Anarchists have been active in the movement for global justice since it began. The influence of anarchism upon the movement consists in large part in the diffusion of egalitarian forms of organisation and actions such as those of the affinity group, an autonomous militant unit of about 5-to-20 individuals. The decision-making process is anarchist, that is to say, it is egalitarian, participatory, deliberative and consensual. After a discussion about the historical origin of the 'affinity group' in anarchist Spain at the end of the nineteenth century, as well as its diffusion via the new social movements of the 1970s through the 1980s until the movement for global justice, the text analyses the political potential of this kind of militant organisation and advances the thesis that it permits a mass movement to function during street actions in a rational, egalitarian and free manner.

**Key words** affinity groups, anti-globalisation, social movement, anarchism, deliberation

**ANARCHISM AND THE POLITICS OF AFFINITY GROUPS**

Anarchists have been active in the movement for global justice since it began. We find them in Chiapas at the side of the Zapatistas soon after the insurrection of January 1, 1994. We find them in Geneva in May 1998, amongst members of the Peoples’ Global Action celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) by shattering the windows of businesses emblematic of global capitalism. Nevertheless, it was not until the Battle of Seattle on November 30, 1999 that the anarchist presence at the heart of the movement was more widely recognised. The 'affinity groups' of the Direct Action Network (DAN) blocked access to the conference centre and, using tactics of non-violent civil disobedience, resisted assaults by the police. Approximately four hours after the first DAN action, members of a 'Black Bloc', masked and dressed in black, targeted the windows of McDonald's restaurants, of Nike and Gap stores, and of banks.2

The diversity and depth of the anarchist influence in the 'anti-globalisation' movement, also known as the movement for global justice or the movement of movements, is evident not only in the streets, but also in the global structure of the movement, its alternative media, its artistic output, as well as the autonomous campsites set up alongside social forums and counter-summits. The discourse of the movement for global justice is saturated with references to 'participatory democracy'. Yet it is those who identify themselves as anarchists, as well as other anti-authoritarian activists commonly labelled as 'radicals', who more than anyone else encourage the participation and the autonomy of militants. Within the global movement, anarchism expresses itself through horizontal, participatory, deliberative and consensual decision-making processes.

The affinity group is one of the organisational structures that allow anarchist principles to be embodied in practices and actions. An affinity group is an autonomous militant unit generally made up of between five-to-twenty individuals who share a sense of the causes worth defending and of the types of actions they prefer to engage in. The decision-making process is anarchist, that is to say, egalitarian, participatory, deliberative and consensual. Political or social organisations can - in principle - adopt and adapt this militant form of organisation. In the context of the end of the late 1990s and the early years of the twenty-first century, it has been used most notably by anti-authoritarian militants - whether self-proclaimed 'anarchists' or not. The
spread of this mode of organisation located at the heart of the movement has enlarged the influence of anarchism, even if those who have recourse to it do not necessarily identify themselves as ‘anarchists’. In this study, I will first examine the historical origin of the 'affinity group' in anarchist Spain at the end of the nineteenth century, and its diffusion via the new social movements of the 1970s, through to the 1980s and the movement for global justice. I will then analyse the political potential of this kind of militant organisation. Finally, I will advance the thesis that this structure makes it possible for a mass movement to function in a rational, egalitarian and free manner. Throughout this investigation, I draw upon a wide range of sources, not only from writings in political philosophy and political history, but also from interviews with activists that I conducted in France and North America while a participant-observer in the movement for global justice.

THE ORIGIN AND SPREAD OF AFFINITY GROUPS

The affinity group first appeared at the end of the nineteenth century within the Spanish anarchist movement, in line with Mikhail Bakunin's call for the creation of 'intimate circles'. In the Spain of the 1870s and 1880s, small circles of friends already known as grupos de afinidad or tertulias (circles, clubs or assemblies) gathered together in cafés to debate ideas, to prepare future actions, and to share news (reading newspapers aloud was an important practice due to the high rate of illiteracy).

At the beginning of the 1920s, henchmen inside the Sindicators Libres who were in the employ of the bosses launched a wave of assassinations of militants of the radical union, the National Workers' Confederation (CNT). In response, anarchists formed self-defence affinity groups. In July 1927, the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI) was founded clandestinely in Valencia. It was composed of affinity groups whose affiliation with the FAI remained informal, as there were neither membership cards nor obligatory dues. Relationships between members rested upon intimacy and confidence, and the decision to admit new members was taken collectively. The Federation of Locals and Districts, which had no decision-making power, organised regional meetings of groups (or of one or two of their representatives), often in the form of country picnics. But according to an anarchist member of the FAI at that time, 'each group within the FAI thought and acted as it saw fit, without concerning itself with what the other groups might think or decide, because there was no inter-group discipline as was the case with communist cells of the same region'.

The notion of affinity groups was also used by anarchists outside of Spain. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the anarchists of Argentina - often hailing from Europe - also had affinity groups. In France, in 1931, the anarchist individualist Emile Armand, in a text devoted to the experiments of autonomous and free communes, noted that these functioned much better if they were the result of a 'grouping by affinity'. Thus, when evaluated in the light of the resurgence of affinity groups, the influence of anarchism in the global movement for social justice has deep historical roots.

The practice of affinity groups was nevertheless rare in the years after the Civil War (1936-39), when Spanish anarchism was bloodily repressed. Yet there is no doubt that Spanish anarchist refugees living in Toulouse and elsewhere perpetuated this form of organisation in the pursuit of
their political activities. The same is true of the International Brigades veterans, who took the practice of affinity groups back to their countries of origin in North America and elsewhere. It also appears that American militants in the War Resisters' League, a pacifist organisation with anarchist leanings, founded in the 1920s, were familiar with 'affinity groups'. The far Left of the 1940s and 1950s was nevertheless affected by the hegemony of highly authoritarian Marxist-Leninist organisations, which did not favour the expansion of autonomous affinity groups. Such groups reappeared in a significant way during the 1960s and 1970s, principally in the United States and West Germany. The sociologist and militant George Katsiaficas recalls that he went to demonstrations with his 'affinity group' during the 1960s.11

Affinity groups should not, however, be associated exclusively with anarchism. There have been various influences, users, and promoters of the affinity group structure in the United States - some yet to be brought to light, and others likely to remain anonymous. For example, the sociologist Barbara Epstein states that the practice of affinity groups was popularised in the United States in the 1960s by Quakers - those partisans of consensus12 - as well as by Murray Bookchin, a militant anarchist and historian of the Spanish Civil War, through his book PostScarcity Anarchism (1971).13 Furthermore, consciousness-raising groups, a key feature of the so-called second-wave feminist movement of the 1960s, were in many cases similar to affinity groups, except that they were seldom involved as collective units in protest actions. In the United States, the Movement for a New Society (MNS), firmly rooted in traditions of non-violent action, played a key role in promoting an array of participatory techniques, including affinity groups, in the fight against nuclear power and other campaigns. While an anarchist sensibility or at least anarchist tendencies certainly existed in radical feminism, the MNS, and the anti-nuclear movement, these forces were neither explicity nor exclusively anarchist. Yet major anti-nuclear and pacifist mobilisations account for hundreds of affinity groups that set up camps on the construction sites of nuclear plants and engaged in acts of civil disobedience leading to hundreds of voluntary arrests.14 According to a Dutch militant active during the 1980s [V9],15 the Autonomous Movement16 in West Germany functioned in a similar manner, organising militant anti-nuclear camps where the 'base group' constituted the smallest unit. This was somewhat different from affinity groups insofar as it was an outgrowth of a permanent collective linked to a town or a neighbourhood, and only its spokesperson could speak during assemblies. Already at that time, militants on both sides of the Atlantic had adapted the modus operandi of affinity groups inherited from the previous generation according to their political and tactical needs, using affinity groups during mass mobilisations, where they acted as a unifying force.

The organisation of affinity groups was again taken up during the 1980s and 1990s by feminist organisations, ecologists and AIDS activists such as Act Up!, which then became vehicles for the spread of the affinity group model. The concept of the affinity group has even gained popularity beyond the social movements. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello have clearly shown how the 'system' co-opted the organisational models and ideological principles of self-management and autonomy found in the protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s. This dynamic of piracy between the social movements and the 'system' is still operative.17 In the United States the concept and even the term 'affinity group' has been adopted and adapted by banks, business schools, universities - including the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)18 - and the State Department. The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International), to cite one example, maintains that 'affinity groups' allow 'the maximisation of
participation' and 'facilitate branching out and communication'. The State Department, for its part, encourages its employees to join affinity groups for Asians, 'Blacks', gays and lesbians' or 'handicapped' people. The affinity group as a mode of organisation is consistent with the new spirit of capitalism articulated by management literature that exalts managers to promote horizontal structures, self-managing teams, and individual autonomy and creativity. The reality in most workplaces is a far cry from this. Nevertheless, the rhetoric regarding employee autonomy and empowerment reflects an ongoing struggle between the dynamism of self-management (because workers and middle range managers are far more inspired when they make decisions themselves) and the desire of organisational elites to maintain their power. The elites are thus compelled to keep self-management under control or use it as a means to increase the satisfaction of employees and managers and, hence, their loyalty and devotion to the firm. Contrary to anarchist affinity groups, however, such corporate affinity groups are not autonomous, since they are created by the institution and then proposed to its staff. The introduction of such corporate affinity groups is, in other words, a top-down process. Aside from the 'affinity group' label and a few declarations of principles, these corporate groups have almost nothing in common with the anarchist tradition.

The affinity group approach seems also to have spread throughout the movement for global justice, although its importance varies considerably from place to place. In Italy, a call was launched on the internet for the creation of affinity groups that would plan and carry out non-violent direct actions during the protest against the G8 Summit, in Genoa, in July 2001. In France, the affinity group method was rarely tried before the mobilisations against the G8 in Evian in June 2003. A member of the Confédération nationale du travail (CNT) has nevertheless remarked that the French 'autonomes' 'function like "affinity groups", without recourse to said label' [CNT]. In the countries of Central Europe, such as Croatia, the movement for global justice is composed principally of anarchists who are familiar with the principle of affinity groups but do not apply it in a formal way [according to GA9]. Elsewhere, diverse militant organisations that conduct mobilisation campaigns encourage demonstrators to form affinity groups. In preparation for the Summit of the Americas, Résiste!, a newspaper put out by the CLAC (Anti-Capitalist Convergence of Montreal) specified that 'it is important for affinity groups to be formed well in advance in order to ensure efficient communication and a democratic decision-making process'. The spread of affinity groups is even more effective when organisations actively and concretely help militants to create their own affinity group, as was the case in the mobilisation for the Battle of Seattle. DAN, linked with the Ruckus Society, offered training workshops to hundreds of militants who were invited to form affinity groups. During the day of actions, these affinity groups were aided by others that had been formed in the buses converging on Seattle, such as that of the student association of the University of Victoria, British Columbia. In interviews, several participants in affinity groups have indicated that they first heard of this method of organisation during workshops given by organisations that were not anarchist; on the other hand, others emphasised the anarchist origins of affinity groups. Nonetheless, the very presence of affinity groups at the heart of the movement for global justice evidences an anarchist influence, because the individuals working within an affinity group find themselves de facto involved in an anarchist political experience.

ANARCHY AND THE POLITICS OF FRIENDSHIP
At first glance, 'affinity' and 'anarchism' do not appear to be synonyms. Affinity' is a 'vague term', first used by chemists and alchemists - such as Albert le Grand (thirteenth century) - to describe a natural attraction between metals, substances and molecules. For sociologists such as Max Weber and then Michael Löwy, it explains the particular relationship between two doctrines as determined by the analogies between their rational structures, emotions or morals. The term 'affinity' currently signifies a shared interest in a kind of work, sport, music or a political cause. But to anarchists, it means much more. Their conceptualisation of the notion of affinity is first found in the writings of Charles Fourier, an anti-authoritarian socialist of the early nineteenth century, for whom 'attraction' (synonymous for him with affinity') would be the fundamental organizing principle around which a just society must be articulated. Subsequently, the Encyclopédie anarchiste (1934) and the Petit lexique philosophique de l'anarchisme (2001) stress the importance of the notion of affinity for anarchism. Sébastien Faure, for example, observes that the principle of affinity is the most solid, because it is capable of resisting the conflicts, quarrels, and dislocations which are the fatal lot of organisations, parties and leagues that group together individuals with opposing tastes, with contradictory interests [...] it is the best, or better put, the only one that conforms to the spirit of anarchism, since it does not stifle the aspirations, character, or liberty of the individual.

The affinity group would thus potentially be the basis for an anarchist organisation or society. As Faure affirmed, 'the anarchist society that we want to found' would be constituted by 'an extraordinary flowering of affinity groups'. A member of the FAI during the 1930s described the formation of affinity groups in these vivid terms: 'After four or five words somebody can tell if there is an affinity, if there's trust. It's like love between a man and a woman - they meet and after only a few words, they know'. The association between 'love' and 'affinity groups', as colourful as it is, nevertheless raises conceptual and political difficulties. The concept of friendship seems more accurately to express the outlook of participants in affinity groups, even if it 'is not certain that we can arrive at, or even approach, a definition of friendship'. Unlike love, friendship does not generally evoke exclusivity or jealousy, but rather reciprocity and common interests; moreover, the activities shared by friends maintain and reinforce the bond of friendship. And friendship is not - in principle - determined by the gender or sex of individuals, or by their sexual preferences. Added to this are the sentiments of complicity, trust, and, yes, affinity, to which friendship is crucially linked, according to psychologists. What is more, love can be unidirectional, while affinity implies reciprocity of sentiment. The anarchists interviewed for the purpose of this essay, as well as several texts that address the question of affinity groups, emphasise the importance of bonds of friendship as the connective element that reinforces the cohesion of groups.

Friendship clearly influences the functioning of political organisations in general, but the dynamic of affinity groups is particularly influenced by the friendship amongst its members. In forming or in joining an affinity group, individuals become what can be called 'amilitants' (in French). This new concept simultaneously evokes an amalgam of the role of the friend - ami in French - and of the militant, as well as a certain repudiation of traditional militancy, insofar as the prefix 'a' indicates negation. In this instance, the behaviour of political actors is primarily influenced by friendship instead of adherence to an ideological doctrine or organised patriotism,
as is usually the case with traditional militancy. This politics of friendship favours the spread - whether conscious or not - of anarchist principles within the global movement for social justice. Amilitants feel that the centrality of the bonds of affinity and friendship within their group implies, almost naturally, a desire or will to reach consensus. An amilitant thus explains that his affinity group was composed of 'five people, friends' and that the decisionmaking process was 'spontaneously consensual' [GAI].33 The importance of the friendship bond at the heart of affinity groups therefore facilitates an egalitarian and consensual collective practice. This is consistent with the results of sociological studies on the subject of friendship, in the course of which respondents defined friendship as a relationship that is incompatible with authority and hierarchy.34 Moreover, individuals who have participated in affinity groups claim that they functioned within an anarchist setting even if they did not identify themselves as anarchists or know anything about anarchism.35 One militant, admitting that he let himself be manipulated in a way by his anarchist friends, explains that his group wasn't explicitly anarchist because it wanted to avoid sectarianism. Me, for example, I was more of a Marxist and I didn't want the anarchist label, but the functioning of the group was anarchist*. And he concludes, 'there are no affinity groups that are not anarchist in terms of their organisational mode' [GA2].

DEMOCRACY OR ANARCHISM?

Affinity groups offer a concrete model of anarchist experience that breaks not only with the logic of representative 'democracy' of a liberal regime, but also with that of various militant organisations having elected or co-opted leaders and elected representatives. Thus, the modus operandi of affinity groups is subversive in that it challenges the traditional decision-making processes of representative 'democracy' and the power held by representatives in the official political regime, political parties, or organisations within the social movement. The experience and functioning of affinity groups demonstrate that the 'people', or 'multitude', are endowed with the capacity to organise themselves to deliberate and act collectively in complex situations of mobilisation and mass action. Hence, the practice of affinity groups can nourish the historical debate between two attitudes that I have elsewhere designated under the rubrics of political 'agoraphobia and 'agoraphilia. Political agoraphobia is rooted in the certitude that the people are naturally devoid of political reason, so that, when assembled in the agora to deliberate, they inevitably fall prey to passions that are manipulated by demagogues and egotistical factions unconcerned with the 'common good'. Political agoraphobia in the modern era also presupposes that the sovereign body - the 'nation' - cannot physically gather together, given the constraints of demographics, geography, and the citizens' commitment to the private sphere (work, leisure, family, friends) in preference to the public sphere. Political agoraphilia, on the other hand, overturns all of these arguments, emphasising that individuals in positions of power necessarily develop emotions and interests distinct from those of the 'people', precisely because of their place in a hierarchical structure. Accordingly, the elite is a faction unto itself, which does not hesitate to try to convince the people, through demagoguery, that it governs on behalf of the 'common good'. Despite the elite's attempt to limit the people's autonomy, the agoraphiles remind us that, historically, there have been many communities, including affinity groups, that have governed themselves directly and without leaders.36 Small-scale political communities - such as squats, militant associations, gatherings of demonstrators, or affinity groups - are alternative political spaces where the decision-making process can be egalitarian and can manifest itself through deliberative assemblies in a hall, an amphitheatre, or even a street, which, when occupied by
demonstrators, may serve as an agora. Through these very experiences, the people demonstrate that they have indeed the capacity to make rational decision and to give to themselves some deliberative procedures that may encourage the rationality of such a process. Moreover, such self-directed groups, able to act together in coalitions on an ad-hoc basis, call into question the logic of handing over centralised political power to representatives of a sovereign entity (the nation, the proletariat, civil society, etc.) endowed with a homogenous core and a common interest.37

Would it be more accurate to speak of direct democracy or of anarchy when referring to affinity groups? Though academics and militants often confuse the two, anarchy is different from (direct) democracy: decisions are made collectively and by consensus under anarchy, but by majority vote in a democracy.38 The narratives and testimonies on the subject of affinity groups show that their participants generally prefer anarchy to direct democracy, whether for moral reasons (democracy is considered synonymous with the tyranny of the majority) or political reasons (consensus is believed to foster group cohesion, the spontaneous division of tasks, and a feeling of security).39

That said, the egalitarian and friendly nature of the political bond is not without its own tensions and problems. First, because 'from a circle of friends to the choice of a romantic partner, social relations are not simply guided by affinities, they arise from social determinants'.40 In spite of the great tolerance displayed by anarchists, their friendships flourish more easily between militants sharing the same cultural, social and economic profile and who are more or less the same age. Moreover, the statements of militants participating in affinity groups refer to the 'danger of being too self-absorbed, because one is with people who think like oneself' [GA5]. Furthermore, certain identities - socio-professional, gendered, etc. - can affect the informal power of each group. Men, for example, have a tendency to hold a premium of informal power over women and to consider women inferior in the political sphere with regard to the capacity for action and autonomy.41 In affinity groups, relations between men and women become that much more problematic when group members, especially men, have trouble apprehending the possibility of friendship between men and women, particularly if they view women primarily as sexual objects. However, such inequalities of informal power remain - in principle - less acute in anarchist groups than in hierarchical ones,42 since in the former there are no positions of official authority that would allow individuals to accumulate informal power and privileges or to wield coercive formal power. Diverse procedures have nevertheless been imagined and tried in order to reduce the inequalities of informal power and to facilitate deliberation, for example, the temporary nomination of a moderator, assisted or not by observers, and attentive to factors such as time, sexism, etc., and more generally to the need for egalitarian, free, and 'efficient'43 discussions.

In North America, where anarchists have been greatly influenced by the radical feminism of the preceding generation, meetings are often moderated in tandem by a man and a woman, and the floor is allotted to men and women in alternation. This is done to offset the proclivity of men to speak in public more easily, for longer periods of time, and in a more affirmative way.44 Some militants think that, given the impact of patriarchal ideology both on society and the activist environment, it is also important for women to meet regularly in non-mixed affinity groups. Such groups allow women to free themselves from the power of men, to define their own issues and
means of action, to 'experience beautiful bonds of solidarity' [F2], and to confront the ways in which occidental culture privileges friendship among men and distrusts friendship among women. In France, however, anarchists are often more divided with regard to these types of practices, since they are seen as arising from a 'communitarian' spirit. Consequently, many French anarchists display a lack of interest in, or a difficulty in thinking through, concrete collective solutions that would reduce the inequalities between diverse 'identities' (men/women, etc.) within their own movement. In spite of these important and concrete problems, the affinity group offers the possibility of enlarging direct participation and the autonomy of active individuals within a vast social movement. Furthermore, to the extent that several groups can decide to act in a coalition, this possibility need not be limited to the boundaries of any one affinity group.

Anarchism and rational crowds

Throughout their considerable history, affinity groups were employed in different ways in different political contexts. In nineteenth-century Spain, affinity groups were independent entities that operated continuously for extended lengths of time, some for several years. Certain affinity groups associated with the movement for global justice follow this model. But from the 1960s onward, militants have frequently resorted to affinity group methods to structure their actions during events such as large street demonstrations. In such cases, the affinity groups function within coalitions and their lifetimes are measured in hours or, at most, days.

By way of illustration, on the occasion of an official summit, activists of the movement for global justice may plan several days of parallel events and rallies. The 'reformists' - a term used here to cover a wide variety of groups, including NGOs, religious associations, unions, and left-wing parties - organise a large unity march, whose route is determined in consultation with political officials and the police. The march is declared 'non-violent' in advance, and a team of marshals supervises it. While participants in a 'unitary' march like this often come with a group of friends, they receive no encouragement to play any particular role in the demonstration. Affinity groups can join in (with their giant puppets, theatrical sketches, songs, slogans, leaflets, etc.), but the 'efficiency' of the demonstration does not depend on the initiative of its participants.

By contrast, more 'radical' groups will propose direct actions. The organisation of affinity groups allows each person to take responsibility for autonomous acts carried out within the framework of a collective action. Coalitions of affinity groups facilitate a voluntary division of militant work on three levels: over time, within the group, and among groups. This is consistent, moreover, with the striving for autonomy that anarchism endorses. For one thing, affinity groups let militants take their time. As one anarchist [GA4] points out, 'wasn't ready for some time to commit radical acts, and today there are still acts that I am not ready to commit. According to the practices of an affinity group, you can do what you want', and join the group whose type of action is in line with your personal inclinations at a given moment. The bond of friendship also permits a sharing and a division of labour amongst individuals who would find themselves excluded from groups based on a particular identity. For example, a heterosexual man explains that 'during a lesbian demonstration, I was in an affinity group but because I am a man I did not participate in the action on the ground. My task consisted of ensuring support for the group (transportation, telephone, help if they were arrested, etc)' [G A6].
In short, a horizontal coalition of affinity groups offers each group the possibility of carrying out a particular task. In the case of the Black Blocs, some groups will specialise in offensive actions, others in defensive actions, others still will act as voluntary nurses, scouts, musicians, flag bearers or banner carriers. Those who do not want to be in the street form groups that organise transportation and lodging, ensure legal defence, keep in touch with official or alternative media, run education workshops, and so forth. This does not imply that all people participating in 'radical' demonstrations are necessarily members of an affinity group. In fact, affinity groups still represent a minority practice, even within radical demonstrations.

In keeping with the principles of equality and autonomy, days of direct action are usually preceded by a general assembly where participants exchange information, pose questions, announce what their affinity group intends to do, and collectively take certain final decisions, even if the decisions concerning the place and hour of departure had been made by a militant core group weeks or months earlier. The decision-making processes of coalitions vary according to the circumstances. When the mobilisation is small, it is possible for everyone to participate in the general assembly. However, for very large-scale mobilisations, representatives of affinity groups ensure coordination through assemblies known in North America as 'spokescouncils', which have existed in the US anti-nuclear movement since the 1970s. The term 'spokescouncil' brings to mind the dynamic link between the representatives who meet and the diverse groups that constitute the coalition. The delegates are not permanent and wield no coercive power that could enable them to impose on their affinity groups decisions at odds with the will of the militants. The delegates can also be seconded by a 'runner', who shuttles between the delegate and his affinity group, making sure that the group's position is respected. It is worth noting here that the previously mentioned procedures to reduce the inequalities of informal power are most prominently applied during the spokescouncils.

The organisation of a coalition of affinity groups makes it possible for deliberation, both within and among affinity groups, to take place even in the midst of demonstrations, thereby transforming a crowd into a rational political actor endowed with a capacity for tactical thought. But decision-making through a spokescouncil requires a fair amount of time and often generates tensions between the demand for egalitarian and free political participation and the demand for tactical and strategic 'efficiency'. A member of the An ti-Capitalist Convergence of Montreal stated in an interview that the anarchist decision-making process 'is long and laborious - especially the first time - but one must relearn, rid oneself of the emphasis on productivity, and realise that one can't resolve everything in two or three seconds' [C7].

Yet isn't it necessary to 'move quickly' in situations of direct action and physical confrontation with the police? The June 2003 demonstrations in Annemasse against the G8 Evian summit provide an example of how, even in complex circumstances, the spokescouncil method can achieve tactical efficiency while, at the same time, politically valorising the individuals taking part in the action. One demonstrator recalls:

I found it extraordinary that we could organise assemblies of delegates right in the midst of the blockage. There were barricades, fires had been lit, and the police were firing a large amount of tear gas. Nevertheless, an assembly was called as someone cried: 'meeting in ten minutes, near this street light'. The meeting was held no more than a few hundred metres from the police, and it
allowed us to determine our next course of actions [...] Each person could inform the others of his needs: 'We need reinforcements in front of the police', 'we need help erecting the barricades', 'we should send people out on reconnaissance [...]', etc. [...] We were therefore capable of acting in a dynamic way during the action, without a single person yelling 'we have to do this or that!'

She then comments on the new dynamic that arose between the demonstrators and the police:

The police think that you are a mob and that you are going to react like a mob. The affinity group model allows for the breaking of this dynamic: you no longer react like a mob, now you act like a rational thinker. Affinity groups help us to actualise our own power. The police are still surprised and disconcerted by the affinity groups: 'We have water cannons, tear gas', they say to themselves, 'but look at how these guys, who should run and save themselves, hold an assembly to decide what they are going to do!'

Such accounts call to mind sociologist Francesca Polletta's thesis that direct democracy, or consensus within social movements, has great political value because it facilitates (self-)organisation, innovation and cohesion amongst the participants themselves. Moreover, many people who have participated in an affinity group recognise its political effectiveness, both as a framework for egalitarian and free processes, and as a tactical boon, enhancing their manoeuvrability and power when facing the police. The modus operandi of affinity groups encourages people to act autonomously and with a sense of responsibility towards organisations, and demonstrates that the multitude is able to self-organise in an egalitarian manner, while at the same time acting efficiently. Finally, and most importantly, it allows direct deliberation amongst individuals who may then collectively define what is or is not politically 'efficient'.

Footnote

NOTES


9. Eduardo Colombo, 'Anarchism in Argentina and Uruguay', Apter & Joll (eds.), Anarchism Today, p. 186. The author does not state whether the term 'affinity' has historical origins or is his own creation.


15. For details of the anonymous interviewees, please see the appendix at the end of this article.


17. Militants also appropriate the logos of companies that they detest, or use them to their own ends on the Internet, a system created by the American Army.


22. See the section 'Qui sommes-nous?', of the pamphlet Résiste!, Montreal, CLAC, March 2001, p. 2.


31. See the text Affinity groups', from the American essayist and militant, Starhawk (http://www.starhawk.org/activism/affinitygroups.html) and the web site of the organization Direct Democracy Now! (http://wwwdirectdemocracynow.org).

32. The ideologues and the elites of social movements propose distinct organisational models for the organisation of primary groups according to their specific orientations: the Marxist-Leninist organise cells, the fascists 'fascia' or 'squadrons', the unions 'sections' or 'locals' and political parties form 'local committees'. Friendship is important to them, but other bonds play an important determining role: the socioprofessional profile for Marxist-Leninist cells, union
committees and student executives; gender for female collectives, whether they are feminist or not; sexual preferences for homosexual groups.

33. Another militant explains: 'because I was with people whom I'd known for a long time, friends', 'it goes without saying that the organisation would be horizontal, without a leader'. 'We voted sometimes, but we abandoned this practice because if someone is more or less ready to act, and if they feel forced to do it by a vote, it creates ill feelings' [G A4]. See also: John Forester, The Deliberative Practitioner: Encouraging Participatory Planning Processes (Cambridge [MA]: MIT Press, 2000), p. 197.


35. One militant had also heard about 'affinity groups' via feminism, before finding out about anarchism: 'In my feminist affinity group, we read about anarchism and we said to ourselves "What? We're anarchists!"' [F5]. See also: Amory Stari, Naming the Enemy: Anti-Corporate Movements Confront Globalization (New York-Australia: Zed Books-Pluto Press, 2000), p. 115.


37. Authors close to the movement for global justice, such as Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri and Paolo Virno, especially privilege the concept of the 'multitude', which evokes the heterogeneity of the social body.

38. It's a matter of conceptual distinction. In practice, an individual can favour direct democracy and call him or herself an anarchist, as do members of the NEFAC and M. Bookchin. By the same token, an individual can privilege consensus without calling him or herself an anarchist'.


philosophical commentaries of the chapter 'De l'aristocratie ou les affinités électives', Michel Onfray, La sculpture de soi: La morale esthétique (Paris: Grasset, 1998).


42. An anarchist who participated in the Village anticapitaliste alternatif anti-guerre (VAAAG) remarks that 'it is difficult for everyone to liberate themselves from our socialisation, and there are little leaders that tend to emerge' even in anarchist inspired organisations [V2]. See also Philippe Coûtant, 'L'autorité dans les groupes militants, les groupes libertaires?', Les Temps maudits, 12 (2001); and Jo Freeman, 'The tyranny of structurelessness', Dark Star (ed.), Quiet Rumors: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader (San Francisco: AK Press, 2002), p. 54-62.


45. Élaine Audet, Le Coeur pensant: Courtepointe de l'amitié entre Females (Québec: Le Loup de Gouttière, 2000). Nina Eliasoph especially remarks how the practices of affinity groups facilitate a more egalitarian access to speech between males and females (in 'Politeness, power, and women's language', p. 98).


47. See the critique of the practices of spokescouncils by a demonstrator against the FMI and the BM in Prague during September 2000, as cited by Tim Jordan, Activism!, London, Reaktion Books, 2002.

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Appendix

APPENDIX


FA3: Male, age 24. Member of the FA. Participated in the VAAAG. Interviewed in Lyon in 2004.


GA1: Female, age 31. Lives in Montreal. Participated in two affinity groups, including the Pénultième état de conscience (PEC) in Ottawa, during the demonstrations against the 2002 G8. Interviewed in Montreal, August 2002.


GA4: Male, age 23. Lives in a Montreal suburb. Participated in several affinity groups, including distributing water to demonstrators opposing the G8 in Ottawa (June 2002), and Pain-Panet et Liberté (PPL), an action committee of the Convergences des luttes anti-capitalistes (CLAC) of Montreal, where he is responsible for food. Interviewed in Montreal, January 2003.


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