WITHOUT MASTERS

AUTOGESTIÓN, ANARCHIST ETHICS & MEXICO CITY PUNK

LIVIA K. STONE

WITHOUT MASTERS

WITHOUT MASTERS

AUTOGESTIÓN, ANARCHIST ETHICS & MEXICO CITY PUNK

LIVIA K. STONE

Duke University Press *Durham and London* 2026

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞
Project Editor: Ihsan Taylor
Typeset in Garamond Premier Pro by Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Stone, Livia author
Title: Without masters : autogestión, anarchist ethics, and Mexico City punk / Livia K. Stone.
Other titles: Autogestión, anarchist ethics, and Mexico City punk
Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2026. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: lccn 2025053881 (print)
LCCN 2025053882 (ebook)
ISBN 9781478039105 paperback
ISBN 9781478034094 hardcover
ISBN 9781478062660 ebook
Subjects: LCSH: Management—Employee participation—Mexico—Mexico City—History—20th century | Punk culture—Political aspects—Mexico—Mexico City—History—20th century | Anarchism—Mexico—Mexico City—History—20th century | Political anthropology—Mexico—Mexico City | Mexico City (Mexico)—Political activity—History—20th century
Classification: LCC HD5660.M62 M495 2026 (print) | LCC HD5660.M62 (ebook) | DDC 306.20972/530904—dc23/eng/20260422
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2025053881
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2025053882

Cover art: Flyer advertising Sublevarte Radio as part of the General Strike Council (CGH). Textures courtesy Adobe Stock (Bizarre Factory/Abdullah).

For four amazing men in this book who died, way too soon, before it was done: Heriberto Salas, Tobi Hendrix, Jeff Juris, and Jim Skibo.

And for my two small ones who were born.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Alicia lives in Mexico City. She is fed up with people messing with her because she dyes her hair bright colors. At 8:00 p.m., she finishes her shift at the gas station, goes to her house, takes a shower, and gets ready to go out. She turns the radio on at full volume and bathes, listening to Las Ultrasónicas. At last, she is alone in her house. She puts on a black T-shirt that she had cut the neck and the sleeves out of so that it falls over her shoulders, leaving her bra strap visible. She puts on some black and purple striped tights and a red and black checkered miniskirt. She adjusts one of her studded black leather belts over her hips and pulls on some socks and her Doc Martens. She saved for six months to buy those Doc Martens. They are one of her most precious possessions. Many times, she has thought that if there were an earthquake and she could only escape with a backpack, the first thing she would grab would be her Doc Martens and then her iPod with her favorite songs.

She lets her multicolored hair float around her head like the feathers of a tropical bird and draws a thick line over her eyelashes that makes her gaze more intense. Her face is attractive: full lips with a small mark near her chin from a piercing she took out. Now she only has a small stud in her left nostril. It's Friday night, and at last she is free to go out. She takes the metro and gets off at Niños Héroes.

She gets to the concert and buys her ticket at the bar. As she goes up the stairs, the first chords of a guitar are playing. The whole song comes into her head, and she begins to jump, to move rhythmically, pressed up against those around her. The words begin to rise from her throat with the voice of the singer at the other end of the room. She can't tell who is singing the song: if it is the singer on stage, the people around her, Alicia herself,

or if the song is the one that sings the people and gives them meaning. The venue is one body. One single throat. One single breath. She takes the hand of her girlfriend among the compressed bodies, and in that moment, she feels that everything is all right. It's not important that there are problems at home, she dropped out of college, or there's no money. She is home. She is in the Multiforo Alicia [a multipurpose music venue that carries her name].

Alicia liked the talks, the roundtables that they held in the Alicia. It was there that she discovered the sense of Zapatismo, where she had learned a little about why the situation of the country was so bad. Where she learned that if she worked in a gas station, it was because she hadn't had more opportunities, not because she wasn't worth anything else.

She is part of a new generation of kids, young people who are creating their own differentiated identity. Influenced by the Zapatista uprising, they are ready to yell their "Enough!" and claim the right to express themselves, demonstrate their nonconformity, make it known that the periphery of the city also exists and that it isn't just the wealthy kids who have a right to have fun. And what is most important, to make their own sounds and styles.

Alicia had dropped liters of sweat on the floor of the Alicia before she liked how her name sounded at last. She tattooed it on her left arm, the *A* surrounded by a red circle, the red and white striped cat smiling like a joker from inside his square. The logo of the Alicia, omnipresent on their posters, was part of her skin and her heart. . . .

It was in the Alicia that she got hooked on listening to live music, on adrenaline and shared space. The craziness of slam, rock directly into the veins. Shared sweat, hugs, shoves, the anger leaving through dance, through yelling. After a concert, she felt tired but happy. Exhausted, but satisfied. Like a good collective fuck.

Carlos Esparza normally sells tickets at the bar of the Multiforo Alicia. He is also in charge of selling CDs and serving beer. In 1999 he was arrested in his high school during the student strike. When he got out of jail, he didn't have a job, and it was then that, invited by a friend who worked there, he became incorporated into the Alicia. After graduating with a degree in sociology, he did a master's in Latin American studies at UNAM

[Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México]. He comes from a family of activists, and he understands his work in the Alicia as a form of activism.[1]

The Multiforo Alicia is a political project, not a business, and it is much more than a music venue. "The laboratory of subterranean cultures and random movements known as the Alicia," they said, at a meeting of anti-neoliberal social movements in 2005, is an "autonomous and *autogestive* space" that intends "to create a cultural industry of the left that counteracts cultural neoliberalism" through generating "autonomous and autogestive culture and the creation of autogestive social centers." The Alicia was among many using the language of *autogestión* at the meeting, one of many attempting to connect movements from around the country into a network capable of writing a new constitution for Mexico. In all, thirteen of the 150 collectives gathered used the words *autogestión* or *autogestivo/a* to describe themselves as horizontal, nonhierarchical, and anticapitalist social or political organizations.[2] All thirteen had in common youth members or a dedication to art, music, or book publishing.[3]

I first started to examine the use of the political principle autogestión around 2009 when living in San Salvador Atenco on the outskirts of Mexico City. The famous social movement of Atenco, the Frente de Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra (FPDT), received a constant stream of solidarity visitors from all over the world who were embedded in networks of anti-neoliberal activism vaguely associated with the World Social Forum and protests against the World Bank and the World Trade Organization (WTO) (see Juris 2008; Graeber 2009). This meant that they were also embedded in transnational Zapatista networks, the Indigenous movement of autonomous communities and armed insurrection that arose to protest the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the 1990s (Hayden 2002; Stephen 2002; Khasnabish 2008; Speed 2008).

Most of the solidarity visitors, however, were representatives of collectives from nearby Mexico City. They were folks like Alicia and Carlos Esparza in the epigraph above, with all the signifiers of lefty *chilangos* (the name given to people from Mexico City): young men with long hair and wrists full of friendship bracelets, young women in Indigenous embroidered blouses with surgically precise wit. Some had the juicy, bouncy accent of working-class Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl, others the crisp, laid-back, stoner-like speech of more privileged Coyoacán. They were the young (and not-so-young) people who, in the context of Oaxaca, Maurice Magaña calls the "2006 Generation": "activists and organizers combin[ing] insurgent Indigenous identities with a political culture that wove together strands of liberationist, antiauthoritarian, urban autonomist, and horizontalist politics" (2020, 14).

Most of the Mexico City collectives were organized around some "productive" activity—children's theater, for example, a silk-screen studio, a bookmaking workshop, community radio, or documentary film. These projects could be anything outside the mainstream capitalist economy that created some economic independence that wasn't rooted in exploitative labor. The production was not the point. Much like music for the Multiforo Alicia, the printmaking, bookbinding, or community gardens were important central activities to concentrate on but were only a framework for doing something more profound. In these collectives, members could surround themselves with like-minded folks *de la banda* who were as interested in going to the political march, the *plantón,* or the Zapatista *encuentro* as they were in the presumptive productive activity of the group.[4] These collectives, which seemed to exist everywhere the FPDT went, almost always seemed to describe themselves as *autogestivos*. It is this single word—*autogestión*—its history, and its meanings, that I wrote this book to explain.

By 2013, there were so many projects in Mexico City that described themselves as *autogestivos* that they came together for an annual Autogestival (autogestión festival). The festival managed an array of autogestión concepts including autogestión of the body, emotional autogestión, digital autogestión, autogestive geography, and interspecies autogestión. A few years later, Fernando González Lozado and Raúl Zibechi (2020) counted 380 collectives and spaces in Mexico City that they refer to as communitarian, occupations, independent, autogestive, or autonomous (COIAA) political-cultural spaces. González told me that not all of them would be comfortable calling themselves autogestive or using the language of autogestión, but about a third of them, likely more than one hundred, self-identified as autogestive. Although my purpose was not to count, at the end of the decade or more of doing the research for this book, I encountered 137 named Mexico City collectives using in some form or another the discourse of autogestión. Among them are projects like the Encuentro de Jóvenes de la Autogestión, the Peña del Son cultural space, Radio Sabotaje, Sublevarte, La Galería Autónoma, and the autogestive collective houses Casa Naranja and Chanti Olín. Others have names like Colectivo Voladora, Cráter Invertido, and GEOBrujas.

To me, a North American academic familiar with European Marxist discourses, *autogestión* was a reference to anarcho-syndicalism, or anarchist unions. I knew the term in English as *self-management*. Like the principle of mutual aid, it conjured images of early twentieth-century European anarchists in wool flat caps, threadbare baggy trousers, and steel lunch boxes cramming into a union hall to plot their overthrow of union-busting factory owners. It seemed an unusual political principle for a music venue or an urban commune, or to be adapted to a conception like autogestión of the body. It took an embarrassingly long time

for me to realize that I had an entirely separate set of references and definitions for autogestión than the Mexico City collectives. Rather than flat caps in a union hall, the primary reference was Zapatismo. Instead of being paired with *mutual aid*, it was paired with *autonomy*. Most shocking to me was that almost every member of Mexico City's *colectivos autogestivos* I spoke with vehemently rejected the idea that autogestión was anarchist, even though Mexico has a long and distinguished history of anarchist politics and anarchist thought is widespread. The self-identified anarchists I spoke with did not reject the association.

If someone else had written a book on the origins of autogestión, I would have happily cited it and moved on with an ethnography of colectivos autogestivos in Mexico City. However, that book didn't exist. So I found myself immersed in the primary-source historical research that I wished someone else had already done and which turned out to be mostly in French. It was immediately obvious that the Zapatistas of the actual Indigenous Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), had nothing to do with it. Nearly everything they have officially said or written since 1993 is neatly cataloged and easily searchable on their website.[5] The only place where the term *autogestión* appears is in the comment sections with reference to urban, often university supporters. What was this history? Why was autogestión suddenly so popular? When did the meanings diverge? Perhaps most crucially, what could its (new?) meanings and popularization tell us about how transnational anti-neoliberal activism was responding to the unexpected turns of global politics in the Trump-Brexit era?

Why It Matters: Where the Bodies Are Buried

There is some scholarship that briefly outlines autogestion's history (Guérin 1965, Guillerm 1979; Arvon 1980), but there are also odd gaps in citations. Much of the literature (much of it in French) repeats the story that *autogestion* is a French translation of a Slavic term (*samoupravljanje*) arising out of Tito's Yugoslavia of the 1950s in which workers organized themselves outside the traditional hierarchies of the Soviet-controlled constellations of communist parties. However, the citations are slim and don't pan out. The original texts don't use the term. Even etymological dictionaries seem to have their dates mixed up, giving a date for the term of 1960, but a first citation in 1962 (Imbs et al. 1974; Gilbert 1980). Many authors place the term in the Spanish Civil War (1930s), the Paris Commune of 1871, or even into the mouths of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Mikhail Bakunin (both from the nineteenth century), even though a quick search proves the word was never uttered or written in any of those original contexts.

Instead, I found that the thread of this particular story of autogestion begins in the early 1960s in Algeria. The term then winds its way through French radicalism of the late 1960s, emerges in the Mexico City punk scene of the 1980s, provides some structure to student Zapatista activism of the 1990s, and then explodes to popularity through the UNAM student strike of 1999 and the general atmosphere of anti-neoliberal activism of the early 2000s. The path is shot through with ideas of indigeneity in the Valley of Mexico, twentieth-century revolutions, and European social theory; three strands that I will argue are intimately intertwined.

Many readers will be challenged by the idea that this is one narrative. Algeria, France, Mexico City: It's too confusing. Too chaotic. We are used to the idea that North Africa, France, and Mexico are distinct and any discussion of them together must be an artificial joining. We are used to the idea that histories coded as "European" and "North American" are universally interesting, whereas histories coded as "Mexican" or "Algerian" are particular, niche, of interest only to regional specialists, and not universally applicable. From the vantage point of the United States, it seems unlikely that Algeria and Mexico have ever had anything to do with each other.

Rather than an obscure history, however, I argue that the threads of autogestión, and the particularities of Algeria and Mexico specifically, run through everyone's backyard in the social sciences. Following the line of autogestión back in time was like finding a thread buried in the grass in this backyard, pulling it up, following it, and realizing that it was dislodging a corpse buried back there. Two corpses, actually.

The first body found was made up of the midcentury French Marxists who make up an outsized proportion of the obligatory citations in the social sciences: Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Gilles Deleuze, Henri Lefebvre, Guy Debord. The French left (especially the radical left) of the 1960s was preoccupied with Algerian independence. Algeria was one of France's most treasured colonies and subjects of study. Throughout the early 1960s there was a dramatic and bloody war for independence in Algeria as well as in the streets of Paris.

This is a context almost entirely missed in English. We will honor and exhaustively cite the social theories of Pierre Bourdieu, and somehow completely miss the fact that he is writing about Algeria. The English version of his book *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) simply leaves off its subtitle in French that makes its Algerian ethnographic context clear: *preceded by three Kabyle ethnographic studies* (see Goodman and Silverstein 2009). We cite and celebrate Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, without recognizing that Guattari was writing on the heels of running suitcases around Paris for the Algerian National Liberation Front, the FLN (Ross 2002, 51), and that Deleuze was active in an organization investigating prison conditions.

The Situationists, including the oft-cited Guy Debord, wrote militant statements in support of Algerian autogestion before they wrote treatises on the society of the spectacle (Debord 1967) and revolutions of everyday life (Vaneigem 1967).

The radicalism and politics of Algerian revolution bled right into the student movements of 1968 in Paris that dramatically shut down the country for a time. The Situationist slogans supporting Algerian revolution became slogans inciting French students and workers to strike. Henri Lefebvre, today known for his theorization of urban space, was deeply enmeshed with the Situationists and was widely considered one of the intellectual inspirations for the student revolt in 1968 (see Hess 1988). Even more staid social theorists like Michel Foucault were involved. Medien (2020) argues that he was somewhat radicalized by student activists when he was teaching in North Africa (Tunisia) at the end of the 1960s. Returning to Paris, Foucault began advocating for humane prison conditions along with Gilles Deleuze and Jean-Paul Sartre long before he wrote *Discipline and Punish* (1975) (see Macey 1993).

Autogestion was incredibly important in French Marxist circles, but this history is almost entirely missed in English, in part because it was inconsistently translated. It never caught on in the United States or the United Kingdom as a meaningful articulation of radicality and certainly never caught on as a slogan or byword. I investigate some of this history and its disjunctures with English-language scholarship in chapter 1. In Mexico however, the term easily translated and was effortlessly picked up in both its academic and activist incarnations.

It was the Mexican corpse in the backyard that was, for me, the more startling revelation. This one was buried a lot deeper, two-hundred-years deep, in social-theoretical scholarship. This body is the inseparable and strangely invisible ways that the history of Mexico, and even the particularities of Indigenous peoples in the Valley of Mexico are enmeshed in the foundations of anthropological scholarship. E. B. Tylor more or less created the discipline of cultural anthropology after a trip to Mexico in 1856. Lewis Henry Morgan had very strong opinions about what he called the Aztec Confederacy of what is now Mexico City, arguing that it was the prototypical example of a society characterized by "communism in living" (Morgan 1877, 82–82). Marx was quite famously inspired by Morgan's scholarship at the end of his life, and these particularities then became enmeshed in the Marxist canon of works. Each of these men, and many others, was influenced by experiences and ideas of Mexico (often Mexico City/Tenochtitlán) that then became incorporated into ideas (bearing their names and not those of Indigenous Mexicans) that form the basis of how all social scientists think about how society and culture works. I discuss this story in greater detail in chapter 2.

The connection between Marxist scholarship and Mexico was furthered in twentieth-century literature as the Mexican Revolution joined other peasant revolutions of the era in Russia and China, to form a core of revolutionary Marxism. Mexico City, as a welcoming place for political dissidents, became the substrate of radicals from all over the world, from Leon Trotsky himself to the Beats like Jack Kerouac and William S. Burroughs to virtually anonymous militants of Spain's Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT).

In the 1990s, everyone on the left around the world was influenced by the Zapatista Indigenous movement of Chiapas. Zapatismo formed a core and an inspiration for the anti-neoliberal movements of the era, becoming incorporated into the thinking and writing of anyone, activist or scholar, who was critical of neoliberalism: Noam Chomsky, Slavoj Žižek, Naomi Klein, David Harvey, David Graeber, James C. Scott. All reference Zapatismo from time to time as part of a shared contextual foundation of anti-neoliberal activism.

In his influential critique of anthropology, Johannes Fabian ([1983] 2014) notes how anthropologists write as if they exist in a different time than the people they are writing about. This difference in time, that he describes as "allochronic," places the anthropologist as a contemporary of their readers, but the subjects of their ethnographies as living in the past, always behind the metropoles of Europe and North America. Since the 1980s when he wrote this influential book, anthropologists have gotten much more equitable and what Fabian calls "coeval" with our interlocutors and participants.

The allochronism that is not as recognizable and that we continue to grapple with in US scholarship, however, is a similar attitude toward the social theorists that we rely on to understand our ethnographic "data." It is not that we exoticize these thinkers. Instead, we seem to pretend that they are somehow timeless or from a different universe than the ethnographic portions of our writing. The supposed universality of their ideas seems to abstract them and separate them from our shared world. Canonization seems to give complete ownership of ideas to one famous man separated out from his context while also erasing the complexity of his humanity.

This separation is a lie though. Our shared body of prestige social theorists are all bound up together in the same chaotic, churning world in which everyone lives, where social movements and social theory, revolutionaries and academics, punks and novelists read, talk, borrow from, and plagiarize one another. We have ordered the world inaccurately if we imagine Mexico City in a different world than Algiers or Paris. Consider two frenzied examples: (1) Argentinian revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara (who met his comrade Fidel Castro while exiled in Mexico City) traveling to Algiers in 1964 to show support for

its revolutionary government and inspiring the queer Algerian son of a Spanish mother to write the famous lines "you are beautiful, as a management committee" (Sainson 2011; Sénac 2010). (2) Gilles Deleuze reading William S. Burroughs's account of Indigenous Mexican priests controlling people's minds through calendar technology and borrowing the writing method that Burroughs stole from his British-Canadian, Sorbonne-educated, surrealist friend (whom he met in Tangiers) to write some famous books with his Trotskyist psychoanalyst friend (Félix Guattari) who had been running contraband for Algerian revolutionaries. These examples make the head spin. It is simply accurate to note that influences churn chaotically around the world. What is clear, however, is that we simply do not live in a world in which people in Paris and Mexico City, New York and Algiers, whether prestige scholars or disreputable punks, are separate from one another. Cultural influences move quickly, coevally, messily around the world, through music, novels, social science, and social theory. There is a lot of movement that passes through Mexico City and Paris. There is a lot of churning through major universities—engines and repositories of scholarship, activism, art, and popular culture.

However, when scholarship (even excellent, well-meaning, and politically committed scholarship) takes a snapshot of this coeval churning of continual mutual influence, it necessarily obscures some connections and exaggerates others. Mexico and Algeria are often deemed unimportant and get left out. A primary argument of this book is that prestige scholarship systematically ignores and erases debts owed to radicalism from disreputable, marginal corners of popular culture. One of this book's specific purposes is to correct this history in the case of autogestión. Another is to suggest how this dispossession repeatedly happens in the anthropological distinction between data and theory, in the allochronic distinction between the ethnography and the literature review. If you put this book down because it is (mostly) about Mexico and you believe you are simply not interested in Mexico, then you are also denying how the particularities of Mexico have informed a huge part of what you think you know about the world around us.

This book *is* mostly about students and punks in Mexico City in the 1990s. But the story is not niche or esoteric. It is not easily cordoned off into a go-to category of analysis: the result of liberation theology, Indigenous movements in general or Zapatismo in particular, or the emulation of 1960s student radicalism. Each of these "things" (liberation theology, Zapatismo, student radicalism) is itself composed of bits of prestige European social theory, ideas of Indigenous Mexico, and histories of twentieth-century revolutions. The social theory, in turn, consists of bits of revolution and Indigenous Mexico, the revolution is

made up of bits of indigeneity and social theory, and the indigeneity is composed of revolution and bits of European social theory. (If you don't believe me, ask any Zapatista soldier to explain biopower or neoliberalism to you.) The university, in the journey of autogestión, is one of the primary sites of the action that brings together these three strands, as a font and receptacle of all three.

My main purpose in this book is to tell the story of the popularization of autogestión in Mexico City from the 1980s through to the first decades of the twenty-first century. But I will also uncover these corpses in our shared backyard along the way.

Autogestión Essentials

Generally, the term *autogestión* is translated into English as *self-management*. This is literally true, and yet as with so much translation, does a poor job of conveying its meaning. Vieta (2014, 783) suggests conceptualizing autogestion as "self-gestation—to self-create, self-control, and self-provision; in other words, to be self-reliant and self-determining." The verbs *gestionar* in Spanish or *gérer* in French are more exciting and agentive than the English idea of "management." The term *self-management* in English seems to recede into the background as something that is almost meaningless. In contrast, *autogestión* in Spanish, or *autogestion* in French, has the glow of significance around it. "They become a possibility of AUTOGESTIVE participation for students and faculty," a fanzine might say (Consejos Académicos por Colegio 1983, 5), "ALL ACADEMIC POWER TO STUDENTS AND TEACHERS! [...] VIVA LA AUTOGESTIÓN!" It is dropped—thrown really—like a Molotov cocktail or threaded into a slogan like a prized shell.

By far the most well-known use of the principle of autogestión throughout Latin America is the recuperated workplace movement in Argentina. The economic crisis of the early 2000s meant that many Argentinian business owners strung workers along for long periods of time without paying them and then often simply abandoned their businesses. Workers kept working, sometimes occupying workplaces and sleeping next to machines so that their machinery and tools could not be taken away and sold. They carried on working without bosses, *self-managing* their workplaces, in a last-ditch effort to save their livelihood (Sitrin 2012; Vieta 2020). This form of autogestión had the additional benefit of workers being able to work out their labor conditions and schedules themselves rather than being squeezed by oppressive owners or managers.

The Argentinian sense of self-management is what has traditionally been meant by the word *autogestión* and was my primary reference for its meaning

before beginning the research for this book: an anarcho-syndicalist sense of workers organizing the labor of a factory, possibly industrialized agriculture, without bosses. French anarchist historian Henri Arvon (1980) defined the term in his book on the subject almost entirely in terms of factory workers taking over their means of production. He writes that *autogestion* is a combination of two English terms: the economic idea of self-management and the democratic idea of self-governance (1980, 7). This is also the way that Murray Bookchin, American anarchist and ecologist, thought of the term in his writings at the time, even as he sought to amplify its meanings. He writes, nearly at the same time as Arvon, that "when we speak of 'self-management' today, we usually mean one or another form of syndicalism" (1979, 1).

Forty years later, in his volume on the Argentinian recuperated workplace movement, Vieta (2020) defines autogestión as

> the collective and democratic self-constitution, self-organisation, and self-direction of the productive social, cultural, or economic spheres of life by the very people and communities that most directly benefit from or are affected by these activities, while attempting to minimize the intrusive mediation of markets, hierarchical organization, or the state. In short, autogestión is the desire and lived experience of striving to self-determine a collective's own socio-economic destiny (2020, 18–19).

Vieta's vision of autogestión, based on his extensive ethnographic work in Argentina, is quite technical. There are ethical and utopian aspects that overlap with the idea of autogestión present in the uses by the Multiforo Alicia that I quote above in the context of Mexico. However, Vieta's description and analysis of the recuperated workplace movement is in some tension with its Mexico City counterparts. In the Mexico City context, there is much more emphasis on self-making in an ethical sense and an almost total disregard for any sense of economic viability.

Marina Sitrin, in her activist anthropological work on and with the recuperated workplace movements in Argentina, mentions that in Argentina and Venezuela, the concept of autogestión "push[es] the boundaries of capitalist value exchange in order to create less alienated workplaces" (2012, 177). She admits that the term does have more expansive, ethico-political meanings in line with the Multiforo Alicia and others, but when she does so her examples often move to Mexico: Indigenous communities in Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero. There is a different sense of autogestión in Mexico. Additionally, Sitrin's scholarship and politics are explicitly inspired by Zapatista organizing and what Khasnabish (2008) calls the "resonance" of Zapatismo.

The easy answer for this discrepancy in meaning is Zapatismo. Although the Argentinian *piqueteros* and autogestivos are unquestionably also influenced by Zapatismo, it makes sense that the Mexico City networks are more closely connected to it interpersonally and ideologically. Sitrin, as well as the people of the Multiforo Alicia (among hundreds of other *proyectos autogestivos*) see the autogestión language as very Zapatista. Seemingly unbeknownst to them however, the EZLN and associated Indigenous movements barely mention the concept in the volumes of writings and speeches since the 1990s. Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos (hereafter mostly referred to as "the Sup," which has become the abbreviation for his title and nom de guerre[6]) mentioned the term occasionally during his nationwide tour in 2006 (which I discuss in some detail in chapter 5), always in the context of describing his campaign as a place for a diversity of movements, and usually in the context of mentioning anarchist or punk supporters. Furthermore, even though anarchism has a very long history in Mexico, the Sup speaks of the anarchists and autogestivos as a new phenomenon. He recognizes affinities between the autogestivos and Zapatistas, and that they are part of the extended network of Zapatista supporters, but there is distance there. He does not see the autonomous communities in Chiapas as being autogestivos. The principle only comes up in the city, not in the jungle. In short, the difference between the Argentinian and Mexican senses of the word is not due to a Zapatismo emanating from the EZLN itself.[7]

In contrast, Kelley Tatro's (2022) recent book on the punk scene in Mexico City presents the principle of autogestión as the ethical backbone of the scene. She writes that autogestión is seen as a continual interpersonal practice in outreach, mutual aid, and direct action among other principles. "Learned from local anarchists," she writes, "the term *autogestión* suggests the dogged commitment and effort it takes to change social and political life" (2022, 123).

Likewise, in his book on the punk scene in Peru, Shane Greene describes a manifesto he refers to as Text X written by an influential Peruvian punk in the 1980s. Greene writes that "the basic argument [of Text X] is that *autogestión revolucionaria* is the fundamental basis for all forms of free political association and autonomous social organization as well as a practical means to engage in unalienated forms of cultural expression and acts of genuinely pleasurable spontaneity" (2016, 172). For these authors writing about punk in Latin America, autogestión takes on individual ethical and collective self-making meanings.

Ethnomusicologist Andrew Green (2018, 2024) presents another population of more mainstream rock musicians in Mexico who are fond of the term *autogestión*. Green's interlocutors use the term to refer to independent music practices connected to their digital home recording studios. These musicians,

much like Sitrin, the Multiforo Alicia, and other chilango collectives (and unlike the punks Tatro and Shane Greene write about) connect the practice and the term specifically to Zapatista autonomy. These musicians are overtly inspired by Zapatista politics and attempt to manifest that politics and connect with their cultural roots through home-studio recording practices that they describe as autogestivos.

In each of these contexts in Mexico and Argentina, the use of the specific word *autogestión* is vehement. It is a central organizing principle taken on as a slogan. However, it has distinctive meanings in the different contexts. Stirin cites Zapatismo as a source of autogestión, but the Sup disavows autogestión and pushes it toward urban punks. Tatro and Green, in line with their interlocutors, aren't that interested in where the principle comes from or who uses it differently. The Mexico City nonpunk anarchists I was talking to seemed to love that others were using what they see as an anarchist principle, but didn't (and don't) use it that much themselves. When it comes to autogestión, in the literature, the activism, and even the music, there is a lot of talking past one another.

It is also important to note that the autogestión literature is not distinct from the activism. Many of the mid-twentieth-century figures I discuss in the next chapter were not just activist-scholars like Bookchin and Arvon, whom I cite above, but militant activists like Raoul Vaneigem and Daniel Guérin, or actual armed revolutionaries like Mohamed Harbi and Michalis Raptis (a.k.a. Michel Pablo). The contemporary landscape has fewer armed combatants but similarly challenges activist and scholarly boundaries. Shane Greene is a punk performer as well as a scholar and professor. Many Autogestival organizers and participants graduated from prestigious universities. Marina Sitrin is an activist as well as a scholar, as are other academics like David Graeber and Jeff Juris writing about the extended activist networks implicated in this history. As I will discuss in chapter 3, one of Mexico City's scholars of autogestión is José Luis Paredes Pacho, the current head of a public museum of popular culture (El Chopo) who wrote a thesis on autogestión but is more well known as the drummer of the very famous indie band La Maldita Vecindad y los Hijos del Quinto Patio. El Sup, probably the most recognizable living militant guerrilla fighter in the world, was a college professor who threw off academia to live in the Lacandon jungle and fight for Indigenous autonomy. He is a poet, a storyteller, and an academic who has read the same French social theory as you and I and everyone else mentioned above. His own thesis in philosophy was heavily influenced by Louis Althusser and carried an epigram on discourse by Michel Foucault (Henck 2007).[8]

The story of autogestión is not one where there are clear lines between the literature review and the ethnographic data. Instead, it pushes and interrogates

the politics and appropriations inherent in a distinction between the literature review and the ethnography, the etic and the emic. Both and all are part of a global churning of mutual influence that mixes the ideas of prestige scholarship read or produced at a desk at the university with the voice of the disreputable punk heard on the (pirate?) university radio station on the way to the office. As a result, the connotations of autogestión are numerous.

(Post?) Neoliberal Self-Making

There is a wealth of scholarship since the 1990s that has been interested in the creation of and resistances to neoliberal subject formation. Suzana Sawyer (2004), Aihwa Ong (2006), James Holston (2008), and Sian Lazar (2008), among others, are interested in the contours of the relationship between individual and collective selves to the state and how neoliberal economic regimes transform political subjectivities. Others, like Caitlin Zaloom (2010), Carla Freeman (2014), Susan Ellison (2018), have been interested in the potent machinations of state and economic forces that compel and shape neoliberal subjectivities according to an ethical regime of competitive, self-interested individualism. At stake in the literature concerned with citizenship and neoliberal self-making is the ideal of the meritocratic, male-coded individualistic public citizen-subject of classic liberalism, and the consequences of its reinvented meanings under advanced neoliberal capitalism. More broadly, including the literature concerned with citizenship, is how neoliberal economic and political regimes are changing the meanings of what it means to be human in a moral sense throughout the world. Here, E. P. Thompson's theorization of moral economy comes together with Michel Foucault's conceptions of disciplinary power to argue that economic regimes of global free-trade capitalism encourage and create political and economic subjects in their own image: entrepreneurial, self-interested, self-promoting, self-disciplined, competitive, and individualistic.

Perhaps in contrast to the ways that Foucault imagined this kind of subject formation (that doesn't leave a lot of room to think about resistance or missing the mark) the anthropological literature interested in neoliberal self-making is also interested in how these processes "go awry" (to use a phrase from Lila Abu-Lughod [2004]). Sawyer (2004) notes the "neoliberal irony," for example, of the Ecuadorian state creating the very oppositional Indigenous subjects that it fears. Ong (2006) and Holston (2008) are interested in what happens when neoliberal ideas of citizenship and subject formation collide and merge with distinct local citizenship regimes. Jafari Allen (2011) describes practices of radical erotic self-making in networks of queer Black Cubans, self-making projects that are

oppositional not just to neoliberal capitalism but also to the racism and heteronormativity of socialist Cuban forms of citizenship. Arturo Escobar asks how we can "reorient" societies toward "tangible alternatives to capitalist significations . . . fostering the construction of new existential territories" (2008, 14), and how paying attention to Black and Indigenous experiences and knowledges is crucial to that project.

This more ethnographically grounded literature converses with a second overlapping body of literature that is more activist, directly critical, and also prescriptive: the works and speeches of scholars such as David Harvey, Slavoj Žižek, and Noam Chomsky. These are scholars also interested in and conversing with the transnational movements working against what Juris (2008) calls "corporate globalization" and David Graeber (2009) refers to as the "global justice movement." This more activist and prescriptive literature is pulled quickly into the orbit of Zapatismo as the quintessential Indigenous response to neoliberal political and economic regimes. It merges with the sharp critical analysis of neoliberalism provided by the Sup.

Academics were not the only ones to have this critique of neoliberalism. The friends and participants in most of the anthropological studies cited above, most of whom are Black and Indigenous peoples in Latin America, had a fairly keen sense of the kind of person that neoliberal economic and political reforms were expecting them to be and doing all they could to push back against it. The scholars were exploring and sharpening this emic critique, but it was not a purely abstract social theoretical notion imposed on the participants in these ethnographies.

The autogestivos that this book is about are very similar in the sense that overwhelmingly, they also have a keen ethical and political critical analysis of neoliberalism. For the most part, they also have a relationship to the scholarship itself, either because they studied these social theorists in college or have participated in some form of *difusión cultural* (book clubs, encuentros, political zines, journalistic writing, discussion groups, documentary films, etc.) that were meant to convey social theory to a more popular audience. Largely speaking, they self-consciously recognize neoliberalism (that they name and think about specifically *as* neoliberalism) as a Foucauldian disciplinary ethical regime acting on them. They are using the principle of autogestión as an alternative, oppositional ethical regime (connected to social and political subject-forming structures) to try and create themselves individually and collectively in opposition, or at least autonomously, from that neoliberal ethical regime. This is not my own etic analysis of what is going on, but the emic understanding of most people I talked to in colectivos autogestivos. They are taking this project on in part because they

have not only listened to the speeches and participated in the encuentros with the Sup and his analysis of neoliberalism, but they are also incredibly likely to have read Michel Foucault, Noam Chomsky, Arturo Escobar, and other scholars who have an analysis of neoliberal subject formation. This includes a pantheon of scholars who are more well known in Mexico and not as much in the United States such as Adolfo Gilly, Gustavo Esteva, Alberto Híjar, and Carlos Monsiváis. Many of them have literally been in Adolfo Gilly's classes at the national university, and participated in events at Universidad de la Tierra with Gustavo Esteva. They have certainly read Carlos Monsiváis's analyses in the newspapers.

This literature, activism, and the state of neoliberalism itself came to an uncertain head in the world after the subprime mortgage crisis of 2009, which then slid sideways into the Brexit decision in the United Kingdom and the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States in 2016. The vehemently anti-neoliberal moves of Brexit and the election of Donald Trump *from the political right* of both nations after thirty years of leftist struggles against neoliberalism was disorienting, to say the least. Less commented on, but also incredibly significant, was the 2012 selection (by Barack Obama) of neoliberal-critical medical anthropologist Jim Kim as president of the World Bank. Who among the Zapatista-inspired activists huddled around computers in the IndyMedia center at the Battle of Seattle in 1999 (that famously shut down the meetings of the WTO that year) would have guessed that within twenty years, the World Bank would be headed by a reasonably progressive medical anthropologist and the *Republican* president of the United States would be stirring up a popular movement of working-class Americans railing about corporate-owned media bias and the evils of free-trade agreements?

What does it mean that the political right in the United States and the United Kingdom seem to have forsaken the neoliberal economic and political reformations it had been working toward since the 1970s at the same time that they seem to be doubling down on neoliberal ethical regimes of selfhood? What appeared at the beginning of the 2000s to be a rather niche academic concern over neoliberal ethical self-making has turned into the defining characteristic of the political right in the era of Trump. Was all the economic theory an elaborate veil for what was *always* a refashioning of what it means to be human, and we are only just now seeing it in its true form? Or possibly is the doubling down just the last desperate jump-scare of the already dead neoliberal monster?

The history of autogestión follows the entire trajectory of this political and academic story. Autogestión is the political and academic progenitor of Foucauldian ideas of self-making. Even though Foucault almost never cites any contemporary example, his own activism and writing was occurring in France in the

wake of the 1968 upheavals in which autogestion was popularized and unavoidable. Self-management was a central slogan throughout radical Paris twenty years before Foucault became interested in self-care. It was a watchword that I argue was the significant innovation in Marxist thought and activism moving from thinking of the prototypical (or even only legitimate) revolutionary subject as a worker or peasant to thinking more broadly about revolutionary subjects as other kinds of collectives: Black and Indigenous peoples, women, gays, or punks.

There does seem to be an inherent contradiction in the turn toward autogestión as an antidote to neoliberal self-making, however. Self-management can be seen as a kind of "outsourcing" or shifting responsibility of management from bosses or the state onto subjects themselves. There is even a literature in business and education that uses a discourse of self-management as a technology of control. My view is that the overlap is not so much a contradiction as it is one of the strange points of convergence between the procapitalist neoliberal (US-style) libertarians and the anticapitalist anti-neoliberal liberationists.[9] Both seek autonomy from the state and the transformation of the global economy. The former seek liberation from the state so that they are freed from any social responsibility that can hinder their individual self-interestedness (sometimes veiled behind an idea of competitive self-interestedness being good for everyone). The latter seek collective liberation of all people from oppression of all kinds, including the coercive hierarchy of the state, and generally see the solution as radically horizontal interdependence.[10] The two are radically different, and yet for many political actors who have not thought through the finer points of even their own stance on such questions in the United States, one can slide into the other in their disgust with the state. With the political right turning away from neoliberalism and the center left embracing it, perhaps more fiercely than ever, there can be an uncanny overlap between the Bernie Bros and the Proud Boys. What can we learn about these post-neoliberal political subjects (Proud Boys, Bernie Bros, and everyone in between) through an examination of how autonomous self-management was popularized throughout the 1990s as a technology of purposeful self-making?

Deleuzian Genealogies of Autogestion

One might use the idea of rhizomes as a central theoretical tool in describing or attempting to understand what I have been calling the churning of influences; how autogestión emerges, disappears, and re-emerges in other contexts throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. There are multiplicities; nonlinear jumpings and crossings-over. Multiple becomings. For a constellation of reasons I detail

below, the content of this research demands rhizomatic thinking. However, this book is ambivalent about conversing with the large body of Deleuzian scholarship.

I have no objection to analogies or metaphors as theoretical tools. They can be very helpful. Deleuze and Guattari's ([1980] 1987) metaphor of the rhizome for understanding the way that culture and social theory can move, change, disappear, and reappear somewhere completely different in nonlinear, nonhierarchical ways is, in fact, an excellent metaphor for understanding the journey that autogestión has been on and that I describe here. It is not a coincidence. Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the rhizomatic arises alongside the discourse of autogestión. They are part of the same set of movements and ideas. However, what has seemed to happen with rhizomes as a social-theoretical tool is that the metaphor is generally described as a mystical, unknowable mechanism. I am reminded of E. P. Thompson's (1978) "The Poverty of Theory" essay in which he begins his critique of Althusser:

> Few spectacles would be more ludicrous than that of an English historian—and, moreover one manifestly self-incriminated of empirical practices—attempting to offer epistemological correction to a rigorous Parisian philosopher. I can sense, as I stare at the paper before me, the shadowy faces of an expectant audience, scarcely able to conceal their rising mirth. ([1978] 2008, 5)

I am not an Englishman. I am yet still more detestable: an American woman; a white lady; a pushy, crass dyke. Perhaps redeemingly, I also have no particular problem with Deleuze (or Althusser for that matter). But in thinking rhizomatically—horizontally, nonhierarchically, nonlinearly—we cannot fall into the trap of fetishizing cultural traits, social theory, or concepts like autogestión or rhizomes as capitalists and economists fetishize commodities, markets, and money: as if they have a will and a desire to reproduce and exert themselves outside of the brains and lives of human beings. They don't. To the extent that ideas live at all, they live and die and accrue new lives completely in the brains and hands of human beings living in the world. These brains and lives of humans are not the substrate of a living thing (the autogestión rhizome) that moves among them through time. Humans are the agents who move and transform the discourse of autogestión—perhaps unknowingly, perhaps chaotically—throughout time and across the world. If all the people in the world were to suddenly die tomorrow, so, too, would all the ideas in their heads. Actual, physical rhizomes in the dirt would live on.

Despite my misgivings, this book does sincerely make use of the rhizome as a theoretically useful tool, even as it seeks to recontextualize the scholarship that

is its primary referent and use it in a way contrary to most of the literature that invokes it. Much like the Foucauldian literature I reference above, the context of Gilles Deleuze's work is the 1968 student revolution in France. He published his first major work (*Difference and Repetition*) in 1968. He was not a young man then (forty-two), and yet the dominant context for his writing and thinking are the tremendous cultural and political upheavals of that time that, although are generally described as "the sixties," generally actually took place through more of the 1970s when Deleuze and Guattari began writing the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* books, of which, volume 2, *Mille Plateaux* (1980), presents the metaphor of the rhizome. These books are about revolution and social change. They are responding to a local social movement that took autogestion on as one of its primary slogans and in a time period in which the language of autogestion may have been at its peak in France. Just like the Sup and José Luis Paredes Pacho, Deleuze is both informant and theoretical framework in the story of autogestión. I cannot avoid him.

Instead of the postmodern ethereal poetry of so many of his enthusiasts (*A Thousand Plateaus* came out in English for the first time in 1987, a more postmodern era), Deleuze and Guattari's writing reads more like Beat poetry. *Anti-Oedipus* begins, "It breathes, it heats, it eats. It shits and fucks" (Deleuze and Guattari [1971] 1977, 1). Deleuze and Guattari are fond of exclamation marks and an incredibly wide and weird array of cultural referents. In *A Thousand Plateaus* they write:

> Write to the *n*th power, the *n*-1 power, write with slogans: Make rhizomes, not roots, never plant! Don't sow, grow offshoots! Don't be one or multiple, be multiplicities! Run lines, never plot a point! Speed turns the point into a line! Be quick, even when standing still! Line of chance, line of hips, line of flight. Don't bring out the General in you! Don't have just ideas, just have an idea (Godard). Have short-term ideas. Make maps, not photos or drawings. Be the Pink Panther and your loves will be like the wasp and the orchid, the cat and the baboon ([1980] 1987, 24–25)

It is this less serious, Beat poet of a Deleuze whom I wish to invoke through using the metaphor of the rhizome. It is men publishing in the wake of a chaotic global revolution, trying to systematize and make sense of it, and coming up short.

My reference to Beat poetry is not idle and plays an intimate role in the history of autogestión. Deleuze and Guattari bring it up repeatedly. The influence seems obvious in their form: the vast majority of the works of Deleuze and Guattari read like a William S. Burroughs novel, if Burroughs's writing were meant to make philosophical sense. The wasp and the orchid, the cat and the baboon,

are examples based in actual biological research. Even so, scholars appear and disappear in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) like drug dealers in *Naked Lunch* (Burroughs 1959). The nonlinear form of *A Thousand Plateaus*, meant to illustrate the rhizomatic, was in part influenced by Burroughs. "Take William Burrough's cut-up method," they write, "the folding of one text onto another, which constitutes multiple and even adventitious roots (like a cutting)" ([1980] 1987, 6). Several pages later they bring up the Beats again in the context of America, a special case. "Everything important that has happened or is happening takes the route of the American rhizome: the beatniks, the underground, bands and gangs, successive lateral offshoots in immediate connection with an outside. . . . The American singer Patti Smith sings the bible of the American dentist: Don't go for the root, follow the canal" (19). Patti Smith was foundational to the US punk scene, the godmother to Burroughs's godfather of punk. Punk, which also made great use of the cut-up method, was emerging as *A Thousand Plateaus* was being written. The influences churn. They breathe. Deleuze is influenced by punk, by William S. Burroughs, a man educated in Mayan archaeology whose most influential books take place in a Mexico City dreamscape.

In 2022, I sat at a café in the trendy southern Mexico City neighborhood of Coyoacán with a man named Conejo who had been part of an art collective and pirate radio station that used "Rizoma Insurgente" (Insurgent Rhizome) as their slogan for a time. Now a college professor and looking more handsomely gaunt and gray in the beard since the last time I saw him, Conejo speaks with the cadence characteristic of one of Mexico City's largest working-class neighborhoods. I will spend some time relating Conejo's experiences of an important university strike in chapters 4 and 5. He was integral to the writing of this book. We were meeting in Coyoacán in part because I had just tracked down a thin book I had been looking for called *Rizomas* at a nearby bookstore (called Ghandi). The volume, a publication unique to Mexico as far as I can tell, is a Spanish translation of just the part of *A Thousand Plateaus* that defines how they conceptualize rhizomes. It was still in my hand (and my thoughts) when I asked Conejo why his collective decided to call themselves an *insurgent rhizome* twenty years ago. He simply smiled and reached over to thump the book in my hands.

Rhizomes, or perhaps mycelia, are an excellent metaphor for conceptualizing the popularization and continual rearticulation of autogestión. How else to describe how the political principle of autogestión traveled from the back of Mexico City's Chopo street market where the punks are, to the front where the more mainstream rockers are? It spread laterally, nonhierarchically. It spawned multiplicities that rearticulated it with political traditions like Zapatismo that it had little to do with previously. The people who have moved and changed

autogestión are not generally fond of lineage or using citations. It's not really the point. Rhizomes are a compelling metaphor that aligns closely with the autogestivo: something possibly revolutionary spreading nonhierarchically beneath the surface, seemingly benign but suddenly everywhere, no centralized structure to uproot and destroy. Given the timeline and the proclivities of Deleuze and Guattari, it is very reasonable to conclude that discourses surrounding autogestion in Paris are part of what they are attempting to describe with their sense of the rhizomatic. The overlap in the discourses is not coincidental. If anything, the rhizomatic is derivative, an offshoot, of the autogestion discourse that arose a decade before.

Even so, the project of this book is actually in considerable tension with Deleuzian rhizomes. I am attempting to write a cohesive history of autogestión and trace its genealogy, understand how it has moved and changed. Deleuze and Guattari are quite clear that they are invoking rhizomes to challenge traditional genealogies that take the conceptual form of trees and roots (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 1987, 5–6). The section heading above, "Deleuzian Genealogies" is an oxymoron. The rhizomatic as a conceptual tool was invented to oppose the idea of a genealogy.

However, actual rhizomes spread through biological processes that are knowable. They are part of a physical, biological universe made up of chemicals and cells. They are not as ethereal or abstract as most of the scholarship that invokes them. We can, and certainly should wonder at their beauty, their cleverness, and their complexity. We can even describe their growth and reproduction using obscure and technical language that other humans may marvel at (or groan over). We can write poetry about them. However, they remain simple physical (beautiful, delicious, clever) roots. Their movements may be unknown, but they are not unknowable. We can have gaps in our understanding of how they grow; gaps that may be filled in at a later date and may remain a mystery forever because of human inadequacy or lack of interest. But they do not grow by magic. They grow in the dirt. They grow better if there's some shit mixed in.

In short, my purpose in *Without Masters* is to attempt an understanding of how autogestión moved around the world and was popularized in Mexico City, while acknowledging the rhizomatic impossibility of the task. It is impossible in part because coherent narrative or explanation is always a lie. Real humans are messier than that. However, there are moments of explainable coherence. These single frames of a constantly moving, churning circulation of people, things, and ideas are also mundane. At some point, Conejo read a thing about rhizomes, liked it, and made it into his collective's slogan. How the text came into his hands (a reading for class? a pamphlet? a zine?) is equally important as

the moment he read it, but the precise means through which it came to him is probably lost forever. These moments are not unlike the materials of archaeology or biological anthropology. This particular stone tool, pot shard, or hominin jaw was completely unremarkable in its time. It is merely a single unremarkable frame of something constantly in motion—people, culture, evolution—and yet in retrospect, that single frame allows us to piece together a narrative that (probably) gives us some insight.

Anthropological History

I am an anthropologist writing a book that I think is mostly history and is influenced by feminist, interdisciplinary queer scholarship. It is, in short, what Jack Halberstam has called queer methodology: "supple enough to respond to the various locations of information" and demonstrating a "certain disloyalty to conventional disciplinary methods" (1998, 10). In a subsequent work, Halberstam develops what they call "low theory" based in the words of Stuart Hall about Antonio Gramsci:

> Hall goes on to argue that Gramsci was not "aiming higher and missing his political target"; instead, like Hall himself, he was aiming low in order to hit a broader target. Here we can think about *low theory* as a mode of accessibility, . . . a kind of theoretical model that flies below the radar, that is assembled from eccentric texts and examples that refuses to confirm the hierarchies of knowing that maintain the *high* in high theory. (2011, 16)

For Halberstam, low theory means the analysis of cultural texts like SpongeBob SquarePants and Pixar movies to tell us something about regimes of success and failure in late capitalism. This book is also a project that aims low and broad, traversing the boundaries between disciplines (history, anthropology, cultural studies) as well as the "high" and "low." It brushes off volumes of rigorous Parisian social theory but parses through the referential intricacies of punk zines and political fliers. Rather than maintaining the distinction between high and low and rapidly traversing it, as Halberstam does, this project simply refuses to take seriously or respect the distinction. This is partially a conscious choice in decolonial, antiracist feminist scholarship that refuses to performatively revere prestige and fame. It is partially just because the subject matter demands it. Is William S. Burroughs high or low? What about José Luis Paredes Pacho, both the head of an influential museum and the drummer from a popular rock band? Or Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, a former academic turned *guerrillero*? Is Henri Lefebvre "high" when writing about urban space, but "low" when

(probably) plagiarizing the theories of his more activist friends communicated to him over beers? Is Raoul Vaneigem "high" in his famous 1967 treatise translated into dozens of languages, but "low" when inciting revolution in his writings as Ratgeb? Is Deleuze "high" in *A Thousand Plateaus* (which references anal sex only slightly less than Burroughs's *The Soft Machine*), and "low" when tagging along with Michel Foucault and Jean-Paul Sartre in their stint as prisoners' rights activists? In the story of autogestion, high and low, the prestigious and the disreputable, lose meaning.

This book describes a history that is not very old. The story begins in the 1960s and continues into the 2010s. I personally was involved as a participant observer in some ways starting sometime in the mid-1990s (weirdly, the midpoint between 1965 and 2025), although in very much a bystander sense. The pieces of participant-observation "research" that I resurrect from the 1990s were not conceived of as research at the time. I was studying anthropology and yet did not think I was going to become an anthropologist. Even if I was, I was only a teenager living my life, sometimes in Mexico City and sometimes paying attention.

Much of the research for this book was pieced together using methods that are generally associated with ethnography: networking, interviewing people, hanging out with them. However, most of the things we talked about could be considered more oral history than ethnographic interviews: tell me about this series of things that happened to you twenty years ago, or forty years ago. There is quite a lot of archival research here, but in the realm of what is generally considered informal or found archives: the boxes of things that people collect and hold on to. One of the archives was collected by a history student who thought he would write his history thesis based on the materials, Raúl Madrid González. Another archive was made up of the materials collected by an activist-artist (Conejo, mentioned above) and his long-term work over decades with various collectives. A third archive is neatly cataloged and available for public perusal, but only to those who know of the existence of the anarchist library in Mexico City (wedged into the ground floor of a union building) and who know or could guess that they probably have a lot of punk fanzines.

In short, this is a history of autogestión centered on its history in Mexico, but pieced together with the scrappy, people-centered, immersive sensibility of an anthropologist.

I have woven through the book moments and references having to do with the United States and my own personal history. I have done this for a few reasons. First, as a Mexicanist scholar, I am often told that I need to make the specificity of Mexico relevant to a "broader" or "general" audience. I interrogate this idea in

chapter 2 as part of racist and colonial academic practice that is also woven into the history of autogestión. However, this critique doesn't help a reader unfamiliar with the Mexican context whose eyes begin to glaze over by detail unrelatable to them. I have meant these transnational connections to be small jolts of familiarity reminding the reader that the stories I am telling are not distinct from their own life and history. Part of my larger argument is that these events are not something that happened in a remote time and place. Everyone is implicated.

Second, I include these connections and personal stories because it has not gone without notice that almost everyone I am describing in this book is almost precisely my age. I was born in 1978: the tail end of Generation X. We were young in the 1990s, and this book is largely about a series of global events that happened among young people in the 1990s. I happened to have been living in Mexico and was a frequent visitor to Mexico City in 1999 and 2000, the years of some of the more dramatic happenings in this story. As I say in chapter 4, it is possible that a large part of this book is my generation's circling around how to understand what happened when we were young. In that sense, I have a trove of ethnographic material that I believe to give a flavor of a time for readers who may benefit from remembering or coming to know for the first time what it was like to be young in the 1990s.

Outline of the Book

Chapter 1 is concerned with getting the history and origins of autogestión right. I argue that instead of a translation of the 1950s Yugoslavian word *samoupravljanje* that is mostly cited in the literature, the term *autogestion* originated, or at least cohered for the first time, in 1962, during and after the Algerian Revolution. This chapter further argues that the transformation of the terms *workers' councils* or *workers'-management* to *self-management* (autogestion) is an important conceptual leap that then enabled subsequent rearticulations of the political principle to take on meanings and connotations that it wouldn't have otherwise. These new meanings were very important to the shift from Marxist class-based movements of the early twentieth century (in which the only legitimate revolutionary subject is the worker or peasant) to the "New Social Movements" starting in the 1960s in which revolutionary subjects began to form around other identities: being Black, gay, Indigenous, or women.

Chapter 2 attempts to rethink the place of Indigenous Mexico in the social sciences. That sounds very ambitious, and yet I think it is necessary in order to accurately map the circularity of the cultural churning I describe in the case of autogestión. The argument, for example, that Mexico City's punks combined

European social theory and Indigenous political organization to transform autogestión discourse for their own purposes, creates an artificial and inaccurate separation between European social theory and Indigenous Mexican movements. One of the interesting and incredible things about studying Mexico City is that written accounts of it, and European fascination with it, predate the social sciences. Circulating descriptions of Mexico City/Tenochtitlán even predate the Enlightenment. Rather than being an obscure population to which European social theory can be applied, in significant ways all prestige social theory has bits and pieces of Indigenous Mexico City already incorporated into its folds. Outside the United States, the Mexican Revolution of the early twentieth century was also very influential, meaning that it, too, is present in a significant way in European social theory. This chapter observes how Mexico City/Tenochtitlán and Mexican indigeneity has been formative of prestige social theory and global popular culture throughout history. One of the reasons that autogestión in Mexico appears to derive from the EZLN is because both the EZLN and the Algerian revolution were both informed by the Mexican Revolution and Indigenous forms of self-governance. In short, this chapter is important to understanding how things like autogestión, punk rock, and even Marxism *seem* to be imported to Mexico from Europe, but this is a colonial (and yes, racist) illusion. Instead, the two have coproduced one another.

Chapter 3 tells the story of how Mexico City's punk scene transformed and popularized the discourse of autogestión in the 1980s and 1990s. I argue that punk transformed autogestión from a sense of industrial production to a sense of cultural production. A significant part of the popularization of the principle in this era were (self-managed) university benefit rock concerts raising money and awareness for the EZLN and its associated autonomous communities. I argue that this set of concerts was largely responsible for the association of autogestión discourse with Zapatismo in Mexico City. The punk mode of nonhierarchical independent cultural production became an urban equivalent for rural Indigenous autonomy and self-governance.

Chapter 4 turns even more toward the university, continuing the chronological history of autogestión to demonstrate how the 1999–2000 student strike of the national university (UNAM) and its associated high schools became a crucial site for the popularization of ideas of autogestión. Members of colectivos autogestivos in Mexico City unanimously traced their attraction to autogestión to this student strike, and so this chapter maps that influence. Although only casually in the background of strike discourses, this strike, alongside Indigenous and Zapatista iconography, helped deepen its connection to Zapatismo and further dissociate it from anarchist and punk movements. Most importantly, it was

a common set of experiences of the strike that were crucial to its popularization afterward: positive experiences of Indigenous self-governance and cultural production (zines, radio, community media) that people wanted to replicate, and negative experiences of dogmatic ideologies and violent repression that they wished to move beyond. It was because of these experiences that after the dust cleared—when people got out of prison, when police violence receded into the background—people became very interested in autogestión.

Chapter 5 is where I finally come to the projects that began this investigation: Mexico City's colectivos autogestivos. In choosing among the hundreds of options to delve into, I have erred on the side of the well known, influential, and nameable. Radio KeHuelga was a very long-lived community/pirate radio station that began during the strike. Jóvenes en Resistencia Alternativa (JRA) was involved in a multitude of projects, from taking over responsibilities of mass benefit concerts for the EZLN, to a well-known and well-regarded publishing house (Bajo Tierra). La Otra Campaña was a national campaign lead by Indigenous Zapatistas for a new constitution for Mexico. Autogestión, although not part of the official campaign discourse, nonetheless spread through the networks of its Mexico City members as if it were. Café Victoria is a literal café, a worker-owned self-managed business. In keeping with my primary concern of mapping influences, I am less concerned with presenting a complex ethnographic portrait of the practices of these projects and much more interested in their discourses and making sense of their particular assemblages of diverse influences in creating their vision of autogestión.

Between chapters, I have placed more primary source texts as interludes that I believe to converse with the chapters: a description of a weekly rock market, the Tianguis Cultural del Chopo, Conejo's description of the UNAM strike, and a poem written by a recently incarcerated youth in the immediate aftermath of the student strike.

In the conclusion, I revisit the question of what this history of autogestión can tell us about citational politics in scholarship and activism sometimes obscuring rather than clarifying the engines of cultural and political change. I conclude with a relatively practical note about activist self-making practice and social change in a post-neoliberal world.

to begin to practice the virtue of autogestión in their pamphlet: beginning in the intimacy of one's close relationships and then moving outward. The practice is not only precapitalist but premodern and pre-Christian.

Second, in light of the journey that autogestión has been on since the 1960s, the "problem" of purposeful social change does not seem to be whether social movements or revolution have consequences or not. Clearly there are consequences. The problem is that the consequences seem to be so chaotic and unrelated to the intentions of activists. Attempting to articulate a uniquely Algerian form of socialism, the Trotskyist revolutionaries in Algeria birthed a slogan for French student activism. Even though he tried, José Revueltas was unsuccessful in getting autogestión to stick in Mexico. Instead, it "stuck" decades later when young people defiantly claimed a right to rock concerts. The violence of the Mexican state may have purposefully ended the strike, but it also helped turn these same young people toward anarchism, just as state violence in 1968 and 1971 spawned decades of student radicalism.

The unpredictable nature of purposeful social change is frustrating for activists because it makes it difficult to decide what, exactly, to do for maximum effect. I'm sure that it is frustrating to politicians and state actors for identical reasons. It is frustrating for scholars because it makes it very difficult to form any sort of cohesive rational understanding of historical or contemporary change. The self, whether an individual self or a quite small collective self, is an attractive scale of attention because it appears to be more easily comprehensible and actionable. When the world is falling down around you, or at least relentlessly and chaotically churning, there is a great attraction to a smaller and more (self) manageable eddy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks first go to all the people who spoke with me about autogestión, including all the individuals and collectives who spent time with me. There is a temptation, based on my degree of appreciation, to list everyone by name here. That seems inadvisable. I do want to mention that not everyone who was important to this project is named in the final version of the book. Absolutely everyone whom I spoke with was important. If you are reading this in hopes of seeing your name or an anonymized version of yourself and do not find it, please know that you were important to this book and have my sincerest gratitude!

I owe a special degree of gratitude to Conejo, Raúl Madrid González, La Biblioteca Social Reconstruir (BSR), and Tere Carvajal for generously sharing their archives with me. Conejo especially has been incredibly generous with his time and attention over the years. Tere has contributed in more ways than one through her responsiveness, kindness, and feedback. A special thanks is needed for the generosity of Tobi and Martha at the BSR. Thanks to Martha for welcoming me, trusting me with their collections, and being so gracious with her thoughts and attention. I spoke with Tobi much, much earlier, when I had imagined this book as something very different. I did not know it at the time, but Tobi very rarely gave interviews, and I am incredibly grateful that he chose to share his thoughts with me before he passed. I know that he was more well known as Tobi Libertario, but he once signed a consent form (without me noticing) as Tobi Hendrix, helping me fight a particularly irksome battle with an internal review board (IRB) over the utility of signatures. If I am not mistaken, this small irreverent act helped transform my university's IRB, demonstrating that even small acts of resistance can sometimes have a tremendous impact.

Thanks, of course, to Pablo Lugo, Conejo, and Maite López Flamarique for allowing me to reproduce their writing here. I could not have said it better myself and I thank you for your generosity. Thanks also to Fernando González Lozado, Mina Navarro Trujillo, Estrella Soria Arenas, and Shane Greene for chatting with me about their publications.

Thanks to colleagues and friends who gave me feedback on work in progress. I owe a special debt to Jeff Juris and the autonomy group: Kelley Tatro, Andrew Green, Maurice Magaña, Michelle Tellez, and José Martinez-Reyes. Thanks also to Adela Cedillo and Fernando Calderón. My dear friends Katie Hejtmanek, Nutsa Batiashvili, and Stéphanie Larchanché gave more feedback and support than I have words to express in our writing group. Keith Pluymers, Reecia Orzeck, Andrew Hartman, Maura Toro-Morn, Aaron Pitluck, Mike Dougherty, Jim Skibo, and Fred Smith all gave feedback and support at various stages of the project.

I am deeply appreciative of John Jackson's support at a crucial moment and the guidance of Ken Wissoker and Kate Mullen at Duke University Press. Research was supported with grants from Illinois State University, and especially the financial support for summer research and a sabbatical year.

Words cannot express my gratitude for all the ways that my Mexico City family have aided and continue to support me and this project. I can always count on Mario Viveros to be my home base. And, of course, Mexico City would never have been home at all without Alejandro, Sandra, Ana Maria, and Sergio.

This book would not have existed without the support of my wife, Abigail Stone. Her ruthless editorial hand was crucial, if not entirely pleasant, at some key moments. And of course, the book could not have been written at all if she didn't allow me to disappear for several days at a time to concentrate on research and writing. I will not thank our children for helping. Without them, I'm sure this book would have taken half the time to finish. However, I do not regret it in the slightest. There is also a ferocity in the tone of this book, possibly tempered somewhat in the final product, to which I think I owe them for making me Mama.

This book took more than a decade to write and so I know there are people to whom I owe a debt of gratitude who are not among the names above. There are others who did not want to be named or who were unsure. Thank you!

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Condensed and abridged excerpts from López Flamarique 2010, 9–10, 111, 14, 12–13, 130 (paragraphs are not presented in their original order in the text). The original can be accessed at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328489835_Alicia_en_el_espejo_Historias_del_Multiforo_Cultural_Alicia. Unless specified otherwise, all translations in this book are my own.

2. *Autogestión* (with an accent) is the Spanish spelling, and *autogestion* (without an accent) is the French spelling. When I speak of the term in the Mexican context, I use the Spanish spelling; in the French context, I use the French spelling. When using the term in general, I often drop the accent to blend into the English context, even adapting the Spanish adjective to an English *autogestive*.

3. Only two also described themselves as punk or anarchist. The meeting was held on August 26–28, 2005, in the Mexico City area under the auspices of what would become La Otra Campaña, a "campaign" I describe in chapter 5.

4. I will often use Spanish words throughout the book without immediately translating them. This is purposeful. Immediate translation is rarely asked of common phrases in French or Latin, relying on an elitist (and probably racist) idea of a reader whose education has provided them with the definition of *ontological* or *coup d'etat* but not *encuentro*. It tends to normalize the denigration of Spanish. It is easier than ever before to look up words and phrases you don't understand. There's a phone in your pocket!

5. "Enlace Zapatista" EZLN, updated December 2025. https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/.

6. Referring to him as "the Sup" also obviates the difficulty of him changing his nom de guerre a few times in this period. As of 2023 when the EZLN officially dissolved, the Sup appears to be referring to himself as "El Capitán" in mirror image.

7. This does not mean that there is not a substantive conceptual link between Zapatisata organizing and autogestión. Scholars and activists are not wrong to see a conceptual connection. I discuss this further in chapter 2.

8. The Sup's thesis and Paredes Pacho's thesis mentioned in the previous sentence are for the degree of *licenciatura*, which corresponds to an undergraduate bachelor's degree in the United States. The standard for these theses, however, is original research. They require a substantial amount of work and are far beyond what someone would write as an undergraduate in the United States. Theses sometimes take years to complete after coursework is finished and are defended (occasionally in large auditoriums) like doctoral dissertations. Throughout the book, when I mention someone's thesis without specifying that it was a master's thesis or a doctoral dissertation, it was their licenciatura thesis.

9. Throughout most of the world, *libertarian* is synonymous with *anarchist*. The coining of *liberationist* to differentiate is one that Maurice Magaña (2020) employs and is a useful one.

10. There are anticapitalist individualist anarchists on the political left. The oppositions between collectivist and individualist anarchists, and between pacifist and insurrectionalist anarchists, are probably the two most significant divisions among contemporary anarchists.

CHAPTER ONE. GETTING THE HISTORY RIGHT

Epigraph: As translated by Clegg (1971, 220), the quote is from the last statement of the second part of the charter that enumerates the transition to socialism. The quote refers more to an imagined future society than an existing Algerian one.

1. The word is *autogestion* in French without an accent mark. Because this chapter is overwhelmingly discussing the term in French, I have chosen to use the French spelling in this chapter.

2. See Davis (2022) for a discussion of the racialization of Islam by French colonization.

3. My translation of the original, but using Ken Knabb's (2001) translation of *autogestion généralisée* as "total self-management."

4. The 1965 French version uses the term *autogestion*. The quotes here are from the 1970 English translation, and so I have kept *self-management*. The original Proudhon (1851) work he references uses the language of *companies ouvriéres* and *association*.

5. "Cornealius Castoriadis (1922–1997)," WorkersControl.net, October 11, 2015, http://www.workerscontrol.net/theorists/cornelius-castoriadis. Re-posted French translation on Association Autogestion, May 5, 2016, https://autogestion.asso.fr/cornelius-castoriadis-1922-1997/.

6. I have, just as I am putting the final touches on the manuscript in 2025, found a document prepared for the 1953 International Collective Economy Congress (Congres international de l'economie collective) in Geneva titled *L'autogestion ouvriere dans l'economy Yougoslave*. I believe that this document demonstrates that the term had been uttered and yet was not yet used widely as the translation of *samoupravljanje*. Also note the modifier: *L'autogestion ouvriere*. The same is true for two publications prepared for a 1961 Expo in Turin, Italy, one titled *L'autogestion en Yougoslavie* (Kavcic, 1961) and *Développement de l'autogestion en Yougoslavie* (Kovac, 1961). Both were translated into