the type of salvage I explore—using an old thing in a new way does not, in itself, possess political implications. The salvage I examine, as suggested by Stavros Stavrides, constitutes a “craft of the poor” (Stavrides 2016, 126).⁶ When turning an old factory into a mall or high-end condominiums, the shell might be retained, but the materials, and more importantly the idea and the planning process are commodities, things that are bought new. But when the poor salvage, it is not a choice. They must use primarily what surrounds them and work with the people around them. They are often led to intently pay attention to the qualities of the items and spaces that constitute their landscape in order to discern the possibilities within them. They must try to sense the vibrant potentiality latent within the items that they have because they do not have the means to obtain others. They must use these items in new ways and must use them before they are sure their interventions and repairs will work. Thus, they will fail frequently and must start over and reassess more frequently. Furthermore, not only can they not pick the environment from which they salvage items, they cannot pick the uses for which they will be employed. Challenges to living cannot be avoided and are more frequent due to the precariousness of poverty. Finally, I want to emphasize that when poverty is understood in this sense, activists are poor. This precariousness of poverty mirrors the precariousness of the political activities that employ salvage, as the vagaries of life under the stress of state harassment, internal disagreement, and shifting political winds force activists engaging in salvaging public spaces and encampments to deal with unforeseen, messy, and unavoidable circumstances. Restoring an old bicycle meant to be ridden on weekends through the park is a choice that one need not make, whereas restoring a bicycle to power an encampment generator is an act performed in the context of necessity. It is this unavoidable salvage, salvage that must happen

to fulfill an essential, unavoidable, or immediate task that imposes burdens on its practitioners, yet it is in these impositions that one can find its unique attributes and anticapitalist promise; promise that does not necessarily lead to political action, but constitutes a situation that increases its likelihood.

I also do not offer an all-encompassing account of contemporary salvage activities and their relationship to political movements. There are many examples of the involvement of political activism and salvage that I do not discuss.⁷ This is because this book, despite the fact that it draws on material from many fields of inquiry, remains a primarily theoretical endeavor. I undertake the investigation from the perspective of political theory largely as a means of clarification and intensification. The work is itself a type of salvage,⁸ in that I attempt to roam around the messy landscape of contemporary social theory and political activism, gather works that seemingly could never fit together, and jury rig them into a tool that might aid in imagining the construction of a revolutionary subject. Thus, while this work will draw heavily on the work of others, it does not aspire to be a comprehensive examination of salvage. It only hopes to clarify what I deem to be the concepts, values, and practices that might constitute a political theory of salvage using theory and example. Once again, not every act of salvage by the poor will result in political salvage, and thus I will focus on examples that I see as pointing toward the conditions that have increased the occurrence of such as the fusion of salvage and politics, and, furthermore, that constitute the conditions that have maintained this linkage. Although manifestations of “political salvage” as I call it have been increasing in number, such activity has not been acknowledged as a specific mode of activism with its own specific repertoire of actions, consequences, and attitudes.

I want to introduce one final qualification to this study. In trying to articulate a political theory of salvage, I examine many empirical examples of activists engaging in political salvage. In my examination, I highlight the political promise of these activities using conceptual analyses. This is not meant to discount the difficulties, errors, and perils faced by these movements. Salvage constitutes a precarious activity in many different ways. One might not find what one is looking for, and an item might not behave in a way that one might have thought. Furthermore, contestant politics in itself entails risks, with the best laid plans falling prey to either fortune or overwhelming odds. I state these seeming truisms to emphasize that the movements and activists I discuss

in this work are not flawless—they have made mistakes, have failed and fallen prey to internal, petty discord like any other political endeavor.

Despite these failures I will not be assessing these movements on the basis of their “practical” success—I will be engaging in a theoretical exegesis, using these examples of the potentialities I see within these movements in hopes of suggesting strategies for extending the nascent political implications I identify. Furthermore, when talking about the potentials of these movements and activists, I do not wish to diminish the desperate circumstances that most often prompt political salvage. It is the poor who undertake political salvage, and although I see promise that transcends particular effort, this is not to romanticize these efforts or the situation that prompts them. I look at the poverty that prompts salvage not as some form of redemption, but a circumstance that prompts attitudes and practices that can be recreated in any situation after they are identified and analyzed.

While acknowledging such limitations, I do claim that a theoretical examination such as this can help to clarify and define political salvage, orienting political inquiry to examine it as a distinct form of contemporary protest. Furthermore, in articulating a political theory of salvage based upon the core concepts inherent in its practice, one might begin to think about how to deepen and intensify its practice, and apply these concepts to new situations where it is not presently undertaken. As Sheldon Wolin (2016) points out, political theory does not simply examine and clarify concepts, but offers a vision of political practice, helping to redefine the world it examines. The “vision” produced through a political theory of salvage, with its origin in material situations of extreme contingency and breakdown, cannot be expressed in any concrete representation of a better world. Instead, as we shall see, it is better expressed in jury-rigged experiments that must be constantly modified. Isabel Stenger argues that this mode of experimentation without vision, or perhaps, experimentation that will hopefully lead to vision, should be the goal of a political theory that truly grows from and listens to the contingency that I place at the center of salvage. As she puts it:

[T]he challenge for political theorists may then be to learn how to situate themselves in relation to such empowering experimentation, the role and importance of which can easily be dismissed or assimilated into the background noise, unable to seriously disturb power relationships, or equally

to be misrepresented as a model embodying a new idea of democracy. What theorists have to do is to learn how to relate to something that involves true experimentation on its own ground. (Stengers and Bennett 2010, 22)

Thus, through articulating a political theory of salvage, I write as both a scholar of salvage and as one engaged in salvage, attempting to dig myself and my community out of the muck that surrounds me in a way where I do not simply survive, but build something new and, perhaps, better.

Chapter Outlines

I will begin my argument in chapter 1 by presenting examples of what I call “political salvage” or the growing imbrication of anticapitalist political activism with scavenging and the construction and repair of spaces using salvaged material. I organize the chapter around common themes I find within these examples. From a simply descriptive and qualitative perspective, Tsing’s observations on “salvage accumulation” constitute my starting point in portraying the “arts of living on a damaged planet” necessary to exist in a world of climate change, neoliberal austerity, and political authoritarianism. Other ethnographies describe the daily struggles of those who salvage refuse for a living. In the midst of this struggle, these examples demonstrate how individuals develop salvage skills and forms of community that not only allow them to subsist, but also to develop new concepts of freedom and modes of consciousness. I then explore the growing recognition that salvage has become an important mode of contemporary activism and a common value upon which many build their communities. Whether it be the informal community dwellers salvaging to build their neighborhoods, the “crafts of the poor” that Athenians are forced to employ in their fight to survive austerity, or the jury-rigged gas masks and tree-borne shelters cobbled together by activists in the midst of their struggle I outline three categories of political salvage, occupations, squats and barrios. I conclude by arguing that the defining concept of this “political salvage” lies in its “plasticity” or the fact that salvage can lead its practitioners to creatively reinterpret the uses of the materials and environments in which they are forced to exist.

In chapter 2, I explore the significance of the fact that salvagers particularly rely upon their sense of the affective qualities they experience

when interacting with their broken environment when both scavenging and repairing, and how affect lies at the core of salvage's political potential. Not only have theorists attempted to flesh out a theory of affect in order to describe how people experience the potentialities of their interactions with damaged environments, but also some have begun to explore the affects produced through existence within contemporary capitalism and how this sense of the everyday might play a role in perpetuating its legitimacy, undertaking what they call a "political economy of the senses." Theorists have not limited their use of affect to describing the many ways that capitalism constitutes a particular affective landscape that encourages identities and perceptions shaped by reification and alienation. They have begun to argue that any attempt to overcome such affective infrastructure gains power through the cultivation of particular affects—affects that begin to resemble those described by salvage theorists. Specifically, I argue that nascent affects of "love" and "depression" are often produced through salvage, and by identifying and accentuating such affects its practice can gain political power. I conclude the chapter by arguing that the work of William Connolly, and especially his grounding of democracy in a "A World of Becoming," constitutes the best contemporary political analog to the love/depression dynamic I describe and consequently to the critical potentiality of salvage as I understand it. In his understanding, democratic citizens form relationships with others based not on compromise or shared identity, but instead grounded in creative transformations they experience through following the subtle resonances that result from opening themselves up to the hidden multiplicity of their pluralistic surroundings. The affect-enabled plasticity of salvage labor mirrors the plasticity of this democratic, anti-capitalist becoming, and thus I claim that salvage, when practiced in a way that intensifies such affect, can be seen as a generator of the ethos of radical democracy articulated by Connolly.

In chapter 3, I examine the abilities, skills, and habits that might intensify the political potentials of salvage. As I said before, some have interpreted salvage as a "craft of the poor." Using this insight as a springboard, I analyze salvage through accounts of artisan practices presented in the work of Richard Sennett and Gilles Deleuze. They highlight how craft workers rely upon habits that accentuate the propensity to follow contingent affects and thus increase one's likelihood of adopting "plastic" flexible habits. I then employ both Deleuze, John Dewey, and others to claim that being able to fully take advantage of the affective

sense produced through one's interaction with one's environment to engage in creative, subversive becoming should be undertaken with the rhythmic form exhibited by craftwork. In this way, craftworkers exhibit "disciplined" becoming that better enables practitioners to sustain their plastic labor and could thus increase its political consequences. I also claim that craftwork is best practiced communally and in spaces that encourage the development of rhythmic, affective, craft habits. To explore such spaces, I demonstrate how John Dewey's model of the progressive schoolroom is designed to assist students in adopting a productive aesthetic form to their thinking, and Deleuze's schema of the Baroque House is meant to highlight the proper rhythmic alternation necessary for the nomadic "minor" sciences. Thus, I contend that such spaces, which I call "radical workshops" encourage what I call "rhythms of resistance" that might encourage a critical praxis of salvage. If these craftlike characteristics of salvage were acknowledged and accentuated, then its practice might more powerfully break down reified perspectives and allow for the construction of alternatives to the ruined landscapes of contemporary capitalism.

After articulating the various political potentialities lying within salvage—reliance on affect, embodying a rhythmic form, and occurring in urban spaces—in chapter 4 I discuss how the practice of salvage becomes political. I argue that the work of Henri Lefebvre helps us to imagine a "macro choreography" where the entire city becomes the "stage" that encourages salvage-based insurrection. I demonstrate that the dynamic of capitalist development within cities, that of creating abstract centralities primed for capitalist accumulation and segregated peripheries where discarded materials, workers, and spaces themselves create dialectical tensions within the cities, has often led apolitical salvage cites to engage in political contestation. For example, when salvage cites that are ignored because of their locations on peripheries come to be the targets of capitalist appropriation, the members of such groups often resist. But, using Lefebvre's methodology of "rhythmanalysis" I show how the plastic, affects felt by salvagers in their local salvage spaces might also be produced by the contradictory geography of the capitalist city itself. Thus, Lefebvre can help to understand how the potentialities within in the micro practice of salvage that I identify are often actuated by the macro dynamics of the capitalist city, and therefore how larger political forces can transform salvage as a survival strategy into salvage as an act of resistance.

In chapter 5, I explore the spatial qualities that accentuate and diminish the possibility for political salvage in particular spaces. The main concept I use to enter this discussion is that of anticapitalist “choreography” as discussed by Derek P. McCormack and Brian Massumi. I use these works to discuss how spaces, such as the “radical workshops” I examine in chapter 3, might be arranged to deepen individuals’ sense of the resonances that surround them and to use these affects to deepen their likelihood to undergo radical becoming or to engage in what he calls “experiments with experience.” I then go on to discuss a number of actual protest “spaces,” such as Occupy encampments, urban squats, political art installations, and informal communities, that display aspects of productive choreography, and then suggest how this choreography might be improved to encourage salvage. Such choreography centers on establishing rhythms of interactions between people, things, and spaces that create an affective background conducive to the dereifying, relationship-creating, and sensing of different resonances that can encourage what I call the affective “rhythms of resistance.” With choreographic attributes of such “radical workshops” articulated, perhaps future occupations and examples of salvage politics might be endowed with a weak structure that would address the charge of the “tyranny of structurelessness” levied by so many toward Occupy Wall Street and the other self-organized political actions involving salvage it has inspired.

In chapter 6, I begin to discuss how all of the conditions that I have suggested sustain and enhance political salvage might be expressed within a political movement with discrete political goals. Such a vision centers around the concept of the “commons.” In numerous case studies and ethnographies of political action within poor communities, theorists have described the product of such autonomous productive activity as the “commons,” meaning a space neither publicly administered by governments nor privately held by individuals. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their *Commonwealth* have been especially enthusiastic concerning not simply informatively supporting this concept as a goal of politics, but also showing how the contradictions produced through biopolitical production has increasingly led to acts of resistance that produce common spaces, communities, and businesses. Through linking Hardt and Negri’s understanding of the commons to salvage, I can further clarify what I see to be its concrete political implications. The commons plays a fundamental role in Hardt and Negri’s articulation of the political subject they refer to as the “multitude.” They describe the multitude as a loose network

of self-organizing groups resisting biopolitical extraction of value from the commons. Although they briefly name salvage as a promising site for the constitution of the multitude, they do not develop this insight. I claim that through choreographing spaces that encourage the craft of salvage and its rhythms of resistance, salvage can act as a powerful practice encouraging the formation of the multitude. This insight leads me to a larger political claim—that salvage can act as a loose political structure based in shared practices that lie somewhere between a crowd and a party. Hardt and Negri rely too heavily on their assumption that the multitude constitutes a self-organizing political subject that rises due to the contradictions of what they deem to be the contradictions of the new form of biopolitical capitalist production. My understanding of salvage as a craft that best occurs in choreographed spaces suggests that through self-imposed regulation and practice, the multitude can be cultivated—not by organizers working for a hierarchical party, but instead by adopting preexisting rituals and training procedures in choreographed spaces. Thus, the craft of political salvage, as I imagine it occupies a median space between socialist and anarchist practice, displaying both structure and spontaneity. Therefore, the political theory of salvage can contribute to the diminishing the acrimony that currently divides the Left.

Conclusion

As with the other Occupy actions, the salvaged village of Occupy Flint was eventually dismantled, in this case with a whimper and not a police-induced bang. Flint's state-requisitioned local autonomy was not replaced by political horizontalism and numerous general assemblies, but instead returned through the same executive fiat through which it was taken away. By that time, the damage had been done—its water had been poisoned by the policies of neoliberal austerity. Was Occupy Flint a failure, as so many had deemed Occupy Wall Street? I argue that it was not. Just as the resonances of the Occupation of Zuccotti Park could be felt in the aid efforts of Occupy Sandy, where New Yorkers formed autonomous communities of mutual aid to help with hurricane relief, the influences of Occupy Flint could be heard in the community uprising to combat the Flint water crisis.⁹ Remember, the import of salvage does not lie in the act, but in new habits, attitudes, and relationships that it fosters. If, as John Dewey stated, democracy is a way of life, then

perhaps salvage is the way of enacting democratic, anticapitalist life in a broken world. Some episodes of political salvage persist and some die. Yet salvage as a political strategy transcends its own individual manifestations. As capitalism creates increasing numbers of ruined landscapes and more and more poor people who inhabit such landscapes, salvage will continue to constitute a necessity to survive. And with this increase in salvage comes the opportunity to implement the observations that I make concerning the qualities that increase the possibility and sustain the practice of political salvage. Furthermore, in many ways, efforts to resist such phenomena have been in decline: reactionary governments have been on the rise in both the industrialized and industrializing world, oftentimes using the ruins of capitalism to justify their authoritarian and exclusionary practices. Despite this, salvage will continue to be linked with politics as more movements attempt to reclaim, refurbish and reinhabit their environments. If salvage is acknowledged as an integral, and, more importantly, a positive and constructive part of not simply coping with ruin, but of overcoming it in a hopeful and possibly revolutionary way, then perhaps the ruin of the world might be thought of as representing the opportunity to make a new one.