

## OCCUPY – A DISCUSSION CONTRIBUTION

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[Note: The following paragraphs respond to R.C. Smith's 'In defence of Occupy's emphasis on non-dominant, non-hierarchical organisation' (published online by Heathwood Institute and Press on 15 September 2013). For Smith's article, and for his response to our comment on 'leadership', see <http://www.heathwoodpress.com/defense-occupys-emphasis-non-dominant-non-hierarchical-organisation/>.]

We write to endorse Robert Smith's chief point in his discussion of the Occupy movement: Occupy is not to be understood as an instance of political resistance that failed – owing to its inability to establish top-down leadership. It is to be seen as an assertion of 'horizontal and mutually recognitive collectivity' (Smith's formulation) in a world where hierarchy and one-sided recognition prevail. In recent years, a host of crowds and assemblies and mass movements have renewed revolutionary possibilities: they have done so by refusing the terms of the old world order and acting courageously as though contradictory and alienated recognition were a thing of the past. Because such movements have unfolded against a background of contradictory recognition, the prefiguration which they achieve has been fragile and partial – and all-too-brief. This is not to say that they have failed. Quite the opposite! Smith's intervention is valuable because he sees that, in evaluating Occupy-style movements, everything depends on choosing the right criteria.

Besides stressing the notion of horizontal and mutually recognitive collectivity, Smith raises questions about 'horizontal leadership' (as distinct from 'hierarchical, dominant leadership'). The phrase fills us – we concede – with disquiet, but this may be because we are unclear about its meaning. Our preference is to stress the notion of flexibility rather than leadership – our notion being that different individuals may come to the fore in different situations. So to say, there are no leaders but only individuals who may occasionally lead. However, where “occasionally leading” individuals acquire the role definition of *leader*, contradictory and alienated (as distinct from mutual) recognition reappears.

And a final point. In his discussion of Occupy, Smith rejects Zizek's claim that the Left needs a new 'Master' (see *New Statesman* for 17 April 2013). We wholeheartedly endorse Smith's position. Furthermore, we welcome his demonstration – in his 'The Ticklish Subject' (Heathwood website 22 August 2013) – that Zizek's appeal to Mastery and his view of the human subject go hand in hand. For Zizek, Smith argues, human subjectivity is irremediably 'split' and defective – and self-aware political action is beyond our capacities. As with his reading of Hegel (see Gunn and Wilding 'Zizek's Hegel' on Heathwood's website 21 August 2013), Zizek's scepticism regarding human capacities conspires to rule out revolution – or to make revolution an existentialist leap in the dark. Against Zizek, we view the subject not, indeed, as untarnished and perfect (unsurprisingly, contradictory recognition entails contradictory subjectivity and contradictory, one-sided knowledge) but as moving towards clarity as mutual recognition is achieved.