

## OCCUPY AND PREFIGURATION - A ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

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**This discussion, between a number of Heathwood authors, is intended to inspire interaction and discussion. It forms part of Heathwood's exploration of revolutionary struggle and Occupy's politics. The discussion takes as its starting point an article by Mark and Paul Engler, [‘Should we fight the system or be the change?’](#) (*New Internationalist* 4 June 2014).**

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**Adrian Wilding:** In their article, Mark and Paul Engler draw an important contrast between the ‘prefigurative’ and ‘strategic’ dimensions of revolutionary movements. Giving a brief history of the former (drawn primarily from American experience), they explain in engaging terms what is at stake in revolutionaries choosing to prefigure in the here-and-now the sort of egalitarian and emancipated existence which they want for society at large. As someone who has emphasised the prefigurative aspect of recent struggles – such as the global Occupy movement – as a key to understanding them, I’m sympathetic to Engler and Engler here.

At the same time, I feel that the (again American-oriented) examples of prefigurative politics they have chosen give the impression that such politics can easily become individualistic or even sectarian: a matter of affirming particular lifestyles or (sub)cultures. It is undeniable that prefiguration has a history, but I think we miss the challenge of a movement like Occupy if we judge it in terms – for instance the terms of a sometimes narcissistic 60s counter-culture – of the past. It’s also hasty to align the strategic versus the prefigurative distinction with an older dispute, namely between Marx and the utopian socialists. The utopian socialists were much more institutionally-minded (Fourier) or authoritarian (Owen) than anything we see in contemporary prefigurative experiments and Marx – deliberately – wrote almost nothing on strategy.

I worry that Engler and Engler draw too stark a distinction – a dualism even – between the prefigurative and the strategic. Once this is done it is then easy to judge the former deficient in terms of the latter. Prefigurative movements, so a now-familiar argument runs, lack the ability to make concrete political demands or to ‘scale up’ their actions. But as anyone who has studied Occupy has seen, the issue of demands is a complex one. There is a specific thinking behind Occupy’s refusal to make them, one which follows consistently from the claim that we the people (‘the 99%’) and not our parliamentary representatives (or the capitalist 1% whose interests they reflect) are the ultimate political power. In any case, so Occupiers have argued, why demand *ad hoc* policy changes to a society that is *systematically* unequal, oppressive and alienated? As Sarah van Gelder puts it, “the system is broken in so many ways it’s dizzying to try to name them all.”

Engler and Engler talk of a ‘spectrum’ within struggle ranging from the prefigurative to the strategic (here they are surely empirically correct) and conclude that we need to “balance the [two] competing interests in creative and affirmative ways”. But arguably this dualism is already overcome in the praxis of prefiguration, where we establish *in nuce* a form of life – Occupy’s horizontalism and direct democracy, for instance – that is to be realised across our

societies. Revolutionary strategy's guiding thread must be its consistency with the prefigured form of life. Without this, any strategy likely loses its way.

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**Richard Gunn:** Mark and Paul Engler's discussion of prefigurative and strategic organisation is much to be welcomed. However, it fails to take a familiar difficulty into account. The difficulty is that of viewpoint. If revolutionary struggle is seen externally, from a sociological or journalistic stance, then of course struggle's prefigurative and strategic dimensions will seem opposed – and prefiguration will count as narcissistic. If, on the other hand, revolution is seen in terms of critical theory, fresh perspectives will appear. In place of external opposition, prefigurative and strategic dimensions will sustain one another: occupation will count as a 'home' for 'struggle outwards' – to employ Yotam Marom's terms in conversation with Naomi Klein (*The Nation* 9 January 2012). And concern for a 'home' will cease to be narcissistic because questions about what is to be prefigured assume pride of place. Let me explain.

To a participant in a revolutionary struggle, and for a critical theorist, questions about glimmers of a self-determining future will be all important. From such a perspective, issues about whether or not 'home' involves a distinctive culture – or, indeed, a counter-culture – will seem abstract at best. What matters above all else, and before all else, is that mutual recognition – the life and interaction in and through which freedom may be sustained – exists in a tangible and directly experiential way. If mutual recognition, thus understood, is present there is a future to revolution. If mutual recognition is absent, or sacrificed to a more-or-less-distant strategic goal, the revolution has lost its way. Why – a sociologist or external observer may ask – is non-mutually recognitive revolution self-defeating? The answer is that a revolution, if it is to count as such, must start as it intends to go on. Once revolution cools the white heat of mutually recognitive interaction, a future of hierarchical and role-definitional alienation points towards a grey and grim infinity. If, by contrast, a mutually recognitive 'home' is sustained, revolution – whatever violence may be hurled against it – retains its rationale. 'Struggle outwards' remains revolutionary because the goal of revolution remains in play.

To an extent, Engler and Engler feel the force of the points just made. They note that Occupy Wall Street sought to prefigure 'a more radical and participatory democracy' and they recall the 1960's 'aspiration to a beloved society' – formulations which hint at the notion of mutual recognition. They cite, however, notions of participatory democracy and beloved society as instances which, it so happens, prefigurative struggle has addressed. My claim is that mutual recognition is much more than an instance. It is the political value which gives meaning to prefiguration and to revolution itself. Again, Engler and Engler seek a 'balance' between struggle's 'strategic and prefigurative dimensions': neither, they say, can be 'embraced or rejected wholesale'. As my reference to Yotam Marom indicates, I am in favour of overcoming a strategic versus prefigurative 'dualism' (to employ Adrian Wilding's useful term). But the notion of such a 'balance' remains unstable and eclectic unless mutually recognitive interaction – or, in a word, freedom – is made the basis of all else.

I return to the question of viewpoint. The 'balance' sought by Engler and Engler remains formal, unless mutual recognition – the longed-for aim of revolutionary struggle – is brought

into play. When viewed from a “critical theory” standpoint, mutual recognition comes to the fore – and the sociological dichotomy of strategy versus prefiguration disappears.

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**R.C. Smith:** I am in agreement with Adrian and Richard’s assessment of the article by Mark and Paul Engler. They’ve pretty much summed up my own position. I can certainly sympathise with the argument by Engler and Engler; however their viewpoint which suggests a strategic versus prefigurative dualism is questionable and appears quite rigid, especially with regards to Occupy-style movements. Prefiguration has a history and, indeed, it could be noted that in specific cases a conflict between the prefigurative and strategic may have caused certain specific movements to collapse. Following their line of analysis, it’s not entirely unreasonable that certain past prefigurative movements may have struggled with a conflict between strategy and prefiguration. I can think of certain modern ecovillages or self-reliant communities, where their prefigurative politics has become individualistic or even sectarian – a sort of self-destructive and isolated subculture. But for reasons Adrian and Richard state, I don’t think the assessment by Engler and Engler of Occupy Wall Street is correct or does much justice to the particulars of Occupy-style movements.

What the authors seem to suggest is the need to recognise the important relationship between prefigurative politics and strategic politics, especially if prefigurative movements such as Occupy-style movements are going to produce structural or systemic change. For this reason they ask: “For those who wish to both live their values and impact the world as it now exists .../ How can we use the desire to ‘be the change’ in the service of strategic action?” As a practical matter, this is a much welcomed question. But if the authors are indicating, as appears to be the case, that the downfall of OWS was due to how it lacked strategic facets or as a result of a conflict between “competing interests” of the prefigurative and strategic, I think the author’s position becomes untenable. In other words, I don’t think one can argue that the downfall of OWS was a matter of how the movement did not evidence strategic facets. In fact I think OWS was quite strategic in scale and that dialectical relation between prefiguration-strategy, which is worked through reasonably well in terms of Occupy’s political praxis, seems to continue today with the Global Occupy Movement.

While the issue of demands itself is indeed complex, as Adrian rightly points out, we can nevertheless look to many examples where OWS and many other similar Occupy-style events evidenced a notable degree of ‘strategy’ (although, perhaps not in instrumental terms, which I think needs to be distinguished): from the use of social media and communicative campaigns to get more support (let’s not forget the staggering amount of people that OWS inspired to take to the streets), to the organising of key blockades and the setting up of medical facilities, to liaising with other occupations (nationally and internationally). In each case, in almost every example of Occupy-style events, the prefigurative politics in questions evidences ‘strategy’ on the level of praxis. Even smaller-scale occupations, such as University-based occupations for instance, do not evidence any sort of dualism. Marom’s observation, which Richard already referenced, of the occupation as a ‘home’ for the ‘struggle outwards’, is therefore apt.

A second issue worth a few comments has to do with the matter of “self-destructive isolation”. I wonder if this image of self-isolation and sectarianism actually matches the more general experience of life in the camp at Zuccotti Park in particular or of other occupations in general. Perhaps the authors are indicating that there’s a tension between the actual camps themselves and the wider movements outside the camps? Even if this is case, and even if there was some tension here, not only is Occupy’s alternative politics widely noted as being largely inclusive, open and tolerant – both inside and outside the camps - I think what we witnessed was actually uncharacteristic of certain notable prefigurative movements of past, which the author’s use as a scaffold of example. Theoretically and practically, there appears to be the opposite in Occupy’s politics: a conscious resistance to self-isolation, which, I would say, is partly due to its mutually recognitive foundations. But again, if I were to play devil’s advocate: even if a tension between the prefigurative and strategic did arise in certain specific instances during Occupy Wall Street – like small flashes in a pan – I don’t think there’s much evidence to suggest that these surfacing tensions reached the point of a violent, tearing conflict or became the source of OWS’ collapse.

In truth, a similar argument has been made before: that the nature of Occupy’s alternative politics was the source of the movement’s collapse in New York. This line of argumentation has been addressed in past studies as part of Heathwood’s series. But the main point I would like to reiterate is that Occupy Wall Street was, first and foremost, systematically destroyed by brutal forces of state repression. This was the main factor of its downfall. The same can be said for other Occupy-style events that have met a premature end. Without this repression, OWS could have very well gone on for a long time and built more momentum, got more of its message across, and continued to ‘struggle onwards’. It seems quite evident that this type of open, inclusive, prefigurative politics seems to represent such a threat to the modern state – we see it all over the world, how Global Occupy-style movements evoke such a violent reaction.

In passing - and moving beyond the Engler and Engler article - I am also reminded of other more general criticisms of the movement’s occasional struggle with regards to the development and practice of participatory/horizontal politics. We also mustn’t forget that these movements are forced to exist within a largely alienated, coercive, dominant and hierarchical society. There is a real courage in these movements in this regard: that in the face of dominant and coercive society, against popular ideologies of hierarchy and party politics, here is a space where people can imagine and experiment with a post-capitalist freedom. The very basis of Occupy’s alternative politics, which Richard and Adrian already noted, goes directly against the grain of modern society and its dominant power-driven politics: it’s revolutionary alternative political horizon doesn’t match up to the coordinates of our present sociohistorical-cultural context. In this respect, there’s going to be some tension, some struggle, and some ‘growing pains’. But one of the most important things is that the occupations themselves, which should be seen in the first instance as radical alternative public spaces where ‘mutual recognition’ obtains, can and do start to highlight a truly revolutionary, emancipatory political horizon. The ultimate goal or rationale of this emancipatory activity is the mutual recognition which commonising entails – counter to the

capitalist mode of relations – in the field of participatory public engagement. Regarding future action, if mutual recognition is to be possible, the goal has to exist in the present. Perhaps concerning another matter, I think this is also important if we're to consider in the future a critical concept of non-violence and fundamental theory of non-coercive power.

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**Christian Fuchs:** Mark and Paul Engler's [article](#) "Should we fight the system or be the change?" brings up the question how what they call prefigurative and strategic politics are related in the context of the Occupy movement. This question is in my opinion important because it is crucial to discuss what the potentials of revolutionary politics are today and how such politics should look like.

Engler and Engler and the contributions to the round table dialogue thus far all point out that discussions about this relation are not new, but something that is, has been and was and will be present in many radical movements. If we think back historically, then it for example played an important role in the conflict between Marx and Bakunin and the split of the International Workingmen's Association (IWA) in 1872. Both the Anarchists around Bakunin and the Marxists agreed that a dominationless society needs to be created, but they disagreed on the ways towards it. Whereas the Anarchists thought the state can, should and needs to be immediately abolished after a revolution and that revolutionary politics needs to operate as social movement, Marx and his followers argued that state power needs to be conquered by the revolutionaries and can only be subsequently abolished.

In my view, this conflict has in principle been solved today by historical developments: A dominationless society is not just one, in which all collective decisions are taken by all those concerned by them and where the means of production are owned in common. It is also a post-scarcity society, in which there is no toil. A free society and toil are incompatible. Today, the productive forces are developed to such a degree that we could have a dominationless global society, in which toil for all people in the world is minimised, tomorrow. Participatory democracy requires as *one* of its preconditions that people are freed up from necessary labour and have time and spaces to engage in discussions and decision-making. The level of development of the productive forces in 19<sup>th</sup> century would not have enabled this necessary freedom of time, whereas the levels reached in the 21<sup>st</sup> century pose a far better precondition. In this respect, Bakunin and his followers were idealists who saw the question of anarchy (understood as participatory democracy) as independent from the economy, whereas communist Anarchists such as Peter Kropotkin and later Murray Bookchin were much more aware of the importance that technology has to play in a dominationless society. A major problem today is not to increase productivity, but that labour time is unequally distributed so that many work crazy hours overtime on the hand and many are on the other hand unemployed or precarious workers. This capitalist contradiction of labour and technology that contributes to precarious life is one of the factors contributing to the existence of the Occupy movement. The productive forces under capitalist conditions have turned into forces for the destruction of humans and nature. The objective conditions exist in society today that we can tomorrow have a dominationless society that is a participatory

democracy. The problem is however that various ideologies forestall the subjective factor needed for such a transition. The various Occupy movements are an utterance of radical subjectivity that remind us of the contradictions of capitalism that have culminated in the on-going crisis and of the need to establish alternatives to capitalism.

That we need alternatives to capitalism implies radical politics. And here the question arises how radical politics should best operate. The Trotskyist and Leninist strategy of trying to build revolutionary parties and convince people to join it by selling the Socialist Worker and similar publications to them does not work because it, among other factors, often comes along with an old-fashioned image of the working class as factory workers that disregards the changes of capitalism and does not see the paradox that many people in contemporary movements are not the blue-collar workers, to which the Trotskyists and Leninists want to appeal, because the 21<sup>st</sup> century working class has expanded towards the collective and information worker. The pure Anarchist strategy of rejecting state power and building movements from below also has certain limits because operating against capitalism can only be done in the here and now – a society, in which money and power play crucial roles. There is a danger that a lack of money, power and visibility results in isolation and forms of sectarianism that present themselves as participatory, but construct new forms of leadership and hierarchy that stem from the lack of resources, visibility and feelings of powerlessness. Social movements are within capitalism also automatically confronted with the inequality and scarcity of time, income, and skills of their own activists and the implications that an associated division of movement labour brings about.

In my view, radical politics needs to be a form of radical reformism, in which social movements move the social contradictions of capitalism towards an alternative framework of society and political parties struggle in co-ordination with social movements for obtaining parliamentary power and making reforms that immediately abolish precarious life by measures such as a redistributive basic income, the increase of capital taxation etc and that support and enable resources, time, and space for progressive movements.

One can agree or disagree with the need for radical reformism, which is just a scholastic debate, but the fact is that such discussions are an on-going practice of the Left in many countries. In Germany, a heavily discussed question in *Die Linke* is the role and relationship of social movement politics and parliamentarism within the party. In Greece, Syriza and the Indignant citizen movement are together facing austerity and fascism as joint enemies. In Spain, Podemos and Partido X emerged out of the 15-M movement. The question of the relationship of movements and parties is crucial today.

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**Michael Ott:** In reading again Mark and Paul Engler's essay "Should We Fight the System or Be the Change?," I must admit that I was transported back in memory a few decades to my SDS days at university, where we struggled to put into praxis various social change theories in the midst of the growing "system" challenges in the 1960's. The article does make a contribution to keeping the discourse on the theory and praxis of social change critically

alive, particularly with regards to the Occupy and other resistance movements worldwide. Many issues and questions came to mind as I read this article, all of which I think should be discussed in depth. However, I will limit myself to comment on just a couple of concerns that I think need to be included in the discourse.

The so-called dialectical “logic of revolution” is missing completely in this article. I realize that the dialectical relationship between their notions of prefigurative and strategic action goes beyond the focus of the authors as they rather dualistically address the separate meanings of these approaches. Although they end their article with the challenge *to balance the competing impulses of the two approaches in creative and effective ways*, it is just this limited dualistic, methodological focus on their artificially reified concepts that greatly limits their analysis of these two approaches for social change. Their very concept of these two approaches to social change as being “competing impulses” is derived from their dualistic methodology. The authors never explain why these theories are in competition, but state it as a given fact.

It is my position that both the prefigurative, which I understand in terms of materialistic *utopic* thinking, and concrete, strategic action/praxis are two inter-related dynamics that can nourish and critically negate, reinforce, and create each other anew in the struggle for a more reconciled future society. They share the same dialectical, dynamic relationship as that of theory and praxis. As Adorno stated, when you cut out or reject utopia, thought - and I would add strategic praxis that is directed at that which it “other” than what is - itself withers away. (Theodor Adorno & Max Horkheimer. 2011. *Towards a New Manifesto*. London/New York: Verso. Chapter 1). The dynamic, revolutionary element of dialectical thought is its methodology of “determinate negation,” or *aufheben* in German. Determinate negation is the non-dogmatic methodology of negating that which is identified as a cause of the fear, suffering, destruction and the death of innocent victims of any form of oppression and domination, all the while attempting to preserve that which is deemed needed and good, and thereby allow that which has been preserved to possibly be unfolded toward a new historical realization - that which is “other,” meaning that which is more just, equitable, humane, good, rational, free and peaceful than what exists. [I am fully aware of how abstract and thus methodologically dangerous this last statement is, and how it can be and has been used ideologically by systems of domination. For me, this is where the theoretical work of the first generation of Critical Theorists - Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Fromm, Benjamin, Löwenthal, et al. and their emphasis on “negative” dialectics comes in as a bulwark against this. It is here also that Habermas’s and Apel’s dialectical method of “universal, pragmatic discourse ethics” in “mutual recognition” and “solidarity” - as well as Honneth’s critique - can be a safe-guard against dialectics itself flipping over on itself to justify any form of domination.] Nevertheless, for me, this lack of dialectical thought is one of the fundamental weaknesses in the authors’ argument.

In my view, the authors have positivistically reduced the issue of creating social change to a very narrow dualism between “strategic” and “prefigurative” praxis, between macro and micro socio-political theory, between the “real” and the “ideal”, between the utopic and pragmatic, the personal and the social, between the culture and the social base structures. In my reading of the article, the authors have reduced the issue to a type of formal semantic analysis. In their attempt to explain the difference between *their* notion of system/structural change - “fight the system” - and personal transformation change - “be the change,” they have analytically reified these concepts and actions into disconnected alternatives rather than understanding them as being two interrelated and needed facets of the same revolutionary

dynamic. The living, dialectic logic of and thus praxis for real social and personal change for a better future is missing in their analysis. Because of this, the authors reduce both approaches to the socio-historical and existential horror of today into escapist - and ultimately hopeless - reactions to the oppressive power of the existing system of domination. Their notion of "strategic" action or politics is reduced merely into making patchwork-reform *within* the existing system, just as their depiction of "prefigurative" politics is diminished into some type of abstract bourgeois and thus, subjectivized counter-culture that has no revolutionary teeth or bite. Thus, the author's reified definitions of these concepts in their present form are of little help in the development of a concrete social theory, as the social totality *system* of crushing class domination remains firmly ensconced as well as hidden.

As stated by Adrian, which I am certain applies to everyone in this discourse, I too have been an advocate and practitioner of what is being called "prefigurative politics" for the past four decades. The very idea of prefigurative politics is rooted not only in the secular Bourgeois and Marxian Enlightenment/liberation movements, but goes even further back historically to its religious roots, particularly that of the prophetic, Messianic, eschatological substance of the Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, of which, as Horkheimer stated the critical theory is its secular heir. For all of these religions' historical, murderous betrayals of their own prophetic and future-oriented substance [and this critique applies also to the secular enlightenment and scientific movements as well], neither can escape the dialectical *immanent critique* of their concrete actions by their own critical proclaimed prefigurative or utopic vision and telos. The theology and theory of a more reconciled future society is measured by the advocates' praxis of embodying/owning – both personally and collectively – this vision, theory and praxis for the socio-historical realization of this society. The dialectical substance and dynamic between theory and praxis, between prefigurative and structural politics has to be maintained. It is here that I share Richard Gunn's claim that "mutual recognition" and "solidarity," which is expressed religiously as the "love of neighbor" or the Golden Rule or the norm of reciprocity, are essential subjective and inter-subjective convictions that are needed to put into concrete praxis any theory of revolutionary social change. It requires a subjective passion or "longing" [Horkheimer's 1970's interview *Sehnsucht nach dem ganz Anderen*] for the ideal through which people develop their identity and commitment to live the ideal in the present reality. Because of the article's lack of dialectical thought, I don't think that it comprehends or give expressions to the revolutionary struggle of liberation in the '60's or, more importantly, of the present day Occupy system critiques and movements.

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**Adrian Wilding:** I would like, if possible, to steer the discussion back towards the Engler and Engler article. Where Richard and Robert and Christian and I seem to agree is that the opposition between "prefiguration" and "strategy" is not as hard and fast as Engler and Engler imply. Particularly within the Occupy movement we have seen a self-awareness that *prefiguration is itself a strategy* and that the best *strategy* may be to *prefigure*: to prefigure an emancipated world and to multiply these prefigurations, spread them as far and as wide as possible. What Richard and Robert and I call "mutual recognition" is just this prefiguration, the basis for any discussion of "where next?", any "strategy". If we don't start as we mean to go on, i.e. relating to one another in democratic and egalitarian and "dominationless" (Fuchs) ways, then it is unlikely that revolution will adhere to these principles over the long haul. If relations of domination and domineering ways of thinking take hold at the outset of revolutionary uprisings, then it hard to see how they can be magically eliminated at some



future date. For me, Occupy has politicised so many people (especially those alienated by traditional hierarchical activism) because it grasped this truth.

Robert rightly mentions the high profile eviction of Occupy from Zuccotti Park (Taksim Square and St. Paul's in London are other examples) as resulting not from some internal failure of horizontalism but from the violent power of frightened States. Yet I think the other discussants would agree with me how wrong it would be to speak of Occupy's *defeat*; that Occupy-style protests still spring up across the globe shows that something lasting has been created, something in left-wing politics has changed in ways that will not easily be undone. In New Social Movement studies (itself a rather dispassionate, sociological field) they speak of "waves" or "cycles" of struggle that may be "dormant" for a time and this may imperfectly capture another truth: that we write off Occupy at our peril. Critics certainly speak of Occupy's mistaken "strategy" and see the evictions as vindicating their own vanguardism. I think this fails to appreciate what changed with Occupy. An [article](#) I read recently suggested that horizontal discussion can never work because revolutionaries must share information on a "need-to-know" basis! Such elitism is, thankfully, becoming rarer.

Where Occupy-style politics goes next is of course a valid question. But for Occupy this *where next* is already implicit in its principle of mutual recognition. Think of the "Rolling Jubilee" for instance, whereby activists are buying up debt, e.g. the sub-prime mortgages forced on the poorest Americans, and simply writing it off. Is this prefigurative or strategic? Or to take another example, the Indignados and Aganaktismenoi setting up of networks of mutual aid via non-monetary exchange. Is this prefigurative or strategic? I think it is hard to clearly distinguish the two elements and for this reason I'm sceptical about Engler and Engler's approach. Robert mentions Occupy's use of social media as a strategy, but I suggest that so many activists engage with the internet because it too was built on horizontal, i.e., prefigurative, foundations (though this is increasingly under threat today). I won't go into the example Christian mentioned, the complex question of whether social movements like Occupy should co-operate with (or even form) political parties, but it should be clear from the central role I afford to the principle of mutual recognition how I might answer that.

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**Richard Gunn:** I am very struck by Adrian's reference to the Rolling Jubilee project and to 'networks of mutual aid via non-monetary exchange'. When he asks 'Is this prefigurative or strategic?', he forces us to rethink assumptions about how strategy and prefiguration are related.

What form might such a rethinking take? We must, I think, start with an admission: there is, indeed, a sense in which strategic and prefigurative struggle are incompatible. They are *conceptually* incompatible. Strategic struggle looks (as in a chess game) for means that are effective in reaching a goal. Prefigurative struggle reaches ahead, and involves acting *as though* the goal concerned had been reached. An attempt to do both of these things results (or can result) in incoherence. If, in the course of a battle, a general acts *as though* victory has been won, the battle is as good as lost. If, in a mutually recognitive meeting, individuals

attempt to manipulate one another, inauthenticity - what an older tradition of political thought terms 'corruption' - creeps in.

But (we need to go on to say) what is *conceptually* the case is not the whole story. Although strategic struggle and prefigurative struggle may conceptually be at odds, in practice a whole galaxy of *hybrid* forms of struggle can exist. Yotam Moram's reference to a 'home' for 'struggle outward' may point towards such a hybrid. Adrian's reference to 'networks of mutual aid via non-monetary exchange' may point towards another.

Why the word "hybrid"? Let me be very clear that I am not against - or not *altogether* against - strategic-and-prefigurative combinations. They can be indispensable, in a political sense. In a given situation, oscillation between prefigurative 'home' and strategic 'struggle' may be a cogent and thoughtful and judicious approach. But the term "hybrid" is useful because it suggests something unfinished and, in the last instance, unstable. It suggests that a combination of strategic and prefigurative considerations has an oil-and-water character. Stating the point differently: a combination of strategy and prefiguration may be on-going in practice and yet contain within itself issues that must (somewhere along the line) be resolved. Although strategic and prefigurative approaches may be combined in practice, a *tension* - not merely a *conceptual* but a *practical* tension - remains. Robert refers to 'tension' in his contribution to our discussion, and the term is one that we should use.

As long as this sense of tension is kept in mind, I have no objection to speaking about combinations of prefigurative and instrumental thinking. In my first contribution, I stressed the need to place the strategy-*versus*-prefiguration debate in a revolutionary and political context - rather than in a context of abstract sociology. Here, once again, I stress the importance of a revolutionary perspective. It is in the context of revolutionary struggle that programs which are *at once strategic and prefigurative* make sense. It is in such a context that overcoming 'dualism' (to employ Adrian's earlier term) is both possible and, frequently, worthwhile. But, in and through such an overcoming, the *tension* that I have referred to remains undischarged. Until it is, and until mutual recognition is attained, emancipation is incomplete.

I'd like to add a note to these highly general and schematic comments. Robert refers to the Occupy movement's 'open, inclusive, prefigurative politics' and Christian reminds us that the 'relation of movements and parties' is a crucial issue today. I strongly endorse the view that the strategy-and-prefiguration debate broadens out into a host of real-life social and political concerns. Viewed on its own, or in abstraction, the debate ceases to be interesting. Restored to its social and political context, or contexts, the debate springs into life. To take an example: in Latin America, the issue of how instrumentalist *parties* relate to socially transcendent *movements* is of vital importance (see Benjamin Dangl's *Dancing with Dynamite* and the writings of Raul Zibechi). To take another example: the current debate on Scottish independence shows interaction-oriented movements (with their prefigurative potential) being dragooned into an institutionalist pen.

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**Christian Fuchs:** I find this a very inspiring discussion. Adrian, Michael, Richard, and Robert's contributions thus far show in my view that it is a way forward to see Occupy and the complex question of the relationship of revolutionary self-organisation and organisation in terms of mutual aid, oscillations, solidarity, unity in diversity that involves tensions, and a dialectic that transcends the binarism that Engler & Engler assume in their analysis, and that we have to see as a very important factor how repressive state apparatuses try to monitor, infiltrate, and crush contemporary left movements and groups.

My own interest is, among other things, the study of the role of the media and communication in relation to social movements, an issue that Robert and Michael already pointed out in their previous contributions. I have published some research results on this topic in the book [\*OccupyMedia! The Occupy Movement and Social Media in Crisis Capitalism\*](#) (Fuchs 2014, see also Thomas Swann's [review on the Heathwood Press site](#)). One question for all social movements is how they relate to capitalist social media such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. The advantage is that these media can allow reaching out to a lot of people in the public and can be used for movement-internal co-ordination and communication. The disadvantage is that these capitalist media are part of the 1%, exploit the digital labour of all users, including activists, by business models, in which personal data is traded as a commodity in order to enable targeted advertising, and that they tend, as Edward Snowden's revelations have shown, to collaborate with secret services such as the NSA, GCHQ and others, so that these state institutions can monitor all citizens, including activists. At the same time there are alternative, activist- or civil-society operated social media platforms – so-called federated social networks – such as N-1, Lorea, Diaspora, identi.ca, StatusNet, Quitter, Vinilox, Load Average, Thimbl, Crabgrass that are non-commercial, non-profit and citizen-controlled. They have the advantage that they are more resistant to surveillance and avoid the negative implications of commercial media, but face the disadvantages of having few users because of corporate social media oligopolies, tend to be not so well known among activists, and require resources (money, personnel, technical skills, time, servers, web space, etc.) in order to be operated that are often not readily available. The alternative platforms are a form of prefigurative media politics – a piece of liberation from capitalist media, a media commons freed from the commodity form – that today however has to operate within capitalism, which results in contradictions. One cannot stop using Facebook, YouTube and Twitter within social movements without facing the threat of reduced public visibility and communication capacities and can not-yet only rely on the alternative platforms because they are too small and under-resourced. And we cannot stop using these media altogether in social movements and focus on selling the *Socialist Worker* because nobody besides a few “enlightened” Trotskyites may be interested to buy it and to engage with the 19<sup>th</sup> century working class politics it advocates.

The issue of state repression is absolutely crucial when discussing mainstream and alternative social media. State surveillance of and repression against the left is of course nothing new, if we think for example of the McCarthy era, COINTELPRO, or the [fact](#) that in the UK the Special Demonstration Squad over 40 years infiltrated and monitored movements and groups

such as the anti-Vietnam war protestors, Youth Against Racism in Europe (YRE), Militant tendency in Labour Party, black justice campaigns, the families of the victims of police and other violence, the Militant tendency in the Labour Party, Greenpeace London, the Socialist Workers Party, etc. A [video](#) showed in 2013 how the UK police tried to hire an activist to spy on Cambridge student activists. The Center for Media and Democracy showed in a [report](#) how the US state equates Occupy with terrorism and tried to monitor, infiltrate, and crush the movement. One can be quite sure that they for this purpose used the technologies whose existence Edward Snowden revealed. Snowden's revelations about the existence of surveillance systems such as Prism, Tempora and XKeyScore do not show that we have now "lost" liberal freedoms and privacy, but rather that capitalism is always a surveillance society and that this surveillance society has been taken to a new quality that requires that we think about how to disentangle the Internet from the surveillance-military-industrial complex, which is a huge and difficult task because not just the state, but also all the major communication corporations are involved and a lot of this surveillance is invisible to the users and covert.

In my view, the most adequate media politics for social movements in light of these dilemmas is one of radical reformism: to work in the here and now on alternative media that anticipate the future state of society, but to do so together with media reform movements that struggle for reforms that can improve the resource situation of radical and alternative media.

My specific [suggestion](#) in this respect is that we need the introduction of a media fee that further develops the license fee so that it is paid both by citizens and companies and is a progressive, not a flat fee. This fee should be used for not just funding public service broadcasting, but in addition one part of it should be distributed via participatory budgeting to all citizens, who are required to donate the amount they receive per year (e.g. £200) to a non-commercial, non-profit media initiative. The participatory media fee could, together with other media reforms, provide a resource base for fostering support for alternative and radical media, online and offline. Such media are prefigurative projects that require in the existing framework institutional reforms in order to obtain a substantial resource base and large-scale voice, visibility and attention. Left media politics require both social movements operating radical media and parliamentary reforms that enable laws that govern support for such media.

Activist-run media are less likely to collaborate with state surveillors and have no need for economic surveillance because they do not have a for-profit purpose. A problem that can not be addressed by them is the fact that secret services, as Snowden has revealed, also directly in on the wires that transmit data. It is very difficult to address this issue. The powers of secret services have to be controlled and limited.

There is of course always the danger that institutional politics turns into instrumental bureaucracy and tame the radicalism and political visions of those who are part of them. This is exactly what has happened to many Green Parties in Europe. The question is however if a parliamentary strategy *can* result in pure reformism or *has to* result in it. I take in this respect the position of Rosa Luxemburg, who fought against revisionist reformism, but nonetheless

saw the importance of parliamentarism for revolutionary politics: “The daily struggle for reforms, for the amelioration of the condition of the workers within the framework of the existing social order, and for democratic institutions, offers to the social democracy the only means of engaging in the proletarian class war and working in the direction of the final goal—the conquest of political power and the suppression of wage labor. Between social reforms and revolution there exists for the social democracy an indissoluble tie. The struggle for reforms is its means; the social revolution, its aim” (Luxemburg 1899, 41).

Counterinstitutions are likely to work best within the framework of radical reformist politics. This is as true in the age of social media and Occupy, as it was in the early 1970s, when Herbert Marcuse observed about the New Left that counterinstitutions “have long been an aim of the movement, but the lack of funds was greatly responsible for their weakness and their inferior quality. [...] This is especially important for the development of radical, ‘free’ media. The fact that the radical Left has no equal access to the great chains of information and indoctrination is largely responsible for its isolation. Similarly with the development of independent schools and ‘free universities’. They must be made competitive. The collection of large funds for the operation of effective counterinstitutions requires compromises. The time of the wholesale rejection of the ‘liberals’ has passed—or has not yet come [...] Radicalism has much to gain from the ‘legitimate’ protest against the war, inflation, and unemployment, from the defense of civil rights—even perhaps from a ‘lesser evil’ in local elections. The ground for the building of a united front is shifting and sometimes dirty—but it is there . . .” (Marcuse 1972, 55-56).

Counterinstitutions are part of a transition to communism that already starts within capitalism. The germs of communism have their start within capitalism and the antagonism between networked productive forces and class relations. Marx made this point of prefigurative institutions emerging from capitalism itself when analyzing co-operatives: “The cooperative factories run by workers themselves are, within the old form, the first examples of the emergence of a new form, even though they naturally reproduce in all cases, in their present organization, all the defects of the existing system, and must reproduce them. But the opposition between capital and labour is abolished here, even if at first only in the form that the workers in association become their own capitalist, i.e. they use the means of production to valorize their own labour. These factories show how, at a certain stage of development of the material forces of production, and of the social forms of production corresponding to them, a new mode of production develops and is formed naturally out of the old“ (Marx 1894, 571). The point is that such prefigurative counterinstitutions are facing contradictions within capitalism. Radical reformism is a way of supporting such institutions in not getting destroyed by the circumstance that they try to operate inside capitalism against capitalism.

We need to work against capitalism by working simultaneously inside and outside and across some of the institutions that make it up. An obvious example is that people have to earn wages in order to survive and partly use this money for funding radical politics. I do not suggest that we have to work inside Facebook or Twitter, but that for the moment social movements should not stop using these platforms, but should at the same time work on

advancing radical reformist media politics that foster alternatives to corporate social media so that capitalist media monopolies and oligopolies can be broken. Another dimension is the liberal state and its institutions. It has always, as I argued, engaged in monitoring and repressing left-wing activists. The extension and intensification of surveillance capacities that Western states however have today acquired has intensified this danger and reality. Online media are embedded into a surveillance-industrial complex that combines the corporate exploitation of digital labour and state surveillance. Struggling against this complex is an urgent and not an easy task. It would be wrong not to try to reform the liberal state and to safeguard basic liberal rights that can protect political activism from outright repression. It is therefore today also important that radical movements enter a dialogue and work together with privacy advocacy groups that work for the reform of state institutions.

Contemporary politics are complex and multi-dimensional. Radical reformism that combines and articulates social movements and a parliamentary strategy is in my view the only political way forward in the very crisis situation we are in. Media reforms and the creation of alternative media organisations that are run by activists and civil society have to be seen as two complementary levels of radical reformist media politics.

The crucial question is how revolutionary politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should look like. My main point is that in this discussion it is crucial that we take into consideration the role of culture, the media, information, technology and the internet – the whole realm of communication that is not a superstructure or secondary, but is part of the base of 21<sup>st</sup> century society.

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**Michael Ott:** Some great points. To begin, there is one other theoretical and/or methodological issue that I would like to raise concerning the authors' approach to the theory and praxis dynamics of radical or revolutionary social change movements. The authors begin their article with the statement that "*It is an old question in social movements: 'Should we fight the system or 'be the change we wish to see'?'*" I agree that this dichotomy that they pose is expressive of an "old" theoretical framework, which I question whether it is relevant in analyzing not only social change movements but also its ability to help in critiquing and exposing the concrete, systemic advancements of the capitalist class's global hegemony. It is my position that this issue and the inadequacy of such a dualistic analysis of it have already been shown. To repeat this approach seems to be diversionary to the work of revolutionary

theory and praxis formation. In saying this, I am reminded of Hegel's comments in the very beginning of the preface to his *Phenomenology of Geist* in which he criticizes the scientific reduction of knowledge to such a particularized approach, in which the living, dynamic parts of the whole are "regarded as lifeless." As he stated, due to this "descriptive and superficial approach" ... "we can be quite certain that we do not possess the objective concrete fact." This is my concern with the authors' argument, which nevertheless has stimulated this critical and creative round-table discourse. From the very start, as stated by the authors' themselves, their theoretical method prevents them from offering any helpful insight to further the revolutionary dynamics and potential of the Occupy Wall Street or any other social change movement. I must say that when I read this article, before the creation of our round-table discourse, I dismissed it quite out of hand as not being helpful toward the advancement of very much needed revolutionary social change theory and praxis. Our stimulating discourse on the topic of this article, however, has led me to further wrestle with the authors' argument, which has helped me formulate a bit more concretely my critique.

As an expression of this, I would like to add that the concrete, materialist notion of society as a "social totality" of inter-related structures and systems, including its driving "steering mechanisms" of wealth, power, and solidarity, is missing in this article. As critical sociological theorists and activists have made perfectly clear, if social solidarity and the normative valuing of the human "being," of human integrity, dignity, recognition, rights and freedom for all is not the dominant steering mechanism in the operation of the existing social totality, which thereby gives purpose and direction to the social production and distribution of social wealth and power, then that society is an increasing antagonistic social totality. As Marx has stated and as we sadly know all too well, this is the very substance and reality of all capitalist societies.

Although the authors mention in passing this social "system" and the need to fight against it, they don't identify the insidious class dynamics of this system and its exponentially increasing power of domination. Of equal importance, as Christian has mentioned, the authors do not address the concrete, i.e., the scientific, technological, communicative, transportation, and cultural potentials that this antagonistic social totality already contains within itself for the creation of a more reconciled and peaceful future society. Such a reconciled social totality is not and cannot be created *ex nihilo*. The dialectical, revolutionary "prefigurative" and "strategic" potentials and dynamics for a more reconciled society are already present in the reality of this modern antagonistic social totality. Aesop's proverbial demand is as relevant and challenging today to any aspect of revolutionary social change movement as it was in the fable: "*Hic Rhodus, hic salta*" - "*Here is Rhodes, jump or prove yourself here.*" The more reconciled future society can only revolutionarily "prove" itself out of the midst of the existing antagonistic social totality through the struggle to negate those dominational class relations of production and ownership, which has the potential of allowing the more humane and peaceful future society to develop. Of course, this raises the question not only of having the power to create such change, but also of having the "covenantal" will and commitment to this end in solidarity with others. It is this "erotic" question and reality of subjectively owning and thereby finding one's identity and life purpose in this struggle for the future that needs to be discussed in much more depth. Yet, this issue of the actualizing power for revolutionary change is not adequately addressed in this article, in my opinion. Thus, the antagonistic class warfare substance of this "system" is taken for granted and thus, remains veiled in the authors' analysis.

I agree with everyone's assessment that the various systems of legitimation and defense of this antagonistic social totality, i.e., the "on the ground" militarized police forces, driven by the FBI, the NSA, defense contractors, arms manufacturers, law enforcement agencies, SWAT teams, the media and the dominant neoconservative culture that are all in the service of the 1-5%, barbarically crushed the Occupy Wall Street protest, particularly throughout the U.S. The destruction of the Occupy Wall Street protest was a violent manifestation of the same *system* of class domination, directed by the capitalist class's interest in securing ever more wealth and power, that has been and is being imperialistically globalized into the so-called "Third World/periphery" countries, and is also politically gutting the infrastructures of both rural and urban centers at the expense of the working class and the poor through structural adjustment austerity programs that are privatising public enterprises and services, while draconically cutting all social programs that serve the poor all for the purpose of increasing the profit and power of the capitalist class.

The notion of modern "civil" society - or better named as an "un-civilized" and "un-civilizing" capitalist social totality, that exists today - as the *bellum omnium contra omnes* [the war of all against all] is not new, but through its mutation into neoliberal capitalist and neoconservative hegemonic form it is now increasingly being taken hopelessly for granted. It is precisely this oppressive social totality of capitalist class domination that once again was being exposed, critiqued and thereby threatened by the Occupy movement. In Marx's terms [2<sup>nd</sup> Preface to *Capital*], the "We are the 99%" protest was "lifting the veil" to expose the deadly "Medusa" of the capitalist system that was and is destroying the fabric of all civilizing societies, if not the continuing possibility of life on this planet. This is expressive of Marcuse's [and Benjamin's] notion of the "irrationality of [an instrumental, strategic] reason" that will sacrifice everything for the "progress" of the capitalist class acquiring the means for ever-increasing profit and power. I would like to agree with Robert's assessment that without this system's repression, the Occupy Wall Street movement could have continued and grown. However, in my estimation, given the social Darwinistic "rationality" of all systems of domination, such continuance could not be allowed.

This raises the question posed by Christian concerning the creating of a more reconciled society through revolution or through what he terms "radical reformism." I think we need both. Herbert Marcuse made this very point in an interview published in an article entitled "The New Society." [See: Ferguson, A.T. [Ed.] 1976. *Revolution or Reform? A Confrontation*. Chicago: Precedent Publishing Co.] In the interview, Marcuse was asked whether a humane, emancipated society could be achieved through reforms made in the class antagonistic social totality. As Marcuse stated, reforms must be attempted to alleviate the suffering, repression and misery of people. However, as experienced by the Occupy movement, such barbaric repression and domination are of the very substance of the capitalist system. This means that sooner or later such attempts at reform will run up against the pre-established limits of the system forcing the system to defend itself in the interest of self-preservation. This then raises the question, need, and possibility of revolutionary action. In any discussion of revolutionary system change, both issues need to be seriously discussed. I for one am very happy we have returned to this discussion!

The Occupy Wall Street movements were seriously calling into question if not threatening the future of the capitalist social *system* - not just Wall Street - and this had to be stopped at all costs. In terms of all theories and systems of domination, the class-dominated system will protect itself against its enemies. A possible future consequence of this self-protective, class war system being threatened "from below" was recently hypothetically presented in an article



that posed the following scenario. In the face of the increasing anger and rage against this system of domination among the working and “under” classes, the horrifying question was asked of whether or not the militarized police, national guard, and/or military will shoot its own citizens that they are sworn to protect. If the threat to the plutocrats and their epigones become dangerous enough, I think we already now the deadly answer to that question, as already evidenced in the U.S. by the National Guard shooting dead students on the campuses of Kent State University, Jackson State University, and bayonetting eleven students at the University of New Mexico in May 1970 who all were protesting the U.S. war in Indochina. These barbaric, class-interest acts of the past and are continuing today were not an aberration, a mistake of a few “bad cops” or police departments. They are the strategic action of the class-dominated system itself, protecting the interests and “private property” of the capitalist class and their servants. I think Niklas Luhmann’s conception of modern, civil society as an autopoietic, cybernetic system that can operate essentially on its own in serving the class interest of its creators is still a bit of an exaggeration. We are not there yet, just as we are not yet a totally administered society, but I think this future is becoming more of a reality.

As Max Weber warned of modern “civil” but not civilizing society becoming an “iron cage” of administrative, instrumental rationality, so too in their later writings did Horkheimer and Adorno identify the “sinister trend” in capitalist society toward its universalizing or globalizing this barbarity into becoming a totally administered, bureaucratized society, characterized by what Marcuse called a cold culture-less and thus dehumanized “one-dimensional” class dominated society that is systemically “introjected” into the social character of people through the media, culture, education, and the demands of the “new economy,” thus, creating humanity in the image of the machine. This is Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s notion of a “totally administered society,” that must be known and resisted/negated. The authors of this article water this reality down as being merely the “shell of the old” in which the new world is to be built. If only it was that easy. Sadly, this globalizing class system, its power, wealth concentration and its structures are much more than a mere “shell.”

In my office, I have a picture of an Occupy Wall Street protester holding up a sign made of two pieces of cardboard on which was written: “*The System was never broken. It was built this way.*” The capitalist class domination of the modern “civil” social totality - that has, is and will continue to produce the horror increasingly experienced by billions of human beings and nature itself - has to be given the highest priority in any dialectical, revolutionary theory development and social praxis. This antagonistic social totality is the socio-historical context or “shell” within which we all live, suffer and hope. It must not be semantically or academically glossed over as a “given,” which I think the authors of this article do.

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**Robert Smith:** Before I offer a few additional comments, I would like to thank Richard, Adrian, Christian and Mike for taking the time to participate in this roundtable dialogue. So many great points have been made, and I think together we’ve managed to achieve an extremely fascinating, insightful and substantive discourse on Occupy and Occupy-related issues. Well done, everyone.

Moving forward, it is probably already clear that I am in agreement with Adrian and Richard's analysis regarding the significance of Occupy's radical alternative politics. As I wrote in a recent article entitled [Promissory notes of a better world | Occupy, radical democracy and the question of revolutionary politics](#): "what makes the radical political horizon of 'Occupy-style movements' so fundamentally significant – socially, historically and politically – is the unprecedented development or maturity of a *radical prefigurative grassroots praxis*, wherein *mutual recognition* serves as a *guiding thread in social interaction, collective engagement and participatory politics*."

My intention, however, is not to repeat these points. Rather, to conclude the roundtable discussion, I would like to pick up on a few comments made by Christian and Mike, which, I think, might provide a fitting end to an already a stimulating exchange.

My focus here, moreover, concerns issues with regards to Occupy-style politics and the question of "routes forward". To start, I have to say that I agree with Mike's analysis regarding the lack of dialectical thought in Engler and Engler's piece. This is what essentially inspired my observation regarding a 'tension' between the prefigurative and the strategic – a dialectical tension - which I think is a very important point, one that provides some insight into the future of Occupy's radical prefigurative politics.

If we critique Engler and Engler's piece through the lens of Adorno's critical theory, we see precisely what Mike is suggesting above. To allow myself to be overly theoretical for a moment: antinomies arise as a result of the "systematic subordinating concept" (See: Adorno, T.W 1989. *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Adorno, T.W [Ed.] 1992. *Negative Dialectics*. New York: Continuum), which basically breaks off the dialectic and leads to an assortment of false assertions regarding the direction of or basis for reconciliation. By breaking off the dialectic between the prefigurative and the strategic, Engler and Engler essentially hypostatize the terms in their difference. In doing so, they not only appear guilty of "analytically reifying these concepts and actions into disconnected alternatives" (Ibid), but also appear to theoretically distort the modern political situation. Their analytical approach, in other words, results in a more or less skewed picture, which does less to assist revolutionary politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century than the authors would appear to hope.

More practically, I tend to think that, when considering the social-historical significance of the prefigurative basis of Occupy-style movements and politics, this is not to suggest that Occupy-style politics *is not strategic*. To suggest otherwise is to undertake a very one-dimensional political analysis, and to ignore the tremendous amount of strategy that obviously existed and continues to exist within and through Occupy-style movements. On the other hand, I don't agree that the strategic must necessarily be considered instrumental. Instrumentalism is, for me, a much more hardened logic that is less 'strategic' and more manipulative or coercive.

With that said if the strategic and the prefigurative are dialectical - as has been suggested - I think they are so in a very experiential way. To consider that the revolutionary basis or foundation of Occupy-style politics – the ultimate goal or rational of the emancipatory activity of Occupy-style movements – is to be assessed firstly in terms of the alternative public space that it creates and the mutual recognition between individuals that (in however fragile a fashion) it brings into existence, the very existence of this politics is *already*

*strategic* without necessarily being instrumental. As Adrian more or less suggested, the strategic is ultimately enmeshed up in the emancipatory activity of this radical grassroots praxis.

While I would argue that there is actually something very “negatively dialectical” (Adorno) about Occupy-style movements and events, Mike’s recent comments in light of the Frankfurt School calls to mind an important but altogether different aspect of Adorno’s critical theory. One thing that always strikes me about Adorno is how his entire philosophical project aims toward establishing a concrete and indeed radical theory of praxis. Mike’s comparative paper on Adorno and Bloch highlights this point quite wonderfully. With this in mind, it is interesting to note as well the debate between Adorno and Marcuse, where, concerning the 1968 student protests in Germany, Adorno famously argued that ‘praxis is blocked’. I quite agree with Adorno here, and the underlying argument is one that remains entirely relevant today.

Confronting Marcuse on the subject of praxis and the questionable (hostile) characteristics of the student uprising, Adorno quite rightly states to Marcuse: “You think that praxis — in its emphatic sense — is not blocked today; I think differently. I would have to deny everything that I think and know about the objective tendency if I wanted to believe that the student protest movement in Germany had even the tiniest prospect of effecting a social intervention.” Although, as I have noted in the past, this has been widely misread as a complete and utter denunciation of student protests of the time, Adorno’s fundamental point strikes the very heart of the question of ‘revolutionary politics’, in both theory and practice.

Adorno writes, moreover: “I am the last person to underestimate the merits of the student movement; it has disrupted the smooth transition to the totally administered world. But it contains a grain of insanity in which a future totalitarianism is implicit.” If what Adorno is suggesting here is that the ‘grain of insanity’, which is so deeply embedded in the unreconciled antagonisms of modern thought (modernity), does tend to restrict on a fundamental level attempts to establish an emancipatory movement in practice, I think he is right. But he is correct insofar that this analysis leaves us either to recognise this dilemma or else risk repeating a history of coercive and dominating social systems.

For Adorno, we should remember, “freedom means to criticise and change situations, not confirm them by deciding within their coercive structure” (Adorno, T.W [Ed.] 1992. *Negative Dialectics*. New York: Continuum). In the same way that “negative dialectics” is “impelled by the desire to open up ‘theoretical spaces’ for individual experience that is undistorted by prevailing concepts” (Sherman, D. 2007. *Dialectics of Subjectivity: Sartre and Adorno*. New York: SUNY), one might argue that there is a striking similarity – even if only by analogy – between Adorno’s all-important notion of theoretical resistance and the alternative public spaces that ‘Occupy-style politics’ creates. In this light, David Sherman offers a remarkable passage that confirms the position I am highlighting: “Ultimately .../ just as a practically committed resistance must preserve its theoretical wits .../ [critical] theory must engage with the most emancipatory form of practice that is available in a coercive world, lest the world move beyond not only the possibility of any emancipatory form of practice but also the possibility of any emancipatory theory. Practice is required to keep critical theory alive, for in the absence of oppositional practices that might staunch the movement toward the “totally administered society”, there will no longer be any *space* open for oppositional theories” (Ibid; emphasis added).

For me the link between Occupy-style politics and critical theory – implicitly or explicitly - is significant. If emancipatory “freedom requires engagement and disengagement, action and reflection” (Ibid), what we witness in Occupy-style movements is how mutual recognition -

essentially the foundation of emancipation – represents a social situation “where individuals are free” (Gunn, R. 2014. *Occupy Talks*. Heathwood Press) in and through the complex of them selves as “mediating subjects” (Smith, R.C. 2013. *The Ticklish Subject? A critique of Zizek’s Lacanian theory of subjectivity, with emphasis on an alternative*. Holt: Heathwood Institute and Press): “free, that is, not *despite* other individuals (as in scenarios of “negative” freedom) but *in and through* interaction with others”.

By creating alternative spaces which, while not absolutely free of capitalism’s coercive legacy – as this is not immediately possible – act as public spaces of resistance to repression (Adorno, T.W [Ed.] 1992. *Negative Dialectics*. New York: Continuum), what we witness is in fact an emancipatory freedom as intervened in the complex of the individual. Such is what makes Occupy’s politics so fundamentally important, as it brings into existence an experiential index for the practice of mutual recognition, wherein “interaction itself is untrammelled and unconstrained”, and where “individuals may *expand* and *develop* through interaction with others” in a way that is “*educative* in a deeply real and deeply informal sense” (Gunn, R. 2014. *Occupy Talks*. Heathwood Press).

I think this politics begins to answer Adorno’s challenge. While he indicates in contradistinction to Marcuse that the student revolutions in 1968 Germany lacked a radical prefigurative basis, which left the coercive, dominant legacies of “bad society” at risk of being reproduced - for Occupy-style politics, on the other hand, what we witness is a clear attempt to break from coercive society: i.e., from the hierarchical, dominant, power-driven ideology characteristic of modern and historical society (Smith, R.C. 2014. *Revolution, History and Dominating Social Systems: Notes on a foundational approach to systemic change*. Heathwood Press).

To cut things short, the reason I raise these points is because I think this line of analysis is extremely important when it comes to engaging with Christian’s comments on “radical reformism” and Mike’s contribution in response. I don’t disagree that “radical reformism” is required, especially when it comes to the immediate abolishment of precarious life. Policies like universal basic income, universal healthcare, a shortened work week, and environmental specific policies (etc.) are things I actively advocate as being important in the transition from capitalism. But Mike raises the point that “radical reformism” itself won’t do. Here, I agree. I think that not only do we need both - if we consider “radical reformism” as only one-dimension of Occupy’s revolutionary political movement - but any sort of “radical reformism” would still have to be underpinned or, better yet, normatively rooted in the prefigurative. For this reason, while I appreciate Marcuse’s notion of “counterinstitutions”, these “counterinstitutions” cannot in practice be forged in the fires of a hierarchical, dominant politics. If they do take on a hierarchical, dominant and authoritarian form then they become illegitimate. What is needed, in this respect, is a completely new definition of “counterinstitution”, one which is prefiguratively rooted in Occupy’s grassroots politics. Certain radical non-profits and grassroots citizen’s groups, such as Partido X, may represent an obvious example of what this could look like at the start (although with still much to be improved).

If we take things a few steps further, I think what this discussion highlights is not only the question, need, and possibility of revolutionary action today, but actually two fundamentally different visions of change. One thing that Occupy accomplished in this respect, which I find truly fascinating, is that it essentially redefined the general political landscape and in the process exposed massive fractures among the left. On the one hand, we’ve got the Trotskyites and Leninists - what might be more or less considered ‘the traditional left’. In this less-than-revolutionary view of change, an instrumentalist perspective is employed in such a way that it actually serves as a great example of the organizational manifestation of “instrumental

reason” as read in Horkheimer and Adorno’s critique. Most important, however, within this view of change dependency on the notion of the Event – the great revolutionary event (à la the French Revolution) – can be found. Aside from the obvious problems with this less-than-revolutionary view of change, including its hierarchical tendencies, dependency on dominant leaders, top-down and authoritarian forms of social integration, theories of democratic centralism and so on, if horizontality is what we’re after in the 21st Century, if that is the call of the hour – to achieve actually egalitarian democratic conditions – then we have to begin there. Traditional leftist politics, which is dominant, authoritarian and coercive, is, for me, fraudulent, betraying the very foundations of emancipation.

Lastly, if we agree with Christian that Occupy’s radical politics needs to entertain a form of “radical reformism”, what this comes down to, for me, is a point I raise in light of the notion of an alternative philosophy of systemic change. In general, I argue that sustainable socio-historical change should be seen as a fluid, ongoing multi-directional and many-sided process grounded in the already discussed mutually recognitive grassroots (prefigurative) praxis. Sustainable system change is considered here as historically transitory, as opposed to a ‘big bang’ theory of revolution. Within this view of systemic change, reformism can certainly have a place. But while specific reforms – changes to welfare provision or property-distribution, alternative economic structures, introduction of redistributive basic income, corporate taxation, or whatever – are important, I am extremely suspicious of parliamentarism. Why? Practically speaking, parliamentarism – representative democracy – wherein parliamentary power must be obtained and exercised, strikes me as being contradictory in that it is hierarchical and evidences the use of coercive power.

On the contrary, if an actually egalitarian democracy is what we’re after, if the (re)commonising of society is the goal, if fundamental systemic change is to be possible, we have to begin as we intend to go on: that is, on the basis of mutual recognition. Only from ‘beginning as we intend to go on’ might we ensure the legitimacy of a politics which aims toward achieving actually egalitarian, radically democratic conditions.

In the many occupations and Occupy-style events to have taken place in recent years, one theme that has consistently surfaced in discussions and proposals amongst people, concerns the development of a social project that would *deepen a participatory notion of democracy*. With the failure of communist party politics – or leftist party politics – all too fresh in mind, this deepening of horizontal and participatory democracy, which accompanies the idea of collective decision making, has to be seen, I argue, as a fundamental need of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. As I wrote in the previously mentioned article: “With the development and deepening of participatory democracy held as a prefigurative aim – whether explicitly acknowledged in terms of mutual recognition or not – questions of accountability, transparency, creating common spaces, what it means to be ‘public’, the need for economic alternatives that are environmentally sustainable, social inclusion, more progressive education, and general social structures for the care of everyone come into direct focus. With these issues coming into focus, in turn, so too does the *very idea of revolution* as a grassroots project.”

Needless to say, I think a more radical and progressive view of revolutionary change is one that therefore emerges in and through mutual recognition: a many-sided, holistic, open and interdisciplinary, integrative, transitory, grassroots and self-educating notion of change. With this view of revolutionary change, we should begin with practical ‘everyday’ examples of alternatives – from across all social spheres - on the level of praxis. Any revolutionary

theory of change worth its salt, for me, must also take into account a holistic view of the needs of people: that is, it must take into account all aspects of social, psychological, emotional, educational, political, economic and existential (etc.) life. Not only does 'systemic change' represent a many-sided human transformation that goes well beyond a purely economic or political theory, it also represents the process of a true alternation of present social coordinates: economically, politically, ecologically, relationally, epistemologically, anthropologically, psychologically, etc.