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Everyday Movement Against Capitalism

Prospects for a Prefigurative Strategy Towards Open Utopia

By Alexander Riccio

"Struggle is par for the course when our dreams go into action. But unless we have the space to imagine and a vision of what it means fully to realize our humanity, all the protests and demonstrations in the world won't bring about our liberation."

—*Robin D.G. Kelley*

THE NEXT SYSTEM PROJECT

Across the US, explosions of social uprising abound. Prisoners are calling attention to their conditions of modern-day slavery, students are asserting their authority against formal university leadership, First Nations people are leading massive decolonization efforts in North Dakota, service workers are demanding respect and livable wages, and a dynamic reemergent Black Liberation movement is exercising disruptive tactics against racial oppression.[1] All of this reveals potential openings in the pathway forward from the mire of present domination. Such openings offer not only prospects for gains toward social justice, but for a momentous social revolution many on the left have been desiring for ages. Yet, internal debates among the left on the topic of a revolutionary transition from here to a better place have proven to be an obstacle necessary to overcome to realize the potential of today's possibilities.

In this ongoing polemic, revolutionary perspectives oscillate between two camps: the strategic versus the prefigurative. In brief, strategic proponents argue that social movements must remain politically grounded and materialist in form, requiring the pragmatic use of available resources and technologies. They emphasize the need for a party organization typically led by a vanguard. Prefigurative proponents, conversely, are more idealistic, calling for a transformation of ourselves as well as broader society.[2] They care more about the creation of community than political victories and reject parties on grounds that they morph into bureaucracies that stifle spontaneous and organic methods of practice.

What these camps have primarily battled over is a theory of transition beyond capitalism. Yet, as demonstrated below, these dual orientations have created a false dichotomy. Strategy and prefiguration complement each other as means to liberation, and a framework like that sketched here embraces the radical imagination to eliminate alienation and move everyday toward an open utopia.

Adolph Reed Jr. brings this tension to light when he characterizes the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement of "empty sloganeering… without programmatic or strategic content." Vaguely defined goals expressed as digestible mantras, argues Reed Jr., displace or preclude effective political strategy with "a call for expiation

and moral rehabilitation as political action." On the whole, Reed Jr. critiques BLM reform-based platform as "politically wrong-headed" since it focuses not on racial disparity's "magnitude or intensity in general but [on] whether or not it is distributed in a racially equitable way."[3] Tough love, perhaps, but reviewing "A Vision for Black Lives" from *The Movement for Black Lives* website hints at why Reed Jr. came to such conclusions.[4] The document's core is a call for black dignity and political power, and throughout the authors make it clear that black oppression is the movement's foremost concern.

This vision shouldn't surprise readers given the movement's name. But Reed Jr.'s analysis suggests BLM activists' notions of oppression springing from "patriarchy, exploitative capitalism, militarism, and white supremacy" might be mere lip service if black suffering is presented as a singular issue separate from class oppression. Isn't it, he suggests, reductionist to privilege anti-black racism as the bedrock of injustice that must be eliminated before taking on any other issue?[5]

Reed Jr. particularly questions BLM's point that racial equity is possible within the parameters of existing economic systems—a construct that privileges racial oppression as the touchstone for liberatory politics. That idea is echoed by Alicia Garza, a founding leader of BLM, who explains the movement as a response to "a disease which has plagued America since its inception," and says that to cure this sickness BLM seeks to construct "a transformative vision that touches what's at the root of the problems we are facing."[6]

At first blush, these various assertions about "root problems," whether global capitalism or structural racism, appear to be arguments for the primacy of a class or identity political project.[7] But much more is going on in this dialogue, especially in its crucial subtext on how to constitute a revolution. Initially, BLM's economic justice platform might not seem aimed at broad-based revolution, but consider how often such terms as "transformation" (a contemporary substitute for the out-of-favor "revolution") are scattered throughout the document. The real argument is about strategy versus prefiguration. Recognizing as much, it becomes clearer Reed Jr.'s position in the debate when he calls for politically oriented strategy.

Black Lives Matter is routinely derided for its leaderless structures and lack of clear demands. When such complaints have been put to movement leader Melina Abdullah, she quickly points out that BLM does push for tangible demands, but seeks a vision beyond demands and are not void of leaders but instead are "leaderful."[8] By her own admission, Abdullah's promotion of different organizing forms within movements recalls the legacy of grassroots leaders like Ella Baker, who championed "group-centered leadership" fixed to local community projects. Cultivating vision and pushing for horizontal leadership as prime movement objectives signals to many a critic the subordination of sound strategic discipline to spontaneity and momentary flashes of bold activity.

Similar debates surfaced during Occupy Wall Street (OWS) and still pepper conversations on the movement, its limitations, and its failures. A *Huffington Post* op-ed penned a year after OWS apparently "failed" claims this failure was due largely to the absence of an "agenda." "Lack of clear, stated demands was a huge mistake," writes the author, and this in addition to OWS's leaderless structure destined it for failure.[9] With the benefit of additional hindsight, veteran journalist-activist Arun Gupta claims more insightfully that OWS was doomed from the beginning because "there are no left forces strong enough in the United States to keep a mass movement flying high."

Gupta goes on to acknowledge broader limitations and circumstances that the left has yet to reconcile, but in his view OWS suffered because it harbored impractical aspirations. The necessary material conditions needed to realize such dreams simply weren't there. OWS's inability to develop strong resistance to eventual state cooptation and violence, which Gupta explains comes with the territory for all social movements, was a matter of "outsized ambitions" that couldn't be translated into political impact. "Amorphous 'leaderless' networks can respond quickly to a crisis" he writes, "but act as quicksand to movement building."[10] Gupta's valuable deeper point is that revolution requires historic events, that we can't (as the prefigurative model would have it) simply will the desired results. For advocates of strategy, then, prefiguration is at odds with the need to obtain political power.[11]

Not to be outdone, proponents of prefigurative frameworks merely invert this analysis. Instead of worrying about seizing political power, many in this camp disavow or sidestep all forms of institutional power to remain untainted in the pursuit of a hopeful horizon. Providing stark illustration, The Invisible Committee writes poetically of the need to self-activate, explaining how "it's useless *to wait*—for a breakthrough, for the revolution, the nuclear apocalypse or a social movement" because "the catastrophe is not coming, it is here."[12] But self-activating, they warn, means disavowing all previous models of organizing and opting for a method of outright rebellion and "insurrectional process…built from the ground up."

This approach includes anti-strategy (because strategies are old hat) and the accumulation of seized territories reconfigured into communes.[13] Challenging the left to embrace militancy and understand the importance of autonomous territories is worthwhile, but strategy-wise The Invisible Committee never moves beyond step one in the process, suggesting that a massive uprising will occur soon and that the next day everything will be remade. But if insurrection does not sustain itself long enough to reach the mass tipping point that The Invisible Committee is counting on, then *how* can we get to the desired future?

Questions of when revolution happens underpin these seemingly dual positions. Calls for political strategy, once surveyed in their historical context, tend to be associated with an idea of revolution centered on state power. Once a government is "seized" or toppled, goes the argument, and replaced with a new transitional government, the revolutionary "event" has been accomplished, putting us in a position to start the new society. On the other hand, accepting Reed Jr.'s characterization of BLM—as principally concerned with forcing the United States to end its racism and go forward on a higher moral plane—amounts to a call for a revolution outside the bounds of state-based authority. Stepping back, seeking changes in cultural attitudes and social relationships ingrained in daily life basically equates revolution with cultural transformation.

Since at least the nineteenth century, the left has squabbled over revolutionary perspectives. Then, politically savvy followers of Marx and Engels disdained

"exercises in utopian speculation" without programmatic designs on how to undertake a revolutionary project.[14] Conversely, other segments of the left rejected what they viewed as authoritarian political strategies as "nothing more than the conquest of existing state power rather than its supersession."[15]

Today, these opposing views have been adapted and expanded theoretically through complex developments far beyond the scope of this examination. That said, it is useful to point out that differing views of how to tell *when* a revolution has happened are also rooted in two "strategic and kinetic" interpretations.

Directly referencing the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico, Thomas Nail labels these opposing interpretations as the uppercase and lowercase R/revolution.[16] Uppercase Revolution has philosophical roots in the Aristotelian conception of revolution as "revolving" around the state. Revolutions thus involve a constitutional or internal change in the state's identity. Such historical legacies of this interpretation of revolution were updated following Marx to incorporate strategic views of seizing the state, employing a party, using a vanguard to lead the masses, and centralizing state power.[17] In this centralized state-bound view of revolution, motion returns to the center and the state is wielded instrumentally to maintain revolutionary energies.

Lowercase revolution, says Nail, is a decentralized anti-state view of revolution. In it, intersectional analyses, deeply democratic processes, and horizontalism (meaning specifically antihierarchical forms of organization and leadership) shape strategic pursuits of implementing revolution. Nail's characterization of lowercase revolution also embraces prefigurative processes, which Barbara Epstein explains are marked by consensus decision-making and commitments to nonhierarchy, sometimes called "leaderless structures."[18] Motion for lowercase revolution is a trajectory like an outward line, external from the state instead of a revolving around it.[19] Frequently, uppercase Revolution has been associated with the strategic camp whereas lowercase revolution is cast into the prefigurative camp.

To reiterate, these positions are superficially presented as polarizations, but a possible path forward that transcends this dualism is found in engaging the notion

of open utopia. Strategic and prefigurative interpretations of utopia help explain these camps' differences. Yet, the two share a desire for utopia to be egalitarian, liberating, and humane so the challenge is reconciling their different views of how to transition beyond capitalism.

Very roughly, strategists view utopia as materially distant and thus impossible to realize in the present since current modes or means of production have not caught up with history's prescribed stages. Since utopia is disconnected from present possibility, strategists have often soured on making it the basis of political polemics—one reason utopian socialists so often come under fire. This view of utopia encourages us to view history as a determined set of "events" leading to the desired future, and any deviation from history's "plan" is dismissed as naïve or revisionist. Ideological orthodoxy and demands for discipline seep into this so-called "blueprint utopia."

Conversely, proponents of prefiguration see utopia as a temporal possibility that can be brought to earth in the here and now. Utopia, to them, is a lifestyle made by changing practices and interpersonal relationships modeled on new institutions and practices. These utopian institutions include communes, cooperatives, intentional communities with democratic practices including, say, consensus decision-making within organizations. Prefigurative perspectives, then, are more invested in creating community instead of a party and typically shy away from formal political power, viewing it as inherently corruptible and coopting. In practice, figurative energies become so invested in creating community and resocializing practices that mass exhaustion invariably ensues. This fatigue, what I call "burnout utopia," accounts for the inability to translate utopian practices into sustained revolutionary momentum.

Burnout stems partly from insistence on exclusively localized and autonomous projects. In other words, demands on the state are construed as reformist politics and organizing becomes a "search for pure prefiguration…as a state of fixed purity instead of an ideal we are always in the process of realizing."[20] In parallel fashion, blueprint utopias come as consequences of political purity and orthodoxies whose features have already been described here. Their proponents experience

hyperburnout themselves due to the frustrations inherent in imagining that history accords to one's own deterministic interpretation.

A synthesis of strategic specificity and prefigurative practice—what I'll call the radical imagination—is needed to help pull the left out of its exhausting factionalism. Why call it the radical imagination, instead of a term like praxis? For one, the radical imagination sounds sexier than praxis, and sometimes eye-catching words are needed to grab people's attention. But, more seriously, the expression reflects the belief that creativity is the greatest force capable of sustaining revolutionary energy, and this latent creativity within daily life is waiting to be unleashed. Synthesizing prefiguration, which is inherently rooted in the everyday, and strategy, which offers the long vision needed to keep revolutionary energy intact, requires building upon the spaces available within the mundane. In this theory, only our imagination can break through the routine and the generic to grasp their radical possibilities.

An effective radical imagination, I submit, requires perceiving utopia as an open project—curtailing orthodox blueprints while also preventing burnout. Writers Stephen Shukaitis and David Graeber, while exploring the possibilities of "militant investigation," articulate a methodological position analogous to the radical imagination: "it is a process of collective wondering and wandering that is not afraid to admit that the question of how to move forward is always uncertain."[21]

The implications of an open utopia, directed by exercising the radical imagination, point to a clear need to reconceptualize politics, addressing alienation in one form or another as a chief collective experience of oppression. As shown below, in this new construct, alienation can be a connecting thread, conjoining all of the oppressed.

Strengthening radicalism's utopic basis may just be the conceptual grounding needed to make a strategic mission more coherent and stable. After all, without a visual conception of where we're trying to go, how can we possibly develop a strategy for arriving there? Quite possibly, the Marxist movements failed in strategic transitions to socialism because they deliberately lacked a utopian image of the future. Certain Marxist groups trained their rigid theoretical view exclusively

on economic progression, depriving themselves of the chance to think about what the world they want to live in might look like *after* the revolution.[22] Yet, unacknowledged hints of speculation about the future can be found even within the analyses of orthodox Marxists who subscribed openly to the notion of capitalist growth as a progressive stage necessary toward an eventual communist society. Who, among those who would end our present systems could feasibly orchestrate a strategy without hopeful dreams, or utopian sensibilities, underpinning their activities? Visionary scholar Walidah Imarisha argues that all of us who seek to change the world "are engaging in speculative fiction," or utopian dreaming. And this *should* be the case, as Imarisha explains:

> We want organizers and movement builders to be able to claim the vast space of possibility, to be birthing visionary stories. Using their everyday realities and experiences of changing the world, they can form the foundation of the fantastic, and, we hope, build a future where the fantastic liberates the mundane.[23]

Additionally, arguments that entail open utopia at the expense of strategy seem hollow. Are we to suppose that those envisioning utopias live an entirely immaterial existence? Since life is material, in the sense employed by historical materialists, then aren't speculations of a liberated society rooted in real material circumstance? "The subject of the dream is the dreamer," writes Toni Morrison. Any fictive tale or any fantastic present or future, she means, reflects the life of its inventor.[24] By this reckoning, the strategic implications of open utopia lay embedded in the dream, awaiting cultivation.

Proponents of prefigurative revolution need the conceptual intervention of an open utopia chiefly to curb latent elitism. The pressures of undertaking revolutionary activity by reconfiguring everyday experience explain both the burnout endemic to prefigurative practices and the impulse toward moral purification. The prefigurative focus in this conception of revolution based on dealienated interpersonal relations lays bare all of one's own and humanity's shortcomings and makes individual faults the primary locus of personal reflection. Strategically undermined by excessive navel-gazing, the prefigurative can't connect visions beyond small autonomous territories or intentional communities. Adopting a

notion of open utopia encourages acceptance of human nature and oneself without discouraging the urge to push beyond the inherent messiness of organizing practices within capitalist social relations. Such a framework mitigates tendencies toward political purity without slighting the need to unleash radical imagination in everyday experience to craft a dealienated society in the here and now.

The radical imagination as methodology is really about unlocking creativity, and the moments we do this come as a result of fun and inspiring activities as well as during the practical organizing work necessary for sound strategy.

One powerful way capitalism maintains hegemony is by rendering labor invisible. Such magical thinking also undermines movement organizing because so often the hours of work and social labor that go into organizing a lecture, march, or direct action get taken for granted—small wonder that organizers appear pressed and unimaginative when asked how to change the world. In stressing the need to be strategic, advocates of this view may actually be trying to correct the lack of awareness of the immense labor needed to arrive at the society they want.

Linking the strategic emphasis on material analysis with prefigurative idealism about alternative social relations offers a promising conceptual model for revolution. At root, change happens on an everyday basis, and in our everyday lives we need fun to keep us energized and hopeful. As well, we need to contest the struggles felt on an everyday level in order to chisel out spaces for imaginative dreaming. Muses Robin D. G. Kelley, "sometimes I think the conditions of daily life, of everyday oppressions, of survival, not to mention the temporary pleasures accessible to most of us, render much of our imagination inert."[25] Coming together to envision a better world allows us time to breathe, and space to dream, which taps into our deep desires for excitement, thrills, and inspiration while also exposing the ways capitalism falsely claims to fulfill these desires.

Sketching a Radically Imaginative Methodology

"The social world," according to Pierre Bourdieu, "is accumulated history."[26] For Bourdieu, time is a tremendous factor in creating advantages and disadvantages.

Power is not simply acquired by an individual in one generation; rather, it is transferred through lineage and legacy from one era to the next. Thus, power "takes time to accumulate." Failing to recognize history as accumulative results is a reductionist understanding of our current social reality. As Bourdieu reminds us, the accumulation of history is "what makes the games of society…something other than simple games of chance offering at every moment the possibility of a miracle." Those who overlook accumulated social history typically perceive all social agents on planes of equal opportunity, "where every moment is perfectly independent of the previous one" and "every prize [opportunity] can be attained, instantaneously, by everyone, so that at each moment anyone can become anything."[27]

Yet, getting accumulated history in our sights has both positive and negative implications. Since the social world is an accumulation of history, by extension social movements entail an accumulation of experience, affect, and knowledge. Along with domination, multiform modes of resistance also accumulate. These include collective efforts to break with the prevailing order—a. k. a. "social movement" or (used interchangeably from here on) "social action." But history also entails accumulated uncertainty and discontinuity, allowing for a "social organization of forgetting" that serves systemic oppression and necessitates a responsive "fight against amnesia" to challenge such injustices.[28]

In their ethnographic survey of an Argentine shantytown contaminated by years of oil industry pollution, anthropologists Javier Auyero and Débora Alejandra Swistun ask why local residents of this area don't collectively organize and resist the corporate industries that are poisoning them. Although it appears starkly evident that corporate oil is responsible for this population's suffering, the authors find instead of "cognitive liberation and protest…[the] reproduction of ignorance, doubts, disagreements, and fears" preventing collective action.[29] "Time is responsible for the veiling" of domination, the authors explain: capital power can perpetuate its authority because it can afford to wait while time helps mystify and bewilder the oppressed by simply extending the past into the present.[30]

This confusion stems partly from a view of the past as nothing but a series of inevitable defeats. Yet, only in hindsight are they inevitable and are intrinsic

possibilities clouded. In fact, what seems to underpin so many questions about collective action—including the account written by Auyero and Swistun—is an assumption of destined failure where victory is presumed impossible. With this distorting lens over history, the past is remembered primarily as massacre and destruction or as a long-gone time of nice weather and politeness, thus conveying a sense of loss. Time is pregnant with possibilities though: even if time currently serves dominating power, this does not have to be the case.[31] From this position, where social history and social action are woven both continuously and discontinuously, let's now explore where the jagged threads of utopian ideas meet, going as far back as Thomas More's eponymous text.

Reviewing the genealogical trajectory of utopia reveals the presence of open spaces within the dominant capitalist system. These "cracks," as John Holloway calls them, represent accumulated movements helping to usher in dramatic ruptures—such momentous turning points (or even inflections) of social history, such as uprisings, material transformations like those at the onset of the Industrial Revolution, political breaks from monarchical power, and so forth.[32] Such events lead to broad changes in everyday life, when ways of being and knowing dissolve into new realities and represent the gains achieved primarily through social actions. Utopia, in this framework, serves as a category of social thought generated by ruptures that create the space for hopeful imagining. Ruptures, in themselves, do not guarantee positive developments—witness the onset of such horrible realities as chattel slavery—but rupture can be harnessed or initiated by social action by exercising the radical imagination. As the Wobblies note in their preamble, we can articulate the cracks by "forming the structure of the new society in the shell of the old," and bring about an intentional rupture. We can thus strategically prefigure our futures in the here and now by articulating the cracks in the social imaginary of open utopia.

In many respects, early utopian writing is an embryonic social dream. Social dreams enable us to break from the practical politics of the here and now to broaden sociopolitical possibility. Inspiring here is Tom Moylan's reference to utopia as a methodology poised against a perpetual "utopian problematic" that "must always enable further openings….so that its mobilization of desires and needs for a better world will always exceed any utopian visions that arise from

that very process…and always seek for more."[33] Open utopia is in flux, responsive to ruptures and extending the space that connects, or accumulates, until the next rupture. Through it, we discover that social movements, such as the strategic connection of cracks and the articulation of prefigurative action, can weave together to form the radical imagination.

Fighting social amnesia requires explicating the world without presenting history as a reducible series of disconnected accidents or happenstance and making the status quo seem natural. We might usefully imagine history not as a straight arrow across space, but as a spherical web rotating on its axis like a globe in orbit. Conceived like this, social action can operate within a framework of meaning, intention, and open utopian possibility; in Holloway's terms, moving the cracks through social action can guide open utopian futures.[34]

By discovering where the threads of utopian social history weave together, we can find valuable insights that today's social movement agents can use to get out from under current capitalist domination. Possibly, we might also discover ways to strengthen solidarities among the left by ameliorating fissures between strategic and prefigurative revolutionaries. Although our history may be cast in orbit, gliding into a future unknown, a strategic prefiguration can point our travels toward a hopeful horizon, an open utopia. We can win.

The Social Project of Open Utopia

We can pose the point of contact between Europe and what would come to be called the Americas as a grand phenomenological rupture that blasted open the European radical imagination, shattering rigid convictions in what was known and could be known.[35] Grounding our concept of utopia in this way helps clarify some of the impetus behind Thomas More's master work, where the world from a European perspective suddenly expanded beyond what had been thought real or possible, precipitating both a materialist and idealist transformation.

Quite possibly, early utopian writers saw in the rupture, provided by contact with the Americas, possibility and a chance to mobilize contemporaries "seek[ing]

for more." Perhaps trying to sustain that rupture, early utopian works represent the beginning of a nascent "social imaginary" that would in time grow grander and more creative. These works are permeated by hope and a sense of possibility so strong that early European colonizers under their influence tried to bring utopia to earth. Unfortunately, blinded by their euro- and ethnocentric assumptions, these colonizers took for granted that society could be "blueprinted" and attempted to impose their societal schemas on indigenous Americans—a serious failure in trying to use the radical imagination.

Blueprint utopian thought, as briefly detailed, has attracted the criticisms of many, including the twentieth-century philosopher Karl Popper. Popper argued that utopias foster an irrational belief in the ability to prescribe scientific social ends (or else lull people into a dogmatic faith that historical processes will bring about the desired utopian society).[36] Such scientific determinism, for Popper, inevitably led to violence, so he called for an end to utopian thinking and the embrace of immediate strategies for eliminating oppression in the present rather than strategies based on abstract ideal futures.[37] Popper's warning should be heeded. That said, his conception of utopia reflects exclusively upon a prescriptive tendency within the social imaginary (again, a "blueprint utopia"). This is not the only method available for bringing about utopia. Popper's call to eliminate concrete oppressions (similar to my proposed methodology) does require the radical imagination to confront the present while cultivating a temporal conception of open utopia.

When reading More's *Utopia*, it's wise to reject any prescriptive interpretations of his fictional society (as well as all blueprint utopian orthodoxies). Instead, consider that More's text reflects the author's own hopes for how another world could actually look and does not necessarily, as Popper feared, promote the notion of a prescriptive way forward in history.

The evidence to suggest More wrote from hope obviously depends on an interpretive choice, not known intentions. Yet, it's difficult to ignore the similarities of More's *Utopia* to known indigenous American cultures of the time. Communal lifestyles, collective property, subsistence-based economies, and the storage of

goods in "warehouses" (or longhouses) until meted out according to need—these are features of More's *Utopia* that were commonplace among the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and other indigenous tribes.

In a small way, borrowing like this diminishes More's imaginative undertaking. Certainly, the idea of a society without need for lawyers, for example, doesn't seem as far-fetched as it might have sounded to More's contemporaries because plenty of societies without lawyers existed at the time—and do today. But concluding that More's ideas in total weren't entirely unique because he painted a society that could have been mostly real in his time misses the bigger point that, either way, the social world experienced an epochal turning point at that juncture and that rupture generated the openings (or cracks) that would nurture our social imagination and allow our dreams and hopes to grow bigger.

If we flash forward in time, we discover certain moments of rupture occurring again and again with similar social responses from utopian thinkers and movers. Consider Marx and Engels' famous opening of the *Communist Manifesto*: "a spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism."[38] The two penned the words just prior to massive uprisings in Europe sometimes called the "Springtime of the People" or "People's Spring." Not only was the specter haunting Europe, according to Marx and Engels "all the Powers of Old Europe" were seeking to "exorcise" it to remain dominant.[39] Marx and Engels recognized the cracks in capitalist hegemony, and committed to writing the manifesto in the hopes of initiating a rupture—or better yet a total revolution. Their aspirations were almost realized in the rupture of the People's Spring.

Underpinning their motivation for writing the manifesto was a solid conviction that utopia (i. e., eutopia, in the sense of a "good place") was imminent, and its form would be communism. That this reflects a sense of speculative hope is sometimes forgotten by readers of the *Manifesto* because Marx and Engels hammered such "utopian socialists" as Robert Owen, Henri de Saint-Simon, and Charles Fourier for failing to take history into account and attach their utopian ideals to specific strategies rooted in the present material society. Marx and Engels mapped out how and why utopia would be actualized through the formation of an early

strategic camp. The *Manifesto*, then, attempts to nudge people, specifically the proletariat, in that direction. Their famous call to action at the end of the *Communist Manifesto*—"the proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!"—echoes early utopian literature in its evocation of speculative hope and social dreaming.[40] Clearly, utopia has been present within the strategic camp since its origin.

Manifestoes are not present in all utopian literature. Nor did More think of his work as a call to action. But, recalling that the utopian project is an historical one, we discover the genealogy of utopian manifesto embedded within More's work, then developing into an arc toward political action throughout the centuries before Marx and Engels. Even so, it's a trap to think the trajectory of utopia is historically determined or operates according to some grand human law governing social movement. Instead, we should recognize that the social movement of capitalism's cracks keep utopia open, not closed. In other words, destiny does not control us, but we make our own destiny.[41]

Along the trajectory of manifesto are numerous ruptures guided by the movement of cracks. These ruptures have been both political and social. Specific to European utopianism, they have been responsive to such momentous events as the Protestant Reformation, the European Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, the US and French revolutionary wars, and the creation of globalized capitalism through the massive Transatlantic Slave Trade and colonization of the Americas. As noted, not all ruptures represent positive developments, but each new rupture has opened new space, and by taking our accumulated social history into account, we witness the embryonic dream of utopia taking clearer shape. Further, the possibilities increase for using the radical imagination as the cracks are connected by sound strategy and prefigurative use.

Socialist contributions toward defining utopia pointed the dream toward practical action, making the dream a reality—what Ernst Bloch labeled "concrete utopias." By introducing concrete utopia into the utopian lexicon, Bloch intended to provide a sense of utopia as capable of practical action. Like Marx and Engels before him, he encouraged us "to hope materialistically"[42] and link our utopian

vision to real-world social developments. Jumping forward multiple generations to the failures of Soviet-style communism, the rise in US superpower, the dawn of neoliberal globalization, and an entrenchment of Thatcher's belief that "There is No Alternative" to capitalism, it's all too easy to view utopia as a long dead and ossified relic of past social dreaming. Partially to blame, in my view, is that our social histories depict utopias as cold impersonalized versions of strategic revolution devoid of prefigurative practice. Yet, the fall of the Soviet Union, and with it the notion of centrally planned communism, provided a new rupture in the social imaginary—one proclaiming that "Another World is Possible."

Open Utopia: A New Chapter

Living utopias since the 1990s have been primarily undertaken by prefigurative social movements. The fall of the Soviet Union was seen as a victory for proponents of capitalism, with Francis Fukuyama famously proclaiming that the collapse signified the "end of history." In this view, capitalism won and the only viable ideologies conformed to capitalism and a hollowed-out republican-based democracy. For many on the international left, however, the fall came as a tremendous relief. Finally, the real work of imagining alternatives to capitalism was freed from the shadow of Stalinist-style communism. And with this understanding came excitement: what was next for anticapitalism? And who would show us the way?

An answer came back almost as soon as Fukuyama proclaimed history's end, and that answer has perhaps been articulated best by Grace Lee Boggs, who said "we are the leaders we've been looking for."[43] We are the agents of a new society and of change in capitalism. She and other social critics would have us recognize that capitalism is a social power and that, like all social powers, it can be undone through human capacities. Insisting that humans are endowed with real power and that capitalism is a system that reacts to this human power, Holloway tells us that "we are the crisis of capital, and we are proud of it."[44] Capitalism is actually playing a deceptively aggressive *defense*, while we are on offense, so we can break capitalism's social hold by understanding that we make capitalism and it does not make us. Utopia returns and revolution is viable.

Many social movements after the fall of the Soviet Union operated with this understanding of social power and reembraced utopian dreaming. David McNally endorses this view, which I share, noting that "international left-wing movements of the 1990s and early 2000s renewed activists' investment in the concept of 'utopia.'"[45] He cites the rise of Zapatismo with its call for an "international of hope" and the creation of the World Social Forum as key moments that led to the reemergence of utopia within the social imaginary of movements.[46] However, the movements McNally points to heavily rely upon a prefigurative framework often embraced at the expense of political strategy. Recalling Thomas Nail's differentiation between R/revolution, the international movements that McNally argues have ignited social movements' interest in utopia fit the mold of lowercase revolution.

These movements, such as OWS, did not go far enough in cultivating the radical imagination, and we must be soberly aware of the need to make our prefigurative forces "move to the pulse of the concrete" lest they slide into the self-marginalization of isolated subcultures.[47] Holloway urges us to "keep building the cracks [in capitalism] and [find] ways of keeping them, strengthening them, expanding them, connecting them; seeking the confluence or, preferably, the commoning [sic] of the cracks."[48] The radical imagination, committed to prefigurative strategy, offers an "impure way forward" by articulating the cracks and pushing for sustained ruptures.[49] It aligns with an open utopia—a temporal category of ideas not meant to prescribe our reality, but to help guide us toward an uncertain, yet partially tangible, future. In short, prefiguration rehearses a world beyond capitalism while strategy moves us along the pathway toward liberation, making the radical imagination an embodied spirit of open utopia.

Alienation as Shared Oppression

"We are not nouns, we are verbs."—Stephen Fry

One of the most enduring analytical concepts crafted by Karl Marx was his notion of "alienation," a process whereby "man [sic] (the worker) no longer feels himself to be freely active in any but his animal functions—eating, drinking, procreating,

or at most in his dwelling and in dressing-up," so that "what is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal."[50] Marx tried to convey the loss humans experienced under capitalism not simply as a matter of the rich getting richer at the expense of everyone else, especially workers. What Marx saw as an additional injustice was capitalism's degradation of human beings, whose value was to be determined by their ability to be "productive" (itself a term related to capital accumulation) and not by their creative capacities. Degradation, in Marx's view, is the process of turning human subjects into human objects. Here was an idealistic person, one who depicted a communist society as a place where "it is possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner… without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic."[51]

Capital, for many Marx's magnum opus, begins with this famous argument: "the wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as 'an immense accumulation of commodities.'" Sociologist John Holloway urges readers to reinterpret Marx's opening of *Capital* starting from our "wealth" and "richness" as humans, not as "everybody says, literally without exception," as commodities.[52] His point is that making domination and oppression the starting point too often mires us in how we are disempowered. Echoing Holloway, the late Grace Lee Boggs suggests we "see the oppressed not mainly as victims or objects, but as creative subjects":

> This way, you come to see that real wealth is not material wealth and real poverty is not just the lack of food, shelter, and clothing. Real poverty is the belief that the purpose of life is acquiring wealth and owning things. Real wealth is not the possession of property but the recognition that our deepest need, as human beings, is to keep developing our natural and acquired powers and to relate to other human beings.[53]

If Marx did not harbor a conception of humans as dynamic and inherently valuable, why did he pen so many critiques of capitalism? Exploitation and alienation feature as the ugly side of capitalism for Marx precisely because they disfigure our conceptions of being human. Without holding a fundamental belief in the

human capacity to flourish, wouldn't Marx have been impressed by a rapidly industrializing world like so many of his contemporaries? Instead, he frequently voiced outrage over capitalism's penchant for dehumanization because his philosophy of revolution viewed communism as a state of movement wherein one "strives not to remain something [they] have become, but is in the absolute movement of becoming."[54]

Through alienation, abstractions become operational. For instance, "capitalism… reduces the workers to a fragment, robbing them of their natural and acquired powers."[55] The process of creating commodities offers a window into capitalism's internal logic: by disconnecting products from labor, commodity formation shrouds human involvement, allowing a consumer to encounter some commodity or other (say, a bottle of soda) without ever considering how this product came into existence and into their possession. Instead, the consumer accepts the commodity's existence as given and might be convinced that some type of magic was responsible for its creation—a misconception that Marx describes as "commodity fetishism." He writes, "in [the religious] world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands."[56] Capitalism shucks off the mysticism of religious power, replacing it with the mystical power of rapid production. When commodity fetishism comes into play, expect a double whammy: people who make things are themselves alienated and they also can't recognize the labor contributions of others.

Alienation is not simply a matter of psychic distance, though it entails a psychic disconnect. It goes to the very heart of how capitalist modes of production are structured, literally making cogs of human laborers and keeping them from standing outside their position within the machine, to see their product whole and in use. Work becomes the dull monotonous pattern famously captured in *Modern Times* when Charlie Chaplin develops hand spasms from repeatedly tightening widgets.

Boredom, however, may not fully describe the sorry realities of work for many American workers today. While work rarely offers the creative stimulation that

reminds us of our own humanity, the breakneck speed of today's typical work environment is anything but dull. Rather, work for many resembles the drastic dips and inclines of an EKG during a heart attack— work is speed-up, slow-down, speed-up again—a stressful pattern that leaves workers exhausted, bewildered, and on unsteady ground for the next work day. Any restaurant server will see themselves in this account of work.

As a final note, what is viewed as a form of labor or of productivity, under capitalist economic regimes, ignores entirely the social reproduction of life undertaken primarily by women. Child-raising (which guarantees future labor supplies), food cultivation, general housework, and emotional or interpretive labor—all are necessary to reproduce social life (existence itself) but are rendered virtually invisible by capitalism.[57]

These grim depictions can be dangerous since they invite depression or despair. But that's exactly why Holloway entreats us to first embrace the wealth of humans before confronting their domination. Shattering alienation is implicit in the revolutionary idea that humans are intrinsically endowed with self-worth that should not be suppressed. "To struggle against alienation," writes Immanuel Wallerstein, "is to struggle to restore to people their dignity."[58] Defeat is no basis for constructing a better society. Ideals are committed to when people are convinced they can accomplish much more than they have been allowed to so far.

Alienation is emphasized here because so many leftists (both strategic and pre-figurative proponents) say its presence is a primary reason why capitalism is not a viable social system. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,* Marx articulates a very clear and sober assessment of why alienation is an intolerable and brutish experience under capitalism. Yet, it is important to recall that until the 1930s the public had no access to Marx's texts on alienation and neither his supporters nor his detractors knew the full extent of his philosophic positions until the late twentieth century. However, even before these documents were published, numerous thinkers, primarily anarchists, expressed similar positions to Marx's on alienation without even having read his work on the matter.[59] Writes Emma Goldman, "man [sic] is being robbed not merely of the products of his

labor [under capitalism], but of the power of free initiative, of originality, and the interest in, or desire for, the things he is making."[60] Her sentiments are nearly identical in spirit to those of the self-styled Marxist humanist Grace Lee Boggs: "real wealth consists in things of utility and beauty, in things that help create strong, beautiful bodies and surroundings inspiring to live in."[61]

In a famous essay, Noam Chomsky argues that anarchism holds to a vision of the good society as one "in which social fetters are replaced by social bonds and labor is freely undertaken."[62] As a body of social thought, then, anarchism is premised on "deeper assumptions about the human need for liberty, diversity, and free association," all of which for Chomsky recalls the early work of Marx, who "conceives of 'a new type of human being who *needs* his fellow-men [sic]'" (emphasis in original).[63] Many contemporary anarchist thinkers agree with Chomsky. Exploring possibilities for a better metaphor to describe oppression's interlocking nature, Hilary Lazar sees in anarchist theory "some of the primary concerns for anarchists…with ensuring freedom for all from domination and top-down coercion of any kind, and the ability for all humans…to achieve their *highest potential* and the *greatest well-being possible*" (emphasis mine).[64] Anarchism's attention to relationships and care ethics signal for Lazar multiple possibilities for solidarity politics, and she uses the long history of anarchist thought to develop new theoretical concepts that can help connect different strands of theory to one another to cultivate a political philosophy aimed at collective liberation.[65]

Seeking a Cure for Political Alienation

Representative democracy is another impediment to human flourishing. Once wonderful notions have mutated into a barely recognizable conception of democracy so thoroughly that we now find ourselves lacking any utopic sensibilities amid political normalcy. A political scientist can provide a dozen formulas explaining how incremental change happens, all the while dampening any notion of fundamental transformation. Have you not heard one of these well-intentioned people intone "as a political scientist, I can tell you why revolution is quite impractical"? An appropriate assessment on the implications of alienation extends Marx's conception beyond the point of production and into the sphere of

politics—particularly into state-monopolized politics. Processes of estrangement and alienation within the state political machine are analogous to the mechanisms Marx says objectify labor. This objectification is particularly evident during national and state elections.

Political representation rests on the view that the multiple spheres of social existence are distinct separate domains; generally expressed as the social, political, and economic spheres. As Marina Sitrin and Dario Azzellini explain, "in liberal democracy…the economic and social spheres are excluded from [politics]" while strictly economic matters are outside the auspices of formal representative democracy, seen as private concerns on which politics need not pass judgments.[66] As long as people are "equal" in legalistic forums—a dubious assumption for discussion elsewhere—democracy has served its purpose. Within this liberal democratic framework, then, equality takes on a specific but inaccurate meaning. No pretense is made that individuals are economically equal; nor can representative forms of democracy register social inequalities beyond bare formal rights and voting privileges.

The separation of the social, economic, and political divides politics from people, ingraining estrangement into the fiber of liberal democracy. Since alienated politics depends on estranging latent political agents from politics (thus quashing the notion that any and all are capable of the political), voting isn't a sufficient strategy.[67] Indeed, if our only political actions are through the state, we contribute to our own political alienation. We help legitimize the state's domination of the political and are then further disciplined by the state machine to think of it as the *only arena of politics*. Nothing about this process is voluntary, but it is indicative of the long tentacles of elite political power. Look no further than the economic disposition of the US Congress: as of 2014, the top ten wealthiest congressional representatives had net assets of $38 to $357 million,[68] while *half* of the elected representatives are millionaires.[69] The position of voters is to elect one rich politician or another, a line-up that deepens the divide of political power.[70]

Inequality borne of an economic division of labor parallels the division between societal spheres in liberal democracy. Marx's observation that "the more the

worker produces, the less he [sic] has to consume" is mirrored by the fact that the more voters elect wealthy politicians, the less influence they exert over representatives beholden to the power of money. While Marx observed that "the more values [a worker] creates, the more valueless, the more unworthy he becomes," we see in politics as usual that the more voters acquiesce to representation by candidates, the less their desires are realized in political practice. To Marx's notion that "the mightier labour becomes, the more powerless becomes the worker," we might add that a similar impotence haunts the population where the political projects of non-professional politicians are thoroughly denied—or not even recognized as *political*—and where the state's lock on setting a political agenda is intensified. Finally, Marx's idea that "the more ingenious labour becomes, the duller becomes the worker and the more he becomes nature's bondsman" is paralleled today when the cleverness of neighborhood councils, grassroots organizations, and non-governmental entities dissipates once state political agents appropriate their endeavors. Here the powers that be are effectively saying "we are in charge now, you can go be passive at home again." Under this regimen, energies are sapped and a dull fogginess replaces unique political ambitions. When representation is understood as synonymous and interchangeable with democracy, people become estranged from the political. Only in this setting could individuals imagine that their political aspirations are exclusively actualized by becoming representatives or by pressuring representatives to act responsively. Given all this, linking the social, political, and economic spheres requires as a strategic imperative abolishing the division between politics and social life—a rallying cry like that of classical socialists whose concern about the division of labor led them to advocate abolishing private property.

Sociologist Deborah Gould highlights how politics is often conflated with such state rituals as electoral campaigns, bureaucratic procedure, and party platforms, which leads to political depression or apathy. But the foundations of political thought fall well outside the boundaries of such rituals. As Gould notes, the etymological roots of politics are "public matters" and "civic affairs." Politics, she writes, is a contestation of who and what constitutes the political subject. As such, it requires us to ask such prior questions as who is the citizen and where is the

political arena.[71] Or, as Hannah Arendt puts it, "who has the right to have rights?"[72] Framing the political, then, are questions requiring imagination to answer.

Today, the answers to such questions are determined through unimaginative bureaucratic processes so biased toward dominant power that they are rarely considered debatable, much less explored in public discourse. "Domination is transfigured into administration," wrote Herbert Marcuse fifty-plus years ago, a trend that has only intensified since.[73] Charting the rise of bureaucratic administration, David Graeber concludes "bureaucracy has become the water in which we swim," accounting for why we don't balk at the growth of required paperwork in daily life.[74] For Graeber, the structural violence that keeps dominant state power intact is facilitated by increased bureaucracy, which "impose[s] very simple social relations that involve little or no imaginative identification" for those holding power. Thus, "the overwhelming burden of…interpretive labor is relegated to [power's] victims,"[75] who must learn to identify and sympathize with the powerful as a basic survival strategy.[76] Bureaucracy represents an instrumental logic embedded within capitalist forms of the state, and such impersonal mechanisms of domination narrow the parameters of political possibility, making open utopias seem like pipedreams if they are imaginable at all. As Graeber writes, "the subjective experience of living inside such lopsided structures of imagination is what we are referring to when we talk about 'alienation.'"[77]

Shattering alienation must be central to any vision we construct for an open utopia. A simple, but daring, question for contemporary leftists is: what would life look like without professional bureaucrats? Unfortunately, as David Graeber also opines, today only the right-wing advances a strong critique of bloated administration in government. Meanwhile, the left has all too often failed to think through how radical democracy might cure the political apathy it decries. The rise of the New Left during the 1960s was guided by critiques of political instrumentalism and yearning for community, sometimes called the "beloved community," with a strong vision of a participatory democracy capable of uniting the social and political spheres.[78] These tenets of political thought seem just as pertinent today for cultivating a radical imagination that can reanimate the mass

dead zone of human creativity.[79] In a climate in which endless bureaucratic protocol provides cover for oppression, nothing short of a commitment to radical democracy and radical imagination can break the unevenly experienced world alienation beleaguering us all.

Crafting a Strategic Imagination

Instead of thinking in terms of smashing the state, let's adopt a metaphor favored by Noam Chomsky. He thinks of the state as a cage we live in while outside of the cage roams a tiger (symbolizing private power). Our immediate strategy, says Chomsky, is not to remove the surrounding cage but to "expand the floor of the cage" while our ultimate intention is to tame the tiger and remove the structure.[80] Displacing state power requires reorienting authority and relational positions of power. In turn, my work suggests, that requires localized bases of activity that can connect with the regional, national, and, ultimately, global. By putting radical democracy at the center of strategy, we could root experiments of democratic practice in local everyday life where participation is possible. Injecting real democracy into our political sphere holds out great potential for "withering away" the present state because, as Jacques Ranciére so eloquently points out, the core of real democracy rests on the idea that "the very ground for the power of ruling is that there is no ground at all."[81]

Democracy is legitimated by nothing other than its own "anarchic principle" of heterogeneity, spontaneity, and nonqualification; it's grounded by its own dissolution of political grounding, its own creation and re-creation. Democracy works in practice only if those who are ignorant, those we might find deplorable, are just as right in joining the table of democratic life and have just as much authority to have their desires respected as anyone else. In other words, if democracy were to actualize its utopian ideal of "rule by the people," an individual would need no qualifications whatsoever to participate. Not every cook should *learn* how to govern, but every cook *can* govern stands as democracy's creed.[82]

Democracy cannot romanticize the local either. While, as explored here, the basis of real democracy is initially local, the cold truth is that democracy cannot survive

as an isolated silo amid a capitalist totality. Within a system comprised of global webs, parochial freedoms and privileges for small groups of people are possible only at the expense of unfreedoms for the majority.[83] The implications of this sorry fact for strategic movement toward the democratic bids us to reassess how to orient contestations with the state lest the left mistakenly continue what Carl Boggs describes as "a retreat from politics altogether." Antistatists, says Boggs, too often get stuck in their critique of statist politics at the expense of elaborating "any theory of transition" toward socialism.[84]

This retreat from political activity, or at least political activity recognizable by the state and institutionalized left, has been largely based on the conflation of *politics* and the state—precisely what is meant by the state's monopoly on politics. Valid disgust with campaign cycles, corrupt politicians, unaccountable representatives, and conservative activist courts has led many leftists to prioritize state-led politics or even consider the state arena as the *only legitimate realm* of politics—a serious analytical error. Yet, Boggs is only partially correct in accusing the left traditions of "councilism" or "anarcho-communism" of retreating from politics since these traditions tend to generate "local, collective small-scale organs of socialist democracy" as an "escape from questions of the party and state."[85] Indeed, many antistatist proponents propose reconceptualizing politics as what Chris Dixon calls "another politics," where "the political, economic, and social spheres are no longer separated."[86] This distinction aside, Boggs' assessment holds on the need for localized democracy projects to challenge the state since the state will not allow itself to be ignored forever—and since typically it resorts to violence to remind subjects of its power.[87]

If ignoring the state entirely makes for poor strategy, so does contesting the state on its own terms—*integrating* into the state political machine as calls for a Green Party president would have it. Such strategic thinking, instead of being stuck in critique, is stuck in a narrow conception of now. The framing of a third party as bold and radical belies its reality as nothing more than a maneuver into the state and the status quo. A third party poses no conception of strategy or politics outside of the existing political order; it is not a preferred "third camp,"

as classical anarchists would say; nor does it expand the floor of the cage or erode the legitimacy of state pleas to be invited to the bargaining table, not on behalf of everyone but to add another (albeit easily outflanked) representational perspective for conversation.

Since it is not viable to smash or seize the state, fresher notions of state resistance are needed. Social theorist Immanuel Wallerstein would have us think of state power as a tactic, not an end. For Wallerstein, capitalism positions itself as a global system (socially, politically, and economically), and, as such, its successes— not its failures— generate economic, political, and ideological dilemmas. Here, that ideological dilemma helps clarify the limitations of third-party "revolutions." Also instructive are the lessons drawn by Doug Henwood and Leo Panitch, analysts who note how today's states are stronger and more necessary for the flow of capital than ever before.[88] Capitalism's need for powerful states in turn creates the ideological dilemma Wallerstein identifies. In this vicious circle, states' crucial role in capitalism's success provides an ideological justification for capitalism's self-perpetuation.

In particular, Wallerstein points out, the ideological dilemma posed by capitalism has rationalized strategists' use of nationalist sentiment and its questionable embrace of the state as an instrument for anticapitalist success. We see this ideological dilemma at play in the national liberation movements of nation-states belonging to the "global south," and such state-based ideological justifications have prevailed in anticapitalist movements in the "global north" throughout the twentieth century as well. Currently, such state-based concepts of revolution are useful only as cautionary lessons, and we must hope that shedding tendencies toward state integration will open new pathways for anticapitalist movement. "When the ruling classes have ceased to be self-confident," explains Wallerstein, "and are therefore trying to survive in new ways…the acquisition of state power is far from enough to destroy them. It may even perpetuate them."[89]

What is required now in pursuit of revolutionary rupture is an incorporation of radical activity into everyday life. Of primary concern, then, is how to inject energies organically into lived routines, daily experiences, and constant concerns.

The despair of every individual must be accounted for daily; the priorities of the single mother working constantly must become high political priorities for all of us. Encompassing revolutionary movement in an everyday fashion requires a deep commitment to using the radical imagination—to synthesizing strategic and prefigurative revolutionary perspectives—and finding solutions to everyday problems is pivotal! For to be freed from the suffering of the everyday is nothing less than revolutionary in itself.

Everyday movement against capitalism must contend with all institutional power, both state and supra-state, public and private. Required is a conception of possibility both against and beyond today's models of power and domination—a radical imagination that can orient our revolutionary compass toward an open utopia. And here's a not so modest but humbly presented proposal for beginning: instead of constituting parties and initiating reforms, our movements can grow both strategically and prefiguratively by cultivating spaces of revolutionary (re)production where permanent land and residences are available for social reproduction in all radical cultural and democratic activities. (Re)production does not follow a purely economistic line of definition, for it is not the reproduction of *things* exclusively. "Rather [reproduction] is a definite form of activity…a definite form of expressing…life, a definite *mode of life*."[90] In the (re)production of revolutionary spaces, care work is an essential mode of labor, and we share the opportunity to resocialize our communities with a deep sense of democracy, mutual aid, and fun—all essential to meaningful daily lives.

Practically speaking, these spaces could be formed by tying together projects for community land trusts with cooperative businesses[91] and local political efforts (whether referendums, campaigns for local offices, etc.) all oriented toward establishing present-day commons. The spaces become blocs of power, interlacing land, politics, and economics with prefigurative practices of care work and democratic lifestyles. This is only an idea of how to begin, but exercising our radical imagination reveals and creates possibilities. Community land trusts could help eliminate hunger and homelessness in our neighborhoods, cooperatives could strengthen local economies with businesses less concerned with profit than with providing

value and livelihoods for people, and municipal political power can help buffer such projects from the power of the larger state and capital. Encouraging efforts throughout the US and threading them together into a single whole is crucial, and though they won't look the same internationally, the rough place-based outlines of this strategy can be generalized throughout the world since creativity and local adaptation are at the heart of the radical imagination.

Finding spaces to turn into common spaces, to develop into sites of revolutionary (re)production, can shatter the alienation of daily life and point toward a better horizon—an open utopia. So let us try now to find these cracks, these open spaces, and commit to deepening the cracks, enlarging the open spaces, and initiating the opportunity-opening ruptures before these all-important spaces close.

April 2017

Notes:

1   For a short list of online resources for these various social movements, see http://www.blacklives-matter.com; http://www.standingrock.org; http://www.fightfor15.org; https://itsgoingdown.org; information on student resistance is vast and scattered, and no single website claims to represent a unified student movement though that does not mean that none exists.

2   My use here of "materialist" and "idealist" standpoints accords with common use within philosophy and anthropological theory, in which the social world either begins from the fundamental position of the mind or the material world. That said, neither the strategic camp nor prefigurative camp holds strictly to either perspective. Rather, they are marked by tendencies in one direction or the other.

3   Adolph Reed Jr., "How Racial Disparity Does Not Help Make Sense of Patterns of Police Violence," *Nonsite,* September 16, 2016, http://nonsite.org/editorial/how-racial-disparity-does-not-help-make-sense-of-patterns-of-police-violence.

4   The Movement for Black Lives, "A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom, & Justice," accessed November 23, 2016, https://policy.m4bl.org/.

5   Use of the expression "exploitative capitalism" is a key red flag. Why the adjective since capitalism's core operational logic *is* exploitation?

6   Mychal Denzel Smith, "A Q&A With Alicia Garza, Co-founder of #BlackLivesMatter: the force behind the burgeoning movement talks about the resurgent fight for black liberation," *The Nation*, March 24, 2015, https://www.thenation.com/article/qa-alicia-garza-co-founder-blacklivesmatter/.

7   Such tensions can accurately be described as the debate over "master categories," where once people link structural oppression as specifically a result of class exploitation they run the risk of being accused of reductionism. The inverse is true when white supremacy or racism is identified as a linchpin of oppression or when systems of oppression are linked solely to identity categories (such as race or gender).

8   Tavis Smiley, "Black Lives Matter Organizer Dr. Melina Abdullah," Tavis Smiley show, November 16, 2015, http://www.pbs.org/wnet/tavissmiley/interviews/prof-melina-abdullah/.

9   Andy Ostroy, "The Failure of Occupy Wall Street," *Huffington Post*, July 31, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/andy-ostroy/the-failure-of-occupy-wal_b_1558787.html.

10   Arun Gupta, "What Became of Occupy Wall Street?" *Counterpunch,* November 16, 2015, http://www.counterpunch.org/2015/11/06/what-became-of-occupy-wall-street/.

11   To be clear, Reed Jr. and Gupta are not proponents of a "pure" strategic camp. Since, as argued here, the dichotomy between strategy and prefiguration is merely academic rather than manifested in practice, the opposite is true. At the risk of overgeneralizing, their arguments are simplified in some ways here to highlight the main features of the debate.

12   The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection,* Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009.

13   The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection*.

14   Mainly the band of such Marxist leaders as Lenin, Mao, Castro, etc.

15   See Carl Boggs, "Revolutionary Process, Political Strategy, and the Dilemma of Power," *Theory and Society* 4, no.3 (Autumn, 1977): 359-393. Most popular among them were such anarchists as Bakunin and the council communists given voice by such figures as Rosa Luxemburg and Anton Pannekoek.

16   Thomas Nail, "Revolution," in *Keywords for Radicals: The Contested Vocabulary of Late-Capitalist Struggle*, ed. Kelly Fritsch et al. (Chico: AK Press, 2016) 375-381.

17   Marx himself wrote little on the subject, but did seem to subscribe to certain vague notions of "seizing the state," in his rebuttal to Bakunin posthumously published as "After the Revolution" (Marx and Engels 1978: 542-548).

18   Barbara Epstein, "The Politics of Prefigurative Community: The Non-Violent Direct Action Movement," in *Cultural Resistance Reader*, ed. Steven Duncombe (London: Verso, 2002), 333-346.

19   Nail, "Revolution," 375-381.

20   See Romina Akemi and Bree Busk, "Breaking the Waves: Challenging the Liberal Tendency within Anarchist Feminism," *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory: Anarcha-Feminisms,* no. 29 (2016): 114. The strategic camp commits these errors of purity in their allegations of reformist or revisionist political maneuvers, where anything that does not immediately strive to topple the existing state is construed as reform instead of revolution.

21   Stevphen Shukaitis and David Graeber, "Introduction," in *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations, Collective* Theorization, ed. Stevphen Shukaitis, David Graeber, and Erika Biddle (Oakland: AK Press, 2007), 11.

22   Boggs, "Revolutionary Process."

23   Walidah Imarisha and Adrienne Maree Brown, ed., *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements* (Oakland: AK Press, 2015), 3.

24   Toni Morrison, "Black Matters," in *Race Critical Theories,* ed. Philomena Essed and David Theo Goldberg (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 2002), 265-282.

25   Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 11.

26   Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1968), 241-258.

27   Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," 241.

28   Chris Dixon, *Another Politics: Talking Across Today's Transformative Movements* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 51-52.

29   Javier Auyero and Debora Alejandra Swistun, *Flammable: Environmental Suffering in an Argentine Shantytown* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 8.

30   Auyero and Swistun, *Flammable*, 110.

31   Defeat, destruction, and loss have, of course, been witnessed in history too. Indeed, without an awareness of the tremendous catastrophes of history we can scarcely orient ourselves toward any sound possibilities for the future. That said, we need a more robust and rounded view of history—a sense of deep history—so that we can understand how much potential and possibility was available in historical defeats and not perceive loss as destiny.

32   John Holloway, *In, Against, and Beyond Capitalism: The San Francisco Lectures* (Oakland: PM Press, 2016).

33   Tom Moylan, "Realizing Better Futures, Strong Thought for Hard Times," in *Utopian Method Vision: The Use Value of Social Dreaming*, ed. Tom Moylan and Rafaella Baccolini (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2011), 221.

34   Holloway, *In, Against, and Beyond Capitalism.*

35   This does not mean that European elites were *humbled* by their discovery of how little they knew about the world, but they did get exposed in a relative sense to wider imaginative possibilities.

36   Karl Popper, "Utopia and Violence," *World Affairs* 149, no. 1 (Summer 1986): 3-9.

37   Popper, "Utopia and Violence," 3-9.

38   Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1978), 473.

39   Marx and Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 473.

40   Marx and Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 500.

41   But not, of course, in the circumstances of our choosing, as any good Marxist would respond.

42   Quoted in David McNally, "Utopia," In *Keywords for Radicals*, 437.

43   Bill Moyers, "Bill Moyers talks with Grace Lee Boggs," *Bill Moyers Journal,* June 15, 2007, accessed December 5, 2016, http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/06152007/watch3.html.

44   Holloway, *In, Against, and Beyond Capitalism*.

45   McNally, "Utopia," 431.

46   McNally, "Utopia," 431.

47   McNally, "Utopia," 437.

48   Holloway, *In, Against, and Beyond Capitalism*, xv.

49   Deborah Gould, "Politics," in *Keywords for Radicals*, 309.

50   See Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 74. Some might protest Marx's apparent anthropocentrism. I would agree, but we can remove the anthropocentric viewpoint and still find Marx's treatment of alienation valuable.

51   Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 160.

52   Holloway, *In, Against, and Beyond Capitalism*, 6.

53   Grace Lee Boggs, "Revolution as a New Beginning," in *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 60.

54   Holloway, *In, Against, and Beyond Capitalism*, 7.

55   Boggs, "Revolution as a New Beginning," 60.

56   Karl Marx, *Capital: Vol.1 A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production* (New York: International Publishers, (1867) 1987), 43.

57   Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012).

58   Immanuel Wallerstein, "Marxism After the Collapse of the Communisms," in *After Liberalism*, (New York: New Press, 1995), 231.

59   The shared analyses of Marxists with anarchists matter because these two camps have long presented their positions as polarized and irreconcilable. My hope is that showing the common ground makes it clear that the sometimes academically pretentious dichotomies constructed by the leftists I have identified above impede prefigurative strategies for liberation.

60   Emma Goldman, "Anarchism: What it Really Stands For," in *Anarchism and Other Essays* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., (1911) 1969), 47-68.

61 Goldman, "Anarchism," 55.

62 Noam Chomsky, "Notes on Anarchism," in *Chomsky on Anarchism* (Oakland: AK Press, 2005), 118-132.

63 Chomsky, "Notes on Anarchism," 122-123.

64 Hilary Lazar, "Until All Are Free: Black Feminism, Anarchism and Interlocking Oppression," *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory: Anarcha-feminisms, n*o. 29 (2016): 35-50.

65 Lazar locates the shared affinities between anarchism and black feminism to suggest replacing the terminology of "intersectionality," which she sees as starkly academic and thus distancing to a broader public, with "a new metaphor for interlocking oppression—that of a tangled knot." In this way, she cultivates a different concept for overcoming fractious divides among the left (and specifically among various camps of feminism). I look forward to many productive advances in our movement if Lazar's suggested metaphor for analyzing oppression takes hold.

66 Marina Sitrin and Dario Azzellini, *They Can't Represent Us! Reinventing Democracy from Greece to Occupy* (London: Verso, 2014), 42.

67 The only thing we can pragmatically accomplish through electoral voting is what Ryan Conrad describes in *Truthout* as "harm reduction"–namely, acknowledging that harm is inevitable in our current political system so voting can only reduce the amount of inevitable harm we will experience. Conrad would have us subordinate voting to a low-level priority on the list of necessary political activities, but says it can still be minimally helpful in "harm reduction."

68 Noah Gordon, "How Did Members of Congress Get So Wealthy?" *The Atlantic,* September 9, 2014, http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/09/how-did-members-of-congress-get-so-wealthy/379848.

69 Rebecca Kaplan, "Members of Congress richer than ever," *CBS News.* January 9, 2014, http://www.cbsnews.com/news/members-of-congress-richer-than-ever/.

70 The main exceptions being for local political offices, which hold the least political power.

71 Gould, "Politics," 303-309.

72 Quoted in Gould, "Politics," 304.

73 Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 32.

74 David Graeber, "The Iron Law of Liberalism and the Era of Total Bureaucratization," in *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2015), 4.

75 David Graeber, *Revolutions in Reverse: Essays on Politics, Violence, Art, and the Imagination* (Brooklyn: Automedia, 2011), 49.

76 Citing the work of many feminist thinkers who have demonstrated how much of women's lives are relegated to emotional care for men, Graeber argues that their arguments can be extended into cultural pressures to sympathize with the powerful at large—including the police who are the front guard of executing the violence of the state but yet get the benefit of being humanized through countless television shows and movies. Therefore, the victims of power are always learning to feel the pain of their oppressors.

77 Graeber, *Revolutions in Reverse*, 55.

78 Wini Breines, "Politics as Community," in *The Great Refusal: Community and Organization in the New Left: 1962-1968* (New York: J.F. Bergin Publishers, Inc., 1982), 46-66.

79 Graeber, "The Iron Law of Liberalism," 3-44.

80 Noam Chomsky, "Expanding the Floor of the Cage," *Z Magazine*, April 1997.

81 Jacques Ranciere, "Does Democracy Mean Something?" *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (London: Bloomsbury, (2010) 2015), 58.

82 I am not suggesting that democracy should depend solely on this *one* principle of nonqualification (or nonspecialization). Any political form creates needs for multiple operating principles; my point here is simply that the logic of real democracy is perforce antiauthoritarian.

83 Indeed, today one need look no further than the mass gulf of wealth possessed by the "global north" compared to the "global south" for reference of how a parochial democracy cannot ever accomplish democracy's utopian potential.

84 Boggs, "Revolutionary Process," 359-393.

85 Boggs, "Revolutionary Process," 363.

86 Sitrin and Azzellini, *They Can't Represent Us,* 10.

87 Witness the swiftness in which the state chose to brutally crush all encampments in the US associated with OWS in a little over a week.

88 Sasha Lilley et al., *Capital and Its Discontents: Conversations with Radical Thinkers in a Time of Tumult* (Oakland: PM Press, 2011).

89 Immanuel Wallerstein, "Revolutionary Movements in the Era of US Hegemony," in *The Politics of the World Economy* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 132-145.

90   Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 150.

91 Such as embodied by the Mondragon system, where a central bank redistributes surpluses back into the networked cooperatives, particularly to strengthen new sites and help fledgling ones.

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Alexander Riccio is a graduate student in ethnic studies at Oregon State University, as well as a community activist working within multiple horizontalist groups in the Corvallis area. His intellectual work seeks to engage questions on revolutionary theories, positions on which have fractured the left since at least the days of the First International. To do this, Mr. Riccio sets about evaluating notions of transitional phases towards utopia, which requires a fundamental reassessment over notions of politics, vanguards, and alienation to overcome conceptual dualisms which impede revolutionary projects. He bounces these ideas off his dog in times when his partner can no longer tolerate his long-windedness.

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