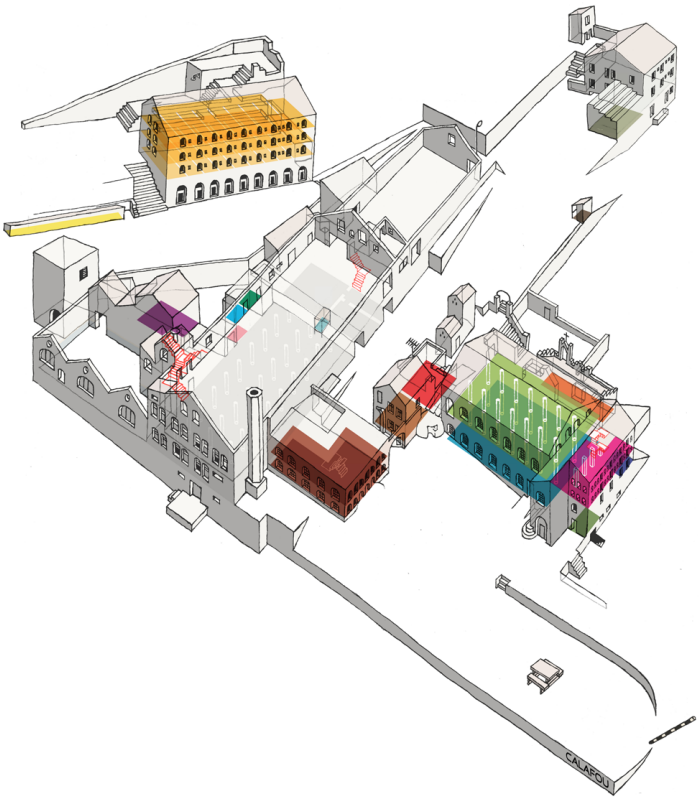
‘Hack the Earth!’: Non-Utopian Myth-Making in Calafou



GALLINEROS
VIVIENDAS
LA CONQUISTA DEL PAN
HACKLAB
BIOLAB
ANARCHASERVER
UTEROXY
PECHBLENDA
CASA ROJA
TALLER DE MADERA
OFICINA TÉCNICA
TALLER
CENTRO SOCIAL
IGLESIA
COCINA
SERIGRAFÍA
CERVECERÍA

Map of Calafou. Source: Olivier M. / agentliquide.com

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Introduction

The first time I visited Calafou in April of 2017 I did not know what to expect from a 'post-capitalist eco-industrial colony'. After exchanging emails with a member of Calafou, Hermes[1], I decided to attend an event called Hack The Earth (HTE). I met Hermes in Barcelona and we travelled together to a small town on the regional train to eventually arrive after a twenty minute walk into the valley. Having crossed one of the most polluted rivers of Europe through a narrow concrete bridge I could finally see the buildings of Calafou — a burnt down but partly rehabilitated textile factory — and a highway overshadowing them. After a short tour of the place, we started helping the others with some final preparations, and the next day HTE began.

The three day event was like an extraordinary school camp where, instead of pupils, activists and professors participate in workshops, talk and play in the afternoons, and drink together in the evening. Every day, we could go to the 'Hacking Area', for mixing free technologies with arts and sciences, the 'New Structures Area', for sharing experiences of cooperativism, networked work and the 'Materials Area', for experimenting with re-appropriation of materials. Guests stayed in the *Camping* or in the *Casa Roja*, the guesthouse which had several mattresses though not many window panes. Some people who maintained closer ties with members slept in the *Viviendas*, the home of the residents which were renovated apartments of former factory workers. Three meals a day were prepared by La Conquista del Pan[2], and the beer sold was made by the local brewery — two cooperatives Calafou gives a home to. They accepted social currency for both the fee of the event and in the bar.

The HTE was a good place to start in understanding how the various projects of Calafou fuse into a coherent (albeit inconsistent) whole: it was a glimpse into how *autogestion* is imagined in this diverse environment. *Autogestion* means self-management or worker's control. The term can be traced to the anti-statist socialist movements of the nineteenth century; it was subsequently debated among contributors to Cornelius Castoriadis' journal in the 1950s and again in the 1960s in discussions within the French Left (Brenner and Elden

[1] Instead of Calafouians' real names, I am using Greek mythological ones to protect their privacy.

[2] 'The conquest of bread'. Name given after the anarcho-communist Peter Kropotkin's book.

2009). It is now mainly used in relation to Catalan, Spanish and Latin-American groups and movements that practice and valorise autonomy, horizontality and openness. In line with this the HTE was an occasion ‘to continue weaving networks, to create passageways, open roads and break walls, while [building] bridges between activist circles and between activists and society in general’ .

Although not everyone in Calafou declares themselves an anarchist, Calafou is part of a long genealogy of anarchist movements; movements that in contrast to the common narrative do not advocate chaos but a society where harmony is obtained by free agreements concluded between social groups (Kropotkin 1910). I talk about the *genealogy* of anarchism rather than its *theory*; anarchy is neither a unified system of ideas nor does it prescribe a fixed praxis. As both Davis (2014) and Graeber (2010) notes, anarchism is one of the most vital impulses of contemporary radical politics that refuses to accept the prevailing worldview that there is no alternative to a domination- and hierarchy-based life. Anarchism is not a newfangled movement. Catalonia in particular has a long history of workers’ self organisation: during the Spanish Civil War 75% of the economy was organised in a cooperative way (Dolgoff 1974). The success and subsequent prosecution of these anarchists lives on not just in the local memory but in the minds of many across the world. Cooperatives still operate according to a similar set of core principles (NRECA 2016):

1. Open and Voluntary Membership
2. Democratic Member Control
3. Members’ Economic Participation
4. Autonomy and Independence
5. Education, Training, and Information
6. Cooperation Among Cooperatives
7. Concern for Community

The project of Calafou has to be understood within this context: rather than a break with the past, hacking demonstrates the continuity of practices that are based on cooperativism’s values of solidarity and horizontality. Hacking used to be only associated with programmers who enjoy the intellectual challenge of creatively overcoming limitations of software systems but now has gone on to encompass new practices that emphasise autonomy, self-instruction, peer networking, and empowerment. Although there is no consensus on an adequate definition

for hacking, it revolves around the notion of passion conveying a dedication to an activity that is interesting and joyous. *Autogestion* here means not complete self-sufficiency but is practiced through hacking.

Calafou was set up as the autonomous project of the Catalan Integral Cooperative (CIC) in 2011. The CIC was founded in Catalonia in 2010 by an assembly of activists with the objective of building a 'post-capitalist' economy capable of satisfying the needs of the local community. Its goal is creating a decentralised network of projects connected by the same principles, supporting each other by sharing resources and capabilities. Catalonia possesses many autonomous eco-farms; the infrastructure of Calafou was supposed to supplement them by catering to the industrial and technological needs of people. As a matter of fact, Calafou was built upon the ruins of a burnt down textile 'colony'. Colonies were industrial centres located in rural areas characterised by the construction of a workers' village near a water powered factory (Dafermos 2017).

At the moment, the colony is inhabited by approximately 20 people, although not everyone lives there throughout the whole year. Inhabitants set up a housing cooperative, which grants them as tenants only the right to *use* the space they inhabit but they are in the process of buying the property collectively. Life is organised through the Working Groups, which report back to the consensus-oriented assembly held every Sunday. Calafou has given home to a variety of projects since its inception from DIY gynaecology through wood-workshops to biolabs. Currently alongside the cooperatives there is, for example, soap making, construction of portable eco-toilets and a feminist server[3].

The first impression I got from Calafou was one of an enchanted industrial fairy tale; a hidden fortress framed by the motorway above and the polluted river below. During my stay we even joked about me writing the mythology of Calafou; it might give more insight to the accumulated knowledge and personal histories of inhabitants than an academic text would. This made me think about why both in academic writing and everyday language 'myth' is often used as a synonym to false collective belief. Why are powerfully inspirational social imaginaries that help forming collective identities dismissed as 'unreal'?

[3] A server is a computer program that provides services to another computer programs (and their users). This feminist server provides cloud services, a blogging platform, online surveys, encrypted files sending, polls and encrypted pads and so on.

The community of Calafou is a radical experiment of the fusion of three types of *hacking* — cooperativism, the development of sovereign technologies and trans-hack-feminism — in the pursuit of an alternative way of life and economy that is based on egalitarianism. Calafou's collaborative and experimental vision of development defies modernist visions of progress which, by imagining change through utopias, evaluate all action as failure. Academic thought has recognised the problem with such unilinear visions (e.g. Adorno and Horkheimer 2016 [1947]; Lefebvre 1970), but through explaining the necessary existence of repressive structures it has rarely provided theoretical or practical tools for change. Through Foucault's (1984) notion of what our 'critical ontology' should be like, I argue that the hacker practices create hope and that the anarchist critique is a necessary element of social transformation.

Both cooperativism and hacking in a narrower sense have been critiqued for being unable to meet their ideals in practice (Kasmir 1996; Barron 2013). These critiques are misjudgements of valuable practices due to a modernist bias. Struggle for social transformation that is anticipating progressive development in direction of a fixed and distant horizon is utopian and thus impractical. In contrast, the practice of *autogestion* in terms of hacking allows the theoretical exercise of radical criticism to go beyond the enervating dominance-resistance divide. Instead of messianic expectations for social change to emerge out of a simple confrontation between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (Kasmir 1996, Standing 2011, Negri 2004), Calafou directs efforts towards an alternative way of living through cooperation across class boundaries. Such pragmatism strengthens the power of their social imaginary — the multimedia mythology — rather than contradicting it because it sustains hope in the struggle's viability. This myth that does not present itself as beyond criticism and change could be of inspiration not just for the hacker community, but for public policy discourse and academic discussions too.

My research was carried out in accordance with the Calafou research protocol (Wiki.Calafou.org). Before proposing my research, I had visited Calafou for 5 days, introduced myself and participated in the HTE 2017. After my proposal was accepted by the assembly I was assigned a 'madrina' (tutor) and was invited to stay at the colony over the summer. I spent 6 weeks participating in the everyday life of Calafou. Next to numerous informal conversations I conducted 8 semi-formal interviews with English-speaking residents, and questioned 7 more through a survey in Castellano. I also made use of the information

available on the Calafou Wiki. From the very beginning I invited anyone interested to comment on my process and had regular discussions with my madrina to ensure my research stayed relevant and contributed to the development of Calafou. I sent my first draft to Calafou for review and incorporated their comments into the finished document. Thus, even though I am the principal author of this essay I would accentuate the collaborative quality of the project. The methods I followed are in line with my conviction that engagement in real world problems should be at the centre of anthropological practice. Activities that grow out of a commitment to informants and a values-based stance ensures that anthropological research has a beneficent effect on the promotion of social justice.

A Safe Space to Make Mistakes

Artists and scientists have been using utopias to imagine ideal societies since ancient Greece[4]. While the adjective 'utopian' is often used to describe impractical or unrealistic schemes, whether utopia may be an adequate method for social change has been the topic of innumerable theoretical discussions. The dialogue between anarchism and utopianism too has a long history (cf. Davis and Kinna 2009), but I will argue that because a modernist vision of progress is ingrained in the notion of utopia, it is best to avoid their association altogether if we seek a sustainable form of struggle. In contrast to modernist utopias, the members of Calafou do not have one single vision of progress: instead of starting with a template which gets projected onto the world, they believe in collaborative development where strategies can always be changed. Academic thought has produced critiques of modernity but these critiques are politically unproductive, because by stressing contingency they do not help in engendering change. The practice of *autogestion* allows the theoretical exercise of radical criticism to go beyond the enervating dominance-resistance divide while the dynamic and conflictive production of social imaginaries ensures continuing inspiration. Calafou's collaborative and experimental vision of development is implied in the hacker ethic that permeates the whole project. I hope that through the analysis of Calafou I can show that the critique of progress in modernity can open up possibilities for social transformation from a leftist perspective.

There is no completely accepted definition, but in the 'West' modernism is commonly seen as a socially progressive trend of thought that affirms the power of human beings to create, improve and reshape their environment with the help of science and technology (Berman 1982). Modernity is supposed to be a break with the past in order to achieve a better future. Modernist visions of progress want to start from a blank slate and build what lies ahead according to plan. All efforts should be directed towards following the plan, and the ultimate goal will eventually be achieved through progressive development. Thus, even though utopias existed before modernity (e.g. Plato's Republic), their nature is inherently modernist in this sense because the utopia, by definition, is the manifestation of the perfectly realised plan.

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[4] Utopiaanddystopia.com has a comprehensive list of the most famous utopian writings and films, but we could look to the plans of modernist architects such as Le Corbusier or the work of futurists, constructivists, and other avant-garde artists.

The authority of Reason and Science has been famously criticised by Adorno and Horkheimer (2016 [1947]), who argue that the Enlightenment, which aimed to free humans from the controls of nature and promised autonomy, has become trapped in the same ties it sought to avoid: it reverted to 'myth' (in the sense of unproven or false collective belief) by presenting itself to be beyond criticism and change. An ever-expanding capitalist economy, fed by scientific research and the latest technologies, is driving the process of sophisticated exploitation and fear-driven domination. With the help of the Culture Industry masses are manipulated and compelled to participate even if they see through the mechanisms of capitalist production. In this view, the autonomy of humans and art is lost as they become tools of instrumental reason. Habermas rightly criticised them for being ambivalent about the possibility of escaping domination: their analysis explains the necessity of the system, not a way out of it. Foucault is often critiqued similarly on his notion of governmentality, but his later work illustrates that even though the technologies of power produce the subject within a discourse, the omnipresence of power means that resistance, too, is everywhere (1978). Not acknowledging this, Habermas (1996) maintains that Foucault's 'antimodernism' is pessimistic and that Foucault conceptualised subjects as passive effects of disciplinary power, when a communicative conception of reason could redeem modernity's promise of enlightenment. Habermas adheres to a unilinear evolutionism in that he sees a trend towards increasing rationality as the inevitable and irreversible outcome of a collective learning process. His inclination to stay within the categories of the established social system does not allow him to get away from fatalistic sociology. In contrast, Foucault questions the whole structure:

> 'The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not […] as a theory, doctrine, […] [but] an attitude, an ethos […] in which the critique of what we are is […] [also] the historical analysis of the limits […] and an experiment with […] going beyond them' (1984: 50).

This radical criticism is also characteristic of anarchism. It is neither the dystopic evolutionism of Adorno and Horkheimer, nor the utopian meta-narrative of Habermas.

Anarchism has been defined in a variety of ways, but at its core is always a practice-grounded belief that society can and should be organised without hierarchy and domination (Davis 2014). Its radicalism consists of not taking for granted the categories of the currently dominant system. It is a recognition that there is a difference between impossible and

‘impossible’. Some things are ‘impossible’ because humanly created institutions make them so and these institutions can also be changed or abolished by humans.

I find that getting beyond the longstanding social scientific trap of the structure and agency question is helpful in the theoretical exercise of radical criticism. As Maskovsky (2018) suggests, the means of dominance and of resistance are often the same but this does not mean resistance is annulled. Political inertia can be avoided if we use analytical categories that are capable of explaining these ambiguous power relations, rather than trying to put them into artificial opposing boxes. We have to find a notion of change that is grounded in the realities of the present but nonetheless allows for indeterminacy in the future. I agree with Lefebvre (1966) that neither reformism nor an absolute rupture is capable of capturing real change; the anarchist element is — if not sufficient — necessary.

The most important strategic element of revitalised anarchist projects is *autogestion.* Through the notion of *autogestion* we can understand how members of a free association can start to take control over their own lives in such way that existing structures are not forgotten. Lefebvre himself establishes that autogestion is not a utopia because it does not evoke ‘an effervescence inflaming the whole of society…but shows the practical way *to change life*’ (1966: 148). Interestingly, he also maintains that there is no theory without utopia because only through utopia is it possible to imagine true alternatives to current society (1970).

Lefebvre (1995, cited in Coleman 2013) distinguishes pathological older utopias from his model that proffers positive engagement with the present. His dialectic process of utopia incorporates testing, elaboration, and correction of its propositions; it is not the prognosticating Utopia of planners but of ‘the distant possible’. Similarly, Davis (2014) and Kinna (2012) wish to rescue the notion of utopia from its negative connotations with terms such us ‘persistent utopia’ or ‘grounded utopia’ to emphasise the imaginative character of anarchist commitments to experimentation and open-ended social change.

However, in my opinion, it is better to avoid the association of utopia and anarchism altogether because it reinforces a belief that projects inspired by anarchist ideas are naïve dreams doomed to failure. Utopia presupposes the possibility of perfectibility even if it is only a methodological tool. Images of the perfect future cannot be inspirational in the long term

because contrasting them with the present will eventuate a constant sense of failure. Rather than chasing the distant possible, focusing on the near future can provide satisfaction while still bearing in mind the moral principles of egalitarianism. Instead of the inspirational layer the utopia is supposed to provide I propose to use the notion of 'social imaginary': 'the dimension through which human beings create their ways of living together and their ways of representing their collective life' (Thompson 1984: 6). Throughout this essay, I will try to show that this symbolic layer — the myth — that Calafou produces is a sustainable form of hope exactly because it is not a fixed template.

During my stay it became clear that although many residents expressed a wish for an articulated common vision, most did not think it was necessary to have it immediately. Some people were eager to discuss what they thought the main objectives of Calafou should be. One of the most interesting conversations happened after a common dinner where some members' incommensurable perspectives relating to the vision were revealed:

> Arete: We tried many times to concrete a common vision and we couldn't.
>
> Hermes: It's like the magic stag in the woods that everybody talks about but nobody finds —like the Loch Ness monster.
>
> (haha)
>
> Me: Do you think it's a problem that you don't have a common vision?
>
> A: No.
>
> Dionysus: Yes […]
>
> A: It's a small problem, but it's not a matter of life and death. It's stopping us to advance in a way, for example expanding our visibility in different places.
>
> […]
>
> D: […] We are good in trying, experimenting, researching but until we have some kind of view […] It doesn't mean we all must think the same way, but if we don't have common objectives, consensus is maybe not a very useful process.

Differences of opinion did not cause tensions during dinner. Calafouians enjoyed discussing these issues and listened to each other with interest. Mutual respect, humour and (self-)irony usually facilitates the good atmosphere at dinners, social events and assemblies.

Not having been able to establish a common vision for six years was not seen as a failure by most but as part of a process which aimed to include everyone's perspective and the project's possibilities as determined by the environment. The lack of a manifesto did not mean

a lack of common objectives. The importance of living in a community, of collaborative knowledge production for the commons and of assuring this place was mentioned by most people independently and features on the Calafou website as well. Calafou is seen as a site well suited for experimentation, especially in industrial and technological aspects and as a safe social hub where social movements can potentially nestle and grow.

Various 'subcultures' exist in Calafou who place emphasis on different objectives and thus have overlapping but differing visions. Visions include not only cooperativism, free software and trans-hack-feminism but less serious ones too such as ecochoni[5], post-aristocracy. While some of these are jokes, they present *partial* visions for the future that come up periodically in conversations about the *common* vision but are not meant to be authoritative for all participants.

In the above discussion Dionysus found it problematic that they do not have a common vision, but neither did he mean a prescriptive blue-print. A week before, he said the following about social change and Calafou's role in it:

> I like to think we are the 'retaguardia de la revolución'[6]: […] not front line but the last line. There are some communists and even some anarchists who think they are the avantgardes, but I think we are the opposite. We're more slow doing things, but we're doing it for the future. […]
>
> It's important to experiment, to do it the wrong ways. […] More projects — more people experimenting. […] There is a difference between a model and an example. For a model, there's only *the* way to do something. If you are an example: 'oh, we do things like that'.

Focusing on experimenting and seeing the project of Calafou as a continuation of past social movements, Dionysus illustrated the humble dedication that was characteristic of this place. For Calafouians, saying that they *invented* the *perfect* plan seemed completely false.

Doing things the wrong ways as part of experiments regularly featured in conversations:

> I think it's important that Calafou is a safe place to make mistakes. I think a community is measured by the extent, scale or size of mistakes that you can make in that community. And I think in this sense, Calafou is a very good community because you have the opportunity to make really big mistakes. (Hermes)

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[5] Ecochoni is a wordplay. 'Choni' would translate to something like 'white trash' in a techno music scene. To reappropriate this category some Calafouians localised this concept to the countryside (to the environment of 'eco-') and made a song and a video.

[6] 'the rearguard of the revolution'

The personal-political ethic which was implied in this vision of progress is the hacker ethic. The hacker ethic originates with a group of programmers who worked at MIT in the 1950-80s (Levy 1984). Its key points are access, freedom of information, and improvement to quality of life. Since then the meaning of hacking has been extended to different practices that emphasise autonomy and self-instruction. The Calafouian Athena explained that hacking is not merely an individual exercise; it is not only DIY (Do It Yourself), but also DIT (Do It Together) and DIWO (Do It With Others).

Although there is no consensus on an adequate definition for hacking it revolves around the notion of passion. It conveys a 'dedication to an activity that is intrinsically interesting, inspiring, and joyous' (Himanen 2001: 6). Hacking is finding a creative solution to a problem; finding it through a loophole, through non-obvious means. In a Donestech[7] article Timmerman is quoted on the definition of hacking: 'there was this women in a detention center, she just escaped using a spoon, and I call that hacking, when you don't accept something as a done deal and you are creative about it' (2012: 215).

Calafouians are hackers in the obvious sense of endorsing free software in the name of technological sovereignty. Free software refers not to the price of the program, but to the freedom to run, study, distribute or copy it (Couture 2014). Everyone is a free software user in Calafou, but several members take an active part of the movement for technological sovereignty: they are part of research groups, contribute to publications or maintain a radical leftist server. Two books (sobtec 2014; 2018) that propose new theoretical and practical descriptions of initiatives developing free technologies were coordinated and edited by Athena with the support of Calafou. The local electronic infrastructure of Calafou is built by residents as well: they have their own economy software, cloud services and give home to a feminist project called Anarchaserver.

Egaña and Solá (2016) in 'Hacking the Body' show how transfeminist artistic expressions in Barcelona provide a theoretical context in which the politics of the body and technology are closely linked are closely linked to sensibilities of a particular type of politics called 'postporn'. Postporn is 'queer politics, postfeminist, punk, DIY, but also a complex view of sex which includes an analysis of the origin of our desire and a direct confrontation with the

[7] Donestech is a collaborative feminist research group investigating free technologies. Two Calafouians are Donestech members.

source of our sexual fantasies' (Llopis cited in ibid.: 77). They show how the hacker and open-source software movement has served not only as a means of technical support for transfeminist production (e.g. uncensored servers), but also as metaphors that exemplify the practices transfeminists — feminists who are informed by trans politics — attempt to carry out. Transferred to the field of gender politics the liberties of free software provide 'a new framework for thinking, manipulating, and modifying bodies and desires outside the framework of compulsory heterosexuality' (Egaña and Solá 2016: 78). Calafou resident Aceso is active in this kind of politics.

Aceso's main interest is gynaecology and her projects work towards 'making it open'. As part of the 'Gynepunk' group she organised many workshops where people with vaginas could learn about how their bio-bits had been named after doctors who experimented on colonial subjects (Anarchagland project) and diagnosing themselves without the often humiliating experience of a clinic. Aceso likes to combine these workshops with lectures as well as 'freak-show' type performances in order to really have an effect on people.

The autonomous hacker attitude is also applied to decision-making. Not only the productive cooperatives but Calafou as a collective is (self-)managed through an assembly. The general assembly that takes place on Sunday embodies the collaborative ideology with its consensus-based process. The assembly is always moderated by different people, and the decision making operates on 'rough consensus': when the facilitator feels that through debating most people have reached an agreement, the facilitator determines the dominant view. It is the forum to discuss everyday issues, evaluate events, determine future projects, report on the work of Working Groups, talk about conflicts or problems of the collective life.

I participated in an assembly where an old friend of many, Bakis, asked whether he could move into a room. Whilst the flat he wanted to move into lacked electricity, it was nicer than some others, possessing furniture and being recently painted. It was established as one of the 'communitary flats' where guests could stay for a short time, or temporary dwelling for future residents. Until this point, assemblies I have attended always had a good atmosphere but this one ended up heightening emotions. Some were concerned if Bakis moves into a room with his dog they will use the whole flat even though the rent for a room is lower. Others feared he will stay there and the original purpose of the flat will be lost. Bakis understandably was hurt by this resistance, so many raised voices in his defense. In the following days Bakis found a

job in the village which meant he was able to pay the rent and was enthusiastic in taking his part of common tasks. He immediately started to rehabilitate a new flat and others offered to help with installing electricity and water. In the next assembly, his case was discussed again and slowly he became a part of Calafou.

Bakis' case was illustrative of the way consensus works in Calafou in two ways. Firstly, it is not a mechanical decision-making process but tries to deal with opinions and emotions of all people in order to find a solution that is best for everyone. In a similar way to the general ideology that rejects unilinear progress, here as well, the solutions and strategies can always be changed. Different perspectives are taken into consideration and the next step is not determined by the hierarchy of opinions but through harmonising them. People had different opinions on the matter based on different focuses (i.e. fear of Bakis not fulfilling his promise, importance of welcoming newcomers) but eventually the discussion and Bakis's behaviour eventuated an outcome that pleased everyone. Some people were good at facilitating conflicts like these. Facilitating was expressed with the word 'dinami(t)zar' and was mentioned repeatedly as an important skill.

Secondly, a structure which allows horizontality does not mean a completely equal distribution of power. The power people have depends on their experience, knowledge and most importantly on their contribution. The way people are treated will depend on their 'trajectory' in the community. This trajectory is measured through 'the energy one puts in the project, the compromise, the responsibility, the altruism' in opposition to 'not maintaining one's compromises, or sucking energy from the group' (Arete). The fact that Bakis was willing to move into a new flat, started to work on it right away and provided evidence that he will be able to pay the rent meant that his dedication was recognised; and his power, so to say, was 'increased'. As a result, he started to become a full member of the community which entailed acquiring the same rights as others.

The solution to this conflict was an example of how well consensus-based resolutions can work in Calafou, but this was not always the case. In Aceso's opinion the assembly is not a good way to solve conflicts because people are afraid, do not face each other but move away instead. In fact, she does not consider herself to be a part of Calafou anymore because she feels hated and that her work is not valued — whereas productive projects such as the brewery are put into the foreground. This comment resonates with a common critique of

consensus-based decision making processes while the image of horizontality is maintained invisible inequalities in power might result in the dominance of some people. Still, Aceso eventually went to an assembly and many people expressed the hope that she will be integrated into the community again. The assembly does not work perfectly, but it is not assumed that it ever can. The foremost value is in the effort of trying to reconcile incommensurable perspectives while bearing in mind the hacker ethic.

The inspiration to live according to the hacker ethic is enabled by the existence of multifarious social imaginaries. So far I have mainly talked about how social imaginaries are produced in discourse and declarations but they are created in a number of media. Importantly, they are enabled by the organisation of events themselves, and by witty invitation videos and graphics that are associated with them. Since 2012 Calafou has organised more than 50 events including HTEs and hacker-meetings (Wiki.Calafou.org). Some of these events are attended by up to a hundred people coming from everywhere around the world. There are returning visitors, but new guests come every year to exchange ideas, watch performances, make things together; in short, to bathe themselves in the effervescent environment and return home refreshed with conviction that it is worth struggling for a better world. Events, software code, books and publications, performances, graphics and graffiti, videos and documentaries all contribute to the *multimedia mythology*[8] of Calafou. In opposition to modernist utopias the mythology of Calafou does not presuppose perfectibility. Rather than a break with the past, it builds on already existing knowledge. It is not beyond change; on the contrary, it requires continuing change according to the outcomes of experiments. Neither is it completely coherent: existing visions are partly conflicting, partly overlapping and it is desired that way.

Modernist visions of progress are barren because by imagining change through utopias they evaluate all action as failure (as no action can live up to the ideal). Academic thought has recognised the problem with such unilinear visions, but through explaining the necessary existence of repressive structures it has rarely provided theoretical or practical tools for change. The most important strategic element of anarchist projects, *autogestion*, allows for a radical re-imagination of present society as its main principle is horizontality. However, it is protected against inertia because it does not require a complete rejection of everything that is not perfect, but rather facilitates naturally emerging development through collaborative

[8] Adding ‘multimedia’ to the expression was Hermes’s idea.

experimentation. In Calafou *autogestion* is practised in terms of hacking: instead of aiming for complete autonomy which would be impossible now, Calafouians try to find loopholes through which they can work for a more egalitarian world. The hacker ethic is enabled by the multimedia mythology and is present virtually everywhere in Calafou: it is there in small DIY projects, in the vision, in free software development, in queer-feminist activism, in decision making and even in — what will be the topic of the next chapter — cooperativism.

Together in the Struggle of Hacking

The beer, food and housing cooperative are themselves a way of 'hacking the system'. Under the aegis of *autogestion* they convert money from 'capitalist' resources into another economic logic that hinges on values of solidarity and horizontality. Rather than a break with the past, hacking in this context demonstrates the continuity of practices that are based on these values. Both cooperativism and hacking in a narrower sense has been critiqued for not being able to meet their ideals in practice. Kasmir (1996) argues that cooperativism conceals inequalities because it was founded as an entrepreneurial alternative to working-class activism. This critique, however, is a misjudgement of a valuable practice due to a modernist bias. Struggle that is anticipating progressive development in direction of a fixed and distant horizon is utopian and thus impractical. Class can be used as a fruitful analytic category, as an embodied disposition that organises the ways in which people perceive the social world around them and react to it (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]). Members of one class do tend to socialise with one another, live in the same neighbourhoods, enjoy the same leisure activities and have similar tastes (Great British Class Survey cited in Sanchez 2018), but they rarely organise themselves into politically active collectivities based on their shared history. Instead of messianic expectations for social change to emerge out of a simple confrontation between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, Calafou directs efforts towards an alternative way of living *now*, and does so through cooperation *across* class boundaries.

Cooperativism has been under academic inspection for a long time (cf. Vargas-Cetina 2005). Early studies in the beginning of the 20th century assumed cooperatives to eventually supersede other, more 'primary' forms of association based on kinship or age groups. By the 1970s the study of grassroots production and distribution and their interface with nation state development projects grew into a main field of anthropology. Some studies showed that state-sponsored cooperation did not always turn out to be the best development tool, but also that cooperatives struggled to live long-term without this external support. Cooperatives, in the meantime, continued to 'be conceptualised as self-contained units that involved long-term association of their members and required, if not a utopian understanding of the organization as a community at least a degree of harmony' (Vargas-Cetina 2005: 232). Although this burgeoning literature has covered a broad range of topics, an antagonism between left labour politics and cooperativism has been a theme since the beginning (cf. Gibson-Graham 2003).

One of the most studied cooperative from which anthropologists have drawn far reaching conclusions is the Mondragón in the Basque country.

Kasmir (1996), in her ethnography of the Mondragón, argues that cooperatives are intrinsically inadequate as an economic model to achieve equality and overcome exploitation because they generate a middle class consciousness. She aimed to show that it is the 'myth' of Mondragón that workers are really in control of the cooperatives. Scholars expect to find that working conditions in cooperative factories will be better than those in standard private firms, cooperators will be actively involved in running their factories, and will be more satisfied in their jobs. She claims none of this is true and in fact workers are pulled back from collectively standing up for themselves. According to Kasmir there is not much difference between cooperatives like the Mondragón and employee stock ownership plans or other strategies that are increasingly prevailing in the corporate world that super-exploit workers under the cloak of 'inclusion in decisions'. She draws on a Gramscian notion of hegemony to argue that cooperativism is a 'subtle phenomenon of social, cultural, and ideological control' (65) and is *always* a key managerial strategy and a corporate ideology of flexible accumulation. In the case of Mondragón, the funder Father Arizmendiarrieta is said to have set out to create a middle class from workers through education and cooperativism which ruptured the social fabric of the working class.

While Kasmir's analysis points to existing problems, her conclusions are not necessarily based on well-founded premises. Kasmir herself admits that her survey which is supposed to show workers' frustration with cooperativism is not representative (1996: 160). While some of her interviewees are undoubtedly disillusioned by cooperativism others would like to see their institutions change in a way that enhances horizontality, for example by complementing worker councils with unions. Many studies of Mondragón are driven by the desire to highlight the uniqueness and utopian otherness of the alternative but when researchers go close enough and find problems they are disappointed that cooperativism is no ultimate alternative to capitalism (cf. Gibson-Graham 2003). Despite the fact that undoubtedly one can find class differences in cooperatives around the world, Kasmir's conclusion that cooperativism is an ideology to exploit workers is a misconstruction based on an outdated Marxist conception of class struggle. Marx's materialist conception of history is inherently modernist due not only to its emphasis on industrialisation but because of its claim that communism is the inevitable

endpoint of the dialectic of class struggles. Rather than dismissing them as failed utopias, cooperatives are better seen as practices of economic experimentation. Marx and Engels critiqued utopian socialists, but their ambiguous and changing attitude earned them the name 'anti-utopian utopianists' (cf. Paden 2002).

I do not rule out the possibility of political action based on the experience of social relatedness. Turner's (1995) case study, for example, shows how the emergence of a 'practical class consciousness' through shared experiences of daily life, solidarity in demonstrations and education led Japanese workers to seize their factory's shop floor and form a worker cooperative. However, on the one hand there was no coherent belief system to this consciousness, on the other, the consciousness itself was vulnerable to changing circumstances. It no longer makes sense to talk about two fixed class lines (if it ever did) and staying open to non class-consciousness based struggles may contribute to radical social transformation.

In Calafou people from different classes work *together* towards social transformation. It is true that the housing cooperative is not open to everyone because of the rent, but people can join without paying if they are sleeping in the red house or staying with friends. Inhabitants of Calafou come not only from different countries but from different backgrounds. There are people who could be considered to be part of upper-classes, as Hermes has called himself and others, of 'cognitive capitalists', but not everyone is. Cognitive capitalist refers mainly those that occupy themselves with academic writing, software development or art performances while others predominantly spend energy on producing 'things' in the cooperatives. Still, most people participate in both kinds of production.

As stated in Marxism, workers' collective realisation of their shared position of alienation leads to an idea and a new value (people will start thinking differently) which then culminates in a new position (dictatorship of the proletariat and eventually communism) (Marx and Engels 1848). Contrarily, struggle in Calafou operates according to a reversed logic: shared egalitarian values led people from various backgrounds to performatively thrust themselves into a shared position which then produces more value (the inspirational myth). Whilst Mondragón and Calafou differ due to size, history and context, their organisation in principle is the same. Calafou says something about cooperatives and the nature of struggle in general

which would be hard to interpret in relationship to a Marxist model and which, I argue, is a more sustainable form of social transformation.

As an illustration of cooperation between classes on shared ideological bases let's look at two different life trajectories. Hermes and Triptolemus have very different educational and working backgrounds but both have decided to move to Calafou because they believe this 'alternative way of life' is more consistent with their values.

Hermes comes from Budapest where he did 4 Masters and 3 Bachelor degrees for free through persuading/tricking the administrators of the then not yet digitalised university system to let him do more exams than the legal allowance (6 years are free in Hungary). After ending his postdoctoral research in Catalonia, he is now lecturing hacker culture at Lancaster University which means he only spends 6 months in Calafou per year. Hermes explained he wanted to move here because: (1) he had political, academic and economic reasons to move to Catalonia (2) it seemed to be the best place for doing technology, anarchism and self-organisation (3) it sounded crazy enough to be an interesting experience (4) the post-apocalyptic setting, scale and ambition of the project was appealing. In Calafou he is responsible for maintaining the IP network. He also does book scanning, 3D printing sometimes and other small tasks. Importantly, he is bringing a steady stream of people to the project and keeps circulation in the international hacker/academic network.

Triptolemus used to work in a restaurant in Valencia with Carmanor and decided to move to Calafou two years ago because they thought it was a perfect place start their productive project of food transformation, the Conquista del Pan. Triptolemus has always been politically active, even when he had a commercial job he was part of anti-fascist groups and the anarchist syndicate. For the Conquista it was important that they live and work in the same place. According to Triptolemus, Calafou is a great opportunity to have an 'industrial project outside of the system', when they lived in Valencia their work was 'financing other people' not them and they wanted to change this: 'here you don't work for money, you work for projects, which is good. I think it's a problem that people usually only work for money and not in a collaborative way'.

Everyone's answers to the question of why they moved to Calafou revolved around themes of wanting to work for social transformation with a long-term perspective, live in a

community, be part of productive and technological sovereignty projects. It is difficult to place Hermes and Triptolemus on one 'class scale' as translating class across national boundaries is problematic, but broadly speaking we can establish that they belong to different classes based on their history of financial, social and cultural capital. Calafouians are together in this struggle not because they originally shared a position in society but because they believe moving here helps them to live a more coherent life in terms of political-personal aspirations. They are aware of differences in capital which shows not only in Hermes's self-definition as cognitive capitalist, but also in workshops they held for revealing privileges. Calafou shows that the existence of class differences in a social movement is not necessarily indicative of impotence. A struggle that is based on cooperation seems to be more productive than one that is based on antagonism.

The changed labour circumstances Kasmir draws attention to in the current 'neoliberal' age illuminate how insecurity now is often defined in temporal terms, meaning a precarious existence. I am wary of throwing concepts around like 'neoliberalism' as it has been used in a wide variety of ways, people often not making clear whether they referring to a theory, a phase of capitalism, or a set of policies or else. Neoliberalism, as a policy model, advocates the repositioning of control of economic factors from the public to the private sector. In this context, precarity refers to the widespread condition of temporary, flexible, casual, work in postindustrial societies, brought about by the neoliberal labor market reforms that have strengthened management and weakened the bargaining power of employees. The social class defined by this condition has been termed the precariat. Standing (2011; 2014) has argued that the precariat is a new global class in-the-making which has an even more insecure position that the unionised working class. Using a Marxist model he maintains that once the people in the precariat will come to see themselves as part of a group facing similar challenges they will gain the strength to demand changes. Although I would give more credit to Standing's work than some of his ruthless critiques (Breman 2013, Allen 2014) Standing's fixed model promotes waiting for change to emerge instead of encouraging practical action now.

Similarly, Negri (2004) in his *Time for Revolution* combines a critique of capitalist time with a call for the 'poor' to create a new communist idea, a new proletarian practice of time(s). He argues that by now capitalism has subsumed the whole of social life: exploitation has extended to include everyone, not just workers. The erstwhile disciplinary system that

safeguarded production has been replaced by a system of subtle control which ensures production in a new 'biopolitical' mode. Negri's philosophical discussion entails a consideration of new flexible working times and seductive power structures similar to Kasmir's argument about cooperatives. These considerations add complexity to an understanding of labour in 'neoliberal' times. The concept of class too is useful in understanding how the volume and structure of capital that agents possess shape their habitus (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]).

However, struggle that highlights action in the present is what can provide hope by 'filling in' that temporal gap Guyer (2007) has identified as the 'evacuated near future'. Guyer argues that explanations of freedom in neoliberal thinking concentrate on immediate choices and notions of the distant future. The near future is being reinhabited by forms of punctuated time (e.g. debt). Similarly to the remaining population of Hoyerswerda, Germany's fastest shrinking city (Ringel 2012; 2014), the people of Calafou 'per*form*' (Ringel 2014: 67) the future, they attempt to live in an ethically consistent way. The members of Calafou are aware of the problems cooperatives have to face, but are not convinced that the class system will eventually dissolve on its own and that the current task is to wait until a global proletariat or precariat will overcome its ruling evil partner.

Calafouians nonetheless subscribe to a substantial project of rethinking the economy through 'degrowth'. Degrowth advocates the *downscaling* of production and consumption arguing that overconsumption lies at the root of long term environmental issues and social inequalities (D'alisa et al 2014). Because of the low rent Calafouians can 'degrow': work only part time (often as a teacher or in another social role) and spend their free time socialising, working on local projects or participating in traditional activist groups. Living in Calafou also allows inhabitants to sometimes mobilise the local resources (people, space, infrastructure) when they are necessary for these movements.

One example is the Conquista, who had to work full time in Valencia. In contrast, Calafou allowed them to 'degrow' and start their project according to egalitarian values. There are not many workers in the Conquista yet, but all workers are owners, get paid the same amount (per hour) and the decisions are made through consensus. They participate in the Catalan ethical economy network too through which they buy ingredients and sell the food. The Conquista's life is deeply connected to Calafou: they cook everything in their kitchen there, cater for some

of the events, and have an ongoing agreement with the beer cooperative that they make lunch for its workers. In addition, they act as a reseller to the beer cooperative. The idea next to ‘not having bosses’ is that the profit they make from beer sales and catering for Calafou events gets reinvested in this ethical economy that resists the logic of domination. Arete himself recognises that market capitalism was fast to adapt to and exploit visions of collaborative work, but this is a very different type of functioning than the ‘fake’ cooperatives that try to use worker ownership to manipulate people.

As Ringel (2014) has shown an ‘enduring indeterminacy’ (Bloch in Ringel), the ongoing possibility of changing relations of power, is often envisioned without structure in scholarly imagination. However, like his informants, Calafouians buoy hope only partially from a belief in the emergence of something new. Radical imagination outside the hegemony of capital does not need to be an obsession with the entirely new; the world is open to change as long as the future is not completely determined. Calafouians see themselves as the ‘rearguard’, they make up a link of a chain which has historically worked towards an egalitarian society through collaborative production. All forms of production that exist in Calafou — of discourse on gender, software — are non-hierarchical and self-managed like cooperatives. The tenets of hacker ethic — sharing, openness, decentralisation, freedom, world improvement, collaboration — overlap with the principles of cooperativism. Calafouians hack the system by subverting the logic of capitalism that claims its unquestionable authority. Rejecting a radical rupture with the past, this continuity allows for a flexible and open-ended endurance.

Similar to leftist of critiques of cooperativism that argue that it is actually a middle class movement, there exist critiques of free software which claim that they merely seek to trap development in capitalism (Kleiner 2012; Barron 2013). Barron (2013) contradicts Himmanen and argues that the hacker ethic is actually the most advanced manifestation of the new spirit of capitalism: ‘free software projects have been made to serve as laboratories for the development of organizational and managerial techniques tailored to a project-based capitalist economy, and the hacker ethos animating these projects has become distilled into a particularly pure form of the ‘spirit’ of this capitalism’ (2). In a like manner Byung-Chul Han

(2014) claims that neoliberal[9] governmental regimes fully absorb the technology of the self and while we experience a feeling of freedom we are actually subject to an extremely efficient form of subjectification and submission. Barron's article draws attention to a real problem that corporations exploit and virtually steal the work of developer communities. However, aiming to reveal how the experience of freedom is actually a governmental tool does more harm than good. If we turn our analytical kaleidoscope just by a little, a new pattern will appear: abandoning the search for ultimate resistance we can now recognise the scattered, ambiguous or sometimes even contradictory segments of subversion. The means through which hackers can hack the system can coincide with the ones through which they are (attempted to be) controlled.

Nevertheless, Calafou's involvement in the capitalist economy has induced conflicts and disagreements within the community as well. Simply put, there is friction is between free software and art 'communities' and cooperative 'communities' in Calafou which centres around a discussion of what is considered production. On a 'theoretical' level they do not see a strict opposition between production for the market and for the commons but when it comes down to decisions on the pragmatics of everyday life problems arise.

Dionysus argued[10] that the free software communities of Calafou only get to testing stage and never go into production. Hermes raised the problem that the distinction between production and testing is not made clear. He also claimed that 'we don't produce anything'; he does not want to produce knowledge, but things that are necessary for life. Euphrosyne told me that she thinks the conflict between these two 'branches' is not only related to the immaterial/material discourse but also to a political culture. The HTE, trans-hack-feminism are replicating an events-structure that was born in hack-meetings, in a very specific anarchist culture: 'If you are not doing things the right way you can generate disappointment in the hacker scene'.

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[9] Han uses the term 'neoliberal' to refer to an ideology rather than a policy model. Developing Foucault's notion of biopolitics he talks about 'psychopolitics'. He argues it is no longer solely the bodies but the psyches of subjects that are targeted: you will often no longer want to redeem unjust, unequal, oppressive situations, but find the best way to benefit from them. Han claims that we believe today that we are not a subordinate subjects but free, ever-new, self-reinventing projects.

[10] I am aware that it is unusual to cite my interlocutors as if they were academic texts. However, they have been engaging with the kind of questions I posed for a much longer time than I have been. My interlocutors and I are in a global 'multilogue' on questions of social transformation.

There can be disagreements the other way around as well. Dionysus and Hermes agreed that parts of the hacker ethic are like the hobby of a 19th century gentleman: ‘You don’t do certain things because you die if you don’t do it. You have to do it, because it is the calling of history. So when you explain what’s a hacker to poor people they cannot understand’. This is trope criticism of hacking, Hermes said ‘this is our contradiction’. Arete does not think it is a contradiction, ‘it’s the way of degrowing: to make the things you want, to put in practice the hacker-ethics. You have to lower your level of life to make this’. He also argued many things can be considered production: documentation (i.e. producing knowledge) and ‘events, where the accumulated knowledge is shared, people get happy, Calafou gets some money, and the some of infrastructure gets improved’.

Different ways of production can co-exist in an anarchist setting. Everyone agreed that they need both sovereign technologies and cooperativist communities, and what makes Calafou special that it is constantly working on how to adapt them to each other. There are people who take part in both communities, like Dionysus who makes documentaries but also works in the brewery, but the main meeting points are events. Especially open days and the HTE are occasions where the threads are interwoven: all types of knowledge is shared, artists can perform and cooperatives can sell their products. These conflicts are part of the experiment of fusing these branches in the pursuit of *autogestion*. Some people moved away as a result, but many stay and new ones are joining.

To be able to have any influence it is necessary to engage with existing structures and institutions; hence hacking will always be an imperfect exercise. When one hacks, to find the solutions can take time and sometimes it can even be impossible. Not everything can be acquired from autonomous eco-farms or cooperatives. Sometimes DIY gynaecology is not sufficient, and to cure an STI a hospital is needed. When using free software, one can report problems to the community, but in reality correction often takes a long time. However, for Calafouians what is important is to uphold the hacker attitude:

> This is an attitude that is not only useful for learning software but for your life. If you have a problem with some electrical thing, you try to document and fix it, that is something you can apply to everything. (Arete)

The modernist-Marxist critique of cooperativism for being inherently middle class and thus incapable of eventuating social change does not recognise its subversive potential. For Kasmir

struggle can only be based on a shared class-consciousness when the open-ended struggle Calafou is fighting operates with a much more pragmatic approach. Hacking is not a total revolution. Hacking does not mean refusing to participate in the capitalist economy; on the contrary, it fosters ongoing engagement with it in order to transform it. Eventually, the aim is to get rid of the state but at the moment this is impossible. The immediate objective is to participate in building an alternative economy based on solidarity and assure a place where social movements can potentially grow. This pragmatism strengthens the power of Calafou's social imaginary rather than contradicting it because it sustains hope that we can change the world to be (just a little) more just in the near future and inspiration to how to do so. I agree with Arete that in some ways degrowing dissolves the contradiction of hacking, and the struggle of Calafou is not only valid but a necessary one. In the current 'neoliberal' era when labour circumstances are more precarious than ever, such hopefulness might well be one of the answers to the increasing social and political despair.

Conclusion

Critics of cooperativism and hacking often assume that promoters of such practices are claiming to have found an ultimate solution for the injustices of existing structures and when they discover problems or contradictions they dismiss them altogether. Undoubtedly, there will always be difficulties in any kind of action that aims for social transformation, but development is impossible without experimenting. If cooperatives were to work on a bigger scale than Calafou, they would need to have mechanisms that ensure egalitarianism: of course, it is incomparably easier to establish consensus among 20 than a few hundred people and subvert capitalist logics if the production is so small. In any case, education is key — even if schools are tools of discipline, learning is the principal instrument for social mobility (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). Calafouians are constantly teaching and learning and make their knowledge available for others.

A pragmatic struggle that has a clearly defined ethics makes more sense to me than critiques of modernity that only explain the inevitability of the current repressive system rather than trying to change it, the revolutionary academic strand that is merely waiting for radical things to happen or a kind of self-flagellation which is so well captured by Sara Ahmed's 'killjoy manifesto' (2017). Fighting to undermine existing power structures, to change the world for better does not need to kill joy. A killjoy approach that is essentially antagonistic and involves keep taking sides is not productive but dispiriting. Political struggles should not be based on simple antagonistic groupings and need some sense of everyday hope to be sustainable. Calafouians take their actions and aspirations seriously but their life is also rich in humour, which gives the world the hope that struggle does not necessarily have to equal misery. Hacking often involves playful explorations, hacking is a passionate dedication to an activity that is joyous. One might comment that it is easy for them not to suffer as modern day 19th century hobbyists, but this critique misses the point.

Revitalised anarchism it is not merely an appropriate, but a necessary part of struggle. Thinking outside the currently existing categories of the system is necessary because reform only does not produce substantial change. We need both reform and radical thought, as well as a dialogue between them even if they are incommensurable perspectives. After all, anarchism is about recognising that all views are incommensurable and still trying to bring them together. This radicalism does not have to mean antinomianism. It is not one of those 'anti-'

movements Ferguson (2010) refers to when it is done in such a proactive way. Calafouians recognise that it is pointless to go against ‘capitalism’ or the ‘state’ as a whole; it makes more sense to find their little weaknesses and exploit them, that is, to hack the system.

Calafou is not a retreat for burnt-out activists, but a social hub that by interweaving personal and political aspirations allows residents to live their lives in a more ethically consistent way while staying active in and outside of Calafou. Calafou might be viewed as the embodiment of hope, a performative example that conveys the message that there are things that can be done and it is worth doing them because there are others who collaborate with you. In my opinion, the multimedia mythology is the most important thing Calafou produces at the moment. This myth is not a prescriptive but false belief and by no means does it presents itself as beyond criticism and change. Yet it does give an increasing number of people a confirmation that they should continue to work for a more just and equal world in their own environment. It is not only cooperatives or anarchist collectives who can learn from Calafou’s experiments: autogestion and the cooperative principles can be deployed in many ways, including in corporations, schools, NGOs or government projects. Strategies for ensuring that participation in decisions does not become merely instrumental to predetermined objectives but stays an end in itself are translatable to such ‘mainstream’ contexts.

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