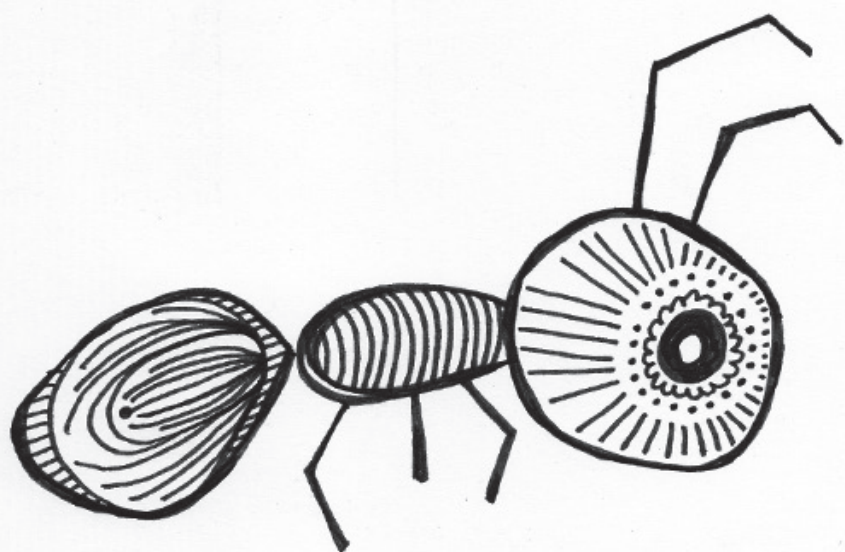


the ant hill
COLLECTIVE



A
zine



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THE ZINE AND APPENDIX CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT ANTHILLZINE.WORDPRESS.COM.



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Purpose of Writing This Zine

We write this zine with the intention of conveying our experiences around the aspiration, strategy, hopes and dreams of the Ant Hill Collective in an effort to serve as a potential tool for others seeking similar theory and practice. Understanding that objective certainty is not a human possibility, we do not claim to hold any objective truths on the accounts and claims of this narrative structure. However, we believe in our (Ant Hill Collective's remaining members) collective experience and think it relevant to similar past, present and future projects seeking a sustainable path of resistance to white-supremacist-capitalist-patriarchy with an understanding that the 'personal is political.'

With that in mind, we have decided to write this zine in a way we feel focuses on the history, successes/failures and our lessons learned for future projects. We have chosen to make this zine public for the potential benefit of others seeking a similar course. If this zine can help just one person or group of people to become better, more effective agents for change in struggles for liberation from structures of oppression, then it will have been worth the effort to write this document.

Though we realize there has been discussion in the broader community about the conflict in this collective, which has unfortunately led to rifts and divisions among some people, we have sincerely made an effort for this not to be the case. Further, we continue to work against such unsustainable practice and hope this document will be read with that in mind.

The rampant existence of various oppressions are not a physical law or natural order like those in power would have us believe. Understanding we are all a part of such complex and adaptive forms of oppression is an essential step toward building awareness of the 'what' and 'why' of the oppression we struggle against. It is often the reason for the ebb and flow, the ups and downs of liberatory movements. To choose vigilance in the face of oppression's adaptive persistence is a choice we must make each day. Vigilance is not easy, especially from the margins of society. However, vigilance in the face of oppression can lead to its demise. Towards that effort, we contribute this zine.



PART ONE

HISTORY OF THE COLLECTIVE

How it Started

Once upon a time, on a dark and stormy night in 2009, the Ant Hill Collective was founded by a small group of passion-ant people looking to create a living space that offered alternatives to the oppression and alienation we face in capitalist society. We wanted to share the responsibilities of day-to-day living and financial and material resources as a group in an effort to live more in line with our shared values. Throughout its history, 13 ants called the Ant Hill home (with anywhere between 6-8 people living on the property at any given time). During the first two and a half years of the collective's existence, it was a stable, thriving collective in San Diego, CA.

At the time, no one had enough capital to purchase a home outright, so renting was the best option for starting a collective. We were lucky to find a property with two houses on a single parcel of land. We rented the front house on the property until the back house became available months later, giving us two houses as the basis to build the infrastructure of the project.

We agreed to distinguish ourselves from other intentional living models like housing cooperatives or eco-villages and decided we would be a collective, and we would work on projects as a group to combat the injustices we saw in the world in an egalitarian way. We agreed the collective would work for social justice around issues of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, sexuality, ability and the environment.

Before both homes were filled, there was some initial disagreement about how much would be formalized in the beginning of the collective regarding how we would operate, our process and our structure. Some wanted to wait until all rooms were filled in both houses to lay down the groundwork of who we were and how things would work. The stated purpose for this proposed course of action was so any new members moving into the back house of the property would have a sense of say in and ownership over the new project we were involved in creating. Others wanted to hammer out those details up front with the establishment of a coherent collective house manual explaining details on



the ins and outs of the collective (decision making procedure, food and resource sharing, chore rotation, conflict resolution, removal policy, etc.) This was proposed as a potential guide for us to follow as an understood direction we were intending to live in and for potential members to decide to sign onto with the understanding those details could be changed through a consensus decision making process at a later time. This difference was negotiated by holding back on some decisions and moving forward with others.

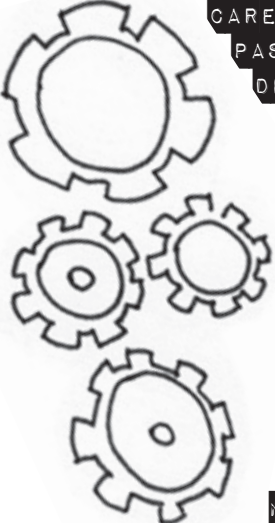
The result was the collective agreed on the intention of developing a system of consensus decision making, food and resource sharing, chore rotation, gardening, conflict resolution and removal policy, but there was no consensus on the details of how any of those things would be structured, and many were put off to be determined at a later time.

All of this was consented to, but never formalized as part of a more coherent collective house manual that contained the other aspects of our theory and practice, which some ants wanted to work through in the very beginning of the project. As it turned out, we never established a conflict resolution policy, a removal policy, a final staples list for food shopping or a collective house manual. Many of these items that were not hammered out in the beginning stayed on our agenda throughout the life of the collective and were consistently not discussed or were continually bracketed to be dealt with at a later time having consequences down the road. For the most part, these systems functioned pretty well, and we came to see that much of our practice around these issues were quite sustaining compared to other projects near and far that we heard stories of.

One such issue we faced immediately upon deciding to live on this property was the acknowledgement of the role we played in renting a house in a neighborhood on the brink of gentrification. Though our collective was not entirely normative/white since we were four white people and three people of color from differing ethnic backgrounds, we considered our presence in this ethnically diverse, low-income, working-class neighborhood as susceptible to becoming part of the first wave of gentrification as lower-income, college-educated, artist and activist-type people moving in from outside the community's generational history. We wanted to combat that tendency as best we could given our presence and constantly sought ways to attempt this. We wanted to make an effort to be a part of the neighborhood at large and not just create our own enclave.

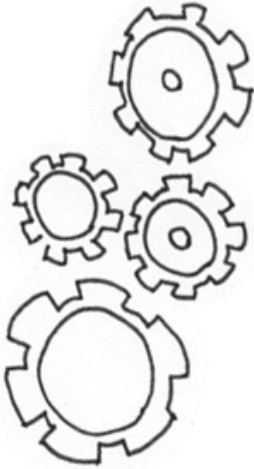


HOW IT OPERATED




THE ANT HILL USED A CONSENSUS MODEL FOR ALL IMPORTANT DECISION MAKING AT REGULAR MEETINGS. ALL MEMBERS WERE REQUIRED TO ACTIVELY ASSENT TO A DECISION FOR IT TO TAKE EFFECT, WITH ANY ONE MEMBER ABLE TO BLOCK. ABSTENTION WAS AN OPTION FOR COLLECTIVE MEMBERS ON ANY ISSUE ASIDE FROM VERY IMPORTANT DECISIONS SUCH AS CONSENTING TO NEW COLLECTIVE MEMBERS. WE GAVE SPECIAL CARE AND CONSIDERATION WHEN WE DETECTED PASSIVE INVOLVEMENT FROM MEMBERS IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS. WE WANTED ALL MEMBERS TO FEEL STRONGLY ABOUT DECISIONS MADE, SO THE COLLECTIVE OPERATED ON A MORE EGALITARIAN BASIS, AND WAS NOT OVERRIDDEN BY THE STRONGER-WILLED OR THE MORE OUTSPOKEN. DURING MEETINGS WE WOULD CHECK IN WITH EVERYONE TO ENSURE ALL VOICES WERE BEING HEARD. THIS WAS NOT ALWAYS EASY. AT TIMES IT COULD BE DIFFICULT TO DETERMINE THE REASON FOR A PERCEPTION BY SOME MEMBERS OF THE LACKING INVOLVEMENT BY OTHERS IN A CONVERSATION ABOUT ANY GIVEN TOPIC.

THERE WERE OCCASIONALLY DISCUSSIONS ABOUT CERTAIN COLLECTIVE MEMBERS TAKING UP TOO MUCH SPACE IN A MEETING ON AN ISSUE. THIS MEANT THAT THROUGH THEIR WORDS, MANNER OF COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONAL POSITION TO OTHERS, THERE WAS AN IMBALANCE OF INPUT AMONG COLLECTIVE MEMBERS ON A TOPIC BEING DISCUSSED. MANY TIMES THIS WAS ACTUALLY BROUGHT UP BY THE PEOPLE TAKING THAT SPACE AS A WAY OF CHECKING IN WITH OTHERS ABOUT WHETHER TO CONTINUE OR HOW TO PROCEED. THE MORE VOLUMINOUS SPEAKERS INTENTIONALLY AND EFFECTIVELY MADE SPACE FOR THOSE WHO WERE



LESS OUTSPOKEN, WITHOUT PRESSURING OR INFLUENCING THEM. IN THIS PROACTIVE ATTEMPT TO CREATE A MORE HORIZONTAL MEETING ENVIRONMENT, WE ALSO ENCOURAGED PEOPLE WHO NORMALLY TOOK LESS SPACE TO SPEAK UP WHEN THEY FELT THEY COULD, EVEN IF THEY DIDN'T FEEL THEY HAD MUCH TO SAY. BALANCING A PERSON'S NEEDS TO BE CLEARLY HEARD ON AN ISSUE ALONG WITH PEOPLE'S NEED TO REMAIN UNSPOKEN OR NOT PRESSURED INTO COMMUNICATING IS OFTEN A DIFFICULT BALANCE TO ACHIEVE IN THOUGHTFUL COLLECTIVE MEETINGS, AND ANT HILL MEETINGS WERE NO EXCEPTION. THE ANT HILL FOUND A GOOD BALANCE BETWEEN ALLOWING TIME AND CREATING SPACE IN MEETINGS FOR THOSE WHO HAD A LOT TO SAY AS WELL AS FOR THOSE WHO TRADITIONALLY DID NOT.

OF COURSE, A NOTE TAKER WAS INVALUABLE AS WE FOUND PEOPLE REMEMBER MEETINGS AND DECISIONS DIFFERENTLY, AND IT IS UP TO THE NOTES TO HELP PROVIDE A CLEAR PERSPECTIVE IN DISAGREEMENTS AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS FOR PARTICULAR MEETINGS. SOMETIMES, THE NOTES DID NOT FULLY CAPTURE THE ESSENCE OF A MEETING OR ITS OUTCOMES, BUT IN SUCH A CASE, THERE WERE ALWAYS FUTURE MEETINGS WHERE WE COULD DISCUSS PREVIOUS DECISIONS.



FINANCIALLY, ALL MEMBERS SPLIT THE COSTS OF BILLS AND FOOD EQUALLY. RENT WAS SPLIT BY ROOM. ANY OTHER EXPENSES RELATED TO INFRASTRUCTURE, PROJECTS OR EVENTS REQUIRED CONSENSUS OF ALL MEMBERS WITH THE COST SPLIT EQUALLY UNLESS SOME DEVIATION OF THIS WAS AGREED TO BEFOREHAND.

ALSO RELEVANT IS THE HISTORY OF COLLECTIVE MEMBER DEPARTURES - THAT IS, FOLKS WHO DECIDED TO

LEAVE THE COLLECTIVE - AND WHAT HAPPENED IN THOSE TRANSITIONS. FOR THE MAJORITY OF THE HISTORY OF THE COLLECTIVE, MEMBERS WERE REQUIRED TO GIVE A MONTH'S NOTICE BEFORE THEIR MOVE OUT DATE. SOMETIMES, THEY GAVE NOTICE TWO TO SIX MONTHS IN ADVANCE OF A MOVE OUT DATE. THE MEMBERS CONTINUED TO PAY UTILITY DUES (GAS, WATER, ELECTRICITY AND INTERNET BILLS) UP TO THE DATE THEY AGREED TO MOVE OUT (USUALLY THE END OF THE MONTH).



THEY ALSO CONTINUED THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE COLLECTIVE - ATTENDING MEETINGS AND DOING CHORES, FOR INSTANCE. AFTER THE MOVE OUT NOTICE WAS GIVEN, THE REMAINING MEMBERS SEARCHED FOR A NEW MEMBER TO FILL THE ROOM, COLLECTING QUESTIONNAIRES AND CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS. THE MEMBER MOVING OUT HAD THE OPTION TO

PARTICIPATE IN THE SEARCH PROCESS (ADVERTISING, QUESTIONNAIRES,

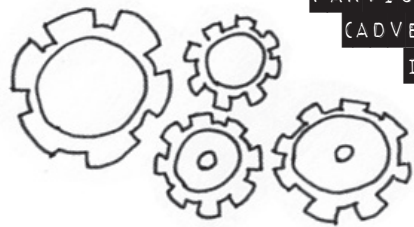
INTERVIEWS, ETC.) AND WAS ENCOURAGED TO DO SO. ONCE THE EXITING MEMBER HAD LEFT, THE NEW COLLECTIVE MEMBER WOULD PAY A

SECURITY DEPOSIT TO THE COLLECTIVE EQUAL TO THE

AMOUNT OF RENT FOR THE ROOM BEING LIVED IN, AND THE EXITING MEMBER WOULD RECEIVE THEIR SECURITY DEPOSIT WHEN THE NEW COLLECTIVE MEMBER MOVED IN.

IN THIS RESPECT, SOME OF THE INITIAL MEMBERS OF THE COLLECTIVE PAID A LEGALLY-BOUND DEPOSIT TO THE PROPERTY MANAGERS, LEAVING WHOEVER LEAVES THE PROPERTY/LEASE LAST TO ASSUME THE FINANCIAL

RISK OF THE DEPOSIT. AS MEMBERS MOVED IN AND OTHERS MOVED OUT OF THE ANT HILL, THE DEPOSIT WAS HANDLED WITH INTERNAL ACCOUNTING THAT DID NOT INVOLVE THE PROPERTY MANAGERS.



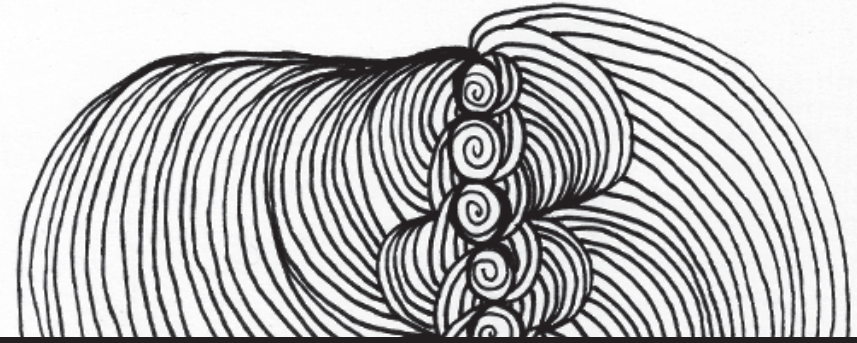
STAYING COLLECTIVE MEMBERS REIMBURSED THOSE LEAVING WITH FUNDS FROM THE NEW MEMBER.

WE LATER FOUND THAT A MONTH WAS OFTEN TOO SHORT OF A TIME TO FIND AND VET A NEW POTENTIAL COLLECTIVE MEMBER WHOSE POLITICAL VIEWS, BEHAVIOR AND NEEDS WERE CONSISTENT WITH THOSE OF THE COLLECTIVE. SO, IN A MEETING IN 2012, WE ALL AGREED ON A NEW POLICY WHERE A DEPARTING MEMBER WOULD HAVE TO GIVE AT LEAST THREE MONTH'S NOTIFICATION PRIOR TO LEAVING AND A TWO MONTH NOTICE FOR AN EXACT MOVE OUT DATE WHENEVER POSSIBLE.



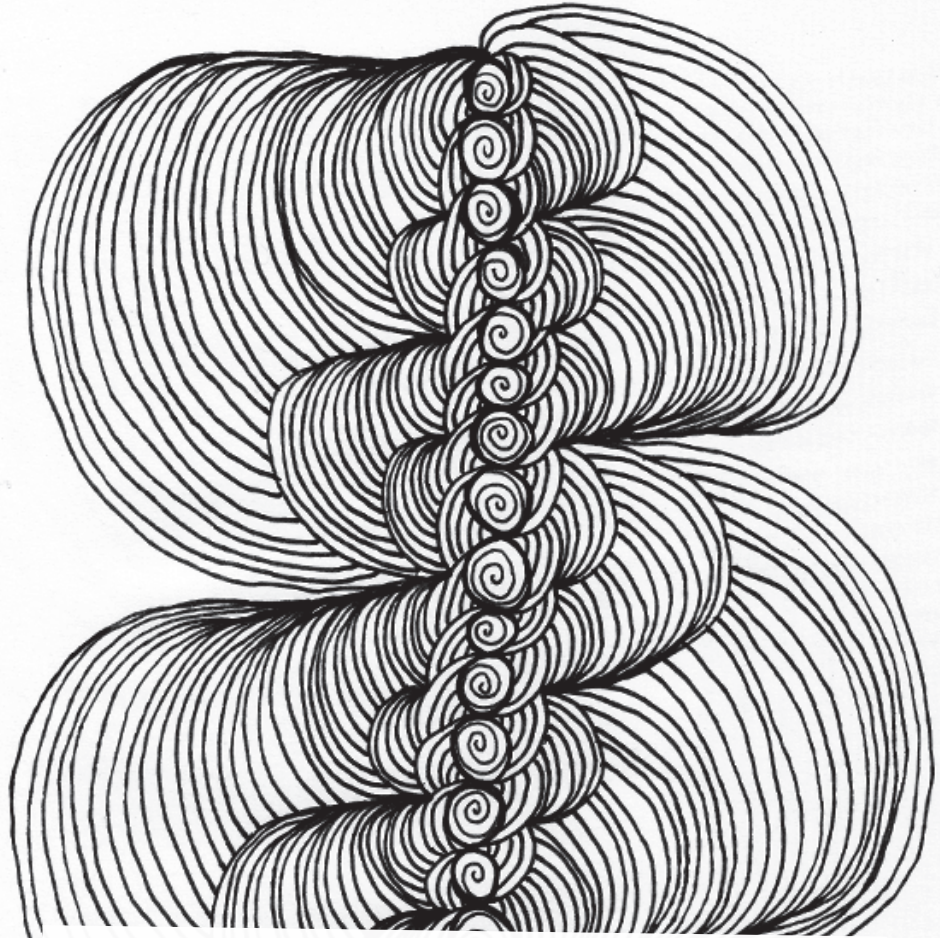
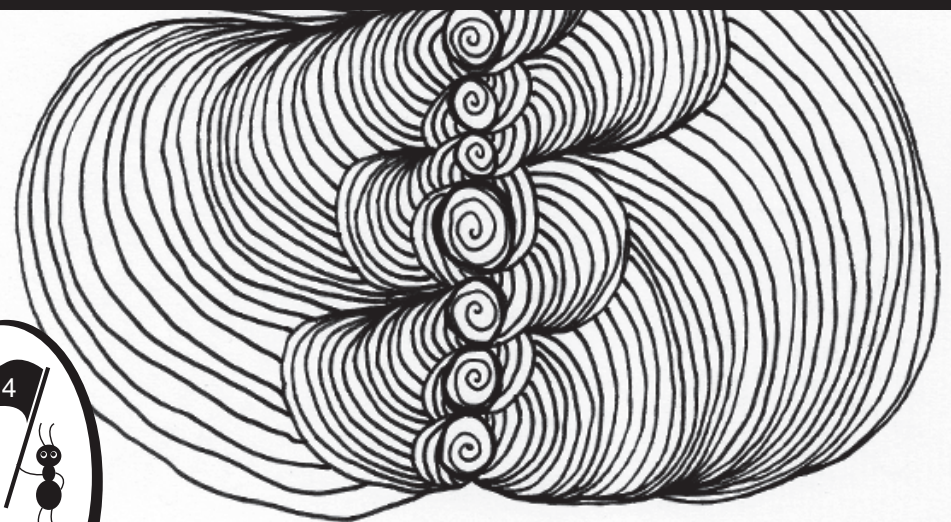
NOS TIENEN
MIEDO
PORQUE
NO TENEMOS
MIEDO





PART TWO

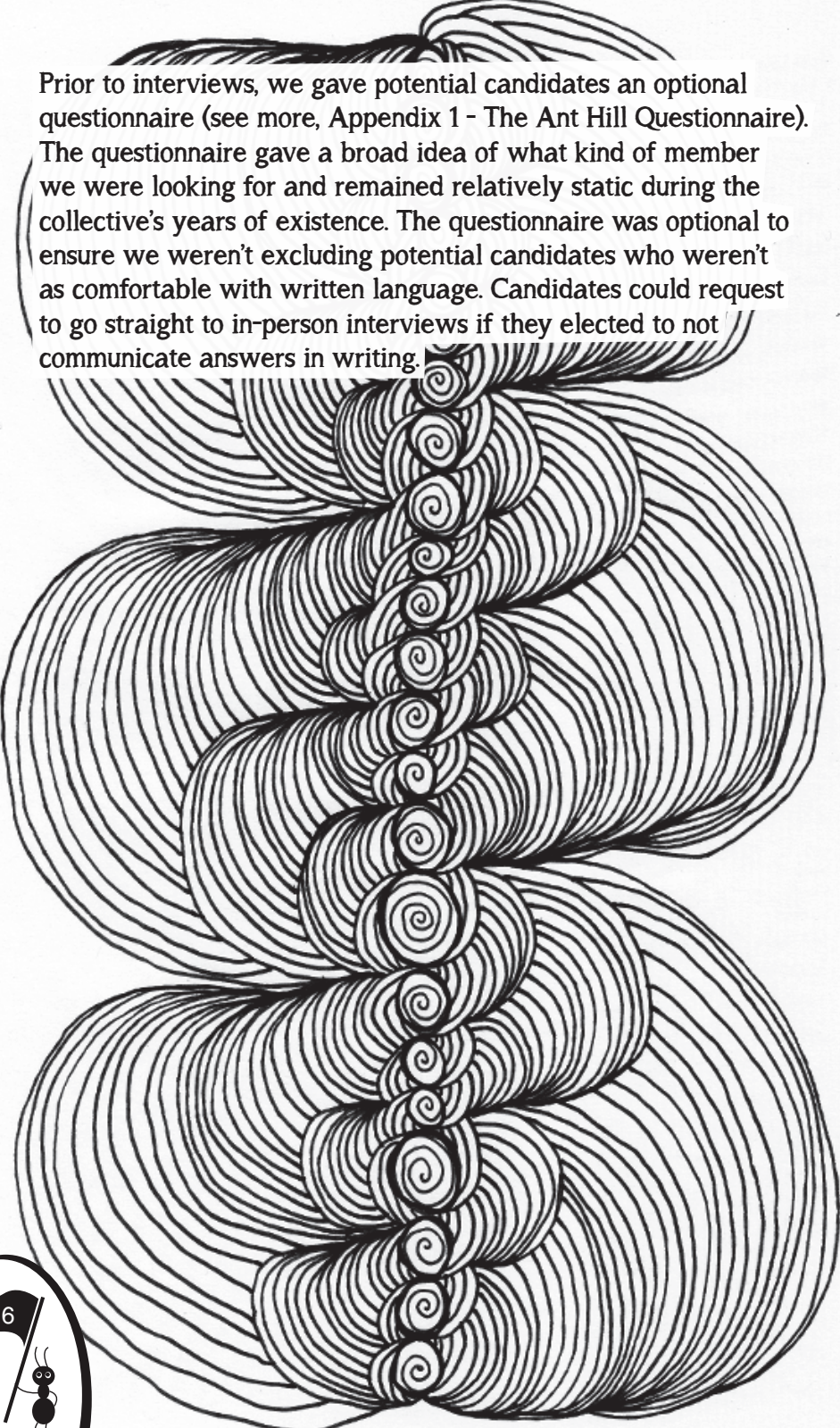
THE TOOLS THAT MADE IT WORK



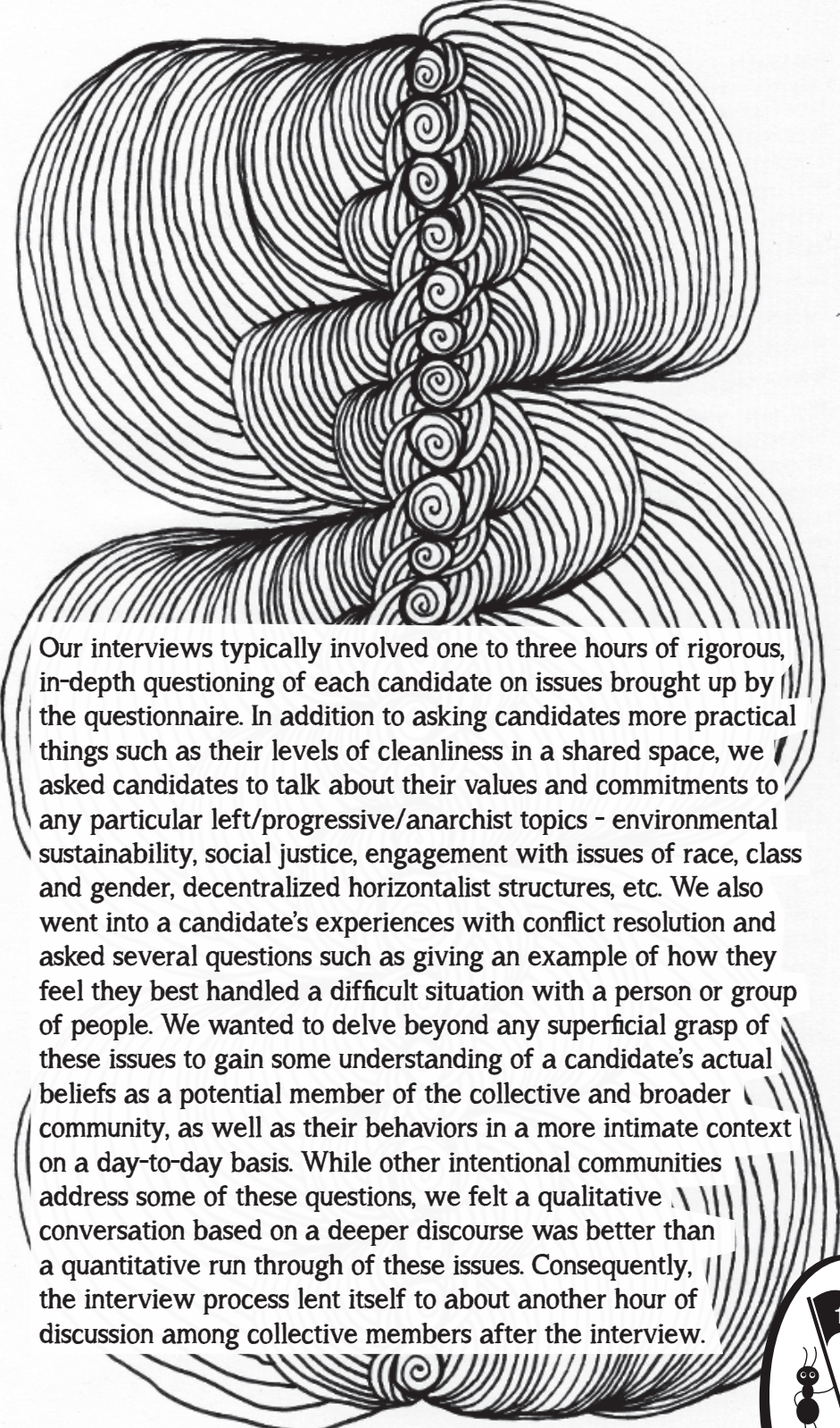
Interview Process - Questionnaire and Extensive Interview

The Ant Hill's interview and member selection process was one of the greatest contributors to the stability and longevity of the project. We understood that for a collective rooted in political activism and social justice, our expectations and needs required a much more rigorous process with those wanting to live and work with us, compared to many shared housing situations or job environments, where principles and politics do not necessarily enter into the decision. Our personal is political code factored into many of the minutiae of living - from what kind of dish detergent we bought to communicating using language sensitive to different forms of oppression.





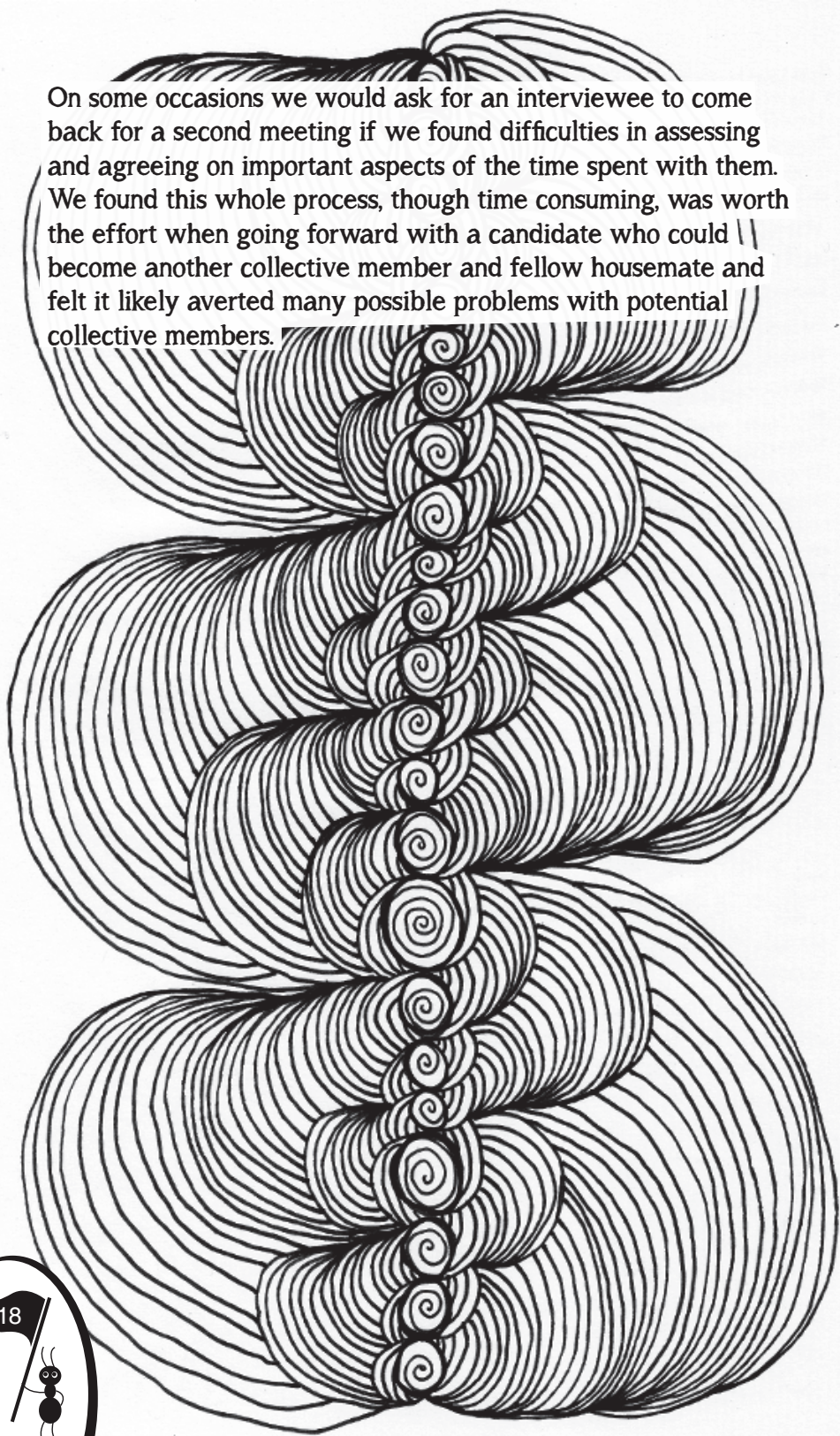
Prior to interviews, we gave potential candidates an optional questionnaire (see more, Appendix 1 - The Ant Hill Questionnaire). The questionnaire gave a broad idea of what kind of member we were looking for and remained relatively static during the collective's years of existence. The questionnaire was optional to ensure we weren't excluding potential candidates who weren't as comfortable with written language. Candidates could request to go straight to in-person interviews if they elected to not communicate answers in writing.



Our interviews typically involved one to three hours of rigorous, in-depth questioning of each candidate on issues brought up by the questionnaire. In addition to asking candidates more practical things such as their levels of cleanliness in a shared space, we asked candidates to talk about their values and commitments to any particular left/progressive/anarchist topics - environmental sustainability, social justice, engagement with issues of race, class and gender, decentralized horizontalist structures, etc. We also went into a candidate's experiences with conflict resolution and asked several questions such as giving an example of how they feel they best handled a difficult situation with a person or group of people. We wanted to delve beyond any superficial grasp of these issues to gain some understanding of a candidate's actual beliefs as a potential member of the collective and broader community, as well as their behaviors in a more intimate context on a day-to-day basis. While other intentional communities address some of these questions, we felt a qualitative conversation based on a deeper discourse was better than a quantitative run through of these issues. Consequently, the interview process lent itself to about another hour of discussion among collective members after the interview.



On some occasions we would ask for an interviewee to come back for a second meeting if we found difficulties in assessing and agreeing on important aspects of the time spent with them. We found this whole process, though time consuming, was worth the effort when going forward with a candidate who could become another collective member and fellow housemate and felt it likely averted many possible problems with potential collective members.



we've got an open room at
the **ant hill collective**



weekly consensus-based meetings
vegetarian meals 4 days/week
gardens, chickens, & bees
shared chore rotation
available july 1
grant hill neighborhood
\$470 (+ utilities & groceries)

interested?

get a questionnaire ...

email us:

theanthillcollective@gmail.com



Regular Meetings

We held meetings which, for most of the Ant Hill's existence, took place on a weekly basis. We ran our meetings on a consensus-based decision making model, in which decisions required unanimous agreement. This structure attempted to ensure our policies were the result of everyone's consent and not a product of a more singular, dominant and influential individual or group. We bookended meetings with check-in and check-out periods. Check-ins served as opportunities for members to speak about what was happening in their lives and for each of us to connect with each other a bit outside of the meeting's agenda. Check-outs offered a time for members to reflect and comment about the meeting itself, and as a way to affirm goals and commitments until the subsequent meeting. Meetings served as an exercise in building our intentional community, learning from each other and furthering our longer term goals for the collective.

There were basic structural components to our meetings. For every meeting, we used a facilitator and a note taker, rotating those roles to each member who felt comfortable taking on such responsibilities. People could opt out of these responsibilities for whatever reason, but we never had to deal with no one wanting to do it or one or a few people always being in those roles, which would be a sign of something unhealthy. The role of the facilitator would be to guide, but not dominate or micromanage, the discussions. Our meetings were fluid enough that a speaking "stack" was not used often. We (usually) respected each other's opinions and time for listening and talking.

We also utilized a number of tools to make meetings and discussions better, more productive and horizontal, understanding each person had different styles of communication and dialectical proficiency. We often used hand gestures as a means of communicating agreement with what was being said or to indicate someone going on for too long or off point. We all understood use of hand gestures as a way of quickly communicating between people in the meeting without having to take the time and space to verbalize where a member was at with what was being said or what they thought about a certain point being made (see more, Appendix 2 - Sustaining Tools and Tactics). A list of some of the more productive tools used in meetings is as follows:

Go-Arounds

Quite naturally, some people had more to say on issues while others had less to say. Additionally, some folks are louder than others, while some are more reserved or quiet. We acknowledged that these differences needed to be addressed on both ends of the spectrum, and while we asked those who speak up more to step back at times, there was an expectation that those who speak less would work to step up as much as possible. To ensure everyone's voice was heard, we would often have "go-arounds" where each person was asked to speak on the issue being discussed. This also worked to defuse any sort of back-and-forth tension which was being created between 2-3 people. At any point, someone could suggest we have a go-around.



Vibe Checks and Breaks

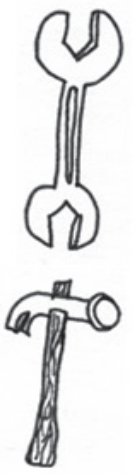
At any point during a meeting when tensions got high, we would call out "vibe check." Anyone in the meeting could call this out at any time they felt appropriate. This gave us all a minute to stop and reflect on how we were feeling and what the vibe was in the room. Vibe check was a tool which could easily be used to stop an escalating conversation. If simply calling vibe check didn't resolve tension, we would take a quick break. Folks could get up and go to another room, get water, simply sit, etc. This allowed people to reflect on their contribution to the vibe and when we calmly started up the conversation after the break, people could address any issues that may exist underneath the surface of the conversation. After the break, there would either be a call for a go-around to hear from all people in the meeting about the vibe in the room (thoughts on and suggestions of what way to move forward) or some other facilitated and agreed to exercise that sought to reflect on the tension and approach it from a fresh angle. While this didn't always work, it was a great tool used to ease contentious situations and created space for people not directly involved in any tension to safely interject.

Interjections/Interruptions

As in any social situation, different people share different views and needs regarding communication. Ant Hill was no different. As an example of differing communication styles, many (like most) regarded interrupting someone as inappropriate communication and did not want anyone to speak or ask a question of them when they were talking. Others made a distinction between an interjection and an interruption where the former was something that was welcomed and could clarify someone's position or point being made whereas the latter was more of an inappropriate comment or critique towards the person speaking before they were done.

Some members of Ant Hill preferred interjections while they were speaking and felt it afforded them to clarify anything that was not being understood by the people making a break in their speaking. They felt they had the ability to pick the conversation up after an interjection occurred, and it was beneficial to the communicative process to have such an interjection occur. This usually took the form of a quick question or comment as a point of clarification. However, others did not like being interrupted even if another member's intention was to interject as a point of clarification and felt it stopped their train of thought. It also was suggested it could be used in a way to take up too much space in a meeting and would limit the ability of some members to convey their thoughts and ideas on an issue. We all shared our thoughts on interruptions and preferences about interjections as a way of knowing how to communicate better with one another according to each of our needs and desires in meetings. Consequently, interjections were only used when certain members who requested they be used with them were speaking.





Stack

Though we did not use this tool often, when many people wanted to speak on an issue being discussed such that a normal, equitable flow to the conversation was not possible, we employed the stack. This tool is simply the taking down of names of people in order of hands being raised by one person managing the list such that people can then speak on that issue in the order of their name's place on that list. The list is referred to as the "stack".

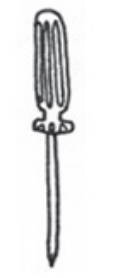


Many of us felt there were as many problems the stack created as it solved. Often, one's placement in the stack might make for them addressing a point that was made several comments prior which might not be relevant to the points being made just before their turn to speak. This could lead to a very disjointed conversation on the topic if the conversation was not focused and often the stack is needed when there is high demand to speak in a conversation that has already become unfocused. Nonetheless, in our limited experience with this tool, it served well on the few occasions it was needed.



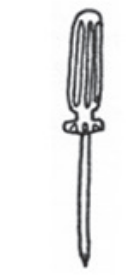
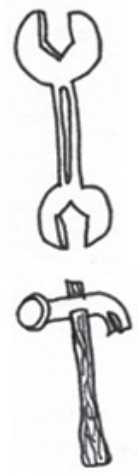
Crit / Self Crit/Praise

Though Crit/ Self Crit/ Praise was not adopted by the Ant Hill Collective, it was suggested by a number of members and discussed at a couple of meetings. The idea behind this tool is to engage in a go around at the end of the meeting where each member gives a reflection on all the various aspects of the meeting in a structured way which follows the pattern of critiquing some things that could have been better for reasons stated, a self critique as to what they their self could have done better for given reasons,



and praise of how something was done very well and why. The idea behind this is: 1) Critique - when open, honest, principled and coming from a loving place - can better ourselves individually and as a group in our theory and practice; 2) Self Critique can bring self reflection on ways we can become better people in line with our ascribed values; 3) Praise can help to better understand what we do well by identifying those actions and patterns of behavior as achievements to celebrate and thus replicate.

It is not the case everyone or anyone need say something related to all three categories of the process. However, the option to speak on such aspects of a meeting would be there for those who were willing to do so and attempt to create a climate that is open to communication on difficult matters with an intent on pushing ourselves to become better, more committed members of a shared collective project. Though some members wanted to use this process as a tool in our meetings and felt that it could break down barriers built by difference and encourage more open, authentic communication, other members felt they needed a deeper sense of trust and emotional safety to engage in this process to find it beneficial to them personally. Consequently, Crit, Self Crit, Praise was not a tool formally adopted though the process was well discussed and somewhat practiced randomly by collective members during personal meeting check outs.



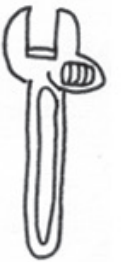
Consensus Decision Making

At the Ant Hill Collective, we used a unanimous consensus-based decision making model in which all members of the collective have to agree on any decisions that get made. This model works well in small, trusting groups with a common goal. Various models could be used for different types of groups; for example, larger groups like various Occupy movements considered a 90% super majority consensus model in which 90% of the group has to agree on any decision. In larger, less intimate and trusting groups like Occupy, the supermajority model accounts for forces like agent provocateurs or government plants who may try to infiltrate a group and block important decisions that need to be made. Consensus is therefore not at odds with the principles of democracy in that it is still a form of rule, governance and decision making by the people as equal subjects. It can actually be seen as a form of democracy existing in it's most equal and horizontal form.

A more common, mainstream majority-based decision making model like a simple majority or representative democracy can serve to silence the voices of the minority, while consensus works to amplify everyone's voices. Because everyone in the group has to consent to a decision being made, the group has inherent interest in hearing what each person has to say, and there's little-to-no room for a majority-rule vote that marginalizes the few. For the rest of this section, we will discuss the unanimous consensus model used by the Ant Hill.

For consensus decision making to work, it's important that each member clearly understands the process for making decisions, or possess a willingness to learn. Consensus models horizontally solicit participation of each member of the group to give input. Members work together to think through all possible angles on a decision. Not everyone has to love every consented to decision, but everyone has to be heard and considered when making a decision, and individuals should work together to make decisions that reflect what's best for the entire group. In the process, individuals can either affirm a decision, negate a decision by blocking, or abstain from a decision altogether. In the latter case, someone who personally disagrees with a decision can elect to stand aside for the benefit of the group. Using consensus works to create a culture that does a better job of distributing power to everyone distributes power to everyone, working to make people feel empowered to contribute as individuals. However, it does this while valuing the group's needs over those of an individual's personal, self-serving interests, if they are at odds with the group's interests. This process requires that people trust in each other's intention and ability to work through issues to get to a point of resolution.

Consensus decision making requires thorough, qualitative discussion, which takes time and dedication. In a capitalist paradigm where time and money are valued over people, time-based efficiency usually outweighs qualitative input from each individual. Slowing down and taking more time to ensure decisions are made horizontally and thoughtfully is important when working for consensus.



The whole group's participation is needed for big decisions such as policy changes, group finances and new housemates. In some cases, the entire group is not needed to make decisions on small issues and they can be dealt with in smaller groups or committees. Because our group was never larger than 8 people, we generally made most of our decisions together. Any decision can be placed back on the agenda and revisited later.

Facilitation

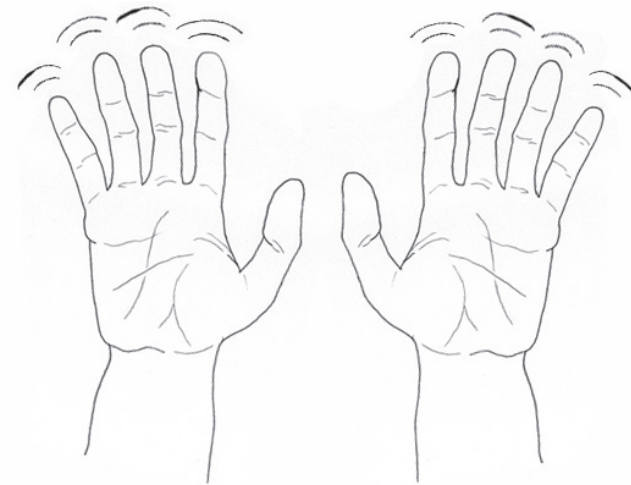
Consensus works best with strong, skillful facilitation. Rotating the facilitation role allows different styles of facilitation to take place, and members can learn from differing styles to improve their own. A good facilitator works to move the group along with an unbiased approach. The facilitator brings up items on the agenda and helps to engage all members in discussion. Before moving on to the next agenda item, a facilitator wraps up discussions and decisions by confirming everyone in the group has consented. During a meeting, a facilitator will often welcome support from the group to facilitate if needed.

Blocking

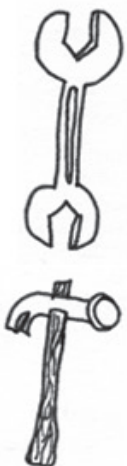
Blocking should be used extremely sparingly. Some examples of its use are when a member feels a decision would harm individuals or the group as a whole, when a member feels that something has gone awry with the decision process or when the voice of a member has not been heard. After blocking a decision, the blocking member will ideally follow up their block with a thorough explanation and an alternative solution.

Hand Signals

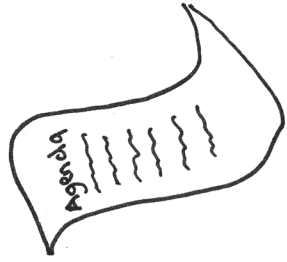
Hand signals can be used to speed up the consensus process. When people agree with something being said, instead of waiting their turn to speak to express their approval, they can hold up their hands, palms facing out and wiggle their fingers - this is called twinkle fingers. To express disapproval, they can point their fingers down, palms facing inward and wiggle their fingers. If someone feels a member is taking up more time than needed to address something, they can twirl their index finger in the air to signal "wrap it up." To block, they can cross their arms in front of themselves to make an X. These techniques can build better group cohesion and clearer communication as well as save time in groups of five or more.



In consensus decision making, the process is just as important as the outcome. We've simplistically outlined the process for further clarity on the following page.



THE CONSENSUS PROCESS

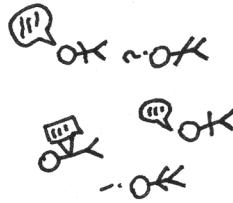


A meeting agenda is created.

Note: Agenda items can be added at any time and are agreed upon at the beginning of each meeting.



The facilitator reviews the agenda and puts the items in order with the group.



The first agenda item is introduced, and all relevant information is shared. Members can ask questions, express approval and share concerns about the item being discussed.



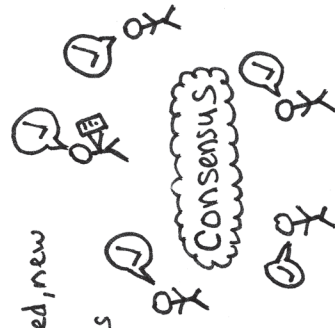
After all discussion is had and each person is heard, the facilitator and group can identify emerging possible solutions or proposals being identified.



The facilitator asks each person what they think about the proposal and shares what they think as well.

If everyone agrees on a particular proposal, you have consensus!

If everyone doesn't agree or an item is blocked, proposals can be amended, new solutions can be contributed and more discussion is had until consensus is reached. - even if the consensus is to not continue discussing the item and move forward.

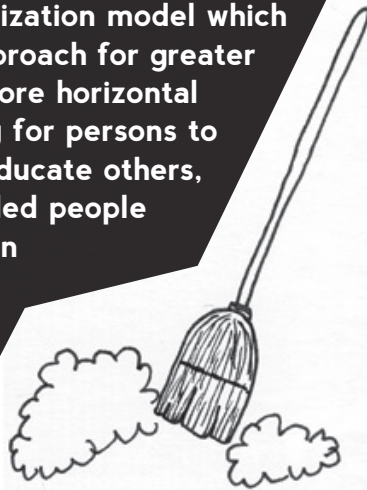


Chore Rotations

The Ant Hill existed on one lot, but with two separate houses, technically on two separate leases. However, we considered the property and the collective one inclusive entity, with members freely moving between each house and sharing the space equally. Our chore system expanded on this by splitting chore duties evenly between all the members, even if the chore was house-specific. For example, someone living in the back house had just as much chore expectations for the front house bathroom as someone living in the front house. This helped foster an environment of shared responsibility and communal lifestyle.

All members shared chore duties equally, rotating every three weeks to a new chore. Each member also watered the garden and tended to the chickens, and later, ducks on their particular morning. Members helped prepare a dinner meal at least once each week, usually working in pairs. By working in pairs, some members could effectively teach their cooking skills to their partners. Though members had very different and often non-overlapping schedules, each made efforts to eat together at dinnertime.

This model helped buffer each member's skills in all the upkeep tasks, as opposed to a specialization model which may have sacrificed an egalitarian approach for greater efficiency. Not only did we achieve more horizontal stability, but there was an opportunity for persons to gain experience in some chores and educate others, as rotating between each chore afforded people the opportunity to engage in discussion about what should and should not go into a chore.



Bill Tracking and Food Money

In keeping with the model of sharing the two houses, we split all our utility and grocery expenditures evenly among the residents. A front house resident was just as much responsible for use of water in the back house as the reverse. For instance, when there were seven members of the collective, the water bill would be split seven ways. This was the case even though there were two houses and two sets of bills for each house. Room costs varied based on size and quality of life per living in each room and were determined through consensus decisions. Though we did not make these decisions after an agreed upon set of variables to quantify and qualify each room, we did discuss some of the known differences between certain rooms and determined or adjusted portion of total rent accordingly (see more, Appendix 3 - Room Price Rating Chart). Room costs stayed the same regardless of the number of people living in the rooms, so a pair of people living in a room could split the room cost. This had no effect on other house finances since all other bills were separate from rent.

This model made sense as many of our collective endeavors took place in and outside of both homes and we collectivized all the structures on the property. For example, meals were mostly prepared and consumed in the front house kitchen, most of the gardening took place in the front house yard, the chickens and ducks inhabited the yard behind the back house, the internet was shared from the front house cable connection to the back house, the washing machine and dryer were run off the front house, water filtration system for drinking was run off the back house and there were storage sheds in the front, middle and back of the property.



Projects, Events and Neighborhood Relations

From its beginnings, members of the Ant Hill were highly involved in San Diego activist communities and organizations, as comrades, leaders, members, allies and participants. The Ant Hill hosted meetings, workshops, teach-ins, potlucks, parties and an assortment of other events for such groups in the city at a frequency of at least weekly or more. Some events drew nearly one hundred people to the property. The collective quickly became a well-known resource for community events, both as a host place and as a resource for its members' own skills and the collective's materials which were readily available to help out folks in need. We sought to make Ant Hill a layered institution, which not only served as an educational model for sustainable urban homesteading, but a rooted base from which to organize and build a counter to the status quo of ruling class power by our practice and the existence of our physical space (see more, Appendix - 4 Projects as Practice / Internal to External).

Below is a list of the notable projects and events which took place at Ant Hill.

Some Community Events at Ant Hill...

- Anarchist picnic
- Teaching to Transgress, a free school
- Anti-Walmart meetings
- International Socialist Organization meetings
- worker cooperative meetings
- urban homesteading workshops
- Activist San Diego meetings
- clothing swaps
- and more...



Among the Organizations Active Ants Took Part In...

- San Diego Puppet Insurgency
- Occupy San Diego
- Local, educational farms
- Activist San Diego
- International Socialist Organization
- BEAT Club and Visionary Feminists at City College
- Board member of local community center
- Bikes del Pueblo - bike kitchen
- Teaching to Transgress
- KNSJ 89.1 fm (Networking for Social Justice)
- TranscENDANCE
- National Lawyers Guild
- Peace and Dignity Runners
- San Diego Coalition for Peace and Justice
- Local women's health and birth center
- and more...



Neighborhood Events

In addition to the many events and happenings in which we engaged our networks from the broader activist/organizing community, we also made real efforts to establish a presence in our neighborhood community. We thought the best way to do this was to open our space as much as possible to the people in our immediate vicinity. Day-to-day this took the form of general neighborly stuff (sharing tools, computers, food and other resources). But it also took the form of our planning for the creation of an open place on holidays such as Halloween in which we created outdoor space to have members of our lived community gather and share time and conversation while engaging them in a celebration of the holiday that tended to fit more with our principles (Wood-cut, press and roll printed t-shirt treats, fresh cinnamon-coconut oil popcorn bag treats, hot chocolate, mini pumpkin art craft, etc.) Usually, we looked for ways to engage our lived in community and build a bridge over any gaps between us and any more politically mainstream neighbors. With this effort we hoped to meet with our lived community somewhere in the middle and exchange ideas and histories in an effort to learn and grow from each other.

The strongest neighborhood relationships we had were with the children who lived across the street. Soon after we moved in, the kids came over to introduce themselves. We welcomed their help in working to build our gardens, and from that point on, we became very close. They came over every few days to hang out, cook with us, draw, talk and work on projects together. They contributed a lot of life to the house. We watched them grow over the years and did what we could to include them in our lives. We often brought them to events in the community or on special outings.

We worked with the kids to establish rules, like knocking before they come in the house, but generally, we tried not to treat them in an authoritarian way. We also made rules for ourselves; for example, we decided not to have kids over when only men were present to avoid anyone perceiving the children's presence at the house as inappropriate. At any time, up to seven kids would come over, which would generate a lot of noise and require significant attention, so we set up the boundary that no kids could visit between 9 p.m. and 10 a.m. As well, at any point if a collective member wanted the kids to go home, we all agreed to support one another in sending them home.

Being close with the kids was extremely fulfilling and had the added benefit of helping us to make even better connections with their parents and other neighbors.



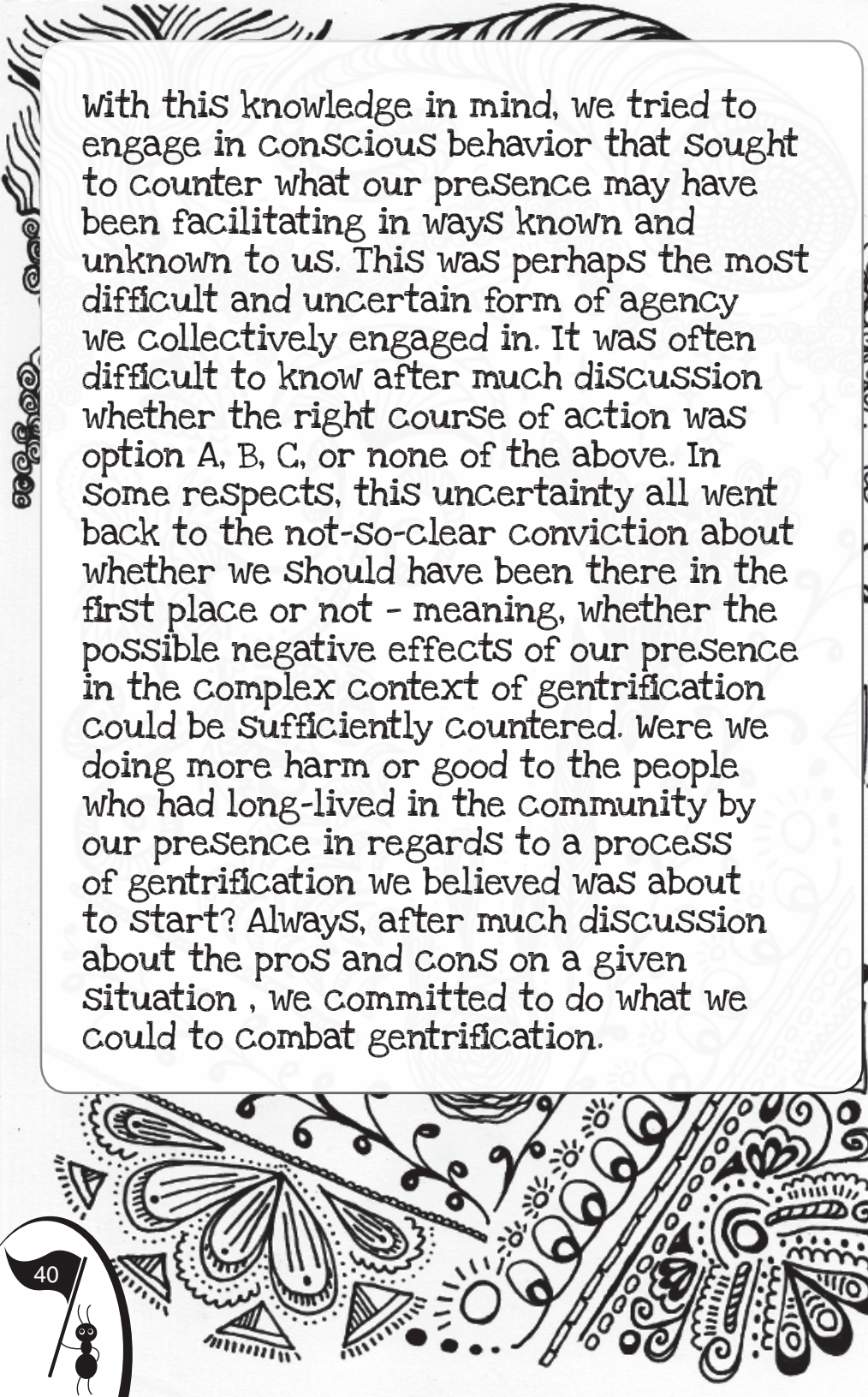
Gentrification

One of the biggest concerns we had when starting up a collective house in the neighborhood of Grant Hill was the process of gentrification and our role in it. We understood our choice to locate an activist housing collective in a historically low-income, culturally diverse, blue-collar working class neighborhood could advance the negative effects of gentrification. With this in mind, we were conscious of our presence, behavioral manner and sub-cultural affiliations and their potential effect on the community.



In the typical pattern that gentrification happens, we knew that our presence was really the first wave of the process. Most of our efforts would potentially spark greater interest in the community by many activists, artists, and hipster-like scene people which could then attract different kinds of residents, cultural events and businesses, leading to a desire for outside money to further re-develop and market the space in a then trendy area to young, white, middle and upper middle class workers and older money bohemians.





With this knowledge in mind, we tried to engage in conscious behavior that sought to counter what our presence may have been facilitating in ways known and unknown to us. This was perhaps the most difficult and uncertain form of agency we collectively engaged in. It was often difficult to know after much discussion whether the right course of action was option A, B, C, or none of the above. In some respects, this uncertainty all went back to the not-so-clear conviction about whether we should have been there in the first place or not - meaning, whether the possible negative effects of our presence in the complex context of gentrification could be sufficiently countered. Were we doing more harm or good to the people who had long-lived in the community by our presence in regards to a process of gentrification we believed was about to start? Always, after much discussion about the pros and cons on a given situation, we committed to do what we could to combat gentrification.



Much of our chosen practice can be understood as follows:

- Attempting to greet our neighbors in a manner that invited them into our open space quickly after moving in.
- Not letting our personal or collective politics be the only arbiter of what we chose to do in a given situation that seemed to call for action.
- Seeing how people we began to share community with thought about and responded to various situations and following their example, as opposed to only relying on our own political views..
- Inviting neighbors to events that took place at our living space.
- Getting formally involved with some of the local political and community-based institutions.
- Not calling the police for any reasons other than personal matters (i.e., a stolen car or direct, personal harm).

- Engaging in cop watch when the police were out in force in our vicinity.
- Lending resource support to our neighbors as we would support personal friends and fellow comrades as a means of including them in an open sharing of intentional community space.
- Not removing graffiti and observing and following the lead of those who have lived in the neighborhood and understand the history, context and meaning of the tagging.
- Attempting to have our collective membership reflect a similar racial and cultural symmetry to the neighborhood the Ant Hill existed in.
- Attempting to set the aesthetic of our collective space as resistance and DIY as opposed to existence and Hipster-fi.



These practices were by no means perfect, and we often felt they were not enough in the grand scheme of things. But those feelings were only accompanied by the added frustration many feel when resisting gentrification in urban centers, where the roots of the problem are a microcosm of the intersection of oppressive forces in late capitalism. We believe any real solutions must be multifaceted in scope and successfully revolutionary in practice, whether something as simple as rent control or more complex like putting limitations on private capital and a need to control local, regional and State governance to help do either (see more, Appendix 5 - Gentrification).

PART THREE

THE BREAKDOWN OF COLLECTIVE PROCESS

Here, at the start of our communication about the breakdown of the collective, we want to again qualify that this is coming from our perspective. When we reference ourselves as "we," it means the four of us left in the Ant Hill Collective writing this zine who, in the end, asked two other members to move out and not be a part of the collective any longer. This was an emotionally painful process that led to very raw feelings that remain to this day.



Legend of the Ant Hill Collective

We initially attempted to maintain anonymity by not using names or gender pronouns to reference people throughout the zine. After review, we and our editors realized it made things unintelligible, and we balanced our need for anonymity with clarity by electing to assign fake names to the members living at Ant Hill at the time of the collective breakdown.

The four of us who are writing this zine and still living on the property were assigned vegetable names:

- ◇ Lettuce
- ◇ Cucumber
- ◇ Kale
- ◇ Potato

The couple that was ultimately asked to leave the property and were removed from the collective were assigned grain names:

- ◇ Quinoa
- ◇ Barley

The one neutral member, described in the zine, was assigned a fruit name:

- ◇ Orange

This is our effort to make the zine readable, while still maintaining anonymity.

Intro, Background and Contextual Synopsis

Many factors contributed to the downward spiral we experienced in the collective. They did not suddenly begin after years of harmony, but grew over years of neglect and inability to find a sustainable way forward. As in any relationship, we all experienced differences with one another, but at the core, we feel an unwillingness to take time to transgress interpersonal conflicts, stemming from certain differences, was ultimately responsible for not lifting the collective out of its troubles. There are many issues stemming from differences between people that can create problems both interpersonally and for intentional communities as a whole, especially in a collective living situation. These issues are, for the most part, a normal occurrence in all intentional communities. Such issues and problems stemming from them may have precipitated the breakdown of Ant Hill, but it was because these issues could not be sustainably addressed that our problems could not be resolved. This led to much greater problems in which people had to live and make decisions.

Primary among the factors leading to our inability to resolve the troubles was a lack of established trust and honest communication between some members, even after years of attempts and many hours of discussion, in order to have an interpersonal basis for resolving conflict. There were also differing visions for the collective. Some of these differences in vision were tied to certain political and worldview differences among members which went largely undiscussed and/or unreconciled. There seemed to be an acknowledgement of the subtle differences in people's beliefs and worldviews and a great practice of tolerance and acceptance for people where they were at in their personal journeys. However, there was little open discussion about those differences which might have allowed for growth within or outside of one's present position on any issue. This presented problems, as a lack of



homogeneity for a politically active collective can be a serious issue when the differences affect how people understand each other and the meaning of important concepts like consensus, collectivism, personal is political theory and practice, and how individual agency and responsibility cohere with such concepts.

These rifts in vision coupled with the inability to transgress interpersonal issues played out in meetings and led to an overall standstill to reach consensus on serious topics, such as food buying policies, a removal policy for reference in troubled times, horizontal use of common space, etc. We disagreed not only on what the problems were at the collective, but also how to address them, when to address them and what was responsible for them. This greatly complicated efforts at resolution and drastically lengthened time spent in meetings and led to an increase in discussions among all collective members outside of meetings. Eventually, some members felt they could no longer be a part of the collective's dysfunction in an environment where interpersonal hostility trumped compromise and good faith and where consensus could not be reached on critical topics vital to its internal health and sustainability.

All of these factors culminated in the decision of one of the founding members, Kale, to remove himself from participating in regular house meetings though agreeing to abide by all decisions made at those meetings, and further, announcing they intended to move out in the distant future for collective and personal reasons at a date undisclosed but likely to be several months into the future. On several occasions prior to this moment, Kale attempted to bring up the issue of interpersonal and structural problems as a way of creating space to openly discuss and resolve the dysfunction as everyone saw it from their own perspective. Though efforts were made by Kale and other collective members to push for open and honest communication on the underlying causes of our dysfunction, it was felt there was a resistance from Quinoa and Barley to openly discuss or even openly acknowledge

the level of dysfunction for years. This resistance seemed to take many forms, subtle, passive and direct.

In the months ahead, a room opened up for rent at the Ant Hill. A new collective member, Orange, moved into the collective with all our problems unresolved because with the tension in meetings, we did not reach consensus on utilizing creative solutions to postpone seeking a new member until we resolved our issues. There were several meetings that attempted to address these problems with this new member trying to facilitate as someone outside the history of our troubles. Though Orange was committed to an extremely difficult task, these efforts proved unsuccessful and this led to her realizing there seemed no hope for resolving the problems of the collective. Consequently, another member, Cucumber, made a decision to move out of the collective citing the dysfunctional impasse that seemed to be the case and its negative impact on her day-to-day experience.

Within a month from that point and after a few meetings that proved still unsuccessful at even being able to talk about our problems openly in a meeting setting, Lettuce and Potato, a founding collective member of over 3 years and collective member of nearly 3 years stated independently and at differing times that they also intended to move out for reasons having to do with the apparent inability or resistance to openly discuss the problems we were having and work to find solutions. Lettuce and Potato also communicated that the stress of day-to-day dysfunction and vibes around the house was feeling too overwhelming after so long an attempt to figure out the reasons for our collective problems. Seeing no solution, they did not have any hope of moving beyond to a healthier place with the people involved. These sentiments were communicated with a heavy heart after much emotional and physical investment in the collective project and attempts to resolve such issues.



resistants



At this point, no move out dates were given by any collective member who said they were moving out (the vegetables), though it was a consented upon collective policy that a minimum of three months notice needed to be given. The maximum could be any number of months, but there needed to be a specific date given two months away from the actual date of a person leaving the collective in keeping with a consented to agreement.

It was then requested in a meeting by Lettuce and Potato, who announced intentions to move out, that there be a direct and open conversation in a meeting setting about the collective's issues and the reasoning behind individuals' decisions to move out. It was made clear that it was important to process the what and why of the dysfunction in the collective even if they were not going to be living there in the future. All members consented to this meeting, in which we planned to address collective issues into the future with the stipulation there be a 5 week delay asked for by Quinoa due to personal reasons. At the end of this 5 week period, collective members who announced their intention to move out (the vegetables) felt there would finally be a space to openly address what all members' problems were and how we all potentially contributed to create such a dynamic in this intentional community. It was with hope for the future in resolving our problems, potentially finding a sustainable path forward or just closure on a difficult time in people's lives, whether in continued shared living space or not, that the majority members of the collective anticipated future meetings.

Over the 5 week period of no meetings, we (Lettuce, Cucumber, Kale and Potato), began to have serious discussions with each other about why we were leaving. Our reasons had obviously been building for months prior, but it was not until this time that we all opened up to each other about our reasons. Those discussions revealed our grievances were very much in common and were problems on a collective level as opposed to a personal level or merely problems of isolated individuals. We drew on past experiences and our dissatisfaction with

the inability to resolve interpersonal conflicts as well as core policies and practices of the collective (the several important backburnered agenda items, the disregard of consented-to use of common space by Barley, for example).

Out of these discussions, what became clear to us was we had all individually felt most of the impasse in resolving the problems we could identify at the time was because of Quinoa and Barley's reluctance, if not adamant opposition, to moving through the conflict with open communication to find resolution. It seemed to us that Quinoa and Barley were resistant to resolve many issues like the back burnered agenda items mentioned above because the status quo (which was dysfunctional for most) was in many ways working well for them. In example, to actually address issues around use of collective space and the continued violations of consented to decisions on what personal items can or cannot be stored, would be to the detriment of Barley's overwhelmingly dominant use of collective space with personal possessions. This situation is akin to someone who knows the rules but breaks the rules for their own personal benefit. Their not wanting to discuss following the rules or their violations of those rules is likely for fear of losing the privilege gained from the rules violation.

With many other similar examples we discussed, we felt that for Quinoa and Barley to actually avail themselves to transgress issues of communication, trust and harmful power dynamics would have been to move them into a more horizontal space among collective members and led to changes in aspects of the status quo which was working to Quinoa and Barley's benefit in many ways. Further, to actually create and consent to a collective house manual and removal policy in a context where collective members had observed problems with their behavior and lack of willingness to address issues of interpersonal dynamics, would be to put Quinoa and Barley in a place of risk in changing the status quo or having potential consequences. This realization was something that made us feel more clear



about what was going on and why, even though there were many things left unanswered. With greater insights into our grievances with the collective, we looked to continue meetings with all collective members present to address such issues and decided as a group, we would likely start up a new collective together if problems could not be resolved.

We want to emphasize that though we announced intentions to leave the collective, we remained engaged to it, and we were still collective members in full standing whose consent to issues was expected and necessary as was always the case with previous collective members throughout Ant Hill's history in our position. Further, one might expect members who intend to leave an intentional community to distance themselves from the community by withdrawing from responsibilities and participation in its development. This was not the case with the four of us who felt committed to making the collective work and saw leaving as a last resort. Just as we did not withdraw from dinner nights and chores, we did not disengage from commitments to our visions and goals.

During this break in formal meetings requested by Quinoa for personal leave, there was a need to meet twice for practical and logistical reasons involving bill responsibilities without all members present. We all understood we weren't supposed to discuss big issues during those meetings. However, due to the flow of the conversation at the second of these meetings towards the end of the requested 5 week break, we prematurely announced that our leaving should not be seen as acts of individuals; rather, it should be seen as a group action due to the conflict we were all dealing with. This is something we knew would need further discussion with everyone present. We clearly expressed our intention to discuss the matter at length in the next meeting where we all agreed to discuss openly the problems we were experiencing and the reasons for people deciding to move out.



Though we awaited a meeting in which to finally discuss these long standing problems we had been experiencing, when the time came to schedule the meeting, efforts were made by the four of us and Orange to set a date for the meeting to take place, but Quinoa, who requested a 5-week delay in the meeting and Barley (her partner) seemed to ignore the requests to set a date.

After a couple of weeks beyond the 5 week delay of the meeting we all consented to, we were shocked and dismayed to see that Quinoa sent a public message to the listserv connecting San Diego collectives and other people interested in them stating that rooms were open for rent at the Ant Hill at a specific future date. Again, no specific date had been given by any of us. And in light of this, we felt that the choice by Quinoa to communicate directly with the public with false and misleading information rather than clarifying with any of the four of us was irresponsible and in contradiction to house policy.

Further, there was a link sent to a website describing the Ant Hill Collective in words we had never seen, nor were involved in crafting. There were also interview questions for prospective new collective members that were not what the Ant Hill Collective had used in the past and a reply email address that was Quinoa's personal address. As members of a horizontal collective in theory and for the most part in practice, we were totally surprised by this revision of who we were and what we were doing as a collective project without the consent of all current members. Even when former members had clearly given a move out date, Ant Hill had always seen these members as in full standing with necessary and valuable input. We were shocked at this and felt that it derailed the possibility of moving forward in a productive, sustaining and conciliatory way.

Immediately following (a few minutes later) Quinoa's message sent to the listserv about rooms available at the Ant Hill collective, she and Barley sent the four of us a lengthy message saying they were not interested in meeting to



discuss anything about conflict or issues of collective problems. They went on to state they were only interested in discussing logistical matters of our moving out. This was disturbing in layered ways and set the trajectory for extremely stressful and difficult problems to deal with going forward.

The four of us came together to discuss Quinoa's actions and how to best address the public. We determined the most responsible thing to do was to immediately send word to the collectives listserv that the rooms were not opening up for rent at the date given and that there were many problems the Ant Hill Collective was attempting to deal with which led to the incorrect information being sent out. We decided to be discrete as we felt it unprincipled to divulge any more information about our internal conflict and collective dynamics at that time, and we did not want to have our issues hijack a collective listserv or spill out into the broader community for fear of doing harm to the people and organizations we all were connected to in some way.



Our Abridged Narrative

Note: A more qualitative and complete linear narrative of what happened as we experienced it from this point forward can be found in the appendix (see more, Appendix 6 - Our Narrative [complete version]). For the purposes of this zine, we've provided an abridged narrative with details to give context to what we experienced and how we chose to deal with it during the escalation of conflict. We also include this with hopes that our story may help other people in similar situations, or even help to avoid such situations. Though we feel it is important that our voices be heard, we understand there is a subjectivity to the truth in all narratives and that details of the information contained in this section likely will not be agreed with by all who went through these many months of conflict. However, what follows is how we collectively experienced things.

As the conflict was escalating, Orange requested from all other members to be left out of the conflict, seeing herself as a neutral party. With Quinoa and Barley unwilling to address the collective's problems, we decided to hold four meetings in which we intended to discuss four aspects of the situation. During these meetings, we made extensive notes and shared those notes with all collective members for the sake of transparency and open communication, even if they didn't attend. These four meetings covered four topics in succession:

- what got us into the problems that we were facing
- what does it mean and what happens to the Ant Hill Collective going forward
- any collective statement that is to be made to the public
- any logistics going forward as an outcome of the meetings seeking resolution to the conflict.



The day to day sharing of space became very difficult, as communication between the four of us and Quinoa and Barley largely broke down. We no longer held regular meetings, and basic responsibilities such as chores, shopping, and cooking meals became fraught with uncertainty.

During this time of uncertainty and heightened tension, we found out with less than two weeks notice that Quinoa and/or Barley had scheduled a large scale event at the Ant Hill with a mutual friend of ours without our consent or knowledge. Such an event, which involved live music, visitors from hundreds of miles away and potentially over a hundred other attendees, traditionally required thorough discussion and consensus with all collective members. We felt this break from protocol directly challenged our standing in the collective and that they assumed consensus was no longer needed from the four of us. We surmised it would be unprincipled to have the event at Ant Hill when the collective was in such a state of dysfunction. Further, it would have surrendered our say in the direction of the collective. With this in mind, we worked with the event organizer who was unaware of any of these issues to find a different venue to host the event so it could go forward without involving the Ant Hill. With our and the event organizer's intentions known, Quinoa went as far as persuading other collectives against hosting the event. Some collective houses declined our request after hearing from Quinoa as they did not wish to get in the middle of our conflict. Fortunately one collective house held an emergency meeting to consider the situation and eventually volunteered to host it. In our view, the event was a success, despite the turbulence leading up to it. It also came at the cost of potentially shaken relationships between us and those in the outside community. We learned that Quinoa was lying to members of the greater community about our characters and our actions in an effort to discredit us, a pattern which continued throughout the conflict.



We understood that all collective members' connections with people outside the collective were important and covered nearly all activist, progressive, left, anti-authoritarian, and local food justice circles in San Diego. Further, we understood that the publicising of our internal problems had the potential to create a rift in the community. Such a rift could be detrimental to many people's relationships while having lasting effects on good work taking place in various struggles for justice and liberation. While Quinoa described this situation as akin to "warring" in her perception of things, our efforts were not to win at anything. Rather, we sought to stay with our principles while seeking a resolution to the conflict that maintained relational continuity and sustainability between individuals and institutions; both ours with them and all collective members with others outside the collective. Anything else would have been both irresponsible and not in keeping with the collective's principles and the personal goals we claimed to base our theory and practice on.

This put us in a difficult situation. We felt it unprincipled to spread word of our internal collective problems without communication and resolution between all seven of us first. Yet, we learned from others in the community that Quinoa and Barley were doing those very things. This led to very tense interactions with those we considered friends and allies. In saying this, it is important to note that we did seek some outside perspective from a couple of people about our situation and our actions as a way to self-check that we were in line with our principles and best interests as a collective.

We went on with our second meeting discussing what the failure to get beyond our collective's problems all meant for the Ant Hill and its future. We determined and decided to communicate our desires to move in a direction toward ending the Ant Hill Collective based on the belief we had reached a point where there seemed little-to-no hope



of reaching consensus on a sustainable way forward for the collective let alone any possibility of coming to some sense of resolve. We came to this conclusion mindful of our differing perspectives with Quinoa and Barley and our inability to come to shared reasons for how we all got to that point.

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As we continued our four meetings, Quinoa and Barley emailed us with a proposal to engage in mediation with the National Conflict Resource Center. After discussion, we agreed. Yet, by that time (six days later after concluding our four meetings), they then declined the service, stipulating that they meant that they meant mediation could only involve the logistics of the four of us moving out. We felt mediation with stipulations that limited the discussion to only their demands and one-sided logistics didn't constitute real mediation, so we continued pressing for mediation without agreeing to such parameters.

By the end of our fourth meeting, the four of us agreed that our interpersonal relationships with Quinoa and Barley mixed with their unwillingness to engage in process work to resolve our differences was the root of our collective problems. We had exhausted our tools and all possible ways we knew of to resolve such problems. As the four of us wanted to continue living collectively, and in the absence of

a removal policy, we justified on democratic grounds that we should not leave the Ant Hill. We know this has been a position that other housing collectives have experienced and have determined to use a democratic process (or consensus minus those being asked to leave) in the absence of a consented to removal policy. It also made more sense to us that with 6 rooms on the property, four people living in 4 rooms of both houses was a better logistical reason for staying then two people in 1 room. Therefore, we requested that Quinoa and Barley, leave the Ant Hill. (see more, Appendix 7 - Letter Asking for Quinoa and Barley to Move Out)

Upon hearing from outside community members it was communicated to them that we rejected offers of mediation from Quinoa and Barley, we decided again to open up a request for free professional mediation with the NCRC. Our thoughts were that Quinoa and Barley were not being honest with people about what was happening at the collective, and they were attempting to make us look unreasonable and unprincipled. Especially because attempts to engage in a community based mediation process with a group of agreed upon peers did not seem to gain any momentum when we floated the idea to an intermediary we knew was talking to both us and Quinoa and Barley. However, we also had a hope that maybe this failure to engage in mediation was because of some miscommunication or that they had a change of heart without yet contacting us about it. Though we hoped for an agreement to our third attempt at mediation, this request via an NCRC mediator who contacted them was denied by Quinoa and Barley.

In our perspective, the purpose of mediation during the breakdown at the Ant Hill was to deal with the logistics regarding any transitions on the property as a potential outcome as well as provide a space to attempt to resolve issues in the absence of all other processes of communication having broken down. Mediation would



have allowed members from the community of collective/ cooperative housing or otherwise outside person(s) to enter in as a neutral perspective able to deal with the intense issues that were present. Unfortunately, for all collective members involved and for the extended community which our collective conflict affected due to how it was made public and the intention behind how it was made public, real mediation was not a possibility.

We found ourselves in a situation where we felt deeply invested in the collective, like it was a part of us after all the work we contributed in the previous years. We acknowledge Quinoa and Barley likely felt the same way. We were frequently reminded that it would have been easier for us to just leave and start something else on our own. This may have avoided the stress and anxiety we experienced, but we thought addressing these issues head on was the right thing to do. We felt that given this context, if a majority of the collectives' members (in this case, the vegetables) left in spite of the violations of collective process and unwillingness to address the collective's problems by a couple of members (Quinoa and Barley), it would have gone against our principles of working for sustainability through understanding the power dynamics and political dimensions to personal practice. We determined that our collective, founded on principles of social justice, should either endure or end in keeping with those principles best we could. We took guidance from past examples and writings to determine each step of the way towards such goals. In spite of this, we still looked into the possibility of finding another house to start a new collective if the situation at Ant Hill could not be resolved, though this was a last resort in our minds.

When we asked Quinoa and Barley to move out, they refused, insisting that we follow through on our intentions to move out. They told us in person and in writing that they were not willing to talk with us about

anything except our moving out and a staunch silence was the vibe and tone of shared space other than glances passed, or infrequent salutations. At this time, with no agreement from Quinoa and Barley to move out and their stated intention to stay and "see who leaves first," we decided to not have our collective efforts be put in limbo with the rest of the problems we were having with them. We determined the next best step would be to remove Quinoa and Barley from the collective. This took the form of us taking ownership over nearly all responsibilities and chores for the collective, which included grocery shopping, cleaning, gardens, bird care, meetings, online accounts, etc. Paying rent and utilities continued nearly as usual, as we still shared the property. We arrived at this decision with hours and weeks of discussion. After carefully weighing our alternatives, we determined it was the best and most principled course of action. Soon after, Quinoa and Barley requested we not communicate with them except for in writing. This left little to no verbal communication with them from that point forward. We respected their expressed need and mostly sent emails or texts as our form of communication from that point forward.

At this point, we noticed that in addition to not speaking to us, Quinoa changed her conduct towards us - she started playing loud music early in the morning, taking pictures of us, recording us then writing down notes while we were in common areas though we were not doing anything towards her, etc. When we attempted to address these issues with them in writing as requested, her response was one which referenced legal use of the space according to city code, claimed we were harassing them, and threatened that we would be held "accountable." We started to question what our situation looked like from the law's perspective having already known that there were no civil legal means to remove anyone from the property who was also on the lease. We worried that we would be forced off the property legally via false allegations under criminal law which



appeared to be the intent on note taking, photos and claims of accountability for harassment. In the face of this, we continued to stay with our principles and only engage Quinoa and Barley with our collective voice after carefully consented to decisions.

Around this time, we found out from our property management company that Quinoa had taken a person, who was unknown to the four of us, into their offices to submit a \$35 rental application in order to be added to the lease on the house Quinoa and Barley did not live in. The property managers told us they found it odd that Quinoa was there in the office for this application since technically they lived at the other house. The property managers said Quinoa stated, “we are all friends on the property” and convinced them we were all informed and in agreement about the decision. Quinoa was working to move a stranger into our home without our knowledge or consent and in the midst of this contentious conflict. Upon learning this, we contacted the property managers, and they did not process the application. Our efforts in reaching out to the person who had applied did not go far — they were initially open to talking with us about potentially moving in and the situation at the collective but were later unreachable or unavailable for talking. From our experiences with this person, it seemed they were unaware of the conflict and context in which they sought to move in to the Ant Hill Collective.

With matters still unresolved, and at the suggestion of a few in the community, we reached out to the San Diego Collectives email listserv for advice and assistance in resolving our conflict. We followed up on the two responses we received, but neither were effective at finding a resolution with Quinoa and Barley, who were still unwilling to mediate with us or speak to us except in writing.

One of these people offered to come anyway and meet with the four of us. We agreed, and this person and another friend of theirs who was also trained in Nonviolent Communication (NVC) mediation techniques came to discuss matters with us. One of them had met Quinoa and Barley in the past, which we felt made the discussion more relevant.

Orange decided to attend that meeting since she thought it would be a positive thing. Though the scope of the conversation could not include resolution to our problems with Quinoa and Barley, it did afford us a discussion of our grievances and recent disturbing experiences with them. In the end, though it did not produce any notable movement toward resolve, sustainability or justice among the people we felt were doing us wrong both in and outside of the collective, it was good that these two NVC mediators came from outside our intentional community offering their help. Overall, we think it had a cathartic effect for us by the end of that meeting and was welcomed in the midst of a context where we were enduring traumatic stress levels.

Soon after, Orange, who announced months earlier they intended to move out around this time, told us their move out date and gave their 30 day notice. Soon after this message was communicated, much to our surprise, Quinoa and Barley announced they too were giving their 30 day notice. We were of course relieved that there seemed to be an end to the lived dysfunction we shared with Quinoa and Barley, as we ourselves were preparing for the possibility of moving on and setting up another collective house.

As their move out date approached, Quinoa and Barley announced to us they were staying an extra 30 days and that their request had been authorized by the property managers. We then contacted the property managers, who told us they had not said this and they required written approval from others on the lease for a 30 day extension. Given



this information, the fact that we felt unsafe sharing space by this time with Quinoa and Barley and that we had already agreed to sublease their room, we agreed not to approve a 30 day extension (see more, Appendix 8 - Letter Explaining No Extension of 30 Day Notice).

The week ahead was difficult in that many people from our extended community were involved in efforts to help pack up and move Quinoa and Barley from Ant Hill. This was difficult for us because we figured many of the people helping Quinoa and Barley were given a one-sided account of things. No matter what people personally thought of the conflict after only hearing one side, it was not the time or place to address any of it, even though we had interactions with them. Consequently, there was a vibe and tone to some of the interactions with others in the broader community here during that time which we felt represented a campaign against us and our character.

This made matters more difficult to deal with in that many of these people who were helping Quinoa and Barley move were directed by them to pack up and do certain things which we needed to step in and stop them from doing. The most common of these was their being told to pack up certain belongings of ours and load them into their vehicles. Many times we would tell them it was ours, and they would say they were told to move it. Often we would walk by and see some of our personal things in the back of a truck or being put into a car. It seemed constant that items which were personally owned by us were loaded up and in many cases, taken away. We do not know what happened to many of those things to this day, though we did create a shared online document with Quinoa and Barley listing all of the missing items of each individual and asked they send us any information they may have on the items' whereabouts. There has not been a verbal or written response to our request.

With their departure, Quinoa and Barley requested an inspection of the property to assess damage that warranted withholding any part of their security deposit. With the breakdown in collective process, their removal from the collective and Quinoa and Barley's use of State law to govern our interactions, we determined to base our reasons for acting in this matter on both State law as well as our collective principles. Property management and our own legal research suggested that legally, we did not owe them a security deposit. The deposit is not returned until the last person on the lease, who bares all financial risk and responsibility, leaves the property and terminates the contract with property management. At such time, property management conducts the walk through and property assessment to determine withholdings from the deposit for violations of the lease, which is a legal contract they have with the departing tenant, not other people who were also on the lease. Further, the accumulation of their modifications to the property that needed to be fixed in addition to the value of our belongings which they took and never returned far exceeded the value of their security deposit. Some of the items had sentimental attachments that were hard to put a price on. In the following months, we received letters from Quinoa containing threats of lawsuits against us for withholding their deposit. These threats never materialized, and would never hold up against the lease agreement they signed with property management or the legal statutes of the State.

Since the departure of Quinoa and Barley, the Ant Hill Collective has continued with the four remaining members (the vegetables) while we have sought out subletters for the open rooms until we are ready to formally end the collective and start a new project on the knowledge, passion and lessons learned from the old.

Throughout the last year, the continuation of the conflict post separation has been difficult. We felt it necessary



constructive dialog on several aspects of our problems. Though these meetings were slow going and people seemed tentative to speak directly to the heart of the matter as they saw it, they were none-the-less meetings in which the problems, or at least the symptoms of the problems, were discussed without resolve.

In the end, Orange conveyed much frustration at the apparent impasse we were all experiencing and expressed she felt unable to help facilitate productive dialog about our issues and move us in a direction that was more sustainable.

After the five week break in meetings, while attempting to schedule the consented to meeting to discuss the problems we were having at Ant Hill, Orange emailed all collective members suggesting that we wait to have these discussions in the summer to avoid having the conversation be skewed by reaction and built-up emotions. The day after sending this email, she made herself available for discussion in the front house kitchen where she and Kale started to talk about the email she sent. Kale communicated that he appreciated Orange's suggestion but also felt that Orange, not having an experience of living several years in the collective and then what leaving on such terms may mean for others, proposed a solutions that would be hard to agree with given our different positions and relationships to the conflict. In an emotionally deep context of conversation, given the topic, Orange heard this as Kale saying that her opinion did not matter because she had been a collective member for only three months. Kale explained that this was not at all what he was saying and that he genuinely valued Orange's opinion but that it was derived from a very different contextual experience than that

of collective members who were founding members of the collective or who had lived there for years.

Minutes after starting their conversation, Kale and Orange were then joined by Lettuce and Potato, who randomly entered the kitchen, observed the conversation and joined in. All four collective members were then engaging in a thoughtful and calm though emotionally laden conversation on the topic that Orange had made herself available to discuss with the vegetables (the topic being her suggestion to Postpone the consented to meeting until after they moved out in the summer 4 months away). Kale, Lettuce and Potato shared with Orange that while appreciative of her proposition, it seemed to hamper the progress we all worked hard to make in the direction of agreeing to have these meetings to talk about long standing problems and that these talks were very important to them for a number of layered reasons. Quinoa, when getting ready to leave the house, walked by, observed the conversation taking place and without knowing the pretext or context, made assumptions about the dynamic of conversation and then text Barley before leaving, who was in a meeting in the other house.

Our talk continued and in the middle of our conversation, Barley came into the kitchen and observed that Orange was in an emotional space and had been crying but had little-to-no contextual reference as to why. Barley accused us of bullying Orange and claimed that "this is what we do." He had no idea about what was said before he came in and did not know anything about Orange wanting to make herself available to talk with us. He did not know that minutes before him walking in, Lettuce was hugging Orange and consoling her



since she was emotionally distraught and had just got done explaining that she felt a lot of pressure from Quinoa and Barley to go along with their perspective on the problems we were experiencing and that she really just didn't want to be in the middle of it all.

We find this account relevant because of the outcome of this interaction, which Orange intentionally sought out. After taking the time to do the transgressing process work with authentic communication about our differing perspectives, we and Orange came to an understanding on what those differences between us were and why we had them. We became closer and more trusting of each other after pushing through the conflict we were having around those differences. Conversely, Quinoa and Barley assumed things about the dynamic and the people involved but did not engage in any process work to see what differences to their point of view others had and why. Consequently, Quinoa and Barley held to the notion that we, Potato, Lettuce and Kale, had cornered Orange in the kitchen and bullied into taking to us about her proposal to postpone the meeting until she broke down crying and that even then, we did not relent.

We believe that this is not just an example how people can have self confirming biases to collectively observed phenomena, it is also representative of how without being willing to engage in authentic communication, seeking an understanding of differences, people are left to engage with that difference without the possibility of averting the negative consequences of unaddressed misunderstanding. For differences real or assumed in a context of conflict,

the most critical thing to do, if people want to progress to resolution of the problems those positions generate, is to genuinely engage people on those points of difference. Without a willingness by Quinoa and Barley for time and effort in a transgressing process, this particular situation was left in their minds as something evident about our characters and the possible productiveness of any future discussions seeking resolve in our problems.

Soon after Quinoa and Barley stated their unwillingness to engage in an open and honest discussion about the reasons for our issues, Orange stated she wished to be left out of any future attempts at finding resolution to our problems. She further stated she would be seeking a different living situation in the coming months.

From this point forward, we acted upon Orange's request to remain neutral regarding collective troubles and did not seek to engage her in discussion about the issues we were facing. However, a couple weeks after her request, Orange expressed to us she felt pressure from Quinoa and/or Barley to take their side in the conflict, and she felt uneasy at some of the language and perspective Quinoa and Barley were bringing to the conversations she had with them. We discussed Orange's feelings on this situation she felt she was in and encouraged her not to take either side of the conflict. We suggested that she had her own side to how she saw things and agency over what she did with her perspective. She then reiterated to us her request to not be involved in any of the conflict at the collective, and she wished to remain out of it. We acknowledged her need to remain neutral and invited her to join our meetings at any time if she needed



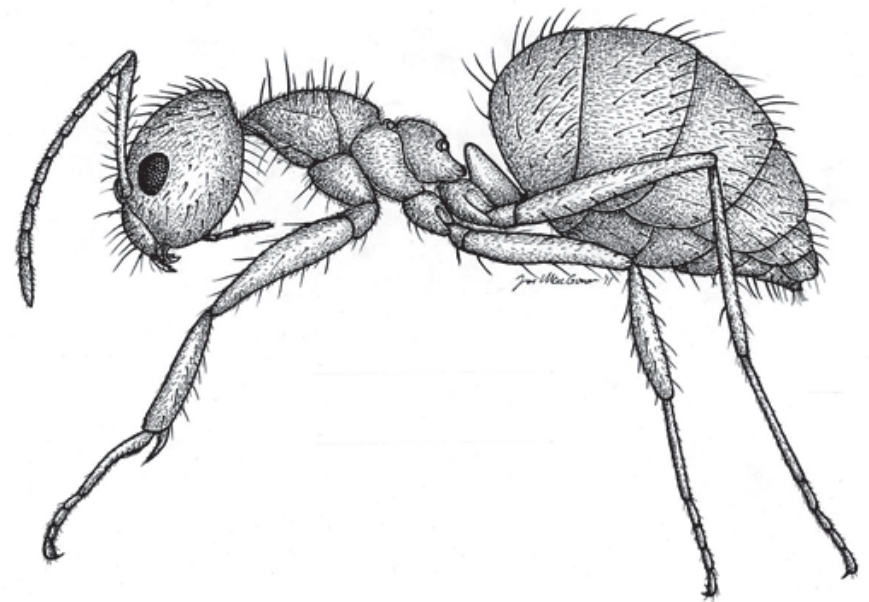
to check in with us, which she sought to do on a number of occasions. We tried to keep her apprised of where we were at with things out of consideration for her being stuck in a bad situation. We checked-in with Orange before making big decisions in an effort to take her emotions and well-being into account as we wanted to make sure she was not blindsided by anything that could cause a reaction or repercussions that may affect her living on the property. Orange expressed her gratitude for our efforts at not including her in the conflict while keeping her informed of any major group decision the four of us were making before doing so.

In email communications to the community at large, Quinoa and Barley represented Orange as being on their side against her clearly communicated wishes to remain neutral in the conflict. At the time, Orange explained to us that this was disturbing and hurtful.

After observing many instances of troubling behaviors by Quinoa, Orange stated to us that she felt hesitant to confront Quinoa and Barley or the broader community for fear of retribution. Orange never expressed her neutrality to the broader community, which likely left an impression with the public that she took a side and that there was more of an equal 4/3 split in the conflict at the Ant Hill Collective. This becomes relevant as far as public perception of our decision to use democratic process in resolving who stays on the property.

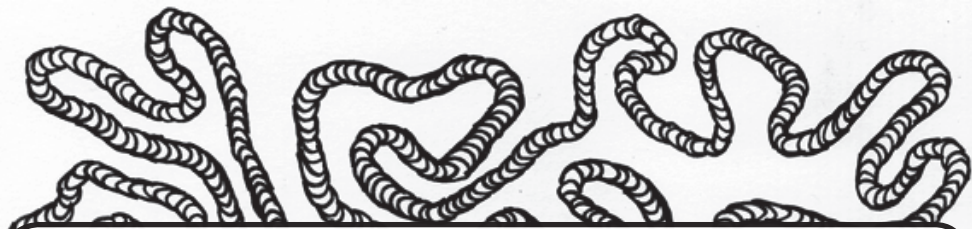
Though we were unhappy with Orange's lack of response to the broader community in that moment, we fully understand the fear, frustration and anxiety she experienced in those times before she was finally able to leave the living

situation she found herself in. While this is an account of our experiences with Orange, we want to make it clear that we do not know if she agreed with everything we did, and she intentionally wanted to remain neutral throughout the conflict.



The Ant Hill is Over, and Why

Without a clear mission, it's hard to judge where the Ant Hill Collective succeeded and where it failed. It's also difficult to judge when a collective is over without any clear policy or timeline to be an indication. It is left to personal opinions, informed by historical precedent and definitions of what it means to be a collective. During the second of the four open meetings previously mentioned seeking to address our issues' origins and solutions and what the conflict means for the future of the Ant Hill, the four of us discussed what we considered as next steps given the context of our dysfunction. We drafted a potential public statement, and like all the notes and documents from those meetings, we shared statements with Quinoa, Barley and Orange. Our intention for sharing notes and documents from those meetings was to take responsibility for our actions and create as much openness about our decisions as possible with all collective members, especially the two members we were in conflict with.



As far as the future of the Ant Hill Collective was concerned, we communicated that given the immense problems we were stuck with, we felt the best thing to do was move to end the Ant Hill Collective. Our reasoning at the time, before Quinoa and Barley's first rejection of mediation, was to move in this direction on principle for reasons that can be seen in the following excerpt from our shared meeting notes:

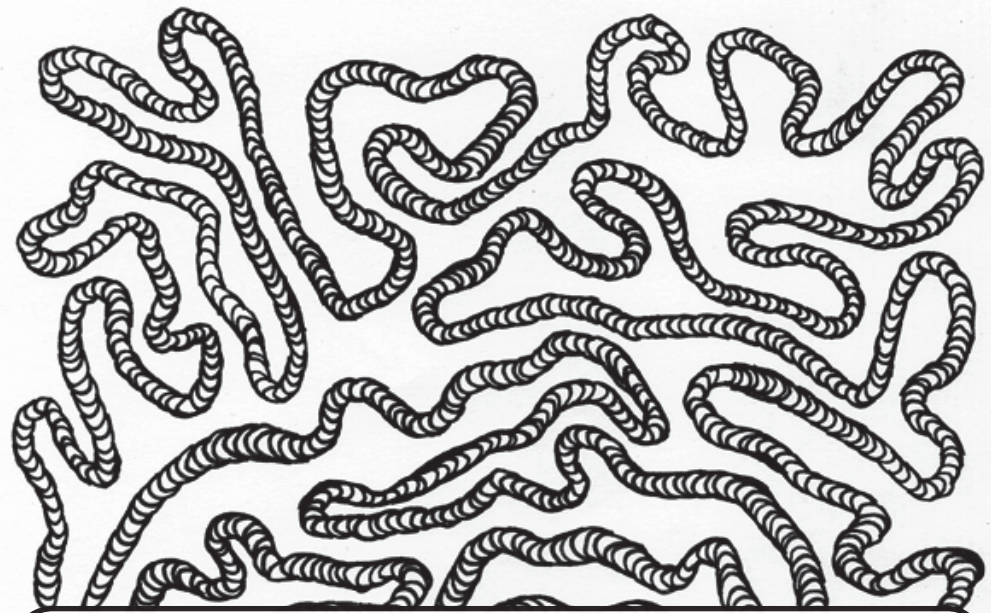
We feel that regardless of who stays on this property, we think the Ant Hill Collective should be disbanded. We do not feel this because we are leaving or feel some sense of bitterness, but rather, for reasons stated below.

- Collective process has broken down with no hope or commitment to finding resolution.
- Majority of members have found the environment unhealthy to live in
- Majority of collective members think that the collective should be over
- Recent events have taken place that have violated collective process in ways destructive and unsustainable to people both inside the collective and in the broader community
- Failure and unwillingness to transgress interpersonal conflicts, which barred consensus decision making
- Repeated violation of consented to policies
- Statement made by another member, who is not one of us [Orange], that the Collective is dead
- Statement made by another member, who is not one of us [Barley], that they believe "it's every person for their self now"



Consequently, there can be no continuation of the collective going forward with new members regardless of who stays on the property as there would need to be an ability to engage in collective process to move the Ant Hill Collective forward with new consented to members and consented to agreements on what those new members were joining in name, theory, and practice.

[We think this last point is important given the context of two collective members publicly redefining the Ant Hill Collective, removing and rewording various questions in the application for potential new members and routing all communications on these issues through their personal email account, without the consent of or informing all collective members. This breaks with any previously consented to procedure from the previous 3 years of the collective's existence.]



It is with great difficulty and some sadness that we reach this point of reason in our collective process. But we feel that our continued commitment to the worldview, principles and politics that had us seek the founding of and/or joining of this collective leaves us with this action as the only way to remain committed to our principles. We do not seek to go forward in contradiction or hypocrisy. We do not wish to call something inauthentic by authentic name.

In the end, we feel the Ant Hill Collective was left with extremely difficult problems to deal with in impossible circumstances due to a lack of willingness by all members to attempt to move beyond the problems we were having. In the absence of a removal policy, we defaulted to a democratic process of consensus minus those being asked to leave as many other collectives have used when found in similar situations with no previously agreed upon protocol to follow. Consequently, the majority members asking two members to remove themselves from the collective signaled a drastic change in the collective, but we believe this decision was made by the Ant Hill Collective.



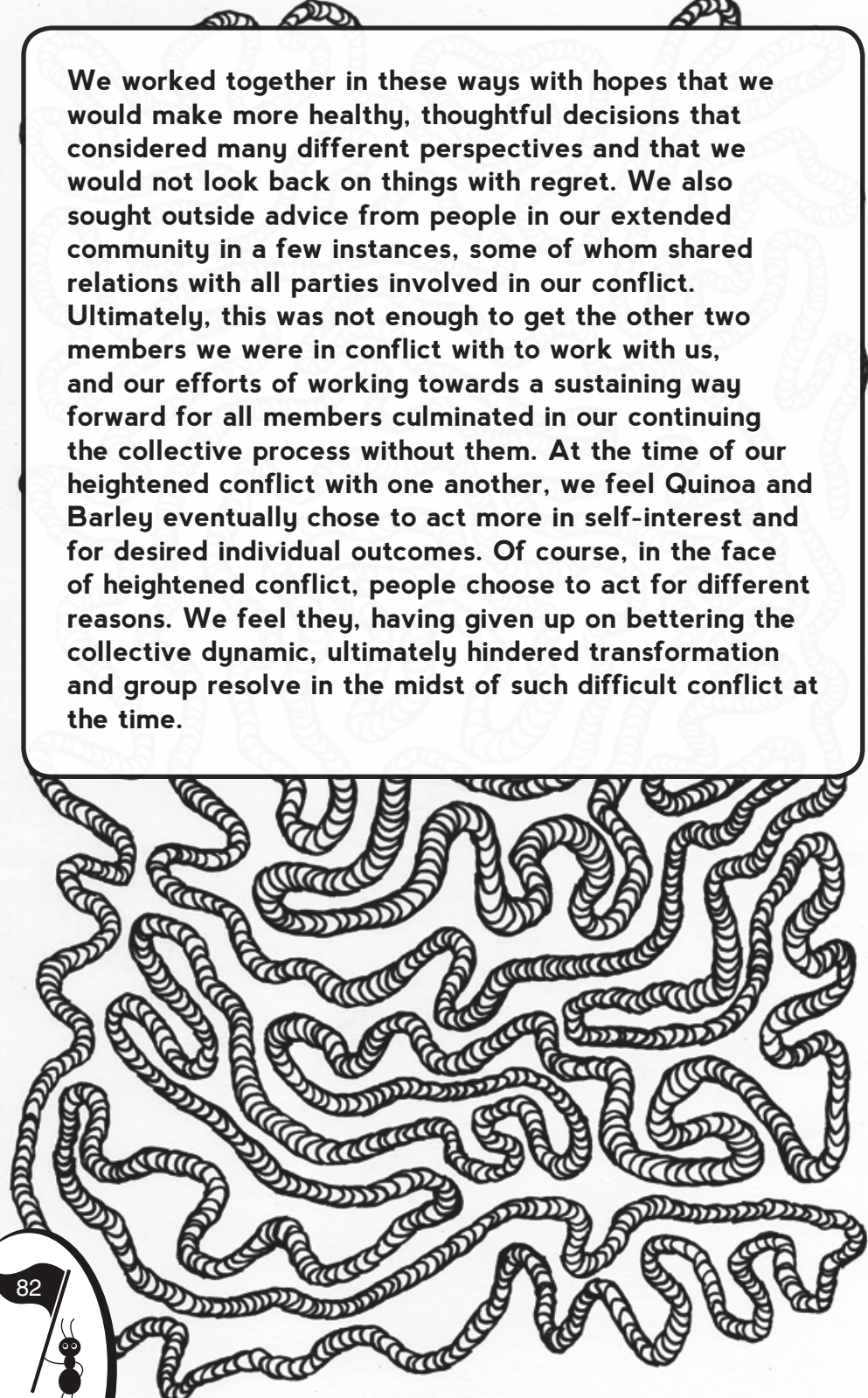
From that point forward, Ant Hill Collective consisted of the remaining four members to which no other members have been added since this decision was made. The four of us have maintained a similar collective process to that of our over 4 year history of the Ant Hill while subletting any rooms open for rent to non-member residents. We have worked to rebuild infrastructure in the wake of a troubling separation, and we have taken much time fulfilling numerous projects and goals talked about over the years of the collective's existence, that never came to fruition due to the issues and conflict we were having.

We feel we have laid the foundation for a space that is physically, aesthetically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually centered in our principles and theory which can better facilitate people practicing what we/they believe in. The months leading up to and following the separation also required a great deal of healing and recovery, best processed with each other and our closest friends and family. Thus, our efforts have not been as outward and public in the past year as previous years. We felt it important to communicate here the general scope and tone of our practice since the split in our membership.

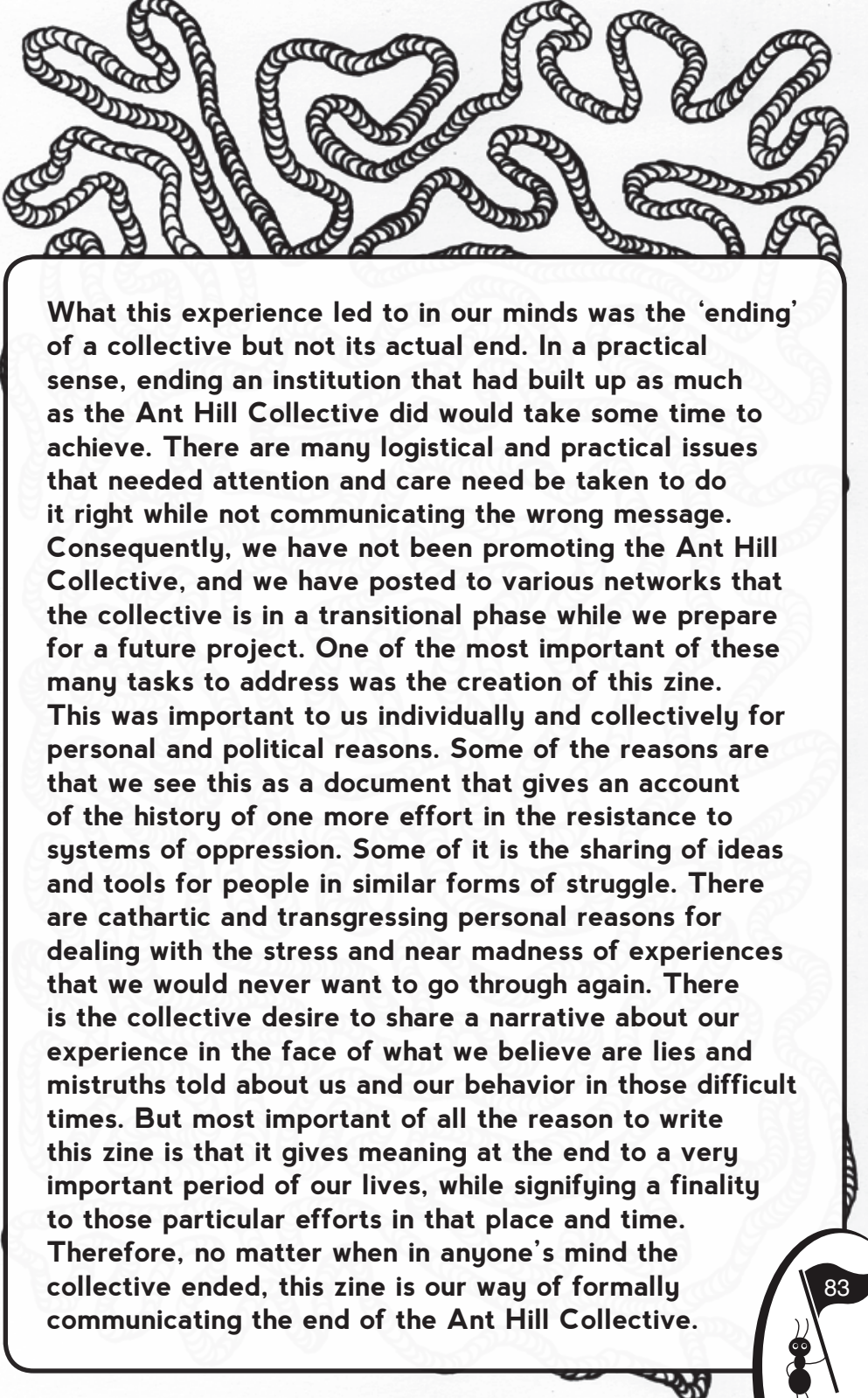
In some ways, we could venture to say the collective ended once we were no longer operating as a collective with the other two members, beginning late winter 2013, when we stopped having meetings and disagreed about the state of things as they were, what was to come of them and how. However, throughout that time, we did everything we could to hold more meetings, more dialogue and find consensus in decisions that impacted the collective and people in our shared community and networks. We took great effort to be non-confrontational, respectful and in accordance with our values when dealing with these problems as people and as members of an intentional community and activist collective.

In our years as collective members, there was no time more than these few months where we felt we acted more in line with and aware of our ethical principles as people and agents for liberatory change. Each of us wanted to see the best possible outcome for the collective, sacrificing our time and mental energy to that end. We worked hard to check one another with critical perspectives and give each other feedback. We shared ideas and thoughts with one another to work towards what we thought was the most ethical decision to make and behavior in which to engage. We made decisions, wrote emails and responded to emails as a group.





We worked together in these ways with hopes that we would make more healthy, thoughtful decisions that considered many different perspectives and that we would not look back on things with regret. We also sought outside advice from people in our extended community in a few instances, some of whom shared relations with all parties involved in our conflict. Ultimately, this was not enough to get the other two members we were in conflict with to work with us, and our efforts of working towards a sustaining way forward for all members culminated in our continuing the collective process without them. At the time of our heightened conflict with one another, we feel Quinoa and Barley eventually chose to act more in self-interest and for desired individual outcomes. Of course, in the face of heightened conflict, people choose to act for different reasons. We feel they, having given up on bettering the collective dynamic, ultimately hindered transformation and group resolve in the midst of such difficult conflict at the time.

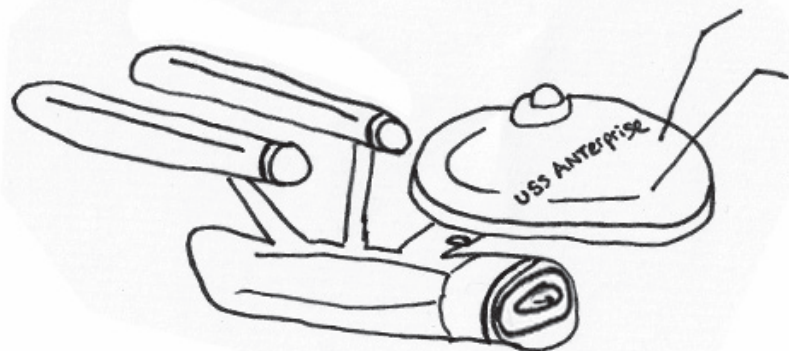


What this experience led to in our minds was the 'ending' of a collective but not its actual end. In a practical sense, ending an institution that had built up as much as the Ant Hill Collective did would take some time to achieve. There are many logistical and practical issues that needed attention and care need be taken to do it right while not communicating the wrong message. Consequently, we have not been promoting the Ant Hill Collective, and we have posted to various networks that the collective is in a transitional phase while we prepare for a future project. One of the most important of these many tasks to address was the creation of this zine. This was important to us individually and collectively for personal and political reasons. Some of the reasons are that we see this as a document that gives an account of the history of one more effort in the resistance to systems of oppression. Some of it is the sharing of ideas and tools for people in similar forms of struggle. There are cathartic and transgressing personal reasons for dealing with the stress and near madness of experiences that we would never want to go through again. There is the collective desire to share a narrative about our experience in the face of what we believe are lies and mistruths told about us and our behavior in those difficult times. But most important of all the reason to write this zine is that it gives meaning at the end to a very important period of our lives, while signifying a finality to those particular efforts in that place and time. Therefore, no matter when in anyone's mind the collective ended, this zine is our way of formally communicating the end of the Ant Hill Collective.



PART FOUR

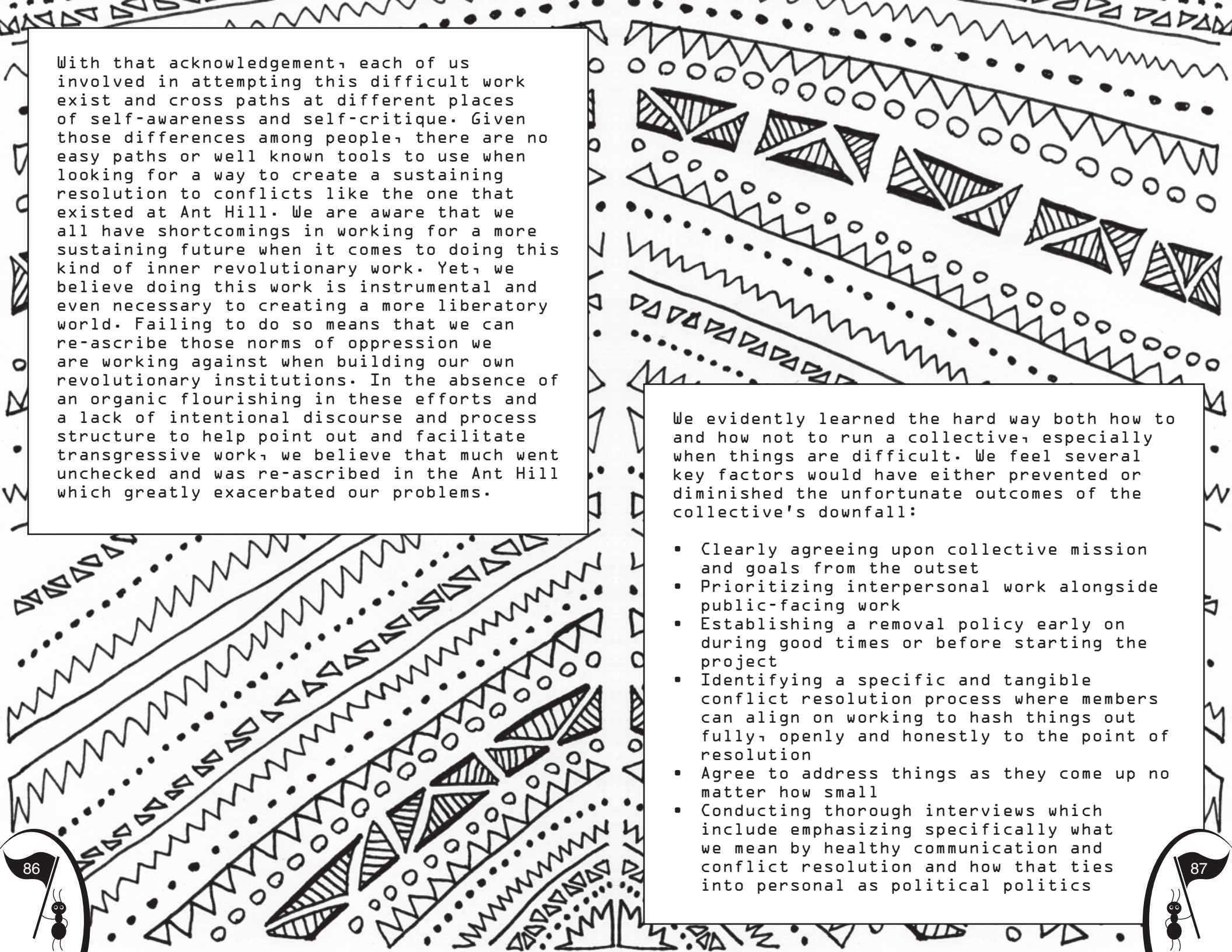
THE FINAL FRONTIER



Lessons Learned

With every hurdle that inched us closer to the breakdown of the collective, in spite of all the negativity and repeated feelings of defeat, we gained invaluable insights into each other and ourselves, including opportunities for growth and learning from our experiences. By working together during the conflict to hold one-another accountable, we learned from what we didn't do well and wish we had done better. We also learned the negative impacts of attempting to do transgressive accountability work with people who seemed resistant to engaging in that transformative process.

People in left/anarcho/progressive communities often tend to focus on work that brings about revolutionary change to institutions of society. However, the work to facilitate similar revolutionary change within one's self, while needed, often takes a back burner to one's outward revolutionary practice. This seems to be the case even if the importance of the work is realized. We live in a society that does not promote taking a self-critical lens to our interpersonal practices. This can make it even more difficult when attempting to live by our stated principles that often go against the norms of mainstream society.

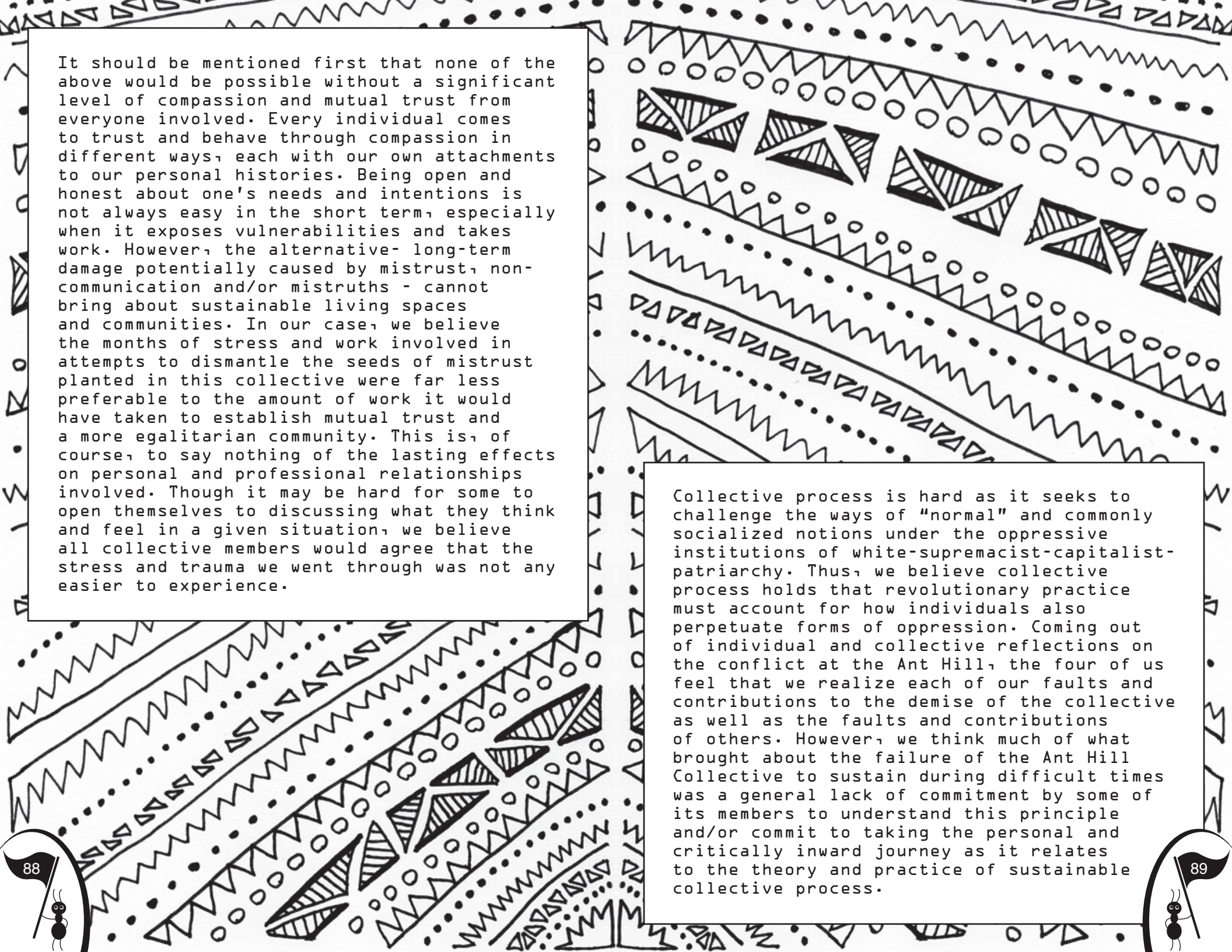


With that acknowledgement, each of us involved in attempting this difficult work exist and cross paths at different places of self-awareness and self-critique. Given those differences among people, there are no easy paths or well known tools to use when looking for a way to create a sustaining resolution to conflicts like the one that existed at Ant Hill. We are aware that we all have shortcomings in working for a more sustaining future when it comes to doing this kind of inner revolutionary work. Yet, we believe doing this work is instrumental and even necessary to creating a more liberatory world. Failing to do so means that we can re-ascribe those norms of oppression we are working against when building our own revolutionary institutions. In the absence of an organic flourishing in these efforts and a lack of intentional discourse and process structure to help point out and facilitate transgressive work, we believe that much went unchecked and was re-ascribed in the Ant Hill which greatly exacerbated our problems.

We evidently learned the hard way both how to and how not to run a collective, especially when things are difficult. We feel several key factors would have either prevented or diminished the unfortunate outcomes of the collective's downfall:

- Clearly agreeing upon collective mission and goals from the outset
- Prioritizing interpersonal work alongside public-facing work
- Establishing a removal policy early on during good times or before starting the project
- Identifying a specific and tangible conflict resolution process where members can align on working to hash things out fully, openly and honestly to the point of resolution
- Agree to address things as they come up no matter how small
- Conducting thorough interviews which include emphasizing specifically what we mean by healthy communication and conflict resolution and how that ties into personal as political politics

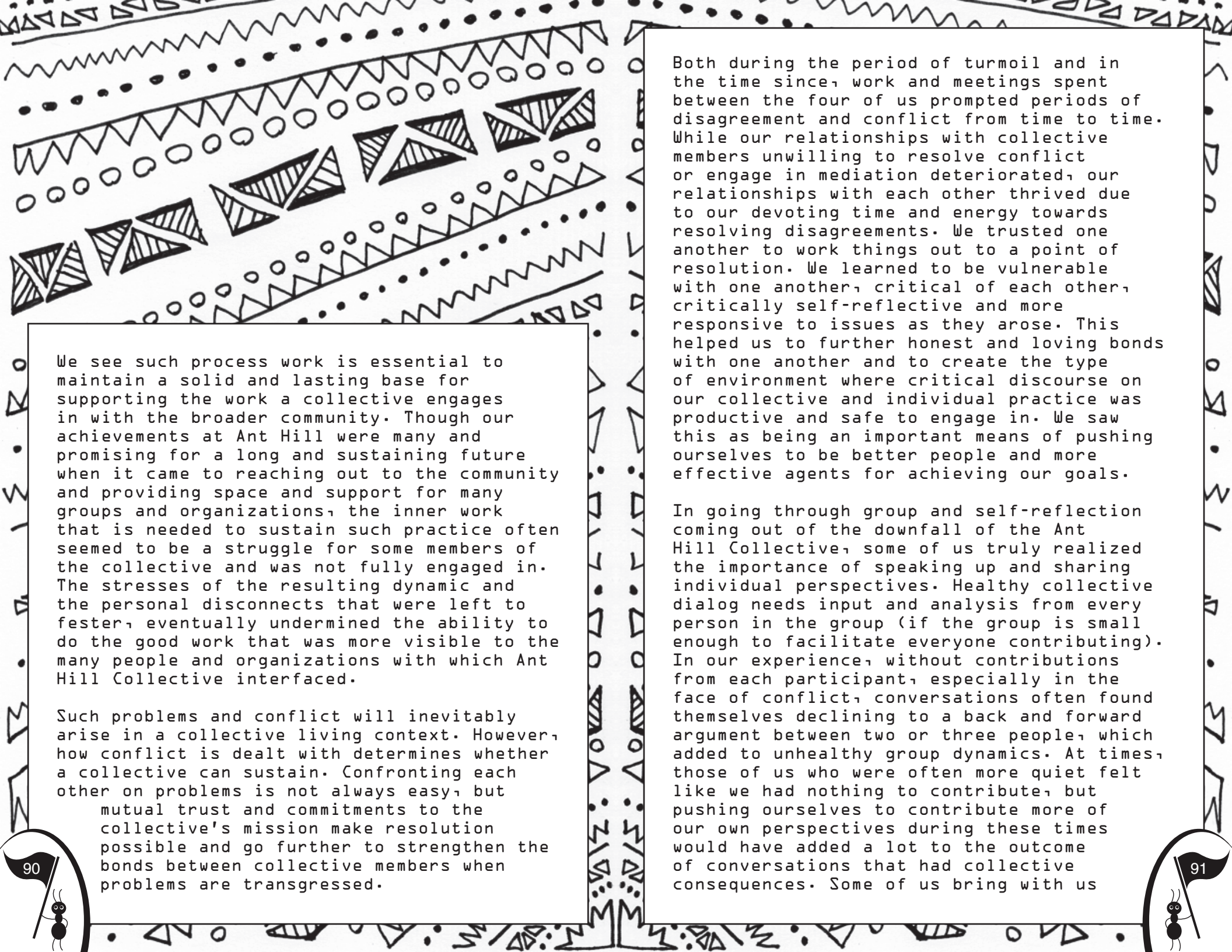




It should be mentioned first that none of the above would be possible without a significant level of compassion and mutual trust from everyone involved. Every individual comes to trust and behave through compassion in different ways, each with our own attachments to our personal histories. Being open and honest about one's needs and intentions is not always easy in the short term, especially when it exposes vulnerabilities and takes work. However, the alternative- long-term damage potentially caused by mistrust, non-communication and/or mistruths - cannot bring about sustainable living spaces and communities. In our case, we believe the months of stress and work involved in attempts to dismantle the seeds of mistrust planted in this collective were far less preferable to the amount of work it would have taken to establish mutual trust and a more egalitarian community. This is, of course, to say nothing of the lasting effects on personal and professional relationships involved. Though it may be hard for some to open themselves to discussing what they think and feel in a given situation, we believe all collective members would agree that the stress and trauma we went through was not any easier to experience.

Collective process is hard as it seeks to challenge the ways of "normal" and commonly socialized notions under the oppressive institutions of white-supremacist-capitalist-patriarchy. Thus, we believe collective process holds that revolutionary practice must account for how individuals also perpetuate forms of oppression. Coming out of individual and collective reflections on the conflict at the Ant Hill, the four of us feel that we realize each of our faults and contributions to the demise of the collective as well as the faults and contributions of others. However, we think much of what brought about the failure of the Ant Hill Collective to sustain during difficult times was a general lack of commitment by some of its members to understand this principle and/or commit to taking the personal and critically inward journey as it relates to the theory and practice of sustainable collective process.





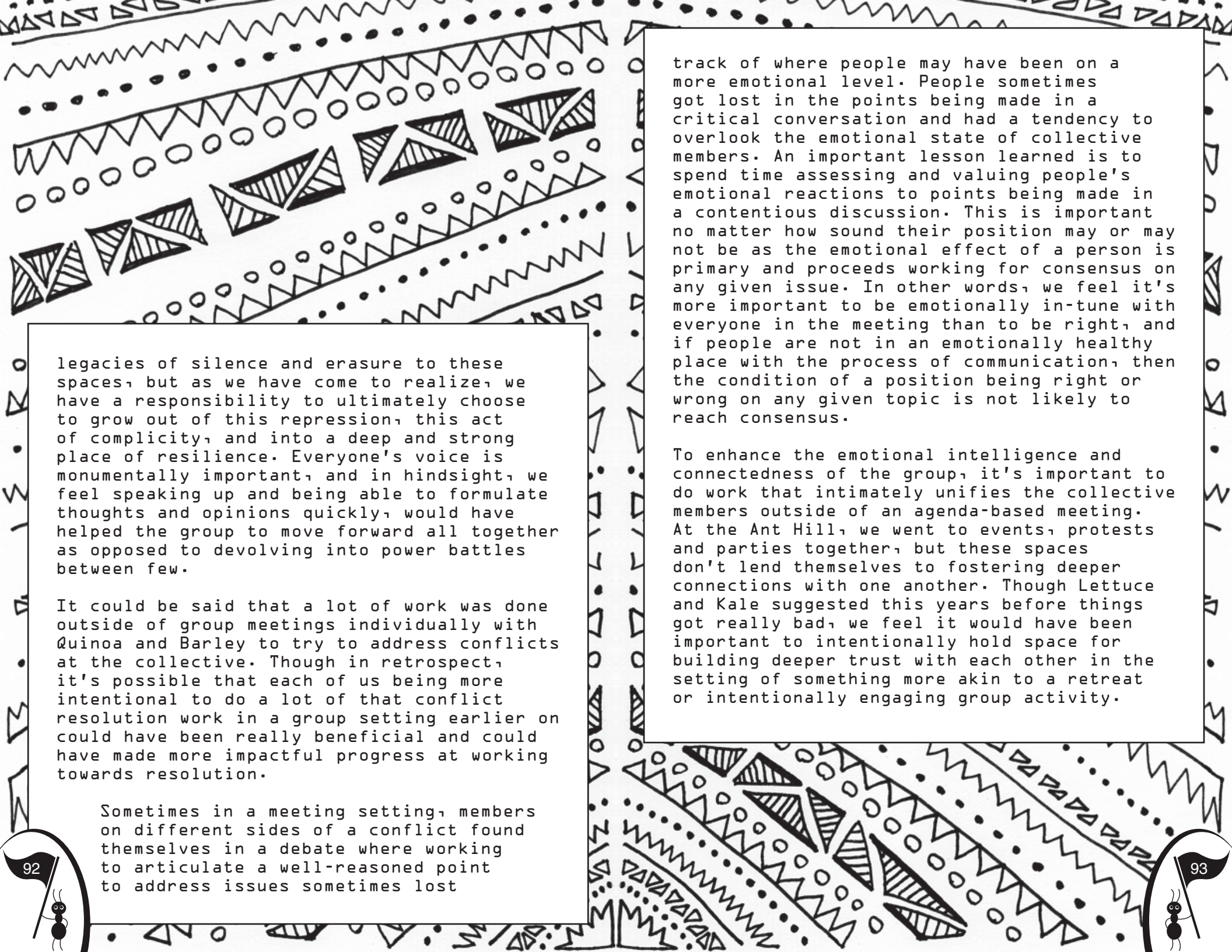
We see such process work is essential to maintain a solid and lasting base for supporting the work a collective engages in with the broader community. Though our achievements at Ant Hill were many and promising for a long and sustaining future when it came to reaching out to the community and providing space and support for many groups and organizations, the inner work that is needed to sustain such practice often seemed to be a struggle for some members of the collective and was not fully engaged in. The stresses of the resulting dynamic and the personal disconnects that were left to fester, eventually undermined the ability to do the good work that was more visible to the many people and organizations with which Ant Hill Collective interfaced.

Such problems and conflict will inevitably arise in a collective living context. However, how conflict is dealt with determines whether a collective can sustain. Confronting each other on problems is not always easy, but mutual trust and commitments to the collective's mission make resolution possible and go further to strengthen the bonds between collective members when problems are transgressed.

Both during the period of turmoil and in the time since, work and meetings spent between the four of us prompted periods of disagreement and conflict from time to time. While our relationships with collective members unwilling to resolve conflict or engage in mediation deteriorated, our relationships with each other thrived due to our devoting time and energy towards resolving disagreements. We trusted one another to work things out to a point of resolution. We learned to be vulnerable with one another, critical of each other, critically self-reflective and more responsive to issues as they arose. This helped us to further honest and loving bonds with one another and to create the type of environment where critical discourse on our collective and individual practice was productive and safe to engage in. We saw this as being an important means of pushing ourselves to be better people and more effective agents for achieving our goals.

In going through group and self-reflection coming out of the downfall of the Ant Hill Collective, some of us truly realized the importance of speaking up and sharing individual perspectives. Healthy collective dialog needs input and analysis from every person in the group (if the group is small enough to facilitate everyone contributing). In our experience, without contributions from each participant, especially in the face of conflict, conversations often found themselves declining to a back and forward argument between two or three people, which added to unhealthy group dynamics. At times, those of us who were often more quiet felt like we had nothing to contribute, but pushing ourselves to contribute more of our own perspectives during these times would have added a lot to the outcome of conversations that had collective consequences. Some of us bring with us





legacies of silence and erasure to these spaces, but as we have come to realize, we have a responsibility to ultimately choose to grow out of this repression, this act of complicity, and into a deep and strong place of resilience. Everyone's voice is monumentally important, and in hindsight, we feel speaking up and being able to formulate thoughts and opinions quickly, would have helped the group to move forward all together as opposed to devolving into power battles between few.

It could be said that a lot of work was done outside of group meetings individually with Quinoa and Barley to try to address conflicts at the collective. Though in retrospect, it's possible that each of us being more intentional to do a lot of that conflict resolution work in a group setting earlier on could have been really beneficial and could have made more impactful progress at working towards resolution.

Sometimes in a meeting setting, members on different sides of a conflict found themselves in a debate where working to articulate a well-reasoned point to address issues sometimes lost

track of where people may have been on a more emotional level. People sometimes got lost in the points being made in a critical conversation and had a tendency to overlook the emotional state of collective members. An important lesson learned is to spend time assessing and valuing people's emotional reactions to points being made in a contentious discussion. This is important no matter how sound their position may or may not be as the emotional effect of a person is primary and proceeds working for consensus on any given issue. In other words, we feel it's more important to be emotionally in-tune with everyone in the meeting than to be right, and if people are not in an emotionally healthy place with the process of communication, then the condition of a position being right or wrong on any given topic is not likely to reach consensus.

To enhance the emotional intelligence and connectedness of the group, it's important to do work that intimately unifies the collective members outside of an agenda-based meeting. At the Ant Hill, we went to events, protests and parties together, but these spaces don't lend themselves to fostering deeper connections with one another. Though Lettuce and Kale suggested this years before things got really bad, we feel it would have been important to intentionally hold space for building deeper trust with each other in the setting of something more akin to a retreat or intentionally engaging group activity.



Moving Forward

The Ant Hill Collective has had important achievements and moments. As a collective housing institution, the members who have been part of the collective over time have worked together to do great things. Ending the collective should not serve to discredit the work that has been done here by any of the members past and present. There is a lot of knowledge to learn from this project's successes and failures - both by people who were members and people who were part of the Ant Hill Collective's extended communities.

Though our relationships with Quinoa and Barley have become something that is unfortunate and difficult to negotiate personally, politically we realize the need to move beyond the barriers our personal limitations created. To us, this means anything from leaving these relationships as they are and continuing the work we've been doing since moving forward with our lives, to engaging in a process of reconciliation and resolve if possible and desired by all people involved. For this reason, we would still be willing to engage in a mediated discussion that seeks a more sustainable closure to an experience we know was extremely difficult on both sides of the conflict. We acknowledge that we made mistakes and would have done some things differently over the years that led to the eventual ramping up of conflict, and though we stand by the decisions we made, our approach, and our practice during that time of heightened conflict, we believe there is always room to grow and learn from past experiences as contexts change. Further, we see no benefit to prolonged conflict with continued animosity either for us personally or for those people we mutually know in the broader community.

We hope people will continue to move forward from this experience and further the work of creating new organizations, institutions and other points of resistance to the juggernaut of oppressions that thrive in late industrial capitalism. Toward this end, in addition to the work we have been doing, our intention is to start a new project under new energy, spirit and name.

Among other things, we have spent the last year working on infrastructure at the property of the former Ant Hill Collective, developed a collective house manual as a working document to help guide our project when needed in times good and bad, and written this zine both for our own personal benefit and for the benefit of the extended community, as well as others we may never come to know. In preparation for a new collective project, we plan to take what we've learned to build a strong, sustaining institution that has the advantage of building on already established infrastructure both theoretical and physical, such as a collective member removal policy, the collectivization of resources or a fully functioning shop space.

We believe emphasis on working to keep space organized and clean is essential to sustaining practice. We also believe a high quality of life is important in any shared living space for people involved with liberatory struggles. That a collective living space is not just about the bare necessities or representing Solidarity under a vow of destitution. Towards that end we have sought to create a living space that can facilitate not just peoples needs but many of their wants and desires as a means to engage in known or learned arts, crafts and hobbies. We think the better the collective infrastructure fits with our particular goals, the better the resource for the community as a whole (be they neighbors or activist organizations) to achieve the same (see more, Appendix 9 - Housing Collective Resource Infrastructure). Our project will continue as an open space for public use via member consent, so the institution of the collective can be utilized by the broader activist/collective community.




We've taken steps to embark on this new project with the mission to find creative ways to challenge the root causes and negative effects of white-supremacist-capitalist-patriarchy while mitigating our environmental impact through sustainable practices. Understanding the interconnectedness of class, race, gender, sex, age and ability as factors in the most destructive structures of oppression, it is our intention to develop a safe and productive space for resident members and people from the broader community by integrating a theory and practice guided by the principle that the personal is political.

With this in mind, we envision a collective where we...

- Build trusting relationships while being engaged in social struggle
- Challenge one another to develop personal and political strength/growth to become better practitioners of theory and theoreticians of practice
- Avoid being dogmatic, even to notions of radical theory and practice
- Practice honest, open and compassionate communication
- Implement a horizontal, decentralized, collaborative, consensus-based decision making process
- Share and acquire resources second-hand to combat materialist consumer culture
- Develop/implement house systems that are intuitive, resource conserving and transgressive for maximum collective use and ecological/social sustainability
- Use efficient and environmentally safe practices and products
- Grow, cook and eat vegetarian food as a household; local and organic whenever possible
- Share housing that is affordable, clean and functional
- Nurture relationships with neighbors and the community with awareness of gentrification
- Further the mission and purpose of the collective in the local, regional, societal and/or world context

The
PERSONAL
is
POLITICAL

In the spirit of lessons learned and sustaining practice, we have established a collective house manual with removal policy in advance of people joining the project. We believe it is best to actually discuss and create a manual before starting a project. Going through the process of creating such a document may give an idea as to the viability of sustaining a project with those who seek to start one. Further, we think it gives potential new members a clearer idea of who we are and what we do, so they can better determine if it is a project they fit well with and really are comfortable in joining. As mentioned above, this document is a living document which is to be a guide and adapted to the collective's needs as they change through consensus process. It is available to all who might find it useful in any similar projects (see more, Appendix 10 - Collective House Manual).



The contents of this zine are not a reflection of what all former members of the Ant Hill Collective think or feel. These are thoughts, views, critiques and conclusions that the four of us have come to based on our experiences with this collective project. While this written document is extensive, there is much that could be further expanded upon as well as other lenses through which to view our shared phenomena. We are available to share more information or discussion about our collective experience or what we've come to understand to help further the creation and sustainability of alternative institutions that seek to bring about a more liberatory world and people who live in it. We also welcome discussion and dialog on our personal experiences in the setting up, maintaining and ending of the Ant Hill Collective. We are available to answer questions or expand upon the things we've mentioned in this zine, be they about the Ant Hill or new projects, and can be contacted through the Ant Hill's collective email at

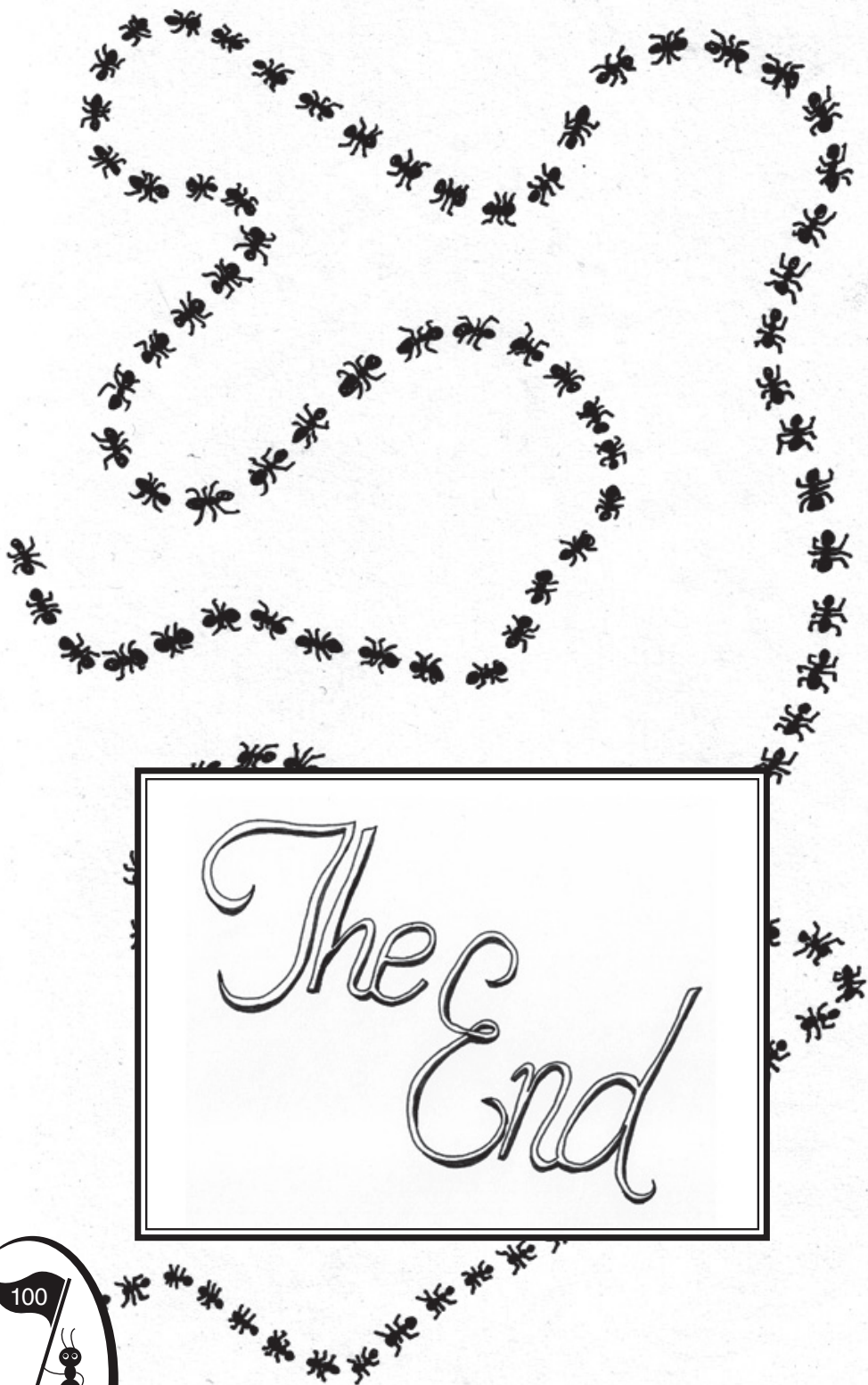
theanthillcollective@gmail.com.

Thanksgiving

We believe critical individual and collective reflection is important in advancing revolutionary projects and would like to express our gratitude to the authors of "After Winter Must Come Spring: a Self-Critical Evaluation of the Life and Death of the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation (New York); 2000" for inspiration in the creation of this zine.

Additionally, we are grateful for the invaluable time, skills, perspectives and contributions from the three individuals who we chose to help edit this zine.





The
End

