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FORMS OF THE STRUGGLE

35-1

\$7.95





FROM WALL STREET TO WALL STREET TO WALL STREET TO WALL STREET TO WALL STREET

FROM WALL STREET TO WALL STREET TO WALL STREET TO WALL STREET TO WALL STREET

This is a direct indirect action, about every dead and reified sign and symbol of capitalism, finance, city, and protest.

The subject exists here and there, the commodity exists here and there, so we will go here and there, but more here than there. We are for the certain uncertain outcome, for something always negative, but realer than real.

This action, this street, is a gateway toward something else, something other than what we know, what we've seen, what we've been told, what we've read. Wall Street is no more worth occupying, reclaiming, taking back, than any other street. This is just a start. There's nothing to reclaim unless we're willing to reclaim everything, all at once, at all times.

Here is a rupture for the disappointed, frustrated, and indifferent. An attack on those actions that are supposed to have made us feel better, feel hopeful. A provocation to those radicals that ask us to stand inside pens while the police laugh at us, the state laughs at us, capital laughs at us.

Our referent is more literal than yours, more direct than yours, more possible than yours. We will scale these walls, scale our own walls, always by surprise, like a flood. Every wall, every street, has a giant target on it, waiting to be attacked, torn down.

This is a hex on Wall Street, a war on Wall Street, every Wall Street, every street, every wall, every symbol, every bank, everything, until they no longer exist, when Wall Street will mean something else, when every street, every symbol, every action, will mean something else.

We're sick of Wall Street, this street, every street, we're sick of debt, we're sick of crisis, we're sick of standing outside empty buildings, with empty signs, with empty words, and empty bank accounts. Fuck Wall Street!

We reject the city and the city, binary there is no more! We made our choice from those two nonchoices. We chose the breach. This is the space between all spaces, all walls, all streets, all signs, all ideologies, all subjects. There is no return from where we are.

They say the economy is wounded and weak. We want it to bleed, to die. But this isn't a funeral, we aren't undertakers or pallbearers. Capitalists have no rights except being their own gravediggers. We won't carry the corpse or bury their bones. Our procession will be joyful. We'll walk from Uptown to Downtown and out of town.

From Wall Street to Wall Street to Wall Street to Wall Street to every street. We are after something more, and less, fundamental, simultaneously. The confusion is yours and not ours. This is as clear as we can be. This is the most dangerous action there is. Where we encounter new accomplices for the unpredictable.

More of the Same  
confusingsigns.tumblr.com

## FEATURE INTERVIEW

# OPEN COLLECTIVITIES

Nasrin Himada in conversation with Red Channels

Nasrin Himada is a film programmer and writer residing in Montreal. She is completing a Ph.D. in the Interdisciplinary Program in Society and Culture at Concordia University.

Sunita Prasad works in film, video and photography in Brooklyn, New York. She teaches photography and video at various institutions in New York City, and has been involved with Red Channels since June 2010.

Malek Rasamny is a writer, filmmaker and film curator living and working in New York City. He graduated from Bard College with a degree in Anthropology. In addition to working with Red Channels and doing curatorial work for the Maysles Institute, Rasamny is writing his first semi-fictional novel.

In a climate of perpetual warfare, ecological disasters, state divestment from social welfare, sanctioned police violence and neocolonial urban planning procedures, Red Channels, a collective based in New York City, works to make histories of struggle tangible. Red Channels uses cinema as a tool to mobilize — an idea that stems from a history of revolutionary organizing in the 1960s and 70s. Filmmakers such as Mostafa Abu Ali of the Palestine Film Unit, and Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas from Argentina, who directed *The Hour of the Furnaces* (1968), used cinema as way to document — and spread information on — the proto-revolutionary process. “Cinema as a weapon” was the idiom used in the revolutionary struggle for liberation from colonial and state military regimes. Red Channels brings this sentiment back to present-day struggles, through the films they show and the films they make. Collectively, they ask: how do cinematic images inspire us to create platforms for conversation, action and expansive organizing?

←  
Red Channels, April 4  
*Communiqué*, 2011.  
Self-published text.  
Courtesy of the artists.

For Red Channels, this enquiry has extended beyond film curation. Putting emphasis on modes of participation, Red Channels organizes discussions and walking tours, and they mobilize around local struggles, such as anti-budget cut rallies or public transit fare hikes in New York City. What is impressive about Red Channels

is the multiplicity of action taken under the guise of one collective. With no clear mandate or mission statement, the collective functions precisely because it is open. They are open in that they are not limited to one ideological position, and that they consistently take on new collaborations and projects that merge art and politics in a thoughtful and challenging manner.

What makes the structure and process of Red Channels so relevant today is the reversal of the relationship between what a collective represents and its extension into what it does. Red Channels is not a container of pre-determined practices and beliefs, but a mobilizing machine interested in how the public engages with varied content, material forms and its present political context.

There are well over forty active members in Red Channels, but I happened to speak with two — Sunita Prasad and Malek Rasamny — in New York City, on July 11, 2011.

NH: How did you get involved with Red Channels?

SP: Red Channels had paired up with Paper Tiger Television, one of the oldest non-profit, open, volunteer-based video collectives around, whose purpose is to produce non-mainstream forms of media like public access television. Paper Tiger Television was taping a public access show about military contracts, and a friend told me that they needed people to be on camera. I went and read military contracts in front of a camera for a day. That's how I met Matt Peterson, who was running Red Channels. At the time, Red Channels was not yet a collective, but less than a week later Matt called for its collectivization, I believe out of a desire to enact a political principle of cooperation and collaboration. The new collective met for the first time in Prospect Park, in June 2010, and around twenty people showed up for the meeting.



We consisted of filmmakers, curators, archivists and documentarians—mostly people who were loosely related to film and video.

MR: I found out about Red Channels when I attended a couple of screenings that Matt had organized. What I really valued about the screenings were the discussions. Matt was really good at mediating and making sure the discussion was a collective effort. I was really struck by that; it was the first time I had seen a panel discussion structured as an open conversation. Even though there were extremely knowledgeable people in the room who provided valuable context, Matt saw to it that their voices were not privileged above anyone else's. The discussion was allowed to flow in different directions that brought the work into contact with various other issues and concerns. We were allowed to go off-topic—something that most panel discussions steer away from—which proved very valuable. This format provided the conceptual framework for how audience participation would be approached in later events, once Red Channels became a collective.

NH: How exactly did you envision Red Channels as a collective?

SP: Originally, and still, Red Channels is an open collective, meaning anyone can join at any time. We did a film series called *Our Friendships Are Constructed On the Basis of Conflict* (2011). This title is indicative of how we operate, because we find camaraderie in our differences and value productive arguments. We don't want to have a mission statement. We're not all Marxists and we're not all anarchists. Those kinds of political tendencies are in conversation with each other all the time, in each event Red Channels holds. When we work together, we don't do it from a position of a specific political agenda, but instead debate, for example, the value of flexibility in organizing against what has been called "the tyranny of structurelessness." This term emerged from an article written by Jo Freeman, a feminist writing in the 1970s. Freeman, focusing on the women's movement at the time, describes how the bid for non-hierarchical groups often simply precluded discussion within the group about the hierarchies that form anyway. Red Channels strives for fluidity in structure, in part to avoid hierarchy and bureaucracy within the group, but we have to acknowledge that hierarchy bubbles up. There are times when we defer too much to people who have been working with the group longest. And there are other

times when the hierarchies that crystallize perhaps make more sense or are even useful to us. For example, deferring to experience and letting people who have been putting more work into a particular project take the lead.

MR: As a group, we don't want to create a firm and rigid philosophy and approach that would confine our actions. Rather, we allow our actions to determine who we are as a collective.

SP: Red Channels is not a consensus based collective, in part because we don't know who's going to be at any given meeting. For the most part, two or three people are consistently there and another seven or so could be from anywhere; altogether the collective is made up of about forty people. Because of this, it would be difficult to call anything that gets decided in a meeting a true consensus. We feel that we don't all need to agree on everything that Red Channels does as a group. If three people decide they want to do something, they can, and often their initiative is infectious.

MR: I think that is a really significant approach to dealing with an age-old problem or contradiction that exists in so many collectives, which is the problem of maintaining a certain level of activity, momentum and sustainability without becoming too rigid or authoritarian. The model of two or more allows Red Channels to be constantly active and responsive without introducing any sort of hierarchy. This allows the collective to act on various initiatives that were individually conceived harmonizing individual imagination and group action.

SP: And you can do it under the banner of Red Channels even if a lot of people in the group don't necessarily want to participate. We don't all have to agree with the project or initiative. We're generous and understanding with each other about that. It's a nice way to operate. This characteristic is key to how the collective functions. And another characteristic is that we don't have a venue, and we like not having a venue. We like moving around the city.

MR: We've met in parks; we've met in members' homes, like mine and Sunita's; we've met at various institutions like The Brecht Forum, The Maysles Cinema, and The Bushwick Center for the Arts. We've also collaborated with 16 Beaver, and we've met in places like Bluestockings, a café and bookstore.

SP: Another identifying factor of our collective—that is not unique but something I feel is becoming part of the identity of Red Channels—is that we have no funds and we have no budget. We don't

do anything that raises money, or that costs money, or at least not more than a small amount people working on the project are willing to put in individually. We don't do events in venues that charge us, and we don't charge for our events. We generally get copies of films for free, and if we need materials or services like paper or copies, we try to use our connections in other areas of our lives to get them donated.

NH: One thing I find fascinating about Red Channels is that you're not all film curators, and Red Channels is not fixed on film curating. Can you talk more about the multiplicity of Red Channels' activities? How does it fit into the model of the collective that you are describing?

SP: Red Channels works on multiple platforms: curating and holding events and discussions; organizing actions in the city; engaging the city in collective research, such as the walking tours; and acting as an affinity group in larger protests/demonstrations.

MR: We organized a walking tour of prisons in Manhattan. People often think of prisons as institutions that function in far away places, outside of city parameters, and are therefore more of a general political problem, not one that is directly related to the fabric of city.

NH: These prisons are in Manhattan? They're *that* local?

MR: Yes. It wasn't a walking tour in obscure places. The walking tour took place amidst heavy pedestrian traffic.

SP: Some of them are maximum-security prisons.

NH: I had no idea that there are maximum-security prisons in the city.

MR: There's one on the West Side Highway, two in the Wall Street area, one near the Brooklyn Bridge, one on 110th street, another one in the Murray Hill area. Another project initiated by a member of Red Channels had to do with the subway fare hikes. We created a campaign around the MTA [New York City Public Transit] Unlimited Ride MetroCard, where we let people know that if you had a card, you can swipe other people through. It's illegal for people to ask to be swiped through.

NH: It's illegal for someone to ask to be swiped through to get on the subway?

MR: Yeah, it's illegal for me to stand in front of the subway toll and ask

people who have Unlimited to swipe me in. I can get arrested for doing that.

NH: How was that made illegal?

MR: It's defined as a form of panhandling.

SP: Or theft from the MTA.

MR: But it's *legal* for me to give someone my card, so we devised a way to make people visible if they wanted to swipe other people through. We had to make decisions: do we use both English and Spanish; should we use images or symbols rather than text; how do we get people's attention. It was an aesthetic question, very tangible. How to make willing card-carriers visible so that others know they can approach?

NH: What did you decide in the end?

SP: We made two-inch buttons out of expired metro cards.

MR: I wanted to mention—in regards to your question about how these activities fit into the model of the collective—that Red Channels feels more like we're made up of different constellations. You can be organizing one project and other Red Channels events are happening around you. It's not systematic, so that we're doing one thing after the next. There are always different planes of activity occurring simultaneously.

Another non-film activity is a reading group we organize based on having someone nominate a list of five books, and the collective votes from the list on which one we're most interested in reading. The first book we read was Henri Lefebvre's *Right to the City*, and we had Peter Marcuse, a professor of Urban Planning at Columbia University, attend the last reading session of that. This reading group runs concurrently with other campaigns, projects, film festivals and actions all occurring under the banner of Red Channels.

NH: It sounds like any time a big event occurs, Red Channels is on it somehow and you begin to mobilize around it.

MR: Yes. For example, during the release of the WikiLeaks cables in February 2011, in response to both the information that was released and the democratization of journalism that the release seemed to point towards, we had an informational potluck/teach-in. It was an open call for people to present information about or from the WikiLeaks cables using open-

source media. The event first took place in Bushwick, Brooklyn, and again in Harlem.

SP: Another Red Channels action took place at a big anti-budget cut rally on May 12 (2011), in the Wall Street financial district in Manhattan. The city was reviewing a proposal that would cut the budgets for schools and other social services in the city, and a lot of student groups, workers and immigrant groups organized a day of action. Red Channels made this big, black sheet, and we were going to try and drape the bull that has become a symbol of the financial world—it was originally a piece of illegal public art. We made a video of the sheet being used in the march, intercut with a text we wrote in response to the demonstration. For each of these actions, there's a collectively written communiqué. They're short, one page texts, where we write over each other on a shared document until we get somewhere that satisfies all of us, or we run out of time. We have also collaborated with Todos Somos Japon, who are trying to radicalize demonstrations already happening there, in order to criticize the Japanese government and TEPCO's [Tokyo Electric Power Company] response to the March 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. In the communiqué we distributed to accompany the action, we pointed out how the Japanese government had fiddled with the legal limits of radiation to avoid providing evacuation services, and how both the government and nuclear energy corporations were willing to place communities on a precarious perch at the brink of annihilation with this dangerous energy source. Todos Somos Japon organized a rally, and we brought giant origami paper with radioactive symbols on it. We made really big, radioactive paper cranes and we walked them from Tompkins Square, in Lower Manhattan, to Rockefeller Center in midtown where the General Electric (GE) building is. GE sells the reactors that were used at Fukushima and has expressed their intention to continue with this model. They are also a major lobbyist for nuclear energy in the US and abroad. We made a shrine of cranes fly in front of the Rockefeller Center, which is full of tourists, and tussled with the security guards.

NH: Can you talk about that program a bit more?

SP: Red Channels has a big identity; it has become bigger and more nebulous. But we are interested in film screenings with a focus on rare and radical work.

NH: Can we talk about your film programs? What is Red Channels' main mandate in terms of film programming?

One of the programs we did was on women in prison. It included films by Third World Newsreel (*Inside Women Inside*, 1978), Dara Greenwald (*The Package*, 2010) and Blair Doroshwalther (*The Fire This Time*, in progress). Vikki Law, who writes on women in prison, was present, and we had a conversation about issues particular to women: women's health and gendered assumptions in prisons, such as the notion that women prisoners don't organize for their rights. In fact, strikes in women's prisons just tend not to get the same publicity and support as they do in men's prisons. Also, health issues particular to women in prison are not often discussed in the prison solidarity community at large.

MR: Another film program we organized was a screening of early works by Albert Maysles and DA Pennebaker that they made when they were in the Soviet Union. The films were rarely screened. Even the directors themselves hadn't seen them since they made them more than fifty years ago. I watched *Russian Close-Up* (1957) with Albert Maysles for the first time since he made it. The series traced the roots of what later became known as cinema-verité. At the time, Stalin had died, the Iron Curtain was fading somewhat, and western filmmakers were seeing the Soviet Union for the first time. In fact, the series was called *The Thaw: Early Cinema-Verité in the Soviet Union*.

SP: The series we mentioned earlier, *Our Friendships Are Constructed On the Basis of Conflict*, was a smashing success.

NH: Can you talk about that program a bit more?

SP: Yeah. Maria and Molly, two members of Red Channels, worked really closely with Troy from Spectacle, where the screening took place.

MR: Spectacle is a micro-cinema in Williamsburg.

SP: And Molly is an archivist and film curator, and Maria was working at Paper Tiger Television, and they just did an amazing job of collating a huge range of films by collectives.

MR: Films by The Invisible Committee, the Black Audio Film Collective, TVTV, Videofreex and the Worker's Film and Photo League were screened.

SP: Grupo Ukamau, a film collective from Bolivia making Indigenous themed films in the 1960s, did really amazing work. There were films from Third World Newsreel, a major activist documentary collective in NYC, and General Idea.

MR: And Voina, a very controversial collective from Russia, who stage provocative and politically charged public performances.

SP: Discussion is really one of the few mandatory things about a Red Channels event. We lead open discussions on a range of topics. We try to make it clear that we are not an inner circle trying to “teach” the audience about these topics, but instead, we are all contributing to what happens in the room and hope that members of the audience will join us in presenting the next event. We are just starting conversations and encouraging others to start conversations.

MR: If we’re dogmatic about one thing, it’s that. We never screen a film and call it a day. We want to push the idea of an event beyond its own structure. Often it’s about endurance, like the screening of Peter Watkins’ *The Paris Commune* (2000). That’s a six-hour film, and we had discussion afterwards. New York is constantly producing cultural or artistic events and activities, which at times people approach in a consumerist fashion. Red Channels events challenge this kind of approach. We will screen a six-hour film straight through at 16 Beaver. Or, when we do the walking tours, you’re walking around in the heat for six hours or more.

SP: Yes. And after we screened the six-hour film, we got some dinner and talked for another few hours. It’s a full day.

NH: Right. So you’re committed to the event by giving time. That reminds me of a workshop I attended led by the co-creator of *The Pinky Show*, a DIY radical educational television program that you can watch online. He made it mandatory to sign up for an eight-hour workshop if you wanted to participate. For him, it had a lot to do with time and duration. It takes time to have a conversation with strangers, and to really get at things, to unpack them in such a setting. And people came and we stayed. It was amazing to have that much time.

MR: Focusing on the duration and endurance of an event positions the audience within a new frame. The situation becomes more intimate because each audience member is part of creating a collective and participatory dynamic that is radically different from most panel discussions, where the audience asks questions that are then answered by people in a position of expertise. The discussion is then restrictive and formal. At a Red Channels event, discussion becomes a collective effort. We don’t focus on questions like: “Is this work well made? Is it good or bad work?” These are ineffectual questions

that emphasize aesthetic judgment. Rather, we push the attendees to think about whether a work is radical or not, and if so, how. We also try to include all the voices in the room, and not just hear from people who are more talkative than others, or who are more knowledgeable about the topic at hand. Our discussions really challenge the boundary between audience and artwork, or audience and presenter. As a spectator, you’re merely there absorbing the content. But as a participant, you’re entering a new configuration, where you’re pushed to challenge the content, to respond to what is being brought into the room, to invest in what’s happening.

NH: What is a radical or political film or event? How would you articulate the politics that drives Red Channels?

SP: That’s the kind of question we refuse to answer.

NH: Why do you refuse to answer it?

SP: Because, as we said earlier, our politics are demonstrated through our actions. This sounds a little self-important, so I’ll phrase it differently. It is very difficult to speak for the group on what politics drive Red Channels, because it is such an intersection of many politics. However, maybe politics is something we can generate in real-time through our interactions. I think that’s what we hope to do.

MR: There are some commonalities between our politics, but we don’t need to state them or over-determine them in the collective. We do not want to be bound to a framework circumscribed by statements or specific wording that constitutes a set of beliefs. And that was an issue from the very beginning. There is a certain common, political understanding between us in terms of resistance to structures of political, economic, social or cultural authority. We’re different as individuals, but there is an unstated affinity.

NH: I am totally in agreement with you, and I get that refusal to, as you say, over-determine what the politics of a collective or group are, but I also want to get at why it’s important to refuse a definition.

MR: And that’s not being apolitical. We’re not refusing politics. We just don’t want a definitive politics that forms a set of principles or manifesto.

SP: I am going to answer that kind of sideways. I have continued to work with Red Channels over the past year consistently and be as involved as I can

because it makes me really happy. I come away from meetings feeling really happy.

MR: Me too.

SP: Red Channels consists of a group of people that I don’t share everything in common with but who I genuinely really like.

MR: Yeah. Absolutely, and it’s fun.

SP: But when you think of collectives that do the kind of work that we do from a political perspective, however nebulous and unstated, then it doesn’t seem to matter that we like each other as much as I think that we do. The secret is, I don’t think we would bring our politics into public dialogue as well as we do if we didn’t have respect for each other and have a good time doing it.

NH: The point isn’t necessarily to make new friends, but that can also happen.

SP: Right. And I think that the reason it makes me so happy is because it is such a concert of thinking and doing together.

MR: That’s a nice way of phrasing it.

SP: Red Channels has a politicized way of organizing thinking and doing together that I think makes for a better community. Red Channels is a coalition of people who consider each other more, and listen to each other more, and that make each other happier.

MR: We’re not very disciplinarian in terms of contribution or participation. We manage to get a lot done, but we’re not task enforcers.

Red Channels has a core membership that has more or less remained stable. But because we’re an open collective, where people are constantly coming in and out of meetings and participating at different times, we don’t ask for people to commit in a way that they can’t. We remain open.

SP: I’ll call it an ethos of what we do—determining who we are and how we’re represented—also comes into how we organize collectively. We make decisions at meetings, but we don’t judge or chastise people for not showing up at meetings. And by the same coin, they understand when we have to make decisions in their absence. Red Channels is both constituted and limited by the participation of its members, and as much as we participate is as much as it’s operating.

PROJECT

# PLEASE! DON’T INSULT ME



## I’M CHASE

TEACH ME TO QUESTION EVERYTHING!  
SPECIFICALLY THAT TRANSOENDER, TRANSEXUAL, INTERSEXED AND TWO-SPIRIT  
ARE JUST SOME OF MY OPTIONS

1. MR. PREMIER, PLEASE DON’T REMOVE THIS FROM THE CLASSROOM. WE NEED TO CHALLENGE EACH OTHER AND LEARN ABOUT DIFFERENCE
2. MY “MOMMY” (SHE HATES IT WHEN I CALL HER THAT...) IS INVESTED IN A FUTURE WHERE SCHOOLS ARE ENVIRONMENTS FOR KIDS TO FEEL SAFE TO EXPLORE WHO THEY ARE.
3. MR. MCQUINTY, MR. HUDAK AND MS. HORWATH, WHAT WOULD JACK LAYTON DO?!

- “Can A Parent Have Their Child Accommodated Out Of Human Rights Education (LGBTQ) Based On Religious Grounds? NO”
- “Should Schools Send Notes Or Permission Slips Home Before Starting any Classroom Work On LGBTQ (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual/two-spirited, queer) Issues? NO”
- “Can Teachers Seek Accommodation From Teaching Materials That May Contradict Their Religious Beliefs? NO”
- “Can Schools/Teachers Choose Not To Address Controversial Issues For Fear Of Negative Parent Response? NO”

- “Encourage girls and boys to role-play opposite roles ... At times boys may play girls and rely on sexist stereotypical behaviour with which they are familiar.” Page 37
- “Discuss ways to challenge these notions so that people have more choice in who they are and what they want to do.” Page 41
- **Textbook:** *Are You a Boy or a Girl?* Toronto: Green Dragon Press
- “Read some traditional folk tales and fairy tales with the class. Have students write/illustrate their own “gender-bending” versions.” Page 44
- “Read Gloria Goes to Gay Pride. If this storybook is not available, cut out a photo from a newspaper or magazine of the Pride Parade.” Page 56

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