LOCAL ACTIVISM AND NEOLIBERALISM: PERFORMING NEOLIBERAL CITIZENSHIP AS RESISTANCE

Nadine Changfoot

Within the practice of political economy, debate continues over the proper location of struggle for social justice, especially when issues of social justice and anticapitalism intertwine with globalization. The Left recognizes the local, regional, national, and global as sites of struggle and there are spokespersons for each.1 Warren Magnusson notes that local spaces, specifically urban spaces, have been eclipsed as sites of political engagement with the rise of globalization discourse. Michael Peter Smith argues that globalization discourses “assume the growing insignificance of national borders, boundaries and identities,”2 yet it is in local spaces that boundaries and identities marking class (such as “the rich neighbourhood” and “the ghetto”), ethnicity (“Chinatown”), and sexuality (“the gay ghetto”) continue to flourish. Local circumstances are shaped by diverse national, transnational, and global scale activities, but this need not displace the locality of the urban as “a crossroads or meeting place”3 that acts as a venue for these activities and for those who live within its locale. Magnusson refers to these activities as immediate or particular in contrast to the transcendental or universal activities that correspond to the global and transnational. The immediate and particular merit examination, otherwise they become subsumed under the perspective of the universal that erases specificity and diversity between localities. Further, localities are rich political spaces because the local state can potentially provide either more or fewer services that “make a difference to the politics of the social justice of daily life.”4 Daily life in a particular locale with a responsive local state can motivate residents of a municipality to act for change. This is made possible when local government provides
or grants political spaces where residents can be seen, heard, and recognized as sufficiently knowledgeable about their demands and proposed projects or solutions.

This paper examines ongoing local resistance in the City of Peterborough. This resistance reveals activists creatively and vibrantly responding to the effects of neoliberal policy in ways that reflect the attributes of a critical movement. Activists more than respond to neoliberal policy; they perform with it and with the local state. Cultural and antipoverty activism in Peterborough reveals intricate movement undertaken by activists. They “perform” good neoliberal citizenship by discursively appropriating neoliberal goals of economic growth in the case of cultural activism, and constructions of the self-sufficient, autonomous citizen in the case of antipoverty activism. Specifically, cultural workers (this term includes practising artists, curators, arts administrators, and arts advocates) have been working to increase recognition from local government — and increase funding for local arts organizations — in order to maintain a thriving cultural sector in the city. Without local cultural workers fighting for resources, more culture industry entertainment would be supported by the local state, thus squeezing local cultural workers further to the margins publicly, socially, and economically. Antipoverty activists resist continuing downward pressure on social assistance and demand from the local state a public space for cooking and advocacy for the poor to empower their claims as a self-sufficient and self-empowering community. Key for both groups is their use of neoliberal discourse to claim resources for ongoing work. Thus far, their efforts have rendered some notable successes.

Two initiatives on the part of Peterborough cultural workers and antipoverty activists — “artsweek,” and the work of the coalition between People Putting Poverty on the Agenda and Food Not Bombs — provide case studies for how these respective groups partner with neoliberal discourse and the local state to advance their claims. Findings show that neoliberal discourse holds both opportunities and limitations for cultural workers and antipoverty activists. For cultural workers, neoliberal discourse of market practices, economic development, and cultural development related to the broader discourse of the Creative City influences the way requests are made...
Arguments in favour of local cultural production include generating a positive and attractive reputation for the city, and nurturing and sustaining cultural production that reflects the history and uniqueness of the city. During artsweek, local cultural producers raised their profile as revenue generators by producing a week of arts events as partners with city council. This heightened profile gives cultural workers leverage to push for structural changes in funding for local arts organizations, which in turn potentially creates more resources for art that often has social and political goals or content.

Since their inception, People Putting Poverty on the Agenda and Food Not Bombs have used their discourse of self-sufficiency and self-empowerment to create a community of poor people and their allies, and to agitate for public space from the municipality. Antipoverty activists emphasize that poor people and their allies can organize themselves ably and independently. On the basis of their claim to be a self-sufficient group, they want the city to acknowledge its usable and available space, and to allocate a permanent public space with cooking facilities to poor people so they can continue to help themselves. This discourse dovetails well with neoliberal citizenship and creates an opening for relations between poor people and the local state.

The performance of neoliberal characteristics on the part of cultural producers and antipoverty activists is in service of a multifaceted resistance against neoliberal policy that simultaneously strives to exact resources from the local state. Resistance takes the form of making incursions into public space in an effort to expand and secure space, even if only temporarily; transforming space into theatre that involves citizen participation and engagement; empowering the people represented, and making demands of local government. Resistance also includes willingness to work with local government via committee meetings and meetings with city officials and making presentations at city council meetings; not only to seek resources for grassroots projects but also to transform the state’s understanding of the groups involved and their decisionmaking practices. The challenges of such performative resistance include the relatively slow pace of bureaucratic decisionmaking, the risk of stagnation in moving activists’ goals forward once certain political demands have been met, the burnout of activists...
themselves, or their decision to pursue different projects, which at once creates further challenges for continuing action and opportunities for new directions. Whether any performance can sustain itself, and for how long, is an open question for both groups. Yet, it can be productive to think of resistance as performance because success does not lie only in the achievement of the goal — both cultural workers and antipoverty activists see successes with each of their specific actions. This motivates them to continue and repeat their performances, changing some aspect with each repetition.

An important dimension of this kind of performance is the identity of the actors themselves, as activist-artist or artist-activist. The activists who perform neoliberal discourse and resist neoliberal policy self-identify as practising artists or see themselves closely associated with the arts. This suggests that cultural politics and social justice activism are intertwined. The activist as artist, or “artivist,” emerges as a political actor who can skillfully partner or move with neoliberal discourse while advancing social justice demands. Indeed, artists are intimately involved in performance.

**Local Activism, Neoliberalism, and Performance of Citizenship** This section examines how neoliberalism and neoliberal policy have affected arts and culture and the poor, particularly since the 1990s. Ideologically, neoliberalism valorizes selected aspects of classical liberalism, particularly ideas associated with individual choice and capacity for self-sufficiency, the reduced role of the state in its support of social and cultural activity, investment in citizens to make themselves more self-sufficient, and an overall deferral to barrier-free markets for the distribution of goods and services. The thinking here is that adult individuals have the capacity and responsibility to make decisions for which they take full social and economic responsibility, and that the market, strongly resonating with neoclassical economics, will determine the optimum distribution of goods and services and their associated characteristics, including qualifications for labour, wages, price, and quality. The development and implementation of neoliberal beliefs begins in the 1970s with “business activism,” and makes an indelible mark in the mid-1990s when the federal government made significant cuts to provincial transfer payments and the Ontario provincial government dramatically cut funding.
to municipalities, which affected education, social assistance, transit, and housing. With the 1995 election of the Conservative Party under Mike Harris, the Ontario government devolved the costs of most local and regional services to municipal governments. These services included assisted housing and regional commuter transportation; municipal governments had not previously paid into the latter area. Social assistance was renamed “Ontario Works,” a workfare program. The amount of social assistance was reduced and a clawback claimed 50 percent of a recipient’s earnings while on Ontario Works. Support was eliminated for new low-rental housing and transit operating and capital costs. A $250-per-month special diet supplement for those on social assistance who suffered from a list of “approved” diseases was eliminated in November 2005.

Culture was not spared either. Major cuts to cultural funding occurred at the federal and provincial levels in the 1990s. The Canada Council for the Arts took a hit in funding, from $105.5 million in 1991–92 to $88.8 million in 1997–98. This was a softer blow compared to the drop in funding to the Ontario Arts Council, from $42.6 million to $25.3 million in a short 18-month period between 1995–96 and 1996–97. During this period, the orientation of arts funding by the Ontario Arts Council adopted market practices. During the 1990s, arts funding began to demand that performances demonstrate economic viability. Art juries increasingly included representatives from corporations. Artists were rewarded where they demonstrated commercial intentions or success. This contrasts with the period from the 1970s to the 1980s, when the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts promoted arts as a capacity within citizens to be cultivated and nurtured. Since the 1990s, there has been a refocus of arts as more of a commercial enterprise. This is not to say that arts councils see art exclusively in this way, but the policy to promote and regulate the production of art through more market practices has resulted in the regulation of citizens as arts and culture consumers, strengthening the view that art producers and cultural production are intertwined with economic enterprise. While this policy orientation might lead one to expect a high degree of commercialization among practising local artists, local artists maintain a commitment to art-making stemming from their own desire that often
consciously includes social and political goals. Richard Florida's insight that arts and culture bring both economic and social benefits for cities helps maintain a space for relations between cultural workers and local state actors. Thus, there is a fine balance between regulation towards market practices and cultural workers' resistance to them. While spending on culture has risen since 2002, the increases have gone largely to heritage institutions.

How have cultural workers and poor people responded? Wendy Larner and Miriam Smith provide insight into how neoliberalism influences the resistance against it. Larner argues that neoliberalism "involves forms of governance that encourage both institutions and individuals to conform to norms of the market." In terms of citizenship, the state during the neoliberal period has become an instrument of information dissemination, promoting what it does for citizens, as opposed to listening to citizens and actively seeking their input into the policy process. The state has made itself more impermeable to consultation from citizens, and has become fiscally conservative. Even so, the neoliberal direction of the state, Smith writes, "creates both barriers to and opportunities for collective action." She suggests that locally based organizations are locally minded in their goals; their projects will likely exhibit neoliberal objectives of investment for a target group, market practices, and social movement activities of community building, creating solidarities and advancing interests on the part of the marginalized. Thus, one can expect conformity to neoliberal policy orientation that embodies resistance to it.

Local cultural activism and antipoverty activism in Peterborough demonstrate resistance through performances of neoliberal citizenship, thus advancing Larner and Smith's conformance-resistance combination. Cultural workers and antipoverty activists find the neoliberal project anathema. But both groups recognize that, in order to fight for resources they feel the state is responsible for providing to them as contributing citizens, they need to create common ground upon which the local state can be pressured to address their respective demands; this common ground occurs at a discursive level. Thus, cultural workers and antipoverty activists perform selected aspects of neoliberal discourse to gain access to, and build a relationship with, the state. In so doing, they consciously aim to alter modes of commu-
nication and decisionmaking structures within the state. I will outline two recent and ongoing actions that demonstrate this strategy of performative resistance. The first is artsweek and the second is an action building towards “One Space” for poor people.

**artsweek** The first artsweek was presented in fall 2005, and comprised several well-orchestrated arts events. This week-long event is an example of how local artists organized to raise the profile of their activity and their contributions to Peterborough by creating a very public connection between, on the one hand, local artist organizations, city councillors, and officials, and on the other hand, residents of Peterborough and their relationship to the arts and public spaces in the city. The key organizers shepherded the project through the Arts, Culture and Heritage Advisory Committee that meets monthly. This committee makes funding allocations among the arts, culture and heritage institutions and proposes policy recommendations to city council. One way in which cultural workers have altered the structure of the committee is by successfully arguing that three of 22 seats be reserved for practising artists in the community. This representation ensures that perspectives and voices of local artists are heard and included in deliberations. Cultural workers feel this representation is vital in the context of the city’s higher commitment to funding venues that import performances. Cultural workers believe that a proportion of imported performances from outside the city could be sought or created within Peterborough. Further, they believe there is a qualitative difference in the social value of work produced locally. The gap between the city’s support for outside production sources versus local production is substantial. In 2005, the city supported imported cultural production to the tune of about $225,000 and local cultural production at $69,900. Cultural workers believe that they produce work of a highly professional calibre and would like to see a more balanced allocation of funding for local and imported cultural production; artsweek was a venue to communicate this message.

Organizers intended artsweek to transform public and private space into theatre and art spaces. On 12 September 2005, there was a large-scale event, Imagine Peterborough, that started with the entrance of the mayor, city
councillors, and senior civil servants to open the ceremonies (see Image 1). “We wanted city politicians and officials to be performers in the event where their roles were to actively promote and support local arts.”

The public event transformed the city hall grounds (inside and outside) and the main street it faces into a theatrical space for performance where the politicians and public were a part of the spectacle. The aim was to create a “super spectacular arts fantasy land.” During the extravaganza, active artist organizations and individual artists promoted themselves and shared their creative endeavours with an audience of about 200 people. These organizations included Fourth Line Theatre, Old Men Dancing (theatre and dance group), the Peterborough Symphony Orchestra, the Peterborough Singers, and Mysterious Entity (a theatre group).

While the public space was temporarily transformed into theatre, the weaving of city politicians, residents of Peterborough, and artists repre-

Image 1.
sented a critical moment of relations-building that could create such a venue. The participation of city councillors and civil servants signified very public local government recognition of local artists. This was performative politics where the performance enacted the importance of locally based culture to the community, both economically and in terms of cultural citizenship.

Artsweek was considered a success by the media, cultural workers, and the local state. Given its success, artists in the community planned to repeat it for 2006 and the Peterborough Arts, Culture and Heritage Advisory Committee made it a priority, suggesting a $35,000 budget, a significant increase over the 2005 budget. The prospects for ongoing support for artsweek from local government are good, even though, at the time of writing this paper, there is uncertainty whether there will be strong funding for the event. The downtown venue and participation of local artists will support the kind of artistic expression, political expression, and community participation that manifests in public spaces. The event plays very well to neoliberal arguments for economic investment and return, tourism, and entrepreneurialism among artists. Yet, cultural workers also feel some discomfort performing a neoliberal cultural-economic orientation. They are well aware of the contradictions embodied in artsweek. The unabashed promotional character of arts groups fed into arts and culture tourism, even while it was a political move on the part of artists to get city recognition and build support for local arts. Su Ditta recalls that, in the 1980s, as artists “we decided to ‘whore’ ourselves even though we knew that doing so might come back to haunt us.” Artists knew that by playing the entrepreneurial role the state wanted them to, they would reinforce the role in ways that would have negative consequences. The negative consequences came in funding tied to economic performance. Local cultural workers are uneasy with performing the good economic citizen. Yet, arts advocates believe this is the best option for cultivating a local cultural sector that reaps tangible benefits. For instance, the organizers and participants of artsweek felt that the art curated for specific events was of high quality with social and political content relevant to residents. As well, cultural workers were paid fairly; fair payment for cultural production is an ongoing issue in the arts community. Cultural workers are ambivalent over the tenor of the cultural-economic partnership with the
local state, yet artists recognize the importance of this kind of cooperation for stronger recognition and support in the future from the local state and community in general. Cultural workers expect to see stronger support in increased funding for the next artsweek, an increase in the number of calls for public art, a continued voice for artists in decisionmaking about arts and culture, a more cohesive arts and culture community, and a stronger, more positive identity for Peterborough.

Food Not Bombs in Peterborough In November 2005, two antipoverty organizations with overlapping membership started up in Peterborough: People Putting Poverty on the Agenda and Food Not Bombs. People Putting Poverty on the Agenda is actively demanding from the local state a public communal space, called “One Space,” for cooking and poor people’s advocacy. Food Not Bombs is supporting this demand. The two organizations create performance spaces involving food, the primary performance being the transformation of city hall into a vegetarian dining feast for poor people and their allies every Monday night. The Peterborough chapter of Food Not Bombs is part of a global, 25-year-old, self-identified “revolutionary movement” dedicated to nonviolent social change. Food Not Bombs asserts that “food is a right not a privilege.” There are hundreds of autonomous chapters that find food, cook vegetarian food, and feed hungry people, along with protesting war and poverty. This grassroots movement has chapters throughout the Americas, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Australia. The movement works to end hunger, globalization of the economy, restrictions on the movements of people, and exploitation and destruction of the earth. The membership of the Peterborough chapter governs by consensus and comprises primarily poor people. Its goals are to claim food that would otherwise be wasted and discarded from restaurants or growers, cook together and foster communal cooking, feed vegetarian food in an accessible public space to those who need it and, lastly, build solidarity with other groups in the area concerned about poverty. The city health unit, Native Learning Centre, multifaith organizations, and the public library are among Food Not Bomb’s allies.

The lead organizers of People Putting Poverty on the Agenda and Food
Not Bombs are self-identified practicing activists-artists; some have university degrees or are pursuing degrees. They are very conscious of the performance element in their interventions in public space; indeed, they describe what they do as creating theatre in the claiming of public space where poor people and their allies can feel comfortable, be together, and be creative. “Food, music, and theatre are the most effective ways I’ve seen to bring people together for a common purpose and to build community.”

Also key to their performances is a discourse of self-sufficiency that blends well with neoliberal citizenship.

In contrast to the view that the poor are sluggish, incapable, dependent on “handouts,” and unable to contribute positively to society, members of People Putting Poverty on the Agenda and Food Not Bombs see themselves as a self-sufficient and highly independent group providing a service to the public. They do not want significant help from the city in the procuring, preparation, or serving of food. From this position, they argue that the least the city can do is provide a public space and kitchen facilities for people to do this. “We’re not even asking the city to do its job, which we believe is to look after its people by feeding them,” says one member. “We’ll feed ourselves, but the city has a responsibility to provide us the means to do this.”

Because People Putting Poverty on the Agenda and Food Not Bombs have the people and the food resources to make healthy, nutritious vegetarian food, it would look very bad for the city not to support people’s own efforts to be self-sufficient with minimal contribution from the public purse. A couple of city councillors suggested giving the groups a small grant ($3,000) to seek a rental space, but the groups refuse this option for two reasons. First, they insist on free public space because they believe the city has the kind of space that meets these groups’ needs. As well, because the groups believe that the city has a responsibility to the poor, the city could make existing space available to people who want to feed others. Second, the groups do not want to conform to a rental model for space when they are providing a public service to marginal people. The time required to complete reports and paperwork for such a grant exceeds the resources of those involved. The coalition resists bureaucracy and market models for the public space they need.
Since 14 November 2005, the two groups have been transforming the Peterborough city hall into a dining hall serving warm vegetarian meals every Monday evening (see Image 2). The timing of the meal is strategic because city council meets at the same time. “We want city councillors to be reminded of the poor; we want them to have the poor present in their minds when they make decisions.”

By raising awareness of the problem of poverty in the city, it is hoped that the problem of poverty will be continuously in the minds of city councillors, bureaucrats, and residents. Between 20 and 50 people show up for the servings and the people served are mostly poor, with a few higher income individuals coming to support the event. A significant number of those in attendance are also associated with the Peterborough Coalition Against Poverty, a grassroots antipoverty organization that uses direct action and advocacy to help individuals deal with social services (such as Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program), social agencies (including food banks and shelters), housing and landlord issues, police harassment, squatters’ rights, and poor bashing. A few supportive city councillors stop by during the meal to speak with spokespersons they recognize.

The meals themselves are inspired creations and demonstrate the artistic dimension of the groups. One of the lead cooks sees herself as a fundamentally creative person. She does not, and refuses to, distinguish between her creative and activist identities. She sees cooking as an art form and the kind of cooking done for Food Not Bombs, vegetarian and vegan, as both an artistic and political expression of her views on sustainable agricultural production and nutrition.

Indeed, the free meals served on Mondays are made very economically, but are not common fare. Menus include at least five dishes: soup and bread, salad, several main dishes, dessert, and tea. The following menu gives an example of the delicious diversity of dishes that are an enticing blend of colours, textures, and smells, all made from fresh ingredients, organic where possible, and primarily sourced from reclaimed food from local growers at the city farmers’ market and city food producers.
Menu Served 6 February 2006

*Tomato & leek soup*

*Salad with iceberg lettuce, spinach, sprouts, carrots and cucumbers*

*Button & portobello mushrooms, green & red peppers with black sesame seeds*

*Leek and cabbage mix*

*Stuffed potatoes with broccoli, roasted red pepper, marrow fat & pea sprouts*

*Roasted egg plant, sautéed green asparagus, caramelized onion, sunflower & quinoa baked in filo pastry*

*Curried peas and potatoes*

*Applesauce with cinnamon (no sugar)*

*Baked apple crisp*
As with special dinners, the meals themselves are the subject of extended conversation and they elevate the mood of the gathering and the otherwise sanitized atmosphere of the city hall lobby. The person who guides the cooking is known as a “kitchen goddess.”

A week after the vegetarian feasts started at city hall, two members of these groups organized Poverty Awareness Week in Peterborough. The goal of the awareness week was to create a performance venue where cultural workers and poor people could come together to disseminate information on poverty in the city; create as broad-reaching a community as possible comprising individuals concerned about poverty; attract mass media coverage, and persuade city politicians, including the mayor, to attend the Hunger Gala, the largest event of the week. The organizers intended the Hunger Gala to break down the dichotomy of “us” (poor) and “them” (not poor) and celebrate poor culture. Poverty Awareness Week was successful in terms of media exposure, the mayor’s attendance at the Hunger Gala, and engaging the community. Organizers estimate that about 130 people attended.

People Putting Poverty on the Agenda and Food Not Bombs have been effective in using public space to strengthen their support for putting poverty on the agenda of the Peterborough city council and the Department of Social Services. In a context where discursive and institutional spaces for expressing political grievances and demands have declined, the two groups have had success in claiming both discursive and institutional space through regular meetings with the mayor and head of Social Services. The vegetarian feasts have raised the profile of these two groups in the city. Both groups are marginalized through their lack of resources and through stigmatization related to their poor status. But these groups play up their entrepreneurial efforts, insistence on self-reliance, independence, and an ethos of “do it yourself, now” action to put pressure on city council and bureaucracy to meet them at least part way. The slogan adopted by Food Not Bombs, “people feeding people,” communicates the energy of people wanting to provide material needs for themselves and others, and their independence from government handouts. Within a neoliberal context, the direct action involving food and performance arguably made the city’s response to self-independence, self-reliance, and an entrepreneurial attitude that much easier,
and perhaps quicker, than if the two groups had relied on either confrontational protest tactics (such as office shutdowns) on the one hand, or more conventional tactics (such as letter writing) on the other hand. The appearance of a shared ideology with the neoliberal emphasis on self-sufficiency and self-reliance ironically creates a common discursive ground between poor people and the local state. I would emphasize that poor people are not conforming to a neoliberal orientation that demands self-sufficiency and self-reliance. Instead, poor people’s discourse of self-sufficiency and self-reliance comes from their daily experience of already being largely independent. Poor people are resisting a broad neoliberal state orientation by demanding a public good (i.e., One Space) and using neoliberal discourse to involve the local state intertwined with their direct action involving food and using public space as theatre.

One recent development that has emerged from poor people’s resistance is the introduction of a One Space committee comprising People Putting Poverty on the Agenda, Food Not Bombs, the Peterborough Social Planning Council, and Peterborough Social Services. This committee’s goal is to work towards the instantiation of One Space and to deal with issues, as they arise, concerning poor people. In this space, poor people work to transform the patterns of communication that occur among middle-class poverty advocates and bureaucrats. People Putting Poverty on the Agenda and Food Not Bombs are insisting that: the meetings be held in a venue where poor people will feel comfortable, rather than in the boardrooms of Social Services; poor people be able to speak their mind on issues that concern them; the agenda and flow of the meetings be flexible; poor people all have the same authority to make suggestions and recommendations to the process and outcomes; all in attendance need to understand that poor people need to be able to express their rage associated with poverty at the committee meetings, and that food and music be part of the meetings. The committee meets monthly, as of April 2006. People Putting Poverty on the Agenda and Food Not Bombs insist that poor people working with the local state require fundamental change in venue, communication, and decisionmaking practices and processes. So far, the representatives from Social Services, the manager of Homelessness and Housing, and the Peterborough Social Planning Council have been open
to new practices, but not without a concerted education effort from poor people on why changes need to take place at the outset of working together.

**Challenges of Performative Resistance** While activists have derived pleasure and satisfaction in their actions, they are acutely aware of the challenges of performing the good neoliberal citizen. Cultural workers have concerns that local cultural production could become a token within the city if funding for local arts and culture remains constant while funding for arts and culture from entertainment industry grows. Cultural workers could perform neoliberalism too well in that their current success with existing funds may justify the status quo. As well, the enormous physical effort of curating and producing a week-long art project takes a toll on a community of artists that, while relatively large for the size of Peterborough, is modest in terms of the actual number of people. For antipoverty activists, one concern is to keep poor people in the minds of city councillors and officials without city councillors and officials becoming comfortable with their weekly performances and good citizenship at city hall for the free vegetarian feasts. This entails continuous resistance requiring enormous energy and creativity. The activists themselves also have personal goals that they want to pursue, so they set an unspecified date in spring 2006 as a deadline to end the vegetarian feasts at city hall. The warmer weather would ease the challenging conditions the poor face during winter and the prime movers of People Putting Poverty on the Agenda and Food Not Bombs wanted to pursue other, but related, projects. An open and unanswered question was who would continue making the demand for a communal space. Both groups need to maintain a strong presence, continuously create opportunities for political dialogue and action, and sustain the energy for these kinds of activities — tasks that require highly energetic, highly skilled, and sacrificing individuals. Whether performance of neoliberal citizenship by the same actors can be maintained over the long term remains uncertain. In order to sustain the energy and continue resistance efforts, recruiting new actors will be key.

The ongoing work of meeting with city officials takes time and endurance that can have a dampening effect on the energy of activists, especially in the case of People Putting Poverty on the Agenda and Food Not Bombs.
Antipoverty activists are now working with the city to secure a public communal space, but the bureaucratic nature of this kind of work is qualitatively different from the goal of feeding people. There are now two kinds of activism that need to be conducted: the direct action of feeding people, on the one hand, and coalition building with other antipoverty activists in the community (such as the coalition’s allies mentioned above) and policy work, on the other hand. The prime movers and shakers of People Putting Poverty on the Agenda and Food Not Bombs currently balance the two. However, the emergence of the policy aspect of the communal space may strain the groups because policy work does not easily dovetail with the energy of those involved. Activists who feed people do not want to become mired in a slow and regulated bureaucratic process over which they have little control. That is why they are determined to alter the place and mode of communication with city officials so that the meetings have meaning and benefits for them. The success so far in setting the terms of these efforts for poor people will no doubt influence future work between poor people and the local state. Similarly, activists representing cultural workers are committed to working with local government bureaucracy but they want to build on their structural presence within current decisionmaking bodies such as the Art, Culture and Heritage Advisory Committee. They are dedicated to building support for arts and culture that does not have to compete with sports, recreation, or heritage. The representation of local practising artists on the committee will help educate committee members about what it means to be a local cultural worker and the contributions cultural workers make to the city.

**Conclusion** The kind of activism in the City of Peterborough associated with artsweek and the “people feeding people” efforts of People Putting Poverty on the Agenda and Food Not Bombs bring to light that activists create opportunities to work with the local state by playing with and performing different aspects of neoliberal discourse to advance their respective causes. Cultural workers and antipoverty activists are willing to, and see a need to, work with the local state to meet their goals. Both groups understand their marginal position within the city landscape and recognize
that they need to find their own respectively peculiar ways to become involved with the local state. Performing good neoliberal citizenship has resulted in some successes. These successes include structural representation on committees with altered practices that better suit the needs of the groups. For example, cultural workers have structural representation on the city’s Arts, Culture and Heritage Advisory Committee. Through this committee, artswEEK became a reality. Antipoverty activists initiated and gained support for regular meetings through the creation of the One Space Committee on terms they feel are key for poor people. These venues of participation for cultural workers and poor people signal openings where their respective needs can be advanced. The venues, however, require significant and ongoing education efforts on the part of activists for the arts community and poor people. Through the process, cultural workers and poor people are seen to be legitimate citizens and engaged participants within their community. This does not mean that cultural workers or poor people accept a role of neoliberal citizenship. Instead, the successes of cultural workers and antipoverty activists show that the use of neoliberal discourse can leverage local state support for these groups’ projects.

Cultural workers see their work as contributing to the attractiveness of the city for both existing residents and potential newcomers. Advocates of cultural workers want to ensure that local artists have access to revenue generated through cultural tourism. More importantly, they want to ensure that local cultural workers are part of this government-supported economic activity and maintain control over their artistic decisionmaking. Local cultural workers see themselves contributing culturally, politically, and aesthetically to city space and life, but in ways distinct from entertainment industry production. People Putting Poverty on the Agenda and Food Not Bombs are firm in their belief that poor people can and need to empower themselves as a long-term solution to address their ongoing challenge with material comfort and desperation. These antipoverty activists believe that self-sufficiency and self-empowerment are crucial for poor people, and they have the capacity as a group to create the community to make this happen.

Activists believe that the direct action of people feeding people in City Hall and the preparation of creative, inspired, healthy, and aesthetically
pleasing food demonstrates a self-sufficient capacity among the poor. In contrast to the neoliberal conception of self-sufficiency premised upon employability, poor people are focused on self-sufficiency premised upon sustainable and organic agriculture, and reclaiming food and usable items destined for the garbage. At the time of writing this article, the proposal for One Space to have a communal kitchen and other supports has the backing of allies in community and city bureaucracy. The outcome is unknown, but within a relatively short four months (from November 2005 to February 2006), People Putting Poverty on the Agenda and Food Not Bombs created momentum using a combination of neoliberal discourse of self-initiative and direct action in a performance mode that draws upon the public and highly symbolic space of the City Hall lobby to serve their meals and communicate their need for a communal space. Through a combination of neoliberal discourse, multifaceted resistance, and transformative engagement with the local state in a performance of citizenship, cultural workers and antipoverty activists have made headway towards their goals. In so doing, they have also created possibilities for stronger arts and social justice communities and stronger self-identification with the city and downtown space on behalf of these groups.

Nonetheless, while their performances earn them legitimacy, there are also challenges. The challenges of this kind of engagement with the local state include having to cope with slow change because of the time it takes to educate city councillors and civil servants about the conditions cultural workers and poor people respectively face, a context where municipalities are under pressure to provide more with less, and questions about who will maintain the momentum created by these recent performances.

Notes
The author wishes to acknowledge the support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), and thank Caroline Andrew, Su Ditta, Karolyne Newby, and Miriam Smith for their comments, and Sarah Kardash and Jaimie Slopen for their research assistance. All errors are my own.

1. For commentary on the proper site of struggle, see Joel Davison Harden, “Comment: Ruthless Empire(s), Activist Subcultures, or New Solidarities? Choices for Today’s Global Radicals,” Studies in Political Economy 76 (2005), pp. 145–147. Harden argues, along with Sam Gindin, for the nation-state as a more convincing site for strategic reasons, although he recognizes that “local populations have comprised the largest part of recent anticapitalist and antiwar demonstrations and events” (p. 147).


5. Peterborough is about 180 km northeast of Toronto, a 1.5-hour commute by automobile, and has a population of approximately 75,000. Situated relatively close to the Greater Toronto Area, Peterborough is a place of residence for commuters to Oshawa and Toronto, retirees, and people who want to be close to Toronto, but sufficiently removed from it.


9. The portmanteau word “artivist” appears around the same time as the antiglobalization protests starting in 1999 in Seattle. Several artivist organizations are in existence. The Artivist Film Festival (founded in 2003 in Los Angeles, CA) <http://www.artivists.org> (accessed 8 August 2007) and Artivist Jams (founded in 2002 in Boulder, CO) <http://www.artasaction.org/homepage.html> (accessed 8 August 2007) are prominent.


12. The federal government and Ontario provincial government had been reducing transfers to municipalities in the areas of education and transit since the mid-1970s. The 21.6 percent across-the-board reduction in Ontario provincial government spending made the deep cut that much more swift and dramatic in contrast to prior reductions. For further discussion, see Frances Frisken, “The Toronto Story: Sober Reflections on Fifty Years of Experiments with Regional Governance,” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 23/5 (2001), pp. 513–541.

15. Ibid.
19. The Director of Community Services Development has been a spokesperson and provincial leader in Municipal Cultural Planning and has been involved in developing the artistic and cultural capacity of the city.
23. Smith studies the activities of the Toronto-based Supporting Our Youth (SOY), an organization that offers services and support to LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) youth in the city. See Miriam Smith, “Resisting and Reinforcing Neoliberalism: Lesbian and Gay Organizing at the Federal and Local Levels in Canada,” Policy and Politics 33/1 (2005), pp. 75–94. See p. 76.
27. Arts, Culture and Heritage Advisory Committee, Meeting minutes (20 October 2005).
30. Sara Swerdlyk, “‘One Space’ to Address Local Poverty,” arthur 40/1.
32. Rachel Sauvé, speaking at a meeting of people concerned about poverty in Peterborough, Ontario (2 March 2006).
34. Rachel Sauvé, interview by author, Peterborough, Ontario (14 August 2005).
35. Ibid.
36. “Poor culture” refers to an emerging set of norms and values associated with anti-mass culture consumerism, environmental sustainability, and an emphasis on use values (such as the use of previously owned items). Melissa Addison-Webster, activist and artist, interview by author, Peterborough, Ontario (10 February 2006).