

Miami Journal #3: Friday, 11/14/03

You say "Violence": We say "Gardens"

By Starhawk

I wake up early to finish writing and checking email and still be on time for a 10 a.m. interview, a taping for a Sunday discussion show hosted by Michael Putney. Meddle is also on the interview, as another Specimen Anarchist, and we've spent a good bit of time the day before practicing our sound bites. As we wait in the lobby, I tell him we need to put on a glamour, an energetic cape of illusion that will make us appealing. Meddle has blond, boyish good looks and an innocent smile--I tell him to think Luke Skywalker. "You could be Obi-Wan," he suggests, but I tell him I want to be Yoda.

"Many cities trashed have we, but Miami in flames leave it we will," I assure him.

The interview goes well, Putney seems to be a journalist of the old school--that is, he is actually interested in the issues and leads off with them, asking us what we don't like about the FTAA. I feel like I could be sharper on my opening soundbites, but Meddle is great on the anti-democratic nature of the new ordinance which passed yesterday, banning, among other things, any group of more than seven from assembling for more than half an hour without a permit, which seems to me vaguely contraindicated by the First Amendment.

In the end, he asks about violence and we talk about gardens.

He asks if we won't denounce window breaking and we talk about gardens. He presses the point and I tell him how in Seattle, with 60,000 people there, the vast majority peacefully protesting, the police began tear gassing and clubbing people long before a single window was smashed. What I don't say, because even on a show better than most the staccato soundbite rhythm of TV doesn't allow for real in-depth discussion, is that a movement cannot be built by denouncing each other, and I don't want to be the Good Anarchist at the

expense of those who share my values and my struggles, even if at times they do things I don't agree with. But we part on friendly terms, all of us satisfied with our morning interval.

Back at the Convergence Center, we have a meeting of the Earth Cluster to firm up our vision for the 21st and to scheme again about the 19th. And we decide to do a pre-action ritual on the 18th, in the late afternoon.

Then I meet with Abby and with Abigail and Rebecca, who have been bottom-lining the community garden. They take a team off to work in the garden; Tim and Mike will work on the tarps, and Abby and I tackle the greywater. She starts cutting the plastic barrels and putting in the fittings. I get out the yellow pages and look for builders' yards where we can pick up some gravel. Suzy comes down with the truck and we go by the community garden--a huge expanse of blank land under the freeway in the heart of the black ghetto. The garden is divided into plots--some are planted, some not. One contains a grove of mango trees that we can transform into guilds, examples of mutually supportive plant communities. We get the gravel and bring it back. There's a big, wooden crate Abby found a few days ago. She'd been thinking of it for a giant worm bin, but I suggest making it a raised garden instead, and we move it over next to the entrance gate, and unload the truck into it. Suzy goes off for manure, and we finally finish the fittings and are ready to assemble the system.

The system consists of a filter, which is a plastic planter filled with wood chips, where dirty water can be poured out. It drips into a tall, blue barrel filled with gravel, which overflows out a pipe-fitting into a hose which pokes down deep below to nearly the bottom of another tub set up the same way. Gravel cover them all. Later we'll plant the gravel with water tolerant plants.

The bacteria that live amongst the gravel will eat disease organism and fecal coliforms, and with enough stages and percolation time, will render it clean and safe. Our last tub has an outflow to a small piece of old hose, and we dig a token swale, a mini-ditch with berm for water infiltration, in the one corner of the parking lot where some bare dirt has escaped paving, sheet mulch it with cardboard and cover it with compost which Suzy has gone and gotten for us. So in the space of an afternoon, we've begun a garden. Suzy has brought us some plants from her garden, and I place a palm in the large box. Someone is always sitting in front of the gate, our Security who makes sure that police or other hostile forces don't enter unannounced. Now our Security person looks like she's having a tropical vacation, sheltered under the palm. We

discuss getting a truckload of sand to make a beach.

The Convergence Center feels so good today. It's full of young people happily working on projects of their own, self-directed and focused, like a very good kindergarten with all the kids busy at different play stations, and no one yelling or fighting.

Some are painting banners, we are making the garden, Food Not Bombs is setting up to serve food in the parking lot, the women who have taken responsibility for the information area have set up the tables and are making signs and collecting information, an Operations meeting is taking place in one corner and Indymedia is setting up more computers in another. Brush is earnestly pondering ways to make newcomers feel more welcome and more capable of taking on important tasks.

The Convergence Center does, in fact, embody the world we want to create, where work and play are much the same thing and people work for the motivation of contributing something to the whole, and have fun doing it. Where people are empowered and self-directed, looking to see what needs doing and doing it. It's enough to make you believe, for a moment, that the anarchist philosophy of mutual aid is not a utopian dream but a common condition, just interrupted a bit by Western civilization.

In the evening, Ruby, Paul, Brenda, Lynn and I go down to the new Medic space to do some healing work for the healers, and to clean and protect the space, a moldy storefront in a location much nearer to the actions. They are just finishing up a meeting, and most of them leave, but two stay and we cleanse the space with chanting and banging and sprinkling sacred water, then invite in all the spirits and energies we do want.

Our singing echoes off the concrete walls, and I'm happy. It's been a very satisfying day, getting to do something as real as shoveling compost and putting together our greywater system, planting, getting my hands in the dirt. I am really, really happy. Meanwhile poor Lisa has not sat down all day, been in one meeting after another, culminating in one with Police Chief Timoney and the Mayor of Miami. Better her than me!

You say, 'violence', we say, 'gardens'.

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