

# FIGHT TO WIN JUNE 15



social-cleansing laws like the Safe Streets Act



the cancelling of affordable housing



the 21.6% welfare cut

## March on Queens Park

Allan Gardens, Toronto 12 pm

Demand to Address the Legislature

There are two worlds in this province: the world of the rich and the world of the poor. There is no excuse for not fighting back.

Since the Harris Government came to power it has done nothing but attack poor and working people. Premier Harris openly works to make the lives of the rich easier, while we struggle to put food on the table and make enough money to pay the rent. Our brothers and sisters die in the streets while the rich profit from our poverty.

June 15th will mark the beginning of a summer of resistance.

Harris can be stopped.

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Poverty**

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the pro-landlord Tenant Protection Act



# Intentional Disturbances: Making the Toronto Movement Scene

James N. Porter

[W]hat is in question is an understanding of *struggle*, and not of *law* (Debord 1983, 81).

The revolutionary viewpoint of a movement which thinks it can dominate current history by means of scientific knowledge remains *bourgeois* (Debord 1983, 82).

[T]he hatred of the poor for the rich is an evil that is almost inevitable where the law does not guarantee the poor against the extremity of want (Mill 1911, 1: 307; qtd. in Piven and Cloward 1971, 21-22).

Toronto's movement scene, while largely focused upon issues of political economy (specifically the situation of the poor and the capitalist practices assuring their existence and misery), suggests a variety of commitments to and practices of forms of life that cannot be reduced to political economy. This paper explores relations of movement and city cultures to the formation of scenes of resistance using the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP), as an exemplary figure (Bucchler 2000). OCAP is a movement organization explicitly oriented to overcoming the crises of its members' practical lives attributable to globalizing capital and enacted through programmatic commodification of social existence and its corollary, massive disinvestment in collective consumption and enforced constriction and reorganization of public space in the city (Castells 1983). A particularly conspicuous result of globalization and neo-liberal domestic practices has been a dramatic increase in recent years in the numbers of poor persons, evictions, and homeless persons (estimated as high as 50,000 at any time) in Toronto over the past decade (Layton 2000). It is perhaps a special irony that this unfolds in the largest metropolis of English Canada, and that Canada until this year, had been ranked first, for seven consecutive years, on the United Nations Quality of Life Index.

## *Public Space*

An OCAP organizer drew attention to the scope of OCAP's rejection of globalizing capitalism:

We are restructuring our existence into a society that we can participate in.



An economy and state that excludes even one person will not be able to govern... our aim is a totally different society (Collis 2000).

For a number of years OCAP has acted to advance that project through casework, community organizing, public scenes and discourse. One recent example was a OCAP action in Toronto on the occasion of the inauguration of the newly elected City Council and re-elected Mayor. I recall the scene:

In response to a poster campaign in the Dundas and Sherbourne and Parkdale areas that morning and the day before, about sixty street people assemble at 1:00 p.m. in Holy Trinity Church downtown for a feast of venison stew, mashed potatoes and boiled rice. After the meal several people give speeches, including three OCAP organizers, plus Karl, a resident of Tent City, "Pops" who was a man recently released from five months pre-bail detention in the Don Jail and wearing bright orange jail coveralls, and another man from the street. The group of about seventy then move quickly through the cold to City Hall and silently walk into the spacious Rotunda. A jazz trio was playing live muzak. Several hundred suits and city staffers were passing from table to artfully decorated table, murmuring amongst themselves while grazing upon hors d'oeuvres and drinking wine, awaiting the descent of Mayor and Councilors from Council Chamber where a smaller invitation-only crowd had witnessed the official inauguration. The parade of ragged poor wound through the suits toward the centre of the Rotunda, being given wide berth by the backs of the suits, who cast nervous and curious glances over their shoulders. A clutch of bicycle police gathered at the periphery. As an OCAP organizer with a bullhorn prepared to speak two ocappers peeled off toward the muzak-makers, telling them to knock it off. A classic in-your-face-shouting match with Security developed over this. Security claimed the event was a private party while one ocapper replied that that was a lie because the ocapper had phoned the Mayor's Office of Protocol days before and ascertained the time of the event and the fact that it was a 'public' reception in contrast to the 'private' inauguration ceremony. The shouting concluded with one ocapper pulling the plug on the amplification system and Security 'agreeing' to a break in the muzak.

At this point OCAP had succeeded in bringing the danger, dirt and uncertainty of the street into the orderly, clean, polite gathering. In a tense challenge, rich and poor stood side by side in the public theatre of the Rotunda—revealing the rich as being but a part of the life of the city, a type of 'the people' now called to account by its other, the living evidence of the rich's exploitation and indifference. Thus the Rotunda, a scenic

place arrayed in a determined ceremonial order, became a dangerously indeterminate space (de Certeau 1984, 117-118). An OCAP organizer framed the scene by addressing the rich, their politic and its icon over the bullhorn:

We heard that it was warm, and there was food, and that there was a man who was going to be put up for Mayor of this city, a Mayor who fails the immediate needs of the entire society (Globe and Mail 2000b, A18).

You people can go home to your warm places, but one thing is clear: You have no understanding of what these people are going through out on the streets (Toronto Star 2000d, A30).

It has to be made clear, clear to you, clear to Mayor Mel Lastman, and City Council that there has to be priority for the people who are living on the streets, the people who are dying on the streets (Globe and Mail 2000b, A18).

The rich were called out of their specular ease and the bounty free to their hand, onto the ground of want and exploitation that lay behind the appearances of congratulatory politics:

Behind all the tinsel and all this nonsense, there's a crisis going on in this city (Toronto Star 2000d, A30).

These words simplified the ambiguity of the situation and organized the space into one of civil discourse, removing much of the air of possible menace from the scene. Following this exhortation the marchers dispersed throughout the crowd of suits, some helping themselves to hors d'oeuvres, some baiting individual Councilors who had begun to filter down to the reception. Two Councilors in particular received attention: a prominent 'progressive' active in attempts to secure additional social housing (who tried to condescendingly put his arm over the shoulders of Danny, an ocapper who roughly tossed the arm off and said loudly "You're not my friend") and a prominent right-wing supporter of the police (who was quizzed by P.J. as to why cases for weapons missing from police control were said to have been found in his Florida townhouse). After half an hour it became apparent the Mayor had changed his plan to join the reception and would not appear, so the poor people made their way toward the door and exited chanting "housing, housing." As it all unfolded, a city staffer remarked of the scene to a reporter:

This is So Toronto (Toronto Star 2000d, B2).

Our question is how this is so—how does this action make available something characteristic of the culture of this city such that it can be familiarly, almost affectionately, remarked? We will return to this—and to a related matter: how can we see here (or anywhere) the way in which OCAP could be attractive to one who dwells within the city, how can OCAP seduce?

The OCAP scene feels a bit like what one might expect from a street gang with an analysis—sensuous, with the intimate danger of shared underground life. Hurried, spare phone calls notifying of actions, easy physical puppy-play between core members, mutual body bumping and mock punches in courthouse halls, meeting rooms, workspaces. One member's outgoing voicemail message is: "win .. change tactics .. win .. change tactics" delivered in a zero-degree voice with entirely regular pacing. It references an aspect of the strategy of successful anti-capitalist action groups—avoiding repetition of a successful tactic because the second time the cops will be ready for it. In other words, continuous innovation and creativity are fundamental to revolution, and perhaps to an interesting life. Passionate, theatrical expositions of doctrine and denunciations of opponents are delivered as very public performances, poetic occasions formulating the life of the city so as to connect realities sundered in the violence of capital. Orderly, efficient meetings (with agendas formed at the beginning of the meeting by members nominating matters for discussion/action) to plan and report on action campaigns and projects.

Perhaps these features of OCAP are among its attractions, in as much as they at once contrast with and mirror the public face of Toronto, whereby the sensuous is subordinated to the instrumental, repetition (of both winning and losing gestures) is the deadening rule, creativity is what is displayed for a price in shops, athletic arenas or on stages, passion is confused with aggressivity and agendas are set by a few outside the context of deliberation of their content. But the charm of OCAP cannot be only that of its playfulness or its novelty or its belligerence—else it *would* be no different than a street gang. Consider another recent action.

### *Street Justice*

People in the Dundas and Sherbourne area were being hassled by Intelliguard, a major private security outfit that beats up targets found on or near the major downtown commercial properties it covers, and terrorizes residents of and visitors to public housing buildings. So for some time we're saying that we have to do an Intelliguard action. Then comes this little middle-aged black lady who's been hassled by three racist Intelliguards with a Doberman. We meet at eight one early November night outside the OCAP office a few doors from the corner of Dundas and Sher-

bourne, hang out 'till about twenty-five ocappers are there and then head off down the street with the lady to hunt some Intelliguards. On the corner we catch two away from their car in the parking lot of a convenience. This is my first action as a member. So Sue and Shawn and I walk up to the alpha-Intelliguard and Sue just lets him have it with a full-bore indictment rant about Intelliguard's racist, fascist, bully-boy targeting practices leading to Intelliguard now being targeted by OCAP. This is just a beginning, she warns, and he is to tell his buddies to knock it off.

Meanwhile, twenty-odd ocappers have arrayed themselves in an eight-metre circle, penning the security pigs by the simple presence of their bodies. Each knows that impacting another's body, even with a gesture, is grounds for arrest on a criminal assault charge. The alpha pig is physically frozen, but still resisting by asserting that he was not among the three who mistreated the lady and thus recognizes no responsibility. Shawn totally ignores this and comes up behind the alpha and looks down on him sneering "You're not such a big man now are you, white boy? That's right, WHITE boy. You feel big when you beat up my Indian brothers and sisters and black people like this lady here, don't you, you little white shit. Well how does it feel? You don't like it, do you white boy?" Now the pig is silent, totally frozen, caught like a jacked deer.

Sue brings forth the hassled lady, calling on her to speak. The lady, in a small, strong voice, tells the Intelliguard that what was done to her was wrong and inhuman and that she wants an apology. Sue makes the Intelliguard apologize and promise to tell his buddies to knock it off. He is told to treat all people with human dignity now that he knows how it feels to be helpless and targeted solely because he is taken to represent a category. He is told to remember this night. Each word is delivered in full voice and dudgeon, vehemently, each a symbolic rock in the face. Meanwhile the pigs have radioed HQ, reporting being swarmed and held in the lot. Four police cruisers arrive within four minutes, and an Intelliguard car soon after. The ring parts, two cops walk in and address the ocappers, particularly Sue and Shawn, asking what is happening. One calls over to another member, asking his name, to which comes the reply: "You know my name." We tell the cops what problem we have with Intelliguard and that our business is completed and we leave. A crowd of spectator locals on the street voice approval.

For the crowd, for the lady and for OCAP some justice had been done that night—justice in an old Greek sense. The sense summarized in the poet Simonides' definition of justice: "to give to each what is owed" (Plato 1968, 331e). OCAP thinks that like this lady, each is due respect for their humanity and human needs. We can understand the ocappers to display a certain ironic strategy of reversal, whereby they enact a travesty of the security forces' normal programme of targeting the poor through

threats, pain and fear. The cutting, crushing violence of OCAP's militant language and their employment of their bodies to form a sort of fleshy cage/stage is a parody of bourgeois utilitarianism as the latter is employed on routine occasions of police and security industry practice—which treats one's body as an element of a tactical programme, language as an instrument of use and advantage (Blum 2001) and the poor themselves as properties on which to stage the value commitments expressed in bourgeois social relations. In terms of those commitments, the poor exist as a negative category. OCAP's travesty operates through that negativity, turning it back upon itself. Thus OCAP found a security guard acting in an oppressive role, but acted toward him as one who could feel the pain, the fear, of being targeted for how he appeared. The one who could feel that fear is the human being, not the 'security guard,' and it was the human being who was reminded, and told to remind his cohort, of what is at stake. What is at stake is the possibility of a world which includes each human being.

Aspects of OCAP's ideology appear to be deeply akin to Toronto's multicultural liberal ethic of public life as dignity, inclusiveness and human equality. This is coupled with a loosely Marxist economic analysis, a broadly anarchist political ideal and an intense existential urgency. It calls the security forces to cease their fascistic targeting of types of individuals defined on ethno-racial, gender, age or class lines. More, it tells the security forces they ought not exist, and that OCAP aims to eliminate them.

But what did OCAP actually do? In this, as in the previous action, OCAP recast reality, reversed its meaning by coming upon a scene and transforming it into another scene in an instant, in the very moment of its appearance (Baudrillard 1990, 81). In no time at all a challenge was laid down and time was changed from quotidian, morbid repetition and programmed change to the lively time of danger, exposure, sacrifice, reversal of position and subversion of power. OCAP opens a time wherein no one knows what will happen. One OCAP organizer said:

In every one of our actions there is the potential for fighting and violence, and the cops know it (Collis 2000).

Our question is how this transformative edge of danger, this challenge, whether symbolic or physical, can be seductive, and can be a part of what is 'So Toronto.' Consider what is 'urban.' As the built world—the human-made scene par excellence—urban life has been, since the beginning, the site and scene of beauty staged alongside squalor, of the simultaneous excesses of want and luxury, where an infant can perish of starvation and a coroner's jury find 'poverty' a cause of death in the midst of an epidemic of obesity and a record GDP. The city has long been taken to be the

evidence and primary site of civilization—both an architectonic and a meeting place where the first priests, prophets, princes and philosophers, not to mention stonemasons and playboys, debated the best forms that should or could organize that confluence. Urban life is a sort of icon of the arbitrary, of the not-natural, of ways and things that could be otherwise but are not because some ‘we’ decides so. The urban is thus performed, necessarily theatrical, and exists only in as much as it is continuously done and redone. That the city is unthinkable except as a practice of reflexive self-construction has recently been remarked (Magnusson 1997, 94-113). That a city could be understood as a work of (largely unconscious) art was an insight of the Surrealists and Lettristes, put to work by the Situationists in the late 1950’s, with the aim of rendering this artistic practice conscious (Gray 1996, 3-23).

While members seldom speak of these possible roots of OCAP’s political practice, and its publications explicitly deny attempts to understand OCAP in terms of ‘street theatre,’ I suggest that, culturally, OCAP functions as a collective artist and, politically, as a collective revolutionary organic intellectual (Gramsci 1971, 3) in the city scene—that its seductive appeal is its capacity to remake space and time. OCAP’s charm thus may be that of a sort of collective charismatic magician. A body that (re)makes the scene whenever and wherever it appears. Of course, OCAP does not appear just anywhere, but where what is going on is denial of human need, subversion of voice, murder, brutality and class interest—obscured, hidden and normalized behind and within polite appearances, technocratic language, legal subterfuge and moralistic rationalization. And it appears where there is a chance, a tear in the seam between power and its alibis. “Behind all the tinsel and all this nonsense, there’s a crisis going on in this city.” OCAP thus not only speaks prophetically, it enacts an alternative with convincing verisimilitude, as befitting what is real.

OCAP’s ‘magic’ is grounded in concrete struggle and contestation, in duels of fear and force. This grounded efficacy may be the basis of OCAP’s capacity to charm and seduce, as well as to enrage and disturb. It does very well what every urban dweller may wish to do. It creates public space in reclaiming ‘public’ places from control by capital, whether opening shelter spaces in an abandoned hospital building, or democratizing a self-congratulatory reception for the city hall crowd. It calls to account and gives an account of those who would use the public for private ends. For OCAP, ‘public’ refers to the people as a whole, to the lack of exclusion—the city as a space of freedom and of responsibility for freedom, which is to say a certain solidarity, a certain sense of what is proper to urbanized human life as a collective practice. OCAP’s account is couched in the language of the streets, in plain talk, and unambiguous judgment. In the old language of an eye for an eye, of what goes around comes



around. So, the city as first an ethical space of mutuality.

It has been remarked (Layton 2000, 33) that homeless existence is public. Today the most public of people are the homeless, those who necessarily perform in public places, often in public view, the actions (making love, dying, birthing, defecating, washing, bleeding, urinating, sleeping, etc.) that are otherwise done behind doors by those who can purchase such private screens. Like the homeless, OCAP functions in public to ventilate and disrupt policies and practices conceived and implemented behind legal and ideological screens. OCAP makes need—and the choices to refuse need—public, and it does this without respect for proprieties that shield oppressors from public knowledge. OCAP disrupts the ‘normal’ practices of social organizations which oppress and disguise oppression as benevolence. Sidney Tarrow has noted that, “disruption of the lives of opponents appears to be the most potent form of collective action” (1994, 110), or as Piven and Cloward have said: “a placid poor get nothing, but a turbulent poor sometimes get something” (1971, 338). So OCAP has not only invaded the offices, but picketed the homes of those who refuse to provide welfare or shelter to those in need, thereby breaking the fictional distinction between functionaries’ work and private existences. It has put the image and names of gouging landlords on street posters. OCAP outs its enemies in any manner that will be effective.

OCAP’s aims and methods of work are made publicly available. Its official publication, “What is OCAP?” reads in part:

OCAP fights for the rights of poor people using direct action. We bring the poor, unemployed and homeless together to defend one another and organize to fight back against the powers that attack the poor.

We are critical of symbolic gestures and protests, or negotiating without action. Landlords, bosses, the police, government institutions, all have a stake in attacking those who live in poverty. When they attack, criminalize or steal from the poor, OCAP draws the line and confronts these institutions with disruption and public pressure. The way we fight is different from most organizations, because we fight with dignity and strength in order to win, not simply register our dissent (OCAP 2000, 1).

A respected OCAP member characterized OCAP as neither a service agency, research group, discussion group or ‘civil disobedience’ group, nor a practitioner of ‘street theatre.’ It does not bargain with governments or the police and is outside the electoral system:

OCAP is a direct action organization of Toronto’s poor and homeless. Direct action means immediate, pointed intervention in the political, social, economic and administrative processes which exploit and oppress

our members, the poor and homeless. We make it not worthwhile for these oppressions to continue. OCAP does this mainly in two ways. First, OCAP organizes particular actions to support or protect persons or groups who are being oppressed in the ways mentioned: homeless persons, hostel residents, welfare recipients, women, immigrants, tenants. We advise and accompany them in their negotiations with the powers that be. If there is no just settlement forthcoming we organize a group visit to make our point. If there is still no settlement, we may disrupt the workings of the oppressing body. It eventually becomes obvious to the oppressing body that they must be wrong. Second, OCAP organizes mass actions around large social and political wrongs, homelessness, the removal of welfare benefits, police oppression, the transfer of public property to the rich. It is these actions that are seen as most characteristic of OCAP (Feltes 2000, 2).

John Clarke, an OCAP organizer put it succinctly:

We want to disrupt government institutions and welfare organizations and the police, and we've done so on numerous occasions. Its not fair to say we provoke brawls, but we do push the limits (Toronto Star 2000a, A1).

This view of what is *So Toronto* bespeaks a Torontonian who contests the conventional notion of the Canadian citizen as a polite, retiring, conforming, reticent type, complete with passive-aggressive energy. Indeed, OCAP's poor is not the abject wretch with supplicating mien, cowering voiceless in doorways, nor the panhandler politely asking for coins. Many on the street have, through exclusion, ceased to be citizens and refuse to be subjects of the law—living, not as criminals, but as outlaws (though often criminalized). Though this position is not so much chosen as forced upon one by a concatenation of circumstance, the commitment it implies can only be one's own. OCAP acts to make possible the transformation of experience from isolation, failure and despair to solidarity, efficacy and pride. OCAP remakes the excitement of politicizing practical life as it creates and recreates itself.

### *Hard Action*

In the summer of 2000, a registered nurse working with the homeless wrote to the editor of the *Toronto Star* apropos the third unsolved murder of a street person in three weeks:

A newly homeless woman I spoke to after [his] death told me that in her worst, most paranoid moments, she can envision these recent murders as a campaign of terror to drive homeless people out of Toronto in order to secure the Olympic Games. She said, "I wouldn't put it past them. It's just

unbelievable what they are doing to homeless people now. You know, one day all these homeless people are going to rise up, and fight back. And I want to be there when it happens” (Toronto Star 2000a, A25).

That desperation had already shown itself directly and dramatically the previous day, on June 15th at Queen’s Park, the site of the Ontario Provincial Legislature. In an action organized by OCAP a body of over 1500 ocappers, street people and supporters marched to the Legislature demanding a delegation be admitted to address the Legislature in session concerning affordable housing, targeted policing, the landlord/tenant Act and below-subsistence welfare payments. They were denied entry by the Toronto Riot Police. Militants in the assembly broke through two lines of police barricades before they were stopped by the batons of tightly massed, armored police. Militants, too, were armored (primarily against tear gas and pepper spray, save for shields carried by some). Many armed themselves with poles, paving stones, paint bombs and rocks—all of which were used to pelt police. Smoke bombs were thrown and a Molotov cocktail was reported. Mounted police repeatedly charged into the crowd, forcing back the determined militants, who gave quarter grudgingly in a pitched battle lasting over an hour that produced many injuries on both sides.

The June 15 action appears to have raised the intensity of struggle to a new level and qualitatively shifted Toronto’s grammar of action. It did not, however, involve a change in OCAP’s strategy or orientation, which remained as expressed the previous year:

The mandate of the organization is to build amongst the poor and unemployed and the increasing homeless, the capacity to defend themselves through collective action (National Post 1999, B16).

OCAP is resisting the government’s legislative exclusion of the poor from private and public spaces in the city, which reduces welfare payments below the subsistence level, makes begging and squeegeeing offenses, authorizes police to detain and interrogate any person without suspicion of unlawful activity, and prohibits the homeless from sleeping in parks or urinating therein after washrooms are locked for the night. Twenty-two homeless had died on the streets in the twenty-eight weeks prior to the action. An OCAP publication distributed at the June 15 action states:

In this bleak situation, OCAP’s members have found that they have only two choices, to submit (which increasingly means literally to die) or to find the means to fight back. Direct action is the only means available any

longer, the only means by which the poor and homeless can: 1) choose the time and place of the fight, 2) choose what to fight for, 3) choose the methods and the weapons of the fight, 4) control how long a battle shall continue (Feltes 2000).

One of OCAP's mottoes is "Whatever It Takes." Particular actions over OCAP's ten year existence have included: getting compensation for prostitutes displaced from their stroll by a film shoot, restoring welfare benefits to a refugee family by picketing the home of the agency Director, breaking into abandoned buildings for squats, shadowing and video-taping police, picketing homes of yuppie neighbourhood association leaders attempting to exclude local hostels and drop-in centers, getting an emergency welfare cheque for a pregnant woman abandoned by her husband, organizing a 'Safe Park' tent city for the homeless, occupying the Premier's constituency office, disrupting City Council meetings and mass panhandling the opening gala of the Toronto Film Festival. Twice OCAP bussed members to Ottawa to ask for Federal assistance for affordable and social housing, twice they fought with Federal police. OCAP threatened the city's tourist economy:

We will attack the reputation of this city as a place to visit, invest in or to potentially host the Olympic games. We guarantee that large numbers of tourists will leave Toronto this summer with stark images of the homeless (Toronto Sun 1999a, 4).

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Though the deputy mayor responded that "The city doesn't respond to ultimatums," such images had already reached the Mayor, who early in his first election campaign denied the existence of the homeless (until a woman froze to death in a garage washroom two blocks from his office). As Mayor, he was taken on a tour of city agencies, saying afterward:

I sat and talked and had coffee with them--heroin addicts and hookers and guys with schizophrenia--everyone had a major problem. There was this guy who'd been on the street 20-odd years" recalls Lastman, his voice dropping to a whisper. "One had no arms and no legs. It hit me right where it hurts. I hate it. It's horrible to see. I'm disgusted it is happening here. And when people freeze to death, I feel responsible. How can you be proud of your city when you have to walk over people on your way to work? (Toronto Star 1998, A1).

A reporter noted:

Middle-class Toronto is willing to help the virtuous poor. But these home-

less people, with their tattoos, their bruised faces, their chests caved in from too much drink—their attitude—don't seem virtuous. Mac, for instance, says he spent time in prison for armed robbery: “Only financial institutions,” he cautions, “They can afford it. Not people. Never a person” (Toronto Star 1999, A1).

Mac's concern to distinguish person from institution seems not to meet middle-class Toronto's definition of virtue, perhaps because Mac seems to challenge the legal fiction that a corporation is a person. Given such differences in interest and world-view, it comes as no surprise that the Mayor and corporate media defined the June 15 action at Queen's Park as a “riot” and denounced OCAP, those committing anti-police violence, and especially OCAP organizer John Clarke, spokesperson for the action. The Mayor said:

Our Toronto should not be a city of riots and battles with police. It just sickens me to see something like this in our great city. A protest is a democratic right; a riot is not. Our city cannot and will not condone a riot—of any kind (Globe and Mail 2000a, A1).

The Leader of the Provincial Opposition was more explicit:

Such violence cannot be condoned, cannot be tolerated in a civil society. Those responsible for the violence should be charged and tried (Toronto Star 2000b, A23).

A prominent Opposition MPP (who made his name as organizer of a major food bank) denied the poor's authorship of the action, saying in an interview on the scene:

This is not the face of the poor and homeless. They are not political. They lead lives of quiet desperation. This is the face of a few idiots and the police response (Toronto Star 2000b, A23).

Editorial writers unanimously decried the militants as “thugs,” “hooligans,” “goons,” “rent-a-crowd” and the like. Many opined that the action hurt the cause of the poor and homeless by alienating middle class civic progressives. But the liberal progressives had done nothing to address the needs of these people—the problem had become much worse since the day, eleven years before, when the Mayor of the day had told one of many peaceful anti-poverty rallies:

In the shadow of this city's shining towers, the homeless sleep in the

streets. I'm ashamed and we all should be, and its high time we did something about it (Globe and Mail 1989, A13).

What was done was to increase levels of state repression—complete with a fashion shift from blue to black for the police, armoured riot gear, guns firing toxic gas and plastic bullets. Politicians seem to treat the city as a sort of subject which they describe in deontic and visceral terms. Always it is a matter of preserving an appearance under penalty of discomfort (“disgust,” “sickness,” “shame”). The horror of the city’s pollution by its own social waste offends élites’ sense of place. But no official thought strays to systemic practices producing this wreckage. The Mayor only sees individuals with “major problems,” he does not see a city with major problems. He interiorizes, somaticizes, hystericizes his response, he “hurts,” is sickened and disgusted, he feels “responsible.”

OCAP says that after ten years of peaceful petitions, policy papers and pious hand-wringing, their ‘violence’ is justified self-defense in resistance to the cultural vandalism and violence of a Provincial government that has purposively dismantled the safety net that once gave a modicum of succor to those in need. In any case, these actions and the social relations that ground them illuminate the structurally divided character of life in Toronto and Ontario (Ornstein, 2000). An OCAP pamphlet puts it starkly:

There are two worlds in this province: the world of the rich and the world of the poor. Since the Harris Government came to power [1995] it has done nothing but attack poor and working people. Premier Harris openly works to make the lives of the rich easier, while we struggle to put food on the table and make enough money to pay the rent. Our brothers and sisters die in the streets while the rich profit from our poverty. There is no excuse for not fighting back (OCAP 2000).

Letters to editors in the first three days after the action were three to one against it. After that and to date letters have been more supportive of the poor and understanding of the tactic. A Toronto woman wrote:

After six years of unrelenting attacks, it is no wonder that people with nothing to lose are rising up in anger to get their message across (Toronto Star 2000c, A23).

In all of this one may see not only how deep is the divide between these fractions of the city but how they are joined in the discourse that collects the positions and voices released in the sharp energy of the struggle at Queen’s Park. A web is woven, from OCAP, to the police, to the press, to





politicians, to the bystander publics. Each comments on the speeches of the other. And a thread is severed—between the body politic of citizens and the militant poor and homeless. The June 15th OCAP participants presented themselves as what they had become at the hands of the state and civil society: the excluded. What was demonstrated was the violence that citizens forswear in their bargain for civil respect and the necessities of life. The poor have been excluded from that compact by the violence of bourgeois civic and social cleansing practices. Indeed, the Mayor's question: "How can you be proud of your city when you have to walk over people on your way to work?" is better put than he knew, and particularly to the many in the city whose work is to walk over others. What his Honour does not say is that walking over people has become the name of the civic game, one of the everyday practices of late bourgeois globalizing capitalism. The poor, knowing this, did not come to Queen's Park to make speeches or beseech public conscience. They know such conventional rhetoric is the habitus of the haves, the citizens, those enclosed within the contract of the body politic. In the reflexivity of the street the excluded demonstrate that the exclusion of their necessity, and the necessity of their exclusion, their unavailability, is a feature of bourgeois common sense. The poor and damaged arrive in Toronto from every domestic and global hinterland; rural, suburban, small town and urban—youths, abused wives and kids, the disabled, the mad, the native, the immigrant, the refugee, the low-wage worker, the ordinary person—each from some place (perhaps just down the street) that was no refuge for them. They come to the city for some recognition of their need, some food, shelter, some recognition of their being, inclusion, participation. They find a regime of social cleansing that blames them for, and refuses, their existence. Some of them find and organize the hope and pride that come from standing up and fighting back.

OCAP took a great risk on June 15, and created a powerful space of chaos out of which came a reorganized oppositional culture in the city and a regenerated, recreated OCAP. Others in the city may have changed as well. On that day some police learned fear:

They tried to kill one of us, no doubt... they came with evil intentions  
(Staff Sgt. B. O'Conner, qtd. in Toronto Sun 2000b).

I just saw the splinters flying everywhere, they were trying to grab our  
guys, that's what scared us the most. It was overwhelming (Sgt. R. Morris,  
who was hit in the head with a concrete block, qtd in Toronto Sun 2000b).

I've never seen anything like it, guys were actually thinking about quitting.  
They were saying "we were trying to survive" (Veteran North York Offi-  
cer, qtd in Toronto Sun 2000b).

In many cities of the world a few bricks thrown by the poor would be a sort of non-event, a mundane feature of that city's life and traditions. That this event so shocked and arrested public discourse and personal commentary bespeaks its status as a relatively privileged occasion of reflection on the distinction of Toronto's cultures, and on OCAP, the strange attractor at the core of this discourse. In the Queen's Park action OCAP did what it always does, refused as unacceptable the place assigned by law and civic usage. Instead it created a space of danger, uncertainty and, thus, promise. Out of June 15th has come a far stronger OCAP, with more members and resources, a greatly expanded 'Allies Network' of organizations pledged to support OCAP, and respect in the anti-capitalist and social justice action group community. OCAP's view of struggle as 'Fight To Win' was taken up by the strikers of CUPE 3903 in their victorious record-duration strike at York University this winter. With its greater strength and confidence OCAP participated in a significant Canada-U.S. border action led by militants of the Akwesasne Mohawk Nation, coordinated with the April, 2001 anti-FTAA actions in Québec. Perhaps most significantly, OCAP decided within a month after June 15th to begin building a broad-based action coalition capable of sustained, Province-wide economic and political disruption. It continues to successfully organize on a Provincial scale for an efflorescence of economic and infrastructural disruptions in the Fall. These are meant to increase the cost of the government to its major corporate backers beyond acceptable levels.

But OCAP, too, experiences costs and loss. An action on June 12, 2001, meant to symbolically evict the Ontario Deputy Premier's constituency office, resulted in unplanned physical destruction and nineteen arrests. This office was targeted to draw attention to the at least two thousand evictions of Ontario individual and families occurring each month as a result of government legislation. The Crown called it "an act of terrorism" (Globe and Mail 2001, A17) in obtaining severe bail conditions which strictly prohibit association of the nineteen among themselves and with any OCAP member. Two participants were denied bail and faced months of pre-trial incarceration, until bail was granted upon appeal. In this action OCAP's failure to control the destabilization it generated resulted in the many arrests. Still, support for the fall campaign continues to be pledged by Provincial unions, union locals, labour councils and student groups, while many new members continue to come forward. On June 12 OCAP risked itself to exemplify the kind of disruption which may prove to once again shift the grammar of resistance action in the city, the Province and beyond. Or it may herald the destruction of OCAP. However, with or without OCAP the fall campaign will likely be mounted by the coalition that has become bigger than OCAP.



### *Conclusion*

Toronto Police perceive that since June 15 the movement scene (and the gang scene) has become more violent and 'protests' more frequent (Irwin 2001). One grows accustomed to seeing armored police in tactical formations on the streets of Toronto. This is a shift in the grammar of action, with the paradigm moving from 'protest' toward 'resistance.' Recently someone fired twenty-seven machine-gun bullets into an unoccupied security shack in Regent Park. While unconnected to OCAP, that gesture perhaps illustrates the shift in the practices of communication between the public and the security forces in Toronto. As well, it puts OCAP's Intelliguard action in context. Not only OCAP's sense of the possible, but the larger movement scene in the city and province, have developed to the point where many see the fall Provincial action having the potential to create a political crisis sufficient to bring down the Harris Government.

OCAP develops an apparently limitless sequence of provocative disruptions of the practices of power, tending to increase in scope and intensity. Its success and its seduction lie in its consistent capacity to resourcefully engender and organize spaces and processes of disruption or controlled destabilization in public, and to bring a dynamic order of solidarity out of its chaotic dissolution of ruleful action, tracking the seam of reality and imagination. If rule is dead power, OCAP's charm is its enlivening of rigid places, their conversion to responsive spaces of opportunity. As well, OCAP's character is deepened and its seductive appeal qualified to the extent that its sense of order and possibility is continuously specific to its locale within Ontario, Toronto and the particular micro-environments of specific actions. It is that specificity which the elements of travesty and parody depend upon.

Still, what of OCAP's fateful, parodic symmetry with its bourgeois opponent? Of course, that bond will continue to wreath OCAP in the seduction of its mysterious energy, its brash courage, its proletarian chutzpah. The Toronto movement scene, influenced as it has become by OCAP's style of direct action (and the actions of the global anti-capitalist movement which began with the Zapatista resistance in Chiapas and in April drew many from Toronto and Ontario to the anti-FTAA actions in Québec City), will continue to be 'So Toronto.' If OCAP provides an exemplary figure of this scene it perhaps does so because its actions so closely and consistently parody those of its opponents, the Harris conservatives. The latter, then, may serve as an equally apt figure of globalizing neo-liberalism. The 'violence' often attributed to OCAP is but a parody of the violence of the bourgeois order of globalizing neo-liberalism. For over one hundred fifty years we have known, with Marx, that: "uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones" (Marx and Engels

1978) The reality of disturbance now touches us all. It is OCAP's fate to enact, stage and dramatize the disruption of 'private' life on the streets, in public scenes illustrating and resisting the degradation of our lives. OCAP and its many allies refuse to permit disturbance and dislocation to be segregated as the experience of the poor and excluded. Rather, disturbance is democratized and returned to the scenes from whence it is generated and distributed—the offices of welfare bureaucrats, landlords, grasping employers, immigration officials and legislators. It is OCAP's ironic sense of turn-about as fair play which no account of its charm and seductive fascination can exclude.

Even if OCAP at some point overreaches, what is lively in it, its commitment—to desire, to ironic and parodic struggle as creative forms of life, will not die. If "OCAP" names this, and not only the concrete organization and people on the scene today, then while the organization could pass from the scene, OCAP will only die when there is nothing like bourgeois social relations to reflexively oppose. OCAP's practice provides a new model of the practice of struggle as being at home in homelessness, in intense scenes of uncertainty, while attacking the sources of that dispossession with a desire that can only intend to win. It permits us to see how not only OCAP, but its opponents and the struggle itself, are So Toronto.

Parody, travesty and irony may name intellectual devices to typify and perhaps domesticate the relational character of OCAP's passionate, sensuous fluxion. They cannot, however, convey the widening vortex of OCAP's seduction. OCAP attracts because its scenes are moments when humiliated, excluded, oppressed men and women live up to their names as people who dare to stand up and become responsible for themselves as agents of history who refuse to be what they are treated as. In these moments of action and solidarity they become free to risk their very being, to put it on the line in a fateful venture of the present for the future. They show us that futures are founded in acts of desire and imagination, of resourcefulness and daring, and not necessarily in resource accumulation, business plans and risk management. Perhaps the charm of OCAP is that in its actions one can glimpse a reflexive, affirmative reclamation of the human, not as an idea but as an actual form of life practiced in struggle and care.

## Notes

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