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SOCIAL SCIENCES FOR AN OTHER POLITICS

Women Theorizing Without Parachutes

Edited by
Ana Cecilia Dinerstein
with a foreword by
J.K. Gibson-Graham

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This book is dedicated to Berta Cáceres and Jo Cox, two great women brutally silenced for their resistance to power and their hope in a world that can contain many worlds in it.

'Un rayo partió la blancura de la tierra en mil pedazos', (*María Alicia Gutiérrez Punto que simula fijo*, 2014, p. 41)

Editor's Preface

Every book has a story behind it. The story of this book begins with an intuition. I had an idea that made me happy and I had to pursue it. As I was walking home from work that day, I was smiling alone, due to the joy brought about by the simple thought that others would feel the same and would join in. I thought of several female academic-activists who I admire, read and cite in my own work, who I know in person or whose work I follow, and who I feel close to. I believed that we were all doing something very similar, despite the obvious differences in the topics or areas of study. What was it? I considered several ideas. Clearly we were all critical, committed, responsible, interesting. We were all discussing new forms of critical thinking, prefiguration, etc. All of which was true. But I was not convinced. After a while, now having dinner on my own, I thought to myself: what we are doing is 'venturing beyond'. I love this expression that Bloch uses in his *The Principle of Hope*, that is, 'thinking is venturing beyond'. I have used this expression before. Venturing beyond the given. *Más allá* . . . and 'venturing beyond the wire' as a metaphor drawn from the Movement of Rural Landless Workers when they trespass by cutting the wire of a fertile but unoccupied land, to then occupy and plant their seeds. And yet, I thought, as women, we are not simply venturing beyond but our venturing beyond is always edgy, because our theorising happens in a world that is not completely ours. Venturing beyond means verging, as mothers, writers, activists, lovers, workers . . . 'Women on the verge'! As the reader can guess, this name comes from the title of the hilarious film Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown. Unlike those women, we were categorically not on the 'verge of a nervous breakdown' but . . . What did I mean then by 'Women on the verge'?

To put my intuition into words was not easy (it is still not easy). This is not surprising: words can hardly express and translate emotions and hunches. I had a brief conversation with Palgrave Macmillan's female staff at a conference stand before sending the e-mail and they seemed to understand and like the idea. I went ahead and tried my best to communicate my ideas in an e-mail sent to the wonderful women, all scholar-activists, who became contributors to this edited collection. Would they embrace the idea of being 'women on the verge' and write for this collection? My electronic message began with the usual 'Dear all: Apologies for contacting you out of the blue like this'. This polite introduction swiftly triggered an enjoyable process of communication, sharing, thinking and writing. Yes. Our work addresses different areas of the social sciences, but reflects a determination to critique the knowledge produced by such social science, for it constantly restricts and oppresses us, and is unable to account for the emerging struggle for the prefiguration of alternatives realities, new sociabilities, relations, identities, organisations, politics and policy from below, by a myriad of collective subjectivities worldwide. Social science but also critical theory are overlooking them, misunderstanding them, subjugating them under old ideas and old tools. We understand. Yes. Fantastic! And that we should write freely indicating the path we think theory should take. Yes.

That all contributors are female scholar-activists is then not an accident. In a patriarchal society, theorising is a male-dominated activity, which also reproduces colonial patterns of domination. This does not mean that women do not theorise. But with exceptions it is a big deal for us to get through the net of deterrents – adverse or amicable – that are in place. Women's theorising is constantly invisibilised or diminished. Look at your bookshelves. What do you see? Does it matter? Theory is theory, right? Well. No.

At a time when the conditions for the social reproduction of life in the planet are deteriorating at unimaginable speed and levels, the 'warm stream' of critical theory that women can provide (I am paraphrasing Bloch when he distinguishes the cold and the warm streams of Marxism (1959/1986, pp. 209–210)) seems essential in order to renew the dry, cold, rational, negative existing theory produced in both the academic and activist worlds. The warm stream of critical theory is in no way naïve or weak, romantic or superficial. Rather, it provides an embodied critique of capital, coloniality and patriarchy. This theorising is attuned with life, affect, commonality, nature, utopia, possibility. This is not then a book *on* feminism, or feminist theory, although we are feminists and we use

feminist theory. We *are* women thinking and writing. The collection is a vindication of critical theory written by women. This book aims to contribute to the existing process of developing anticipatory, engaged, critical, open, ecological, decolonial, anti-oppressive forms of 'theorising' as a tool against capital, patriarchy and coloniality. Are we 'radical humanists' then? Well. Should radical theory not be about humanity? What else could it be about?

Theorising without parachutes means to engage with traditions and existing radical thought such as anarchism, Marxism, Feminism, but such that we are not protected by their established frameworks of analysis. By 'critique' we understand a constant opening towards the discovery of possibilities that rejects the present state of affairs and navigates through the conflicts that emerge out of the process. It is also the critique of criticism for its permissiveness and resignation in contributing to the naturalisation of an oppressive society. 'Without parachutes' means uncertainty and ambivalence in the practice of theorising (Gibson-Graham 2006, p. xxxi). We struggle with, against and beyond capital, the law, the state. But to confront them we start from the space of nonbeing' (Gibson-Graham 2006, p. xxxiii).

We explored the meaning of being 'Women on the Verge' (WOV) collectively in several ways. Marina Sitrin said 'we are not those women pushed to the edge, overreacting, and caricatures of ourselves as in Almodovar's film, but we are on the edges of doing, of thinking, challenging our own perceptions and stereotypes, tired of being constrained by specific patterns and models required by academia'. As women, we are always 'verging', claim Sarah Amsler. Besides, argued Sara Motta, 'the idea of us becoming "women on the verge" is not related to a particular positionality, but rather to an epistemological embrace and practice of becoming multiple… "women on the verge" suggests at once a commonality that is troubled by our very real differences in praxis, experience, cosmologies'. Raquel Gutiérrez envisaged what she understood by 'women on the verge': 'we are jumping out of a plane flown by mainstream critical theorists and political figures. We jump with hope and determination, but hesitation and fear too. One of the women is trying to get rid of the parachute provided by the male crew. It is big, heavy and uncomfortable. It would be better to jump out of this plane than to continue reproducing ideas driven by social science's establishment and its critics. Their approaches and concepts are constraining our capacity to think freely, to imagine, to prefigure. As they jump out of the plane without parachutes

some start weaving a collective parachute. Others realise that they can float in the air and that they are becoming "flying seeds"'.

Between 8th and 14th August 2016 some of the contributors to this collection attended the workshop 'The Ethics and Politics of Possibility: Principles and Practices of Prefigurative Knowledge and Research', sponsored by the Independent Social Research Foundation (2016 Residential Research Groups) convened by Sarah Amsler at the University of Cambridge, UK. As Sarah wrote, 'the workshop aimed to be a space for fruitful and joyful discovery, and to offer time out from the frenzied pace of knowledge production that often governs both intellectual and political work'. Sarah Amsler, Emily Brissette, Raquel Gutiérrez, Lucia Linsalata, Mina Lorena Navarro, and myself attended the gathering at Girton College (Emily Davis' college). Keri Facer (Bristol University, UK) and Kelly Teamey (Enlivened Learning) joined us. We talked, shared and connected. We also discussed some aspects of this book, in particular the introduction, for which I am grateful. During the meeting at Cambridge, theorising as praxis, and the prospective of constituting the Women on the Verge (WOV) group became a reality.

The book features the work of wonderful women. The final product of this amazing journey reflects, as I imagined, our efforts to push the boundaries of critique beyond its demarcated limits by forcefully challenging ourselves too, risking ideas in an uncertain terrain, experimenting, contributing. Whether we have achieved our ambition or not is up to the readers to decide. Enjoy.

Bristol, August 30, 2016 Ana Cecilia Dinerstein

Foreword

What a joy it is to greet this inspirational book of engaged feminist political theory. I love the image of our thinkers floating down from on high, some free flying, some with parachutes entangled into webs of collectivity, all, aiming to land on an earth that has been transformed by their courageous work. J. K. Gibson-Graham applauds this daring stunt! She recognises herself in the commitments that guide this collection – to a realistic hopefulness, to performative concepts, to prefigurative actions that will bring other worlds into being. And she welcomes the company of so many others in that space 'on the verge'.

When I surveyed the chapters of this book, I was reminded of the wonderful book-length collections that documented feminist research methods that I had relied on so heavily when I was catapulted into teaching Women's Studies in the early 1990s. The similarity was with the commanding array of topics displaying the breadth of feminist engagement. At the same time, the differences were also striking. Importantly, there was no mention of feminism in any of the chapter titles! This is a collection of edgy political theory so saturated with a feminist sensibility that has become unremarkable. And yet remarkable it surely is. The feminist thinkers who have contributed to this book have the weight of the world on their shoulders and the challenges we face as inhabitants on this precious planet squarely in focus. They are leading the way by combining critical thinking, astute appreciation of what we have to work with,

and creative imaginings. Again J. K. Gibson-Graham applauds their efforts. What they have produced is, by no means, just a stunt, it is shaping our future.

J.K. Gibson-Graham

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CHAPTER 1

The Radical Subject and Its Critical Theory: An Introduction

Ana Cecilia Dinerstein

Abstract Dinerstein argues that a new radical subject that is unrecognisable with old analytical tools is in the making. This radical subject is plural, prefigurative, decolonial, ethical, ecological, communal and democratic. A critical theory should demonstrate those qualities, too. She reflects on the shortcomings of theory in understanding these changes by arguing against the resistance of social scientists, most of them critical theorists, to learn about this radical subject and to interrogate concepts, methodologies and epistemologies used to grasp radical change. Unlike both a social science obsessed with facticity and policy, and a critical theory obsessed with negative praxis, the new radical theory explored in this book seeks to critique capital-coloniality by means of the affirmation of life. Affirmation is not positive thinking or affirmationism. It is a form of theorising that, driven by 'hope', ventures beyond the given offering epistemological, theoretical and empirical openings that reflect a prefigurative and 'experiential critique' that is already taking place at the grass roots. The chapter also presents the work of the contributors to the book and the process of theorising without parachutes.

Keywords Radical subject · Critical theory · Possibility · Affirmation · Experiential critique · Venturing beyond · Hope · Theorising

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Introduction

This book opens a space to consider the present captivating moment in radical politics. While the horrors of our time expand dramatically as war, death, violence, rape and hunger, 'utopia' has returned in subtler forms. We are not in Kansas any more. There has been a major shift in grassroots movements' politics, demonstrating that the struggles against the ineffectuality of policy, the failure of representative democracy, the brutality of power and the alienating character of the economy are now mainly struggles for a breathing space from where to conceive and organise social life alternatively. A myriad of knowledges and practices towards this end is developing in urban and rural territories today. Enriched by multiple traditions of resistance, new mobilisations have been articulating concrete forms of cooperative production and consumption, developing many forms of self-management and communal property, non-representational politics and anti-oppressive education; proposing radical ecologies and pedagogies, exploring economic possibilities. *Prefiguration* is the word I am looking for: concrete processes of anticipating a better future in the present, in heterotopic spaces created to that end. This is not an idea but the reality of many movements today. Carlos Marentes, the co-coordinator of the North America Region of La Via Campesina recently put it like this: 'We not only believe that another world is necessary, the members of La Vía Campesina are already building a better world' (Declaration of LVC's Delegation to the 2016 World Social Forum, Montreal, Quebec, 14 August 2016).

Despite the clear failure of politics as usual, intellectual efforts are not being channelled into exploring and developing these alternatives further as one would expect, provided the world's state of affairs. Rather, they have been met with violence or appropriation policy from the state, disdain from orthodox left politics and sympathy from depoliticised citizens. Ignoring this dimension of collective action is no longer an option.

A new radical plural subject that is unrecognisable with old analytical tools is in the making. Gross highlights that 'what makes one radical' is not something that can be decided abstractly, but 'a question that has as many answers as there are conditions necessitating extreme solutions' (1972, p. 107). The chapters of this collection argue that the conditions of today have fostered 'an other politics' that speaks the language of *possibility*. This new language is not utopian in the traditional and/or distorted sense of the word, but is being fashioned in concrete praxis.

The chapters are the result of multidirectional conversations and interactions that are encrypted in the words and ideas explored here. The main aim of the book is to offer epistemological, theoretical and empirical openings that reflect an ongoing *experiential critique* of the hegemonic project. *Experiential critique* means a critique that, far from being ideological, is rooted in everyday life, in the body, in social relations, in communal practices. Following Boaventura de Sousa Santos, it is the political prefiguration of better worlds that equips us with the 'intellectual instruments to unmask the institutionalised, harmful lies that sustain and legitimate social injustice and the political impulse to struggle against them' (Santos 2014, p. viii).

Of central concern to the book is the resistance of social scientists, many of them critical theorists, to learn about this plural subject and to interrogate concepts, methodologies and epistemologies used to grasp radical change. While several traditions of radical thinking have nurtured and inform the critiques offered in the book, the book questions some assumptions that either close theoretical possibilities or restrict new theorisations, thus colonising the new and naturalising the given. Following Psychopedis, 'today, it is necessary to reflect on the changes taking place in thought itself in the context of a changing world [so] the claim for a new theoretical thinking, that could critically counter the new state of humanity, is presented as both utopian and necessary' (2000, p. 72).

The book is a collective act of theoretical prefiguration that is beyond academia's obsession with both factuality and policy. On the one hand, scientificism ignores that, paraphrasing Milan Kundera, 'life is elsewhere'. Social science, writes John Holloway, 'defines itself as scientific precisely by virtue of its exclusion of the scream', the latter being the scream of experience, of hunger, 'that does not accept that mass starvation can exist with plenty' (Holloway 1995, p. 155). Levitas (2013) also points to the unfortunate (perverted) destiny of sociology: while the creation of utopias, as expressions of the desire for a better way of being or living, is the proper and distinctive method of sociology, the discipline has suppressed this task in order to become a respectable social science. The problem is that scientificism naturalises capitalist society as 'our society', as 'the world we live in'. In this naturalisation of capitalist colonial and patriarchal society as the only viable model of human society (the best albeit imperfect), the sociological critique can only exist as criticism for improvement, and social change can only occur within the contours of the reality demarcated by

the theories about such society and its possibilities. Like this, social science concedes and reproduces the violence entailed in the routinisation of a fiction: that reality is what exists in front of us.

On the other hand, the book's theoretical prefiguration is uncomfortable with the fascination to find policy solutions to established 'social problems'. This transforms social science – paraphrasing Alfred Jarry, into a 'science of imaginary solutions'. That is, a science that is pedaling in the air, unable to confront the root of the problem, and therefore perpetuating it. The science of imaginary solutions brings up what Ernst Bloch refers to as the danger 'that the edifice of hope, occupied by thought of improvement, will totally collapse' (Bloch 1959/1986, p. 619). Consider these examples. While at the grass roots, people do not self-refer as 'poor', sociologists worship and help 'the poor' in order to 'make poverty history'. While people are producing alternative economies that include new forms of communal property, economists insist that 'fairness' can be attained without addressing existing property relations. While indigenous movements are repeatedly arguing against the oppressive nature of 'multiculturalism', the latter is still presented by development scholars as a policy solution for the 'integration' of indigenous communities into the world. While Via Campesina and the Movement of Rural Landless Workers have created a new human right, that is, *food sovereignty*, academic consultants of international development organisations insist on *food security*, favouring transnational agribusiness at the expense of rural workers' alternatives. Should not we first try to 'grasp the question about us, as question, and not as the confused indication of an available solution' (Bloch 1918/2000, p. 197).

The book does not provide any solutions. The collection addresses various dimensions of today's plural radical subject. It makes two assumptions. First, the radical subject of today is *at once* prefigurative, decolonial, ethical, plural, communal and democratic. Second, a *critical* theory should demonstrate those qualities, too. Holloway argues that there should be a 'we': 'to start from the third person is to exclude ourselves, generally with the idea of attributing to ourselves some privileged site of understanding, an illusion (2014, p. 1073). But, more than that, "we" is always a question, an exploration.' Amador Fernández Savater (2015) suggests that such exploration is, in fact, a search for 'ethical truths'. That is,

> not mere descriptions of the world, but *assertions* based on the ways in which we inhabit the world and conduct ourselves in it. They are not external and

> objective truths, but truths that connect us to others who perceive the same thing . . . They are not truths that illuminate, but truths that burn.

'Politics', he argues, consists of constructing – based on what we feel is truth – desirable forms of life, capable of lasting and materially sustaining themselves.

The chapters of this book argue that politics is eminently prefigurative. The book theorises alternative ways of looking at the present struggles for 'desirable forms of life' (Fernández Savater 2015). To venture around the struggle for desirable forms of life does not mean to voice 'positive' thinking as opposed to negativity, or as Holloway put is, positive versus negative autonomism (Holloway 2009). It is not what Benjamin Noys names 'affirmationism' (Noys 2010). To Noys, 'the rehabilitation of negativity is crucial to negotiating the inhospitable climate for radical theory. A first step is the negation of capitalism as the untranscendable horizon of our time' (Noys 2010, p. 174). Indeed, negation is an important step in the struggle to shape desirable forms of life. But there is a fundamental difference between the need to negate what it is as the starting point of any struggle, and the argument that 'there is no positive force to hold onto, no security, no guarantee' (Holloway 2010, p. 150). Derrick Jensen (n/d), who was named one of the Utne Reader's '50 visionaries who are changing your world', wrote:

> Frankly, I don't have much hope. But I think it is a good thing. Hope is what keeps us chained to the system, the conglomerate of people and ideas and ideals that is causing the destruction of the earth . . . When you give up on hope, you turn away from fear.

Nothing further from the 'truths that burn'. I recently watched a short video made by Channel 4 News (UK), showing Abu Ward and his son, who humbly run a garden centre in Aleppo until Abu was killed by a bomb. Keeping flowers in that small garden erected in the ruins of blood and cement was in my view an *act of hope* (i.e. negation, survival, resistance, future in the present). The flowers were disproportionately bright and colourful vis-à-vis the rest. Aleppo's inhabitants used to buy those flowers. Perhaps the only colour at all left in the city was hidden in Abu's garden. After Abu's assassination, the garden was closed and his thirteen-year-old son, Ibrahim, was left adrift, sad and with no purpose in life. Please reader, read Jensen's comment again. Do you feel like me that the statement is not

simply inadequate but it adds another layer of violence to the brutality already existing in Aleppo? As Bloch highlights, 'dreamelessness in regards to the future may appear to be a philosophical defence; yet, it is hardly truly philosophic, for it does not anticipate things to come. In this voluntary-involuntary skepticism, therefore, there is fear, not hope; and instead of understanding of the future as the greater dimension of the present . . . there is only anti-climax . . . ' (Bloch 1971, p. 32).

In this book we establish a difference between positive and affirmative thinking. Positive thinking accepts reality as it is. 'Affirmative' thinking, like Abu's thinking, simultaneously negates what it is and embraces hope as a search for alternative forms of life (Dinerstein 2012), while facing the contradictions encountered in the process of venturing beyond. Bloch writes:

> *the No could not be strong if there were not among us, at the same time, a dangerous and battle-worthy Yes*; if, at the same time, below this veiled life, below the nihilism of this modern age, a power unknown in morality or fantasy were not therefore at the same time stirring (1918/2000, p. 171; italics in the original).

There is another argument that we attend to, related to the importance of negativity: Werner Bonefeld claims that 'the dispossessed struggle for access to the means of subsistence to satisfy their human needs' (Bonefeld 2016, p. 235). This is a compelling truth. But it is an incomplete truth. As soon as negativity ceases to be a theoretical or an ideological proclamation and becomes an embodied praxis, we observe that it necessarily becomes *possibility*. Politics is about the possibility of searching and finding an other form. The struggles for access to material things are inspirational. In many parts of the world, inspiration has emanated from overwhelmingly miserable experiences, like Abu's garden. Without hope, 'human beings collapse into themselves, without a path or a goal beyond the quotidian' (Bloch 1918/2000, p. 167). Without the *yes*, critical theory becomes as cynical as the system it wants to negate. It dissociates itself even more from the 'knowledge production about the world' created by social movements (Escobar 2008, p. 306). Negativity necessarily evolves into 'a yes that is anchored in the no of the *gestus* of the action of dignity as a mode of life against death' (Matamoros Ponce 2009, p. 201).

Since 'practical negativity' (Holloway 2002) is not theoretical but an *embodied possibility*, to venture beyond is in no way abstract thinking.

As Bloch highlights, '[r]eal venturing beyond never goes into the mere vacuum of an In-Front-of-Us, merely fanatically, merely visualizing abstractions. Instead, it grasps the new as something that is mediated in what exists and is in motion, although to be revealed the New demands the most extreme effort of will' (Bloch 1959/1996, p. 4).

While acts of prefiguration alter the 'parameters of legibility' imposed by the capitalist, patriarchal and colonial demarcations of reality, the articulation of possibility beyond them is utterly contradictory (Dinerstein 2015, p. 19). Autonomous struggles are immersed within the capitalist colonial world and therefore position themselves with, against and beyond the institutions, laws, regulations, policies, customs and ideologies that mediate their emergence and development. Struggles endure tensions and contradictions, and produce surpluses. The chapters of this book address four modes of the autonomous struggle in search of alternative and desirable forms of life: negation, creation, contradiction and the production of excess. This excess lies in the process of venturing beyond as a process of contesting and transcending the given form, which prevent us from conceiving of life 'other' than in patriarchal colonial capitalist ways.

In Chap. 2, Sarah Amsler offers an *epistemology of possibility*. Following Bloch to whom it is 'a question of learning hope [and] the work of this emotion requires people who throw themselves actively into what is becoming to which they themselves belong' (Bloch 1959/1986, p. 3), Amsler queries 'in what ways "learning hope" as praxis discloses potentials for articulating radically democratic, self-organized, and transformative theories and practices in educational systems in England today'. In an extraordinary attempt to operationalise the process of 'learning hope', Amsler's critical epistemology of possibility 'politicises the pedagogical' and 'pedagogises the political' (Motta and Esteves 2014). Movements are united by their 'critical epistemologies of possibility'. By following Bloch's ontology of the not-yet-being, Amsler argues that the formation of these critical epistemologies takes place at the *Front* of political possibility. Front is not a 'physical location', but the site of the not-yet. Amsler's Blochian-inspired epistemological distinction between the 'no', 'the not-yet' and 'nothing', as well as the possibility of the mediating alternative, is an important resource for educators who 'attempt to think, feel, live and work in counter-capitalist ways within the teeth of neo-liberal hopelessness.'

An epistemology of possibility is also a decolonial epistemology. Colonialism persists in the postcolonial world and to ignore the existence

of the 'coloniality of power' (Quijano 2000) and of knowledge (Lander 2000) leads to what Santos (2014) calls *epistemicide* and what Catherine Walsh calls the Eurocentric 'geopolitical location of critical thought' (2012, p. 12), in which the idea of the 'radical intellectual' and critique are still identified as Western. In Chap. 3, Sara Motta poses a simple yet deep question: 'why are colonised peoples' ideas not considered "philosophy"?' 'Who is considered an intellectual?' 'Why?' She argues that critical theory has been an accomplice in the subjugation of other subaltern voices by means of universalising male-dominated theoretical ideas. Motta takes us on a journey that departs from the 'prophetic Negation' articulated by the white male radical scholar activist – in this case represented by the philosopher Slavoj Žižek – to a new radical critique via prefigurative affirmation represented by storytelling and the work of Maria Lugones, bell hooks and Gloria Anzaldúa. Following Maldonado Torres, Motta invites us to think in the process through which 'specific lived realities are sidelined' and how can they 'acquire existential and epistemological significance'. Her main argument is that despite evidence to the contrary, Žižek's critique, that is, the critique of a prophet of negation, corresponds to the coloniality of knowing-subjectivity that subsumes the prefigurative affirmation of storytellers to a second-class body of ideas. Motta rejects Adornian interpretations of critique and the figure of the prophet of hegemonic continental philosophy for their treatment of critique through negativity. The prefigurative epistemology of the storyteller is affirmative, in that it produces a critique based on embodied and emotional knowledges (rather than disembodied and 'rational').

Possibility and decolonial epistemologies require a third opening: the conceptualisation of Marx's critique of political economy as a prefigurative method of critique. In Chap. 4, Ana C. Dinerstein argues that the forms of utopia are historical. Today, utopia as plan for the future has given room to the emergence of a new form, 'concrete utopia'. Dinerstein is concerned about *recognising* the new form of utopia. Marx's critique of political economy denaturalises capitalist society by revealing how the categories of political economy are abstracted from the reality of struggle and, therefore, they describe a reality that can exist in detachment from the domain of life, today this is not enough. In order to be part of the process of prefiguration, a Marxist critique should elaborate on the reality of the *not yet* that movements are anticipating through their struggles surrounding social reproduction. Marx's critique of political economy should be read 'in the key of hope', that is, as a *prefigurative* critique of

political economy (Dinerstein 2015, p. 204). The *prefigurative* critique of political economy uncovers the process of shaping concrete utopia, in, against and beyond the open veins of capital.

The three chapters comprising the second part of the book address the issue of the social (re)production of life, and include discussions of women and the economy, the common, the political and nature. Mariarosa Dalla Costa highlights that 'human reproduction is built on an *unsustainable sacrifice by women*, as part of a conception and structure of life which is nothing but labour time within an *intolerable sexual hierarchy*' (1995, p. 13, italics in the original). Not surprisingly, for a decade, International Development Organisations have been concerned with 'empowering women' as a means to reduce extreme poverty and control social unrest. As Federici highlights, 'the reason women have been targeted by these institutions is that in the face of the crisis, they have taken matters into their own hands. They have gone into the streets and have created a whole alternative economy...' (Federici and Sitrin 2016, p. 4). In Chap. 5, Suzanne Bergeron offers a substantial critique of one of the World Bank's 'empowerment' policy, Smart Economics, with specific focus on how the role of women in economic development has been theorised. While Smart Economics is presented as an investment in women and therefore as a 'good investment', Bergeron's rereading of this 'development' initiative from a critical feminist perspective that departs radically from mainstream approaches (i.e. Gibson-Graham 2006) shows that the policy subsumes women's creative endeavours within the logic of development. As Dalla Costa argues, women's knowledge and experiences can be 'a decisive force that can lift the increasingly dead siege capitalist development imposes on human reproduction' (1995, p. 15). By drawing on Holloway's notion of 'crack' (2010), Bergeron considers to what extent the concrete alter-spaces created by women's collective actions could free women from the fetter of mainstream gender and development approaches. Cracks alter the logic of the business case approach and open a space for other practices. Cracks have the capacity of doing both breaking the 'social synthesis' of capitalist society and simultaneously signalling the assertion of another type of (anti-capitalist) human activity, or 'doing' (Holloway 2010).

In Chap. 6, Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, Lucia Linsalata and Mina Navarro Trujillo beautifully connect the discussion of social reproduction with the production of the commons and the political. Inspired by the work of Silvia Federici and Bolivar Echeverría, they examine the process of the 'production of the commons in common' as the *political*

activity towards the social (re)production of life. The 'commons' constitute key elements in the process of conceiving of alternative forms of life amidst the present crisis of social reproduction. As Manuel Zechner and Bue Rübner Hansen (2015) write, '[t]he context of crisis and generalized vulnerability opens onto a myriad of struggles around social rights, resources and survival, all of which put life at their center'. Gutiérrez et al. enquire about the overwhelming expansion and penetration of capitalistic social relations into every corner of life: have we completely lost the capacity of 'giving form'? To them, as to Bolivar Echeverría, the capacity of giving form is 'inscribed in social subjects' and 'brings together the ways in which we produce and reproduce our material life and the ways we signify it'. They argue against 'all the leftist approaches that have embraced the capitalist separation between the sphere of production and that of the reproduction of life as something natural, systematically concealing the community dimension of social life'. With Federici, they 're-focus on the processes, social relations, and political forms that sustain the reproduction of life under the rule of capital, and the contradictions of those realities'. Capital, they argue, cannot commodify the human capacity to produce the commons in common. This is the meaning of politics.

In Chap. 7, Francesca Zunino Harper takes up the issue of nature to rethink social reproduction and the possibility of alternative forms of life. Environmental destruction is a central concern in the process of social reproduction of human and non-human life on the planet. The present condition has been described as a 'crisis of civilisation', for the world displays the impossibility of the (re)production of sustainable and dignified human life on the planet (Burch and Tamayo 2011). Carlos Porto-Gonçalves and Enrique Leff advise that such crisis sets 'a limit to the progress of modernity and opens new civilizatory and sustainable horizons' (2015, p. 66). They propose that in order for these horizons to take shape it is important to 'deconstruct those theories and practices that are erected on the foundations of scientific, economic, technological and political rationality of modernity and that are inscribed in the national and global institutions of the global world' (Porto-Gonçalves and Leff 2015, p. 66). An emancipatory project begs for a rejection of the Cartesian separation between nature and society that capitalism entails (Moore 2015, p. 19). To Moore, capitalism *is a form of organising nature* based on such dualism (Moore 2015). Zunino Harper calls for a holistic form of thinking, able to overcome the present unsustainable separation between

culture and nature. She offers an integrated framework, the *natureculture* paradigm, as a theoretical and practical tool for the transdisciplinary understanding of the planet's social, cultural and environmental intricacy. Natureculture works against the 'coloniality of nature', for 'the concept of coloniality that has been applied to knowledge and power . . . also applies to nature' (Escobar 2008, p. 120). Zunino Harper aims at reintegrating the human and the ecospheres by articulating radical perspectives such as eco-anarchism, eco-feminism and others into an alternative discourse in order to create a wider, holistic human sense of belonging.

The three chapters of the third part of the book explore both the real dynamics of prefiguration by social movements and discuss the shortcomings of social movement theory. We are witnessing the end of social movements as we knew them. Existing (American and European) Social Movement Theories (SMT) fall short in capturing the prefigurative feature of contemporary movements. What kind of theorisation and reflection is required to engage with this political development?

In Chap. 8, Emily Brissette challenges the separation between the social and the political and offers an alternative view of the state that can help us to grasp the political nature of prefiguration. Brissette advises that in order to make sense of contemporary prefigurative movements, we need a more *expansive notion of politics* and a distinctive understanding of 'the state' than that found in most North American social movement theory, where the state is usually conflated with the government. Brissette sees in Marx's critique of Hegel's submission to the state, and of the separation between civil society and the state, the key for her analysis. Hegel situates the political at the state level (where, according to him, all contradictions of civil society are resolved). In the tradition of the materialist critique of the capitalist state that regards the state as the 'political form' of the social relations of capital (Clarke 1991; Holloway and Picciotto 1977), however, Brissette argues that the state must be understood 'not as a social actor separated from society, but as a social construction, brought into being through a set of discourses, practices, and relations (which require ongoing participation to maintain the state's materiality)'. If we conceive the state in this way, she claims, 'the transformative potential of social movements comes more clearly into focus, and the prefigurative dimension becomes not only more intelligible but fundamental'. Unlike those who propose the need for 'a passage from the social to the political' (Adamovsky 2007), to Brissette prefiguration *is* political. Prefigurative movements do not want to preserve the realm of civil society against and vis-a-vis the state or to go through a

transition from the social to the political. For Brissette, the political nature of prefigurative movements rests in the process of constituting collective life as a community-in-freedom beyond the state. She rejects the charge of 'ineffectuality' –many times attributed to social movements, for the goal of the prefigurative movements is not to attain political power as traditional movements do. They, she claims, enact 'otherwise'.

But how does prefiguration affect social movements' organisation and dynamics? In Chap. 9, Marianne Maeckelbergh takes a closer look at significant changes in social movement activity. Her main argument is that the separation between prefigurative politics and other forms of social movement activity is unsustainable. The separation inevitably situates prefiguration as a less effective struggle in comparison with strategic and instrumental action. She uses the example of the post-2011 wave of uprisings, with a focus on a general strike in Spain, in order to show the *prefigurative* nature of the strike. She points to the many challenges that prefigurative action possess to the way we have tended to understand social movements. One is the linear temporality of 'cause and effect' that is common among SMT theorists. Maeckelbergh considers 'the success/failure paradigm' problematic because it is not possible to establish when an assessment can be rightly made. Why? Maeckelbergh indicates that prefigurative politics change the temporality of social change, which makes it impossible to commit to 'success or failure' evaluations of the movements' strategies. As Holloway suggests, the cracks are '"here and now insubordination" (Holloway 2010, p. 26) which break the form of experience of time imposed by capitalism, homogeneous time, time as "duration" (Holloway 2010, p. 135)' (Dinerstein 2012, p. 532).

What is wrong with social movement theories? In Chap. 10, Marina Sitrin offers a critique of social movement theory and, following Raúl Zibechi, names them 'societies in movement' instead. Her aim is to capture the main changes in social movement activity and their expansion at the societal level. Sitrin argues that the clear disjuncture between theory and activism is mainly due to the scholars' lack of engagement with movements' own theorising about strategies, projects, practice and imaginaries of emancipation that can be said to affect academia in general, with some exceptions. Sitrin points to the mismatch between the reality of scholarly produced social movement theory and activist-produced knowledge, a critique also made by scholar activists who criticise SMT for its inadequacy in understanding the trajectories, development and future of social movements (Flesher Fominaya and Cox 2013). Others argue that

SMT has become 'irrelevant' (Flacks 2004) and what is required is a 'movement-relevant theory' (Bevington and Dixon 2005; Cox and Nielsen 2007). Sitrin also highlights a problem with the 'contentious politics' framework in political sociology: it fails to acknowledge that societies in movement do not have as their point of reference the government and are not making a 'claim' as their starting point. They are autonomous movements engaged in democratic and horizontal forms of participation. Sitrin suggests that theory does need to catch up with the societies in movement.

In what follows, throughout the book, we theorise, as promised, without parachutes.

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PART I

Epistemological Openings

CHAPTER 2

Learning Hope. An Epistemology of Possibility for Advanced Capitalist Society

Sarah Amsler

Abstract Drawing on the critical theories of Ernst Bloch and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, as well as on the knowledge and learning practices of counter-capitalist social movements, Amsler's chapter offers a reading of political hopelessness amongst educators in England through a critical epistemology which discloses it as 'unfinished' and potent material within a global politics of possibility. She invokes methods from Bloch's critical process-philosophy of 'learning hope' which allows for three reality-shifting operations: (1) the making of distinctions between what is 'not', 'not-yet' and 'nothing' in experience and historical process; (2) identifying and creating 'fronts' of possibility for mediating reality in concretely utopian ways; and (3) the recognition of a multiplicity of anti-hegemonic scales and modes of transformation, and explains why these matter in movements not just for social change but for the immanent creation of an other reality.

Keywords Bloch, Ernst · Critical epistemology: Education, politics of · Hope, learning · Pedagogy, critical · Possibility, politics of · Santos, Boaventura de Sousa

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Resisting 'Reality', on and off the Radical Grid

'In the end hope, wrested from reality by negating it, is the only form in which truth appears. Without hope, the idea of truth would be scarcely even thinkable, and it is the cardinal untruth, having recognised existence to be bad, to present it as truth simply because it has been recognised.' So wrote Theodor Adorno in a defence of hope as a critical practice (Adorno 2005, §61, p. 98). Today, this philosophical critique of *amor fati* finds its concretely practical expression in a 'politics of possibility' which contests capitalist imperatives through a combination of ontological, epistemological and pedagogical resistance to the weapon of 'no alternative'. Around the world, indigenous and anticolonial movements for autonomy, land, resources and dignity; grassroots struggles against patriarchal capitalist globalisation and neo-liberal power; and self-organised spaces for counter-hegemonic thinking and practice constitute a radical political imaginary which enables movements not just for social change but for the immanent creation of a radically other reality (Amsler 2015a; Dinerstein 2015; Gibson–Graham 2006; Sitrin 2014).

Fracturing the end of history from within, these 'hope movements' (Dinerstein and Deneulin 2012) disclose how possibility can be wrested from the 'vast bureaucratic apparatus for the creation and maintenance of hopelessness' in neo-liberal capitalism (Graeber 2014; Dinerstein 2015, p. 82). They also teach us, however, that these possibility-disclosing practices extend beyond negative critique to the unlearning of hegemonic epistemologies, identities, relationships and practices and learning of how to create new ones that do not yet exist (Amsler 2015b; Motta 2014b; on 'possibility-disclosing practice', see Kompridis 2006). This counter-capitalist politics of possibility is therefore underpinned by a dual movement of 'pedagogising the political' – understanding radical transformation as a complex learning process – and 'politicising the pedagogical', which recognises that 'epistemological practices and pedagogical-political projects are struggles for decolonization of our hearts, mind, bodies (including the body of the land) and spirits' (Motta 2014a). The formal and informal politico-pedagogical practices of these movements intersect in global grids of revolutionary energy through which flow – through social media, international gatherings, political actions, translocal dialogues and learning encounters – experiences, knowledges, practices and solidarities in the service of birthing the post-capitalist world (Armbruster–Sandoval 2005; Callahan 2004; Jaramillo 2010; De Angelis 1998; Enlivened Learning 2015; Misoczky 2007, p. 256; Motta and Esteves 2014).

While the differences between these movements preclude any sort of instrumental translation of knowledge from one context to another, what unites them is the attempt to articulate critical epistemologies of possibility that enable and sustain possibility-generating projects to transform states of political domination and heal from epistemic and cultural devastation. Theories of radical change which explicate how we 'make the road by walking' (Freire and Horton 1991) not only liberate the radical imagination but also reread disappointment as a revolutionary experience and an important factor in the creation of living, concrete utopias; 'even the defeat of the wished-for good', Ernst Bloch wrote, 'includes its future possible victory as long as not all possibilities for becoming different, becoming better, are exhausted in history and world' (Bloch 1995, p. 305; for more on the function of disappointment in autonomous organising, see Dinerstein 2015). Such ways of knowing allow for what Bloch called the 'countermove of freedom against so-called destiny which has been removed from process and which counteracts it through stagnation and reification' (1995, p. 200) – in other words, for learning and practising hope on the edge of what is not yet possible.

There are many people, however, who exist outside these movements and who encounter few alternatives to the 'fact' that being subjugated, exploited, abused, misrecognised and discarded by the logics and institutions of patriarchal capitalism is, if not just or tolerable, ultimately inevitable. Their imaginary horizons are those of the imposed and the impossible; the mood, a political – or perhaps more accurately 'post-political' (Wilson and Swyngedow 2014) – depression characterised by the sense that 'customary forms of political response, including direct action and critical analysis, are no longer working either to change the world or to make [them] feel better' and that they are not – perhaps never have been – capable of action and critique (Cvetkovich 2012, p. 460). This is the mood that presently dominates the politics of education in England, where I live and work with school, college and university teachers who are struggling to exercise autonomy, preserve/recover critical-progressive philosophies of knowledge, advance a democratic ethics of justice and care and carve out 'breathing space' in an aggressively neo-liberalised educational system. Through a combination of structural adjustment and cultural warfare, possibilities for critical work are diminished and institutions are increasingly equipped and required by state and market imperatives to administer psychological, professional and financial

punishments for autonomy, democratic collectivity, critique and alterity. The subjective and material architectures of neo-liberal hopelessness are sturdy here.

Some critics suggest that this politics of despair is a logical consequence of colonial violence devouring itself; that 'colonialism has disabled the global north from learning in non-colonial terms' (Santos 2014, p. 19), as 'minds in the north and west seem to be formed mainly by texts and images (produced by professionals and institutions in all fields)' (Fasheh 2006) and therefore cannot recognise, much less dialogue openly with and learn from, non-hegemonic knowledges, practices and realities which are invisibilised or othered by these naturalised dominant rationalities. It is clear, for example, that the subsumption of organised learning, knowledge and learner/educator subjectivities into market–state logics and modern state-capitalist institutions 'reproduce hopelessness by the taming of imagination, thought and learning, which at the same time devalues and delegitimizes other aspects of our human experience and capacity to learn . . . by feeling, doing, valuing, relating to others and place' (Mandel 2014). Yet this remains a location to learn out from, not simply where learning ends. For those whose 'locus of enunciation' in capitalism is presently a northern geo-political and body-political position (Grosfoguel 2007, p. 213), what paths of possibility might be created by pedagogising politics and politicising pedagogy within these institutions and non-professionalised spaces of collective learning for liberation?

In what remains of this chapter, I will illustrate how enunciating a critical epistemology of possibility discloses potentials for articulating radically democratic, self-organised, counter-hegemonic and transformative theories and practices in educational systems in England today. I focus on epistemic and social practices which problematise existing parameters of possibility within educational institutions and discourses, on the one hand, and which visibilise and clarify the conditions of alternatives, on the other. I do this by invoking three epistemic methods from Ernst Bloch's critical process-philosophy of 'learning hope' as sketched out in *The Principle of Hope* (1959), which was once described by its editors as a 'practical guide to living in late capitalist society, in cultural decline, where the possibility of a truly human society seems remote and the dominant emotion is fear' (Plaice et al. 1995, p. xxxiii). This critical epistemology allows: (1) the making of distinctions between what is 'not', 'not-yet' and 'nothing' in experience and historical process; (2) identifying and creating 'fronts' of possibility for mediating reality in concretely utopian ways; and

(3) the recognition of a multiplicity of anti-hegemonic scales and modes of transformation. In the following section, the first of these methods frames my discussion of the current politics of possibility within formal education in England today.

Awkwardness and Indignation: 'Countermoves of Freedom Against So-Called Destiny'

> 'The Not is lack of Something and also escape from this lack; this is a driving towards what is missing. Thus the driving in living things is depicted with Not: as drive, need, striving and primarily as hunger.' (Bloch 1995: 306)

We cannot expect, Bloch wrote, for radical hope to erupt spontaneously in situations where people 'presuppose a world that has already become', just as a map which ends at borders drawn by powerful know edge and agencies of control denies any imagination of what lies beyond. However, while 'everything is still factually impossible for which the conditions do not yet exist at all', it is also the case that 'everything is possible for which the conditions exist in a sufficiently partial form' (Bloch 1995, pp. 8, 205, 234). It is thus necessary to be able to distinguish between what is possible within the existing parameters of intelligibility and material conditions as they are constructed and legitimised by power (what is *according to* possibility) and what is presently unknown and unrealised but nonetheless part of the alternative realities which infinitely transgress and exceed these parameters in processes of becoming (what is *in* possibility) (Bloch 1995, pp. 207, 209). This matters in practice because the 'trashing of alternatives' to neo-liberal policies which represses critical educational practice in England today is achieved by policing what is *according* to possibility in two ways: alternatives are prevented from emerging or rendered invisible and irrelevant by their translation into hegemonic logics of value – in either case, enacting a form of epistemicide, the 'destruction of the social practices and the disqualification of the social agents that operate according to such transformation' (Santos 2014, p. 153).

Without doubt, many educators in this context feel disqualified and destroyed. They speak of being exhausted and alienated from critical knowledge and from their own labour; thrown into conflict with students, colleagues, families and communities; and forced to violate political and ethical commitments to social justice and care. What is publicly available to

study of the politics of their personal struggles (i.e. writing and debate which is not enclosed by subscriptions, copyright laws, access to institutions, etc.) often takes the form of either social media criticism or reports on studies into mental health problems, stress and despair, and into government policies which have intensified labour, diminished autonomy, and privatised, corporatised and marketised the country's educational institutions (Busby 2015a, Busby 2015b; Precey 2015; Shaw and Ward 2014).

Relying on customary (conservative) epistemologies of possibility, and given the recent lack of visible large-scale collective struggles against the colonisation of educational politics, it may seem reasonable to conclude that there is 'nothing' politically interesting happening in this context other than educators indulging in private griping, having nervous breakdowns and making personal decisions to leave the teaching profession – which, given the strong association of educational projects with state and market institutions, often translates into abandoning learning and collective knowledge creation as political practices altogether (a painful and disorienting experience for those who are committed to the latter but who do not yet know where or how else to practise). In a Blochian epistemology, however, 'Nothing' is a specific ontological concept: not just a lack of visible being, but a material expression of 'exertions, long erupted process which is finally thwarted'; of frustration and annihilation. It is distinct from what Bloch calls the 'Not', the hungry 'lack of Something and also escape from this lack' – and thus, 'the beginning of every movement towards something' (Bloch 1995, p. 306).

Expressions of political hopelessness and depression such as those circulating amongst educators in England today are also thus legible as critical potentialities of resistance and alterity. A high school teacher says to me, 'I am not a robot'. And another, 'I am not a trained monkey'. And another, 'it is immoral what they are asking us to do'. Knowledge of how not to be an automaton or circus animal or sinner in this neo-liberal reality; of how to be when, in Adorno's words, 'wrong life cannot be lived rightly' (2005, §18, p. 39), does not yet and perhaps cannot yet follow. Nevertheless, moments of awkwardness and indignation disclose the existence of alternatives in process. Misfitting, disrupting hegemonic performativity and productivity, walking upright (or skipping and cartwheeling) while being discarded as 'superfluous non-subjects' (Motta and Esteves 2014, p. 8) can all be understood as expressions 'of our reluctance to be converted into robots'; to have our labours of thought and love and care transmogrified into abstract labour and capital (Holloway 2010,

p. 917). Even in the form of despair, such ontological refusal points to possibility in process: 'if there were nothing but narrow, suffocating, firmly established walls around the urging after what the subjective lacks, then there would be no urging there. But as it is, something is still open to it, its urging, wishing, doing has room' (Bloch 1995, p. 288).

When both Nothing (thwarted possibility) and Not (lack and hunger) are understood as elements of an ongoing process in which we strive to mediate (learn through and transform) existing tendencies in ourselves and the world, another way of being, 'a different concept of reality', can be enunciated: the Not-*Yet* (Bloch 1995, p. 197). Frustration, 'negative' emotions like 'cynicism, opportunism, depression, bitchiness... can signal the capacity to transcend hopelessness [and] contain the potentiality for new modes of collectivity, belonging in difference and dissent' (Muñoz in Duggan and Muñoz 2009). Far from indicating some sort of false consciousness produced by the mystifications of 'capitalist realism', educators' sense that Nothing will come of customary ways of thinking and acting to mediate the realities of the neo-liberalised institutions in which they teach is a partial but credible assessment of possibility. As Ken Jones has recently pointed out, while some educators in England have 'rallied furiously' against the British state's aggressive austerity policies and the imposition of educational traditionalism since 2010, their actions could not 'influence the *logic of action* of the school, which is itself closely tied to issues of student performance against tightly defined examination criteria, in a context of inter-institutional competition, and in a labour market whose insecurities only serve to strengthen schools' adherence to the principle of safety first'. Therefore, he argues, 'detaching schooling from this logic, even to a limited extent, requires social changes as far-reaching as those of the post-war decades' and 'change of another sort, on another scale: those who work and study in education *would need to acquire a practical sense that another way of "doing education" is possible*' (Jones 2014, p. 190). The question is, how?

Learning Hope on the 'Front' of Political Possibility

The circulation of myths – about the impossibility or never-having-happened of fundamental social change, the insignificance of individual and collective action, the revolutionary power of critical consciousness and of radical love and so on – form the basis of a political ontology which Bloch called a 'world without Front'. In this mode of being, there is no space of or location from

which to enunciate or engage in responses to 'badly existing' realities in order to alter them because these realities do not include 'unfinished material' or 'open dimensions' in people or things (Bloch 1995, p. 148). Within these parameters of possibility, the only legitimate epistemological position is to adapt to things 'as they are and as they stand' by producing knowledge 'of what can be contemplated, namely of the past', as realised in the forms of social life appearing in the lived moment as *faits accomplish* (Bloch 1995, p. 6). Bloch distinguished this from the 'ontology of Not-Yet-Being', which opens onto a world 'with Front'. This reality includes open dimensions, spaces of ideas, materials and relationships that are understood to be unfixed and unfinished, and in which knowledge production must therefore aim 'towards changing the world and informing the desire to change it' (Bloch 1995, pp. 8, 13).

The Front is not a physical location, but a contingent co-ordinate for the always-already possible but not-always-yet actualised situation in which established parameters of possibility are unsettled such that we can work with the 'undecided material' of the present; it is where (and when) 'the Unbecome is located and seeks to articulate itself' (Bloch 1995, pp. 148, 199). While Bloch clearly sensed the importance of the Front as a critical theoretical category with relevance for real-world practice (what he called a 'living-theory practice of comprehended tendency'), he does not define it well in his work. He refers to it as being the place of becoming of 'the world, of world process' (Bloch 1995, p. 246) where 'affairs can still be conducted' (p. 288), and of the 'occurrence of reality' (p. 237); it is also a name for situations in which there is a dynamic movement of 'that part of reality which is coming onto being on the horizon of the real' (p. 68), and more specifically where 'man [and woman] and process, or rather subject and object in dialectically materialist process' come into relation with one another (p. 200). The last definition is the crux as it replaces a metaphorical place of possibility with the embodied activity of refusing dominant rationalities – one which means in its most basic form that people 'throw themselves actively into what is becoming, to which they themselves belong' (p. 3).

Where are the 'fronts' of anti-capitalist, counter-capitalist and post-capitalist possibility in education today? There is now much interest in the diverse experiments that have emerged within the autonomous movements in the global South as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, which together constitute a 'multifarious hope landscape' that epitomises Bloch's frontier politics.[1] Deeply embedded in local histories and cosmologies, these

collectively self-organised, militantly optimistic and socially ingrained experiences have become global points of reference for how to pedagogise politics and politicise pedagogy; for articulating critical epistemologies of possibility and practical methodologies for learning hope.

In England, the hope landscape in education – and thus the forms of possibility 'fronts' here – has a different political terrain, formed through imperial hegemony, traditions of struggle for a socialist state (including for systems of public education) and movements against gender, race and class injustices; the exploitation and destruction of labour; nuclear proliferation; and neo-liberal structural adjustment, particularly New Public Management and privatisation. It has also been shaped more recently by nearly two decades of Thatcherite policies and their extension in subsequent New Labour, Liberal and Conservative neo-liberalism (Hall 2003), which have not only stifled political organisation and democratic autonomy but also penetrated the organising principles and technologies of social institutions, relations of social production; educator and learner subjectivities, and structures of knowledge production and common sense (Ball 2008; Torres and Jones 2013). Here, attempts to 'acquire a practical sense that another way of "doing education" is possible' are less about preserving or reclaiming oppressed space, knowledge and institutions and more about learning autonomy, experimenting at the edges of non-capitalist ways of working and being and reimagining education beyond the imperial-capitalist (and in some cases the state-socialist) form.

There is no definitive map of the dozens of new 'alternative education' or 'free university' projects that grew across the UK after a Conservative political victory in 2010, partly because some are ephemeral and nomadic and partly because they tend to move in their own locations and through international networks but do not constitute an organised 'movement'.[2] There is no map at all of the unknown number of even less visible efforts to defy the logics of capital within the educational institutions, including schools, through action research, direct action, radical curricular reform, space-making and other mediations of reality. These hope projects fulfil immediate needs and desires for autonomous existence and are experiments in generating possibilities for a counter-capitalist movement that is not yet articulate. Locally rooted and globally inspired, they wrest out of hegemonic time and space situations in which, as Bloch wrote, 'affairs can still be conducted' (1995, p. 288). What emerges are context-specific methods for delinking from dominating forms of recognition and security, for learning skills of self-authorship and practices

of co-operation which are marginalised and suppressed in neo-liberal institutions, for tending rather than scorning 'what was made invisible or worthless in our cultures' (Fasheh 2006), and for attending to the 'embodied attachments, affective commitments and spiritual practices that are valued and devalued in hegemonic politics of knowledge but which become central in the creation of an emancipatory politics of knowledge' (Motta and Esteves 2014, p. 15) – as well as to the unlearning of affective investments in practices and institutions which colonise hope (Berlant 2010; Brown 1999).

An Epistemology of Possibility for Advanced Capitalist Society

Do such projects meet the need for change 'of another sort, on another scale' in 'acquiring a practical sense that another way of "doing education" is possible' (Jones 2014, p. 191) in England today? I argue they do when viewed from a critical epistemological perspective that translates the sense of Nothingness into an appreciation of all that strives towards what is Not-Yet possible, discloses 'fronts' of possibility within landscapes of political depression at many different scales, 'eludidat[es] what in the local is not reducible to the impact of hegemonic globalization' and comprehends 'what in it is or may become a seed of resistance against the unequal power relations produced or favored by such globalization' (Santos 2014, p. 179). Educators who attempt to think, feel, live and work in counter-capitalist ways within the teeth of neo-liberal hopelessness in this context do so outside articulated movement, often in a lacunae of epistemological and material resources, at the edges of epistemic and social possibility. It is an important politico-pedagogical act to recognise these more marginal, ephemeral, fumbling, flawed and fragile projects for autonomy in Patti Lather's terms as forms of a praxis based on 'ontological stammering, concepts with a lower ontological weight . . . without guaranteed subjects or objects, oriented toward the as-yet-incompletely thinkable conditions and potentials of given arrangements' (2002, p. 189); or in Blochian terms as significant 'phenomena in which Unbecome is located and seeks to articulate itself' (1995, pp. 11–12). Only in this way can their specific credibilities be 'discussed and argued for and their relations taken as an object of political dispute', and thusly can they be recognised as students and interlocutors of hope within a pluriversal global politics of post-capitalist possibility (Santos 2014, p. 17).

Notes

1. Examples include the Landless Workers Movement's Florestan Fernandes School, organising political education of movement militants outside and in collaboration with state universities in Brazil (MST 2016); the Universidad de la Tierra (University of the Earth) in Oaxaca and Chiapas, Mexico (Esteva 2007); the 'Living Learning' practices of the Abahlali baseMjondolo and Rural Network movements in South Africa (Figlan et al. 2009); and the land-based education Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning in the Canadian (traditional Denendeh) Northwest Territories (Freeland Ballantyne 2014). See also, reflections on recent 'ecoversity' gatherings in Teamey and Mandell (2014, 2016).
2. Current examples include Anti-University Now, the Free University of Brighton, Leicester People's University, Social Science Centre, and the Provisional University (in Ireland), with past projects including Birmingham Radical Education, Free University of Liverpool, Free University Network, Nottingham Free School, Really Open University, Tent City University (Occupy) and more. Other authors refer to this field of projects in Britain as a movement (Lazarus 2013; Saunders and Ghanimi 2013); see also Amsler and Lazarus (2012) for archival commentary on the UK-based Free University Network.

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CHAPTER 3

Decolonising Critique: From Prophetic Negation to Prefigurative Affirmation

Sara C. Motta

Abstract In this chapter, Motta visions a possible answer to the question 'how do we decolonise the practice of revolutionary critique?' Emerging from a dialogue between her praxis with women in movement over the last 15 years and the work of black, decolonial and Chicana feminists, she first deconstructs the classic twentieth-century Prophetic figure of critique. She does this through engagement with Zizek's work demonstrating their reproduction and complicity in the epistemological logics and rationalities of coloniality. She then begins to map some elements of decolonising critique through the figure of the storyteller, for whom critique is existentially grounded in the/our self-liberating and collective practices of healing as emancipation. Here, possibilities for multiple grounds of onto-epistemological becoming are opened as racialised women, who are denied knowing-subjectivity in coloniality, co-construct radical community, critical intimacy and speak in multiple tongues enfleshing and thus reinventing revolutionary praxis.

Keywords Decolonising critique · Prefigurative epistemologies · Embodied emancipation · Critical intimacy · Pedagogies of becoming · Decolonial feminism · Black feminism · Chicana feminism

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Decolonising the epistemological frameworks of coloniality demands that the works of colonised peoples be read philosophically and not as mere appendages to Eurocentric traditions. In recognising these perspectives as philosophical, we are able to ask meta-theoretical questions which change the terms of the violent conversation that have structured the politics of knowing of capitalist-coloniality as opposed to seeking recognition and inclusion into its logics. They importantly force us to ask critical questions about who and what counts as an intellectual, what counts as critique and which practices are deemed as those which produce critical theory, demonstrating how the current contours which structure the subjectivity, production and performance of critique reproduce coloniality. These perspectives enable as Maldonado-Torres (2006a, p. 4) describes 'a new set of metaphors and lived realities to acquire existential and epistemological significance'. Accordingly, I will draw on the work of Maria Lugones, bell hooks and Gloria Anzaldúa in my critique of Žižek, as paradigmatic of the Prophetic knowing-subject of orthodox critique, and the task of conceptualising an affirmative decolonising praxis of epistemological emancipation beyond this figure of the Prophet.

I choose the metaphor of the Prophet as paradigmatic of the subject-of-knowing in both Analytic and Continental philosophies and thus underpinning many articulations of Marxist critique. Afro-American philosopher Cornell West (1993, p.66) argues '[this subject] is continuous with the great and grand Jewish and Christian traditions of the prophetic in which "Thus says the Lore", or "Eternal truth speaks from on top"'. Such a subject enacts authoritative violence and, as I demonstrate, reproduces the dehumanising dualisms of the coloniality of knowing-subjectivity.

I develop my critique around three areas: the knowing-subject; the performance of critique and their relationship with the 'other' or popular, demonstrating how in each Žižek's critique is reabsorbed into the coloniality of knowing-subjectivity. I then vision a decolonising politics of knowledge through the figure of the storyteller from the epistemological margins.

The Coloniality of Knowing

Decolonial theory demonstrates that coloniality[1] is the underside which co-created and sustains capitalism. To legitimate these logics, a particular politics of knowledge is naturalised and universalised. This coloniality of knowing is constituted through processes of subjectification which create

and (re)produce a particular knowing-subject – the Westernised and individualised subject encapsulated in Rene Descartes' articulation of the ego-cogito; the knowing-subject of 'I think therefore I am'. Yet, Dussel demonstrates how the Eurocentric ego-cogito was founded on the dualistic exclusion of the raced and feminised less-than-human other (Lugones 2010; Maldonado-Torres 2007).

This coloniality of knowing-subjectivity is embodied in the figure of the Prophet who comes to know through violent separation from this raced and gendered 'other' that is rendered invisible, mute and absent (Lugones 2010, p. 745). As Maldonado-Torres (2007) explains within these logics the experience of the damné is characterised by invisibility, the white gaze of suspicion and denial of the capacity of gift. Invisibility is constituted through the denial of knowledges to the raced and gendered other; suspicion is cast as the gaze in which the question is always asked 'are you like us', 'are you truly human'; and the denial of the capacity of gift legitimises the idea that there is nothing to learn from the damné undercutting the conditions of dialogue, reciprocity and humanisation. The Prophetic figure of knowing of capitalist-coloniality is thus a Monological subject speaking for and erasing the other.

This Prophetic subject has particular embodied attributes and affective practices which constitute and are constituted by gendered practices, ways of being and social relationships. His detached, masculinised rationality can and ought to control the unruly and irrational feminised emotions and bodily desires and the irrationalities of all others named as disorderly and underdeveloped (hooks 2001, 2003). Emotional, embodied, oral, popular and spiritual knowledges are delegitimised, invisibilised and denied. Other ways of relating to the earth, each other, the cosmos and our selves are denied either through assimilation or coercive elimination (Lugones 2010).

These epistemological logics are not external to the colonised and oppressed subject. Rather the long process of subjectification to which she is object creates as Gil et al. (2012, p. 11) describe 'epistemological wounds and ontological wounds'. Such wounding becomes internalised constituting an internal and external exile from self and other. As Anzaldúa (2009, p. ix) articulates:

> We (women of color) knew we were different, set apart, exiled from what is considered 'normal'. And as we internalised this exile, we came to see the alien within us and too often, as a result, we split apart from ourselves and each other. Forever after we have been in search of that self, that 'other' and each other.

The coloniality of knowing-subjectivity also underpins many traditions within Continental philosophy. Despite commitment to emancipation and attention to historicity this tradition reproduces a Eurocentric practice, subject and performance of critique which is self-referential and limited by its provinciality.[2] It is not however enough to particularise the claims of Continental philosophy because this invisibilises how the European 'Prophetic' knowing-subject has a dehumanising side which is co-constitutive of its very epistemological grounds of being. Accordingly, in what follows, I contribute to the task of decolonising critique through exposing the logics of coloniality upon which the Prophetic figure of critique is produced through a focus on the works of Slavoj Žižek who was described recently as 'the thinker of choice for Europe's young intellectual vanguard'.[3]

Žižek: The Maverick Prophet

Žižek develops critique without compromise, both in form where he despises what he calls 'political correctness' and in content where he targets without mercy political and theoretical opponents. His political analysis berates the shortcomings of popular rebellions and mobilisations from the Greek uprising, Occupy, direct action, feminist politics, and the Arab Spring to name but a few. Undoubtedly his writing is passionate, prolific and daring (sf. Zizek 2012, 2013). Yet his negative critique has been labelled nihilistic and empty without ability to construct the horizons of an emancipatory left imaginary. However, more problematic than the emptiness of his negative critique, as I demonstrate, is its reproduction of the coloniality of knowing-subjectivity.

Žižek enacts critique through negativity. As the maverick critic, he opens the possibility for 'real' acts/events by suspending and disturbing the hegemonic contours of current thinking, politics and ethics. As he argues:

> the point is not the shift in relations of power and domination . . . but the very fact of transcending- or rather momentarily cancelling- this very domain, of the emergence of a totally different domain of collective will (Žižek 2008a, p. 31).

The political event/act must decisively differentiate itself from all that has come, not as substance and possibility of what could be, but as nothingness,

a form of ground-zero (Butler et al. 2000, p. 131; Žižek 2002a). Negative critique is thus characterised by violent differentiation from the norm which creates the grounds 'for antagonistic universality, of the universality as struggle which cuts across the entire social body' (Žižek 2004c, p. 29). Revolutionary politics are groundless, necessarily disembodied and appear out of the horizon of utopian possibility offered 'by the brief apparition of a future utopian Otherness to which every authentic revolutionary stance should cling' (Žižek 2000b, pp. 159–160).[4]

Unsurprisingly then, negative critique does not involve an embrace of the other (as body or embodied experience) but rather 'overcoming and subduing, annihilating even, the other . . . a logic of the struggle with an antagonist' (2004a, p. 186). Thus authentic political acts must be 'impervious to any call of the Other' (2001, pp. 111, 175). The author as the knower becomes a disembodied speaker who is beyond critique, enacting an anti-ethic in the name of liberation, which is however premised on dehumanisation of the other through denial of their capacity of gift.[5]

Žižek is unable to develop an affirmative politics of knowledge that enacts ways of becoming, otherwise to the dehumanising underside of Prophetic knowing-subjectivity. Indeed the tendency in Žižek's enactment of critique is to 'speak over' multiple perspectives in the name of achieving 'real' acts (Dabashi 2011). This practice of critique fetishises the event as *the* political, reinforcing the coloniality of Prophetic-knowing in which the 'knowing' subject has the right and duty to silence 'others' (sf Zizek 2002b). Such a representational epistemological stance universalises a particular politics of knowledge and knowing-subjectivity constructed in and through onto-epistemological violence.

Performing the Prophet

The affective attributes and embodied norms of Žižek's Prophetic critic are violent passionate antagonism, opposed to sentimentality and tenderness. For Žižek this subject is tensed, ready to pounce on such weaknesses. The gendered norms of coloniality are reinscribed in a new 'revolutionary' dualism of violent passion versus sentimental superficiality, strength versus weakness, hardened bodies versus relaxed soft bodies. For Žižek, if we succumb to the latter we reproduce the contours of the hegemonic present. Creating emancipatory possibilities involve 'crushing' the individual to produce a New Man (Žižek 2000b, p. 131). The boundaries of critique are thus constructed as a traumatic awareness of the other, destruction of

the self and violent separation from the repressed Real. This normalises and naturalises a Monological masculinised knowing-subject who must close off to receiving and listening to the feminised and racialised other and re-enact the traumatic encounter of coloniality.

Žižek's conceptualisation of the affective and bodily attributes of the critic naturalises a one-sided articulation of human possibility, connection and practice. Such a performance of critique reinscribes the divisions between masculinised mind and feminised racialised body that characterise the affectivities of the knowing-subject of coloniality. Thus critique remains as a moment of disembodied and empty negativity, disruption and violence against the repressed Real. It therefore becomes the mirror image of this repressed Real, unable as a subject or a practice to produce a knowing-subjectivity which transcends the logics of coloniality.

Relationship with the Popular

Unsurprisingly, Žižek paints the terrain of common understanding as one of the repressed Real. This legitimises a politics of Monological knowing and an epistemology of blindness and deafness. 'Revolutionary politics is not a matter of opinions but of the truth on behalf of which one is compelled to disregard the opinion of the majority and to impose revolutionary will against it' (Žižek 2000a, p. 123). Accordingly, the Prophet has the right to suspend the ethical in the name of a glimpse of utopian possibility (Zizek 2004b, c, p. 517).

For Žižek, therefore, politics which begin from the embodied experiences of oppression and seek to prefigure liberation can only enact 'a desperate strategic retreat from the hopelessness of any approach based on the more global cognitive mapping of the situation' (2004d, p. 312). Such practices for Žižek are the antithesis of a revolutionary critic who must distinguish himself violently from the *herd* and their affective, embodied and cognitive attachments (Zizek 2006). As he explains (referencing Nietzsche), 'such moral sensitivity (to the experience of oppression) culminates in the contemporary Last Man who fears the excessive intensity of life' (2004d, p. 297).

In sum, Žižek constructs critique through negativity and demystifies elements of hegemonic thought and practise. However, his practice of critique is embedded in the denial of the damné's capacity of gift. It thus produces a Monological subject of knowing who has the duty to speak

over and name others' for their recuperation into capitalism. His affective commitments are those of violent differentiation and event production through the external imposition of the theorist's truth as an act of trauma. The critic is disembodied and de-subjectivised, beyond critique and necessarily blind and deaf to receiving from the other. A particular form of politics and of thinking the possibility of emancipatory critique becomes universalised as the very ontology of critical thought. Žižek as subject and practice of Prophetic negation becomes the mirror image of Enlightenment politics of knowledge and thus trapped in the coloniality of knowing-subjectivity.

The Storytellers

In this final section, I vision decolonising critique around the figure of the storyteller, a metaphor that exceeds the coloniality of knowing-subjectivity for it captures, as Christian (1987, p. 54) argues in relation to Afro-American women:

> how our theorising (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative form, in the stories we create, in the riddles and proverbs, in the play with language. How else have we managed to survive with such spiritedness the assault on our bodies, social institutions, countries and our very humanity?

Our storytelling is a meta-epistemological task which is deeply rooted in the existential questions and realities of those who have been denied knowing-subjectivity and internalised the external categories of being less-than human (West 1989, pp. 223, 165). In the process, those dehumanised affirm their existence and articulate a new epistemological orientation for decolonising practices of knowing, knowledges and knowing-subjectivities.

Bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa and Maria Lugones practice negative critique but in a way which is itself prefigurative, collective and constructs the revolutionary affirmative through possibilites of becoming other in thought, practice and as embodied subjects. Thus the orthodox practice of critique as negation is not enough. To remain within this move is to reinscribe the colonised into the coloniser's logics of representation and to assume that, as Lugones (2010, p. 748) describes, 'global capitalist colonial system is in every way successful in its destruction of people's knowledges,

relations and economies'. Rather we must remember that it is her belonging to impure communities that gives life to her agency; that she is:

> a being who begins to inhabit a fractured locus constructed doubly, who perceives doubly, where the sides of the locus are in tension, and the conflict itself actively informs the subjectivity of the colonized self in multiple relation' (Lugones 2010, p. 748).

Building upon the fracture in the colonial locus means that as bell hooks (1990, p. 15) argues:

> [that] in that vacant space after one has resisted there is still the necessity to become- to make oneself anew . . . That process emerges as one comes to understand how structures of domination work in one's own life, as one invents alternative habits of being and resists from marginal space of difference inwardly defined.

Thus, for the storyteller to transform capitalism is a praxical task which implies a stepping inwards to the contours of everyday life and inhabiting the fractured locus between processes of subjectification and active processes of decolonising subjectivity.

The methodologies of the storyteller become methodologies of everyday life that enable her to facilitate processes of critical intimacy as opposed to the groundless distance of the Prophet (Motta 2014). To step inwards involves committing to developing knowledge processes in which we collectively bring to awareness how systems of oppression wounds us and become embedded in our bodies, distort our emotions, separate us from our souls and limit our creative capacities (Levins Morales 1998). Critique for the storyteller, is not merely a process of contesting power relationships 'out there', or decrying the ignorance of the other and building the conditions for a nihilistic authentic act of truth as in Žižek, but of unlearning social relationships, subjectivities and ways of life and learning new ones.

How might the storyteller enact such a stepping inwards through critical intimacy? As I have demonstrated, the twentieth-century Prophetic figure of critique reinscribes the coloniality of knowing-subjectivity who expresses strength through mastery and control over the unruly emotions and irrational racialised body and cannot express his vulnerabilities or his loves for these are viewed as weaknesses. The storyteller is a figure who moves away from such patriarchal and racist enactments of masculinity towards a caring

and nurturing self who is able to participate in, and contribute to the building of, community. This involves transgressing the one-dimensional Prophetic subject constituted through splitting in which the knowing self is separated from, and/or gains control over, the feminised heart and body. The multidimensional storyteller is intensely embodied in the present and processes of (their) bodies and thus attentive to the rootedness of community in history, spatiality, cosmology, culture and social relations.

This subject could not seek to enact Žižek's violent differentiation as monologue, death and annihilation of the other (as self and community) as critique. Rather, they create the conditions of embodied communion through dialogue because, as Paulo Freire (cited in Cotos 2013, p. 112) describes:

> Dialogue is an existential demand and enables a form of meeting which fosters reflection and action . . . Dialogue is the terrain which grants meaning to desires, aspirations, dreams, hopes and makes possible an exchange of ideas and critical conversations that emerge from reality . . . To exist humanly is to speak the world . . . Dialogue is the meeting of people mediated by the world, which enables such a speaking of the world.

Dialogical construction breaks the domination of Monological thought, practice, and being as it opens up the space for multiplicity, for doubts, questions, and discontent with the world as it is (both internal and external). To foster such dialogical spaces involves turning towards the other and co-constructing the conditions for voice, speaking and listening. The storyteller 'knows' that those who have suffered multiple oppressions are often silent because of the inability to speak, the refusal/inability of others to listen, the risks involved in speaking truth to power and/or from the insufficiency of representation, the fact that some things cannot be spoken in words. She therefore comes to learn to take seriously these often invisibilised dynamics of power; dynamics which mark who is heard and who speaks and conversely who and how some are silenced. As Anzaldúa (2009, p. 75) explains:

> If I'm talking to you but not really listening or observing your body language and I'm not really empathic with you, I don't really hear or see you. It's a multilevel kind of listening . . . You listen with both outer ear and inner ear. This is the spiritual dimension . . . which combines activism with inner, subjective listening.

Thus the storyteller develops practices which facilitate inner voice and active listening; disalienating the internalisation of the denial of her/our capacity to gift, and in the process creates the grounds for opening towards critical intimacy. Through this, communities come to value and nurture their inner life, their knowing and their truth as they (we) begin to build the conditions for collective and critical readings of the world that enable their (our) transformation. As Anzaldúa (2009, p. 49) describes this is 'a going deep into the self and an expanding out into the world, a simultaneous recreation of the self and a reconstruction of society'.

Accordingly, this capacity for affirmative decolonising critique as Lorde (cited in hooks 1990, p. 19) reminds us, cannot be forged with the master's tools for 'these tools will never dismantle the master's house'. Rather we need to reimagine critique away from its embedding in the coloniality of knowing-subjectivity which universalises one form of knowing, knowledge and knower towards an embrace of multiple epistemologies, multiple subjects of knowing and multiple practices of creating knowledge.

A way which she might enact such a reinvention is through the co-creation of prefigurative epistemologies (Motta 2011). Prefigurative epistemologies are embedded in the collective construction of multiple readings of the world in which we speak in multiple tongues, rethinking and creating what it means to speak, to write, to theorise. As Anzaldúa (2007, p. 81) describes in relation to her experience – and eminently applicable here – 'I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing; I will have my voice . . . I will have my serpent's tongue- my woman's voice'.

Prefigurative epistemologies are inherently pedagogical, in that they involve the development of practices of (un)learning that enable decolonising practices of transformation. Critical to emancipatory pedagogies such as these are an overcoming of the dualism between mind and body, theory and practice and knower and known. As suggested above, key to this is a politics of dialogue – as opposed to Monological silencing practices and rationalities of the Prophet– in which all become co-constructors of knowledge, our social worlds and our selves.

This enables a disruption of the Prophet's illusion, as Mignolo and Walsh (2002, p. 19) argue 'that knowledge is disembodied and de-localised and that it is necessary in all parts of the planet to follow modernity's epistemology'. Through decentring these logics of knowledge of coloniality those on the margins become resisting subjects rather than objects of enquiry, actively

engaged in the creation of knowledge and in their own destinies finding our voices through renaming and recreating the world (see Freire 2000).

Performing the Storyteller

The storyteller embraces a full and multiple emotional palette. She is able to share and make visible her vulnerabilities as the epitome of strength and solidarity. She co-constructs spaces of dialogue through nurturing safety and recognition. As hooks (2003, p. 216) explains, 'We cannot really risk emotionally in relationships where we do not feel safe'. Central to such performance of critique is an ethics of love. Love not in its individualised, commodified and bourgeois form as lover of possessions, power-over and the disembodiment of desire but love as an ethics of affirmation of power-with and power-within.

This enables a stepping through anger towards self-love and love for the other. Such a transformation of the pain and anger of denial and devaluation into relationships of becoming, opening and integrity involves crossings into the borderlands. For Anzaldúa, such crossings are multiple and take us to our borders of self and certainty. As she describes (2007, p. 47), 'every increment of consciousness, every step forward is a travesia, a crossing. I am again an alien in new territory. And again, and again'.

The affective attributes of enabling such a practice of love cannot involve practices of shaming, ridicule and denial, as in Žižek. Rather, she nurtures critical practices of affirmation and emotional opening that foster practices of emotional alchemy which are 'difficult . . . painful' but which enable the transformation of our wounds into sources of joy, courage and love, 'without which there can be no wholeness' (hooks 2004, p. 156).

The ethics of love involve a commitment to creating affective and embodied interactions, connections and relationships enacted through the loving eye, the tender touch, the attentive ear and the knowing heart. Here song, dance, ritual in which our bodies, hearts, minds and souls meet are the epitomes of the storytellers practice in which through each thread of our weaving we remember and honour our histories and rework novel structures, conceptions of self and social relationships. As hooks (1990, p. 8) describes such practices:

> expressed in writing, teaching and habits of being [are] fundamentally linked to a concern with creating strategies that will enable colonised folks to decolonise their minds and actions, thereby promoting the insurrection of subjugated knowledges.

Relationship with the Popular

The storyteller unlike the Prophet does not seek aesthetic, epistemological and linguistic separation from the popular. The storyteller imbues the margins and our embodied experiences of oppression with sacredness for as Anzaldúa (2007, p. 60) describes those who are pushed out and have faced multiple oppressions are most likely to develop *la facultad* – the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities. The ones possessing this sensitivity are 'excruciatingly alive to the world' and from critical collective remembering, recreating and reweaving these experiences can develop the most complex and multiple forms of liberatory praxis.

The storyteller makes an active choice of and from the margins as a 'location of radical openness and possibility'. She comes to this space through her experiences of suffering, survival and practices of healing, and invites dialogue between and within our wounded selves and communities (Motta 2015). The storyteller, unlike the Prophet, does not herald their message as a truth to be followed but creates spaces of radical community and critical intimacy from which we can bear witness and remember. She is one yet multiple; open yet with clear boundaries of affirmation and dignity, able to create 'a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world' (hooks 1990, p. 153). Thus the storyteller unlike the Prophet does not frame, re-present and silence the oppressed 'other' but rather enacts a (collective) speaking of truth to power which in its practice creates us anew.

From Prophetic Negation to Prefigurative Affirmation

It is time to dethrone Žižek and the fetish of Prophetic negation from its epistemological privilege at the heart of twentieth-century critique, for this practice can only lead to a deepening of our moment of crisis not its transcendence. Such a dethroning is an invitation to self-reflect, unlearn dominant knowledge practices and subjectivities, and enact epistemological decolonisation.

The sketch of the figure of the storyteller I have drawn offers a beginning to think about practices of epistemological decolonisation. At its heart is a commitment to co-create spaces of radical community which honour experiences of oppression with epistemic privilege. The storyteller enters in her nakedness in such spaces not as the liberated or the liberator but as a participant in practices of healing. Her practice is embedded in an

ethics of love and enacts a stepping inwards to the other, within and without thus moving beyond Monological forms of knowing-subjectivity premised upon the dehumanisation of the raced and gendered other. Instead our epistemological horizons are opened to dialogical grounds of becoming through multiple knowledges, multiple subjects of knowing and multiple practices of creating knowledge. Here the storytellers are one and many, self as other, and speak, write and become in multiple tongues. The storytellers decolonise critique by reclaiming the revolutionary affirmative through prefigurative epistemologies.

Notes

1. Coloniality refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism. Thus coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and everyday (Nelson Maldonado Torres 2007, p. 243).
2. For a critical analysis of this tradition's spatio-temporal limitations see Maldonado-Torres 2006b; and for a critical analysis of its epistemological provinciality see Mignolo 2009.
3. http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2010/jun/27/slavoj-zizek-living-end-times.
4. See also for a critical analysis of this form of disembodied Prophetic critique West, 1989, p. 239.
5. See also for similar critiques of the anti-ethics of the politics of knowing of coloniality, Morgensen 2011; Mendoza 2013.

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CHAPTER 4

Denaturalising Society: Concrete Utopia and the Prefigurative Critique of Political Economy

Ana Cecilia Dinerstein

> *All science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincide* (Marx, *Capital* Vol. III, p. 956)

Abstract Dinerstein argues that the form of utopia today is not abstract but 'concrete'. Concrete utopias are 'denaturalising' capitalist-colonial society as they are negating the given and creating alternative practices at the grass roots. Dinerstein suggests that Marx's critique of political economy constitutes the most unforgiving critique of capitalist society. Yet, in order to grasp concrete utopias, Marx's critique should be read 'in the key of hope', that is through the lenses of Bloch's principle of hope. Like this, Marx's critique becomes a prefigurative critique of political economy that recognises the process of shaping concrete utopia as a critique of the value form from within the process of the self-expansion of value. In the final section, Dinerstein enquiries about the adequacy of the term concrete utopia to understand indigenous struggles for self-determination. She offers the notion of 'subsumption by exclusion' to argue for a particular form of subordination of indigenous peoples in capital.

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They 'appear' outside but in fact constitute a threat to the expansion of value. Both kinds of concrete utopia navigate the open veins of capital.

Keywords Ernst Bloch · Denaturalising capitalism · The not yet · Karl Marx · Prefigurative critique of political economy · Concrete utopia · Key of hope · Real subsumption by exclusion

Introduction

Capitalist society stands before us simply as 'society'. Although previous forms of society are recognised, and the possibility of the existence of another type of society is not resolutely discarded, the history of utopia seems to have stopped here. With capitalist society named as 'society', all we can do is to love it or hate it, criticise it, try to improve it, endure it. In this chapter, I argue that the naturalisation of capitalist society as society transpires a disbelief in 'abstract' utopias. Abstract utopias try to imagine what the future will bring *when* the right conditions would arrive. But the predominant form of utopia today is not abstract but concrete. Unlike abstract utopias, concrete utopias are collective struggles that sanction the anticipation of the future in the present. The concrete utopias that are emerging today are real struggles connected to peoples' everyday life. They are 'denaturalising' capitalist-colonial society as the only possible form of human society.

While there is no doubt that Marx's critique of political economy constitutes the most unforgiving critique of capitalist society able to challenge the 'normality' of capitalism, is it enough as a tool to grasp the prefigurative nature of concrete utopias today? In this chapter, I contend that in order to effectively engage and recognise the critical and prefigurative capacity of present social mobilisation to confront and move beyond the world of capital, that is, to become 'utopia as method' (Levitas 2013), Marx's critique of political economy should become a *prefigurative critique of political economy* (Dinerstein 2015, p. 204). The prefigurative critique of political economy highlights how present concrete utopias counter-pose an experiential critique that rejects value as a form of human society. The last section of the chapter respectfully deals with the question of whether the term concrete utopia is a good tool to understand indigenous struggles for self-determination. I offer the notion of 'subsumption by exclusion' to argue for a particular form of

subordination of indigenous alternative knowleges in capital. Like this, indigenous-lived utopias are not outside the world of capital but, like non-indigenous concrete utopias, they also navigate the open veins of capital.

On Concrete Utopia

Utopias are historical. Today, utopia is no longer an idea or plan to be concretised in the future. The present utopia is a 'concrete utopia' (Bloch [1959] 1986, p. 623). Concrete utopia is an enigmatic term, for utopia means 'nowhere' and 'concrete' means the materialisation of something: 'The only seemingly paradoxical concept of concrete utopia would be appropriate here' –argues Bloch – 'that is, of an anticipatory kind which by no means coincides with abstract utopia dreaminess, nor is directed by the immaturity of merely abstract utopian socialism' (Bloch [1959] 1986, p. 146). Bloch, writes Peter Thompson (2013):

> restored honour to the idea of utopia by seeing it not as a pre-existing programmatic state which had to be reached under wise and all-knowing leadership either of the party or the church, but as an autopoietic process driven by the labouring, creating and producing human being driven on by their material hunger as well as their dreams of overcoming that hunger.

Abstract utopia lacks historical specificity as it exists as a collective imagination to be realised in the future, while concrete utopia 'recovers the contents of what is not yet conscious' (Aínsa 2012, p. 25), in a permanent and contradictory movement towards the opening of new horizons. Bloch's notion of concrete utopia is not concerned with 'feasibility'. It is about dreaming in practice. To Bloch, utopia must be rescued as concrete praxis but this is not necessarily viable or probable (c.f. Wright 2013). The difference between possibility and probability is vital. As Strengers highlights, following Bloch, 'if we follow probability there is no hope, just a calculated anticipation authorised by the world as it is. But to "think" is to create possibility against probability . . . possibility cannot be calculated a priori because it implies the fact that the very description of the system itself can change. And you cannot calculate that' (Stengers and Zournazi 2002, pp. 245–246; see Amsler, in this book). The lack of correspondence between probability and possibility points to the existence of an excess that does *not yet* exist (Dinerstein 2015, p. 73).

The absence of objective conditions for change to take place does not constrain the possibility of conceiving of alternatives. In fact, the articulation of concrete utopias makes apparent how constraining is the reality represented by ‘facts’:

> ... because of this ‘facticity’, it was particularly easy to forget what had not yet become a fact was still in the process of becoming ... even as it was possible to forget the producer because of the reified product, and to forget the open future lying ahead of mankind because of the apparently fixed and completed region behind him. (Bloch 1971, p. 100)

Hence, in Bloch’s terms, utopia can be concrete despite the word utopia means no place for utopia ‘is no longer something that does not exist anywhere, but is an element of all human activity and at the same time is historical and empirical’ (Bronner 1997, p. 166). As a ‘praxis-oriented category’ (Levitas 1997, p. 70; Geoghegan 1996, p. 38), concrete utopia encompasses four modes of struggle.

Concrete utopia begins with *negation*: ‘social utopias ... were always capable of saying NO to the despicable, even if it was powerful, even if it was the habitual’ (Bloch [1959] 1986, p. 480). This is the ‘Not’ with which everything starts up and begins, around which every Something is still built’. While the NO is empty, it contains already the not yet within it (Bloch [1959] 1986, p. 307). Thus, it is not possible to disentangle negation from hope, for negation makes possible to get involved with what is already on its way. Concrete utopias bring about real *possibility*: they are ‘stepping stones of what the human individual and the world could become’ (Zipes 1988, p. xxvii).

But we must be absolutely clear about the relation between concrete utopia and capitalist-colonial society: concrete utopia emerges and evolves within, against and beyond the social relation of capital and its institutions. Concrete utopia is not outside capital. Concrete utopia flourishes as a struggle against the real ‘subsumption of society in capital’ (Negri 1992). Real subsumption is not an economic but a political process, that is, a process through which capital becomes the ‘organising principle of society’ thus taking over ‘not only human powers but also the institutions through which human life is dominated’ (Dinerstein and Neary 2002, p. 237).

As a praxis-oriented activity within this dehumanised dynamic, concrete utopia is crisscrossed by the contradictions that emerge in the process. Conceived of in the currents of River Capital, concrete utopia is compelled to navigate its open veins, its canals and passageways,

stop at its stations, fall into its vessels, swim against the current. In political terms concrete utopia entails a struggle with, against and beyond the state. As the political form of capital, the state permanently intends to incorporate, silence, domesticate, repress, that is, *translate*, the anticipatory and prefigurative nature of utopia into the grammar of order, via policy, monetisation and the law. Concrete utopia is shaped by those relations and dynamics, oppressions and social forms that she wants to obliterate. *State translation* means much more than co-optation, recuperation and appropriation: it means to circumscribe utopia with power and narrate it within specific 'parameters of legibility' (Vázquez 2011) that exclude and invisibilise the emancipatory nature of concrete utopia. The risk to be translated is always latent. If there is hope, there is disappointment. Concrete utopia is disappointable.

Yet, while experience reveals the contradictory character of all concrete utopias and high probability of disappointment, in the process concrete utopia transforms its mediations, thus producing surplus possibilities that cannot be translated into the grammar of capitalist colonial language. To keep this 'untranslatability' of concrete utopia expanding is one of the most difficult tasks of the 'art of organising hope' (Dinerstein 2015), for it needs to be recognised, cherished and nurtured. But this *untranslatable* excess is invisible to the eyes of social sciences. I have brought the issue full circle back to the beginning: in order to grasp concrete utopia we are required to denaturalise capitalist society.

On Naturalisation and Dystopian Sciences

Classical political economy naturalised capitalist society with the use of formal abstractions that described but did not explain it. Following Clarke (1991), in *Wealth of Nations,* Adam Smith describes the process of division of labour as a result of the natural tendency oriented towards social progress of individuals and social cooperation. However, Smith was innovative. To him, the expansion of the division of labour was not a peaceful process. Breaking with the Hobbesian natural law, Smith was the first one to introduce – from a materialist perspective – a distinction between three classes of capitalist society, 'the owners of the stock, the land owners and workers' (Smith in Clarke 1991, p. 24). Clarke (1991) highlights that insofar as for Smith the division of labour was natural rather than technical and social, the former was seen as a contested process, but not as an antagonistic or contradictory one. Labour, land and capital appeared as

the natural factors of production, externally related to one another through cooperation and exchange. In this way, political economy concealed the *social* character of labour in capitalism, naturalised capitalist relations of production. It uncritically ratified that the ways in which social relationships are presented to us is what it is, and through which *social* powers are mediated through things that appear to be powerful (Clarke 1991, p. 85). But 'revealing the social character of labour in capitalism is far more complex than it looks, since formal abstractions are not simply "ideological devices" to be revealed, but reflect the fetishised world of capital as we experience it' (Clarke 1991; in Dinerstein 2012, p. 524).

I used elsewhere the example of unemployment in order to illustrate how it is a real situation that, nonetheless, should not be naturalised by social sciences. Unemployment is treated as a sad reality of our time, unwittingly produced by economic forces, and it is assisted by policy, charity or communal survival strategies. But it is also true that the existence of unemployment relies on a specific *form of society*, which, like in no other, we *need to work for a wage in order to live* (Dinerstein et al. 2016). Economic theory analyses unemployment abstractly and statistically, while sociologist focus on the predicaments suffered by those unemployed. Neither of them are willing to recognise that this would not happen in an alternative society. The critique of political economy grasps unemployment as a constitutive dimension of capital, which does not constitute the *lack of* capitalist work but a particular *form of* it (Dinerstein 2002, 2015). The difference is vital. While the idea of 'the lack of' leads us directly to believe that the problem is unemployment and the solution to unemployment is to create jobs, in the latter we realised that the problem is *not* unemployment but capitalist work altogether and therefore, the final solution to the problem depends on the struggles for an alternative society. Social scientists have the opportunity to be enlightened by grass root movements' experiences that today are taken the second path. They suggest that in order to stop being unemployed we must create an alternative society with an alternative form of the economy and politics, ethics, pedagogies and ecologies: A society where people do not have to work in order to live. Some groups within the movement of unemployed workers in Argentina, for example, experimented with alternative forms of production, property, consumption, politics, economy. As a result, they denaturalised economic categories in practice: they produced an 'experiential critique' of social theory (see Dinerstein,

Chapter 1, in this book). There are many more examples. Unemployment is not an illusion. It is a real illusion, that is, it is a 'economic fact of contemporary society', if the latter is a *capitalist* society.

Marx's Critique of Political Economy

Marx's *critique of* political economy did not offer an alternative interpretation of the 'economy' or an alternative economic thought: there is not such as thing as Marxist political economy. Marx's *critique of* political economy revealed the social constitution of labour in capitalist society, which gives such society a specific historically determined form, based on the production and expansion of value through the exploitation of labour power as waged labour. Labour and capital are explained by a violent process of expropriation through which capital and wage labour were constituted as antagonistic forces in an ongoing process up to the present.

Marx criticised the *formal* abstractions of political economy, that is, 'capital', 'labour', for they were used as categories detached from the struggle they embodied. The formal abstractions of political economy create an abstract world where things and categories, for example, money, acquire life of their own. Marx's critique of political economy reveals, as Bonefeld (2016, p. 234) suggests, that capitalist society is 'governed by abstract economic laws that manifest the social relations as relations between seemingly self-moving economic things . . . the social world manifest itself behind the backs of individuals, and yet, this manifestation is their own work'. As a result of the naturalisation of inhuman and ghostly forces, the economy becomes something superior, unmanageable, that exists above us, like God: 'Since nobody individually is in control, nobody individually can be blamed' (Bonefeld 2016, p. 235). To Marx, the word *labour* was not a descriptor of a natural activity, but a category that encapsulates a specific development of a relation of struggle, that is, a *determinate* abstraction. Categories, suggests Clarke (1991, p. 141) 'correspond not to essential qualities embodied in things, but to determinate social processes'. Unlike the formal abstractions of political economy (and today's social sciences), which abstract social phenomena from the struggle that is condensed in them, determinate abstractions 'are abstractions in and through which phenomena obtain' (Gunn 1992, p. 23). Determinate abstractions are not 'abstractions *of* reality', that is, abstractions from the social relations which produce them, but they are abstractions *in* reality (Gunn 1992, my italics).

The critique of formal abstractions enables us to reveal the hidden material processes of struggle, which fosters historical social forms that mediate the production of both order and insubordination. Marx's critique of political economy uncovers the mystery in the value form: 'human labour power in its fluid state, or human labour, creates value, but it is not itself value. It becomes value in its coagulated state, in objective form' (Marx 1990, p. 142). The problem that we confront is that in capitalism concrete work is only socially validated when it is abstracted from the workers' person, sensuality and sensibility. The fact that concrete labour is only recognised as part of a homogeneous substance, that is, abstract labour, that is, the socially necessary labour time in a determinate historical moment of the development of economic forces, is one of the most abstract yet fascinating features of capitalism. While concrete labour matters to workers, and the employers who hires them to a lesser degree, the transformation of concrete labour into abstract labour expands capital's *indifference* (Cleaver 2002). Concrete labour becomes irrelevant for capital, as it has no longer any autonomous existence separated from abstract labour. The latter is the specific *form of existence* of human practice in capitalist society. This is why everything seems to be happening at our backs, because it is abstract labour and not concrete labour what counts as the substance of value. As value self-expands, it expands indifference, creating a gap between my concrete experience and what makes 'the economy' flourish. Therefore, our struggles, highlights Holloway (2010, p. 157) are not struggles between 'capital' and 'labour' (the orthodox Marxist view), but 'the struggle of doing against labour' (and therefore against capital). To Holloway, we do not struggle against capital but against abstract labour. Our struggle is a struggle to defend our doing (power to do) against being transformed into an abstract substance that self-expands (Dinerstein 2012). Not for nothing, Marx calls value a 'phantom-like objectivity' or a 'purely fantastic objectivity ... which has nothing corporeal about it' (Marx 1993, p. 309). Although value no empirical evidence, and is only palpable in the form of money, it dominates the social field. Class struggle is then constitutive contradiction of everyday social existence in capitalist society (Dinerstein 2002).

The ongoing process of abstraction (Kay and Mott 1982) is not an economic problem but an eminently *political* one, for we seek to reaffirm human life in a world ultimately dominated by a ghost. The struggle against the expansion of indifference entailed in the value form, that is, a

struggle against an invisible enemy, is mediated, and fosters new social forms of the social existence of labour and its concrete utopias.

The *Prefigurative* Critique of Political Economy

Marx's ruthless critique of capitalist society reveals the hidden workings of capital and opens to the future. By reading Marx's critique of political 'in the key of hope' that is, as a *prefigurative critique of political economy* (Dinerstein 2015), we can appreciate how concrete utopia confronts value as anti-value in motion. The prefigurative critique of political economy is inspired in the work of Ernst Bloch. Utopia is 'a necessary element in Marxist analysis, since concrete utopia is embodied in Marxism where real change and aspirations are interwoven' (Levitas 1990, p. 92). Bloch enables Marxism to become a critique able to *recognise* 'what is becoming as an aspect of reality . . . and [to reveal] the process by which utopia is possible. Possibility –*real* rather than merely formal possibility –provides the link between Marxism and Utopia' (Levitas 1990, p. 92). As Boldyrev (2015, p. 26) writes, 'Bloch regards the "utopian function" of being as a product of social relations. Any dream, any project, any outline of the future is conditions by the objective tendencies of the epoch, is embedded in social history.

Decolonising Concrete Utopia

So far, I have argued that concrete utopia breaks the process of real subsumption of society in capital from within the process of valorisation, and that, in order to recognise how this process unfolds place, Marx's critique of political economy must be read in the key of hope. But there is another question to be asked: is the term 'concrete utopia' a good tool to understand indigenous struggles for self-determination? Today, this question has become important amidst a movement towards the decolonisation of solidarity (Land 2015), the decolonisation of critique (see Motta in this book) and the need to decolonise Marxism (Dinerstein 2016). Following Luisetti et al. (2015, p. 9) 'in this socio-historical moment, a multiplicity of cross-currents are generating alternative geopolitics of knowledge, holding the promise of reconfiguring the modern Eurocentric episteme'. Do indigenous cosmologies and *lived* utopias navigate the open veins of capital? How?

This question begs for another, prior, query: whether and how indigenous people are *subsumed* in capitalist social relations. Roughly, both Subaltern Studies and the decolonial school argue that, historically, indigenous peoples have not been integrated into the international labour market, or they have been incorporated only 'formally'. Mainly, as Santos suggests, they have been oppressed and invisibilised (Santos 2007) instead. Does this mean that indigenous peoples exist *outside* the world of capital? Has their relation with the capitalist world changed at all over the years, considering the expansive character of global neoliberal capitalism and coloniality of the past 30 years?

Chibber's view (2013, p. 111) is that capitalism universalises a particular strategy of economic reproduction, but this does not mean that it has homogenised power relations in the West and East. If we uncouple univerzalization and homogeneisation as he suggests, we observe that the universalisation of capital promotes differences which coexist with the self-expansion of global capital as a universal project. If we accept that the key feature of capitalism *is not* the incorporation of workers into the production process but the subordination of the concrete labour into abstract labour, it is likely that the lack of incorporation of indigenous peoples into the production process is not an impediment for their subordination to the value form that dominates human society.

The real 'subsumption of society in capital' (Negri 1992) acquires specific *forms* in different economic formations. I offered elsewhere the term 'subsumption by exclusion' (Dinerstein 2015) to designate a particular case of the real subsumption of indigeneity in capital. 'Real subsumption by exclusion' designates a process that begins with the invention of the 'Indio' as the inferior race: as a 'supra-ethnic category' (Bonfil Batalla 1987). Following Bonfil Batalla (1987) the term does not denote any specific content of the groups that it comprises, but rather entails the condition of being colonised (Bonfil Batalla 1987). As argued elsewhere, '"Indio" emerged as a social category that was not related to any particular quality of the persons involved but arbitrarily designated "inferiority" . . . "Indio" is intrinsic to the process of nation building for it required the destruction of indigenous peoples' rights to their communal lands and self-government, and this included the physical elimination of the "unruly"' (Dinerstein 2015, p. 213)

The term 'real subsumption by exclusion' designates other form of (non)subordination of indigenous peoples in capital. The oppression and

invisilisation of their cosmologies allowed the possibility to naturalise capitalist society. Exclusion is a phenomenological expression of a distinctive experience of real subsumption of indigenous cosmologies into value. Politically, 'real subsumption by exclusion' permits to uncover the power of indigenous insurgency, resistances and cosmologies as *internal* threats to the universalising force of capital. Both types of concrete utopia in their own ways open physical, geographical, metaphorical spaces where the world of abstractions that dominate social life is confronted with life experiences. As the real subsumption of society in capital means that *resistance lives at the core of capital*, wherever capital flows, it will produce concrete utopias in its way.

A Final Thought

Marx was never engaged in any 'descriptions of the future', which as Ernst Bloch reminds us, it is why he 'called his work "Capital" and not "Appeal for Socialism"' (Bloch [1959] 1986, p. 620). He 'never endorses given social form as a solution' (Hudis 2012, p. 209). But *the future*, which Bloch sees as deliberately missing in Marx work, is present in his writings 'as a knowing future capable of being shaped' (Bloch [1959] 1986, p. 621). By reading Marx in the key of hope, the prefigurative critique of political economy discussed in this chapter emphasises this untheorised dimension of Marx's critique after the collapse of abstract utopia. As Fritsch et al (2016, p. 12) argue, 'language doesn't *produce* the world ... however, it does organize and delimit its objects'. In Bloch's hands, Marxism becomes 'a philosophy of the future' (Bloch 1970). It 'stands for the philosophy of the future of action and the constitution of a new subjectivity' (Boldyrev 2015, p. 30) at this particular dystopian and disappointing world political and economic conjunction. In the end, Bloch's *Principle of Hope* was originally titled 'Dreams of a Better Life' (Thompson 2013: n/p). To articulate these dreams is the fundamental task of the *prefigurative* critique of political economy for a critical (i.e. humanized) social science.

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PART II

The (Re)production of Life

CHAPTER 5

Transgressing Gender and Development: Rethinking Economy Beyond 'Smart Economics'

Suzanne Bergeron

Abstract This chapter provides a critical rereading of recent gender and development initiatives that emphasises the 'cracks' that are opened up by their attention to equity and economic difference. While acknowledging that many progressive ideas are co-opted when institutions such as the World Bank reduce gender equity to 'smart economics', the chapter highlights the ways that the contradictions and contestations that emerge from these cracks can never be entirely co-opted.

Keywords Gender and development · 'Smart economics' · Economic difference · Interstitial resistance · Crack

Introduction

Gender equity has long been viewed as a rather trivial matter by institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other international financial organisations – more or less a distraction

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from the 'real' development issues of economic growth and efficiency. But as the failures of structural adjustment led to a search for new development strategies in the late 1990s, attention to gender increasingly moved from the margins into the mainstream. The inclusion of gender equality as one of the 2015 United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, the World Bank's devotion of their entire 2012 *World Development Report* to the topic and the creation of the Women's Empowerment Office at United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in 2012 are just a few examples of development's increased emphasis on the goal of improving lives for women. Alongside this increased attention to questions of equity has been the integration of economic issues and activities historically associated with women, many of which lie 'outside' of capitalist markets. Non-market social reproduction, household economies, community-building work and so forth are now acknowledged and even supported in development policy. So, too, are personal attributes that were previously ignored or dismissed as 'non-economic' because they did not fit market rationalities, such as care and cooperation. Thus, increased attention to gender can be viewed as a project of potential transformation away from neo-liberal business-as-usual in development policy. It opens space for foregrounding equity over market efficiency, and acknowledges the heterogeneous landscape of the economy, including activities and subjectivities outside of the capitalist frame.

However, this increased attention to questions of justice and economic difference has, by and large, failed to challenge development's underlying capitalist economic model. Unlike the feminist social movements that have called for these alternatives, development policy remains mired in a neo-liberal approach that limits its ability to imagine economy otherwise. It focuses on improving outcomes for women by reforming, rather than jettisoning, the existing economic orthodoxies that created so much dislocation and exploitation. Further, by leaving intact the notion of a pre-existing capitalist logic to the economy, this policy approach shifts the conversation away from justice and ethics and towards a technocratic discourse of gender and development. Consequently, questions of justice and economic difference are too often truncated within institutional gender and development policy around only those aspects of gender transformation that can contribute to market efficiency and growth. This is most apparent in the dominant 'gender equity is smart economics' discourse that touts 'women's empowerment' through insertion into labour and credit markets as contributing to goals of growth and efficiency.

In this chapter, I explore ways that the spaces of economic alterity that have emerged under the market-centred, 'smart economics' framings of mainstream gender and development can be reimagined from a critical feminist political economy perspective. I begin with a brief summary of the 'smart economics' approach to gender justice in development, and follow that with an alternative reading of the economic diversity that is pushed to the margins in 'smart economics' frameworks. Then, drawing on new understandings of economic difference and capitalist resistance developed by J. K. Gibson-Graham and John Holloway, I discuss ways to read these frameworks for 'cracks' that can lead to reconceptualisations of the economy that breaks from the singular capitalist logic imagined in mainstream 'smart economic' approaches. I then show how this approach can also reframe gender and development as a site of ethical negotiation rather than technical management towards strict efficiency aims. I end by discussing the potential and limits for critical feminist political economists to work around the business case agenda towards more transformative outcomes.

Gender, Development and 'Smart Economics'

In recent years, it seems that even the most resistant of organisations have embraced justice for women as an intrinsic goal of development. For instance, the World Bank's 2012 World Development report is based on the premise that 'women's empowerment and gender equality are development objectives in their own right' (World Bank 2012, p. 2). IMF director Christine Lagarde recently argued that, 'women are over-exploited. This needs to change ... it is a matter of justice' (Lagarde 2014). This focus on gender justice in development, initially rooted in transnational feminist and global justice movements (Batliwala 2007), has been adopted by a host of institutions as a response to their critics, and in the wake of the failures and of the economic policies they had enacted in the 1980s and 1990s.

Alongside this interest in promoting feminist goals of equity is a repositioning of the activities and motivations formerly viewed as 'outside' of the economy such as care, unpaid household production, community work and cooperation within development. A wide range of new projects are based on the idea that gender equity can only be achieved if attention and support is given to the previously invisibilised unpaid household care work that women do in households and communities (Molyneux 2006;

Bedford 2009). For example, policies now aim to make households egalitarian in order to reduce the inequity of women's care burdens, with the belief that these efforts will improve the well-being of women and all family members. This focus on the household as a site of production and locus of gender struggle marks an extraordinary shift from past practices, and reflect decades of effort by transnational feminist activists to get power dynamics and women's non-market activities on the map.

Further, in addition to recognising non-market production, gender equity policies now value motivations not generally associated with the market such as care and cooperation. For instance, women's greater cooperative, caring and altruistic proclivities are now widely celebrated as an important form of social capital, rather than out of step with development goals (Rankin 2001; World Bank 2012). Because of this, women have received expanded opportunities to participate in cooperative microcredit lending circles and non-profit organisations. Much of the thinking behind this shift comes out of the alternative, participatory and human-centred development paradigm that emerged within social movements in the Global South in the 1970s that called for participatory forms economy as an alternative to the top-down, capitalist and growth-centred approaches of the mainstream (Escobar 1992). Like attention to justice as a goal in its own right, this focus on non-market activities and motivations marks a significant break with those earlier mainstream practices that invisibilised and/or pathologised such activities as 'non-economic' and/or 'backward'.

However, these glimmers of difference are typically made sense of in contemporary gender and development through a narrow approach that recentres the market, and thus contains much of their transformative potential. That is because they are typically focused through a 'business case' for gender equity that connects empowerment and economic difference to the 'smart economics' of achieving goals of growth and efficiency. For example, women's caring proclivities in households are valued for their ability to generate human capital for enhanced productivity, rather than being viewed as an alternative subjectivity that might be at odds with capitalist rationality. As the 2012 *World Development Report* puts it, '(g)reater control over household resources by women leads to more investment in children's human capital, with dynamic positive effects on economic growth' (World Bank 2012, p. 4). Similarly, the Nike *Girl Effect* campaign was launched to promote investments in girls in order to achieve reduced fertility, Gross Domestic Product growth and intergenerational poverty alleviation under

the assumption that if resources are provided to girls who will grow up to be caring mothers, their children's health and educational outcomes will improve (Nike Inc. 2009). As the Girl *Effect* website states, '(i)nvesting in a girl stops poverty before it starts' (Nike Inc. 2016). Further, rather than looking to cooperative microcredit lending circles to foster cooperation, the emphasis is on cooperation as a way to minimise the risk to lenders, and drawing women into circuits of global finance to become budding entrepreneurs (Roy 2010; Karim 2011).

This 'smart economics' discourse has by now permeated the global development agenda, and can be found in a range of initiatives from the World Bank's 'gender equality is smart economics' (World Bank 2006) to UN Women's 'Equality Means Business' empowerment principles (UN Women 2014), to the Nike 'Girl Effect' campaign (Nike Inc. 2009), to the IMF, USAID and legions of corporate philanthropies. In the smart economics framework, women are a good investment, it is argued, because they are caring and thus committed to investing in their children and/or have a more cooperative attitude than men. So while significant emphasis has been placed on women's alternative economic locations (households, the informal sector) and subjectivities (care, cooperation) in the smart economics framework, progressive goals have been diverted by their placement under the umbrella of a unitary capitalist economy. In addition, these initiatives often reify rather than challenge gender norms and stereotypes in their efforts to harness women's contributions based on their presumed identities as caretakers and mothers (Bedford 2009; Bergeron 2011).

It is not surprising, then, that the expanded space for addressing gender equity and economic difference in development over the past decade has not been met with much optimism by progressive feminists looking to engender post-neo-liberal alternatives. In fact, a fair number of critical feminist analysts view this recent shift as 'business as usual', made all the more insidious by the fact that neo-liberal agendas are provided a smokescreen by being wrapped in a language of care and equity while also trading on an essentialist account of gender roles. As Adrienne Roberts writes, the recognition of diverse economic practices and motivations within gender and development is a purely instrumental one, part of an effort to increase the 'penetration of capital into new spaces and social relations' (Roberts 2008, p. 535). Other critics have noted that this new focus on gender and development calls upon values of care and altruism only to shore up its attempts to construct women as self-managing

subjects who can make up for the withdrawal of state support for their households (Rankin 2001; Roy 2010). Others argue that development's attention to women's labour in the reproductive sphere is due to the fact that such unpaid labour mitigates the impact of neo-liberal policies on household well-being (Chant 2012). So if attention is paid to caring labour and motivations in development policy, these critics argue, it is less about acknowledging the household as a realm of economic difference that contributes to human well-being, or fostering cooperation and care, than it is about co-opting feminism to make an instrumental argument.

Beyond the Business Case

These critiques provide a much-needed reminder that feminist aims can be thwarted when they are taken up within the spaces of global governance, as well as a useful counter-narrative to claims that the current approach to gender and development policy constitutes a victory for feminist alternatives when so clearly it is not. But the way that capitalism is presented in these critiques – as *a priori* determining all outcomes and bending all agendas to its will – makes it difficult to imagine development otherwise. The bulk of feminist criticism of current gender and development policy may therefore give too much power to the capitalist economy, even as these critics acknowledge the existence and value of a diversity of economic practices and motivations outside of it (Gibson-Graham 2006).

But what if instead of seeing capitalism as an impenetrable system that determines the course of everything – including the messy business of gender and development – we could imagine these glimmers of economic difference in policy as 'cracks' of opportunity for challenging the capitalist neo-liberal order? John Holloway provides an opening to such reimagining in his book *Crack Capitalism*, which argues that social change can be fostered by the creation of 'cracks' and fissures in the supposed logic of capitalism that allow us to move beyond it to a more just world (Holloway 2010, p. 11). Holloway's idea of cracking open the 'world that presents itself as closed' (Holloway 2010, p. 9) can be extended to the knowledge and practice of gender and development. The 'business case' approach, as presented by both its champions and its critics, views the world as a closed capitalist system to which all non-capitalist activities and motivations function only as resources for capitalism. An alternative reading could identify the glimmers of alternative economic and social practices that might emerge from the 'cracks' of

economic diversity in gender and development – rather than presenting them in terms of a closure that gives capitalism a social cohesion and is difficult to break (Holloway 2010, p. 52). Of course not all resistances will create post-capitalist possibilities, and in fact invocations of 'community' and 'care' and 'participation' and 'women's empowerment' and the like may very well be integrated into projects to sustain capitalism, as the critics suggest. But when development is seen as only doing the work of global capitalism, it is itself presented as a unified force rather than a multivocal site of contestation over political projects (Ferguson 2009). Thus we cannot know in advance the effect of these openings, as they occupy the contradictory space between resistance and integration that cannot be entirely co-opted or contained by the state and capitalist system (Holloway 2010; Dinerstein 2012).

The question remains, then, as to how these glimmers and openings might allow for activities and motivations that are at odds with the 'business case' being pursued by development institutions. By refusing to define capitalism as a determining force, could we be open to imagining ways to take these openings and cultivate economic subjects-in-becoming who are guided by motivations of care, collectivity and ethical concern (Graham and Amariglio 2006)? Might we look to recent shifts in gender and development for spaces to foster projects that decentre neo-liberal subjectification in favour of emerging motivations of solidarity and care through which new conceptions of the self can be created (Gibson-Graham 2006, p. xxv), or what Holloway (2010) might identify as a 'crack' or interstitial moment of resistance? Knowing there are no guarantees, we might still consider letting go of totalising stories and adopting an approach that 'tolerates "not knowing"' (Gibson-Graham 2006, p. xxxi) and an orientation towards possibility.

Economic Difference and the Contradictions of the Business Case Approach

As the pioneering work of J. K. Gibson-Graham (1996, 2006) suggests, this orientation towards possibility is predicated upon imagining the economy as a diversity of economic practices that include market and non-market activities, individual and caring motivations, multiple class forms that include cooperative, capitalist and other modes of production, and so forth. These insights regarding economic diversity tandem with the work of feminist economists such as Debbie

Budlender, who contend that between one-third to one-half of all economic activity, such as housework, child care and agricultural production, is performed outside of the market (Budlender 2008). Others have examined household forms themselves and found a heterogeneous landscape in which some are organised around traditional patriarchal divisions of labour in which women assume the care role, while others are independent households (female or male headed) and still others are more cooperative in terms of their division of labour (Cameron 2002). Still others have shown that households function internationally in terms of financial support, labour and acts of mutual aid (Safri and Graham 2010). Still other work has shown that informal caregiving in households can result in the emergence of community-based mutual aid practices and forms of solidarity (Healy 2008). This understanding of household economies shows a diversity of economic activities and practices that are not necessary beholden to either the dictates of traditional gender roles or the needs of capitalist reproduction. And, by not reducing the economy to capitalism, it becomes possible to recognise different forms of economic practice both within and beyond capitalism. This reimagining of the economy as a landscape of difference makes heterogeneous practices visible, which in turn enables a different understanding of the world beyond the standard 'narrative of eviction' that excludes the stories, forms and practices that tend to disrupt capitalism's presumed order (Sassen 1998, p. 82).

As it relates to the topic of this chapter, such an approach opens space for recognising that capitalist logic does not dictate the course of all development policy. In the messy business of gender and development, there are multiple constituencies and forces – including feminist and other connected social movements, corporate interests, institutional cultures of international organisations, gender champions working within the system and so forth – who are involved in this recent shift of attention to gender equity and economic diversity in development policy. Further, even the business case agenda can be reframed and transformed through the implementation process in the practices of local development brokers and the subjects who are the targets of policy themselves. The 1970s shift to a centring of 'basic needs' such as nutrition in development was undertaken to better achieve goals of efficiency and growth by organisations such as the World Bank and International Labor Organization, for instance, but this was 'translated' by Latin American social movements into more transformative outcomes such as land reform (Porter 1995). Similarly,

the business case approach that contains equity and economic diversity concerns within a narrow efficiency framework can be potentially cracked open in certain contexts.

A recent case study by Altan-Olcay (2015) of Turkish programmes aimed at fostering gender empowerment and economic growth demonstrates some of these contradictions. The study, focusing on the relationship between non-governmental organization field officers and programme beneficiaries in a microcredit and cooperative development scheme, shows that attempts by the field officers to either identify or inculcate self-managing neo-liberal subjectivities among the beneficiaries encountered myriad forms of resistance, largely because the women did not identify with the characteristics that were assigned to them. Similarly, attempts to identify the women beneficiaries as contributing to their households in their presumed roles as carers resulted in contradictory outcomes, as did the presumption that access to credit or work was inherently empowering to these women with regard to the respect they received from their husbands and sons (Altan-Olcay 2015, p. 13). Thus, 'instead of the consolidation of neo-liberal subjectivities, what transpired…was a more complicated process' (Altan-Olcay 2015, p. 14). Research such as this shows that gender and development is a messy process that does not always achieve its stated aims of neo-liberalism.

Another example of how business case approaches land on the ground in ways that differ from presumed outcomes is offered by the Community Economies Collective (CEC) and Katherine Gibson's (2009) work on a gender and development project in the rural Philippines. This project, funded by the Australian Agency for International Development, was aimed at encouraging activity by women domestic workers with remittance income in order to both empower them and achieve efficiency goals in the region. It was also part of a broader neo-liberal scheme to defund state supports for rural development. However, CEC and Gibson were able to widen the cracks of alternative motivations and economic diversity to produce a different set of outcomes than those anticipated by the funders. They launched a migrant savings group aimed at investing in social enterprises to create employment opportunities that provided an alternative to outmigration. Through this process, economic subjects and activities motivated by care and solidarity came into being. For example, the savings group supported a rice-processing social enterprise in the area that served local rice farmers. The coordinator of the rice-processing centre realised that these farmers were effectively in a state of feudalism

due to their debt–peonage relationship to the wholesalers. The coordinator then staked everything to buy the farmers debt to get them out of that exploitative relationship (2009). Over time, the rice-processing centre also offered a number of linked social enterprises that served poor farmers. It also supported a group of local woman who started a social enterprise making ginger tea. These women moved from individualised home production to these cooperative, fostering networks of support and solidarity between them (2009). As Stephen Healy and I argue elsewhere (Bergeron and Healy 2015), this example illustrates the following regarding its break from the business case corporate lexicon. First, while the outcome is obviously uncertain, this is an example of how the diversity of economic practices comes together to create class transformation from feudal to independent production, and from self-employment to cooperatives, among other changes. Second, the project fostered relations of interdependence and care and practices of mutual aid. Finally, this project of social enterprise development relied upon ethical negotiations – not just bottom-line concerns of efficiency and growth – in its decision-making processes.

Conclusion

While not minimising the shortcomings of the 'smart economics' approach to gender and development – with its fetishisation of market efficiency and essentialist framings of gender roles – this chapter has argued that the openings created by its recognition of care, solidarity and economic diversity might provide ways for imagining and doing development otherwise. This alternative approach hinges on the recognition that neo-liberalism is a discourse that in part constitutes its subjects, and that even a critique of neo-liberalism – such as the one provided by some feminist critics of the business case – can increase capitalism's power effectiveness by presenting it as a cohesive and totalising force. Instead, I have emphasised the possibility of nurturing alternatives grounded in the recognition of potential cracks in the capitalist frame. By letting go of the monolithic view of the economy held by both the 'business case' advocates and their feminist critics, a new picture of the economy emerges. This new picture of a diverse economy need not reinforce essentialist notions of gender, nor need it be complicit in attempts to subsume all activities under the supposed self-expanding force of capitalism (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2006). By rejecting the business case approach that defines

everything with reference to capitalism, space is opened up to cultivating economic subjects who are guided by motivations of care, ethical concern and solidarity from which we can imagine a process of development that allows us the chance of a future worth inhabiting.

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CHAPTER 6

Producing the Common and Reproducing Life: Keys Towards Rethinking *the Political*

Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, Lucia Linsalata and Mina Lorena Navarro Trujillo

Abstract Is it possible to think of other ways of producing concrete wealth, forms not fully subjected to the mandates of capital? In our work we think about this question through the theoretical lens of what we call *the production of the commons in common*. Our starting point, inspired by the work of Silvia Federici, is constituted by ever-renewing processes and human activities that favour the dignified reproduction of life, even amidst the devastation imposed on us by capitalism. We build an argument that revisits certain discussions on the political, understanding it as our capacity to self-determine the goals, rhythms and forms of our everyday life beyond and against capital.

Keywords Production of the common · Reproduction of life · Paths of social transformation · Concrete wealth

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Introduction

Is it possible to think of other ways of producing concrete wealth, forms not fully subjected to the mandates of capital? Is it possible to have other ways of organising and reproducing social life, which are more satisfactory than the modes of existence imposed by the modern capitalist world? To what extent is the use value of the life forced upon us by capitalist modernity, the only one imaginable? Can we recover our capacity to self-determine the goals, rhythms and forms of our everyday life? Where does this possibility lie? How is it produced and nurtured?[1] In this chapter, we set out to rethink what Bolívar Echeverría calls *the political* through the theoretical lens of what we call *the production of the commons in common*. Our goal is to stimulate discussions on diverse and multifarious sets of practices of *the political* by rendering them visible: we believe these practices can shed light upon new meanings of social transformation. Our starting point, inspired by the work of Silvia Federici, is constituted by ever-renewing processes and human activities that favour the dignified reproduction of life, even amidst the devastation imposed on us by capitalism. It is from here that we set out to conceptualise the production and regeneration of *the common*. We understand *the common* as a critical category that allows us to expand our shared understanding of struggle. Through this lens, we build an argument that revisits certain discussions on *the political* and on contemporary paths to social transformation.

The Reproduction of Life, *the Political* and *the Common*

One of the most important lessons we have learned through a shared reading of the works of Bolívar Echeverría, the Ecuadorian Marxist who taught at the Autonomous National University of Mexico for decades, and of the Italian-American feminist Silvia Federici is the certainty that, at present, a radical critique of capitalism is possible only if our analysis and transformative practices centre the reproduction of human and non-human life as a whole. This means, in the first place, to recognise that human beings produce and reproduce our lives socially, establishing numerous relations of interdependence between members of human communities and between communities of the human and the non-human (or more-than-human) world. In the words of Argentine political-ecologist

Horacio Machado, we can affirm there is no life without biotic communities; that is, communities that are reproduced on the basis of relations of reciprocity, complementarity, mutuality, exchange and joint determination between members of different species, who need each other in order to produce and reproduce life (Machado 2015). In this sense, community is a fundamental quality of life: an essential precondition for the reproduction of existence. That said, social existence of human beings within communities is not given *a priori*, neither is it given once and for all. Human communities do not stem from an instinctive principle that is inscribed in our animal condition, as is the case with other species. As Bolívar Echeverría reminds us, human beings are 'condemned' to permanently create, reinvent, update, modify or ratify the social forms of our concrete communities (Echeverría 1998, p. 166). For 'human beings' – who, to begin with, cannot be conceived as isolated 'individuals', but rather as a historically specific and dynamic collectivity– the reproduction, production and use of our condition of existence in community is not the result of automatic repetition or reiteration. It is rather about constantly re-creating and re-inventing (through a permanent and 'ongoing' process of codification[2]) relations between the members of such a dynamic collectivity. Furthermore, this process requires the social subject to engage in a semiotic appropriation of nature and of their self: a never-ending action of signifying everyday life, and expanding that signification to include the world around them.

That is where the basic *politicity*[3] of human beings lies. This is what Bolivar Echeverría calls *the political*. That is, the capacity of human beings to impress a more or less stable and unique shape to our sociality; to mould our social organisation, giving form, content and meaning to all kinds of social relations of interdependence of work and enjoyment; these relations are what allow the reproduction of our existence (Echeverría 1998). In this sense, *the political* is not just another characteristic of the process of reproduction of human life, but rather the constitutive and specific character of this process. In order to guarantee their existence and reproduce their lives, human beings need to create a social form of co-existing with others in order to shape their sociality, thereby shaping their surroundings and establishing a relation with the non-human, and in so doing, creating their own lifeworld. This *capacity of giving form* (Echeverría 1998) which is inscribed in social subjects is constantly being mobilised, but it is always deployed in specific places and times, thus it is manifested in diverse ways. The *capacity of giving*

form brings together the ways in which we produce and reproduce our material life and the ways we signify it. That is, *capacity of giving form* is renewed and embodied in innumerable concrete life communities, whose diversity accounts for the 'inevitable' plurality and heterogeneity of the human, and of the qualitative material wealth of the process of social reproduction, which produces and consumes use values.

We adopt the perspective of the *production of the common* in order to examine the regeneration and renewal of the processes by which social ties and relations create concrete wealth. These creative processes are material and symbolic, and they are nurtured by many communitarian weavings which: (1) constantly renew the human capacity of giving form; (2) in doing so, reinforce the *politicity* of these communitarian weavings and (3) repeatedly guarantee and expand the possibilities of use and enjoyment that are vital to the reproduction of life as a whole (Gutiérrez Aguilar and Salazar 2015).

But, we must ask, what happens when capitalism manages to spread throughout all spheres of life? How are the processes of social reproduction transformed in capitalist modernity? As Echeverría reminds us, referencing Marx, under capital these processes are inclined to become increasingly homogenised, and acquire a radically different form (Echeverria 1995). The social subject faces a new civilising condition, which is utterly different to that of the past. The novelty lies in the fact that, in capitalist modernity, the economic system is based on capital accumulation, and does not ensure or guarantee the reproduction of life. Instead it imposes a form of reproduction: the reproduction of capital, not of life. Capital attempts to dictate and enforce a homogenised type of subjectivity, denying and nullifying our diverse and varied *capacity of giving form*.

As the logic of capitalism advances and expands, the vital processes of human life are violently deformed in the service of an abstract objective: the creation of profit. Under the civilising form of capital, the *capacity of giving form* that is inscribed in the basic *politicity* of social subjects is taken from them. The civilising form of capital attempts to erode and destroy our collective human capacity to define the use value of life, a capacity which is nurtured and made possible by particular life communities or through expanded polymorphic *communitarian weavings* (Gutiérrez 2011) which are centred around the reproduction of life. These weavings are under constant attack and always threatened by an abstract subject, capital, which tries to impose a form that encourages accumulation and valorisation while weakening and obstructing the human *capacity of giving form*. However, we believe the ongoing, constantly renewed processes of

the *production of the common* denote the existence of a cooperative doing that is oriented by use value and aims at guaranteeing and nurturing all that is shared and serves the reproduction of life. The *production of the common* also exposes the instabilities of the dominance of capitalist relations and the incapacity of these relations to commodify everything. It is through this lens that we consider how the flow of activities that produce the common can shape or give form to social capacities, and how this flow of activities can generate the conditions to resist, question, subvert and/or overflow the relations of capital and the state.

In general terms, we believe the production of the common is made possible through the active cultivation and nurturing of relations among those who *are part* of a communitarian weaving, and of relations of protection and healing between that communitarian weaving and its surroundings. In contrast, the imposition of the civilising form of capital has been widely acknowledged as a historical process of separation of the producers from the means of production (Marx 1990) or, as we call it, a separation from the *means of existence for the reproduction of life* – in order to turn people into a labour force that is dispossessed and doubly free: emancipated from the ties of feudal servitude but also dispossessed of the *means of existence for the reproduction of life*.[4] This process of separation has advanced through the commodification of nature, as well as through the weakening, disarticulation and destruction of many of the ties which comprise the *communitarian weavings* that guarantee life. These social bonds and links have been subsumed – sometimes gradually and other times through blunt violence – to the one-dimensional logic of the market, abstract time and individualism. As a result, a specific vision of the world, and a specific way of structuring social relations based on individuals who are allegedly free, has been imposed. These processes of individualisation and separation never end, not because there are still spheres of the social that are historically located 'outside' capitalism, but because the possibility of these spheres of social relations are regenerated over and over again as collective human creation.

In any case, throughout the history of capitalism the imaginary of the 'free individual'[5] has systematically concealed two dimensions of the reproduction of human life that are closely linked to each other. On the one hand is what Silvia Federici calls 'reproductive labour'(Federici, 2013): the emotional processes and activities of care that are required for the material reproduction of human beings and are performed in the domestic sphere, usually by women. On the other hand are the relations of mutual affective and material

dependence within the community, which make life sustainable from generation to generation and in the context of everyday life. In the imaginary of the capitalist individual, the activities that are oriented towards the reproduction of life are not considered labour and, therefore, have no value. The community, once the starting point for the comprehension and reproduction of all that is human, is now seen as an anomalous, exotic, archaic and pre-modern form of organising social life.

Against all the leftist approaches that have embraced the capitalist separation between the sphere of production and that of the reproduction of life as something natural, systematically concealing the community dimension of social life, we propose, following Federici (2004), that we refocus on the processes, social relations and political forms that sustain the reproduction of life under the rule of capital, and the contradictions of those realities. It is in this sense that we ask how capital still dispossesses us of our conditions of existence, and how it subordinates human sociality to the valorisation of value. But, above all, we ask how specific human communities react, resist and sometimes break with the social relations determined and enforced by capital and state power. It is precisely from this complexity that we set out to approach the comprehension of the production of the common.

The Production of the Common as Social Relations for the Reproduction of Life

Our approach to the notion of the common tries to radically break, first, with the positions represented by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt (Negri and Hardt 2011). These authors approach the common from within the sphere of the production of value, as a set of immaterial goods that result from the social cooperation that takes place within the productive terrains of advanced capitalism, on the basis of transformations in the technical composition of labour. Hardt and Negri argue that these transformations can generate new spaces of autonomy within capitalist labour. We also distance ourselves from other visions of the commons that focus much more on economy, whose most well-known advocate is, undoubtedly, Elinor Ostrom (1990). This vision approaches the commons exclusively in terms of shared resources or common goods that are collectively owned and administrated by local residents through a series of institutional processes. We believe both outlooks fall into the trap of ignoring

reproductive labour and the multiplicity of relations of cooperation that are produced from below, at the margins, or against the capitalist social relations, and around the material reproduction of life and the search for a dignified existence.[6]

In contrast to the aforementioned visions, our approach to understanding the *production of the common* is based on a fundamental premise: the common is not – or is not exclusively – a thing, a good or sets of tangible or intangible goods that are shared and used by many. *The common is produced*, it is made by many through the generation and constant reproduction of a multiplicity of weavings of association and through social relations of collaboration that continuously enable the production and enjoyment of a large quantity of common goods, be they material or immaterial. The goods that are often called 'common' – water, seeds, forests, the water distribution systems of certain communities, urban self-managed spaces, etc. – cannot exist without the social relations that produce them. In fact, they could not be understood without the people, organisational practices, processes of collective signifying, affective ties, relations of mutual dependence and reciprocity that shape them every day, that produce these goods as commons.

Although these relations ambiguously and contradictorily coexist with capitalist social relations, they are not produced – or are minimally produced – within the capitalist sphere of value production. In most cases, the social relations that produce the commons generally emerge as a result of the concrete and cooperative work of organised human communities[7]; communities that create joint strategies to tackle common problems and needs and thus guarantee the reproduction and nurturing of the material and spiritual sustenance of their communities of life. In this sense, we argue that *the production of the common is above all a social relation*, a social relation of association and cooperation that is *capable of enabling on a daily basis the social production and enjoyment of concrete wealth* as use values; that is, as material and immaterial goods that are necessary for the defence and the reproduction of life.

To assume that the *production of the common* not only refers to things, but above all to social relations, entails assuming that there is not only one, but rather multiple and varied forms of producing the common. This variety is as rich as the constellations of weavings created historically by human communities as a means of reproducing their lives in common.[8] It also involves recognising that, although the production of the common can occur on the basis of inherited cultural forms of belonging, that which

is common is never given *a priori* and once and for all. The *production of the common* is a process that must be constantly renewed and reproduced. The renewal, reproduction and the ensuing validation of the production of common as a social relation, just as the disappearance or destruction of that which is common, depend on the capacity of a community of people to set shared goals. The production of the common also continually reasserts the validity of the ties of cooperation and mutual obligation that allow for the attainment of said goals, and the continuation of the processes of producing and reproducing life.

Based on the study of different experiences the production of the common as well as struggles to maintain and expand these experiences, we argue that the production of the common is founded on an '*us*' *that is at the same time inherited and produced, an 'us' which emerges from a practical sense of inclusion*. The 'us' that is inherited is transmitted by *codes of belonging* that are established by our ancestors, through which each new human generation is socialised by learning practical knowledge, life meanings and specific skills which are produced and conserved within longstanding, often territorially rooted communitarian weavings. This knowledge, the meanings and skills that are transmitted every day, year in, year out, during the long years of human childhood, provide individuals with the tools and the emotional and semiotic context that is necessary for living together with others. That is how, in each generation, fundamental relationships are not only repeated and reinforced, but also transformed. These relations are completely contradictory to the notions of modern individualism: the relations of *being part of something*. Therefore, one is born and raised *as part* of a weaving of specific social relations that are inherited and, at times, renewed and transformed in adulthood, shaping codes of belonging that are relatively rigid and stable through time.

These inherited codes of belonging not only provide practical knowledge and shed light on life strategies, but also fix and possibly limit the capacities of transformation. Throughout capitalism, codes of belonging have been moulded into fixed identities that are often established by those with the most social power, who classify and separate 'populations' and contribute to a determination of individual identity which, is never completely attained. These codes of belonging have attempted to fix the trajectories of individuals within communitarian weavings by enclosing them in fixed identities. In contrast, if we analyse what goes on from within the reproductive weaving itself, the relationship of the new member that *is part of* is established through an inherited or assigned code of

belonging, through the social creation of a *sense of inclusion*. By *sense of inclusion* we mean everyday practices – that are dynamic, flexible, repeated and stable through time, but which can be modified or altered – that a community creates and sets in motion through the flow of actions that allows the social reproduction of material and symbolic life. Therefore, this *being part of* – an individual or collective weaving – is not simply inherited; it is, above all, an activity, a *doing with others that is continually occurring every day*. A common, systematic and demanding activity that acquires meaning given the *capacity of giving form* that is collectively nurtured and, for the same reason, establishes or marks the terms of inclusion in the *ongoing us*.[9] That is, *being part of* an 'us', of a unique reproductive weaving, is neither something that is given once and for all, as many theorise. Nor is it akin to a fixed list of codes of belonging, codes that, we insist, are almost always established from spaces of power which categorise individuals according to features imposed from above. It is rather a productive activity of generating ties and goods that can be shared. That is why the *sense of inclusion*, as well as its consubstantial relation of *being part of* must be permanently renewed, (re)produced on the basis of collective practices that guarantee the (re)production of life. The sense of inclusion and the relation of being part of lay the foundations of a common doing that reinvents, transforms and recreates the multiple expressions of 'us' who produce the common.

Therefore, we describe *multiple expressions of us*, not only as an immense collection of alien groups that can be counted and listed, but, above all, as multiple productions and recreations of the *capacity to give form*, which in turn enables the production of goals and means in order to repeatedly sustain the reproduction of collective/community, and therefore individual, life. Consequently, the production of the common that is supported by an *us* founded on meanings of ever-renewing inclusion, the capacity of giving form is always at stake: the possibility that the *us* created this way can choose and shape its own sociality; and also create, renew, change and transform – over and over again – forms of regulating life in common. However, the human capacities that are involved in the multiple processes of producing the common, as well as their material creations, are systematically attacked and assaulted by the multiple and expansive processes of capital accumulation and the valorisation of value that are imposed upon the reproduction of human and non-human life, always restricting their possible forms and stripping them of their concrete wealth. It is precisely this contradiction that we will discuss in the following section.

The Reproduction of Life as Contradiction with the Expansive Reproduction of Capital

We understand *capital* as a type of social relation that is reproduced by obliging our vital forces to be used to regenerate and accumulate value. The logic that is inherent to the expansive dynamic of capital demands that at least one part of people in the world be converted into labour force, now turned into 'free subjects', against the needs and desires of the specific subjects. Therefore, in the context of capitalist relations or, better, under the expansive rule of capital, life in all its exuberance and potential and creativity is only a means and not an end. Human beings are limited to serving as bearers of labour and the natural world constrained to resources to be exploited for the accumulation of capital. Communitarian approaches to the reproduction of life, however, aim at guaranteeing sustenance – food, water, shelter, health, education for future generations, etc. – and, therefore, tend to care not only for the natural goods that guarantee the collective life for present and future generations but also for the ties, links and bonds that produce communitarian weavings. These weavings equip individuals with new capacities, regenerating and expanding the collective possibilities of production, reproduction and enjoyment.

Consequently, if we consider human beings under the capital relation as simple bearers of labour force, and natural goods as no more than resources for the production of commodities (or as areas for the discharge of waste), the starting point of our reflection will be reductive and limited. As we attempt to understand struggles against capital and their political forms, this form of reasoning will lead us down infertile paths which centre the contradictions and antagonisms that tear social life apart. However, if our starting point is the ever-renewing impulse to reproduce human and non-human life, the horizon broadens to include our comprehension of the contradictions and antagonisms we experience under capital. We can perceive how capital, in its systematic and aggressive expansion, never completely imprisons life, failing to strip it completely of its capacity of regeneration. And if we think from a space of contradiction, we can understand the instability that these ongoing processes of creation and regeneration of life insert into the logic of capital and its never-ending expansive production of value. *Living labour* is thus unveiled as the central source of capital without, however, forgetting that the reproductive capacity of life is the foundation of the very deployment of concrete work, of doing. We therefore believe it is crucial to consider the radical contradiction between life and its

ever-renewing possibilities of reproduction, and capital and its violent logics of separation, exploitation and dispossession, as well as its efforts to nullify the human *capacity to give form*, something it never completely attains. From here, we can begin to understand the unprecedented dimensions social antagonism has acquired during the past decades. We can read the social antagonism that takes place at the level of the immediate production of commodities and value, which is a productive terrain of unacceptable processes of exploitation, as well as beyond these processes and spaces of the accumulation of capital, to the spaces and moments where human beings reproduce our collective life, every single day, in the cities and the fields.

Capital's continuous processes of expanded production and accumulation repeatedly negate/clash with the equally reiterated flow of activities of the reproduction of life which are nurtured, protected and adapted within various communitarian weavings that not only resist and defend themselves from the aggressions of capitalist accumulation but also promote an intimate and distinctively human capacity of form. Life and its tendency towards encouraging the reproduction and expansion of its creations is the limit that capital cannot overcome. The vital collective capacity to recreate and reproduce concrete goods and wealth is the basis for organising the reproduction of all that is human and for revitalising the capacity of giving form. And we believe it is also the thread of Ariadne to understanding the modern possibilities of social transformation through the erosion, dissolution, rupture and/or overcoming of the relation of capital.

By Way of Conclusion

We have presented a set of arguments that aim at revealing and reinforcing the possibilities of a dignified existence and struggle, which are recreated and updated in different and polymorphic communitarian weavings. Our starting point is the shared practices, knowledge and skills capable of repeatedly producing fertile links which open the way towards the production of different varieties of use value to be enjoyed by all. We believe it is in these worlds of the material reproduction of life, historically and systematically ignored, that the social capacities that can challenge, deform, dissolve and occasionally and intermittently break with the modern capitalist relations that attack, exploit and despoil human creations and natural gifts.

In the face of the increasingly harsher and starker contexts of modern capitalism, where life itself is negated, we commit to concrete processes of social transformation. We learn from the struggles we share with others and

become aware of the difficulties and the limits of those struggles, but also of the tenacity with which the human capacity of form re-emerges in defiance of capitalist modernity, which presents it as an absolute impossibility. We present the critical quality of the production of the common as the only guarantee of a dignified life, when we insist in that the possibility of social transformation resides only in *us*: in the *us* that is recreated every day in processes of caring and creation that focus on the reproduction of human and non-human life, and entail affection and emotions, inherited wisdom and renewed abilities.

Notes

1. We have approached these questions together with other colleagues from different universities during the permanent seminar 'Alternative Modernities and New Common Sense' (Modernidades alternativas y nuevo sentido común) that has been conducted during the last two years at the Colegio de Estudios Latinoamericanos of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (CELA-UNAM). A Spanish version of this work will be published in 2016 as part of the outcome of the seminar.
2. We use the expression 'ongoing' codification following the words of Sartre in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (2004), where he refers to the human capacity of 'ongoing totalisation'.
3. We use politicity as a translation of *politicidad*, which Echeverría defines as the capacity to shape parts of our lives even within a system of structural domination by capital.
4. Following Massimo de Angelis (2001), we speak of *means of existence* for the reproduction of life in order to go beyond the classic notion of the means of production and refer to all the material and symbolic means that guarantee the support and reproduction of life.
5. The allegedly universal 'free individual', generally understood as a male proprietor of accumulated value in its abstract form or as a male that is involved in the production of value for others. It is worth noting that the 'gender' of the 'abstract' individual is in agreement with the 'dominant male' feature of capital that avoids, denies and conceals the world of reproduction.
6. In order to demarcate the differences in our approach, we talk about the common, *lo común*, not the commons.
7. In Marx there are at least three distinct notions of work: 'live', concrete and abstract. We are interested in emphasising the concrete character of the production of the common. A similar but somewhat different version of this discussion is evidenced in the contradiction between doing and labour (Holloway 2011).

8. On this, see Navarro (2015) and Linsalata (2015).
9. Here, we once again use the Sartrean notion of 'ongoing' in order to describe the dynamic and creative quality of a process of reproduction of social life that must not be understood as simply repeated and daily.

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CHAPTER 7

Talking About Nature: Ecolinguistics and the *Natureculture* Paradigm

Francesca Zunino Harper

Abstract The chapter proposes the use of the integrated *natureculture* framework as a theoretical and practical tool for transdisciplinary analysis of the planet's social, cultural and environmental complexity. It aims at re-integrating research on the human and the ecospheres from an initial change in the linguistic, discoursive and communication perspective onwards in order to create a wider, holistic perspective. The use of the nature-culture framework through collaboration within and outside the academia is seen as part of the contemporary interstitial revolution and the global hope movement for tackling destructive, neo-liberal stances that have been causing the ongoing crisis of the planet and its people.

Keywords Nature · Culture · System thinking · Ecosphere · Ecolinguistics · Hope movements

Introduction

Capitalist society is experiencing swift and fundamental changes due to the effects of (human-induced) climate change, which are under way. The dominant epistemological principles that have been applied in most of

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the past decade's social analyses have become inappropriate for the task of understanding these changes. This is due to the still-rigid fragmentation of the different analytical frameworks being used. In order to be able to understand and act upon these new, and often unpredictable dynamics, scholars and practitioners from across the intellectual and scientific spectrum need to join forces. The current precarious situation demands that we utilise a radically integrated worldview, rejoining society and all its broad cultural aspects to the planet in which humans are embedded and act upon: we need to talk about nature.

This chapter aims to foster awareness of the necessity of dealing with the interface of social, cultural and environmental issues both from a contemporary and a diachronic standpoint. I argue that culture and nature are two sides of the same sphere. The inner self (i.e. our own individual blend of 'natural' and 'cultural' being) and the outer self (i.e. 'nature' and 'culture' as created both by each of the planet's cultures and by our global culture) are mutually defined. Natureculture studies is finally beginning to emerge as the ultimate holistic frontier of thinking. There is currently an exciting buzz around unifying these two research areas in order to find new, creative, boundary-crossing ways to analyse the global web of life. Natureculture studies is a relatively new multidisciplinary area of research wishing to reunite the parts of the classic Western dichotomy that juxtaposes the 'human' ('cultural', 'linguistic', 'anthropological', 'social', the 'anthroposphere') and the 'non-human' or better the 'natural' ('environmental', 'ecological', 'green', 'animal and vegetal', the 'ecosphere') in both theory and analysis. Natureculture studies can offer an integrated, systemic perspective that conceives the planet as a whole. A holistic, systemic, integrated natureculture perspective has the potential to shine light on a wide range of cross-feeding issues. The sphere of influence of this networking framework reaches beyond regional interests to include global problems, ultimately aspiring to foster the ability of informed research to influence people's thinking and actions on the planet.

On Separations and Connections: Thinking Holistically

Today, it has become clear that 'social' problems are intimately connected to 'environmental' problems: environmental problems have been largely created by human actions and by neo-liberal global capitalist societies. At the same time, environmental and ecological problems are socially and discursively mediated. Moreover, social relations, linguistic and cultural

practices, and identity issues are all connected to numerous concerns regarding environmental governance that involve the 'glocal' society embedded in the planet's ecology. For example, efforts by states to reorganise the control over, and facilitate the over-exploitation of, natural resources by business corporations have important social, cultural and ecological implications. As ecoliteracy founder Fritjof Capra wrote:

> Ultimately, these problems must be seen as just different facets of one single crisis, which is largely a crisis of perception. . . . And, indeed, we are now at the beginning of such a fundamental change of worldview in science and society, a change of paradigms as radical as the Copernican Revolution. But this realisation has not yet dawned on most of our political leaders. The recognition that a profound change of perception and thinking is needed if we are to survive has not yet reached most of our corporate leaders wither, nor the administrators and professors of our large universities (Capra 1996, pp. 5–6).

In light of all these assumptions, a very high level of critical and constructive holistic thinking is required: this would mean 'a shift of perception from material objects and structures to the nonmaterial processes and patterns of organization that represent the very essence of life' (Capra 2009). However, international academia is still unaware of the need for the kind of holistic thinking offered by ecoliteracy or ecopedagogy. Ecoliteracy, or ecopedagogy, means applying ecological education throughout the curricula, or knowing and understanding how nature sustains the planet's life and how to live accordingly. This would mean, borrowing from the definition of 'ecocriticism' by Glotfelty and Fromm (1996, p. xviii), 'taking an earth-centred approach' to any type of study. The interface of what Western thought has been separately calling 'nature' (the *Umwelt*, the environment, everything that is 'outside' of the realm of the 'human', that is the 'non-human') and 'culture' (the *Innenwelt*, the 'I' and the 'us', the 'human' power of cognition, speech and action) is in fact a single dimension of inextricable, bidirectional connections. For some, the 'non-human' sphere also includes the elements, such as air, water, etc. For many past and present non-Western cultures, it also includes the sphere of the transcendent (the divine, the spiritual, the religious, the unworldly, otherworldly or maybe parallel and contemporary to the 'human'). The 'web of life' is an interactive (Haraway 2007), dynamic sociocultural-natural hybrid expressed through language, the body and its – also hybrid – identities: 'Without the capacity to think through human/non-human points of continuity and difference, we have

no social science, nor do we have any capacity to coherently respond ethically and politically to the socio-environmental dilemmas of our times' (White et al. 2016, p. 35).

The main cultural definitions and constructions of the categories of nature and the environment are notably linguistic, literary, narrative and discursive. There is a wide scope for reflection on how the media, academia, governmental, institutional and grass roots organisations and other social actors have been framing ideas and identities concerning nature and culture both from an historical and contemporary standpoint, as well as for highlighting the potentialities and interstitial possibilities for alternative discourses, and thus social praxes. In parallel, climate change's effects on all species' everyday life and very survival require that fundamental topics on the thread between society, politics, development and the environment be addressed.

Considering 'Power' in Ecolinguistics

Ecolinguistics has long acknowledged the reality of the manifold links between the traditionally separate realms of the anthroposphere and the ecosphere (Sapir [1912] 2001). These links are culturally determined and perpetuated in Western cultures through the use of the discursive-cognitive-ideological grammars of the Latin-derived English, Spanish, French and other colonising languages. Thus, ecolinguistics as an applied, militant theory and practice, puts power relations between humans and nature at the very core of its analysis. In fact, '. . . human access to and interaction with the environment is – amongst other things – deeply mediated and influenced by doing things with words' (Austin 1975), which enlarges the natural ecosystem with cultural aspects: the natural and the cultural ecosystems are blended together into a Nature–Culture ecosystem (Doring 2003, p. 198). Nature and culture are thus deeply interwoven by language and other practices through which they become contextualised NatureCultures (Latour 1998, pp. 18–21) displaying 'nature–society relationships' (Döring and Zunino 2014, p. 35).

This integrated, holistic framework which also connects language and communication studies to many of the social and natural sciences in general, has not been embraced by the main strands of linguistics studies. This is because it rejects the latter's fundamental-isolated, unit-based structuralist standpoints, as well as the post-structuralist Chomskian views of a context-free 'transformational generative' grammar, 'universal'

and thus exclusive only to the *Homo sapiens* species (see Harré et al. 1999, and Mühlhäusler 2003). In fact, the vast power that language and discourse have in shaping people's ideas, thoughts, views and our individual and collective actions on the environment – and consequently communication's central role in the many socioecological crises of our times – has often been overlooked by both scholars and practitioners. In parallel, the potential of communication for finding alternatives (if not solutions) is not fully recognised or exploited either within or outside academia. That is, the view that the interface of nature and culture as two sides of the same coin, constantly inter-feeding each other from each and every intellectual standpoint we can use to analyse it, is revolutionary in both theory and practice. Could one of the main reasons for this be that this position is highly political, and even 'too' radical for some? The idea of a militant, decolonised, applied academia can often be seen as destabilising academic boundaries, disciplinary divisions and our Standard Average European (SAE) languages' strictly binary visions ('good' vs. 'bad', 'black' vs. 'white', 'nature' vs. 'culture'), all of which often lack more complex, nuanced words for our planet's complex, dynamic, multilayered reality. An inclusive ecopedagogy of, by and for the oppressed (both people and the planet) can still be regarded as a threat to the *status quo*. Related and interchangeable concepts of power in communication and in the use of language such as linguistic imperialism (Mühlhäusler 1996), ecological imperialism (Crosby [1993] 2004) and, of course cultural imperialism, help to highlight and define the predominance of the English language and its *discursive constraints* in our globalised world, and its social, environmental, political, economic effects again simultaneously on both people and the planet.

Seen through the discursive and ecolinguistic, power relations strongly mediate how different social sectors in both local and global societies are being affected and therefore can react to the ongoing environmental crisis. As Peter Allen highlights in a UN publication on industrial metabolism, 'Instead of regarding human progress as following some steady path towards a better quality of life [, culture and]... relationship with the natural world, we see... change driven by the values of an internal game,... lead[ing] to the emergence of an artificial world, cut off from nature and yet of course embedded within it, and therefore potentially ripe for environmental catastrophe' (Allen 1994, pp. 93–94).

Historically while 'many influential traditions of mainstream social theory have struggled or actively resisted incorporating ecological and

environmental questions into social analysis[,] . . . many currents of social thought have swung rather violently between two equally problematic forms of reductionism over the last century and more. Naturalistic or biophysical reductionism . . . [and] in contrast, sociological reductionism . . . ' (White et al. 2016, p. 17). To overcome this impasse, environmental sociologists suggest using 'the ideas of coevolution and structuration, derived from Norgaard (1984) and Giddens (1984) respectively . . . as a way of offering very promising conceptual devices for overcoming the constructivist/realist dualism' (Woodgate and Redclift 1998, p. 4). In parallel, as a small but pragmatic part of the international applied linguistics community has recognised since the 1970s (following the Norwegian philosopher Einar Haugen and its first 'ecology of language' paradigm, [1972] 2001), and again in the early 1990s (the specular 'language of ecology' paradigm, by Alwin Fill – Fill 1993), ' . . . the very boundary between nature and culture is a linguistic construct' (Mühlhäusler 2003). Goatly (2001, p. 203) underlines how 'ordinary language, especially the transitive clause, is inadequate to the representation of the world demanded by . . . ecological theory'. As an ecoliteracy educator, Stibbe highlights that, 'in general, the "linguistics" side of ecolinguistics holds out the promise of sophisticated analysis of the linguistic mechanisms by which worldviews are constructed, reproduced, spread and resisted, while the "eco" side promises a sophisticated ecological framework to consider the role of those worldviews in preserving or undermining the conditions that support life' (Stibbe 2014, p. 118).

Even before human awareness of climate change, American anthropologist Edward Sapir wrote in [1912] (2001) that 'the important point remains that in actual society even the simplest environmental influence is either supported or transformed by social forces. . . . The social forces which thus transform the purely environmental influences may themselves be looked upon as environmental in character in so far as a given individual is placed in, and therefore reacts to, a set of social factors. . . . That these social forces are themselves subject to environmental, among other, changes, illustrates the complexity of the problem of cultural origins and development' (Sapir [1912] 2001, pp. 13–14). The analysis of the social-cultural and environmental-natural relationship requires a deep historical, diachronic understanding: 'above all, a historical and ideological perspective teaches us that there is no one, objective, monolithic truth about society–nature-environment relationships, as some might have us believe' (Pepper 1996, pp. 3–4). The need for a

'new [socio]ecological paradigm' has also been expressed within cultural studies since the 1990s. As Pezzullo underlines:

> …the environment stubbornly appears ghettoised in cultural studies, the purview of only those of us who identify as environmentalists or who make the environment one of our primary areas of research – as if one can or should talk about topics such as popular culture, technology, government policy, or global flows without mentioning environmental dimensions as part of the analysis. Like foundational categories such as identity, economics, and historical context, the environment is and should be considered relevant to any research done in the name of cultural studies. (Pezzullo 2011, pp. 362–363)

The various intersections of cultural studies and the environment, and their connections with a number of issues involving environmental and social justice, are also being slowly but surely deepened by many disciplines that cross-feed between social and environmental studies. These disciplines are, for example, environmental sociology, ecosociology, political ecology, socio-ecolinguistics and ecocriticism, environmental and sustainability studies, environmental movements, environmental education, geography and landscape studies, epistemology of nature and culture, critical discourse analysis, gender and identity studies, sustainable development studies and critical development studies, political economy, globalisation studies, human rights studies, human ecology – among others. The social and the ecological interconnections, and at the same time the material and the cultural juxtapositions, need much more extreme, deeper and wider nets of recognition, collaboration and research. White suggests that 'if we are to move beyond the dead-ends of Malthusian survivalism, end times ecology or neoliberal natures, we need to produce not simply deconstructive but much more boldly reconstructive political ecologies and reconstructive environmental sociologies…' (White et al. 2016, pp. 214–215).

Natureculture: An Alternative Paradigm

Ecosocialism, ecoanarchism, ecofeminism and many diverse alternative or radical political theories and praxes of the past decades may be able to play an important part in this new understanding and reappropriation of the natureculture identity of the self, and of the world (or better, the planet). The self must be thus regarded as an integral, relational part of its integrated

networks of relations, following Bruno Latour's concept of *assemblages* (2004, 2005). We may be better able to think, perceive and explore the universe we live in if we see it as a network of diverse 'assemblages' that constantly connect and intersect. As Naomi Milner suggests (Milner 2016), we should definitely use 'a *multinaturalist* perspective, which goes beyond looking at different cultural approaches to one given nature (multiculturalism) to apprehend a multitude of nature-cultures'. This, she argues, will allow us 'to create friction around universalising claims to "nature," and thus to posit the valorisation of diverse forms of expertise within the production of future-oriented environmental knowledge' (Ibidem).

We could push these boundaries further and declare that, in order to be truly and ultimately radical, empowered, critical, political, feminist, and completely *naturalcultural*, we should take the boundaries that circumscribe the academia down, and let the real world in. Perhaps, the academia and all scholars should take a step further, walk over the fence themselves and go out there, where scholarly works end and society starts, where privileged, esoteric reflections do not count but the green spaces are being suffocated by pollution . . . where the Arctic is melting and the most recent cloud analyses (by scientists at Yale University!) affirm that 'a doubling of carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere compared with pre-industrial times could result in a global temperature increase of up to 5.3°C – far warmer than the 4.6°C older models predict' (Milnan 2016). Following Moore's contemporary critique of capitalism through the dialectic of humanity-in-nature as a world ecology of wealth, power and nature, we must underline this point: 'Capitalism is not an economic system; it is not a social system; it is a way of organising nature. . . . The 'web of life' is nature as a whole: nature with an emphatically lowercase *n*. This is nature as us, as inside us, as around us. . . . The crisis today is therefore not multiple but singular and manifold. It is not a crisis of capitalism and nature but of modernity-in-nature. That modernity is a capitalist world-ecology' (Moore 2015: 2-4; also see Moore 2013).

Natureculture and 'Hope Movements'

The natureculture perspective appears to be a very strong counter-hegemonic discourse that can be used as part of the strategies of an interstitial transformation of capitalism (Holloway 2010; Dinerstein 2012). That is, a theoretical and practical means of societal transformation through progressively and strategically enlarging spaces of social-environmental empowerment

from below. It is also a highly revolutionary idea, part of the explosive fusion of negativity and hope (Ibidem) that is leading many areas of the world to spontaneously organise what have been recently defined as 'hope movements' (Dinerstein and Deneulin 2012). Hope movements' claims are manifold and involve assorted topics, such as: the development agenda's language on people and the environment, social and academic discourses on gender, identity, indigeneity and the land, environmental and human rights, economic, ecological and social justice and natural and cultural resources' conservation and sustainability in the light of climate change, poverty, dignity and well-being (*buen vivir*). For example, many hope movements throughout the planet have already been including environmental and ecological demands in their struggles for decades. In Canada, the USA and Latin America, the efforts for survival of original peoples' traditions, languages and very physical beings often go hand in hand with the survival of the land in which they all live, be it in remote, rural or more urbanised areas. This is also true for other continents' traditional peoples, first nations and others whose self-identification is a mixture of non-Standard Average European languages (e.g. languages that do not originate in the European colonisation of non-European spaces – Whorf 1956) and their relationship with the land, usually including a very spiritual and ecological–ecosophical dimension. It is possible that the dualistic, opportunistic world vision of the capitalist world has been overlooking this non-Christian, 'cosmoteandrogynic' interrelation of spheres (this term is slightly modified after R. Panikkar's original and mostly Christian-based concept, and also trying to include women, and other genders, in his 'cosmoteandric' ecosophy, a union of the cosmos, the divine and the human into one – 1994, 2004).

Decisively, we must use the critical and constructive natureculture framework as part of the *art of organising hope* (Dinerstein 2015). As Ana Dinerstein and Séverine Deneulin underline, Ernst Bloch's concept of hope starts from the negation of established practices, and the creation of hope for the possibility of alternatives: 'In a hopeless world, hope is not powerless. It empowers by cracking the façade of a world that says that there is no alternative' (Dinerstein and Deneulin 2012, pp. 589–590). Embracing and applying the natureculture perspective to both our research and our lives becomes an act of revolution and an act of hope. This act, when applied, applied – ideologically, linguistically, theoretically and pragmatically – can help us, paraphrasing Dinerstein and Deneulin (Ibid.), to search for a new way of life, which is more conducive to creating an environment where *all present and future beings* can live in dignity.

Conclusion

My proposal has been to connect academia, activism and policy, in diverse, creative and fruitful ways under the perspective of natureculture. Collaborating, as well as working apart, and moving forward together seems to be the key to tackling the complex scenario that is so swiftly changing for the worse. Building bridges within and outside the university environment will also assist in finding and developing alternatives to the neo-liberal model. Maybe it will also help to find new words and give new meanings to buzzwords that have been hijacked by the mainstream agenda, such as 'sustainable', 'transformative', 'emancipatory', 'participative'. Paraphrasing the ecofeminist Mary Mellor (1997, p. 196), we also need to retrieve some core concepts that have emerged and often been too swiftly dismissed, such as responsibility, reciprocity, holism, co-existence, humility, awareness. Applying a holistic natureculture perspective, we will be able to integrate many studies, discourses and human–environmental rights – such as all the enormous issues regarding 'development' – in wider demands for change and amelioration in social, cultural, linguistic rights, well-being, dignity, security, peace, human rights and accessibility to water, clean air, education, housing, etc. Following a critical development studies standpoint, difference and contestation experienced by practitioners during their research and field work with activists and communities can help in embracing this all-encompassing natureculture perspective, which also includes ethics. Although it is essential to recognise the role of power relations in development management, social difference and contestation experienced in the negotiation of changing relationships can create spaces. They can also be important sources of engagement and learning for development managers and their organisations. The question is whether and how such learning can lead to more emancipatory means and ends of development management, rather than simply consolidating existing social relations (Johnson et al. 2012, pp. 635–636). To be sure, natureculture is in fact deeply socioecological (using Arne Naess' concept of deep vs. shallow ecology and environmentalism – Naess [1973] 1996). Natureculture's 'supporters emphasize place-specific, ecological wisdom, and vernacular technology practices. No one philosophy and technology is applicable to the whole planet. As Naess has said many times, the more diversity, the better' (http://www.deepecology.org/deepecology.htm).

A particularly interesting area of research for natureculture studies is civil society's engaged responses to changes in the use and governance of natural

resources. This is especially important regarding the impact of grass roots organisations, social movements and rural and urban advocacy groups on politics, policy and practice. Exploring this emerging socialcultural and natural-environmental interface in non-governmental public action has the potential to shine light on a wide range of issues, including: justice, ethnicity, violence, conflict, empowerment, gender, equality, accountability, inclusion and state–society relations. It can also assist in integrating human and environmental perspectives into one wider, cross-disciplinary multi-area. In this macro-area, the boundaries between sociocultural and environmental-ecological are dissolved in favour of a constant search for connections, overlapping and bridges in both the problems and the solutions. In it, there is a relentless dialogue with the active, 'eco-ethical' part of business and political leadership to be involved as promising driving forces for a complete u-turn of the market, towards the implementation of rapid third-way solutions against climate change (Flannery 2015: 7–9). This can definitely be the initial phase of the counter-attack in our fight for the future here and now.

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PART III

Social Movements and Prefigurative Politics

CHAPTER 8

The Prefigurative Is Political: On Politics Beyond 'The State'

Emily Brissette

Abstract In order to make sense of contemporary prefigurative movements and their transformative potential, we need a more expansive notion of politics and a more nuanced understanding of 'the state' than that found in most North American social movement theory. In this chapter, Brissette traces critics' failure to register the political nature of prefigurative politics to an underlying conceptual framework that defines politics in relation to existing state structures and reifies the state as a bounded entity distinct from society. Drawing on Marx's theorization of the state as abstraction to contest this reification, Brissette locates the political nature of prefigurative movements in the process of constituting collective life as a community-in-freedom beyond the state.

Keywords Prefigurative politics · Civil society · The state · Social movement theory · Karl Marx · Reification of the state

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Introduction

When the Occupy Wall Street movement swept North America in the fall of 2011, it caught journalists, scholars and even many activists off guard. It was an unexpected response to the 2008 financial crisis and the effects of austerity on communities across the country – unexpected because, 3 years into the crisis, a weary resignation had seemed about all that the Left could muster. But not only was a movement at last emerging, it was a striking departure from the formulaic, permitted rallies and marches that had become so normalized over the preceding decades. People were camping out: transforming the cityscape with tents and tables, well-positioned pallets and expressive cardboard. They were living together in public, forging community and a new division of labour: some pitching in to sweep the concrete and asphalt free of capitalist debris, others preparing or serving meals to occupiers and observers alike; some powering the generator with their bodies on stationary bikes, others providing children an inviting space of exploration and calm amidst the tumult.

Prone to a disenchanting positivism, the dominant forms of North American social movement theory struggled to make sense of the prefigurative aspects of this new movement. Many concluded that Occupy was not sufficiently 'political.' That people were mobilizing, raising awareness and 'changing the conversation' – these were all welcome developments. But, critics argued, Occupy failed to organize itself for direct political leverage (as the Tea Party had) and so was ultimately ineffectual (see, e.g. Skocpol in Tangel 2012). Some suggested that the movement undermined its own capacity and its own (political) goals by getting bogged down in the day-to-day life of the camp (Roberts 2012; Smucker 2014), in the prefigurative experiment of creating new social relations, new forms of decision-making and new ways of organizing the production and distribution of food and shelter (that most basic of materialist struggles). Such critiques of the prefigurative as insufficiently 'political' are not, of course, new (see Breines 1989). But I want to suggest that what lies beneath these critiques, animating them in part if not in whole, are particular conceptualizations of the state, as a bounded sphere or actor distinct from society; and of politics, as that which occurs within or in relation to existing state structures. In what follows, I argue that if we are to grasp the *political* nature of the prefigurative and take seriously its radically *transformative* potential, we must embrace a more expansive notion of politics and resist the reification the state.

The Politics of Social Movements

Within US social movement studies, the dominant paradigms over the past 40 or so years – resource mobilization, political process and political opportunity, and contentious politics – have all privileged a narrow understanding of the 'political' that locates it squarely within the realm of the state and particularly within electoral and legislative processes. In this framework, social movements are typically seen as struggles for greater inclusion within a given set of political institutions. For Charles Tilly (1998, p. 216), a social movement is a 'sustained challenge to powerholders in the name of a population living under the jurisdiction of those powerholders by means of repeated displays of that population's numbers, commitment, unity and worthiness' – the latter captured, in reverse order, by the rather ugly acronym WUNC. In this definition, movements are made by (representatives of) a subordinate group; consist of appealing to constituted authorities who have the power to legislate; and require that challengers present themselves simultaneously as latent threat (in numbers, commitment and unity) and respectable supplicants (in worthiness). Ventriloquizing, Tilly continues, 'We, the aggrieved, demand that you, the perpetrators of evil or the responsible authorities, act to alleviate a condition about which we are justly indignant'. Social movements in his view *necessarily* involve an appeal to power for redress of grievances; specific demands thus play a key and central role and most actions serve (only) to 'dramatize' the problem and the movement's 'WUNC'. Occupy largely refused these prerequisites, and thus opened itself up to the charge of disorganization and political naïveté. But the movement's prefigurative attempts to envision and actualize a new social order are particularly difficult to grasp within such a definition of social movements, as the definition forecloses the possibility of any thoroughgoing, transformative change. Instead, it binds movements to existing norms for legibility and leaves *fundamental* frameworks and distributions of power unquestioned.

Despite Tilly's catholic reference to powerholders in his definition of social movements, he defines the political narrowly to mean that which involves the government or state. *Political* identities, in his rendering, are 'the subset of identities to which governments are parties' (1998, p. 217; McAdam et al. 2001, p. 134). In collaborative work with Sidney Tarrow and Doug McAdam, he situates social movements on a continuum alongside other forms of 'contentious politics', defined in part as such because 'at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the

claims' (McAdam et al. 2001, p. 5). If politics exists only within this institutional frame, then properly political goals, fully legible movement demands, can only concern specific policies that might be reformed or introduced (see also Sitrin, this volume). Visions of more radical transformations, and prefigurative efforts to realize those visions, on however small a scale as exemplar and practicum of what-might-be, are not (fully) political.

The prefigurative dimensions of movements are thus occluded, rendered extraneous colour or flair, if visible at all.[1] Inspiration, vision, even hope are sidelined, overlooked in favour of the rational, strategic and ultimately pragmatic. And yet even within this rational(izing) world, the 'madness' creeps in, the sense of something more, something inexplicable: Tarrow (1995) found himself trying to make sense of the tremendous upheavals of the late 1960s, to trace the play of inspiration and imagination without naming them as such. These forces must be tamed – renamed 'diffusion' or 'spillover' or 'spillout' – and the focus turned to the *spread* rather than to the *spirit* which moves (see, e.g. McAdam 1995). George Katsiaficas (1987, 1989), in contrast, emphasized the particular spirit or ethos alive in that moment: a very human yearning for connection, authenticity and freedom which he called the 'eros effect'. In the dominant theoretical model(s), social movements are rationalized and disenchanted, their internal dynamics reduced to a set of mechanistic variables and processes. The compelling, magnetic dimensions of movements – vision, hope, inspiration, courage, community, the momentary instantiation of freedom – are boxed out.[2] If they refuse to go quietly, if they persist in making themselves visible and known; if they camp out on the lawns of power, insistently within the frame, then they are often disparaged as irrelevant, childish outbursts – not the sober and serious work of change.

The Reification of the State

I want to suggest that this view of social movements is very much tied, not just to a narrow understanding of politics made synonymous with the state, but also with a particular conceptualization (reification) of the state. Tilly's conceptualization of the state is a Weberian one. He defines government as 'an organization controlling the principal concentrated means of coercion within some substantial territory' and notes that 'a government is a state' if it is recognized as such by other states and has jurisdictional autonomy: it is not nestled within some larger overarching

government. In Tilly's conceptualization, states are subjects with agency: they intervene in social relations, enact laws, provide aid, attack resisters of centralized rule, dispossess rival organizations, redistribute resources (Tilly 1998, pp.195–197). This conceptualization of the state is consonant with a broader turn within US political sociology in the 1970s and 1980s in which the state came to be seen as a 'potent and autonomous organizational actor', endowed with volition and sometimes even with strikingly anthropomorphized 'sinews' of power (Skocpol 1985, pp. 6, 16). The state as social actor, clearly distinct and relatively autonomous from society (and diverse groups within), has been taken for granted within much social movement theorizing. It is the target of claims, the arbiter of conflicts, the perpetrator of repression. It is where politics happens.

North American social movement theory has not seriously grappled with the myriad challenges to the coherence, boundedness or thing-ness of the state that have proliferated over the past few decades, especially amongst post-structuralist theorists and anthropologists (Mitchell 1991; Taussing 1992; Brown 1995; Gupta 1995). While much of this work is inspired in no small part by that of Foucault, there is also a thread that can be traced back to Marx's own insightful and imaginative analysis of the state. In his early work, Marx conceptualized the state as an abstraction ('The state is an abstraction. The people alone is what is concrete' [1978a, p. 18]) and worked through the ways in which the state, like religion, could be understood as the externalization of the people's own power and desire for community, a faux-actualization (in truth, alienation) of species-being. The state is not actor, apparatus or instrument here, but abstraction, imaginary, spiritual construct. In his essay 'On the Jewish Question,' Marx (1978b, p. 32) argued that the 'state is the intermediary between man and human liberty. Just as Christ is the intermediary to whom man attributes all his own divinity and all his religious *bonds*, so the state is the intermediary to which man confides all his non-divinity and all his *human freedom*'. Lest we think this makes the state material (in the way that a human Jesus once was [but Christ as ideal is not]), Marx suggests that the state is the realm of the 'celestial': the 'political state, in relation to civil society, is just as spiritual as is heaven in relation to earth' (1978b, p. 34).

There is a division between state and civil society here, that Marx argues liberalism effects. Material relations within society are depoliticized, fragments of 'the political spirit' gathered up and invested in the state (Marx 1978b, p. 45). Very real desires for freedom-in-community are thus transposed onto the (liberal) state, which comes to represent, in a

transcendent way, ideals of universality and common humanity. Rather than realizing species-being in and through the state, however, the communal impulse is instrumentalized in the service of shoring up bourgeois relations. Marx (1978b, p. 43) points out that liberal theorists 'reduce citizenship, the *political community*, to a mere *means* for preserving [the] so-called rights of man' – equality, liberty, security, property – which serve only to circumscribe relations between individuals, not to bring them together. It is a thin notion of politics, and a negative form of freedom, that they champion. When social movement scholars locate politics (only) in the state, they participate in this liberal bifurcation of state and society; when they conceive of the state as a social actor separate from society, they ensure its reification. Within this theoretical framework, the positive freedom that the prefigurative seeks to instantiate, the species-being it seeks to actualize, is at best a curiosity.

Picking up on Marx's insights, Philip Abrams (1988) has argued forcefully that 'the state' is an effect of ideology, which imposes a sense of coherence onto what are in reality disparate and tension-ridden practices of various agencies, policies and personnel. The state is '*res publica*, the public reification', mystifying real relations of domination and exploitation (Abrams 1988, p. 82). Abrams suggests that activities directed at (or around) the state, those which much social movement theory would recognize as properly political, both detract from the real conflict (in concrete lived relations) and *construct* the state. Counting votes, currying favour, crafting policy proposals, speaking truth to power and other such 'political' activities are exercises in displacement, transferring the conflict between capital and its discontents onto the electoral and legislative arenas. They also imbue the mirage of the state with a certain facticity, interpellating it into existence through recurrent appeals for 'it' to intervene, desist, legislate or enforce. If we reconceive the state in this way, not as a social actor separate from society, but as a social construction, brought into being through a set of discourses, practices and relations (which require ongoing participation to maintain the state's materiality), then the transformative potential of social movements comes more clearly into focus, and the prefigurative dimension becomes not only more intelligible but also fundamental.

In setting up a contrast between the illusory nature of the state and the materiality of lived social relations, however, Abrams draws the line too starkly. He urges scholars to examine how the state comes to be constructed, to treat the *idea* of the state as an object of analysis, but we might also treat it as an important object of struggle. If the ideological exercises such sway over

us, mystifying relations, clouding judgment, misrepresenting the terrain, then the struggle to be waged is not only a material, but also a cultural one. This was one of Gramsci's core insights. Combining this insight with a careful analysis of the discursive construction of the state in India, Akhil Gupta (1995) reminds us that 'one's theory of 'the state' does greatly matter in formulating struggles for political action' and suggests that, in any struggle, what 'is at stake is nothing less than a transformation in the manner in which the state comes to be constructed'.[3] Noting the state's contingent nature, fashioned as 'it' is out of myriad processes, practices and discourses, Gupta stressed that 'we must remember how unstable and fragile this self-representation is and how it could *always be otherwise*' (Gupta 1995, p. 394, emphasis in original). Of course, in struggling over how the state comes to be constructed, the goal is not to replace one abstraction with another, one externalization of human power and desire with another just as alienating. It is ultimately, as Marx noted, to reabsorb those powers, to engage with one another as whole, unfractured beings, to collectively (re)constitute ourselves as a community-in-freedom (Brissette 2013).

This is precisely what the prefigurative offers: a chance in the here and now to enact another set of social relations, to actualize another kind of vision, to make real freedom-in-community and universal(izing) love, or *eros*. Rather than reinscribe the ideological fiction of the state, rather than interpellate it with demands, the prefigurative impulse has the potential to melt or transcend that realm of illusions and to shift the concrete terrain of struggle by simply acting otherwise.

The Prefigurative Is Political

In a lyrical reflection on the violence, exclusion and injustice at the heart of America's social order, Ashon Crawley (2014) offers 'Otherwise' as locus of hope and struggle: 'To begin with the otherwise as word, as concept, is to presume that whatever we have is not all that is possible. . . . Otherwise is the enunciation and concept of irreducible possibility, irreducible capacity, to create change, to be something else, to explore, to imagine, to live fully, freely, vibrantly'. Otherwise. The prefigurative takes this as its ground. It is a wilful practice of *what if*, which subtly shifts conceptions of the state, of struggle, of possibility.

In a very real way the prefigurative could be seen as the heart of politics. As Wendy Brown (1995, p. 38) reminds us, politics is derived from '*politeia*, an ancient Greek term marking the singularly human practice of

constituting a particular mode of collective life through the generation of multiple associations, institutions, boundaries, mores, habits, and laws.' Institutions may congeal, associations ossify, mores become oppressive and suffocating, but politics holds out the promise and *irreducible possibility* that we might constitute our world anew (see also Gutiérrez et al., this volume). The prefigurative marks that moment when movements seek to actualize that promise, to materialize faith in an otherwise and transform personal subjectivities, interpersonal relations and structures of power. In Occupy, the prefigurative suffused life in the camps. It was manifest in the general assemblies which put participatory democracy and consensus decision-making processes into practice. It defined the myriad subcommittees which sustained daily life: kitchen, library, medic, brooms and more. It emerged in drum circles and dance parties, in speak-outs and poetry slams. Absent the camps, the prefigurative was less visible, but it remained present in the ongoing general assemblies, in the persistent work of self-organizing subcommittees, in budding relationships and personal transformations, on the picket line, and in scattered but deliberate attempts to (re)create moments of freedom-in-community (Brissette 2013; King and Brissette forthcoming).

Politics as a practice of constituting collective life is not confined to 'the state'. To locate politics only within the state is to make the latter coterminous with collective life; to locate politics in a state rendered distinct from society is to externalize freedom and alienate us from one another and our species-being. We should read Occupy's refusal to make demands of the state or to organize itself for electoral impact in this light: this refusal was not because Occupy was fundamentally apolitical or non-strategic, but because to engage in these narrowly 'political' acts would divest participants of their collective power and reinscribe that of the state. It would trap the movement in a statist construction of 'the possible' and belie the fact that the limits of what is possible are continually rewritten through collective action. Occupy embraced a prefigurative form of direct action that seeks less to dramatize long-simmering tensions or force negotiations with powerholders[4] than to immediately and directly create new social relations, new practices and new understandings within the (expanding) interstices of the old (see also Maeckelbergh, this volume). And in that action-as-creation lies the heart of politics. Prefigurative politics are *politics* in the most basic sense: they seek to actualize a (vision of) collective life. Forward looking, yet resolutely present, prefigurative politics activate imagination while reconfiguring lived social relations and

the exercise of power. They instantiate faith in the possibility of a transformed world and embody the courage to (en)act Otherwise.

Notes

1. In an early assessment of the Occupy movement, Tarrow (2011) was sympathetic to the movement's lack of demands and clear 'political' identity, but he failed to grasp the movement's prefigurative nature and instead read the movement as a bid for recognition, a kind of 'We Are Here!' moment.
2. Of course there are many scholars who take these dimensions seriously, but these dimensions are not easily systematized and slotted into mechanistic models, and those who analyse them remain largely on the margins of the field of North American social movement studies, despite (in most cases) being closer to the movements they study. For exemplars among North American scholars in addition to Breines and Katsiaficas, see, for example, Epstein (1991), Polletta (2006), Gould (2009), and Dixon (2014).
3. For an example of how one's theory of the state shapes subjectivities and forms of political action, see Brissette (2015).
4. This is how Martin Luther King, Jr. (2003), for example, understood direct action.

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CHAPTER 9

The Prefigurative Turn: The Time and Place of Social Movement Practice

Marianne Maeckelbergh

Abstract Maeckelbergh argues that experimentation with alternative political structures within social movements as a form of prefigurative politics is too often understood as separate from 'other' forms of politics. Those who reproduce the dichotomy argue that 'other' forms of politics are more strategic, instrumental and effective than prefiguration, which by comparison, becomes astrategic and ineffective. Drawing on the examples from the post-2011 wave of uprisings, with a focus on a general strike in Spain, Maeckelbergh argues that it is not possible to separate out 'prefiguration' from 'other' forms of political activity. The false dichotomy between prefiguration and 'instrumental' action is closely tied to powerful declarations about when a movement has succeeded or failed. The success/failure paradigm, however, is problematic when considering prefigurative politics because it raises the question of *when* such an assessment can rightly be made. The temporality of social change implied in prefiguration does not allow for easy success/failure declarations and the question of *when* we assess these movements therefore becomes a central concern with powerful consequences.

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Introduction

In the early 2010s social movements, uprisings, revolutions and revolts spread across the world. In the aftermath of the 2011 occupation and assembly-based movements, there has been an upsurge in scholarly interest in the concept and practice of prefigurative politics within social movements.[1] Prefiguration as a political practice, however, was nothing new in 2011; it has a long history and will likely outlast the contemporary moment.[2] It therefore seems important to explore some of the problems related to prefiguration that have emerged in the literature. In this chapter, I take up two interconnected problems. The first is the idea that prefigurative politics can somehow be separated out from 'other' forms of politics. The second is an analytical problem: it is the question of *when* exactly we can determine whether an attempt to prefigure an alternative future has succeeded of failed. Both of these matters have consequences for the movements we study and for our analyses of them. I argue that in order to understand how prefiguration works in practice, we need to understand it as a process that is integrated into and connects many types of movement activity and, consequently, that it can be dangerous to assess its success or failure through too short a time frame.

What Is Prefiguration?

Prefiguration is a practice – an embodied process of reimagining all of society – and as such the specific practice of prefiguration is different every time and in each place that it is enacted. Social movements can prefigure any number of different political values, but the term is most commonly used in relation to social movements that embody a left-wing politics that is distinct from traditional left politics, in that it rejects the idea of revolutionary change guided by a vanguard as well as the idea of a transition in which the revolutionary goal is deferred to an unspecified moment in the future after a 'period of readjustment' (Yates 2015, p. 2). As Franks (2003) puts it, prefiguration is 'anti-consequentialist' – prefiguration does not privilege the ends to the exclusion of the means of political struggle.

Prefiguration is commonly written about as a conflation of the means and ends of political action in the daily organizing of social movements so

that the movement organizes itself in a way that embodies (or attempts to embody) its own ideals (Graeber 2002, 2009, 2013; Juris 2008; Maeckelbergh 2009, 2011; Polletta 2002). The principles and values of the desired future society are what guide the movement's own organizational logic. What this conflation of ends and means signifies in practice, however, is a matter of empirical investigation that requires an examination of which ends and which means are being enacted and in relation to which other ends and means that may be present in movements, as well as an analysis of how even the same ends and means are articulated differently at different times (Yates 2015, pp. 15–18). From the perspective of daily movement practice, we therefore must view prefiguration as 'inherently experimental and experiential' (Van De Sande 2015, p. 189) since movements are creating and trying out new political and economic forms in situ. These new forms are 'both actual and imagined, emergent but unguaranteed' (Bonilla 2010, p. 135).

The movements that are presented in this chapter prefigure various forms of anti-hierarchical social, political and economic organization, often referred to as 'horizontal'.[3] In the case of these movements, prefiguration is used to refer to movements that are leaderless, or as many prefer, leaderful. These movements reject not only the idea of a vanguard but also the idea that hierarchical social stratification is necessary for effective political organization in favour of prefiguring new forms of social organization that reject leaders and fixed political representation.[4] Within these movements, leadership is distributed (though not always equally) so that acts of leadership are carried out by many, if not all, participants. A prefigurative process is direct and unmediated by political or economic elites based on the assumption that political leaders will not or cannot bring about the kind of total social transformation that is needed. The goal of prefiguration is not to get someone within a position of power to recognize and respond to your grievance. It is about reimagining society through experimenting with new political practices. Horizontal prefiguration is anti-capitalist and anti-state. This does not mean that everyone in these movements is necessarily anti-capitalist or anti-state, but the ultimate aim of a radically equal society that maximizes collective self-determination and autonomy requires an end to capitalism and an end to the state in its form as a centralized structure of bureaucratic organization and violent control. Prefiguration is therefore a way movements can experiment with forms of social organization that can confront and replace capitalism and the state.

This chapter looks at how prefiguration works at the level of everyday movement practice with two specific goals in mind. First, to show why it is impossible to separate out prefiguration from 'other' forms of political activity. To this end, I intentionally use an example of movement organizing, strikes, that are not usually thought of as prefigurative to show how prefiguration is a process that can be implicated in many forms of political action. The idea that prefigurative politics cannot be separated from other forms of political practice may be a somewhat obvious point to many movement actors, but it is unfortunately necessary to make this argument because many scholars posit as their *starting assumption* a dichotomy between prefigurative politics and 'other' forms of politics. Just one recent example of this mode of thought is the opening question posed by the Berkeley Journal of Sociology's issue on 'Power and Prefiguration':

> Is the prevailing narrative about the recent global wave of uprisings – that they are 'prefigurative' and 'leaderless' – really representative of the majority of political organizing today, and of the relationship between movements, the state and power? Is horizontal 'prefigurative politics' the dominant mode of organizing against contemporary global capitalism, or are other forms of politics still flourishing?

Framing the discussion as an either/or problem, taking the idea that *either* prefiguration is 'the dominant mode of organizing' *or* other forms of politics are 'still flourishing' as the starting assumption for a debate on the subject builds the discussion on the basis of a fundamental misunderstanding of how movement politics works in practice. These 'other' forms of politics are often labelled 'strategic' or 'instrumental' – which when used in this context means the use of hierarchical organization in the pursuit of clearly and narrowly demarcated goals (goals that are perceived as achievable). This is a rather outdated notion of what movement strategy is, but it still emerges today (see, e.g. Engler and Engler 2014) in critiques of prefigurative politics within Occupy. And so the idea that we, as movements, have to be either prefigurative or instrumental in our actions, becomes part of a discourse that tells us that we must be more instrumental – in the narrowly defined meaning of the term. That is, that we need to formulate clear demands and direct these at those who can respond.[5]

This dichotomy rests on the idea that prefiguration is an isolated political act or strategy. But prefiguration is a way of understanding the broader significance of movement praxis – and as such any numbers of

seemingly 'instrumental' actions have their place within the larger process of prefiguration. In fact, the spaces and process of prefiguration are those where actions targeting capital and the state are planned and carried out, they are the spaces where demands are formulated.[6] Few people would challenge the claim that prefigurative politics was central to the Occupy movement, but at the same time many of the campaigns that were an integral part of Occupy or that grew out of Occupy were demands for specific goals (i.e. to stop evictions, to change stop and frisk laws, to scrap debt and so on). These specific demands directed at people in the position of power were also viewed by participants as part of a wider process of dismantling the existing system while building a new one. The question is not whether there is a specific demand being made, or a clear immediate goal being pursued – the question is do the people making those demands and pursuing that goal *also* think that embodying the movement's principles in their own organizational practices is an essential part of bringing about the desired political structures within society as a whole?

Second, the desire to emphasize 'instrumentality' is closely tied to the desire to assess whether a movement has succeeded or failed in relation to specific goals it has set for itself (or, as is often the case, goals that were projected onto the movement by observers). As I have argued elsewhere, prefiguration should itself be understood as a strategic movement practice because it is the most effective way to set about developing the new sets of social, political and economic relations that are required to successfully create new political and economic systems (see Maeckelbergh 2011). However, regardless of whether we choose to view prefiguration itself as strategic or not, one difficulty prefiguration presents us with is the question of *when* to measure whether prefiguration has succeeded of failed. Since prefiguration is the enactment in the present moment of a transformed future world which we desire to bring about, but we carry out this practice with full knowledge that we are unlikely to transform the entire world overnight, the question of temporality becomes essential to our understanding of prefiguration.

While it does not matter much to me whether we call movements 'prefigurative' or not – nor is this label important to most people I know who have been involved in the movements I have worked with – what does matter is the way that the dichotomy between prefiguration and instrumental/strategic action has been used to delegitimize a form of political struggle that is of essential importance to thousands of people around the world. If prefiguration (as we have known it) is to be abandoned as a movement practice, this should emerge out of movement experiences, not

out of the creation of some false dichotomy set-up to dismiss out of hand an entire history of thought about the practice of social change. In this historical moment, after the upsurge in prefigurative politics within the movements that spread around the world since 2011, many people who were involved in these movements are wondering what exactly prefiguration accomplished and what it can or cannot accomplish as a strategy of social change, so it is important that we make sure we are evaluating off the basis of a realistic understanding of how prefiguration works.

Organizing Strikes

Since the start of 2011 there have been many general strikes in several of the countries where there have been uprisings. Greece has had more general strikes than perhaps any other country with over thirty general strikes between 2008 and 2015. In the immediate aftermath of the economic crisis, the island of Guadalupe was brought to a complete halt for 44 days as the result of a coordinated mass strike effort (Bonilla 2010). Even in the USA and the UK, activists used clever strategies to call for and enact a new version of a general strike. On 30 November 2011 in the UK, where sympathy strikes are illegal, unions nevertheless managed to organize the second largest demonstration in London's history, calling it a strike, under the auspices of protesting pension reform, addressing not just pension reform, but the entire austerity regime. In Oakland, California, the Occupy movement called for a general strike on 2 November 2012 – a strike that successfully shut down the port of Oakland, the fifth busiest container port in the USA. Strike action was also essential in the 18 days of revolution in Egypt, with many people referring to the wildcat strikes as a tipping point in the fall of the Mubarak regime. In each of these examples, strike action took an unusual and creative form – not always being called for by the unions. In each case the strike action relied on and merged with popular movements in the streets, made up of people who are unemployed, precarious, un-unionized or students – in other words, people who are organized through political networks and organizations that are not directly connected to their workplace. In many of the cases described above, the organizing for the strike happened inside the horizontal prefigurative spaces of the occupied squares and encampments and was either initiated by, or at least coordinated with, these movements. So while each strike certainly had specific grievances (a new labour reform law, pension cuts) or had a specific 'instrumental' goal (such as shutting down the port,

or halting capital production and circulation), the presence of these grievances and goals cannot be separated from the wider ongoing prefigurative process aimed at near total societal transformation.

Of all the major strikes since 2011, the general strike in Spain on 29 March 2012 is perhaps one of the most impressive. In Barcelona, there was over 80% participation in the strike and most industries were shut down entirely. In other parts of the country, such as the Basque country, where the call for a general strike originated, there was over 90% participation. Nationwide schools, universities, construction and heavy industries all went on strike: auto, rubber, steel, petrochemical, food, mining and manufacturing industries among others. Total 90% of long-distance rail workers went on strike bringing transport, shipping and distribution to a halt. In the mining and construction industry the figure stood at 90–100% work stoppage, and in manufacturing it was over 80%. All across the country cities were at a stand still, many highways were blocked and several ports were paralysed. In Barcelona, nearly seventy local neighbourhood protests took place.[7]

In contrast to the strike in Oakland, which was decided through a general assembly of Occupy Oakland, the strike in Spain was not initiated by the 15 M movement, but by the Basque unions. However, a large portion of the day's activities were organized by neighbourhood assemblies that grew out of the 15 M movement:

> Not only the unions were on the street, also a lot of people organised themselves. After the 15 M movement left Plaça Catalunya, the people split up into local assemblies in different neighborhoods. For the general strike, these assemblies, the local assemblies, they organised their own pickets during the day of the general strike independently of the call made by the unions. Just unions could not bring out so many people as at the last general strike. (Member of Enmedio collective, 29 March 2012, interview by Brandon Jourdan)

So a large part of the organization for the strike took place in the assembly spaces where experimenting with new forms of social and political organization in daily movement practice was an important part of the process. The involvement of neighbourhood assemblies stemming from the 15 M movement had the effect of transforming the 'logic' of a strike:

> The logic of the union strike is to shut down factories to shut down the work place. This is really centered in individual work places and really relies on workers in those spaces to do something at the same time.... On the 29th of March in addition to the labour union strikes, you started to

> see neighborhood assemblies of different types of non-union workers contributing.... We really saw all of this repertoire come together along with the consumption strike which was another way to allow people who were not in the workplace a way to participate by just not consuming anything that day to give more strength to the goal of shutting down economic production. (29 March 2012, interview by Brandon Jourdan)

The consumption strike was a powerful addition to the shutting down of work places. Shops that remained open were targeted by the neighbourhood assemblies marching from their own neighbourhoods towards central Barcelona. If it was a small business, the protestors would be kind and ask them to please close. For corporate and chain establishments the tactics were harsher, including blockades of doors, shouting at shoppers as they entered or left the buildings, and in the case of Starbucks, it was set on fire. All of these actions co-existed simultaneously in the day of action and they all contributed to the 'success' of the strike and the general show of popular force that the strike embodied. These many different actions were not intended to be primarily the prefiguration of a better society in and of themselves, but for many of these actions, the process of organizing was prefigurative in that the meetings were part of a longer process of reinventing political life as we know it and bringing a collective radical imagination into everyday practice to organize and coordinate political and economic life.

Additionally, these strikes had effects beyond just causing economic loss for a day. They represented an important shift in how strikes could be thought about and organized. As the 15 M activists pointed out, unions are also most commonly focussed on production, leaving consumption on the day of a strike to continue as usual. Contemporary unions often have a role as negotiators who need to be viewed by their bosses or by political representatives as 'reasonable'. The 15 M movement, on the other hand, with its unmediated horizontal action organized through decentralized neighbourhood assemblies, was perfectly positioned to target consumption in each of their respective neighbourhoods. It was a fruitful collaboration, but this collaboration was not a collaboration that ignored the political and tactical differences between the 15 M movement and the unions. The collaboration developed a mode of organization in which groups who do not share the same political principles, aims or tactics could coordinate without having to cooperate directly.

The classically instrumental action of unions going on strike, therefore, was in the aftermath of the 2011 movement of the squares, inextricably

linked to a wider political practice of prefiguration, even if many of the movement actors involved in organizing the strike and many of those who went on strike might not have seen it this way. In the messy reality of daily movement organizing it becomes hard to think of any moments of prefiguration that were completely isolated from 'other forms' of politics, and conversely, hard to imagine any form of politics that was isolated from from the prefigurative impulse of the larger movements. Strikes may be short-lived events that cause financial loss, that bring bosses to negotiating tables, that try to impact legislative reform, but the mode of organization employed to make that action happen can still be prefigurative of new and better social relations and political structures. It is important to see the ways that all forms of action come to fruition through multiple forms of organization at once because it is too easy to argue that prefiguration is a 'failure' when we isolate it from all the meaningful political changes of which it has been an integral part.

The Temporality of Social Change

This point brings us to the problem of prefiguration and the success/failure paradigm of social movement analysis. While I am sceptical of any analysis that attempts to determine what should constitute 'success' for a political movement, we do need moments of reflection in which we critically assess our own practices and take stock of what is working and what might not be. In order to do this, we need to be aware of which criteria are being used to determine success and under which circumstances these criteria are mobilized. One thing that becomes clear in relation to prefigurative politics is the power wielded by the time frame we choose for assessing our successes and failures. In most cases, when a shorter time frame is used, we see more failures than successes. This is why we ought to be sceptical of those who prematurely declare a movement 'over'. The problem of the 'success' time frame is doubly important for movements that invoke a prefigurative ethos because prefiguration is an enactment of wholly different set of social relations, political structures and economic practices. This enactment happens in the present moment so that we can learn, through practice, how to change the way power operates – not just the power of institutions but also the power of inequalities that are expressed in and through our everyday interactions. Although part of the purpose of prefiguration is to enact these changes in the present moment, such massive social and structural changes cannot be enacted in a

short time frame. In the present moment, therefore, while we try to embody these changes, what we usually end up with in practice is a series of conflicts that arise when we fail to embody the principles fully – or when we succeed in embodying them only partially. While these conflicts often feel like failure in the moment itself, they are how we learn, over time, to enact and continuously improve our new political structures in such a way as to transform the way power operates in our society.

So the question of how and at which point to assess whether these new political structures really do transform the way power operates is an important one. If we assess at a specific moment, we will likely conclude that we have failed. In any given moment, the challenges to dominant power relations present themselves in the form of conflicts that emerge when hierarchies are reproduced. If, however, we take the perspective of long-term movement practice, we can see some improvement over time within movements. In the 1960s and 1970s, movements believed that they were embodying ideals of participatory democracy, but women still took the meeting minutes, prepared the tea and coffee, cleaned all the dishes and no one thought that was a problem until women started asking why the ideals of participatory democracy and equality did not apply to them as well. In the alterglobalization movement, activists thought they had created horizontal spaces by having strict rules against any sexist, racist or heteronormative behaviour and even requiring all participants to actively challenge these types of oppression – these rules were called the 'anti-oppression principles'. The alterglobalization movement drew lessons from civil rights movements and feminist movements to reject a formal notion of equality which served only to reproduce inequality in favour of an active commitment to challenging every inequality when it inevitably emerged. But even this ideal of equality, was not enough. Hidden in this notion of equality was still a type of formal equality that, despite good intentions, did not allow for the active *reversal* of power hierarchies that was necessary in the highly unequal society that we inhabit. Allowing everyone to be leaders, was not enough to counteract power hierarchies. In the USA, there was a backlash from movement participants to the persistence of oppression within the Occupy movement, and in 2014, the Black Lives Matter movement placed black leadership centrally as an organizing principle to actively reverse the power relations not just within movements for black lives, but in other movements as well (the idea of promoting black leadership within movements is an old one that was often argued for, but usually fell on deaf ears in the predominantly white

spaces of the alterglobalization movement and Occupy-related movements). I do not mean to present this narrative as some sort of linear progress narrative, because for every lesson learned, lessons were also lost. My point is only that, when viewed over time, prefigurative politics might have more successes than failures, even if each success felt like a failure at the time.

Still, prefiguration involves the creation of a model of social organization that in the long run is meant to replace the existing political and economic order, and measuring whether the existing order is being replaced is not a simple matter. Many people have already declared Occupy and similar movements a failure, just a few years on – but from the point of view of prefigurative politics, this might be premature. Prefigurative politics is a process that cannot be measured through short-term perspectives. Have they failed for not having successfully ended capitalism and overthrown the nation-state system in just a few years? The problem is that there is no way to decide when the assessment should happen – how long should we wait before we say that prefiguration has failed? Transforming the way power operates, even within the movements themselves, takes a long time. I have no answers to these questions, except to say that we need analyses that understand the way prefiguration is integrated within a larger set of movement practices, not analyses that separate it out artificially and then declare it powerless. What we need are analyses that can grasp how political innovation works on multiple levels at once, across time and even from one place to the next – analyses that do not declare movements over, but which allow movements to continue into the future even if it leaves the author with an uncomfortably unbounded subject.

Notes

1. A complete list of all references would be impossible, but here is a small selection (since 2012 only): Baker (2013), Brissette (2013), Dinerstein (2015), Howard and Pratt-Boyden (2013), Graeber (2013), Juris (2012), Kokkinidis (2015), Luchies (2015), Maeckelbergh (2012a, b), Murray (2014), Pickerill and Krinsky (2014), Razsa and Kurnik (2012), Serafini (2015), Sitrin (2012), Sitrin and Azzellini (2014), Szolucha (2013), Teivainan (2016), Van De Sande (2015), Wilding et al. (2014), Yates (2015).
2. On prefiguration prior to 2000: See Boggs (1977), Breines (1989), Epstein (1991), Franks (2003), Polletta (2002).

3. Movements can, of course, prefigure any set of values.
4. The rejection of fixed representation is not a rejection of a division of labor, the allocation of tasks and responsibilities, or a rejection of fluid and temporary forms of representation, all of which are quite important in horizontal movements (for an excellent discussion of the role of representation within global justice movements see Teivainen 2016).
5. It is relevant here to contextualize how this dichotomy has arisen. There are two types of thinkers that fuel this dichotomy – traditional communist/socialists who hold on to a pure consequentialist theory of revolutionary social change in which our egalitarian future is brought to us at a later time by our new leaders, and modernist democrats (in the sense of classic modernization theory) who believe that social change is a linear trajectory of progress enacted from above by designated representatives on behalf of 'the people' and our job is to ask for the changes we want/need or to elect someone who will embody these changes on our behalf. In both models the only form of action deemed 'strategic' is one carried out through a clear hierarchical organization. Furthermore, the 'reasonableness' and legitimacy of movement goals is determined not by the movement itself, but from above by movement leaders or elected officials.
6. For a critique see Dinerstein (2015, p. 18).
7. All of the information presented on strikes since 2011 was gathered and analysed in collaboration with Brandon Jourdan as part of the globaluprisings.org film series. See http://www.globaluprisings.org/barcelona-march-29th-general-strike/

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CHAPTER 10

Rethinking Social Movements with Societies in Movement

Marina Sitrin

Abstract There is a new form of social movement organizing taking place around the globe, one grounded in direct action, horizontalidad, prefiguration and self-organization. The Contentious Politics framework in sociology is not sufficient to understand these movements, as these new movements do not have as their point of reference the government or making a 'claim' as their starting point. This chapter opens a conversation on thinking more broadly about what is taking place, using the concept of societies in movement. In particular, it looks to movement practices in Latin America over the past 20 years to garner ways of rethinking theory based in practice.

Keywords Affect · *Autogestión* · Contentious politics · Horizontalism · Social movement · Societies in movement

Introduction: Societies in Movement Beyond Contention

With this chapter, I hope to further recent conversations that challenge the place of newer, more autonomous movements, in the sphere of social movement theory.[1] As the movements in this text describe, along with

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many others not included here, there is something new taking place around the globe. Societies and communities are organizing with one another, and many, rather than looking to institutions of power as the place of change, are first looking to one another, creating horizontal relationships and together deciding the way forward. Not making 'claims' on the state along with seeing power as horizontal does not fit into the framework of contentious politics or the field of protest studies. The argument made here is not an attempt to criticize the theory as it stands as much as to expand it and place the critique on the all-too-frequent use of frameworks to understand movements – rather than listening to these movements. As other chapters in this book illustrate, there is popular theory being developed, in movement, with and by these same movements, and our role as scholars is to listen and from that place begin to think together about the moment in which we are living. Perhaps expanding social movement theory. Perhaps creating new theory. Perhaps abandoning the idea of theory. First, let us assess where we are and what people in movement are doing and saying.

From the Zapatistas in 1994 declaring a resounding '*Ya Basta*!' and rather than making demands on institutional power for autonomy, created dozens of indigenous rebel communities encompassing many thousands, to Argentina, in 2001 with the popular rebellion singing, '*Que Se Vayan Todos! Que No Quede Ni Uno Solo!*' and, as with the Zapatistas, organizing in horizontal assemblies, creating alternatives, from recuperating workplaces, creating alternative media, to building autonomous communities on the peripheries of cities. And the hundreds of thousands of people around the globe, led by women, often organized in neighbourhoods and entire communities, to defend the earth, water and air – using forms of direct democracy and direction action. To then the Movements of the Squares, mobilizing millions around the world and looking to one another instead of the institutions that created the crisis.

What has been taking place around the world is part of a new wave that is both revolutionary in the day-to-day sense of the word, as well as without precedent with regard to consistency of form, politics, scope and scale. Separately, many of these forms are not 'new'; however, it is the taking of them together that makes them such. The current frameworks provided by the social sciences to understand these movements, particularly the 'contentious politics' and 'protest frameworks' in social movement theory have yet to catch up with what is new and different about the movements.

Contentious politics, a framework for understanding social movements that is generally accepted in the social sciences, is defined by Sidney Tarrow and David Meyer, two of the eminent scholars within this field and framework as 'collective challenges to existing arrangements of power and distribution by people with common purposes and solidarity, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities' (Meyer and Tarrow 1998, p. 4). Further, Tarrow and Meyer view social movements functionally as a 'way of making claims in national politics'. And Charles Tilly, perhaps the most pre-eminent US contemporary scholar of social movement theory, and specifically the politics of contention, articulated three criteria that must exist for the existence of a social movement, the first being 'a sustained, organized public effort making collective claims on target authorities' (Tilly 2010, p. 53).

In this chapter, I open a conversation on other ways of understanding what has been taking place with communities in movement, and suggest new ways to think about them. In particular, I examine horizontal and prefigurative forms of organization and the uses of direct action, autogestión and autonomy to meet movement goals, over demands on institutions and 'claims' on governments. I argue that by looking to the global south, with the practices and emergent theories of the movements we are better able to engage with and understand this new phenomenon. I use a dozen examples of movements from Latin America to begin to illustrate this newness and the commonalities of what is being created.

Contention and Repertoire

The current framework for understanding social movements no longer fits the reality for millions of people – perhaps it never did. Structures and frameworks in general are not a good place to begin to understand societies and people in movement (Flacks 2003: 136), and rather, listening to and engaging with those people, from below and horizontally, is what will allow for the best listening and really hearing. From there, how it is interpreted is yet another question. First, one must begin on the ground, in movement, with people, not in with preformed concepts and frames. I write this not only because it is a better practice and one based in respect and participation, as Bourdieu (1993, 2002) argued, but if one begins first with a theory or framework, and then tries to fit people or a movement into it, there will be invariable errors and conflicts in understanding. Unfortunately, this is what has increasingly been occurring in

social movement sociology. This chapter argues from the perspective of and within the new practices. As it puts forward a lacking in the sociological understandings of these movements, it relies heavily on movement descriptions and ethnographic observations. I put forward the term 'societies in movements' in order to help understand these movements. This is not done to provide another theoretical framework, but a loose description that allows for more creative engagement than those so far offered in the contentious politics field. First, coined by Raul Zibechi related to Bolivia in the early 2000s, I use the phrase both with the literal meaning, societies/communities that are moving, and take it a bit further to people creating their own communities, not just those organized in geographic locations.

Societies in Movement: Some Examples

The movements described in this chapter paint a small part of a much larger picture of societies and communities in movement. These are not traditional social movements, with participants mobilized around particular slogans or one demand forethought and pre-organized by a coordinating committee. Neither do they use pre-formed tactics to meet a set strategy. The movements emerge from necessity, use the assembly form, and having found demands on governments to be fruitless, they turn to one another, creating horizontally and self-organizing autonomously. The participants in these movements have generally not been politically active, and most identify as neighbour, grandmother, daughter or sister. They do not organize with party or union structures and do not seek representative formations. They come together in assembly forms, not out of any ideology, but because being in a circle is the best way for people to see and hear one another. They strive for horizontalism because they do not want to replicate those structures where power is something wielded. They do not begin talking about power or empowerment, and end up creating new theories and practices of what it means to change the world.

Between 2011 and 2012, millions of people gathered in plazas and squares declaring in Spain *No Nos Representan!* (They Don't Represent US!), in Greece *вы нас даже не представляете!* (*Ya Basta* referencing the Zapatistas), in Russia *vy nas dazhe ne predstavlyayete!* (You can't represent us – and you cannot even imagine us!) and the spark in Egypt *Kefaya*! (Enough!). People came together in that *no*, that refusal, and turning their backs on the state and institutions that brought them

to this moment looked to one another and began talking about alternatives; forming assemblies and over time, networks and groups of self-organization (Sitrin and Azzellini 2014; Roos and Oikonomakis 2013). The media were incredulous, ceaselessly asking, *what do they want*? The traditional left was equally so, as well as angry when the movements did not accept their leadership. And the social scientists were some combination, concluding these were not movements but appearances, 'we are here' moments (Tarrow 2011).

A number of years have passed since the plaza occupations, yet the reverberations continue. As the Spanish 15 M movement participants reflect, the movement was *una clima*, a sensation. This echoes societies in movement in Latin America over the past decade where, for example, people in Argentina refer to their continued use of *horizontalidad* and autonomy as being children of the popular rebellion of 2001 (Falleti 2012). Looking to Latin America not only helps one understand what has been taking place with the movements of the squares but also opens an entirely new way of thinking about power, movement and society.

Another interesting example is the Zapatistas, who have opened the collective imaginations of activists and other movements to what is possible from below and against and beyond the state. It is also one of the most exemplary movements defying the contentious politics framework. The Zapatistas appeared to the world on 1 January 1994 declaring a resounding '*Ya Basta!*'; rejecting over 500 years of domination. The taking back of their land was an integral part of the refusal of a history of repression and domination. The construction of alternative communities, relationships and governance forms that began over 20 years ago continues to this day. One of the many phrases referenced by the newer movements to describe how they are refusing to accept the status quo and simultaneously are creating alternatives is the Zapatista concept of 'one no and many yeses' (Kingsnorth 2004). The Zapatistas now control approximately the northeast half of Mexico's Chiapas territory divided into five regions/caracoles, with several municipalities in each. Each has its own autonomous governance, *the Juntas de Buen Gobierno* (as opposed to the bad state government). These are directly democratic governments focused on the autonomous projects in each region: schools, health clinics, cooperative land projects and the women's groups.

In 2008, I participated in the Zapatista Women's *Encuentro* in La Garrucha, the Selva Tzeltal zone. The event was organized, facilitated and

run by women, with the exception of the cooking and cleaning, including the recently constructed dry toilets, all of which was done by the Zapatista men. Nothing remotely like this had ever taken place in the Zapatista communities, and despite some debate, all went smoothly. Presentations were made by delegates from the five *Caracoles* on topics such as: what life was like before becoming Zapatistas; how they have achieved the rights they have today; how they sustain themselves in struggle; what their responsibilities are now as compared to before and how they struggle as Zapatista females. The Zapatistas, as many of the autonomous movements in Latin America, speak of the importance of dignity and changed subjectivity. This is an area not easily measured by the social sciences, yet one that is among the most important to the movements. Women from the different communities spoke for days, telling their personal and collective stories, and the transformation of the society could be felt with their words. The words were spoken in Spanish, often their second or third language. Not used to public speaking, and still being held by the culture of demure demeanours, most people had to strain to hear them.

Then 9-year-old Marialinda got up to speak and perfectly illustrated this new dignity. She spoke clearly and looked up at the hundreds of women in the room. At once the new society was here.

> I'm going to tell you about my own life and about my rights.
>
> As a girl I have the right to do everything I want to do.
>
> My parents have given me the right to study in the autonomous schools so that I can learn.
>
> They have given me the right go out, to play, sing and dance because I think it's necessary to have fun.

People applauded at almost every sentence and laughed at the part about having fun. She spoke with such clarity and self-assurance that it was evident the Zapatistas had created the next generation.

My third example includes Argentina's Que se vayan todos movements (QSVT), the Unemployed Workers Movements (MTDs) and the recuperated workplace movement. On 19 and 20 December 2001, an economic crisis, precipitated by years of unprecedented privatization, came to a head in Argentina. When the government froze people's bank accounts, the populace could no longer be silent and began to go into the streets banging pots and pans – *cacerolando*. They were not organized by political parties or in formal grouping, but seeing their neighbours in the streets, hundreds of

thousands went out *cacerolando*. No specific demand, just a song 'Que se vayan todos, que no quede ni uno solo'. It worked. They forced out four consecutive governments. The movement has since been referred to as the 19th and 20th. Rather than looking to take over the state, people took over workplaces and formed neighbourhood assemblies exploding with new groups and networks from media and art collectives, popular kitchens, after school programmes to groups for reflection and a massive barter network. Due to space limitations, this chapter will address only three such formations: recuperated workplaces, the MTDs and the more recent movements in defence of the land. All such movements functioned with assemblies coining the now widespread term *horizontalidad*. *Horizontalidad* is a social relationship described as a flat plane upon which to communicate. It emerged in reaction to hierarchical forms of organizing, and became both a tool and goal for emancipatory relationships (Sitrin 2006; Zibechi 2012). While some have shrunk numerically, the forms of organizing inspired by the popular rebellion continue in the movements. Many refer to themselves as *Hijos del 19 y 20*, meaning their organizing embodies those forms practised in the early assemblies: *horizontalidad*, autonomy and *autogestion* in particular (Sitrin 2012; Falleti 2012).

All the energy that was released on the 19th and 20th did not slow down. There was an epoch change – it has been more than 10 years and we have a government with a long continuum of Kirchnerismo and the many changes in Latin America, but the important energy is citizen participation, to join an assembly to discuss problems, listen, create tools through direct action and struggle with road blockades. . . . That is not stopping, not at all, the opposite . . . (Sparato in Sitrin 2014). 'Occupy, Resist, Produce' – this slogan represents one of the past two decades' most straightforward yet sophisticated movements in Latin America. With over 350 recuperated workplaces in Argentina today, workers are creating new relationships to production, often challenging the capitalist mode of value production (De Angelis 2006; Holloway 2010; Zibechi 2008). Workplace recuperations in Argentina arose from economic necessity: workers took the situation into their own hands, not organized by unions, parties or any other external force – they self-organized horizontally (Zibechi 2006). The number of recuperations rose from 5 in 2001 to 270 in 2009 and 350 by early 2015 (Ruggeri 2014). Similarly in Uruguay and Brazil, workers have taken the prospect of unending unemployment into their own hands, organizing in assemblies and putting their workplaces back into production. Workers are not staging sit-ins, strikes or occupations; they are recuperating, that is

recovering, reclaiming, taking back something that was already theirs (Ruggeri 2014). Workers almost always insist on this language. They organize looking to one another, and most all explain how they organize with *horizontalidad* (Sitrin forthcoming).

Community is central to any recuperation. Once a recuperation process has begun neighbours mobilize in support, and the workplace becomes a social centre for the community, with evening events, workshops and increasingly in Argentina, the bases for *Bachillerato Populares*, alternative high school degree programmes organized horizontally by people in the community. The recuperated workplaces' relationship to the state has changed over time. In the first years it was resisting police repression and eviction orders. As time passed and the state struggled to regain legitimacy, various mechanisms were created so that autonomous movements would engage with it (Sitrin 2012). One such measure is the laws of cooperation, which include the legal option for workplaces to become cooperatives. This allows workplaces to function legally for a period of time and to apply for government loans. At the same time, there are regular attempts to evict the workplaces, even those who have requested legal status, besides regular bureaucratic obstacles.

The Argentine Unemployed Workers Movement (MTD) first arose in the 1990's, and took off after 2001. Generally, led by women, unemployed workers in the northern and southern provinces took to the streets by the thousands, blocking major transportation arteries demanding subsidies from the government (Dinerstein 2001, 2002, 2013; Svampa and Pereyra 2003). Instead of using party brokers or elected officials, as was the norm, people came together in assemblies deciding horizontally what to do next. The *piquete* was developed to stop all transit, not having the option of strikes or other forms of collective action. It was on the *piquete* that the assembly experience deepened and relationships amongst neighbours, supporting one another often for days at a time, created the solidarity and forms of self-organization that were to be the base of the movements in the future. Over time people began to refer to the *piquete* not so much as the shutting down of something, but the opening of something else (Zibechi 2012).

The organization and consistency of the blockades forced the government to give the first unemployment subsidies in Latin America. Within a few years of the emergence of the *piquetes* many groups evolved into movements, expanding their strategies and tactics. Some movements continued to demand from the state, while others, those to which this chapter

refers, are movements that decided to no longer look to the state and abandoned the *piquete,* focusing their energy on the new relationships and forms of *autogestion* learned on the blockades. As Neka, one of the organizers of the MTD Solano explained, 'The most marvelous idea is not to think of the future and deposit your life in the hands of others who will then guarantee this future, but rather the recuperation of life and live it in a way that is different' (Neka in Sitrin 2006, p. 242).

Movements sometimes squatted land, built housing, gardens, raised livestock, created alternative education and health care along with many other creative and subsistence projects. Most all had a group for reflection with anything from weekly discussion on popular topics to study groups of books related to movements and autonomy, to the organization of regional and national gatherings. Some of the initial projects of the MTD Solano, beyond the bakeries and kitchens, were fish hatcheries, shoe production and acupuncture classes. In the MTD La Matanza, outside Buenos Aires, the movement created a school, a small sewing shop and an elaborate bakery selling to many in the neighbourhood. In La Plata they took over land to build housing, and in the MTD Allen, in Patagonia, they developed a micro-enterprise called 'Discover', because through the MTD they discovered the value of *compañerismo*, the value of solidarity. Through the MTD, they discovered experiences that 'enable one to expresses oneself beyond words' (Compañera in Sitrin 2006, p. 109).

The movements in defence of the earth are also often great examples of the idea of society in movement, beyond contention. While corporations continue to land grab, exploit and privatize the little still held in common – people around the globe have been rising up. Women are preventing dams from being built in India; indigenous are *Idle No More* defending the earth; entire towns and villages have organized to prevent airports, roads and mines from being developed in France, Italy and Greece; thousands throughout the America have used their bodies to block the construction of pipelines intended for fracking and throughout Latin America there are struggles everywhere against mining and the exploitation of land and water. The use of direct action comes first from a lack of response from the government in each location, or worse, their complicity in the exploitation of the land. Rather than petition a government, which movements see as fruitless, they take matters into their own hands. From the mobilizations and blockades new relationships emerge, and have become the root of many of the new forms of self-organization in the various communities.

What began with a few neighbours meeting to find out possible ramifications of Monsanto in their town turned into hundreds, and within weeks tens of thousands, including supporters from outside the town, creating ongoing blockades of a construction process and site. They stopped Monsanto and what would have been the largest genetically modified seed processing plant in the world. As Vanessa Sartoris, one of the organizers of the Malvinas Assembly and mother of a toddler who, as she explained, grew up in the assembly, reflected, *Our resistance began in 2012 when a group of neighbours came together… almost none of us had organizing experience before. We organize in a horizontal way, don't have a leader and make all the decisions together.*

We began to study their [Monsanto] movements and see on which days things like cement were arriving by truck. Then we would create human barriers, standing in front of the trucks with banners and flags that said 'Out Monsanto' and the 'Assembly of Malvinas'. In September 2013, we organized a festival at the gates of the construction site called 'Spring without Monsanto'. There were tons of people from all over Argentina. There were neighbourhood organizations and community groups; people from the south who were fighting a mining project and the assembly from La Rioja; there were indigenous from Chaco, Paraguay and Brazil who are also fighting against genetically modified soy; there were many from Uruguay and even Central America. It was then that we decided to create a permanent camp at the gates of the site until Monsanto withdrew. On 8 January 2014, the courts in Córdoba decided that Monsanto had to stop the construction and that their permits were illegal (2015). While they gained a legal victory, people in Malvinas and throughout Argentina stay vigilant and organized. Assembly participants reflect that it does not matter who is in government, the only way to stop Monsanto and defend the earth is directly and together. The assembly continues to meet and speak to other places facing similar attempts at land grabbing and contamination and the message is the same, 'We did it and so can you'.

A few 100 km northwest of Malvinas is La Rioja and Mt. La Famatina. Neighbours and communities in the region have been organizing in local assemblies since early 2007 to prevent international mining companies from strip mining the mountain. Townspeople and those from neighbouring towns and villages, coordinated in the Union of Citizens Assemblies, created blockades and prevented every attempt to exploit the mountain. The assemblies, as with most all Latin American land defenders, are

comprised of everyone – 'regular people' as Vanessa from Malvinas described them – and they hold the blockade during the night.

The first company to withdraw was Barrick Gold, then Shandong Gold and finally the Osisko Mining Corporation. Those involved in the movement say 'the struggle to defend La Famatina is forever' (https://www.facebook.com/famatina.nosetoca?fref=ts). What began as a defence of the mountain, earth and water has evolved into a new space of creation. On the road blockades, as with the *piqueteros* years earlier, people organize to cook together, arrange medical support and entertain themselves through music, dance and storytelling. At the heart of all this activity is the assembly. People in each town and village organize regular open assemblies in their squares and plazas where anyone can speak and be heard.

Moving much further east and a bit north, Corrientes is a predominately indigenous region with Guarani as the official co-language. Here, the assemblies decided not only to defend their land from mining and land grabs but also to create a range of micro-projects to sustain themselves and their communities as a way of protecting the earth and surviving without corporations. Emilio Spataro with the Guardianes del Iberá explains, 'The movement has social ecology as its main banner. What is common to the entire organization is the defence of the territory, confronting the advancement of extractive companies that want to plunder, and building autonomy with our own self-managed projects . . . ' (Sitrin 2014)

Autogestión over 'Repertoire'

The most substantial divergence in the theories of contentious politics and the practices and reflections of the movements is on the question of the relationship to the state and government. Contentious politics necessitates that there is always a 'claim' being made and that 'at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims' (McAdam et al. 2001, p. 5). Similarly, the framework of protest is that a social movement must organize against particular institutions or policies (Della Porta and Diani 2006). While some of the movements discussed here began with a claim, such as the unemployed for subsidies, or the land defence movements for the governments to break contracts with (inter)national corporations, over time each of the movements intentionally broke their gaze from the government and looked to one another to meet their goals, from using direct action to block trucks, to taking over land and workplaces from which they survive. The Zapatistas have been developing in this way for over 20 years, the *Regantes*

in Bolivia much longer, as they continue to struggle to maintain their autonomy after the Water Wars, and the recuperated workplaces for almost 15 years now, with their experience spreading throughout the Americas and Europe. And this chapter only touches on a small selection of such societies in movement.

While the movements do not have the government as their point of reference, this does not mean they do not engage it on occasion or have specific needs or demands related to their struggles. The argument is that they do not look to the government in their organizing; their goals are not 'claim' based. Of course there are many moments where movements, such as the Zapatistas, demand an end to repression, or the Regantes in Bolivia oppose government policies, or the recuperated workplaces make a claim for legal status. An end to repression or claim to be left alone is not the same as a claim or demand that if met would meet the goals of a movement, but rather a way of illustrating the undemocratic nature of the government, and often done in such a way as to garner more popular support.

Autogestión, or self-organization is the means that most movements use to organize their alternative ways of being/doing/relating. While the site of the self-organization is sometimes different, it is nonetheless the core of the organizational form. In the land defence movements or HIJOS for example, the struggle is territorial, yet some participants have other jobs or responsibilities that bring them back and forth to the blockades, projects or assemblies. With the recuperated workplaces, MTDs, Zapatistas and Regantes, self-organization and day-to-day survival are intertwined for all.

The societies in movement's ways to achieve their goals, from direct action, blockades, taking over land, workplaces and taking back their natural resources, do not fit into the explanation that resource mobilization, as a part of contentious politics, argues is a necessary means of struggle. What is now referred to as 'the social movement repertoire' (Tilly 2004) does not allow one to see what is actually taking place in the movements, or, perhaps worse, would lead one to argue that what is happening is not a movement. There are times when some tactics from the repertoire are used, but only at times, and most important, the overarching strategy is self-organization for survival and other ways of living – prefigured with horizontal forms.

It is important to note that the position of autogestion over claim-making does not come from an ideological place much of the time, at least initially, but is a result of changes in neo-liberalism to increasingly not meet the needs of populations. In interviews with movement participants around the world

the responses were the same. It is out of necessity that they organize. It is useless to demand of a government that ignores you. Over time however, once the practices of self-organization deepen, these same movement participants reflect on how this is the only way to transform society as it develops new relationships and practices that embody the world that is desired.

Conclusion: Theorizing from Below and in Movement

Many of the groundbreaking moments in social movement theory have come from movement participants themselves contributing by writing and sharing publicly this new way of thinking. Often this happens once activists leave movements and get jobs in the university. But there is so much more taking place from below, ideas and new ways of relating that are being reflected upon together – in movement. One of the aims of this book, and this chapter in particular, is to push us – those in the academy and those not – to listen better to people and societies in movement, and with them create new ways of thinking about, and reflecting upon what is taking place. Perhaps together over time we can open ways of imagining movements that will be helpful for those in movement – as well as ways of accompanying people and movements to which we do not belong. Every big shift in social movement theory has come on the wake of massive global movements. The movements are moving – it is theories time to catch up.

Note

1. The argument in this chapter is a continuation of the one I began in my book *Everyday Revolutions: Horizontalism and Autonomy in Argentina*. There I examined mainly the experiences of Argentina and used them as a way to challenge the contentious politics framework as not sufficient to understand what was taking place.

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