

HIERARCHY OR HORIZONTALISM? - CRITICS OF OCCUPY

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The cycle of struggle which opened in 2011 has had numerous critics. A frequent target has been Occupy's commitment to 'horizontalism' and direct democracy. Voices from the traditional left and from present-day critical theory declare that horizontalism is (at best) limited in its application or (at worst) incoherent. Our essay indicates a line of thought which allows such voices to be stilled.

The line of thought which we follow turns on mutual recognition, as a practice and an idea. In their accounts of Occupy, neither David Harvey nor Nancy Fraser – the critics whom we select for discussion¹ – focus upon mutual recognition as a political theme. For Harvey, the notion of mutual recognition is eclipsed by an instrumentalist conception of organisation whereas, for Fraser, an understanding of politics in terms of institutions blocks the conceptual view. In Harvey's case, the deficiency is to be regretted – for two reasons. First, his *Rebel Cities* presents a challenge which needs a response if a defence of Occupy is to be sustained. (The challenge concerns the 'scale'² at which anti-capitalist opposition is to take place.) Second, a response turns on the notion of mutual recognition – which Harvey fails to consider.

In the first three sections of our paper, we discuss Fraser's and Harvey's approaches to Occupy. (Our discussion of Fraser comes first because it is relatively self-contained.) In section 4, we explore Harvey's claim that Occupy-style politics faces problems of scale. Section 5 suggests how, in our view, such problems may be met. Our final section broadens discussion and asks how emancipated social existence may be pictured.

1 See D. Harvey *Rebel Cities* (London: Verso 2013) and N. Fraser 'Against Anarchism' *Public Seminar* (www.publicseminar.org) 9 October 2013 .

2 *Rebel Cities* pp. 69, 80, 151.

Before launching our discussion, a clarificatory note may be added. From time to time, we refer to 'Occupy-style' movements and this generic term tends to have European and North American connotations. But we are aware that struggles in, for example, the global South also bring issues of horizontalism *versus* hierarchy to the fore.³ We see the movements of 2011-2013 as renewing a widespread and, in the history of struggle, longstanding theme.

1. Fraser, anarchism and the public sphere

For Fraser, the 'neo-anarchist' political stance which she associates with Occupy is 'conceptually incoherent'. *Either* such a stance 'presupposes that everyone can always act collectively on everything that concerns them' – a presupposition which she describes as 'patently absurd' – *or* it requires a decision-making council which is itself 'an institutionalized power'. If the latter is the case, councils confront 'publics' to whom they are accountable – just as 'publics' confront 'institutionalised powers' which will, they hope, 'enact their will'. In general, concludes Fraser, 'the distinction between publics and institutions is not so easily dispensed with'.⁴

What should a reader make of Fraser's reflections? Her claim that neo-anarchism is 'conceptually incoherent' is, we suggest, a declaration that Occupy thinks of democracy in terms different from Fraser's own. The terms which Fraser favours are set out in a much earlier paper, to which 'Against Anarchism' refers. In her 'Rethinking the Public Sphere' of 1990, Fraser envisages a post-bourgeois condition where decision-making bodies are 'deemed accountable' to public spheres (in the plural) and where 'people who are affected by an undertaking' have 'a legitimate claim to a say'.⁵ Fraser's preference is, seemingly, for representative (as distinct from direct) democracy. What she requires, and sees as possible, is that decision-making powers will be sensitive to their publics. Relations of representation/accountability will obtain between the powers and the publics – read: the constituencies – concerned.

Evidently, Occupy's understanding of democracy and Fraser's are drastically different. Whereas Occupy links democracy to participation in general assemblies, Fraser favours a 'two-track model'⁶ – a model involving a decision-making council and its public – of how democracy is to be seen. Which understanding is preferable? Fraser's view, which attempts a *rapprochement* between critical theory and traditional

3 See, for example, R. Zibechi *Territories in Resistance* (Oakland and Edinburgh: AK Press 2012) pp. 19, 36, 46, 81, 107, 283, 295-6, 330.

4 Passages quoted in this paragraph are from 'Against Anarchism' pp. 2-3.

5 N. Fraser 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy' *Social Text* No. 25/26 (1990) p. 76.

6 'Against Anarchism' p. 2.

representative democracy, strikes us as vitiated by its deeply institutionalist tone. We should like, at this point in our discussion, to make clear how the term *institutionalist* is intended: we have in mind Hegel's depiction of social institutions as 'spiritual masses [*geistige Massen*]'.⁷ When Hegel refers to 'spiritual masses', he underlines the quasi-natural inertia (and thence the alienation) that social institutions possess. An important aspect of this alienation is the circumstance that social institutions stand *over against* individuals – and (so to say) *over againstness* is a feature of democracy in Fraser's sense. From the standpoint of a public or constituency as seen by Fraser, a decision-making council stands *over against* represented individuals; it may or may not be sensitive to the criticisms which discussion in a public sphere may raise. From the standpoint of a decision-making council, conversely, the individuals who make up its public count not merely as a source of legitimacy but as a force – a potentially hostile force – which must be appeased. Fraser (we note) seems untroubled by the *over againstness* which clings to her favoured model of democracy. Her view remains institutionalist (in the sense which we have indicated) and makes its peace with a world where contradictory – or alienated – recognition prevails.⁸

To this criticism of Fraser, two objections may be expected. The first can be stated in the form of a rhetorical question. Surely all democracy – democracy *per se* – turns on accountability? Our response is that, if the democracy is representative in character, it is *of course* essential that channels of accountability are intact. One of the ways in which a representative democracy becomes insensitive to its constituents is that traditions of accountability dry up. In neoliberal years, notions of democracy have been prised away from accountability – and reduced to a mockery of themselves. If, however, the democracy is direct a different response is in order. What is essential is not that people with one role-definition (e.g. the role-definition of “council member”) be accountable to people with another (e.g. the role-definition of “citizen”), but that people affected by a decision be able to discuss and interact in an egalitarian and self-determining way.⁹

The second envisaged objection comes into focus when the *group of people affected by a decision* is considered. Who may these people be? Some may be decision-makers. Others are 'people who are affected by an undertaking in which they do not directly participate'.¹⁰ Surely (asks Fraser) people in the latter category are best served by a 'two-track' (a council and public sphere) rather than a direct-democracy approach?¹¹

7 On 'spiritual masses', see G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977) pp. 300, 356.

8 On contradictory recognition, see R. Gunn and A. Wilding 'Revolutionary or Less-than-Revolutionary Recognition?' published by Heathwood Institute and Press (www.heathwoodpress.com) on 24 July 2013.

9 The relation of role-definitions to 'spiritual masses' (Hegel), and thereby to contradictory recognition, is discussed in our 'Revolutionary or Less-than-Revolutionary Recognition?', section 2.

10 Fraser 'Rethinking the Public Sphere' loc. cit. The phrase 'directly participate' in this sentence means: participate in decision-making.

11 See note 6, above. Fraser's thought, here, echoes an early essay by Michael Walzer: people who for one reason or

The objection is reminiscent of the complaint that not everyone wants to (or is able to) sit through lengthy meetings. For that reason, it may be tempting to set the objection aside. Fraser's question is, however, worth taking seriously. Are people whom a decision affects best served by a “vertical” approach (where lines of authority and accountability run *up* to a council and *down* to the council's constituency) – or by horizontality (where all concerned are on the same footing)? Our reply is that, while neither approach is problem-free, the latter is to be preferred.

We comment first on the “vertical” or, in Fraser's term, 'two-track' model. Whereas Fraser worries that direct democracy denies a voice to non-participants, we for our part point to the disenfranchising apathy that representative democracy famously entails. Our underlying thought is that the institutionalism of representative democracy and apathy – ultimately, a substitution of “public” with “private” perspectives – go hand in hand.¹² Might the multiculturalist and decentralised form of democracy which Fraser recommends avoid, or at least lessen, this apathy? Perhaps – but this is because, if Fraser's notion of post-bourgeois democracy is favoured, not merely *a public* but *publics* exist. If the existence of *publics* is what is important, this is tantamount to saying that apathy is lessened the more “participatory” democracy becomes. It is, moreover, fair to tax Fraser with the following question: does the existence of *publics* improve the position of people who are not party to a decision – but who are affected by it nonetheless? If Fraser's notion of a 'two-track' model is to be followed, what such people need is – it seems – a general and unitary public sphere where indirect consequences of a policy can be debated. A view where *publics* exist without the overarching notion of *a public* is, surely, a view where factionalism is given free play. In the present connection, the implications of this point are dramatic. If the notion of *publics* remains confused, or needs further development, can a reader of Fraser be confident that worries about institutional apathy are misplaced?

We turn, now, to a “horizontal” conception of democracy. If such a conception of democracy is in place, how do people who are 'affected by an undertaking' but who 'do not directly participate' fare? We have described such people as, according to Fraser's two-track model, located *below* the envisaged decision-making council: lines of authority run *up* to the council and *down* to the council's constituency. In a horizontal democracy we can picture such people as existing *alongside* the council. In terms of authority, such people are positioned *on the same level* as the council itself.

another stay away from meetings may be affected by decisions which the meeting takes. Walzer's conclusion is that 'participatory democracy has to be paralleled by representative democracy': M. Walzer *Obligations* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1971) p. 236. Fraser appears to agree.

¹² See, similarly, Robinson's observation that 'polyarchy' – that is, 'elite' democracy – is 'promoted in order to co-opt, neutralize and redirect...mass popular democratic movements': W.I. Robinson 'Promoting Polyarchy in Latin America: The Oxymoron of “Market Democracy”' in E. Hershberg and F. Rosen, eds., *Latin America after Neoliberalism* (New York: The New Press 2006) pp. 99-100.

If the implications of this metaphorical change are pursued, the “council” is best thought of (we suggest) as a “general assembly” – an assembly which is open to fresh participants. This assembly is not a fixed social institution (a 'spiritual mass' in Hegel's meaning) and individuals – all individuals – are participants, actually or potentially as the case may be. Pressing this line of thought further, we may say that *there is no* distinction between (on the one hand) a “council” or “assembly” and (on the other hand) people who 'do not directly participate' in Fraser's sense. Are non-active individuals disadvantaged by the fluidity which our description of horizontality entails? Our answer to this question is “no” - for two reasons. First, fluidity itself ensures that a distinction between *actual* and *potential* participation comes into being on an issue-by-issue or occasion-by-occasion basis. Discrimination comes into play when a distinction between actuality and potentiality becomes socially fixed. And second, horizontal democracy as practiced in Occupy-style movements stipulates that anyone attending an assembly may block a decision to which he or she objects.¹³

If horizontal and participatory democracy may be defended against Fraser's charge of conceptual incoherence, a further question remains. In what sort of social movement may such democracy subsist? A striking answer is given by Raul Zibechi, who pictures an oppositional movement as a 'pedagogical subject' – that is, as a movement which does not merely take education seriously but which is educative (and hence self-transformative) through and through. Such a movement is 'a permanent process of self-education'.¹⁴ We do not explore Zibechi's picture of a social movement further,¹⁵ other than to note its contrast with Harvey's instrumentalist conception – to which we now turn.

2. Harvey, Occupy and recognition

What goal should political radicalism adopt, when undertaken in an urban context? If oppositional movements flow together, what should they demand? In his *Rebel Cities*, Harvey asks these questions and proposes an answer. His answer is that such movements should demand 'greater democratic control over the production and use of the surplus'¹⁶ – that is, the surplus which capitalist society generates. Because urbanisation is, for Harvey, a major channel through which capitalism's surplus is absorbed, oppositional movements should claim a 'shaping power...over the way in

13 On 'blocks' in Occupy-style assemblies, see note 27, below. Does our reference to 'anyone attending an assembly' disadvantage non-attenders? It seems to us that, in an electronic age, the problem of non-attendance is not insuperable. A more fundamental point is that *what counts as participation* is to be decided with notions of mutual recognition (see later) in mind.

14 R. Zibechi *Territories in Resistance* pp. 24-5.

15 A further exploration may, usefully, set it alongside current “co-operative university” thinking. See M. Neary and J. Winn 'Student as Producer: reinventing the student experience in higher education' [2009](www.studentasproducer.lincoln.ac.uk); M. Neary and S. Amsler 'Occupy: A New Pedagogy of Space and Time?' *Journal for Critical Educational Policy Studies* Vol. 10, No. 2 (2012).

16 *Rebel Cities* p. 22.

which our cities are made and remade'.¹⁷

How should a reader respond to Harvey's complex of ideas? In what follows, we make no attempt to comment on everything that *Rebel Cities* contains. We take it for granted that a reader finds Harvey's castigation of 'the liberal ethic of intense possessive individualism' refreshing.¹⁸ We assume agreement with his claim that establishing 'a place for open discussion and debate' on the power of money¹⁹ is something to be praised. On a more complex issue, we find Harvey's reconceptualisation of the term 'proletariat' – a reconceptualisation which shifts the term's emphasis from factory-based labour to urban existence – intriguing.²⁰ In the literature which is gathering pace in the aftermath of Occupy-style initiatives, *Rebel Cities* is a work which calls for close attention and debate. In the present paper, we concentrate on what we see as *Rebel Cities*' chief weakness: Harvey's account of the Occupy movement says nothing whatever about recognition. This silence is the more damaging because, we consider, Occupy's political importance and its focus on mutual recognition²¹ are inseparable themes. The main political challenge which, as we shall argue, *Rebel Cities* presents is one to which the notion of mutual recognition is the key.

We open discussion by turning to *Rebel Cities*' central question: in an urban context, what should oppositional movements demand? Our proposal is that Harvey's answer – namely, that oppositional movements should demand control over society's surplus – is not, indeed, mistaken but incomplete. Why should 'greater democratic control over...the surplus' (Harvey) be sought? What sort of 'democratic control' should oppositional movements seek? The “why” question and the “how” question are, we note, closely related. Both concern the rationale of the demand which (rightly) Harvey favours.

A reader sympathetic to Harvey may, of course, protest that considerations of rationale have no place in a list of political demands. But such a protest may be over-hasty. In some cases, specification of a rationale may be needless because it is well-understood. In others, a reference to normative values – say, self-determination or dignity – is part of the demands themselves. In still further cases, an indication of

17 Ibid p. 5.

18 Ibid. p. 14.

19 Ibid. p. 161.

20 Says Harvey: 'So now we have a choice: mourn the passing of the possibility of revolution because that proletariat has disappeared, or change our conception of the proletariat to include the hoardes of unorganized urbanization producers (or the sort mobilized in the immigrants rights marches), and explore their distinctive revolutionary capacities and powers' (ibid p 130). We note in passing that, if this sounds like a “farewell to the working class” scenario, the appearance is misleading. Harvey's shift of conceptual attention from the factory to the city is not premised on an abandonment of class analysis. It is premised on an appreciation that circuits of capital (as set out in *Capital* Vol. 2) are no less important than production (understanding 'production' in a merely immediate and factory-linked sense).

21 See R. Gunn and A. Wilding 'Occupy as Mutual Recognition' published by Heathwood Press and Institute (www.heathwoodpress.com) on 12 November 2013.

how and why a demand should be satisfied is essential as a means of building support. It is striking that, if we turn to Marx, an indication of communism's rationale is easy to find.

In Marx's view, why should communism be established? Why should control over society's surplus be sought? An answer to such questions is given in a famous passage from the *1844 Manuscripts*: communism involves 'the real *appropriation* of the *human* essence by and for man'.²² This 'appropriation' is seen by Marx as one of man (a) as a *social* being and (b) as a *species* being – understanding the latter term to mean being which determines itself. If (a) and (b) are taken together, the result is that Marx envisages communism as social existence where *mutual recognition* obtains. We do not, here, unpack the notion of mutual recognition²³ – save to note that, where there is mutual recognition, each individual counts as self-determining through the recognition that others freely give. When Marx refers to communist society as 'an association, in which the free development of each is the free development of all',²⁴ his tacit reference is to mutual recognition. In the present connection, Marx's invocation of recognition is of interest for two reasons. One is that it illustrates Marx's willingness to address normative (or “ethical”) issues. The other is that Occupy, for its part, gives mutual recognition a central place.

We have noted that, in *Rebel Cities*, Harvey says nothing about recognition. In a moment, we shall suggest a reason for this silence – or omission. In the remainder of this section, however, we highlight Occupy's emphasis on mutual recognition.²⁵

A much-commented-upon aspect of Occupy's politics from 2011 to 2013 has been its 'commitment to horizontal principles'.²⁶ In section 1, we have commented on horizontalism's relation to public sphere discourse. Here, we stress the focus on mutual recognition that horizontalism entails. The equality which 'horizontal principles' imply is, we propose, equality between individuals who *recognize* and *are recognized* by others – in short, it is the interactive equality of individuals amongst whom mutual recognition obtains. For Occupy, furthermore, a commitment to horizontal principles goes hand in hand with a direct democracy – and its practice of decision-making by general assembly relies on the to-and-fro interaction that mutual recognition entails. When it is added that Occupy's notion of direct democracy turns on consensus-seeking and consensus-building, rather than on majoritarian winning or losing,²⁷ mutual recognition's focus on individuals' freedom is underlined. To these

22 K. Marx and F. Engels *Collected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart 1975) Vol. 3, p. 296.

23 Discussion of mutual recognition can be found in our 'Revolutionary or Less-than-Revolutionary Recognition?' and our 'Occupy as Mutual Recognition', both referred to above. See further R. Gunn *Five Lectures on Hegel* (PM Press forthcoming).

24 *Collected Works* Vol. 6, p. 506.

25 For further discussion, see R.C. Smith 'In defence of Occupy's emphasis on non-dominant, non-hierarchical organisation' (www.heathwoodpress.com) as well as our 'Occupy as Mutual Recognition'.

26 D. Graeber *The Democracy Project* (London: Allen Lane 2013) p. 141.

27 Very roughly: an Occupy-style collective decision is made by seeking an agreement which is acceptable to all

comments, two observations may be added. The first is that, in stressing Occupy's 'commitment to horizontal principles', we do not *directly identify* mutual recognition with any single political arrangement, however direct and consensual. Our point is that Occupy's favoured form of democracy *turns upon* and, moreover, *helps to build* mutual recognition – so that a “virtuous circle” (rather than an alienating spiral) linking politics and recognition may result. The second observation is that activity in Occupied spaces is characteristically many-sided. Besides political decision-making, child-care, health care, food provision, constructing a library and musical performance (for example) find a place.²⁸ In London, Tent City University – a university which, despite 'few amenities', was high in intellectual stimulation – came into existence.²⁹ Such a list of forms of activity resonates with the notion that mutual recognition (if it is to count as such) brings the entirety – in philosophical terms, the “totality” – of a human being into play. Frequently, the many-sidedness of activity in zones of Occupation is understood in terms of prefiguration (or prolepsis, or anticipation). In Döşemeci's words: 'The occupations were just as much about setting up a new society as they were about criticizing the chains of the old one'.³⁰ In a word, the occupations anticipate (and are/were seen as anticipating) a world of mutual recognition. The prefigurative aspect of Occupy-style actions is, in our view, vital. Unless it is kept in mind, Occupy's emphasis on mutual recognition appears to be quixotic and difficult to understand. The prefigurative aspect is marginalised, we argue, if Harvey's view of oppositional movements and demands is assumed.

3. Harvey and the problem of organisation

Harvey's approach to political demands and oppositional movements reminds us of the approach enshrined in Marxism-Leninism's “problem of organisation”. Is it possible that, a hundred years since its inception, the ghost of the “problem of organisation” still walks? Before indicating points of similarity between Harvey's and Marxism-Leninism's thinking, we outline the form which the “problem of organisation” came to adopt.

Debate on the problem of organisation opened with an exchange between Lenin and

participants, rather than by asking which view wins the majority of votes. Whereas majoritarian democracy (however direct) simply sweeps aside minority views, Occupy-style decision-making gives all present an opportunity to veto (“block”) a proposal that he/she feels 'violates a fundamental principle' (*Democracy Project* p. 211; see also pp. 215-7) – and goes on to refine a proposal until unanimity is achieved. From the standpoint of conventional or majoritarian democracy, Occupy-style procedures consider “second preferences” (or, if necessary, third or fourth preferences). From Occupy's standpoint, the favoured procedures articulate the voice of (in Hegel's phrase: *Phenomenology* p. 110) an “I” that is “We”.

28 See, for example, J. Schradie's note on Oakland: 'Why Tents (Still) Matter for the Occupation Movement' *Common Dreams* (<https://www.commondreams.org>), 24 November 2011 – and, for an overall view, M. Döşemeci 'Don't move, Occupy! Social movement vs social arrest' *ROAR Magazine* (www.roarmag.org), 5 November 2013 .

29 P. Walker 'Tent City University – one of the most remarkable aspects of Occupy London' *The Guardian*, 19 January 2012.

30 'Don't move, Occupy!' p. 8.

Luxemburg. In her 'Organizational Question of the Russian Social Democracy' (1904), Luxemburg argues that 'tactical policy' is 'the product of great creative acts of the often spontaneous class struggle seeking its way forward'. She continues: 'The unconscious comes before the conscious. The logic of the historic process comes before the subjective logic of the human beings who participate in the historic process. The tendency is for the directing organs of the socialist party to play a conservative role'.³¹ Luxemburg is responding to Lenin's 'What Is to Be Done?' (1903), according to which spontaneity that is left to itself 'means strengthening bourgeois ideology'.³² For Lenin, political consciousness 'can be brought to the workers *only from without*, that is, only outside...the sphere of relations between workers and employers'.³³ For this, in Lenin's view, a revolutionary political party is needed.

Neither Lenin's nor Luxemburg's position, as just presented, appears attractive. Whereas Lenin's defence of a vanguard party invites elitism, and a separation of theory from practice, Luxemburg's dictum that the unconscious comes before the conscious and her invocation of 'the logic of the historic process' depict spontaneity in a deeply determinist light. Although her invocation of spontaneity (and the 'great creative acts' to which it is linked) appears to open a way towards what, in section 1, we have termed questions of "why" and "how", her determinist conception of spontaneous struggle remains within positivism's confines. All this said, the question of relative attractiveness is not the most important issue in the debate launched by Lenin and Luxemburg. It is an assumption on which Marxist theories of organization came to rest.

The assumption is made explicit in Lenin's writings. There, questions relating to 'our programme', 'tactical questions' and 'organisational questions' are distinguished – each level being 'less important' than the preceding.³⁴ The passage makes sense only if 'tactical questions' are decided by their success in promoting programmatic objectives, just as 'organisational questions' are decided in the light of tactical aims. In short, the underlying framework of the "problem of organisation" is instrumental: as in a chess game, even minor moves are valid insofar as (and only insofar as) they improve the chances of capturing the king. Our contention is that, in over a century of Marxist and quasi-Marxist thinking, the influence of instrumentalist thinking on social movements remains pervasive. It is no accident – we suggest – that, when Harvey endorses the notion of setting up a 'place for open discussion and debate', his way of expressing approval is to say that he endorses Occupy Wall Street's 'tactics'.³⁵ Are we to gather that, if tactical thinking had lead to different conclusions, open

31 R. Luxemburg 'Organisational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy' in M.-A. Waters, ed., *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* (New York: Pathfinder Press 1970) p. 121.

32 V.I. Lenin 'What Is to Be Done?' in his *Selected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart n.d.) Vol. 2, p. 62.

33 Ibid. p. 98.

34 V.I. Lenin 'One Step Forward, Two Steps Back' (1904) in his *Selected Works* Vol. 2, p. 455. See also p. 464.

35 *Rebel Cities* p. 161.

discussion and debate would have been a misguided aim?

It is, let us concede, unfair to hold Harvey to a single expression – one which he uses in a loose and in-passing way. Certainly, it is unreasonable to make a judgement of a book turn on a single formulation.³⁶ The reference to 'tactics' fits all too readily, however, with the silence about recognition which (as we have seen) prevails in *Rebel Cities'* discussion. For Occupy movements, mutual recognition is not merely one concern amongst others. It is to be prioritised at all costs, and in the face of all-too-evident threat. For Harvey, it seems, mutual recognition is – if it is worth a mention – something which may turn out to be useful in an instrumentalist way.

Bearing the above comments on the “problem of organisation” in mind, we may set Marxism-Leninism's and Harvey's reflections alongside one another. First, Marxism-Leninism evaluates a form of organisation or political initiative in terms of its tendency to promote a specific goal – and Harvey, in his comments on control over society's surplus product, does the same thing.³⁷ Second, both Harvey and Marxism-Leninism understand the goal as one which a theorist may know *before* struggle is embarked upon: there can be no question of evaluating a movement in terms of its self-education or by goals or aims which it, itself, evolves. Third, nothing which fails to promote the instrumental goal in an efficient and “economical” fashion³⁸ can be seen as having political value. It is in the light of this point, we suggest, that Harvey's silence about recognition is to be seen.³⁹ For Occupy, an oppositional movement which loses sight of mutual recognition loses its *raison d'etre*. More: mutual recognition is not merely one feature of struggle against others – but an unconditional priority which must regulate political action at every step. For the Marxist-Leninist “problem of organisation”, as (seemingly) for Harvey, no feature of struggle can have value in this unconditional sense. Finally, a Marxist-Leninist understanding of the “problem of organisation” excludes any notion of prefiguration or prolepsis: instrumental thinking forbids blurring together political means and political ends. On such a view, for example, Marx's description of communism as 'the *real* movement

36 For this reason, we do not explore Harvey's contentious claim that the UK Socialist Worker Party 'led the successful struggle against Thatcher's poll tax' (ibid. p. 121). Our memory of the struggle against the poll tax is significantly different. But we mention the claim because it indicates Harvey's apparent sympathy with a Leninist or Trotskyist line of thought.

37 A note of clarification may be necessary here: our suggestion is not that an oppositional movement can dispense with questions about society's surplus. Far from it. Our point concerns the role in thinking about Occupy that Harvey's comments on surplus play. By assessing Occupy in terms of its 'demands' (ibid. p. 22) and 'tactics' (ibid. p. 134), Harvey – we propose – employs an all-too-traditional conceptual scheme.

38 On the relevant sense of the term “economical” here, see G. Bataille *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1985) pp. 120-3.

39 A note of clarification is needed at this point. We accuse Harvey of instrumentalism, according to which political value depends on whether a goal is promoted. We should, here, point out that instrumentalism can have “soft” and “hard” applications. Emma Goldman – for example – identifies the latter when she describes the Bolsheviks as 'the Jesuits of revolution, justifying all means to attain their purpose': see E. Goldman *Living My Life* (London: Penguin Books 2006) pp. 491-2. It should go without saying that we do not accuse Harvey of “Jesuitism”. Our suggestion is, rather, that he breathes in an instrumentalism which is culturally pervasive and which the Marxist-Leninist tradition underlines.

which abolishes the present state of things⁴⁰ becomes meaningless – or ill-formulated at best. In *Rebel Cities*, a silence not merely about recognition but about prolepsis (to which, for Occupy, mutual recognition is closely linked) suggests a prevalence of instrumental thinking. To repeat: much in *Rebel Cities* strikes us as intriguing and sympathetic. But an unreconstructed instrumentalism inherited from the “problem of organisation” casts a shadow at every turn.

A reader who has followed our discussion thus far may be inclined to ask: what sort of oppositional movement may count as “non-instrumental” in the above sense? Our answer is: a “non-instrumental” movement may be pictured as one which is self-transformative and self-educative in Zibechi's sense. For such a movement, the mutual recognition which prefigures a new world enables learning; at the same time, as participants in Occupied zones are the first to acknowledge, it is something to be learned. In this connection, a final point regarding 'spontaneity' is in order. We have seen that Luxemburg favours spontaneism – whilst understanding it in a determinist sense. Zibechi, who argues against statist or centralised notions of revolution, mistrusts the notion of spontaneity *per se*:⁴¹ it is as though he is reacting against Luxemburg's picture. His emphasis is on the consciousness and, so to say, the learning curve that so-called spontaneous struggle entails. Our view is that the notion of spontaneity succeeds in breaking with instrumentalist thinking if, and only if, social movements are seen in a self-transformative way.

4. Harvey's challenge: Occupy and problems of scale

So far, our discussion of *Rebel Cities* has focused on what we see as the work's chief failing – namely, its instrumental conception of organisation. We turn now to its chief challenge – and to the line of thought which a sympathiser with the Occupy movement may find most valuable. Sadly, Harvey's instrumentalism and his blind spot regarding recognition prevent him from understanding how this challenge may be seen.

A reader of *Rebel Cities* quickly discovers that Harvey writes in a sharply critical manner. Although most of the work's criticisms are directed rightwards,⁴² part of its most energetic polemic is against the contemporary left. 'Unfortunately', he tells us, the term *hierarchy* is 'virulently unpopular with much of the left these days' – and the circumstance that only horizontalism is seen as 'politically correct' allows important

40 Marx and Engels *Collected Works* Vol 5 p. 49.

41 R. Zibechi *Dispersing Power* (Oakland and Edinburgh: AK Press 2010) pp. 84-5; see also his *Territories in Resistance* p. 87.

42 *Rebel Cities*' passages on the role of urbanisation in capitalist reproduction, and on urban space, supply a valuable postscript to Harvey's earlier *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 2005).

issues to be 'evaded'.⁴³ The present-day left is, he maintains, gripped by a 'fetishism of organisational preference' – viz., a preference for 'pure horizontality'.⁴⁴ John Holloway receives mention as a 'leading theorist' of this 'hegemonic anti-hierarchical view'.⁴⁵ Are Harvey's strictures justified? Which issues does a turn to horizontality evade?

The issues are (as our opening remarks have indicated) issues of scale. Harvey urges that "'hierarchical'" [as distinct from horizontal] forms of organisation are needed to address large-scale problems'.⁴⁶ The large-scale problems that *Rebel Cities* has in mind include problems of 'how one organizes a whole city',⁴⁷ how one organises a 'metropolitan region as a whole'⁴⁸ and – more ambitiously still – how one tackles global warming.⁴⁹ Clearly, control over society's surplus is a 'large-scale' issue in Harvey's sense. Why should such large-scale issues require a hierarchical mode of organisation? Harvey's answer to this question is made clear when he considers Elinor Ostrom's work on common-pool resources (or "commons").⁵⁰ A key finding in Ostrom's research is that the famed "tragedy of the commons"⁵¹ need not occur, if users of the commons are allowed to interact (instead of being seen as isolated agents as on Rational Choice theory). So to say, Ostrom bears out Thompson's observation – directed against Hardin – that 'commoners' have been 'not without commonsense'.⁵² The difficulty which Harvey finds with Ostrom is that, as she admits, any large-scale issue 'requires a "nested" structure of decision-making'⁵³ – and "nesting" brings into play 'leadership structures *alongside* egalitarian assemblies'.⁵⁴ It brings into play 'some higher-order hierarchical structure'; Ostrom is 'naïve' to believe that 'strong hierarchical constraints and active enforcement' are unnecessary.⁵⁵ In short, face-to-face informality is insufficient; for "nested" face-to-face situations to be related, and for issues common to them to be handled equitably, there must be overarching rules of the game. Decisions about specifics must be subordinated to decisions about generalities. Authority must have layers. The further one moves from a local focus, the more evidently a need for "hierarchy" is seen.

43 *Rebel Cities* p. 69.

44 *Ibid.* p. 70.

45 *Ibid.* p. 173.

46 *Ibid.* p. 69.

47 *Ibid.* p. 152.

48 *Ibid.* p. 80.

49 *Ibid.* p. 69.

50 See, for an introduction to Ostrom, her 'Beyond Markets and States: Polycentric Governance of Complex Economic Systems' (Nobel Prize lecture 8 December 2009) (www.nobelprize.org). For a (sympathetic) discussion of Ostrom's work, see G.R. Marshall 'Nesting, subsidiarity and community-based environmental governance beyond the local level' *International Journal of the Commons* (www.thecommonsjournal.org) Vol. 2, No. 1 (2008).

51 G. Hardin 'The Tragedy of the Commons' *Science* Vol. 162, No. 3859 (13 December 1968).

52 E.P. Thompson *Customs in Common* (London: Penguin Books 1993) p. 107.

53 *Rebel Cities* p. 69; see also p. 81.

54 *Ibid.* p. 150 (emphasis added).

55 *Ibid.* p. 84. If the left (reformist or revolutionary) thinks *only* in terms of direct democracy, and if 'hierarchical constraints' are rejected, the likely result is – according to Harvey – inequality and injustice between communities (*ibid.* pp. 82, 152). In effect, Harvey shares Fraser's worry – see note 10, above – about 'people who are affected by an undertaking in which they do not directly participate'.

How should the left – and, more specifically, the section of the left which is sympathetic with the Occupy movement – respond to Harvey's reflections? Does Occupy's 'commitment to horizontal principles'⁵⁶ become meaningless, once city-wide or, indeed, society-wide issues are brought into view? First of all we consider two lines of argument that a defender of horizontality is likely to employ. Next, we indicate our own position.

Before turning to defences of Occupy, we distinguish Harvey's position from one which appears similar. In a recent video, Žižek has declared that direct democracy is insufficient; in order to be politically effective, the discussion which democracy involves needs the back-up of a larger structure such as a state.⁵⁷ In part, Žižek's contention overlaps with Harvey's: not least, both refer to Holloway as an exponent of views which they deplore. But the traditions of thought which Harvey and Žižek expound are (it seems to us) different. Whereas Harvey allows his discussion of Occupy to become trapped in the instrumentalism of the “problem of organization”, Žižek belongs in a current of thought where the human subject is seen as fundamentally flawed.⁵⁸ So flawed is the subject, it seems, that redemptive or emancipatory action is impossible – or, at best, an existential leap in the dark.⁵⁹ It is this pessimism (so we conjecture) that lies behind Žižek's notorious claim the left awaits a new 'Master'.⁶⁰ In the present article, we have chosen to discuss Harvey rather than Žižek because *Rebel Cities'* discussion of 'scale' is not contingent on a pre-given philosophical position.

How might horizontalism be defended against the charge that hierarchy (“verticality”) is needed if large-scale issues are to be addressed? A first response might be to argue that many issues which, conventionally, call for centralisation can be approached in a decentred or non-hierarchical way. So to say, large-scale issues

56 See note 26, above.

57 Alfredo Torrado 'Critica de Žižek a la idea de la democracia directa' (www.youtube.com). In his 'Occupy Wall Street: what is to be done next?' (*The Guardian*, 24 April 2012), Žižek similarly warns Occupy against 'narcissism' and – in tones reminiscent of Lenin's paean to factory discipline (*Selected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 442) – recommends 'a new form of organisation, discipline, hard work'.

58 See, for discussion, R.C. Smith 'The Ticklish Subject: A critique of the Lacanian subject and Žižek's notion of political subjectivity, with emphasis on an alternative' Heathwood Institute and Press (www.heathwoodpress.com) 22 August 2013.

59 For Žižek's characterisation of radical political action as 'an existential wager in Pascal's sense', see his *The Year of Living Dangerously* (London: Verso 2012) p. 129.

60 S. Žižek 'The simple courage of a decision: a leftist tribute to Thatcher' *New Statesman* (17 April 2013). Two comments on Žižek's notion of a new Master are in order. *One* is that Žižek's *New Statesman* piece and his *Guardian* piece (quoted in note 57, above) differ slightly: whereas the *New Statesman* article argues unambiguously that the left needs a new Master, the *Guardian* article declares that unstructured revolt generates a new Master – whether a Master of the left or of the right. The articles become consistent with one another if the claim is that revolt brings a right-wing Master *unless* a left-wing Master is discovered. And this seems indeed to be Žižek's “top down”, view. The *second* comment is that, no doubt, Žižek intends his appeal to Mastery to be nuanced in a Lacanian or Hegelian sense. Our suggestion is that, whether Lacanian or not, it is nuanced in terms of philosophical pessimism: a Žižekian subject is (*minus* a Master) incapable of revolution just as a Calvinist subject is (*minus* God-given grace) incapable of staying out of hell.

raise no distinctive problems and might be addressed by what Zibechi terms 'rhizomatic'⁶¹ (and thereby non-centralised) means. Is this confidence in the logic of dispersal justified? Might problems of climate change – to take Harvey's example – be addressed rhizomatically? Perhaps: if a logic of dispersal were followed, such problems might be more easily addressed. Might all social problems evaporate in this manner? Here, our “perhaps” becomes less confident (or still-less confident). Let us agree that a good deal of centralised thinking is unnecessary or mistaken. But it surely cannot be *taken for granted* that a need for centralisation will simply wither away.

A second response to Harvey's question – how might horizontalism cope with large-scale issues? – may suggest itself. On this approach, the distinctive character of large-scale issues is admitted: problems of climate change and social justice are seen as reaching beyond the confines of any single community. But (it is claimed) participatory democracy is not tied to local or relatively small-scale or face-to-face issues. Its range may be extended: society-wide questions can be addressed in a participatory way. What should our own response to this suggestion be?

As when we commented on accountability in section 1, an “of course” element here enters our discussion. *Of course* we welcome the extension of participatory practice. As in the case of accountability, however, we worry about instances where participation is co-opted and either rendered ineffective or made to serve institutionalist ends.⁶² Conceptually, the issue raised by the second response to Harvey concerns *citizenship* – and the form (or forms) of recognition to which recognition is linked. However, the two definitions of citizenship which have had most widespread currency in political theory strike us as tied to recognition of a contradictory (as distinct from a mutual) sort. The standard *liberal* definition is tied to the notion of what Lazar terms an 'individual ownership of a basket of rights and corresponding duties'.⁶³ That is, it is tied to possessive individualism.⁶⁴ The standard *civic* (or *civic humanist*) definition goes forward in terms of active citizenship and commitment to a public good.⁶⁵ Although the civic definition of citizenship appears

61 *Dispersing Power* p. 51.

62 The fate of Iceland's attempted “crowdsourced” constitution is a recent example of the institutional pressure that we fear. See, for discussion, L. Mirani 'Iceland's experiment with crowd-sourcing its constitution just died' *Quartz* (<http://qz.com>) 29 March 2013 and T. Gylfason 'Democracy on ice: a post-mortem of the Icelandic constitution' *OpenDemocracy* (www.opendemocracy.net) 19 June 2013.

63 S. Lazar *El Alto, Rebel City* (Durham and London: Duke University Press 2008) p. 4. The classic statement of what we refer to as liberal citizenship – a statement which Lazar (loc. cit.) quotes – is that of Marshall: 'Citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed' (T. Marshall 'Citizenship and Social Class' in D. Held *et al.*, eds., *States and Societies*, London: Basil Blackwell 1983, p. 253). Strictly speaking, our characterisation of Marshallian citizenship as 'liberal' requires modification: the 'rights' to which Marshall refers include 'social rights' (ibid. p. 252) and his overall perspective is social democratic. However, the link between rights-based citizenship and liberalism is a link we allow to stand.

64 On 'possessive individualism', see our 'Revolutionary or Less-than-Revolutionary Recognition' section 3.

65 For a characterisation of civic humanism, see J.G.A. Pocock *Politics, Language and Time* (London: Methuen 1972) p. 85.

to favour participation, and extend it to the boundaries of a state or city, problems linked to institutionalism remain: the list of those who *count as* citizens may be drawn up restrictively (resulting in elitism) and, further, a debate in political theory has gone forward about *how large* – city-wide? nation-wide? – a civic community may be. If the standard liberal conception of citizenship presupposes the role-definition of the individual as a possessor or proprietor, the standard civic conception presupposes the institution (or 'spiritual mass') of the city or nation or state.

In place of the responses to Harvey that we have considered, we offer our own suggestion about how *Rebel Cities'* challenge may be met. Our suggestion turns on the notion of mutual recognition. In our view, mutual recognition is not merely one form of organisation amongst others. It is not merely a form or pattern or practice of interaction which may be assessed – and, if necessary, set aside – in the light of its capacity to further an externally-given objective. On the contrary, it is the form of organisation in which emancipation exists.

More than this, Harvey's silence prevents him from seeing where a solution to problems of scale may be found. If mutual recognition is a *sine qua non* of emancipation, it is at the same time a condition of the *flexibility* which – we suggest – a democratic handling of large-scale issues needs. Where mutual recognition exists, as a living principle, *a range* of organisational patterns may be employed – and selected as of need. Through its flexibility, we propose, mutual recognition can address problems of 'scale'. By contrast, the “problem of organisation” (within whose confines Harvey's discussion moves) does not – and, owing to its instrumentalism, cannot – address issues of recognition.

The section of our paper which follows explains how, in our view, the relation between flexibility and mutual recognition is to be seen.

5. Mutual recognition and flexible constitution

The view which we suggest is one where mutual recognition obtains – and where, in the course of mutually recognitive interaction or conversation, a range of forms of organisation may be chosen. At one end of this range lies mutual recognition itself: mutual recognition may choose to continue organising itself horizontally. At the opposite end lies hierarchy: in the light of circumstances, and as a result of horizontally-arranged discussion, mutual recognition may opt for organisation which has a hierarchical form.

Our proposed response to Harvey's challenge regarding 'scale' is, accordingly, two-fold. First, we propose that, for the problem of 'scale' to be surmounted, a flexible attitude to organisation is required. According to such an attitude, local issues and

society-wide issues may be addressed in whatever form is effective and appropriate. Second, however – *and this “second” is vitally important* – the flexibility that we have in mind is conceivable only if mutual recognition exists. If mutual recognition exists and is flourishing, emancipation (and the “educative” self-transformation that emancipation entails) is present. If mutual recognition is absent, and if a culture of mutual recognition fails to inform *all* social actions, an emancipatory project (however well intentioned) becomes a self-defeating morass.

The position which we here adopt can be stated in the form of a contrast. Through flexibility, we propose, mutual recognition can address what Harvey terms 'large-scale' problems. By contrast, the “problem of organisation”, within which Harvey's discussion moves, does not – and, owing to its instrumentalism, cannot – address issues of recognition. If our position can be simply stated, however, much more needs to be said about the relationship in which flexibility and mutual recognition stand.

We open discussion of the flexibility/mutual recognition relation by warning against a reading of our comments so far. We have said that, in the light of circumstances, mutual recognition may opt for hierarchical organisation. This does not mean that, in our view, hierarchical organisation may become (so to say) user-friendly and benign. On the contrary: hierarchical organisation is intrinsically tied to contradictory and thereby alienated, recognition. Viewed in terms of recognition, hierarchy is damaging *per se*. Non-alienated or, so to say, non-toxic hierarchy is an impossibility – it remains so, even if (for reasons of circumstances or emergency) mutual recognition selects it. In saying that, where mutual recognition exists, *a range* of patterns may be employed, we do not suggest that hierarchical organisation may change its nature. What we propose is that, on a terrain of mutual recognition, the toxic material of hierarchy may be handled – if not with impunity, at least in a manner which allows emancipation to survive. If emancipation survives, it is not because hierarchy has changed. It is because mutual recognition remains the overarching principle to which organisational issues must answer. Not an invocation of “benign” hierarchy but, on the contrary, an emphasis on mutual recognition's capacities lies at core of the view that we recommend.

Why (a reader may ask) should mutual recognition be in a position – indeed, a *uniquely favoured* position – to experiment with a range of organisational patterns? Why should mutual recognition be able to handle the toxic material of contradictory recognition – and survive? An answer is that, on a mutually recognitive terrain, there is widespread (indeed, universal) awareness of fundamental social values. Such values – amongst them, the values of unconstrained interaction and self-determination – are everywhere and everywhen at stake. A further answer is that mutually recognitive interaction is, so to say, a *conversation* which brings a wide range of possible circumstances and responses into play. Such a conversation is 'a permanent process of self-education' (Zibechi). Thereby, it contains a dynamic that is

self-sustaining. A third consideration is that centralisation (which, in a given instance, mutual recognition may select) involves *trust* – and trust, like 'forgiveness',⁶⁶ presupposes mutual recognition. A final observation is that, where mutual recognition obtains, interaction resembles a sea upon which islands of hierarchy may or may not appear. Even if these islands become massive, the sea which surrounds them is one where unstructured interaction prevails. Interaction continues as a background against which, and in relation to which, hierarchy must state its case.

So far in the present section, our comments on mutual recognition and flexibility are of a general nature. In what follows, we attempt – still at the level of a sketch – a more detailed consideration. A starting-point is the *conversation* which, we have suggested, mutual recognition involves. How should this conversation be pictured? For a conversation to be mutually recognitive, it must (we propose) be one which is open to all comers and where all issues that any participant considers relevant may be raised. A conversation which is, in this sense, egalitarian and searching is, so to say, maximally rigorous: on the basis of such a conversation, truth-claims – which future conversation may or may not refute – can be made.⁶⁷ Conversations become *less than rigorous* to the extent that topics and participants and perspectives are excluded or debarred. Once interaction flows in restricted channels, as a result of imposed role-definitions or institutional pressure, truth-claims degenerate into conformism and thought's critical edge is lost.

In our view of what (in our section's heading) we refer to as *flexible constitution*, forms of organisation are selected through a conversation or discussion of a mutually recognitive kind. In such a conversation, a 'commitment to horizontal principles' (Graeber) is in play. No doubt, in an actual situation, such a conversation will be ragged and imperfect – and harshly cut off. Mutually recognitive interaction will be distorted, and unable to develop into a general norm. But, for emancipation and self-transformation to be possible, such interaction is essential. And, for organisational flexibility to go forward, such interaction is the condition of all else.

Let us imagine that a conversation of the sort here indicated has made a decision regarding organisation. In the light of circumstances and their bearing on mutual recognition, an open assembly has decided what form of organisation to adopt.

What happens next? If mutual recognition is to be a principle of social life, then – so we propose – discussion continues. To be sure, voices may fall (relatively) silent after a decision has been taken and the assembly which we envisage may temporarily disperse. But no decision as to forms of organisation is binding. The decision may be reversed or altered because, for example, new voices may be raised. New

66 Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* p. 407.

67 See J. Habermas 'Wahrheitstheorien' in H. Fahrenbach, ed., *Wirklichkeit und Reflexion* (Pfullingen 1973). What we refer to as mutually recognitive conversation, Habermas describes as communication where 'there is a symmetrical distribution of the opportunities for all participants...to choose speech acts and carry them out' (ibid. p. 255).

perspectives and new situations may arise. Owing to the flux of circumstances, situations which a decision attempted to meet may pass out of existence: in part, the *flexibility* which we have referred to is flexibility to the challenges that fresh circumstances may bring.

The circumstance that conversation is on-going has political implications. Most strikingly, it implies that forms of organisation that involve hierarchy or centralisation are – supposing conversation to have selected them – ephemeral. The “life” of a centralised organisation may be long or short: whichever is the case, it exists only as an artifact which mutual recognition has generated. To be sure, it embodies contradictory recognition. It takes on a reified and zombie-like life which institutions (or 'spiritual masses') all-too-readily display. On a mutually recognitive terrain, however, hierarchy exists on condition that it may be submerged in interaction's flow.

Mention of organisations' ephemerality brings us to what is, perhaps, the most essential aspect of our envisaged picture: at every point – that is, before and during and after an instance of decision-making takes place – mutual recognition must be prioritised. It must be prioritized not merely “theoretically”, in a text such as the present, but “practically” as well. Far from having merely instrumental or conditional significance, mutual recognition must (not merely “theoretically” but “practically”) be viewed as an 'absolute' – in the sense that it overreaches everything else.⁶⁸ Two points follow from this observation. One is that a chosen form of organisation must stand as close to mutual recognition and horizontality as circumstances permit. The other is that, if a hierarchical form of organisation is to be chosen, only one line of argument may justify the choice. Whoever argues in favour of such a choice must demonstrate that hierarchy maximises mutual recognition – or leads to mutual recognition by the shortest and most reliable route. Can such a demonstration ever be convincing?⁶⁹ Regardless of the answer to this question, such is the case that hierarchy must make.

At this point in our sketch of flexible constitution, our account faces an objection. Our discussion (so we may be told) grants either an *excessive* or an *inadequate* power to hierarchical organisations. The power is excessive – so it may be argued – because we provide no formal safeguards against what hierarchy may attempt. In response to this charge we hasten to make clear that, if formal structures are decided upon, then *of course* safeguards are needed. But, we add, such safeguards cannot be the sole or, indeed, the major issue. If it is to exist, hierarchy must count as (so to say) a frail raft of formality which floats on an interactive – a mutually recognitive and thereby

68 Inverted commas in the present sentence warn that the term 'absolute' has more than one connotation. *Absolute* may mean *possessing a place in a cosmological – say, a natural or divine – order*. Or it may mean *possessing overreaching significance*. Or still more meanings may be intended. It is the second of these meanings (and not the first) that we have in mind here.

69 A difficulty with such a demonstration is that hierarchies tend to perpetuate themselves. For example, a political struggle against a state tends to replicate – and perpetuate – state-like means. If a hierarchy succeeds in furthering recognition, this is most likely because external pressure has been applied.

unstructured – sea.⁷⁰ Direct democracy serves to police (it would be better to say: it serves to anti-police) hierarchy. At this stage, we are likely to be told that we grant hierarchical organisations inadequate power. Our response is that less-than-adequate power is what such organisations (if they are needed) should possess.

The foregoing paragraphs have sketched a manner in which mutual recognition and flexibility may be related.⁷¹ The paragraphs have suggested that flexibility may be combined without diluting the notion of mutual recognition; more than this, flexibility may be introduced *on condition* that mutual recognition subsists in an undiluted – an unstructured and unchannelled – way.

Standing back, we note briefly that our section draws upon, and seeks to remodel, a notion which features in mainstream political theory. Machiavelli's *Discourses* – a pivotal text in the civic humanist tradition – describes the Roman Republic in terms which are relevant here. In republican Rome, says Machiavelli, a strong leader may be appointed by the senate or the people; but such a leader was 'appointed for a limited time, and for the purpose of dealing solely with such matters as had led to the appointment'.⁷² In view, says Machiavelli, of 'the short duration of the dictatorship, of the limited authority which the dictator possessed, and of the fact that the Roman people were not corrupt', it was 'impossible' for the strong leader to do significant harm.⁷³ On the contrary, such an appointment allowed the republic to meet (for example) military emergencies. With such passages in mind, the *Discourses'* editor remarks that Machiavelli 'takes the familiar theory of mixed government, but gives it a wholly new and dynamic dimension'.⁷⁴ One way of summarising Machiavelli's political theory is to say that he regards republics as more flexible than princedoms: whereas princedoms are fixed in their habitual – we may say: hierarchical – pattern, republics may respond to a range of disparate circumstances. Republican rule may adapt itself to the ways of *fortuna* and respond in now-popular, now-hierarchical, ways. Whether this adaptability and flexibility was, historically, a feature of the republics with Machiavelli admired – ancient Rome, Renaissance Florence – is a question we do not explore. What we do stress is the extent to which Machiavelli's notion of flexible constitution is altered in the use we make of his suggestions.

As Machiavelli's editor remarks, the *Discourses* remodel an older motif – that of mixed constitution. What is new in Machiavelli is that mixed constitution is

70 In writing this sentence, we have in mind Emma Goldman's depiction of the early Soviet Union (*Living My Life* pp. 402-527). Goldman describes a situation where, she claims, the Bolsheviks acknowledged nothing outside their own structures – and where the tumultuous currents of the Russian revolution were (in consequence of incorporation and repression) drying up. With Goldman, we emphasise that, if mutual recognition is to be an aim of revolution, a “drying up” of informal interaction is to be resisted at all costs.

71 This sketch, and the suggestion with which the present section ends, is an expansion of our 'Revolutionary or Less-than-Revolutionary Recognition?' footnote 139.

72 N. Machiavelli *The Discourses* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1970) [Bk. I, ch. 34] p. 194

73 Ibid. p. 195.

74 Editor's introduction to *Discourses* p. 33.

understood in dynamic – that is, fluid and flexible – terms. In the present section, we carry this remodelling a stage further. For Machiavelli, participatory action is a matter of involvement in the affairs of a republic or city state. The institutions of a republic or city state are taken for granted, and form a background to the participation-based flexibility which he defends. For us, by contrast, action or interaction calls institutions into question and mutual recognition counts as a background to all else. Whereas Machiavelli tends to picture leaders (however temporary) in a civic and thereby institutional setting, we for our part regard leadership as a toxin which may cure – or which may kill. In stressing these differences, however, we wish to indicate an indebtedness to Machiavelli's thinking. If the *Discourse's* reference to a non-corrupt people⁷⁵ is read – or intentionally mis-read – as a reference to a people amongst whom there is mutual recognition, issues concerning institutionalism recede into the discussion's background and similarities appear.

6. *Mutual recognition and emancipation*

We end by noting a sense in which our comments on flexibility and mutual recognition may be generalised. Although our paper has focused on organisational issues, our comments on mutual recognition and flexibility have bearing on how emancipated life may be seen.

More specifically, our comments may serve as a riposte to a view of emancipation which became influential in the critical theory tradition between, roughly, 1980 and 2010. In those years, Habermas in his later writings revised his conception of emancipated existence to signify not a world of unstructured interaction but a world where law and the state retain a place. Retracting his earlier view – of which we ourselves are sympathetic – that emancipated life is anticipated in the concept of an ideal speech situation, he urges the need for 'mediations between the ethic of discourse and the practice of life'.⁷⁶ These 'mediations' turn out to be social institutions – such as the legal system. Albrecht Wellmer gives forceful expression of the later Habermas's view when he argues that 'an institution of freedom' – that is, an understanding of freedom in terms of institutions – is needed even in a post-capitalist world.⁷⁷ For Wellmer, as for the later Habermas and for critical theory which follows in the later Habermas's footsteps, an 'irreversible differentiation process' is 'constitutive of the “project of modernity”'.⁷⁸ This differentiation is seen as going

75 See note 73, above.

76 J. Habermas 'A Reply to My Critics' in J.B. Thompson and D. Held, eds., *Habermas: Critical Debates* (London: Macmillan 1982) pp. 261-2. Habermas's earlier view, which focuses on the notion of an ideal speech situation, can be gathered from his 'Wahrheitstheorien' (see note 67, above).

77 A. Wellmer 'The Critique of Critical Theory: Reason, Utopia and the Dialectic of Enlightenment' *Praxis International* Issue 2 (1983) pp. 84, 101, 107.

78 *Ibid.* p. 107.

forward in the life of the individual and is marked by the range of institutions – the legal system being one – which a modern individual confronts. In Axel Honneth's writings – which follow on from those of Habermas – the sociological notion of 'differentiation' is emphasised, and becomes a basis for distinguishing recognition into three distinct 'spheres'.⁷⁹ A reader of Honneth gains the impression (a) that the 'spheres' are anchored in institutions and (b) that, once they have emerged historically, the 'spheres' are (give or take some relatively inessential modification) here to stay. The later Habermas and Honneth operate with a notion of “modernity” where, we propose, a distinction between present day society and emancipation is blurred. In the name of differentiation, and the demystification which differentiation allegedly entails, social institutions of one sort or another – the family, the legal system and the state – take root in an emancipation which (for Marx) was institution-free.

The view of emancipated life presented by Habermas and Wellmer and Honneth merits strong repudiation. The view prises “Frankfurt School” critical theory away from its initially revolutionary roots. More significantly, it infects the notion of emancipated existence with the institutionalism of 'spiritual masses' – employing this term in Hegel's sense. It imports and endorses contradictory (or “alienated”) recognition, and suggests that role-definitions of bourgeois society are carried forward into a post-capitalist world. For Marx, by contrast, social role-definitions are called wholly into question⁸⁰ – and communism's rationale is the mutual recognition which it brings. That is, communism is for Marx a condition where (proleptically or actually) open and unconfined interaction takes place.

At this point in discussion, a reader may sense the importance of Harvey's challenge regarding 'scale'. Issues not only of organisation, but of emancipation, are raised by Harvey's claims. Is the notion of an unstructured (or non-institutional) or mutually recognitive society merely a romantic dream? Is such a society impossible – as Honneth and Wellmer and the late Habermas suggest? Our reply is that it *is* possible, in virtue of the resources of flexibility that mutual recognition – and it alone – contains. Our reply to Harvey's worries regarding 'scale' is, *mutatis mutandis*, a reply to Habermasian and Honnethian discussions of emancipation. Just as 'large-scale' issues may be approached *via* flexibility, and the priority of mutual recognition retained, so issues of 'differentiation' may be addressed by thinking in mutually recognitive *and* flexible ways. So to say, a “generalist” culture may adopt “specialist” modes of thinking – as specific circumstances present themselves and as necessity dictates. A full examination of this suggestion calls, to be sure, for a much more extensive discussion. But the difference between recent critical theory and ourselves

79 See, for example, Honneth's 'Redistribution as Recognition' in N. Fraser and A. Honneth *Redistribution or Recognition?* (London: Verso 2003) p. 138.

80 This is how we interpret Marx's famous comments on hunting, fishing, etc., 'in communist society': see *Collected Works* Vol. 5 p. 47.

should be clear. Whereas an importation of institutions into emancipation freezes what should be a moving (and self-moving) picture, our line of thought leaves the molten – so to say, the constituent rather than constituted – notion of emancipation intact.

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