



**Window
Space**

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Long Live the Working Class
Hannah Enkel and Philip Shelton
April 11 – May 9th, 2014

And

I am only interested in what is not mine
Rodrigo Martí in collaboration with Ananna Oisharja Rafa & Sarah Azimi
April 11th, 2014

The collective joy of protesting, despite the ever-present and alarmingly real threat of violence from the state, reminds us that there is much more at stake than a single body, whether it be our own or that of another - there is a collective body, shared capacities lopsidedly hacked away at by contemporary forms of work.¹

Hannah Enkel and Philip Shelton's *Long Live the Working Class*, on display in Xpace Cultural Centre's Window Gallery, acts as an anthem in support of a working class. Described within a manifesto written by Enkel and Shelton, the sign reflects on and stands in support of those whose labour often is often dismissed:

This is for those who fix and maintain vehicles, who take away our garbage, who wire up spaces so we can see. This is for House Cleaners, Plumbers, General Contractors and Woodworkers. This is for Personal Support Workers, Social Workers, and people who care for children. This is for Farmers, Baristas, and people who supply food and serve it to us, so that we can survive, and enjoy surviving. This is for those who work in factories, in unsafe or slum conditions, and for those who are underpaid.²

Both Enkel and Shelton identify themselves as a part of this working class, Enkel has worked as a cleaner and child-care worker and Shelton as an electrician, and so this call for support can also be seen as an act of collective support for workers by workers.

Why is collective support so important? According to Working America's Fix My Job website (fixmyjob.com), when workers stick together and protect each other they are more likely to have regular scheduled hours, it is 30% more likely that they will receive paid sick leave, they tend to earn 30% more, and are 35% more likely to get health care.³

¹ Nina Power, "Don't Smile, Organise," in *Work Work Work: A Reader on Art and Labour*, ed. Jonatan Habib Engqvist, Annika Enqvist, Michele Masucci, Lisa Rosendahl, Cecilia Widenheim (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), Pg. 38

² Hannah Enkel and Philip Shelton, Artist Statement, 2014.

³ "Fix My Job," <http://www.fixmyjob.com/index.php>

Given these kinds of statistics it begs the question why we don't see more collective support for workers and by workers within the workplace.

Instead, labour is contextualized using a language of fear and scarcity. Existing systems for worker rights and organizations, such as unions, are demonized by workplaces and within the press. For example, Target requires all employees to watch an anti-union video as part of their training process. Leaked online, the video uses fear mongering tactics to vilify unions, with direct quotes like, "Someday, someone you don't know may approach you at work, or visit you at home, asking you to sign your name to an authorization card, petition, or some other union document."⁴ Here the rhetoric of the video implies that Target as a corporation is sincerely invested in protecting their workers, simply looking out for their welfare, and protecting their hard-earned money from the union enemy. Other statements include, "Everyone gets hurt. Everyone except the union,"⁵ and "Some unions have gone so far as to force themselves on employees."⁶ Most tellingly, there is an implied undercurrent of the threat of job loss in the event of the formation of a union, as the smiling Target representatives ominously intone, "Our ability to serve our guests could suffer dramatically, and with fewer guests, what happens to our team?"⁷ This language of fear is deliberate, and with so many people living precariously, it leads to situations where workers are too afraid of pushing back against unfair working conditions, for fear of losing their jobs. Precarity uses the threat that someone else is always waiting on the sidelines willing to do more for less.

But it doesn't have to be this way.

In Rodrigo Martí's temporary installation *I am only interested in what is not mine* Martí reflects on the way that Brazil's youth movement of Rolezinhos (or 'little strolls') offers an example of the ways that young people are gathering together to assert their presence within public spaces to which economically they have little real access. These Rolezinhos can be contextualized, along with other youth movements, as "a refusal on the part of young people to be written out of the future."⁸ For Martí, the gathering of information and the envisioning of the final installation involved a collective process. The work could not exist without the thoughts of interviewees: Francisco Fernando Granados, Mojan Jianfar, Sebastian Gil-Riaño, Craig Morrison, Maya Annik Bedward, Thomas Bürk, Yan Wu, Aidan Grove-White, and Darren O'Donnell, and the artistic collaboration of Ananna Oisharja Rafa and Sarah Azimi, both youth members of The STEPS Initiative, a non-profit community arts organization Martí has worked with in the past. Research and planning plays a large role in the resulting work, and the temporary installation is just one of many potential variations on the information and ideas gathered throughout his process. The choice to bring teenage collaborators was done to bring in young people who could relate to the Rolezinhos in a way that Martí couldn't. The work in the end is about taking the chaotic and messy spirit of these gatherings, and bringing them into a local and personal context.

⁴ Hamilton Nolan, "Behold Target's Brand New Cheesy Anti Union Video," <http://gawker.com/behold-targets-brand-new-cheesy-anti-union-video-1547193676> (March 19, 2014)

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Henry Giroux, *The Twilight of the Social: Resurgent Politics in an Age of Disposability*, (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), Pg. 8.

Both Enkel and Shelton's sign and Martí's temporary installation can be viewed in connection with the ways in which workers and a new generation of young people are being dismissed and demonized by a growing austerity culture that uses this dismissal and villainization as justification to take away rights and support, as Henry Giroux explains:

As a long-term social investment, young people are now viewed as a liability, if not a pathology. No longer a symbol of hope and the future, they are viewed as a drain on the economy, and if they do not assume the role of functioning consumers or potential recruits for the war machine, they are considered disposable.⁹

This disposable-ness of young people is reflected in the opportunities that are made available to them, where youth unemployment continues to rise and young workers consistently are finding that they are being asked to work in precarious situations for little to no pay. Facing seemingly insurmountable student debt, this lack of opportunity can feel exhausting. It is difficult to imagine participating in collective action when day-to-day living feels like a big enough struggle, and even with the inspiration of collective pushing back, it can be difficult to see how (or even if) that pushing back can be taken up by just anyone without consideration of the specific cultural and political contexts in which they occur. The strength of many of these actions comes from the context of specific times and places. However, even if it is not possible to simply recreate these actions, it is possible to find inspiration in those moments where other people have succeeded:

Students and young people are now fighting back, affirming new modes of solidarity, forming alliances with workers and labor organizations, and embracing a vision of democracy committed to economic and political equality. Most remarkably, this new generation of young people is not only to think in terms that relate isolated problems to larger public considerations, but also to recognize the importance of a civic society that provides the formative culture necessary for self-governing democratic societies. Hence, the emphasis on the new media, social networks, and the Internet is not merely about dodging the repression of dissent. It is more importantly about creating alternative public spheres where the values, ideas, dialogue, knowledge, and social relations necessary for a democracy can take root, if not flourish... This is a generation that is fighting back and, in doing so, inventing new pedagogical tools to expose the official scripts of power while at the same time constructing new modes of association and struggle based on democratic ideals and values.¹⁰

Here we begin to see what a collective refusal might look like, and the power and potential that can be found in a gathering together. When we stand in support of each other we can achieve more than we can alone. There is power in people just getting together, bodies in space, even if the outcome may not be apparent at the start.

-Amber Landgraff

⁹ Ibid, Pg. 19.

¹⁰ Ibid, Pg. 10.