

NOW-TIME VENEZUELA

MEDIA ALONG THE PATH OF
THE BOLIVARIAN PROCESS

PART 1: WORKER-CONTROLLED FACTORIES

March 26–May 28, 2006

Dario Azzellini and Oliver Ressler

5 FACTORIES—WORKER CONTROL IN VENEZUELA

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PREVIOUS PAGE:

Marivit López at ALCASA aluminum factory, Ciudad Guayana, Bolivar State.

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University of California, Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive
MATRIX Program for Contemporary Art

PREFACE

NOW-TIME VENEZUELA:

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In 1998, the year of Hugo Chávez's election to the presidency, Venezuela began a profound process of social and political change. This is the Bolivarian revolution, the immediate roots of which reach back at least fifteen years to the Caracazo, a spontaneous uprising in rejection of neoliberalism and capitalism that shook the streets of Caracas for a number of days in 1989.¹ Today, Venezuela's revolutionary process is reaching to all levels of society. Its hallmarks are social protagonism, participatory democracy, a constitution calling for universal rights to education and health, and a series of land and educational reforms—a formula that has evolved from a modest critique of neoliberalism to a broad and internationalist plan for a socialism for the twenty-first century.² The projects in the yearlong MATRIX cycle **Now-Time Venezuela: Media Along the Path of the Bolivarian Process** will operate in solidarity with this process. They are not only or even primarily representations of or reflections on this process but, as our title indicates, *along* the path itself.

Our cycle involves a theory of art as well as a theory of history. In keeping with a recognition that art, as a superstructure, is dependent on broader processes of social change, the work included in the **Now-Time** cycle is aligned with epic struggles for

social and political change; as a consequence, it is opposed to the workings of late capitalism that have emptied most spheres of human activity, including culture, of their autonomous values and life (one lifeless result of which is the so-called art world). The stakes of this political and cultural struggle are clear: on the one side emptiness, desolation, and sometimes even mental and bodily death; on the other, an explosion of creativity and resistance on the level of life. The unique and powerful character of this explosion in the Venezuelan context is one reason we feel justified in using a term from Walter Benjamin's speculations on a discontinuous radical history, "now-time," to refer to the unprecedented character of the Bolivarian event.

Chris Gilbert

Phyllis Wattis MATRIX Curator

OCCUPIED FACTORIES, AN OCCUPIED PRESENT

Chris Gilbert

First, when talking about factory takeovers, we must talk about social justice: about the operations of neoliberal capitalism and re-emergent processes of primitive accumulation that are in play, for example, in the expropriation of the reproductive capacities of seeds, the commodification of water access, and the theft by corporations of common spaces in city and country.¹ Also to consider is the casting of entire populations as irrelevant and valueless in a world system based on shifting markets, as happened in Chiapas following the creation of NAFTA. Finally, within our view should be the inevitable counter-movements that capitalist aggression produces, whether in Katrina-wasted Louisiana or the barrios of South America, or covertly in almost any other sector of the globe. Once all this has been reviewed, we may talk about culture and the dependent yet important role that aligned cultural production may have in contributing to the work of counter-movements that are at their core economic and political.

The popular struggles in Venezuela that coincide roughly with the period since the Caracazo uprising and Hugo Chávez's first bid for power shortly thereafter are not new.² There is a history, albeit buried and discontinuous, in which analogous features have surfaced in Russia of the 1910s, Italy of the early 1920s, Republican Spain of the 1930s, and exist today in such places as Argentina

and Korea. An almost uncanny isomorphism emerges from the haze of bourgeois history, with salient characteristics such as squatting and the reappropriation of common property, the centrality of women in the struggles, and most to the point, occupation of the means of production through factory and farm takeovers. What keeps these past moments from being mere history is that their legacy hangs over the present like a specter, a standing possibility. For this reason, such “pasts” can never be understood only as pasts. They become “understood” when, in the course of a transformative moment, a group passes from reflection into action. In such situations, temporality is itself transformed, and time ceases to be a mere passage or sequence. It is no longer a time *of* but a time *for*: a now-time.³

The taking of power by people at all levels of Venezuelan society, including the recent factory occupations that are documented in Dario Azzellini and Oliver Ressler’s new video project, calls for description under the sign of such a temporal suspension. It suggests a double movement of connection and disconnection in which direct linkages between discontinuous moments of *becoming* break with the even *sameness* of the lineages favored by the historical accounts of empowered groups. For in such circumstances, when faced with seemingly insurmountable opposition, workers

have seized and fought for the means of production; in such circumstances, a deeply and meaningfully creative process, long held to be the special province of artists, enters the world. Reality itself then becomes a field of activity for the imagination—not the imagination of a single person, as in prevalent notions of artistic production, but a distributed imagination that, like the mass intellectuality that tends to accompany such developments, gives the lie to thought's interiority and individuation, and especially to truth's ownership by an individual or class.

Azzellini and Ressler's filmic record of this process, with interviews distributed on six screens, provides ample evidence of workers' agency and its world-transformative power. (The video, which will ultimately be compiled into a single-channel DVD, proposes to not just record but also contribute to the struggle through its dissemination in Venezuela as a kind of feedback and sharing of knowledge among dispersed worker groups.) For example, a key structuring principle of the work is the logic of self-presentation—workers speak for themselves in the video, just as in the factories they resist delegating their leadership roles to managers, which connects with the themes of social participation and social protagonism that operate on many levels in the Bolivarian revolution.⁴ The video also points to how a widespread common ground of words and ideas, making up a discursive space that is held in common, has come to exist alongside the collectively held property and means of production.

Listening to and participating in this discursive space, made immersive and enjoyable when the projections are life-size, as they are in the current installation, one realizes that no concept is left untransformed. Theoretical points are argued about, refined, discussed, and contested. The “derechos” that the workers put forth are thus far from the reified human rights that dominate liberal discourse. By contrast, what is at stake are “rights” that are tentative and in transformation inasmuch as they are embedded in social processes and are continuous with forms of social solidarity and communal life. And, as with the concept of rights in Venezuela, so with the concepts of leadership, nation, party, and power. In particular, leadership in this context becomes very evidently a matter of focus and a channel for an emergent multitude.⁵

Some on the political left in Venezuela—and internationally—have chosen to mark their distance from or simply ignore the Bolivarian revolution. There are a variety of possible explanations for this, including the displacement of traditional intellectuals by mass intellectuality, and the deceptive operations of the mainstream media. But a key factor is certainly a measure of bad faith on the left, evidenced in a tendency to point a finger at the perils of leadership, party, and state, when what is really meant is a refusal or fear of taking power.⁶ In place of an interest in real politics and the formation of power blocs it entails, the basically anarchic values of horizontal organization and workers’ autonomy are held out as (often aestheticized) ideals, while state power and class leadership are cast as bogeys. But it is clear from recent events—

the struggling worker occupations in Argentina, much like the betrayed factory takeovers in Turin of the early 1920s (and leaving aside the self-limiting activities of many activist groups in the United States and Europe)—that self-organization and worker autonomy have their limits. An unwavering reading of our historical moment tells us that small group organization is a necessary and important beginning, but without displacing and reconstituting real power, even state power, and without class leadership, it inevitably becomes subject to operations of capture by the extant forms of power and class structure.

Here the Venezuelan situation, with its commitment to micro-political issues such as gay and women's rights and local self-determination, combined with a constant focus on the macro-political concerns of state power under which the former can actually thrive, becomes exemplary. The approach to legislation is itself quite creative, as is a novel practice of *cogestión* (comanagement) that underpins the occupations and marks a clear distinction from the Argentinean and Italian examples. At the core of *cogestión* are principles of social solidarity among workers and between the factory and society at large.⁷ There are many possible realizations of these principles, but one common arrangement has workers owning 49 percent of the factory, sharing profits, and making decisions on the basis of assemblies, while 51 percent of the factory is owned by the state, which provides means and initial investment that is projected to be gradually bought out by the workers. This marriage of state power and protection with workers'

initiative—a pattern that holds in *cogestión* as in other features of the Bolivarian process—has resulted in enormous gains.⁸ Suddenly self-organization becomes real, writ large on a social plane, a socially realizable program rather than a merely symbolic or projective activity.

It is hard to overrate the exciting sense that such a situation conveys of a world become not indifferent to and against people, and the lightness of step that it produces for those involved and for fellow travelers. The video, despite its measured character, transmits or really participates in this in many ways. Here it may be useful to ask to what degree the video inherits a realist documentary or even socialist-realist tradition. In keeping with what we have said above, socialist realism clearly comes to take on a different, more dynamic character when reality itself becomes imbued with imagination, whereas creativity has suffocated through isolation in the “arts.” In these conditions, the more vibrant artistic product will be that which, not operating in the studio and even less in the artist’s internal imagination, turns its focus to the world. Call this a “new socialist realism,” if you will, with one key exception: the gesture of turning to the world is in part an act of documentation but it also contributes—as a form of mediating and making—to the very processes with which it works.⁹

Arguably, it is as collective mediators and co-makers that today’s art workers should operate. Eschewing the hubris and vacuity of most so-called creation, they will align themselves with an

emergent multitude. For clearly there is a war taking place, a war against the poor (the Fourth World War, to use the Zapatistas' description). In such circumstances, it becomes incumbent upon all to choose sides between being agents of the dominant class's power—for which culture provides a mask or smokescreen for its property grabs and a celebration of its values (such as I would argue on some level almost the whole of contemporary art has been reduced to)—or by contrast aligning with processes of social transformation and counter-movement that take shape under the names of anti-globalization, fight against capitalism, or in this case Bolivarian Venezuela. As one would expect for a process that is at base materialist, there are already signs of such options in the cultural sphere, in both the figure of modestly "interventionist" art practices and a basically anthropological interest in the multitude's creativity.¹⁰ Today, the stakes in a war for hegemony are now bald and clear between the figures of destruction or the powers of making and remaking. It is as agents of securing power for the latter—the persuasive and informative human torso to the horse's body of real power (to use Gramsci's famous figure of hegemony as a centaur)—that cultural workers may now locate themselves.

OCCUPIED FACTORIES, EXPROPRIATION, AND WORKERS' COOPERATIVES

Dario Azzellini

At the end of July 2005, Hugo Chávez announced on his TV program *Aló Presidente* that 136 closed Venezuelan factories were to be evaluated for possible expropriation. “The existence of closed factories goes against the national constitution. It’s just like land lying fallow,” said Chávez. The announcement took place at the inauguration of the Unión Cooperativa Agroindustrial del Cacao, a factory that had been closed for nine years until, with a government loan, it was bought by its workers. The cocoa-producing cooperative is an example of the new “factories of social production” (Empresas de Producción Sociales) that, according to Chávez, represent the focus of an “economic turn in the direction of socialism in the twenty-first century.”

Chávez read out numerous lists—of factories that are already undergoing expropriation, of the 136 factories where expropriation is being considered, of firms that have partially or completely stopped work—representing 1,149 firms in all. In addition, he encouraged people to report any other closed factories. As one of his many examples, Chávez mentioned a fish-processing and packing plant in the Guanta ports, near Puerto La Cruz, that had all the necessary equipment to be active, but that was closed all the same.

“If the proprietors don’t want to open it, we’ll have to expropriate it, and re-open it ourselves,” said the president.

Title III, Chapter VII, Article 115 of the constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela permits expropriation by the state in certain cases:

The right of property is guaranteed. Every person has the right to the use, enjoyment, consumption, and disposal of his or her goods. Property shall be subject to such contributions, restrictions, and obligations as may be established by law to be in the service of the public or general interest. The expropriation of any kind of property may only be declared for reasons of public benefit or social interest by legally binding judgment, and upon timely payment of a just compensation.

Although the constitution has been in force since 2000, before September 2005 there had been only two cases of successfully concluded expropriations: the paper factory Venepal, in January 2005, and at the end of April, the Constructora Nacional de Válvulas (CNV), a factory that manufactures valves for the oil industry. In July 2005 the government began to direct its attention towards the situation of closed factories. When, at the end of September, the National Assembly declared the sugar cane-processing compa-

ny Cumanacoa and the crude oil producer Sidororca to be firms “of social interest” and initiated their expropriation, employees had already occupied Cumanacoa for more than two months. In the preceding years the factory had gradually reduced its capacities by 80 percent. At the same time, it often paid its employees less than the minimum wage and sometimes, as in colonial times, in sacks of sugar cane. Finally, the employees decided to occupy the plant. Sidororca, on the other hand, had stood still for many years.

The minister of labor, María Cristina Iglesias, had called upon trade unions, workers, and former employees to “take back” the enterprises named by Chávez, because only in this way could Venezuela’s state of dependence be overcome. The National Union of Workers (UNT) declared it would support the government’s actions. Marcela Máspero, of the UNT’s coordination committee, announced that, according to the UNT’s investigations, there were 700 inoperative firms in Venezuela, 30 percent of those in the food and drink sector. According to the UNT, 7,000 new jobs could be created through the activation of the food factories alone; 700 factories would mean around 20,000 jobs. The UNT intends to take a petition to the National Assembly calling for the recognition of a “general public interest,” which would enable the 700 factories to be expropriated and reactivated by the workers in collective administration.

The UNT also reported, in mid-September, that they intended to occupy the 700 closed factories. Among them are the plants of

the transnational corporations Parmalat and Heinz. “In view of neoliberalism and capitalism’s offensives, we will make use of the mechanism of the workers to occupy these factories, together with the communities,” said Máspero. At the time of this writing, eight factories have been occupied; they include some silos belonging to the Venezuelan group Polar, a Heinz tomato-processing factory, and two production plants belonging to Parmalat, the Italian food and drink multinational that recently collapsed due to murky financial dealings. “First we occupy, and then we solve questions of ownership, because there is always good ground for the occupations,” Máspero said.

Máspero offered the case of the corn-processing factory Promabasa, occupied in September 2005, as an example. According to reports, the workers hadn’t been paid at all for more than six months. At the beginning of September, after workers had taken over the running of the factory, the army occupied a number of the grain silos in Promabasa belonging to Venezuela’s largest food and drink manufacturer, Alimentos Polar. Antonio Albarran, minister of agriculture, demanded that Polar both pay the producers a fair price and lower the cost of flour for the poor. According to a parliamentary investigation committee, Polar bought the factory years ago as part of their plan to eliminate any competition in the sector and gain a monopoly over the Venezuelan market. Polar closed the site, which contains grain silos, a plant for the production of maize flour, and another for the production of corn oil, and relocated some of the machinery to Colombia. The processed maize products

were then exported from Colombia back to Venezuela and sold over Polar's distribution network. Eventually, at the end of September, the governor of the state of Barina, Hugo de los Reyes Chávez, the president's father, expropriated the plant by decree, and its former owners were compensated at market value. The plant, according to the model of *cogestión*, is to be handed over as soon as possible to the cooperative Maiceros de la Revolución, which consists of former employees.

The inactive factory in the state of Monagas, on the other hand, was first occupied by former employees and then seized by the state for examination. The factory belonged to Alimentos Heinz, the Venezuelan subcorporation of the ketchup multinational H. J. Heinz Co. Heinz disputed that the factory had been abandoned; it was just no longer profitable, and was therefore about to be put up for sale. A spokesperson for the company described the actions of the Venezuelan government as "infringing on ownership rights and free trade." In another declaration, Heinz stated that the factories had to be closed temporarily because rural suppliers hadn't been able to fulfill their commitments.

The Venezuelan minister of agriculture alleged that, although 80 percent of the factory belonged to the workers, Heinz had illegally acquired it in 1996, and it had been closed since then. The cattle breeders and agricultural union Congafan, which has close ties to the government, approved this evaluation and called the closure on Heinz's part "criminal" for the damage it had caused the toma-

to producers in the surrounding area. Meanwhile, the industrial union Conindustria, which is aligned with the opposition party, condemned the government's actions. Eventually Heinz and the Venezuelan state agreed on a price and the state bought the factory.

The cases of the paper factory Venepal and the valve factory CNV work as models for the way in which factories should be expropriated. In both factories, workers' cooperatives were instituted; 51 percent of each factory is state-owned and 49 percent is under the ownership of a cooperative that consists of all the employees.

The government's attempt to increase national production, and above all production in the failing interior market, doesn't just involve the expropriation or seizure of private factories. For example, cooperatives are also granted interest-free or low-interest loans to buy inactive factories. In September 2005 former employees used a special government loan to buy a cocoa-processing plant that had been shut for nine years—closed, according to Elías Jaua, the minister of the economy, as a consequence of neoliberalism. The previous government stopped subsidizing it, and chocolate produced outside of Europe was at that time charged with additional tariffs. The factory's former (international) owners transferred ownership to a private bank, to which they were in debt. The workers formed a cooperative (Unión Cooperativa Agroindustrial del Cacao) that bought the closed factory with a government loan of 4,800 million Bolivar (approx. \$2.3 million) at an annual interest rate of only 4 percent (interest on private bank loans is around 26

percent). A time frame of six years was agreed upon for paying back the loan. Small cooperatives, on the other hand, are granted interest-free loans.¹

Partially inactive factories that show signs of being in financial straits are also being offered state support. Through a special program, employers who reactivate businesses or create new jobs have access to favorable loans, provided they set up a workers' cooperative that concedes a share of the factory's administration, direction, and profits to the workers. According to the minister of labor, María Cristina Iglesias, in 155 of these factories an agreement between workers and employers in the form of a "workers' cooperative" has already been instituted.

The concept of "workers' comanagement" (*cogestión*), as it is laid out in the new constitution, is based on social citizenship and social equality as a means of achieving social order (with the state as guarantor). The models for *cogestión* that are being discussed within the scope of a "participatory and protagonistic democracy"—that is, the state as a participative space in which, by diverse means, the population contributes to the structuring of public life and the regulation of institutions—are diverse, because until now *cogestión* had no legal basis. Since the beginning of 2005, workers' comanagement has begun to be introduced in state companies, in some cases—for example at the aluminum factory ALCASA—reaching as far as the election of section directors in the workers' assembly. Workers' participation is being accelerated by the indi-

vidual unions of the UNT. All these expropriated factories must act correspondingly, in view of social interests at large: 10 percent of their profits must be transferred into a local development fund for the community in which they are situated. With offers of loans under special conditions and specific requirements—the institution of a workers' comanagement, among others—the government is trying to induce private businesses, as well, to adopt a model of *cogestión*.

Translated from the German by Emily Speers Mears

APPENDIX:

ECONOMIC RIGHTS IN BOLIVARIAN VENEZUELA

Reproduced here in full is the section on economic rights of the Bolivarian constitution of 1999. We offer it with the following observation: The process by which this constitution came into being as well as the discursive context in which it is used are key to the document's social meaning. Regarding the process, the constitution was born in an assembly in which needs and desires were brought to the table by a wide range of constituents in a deeply participative, even contested, process that consumed the government for the first year of its being in power. As for the use, the rights are discussed and deployed in a creative way that is in part facilitated by the easy language and portability of the constitution (one common version is a three-inch booklet; another is a "zine" that is about the size of this publication). Both circumstances contribute to make the rights presented in it anything but the reified, individualist (and ultimately often counterproductive) affairs that we associate with liberalism. Rather, they are discursive "nodes" that operate within a continually in-process sphere of collective responsibility and action. This section of the constitution is presented here with the hope that it will be approached in a like spirit and with the awareness that in some ways the recent progress of the revolution may have already transcended it.

Chapter VII: Economic Rights

Article 112: All persons may devote themselves freely to the economic activity of their choice, subject only to the limitations provided for in this Constitution and those established by law for reasons of human development, security, health, environmental protection or other reasons in the social interest. The State shall promote private initiative, guaranteeing the creation and fair distribution of wealth, as well as the production of goods and services that meet the needs of the populace, freedom of work, enterprise, commerce, industry, without prejudice to the power of the State to promulgate measures to plan, rationalize and regulate the economy and promote the overall development of the country.

Article 113: Monopolies shall not be permitted. Any act, activity, conduct or agreement of private individuals which is intended to establish a monopoly or which leads by reason of its actual effects to the existence of a monopoly, regardless of the intentions of the persons involved, and whatever the form it actually takes, is hereby declared contrary to the fundamental principles of this Constitution. Also contrary to such principles is abuse of a position of dominance which a private individual, a group of individuals

or a business enterprise or group of enterprises acquires or has acquired in a given market of goods or services, regardless of what factors caused such position of dominance, as well as in the event of a concentration of demand. In all of the cases indicated, the State shall be required to adopt such measures as may be necessary to prevent the harmful and restrictive effects of monopoly, abuse of a position of dominance and a concentration of demand, with the purpose of protecting consumers and producers and ensuring the existence of genuine competitive conditions in the economy.

In the case of the exploitation of natural resources which are the property of the Nation or the providing of services of a public nature, on an exclusive basis or otherwise, the State shall grant concessions for a certain period, in all cases ensuring the existence of adequate consideration or compensation to serve the public interest.

Article 114: Economic crime, speculation, hoarding, usury, the formation of cartels and other related offenses, shall be punished severely in accordance with law.

Article 115: The right of property is guaranteed. Every person has the right to the use, enjoyment, usufruct and disposal of his or her goods. Property shall be subject to such contributions, restrictions and obligations as may be established by law in the service of the public or general interest. Only for reasons of public benefit

or social interest by final judgment, with timely payment of fair compensation, the expropriation of any kind of property may be declared.

Article 116: Confiscation of property shall not be ordered and carried out, but in the cases permitted by this Constitution. As an exceptional measure, the property of natural or legal persons of Venezuelan or foreign nationality who are responsible for crimes committed against public patrimony may be subject to confiscation, as may be the property of those who illicitly enriched themselves under cover of Public Power, and property deriving from business, financial or any other activities connected with unlawful trafficking in psychotropic and narcotic substances.

Article 117: All persons shall have the right of access to goods and services of good quality, as well as to adequate and non-misleading information concerning the contents and characteristics of the products and services they consume, to freedom of choice and to fair and dignified treatment. The mechanisms necessary to guarantee these rights, the standards of quality and quantity for goods and services, consumer protection procedures, compensation for damages caused and appropriate penalties for the violation of these rights shall be established by law.

Article 118: The right of workers and the community to develop associations of social and participative nature such as cooperatives, savings funds, mutual funds and other forms of association

is recognized. These associations may develop any kind of economic activities in accordance with the law. The law shall recognize the specificity of these organizations, especially those relating the cooperative, the associated work and the generation of collective benefits.

The state shall promote and protect these associations destined to improve the popular economic alternative.

ENDNOTES

PREFACE

1.

The Bolivarian revolution, together with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela that came into place after the 1999 constitution, take their names from nineteenth-century revolutionary Simón Bolívar.

2.

Together with participation, protagonism is a central concept in the Bolivarian process, meaning that people themselves are the actors in the political process.

OCCUPIED FACTORIES, AN OCCUPIED PRESENT

1.

David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 147–48. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (London: Penguin, 2004), 179–88.

2.

In 1989, despite promises to the contrary, the newly elected president Carlos Andrés Pérez conceded to a structural adjustments plan, the usual approach to national debt prescribed by the Washington Consensus. Precipitated by a hike in bus fares, spontaneous insurgency broke out in Caracas and other Venezuelan cities. The events of the Caracazo, including its brutal suppression, which left some 600 to 3000 people dead, depending on the account, was a politicizing moment for Venezuelans, including many in the army who resented being made into agents of transnational capital in acts of violence against their own people.

3.

The term “now-time” is a literal translation of *Jetztzeit*, Walter Benjamin’s term, which he took from Karl Krauss, for a moment with revolutionary potential that the historian or chronicler wrests from the continuity of history. *Jetztzeit* is not the customary German word for present (*Gegenwart*); it signals a time that is full with “the presence of the now,” with possibilities and dangers for the working class, and may be distinguished from the empty and homogenous character of time as conceived in a bourgeois historiography.

4.

The factories where the interviews took place are: the aluminum company ALCASA, Textile Workers Cooperative of the Táchira, Guárico Tomatoes–Caigua, Cocoa Agro–Industrial Cooperative Union, and Invepal paper factory.

5.

For example, according to Alexander Patiño, a worker in Azzellini and Ressler’s video: “Now we have the the opportunity in the framework of our constitution, to write our history. We are the protagonists. . . . We don’t think as Commandante Chávez does, Commandante Chávez thinks like us and that is why he is there and we will keep him there.”

6.

Cf. Claudia Jardim and Jonah Gindin, “Interview with Tariq Ali,” *Venezuela: Changing the World by Taking Power*, <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles?artno=1223>.

7.

Michael Lebowitz, “Constructing Co-management in Venezuela: Contradictions Along the Path,” <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/lebowitz241005.html>.

8.

Cooperatives, most of them formed since 2004, have become a central feature of the Bolivarian government’s plans for a socialism of the twenty-first century. For an interesting discussion see Camila Piñeiro Harnecker, “The New Cooperative Movement in the Bolivarian Process,” <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/harnecker051205.html>.

9.

We use the word “media” in our title to signal the possibility of a socialist realism that reaches beyond the anti-modern practices advanced by such figures as Andrei Zhdanov, governor of Leningrad between 1932 and 1948 and a key figure in the socialist realist practices that dominated under Stalin. “Media” further points to our recognition that all documentation is a form of creation or labor, the products of which come to exist alongside and ideally in solidarity with the new realities it documents. Finally, “media” and its cognate “mediation” reference the role that art may have in securing hegemony through consent and persuasion, when operating in conjunction with or alongside force.

10.

Cf. Nato Thompson and Gregory Sholette, *The Interventionists: A User's Manual for the Creative Disruption of Everyday Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004). This exhibition included Azzellini and Ressler's first collaboration *Disobbedienti*, 2002.

OCCUPIED FACTORIES, EXPROPRIATION, AND WORKERS' COOPERATIVES

1.

"Chávez anuncia expropiaciones de empresas cerradas," www.rebelion.org, July 27, 2005.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Dario Azzellini is a writer, social investigator, and political analyst living between Latin America and Berlin. His recently published work includes *Futbolistas* (2006), co-authored with Stefan Thimmel; *Venezuela Bolivariana* (2006); and *La Privatización de las guerras* (2003–06, published in various languages), co-authored with Boris Kanzleiter. www.azzellini.net

Oliver Ressler is an artist who lives and works in Vienna. Since 1994 his practice has focused on theme-specific exhibitions, interventions in public space, and videos on issues of racism, migration, economic globalization, forms of resistance, and social alternatives. www.ressler.at

The current project, *5 Factories—Worker Control in Venezuela*, is Azzellini and Ressler's third collaboratively produced video; it is preceded by *Disobbedienti* (2002) and *Venezuela from Below* (2004).

Chris Gilbert is Phyllis Wattis MATRIX Curator at the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive.