Engaging Contradictions

Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship

Edited by
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1. Forgotten Places and the Seeds of Grassroots Planning

Ruth Wilson Gilmore

THE MIX

Forgotten places are not outside history. Rather, they are places that have experienced the abandonment characteristic of contemporary capitalist and neoliberal state reorganization. Given the enormous disorder that “organized abandonment” (Harvey 1989, 303) both creates and exploits, how can people who inhabit forgotten places scale up their activism from intensely localized struggles to something less atomized and therefore possessed of a significant capacity for self-determination? How do they set and fulfill agendas for life-affirming social change—whether by seizing control of the social wage or through other means? In this chapter I will conceptualize the kinds of places where prisoners come from and where prisons are built as a single—though spatially discontinuous—abandoned region. I will then present three exemplary facets of the process I am trying to think through by doing and writing, in order to highlight the potential of certain kinds of research. Here indeed is where scholars can make a difference: not because we have technical expertise (although that matters) but rather because we have the precious opportunity to think in cross-cutting ways and to find both promising continuities and productive breaks in the mix of people, histories, political and economic forces, and landscapes that make up forgotten places (Moten 2003; Robinson 1983; see also Hart 2002a).

Why prisons and prisoners? I didn’t turn to the topic because I was driven as a scholar to answer some pressing questions. Rather, the issue hailed me in the early 1990s, when I started to work with some prisoners and their families, and persisted as I pursued a PhD in geography and employment in academia. The entire world of premature death and criminalization was not at all new to me: I’ve had family members who have done time, some of us have been harmed by others, and one of us
has been killed. In short, the problem already, to paraphrase Hall (1980), bit into my existence. But with sometimes surprising intensity during the past decade and a half, my lifelong activism has been mixed into and fixed on the places prisoners come from and the places where prisons are built. In the United States, these people and locations are among the most vulnerable to the “organized abandonment” that accompanies globalization’s large-scale movements of capital and labor, and as such they are subject to many other processes that accumulate in and as forgotten places. Here’s a chicken-egg conundrum: I don’t know whether I think we can find important lessons for making change by studying the margins because I’m a geographer or whether I became a geographer because of how I already thought about contradictions and interfaces. What geography enables is the combination of an innate (if unevenly developed) interdisciplinarity with the field’s central mission to examine the interfaces of the earth’s multiple natural and social spatial forms (Gilmore 2005a).

Greenberg and Schneider’s (1994) “marginal people on marginal lands” suggests the conceptual continuity of forgotten places that I wish both to broaden and specify. People in these locales, exhausted by the daily violence of environmental degradation, racism, underemployment, overwork, shrinking social wages, and the disappearance of whole ways of life and those who lived them, nevertheless refuse to give up hope. What capacities might such people animate, and at what scales, to make the future better than the present? What does better mean? How do people make broadly contested sensibilities—indeed feelings—the basis for political struggle, especially when their social identities are not fixed by characteristics that point toward certain proven patterns (or theories) for action? In terms of prisons and prisoners the goal is double: to find relief for all from the expanding use of cages as all-purpose solutions to social and economic problems and to use the extreme (marginal) case to figure out how social justice activists might reinvigorate an organizational movement after it has spent several decades underground, undertheorized, or under cover of the not-for-profit sector (Incite! 2007).

Forgotten places, then, are both symptomatic of and intimately shaped by crisis. I use crisis in the sense summarized by Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz (1988, 96): it occurs when “the existing social formation can no longer be reproduced on the basis of the pre-existing system of social relations.” Crises are territorial and multiscalar; they overlap and sometimes interlock (see Rodney 1972; Fanon 1961; Soja 1989). At the outset of my studies I learned everything I could about what was happening in urban areas because that was where most prisoners came from. But since
Forgotten Places

they were sent away to new rural prisons it seemed necessary to learn about what drove the lockups’ location and proliferation. In the early 1990s, Thomas Lyson and William Falk (1993) edited Forgotten Places, a volume on uneven development in rural America. Inspired by the editors’ framework, I read closely the arguments they and their colleagues—especially Ted Bradshaw (1993)—had made, and I tried to connect their insights with my own and others’ research on abandoned urban locales (Gooding-Williams 1993; Pulido 2000; Pastor 2001; Smith 1996; Katz 2004). My goal was to connect rural and urban in a nonschematic way.

Especially at a time when urban and rural appear to be self-evidently and perhaps irreconcilably different (as in the “red state”/“blue state” distinction that has come to stand in for real descriptions or explanations of U.S. intranational geopolitics), it seemed important to consider not only how they are connected—an old question for geographers—but also how they are objectively similar. What are the material and ideological linkages that make urban and rural—in some areas of the United States as well as elsewhere—more continuous and less distinct than ordinarily imagined? There are problems with such an approach. One set of them is broadly subjective: What about the self-perception of communities in different kinds of locales, the ways they view other kinds of communities across social and spatial divides, and their understanding of those divides? Another set is material: given that, place by place, past and present pathways and trajectories for capital and labor are often significantly different, can we usefully—even in theory—combine disparate sites into singular objects of scholarly and political action when the decisive motion of productive factors shaping social, political, economic, and physical space might seem necessarily to leave entirely distinctive topographies in their wake (see Katz 2001, 2004)? In short, to make connections raises a number of challenges, which are addressed in the examples given in this chapter.

Urgency and not mere curiosity is involved in scaling up the object of analysis by articulating urban with rural. The urgency has do with the imperative to understand how ordinary people who lack resources but who do not necessarily lack “resourcefulness” (Ganz 2000) develop the capacity to combine themselves into extraordinary forces and form the kinds of organizations that are the foundation of liberatory social movements. Granted the difficulties, where might we find the ground for considering at least some urban and rural forgotten places together—as a single, though spatially discontinuous, abandoned region? There are precedents for such political-theoretical ambitions in many kinds of in-
ternationalism, of which Pan-Africanism is a long-standing and by no means outmoded example (see Lemelle and Kelley 1994; Edwards 2003; Robinson 1983). Perhaps the twentieth century’s most widely lived and influential example was the meeting of nonaligned states in 1955 in Bandung, Indonesia, where debate and planning, rhetoric and material analysis brought the Third World into self-conscious being.²

TOWARD A UNIFIED CONCEPT OF FORGOTTEN PLACE

In previous writing I have used the concept of “gulag” to talk about the places prisoners come from and the places where prisons are built, and I think it works quite well as an indicator and analytical guide. However, it also seems to carry within it a conclusion that is quite the opposite of the actual material and ideological end toward which I have studied prisons so thoroughly: it does not enable description of what else is out there, beyond its margins. What concept might get at the kinds of forgotten places that have been absorbed into the gulag yet exceed them?

In the summer of 2002 I had the good fortune to help conceive of and then attend an amazing workshop called “Globalization and Forgotten Places,” organized by Yong-Sook Lee and Brenda Yeoh at the National University of Singapore. The group convened to share research and also to look for theoretical and methodological assistance to refine our objects of study, analyze them, and think through what might be done about them. As should be evident from the previous discussion, we looked abroad, not because intranational theories and methods are necessarily threadbare, but rather because it struck us, as it has so many others, that if globalization is indeed globalization, we might usefully find convergences at many levels—not solely in the realm of capital concentration or information networks or other typically studied categories. In other words, to take seriously the thinking and actions of generations of internationalists who wish to globalize liberation is in part to take comparison seriously. Comparison is often imagined narrowly to be a statistical or institutional exercise (looking at organizations, practices, outcomes); and while it is indeed a method for discovering crucial distinctions within and between the similar, comparison is also a means for bringing together—or syncretizing—what at first glance seems irreconcilable.

One concept that captured my attention was desakota, a Malay word, meaning “town-country,” that was brought into economic geography by Terry McGee (1991) to designate and think about places that are neither urban nor rural. McGee’s interest was to characterize regions in Indone-
sia and other southeast Asian countries where settlement, economic activity, politics, demographics, and culture belie categorization as “either/or” — ambiguous places in the dominant typology of settlement and sector. This kind of thinking derives from the anticolonial and antiracist work of Third Worldist scholars; from Du Bois (1935) to Rodney (1972), from Nkrumah (1964) to Sivanandan (1982, 1991) and Hall (1976, 1994), the goal has been to compare political, economic, territorial, and ideological valences that distinguish and might unite disparate places shaped by external control or located outside particular developmental pathways (for whatever combination of reasons).

So far, so good; but is the concept mobile? I think it works provisionally for California, but not without some adjustment (as any migration requires). A modified concept of desakota might give us a way to think the-city-and-the-country (and embrace the “Third World”) somewhat freshly without advancing yet another theoretical novelty that stands in for political analysis but is actually only a luxurious evasion of politics (Gilmore 1993; see also Pulido, chapter 13 of this volume). However, freshness is required precisely because inadequate concepts and methods have, as Hart and Sitas (2004) note in their work on and with South African relocation townships, “trapped a large chunk of scholarship into an iron cage of instrumental knowledge and policy recommendations ... sharply at odds with emerging realities” (31).

Desakota indicates a mix that in the California case encompasses the strange combination of sudden settlement changes—urban depopulation along with the establishment of megaprisons on formerly agricultural lands—and the regular circulation of people throughout the entire region without any necessary relation to the formal economy, to the distinct and overlapping political jurisdictions, to the prisons, or even to each other: visitors, prisoners, workers. In addition, desakota helps us situate the rural-and-urban forgotten in a relational as well as linked context. It raises for our consideration how dwellers in the more urban areas combine deep rural roots with participation in formal and informal economies (see Flaming 2006) and even subsistence farming, while many of the more rural dwellers work in what are ordinarily thought of as more urban economic sectors and do periodic or annual circular migrations within and beyond the region. The quality of having been forgotten that materially links such places is not merely about absence or lack. Abandoned places are also planned concentrations or sinks—of hazardous materials and destructive practices that are in turn sources of group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death (which, whether state-sanctioned or extrale-
gal, is how racism works, regardless of the intent of the harms’ producers, who produce along the way racialization and therefore race). Thus California desakota is a mix, a region composed of places linked through coordinated as well as apparently uncoordinated (though by no means random) forces of habitation and change. Hart and Sitas’s (2004) arguments concerning the formation and possible futures of South African relocation townships help deepen this understanding, in part because voluntary and involuntary movements, layering previous rounds of dispossession, domination, and development, make a particular grounding for politics in relation to capital, the multiple scales of the state, and the rest of society; indeed, the point is that these contradictions at the margin are resolved in and as desakota spaces.

In other words, people in forgotten places who lack social or economic mobility, or who simply don’t want to move away, act within and against the constraints of capital’s changing participation in the landscape and the government’s multiscalar and sometimes contradictory struggle to re-legitimize state power through the ideology and practices of an antistate state (Gilmore 2007a; Gilmore and Gilmore 2007) in the ambient atmosphere of neoliberalism (Gilmore 2007b). People in forgotten places also act within the institutional and individualized constraints defined by racialization, gender hierarchy, and nationality, and the complex potential mix of these possibilities has produced its own academic specialties old and new: the various branches of the social sciences, area studies, ethnic studies, gender studies, cultural studies—the latter three dedicated to the study of disabling (in the sense of both debilitating and undoing; see Hart 2002b) constraints.

Constraints does not mean “insurmountable barriers.” However, it does suggest that people use what is available to make a place in the world. In my research I have found that the constraint of crisis becomes a central element in whole ways of life—that having been forgotten is part of a syncretic culture of “betweenness”—of desakota considered not simply as a peculiar spatialization of the economic but also as cultural, social, and political (see Woods 1998, 2002). While the syncretic is no more amenable to change than whatever one can imagine that is not syncretic, the awareness of being “neither/nor,” which is to say the awareness of imminent and ineluctable change that comes with abandonment in new ways and at new scales, opens up the possibility for people to organize themselves at novel resolutions.
PRACTICAL SYNCRETISM

Syncretic, which traces its long English-language usage to observations of surprising religious intermixture, is a term that had a lot of academic cachet about twenty-five or thirty years ago—in studies of religion and other aspects of contact culture—but was less used as hybrid became popular in the 1980s and 1990s. Syncretic appeals more to me than hybrid because it avoids suggesting technical intervention (other than perhaps, in the poetical sense, as in Jerome Rothenberg’s [1969] Technicians of the Sacred). More importantly, it downplays any presumption of prior purity and instead emphasizes a more active and general practice through which people use what they have to craft ad hoc and durable modes for living and for giving meaning to—interpreting, understanding—life. Indeed, Brackette Williams (1989) has long argued that all cultures are contact cultures. In any event, syncretism denotes qualities key to crafting the kinds of motivated methodologies that enable the continuum of scholarly research as political experimentation.

If we see in a syncretic approach to research and activism provisional resolutions—some more lasting than others—to contradictions and challenges, then we might imagine that the concept is charged at the outset by a particular kind of questioning. Syncretism has a purpose, and asking questions that enable it is part of the challenge of doing research well. This thinking flies in the face of some academic disciplining, even in avowedly interdisciplinary formations. The either/or boundary drawing that secures academic practices and jobs is not inherently useless; it is silly to suggest that the powerful forces of the liberal arts and professions, organized for good, for not-so-good, and for straight-up evil over the last two centuries, could be characterized as thoroughly weak today. But as universities on a global scale struggle through what seem to be endless crises of accumulation of enough students, endowments, and prestige, the retreat into disciplines, no less than the formal (but frequently not real) embrace of “interdisciplinarity,” seems to foreshadow if not prove widespread irrelevance, which is exactly (although not exclusively or uniquely) what the activist scholar is not about.

The syncretic compels us to think about problems, and the theories and questions adequate to them, in terms of what I have called their stretch, resonance, and resilience. With a focus on questions, let’s take each in turn (from Gilmore 2005b):

- **Stretch** enables a question to reach further than the immediate object without bypassing its particularity—rather than merely
asking a community, “Why do you want this development project?” one asks, “What is development?”

- **Resonance** enables a question to support and model nonhierarchical collective action by producing a hum that, by inviting strong attention, elicits responses that do not necessarily adhere to already existing architectures of sense making. Ornette Coleman’s harmolodics exemplify how such a process makes participant and audience a single, but neither static nor closed, category (Rycenga 1992).

- **Resilience** enables a question to be flexible rather than brittle, such that changing circumstances and surprising discoveries keep a project connected with its purpose rather than defeated by the unexpected. For example, the alleged relationship between contemporary prison expansion and slavery falls apart when the question describes slavery in terms of uncompensated labor because very few of the 2.2 million prisoners in the United States work for anybody while locked in cages. But the relationship remains provocatively stable when the question describes slavery in terms of social death and asks how and to what end a category of dehumanized humans is made from peculiar combinations of dishonor, alienation, and violent domination (Patterson 1982; Gordon 2006).

If we assume that identities are changed through action and struggle, what sort of political-economic and cultural projects can draw enthusiastic participation from both rural and urban residents and forge among them a new vision? The term desakota highlights the structural and lived relationship between marginal people and marginal lands in both urban and rural contexts and raises the urgent question of how to scale up political activity from the level of hyperlocal, atomized organizations to the level of regional coalitions working for a common purpose, partly because their growing understanding of their sameness trumps their previously developed beliefs in their irreconcilable differences. Insofar as regions are economic as well as cultural and geopolitical units of analysis, this essay will, by depicting a combination of experimental and ethnographic insights, identify ways in which research combines with the actions of everyday people to shift the field of struggle and thus reorganize both their own consciousness and the concentration and uses of social wealth in “forgotten places.”
THE PROCESS IN THE TERRITORY

Joining Forces: Stretch

Politically, a solid but supple mix of aims and people is hard to achieve, and very often its categorical contingencies (some will do X but not Y; others will support A but never B) make it far too brittle to withstand the wear and tear of sustained and purposeful practical movement. A tiresomely overdeveloped take on leftist politics argues that the twentieth-century failure of solidarity to endure in the long run should be laid at the door of something the critics call “identity politics.” What they seem to mean is antiracist politics, or antisexist politics; and often what they really mean, given the examples they choose, is that Black people or women of all races interrupted and messed up class politics in favor of “militant particularism.” That is a pretty silly view for a number of reasons, most of which are well grounded in the evidence of what happened to whom and why. It is also a stupid view, given that capitalism has regularly encountered its “sternest negation” (Robinson 1983) from peoples organized according to a number of principles at once, including antiracism and anticolonialism. A more useful critique of identity complicates its subjective qualities (noting, for example, that class is also an identity rather than an ontology), shows how the complexity operates (as in Hall’s [1980b] exquisite “Race is . . . the modality through which class is lived”), and reveals the contradictory ways in which identities fracture and reform in the crucibles of state and society, public and private, home and work, violence and consent (see, e.g., Alexander 1994; Omi and Winant 1986; Ransby 2006; Kelley 2002).

In other words, if race is the modality through which class is lived, but not voluntarily, then the official codes, habits, and institutions, and the military, immigration officers, and other police who maintain order (sometimes through producing a mess to be endlessly fixed up), have a lot to do with the production and reproduction of ways of being in the world (Kim 1999; Brown 1994). It is frightfully unpopular to talk about how top-down identity ascription operates, or even that it is meaningful. A decade ago, during a seminar on the politics of reproduction, the brilliant Nuyorican scholar activist Caridad Souza rolled her eyes and whispered to me, “If one more of these workshop-feminists says ‘agency’ I’m going to choke her.” Within seconds someone uttered the offending word; eschewing nonproductive violence, Souza soon quit academia’s ranks. The point here is not that “agency” is an unimportant concept but rather, as I have argued elsewhere, that it is too often used as if it designated an ex-
inclusive attribute of oppressed people in their struggle against an opponent called “structure” (Gilmore 2007). Such a dichotomy doesn’t stand up to how the world actually works. Structures are both the residue of agency (Glassman 2003) and animated by agential capacities, while the modes in which ordinary people organize to relieve the pressures that kill them and their kin are, or become, structural—especially insofar as they draw from, and operate through, relationships that can only be called structural as well (familial, religious, cultural, etc.; see, e.g., Fernandes 1997). Racialization works—vertically and horizontally—through the contradictory processes of structure-agency. Change certainly makes more sense when perceived this way (see Du Bois [1935] for a detailed exposition of structure-agency dialectics in the post–Civil War South). Here, then, we stretch in a couple of directions, both in terms of generalization (to think of key concepts such as structure and agency in relation to each other), and in terms of what we must think about to think at all well.

In February 2001, a group of people trying to figure out how to stop construction of a prison in Delano, California, organized Joining Forces, a conference for environmental justice and antiprison activists. The purpose for the meeting was to develop strategies for mixing issues, understanding, and campaigns throughout the desakota of California’s prison region. While it did not for them bear the Malay name, the region theorized in this chapter was becoming increasingly visible to the conference organizers, in part because they had taken seriously the scholarship of Mary Pardo (1998), Laura Pulido (1996), myself (Gilmore 1998, 1999), and others; they had learned about the workings of environmental law and environmental justice (Cole and Foster 2001; Bullard 1990); and they were persuaded that the only way to stop the prison would be to build an extensive coalition whose convergence centered on principles other than “Not in My Backyard” (see Braz and Gilmore 2006).

In addition, some of the conference organizers had traveled in the area surrounding the proposed prison in the preceding couple of years, retracing my earlier research path and also following the spatial patterns laid out by United Farm Workers campaigns and emergency relief, by environmental justice cases, and by whoever serendipitously contacted the tiny, all-volunteer California Prison Moratorium Project via its Web site or answering machine. They had learned from grassroots activists in small towns (many of whom thought of themselves, not as activists at all, but rather as concerned citizens, residents, parents, farmers, farmworkers, immigrants, schoolchildren) that attention to what created the continuity of urban and rural—what we might call here its structural betweenness—
was crucial to understanding prison proliferation (California Prison Moratorium Project 2006; see also Gilmore and Gilmore 2004). The organizers had held a miniconference of urban and rural organizers a year earlier and had learned that unlikely organizations and alliances could be created through persuasively appealing to a shifting range of subjectivities differentially located in the wider desakota’s political, productive, and problem-riddled landscapes.

The conference featured a series of panels in which activists talked about how they had come to encounter, identify, understand, and solve the problems where they lived. To build a coalition, the conference organizers wanted to establish that prisons constitute environmental harms both for the places where prisoners come from and the places where prisons are built: prisons wear out people and places, and that exhaustion has lethal consequences. There were lunchtime breakout sessions organized topically and an open microphone plenary, so that individuals and organizations who had found their way to the conference but hadn’t been placed on the formal agenda could speak. The final segment was a planning workshop in which conference participants broke into groups and tried to brainstorm alternative outcomes to life-harming situations (prisons, toxic waste, etc.) that could be realized given what the participants already some idea of how to do or control.

In the first part of the program, each speaker described what their group did and how they had achieved success. A group of immigrant farmworkers, mostly indigenous Mixtec speakers from Oaxaca in south central Mexico, had forced Chevron to clean up the murderous toxic wastes that poisoned their colonia outside Fresno. An East Los Angeles group of mostly Mexicana women with green cards had stopped a state prison in their neighborhood and, tracing the roots of school leaving that make children vulnerable to criminalization, had also stopped environmentally harmful industrial production and transport in their community. An East Palo Alto group of people who had been in prison had organized a community-based, non-cop-controlled live-work-treatment facility to help people stay away from prisons and other death-dealing institutions and materials. As these activists spoke, what became increasingly clear was the ways in which they had all encountered, and tried to prevail against, the state-sanctioned and or extralegal production or exploitation of their own group’s vulnerability to premature death. A coalition of antiprison and environmental activists brought suit under the California Environmental Quality Act, charging that the proposed prison would harm Delano in a number of ways not dealt with in the official en-
vironmental analysis that could, nevertheless, be partly understood in terms of environmental justice. In stretching both the object and the analysis from their parochial struggles to the entire range of struggles represented in the room, conference attendees began to recognize that—objectively—they and their places shared a family resemblance that needed further investigation.

The cooperation that came out of the conference might be viewed as multicultural organizing in today’s dominant lexicon of cooperation and difference; or it might be viewed as something else. In 1970s and 1980s Britain, in response to the various forces unleashed by Enoch Powell’s 1968 “Rivers of Blood” speech, various postcolonials of different generations living in the metropole came together as Black—not African, Black—Britain. A bottom-up politics of recognition in the face of threatened annihilation enhanced a syncretic rescaling of identity for these people, even though the novel category directly conflicted with the statistical identities that had officially divided them (see Smith and Katz 1993).

In the United States today, white people suffering from a concentration of environmental harms in some rural communities have learned to call what is happening “environmental racism” without imagining that they are somehow excluding themselves from the analysis and instead feeling whiteness peel away in the context of their vulnerability. This stretched understanding of racism enables vulnerable people to consider the ways in which harmful forces might be disciplined and harms remedied (rather than areally redistributed—or concentrated out of sight). Race does not disappear; in some instances, reworking race reveals its structural essence to be residue rather than destiny. At least potentially, such a stretch evades (if it cannot quite preclude) any imagined necessity for desakota countercoherence to pattern itself according to logics of victim and punishment rather than to tend toward the pleasure of life-affirming political and cultural practice.

Indeed, it was for the future that the conference participants gathered, laboring in triple shifts (work at the job, work at home, work for justice). But lest the reader say, “Ah ha! What you’ve described is what the workshop feminists mean by ‘agency,’” I’d like to take the analysis a bit further. That is, if these participants found a provisionally syncretic identity by comparing their efforts and aims, they also had to re-form the ambitions of their organizations and struggle with mission statements, funding streams, and other boundaries that have enabled many groups working for justice to achieve formal/legal recognition of the legitimacy of their characteristics and objectives. The structures they have come to in-
habit in the shadow of the “shadow state” (Gilmore 2007b) enable certain kinds of creativity and achievement but stifle other kinds of association. As a result, organizations become competitive and use comparison to create distances rather than alliances with other organizations. This is a product of many connected practices and the result of specialization and professionalization in oppositional political work (see Gilmore 2007b). That such narrowing occurred in response to capital’s twentieth-century counter-revolution—which was downright murderous and ultimately resulted in the criminalization of entire generations and communities and practices—goes much farther than the postulation of some prior sentimental or uncritical attachment to an extraeconomic “identity” in explaining the brittleness of political mixes in the present moment. Organizations became “legal” under the rules of the Internal Revenue Service to pursue justice, whereas earlier they had used “the legal” as a tool to pursue justice.

The people who met at the Delano conference and in similarly ad hoc gathering places (such as prison parking lots and seasonal workplaces) are at once way out on the edge and keenly aware of what they have to lose: they have endured Jim Crow, Japanese American internment, farm fascism,5 NAFTA. Their marginality is not simply metaphorical but rather a feature of a spatial dilemma. Their consciousness is a product of vulnerability in space coupled with unavoidable and constant movement through space (an inversion, if you will, of gated communities and full-service suburban malls, but based in related conditions and logics). Indeed, the desakota region is all about the movement of resources—whether transfers of meager social wealth from public sectors (welfare to domestic warfare) or migration of persons (voluntarily or not) intraregionally or across supraregional spaces to amass remittances that, once sent, counter the apparently unidirectional concentration of wealth. Indeed, all of this movement makes the desakota a region of dynamic betweenness—not in dominant development’s terms of “catching up” or “falling behind,” but rather in the sense that it is the shadow, echo, enabler, and resolution of “globalization.” Also, because of their constant motion (which is not the same as “mobility”), people who live in the “between” have a strong sense of it as simultaneously a temporary and a fixed reality. At a general level, they share a sense of possibility based in the necessity for change (which they enact through a-periodic migrations through the region), and their frequent changes of place demand—objectively and subjectively—a respatialization of the social. This, rather than any automatic recognition based in racial or ethnic categories, forms
the basis for syncretizing previously separate political movements. They
don’t transcend, they mix; and it takes a lot of debate, strangely hostile at
first because based in narrowly defined ascriptions of difference, for the
mixing to happen among such disparate actors as long-distance migrants
from indigenous Mexico, African Americans, immigrant women in male-
donated Mexican American households, and so on. All of their learning
is based in skepticism as well as reflection, as is the case with all strong
scholarly inquiry, and the outcome is as good as its ability to be repro-
duced throughout the region and to produce the conditions for new and
useful outcomes.

*The Mismeasure of Man: Resonance*

In the mid-1980s, when prison expansion was the latest thing, designed to
secure the ideological legitimacy of the advancing neoliberal antistate
state by dispersing that state’s sturdy presence via the proliferation of
cages throughout its expanding gulag (Gilmore 2007a), locations willing
to take on these monstrosities in the hope of jobs were awarded
significant signing bonuses in the form of “mitigation” funds that could
be used to make local infrastructural improvements. At the same time,
given the rhetorical urgency with which the claim for endlessly increas-
ing cages was made, federal and state environmental review requirements
were sometimes waived—thus further developing the public’s perception
that “crime” was the paramount harm that any individual or family
might encounter. By the early 1990s, however, once the antistate state
found itself on firm footing, communities throughout the *desakota* re-
gion looking for industries of last resort found themselves back where
they had long been—as petitioners of rather than partners in the prison
boom. That meant the bonuses evaporated, as did most other demands
host towns might make. Representatives of these communities’ local de-
velopment bodies might easily identify with the words of an industry-
seeking mayor of Ladysmith, a South African relocation township, who
declared to his constituenty: “[W]e go kneeling to beg. It is difficult to
beg a person and put conditions” (Hart 2002b, 23).

A prison is a city that weighs heavily on the place where it is. The
thousands of people who live and work there make environmental and in-
frastructural demands on the surrounding area that are not offset by the
prison’s integration into the locality’s economic, social, or cultural life. A
prison is a political weight that, in a lightly populated jurisdiction, can
reconfigure legislative representation by plumping up a district’s size be-
cause prisoners (who cannot vote) are counted where they are held
Forgotten Places

(Wagner 2002), and it can tip the electoral balance as well because relatively well-paid prison staff can and do support or oppose local candidates even though they do not live in the district. A prison is also heavy in part because it is a “dead city” (cf. Davis 2003; Mumford 1968, ch. 1), built and staffed for the singularly unproductive purpose of keeping civilly dead women and men in cages for part or all of their lives. James O’Connor (1973) rightly designates spending on prisons and other policing functions as “social expense”—nonproductive outlays that do not, under any mode of accumulation, enhance the present or future capacity of a place to grow and prosper the way “social investment” does. Besides wages, a prison’s biggest expenditures are for utilities, which are not locally owned. What do prisons produce besides wave after wave of unhappy involuntary residents? An extremely poor yield of local jobs, mostly because competitive wages enlarge the labor market across space and skill (Hooks et al. 2004); the negative effects of anticipatory investment and disinvestment in residential and retail real property; no retail activity; few new residents, lots of traffic as workers come and go; the destruction of both prime agricultural land and endangered-species habitat; and sewage (see California Prison Moratorium Project 2006; Gilmore 2007a). No wonder the bended knee has difficulty straightening out.

Because the residents of prospective prison towns lack political and economic clout (as is true of all localities that turn to industries of last resort), it is not surprising that even as the evidence has accumulated putting the lie to prisons as economic engines, the normalization of prisons as an unending need has caused the urgency-fueled mitigation-dollar largesse to evaporate. Yet prison boosters and prison department public relations personnel have continued to insist that lockups are good for local economies: recession proof and environmentally friendly. Ironically, however, as the urgency of the rhetoric about the need for prisoners has diminished and prisons have been viewed more as being—although public and nonproductive—just like any other industry, it has become easier to criticize the practice of environmental review waiver. From the early 1990s onward, environmental reviews have been produced for state and federal lockups in desakota California fairly consistently.6

The Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP), no less than the California Department of Corrections (CDC), has been on a long-term building binge—famously because of Reagan-era (1980s) and Clinton-endorsed (1990s) drug laws carrying mandatory minimum sentences, but also because starting in the mid-1980s the FBOP began planning to lock up more and more immigrants who the Department of Justice forecast would
be convicted of crimes. The expanded federal capacity is not part of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention centers; rather, it exemplifies the general trend by the antistate state to use criminalization to “solve” problems, particularly the problem of how the rhetoric of “state-lite” can be coordinated with what is actually happening: the constant evolution of a bigger and more coercive state apparatus run by a strong executive branch (which includes policing and prisons). In 2000 the FBOP published its third Criminal Alien Requirements III (CAR) Request for Proposal for sites in California. A number of towns submitted letters of intent asking to be considered. Some towns withdrew from consideration after they learned from other towns or through their own diligence that the wear and tear of a federal prison would far outweigh any imagined benefit.

One city manager produced his own study (McHenry 2001), which he shared with a group of my undergraduates who had decided to find out why a town would first embrace and then reject the prison solution. His data and analysis made it obvious to him that the meager benefits would accrue elsewhere, where prison employees lived and shopped. In fact, he tried to form a strategic tax alliance with the nearby larger city that would claim most prison employee residence and consumption, but the last thing the larger city was going to do—especially in an age of devolution and boundary tightening—was open the door to other petitioners hoping for a share in the social wage (Gilmore 2007a; see also Cameron 2006).

The FBOP decided to look more closely at two Fresno County towns that stayed in the running—Orange Cove and Mendota. In both towns the elected and appointed leadership were united in their boosterism. The FBOP got to work on the Environmental Impact Statement, which turned out to be a thousand pages of a stylistic hodgepodge of technical description and evaluation that concluded Mendota would be the preferred location. During this time, organizers tried to spread the news that economic benefits would not be forthcoming from a prison, while other harms might ensue. However, constituting audiences to make the argument proved very difficult. The environmental review process provided both topic and method to reach people. Since environmental reviews look at a range of impacts—in theory raising concerns before harms occur—and since they require public comment, they are potentially useful means for publishing findings that would not reach people—vertically or horizontally—by other means.
In the classic analysis of racist science *The Mismeasure of Man*, Stephen Jay Gould (1981) reworked a number of experiments and scrutinized the underlying evidence that supported an array of biological justifications for the political, social, and economic marginalization of certain of the world’s people. The book had a second life a few years before the author’s untimely death, when Herrnstein and Murray’s heinous *Bell Curve* (1994) commanded front-page coverage in newspapers, book reviews, magazines, and other opinion-producing media. Gould put the basic scientific practice of redoing experiments to practical political use. From his exploration of cranial capacity to his later demolition of Herrnstein and Murray’s cheap statistics, Gould used the resonance of already produced knowledge—including its origins as well as its circulation—to highlight the intentionally destructive purposes occasioning the original research. He could reach audiences because of his status as a Harvard professor who wrote books (such as *Mismeasure*) for popular consumption. People invited him to speak. He demolished Herrnstein and Murray and others wherever he went.

The environmental review allowed for a modest version of Gould’s labor. Taking the environmental review apart piece by piece, a patient researcher could get to the bottom of the data (often with no more technical assistance than a glossary and a calculator) and choose a few high-profile areas to challenge. The next step was to help a number of people speak to the issues in the required public comment periods, both orally at hearings and in writing. The public comment at hearings enabled organizers to meet the few members of the Mendota community who knew about the prison; most supported it and a few were in opposition. At that time it was already possible to present to city officials proof that their claims for the prison would not be realized. Those nonreturns were in, and people from throughout the region could come to testify that a prison would not provide the benefits that the review had enthusiastically insisted it would.

After one of the hearings I approached the city manager, and we had a reasonably cordial conversation in which I told him that he knew very well that the prison could not and would not do what he and other city leaders claimed. He replied that he knew but that he’d been hired, at a generous salary, to bring the town a prison. Unlike that off-the-record exchange, liable to he-said-she-said dismissal, the authors of an environmental review must address the concerns and criticisms of every letter and oral statement. As a result, it became possible to get into the official record written acknowledgment that prisons are not economic engines or otherwise fiscally benevolent. And through publishing—that is, making
available—both research and critiques of research in a publicly accessible place, we could persuade the county rural redevelopment agency to deny Mendota money to build water infrastructure for the prison, on the basis of the conclusion that the residents would not get jobs or other benefits. The city was instructed by redevelopment to come back with a development plan that would actually help the town’s 95 percent Latino residents, who were a mix of second- and third-generation Chicanos, Mexicans, Salvadorans, and other Central Americans—some with green cards and even more without documents authorizing them to work. The boosters did not reflect the full demographic, only the Anglo and Chicano power elite. The divisions with the community highlight the complex processes of racialization and the fact that mutual political recognition between groups may produce fractures as well as identification.

Both the thousand-page English-language document and the hearings—in which translation was not available and Spanish testimony was not transcribed—became the focus of a sustained campaign because 90 percent of the city’s households used Spanish as the primary language. The problem of language resonates in many ways throughout desakota California. In a number of other campaigns against locally unwanted land uses (incinerators, toxic dumps) or on behalf of life-enhancing infrastructure (such as wells drilled deeply enough to bypass the pesticide-poisoned upper aquifer), communities have fought against their linguistic exclusion from the decision-making process. In many places (as has been true throughout U.S. history from west to east), English is not the primary language. In addition, certain kinds of technical prose obscure the contents and consequences of land use changes. In South Central Los Angeles, a site that was home to a fourteen-acre urban garden had been slated to be used for toxic waste. Organizers fought against the dump, mobilizing around a number of themes, including the fact that the reports were unreadable. In fact, the reports were barely literate by any measure, perhaps less because of jargon than because of the way these extensive documents merely fulfilled the law in letter but not in spirit. The documents’ militant illiteracy suggests that a narrowly technocratic solution (e.g., hiring an ecologist for every community) will not solve the larger problem of civic engagement when the antistate state’s purpose is to minimize such engagement. For Mendota, the FBOP eventually drafted a ten-page Spanish-language “executive summary” of the report that focused entirely on the alleged benefits of the prison for the community.

A young organizer from the region canvassed Mendota door to door, eventually meeting several people who agreed to host a house party to
discuss the environmental review. They had been organizing among farmworkers and therefore were aware of both risks and opportunities. A surprising number of people came on a weekday evening, and they crowded into a tiny living room with food to share and kids too young to leave at home. The discussion led by two organizers met at first with mild interest as people passed around the short Spanish-language summary. But when one of the organizers pulled the thousand-page document from behind his back, the room’s atmosphere changed. Everyone started talking and trading stories about how the same thing had happened in a friend or relative’s town. Communication networks in desakota California work according to a variety of logics, with constantly shifting workplaces, parishes, supratown union locals, and kin groups all contributing to the richness of exchange. Convinced that a wrong had been perpetrated as it habitually was against people like themselves, they collectively composed a letter of protest. It was written out in Spanish by hand on ruled theme paper signed by dozens of households—all vulnerable to eviction or employment reprisal from prison proponents—and sent to Washington, D.C.

The FBOP refused to honor the demand that the full environmental review be translated, insisting that it could not “be translated because it is scientific material.” Wouldn’t they be surprised in Salamanca! Their refusal was based in what Gould had spent a good deal of his life debunking: racist science that both encourages and justifies the sacrifice of human lives. Such science—which is ahistorical in willfully ignorant as well as methodologically negligent ways—seeks to make both reasonable and inevitable the concentration of locally unwanted land uses where people are most vulnerable to them. The natural and social science practices that underlie the building of the antistate state deliberately ignore the cumulative effects of atmospheric and other toxins, as well as the cumulative impacts of debilitating social policies and economic policies (see Braz and Gilmore 2006), whether these policies and outcomes be pesticide drift, expensive or poisoned water, the hunting down of immigrants, bad schooling, racial profiling, intensive policing, or incinerators spewing dioxin.

One afternoon not long ago, the adults who mobilized against the prison rode buses and vans back from a day in the fields and marched, with their children, from the high school to a park for a rally. Many of these people live lives that circulate throughout desakota California and beyond. Most of them are immigrants without documents, but in spite of—or because of—that vulnerability they are willing to participate in the mix and even rally side by side with growers whose opposition to the
prison is not yet tempered by an anti-NIMBY consciousness. Indeed, much to everyone’s surprise, they have been willing to keep fighting even though construction has begun at the now controversial site. Like the participants in the 2001 conference, these women, men, and young people are simultaneously looking for and creating a guide to action through embodied political experimentation—to theorize or map or plan their way out of the margins.

**The Charrette: Resilience**

Industries of last resort materially congeal displacement and defer to other places and times real resolutions of economic, social, and technological problems. Such deferral is not respectful but rather exploitative, and those who live in the shadows of such industries, as prisoners or workers or residents, become what a reformed white-supremacist lifer named himself and the white and of-color others who took part in a prison rebellion several years ago: a convict race (Lynd 2004). In today’s intransigent rebiologization of difference, race has been again characterized as being in the blood—the genetic determinant of life chances. Yet at the same time the social processes of racialization—carried out through warfare against Third World immigrants, Muslims, African American men, street kids—are apparent. So far we have seen that the deep divisions between vulnerable people are not necessarily an impediment, that people get past certain barriers because they have an already developed sense of the perils and promise of movement, that the practice of circulating within regions underlies potential interpretations of possibility and alliance, and finally that multiply rooted people have a sense of the ways that “elsewhere” is simultaneously “here” (another way of saying that “I is an Other”).

When organizers against industries of last resort take to the road, they constantly meet a reasonable question: If not this, then what? In fact, in left-ish discourse in the United States, an insistence that “winnable” solutions be proposed along with problems has become dominant. This dominance is in part an outgrowth of the professionalization of activism of all kinds and its formalization in not-for-profits, which are regularly required to generate “work products” to satisfy funders that the groups are doing what they say they will do. The “what-is-the-solution” imperative is also an outgrowth of the twentieth-century ascendance of the technocrat, specially skilled in breaking problems down into parts and solving them piecemeal. The trouble with technocracy, affecting engaged research and not-for-profit-based political experimentation, is that narrowness of-
ten stands in for specificity (and questions lose stretch and resonance along the way). Thus the long struggle to shrink the U.S. prison system through nonreformist reforms has sometimes been undermined by the technocratic imagination stifling work intended to advance the cause. For example, some advocacy research has narrowed the question “How do we shrink prisons?” to “How can we get some women out of prison?” and has ignored the facts—supported by experience—that the women released might wind up in jails or other lockups, or that the arguments advocated on behalf of decarcerating women might deepen and widen the net in which men and boys are captured and kept.

Yet since activist road shows consistently encounter the question, they have to engage it as well as deconstruct it. Otherwise, the culture of human sacrifice kicks in, and what seems as reasonable as demanding a fully formed alternative is embracing the deferral of problems regardless of cost. For example, after I presented remarks on a plenary called “Militarization, the Economics of War, and Cultures of Violence” at the 2003 National Council for Research on Women’s “Borders, Babies, and Bombs” conference, an Anglo retired career military woman scolded me that my antimilitarism was bad for young Black women, who develop leadership skills in the armed forces. She turned her back and strode off when I refused to agree that there was no better venue for such development outside the industrialized killing sector or that planning and carrying out the death of other people’s children was an appropriate source of self-worth and livelihood for anybody.

Another error is double-edged: that vulnerable communities need mobile specialists who tell them what to do, yet at the same time have a completely thought-through revolutionary sensibility merely waiting to be set free by some visitors. This error recapitulates in two directions the bad thinking that posits structure and agency as opposites in ongoing struggles for self-determination. But if self-determination is a goal, and if desakota California, like anywhere else, is made by people but not under conditions of their own choosing, then a real engagement of people’s creative thinking mixed with locally or externally available understandings of political and economic possibilities and constraints may be a way of getting at the question “If not this, then what.” In other words, the question becomes resilient and depends on people’s immediate and longer-range engagement—their own resilience—to realize any outcome.

In the winter of 2002, during a long-term decline in the number of women in California state prisons, the CDC closed one of its three new women’s prisons, moving the eight hundred women kept there into big-
ger lockups. When the department originally sited the facility just east of Stockton in San Joaquin County in the mid-1980s, local boosters could and did “put conditions” to the CDC, which included that the prisoners be women and that the number locked up not exceed eight hundred. One way the county imposed restrictions was through the conditional-use permit—a standard instrument used to divide a territory into districts for different uses and to control the ways in which particular uses might change over time. This, in addition to mitigation funds, allowed the Anglo power elite to approve siting a prison in a former peach orchard.

Shortly after the prison closed, the CDC announced several possible reuses for the site: it could become a men’s prison or a training facility for new guards, or it could be traded for some federal real estate and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) could redevelop the site as an immigrant detention center. Two Valley-based California Prison Moratorium Project organizers set themselves the task of creating a bottom-up movement against all these uses. They relied on research done by my former undergraduates at the University of California at Berkeley that the students decided to share, as well as research done as an academic studio course by graduate students in Berkeley’s College of Natural Resources, to get a sense of what had happened in political jurisdictions and at the community level and where organizing might fit in.

The organizers learned that the chamber of commerce had opposed reopening the site as a prison, principally because in the nearly two decades since prison had seemed the only possible economic diversification scheme—to complement declining agriculture—the spread of residential hinterlands from the Bay Area and Sacramento put Stockton into a preferred development path of suburbanization (another in-between phenomenon, not dealt with in this chapter). They also learned that some rising members of the city and county political class wished to use the fate of the site as a method to weaken the long-standing domination of the political elites. These newcomers were not necessarily opposed to prison, but they were opposed to decision making behind closed doors that excluded them. Finally, researchers saw that the demographic mix of Stockton was much like the rest of desakota California and that although agriculture was not the area’s sole economic engine it still figured prominently in the political economy of the place.

The Latino organizers, one an immigrant whose principal activity had centered on immigrant rights and the other a multigeneration Central Valley Chicana whose work had ranged widely, including to the margins of the Democratic Party, determined that the best way to get a sense of
the lay of the land would be to hold a grassroots hearing about the site. They worked closely with a number of immigrants’ rights organizers to reach out to farm and other low-wage workers. They also worked their connections in formal political associations to invite representatives of the rising political class to attend the session.

The meeting was announced for 6:00 p.m. At 5:55 the room was fairly empty except for Prison Moratorium Project members, elected officials’ representatives, and leadership from a local of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), some immigrants’ rights organizations, and the Stockton League of Women Voters. It looked like a bust. But in the five minutes between the observation of failure and the time the proceedings were to begin, the room filled—mostly with Spanish-speaking workers. It was apparent that people had come to the neighborhood where the meeting was announced and had waited and scouted to see whether it was another of many ICE stings. ICE had been rounding up workers in an intense but random fashion throughout desakota California, and this meeting could have easily been such a trap. Once people came they stayed, and although I was there I cannot speak to how they would have secured themselves against an ICE invasion should one have occurred.

The organizers brilliantly invited the elected officials’ representatives to sit in the front of the room, facing the audience, arguing that it would be useful for constituents to see them and that they need not speak but could just sit and listen. Good drama. The hearing was well orchestrated, involving a number of people who each spoke for three or four minutes condemning the reuse of the women’s prison as a lockup for any purpose. Speakers of course directed their comments to the front of the room. At the end of the hearing, several representatives from Architects and Planners for Social Responsibility, who had been brought in by the Prison Moratorium Project to help set the stage to answer the expected question “If not this, then what?” invited the audience to attend a planning workshop in the same location the following month.

Since that time several community planning workshops, or charrettes, have been held in Stockton, in which people consider the prison buildings and site from every angle and propose their renovation for schools, museums, training centers, and other social investment uses. The charrettes have enabled people to think about the ways in which social investment works and the political levels at which the purse strings are held, by whom, and how tightly. Where are openings that ordinary people can enter to grasp and redirect a portion of the social wage?
As was seen in the previous section, not all resources that pour into a prison to build it come from a single source. The U.S. state is a jumble of jurisdictions that have been newly federalized in the past twenty-five years. Some of the jurisdictions form a mosaic (as in the counties and states), some overlie others (counties and cities), and some are special-purpose regional governments (e.g., for air quality or water). The unfunded devolution (or respatialization) of certain responsibilities, particularly in the area of social welfare programs, has caused many to think the state is no longer a crucial object of analysis. But if the object of the current analysis is at all correctly conceptualized, it seems more rather than less important to engage with the state at every turn. Certainly, devolution has produced belt tightening and boundary defending by many jurisdictions, and it underlies the widening bifurcation of all of California into richer and poorer (Gilmore and Gilmore 2007).

The charrette outcome can be turned to many uses, and planners have developed a volume to show what they are (Lennertz and Lutzenheiser 2006). The resilience of planning, its reworking into the landscape of community action through both workshops and other kinds of political engagement, enables the creative imagination that self-determination requires. Around the United States, communities in other desakota regions have developed and implemented plans to revitalize shrunken economies in which revised values of place as the repository and resolution of skills, talents, and preferences enable concentrations of resources that, in the shadow of industries of last resort, seem scarce indeed. For example, in South Georgia a consortium of counties reorganized agriculture, food processing, and transportation to enable farmers to keep farming but not grow tobacco. They cobbled together sufficient collective capital from a wide array of public and other sources, finding in surprising corners of statutes and foundations resources that they could use to buy and build what they needed, transforming the landscape and therefore themselves. In the short run, everyone owns everything needed for processing and product movement, and everyone has also kept individual title to the small farms that they nearly wore out with tobacco. Similar counties that did not scale up or otherwise plan in developmentally imaginative ways have prisons and other industries of last resort. In Louisiana, families and friends of imprisoned young people fought to close down the murderous lockup and send the children home; they then continued fighting to have the site renovated and reopened as a community college. In these and other examples, the details of learning to make the future have animated rather than daunted the resilience of those who ask, “If not this, then
what?” By deferring, if not defeating, the proliferation of industries of last resort, they have set a standard and created a context through which the material and ideological margins—*desakota* space—might be syncretically renovated to secure the future.

The purpose of this chapter has been to think through both how to conceptualize a particular mix of socio-spatial relationships and how to operationalize engaged scholarship that matters. Forgotten places are historical geographies animated by real people. As fractured collectivities that are abandoned, yet intensely occupied by the antistate state, these “between” or marginal places might be understandable as a singular region, spatially discontinuous, that is neither urban or rural but in some way a version of *desakota*. How does the practice of engaged scholarship necessarily and ethically change the ideological and material field of struggle? If the fact of observation produces reality (not merely *afterwards*, as a representational artifact, but *during*, as a lived dimension of the field itself), then there are various kinds of work that a scholar might undertake in the mix.

Engaged scholarship and accountable activism share the central goal of constituting audiences both within and as an effect of observation, discovery, analysis, and presentation. Persuasion is crucial at every step. Neither engagement nor accountability has meaning without expanding recognition of how a project can best flourish in the mix. As a result, and to get results, scholar activism always begins with the politics of recognition (Gilmore 1999). Whatever its ultimate purpose, the primary organizing necessary to take a project from concept to accomplishment (and tool) is constrained by people’s practices of identification, fluidly laden with the differences and continuities of characteristics, interests, and purpose through which they contingently produce their individual and collective selves (Hall 1994; Gilmore 1999). Such cultural (or ideological) work connects with, reflects, and shapes the material (or political-economic) relations enlivening a locality as a place that both links with and represents (as an example or outpost) other places at a variety of time-space resolutions—global, regional, postcolonial, et cetera (Massey 1984). So here is another conundrum: it is *consistently* true that the engaged scholar of whatever political conviction works in the unavoidable context of dynamics that force her into self-conscious *inconsistency*; she must at times confirm and at times confront barriers, boundaries, and scales (Gilmore 2007a; Katz 2004; Loyd 2005). This is treacherous territory for all who wish to rewrite the world. Plenty of bad research (engaged or not) is pro-
duced for all kinds of reasons, and plenty of fruitless organizing is undertaken with the best intentions. Activist scholarship attempts to intervene in a particular historical-geographical moment by changing not only what people do but also how all of us think about ourselves and our time and place, by opening the world we make.

NOTES

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1. I have written an entire book about this (Gilmore 2007a), but the work is far from done.

2. There is plenty of criticism about the Third World as an actual political-economic antidependent formation, and I do not dismiss the critics’ learning and insights. However, “Third World” as a condition of existence and category of analysis has been very powerful over half a century, and nonalignment (or perhaps more precisely, differential alignment) continues to be acted out as a counter-trend to U.S. hegemony on a global scale (e.g., in Brazil and India). I should also like to add that third need not indicate a transcendent category (in the sense that fascists deployed the term; Mann 2004), a blurry cosmopolitan space (Soja 1996), or the defeatist-triumphant “third way” of Giddens-Blair Britain. There are threes, and there are threes: in some cases third is deployed to suggest completion or resolution (as in bad dialectics), in others third opens up the possibility for freshly viewing relationships in the world without succumbing to displacement-as-closure (as in good dialectics; see, e.g., Ferreira da Silva, 2007; Moten 2003).

3. Los Angeles County, which was the premier agricultural county in the United States for more than half of the twentieth century, was until August 2006 home to a fourteen-acre inner-city farm made up of independent gardens—one of the largest in the United States (South Central Farmers 2006).

4. As a result of heinous practices carried out at the expense of people’s lives and well-being, researchers rightly hesitate before conducting “human experiments,” and U.S. higher education has developed complicated apparatuses to safeguard human subjects from inhumane protocols. That said, all politics are experimental, the question is not whether but how experiments proceed ethically and practically.

5. Paramilitary squads working for wealthy agriculturalists murdered labor organizers to discipline farmworkers in Depression-era Central California (see McWilliams 1939).

6. Environmental reviews are not always done, as was recently the case for a significant expansion to the federal prison in Lompoc. Also, the political model for claiming urgency to evade responsibility is currently being reinvigorated by the state legislature and governor, who have agreed to waive environmental review in
a proposed multi-billion-dollar Sacramento delta flood control project. They are using the New Orleans–Katrina abandonment disaster to weaken state statutes under the guise of responsibly facing up to imminent danger. In the early years of World War II two big cotton growers in the region that is now desakota California used a similar set of arguments to get the Army Corps of Engineers to build them a couple of dams that guaranteed both free water and fertile bottomland to their empires (Hundley 1992).

7. The politics of forecasting is an urgent topic for social justice.

8. In this case, a consulting firm with a long-standing FBOP contract that seems to get by with minimal research and maximum Web-based cursory data collection and analysis, as activists in places around the United States have reported at conferences and meetings.

9. Presuming that even people who have developed the psychological habits of the bended knee are not permanently so configured, some scholarship that seeks to intervene does so by combining writing and images. For example, the Real Cost of Prisons Project supplements a series of workshops with three comic books that lay out the dollar and other costs of prisons to prison towns (Pyle and Gilmore 2005), the costs of prisons to women and their children (Willmarth, Miller-Mack, and Ahrens 2005), and the real cost of the war on drugs (Jones, Miller-Mack, and Ahrens 2005). See www.realcostofprisons.org.

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