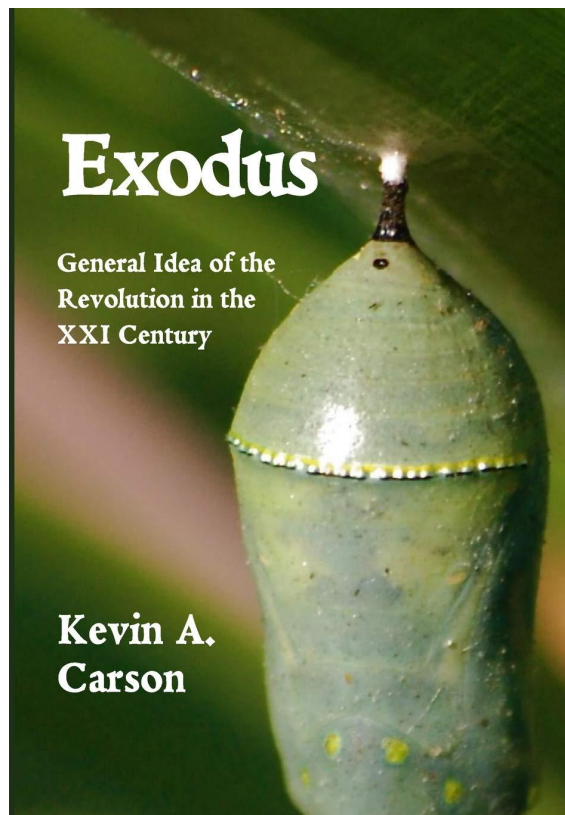


Exodus

General Idea of the Revolution in the XXI Century

Kevin A. Carson



2021

Contents

Reviews	5
Abstract	6
Preface	7
 Part One: Background	 8
Chapter One: The Age of Mass and Maneuver	9
I. A Conflict of Visions	9
II. The Triumph of Mass in the Old Left	15
III. The Assault on Working Class Agency	42
IV. Workerism/Laborism	49
 Chapter Two: Transition	 52
I. Drastic Reductions in Necessary Outlays for the Means of Production	52
II. The Network Revolution and the Imploding Cost of Coordination	57
III. The Impotence of Enforcement, and Superiority of Circumvention to Resistance .	70
IV. Superior General Efficiency and Low Overhead	74
V. Conclusion	78
 Part Two. The Age of Exodus	 79
Chapter Three: Horizontalism and Self-Activity Over Vanguard Institutions	80
Introduction	80
I. The New Left	81
II. Autonomism	90
III. The 1968 Movements and the Transition to Horizontalist Praxis	98
IV. The Post-1994 Movements	100
 Chapter Four: The Abandonment of Workerism	 115
I. The Limited Relevance of Proletarianism in the Mass Production Age	115
II. Technology and the Declining Relevance of Proletarianism	116
III The Abandonment of Proletarianism by the New Left	117
IV. The Abandonment of Workerism in Praxis	127
 Chapter Five: Evolutionary Transition Models	 131
Introduction and Note on Terminology	131

I. Comparison to Previous Systemic Transitions	132
II. The Nature of Post-Capitalist Transition	146
Chapter Six: Interstitial Development and Exodus over Insurrection	157
Introduction	157
I. The Split Within Autonomism	159
II. The Shift From the Factory to Society as the Main Locus of Productivity	159
III. Negri et al vs. the Commons	162
IV. Theoretical Implications	163
Chapter Seven: Interstitial Development: Practical Issues	198
I. Post-1968 (-1994?) Movements	198
II. Strategy	207
Chapter Eight: Interstitial Development: Engagement With the State	217
 Part Three. Seeds beneath the Snow	 245
Chapter Nine: The Commons Sector and the Theory of Municipalism	246
Introduction	246
I. The Growth of the Commons Sector As a Lifeline	249
II. Municipalism: The City as Commons and Platform	262
Chapter Ten: Municipalism: Local Case Studies	282
I. North America	282
II. Europe	299
Chapter Eleven: Municipalism: Building Blocks	317
Chapter Twelve: The Global South and Federation	367
I. Commons-Based Economies in the Global South	367
II. Federation	370
 Backmatter	 384
Bibliography	385
About the Author	411

To the hundreds of thousands or billions
engaged in building the new society
within the shell of the old.

Reviews

“Carson’s writing is always as incisive and informed, as it is mobilizing and bold. Like Homebrew Industrial Revolution, Exodus will be the source to turn to for historical insight and contextualizing the maker movement in the political economy of today.”

— CINDY KOHTALA

researcher on peer production, Aalto University

“Kevin Carson is the kind of thinker I appreciate most—bold, pioneering, rigorous, fiercely independent, focused on grand challenges of the day, humble before the complexities of the world, but willing to grapple deeply with them. His latest book, Exodus, perfectly exemplifies this. It puts forward a theory of post-capitalist transition with ordinary people as the main revolutionary protagonists and backs it up with nearly 500 pages of detailed argumentation. It’s a passionate, but reasoned call to recognize the agency that all of us already possess and the new possibilities of the day. The result is illuminating, inspiring, practical, and thus perfect medicine for today.”

— NEAL GORENFLO

Executive Director, Shareable

“For all those interested in the assault on working class agency, the decline of proletarianism, the network revolution, resistance organisation debates, and the nature of post-capitalist transition, this book is absolutely unmissable!”

— ATHINA KARATZOGIANNI

researcher on new communications media and resistance movements, Leicester University

Abstract

Old Left models of postcapitalist transition based on organizational mass, hierarchy, and revolutionary seizure of power are becoming increasingly irrelevant. Meanwhile, in the interstices of a dying system in hackerspaces and garage shops, neighborhood gardens, community land trusts, and municipalist movements from Jackson to Rojava to Barcelona, people are busy creating the building blocks of a new system within the interstices of a dying one. Exodus explores a model of social, political, and economic revolution driven not by violent upheaval but instead, by the process of fostering new patterns of flourishing social interaction within the shell of an increasingly brittle, unsustainable, and unjust status quo. In this book, Kevin Carson draws on his earlier insights regarding micromanufacturing technology, ephemeralization, communication, and stigmergic organization to deepen our understanding of post-capitalist transition. Examining a broad range of contemporary trends and employing a diverse array of theoretical perspectives, Carson helps us open our eyes to the possibility of a more humane and flourishing world.

Preface

On the whole, this is a typical Carson book. Like all my books since *Studies in Mutualist Political Economy*, it's to a large extent a direct outgrowth of my earlier books insofar as it addresses in depth issues which I was limited to treating on only in passing in the previous books. In this case, *Exodus* applies the findings of *The Homebrew Industrial Revolution* regarding micromanufacturing technology and ephemeralization, and those concerning networked communications and stigmergic organization in *The Desktop Regulatory State*, to the questions of political organization entailed in post-capitalist transition. Three of my research papers at Center for a Stateless Society were much more limited preliminary investigations into some of the same subject matter: "Techno-Utopianism, Counterfeit and Real,"¹ "The Fulcrum of the Present Crisis,"² and "Libertarian Municipalism."³

Like the previous books, it is a product of its time, in the sense that I was enthusiastically immersed in the vital events of the day during the writing process. As with *Homebrew* and *Desktop*, I was always two steps behind the news related to my research, and eventually had to draw a line beyond which I would not incorporate any new material if I was to complete the book at all. And as with the previous books, it was already becoming dated before I wrote down the last word.

Although *Homebrew* and *Desktop* are both considerably dated in many regards, I think much of the analysis is still relevant and holds up fairly well. I hope the same will be true of *Exodus*.

In any case, if you liked the previous books, perhaps you will also like this one—or at least find it somewhat useful. I hope so.

Many thanks to my friend Gary Chartier, of La Sierra University, for formatting the manuscripts into a finished book that's actually pleasing to the eyes.

January 12, 2021

¹ Kevin Carson, "Techno-Utopianism, Counterfeit and Real" (Center for a Stateless Society, Spring 2016) <<https://c4ss.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/TechnoUtopiaPDF1.pdf>>.

² Carson, "The Fulcrum of the Present Crisis: Some Thoughts on Revolutionary Strategy" (Center for a Stateless Society, Winter 2015) <<http://c4ss.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/SomeRevCarson.pdf>>.

³ Carson, "Libertarian Municipalism: Networked Cities as Resilient Platforms for Post-Capitalist Transition" (Center for a Stateless Society, 2018) <<https://c4ss.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/community-platforms.pdf>>.

Part One: Background

Chapter One: The Age of Mass and Maneuver

I. A Conflict of Visions

I should note, at the outset, that in this section I deal with two dichotomies which are theoretically distinct, but tend to heavily overlap in practice. The first is between interstitial visions of change based on creating the building blocks of the future society within the present one, and insurrectionary or ruptural visions based on seizure or conquest of the state and other commanding institutions of the existing society. The second is between organizational forms modeled on prefiguring the future society, and organizational forms (defined mainly by mass, hierarchy and the central imposition of discipline) aimed primarily at the strategic requirements of seizing power.

In the nineteenth century, prefigurative or interstitial visions coexisted with visions centered on mass-based institutions and insurrection. But even the dominant anarchist schools to some extent emphasized the role of organizational mass and insurrection in the transition process.

Following a struggle with the Bakuninists in the First International, the Marxists emerged as the dominant school of socialism — a school that was both insurrectionary and envisioned the seizure of state power as a tool for transformation. (Not that Bakunin himself did not advocate a revolutionary strategy focused on mass and organization; he just saw the immediate abolition of the state as entailed in the act of seizing it.)

Marx and Engels from the beginning stressed that the transition to socialism was a thing to be carried out after the working class's capture of the state, with the proletarian state playing a central role in carrying out the transition.

In the *Communist Manifesto*, the first step in the transition to communism was the seizure of political power, followed by (in Mihailo Markovic's words)

a series of steps which eventually revolutionize the entire mode of production.... [In Marx's] view the proletariat 'is compelled by the force of circumstances' to use [the state] in order to sweep away by force the old conditions of production, classes generally, and its own supremacy as a class.... On the other hand, reformists (e.g. Bernstein) rejected the idea of a political revolution since they thought the very economic process of capitalism led spontaneously towards socialism.¹

As Marx and Engels themselves described it, "the first step in the revolution by the working class"

is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class to win the battle of democracy.

The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degree, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e.,

¹ Mihailo Markovic, "Transition to Socialism," *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*. Edited by Tom Bottomore, Laurence Harris, V.G. Kiernan and Ralph Miliband. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 486.

of the proletariat organised as the ruling class; and to increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible.

Besides revolutionary policies aimed at smashing bourgeois power, like confiscating the property of emigres and rebels, and economic policies aimed at gradually destroying the economic power of the bourgeoisie (e.g. a progressive income tax and abolition of inheritance), they also envisioned a large-scale, centrally organized program of economic reconstruction including:

5. Centralisation of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank with State capital and an exclusive monopoly.
6. Centralisation of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the State.
7. Extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the State; the bringing into cultivation of waste-lands, and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan.
8. Equal liability of all to work. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.
9. Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of all the distinction between town and country by a more equable distribution of the populace over the country.²

In both the Manifesto and *Critique of the Gotha Program*, Marx described a fairly lengthy process of constructing communism after the working class captured control of the state. The Manifesto included a detailed economic program that would have to be implemented over a prolonged period.

As Markovic interpreted it, that specifically ruled out a long process of evolutionary transition analogous to the transition from feudalism to capitalism.

In contrast to bourgeois revolution which is an overthrow of the political power of the aristocracy *at the end* of a long process of growth of the capitalist economy and bourgeois culture within the framework of feudal society, the seizure of political power from the bourgeoisie is, according to Marx, only 'the first episode' of the revolutionary transformation of capitalism into socialism. Marx... distinguished between the *lower phase* of communism (a mixed society which still lacks its own foundations) and its *higher phase* (after the disappearance of the 'enslaving of labour' and of 'the antithesis between mental and physical labour', when such abundance would be attained that goods could be distributed to each 'according to his needs').³

² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Marx/Engels Selected Works, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969). Hosted at Marxist Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/index.htm>>. Accessed September 21, 2016.

³ Markovic, pp. 485–86.

Marx himself, in *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850* (a collection of contemporary newspaper articles he had written analyzing the Revolution of 1848), stressed the mutually determining character of industrial capitalism and the proletariat in creating both the material prerequisites of socialism and a revolutionary class capable of building it.

The development of the industrial proletariat is, in general, conditioned by the development of the industrial bourgeoisie. Only under its rule does the proletariat gain that extensive national existence which can raise its revolution to a national one, and only thus does the proletariat itself create the modern means of production, which become just so many means of its revolutionary emancipation.

At its Hague Conference in 1872, under the influence of Marx and Engels, the International Working Men's Association adopted Article 7a which called for the working class to achieve the "conquest of political power" by "constituting itself into a political party, distinct from, and opposed to all old parties formed by the propertied classes."⁴

And on the occasion of Marx's death in 1883 Engels reiterated, as his and Marx's consistent position, that the proletariat must seize — as "the only organisation the victorious working class finds ready-made for use" — the state, the state being "the only organism by which [it] can... carry out that economic revolution of society..."⁵

The 1891 Erfurt Programme of the SDP, in whose drafting Kautsky played the primary role, reiterated the themes of small businesses being destroyed and capital concentrated into "colossal large enterprises," leaving as the only response "the transformation of the capitalist private ownership of the means of production — land and soil, pits and mines, raw materials, tools, machines, means of transportation — into social property and the transformation of the production of goods into socialist production carried on by and for society." This was to be accomplished through struggle by the working class; and it fell to the Social Democratic Party "to shape the struggle of the working class into a conscious and unified one."⁶

In his 1895 Introduction to *The Class Struggles in France*, Engels framed the destruction of capitalism and creation of socialism as the work of a mass proletarian "army," based on "big industry" and giant industrial centers.

History has proved us, and all who thought like us, wrong. It has made it clear that the state of economic development on the Continent at that time [ie. 1848] was not, by a long way, ripe for the removal of capitalist production; it has proved this by the economic revolution which, since 1848, has seized the whole of the Continent, has really caused big industry for the first time to take root in France, Austria, Hungary, Poland and, recently, in Russia, while it has made Germany positively an industrial country of the first rank.... [T]oday a great international army of Socialists, marching

⁴ International Working Men's Association, "Resolutions," Hague Conference, September 2–7, 1872. Hosted by Marxist Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/iwma/documents/1872/hague-conference/resolutions.htm>>. Accessed July 23, 2018.

⁵ Friedrich Engels, "On the Occasion of Karl Marx's Death" (May 12, 1883), in *Anarchism & Anarcho-Syndicalism: Selected Writings by Marx, Engels, Lenin* (New York: International Publishers, 1972).

⁶ "The Erfurt Programme" (1891). Translated by Thomas Dunlap, and hosted at Marxist Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/history/international/social-democracy/1891/erfurt-program.htm>>. Accessed January 18, 2020.

irresistibly on and growing daily in number, organization, discipline, insight and assurance of victory. If even this mighty army of the proletariat has still not reached its goal, if, a long way from winning victory with one mighty stroke, it has slowly to press forward from position to position in a hard, tenacious struggle, this only proves, once and for all, how impossible it was in 1848 to win social reconstruction by a simple surprise attack.⁷

Meanwhile the working class in Germany developed, as a model for the working class throughout the industrialized world, the combination of universal suffrage and a mass socialist party.

And if universal suffrage had offered no other advantage than that it allowed us to count our numbers every three years; that by the regularly established, unexpectedly rapid rise in the number of votes it increased in equal measure the workers' certainty of victory and the dismay of their opponents, and so became our best means of propaganda; that it accurately informed us concerning our own strength and that of all hostile parties, and thereby provided us with a measure of proportion for our actions second to none, safeguarding us from untimely timidity as much as from untimely foolhardiness — if this had been the only advantage we gained from the suffrage, then it would still have been more than enough. But it has done much more than this. In election agitation it provided us with a means, second to none, of getting in touch with the mass of the people, where they still stand aloof from us; of forcing all parties to defend their views and actions against our attacks before all the people; and, further, it opened to our representatives in the Reichstag a platform from which they could speak to their opponents in Parliament and to the masses without, with quite other authority and freedom than in the press or at meetings....

With this successful utilization of universal suffrage, an entirely new mode of proletarian struggle came into force, and this quickly developed further. It was found that the state institutions, in which the rule of the bourgeoisie is organized, offer still further opportunities for the working class to fight these very state institutions. They took part in elections to individual diets, to municipal councils and to industrial courts; they contested every post against the bourgeoisie in the occupation of which a sufficient part of the proletariat had its say. And so it happened that the bourgeoisie and the government came to be much more afraid of the legal than of the illegal action of the workers' party, of the results of elections than of those of rebellion.⁸

Old fashioned revolutionary insurrections characterized by street fighting and barricades were only successful a minority of the time even in 1848, Engels observed. Developments in military technology since had rendered them completely obsolete. Revolution by spontaneous insurrection and street fighting was no longer feasible, and if it played a part at all it would be in the

⁷ Engels, Introduction. Karl Marx, *The Class Conflict in France, 1848 to 1850*. From Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Volume 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969). Proofed and corrected by Matthew Carmody, 2009, Mark Harris 2010, transcribed by Louis Proyect, and hosted at Marxist Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/class-struggles-france/>>. Accessed Sept. 15, 2016.

⁸ *Ibid.*

later stages of a revolution whose victory had already been largely secured through political organization.

If the conditions have changed in the case of war between nations, this is no less true in the case of the class struggle. The time of surprise attacks, of revolutions carried through by small conscious minorities at the head of unconscious masses, is past. Where it is a question of a complete transformation of the social organization, the masses themselves must also be in it, must themselves already have grasped what is at stake, what they are going in for.... The history of the last fifty years has taught us that. But in order that the masses may understand what is to be done, long, persistent work is required, and it is just this work which we are now pursuing, and with a success which drives the enemy to despair.

In the Latin countries, also, it is being more and more recognized that the old tactics must be revised. Everywhere [*the unprepared onslaught has gone into the background, everywhere*] the German example of utilizing the suffrage, of winning all posts accessible to us, has been imitated.... Slow propaganda work and parliamentary activity are being recognized here, too, as the most immediate tasks of the Party.

The German Social-Democracy, with its two and a half million voters, was “the decisive ‘*shock force*’ of the international proletarian army.” Its central task was to

conquer the greater part of the middle section of society, petty bourgeois and small peasants, and grow into the decisive power in the land, before which all other powers will have to bow, whether they like it or not. To keep this growth going without interruption until of itself it gets beyond the control of the ruling governmental system....⁹

The working class would win by using legal methods, and avoiding being drawn into premature street fighting. The only way the ruling class would thwart the revolutionary project would be by itself resorting to illegality and repression; and the proper strategy of the working class was to so permeate the majority of society, mass political institutions and the army that — as with the Christian permeation of Roman society — by the time the ruling class resorted to full-scale repression, it would be too late.¹⁰

All this is not to say that Marx had no use for interstitial development as such. For instance in his 1864 Inaugural Address to the International Working Men’s Association, he praised the cooperative movement and particularly the self-organized cooperative factories. Such factories showed, “by deed,” that

production on a large scale, and in accord with the behests of modern science, may be carried on without the existence of a class of masters employing a class of hands; that to bear fruit, the means of labor need not be monopolized as a means of dominion over, and of extortion against, the laboring man himself; and that, like slave labor, like serf labor, hired labor is but a transitory and inferior form, destined to disappear

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

before associated labor plying its toil with a willing hand, a ready mind, and a joyous heart.¹¹

Worker cooperatives were “transitional forms from the capitalist mode of production to the associated one...” The growth of joint-stock companies and the reduction of capitalists to rentiers, furthered by the national credit system, illustrated the superfluity of industrial capital to the actual management of industry. And the same national credit system “equally offers the means for the gradual extension of cooperative enterprises on a more or less national scale.”¹²

Nevertheless Marx saw cooperatives mainly as a demonstration effect of what was possible, and not as a primary approach to constructing socialism within the interstices of the capitalist economy. Since in the *Inaugural Address* he explicitly repudiated the cooptation of the cooperative movement by pseudo-”socialist” efforts under the capitalist state like those of LaSalle and Bismarck, the reference above to the credit system is presumably a reference to the construction of socialism by means of a credit system socialized by the socialist state, as per the *Manifesto*. As an actual means of building socialism, Marx made it clear, the cooperative movement could only be effective to the extent that it was subordinated to the political effort to gain control of the state. Cooperatives,

however, [extraneous comma sic] excellent in principle and however useful in practice, co-operative labor, if kept within the narrow circle of the casual efforts of private workmen, will never be able to arrest the growth in geometrical progression of monopoly, to free the masses, nor even to perceptibly lighten the burden of their miseries.¹³

LaSalle, the founder of the first socialist party in Germany — which was later incorporated into the SPD and had some influence on its first Gotha Program — envisioned working through Bismarck’s state to socialize the economy. His party, the General German Workers’ Association, was amalgamated into the Social Democratic Party and constituted a LaSallean wing alongside the Marxist wing of Liebknecht and Bebel, and his ideas had some influence on the wording of the Gotha Program adopted at its first congress in 1875. Although he took a more or less Hegelian view of the state as a force representing society as a whole, he shared with Marxists the idea that control of the state was essential to implementing a socialist program.

This was not true only of the Marxists and LaSallians. Many anarchists and decentralists also put considerable emphasis on the role of organizational mass, control of the state, or insurrection in the transition process.

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (most notably in *General Idea of the Revolution in the XIX Century*) articulated an evolutionary model of transition based on “dissolution of the state into the social body” (or “into the economy”). However, even though Proudhon opposed violent revolution as such, his vision nevertheless involved acting through the state itself to oversee the transition process of devolving state functions into society. In April 1848 he made an unsuccessful run for

¹¹ Karl Marx, *Inaugural Address to the International Working Men’s Association* (1864), Marxists Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1864/10/27.htm>>. Accessed July 19, 2018.

¹² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Capital* vol. III, Chapter 27. (New York: International Publishers, n.d.). Hosted by Marxists Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch27.htm>>. Accessed July 19, 2018.

¹³ Marx, *Inaugural Address*.

the Constituent Assembly, and approached Louis Blanc, who played a leading role in creating a parallel state composed of proletarian social institutions like the state workshops, “to seek Blanc’s sponsorship of his plan to transform the Bank of France into a Bank of Exchange.” He ran again in June, this time successfully, on an electoral program of industrial democracy in which the workers of different industries were to be organized into corporate bodies and represented by occupational category in the national assembly. In addition he resurrected his proposal for a Bank of Exchange, along with a reduction of rents and a redistribution of all property except work tools and personal possessions.¹⁴

Later anarchists like Bakunin and Kropotkin abandoned the idea of creating a socialist society through the state, but they kept the focus on abrupt overthrow of the system.

II. The Triumph of Mass in the Old Left

Leninism. The Old Left’s emphasis on organizational mass and on seizure of the means of production was based in part on the large scale and capital intensiveness of capitalist industry. Because production technology was extremely expensive, a revolutionary strategy centered on seizure of existing means of production was necessary; and this in turn required a workers’ movement with institutions whose mass corresponded to that of the institutions they would be seizing.

The first large wave of worker cooperatives was created by the labor movement as counter-institutions in the early 19th century, by skilled artisans who owned their tools of production and could set up shop anywhere with little to no capital outlay. This was true both of the Owenist unions in the UK, as recounted by E.P. Thompson, and of the National Trades Union in the U.S. according to John Curl.¹⁵ On both sides of the Atlantic, striking artisan workers frequently formed workers’ cooperatives, along with bazaars or alternative currency systems for trading their wares with one another.

But by the 1840s the increasing dominance of factory production and the cost of the machinery required had largely closed off this possibility. Most subsequent attempts at worker-organized manufacturing failed because of the insurmountable capital outlays required — including the large-scale attempt at creating worker cooperatives by the Knights of Labor in the 1880s.¹⁶

The Old Left’s affinity for large-scale organization and centralized control was also partly cultural and aesthetic: it was influenced by the ideological hegemony of the dominant organizational mode of mass-production capitalism.

This was true of the Marxists, in fact, going back to their early days. Marxism lionized large-scale industry as a progressive force, and equated scale with productivity. And the proletariat — the industrial army which capitalism had brought together, and the revolutionary subject which would usher in communism — was a mirror-image of capitalist industry. Only a mass revolutionary body, a socialist party composed of the working class and centrally organized like an army under a general staff, possessed the size and organization to take on the size and organization of capitalist industry.

¹⁴ Robert Graham, “The General Idea of Proudhon’s Revolution,” *Robert Graham’s Anarchism Blog*, February 21, 2009 <<https://robertgraham.wordpress.com/the-general-idea-of-proudhons-revolution/>>.

¹⁵ John Curl, *For All the People: Uncovering the Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperative Movements, and Communism in America* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2009), p. 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 35, 47, 107.

Modern Industry has converted the little workshop of the patriarchal master into the great factory of the industrial capitalist. Masses of labourers, crowded into the factory, are organised like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army they are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants....

But with the development of industry, the proletariat not only increases in number; it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows, and it feels that strength more.... Thereupon, the workers begin to form combinations (Trades' Unions) against the bourgeois; they club together in order to keep up the rate of wages; they found permanent associations in order to make provision beforehand for these occasional revolts.

Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers....

This organisation of the proletarians into a class, and, consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between the workers themselves. But it ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier....

Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of Modern Industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product.¹⁷

The emphasis on mass, hierarchy and central coordination to which the traditional establishment Left is so attached is very much an industrial age paradigm. There has been a tendency in much of the Left — especially the Old Left (Marxist-Leninist, syndicalist and social democratic) — to equate size, capital accumulation and overhead with productivity, to view the gigantism fostered by capitalism as “progressive,” and to equate “Revolution” to putting capitalism’s hierarchical institutions under new management. The mission of revolutionary conquest, or reformist capture (a la LaSalle, Bernstein or Atlee), of the institutions of the old society presupposed countervailing institutions of equal mass. The Old Left model of revolution, and its survivals in the verticalist/establishment Left to the present day, are direct analogues of the mass production industrial model of Schumpeter, Galbraith and Chandler.

There is a great deal of parallelism between the Old Left viewpoint on this, on the one hand, and the liberal capitalist fixation on “economies of scale” (both the Chandlerian celebration of “capital-intensive, management-intensive, high-speed throughput” industry, and the Austrian equation of “roundaboutness” and accumulation with increased productivity) on the other.

Lenin in 1917 mentioned that, along with their differences on the state, Marxists and anarchists also disagreed on their views of industry: “the [revolutionary Marxists] stand for centralized, large-scale communist production, while the [anarchists] stand for disconnected small production.”¹⁸ In his denunciation of “left-wing communism,” he hit all the main points:

Unfortunately, small-scale production is still widespread in the world, and small-scale production engenders capitalism and the bourgeoisie continuously, daily, hourly, spontaneously, and on a mass scale....

¹⁷ Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*.

¹⁸ Lenin, “Third Letter: Concerning a Proletarian Militia,” from *Letters from Afar*. In *Anarchism & Anarcho Syndicalism*, p. 261.

[T]he experience of the victorious dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia has clearly shown even to those who are incapable of thinking or have had no occasion to give thought to the matter that absolute centralisation and rigorous discipline of the proletariat are an essential condition of victory over the bourgeoisie.¹⁹

To be sure Marxism, as such, left considerable room for libertarian and decentralist interpretations — and indeed there have been significant libertarian, or “left-wing communist,” currents within Marxism throughout the 20th century and to the present day.

And there are passages in Marx, Engels and Lenin (most notably Marx’s *The Civil War in France*,²⁰ Engels’s commentary on it and Lenin’s *State and Revolution*) which are particularly amenable to such an interpretation. In those works they frequently implied that the proletarian state or “dictatorship of the proletariat” would be created after totally smashing the capitalist state apparatus, and would replace it with a much more horizontally organized and democratic apparatus directly administered by the working class itself.

Marx wrote, in *The Civil War in France*, that “the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes.”²¹ And in an 1871 letter to Ludwig Kugelmann he cited the struggle of the Paris Communards “[not] to transfer the bureaucratic-military machine from one hand to another, but to *smash* it,” as the model for all future people’s revolutions in Europe.²² In his postscript to *Civil War in France*, Engels observed that the French working class confronted the immediate necessity of “do[ing] away with all the old repressive machinery previously used against it itself” — a necessity it addressed through the “shattering of the former state power and its replacement by a new and really democratic state.”²³

The proletarian dictatorship would be the height of real democracy on the pattern of the Commune, with all posts occupied by elected officials instantly removable by recall and paid the wage of average workers, the standing army replaced by the workers in arms, etc. The Communards themselves according to Marx and Engels — quoted with approval by Lenin — saw the Commune as a model to be replicated in every town and village in France, with the national government as a whole made up of autonomous communes. And once class divisions were finally suppressed and the need for armed force to maintain working class rule disappeared, this workers’ state would in turn wither away as the habits of daily social life replaced coercive authority.

In an earlier draft of *The Civil War in France*, Marx described the Commune’s attack on state power in language that echoed Saint-Simon and Proudhon: “the reabsorption of the State power by society....”²⁴ And he expressed openness, in Peter Hudis’s words, to “an association of freely

¹⁹ V.I. Lenin, “Left-Wing” Communism: an Infantile Disorder (1920). From Collected Works, Volume 31 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964). Hosted at Marxist Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/>> Accessed January 30, 2019.

²⁰ See in particular the Third Address (“The Paris Commune”) and Engels’s 1891 “Postscript.” Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* (English edition of 1871). Hosted at Marxist Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/>>. Accessed August 9, 2018.

²¹ Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* (English edition of 1871), Third Address (“The Paris Commune”). Hosted at Marxist Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/ch05.htm>>. Accessed August 9, 2018.

²² Karl Marx, “Marx to Dr Kugelmann Concerning the Paris Commune,” April 12, 1871. Hosted at Marxist Internet Archive <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/letters/71_04_12.htm>. Accessed July 28, 2018.

²³ Friedrich Engels, 1891 Postscript, *Civil War in France*. <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/postscript.htm>>. Accessed August 9, 2018.

²⁴ Peter Hudis, *Marx’s Concept of the Alternative to Capitalism* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), p. 185.

associated cooperatives as the most effective form for making a transition to a new society.”²⁵ This is actually a paraphrase of Marx’s comment:

if united co-operative societies are to regulate national production upon common plan, thus taking it under their own control, and putting an end to the constant anarchy and periodical convulsions which are the fatality of capitalist production — what else, gentlemen, would it be but communism, “possible” communism?²⁶

And based on a critique of Bakunin, he evidently envisioned the proletarian dictatorship — echoing his commentary in *Civil War in France* on the Paris communards envisioning a French republic composed of horizontally linked local communes — as being something very decentralized and bottom-up. In reply to Bakunin’s question as to whether all forty million French would be members of the workers’ state, Marx said “Certainly! Since the whole thing begins with the self-government of the commune” (from the context “commune” clearly referring to local village and town communes on the model of the Russian Mir or the Paris Commune).²⁷

As Hudis characterized it, Marx’s fundamental orientation was in direct opposition to all forms of institutional authority that treated workers as a means to an end rather than itself functioning as a means through which they expressed their agency:

Here is the most important determinant in Marx’s concept of the new society: social relations must cease to operate independently of the self-activity of the associated individuals. Marx will oppose any power — be it the state, a social plan, or the market itself — that takes on a life of its own and utilises human powers as a mere means to its fruition and development. Human power, he insists, *must* become a self-sufficient end — it must cease to serve as a means to some other end.²⁸

This theme of powers that take on a life of their own — also described in various places as alienation or the inversion of subject and predicate — is a continuous theme in his writing from his Young Hegelian days to the end of his life.

At their best, as described by Gramsci scholar Anne Showstack Sassoon, all these different variants centered on “the theme of the withering away of politics as a separate sphere uncontrolled by society, and its substitution by a new type of democracy....”²⁹

And Marx’s own vision of planned production as carried out by the associated workers by no means carried the bureaucratic and centralizing necessity later read into it by Engels or Lenin; it was entirely consistent with relatively decentralized models of worker-managed production or even non-capitalist markets of a sort, so long as the law of value and the separation of labor from the means of production it presupposed were eliminated. This is a recurring theme in Peter Hudis’s book cited above.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 186, 186n. The phrase itself is cited from Kojin Karatani’s *Transcritique on Kant and Marx*, which in turn cites Marx’s reference to “united co-operative societies” in *The Civil War in France*.

²⁶ Marx, *Civil War in France*, “The Paris Commune.”

²⁷ Marx, Conspectus of Bakunin’s *Statism and Anarchy* (1874). Hosted at Marxist Internet Archive (Catbull mirror) <<https://marxists.catbull.com/archive/marx/works/1874/04/bakunin-notes.htm>>. Accessed November 4, 2018.

²⁸ Hudis, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

²⁹ Anne Showstack Sassoon, “Civil Society,” *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, p. 74.

On the other hand Engels, in a letter written in 1883, suggested that the preexisting state apparatus was to be seized and used as an instrument of revolutionary power rather than smashed and replaced:

But after the victory of the Proletariat, the only organisation the victorious working class finds ready-made for use, is that of the State. It may require adaptation to the new functions. But to destroy that at such a moment, would be to destroy the only organism by means of which the victorious working class can exert its newly conquered power, keep down its capitalist enemies and carry out that economical revolution of society without which the whole victory must end in a defeat and in a massacre of the working class like that after the Paris Commune.³⁰

And this sounds a lot closer to what the Bolsheviks actually *did* in power.

Matthew Crossin stresses the ambiguities in Marx and Engels's conception of the "dictatorship of the proletariat," and its amenability to being stretched in either statist or quasi-anarchistic directions. His reading of their works, over the course of their intellectual careers,

demonstrates a fluid, threefold use of the word 'state':

- a. As a mere synonym for 'society'; a 'state' of affairs. (e.g. a capitalist state or society as opposed to a communist state or society).
- b. Referring to the organisation of class rule. In a socialist context this amounts to the act of revolution itself; an armed populace actively carrying out a transformation of social relations by expropriating the means of production, supposedly establishing the proletariat as 'the new ruling class'.
- c. To indicate the specific governmental apparatus situated above society which maintains class relations through its various instruments of coercion: the legislature, executive, judiciary, army, police, prisons, channels of information, schools, etc.

He points out that Marx himself ("Conspectus of Bakunin's Book Statism and Anarchy," 1874–75), in response to Bukharin's demand as to whether the entire proletariat, collectively, could act as a proletarian state, stressed the anarchist and decentralist aspects of it.

Marx dismissed Bakunin's anarchist critique with considerable contempt, declaring it to be filled with "Schoolboy nonsense!" In expanding upon his conception of 'the proletariat as the ruling class' he first claims that this refers solely to the collective 'use of force' (the 'employment of coercive, meaning governmental, measures') against "enemies and the old organisation of society," which would "not vanish as a result of [the proletariat] coming to power." Simply put, the 'proletarian state' is manifested in any instance where the proletariat "has gained sufficient strength and is sufficiently well organised to employ general means of compulsion" in the suppression of their former masters. It is this, rather than any specific form of social organisation, which would naturally 'wither away' following the disappearance of class struggle

³⁰ Engels to Philipp van Patten, April 18, 1883 <<http://marxengels.public-archive.net/en/ME1950en.html>>.

(i.e., the victory of that revolution). Furthermore, in responding to Bakunin's question about 'all 40 million Germans being members of the government', Marx replies that this is "Certainly" the case, "for the thing begins with the self-government of the commune...."

Crossin echoes Sassoon, quoted above, in seeing the boundary between anarchism and at least one current of Marx's thought as quite indistinct.

This notion of the State – though unhelpfully referred to as such – appears to be entirely in line with the anarchist conception of revolution, though we are once again faced with complications when Marx introduces references to elected managers and trade union executive committees. Nevertheless, if we are to take Marx at his word, this raises the question as to what the Marxist critique of anarchism actually is. If the commune is a self-managed assembly, in which no one is governed by anyone else and 'the State' merely refers to the coordinated (or 'centralised') efforts of the communes to expropriate the means of production and defend this transformation of social relations, we are forced to conclude that Marx and Bakunin were simultaneously both anarchists and statist. The accuracy of either description simply depends on which definition of 'the State' is applied....

...Since Proudhon, the first to call himself an anarchist, the movement's major theorists and political organisations were clear in accepting only the third of Marx and Engels' definitions. Lacking in a sufficiently materialist analysis of the state-form, Marx interprets Bakunin's rejection of all States as the rejection of an 'abstraction'. However, for anarchists, the State has never been understood in such terms. Instead, the movement has merely taken the common, socialist understanding of the State's origin and historical function seriously and, as a result, reasoned that it cannot be the vehicle through which capitalist social relations are overthrown.

... In this essay I have argued that the early Marx's conception of revolution was fundamentally statist. However, this was later complicated by more radical statements, many of which appear to have a more libertarian character, either reframing the State as an abstract concept or advocating for the construction of a new kind of 'State'. Though the description of this 'transitional' form was often vague and contradictory, the democratic statism of Marx and Engels remained fundamentally different to the distortions most 'Marxists' across the world would come to advocate. The statism of even this later period has also been transcended entirely by various anti-authoritarian currents within the Marxist tradition, who drew upon Marx's more 'anarchistic' writings.³¹

Nevertheless, the dominant trend – especially in the version of official Marxism formulated by Engels, Kautsky et al, mostly after Marx's death – was increasingly in favor of the centralizing, statist tendencies and at the expense of the libertarian, decentralist ones. And it was toward emphasizing the continuities between the managerial and administrative styles of monopoly capitalism and those of the proletarian state in the early stages of socialism.

³¹ Matthew Crossin, "Interpreting Marx's Theory of the State and Opposition to Anarchism," libcom.org, Apr 20, 2020 <<https://libcom.org/library/interpreting-marxs-theory-state-opposition-anarchism>>.

An early example of this tendency was Engels' "On Authority" in 1872, which tied together themes celebrating large-scale industry, managerial authority and the military discipline of a revolutionary party.

On examining the economic, industrial and agricultural conditions which form the basis of present-day bourgeois society, we find that they tend more and more to replace isolated action by combined action of individuals. Modern industry, with its big factories and mills, where hundreds of workers supervise complicated machines driven by steam, has superseded the small workshops of the separate producers; the carriages and wagons of the highways have become substituted by railway trains, just as the small schooners and sailing feluccas have been by steam-boats. Even agriculture falls increasingly under the dominion of the machine and of steam, which slowly but relentlessly put in the place of the small proprietors big capitalists, who with the aid of hired workers cultivate vast stretches of land.

Everywhere combined action, the complication of processes dependent upon each other, displaces independent action by individuals. But whoever mentions combined action speaks of organisation; now, is it possible to have organisation without authority?

Supposing a social revolution dethroned the capitalists, who now exercise their authority over the production and circulation of wealth. Supposing, to adopt entirely the point of view of the anti-authoritarians, that the land and the instruments of labour had become the collective property of the workers who use them. Will authority have disappeared, or will it only have changed its form? Let us see....

...Wanting to abolish authority in large-scale industry is tantamount to wanting to abolish industry itself, to destroy the power loom in order to return to the spinning wheel....

We have thus seen that, on the one hand, a certain authority, no matter how delegated, and, on the other hand, a certain subordination, are things which, independently of all social organisation, are imposed upon us together with the material conditions under which we produce and make products circulate.

We have seen, besides, that the material conditions of production and circulation inevitably develop with large-scale industry and large-scale agriculture, and increasingly tend to enlarge the scope of this authority....

...[The anti-authoritarians] demand that the first act of the social revolution shall be the abolition of authority. Have these gentlemen ever seen a revolution? A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon — authoritarian means, if such there be at all; and if the victorious party does not want to have fought in vain, it must maintain this rule by means of the terror which its arms inspire in the reactionists.³²

³² Friedrich Engels, "On Authority," *Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co.), Second edition, 1978 (first edition, 1972). Translated by Robert C. Tucker, transcribed by Mike Lepore. Hosted at <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1872/10/authority.htm>>. Accessed September 23, 2016.

The practical difficulties in distinguishing a strategy of smashing and replacing the capitalist state, from one of simply taking it over under new management, was inadvertently highlighted by Engels' emphasis in *Anti-Duhring* of the institutional continuities between monopoly capitalism and socialism and the extent to which the workers' state would take over the organizational machinery of capitalism.

This rebellion of the productive forces, as they grow more and more powerful, against their quality as capital, this stronger and stronger command that their social character shall be recognised, forces the capitalist class itself to treat them more and more as social productive forces, so far as this is possible under capitalist conditions. The period of industrial high pressure... tends to bring about that form of the socialisation of great masses of means of production which we meet with in the different kinds of joint-stock companies. Many of these means of production and of communication are, from the outset, so colossal that, like the railways, they exclude all other forms of capitalistic exploitation. At a further stage of evolution this form also becomes insufficient: the official representative of capitalist society — the state — will ultimately have to undertake the direction of production. This necessity for conversion into state property is felt first in the great institutions for intercourse and communication — the post office, the telegraphs, the railways.

If the crises demonstrate the incapacity of the bourgeoisie for managing any longer modern productive forces, the transformation of the great establishments for production and distribution into joint-stock companies and state property shows how unnecessary the bourgeoisie are for that purpose. All the social functions of the capitalist are now performed by salaried employees....

But the transformation, either into joint-stock companies, or into state ownership, does not do away with the capitalistic nature of the productive forces.... It is rather brought to a head. But, brought to a head, it topples over. State ownership of the productive forces is not the solution of the conflict, but concealed within it are the technical conditions that form the elements of that solution.

This solution can only consist in the practical recognition of the social nature of the modern forces of production... And this can only come about by society openly and directly taking possession of the productive forces which have outgrown all control except that of society as a whole....³³

These tendencies became even more pronounced in practice, once Lenin and the Bolsheviks faced the task of actually administering a socialist state.

Lenin insisted in *State and Revolution*, echoing Marx and Engels on the Paris Commune, that the proletarian revolution would smash the bourgeois state completely and replace it with a new workers' state based on the soviets that was fundamentally different in character.

But as we already noted, it is hard to distinguish in practice between annihilating the capitalist state and calling an entirely new one into existence from the void, and simply taking over the capitalist state and reorganizing it under new management.

³³ Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Duhring: Herr Eugen Duhring's Revolution in Science* (Progress Publishers, 1947). Hosted at Marxists Internet Archive. Part III: Socialism, "II. Theoretical" <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/ch24.htm>>. Accessed September 2.

Lenin simultaneously claimed that the proletarian state would eliminate the bureaucracy, while also citing the German Postal Service as an example of the kind of administrative apparatus that the workers' state would create.

A witty German Social-Democrat of the seventies of the last century called the postal service an example of the socialist economic system. This is very true. At present the postal service is a business organized on the lines of state-capitalist monopoly. Imperialism is gradually transforming all trusts into organizations of a similar type... Once we have overthrown the capitalists, crushed the resistance of these exploiters with the iron hand of the armed workers, and smashed the bureaucratic machinery of the modern state, we shall have a splendidly-equipped mechanism, freed from the "parasite," a mechanism which can very well be set going by the united workers themselves, who will hire technicians, foremen and accountants, and pay them all, as indeed all "state" officials in general, workmen's wages....

To organize the whole economy on the lines of the postal service so that the technicians, foremen and accountants, as well as all officials, shall receive salaries no higher than "a workman's wage," all under the control and leadership of the armed proletariat — that is our immediate aim.³⁴

To be fair he envisioned this apparatus as a sort of neutral platform operated by workers that would facilitate his vision of direct administration of the state apparatus by ordinary workers, fully consistent with a long tradition of socialist visions of replacing legislation over people with the "administration of things" from Saint-Simon right up to the present-day Partner State of Cosma Orsi and Michel Bauwens.

But in practice, a bureaucratic state on the model Lenin admired so much required an authoritarian internal culture of the kind described by Max Weber and Frederick Taylor in order to function. And in practice it is virtually impossible to separate Lenin's admiration for the German Post Office's bureaucratic model with his admiration for the institutional values of Weber and Taylor, which were directly at odds with worker administration of the state and of industry. Indeed, when Weberian/Taylorist organizational ideas came into conflict with the administration of the state by workers, Lenin chose the former even at the expense of forcibly suppressing the latter.

Lenin, when talking of "smashing the bureaucracy," seemed to define the latter entirely in terms of entrenched status and high salaries, while expressing admiration for Weberian values like standardized work rules that most people who are *not* Lenin consider the defining features of bureaucracy. And it was the features of managerialist, late-stage monopoly capitalism most people regard as bureaucratic that Lenin framed as making bureaucracy no longer necessary.

Capitalist culture has created large-scale production, factories, railways, the postal service, telephones, etc., and on this basis the great majority of the functions of the old "state power" have become so simplified and can be reduced to such exceedingly

³⁴ V.I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution: The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution* (written 1917, published 1918), *Collected Works*, Volume 25, p. 381–492. "Chapter III: Experience of the Paris Commune of 1871. Marx's Analysis." Hosted at Marxists Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch03.htm>>. Accessed August 22, 2018.

simple operations of registration, filing, and checking that they can be easily performed by every literate person, can quite easily be performed for ordinary “workmen’s wages,” and that these functions can (and must) be stripped of every shadow of privilege, of every semblance of “official grandeur.”³⁵

Lenin in fact saw “bureaucracy” not as a mode of operation, but as a stratum defined by privilege; and he saw the elimination of bureaucracy as something brought about not by a change in the mode of operation, but a change in the identities and remuneration of those engaged in it. The Soviet state and industry might be managed according to all the rules identified by Weberian bureaucracy, but so long as they were recallable and paid workers’ wages, and any worker could rotate into superintending positions, it was not a “bureaucracy.”

Despite his claims regarding the elimination of “bureaucracy,” Lenin — like Engels in *Anti-Duhring* — saw the administration of the economy under socialism as a direct outgrowth and continuation of the administrative forms of centralized monopoly capitalism.

The development of capitalism... creates the preconditions that enable really “all” to take part in the administration of the state. Some of these preconditions are: universal literacy, which has already been achieved in a number of the most advanced capitalist countries, then the “training and disciplining” of millions of workers by the huge, complex, socialized apparatus of the postal service, railways, big factories, large-scale commerce, banking, etc., etc.

Given these economic preconditions, it is quite possible, after the overthrow of the capitalists and the bureaucrats, to proceed immediately, overnight, to replace them in the control over production and distribution, in the work of keeping account of labor and products, by the armed workers, by the whole of the armed population. (The question of control and accounting should not be confused with the question of the scientifically trained staff of engineers, agronomists, and so on. These gentlemen are working today in obedience to the wishes of the capitalists and will work even better tomorrow in obedience to the wishes of the armed workers.)

Accounting and control — that is *mainly* what is needed for the “smooth working,” for the proper functioning, of the *first phase* of communist society. *All* citizens are transformed into hired employees of the state, which consists of the armed workers. *All* citizens becomes employees and workers of a *single* countrywide state “syndicate.” All that is required is that they should work equally, do their proper share of work, and get equal pay; the accounting and control necessary for this have been *simplified* by capitalism to the utmost and reduced to the extraordinarily simple operations — which any literate person can perform — of supervising and recording, knowledge of the four rules of arithmetic, and issuing appropriate receipts...

The whole of society will have become a single office and a single factory....³⁶

As Simon Mohun noted, with the rapid growth in industrial output in the late 19th and early 20th century, there was a tendency among Marxists to regard advanced capitalist technology as

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, “Chapter V. The Economic Basis of the Withering Away of the State” <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch05.htm>>. Accessed August 22, 2018.

the necessary form of organization of the labour process no matter what the social relations of production were. That is to say, the technology came to be seen as class-neutral and its authoritarian and hierarchical nature as a function of the prevailing relations of production.³⁷

In “The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government,” Lenin set the primary economic task as introducing the same “strict accounting and control” in expropriated industry which he discussed in *State and Revolution*, and increasing the productivity of labor. And he further stressed the continuities between such methods — which he saw as *eliminating* the need for bureaucracy rather than *characterizing* bureaucratic style — and Taylor’s principles of scientific management. In particular, he said of Taylorism that the Soviet Republic

must at all costs adopt all that is valuable in the achievements of science and technology in this field. The possibility of building socialism depends exactly upon our success in combining the Soviet organization of administration with the up-to-date achievements of capitalism....

...[I]t must be said that large-scale machine industry — which is precisely the material source, the productive source, the foundation of socialism — calls for absolute and strict unity of will, which directs the joint labours of hundreds, thousands and tens of thousands of people. The technical, economic and historical necessity of this is obvious, and all those who have thought about socialism have always regarded it as one of the conditions of socialism. But how can strict unity of will be ensured? By thousands subordinating their will to the will of one.

...We must consolidate what we ourselves have won, what we ourselves have decreed, made law, discussed, planned — consolidate all this in stable forms of *everyday labour discipline*. This is the most difficult, but the most gratifying task, because only its fulfilment will give us a socialist system. We must learn to combine the “public meeting” democracy of the working people — turbulent, surging, overflowing its banks like a spring flood—with *iron* discipline while at work, with *unquestioning obedience* to the will of a single person, the Soviet leader, while at work.³⁸

This mindset led the regime to exclude workers’ factory committees from all involvement in management decisions, and to implement strict “one-man management.”

Anyone knowledgeable in industrial history will know that the primary purpose of standardized procedures and scientific management was to break tasks down into such simple components that individual compliance could be easily monitored, and management could exert control over production workers. Lenin’s language in describing the potential for his favored techniques of accounting and control is quite evocative to anyone familiar with Foucault or James C. Scott.

When the *majority* of the people begin independently and everywhere to keep such accounts and exercise such control over the capitalists (now converted into employees) and over the intellectual gentry who preserve their capitalist habits, this control will really become universal, general, and popular; and there will be no getting away from it, there will be “nowhere to go.”³⁹

³⁷ Simon Mohun, “Labour Process,” in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, p. 269.

³⁸ V.I. Lenin, “The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government,” *Pravda*, April 28, 1918. Hosted at Marxist Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/mar/x03.htm>>. Accessed July 25, 2018.

³⁹ Lenin, *State and Revolution*, Ch. V.

If Lenin stressed the potential for this system of control to render former members of the bourgeoisie and other recalcitrants more legible from above, it was also eminently suited to maintaining such legibility and control over the proletarian work force — the management itself being proletarian in its goals and sympathies by definition, *of course*.

And as Neil Harding observed, the change from writing about a theoretical proletarian dictatorship from outside during the Kerensky regime, to heading a government after the Revolution, had a considerable effect on Lenin's perspective.

From the spring of 1918 onwards Lenin's writings altered considerably in tone. As chairman of the Council of People's Commissars he was confronted by a mounting series of crises: urban famine, collapse of transport and of the army, foreign interventions and civil war. His preoccupations now were to ensure the most efficient mobilization of the regime's scarce resources, to instill firm discipline and accountability and to insist upon the authority of the centre.⁴⁰

All this is in keeping with our earlier discussion of the Old Left as an ideology suited to the mass-production age; it accepted mass production as a neutral and inevitable outcome of the advanced development of productive forces, while ignoring the possibility either that multiple alternative paths of technological advancement might have existed or that capitalism selected among these alternative paths on some basis other than neutral technical efficiency.

And the same mindset carried over into the inexorable stripping of the soviets of real authority and their transformation into transmission belts for policies made within the Party apparatus. Lenin explicitly denounced and mocked the "left-wing communists" who objected to the suppression of both the workers' committees and the soviets.

As any number of libertarian Marxist and other libertarian socialist critics have pointed out, the idea of founding "socialism" on the wage system and on the replication of capitalist relations of authority is fundamentally flawed. For example, Carl Boggs:

The Leninist monopoly of power in Russia had two main consequences: it transformed the masses "represented" by the party into manipulated objects, and it generated a preoccupation with bureaucratic methods and techniques. Lenin's whole approach was that of the technician who stresses the organizational means of political struggle while downplaying the ends themselves. This suppression of values permits the utilization of capitalist methods to advance "socialist construction": hierarchical structures, Taylorism, the authoritarian-submissive personality, alienated labor. All stirrings from below were thus dismissed as "Utopian," "ultra-leftist," or "anarchistic"...

Lenin equated workers' power with the fact of Bolshevik rule, mocking the "petty bourgeois illusions" of leftists who clamored for democratic participation. By 1921, the regime had already destroyed or converted into "transmission belts" those popular and autonomous institutions — the Soviets, trade unions, factory committees — that played a vital role in the revolution...

The idea of "collective ownership" remains a myth so long as the old forms of institutional control are not destroyed; the supersession of private management by state

⁴⁰ Neil Harding, "Lenin," in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, p. 278.

or “public” management poses only a superficial, abstract solution to the contradictions of capitalism.... Only when the workers themselves establish new participatory forms can alienated labor and subordination be eliminated. This transformation includes but runs much deeper than the problem of formal ownership — it penetrates to the level of factory hierarchy and authoritarianism, fragmentation of job skills, commodity production, and separation of mental and physical functions that grow out of the capitalist division of labor. These features, which are often thought to be necessary for greater efficiency and productivity, can better be understood as a means of ensuring control of labor.

Anarchism, Libertarian Communism, Syndicalism, Etc. These technological assumptions regarding large-scale industry — and its corollary, the centrality of large-scale organization to post-capitalist transition — were carried over and intensified not only in Leninism, but in the other major currents of the Old Left. This was true of the major schools of revolutionary anarchism, and of the more libertarian strands of socialism.

Revolutionary anarchist approaches, by definition, entail the existence of mass organization and an emphasis on the wholesale capture of the means of production in a single insurrectionary assault. Pyotr Kropotkin’s *The Conquest of Bread*, for example, was devoted from beginning to end to outlining a scenario of the working class’s seizure of industry, retail shops, housing, food production, etc., and the coordination of production and distribution by the working class on a communistic basis. And he saw such a rupture as an all-or-nothing thing, impossible to carry out piecemeal.

There are, in fact, in a modern State established relations which it is practically impossible to modify if one attacks them only in detail. ...[T]he machinery is so complex and interdependent that no one part can be modified without disturbing the whole...

All is interdependent in a civilized society; it is impossible to reform any one thing without altering the whole. Therefore, on the day we strike at private property, under any one of its forms, territorial or industrial, we shall be obliged to attack them all.⁴¹

Daniel De Leon, a libertarian socialist and the father of the main Marxist tendency native to the United States, argued in 1912 that size — in the sense of capital-intensiveness — was an indispensable prerequisite for efficiency. And like Marx, he saw the increasing size associated with efficiency leading, inexorably, to progressively higher levels of centralized organization by the working class — a process which meant capitalism’s doom.

Progress demands large production of wealth. The volume of wealth is the measure of the possibilities for progress. The measure of efficiency is the volume of wealth produced with least waste, and with the least amount of toil possible. Is such efficiency possible without size? It is not....

There is no help to be looked for by capitalism from a perspective “breakdown” of efficiency due to size. Size is incited by efficiency. Efficiency flows from size. And size

⁴¹ Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread* (New York and London: G.P. Putnam’s Son, 1906). Chapter Four. Online version hosted at Anarchist Archives <http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/kropotkin/conquest/ch4.html> (accessed January 26, 2020).

will wax and wax to the point when capitalism will “break down,” not because of the stoppage of efficiency, but because the human agency of efficiency, the wage-slave class, in whose hands, from captainships down to “high privateships,” the administration of the plants will be found more and more completely lodged, will discontinue administering for a parasite class, and will administer for themselves.⁴²

The syndicalist approach, by its very nature, entails a transitional strategy based on mass organization within industry and coordinated mass activity like the general strike. This was true of De Leonism, to the extent that De Leon’s overall approach combined syndicalist federated industrial unionism in the workplace with electoral politics by a socialist party, although in his strategy the electoral approach was primary. The revolutionary transition was to be achieved primarily in the political realm, but the economy was to be organized by industrial unions in order to take possession of industry at the moment of political victory. Industrial unionism also served as a defensive backup in case the employing class responded to the working class’s political seizure of power with a general capital strike and lockout. The working class, instead, would lock out the capitalists and take over production.⁴³

But a much more significant figure was Rosa Luxemburg, a leader of the Spartakus movement and critic of the growing authoritarianism of the Bolshevik regime, who was martyred during the suppression of the German Council Republic. She saw “the progressive increase of the minimum amount of capital necessary for the functioning of the enterprises in the old branches of production” as a natural tendency in the development of the productive capacities of capitalism.⁴⁴ Like Marx, she saw the growing scale of industry and its increasingly centralized coordination as manifestations of the progressive socialization of production within capitalism.

The vulgar Marxist nature of her views on the development of industrial technology under capitalism becomes especially clear in her discussion of cooperatives under capitalism.⁴⁵

Co-operatives — especially co-operatives in the field of production constitute a hybrid form in the midst of capitalism. They can be described as small units of socialised production within capitalist exchange.

But in capitalist economy exchanges dominate production. As a result of competition, the complete domination of the process of production by the interests of capital — that is, pitiless exploitation — becomes a condition for the survival of each enterprise.... The workers forming a co-operative in the field of production are thus faced with the contradictory necessity of governing themselves with the utmost absolutism. They are obliged to take toward themselves the role of capitalist entrepreneur — a contradiction that accounts for the usual failure of production

⁴² Daniel De Leon, “Brandeis and Efficiency,” *The Daily People*, October 20, 1912. Hosted at Marxists Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/deleon/works/1912/121020.htm>>. Accessed January 18, 2020.

⁴³ De Leon, “The Burning Question of Trades Unionism.” Address delivered at the New Auditorium Hall, Newark, N.J., April 21, 1904. Hosted at Marxists Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/deleon/works/1904/040421.htm>>. Accessed January 26, 2020.

⁴⁴ Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution* (1900), “Chapter II. The Adaptation of Capital.” Hosted at Marxists Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/reform-revolution/ch02.htm>>. Accessed August 24, 2018.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, “Chapter VII. Co-operatives, Unions, Democracy” <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/reform-revolution/ch07.htm>>. Accessed January 18, 2020.

co-operatives which either become pure capitalist enterprises or, if the workers' interests continue to predominate, end by dissolving....

Producers' co-operatives can survive within capitalist economy only if they manage to suppress, by means of some detour, the capitalist controlled contradictions between the mode of production and the mode of exchange. And they can accomplish this only by removing themselves artificially from the influence of the laws of free competition. And they can succeed in doing the last only when they assure themselves beforehand of a constant circle of consumers, that is, when they assure themselves of a constant market.

It is the consumers' co-operative that can offer this service to its brother in the field of production. Here – and not in Oppenheimer's distinction between co-operatives that produce and co-operatives that sell – is the secret sought by Bernstein: the explanation for the invariable failure of producers' co-operatives functioning independently and their survival when they are backed by consumers' organisations.

If it is true that the possibilities of existence of producers' co-operatives within capitalism are bound up with the possibilities of existence of consumers' co-operatives, then the scope of the former is limited, in the most favourable of cases, to the small local market and to the manufacture of articles serving immediate needs, especially food products. Consumers' and therefore producers' co-operatives, are excluded from the most important branches of capital production – the textile, mining, metallurgical and petroleum industries, machine construction, locomotive and ship-building. For this reason alone (forgetting for the moment their hybrid character), co-operatives in the field of production cannot be seriously considered as the instrument of a general social transformation. The establishment of producers' co-operatives on a wide scale would suppose, first of all, the suppression of the world market, the breaking up of the present world economy into small local spheres of production and exchange. The highly developed, wide-spread capitalism of our time is expected to fall back to the merchant economy of the Middle Ages.

Within the framework of present society, producers' co-operatives are limited to the role of simple annexes to consumers' co-operatives. It appears, therefore, that the latter must be the beginning of the proposed social change. But this way the expected reform of society by means of co-operatives ceases to be an offensive against capitalist production. That is, it ceases to be an attack against the principal bases of capitalist economy. It becomes, instead, a struggle against commercial capital, especially small and middle-sized commercial capital. It becomes an attack made on the twigs of the capitalist tree.

Note the implicit assumption, throughout this long passage, that capitalism has created the optimal forms of production technology and means of organizing production – that its historic function has been to “unleash forces of production” which are objectively more efficient than the alternatives. Because the scale and the managerial form of capitalist industry is optimally efficient, it follows that the only way cooperative industry can compete within capitalism is by imposing the same standards of efficiency – and of labor discipline over its members, in particular – as capitalist industry.

Hence it is outside the realm of possibility that the main function of managerial bureaucracy is to compensate for the basic conflicts of interest, information and incentives problems, that plague absentee owned and hierarchical organizations. It is likewise outside the realm of possibility that a cooperative enterprise might be *more* efficient than a capitalist one precisely *because* of its lack of a managerial hierarchy, and its corresponding lack of high overhead costs from management salaries. (This was, in fact, demonstrated by the self-managed recuperated enterprises in Argentina, whose worker-managers discovered that they had solved the problem of unit cost competition by the simple act of firing their C-suite parasites). And it is positively absurd, for a vulgar Marxist, to consider that a worker-managed firm might be more efficient and operate at lower cost — despite paying better wages — because it is better at innovation and at making use of distributed knowledge.

Because large-scale, managerial enterprise is self-evidently the most efficient way to organize production — it is, after all, the product of capitalism, whose historic role is to unleash all those productive forces — it follows that producer cooperatives scaled to the market areas of local consumer cooperatives, being small, will be a regression to the medieval.

Since it is outside the realm of possibility that for large classes of goods the most efficient form of production is with tools scaled to local consumption, we also rule out the possibility that production undertaken directly for use, with highly-efficient small-scale machinery, might be more efficient than capitalist production. Hence the idea of commons-based economies, operating within the interstices of capitalism and actually outcompeting and supplanting it through superior agility and efficiency, can only be pure petty bourgeois fantasy.

And her argument that components of a socialist society cannot be built by workers “within capitalist production”⁴⁶ implies, as in Antonio Negri’s accelerationist version of autonomism, that capitalism is a system “with no outside.”

For Luxemburg as for Marx, the transition to socialism was to be brought about through the seizure of state power by the working class, organized politically. There was no room for even the partial development of socialist institutions, by the working class itself, within the interstices of capitalism; the primary significance of trade union activity and other forms of working class organization within the present system is that “such activity prepares the proletariat, that is to say, creates the *subjective* factor of the socialist transformation” for “the conquest of political power.” All working class organization and activity in the meantime is geared entirely towards the future achievement of that end.⁴⁷ The task of constructing the material basis of communism lay entirely with the capitalists until the Revolution, and with the working class only after the Revolution. In the meantime, the sole task of the working class was to prepare for the revolutionary seizure of what the capitalists had built.

From the uppermost summit of the state down to the tiniest parish, the proletarian mass must therefore replace the inherited organs of bourgeois class rule — the assemblies, parliaments, and city councils — with its own class organs — with workers’ and soldiers’ councils. It must occupy all the posts, supervise all functions, measure all official needs by the standard of its own class interests and the tasks of socialism.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, “Chapter IX. Collapse” <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/reform-revolution/ch09.htm>>. Accessed January 18, 2020.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, “Chapter V. The Consequences of Social Reformism and General Nature of Reformism” <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/reform-revolution/ch05.htm>>. Accessed January 18, 2020.

Only through constant, vital, reciprocal contact between the masses of the people and their organs, the workers' and soldiers' councils, can the activity of the people fill the state with a socialist spirit.

The economic overturn, likewise, can be accomplished only if the process is carried out by proletarian mass action.... The workers can achieve control over production, and ultimately real power, by means of tenacious struggle with capital, hand-to-hand, in every shop, with direct mass pressure, with strikes and with the creation of its own permanent representative organs.⁴⁸

Our assumptions regarding technological history are quite different from those of vulgar Marxism. As we will argue in the next chapter, the radical shift towards cheapening and decentralization of production technology from the late 20th century on has rendered obsolete both the mass production industrial model and the Old Left focus on centrally-directed mass organizations. But that is not to say that large scale production was *ever* objectively necessary. Even in what Lewis Mumford called the Paleotechnic Age, large-scale steam-powered industry was simply one path that supplanted alternative paths that might otherwise have grown out of the possibilities of the Eotechnic technologies of the late Middle Ages.⁴⁹ And it supplanted it, in large part, through the power of the Paleotechnic coalition of the state, military, armaments, capitalist landed interests and extractive industries. Small-scale, distributed machine production was arguably always technically feasible, absent the political power of Paleotechnic gigantism. And the introduction of Neotechnic technologies like electrically powered machinery made small-scale production incontestably the most efficient form. Unfortunately the allied forces of state and capital diverted Neotechnic technologies into the less efficient channel of mass-production industry, and rendered it artificially profitable through subsidies and state-enforced cartels.⁵⁰ What's different today is that micro-manufacturing technology is making small-scale production so much more comparatively efficient, even over and above its previous superior efficiency, that the political power of the big corporations is no longer sufficient to suppress or coopt it.

It would be pointless to tick off all the other specific libertarian socialist, libertarian communist, syndicalist, and revolutionary anarchist tendencies in the same regard. In every case, the ideology by its very definition entails the insurrectionary seizure of the means of production, if not of the state, by mass action. And its central focus, accordingly, is on the mass political party or mass industrial union.

Social Democracy. Social Democratic parties exhibited essentially the same tendencies as the Leninist vanguard party — both before and after taking power — toward bureaucratic oligarchy.

In *Political Parties*, Robert Michels analyzed the functioning of the “Iron Law of Oligarchy” within all large, hierarchical institutions. “By a universally applicable social law,” he wrote, “every organ of the collectivity, brought into existence through the need for the division of labor,

⁴⁸ Luxemburg, “What Does the Spartacus League Want?” *Die Rote Fahne*, December 14, 1918. Hosted at Marxist Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/12/14.htm>>. Accessed May 30, 2020.

⁴⁹ This technological periodization comes from Lewis Mumford's *Technics and Civilization*, runs from the Eotechnic period of the late Middle Ages (sophisticated development of clockwork and water power by the craft workers of the free towns and monasteries), through the Paleotechnic (a group of technologies growing out the institutional coalition described in the text above, culminating in steam power, coal and steel), to the Neotechnic revolution of the late 19th century (primarily associated with electrically powered machinery and internal combustion engines).

⁵⁰ For an extended discussion of this process, see Carson, *The Homebrew Industrial Revolution: A Low-Overhead Manifesto* (Center for a Stateless Society, 2010), Chapter Two.

creates for itself, as soon as it becomes consolidated, interests peculiar to itself.” Since the state “cannot be anything other than the organization of a minority” or ever “be truly representative of the majority,” it follows that the majority will never be capable of self-government through hierarchical institutions based on indirect representation.⁵¹ To summarize: “It is organization which gives birth to the dominion of the elected over the electors, of the mandataries over the mandators, of the delegates over the delegators. Who says organization, says oligarchy.”⁵²

In addition, the oligarchies governing theoretically oppositional institutions frequently wind up, in actual practice, engaging more cooperatively than adversarially with the institutions whose power they were originally intended to limit. Hilaire Belloc speculated, in *The Servile State*, on the likelihood of such a de facto coalition between a “socialist” state and the capitalists whose power it was in theory put in power to supplant with working class power.

Belloc noted the tendencies, in particular, in the Fabian movement of his time. The genuinely principled and egalitarian sort of socialist, he wrote, might desire to dispossess the capitalists of their power and their property in the means of production. But they would find their path to this end blocked by the political realities of the situation, and would find themselves instead diverted in a completely different direction.

This idealist social reformer, therefore, finds the current of his demand canalised. As to one part of it, confiscation, it is checked and barred; as to the other, securing human conditions for the proletariat, the gates are open....

...[A]ll those things in the true socialist’s demand which are compatible with the servile state can certainly be achieved.⁵³

The devil’s bargain offered by the servile state is summarized in the words of an imagined capitalist:

...“I refuse to be dispossessed, and it is, short of catastrophe, impossible to dispossess me. But if you will define the relation between my employees and myself, I will undertake particular responsibilities due to my position. Subject the proletariat, as a proletarian, and because he is a proletarian, to special laws. Clothe me, the capitalist, and because I am a capitalist, with special converse duties under those laws. I will faithfully see that they are obeyed; I will compel my employees to obey them, and I will undertake the new role imposed upon me by the state. Nay, I will go further, and I will say that such a novel arrangement will make my own profits perhaps larger and certainly more secure.”⁵⁴

If the “true” socialist is grudgingly forced into this bargain from the realities of the situation, another kind finds the servile state or collective capitalism positively appealing.

⁵¹ Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*. Translated by Eden and Cedar Paul, with an introduction by Seymour Martin Lipset (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1999), p. 353.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 365.

⁵³ Hilaire Belloc, *The Servile State* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1912, 1977), pp. 143–144.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

In him the exploitation of man by man excites no indignation. Indeed, he is not of a type to which indignation or any other lively passion is familiar. Tables, statistics, an exact frame-work for life these afford him the food that satisfies his moral appetite; the occupation most congenial to him is the “running” of men: as a machine is run.

To such a man the Collectivist ideal particularly appeals....

Now this man, like the other, would prefer to begin with public property in capital and land, and upon that basis to erect the formal scheme which so suits his peculiar temperament....

But all those other things for which such a man cares much more than he does for the socialisation of the means of production — tabulation, detailed administration of men, the co-ordination of many efforts under one schedule..., all these are immediately obtainable without disturbing the existing arrangement of society.... Let laws exist which make the proper housing, feeding, clothing, and recreation of the proletarian mass be incumbent upon the possessing class, and the observance of such rules be imposed, by inspection and punishment, upon those whom he pretends to benefit, and all that he really cares for will be achieved.⁵⁵

This is a description, almost to the letter, of the type of Fabian represented by the Webbs. From the worker’s standpoint, the state socialism Belloc describes is a sort of industrial serfdom administered by the capitalist.

The proletarian accepts a position in which he produces for the capitalist a certain portion of economic values, and retains out of that total a portion only, leaving to the capitalist all surplus value. The capitalist, on his side, is guaranteed in the secure and permanent expectation of that surplus value through all the perils of social envy; the proletarian is guaranteed in a sufficiency and a security for that sufficiency; but by the very action of such a guarantee there is withdrawn from him the power to refuse his labor and thus to aim at putting himself in possession of the means of production.⁵⁶

The overall nature of the project, as with the American Progressive movement, was not socialistic at all. Rather, it aimed at class harmony and the transcendence of class conflict altogether (in Belloc’s words “reconciling the interests of capital and labor”⁵⁷) through the rationalization of society under the supervision of properly qualified professionals.

An American socialist, William English Walling, in the same year (1912) addressed many of the same tendencies under the label “state socialism” (which he used interchangeably with “collective capitalism”).

The “socialist” program of nationalization, social insurance, and labor reform advocated by the Fabians, even at its most ambitious, was no more than Bismarck was doing, and was supported by many “progressive” capitalists — including Churchill and Lloyd-George — who wanted to “rationalize” capitalism as well.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 145–146.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 183–184.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁵⁸ William English Walling, *Socialism As It Is* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1912), pp. 3–5.

...[A]s capitalism becomes further organized and gives more attention to government, and the State takes up such functions as the capitalists direct, they will double and multiply many fold their long-term governmental investments in the form of expenditures for industrial activities and social reforms.

Already leading capitalists in this country as well as elsewhere welcome the extension of government into the business field. The control of the railroads by a special court over which the railroads have a large influence proves to be just what the railroads have wanted...⁵⁹

Despite Roosevelt's pose as a "trust-buster" in a few high-profile cases, the Progressive movement for the most part saw the great trusts as representing optimal efficiency, and favored an alliance between forward-thinking capitalists and the state to manage them in the interest of a "pubic welfare" defined largely in capitalist terms. Walling quotes Elihu Root:

Germany, to a considerable extent, requires combination of her manufacturers, producers, and commercial concerns. Japan also practically does this. But in the United States it cannot be done under government leadership, because the people do not conceive it to be the government's function. It seems to be rather that the government is largely taken up with breaking up organization, and that reduces the industrial efficiency of the country.⁶⁰

Walling's understanding of nationalization of industry by the capitalist state was essentially the same as that of Engels a generation earlier:

...The industrial capitalists, then, have very [sic] motive... to nationalize those fundamental industries that can only be made in this way to subserve the interests of the capitalist class as a whole (instead of some part of it merely), and to undertake through government those costly enterprises which are needed by all industry, but which give too slow returns to attract the capitalist investor.⁶¹

Walling's account of the attitudes of Progressives and Fabians on labor reform echoes that of Belloc: the entire focus is on the effect of improved working and living conditions on creating a more efficient and productive work force, and the resulting benefit to industry.⁶²

The minimal program of such state socialists amounts to integrating the working class as serfs into a new feudalism administered by capitalists, with the state guaranteeing some minimal degree of welfare to the worker in the same way a benevolent lord of the manor might guarantee the welfare of his laborers. But the proper standard of socialism is not the negative one of how much human misery it abolishes, but the positive one of what is done with the *surplus* and who has the right to dispose of it. The state socialism Walling describes is simply a more humane —

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 112–113.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 47 et seq.

and more efficient and productive — form of capitalism, in which the surplus continues to be administered by the capitalists in service to their own ends.⁶³

Walling shared Belloc's view that even reformers who saw themselves as anti-capitalist would most likely naively allow themselves to be coopted into the capitalist regime as overseers and regimenters of the poor.⁶⁴

The state socialist agenda as analyzed by Walling did not give equal power to the organized workers, compared to the power of organized capital. The power of organized labor was at best a veto designed to prevent outright abuses and maintain a minimum standard of living, while remaining integrated into an industrial system directed by the capitalist class.⁶⁵ Compare this to the Wagner Act, which guaranteed a right to unionize for better wages and hours, while removing labor's previous potential for interfering with the right to manage.

The Fabian movement was almost completely anti-socialist, according to any definition of socialism current outside the Fabian Society itself. As an indication of how little of a socialist Sidney Webb was, for example, he denounced the Liberals on the grounds that they had "the revolutionary tradition in their bones," and saw society as "a struggle of warring interests."⁶⁶ Even the Labour Party as such was almost completely dominated by the state socialist approach. Ramsey MacDonald stated in so many words that "Public ownership is Socialism."⁶⁷

New Left historian Gabriel Kolko, writing fifty years later, shared Walling's view that the Progressive movement in the United States aimed primarily at rationalizing capitalism. Specifically,

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 64–65. None of this is to say that nationalization of some industries, an enlarged welfare state, minimum wages, etc., might not be one plausible pathway beyond capitalism. But it depends entirely on what political use is made of them, what further developments they're a springboard to (i.e. whether the goal is to rationalize capitalism and permanently stabilize it, or they're simply steps in a continuing effort to make capitalism less extractive and less capitalistic), whose interests they serve, and what class of people implements them. The distinction is essentially that of Gorz between reformist and non-reformist reforms.

H. G. Wells, one of the more genuinely socialistic of the Fabians, argued that such reforms in themselves are not socialistic without the addition of further, more radical measures. *Ibid.*, pp. 62–63. But as evidenced by the experience of the Atlee government, their success in implementing their agenda lasted only so far as it coincided with the needs of the capitalist system itself, and the agenda stalled out when it reached the point of going beyond such measures and taking on a genuinely socialistic character.

...[E]very step that [collectivized capitalism, or state socialism] takes in the nationalization of industry and the appropriation of land rent would also be a step in Socialism, provided the rents and profits so turned into the coffers of the State were not used entirely for the benefit either of industry or of the community as a whole, as it is now constituted.... *Ibid.*, p. 108.

Marx's and Engels's demand in the *Manifesto* for "the extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the state" was "plainly a conservatively capitalistic or a revolutionary Socialist measure entirely according to the degree to which, and the hands by which, it is carried out.... Up to a certain point [such measures] put capitalism on "a larger basis" ; if carried beyond that, they may, in the right hands, become steps in Socialism." *Ibid.*, p. 114

... "State Socialism" is indispensable as a basis for Socialism, indeed necessitates it, provided Socialists look upon "State Socialist" measures chiefly as transitory means "to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class..."

The measures of a new socialist government that would distinguish it from the preexisting state socialist reforms would be primarily those which raised wages relative to the income of other classes, and those which educated the working class to take over positions in the direction of government and industry proportional to their numbers. *Ibid.*, p. 115

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 118–119.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

Progressive Era reforms were intended to impose cartels on industry through the regulatory regime, in order to prevent destabilizing price competition and facilitate administered pricing.

Political capitalism is the utilization of political outlets to attain conditions of stability, predictability, and security — to attain rationalization — in the economy. *Stability* is the elimination of internecine competition and erratic fluctuations in the economy. *Predictability* is the ability, on the basis of politically stabilized and secured means, to plan future economic action on the basis of fairly calculable expectations. By *security* I mean protection from the political attacks latent in any formally democratic political structure. I do not give to *rationalization* its frequent definition as the improvement of efficiency, output, or internal organization of a company; I mean by the term, rather, the organization of the economy and the larger political and social spheres in a manner that will allow corporations to function in a predictable and secure environment permitting reasonable profits over the long run.⁶⁸

In the ensuing decades, something very much like Walling's state socialism was implemented in the closest approximations to Social Democracy in the UK and US: the Atlee government and the American New Deal.

Power Elite sociologist G. William Domhoff and his mentor C. Wright Mills together created a large body of work showing that the theoretically "countervailing" institutions posited by pluralist thinkers like John Kenneth Galbraith in *American Capitalism* — Big Labor and the regulatory state as limits on the power of Big Business, etc. — actually turn out in practice to form interlocking complexes of institutions governed by the same personnel rotating between their leadership ranks.

Anarchist Paul Goodman noted, in similar terms, the tendency of institutions to group themselves into complexes based on similarity of organizational style: "[T]he genius of our centralized bureaucracies has been, as they interlock, to form a mutually accrediting establishment of decision-makers, with common interests and a common style that nullify the diversity of pluralism."⁶⁹

Goodman formulated a typology of organizations that "cuts across the usual division of profit and non-profit," as shown by the prevalence in large institutions of "status salaries and expense accounts ... , [and] excessive administration and overhead"⁷⁰

To sum up: what swell the costs in enterprises carried on in the interlocking centralized systems of society, whether commercial, official, or non-profit institutional, are all the factors of organization, procedure, and motivation that are not directly determined to the function and the desire to perform it. Their patents and rents, fixed prices, union scales, featherbedding, fringe benefits, status salaries, expense accounts, proliferating administration, paper work, permanent overhead, public relations and promotions, waste of time and skill by departmentalizing task-roles, bureaucratic thinking that is penny-wise pound-foolish, inflexible procedure and tight scheduling that exaggerate contingencies and overtime.

⁶⁸ Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History 1900–1916* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), p. 3.

⁶⁹ Paul Goodman, *Like a Conquered Province*, in *People or Personnel* and *Like a Conquered Province* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965, 1967, 1968), p. 357.

⁷⁰ Goodman, *People or Personnel*, in *People or Personnel* and *Like a Conquered Province*, pp. 114–15.

But when enterprises can be carried on autonomously by professionals, artists, and workmen intrinsically committed to the job, there are economies all along the line. People make do on means. They spend on value, not convention. They flexibly improvise procedures as opportunity presents and they step in in emergencies. They do not watch the clock. The available skills of each person are put to use. They eschew status and in a pinch accept subsistence wages. Administration and overhead are ad hoc. The task is likely to be seen in its essence rather than abstractly.⁷¹

And rather than “countervailing” each other, as argued by Galbraith, the first category of organizations cluster into coalitions or institutional complexes: “the industrial-military complex, the alliance of promoters, contractors, and government in Urban Renewal; the alliance of universities, corporations, and government in research and development. This is the great domain of cost-plus.”⁷²

Domhoff observed something very like Walling’s state socialism and Belloc’s Servile State in the New Deal. Its corporatist nature was evidenced, in particular, in the New Deal labor accord. Its roots lay in the company unions under what was variously known as Welfare Capitalism or the American System, most notably implemented at General Electric under Gerard Swope.

The business coalition behind the New Deal was concentrated primarily in large, capital-intensive industry, as exemplified by Swope’s GE; Swope was the most prominent member of FDR’s Business Advisory Council. Labor was a relatively minor part of the total cost package of such businesses; at the same time, capital-intensive industry, as Galbraith pointed out in his analysis of the “technostructure” in *The New Industrial State*, depended on long-term stability and predictability for planning. Therefore, this segment of big business was willing to trade higher wages for social peace in the workplace.

Industrial unionism, from the employer’s viewpoint, had the advantage over craft unionism of providing a single bargaining agent with which management could deal. One of the reasons for the popularity of “company unions” among large corporations, besides the obvious advantages in pliability, was the fact that they were an alternative to the host of separate craft unions of the AFL.

Swope, in particular, experimented during the heyday of welfare capitalism with company unions that offered a grievance procedure, along with arbitration on disciplinary matters. The purpose of such unions was to secure workplace peace and stability while reserving questions of work organization and compensation to management.

By bringing collective bargaining under the aegis of federal labor law, management was able to use union leadership to discipline its own rank and file, and to use federal courts as a mechanism of enforcement.

The New Dealers devised ... a means to integrate big labor into the corporate state. But only unions that were industrially organized, and which paralleled in their structure the organization of industry itself, could play the appropriate role. A successful corporate state required a safe industrial-union movement to work. It also required a union leadership that shared the desire to operate the economy from the top in

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 113.

formal conferences with the leaders of the other functional economic groups, particularly the corporate leaders. The CIO unions ... provided such a union leadership.⁷³

Collective bargaining did not affect the distribution of wealth, because firms in an oligopoly position, with a relatively inelastic demand, were able to pass increased labor costs on to the consumer at virtually no cost to themselves.⁷⁴

Domhoff saw Wagner as a subsumption of unions by capitalism. "The benefits to capital were several: greater efficiency and productivity from labor, less labor turnover, the disciplining of the labor force by labor unions, the possibility of planning labor costs over the long run, and the dampening of radical doctrines."⁷⁵ James O'Connor argued that under Wagner "unions were... the guarantors of 'managerial prerogatives.'" Their function was "to inhibit disruptive, spontaneous rank-and-file activity (e.g., wildcat strikes and slowdowns) and to maintain labor discipline in general."

The UK's experience with Labour rule under the Atlee government was quite similar. A socialist or labor party, in theory, is to be the key representative of the working class and to be indissolubly linked with it. But, as Stuart Hall observes,

once in government, social democracy is committed to finding solutions to the crisis which are capable of winning support from key sections of capital, since its solutions are framed within those limits. But this requires that the indissoluble link be used, not to advance but to discipline the class and organizations it represents. This is only possible if the link — class-to-party — is dismantled and if there can be substituted for it an alternative articulation: government-to-people. The rhetorics of "national interest," which is the principal ideological form in which a succession of defeats have been imposed on the working class by social democracy in power, are exactly the sites where this contradiction shows through.... [But government-to-people] sets Labour, at key moments of struggle... by definition "on the side of the nation" against "sectional interests," "irresponsible trade union power," etc.

This is the terrain on which Mr. Heath played such destructive games in the lead-through to the Industrial Relations Act and its aftermath with his invocation of... the spectre of "holding the nation up to ransom."⁷⁶

From its origins the Labour Party was faced by a basic contradiction between the demands of the labor movement from which it was derived, and the needs of electoral politics. The existence of the Fabian movement, as an intellectual arm of the Party dominated by the ideological perspective of the managerial and professional classes (much like the circles around the National Civic Federation and the editorial staff of *The New Republic*, which dominated the Progressive movement in the US), only added to this conflict.

This was already apparent from the end of WWI, when trade union leaders admonished the radicals in their membership to eschew industrial action for political purposes, leaving political

⁷³ Ronald Radosh, "The Myth of the New Deal," in Murray Rothbard and Ronald Radosh, eds., *A New History of Leviathan: Essays on the Rise of the American Corporate State* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1972), pp. 178–9, 181.

⁷⁴ G. William Domhoff, *The Higher Circles: The Governing Class in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), p. 223.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

⁷⁶ Stuart Hall, "The Great Moving Right Show," *Marxism Today*, January 1979, p. 17.

goals to the Parliamentary party. There was also, on the part of both mainstream union leaders and Labour Party parliamentarians, no small element of desire to show radicals in the rank-and-file who was to be master, and to appear to their Tory and Liberal fellows as responsible and respectable members of the governing class.⁷⁷ What might have been achieved, had the labor movement retained its capacity for independent political action across the board, was suggested by the success of the threat of a general strike in deterring Lloyd George from military intervention against Soviet Russia on behalf of Poland.⁷⁸ But on the whole, both trade union and Labour Party leadership valued the appearance of respectability over the pursuit of a radical agenda, as evidenced by their betrayal of the coal miners in 1920.⁷⁹

Labour continued its self-limiting approach under the MacDonald government. He consciously limited the Labour agenda to what he could achieve through cooperation with other parties in the coalition, and went so far as attempting to dissuade Labour MPs from singing Red Flag, and otherwise to show “the country” that the Labour Party was a respectable party, motivated by “national well-being” and not class considerations.⁸⁰ Among other things, he made it clear that his government would not hesitate to use troops to break strikes.⁸¹

Despite pro forma declarations of support for trade unions in the General Strike, MacDonald and the rest of the Labour leadership did their best to appease the Tory Government with assurances that the Strike was a purely industrial dispute, fully legal and constitutional, in support of coal miners, and sent out peace feelers to the government for the duration.⁸² The Labour leadership, both in the TUC and in Parliament, for the most part believed “that a challenge to the Government through the assertion of working class strength outside Parliament was *wrong*.... In fact they half shared, indeed more than half shared, the Government’s view that the General Strike was a politically and morally reprehensible venture, undemocratic, anti-parliamentary, subversive. The Labour leadership “flinched” from the obvious fact that the Strike had “unmistakable social content,” involving “the assertion of specific working class claims against property.” This was particularly offensive to Fabian sensibilities. Beatrice Webb expressed disdain for the General Strike in terms comparable to those Hillary Clinton expressed in her thesis on Saul Alinsky: the proper means for achieving “socialism” was through government policies implemented by professional political leaders.⁸³

The failure of the General Strike was a watershed for the future of the Labour Party. The Party permanently eschewed, not only all attempts by itself or by unions “to exercise political influence against the Government of the day by the use of the industrial weapon,” but also even “militancy over *industrial* issues.”⁸⁴

The basic contradiction was at no time more apparent than at Labour’s greatest moment of triumph in 1945, and the period thereafter. The single biggest failure of the postwar Labour government was Herbert Morrison’s affection for the capitalist managerial model. This was foreshadowed by his approach under the national unity cabinet of the 1930s.

⁷⁷ Ralph Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism: A Study in the Politics of Labour* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964), pp. 69–71.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 88–89.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 101–102, 104–105.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 142–143.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 144–145.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

‘Public ownership’ to Morrison meant control by bureaucrats selected ‘on their ability’ by the minister. When he was minister of transport in 1930, he refused to appoint workers’ representatives to the board of his new London Transport undertaking. He wanted the undertaking to be run exclusively by ‘men of a business turn of mind’ which, he explained graciously, ‘might include such people as trade union bodies as well as men of business experience in the ordinary sense of the word’.⁸⁵

He was given free rein for his managerialist sympathies in carrying out the nationalization policy under Atlee, as recounted by Miliband.

Directly related to Morrison’s view of nationalization was the Executive’s refusal to commit itself to any kind of experiment in industrial democracy.... At the 1945 Conference, one composite resolution (later withdrawn) demanded a far more extensive programme of nationalization and also asked the Party to pledge itself ‘to secure the democratic control and operation of these (nationalized) institutions by the workers and technicians’. This latter demand, Morrison said, did not ‘demonstrate good socialization in its method of administration and management’.⁸⁶

Morrison’s management model was a public corporation on the BBC model, with essentially no worker influence outside the collective bargaining process. The sense of betrayal on the part of many trade union militants was considerable. As one coal miner recalled:

I can remember standing at the pit with the banners, celebrating with my father and his friends. They thought, this was it.... They thought nationalisation would bring everything they’d fought for. But within a very short space of time they found out that they’d swapped one boss for another. The first boss we got was a major from the Indian Army, six months later followed by Captain Nicholson Later we had a banker!

We really believed it would make a difference. We really thought it was the beginning of socialism, you know, almost time to hoist the red flag. I thought that we’d be working for ourselves, that we’d be in control. But in fact the supervision and bureaucratic administration became a hundred times worse. You’d get 10 foremen where you only had one; you’d have to use 10 pieces of paper where before you’d only have one. You’d always have to go through many more channels to get anything done. That approach killed nationalisation. A lot of us felt really frustrated. Mind, I still think nationalisation is the only way, but next time it will have to be different.⁸⁷

In return for the repeal of significant amounts of anti-union legislation, the Labour government “expected, and received, from the trade unions a measure of co-operation in the maintenance of

⁸⁵ Paul Foot, “Portrait of an Appalling Man,” *International Socialism* (1st series), No.66 (February 1974). Hosted at Marxists Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/foot-paul/1974/02/morrison.htm>>. accessed December 20, 2019.

⁸⁶ Miliband, pp. 279–280.

⁸⁷ Andrew Cumbers and Robert McMaster, “Revisiting Public Ownership: Knowledge, Democracy and Participation in Economic Decision Making,” *Review of Radical Political Economics* 44 (2012), pp. 361–62.

industrial discipline....” And the Labour government used troops as scabs to carry out essential functions during many of the strikes that did occur.⁸⁸

From the beginning, the nationalization proposals of the Government were designed to achieve the sole purpose of improving the efficiency of a capitalist economy, not as marking the beginning of its wholesale transformation....

...[T]he Government’s conception of public ownership ensured the predominance on the boards of the nationalized corporations of men who had been, or who were, closely associated with private finance and industry....⁸⁹

As Belloc predicted,⁹⁰ the coal industry made out better from its compensation under the nationalization regime “than they could conceivably have done had the industry remained in private ownership.”⁹¹ So the Labour Government, in effect, simply acted as managers on behalf of the capitalists.

By the late 50s Labour under Gaitskell, having shifted to a policy focus centered on “consolidation” of previous gains and then been turned out of office altogether, was “obsessed” with the need for “electoral success” — the “essential condition” for which was “to present the Labour Party as a moderate and respectable party, free from class bias, ‘national’ in outlook.”⁹²

From the beginning, Dan Evans argues, the Labour Party was hampered by a misapprehension of the role both it and the state played in relation to the rest of society.

Ultimately this unswerving commitment to parliamentarism condemns the Labour party to remain a permanent hostage to existing structures of power — both within parliament itself and throughout wider society — and to be doomed by the limitations these inevitably place on socialists, both in government and beyond....

The problem with parliamentarism is that it represents a belief that the state is neutral....

Evans cites Ralph Miliband and John Saville that, far from being a free hand to reshape society in a post-capitalist direction through the control of a neutral state, the reality is that

a power elite, united by a shared class background and a deep ideological conservatism, are spread throughout British society, controlling all aspects of it, not just parliament. Thus the tory party, the judiciary, the media, the education system, the armed forces, the civil service, the police, and so on are all ideologically united and vehemently opposed to socialism and a Labour government. They therefore cannot simply be used as tools of the Labour government, for these state apparatuses will in practice actively push back and attempt to sabotage any changes to the status quo and undermine the government....⁹³

⁸⁸ Miliband, p. 287.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

⁹⁰ Belloc, pp. 162 et seq.

⁹¹ Miliband, p. 288.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 339.

⁹³ Dan Evans, “The Struggle That Lies Ahead,” *New Socialist*, March 24, 2019 <<https://newsocialist.org.uk/struggle-lies-ahead/>>.

Not only does this amount to a class system of defense in depth, Saville said, but the defensive earthworks include the class enculturation of the Labour Party political elite itself.

What has never been understood is the nature of economic and political power in industrial Britain, where two fifths of all private property is in the hands of one per cent of the adult population: where the wealthy groups are linked by social background, marriage and top business positions: where the identity between the wealthy and the politicians of the Conservative Party is very close; and where all the leading social and political institutions mirror the dominance of the wealthy classes. Britain is ruled by an élite which has its main economic basis in industrial and financial capital but with the old landed classes still important: its younger members use the leading public schools and Oxford and Cambridge as their private educational establishments, and the Conservative Party, the administrative grade of the Civil Service and the top managerial positions in business and banking as their providers of earned income. Britain is a profoundly conservative society with a traditional institutional framework within which political decisions are taken. The limitations upon the real power of the House of Commons are such that to accept the conventions of Parliamentary Government means to accept the impossibility of change that is radical in any meaningful sense. No leader of the Labour Party has ever considered stepping outside Parliamentary conventions or going beyond the constitutional proprieties of Parliament. When, as in the days of the 1926 General Strike, there was being revealed a naked confrontation of class interests, the Labour and trade union leadership fell over themselves to reach a compromise, which in the event became capitulation.⁹⁴

Of course the existence of a hostile and coopting power elite, its redoubts distributed in depth throughout society, is not the sole danger. The parliamentary party's vulnerability to cooptation lies in large part in the nature of its own internal structure, and the tendency — already discussed above — for the leaderships of hierarchical organizations nominally opposed in their goals to develop ties of affinity based on their common organizational styles and shared expertise in the subject matter of the policy issues they confront.

III. The Assault on Working Class Agency

Another authoritarian tendency in the main line of official Marxism, as it developed in the Old Left, was its mechanistic view of history and minimization of working class agency and subjectivity.

As with our account above of authoritarian administrative styles, it is likewise true that Marxism was not a monolith in regard to working class agency; it had parallel currents emphasizing the working class as the active agent involved in building the socialist successor society, as well as those treating the working class as the pawn of historical forces.

If anything, it is arguable that the libertarian focus on the agency of the working class predominated in the thought of Marx himself — not only in alleged “juvenalia” like the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* and *Grundrisse*, but as an implicit aspect of “mature” works like *Capital*.

⁹⁴ John Saville, “Labourism and the Labour Government,” *The Socialist Register* (1967). Hosted by Marxists Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/saville/1967/xx/labourgov.htm>>; Accessed December 20, 2019.

In contrast to Lenin's claim that workers on their own were incapable of developing anything more than a "trade union consciousness," both Marx and Engels repeatedly reaffirmed that the ongoing process of working class self-activity would, in itself, further the development of class consciousness.

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, Marx located the origin of communism as a modern political movement in the conscious experience of the working class: "The entire movement of history, just as its [communism's] *actual* act of genesis — the birth act of its empirical existence — is, therefore, for its thinking consciousness the *comprehended* and *known* process of its *becoming*."⁹⁵

The development of communism as a new form of society would emerge from the working class's self-development as a conscious historical agent, conscious of its own power, and would be the doing of the working class. Communism would be the outgrowth of humanity's developing consciousness of itself, and its assertion of control over society, the natural world, and human nature itself.

Communism as... the real *appropriation* of the *human* essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a *social* (i.e., human) being....⁹⁶

...[T]he positive transcendence of private property—i.e., the *perceptible* appropriation for and by man of the human essence and of human life, of objective man, of human *achievements* should not be conceived merely in the sense of *immediate*, one-sided *enjoyment*, merely in the sense of *possessing*, of *having*. Man appropriates his comprehensive essence in a comprehensive manner, that is to say, as a whole man.⁹⁷

Although Marx's analysis in subsequent works became more concrete and less philosophical, and he wrote considerably less about working class subjectivity as a primary theme, what he did write on the specific topic of working class self-activity is fully consistent with his treatment of the overcoming of alienation in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*. If workers become fully human through communism, and overcome their alienation from themselves, from their work, from each other and from nature, it becomes clear in Marx's work that this overcoming is a process whose first beginnings are the working class's emerging consciousness of itself as a subject through political and economic struggles, and its continued development of this consciousness and constitution of itself as a class.

Note that working class subjectivity specifically refers to its growing awareness of itself as a class with interests of its own against other classes, and its activity in constituting itself as a class. And everything Marx writes subsequently on the political and economic activity of the working class is consistent with an analogous understanding of the working class as subject.

And the very process of the working class constituting itself as a class, as a conscious subject with class solidarity and an active agent in society, at the same time entails creating the first kernel of the future communist society:

⁹⁵ Marx, Third Manuscript, "Private Property and Communism," *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Translated by Martin Mulligan (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959). Hosted at Marxist Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm>>. Accessed August 1, 2018.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

When communist *artisans* associate with one another, theory, propaganda, etc., is their first end. But at the same time, as a result of this association, they acquire a new need — the need for society — and what appears as a means becomes an end. In this practical process the most splendid results are to be observed whenever French socialist workers are seen together. Such things as smoking, drinking, eating, etc., are no longer means of contact or means that bring them together. Association, society and conversation, which again has association as its end, are enough for them; the brotherhood of man is no mere phrase with them, but a fact of life, and the nobility of man shines upon us from their work-hardened bodies.⁹⁸

The revolutionary consciousness of the working class is not the passive result of their material circumstances, but emerges from their conscious activity in response to the material conditions they confront.

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism — that of Feuerbach included — is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively....

The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself....

The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*.⁹⁹

In *The German Ideology* Marx argued that the working class would acquire the capability of ultimately transcending all the various estrangements of capitalism in communist society through its growing consciousness of itself and constitution of itself as a class in the struggle against capitalism.

Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, Third Manuscript, “Human Requirements and Division of Labour Under the Rule of Private Property.”

⁹⁹ Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach. Marx/Engels Selected Works*, Volume One. Translated by W. Lough (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969). Hosted at Marxist Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm>>. Accessed August 5, 2018.

¹⁰⁰ Karl Marx, *The German Ideology: Critique of Modern German Philosophy According to Its Representatives Feuerbach, B. Bauer and Stirner, and of German Socialism According to Its Various Prophets* (1932). Hosted by Marxist Internet Archive, Chapter 1 Feuerbach: Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlooks: D. Proletarians and Communism <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01d.htm>>. Accessed August 4, 2018.

Engels argued in *Condition of the Working Class* that strikes, even when defeated, furthered the development of working class consciousness and praxis. From the experience of limited success in individual strikes on an issue-by-issue basis, workers would learn the need to organize on a class-wide basis.

But what gives these Unions and the strikes arising from them their real importance is this, that they are the first attempt of the workers to abolish competition....

The laws determining the rate of wages would, indeed, come into force again in the long run, if the working-men did not go beyond this step of abolishing competition among themselves. But they must go beyond that unless they are prepared to recede again and to allow competition among themselves to reappear. Thus once advanced so far, necessity compels them to go farther; to abolish not only one kind of competition, but competition itself altogether, and that they will do.

The workers are coming to perceive more clearly with every day how competition affects them; they see far more clearly than the bourgeois that competition of the capitalists among themselves presses upon the workers too, by bringing on commercial crises, and that this kind of competition, too, must be abolished. They will soon learn *how* they have to go about it.

The incredible frequency of these strikes proves best of all to what extent the social war has broken out all over England. No week passes, scarcely a day, indeed, in which there is not a strike in some direction.... These strikes, at first skirmishes, sometimes result in weighty struggles; they decide nothing, it is true, but they are the strongest proof that the decisive battle between bourgeoisie and proletariat is approaching. They are the military school of the working-men in which they prepare themselves for the great struggle which cannot be avoided....¹⁰¹

And as the English working class came to perceive bourgeois law as the instrument of its exploitation, it increasingly turned to political action in addition to unionism. The Chartist movement, after the bourgeoisie defected to Liberalism in the face of working class radicalism and the movement took on a fully working class character, was the first step in this process.¹⁰²

Marx, in *Poverty of Philosophy*, argued that conflicts like strikes would continue to escalate into full-scale civil war, causing the proletariat to emerge as a “class for itself.”

If the first aim of resistance was merely the maintenance of wages, combinations, at first isolated, constitute themselves into groups as the capitalists in their turn unite for the purpose of repression, and in the face of always united capital, the maintenance of the association becomes more necessary to them than that of wages.... In this struggle — a veritable civil war — all the elements necessary for a coming battle unite and develop. Once it has reached this point, association takes on a political character.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Panther Edition, 1969, from text provided by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, Moscow), Chapter Ten: “Labour Movements.” Hosted at Marxist Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/condition-working-class/ch10.htm>>. Accessed August 6, 2018.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy: Answer to the Philosophy of Poverty by M. Proudhon*. Translated by Institute of Marxism Leninism (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1955), Chapter 2 Section 5 “Strikes and Combina-

In his September 1850 remarks to the Central Committee of the Communist League, he said “You have fifteen, twenty, or fifty years of civil war and popular struggle to carry out, not only to change the relationships [i.e. build the “living relationships” that are “the driving force of the revolution”] but to change yourself and enable yourself to rule politically.”¹⁰⁴

As Michael Harrington put it: “In Marx’s perspective, it was the democratic self-organization of the proletariat that was the truly radical act — even if it initially took reformist forms.”¹⁰⁵

As late as the third volume of *Capital*, Marx writes of humanity as an active agent in bringing nature under conscious control.

...the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production.... With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants; but, at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working-day is its basic prerequisite.¹⁰⁶

Engels himself, in *Anti-Dühring*, describes the victorious proletariat in terms it’s hard not to read as a celebration of human dignity and agency:

Then for the first time man, in a certain sense, is finally marked off from the rest of the animal kingdom, and emerges from mere animal conditions of existence into really human ones. The whole sphere of the conditions of life which environ man, and which have hitherto ruled man, now comes under the dominion and control of man who for the first time becomes the real, conscious lord of nature because he has now become master of his own social organisation. The laws of his own social action, hitherto standing face to face with man as laws of nature foreign to, and dominating him, will then be used with full understanding, and so mastered by him. Man’s own social organisation, hitherto confronting him as a necessity imposed by nature and history, now becomes the result of his own free action.... Only from that time will man himself, with full consciousness, make his own history.... It is the humanity’s leap from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom.¹⁰⁷

tions of Workers.” Hosted by Marxist Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/poverty-philosophy/ch02e.htm>>. Accessed August 6, 2018.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Michael Harrington, *Socialism* (New York: Bantam/Saturday Review Press, 1972), p. 61.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* p. 75.

¹⁰⁶ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Capital* Vol. 3, Chapter 48 (New York: International Publishers, n.d.) Hosted by Marxist Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch48.htm>>. Accessed July 20, 2018.

¹⁰⁷ Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring’s Revolution in Science* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1947), Part III Ch. 2. Hosted at Marxist Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/ch24.htm>>. Accessed August 8, 2018.

Nevertheless, the primary effect of Engels, in systematizing Marxism after Marx's death, was a negative one. Engels reframed Marx's philosophy of history in much more mechanistic terms. Engels claimed to base his formulation of Marxist historical materialism on a literal reading of the famous paragraphs in Marx's *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*; but according to James White,

whereas for Marx behind the economic base lurked human Society, the economic structure being only the materialized form of man's species-being, for Engels the economic base was the ultimate determining factor.

'Society' for Engels became not a determining factor, but one determined. With Engels, history was no longer centered in human Society, but outside it in the economic structure.¹⁰⁸

At the same time, in his pamphlet *Ludwig Feuerbach*, Engels obscured how Marx's ideas had emerged from those of Schelling, Hegel and the Young Hegelians, and substituted an account of his own relationship to the Hegelians in the 1840s for that of Marx and presented it as Marx's.¹⁰⁹

Plekhanov continued the development of Marxism into a mechanistic parody of itself. Marx himself saw human nature as constant, of a social character; the different relations of production and the superstructures built on them were all alienated versions of this social nature, and history was a process in which humanity worked through these successive forms of alienation towards the finalization of its own social nature in non-alienated form. Plekhanov took the position — which he attributed to Marx — that human nature was variable and was determined from the outside by historical influences.¹¹⁰

Peter Hudis describes the "objectivist" strains of Marxism — which understand Marx's critique of capital as "an analysis of objective forms that assume complete self-determination and automaticity" — as holding that

...Marx's most important contribution lies in his understanding of capital as an autonomous force that takes on a life of its own, totally subsuming the will and actions of the human subject.... They therefore view capital not only as the subject of Marx's theoretical work but as the *Subject* of modern society.¹¹¹

Compare the humanism of Marx at its height with the atmosphere of the Old Left as it emerged in the 20th century. In particular contrast the consistent focus of Marx, on the subjective experience of the working class *from the inside*, and its development in political consciousness as a result of its own experience of struggle, with Lenin's focus in *What Is To Be Done?* on revolutionary consciousness as something *brought to* the working class *from outside*. In every case the workers are the recipient of knowledge given to them outside; in every case he speaks of the

¹⁰⁸ James D. White, *Karl Marx and the Intellectual Origins of Dialectical Materialism* (Palgrave MacMillan UK, 1996), p. 287

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 288–289.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 346.

¹¹¹ Hudis, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

intelligentsia “elevating” or “training” workers who, left to themselves, would never progress beyond “economism” and “trade union consciousness.”¹¹²

Of course for all of Marx’s emphasis on the self-activity and growing self-awareness of the working class, even at his best, it was the development of an agency and subjectivity whose most important expression would be seizing power to begin the work of actually building socialism, after capitalism was finished developing productive forces to the greatest extent possible under the present system. Cooperatives and unions were useful as a sort of school of revolutionary consciousness, but the actual construction of the productive forces of socialism, until the revolutionary rupture occurred, was largely the work of monopoly capital itself and not an interstitial process that would be accomplished to any significant extent before then.

As Rosa Luxemburg put it, trade union activity

creates the *subjective* factor of the socialist transformation, for the task of realising socialism....

[A]s a result of its trade union and parliamentary struggles, the proletariat becomes convinced, of the impossibility of accomplishing a fundamental social change through such activity and arrives at the understanding that the conquest of power is unavoidable.

But such activity was not, in the orthodox Social Democratic view, a way to “realize *objectively* the desired social change.”¹¹³

Although Marx’s position on working class agency and self-activity was arguably multifaceted and not monolithic, the dominant tendency of his thought could be summarized by the statement in the 1864 Rules of the IWMA (of which Marx was a principal editor) “[t]hat the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves.”¹¹⁴ And despite his later role in the formulation of a more mechanistic version of Marxism, Engels himself stated in his 1872 Preface to the German edition of the Communist Manifesto that the same principle — slightly reworded as “the emancipation of the workers must be the act of the working class itself” — had been “our notion... from the beginning.”¹¹⁵

And if this principle is treated as a mostly consistent theme of Marx’s thought, it gives the lie to dismissals of the “early humanistic Marx” as a youthful phase that Marx grew beyond in his “mature” work. The idea of the working class as author of its own self-emancipation flows directly from Marx’s early inversions, first of Hegel and then of Feuerbach, and his focus on humanity’s overcoming of its alienation from its own self-activity and assertion of mastery over all of nature including society and human nature. In the words of Isaiah Berlin, history is

¹¹² V. I. Lenin, *What Is To Be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement*. Translated by Joe Fineberg and George Hanna. *Collected Works* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), vol 5. Hosted at *Marxist Internet Archive* <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/>>. Accessed August 12, 2018.

¹¹³ Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution* (1900), “Chapter V: The Consequences of Social Reformism and General Nature of Reformism.” Hosted at *Marxists Internet Archive* <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/reform-revolution/ch05.htm>>. Accessed August 25, 2018.

¹¹⁴ *Rules and Administrative Regulations of the International Workingmen’s Association* (1867). Hosted at *Marxists Internet Archive* <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/iwma/documents/1867/rules.htm>>. Accessed August 28, 2018.

¹¹⁵ Friedrich Engels, Preface to 1872 German edition of *Communist Manifesto*. Hosted at *Marxists Internet Archive* <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/preface.htm>>. Accessed August 28, 2018.

the struggle of men to realise their full human potentialities; and since they are members of the natural kingdom..., man's effort to realise himself fully is a striving to escape from being the plaything of forces that seem at once mysterious, arbitrary and irresistible, that is, to attain to the mastery of himself, which is freedom. Man attains this subjugation of his world... by activity, by labour.... History is the interaction between the lives of the actors, the men engaged in the struggle for attaining self-direction, and the consequences of their activities....¹¹⁶

Even so, the mechanistic focus was clearly predominant, first in the official Marxist ideology of the Second International, and then taken to self-parody levels in the "diamat" of the Comintern.

IV. Workerism/Laborism

Like its affinity for mass and organization, the Old Left's workerism — its tendency to lionize the industrial proletariat as revolutionary subject and its organizational forms as a paradigm for the future society — go back to the earliest days of Marxism itself. Witness the *Communist Manifesto*:

In the condition of the proletariat, those of old society at large are already virtually swamped. The proletarian is without property; his relation to his wife and children has no longer anything in common with the bourgeois family relations; modern industry labour, modern subjection to capital, the same in England as in France, in America as in Germany, has stripped him of every trace of national character. Law, morality, religion, are to him so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests.

All the preceding classes that got the upper hand sought to fortify their already acquired status by subjecting society at large to their conditions of appropriation. The proletarians cannot become masters of the productive forces of society, except by abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation, and thereby also every other previous mode of appropriation. They have nothing of their own to secure and to fortify; their mission is to destroy all previous securities for, and insurances of, individual property.¹¹⁷

But at least Marx envisioned post-capitalist society in much less workerist terms than his Old Left disciples of the 20th century. Communist society entailed the proletariat's abolition of itself as such, and the creation of a society which abolished both the work/enjoyment opposition and the division of labor. In *The German Ideology* he wrote that for communists, "the basis of this whole opposition between work and enjoyment disappears."¹¹⁸ And with the disappearance of the capitalist wage relationship as an authority over and above the individual capable of imposing a division of labor against their wishes, would come a society in which

¹¹⁶ Isaiah Berlin, *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*. Fourth Edition (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 93–94.

¹¹⁷ Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*.

¹¹⁸ Marx, Part III "Saint Max," *The German Ideology* <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch03d.htm#c.1.6.2>>. Accessed November 1, 2018.

nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it 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, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic.¹¹⁹

Further, in his 1845 draft of a critique of Friedrich List, he treated labor itself (in the sense of alienated labor imposed by capital and the wage system as superior authorities) as something to be superseded under communism.

it is established... that his [the worker's] activity is not a free manifestation of his human life, that it is, rather, a huckstering sale of his forces, an alienation (sale) to capital of his one-sidedly developed abilities, in a word, that it is "*labour*."... "*Labour*" is the living basis of private property, it is private property as the creative source of itself. Private property is nothing but *objectified* labour. If it is desired to strike a mortal blow at private property, one must attack it not only as a *material state of affairs*, but also as *activity*, as *labour*. It is one of the greatest misapprehensions to speak of free, human, social labour, of labour without private property. "*Labour*" by its very nature is unfree, unhuman, unsocial activity, determined by private property and creating private property. Hence the abolition of private property will become a reality only when it is conceived as the abolition of "*labour*" (an abolition which, of course, has become possible only as a result of labour itself, that is to say, has become possible as a result of the material activity of society...).¹²⁰

Marx also makes it clear that these are not goals to be achieved in the distant future, after a prolonged period of building "full communism." Self-actualization through the maximization of free time, and the transition from the "realm of necessity" to the "realm of freedom," rather, are things to be achieved through an ongoing process that begins the instant workers gain control of society.

From the very beginning, the goal of minimizing work time, prioritizing free time for all-sided human development, and recognizing the worker's sovereignty over their own time, is implicitly recognized in the way Marx envisions work-time, in *Critique of the Gotha Program*, as the basis by which the associated workers will divide the product of their collective labor among themselves. The measure is not work accomplished, or value, according to some standard of socially necessary labor; it is work-time, multiplied by comparative "intensity" — which means the subjective effort or energy expenditure experienced by the worker, not productivity — which governs the worker's share of consumption.¹²¹ Such a measure, by treating the amount of free time a worker sacrifices and their subjective experience of difficulty or unpleasantness as a claim to a share in

¹¹⁹ Marx, Part I "Feuerbach," *The German Ideology* <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm>>. Accessed November 1, 2018.

¹²⁰ Marx, "Draft of an Article on Friedrich List's book: *Das Nationale System der Politischen Oekonomie*" (1845), MECW Volume 4, p. 265. Hosted at Marxist Internet Archive <<https://marxists.catbull.com/archive/marx/works/1845/03/list.htm>>. Accessed October 1, 2018.

¹²¹ See Hudis's discussion of this in his section on *Critique of the Gotha Program*, in *Marx's Concept of the Alternative to Capitalism*, pp. 193–204.

the social product, implies (1) the primacy of the workers' claim to their free time and personal development, and their entitlement to a share in the product based on their sacrifice of these things, and (2) the social goal of minimizing their sacrifice. And the reduction of the total amount of labor expended for an abundant standard of living, and the achievement of a post-scarcity society in which labor is decoupled from consumption altogether and the distinction between work and leisure disappears, is a process that begins with the establishment of socialism.

Marx's vision in *The German Ideology* of the abolition of "division of labor" as something imposed from above, and of the free individual constantly shifting from one activity to another as she sees fit, is entirely compatible with even the earliest period of working class power. If the worker is free to work the number of hours she pleases, on condition of her consumption share being allocated accordingly, and she can choose among whatever work openings the associated workers post that she possesses the skills for, from one day to the next, this is a state of affairs very close to Marx's description.

In comparison, the Old Left's vision of the role of work in society resembles a scene from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*: grim-faced workers in overalls trudging in formation into a factory. If this strikes the reader as hyperbole, consider the celebration of Stakhanovites and other "Hero Workers" under Stalin, or the CNT's attempts to enforce work-discipline over worker-managed factories in Spain.

Guy Standing used the term "labourism" to describe the tendency on the Old Left (including Leninist Communism, Social Democracy and CIO-style industrial unionism). Unlike earlier socialist and anarchist models that looked forward to increasing leisure and autonomy, dissolution of the boundary between work and the rest of life, and a shrinkage of both the cash nexus and the wage system, social democracy and industrial unionism presupposed universal full-time employment at wage labor as the norm. They aimed at "full employment" with good wages, benefits and job security, with the understanding that management would be allowed to manage and labor would stay out of matters regarded as "management prerogatives" in return for these things. The "full employment" agenda meant

all men in full-time jobs. Besides being sexist, this neglected all forms of work that were not labour (including reproductive work in the home, caring for others, work in the community, and other self-chosen activities). It also erased a vision of freedom from labour that had figured powerfully in radical thinking in previous ages.¹²²

[Last edited October 5, 2020]

¹²² Guy Standing, *A Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens* (London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 16.

Chapter Two: Transition

All the justifications for an anti-capitalist movement centered on large-scale institutions or mass organizations, or for a transitional model based on insurrectionary seizure of the means of production, reflect the technological realities of the Industrial Revolution from the mid-19th century on — and particularly of the mass-production era in the 20th century.

The material and technological assumptions behind such approaches have lost their relevance in recent decades, and are entirely obsolete now.

To the extent that the old mass-based, insurrectionist model had any valid basis in material conditions, it ended with the mass production age. We no longer need to storm the ramparts of those old state and industrial hierarchies because most of them no longer perform any socially necessary function. Cheap, small-scale physical production technologies and distributed, stigmergic coordination mechanisms have made it possible to build a society mostly outside the old institutional framework, and leave the old institutions to crumble.

I. Drastic Reductions in Necessary Outlays for the Means of Production

Physical Production. The original material rationale for both the wage system and the factory system, as they emerged in the First Industrial Revolution (i.e., the application of steam power to production), was technological. It involved the transition from artisan production with general-purpose craft tools that were individually affordable, to factory production with extremely expensive specialized machinery acquired by one or more rich absentee owners, who then hired laborers to work it. Large capital outlays for industrial machinery, and the large scale of production, meant that organizational mass was necessary to undertake modern forms of production.¹

Technological change is radically cheapening physical production and reducing it in scale. As early as 1971, Murray Bookchin was arguing for a decentralized industrial model based on small-scale craft production using multiple-purpose machines, switching frequently between short runs of a wide variety of products on a demand-pull basis as orders came in.² Colin Ward and Karl Hess proposed community workshops making use of power tools pooled by neighborhood hobbyists, along with second-hand machine tools from machine shops, high school shop classes and

¹ Feel free to read into the text any Mumfordian caveats you want regarding the alternative possibilities of Eotechnic technology had the Industrial Revolution taken a different path; I'm mainly leaving them out for the sake of argument. In any case distributed artisan production with powered machinery has been feasible, at the very least, since the introduction of electrical power in the late 19th century.

² Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (Ramparts Press, 1971); the relevant material is in the chapter "Toward a Liberatory Technology," which is reproduced as an appendix to C4SS's online edition of Paul Goodman's Kropotkin abridgement *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow*.

the like.³ Such shops could be used for repairing appliances, custom-machining the replacement parts necessary to keep them going, or remanufacturing defunct items like refrigerators.

The emergence of relatively small-scale CNC machine tools in the '70s reduced the cost of digitally-controlled production machinery by an order of magnitude and made craft production in smaller shops feasible. It enabled the rise of networked cooperative production in Emilia-Romagna, as well as the corporate outsourcing of a growing share of production to independent job shops in Asia.

The revolution in even smaller and cheaper tabletop CNC tools since the turn of the century, along with the open source hardware, Fab Lab and hackerspace movements, has reduced the cost of necessary machinery by another order of magnitude and made it possible to carry out, in a garage shop with a few tens of thousands of dollars worth of open-source machinery, many kinds of production that would have required a multi-million dollar factory fifty years ago.

As an example of the possibilities, consider the Global Village Construction Set, developed by Open Source Ecology at their demo site, Factor E Farm. It's an entire modular ecosystem of machines with interchangeable modules used in multiple machine designs. Along with the micro-manufacturing machinery (3D printer, laser cutter, drill press and fourteen other machines), the GVCS includes construction machinery (sawmill, compressed earth block maker, etc.), farm machinery (tractor, etc.), and household production goods like a bread oven.

All of the designs are complete, the great majority have been prototyped, and many or most are in actual production. Most of the components of the machines — many of which, like the power transmission system, are modular and used throughout the entire machine ecology — can be produced with the Construction Set's own machine tools, and the inclusion of an induction furnace in the manufacturing collection means they can smelt metal from local scrap.⁴

Their website has a table of the prices of the various machines, either materials alone or materials plus labor, compared to their proprietary commercial counterparts.⁵ Most of the individual manufacturing machines can be made for anywhere from under a thousand to a few thousand dollars in materials, and hence are suited to an individual garage-size workshop; a few of the most expensive items (e.g. \$18,000 for an induction furnace, \$13,000 for a rod and wire mill, or \$50,000 for a machine to extract aluminum from clay) would obviously have to be a shared resource between a number of shops in a larger community.

It's impossible to overstate the practical significance of this, from the standpoint of labor. The availability of a garage factory's worth of high-tech craft machinery at the equivalent of several months factory wages — and still rapidly falling — is a direct reversal of the earlier transition from craft to factory tools.

The cost of capital goods was the central factor in the success or failure of worker cooperatives. According to John Curl, the first major wave of American worker cooperatives was organized through the National Trades' Union in the 1830s. As with the Owenite trade union cooperatives

³ Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (London: Freedom Press, 1982), pp. 108–109; Karl Hess, *Community Technology* (New York, Cambridge, Hagerstown, Philadelphia, San Francisco, London, Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Sydney: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1979), pp. 96–98.

⁴ <<http://opensourceecology.org/gvcs/>>; <http://opensourceecology.org/wiki/Global_Village_Construction_Set>.

⁵ <<http://opensourceecology.org/gvcs/>>

in Britain, they were occurred mostly in craft industries in which the basic tools of the trade were relatively inexpensive.⁶

Worker cooperatives were a frequent resort of striking workers in the early history of America. For example in 1768 twenty striking journeyman tailors in New York, in the first strike by wage-workers in American history, set up their own cooperative workshop. In 1761, journeyman carpenters in Philadelphia striking for the ten-hour day formed a cooperative and undercut their master's price by 25%; they disbanded the co-op when they went back to work. The same tactic was used by shoemakers in Baltimore, 1794, and Philadelphia, 1806.⁷

This pattern recurred throughout American labor history so long as artisan production prevailed, and the organization of cooperatives expanded from being purely a strike tactic to providing an alternative to wage labor. Its feasibility depended on the predominance of artisan production with hand tools in most industries. But by the 1840s, the rise of factory production with expensive machinery had fundamentally altered this state of affairs. As the means of production became prohibitively expensive, the majority of the labor force was relegated to factory employment for wages, with machinery owned by someone else.⁸

But with the technological developments described earlier — the rise of digitally controlled machine tools comparable in price, in relative terms, to the artisan tools of 200 years ago — this process has reversed. The cost of physical means of production, in a growing share of industries, is no longer the bottleneck factor which restricts cooperative production.

Immaterial Production. What cheap micro-manufacturing technology has done for physical production, the personal computer and Internet did for immaterial production. As Michel Piore and Charles Sabel argue, the desktop computer is “a machine that meets Marx’s definition of an artisan’s tool: it is an instrument that responds to and extends the productive capacities of the user.”⁹

The desktop computer is the primary item of capital equipment in a number of forms of immaterial production — music, desktop publishing, and software, in particular. Supplemented by assorted packages of rapidly cheapening printing, sound editing, etc., equipment, it can do things in the publishing, music and broadcast industries that once required initial capital outlays of hundreds of thousands of dollars. The old mass media, according to Yochai Benkler, were “typified by high-cost hubs and cheap, ubiquitous, reception-only systems at the end.” Hence production was limited to “those that could collect sufficient funds to set up a hub.”¹⁰

But the new Internet-era communications system is distinguished, rather, by “network architecture and the [low] cost of becoming a speaker.” The cost of owning a node is drastically reduced, and the old hub-and-spoke architecture is replaced by many-to-many connections among all nodes.¹¹ And this is made possible, again, by the fact that “the basic physical capital necessary to express and communicate human meaning is the connected personal computer.”¹²

⁶ John Curl, *For All the People: Uncovering the Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperative Movements, and Communalism in America* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2009), p. 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 34–35, 47.

⁹ Michael J. Piore and Charles F. Sabel, *The Second Industrial Divide: Possibilities for Prosperity* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1984), p. 261.

¹⁰ Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 179.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 212–213.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 32.

Way back in 2003 Tom Coates noted that, thanks to desktop- and browser-based utilities, open-source productivity software, and the like — much of which was far superior to the proprietary, gold-plated turd versions their employers forced them to work with — “the gap between what can be accomplished at home and what can be accomplished in a work environment has narrowed dramatically over the last ten to fifteen years.”¹³

Distributed Energy Systems. In addition to all the benefits of cheap, decentralized physical and immaterial production technology, the collapse in prices for off-grid (as well as micro-grid connected) alternative energy generation has greatly increased the possibility for economic autonomy.

Writers ranging from Murray Bookchin to Whole Earth and the Radical Technology group to Amory Lovins have been promoting renewable, off-grid energy as a liberatory technology for decades. But only in recent years has it increased in generating capacity and fallen in cost sufficiently to take up the burden of supporting at least a roughly “modern” standard of living (for want of a better word), even with a rational reconfiguration of society and the abolition of waste production.

Between 2010 and 2019, solar generation capacity fell 73% in cost, while that of lithium ion batteries fell 80%.¹⁴ Two aspects of alternative energy technologies, in particular, are of importance for their liberatory potential.

...[M]ost renewables take the form of flows, whilst fossil fuels are stocks. Energy stocks can be stored, which is useful; but they can be used only once. In contrast, energy flows do not exhaust themselves and are harder to disrupt.

...[R]enewable energy sources can be deployed at almost any scale and lend themselves better to decentralized forms of energy production and consumption. This adds to the democratizing effects of renewable energy.¹⁵

Implications. As outlays for physical capital fall, “human capital” — skill, social relationships, distributed knowledge of the work process — increasingly becomes the primary source of value creation, as well as of the book value of the enterprise. Even where physical production technology is a major source of productivity, the primary means of extracting rents from it is not the necessary material cost of producing the technology but the legal barriers to replicating it. And even in physical production, the worker’s unique knowledge of how best to *employ* existing physical capital matters more to productivity than the *amount* of capital employed. Luigi Zingales observes that physical assets, “which used to be the major source of rents, have become less unique and are not commanding large rents anymore.” Rather, “the demand for process innovation and quality improvement... can only be generated by talented employees....”¹⁶

¹³ Tom Coates, “(Weblogs and) The Mass Amateurisation of (Nearly) Everything...” Plasticbag.org, September 3, 2003 <http://www.plasticbag.org/archives/2003/09/weblogs_and_the_mass_amateurisation_of_nearly_everything.shtml> (non-paywalled version at <<http://blogs.ubc.ca/brian/2003/09/weblogs-and-the-mass-amateurisation-of-nearly-everything/>>).

¹⁴ Global Commission on the Geopolitics of Energy Transformation, *A New World: The Geopolitics of the Energy Transformation* (IRENA: International Renewable Energy Agency, 2019) <http://www.geopoliticsofrenewables.org/assets/geopolitics/Reports/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Global_commission_renewable_energy_2019.pdf>, p. 18

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁶ Luigi Zingales, “In Search of New Foundations,” *The Journal of Finance*, vol. lv, no. 4 (August 2000), pp. 1641–1642.

This has always been true, of course. But as the cost of physical means of production implodes from technological advance, and a larger share of the economy shifts to immaterial production or services, it becomes true to a much larger degree.

From the point of view of this study the important point is that as the value of human capital increases, and the cost of physical capital investments needed for independent production by human capital decreases, the power of corporate hierarchies becomes less and less relevant. As the value of human relative to physical capital increases, the entry barriers become progressively lower for workers to take their human capital outside the firm and start new firms under their own control.

The primary source of corporate power over workers is no longer ownership of the machinery used by workers, but intangible property rights of various sorts that act as artificial barriers restricting human capital's independent right to engage in production. The capitalists' profits increasingly depend, not on ownership of the means of production, but on control of the right to use them — the ownership of patents rather than machines, along with other monopolies like non-competition contracts in service industries where human capital is the main source of equity. But this intermediate stage, capitalism's last desperate attempt to snatch scarcity from the jaws of abundance, is doomed to failure.

So, as Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt put it, capital plays less and less of an organizing role, and becomes increasingly entirely parasitic on the productive organization of the multitude itself.

In general, the hegemony of immaterial labor tends to transform the organization of production from the linear relationships of the assembly line to the innumerable and indeterminate relationships of distributed networks. Information, communication, and cooperation become the norms of production, and the network becomes its dominant form of organization.... [E]xploitation under the hegemony of immaterial labor is no longer primarily the expropriation of value measured by individual or collective labor time but rather the capture of value that is produced by cooperative labor and that becomes increasingly common through its circulation in social networks. The central forms of productive cooperation are no longer created by the capitalist as part of the project to organize labor but rather emerge from the productive energies of labor itself.¹⁷

...Marx insists that one of the great progressive elements of capital historically is to organize armies of workers in cooperative productive relationships. The capitalist calls workers to the factory..., directing them to collaborate and communicate in production and giving them the means to do so. In the paradigm of immaterial production, in contrast, labor itself tends to produce the means of interaction, communication, and cooperation for production directly.... [I]n immaterial production the creation of cooperation has become internal to labor and thus external to capital.¹⁸

¹⁷ Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (Penguin Books, 2004), p. 113.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 147.

...Produced relationships and communication are by their very nature common, and yet capital manages to appropriate privately some of their wealth.¹⁹

For Negri, this decline in capital's organizing role is of great significance. Marx argued that the proletariat was a class *in* itself because it had been brought together by capital and performed a functional role. But it could only become a class *for* itself when, having been brought together by capital and begun to function together under the direction of capital, it developed its own consciousness as subject. The growing importance of our self-organization and initiative outside the factory, however, means that the revolutionary subject no longer has to come alive like a golem, from materials brought together by capital.

...[C]ommonism is much more feasible today than in the previous situation, in which the workers were organized and brought together by capital. Before, the workers were brought together, they did not come together of their own initiative. This is no longer the case and precisely this means an enormous boost for the possibilities....

Marx has said of the working classes that they were made by capital and that therefore it was necessary for them to become aware of their situation through a political party, an external organization, an ideology, et cetera, in order to become political. Today we see a maturity and an original organization, so to speak, thanks to the transformation that occurred in labour and society.²⁰

Not only capital but rulers have become superfluous, in organizing society: "the balance has tipped such

that the ruled now tend to be the exclusive producers of social organization. This does not mean that sovereignty immediately crumbles and the rulers lose all their power. It does mean that the rulers become ever more parasitical and that sovereignty becomes increasingly unnecessary.²¹

Note: None of the material immediately above should be taken to mean we accept Negri and Hardt's analytical framework uncritically. Their analysis refers primarily to the "social factory," which is subsumed under capital. But every point they make about the superfluity of capital within that context applies even more strongly to the "outside" of capital (the counter-economy of direct production for use in the commons, within the interstices of capitalism but outside capitalist control).

II. The Network Revolution and the Imploding Cost of Coordination

In the received understanding of the mass-production era, the enormous cost of production machinery and concomitant large scale of production required not only large organizations to

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 150.

²⁰ Pascal Gielen, Sonja Lavaert, "The Salt of the Earth. On Commonism: An Interview with Antonio Negri," *open! Platform for Art, Culture & the Public Domain*, August 18, 2018 <<https://www.onlineopen.org/the-salt-of-the-earth>>.

²¹ Negri and Hardt, *Multitude*, p. 336.

purchase the production machinery and coordinate production, but such production by giant institutions on a national scale required an entire ecology of other large institutions for providing the necessary inputs and supports, coordinating the relations between such institutions, and for correcting and stabilizing their negative externalities.

For the Old Left in particular, this implied a post-capitalist transition model centered on the political seizure of control over all these large institutions — and hence the need for large institutions of their own like vanguard revolutionary parties on the Leninist model, parliamentary parties like Labour, or One Big Union, and a strategy based on mass coordination, in order to carry out such a takeover.

Whether for the corporate and state managerial bureaucracies under capitalism, the large industrial unions and political parties of the Left, or the central planning and industrial management apparatus of the post-1917 state socialist regimes, this institutional model required authoritarian policies like Weberian job-descriptions, Taylorist work rules, “best practices,” etc., all of which reduced the discretion of the very people with the most knowledge of the production process and subjected them to interference from those who knew the least.

The primary characteristic of coordination by a hierarchy is that everyone needs to be on the same page for anything to get done. Strict controls must be placed on individual initiative lest any variance disrupt the performance of the entire organization — even if this means a severe constraint on individual initiative. As a result, there are long delays before the organization can react to new events, or assess the effects of its own policies. And because such organizations are slow-reacting dinosaurs, and have long planning horizons, they must minimize the amount of disruption from their outside environment. Because of the inability to leverage small contributions from individual actors responding to situations on their own initiative, and the high cost of formulating any policy with the full resources of the organization, they must limit their flexibility in dealing with unique situations and tailor their policies primarily to the most common or typical situations at the center of the bell curve.

The rise of the World Wide Web with its many-to-many architecture, the creation of platforms and utilities for organizing projects and making many forms of clerical work unnecessary, and the rise of networked and stigmergic organizational models, together mean that activities by many actors can be coordinated through horizontal relations among the actors themselves. Large institutions are no longer necessary for most things.

In 2002 Yochai Benkler coined the term “commons-based peer production” as a “third mode of production,” alongside Coase’s earlier dichotomy between individual responses to market signals and internal management by corporate bureaucracy as the two ways of coordinating production.²² Commons-based peer production

is better than firms and markets for two reasons. First, it is better at identifying and assigning human capital to information and cultural production processes. In this regard, peer production has an advantage in what I call “information opportunity cost.” That is, it loses less information about who the best person for a given job might be than either of the other two organizational modes. Second, there are substantial increasing returns, in terms of allocation efficiency, to allowing larger clusters of po-

²² Yochai Benkler, “Coase’s Penguin, or, Linux and The Nature of the Firm,” *Yale Law Journal* 112 (2002), p. 1. Pagination from online version at <<http://www.benkler.org/CoasesPenguin.PDF>> (accessed February 4, 2020).

tential contributors to interact with large clusters of information resources in search of new projects and opportunities for collaboration.²³

Commons-based peer production has emerged on a large scale primarily in fields associated with networked communications technology. It has done so because such technology overcomes the transaction costs that Coase identified with the need for hierarchical coordination.²⁴ It has also tended to emerge in areas where human capital, rather than physical capital, is the main source of value creation, because its increased efficiency in motivating and coordinating human effort is a central advantage of commons-based peer production.²⁵

The advantage of commons-based peer production is that all decisions are reserved to those best qualified to make them, and these agents are identified by self-selection.

Commons-based peer production... relies on decentralized information gathering and exchange to reduce the uncertainty of participants, and has particular advantages as an information process for identifying human creativity available to work on information and cultural resources in the pursuit of projects, and as an allocation process for allocating that creative effort. It depends on very large aggregations of individuals independently scouring their information environment in search of opportunities to be creative in small or large increments. These individuals then self-identify for tasks and perform them.... If the problems of motivation and organization can be solved, however, then such a system has two major advantages over firms and markets. First, it places the point of decision about assigning any given person to any given set of resources with the individual.... What peer production does is provide a framework, within which individuals who have the best information available about their own fit for a task can self-identify for the task. This provides an information gain over firms and markets, but only if the system develops some mechanism to filter out mistaken judgments agents make about themselves. This is why practically all successful peer production systems have a robust mechanism for peer review or statistical weeding out of contributions from agents who misjudge themselves.

...Peer production has an advantage over firms and markets because it allows larger groups of individuals to scour larger groups of resources in search of materials, projects, collaborations, and combinations than do firms or individuals who function in markets. This is because when production is organized on a market or firm model, transaction costs associated with property and contract limit the access of people to each other, to resources and to projects, but do not do so when it is organized on a peer production model.²⁶

Benkler's reservation concerning problems of organization and motivation is the reason why such stigmergic coordination (a concept which I discuss below) is ill-suited to the capitalist firm, and instead requires a third mode of production. A hierarchical, absentee-owned business firm has fundamental conflicts of interest baked into it that impede the incentive of production workers to use their best judgement or give their best effort, and make it unsafe for superiors to trust

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 32 *et seq.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

subordinates with discretion. The capitalist business firm must resort to suboptimal forms of coordination, despite efficiency losses, as an inescapable cost of an organization designed to enable absentee owners and managerial hierarchies to extract surpluses from those engaged in production. As Benkler put it, “no one will invest in a project if they cannot appropriate its benefits.”²⁷

Part of the solution to the motivation problem, especially in cases where the overall project is not a money-making effort and participants receive no monetary remuneration, is that the specific tasks are self-assigned based entirely on interest. In addition, when such stigmergic coordination is incorporated into the operations of a worker-owned and -managed firm — a case in which Benkler shows comparatively little interest — the motivation problem is greatly reduced by the fact that no stratum of absentee owners or managers is able to expropriate productivity gains created by producers.

Stigmergy and Permissionless Organization. “Stigmergy” is a term coined by biologist Pierre-Paul Grasse in the 1950s to describe the process by which termites coordinate their activity. Social insects like termites and ants coordinate their efforts through the independent responses of individuals to environmental triggers like chemical markers, without any need for a central coordinating authority.²⁸ The concept was subsequently applied to the analysis of human society.

Applied by way of analogy to human society, Francis Heylighen argues, stigmergy refers primarily to the kinds of networked organization associated with wikis, group blogs, and “leaderless” organizations configured along the lines of networked cells.

The termites do not communicate about who is to do what how or when. Their only communication is indirect: the partially executed work of the ones provides information to the others about where to make their own contribution. In this way, there is no need for a centrally controlled plan, workflow, or division of labor.

While people are of course much more intelligent than social insects and do communicate, open access development uses essentially the same stigmergic mechanism...: any new or revised document or software component uploaded to the site of a community is immediately scrutinized by the members of the community that are interested to use it. When one of them discovers a shortcoming, such as a bug, error or lacking functionality, that member will be inclined to either solve the problem him/herself, or at least point it out to the rest of the community, where it may again entice someone else to take up the problem.²⁹

Mark Elliott, in his doctoral dissertation on stigmergy, contrasts stigmergic coordination with social negotiation. Social negotiation is the traditional method of organizing collaborative group efforts, through agreements and compromise mediated by discussions between individuals. The exponential growth in the number of communications with the size of the group, obviously, imposes constraints on the feasible size of a collaborative group, before coordination must be achieved by hierarchy and top-down authority. Stigmergy, on the other hand, permits collaboration on an unlimited scale by individuals acting independently. This distinction between social

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁸ Mark Elliott, “Stigmergic Collaboration: The Evolution of Group Work,” *M/C Journal*, May 2006 <<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0605/03-elliott.php>>.

²⁹ Francis Heylighen, “Why is Open Access Development so Successful? Stigmergic organization and the economics of information,” draft contribution to B. Lutterbeck, M. Bärwolff & R. A. Gehring (eds.), *Open Source Jahrbuch 2007* (Lehmanns Media, 2007) <<http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/Papers/OpenSourceStigmergy.pdf>>, p. 7.

negotiation and stigmergy is illustrated, in particular, by the contrast between traditional models of co-authoring and collaboration in a wiki.³⁰ Individuals communicate indirectly, “via the stigmergic medium.”³¹

Gus diZerega’s discussion of spontaneous orders closely parallels the concept of stigmergy: Spontaneous orders

arise from networks of independent equals whose actions generate positive and negative feedback that help guide future actors in pursuing their own independently conceived plans, thereby continuing the feedback process. Each person is a node within a network and is linked by feedback, with each node free to act on its own. The feedback they generate minimizes the knowledge anyone needs about the system as a whole in order to succeed within it.

All spontaneous orders possess certain abstract features in common. Participants are equal in status and all are equally subject to whatever rules must be followed to participate within the order. All are free to apply these rules to any project of their choosing. Anything that can be pursued without violating a rule is permitted, including pursuing mutually contradictory goals. Finally, these rules facilitate cooperation among strangers based on certain broadly shared values that are simpler than the values actually motivating many people when they participate. Compared to human beings, spontaneous orders are “value-thin.”³²

Permissionlessness is a central characteristic of stigmergic organization. David de Ugarte quotes the Rand theorists John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, in “Swarming and the Future of Conflict.” In Netwar, the

many small units “already know what they must do,” and are aware that “they must communicate with each other not in order to prepare for action, but only as a consequence of action, and, above all, through action.”³³

Stigmergy transcends the old right-left debates of “individualism” vs. “collectivism.” It synthesizes the highest realizations of both individualism and collectivism, and represents each of them in its most completely actualized form, without qualifying or impairing either in any way.

Stigmergy is not “collectivist” in the traditional sense, as it was understood in the days when a common effort on any significant scale required a large organization to represent the collective, and the administrative coordination of individual efforts through a hierarchy. But it is the ultimate realization of collectivism, in that it removes the transaction costs involved in concerted action by many individuals.

It is the ultimate realization of individualism because all actions are the free, permissionless actions of individuals; the “collective” is simply the sum total of individual actions. Every individual is free to formulate any innovation she sees fit, and every individual or voluntary association of

³⁰ Elliott, “Stigmergic Collaboration.”

³¹ Mark Elliott, “Some General Off-the-Cuff Reflections on Stigmergy,” *Stigmergic Collaboration*, May 21, 2006 <<http://stigmergiccollaboration.blogspot.com/2006/05/some-general-off-cuff-reflections-on.html>>.

³² Gus DiZerega, “Outlining a New Paradigm,” *Cosmos and Taxis* 1:1 (2013), p. 9.

³³ David de Ugarte, *The Power of Networks : An Illustrated Manual for People, Collectives, and Companies Driven to Cyberactivism*. Translated by Asunción Álvarez (n.d.), p. 62 <<http://deugarte.com/gomi/the-power-of-networks.pdf>>.

individuals is likewise free to adopt the innovation, or not, as they see fit. The extent to which any innovation is adopted results entirely from the unanimous consent of every voluntary grouping that adopts it. Each innovation is modular (meaning, as Benkler explains, that the project “can be broken down into smaller components... that can be independently produced before they are assembled into a whole”³⁴), and may be adopted into any number of larger projects if it is found useful. Any grouping where there is disagreement over adoption may fork and replicate their project with or without the innovation.

In this regard it attains the radical democratic ideal of *unanimous* consent of the governed, which is never completely possible under any representative or majoritarian system. Consent — the individual’s participation in the decisions that affected her — was the central value of Jeffersonian democracy (at least as stated). The smaller the unit of governance, and the closer it was to the individual, the closer it approached the ideal of unanimous consent to all acts of government. Hence Jefferson’s proposed ward republics, whose chief virtue was the increased role of each individual in influencing the outcome of policy. But this ideal can only be fully attained when the unit of governance is the individual. So majority rule was the lesser evil, a way to approximate as closely as possible to the spirit of unanimous consent in cases where an entire group of people had to be bound by a single decision. Stigmergy removes the need for any individual to be bound by the group will. When all group actions reflect the unanimous will of the participants, as permitted by stigmergic organization, the ideal of unanimous consent is finally achieved in its fullness.

Group action is facilitated with greater ease and lower transaction costs than ever before, but all “group actions” are the unanimous actions of the participating individuals. As described by Heather Marsh:

With stigmergy, an initial idea is freely given, and the project is driven by the idea, not by a personality or group of personalities. No individual needs permission... or consensus... to propose an idea or initiate a project. There is no need to discuss or vote on the idea, if an idea is exciting or necessary it will attract interest. The interest attracted will be from people actively involved in the system and willing to put effort into carrying the project further, not empty votes from people with little interest or involvement.... Stigmergy also puts individuals in control over their own work, they do not need group permission to tell them what system to work on or what part to contribute.

The person with the initial idea may or may not carry the task further. Evangelizing the idea is voluntary, by a group that is excited by the idea; they may or may not be the ones to carry it out. It is unnecessary to seek start up funding and supporters; if an idea is good it will receive the support required.... Secrecy and competition is unnecessary because once an idea is given, it and all new development belongs to anyone who chooses to work on it.... All ideas are accepted or rejected based on the needs of the system....

Communication between nodes of a system is on an as needed basis. Transparency allows information to travel freely between the various nodes.... Information sharing is driven by the information, not personal relationships. If data is relevant to several

³⁴ Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*, p. 100.

nodes it will be immediately transmitted to all, no formal meetings between official personalities are necessary.

...It is neither reasonable nor desirable for individual thought and action to be subjugated to group consensus in matters which do not affect the group, and it is frankly impossible to accomplish complex tasks if every decision must be presented for approval; that is the biggest weakness of the hierarchical model.³⁵

Benkler uses a hypothetical case to illustrate, in concrete terms, how stigmergic coordination works:

Imagine that one person, or a small group of friends, wants a utility. It could be a text editor, photo-retouching software, or an operating system. The person or small group starts by developing a part of this project, up to a point where the whole utility — if it is simple enough — or some important part of it, is functional, though it might have much room for improvement. At this point, the person makes the program freely available to others, with its source code.... When others begin to use it, they may find bugs, or related utilities that they want to add (e.g., the photo-retouching software only increases size and sharpness, and one of its users wants it to allow changing colors as well). The person who has found the bug or is interested in how to add functions to the software may or may not be the best person in the world to actually write the software fix. Nevertheless, he reports the bug or the new need in an Internet forum of users of the software. That person, or someone else, then thinks that they have a way of tweaking the software to fix the bug or add the new utility. They then do so, just as the first person did, and release a new version of the software with the fix or the added utility. The result is a collaboration between three people — the first author, who wrote the initial software; the second person, who identified a problem or shortcoming; and the third person, who fixed it. This collaboration is not managed by anyone who organizes the three, but is instead the outcome of them all reading the same Internet-based forum and using the same software, which is released under an open, rather than proprietary, license....³⁶

In a hierarchy, all communications between members or between local nodes must pass through a limited number of central nodes. The only communications allowed to pass from one member or local node to another are those which meet the standards for distribution of those who control the central nodes. Only a few nodes within a hierarchy have the authority to transmit; hence the use of the phrase “one-to-many” to describe its topology. The version of local news that appears in the local newspaper under the byline of a local journalist may be far superior in relevant detail and analysis, but it is the wire service version — even if far inferior in quality — which appears in local newspapers all around the world. It is only the communications approved by the Party Secretariat that are heard by all local cells of a party.³⁷

³⁵ Heather Marsh, “Stigmergy,” *GeorgieBC’s Blog*, December 24, 2012 <<http://georgiebc.wordpress.com/2012/12/24/stigmergy-2/>>.

³⁶ Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks* pp. 66–67.

³⁷ De Ugarte, *The Power of Networks*, p. 38.

But in a distributed network, every node has the power to transmit as well as receive, and any two nodes can communicate directly with each other without passing through a central node or obtaining the approval of whoever controls that node.

A network is “plurarchical,” in de Ugarte’s terminology, rather than democratic. Instead of the individual members simply selecting who controls the central nodes, “[s]omeone makes a proposal and everyone who wishes to join in can do so. The range of the action in question will depend on the degree to which the proposal is accepted.” Democracy is a “scarcity system” in which decision-making power is rivalrous: “the collective must face an either/or choice, between one filter and another, between one representative and another.” In a distributed network, on the other hand, decision-making power is non-rivalrous. Each individual’s decision affects only herself, and does not impede the ability of others to do likewise. “Even if the majority not only disagreed with a proposal, but also acted against it, it wouldn’t be able to prevent the proposal from being carried out.”³⁸ “[I]n the blogosphere,” he writes elsewhere,

a space where the social cost of an extra post is zero, any blogger’s publishing his or her information does not decrease anyone else’s publication possibilities. The marginal cost is zero. The need to collectively decide what is published and what is not simply disappears. As opposed to scarcity logic, which generates the need for democratic decision, abundant logic opens the door to pluriarchy.

In such a universe, every collective or hierarchical decision on what to publish or not can only be conceived as an artificial generation of scarcity, a decrease in diversity, and an impoverishment for all.³⁹

Pirate Party co-founder Rick Falkvinge also regards permissionlessness — the ability to act without first getting everybody on the same page — as a major advantage of stigmergic organization:

...if you have a large assembly of people who are forced to agree on every movement, including the mechanism for what constitutes such agreement, then you rarely achieve anything at all.

Therefore, as you build a swarm, it is imperative that everybody is empowered to act in the swarm just through what they believe will further its goals – but no one is allowed to empower themselves to restrict others, neither on their own nor through superior numbers.

This concept – that people are allowed, encouraged and expected to assume speaking and acting power for themselves in the swarm’s name, but never the kind of power that limits others’ right to do the same thing – is a hard thing to grasp for many....

As a result, somebody who believes the swarm should take a certain action to further its goals need only start doing it. If others agree that the action is beneficial, then they will join in on that course of action....

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40.

³⁹ De Ugarte, *Phyles: Economic Democracy in the Network Century* (n.d.), pp. 18–19 <<http://deugarte.com/gomi/phyles.pdf>>.

Traditional marketing says that a message needs to stay constant to penetrate. My experience says that's total hogwash....

If somebody comes up to you and tells you a factual statement in a language that you identify as that of a group you dislike, you are very likely to discard that message as false, despite its actual truthness. In the same vein, if somebody that dresses, speaks, and acts in a manner consistent with your social standards tells you a factual statement, then you are likely to accept it as plausible and maybe examine it on its own merits later....

The recipe is ridiculously simple: communicate your vision to everybody, and let the thousands of activists translate your vision into words that fit their specific social context. Don't make a one-size-fits-all message that everybody has to learn. It will be a one-size-fits-none.⁴⁰

As Heylighen describes it, stigmergy “can be seen as a fundamental mechanism of self-organization”:

it allows global, coordinated activity to emerge out of local, independent actions. Like self-organization in general, stigmergy relies on feedback: action elicits action, via the intermediate of the trace. This feedback is typically positive, in that actions intensify and elaborate the trace, thus eliciting more intense and diverse further actions. The resulting virtuous cycle explains in part why stigmergic organization is so surprisingly effective, enabling the construction of complex structures — such as a termite hill, a network of trails, or a global encyclopedia — in a very short time, even when starting from scratch. When needed, feedback can also be negative: errors, disturbances or “overshoots” that make the trace deviate from its ideal shape will elicit actions that correct the deviation.⁴¹

Agility. Stigmergic, networked organizations are far more agile than hierarchical institutions because they require no permission or administrative coordination to act. A traditional hierarchy, in which decisions are mediated administratively or socially, incurs enormous transaction costs getting everyone on the same page before anyone can act.

Paul Mason points out the irony involved in corporate capitalism — whose apologists used to contrast its agility to the bureaucratic ossification of a planned economy — now being lumped together with state socialist bureaucracy in contrast to the agility of networks.

...[T]he stigmergic, horizontal forms of organization facilitated by networked communications have drastically reduced the transaction costs of coordinating action outside of traditional institutional hierarchy. They have made the central planning of the large corporation as obsolete as the central planning of Gosplan.

⁴⁰ Rick Falkvinge, “Selling Your Vision With a Swarm,” *Falkvinge on Infopolicy*, February 18, 2012 <<http://falkvinge.net/2012/02/18/selling-your-vision-with-a-swarm/>>.

⁴¹ Francis Heylighen, “Stigmergy as a Universal Coordination Mechanism I: Definition and Components,” *Cognitive Systems Research* 38 (16) <https://www.academia.edu/22638155/Stigmergy_as_a_Universal_Coordination_Mechanism_I_Definition_a> p. 12.

Economists like to demonstrate the archaic nature of command planning with mind-games like ‘imagine the Soviet Union tried to create Starbucks’. Now, here’s a more intriguing game: imagine if Amazon, Toyota or Boeing tried to create Wikipedia.⁴²

Agility is a force-multiplier. A small army that can move rapidly can defeat a large, slow army in detail by successively concentrating local superiority of force in a series of places in a short time. Because of their agility, shortened reaction time, and speed with which they share information and new techniques, networks are inside what strategist John Boyd called the “OODA loop” of hierarchies.⁴³ They react more quickly than hierarchies to changing circumstances, staying a step ahead and keeping them constantly off-balance. Networks can go through many generational cycles of innovation while hierarchies are still ponderously formulating a response to issues with first-generation practices. The ability to process new information, and to make generational changes in praxis more quickly in response to that information more quickly, results in superior performance. Boyd called it the Law of Iteration:

the primary determinant to winning dogfights was not observing, orienting, planning, or acting better. The primary determinant to winning dogfights was observing, orienting, planning, and acting faster. In other words, how quickly one could iterate. *Speed of iteration*, Boyd suggested, *beats quality of iteration*.⁴⁴

OODA loops tend to become shorter as the “distance” decreases or “friction” is reduced (in informational terms) between the various stages of the cycle. Anything (like approval processes within a hierarchy) that increases buffering or delay between the different sub-processes of the OODA loop, or impedes feedback, will slow down information-processing and reaction. So a permissionless system in which the observer is empowered to immediately act on information is ideal, from an OODA standpoint.

In the case of networked or stigmergic organizations, only successful iterations matter because their successes become the collective property of the entire network. A single network is experiencing — in the sense of benefiting from the experience of — thousands, millions or billions of constant iterations. So it’s able to undergo generational innovations with the speed of replicating yeast, because members are free to innovate on a modular basis on their own initiative and their contributions are immediately free to anyone in the network who wants to adopt them.

Compare the network’s anti-fragility and its robust engagement with its environment, to the hierarchical organization as exemplified by John Kenneth Galbraith’s corporate technostructure in *The New Industrial State*. The technostructure survives only by suppressing randomness and volatility in its surrounding environment and making it predictable — in other words, it’s fragile.

⁴² Paul Mason, *Post-Capitalism: A Guide to Our Future* (Allan Lane, 2015), p. 129.

⁴³ “... in order to win, we should operate at a faster tempo or rhythm than our adversaries — or, better yet, get inside adversary’s Observation-Orient-Decision-Action time cycle or loop.” John R. Boyd, *Patterns of Conflict* (December 1986), p. 5. The idea is to “Simultaneously compress our time and stretch-out adversary time to generate a favorable mismatch in time/ability to shape and adapt to change.” One does this by exploiting operations and weapons that “Generate a rapidly changing environment” and at the same time to “Inhibit an adversary’s capacity to adapt to such an environment.” p. 7. By doing this one may “Render adversary powerless by denying him the opportunity to cope with unfolding circumstances.” p. 136.

⁴⁴ Jeff Atwood, “Boyd’s Law of Iteration,” *Coding Horror*, February 7, 2007 <<http://www.codinghorror.com/blog/2007/02/boyds-law-of-iteration.html>>.

When you are fragile, you depend on things following the exact planned course, with as little deviation as possible — for deviations are more harmful than helpful. This is why the fragile needs to be very predictive in its approach, and, conversely, predictive systems cause fragility. When you want deviations, and you don't care about the possible dispersion of outcomes that the future can bring, since most will be helpful, you are antifragile.⁴⁵

What makes life simple is that the robust and antifragile don't have to have as accurate a comprehension of the world as the fragile — and they do not need forecasting.⁴⁶

On the other hand what Taleb calls “optionality” — the freedom from not being locked into a course of action by past investments or a burden of overhead and debt — means “you don't have much need for what is commonly called intelligence, knowledge, insight, skills.... For you don't have to be right that often.” Instead, you can gain from random trial and error and incremental tinkering. In evolution, “nature simply keeps what it likes....”⁴⁷ The network benefits from the long-shot contributions of any members, without any downside risk to the network as a whole from individual failures.

Automation of Routine Tasks, Improvement of Tooth-to-Tail Ratio. Digital technology also promotes coordination by automating the most labor-intensive, routine tasks that once engaged most of the rank-and-file members of organisations, and frees it up for other things. Cory Doctorow, countering Evgeny Morozov's facile critique of networked activism, noted the practical effect of digital technology in increasing the tooth-to-tail ratio of all kinds of organizations:

As a lifelong political activist, I remember the thousands of person-hours we used to devote to putting up flyposters, stuffing envelopes, and running telephone trees simply to mobilise people for a protest, petition or public meeting.... I'm sure that if we'd been able to get the word out to thousands of people with the click of a mouse, we wouldn't have hung up our placards and called it a day; that drudge work absorbed the lion's share of our time and our capacity to think up new and exciting ways to make change.⁴⁸

Enabling Direct Appeals Outside Institutional Propaganda Apparatuses. Until the EZLN uprising in Chiapas began the post-1994 cycle of networked, horizontalist resistance movements, discussion of the potential of networked communication for radical organizing was largely theoretical and limited primarily to academic circles. Just two years before the uprising, in 1992, Harry Cleaver had speculated on what the transformation of ARPANET into the Internet, the rise of radical listservs, etc., might lead to.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Nicholas Nassim Taleb, *Antifragile: Things That Gain From Disorder* (New York: Random House, 2012), p. 71.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 180–181.

⁴⁸ Cory Doctorow, “We need a serious critique of net activism,” *The Guardian*, January 25, 2011 <<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2011/jan/25/net-activism-delusion>>.

⁴⁹ Harry Cleaver. “Kropotkin, Self-valorization And The Crisis Of Marxism” Paper presented to conference on Pyotr Alexeevich Kropotkin (Moscow, St. Petersburg and Dimitrov, December 8 — 14, 1992) organized by the Russian Academy of Science on its 150th anniversary. Published in *Anarchist Studies*, edited by Thomas V. Cahill, Department of Politics, Lancaster University, Lancaster, United Kingdom, February 24, 1993. <<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/harry-cleaver-kropotkin-self-valorization-and-the-crisis-of-marxism.pdf>>. Accessed May 29, 2019.

The Mexican authorities responded to the uprising fully expecting the same outcome as in previous such confrontations: quick, quiet suppression, with news coverage limited to the inside pages of the international news sections of a few major newspapers of record.⁵⁰

Instead, propagation of news surrounding the Jan. 1, 1994 EZLN uprising in Chiapas and subsequent attempt at state repression was unprecedentedly swift thanks to the introduction of networked communications, and completely blind-sided the Mexican regime.

The first activist analysis of communicational dimension of the conflict noted that the “most striking thing about the sequence of events set in motion on January 1, 1994 has been the speed with which news of the struggle circulated and the rapidity of the mobilization of support which resulted.” Modern computer communications... made it possible for the Zapatistas to get their message out despite governmental spin control and censorship. Mailing lists and conferences also facilitated discussions and debate among concerned observers that led to the organization of protest and support activities in over forty countries around the world. The Zapatista rebellion was weaving, the analysis concluded, a global “electronic fabric of struggle...”

The power to provoke invitations to dialogue with supranational capitalist institutions was not always there. Before social movements demonstrated their ability to organize an embarrassing amount of public pressure, they were ignored. To build such a level of pressure opposition movements organized themselves internationally, or globally, in ways that bypassed all the layers of mediation that previously protected these institutions. In this way the movements were able to confront the institutions at their own supranational level...

...[T]he elaborate pattern of connections and linkages within social movements bring vast numbers of imaginative people into a collective endeavor where their joint creativity challenges that of a Power often organized in a more rigid and less-flexible manner. Against a Powerful rule-making and enforcing institution, grassroots power pits a rhizomatic constituent force, more capable of innovating and elaborating new lines of flight in struggle.⁵¹

In 2006, halfway to the present, Cleaver remarked on “how the rapid dissemination of information by journalists and others, through a variety of media, including the Internet, played a central role in the mobilization of the solidarity and support for the Zapatistas that helped them survive and continue to elaborate autonomous approaches to self-organization.”

We also know that not only the dissemination of information but also the spread of discussion about tactics and strategy in those same networks circulated the efforts at solidarity and the mobilization of support: from demonstrations against the Mexican government around the world to the arrival of international observers and material aid to the rebellious communities. Moreover, we also know that those networks not only facilitated the organization of the Continental and Intercontinental

⁵⁰ David Ronfeldt and Armando Martinez, “A Comment on the Zapatista Netwar,” in Ronfeldt and Arquilla, *In Athena's Camp: Preparing for Conflict in the Information Age* (Santa Monica: Rand, 1997), pp. 369–371.

⁵¹ Harry Cleaver. “Computer-linked Social Movements and the Global Threat to Capitalism” (Austin, TX: July 1999) <<http://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/polnet.html>>. Accessed May 21, 2019.

Encounters against Neoliberalism and for Humanity in the spring and summer of 1996 and the Second Intercontinental Encounter in Spain in 1997 but led to the formation of Peoples' Global Action and the first Global Action Days against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva in 1998. Those beginnings led, in turn, to the subsequent Battle of Seattle and the emergence of Indymedia in 1999 and the many demonstrations against the WTO, the IMF, the World Bank, and the G8 that followed in places such as Davos, Prague and Genoa, i.e., a global movement contesting the capitalist neoliberal reorganization of the world.

The importance of these developments cannot be overestimated. Never before in history have we seen anything like them. Never before has there been such intense and interconnected opposition to capitalism. Capitalism has always been resisted and opposed but never before have so many moments of resistance and opposition been linked in the ways achieved during the last ten years.⁵²

Note that the movements of 2011 and after, which dwarfed those he was describing — and whose aftershocks still persist — were yet to come.

Modularity and Granularity. A modular architecture means that a movement, system or network can expand incrementally, by the horizontal proliferation of new nodes, rather than as all-or-nothing thing.

...[W]hen a project of any size is broken up into little pieces, each of which could be performed by an individual in a short amount of time, the motivation necessary to get any given individual to contribute need only be very small. This suggests that peer production will thrive where projects have three characteristics. First, they must be modular. That is, they must be divisible into components, or modules, each of which can be produced independently of the production of the others. This enables production to be incremental and asynchronous, pooling the efforts of different people, with different capabilities, who are available at different times. Second, the granularity of the modules is important. Granularity refers to the sizes of the project's modules, and in order for a peer production process successfully to pool a relatively large pool of contributors the modules should be predominately fine-grained, or small in size. This allows the project to capture contributions from large numbers of contributors whose motivation level will not sustain anything more than quite small efforts towards the project.... In addition, a project will likely be more efficient if it can accommodate variously sized contributions. Heterogeneous granularity will allow people with different levels of motivation to collaborate by contributing smaller or larger grained contributions, consistent with their level of motivation. Third, and finally, a successful peer production enterprise must have low-cost integration, which includes both quality control over the modules and a mechanism for integrating the contributions into the finished product.... Automated integration and

⁵² Cleaver, "Neozapatismo and Autonomy," Presentation to the workshop on Neozapatismo, movimiento indígena y autonomía at the Conference on La Autonomía Posible: Reinención de la política y emancipación at the Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México, October 24–26 2006 <<https://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/NeozapatismoAutonomy.pdf>>. Accessed June 1, 2019

iterative peer production of integration, for example the use of free software to integrate peer production of some other information good, are the primary mechanisms by which peer production projects described in this paper have lowered the cost of integration to the point where they can succeed and sustain themselves.⁵³

Horizontal organizations are one of many examples of the module-platform architecture. Modular systems achieve economies by replicating and recombining a limited number of standardized parts. Modular, building-block structures are ubiquitous. Why? Because such a structure “transforms a system’s ability to learn, evolve and adapt... Once a set of building blocks... has been tweaked and refined and thoroughly debugged through experience... then it can generally be adapted and recombined to build a great many new concepts... Certainly that’s a much more efficient way to create something new than starting all over from scratch. And that fact, in turn, suggests a whole new mechanism for adaptation in general. Instead of moving through that immense space of possibilities step by step, so to speak, an adaptive system can reshuffle its building blocks and take giant leaps.” A small number of building blocks can be shuffled and recombined to make a huge number of complex systems.⁵⁴

Modular systems also support emergent phenomena like collective intelligence. If you start with a large number of modular individuals, each capable of interacting with a few other individuals, and acting on other individuals according to a simple grammar of a few rules, under the right circumstances the system can undergo a rapid phase transition, according to systems theorist Stuart Kauffman: “The growth of complexity really does have something to do with far-from-equilibrium systems building themselves up, cascading to higher and higher levels of organization. Atoms, molecules, autocatalytic sets, et cetera.” And the new higher level entities, in turn, can interact among themselves, perhaps creating another autocatalytic phase transition to a higher level.⁵⁵

III. The Impotence of Enforcement, and Superiority of Circumvention to Resistance

We already saw that the means of production and coordination have undergone a cost implosion, and that a rapidly expanding range of tools is becoming affordable for direct production for use in the commons. This means the cost of means of production, and their control by capitalist owners, is no longer the main barrier to production outside the control of capital. Rather, artificial property rights, artificial scarcities, and legal barriers are the main avenues of capitalist control. Fortunately, these artificial property rights and legal barriers are increasingly becoming unenforceable.

Our discussion of the superior agility of stigmergic organization applies, specifically and especially, to the arms race between technologies of surveillance and control, and technologies of evasion and circumvention, respectively. Because such organizations are more agile than authoritarian hierarchies, they are able to get inside the state’s OODA loop in developing technologies of circumvention faster than the state can develop technologies of control.

⁵³ Benkler, “Coase’s Penguin,” pp. 10–11.

⁵⁴ M. Mitchell Waldrop, *Complexity: The Emerging Science at the Edge of Order and Chaos* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore: Simon & Schuster, 1992), pp. 169–170.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 316–317.

Authoritarian hierarchies respond to attack by becoming more authoritarian and hierarchical, while networks respond by becoming more agile and resilient. As Ori Brafman and Rod Beckstrom put it, “when attacked, a decentralized organization tends to become even more open and decentralized.”⁵⁶ Hierarchies, on the other hand, combat leaks by clamping down on internal communications, erecting barriers to the transmission of information between their members, and becoming even more opaque to themselves than previously (and internal knowledge problems and information hoarding are endemic to hierarchy to begin with).

The learning capacity of networks is part of what Nassim Taleb calls “antifragility.” An antifragile system is one that “regenerates itself continuously by using, rather than suffering from, random events, unpredictable shocks, stressors, and volatility. The antifragile gains from prediction errors, in the long run.”⁵⁷ Hierarchies, on the other hand, don’t just improve through experience; they actually learn the *wrong* things (e.g., look at the Maginot Line as a response to the lessons of WWI; or how TSA’s reactions to attempted terror attacks not only make the aviation system less efficient and more costly in performing its transportation functions, but also less effective against future attacks).

The resistance’s agility in technical development mean it is able to develop mashups of existing technology faster than the corporate state was able to develop the original technologies. It can develop means of circumvention faster than the state can deal with them.

In the case of copyright law, “piracy” is effectively legal now. It’s not as widespread as it might otherwise be precisely because, for the last decade or so, Apple and other companies have dealt with de facto competition from the threat of file-sharing by making media downloads cheap and convenient enough that piracy isn’t worth the trouble. With the recent return to price-gouging walled garden models — for instance the ongoing replacement of services like Netflix with a proliferation of company-specific streaming services — it’s quite likely that file-sharing rates will increase again. Likewise, any technological advance that increases the convenience of file-sharing will make copyright evasion more attractive.

In the case of patents on physical goods, the micromanufacturing revolution is making them much harder to enforce. One benefit of the implosion of capital requirements for manufacturing is that the number of producers increases and the average market size shrinks to the point that they are operating below the regulatory state’s radar. Traditionally, patent enforcement depended on the low transaction costs resulting from a small number of large producers marketing a relatively small number of goods through a small number of nationwide retailers. Without the ability to enforce their claimed powers, government commands are about as relevant as the edicts of the Emperor Norton. It’s far more cost-effective to go directly after the state’s enforcement capabilities than try to change the law.

In John Robb’s terminology, the state’s enforcement capability is its *Systempunkt* — its weak point — in a systems disruption strategy. It’s based on the term *Schwerpunkt* from the theory of Blitzkrieg warfare. The *Schwerpunkt* was

the point of greatest emphasis..., where the enemy front lines may be pierced by an explosive combination of multiple weapons systems (tanks, artillery, airpower, and so forth). Once the line is pierced, armored forces can drive deep into enemy

⁵⁶ Ori Brafman and Rod A. Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations* (Portfolio, 2006), p. 21.

⁵⁷ Taleb, p. 8.

territory to disrupt command, control, and logistical systems. When these systems are disrupted, the top-heavy military units they support collapse in confusion.⁵⁸

Just as important, the majority of the enemy's combat forces can be bypassed and rendered ineffective by systems disruption, without the attrition cost of defeating them piecemeal.

And the *Systempunkt*

is the point in a system (either an infrastructure system or a marketplace), usually identified by one of the many autonomous groups operating in the field, that will collapse the target system if it is destroyed. Within an infrastructure system, this collapse takes the form of disrupted flows that result in financial loss or supply shortages. Within a market, the result is a destabilization of the psychology of the marketplace that will introduce severe inefficiencies and chaos.⁵⁹

According to Robb, traditional strategic bombing of the kind used in WWII measured success by a metric based on the total percentage of an infrastructure's capacity which was destroyed. But by that standard — destroying a majority of the actual miles of transmission lines or rails within a network — success was extremely costly. Al Qaeda Iraq, in contrast, achieves enormous force multipliers disabling entire networks by destroying a few key nodes. A small attack on a single point of a critical oil pipeline out of an entire network, at a cost of \$2000, cost the Iraqi government \$500 million in lost oil revenue.⁶⁰ In addition, the \$8/barrel "terror premium" it added to the price of oil cost the global economy \$640 million.⁶¹ An attack on Shell Oil's Forcados loading dock platform in Nigeria, which cost roughly \$2000 to execute, cost Shell \$400,000 in lost oil exports and another \$50 million from the shutdown of an adjacent oil field.⁶² In the case of an electrical power grid, attacks on two percent of the high-load nodes can shut down 60% of an infrastructure's capacity, and attacks on one percent can shut down 40% of capacity.⁶³ A system can be put out of operation, as if its entire physical infrastructure were destroyed, at the cost of destroying only a tiny fraction of its actual physical assets.

Likewise, actually taking control of the state's policy-making apparatus, through conventional politics, is extremely costly. But by attacking the state at its *Systempunkt* — enforcement — we can render it ineffective against us at a tiny fraction of the cost. As Charles Johnson argues:

A law that cannot be enforced is as good as a law that has been repealed....

If you put all your hope for social change in legal reform, and if you put all your faith for legal reform in maneuvering within the political system, then to be sure you will find yourself outmaneuvered at every turn by those who have the deepest pockets and the best media access and the tightest connections. There is no hope for turning this system against them; because, after all, the system was made for them and the system was made by them. Reformist political campaigns inevitably turn

⁵⁸ John Robb, *Brave New War: The Next Stage of Terrorism and the End of Globalization* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), p. 96.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

out to suck a lot of time and money into the politics — with just about none of the reform coming out on the other end. But if you put your faith for social change in methods that ignore or ridicule their parliamentary rules, and push forward through grassroots direct action — if your hopes for social change don't depend on reforming tyrannical laws, and can just as easily be fulfilled by widespread success at bypassing those laws and making them irrelevant to your life — then there is every reason to hope that you will see more freedom and less coercion in your own lifetime. There is every reason to expect that you will see more freedom and less coercion tomorrow than you did today, no matter what the law-books may say.⁶⁴

One of the benefits of stigmergic organization is that individual problems are tackled by the self-selected individuals and groups best suited to deal with them — and their solutions are then passed on, via the network, to everyone who can benefit from them. Individual innovations immediately become part of the common pool of intelligence, universally available to all. To take Cory Doctorow's example of file-sharing:

Raise your hand if you're thinking something like, "But DRM doesn't have to be proof against smart attackers, only average individuals!...." I don't have to be a cracker to break your DRM. I only need to know how to search Google, or Kazaa, or any of the other general-purpose search tools for the cleartext that someone smarter than me has extracted.⁶⁵

It used to be that copy-prevention companies' strategies went like this: "We'll make it easier to buy a copy of this data than to make an unauthorized copy of it. That way, only the *uber*-nerds and the cash-poor/time rich classes will bother to copy instead of buy." But every time a PC is connected to the Internet and its owner is taught to use search tools like Google (or The Pirate Bay), a third option appears: you can just download a copy from the Internet....⁶⁶

Bruce Schneier describes the stigmergic model as automation lowering the marginal cost of sharing innovations.

Automation also allows class breaks to propagate quickly because less expertise is required. The first attacker is the smart one; everyone else can blindly follow his instructions. Take cable TV fraud as an example. None of the cable TV companies would care much if someone built a cable receiver in his basement and illicitly watched cable television. Building that device requires time, skill, and some money. Few people could do it. Even if someone built a few and sold them, it wouldn't have much impact.

But what if that person figured out a class break against cable television? And what if the class break required someone to push some buttons on a cable box in a certain sequence to get free cable TV? If that person published those instructions on

⁶⁴ Charles Johnson, "Counter-economic optimism," *Rad Geek People's Daily*, February 7, 2009 <http://radgeek.com/gt/2009/02/07/countereconomic_optimism/>.

⁶⁵ Cory Doctorow, "Microsoft DRM Research Talk," in *Content: Selected Essays on Technology, Creativity, Copy-right, and the Future of the Future* (San Francisco: Tachyon Publications, 2008), pp. 7–8.

⁶⁶ Doctorow, "It's the Information Economy, Stupid," in *Ibid.*, p. 60.

the Internet, it could increase the number of nonpaying customers by millions and significantly affect the company's profitability.⁶⁷

This is yet another example of the benefits of reduced cost of aggregating or replicating small contributions, and of modular design. In Schneier's words, expertise is "[e]ncapsulated and commoditized." "Take a class break [i.e. a hack], automate it, and propagate the break for free, and you've got a recipe for a security disaster."⁶⁸

Open-source insurgency follows this model, with each individual contribution quickly becoming available to all. Robb writes of the pattern of guerrilla war in Iraq:

I call this pattern the bazaar. The bazaar solves the problem: how do small, potentially antagonistic networks combine to conduct war? Lessons from Eric Raymond's "The Cathedral and the Bazaar" provides a starting point for further analysis. Here are the factors that apply (from the perspective of the guerrillas):

- Release early and often. Try new forms of attacks against different types of targets early and often. Don't wait for a perfect plan.
- Given a large enough pool of co-developers, any difficult problem will be seen as obvious by someone, and solved. Eventually some participant of the bazaar will find a way to disrupt a particularly difficult target. All you need to do is copy the process they used.
- Your co-developers (beta-testers) are your most valuable resource. The other guerrilla networks in the bazaar are your most valuable allies. They will innovate on your plans, swarm on weaknesses you identify, and protect you by creating system noise.⁶⁹

IV. Superior General Efficiency and Low Overhead

We already saw superior agility and faster OODA loops as one of the efficiencies of stigmergic organization, in particular. It's also one of many efficiencies inhering, more broadly, in the new models of production and coordination as a whole. The postcapitalist economy enabled by new technologies is more efficient than its predecessor in a wide range of closely related ways: it is more agile, lower in overhead, and better at extracting maximum value from minimum inputs.

John Robb uses the engineering analysis template of "STEMI compression" (Space, Time, Energy, Mass, Information) to summarize a number of them.

- Space. Less volume/area used.
- Time. Faster.
- Energy. Less energy. Higher efficiency.

⁶⁷ Bruce Schneier, *Beyond Fear: Thinking Sensibly About Security in an Uncertain World* (New York: Copernicus Books, 2003), p. 95.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁶⁹ John Robb, "The Bazaar's Open Source Platform," *Global Guerrillas*, September 24, 2004 <http://globalguerrillas.typepad.com/globalguerrillas/2004/09/bazaar_dynamics.html>.

- Mass. Less waste.
- Information. Higher efficiency. Less management overhead.

In particular, Robb sees his Resilient Communities (substitute the commons-based local economies we discuss in Chapter Seven and the concept applies virtually the same) as an example of across-the-board STEMI compression.

- Space. Localization (or hyperlocalization) radically reduces the space needed to support any given unit of human activity. Turns useless space (residential, etc.) into productive space.
- Time. Wasted time in global transport is washed away. JIT (just in time production) *and* place.
- Energy. Wasted energy for global transport is eliminated. Energy production is tied to locality of use. More efficient use of solar energy....
- Mass. Less systemic wastage. Made to order vs. made for market.
- Information. Radical simplification. Replaces hideously complex global management overhead with simple local management systems.⁷⁰

It's closely related to the concept of "productive recursion," which Nathan Cravens uses to refer to the order of magnitude reduction in material inputs required to obtain a good when it is produced in the social economy, without the artificial levels of overhead and waste associated with the corporate-state nexus.⁷¹ Savings in productive recursion include (say) laboring to produce a design in a fraction of the time it would take to earn the money to pay for a proprietary design, or simply using an open source design; or reforging scrap metal at a tenth the cost of using virgin metal.⁷²

You can get some idea of the general concept and its potential just from comparing the prices of (for example) an MRI machine in the US vs. France, as a result of the difference in overhead from waste and embedded rents even between two bureaucratic monopoly capitalist countries, when one is somewhat less bureaucratic than the other. But Cravens sites a long series of examples from Neil Gershenfeld's book *FAB*, consisting mostly of the achievements of alternative technology and hardware hacking groups in Indian villages.

Marcin Jakubowski of the Open Source Ecology group argues, as do Amory and Hunter Lovins and Paul Hawken of the Rocky Mountain Institute, that the efficiencies of productive recursion are cumulative. Jakubowski writes: "Cascading Factor 10 cost reduction occurs when the availability of one product decreases the cost of the next product."⁷³

⁷⁰ Robb, "STEMI Compression," *Global Guerrillas*, November 12, 2008 <<https://globalguerrillas.typepad.com/globalguerrillas/2008/11/>>

⁷¹ Nathan Cravens, "Productive Recursion Proven," Open Manufacturing (Google Groups), March 8, 2009. <http://groups.google.com/group/openmanufacturing/browse_thread/thread/f819aab7683b93ac?pli=1>.

⁷² Cravens, "Productive Recursion," *Open Source Ecology Wiki* <http://openfarmtech.org/index.php?title=Productive_Recursion>.

⁷³ Marcin Jakubowski, "OSE Proposal — Towards a World Class Open Source Research and Development Facility," Open Farm Tech, vol. 12 (January 16, 2008) <http://openfarmtech.org/OSE_Proposal.doc>. Open Farm Tech site defunct; a surviving copy of the proposal is hosted at the Open Source Ecology Wiki <https://wiki.opensourceecology.org/wiki/OE_Proposal> (accessed February 24, 2020).

In *Natural Capitalism* Hawken et al, similarly, contrast the cascading efficiencies (“Tunneling Through the Cost Barrier”) of whole systems design to the standard corporate design approach of considering each component in isolation without regard for its role in a larger system, or the even greater efficiencies upstream that may be achieved from an initial efficiency downstream. Improving components in isolation, or incrementally increasing efficiency, may well increase costs. But large-scale efficiency improvements in entire designs can reduce costs by orders of magnitude.⁷⁴

Much of the art of engineering for advanced resource efficiency involves harnessing helpful interactions between specific measures so that, like loaves and fishes, the savings keep multiplying. The basic way to do this is to “think backward,” from downstream to upstream in a system.

They give the example of a pumping system, in which the cumulative inefficiency losses are so great that the expenditure of a thousand units of fossil fuel energy at a power plant, by the time the energy powers the motor, the motor powers the pump, and the fluid works its way through the pipe, results in only a hundred energy units of flow at the end. On the other hand, if (instead of just leaving plant layout as it is and haphazardly laying pipes around obstacles) we design the pipe layout to minimize friction, we will require a significantly smaller pump, which will require a smaller motor, which will require less electricity from the plant. Reducing energy losses from friction in the pipes by one unit will reduce energy generation needs at the plant by ten units.⁷⁵

More insulation, or a more energy-efficient furnace or air conditioner with the same capacity, will cost significantly more taken in isolation. But if passive solar design is combined with insulation so as to reduce the capacity of the furnace or air conditioner required by three-fourths, the overall system will be significantly cheaper because efficiency is increased systemically.⁷⁶

Likewise, most of a V8 engine’s horsepower remains idle except in very brief periods of acceleration, like passing on a freeway. And all the added weight of that heavy engine block requires a much heavier chassis; the engine and chassis together require power steering, and so on. So that if you redesign a transportation system to eliminate the need for rapid acceleration on freeways, you can scale down the engine a great deal, lighten the chassis even more, eliminate the power steering, etc., until the overall system is only a fraction of the former cost.

Now consider a society in which communities are compact and mixed-use, designed around public transit to get most people from their homes to work and shopping, and these compact communities are linked in turn by light rail networks. In this society the automobile is a niche product (i.e. for those in sparsely populated areas on the outskirts of town not served by railheads, like truck farmers who need to make periodic trips into town; or disabled persons not adequately served by public transportation). There are no freeways. In this society, a vehicle designed as a utility for this niche market might well have an electric motor rather than having an internal combustion engine at all. Most of the components could be built (if molded body panels were replaced by flat ones) with tabletop machines in a neighborhood shop, and the assembly could take place entirely in such shops, resulting in still further savings in transportation.

⁷⁴ Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins, and L. Hunter Lovins, *Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution* (Boston, New York, and London: Little, Brown, and Company, 1999), pp. 113–124.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 116–117, 121.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 114, 119–120.

Generally speaking, the counter-economy is more efficient in its use of resources because it has developed, and continues to develop, under a set of constraints and incentives fundamentally different from those under which capitalism functions. Capitalism has always operated in an environment of artificial abundance of material resources, and mostly grown by extensive development (i.e., through the addition of new resource inputs rather than more efficient use of existing ones) because of its privileged access to enclosed land and resources and the state's socialization of the costs of many material inputs. The post-capitalist economy we are building, on the other hand, operates without such subsidies and privileged access to resources, so that it must extract maximum value from available labor and resources, often making more efficient use of the castoffs and waste byproducts of capitalism.

Conversely, while the capitalist economy makes information artificially scarce, expensive, immobile and difficult to share, the post-capitalist economy makes much more efficient use of information by facilitating sharing and collaboration and eliminating barriers to the flow of ideas.

Distributed, Ephemeral Infrastructures. Infrastructure needs and the resulting overhead can be reduced significantly just by adopting the whole systems design approach described above, and designing production processes according to lean principles.

Most costs come from five percent of point consumption needs, and the need to scale the infrastructure to cover the extra peak loads that occur only five percent of the time. Similarly, the tendency of mass production industry to undertake production without regard to immediate demand, thus getting production out of scale to demand, requires additional infrastructure for intermediate storage of in-process outputs for which there is no immediate need. Because mass production industry optimizes the efficiency of individual points in the production process (i.e., the unit costs of a particular machine) in isolation, without regard to maintaining sync with the overall flow of production, the production flow is filled with eddies of excess inventory and backlogs that add to overhead costs.

Things like asking whether the needs involved in that five percent peak demand surge are really necessary, whether the process can be designed to eliminate them, whether the process can be redesigned on a lean basis to scale machine output to overall production flow and to scale production flow to immediate demand — all these things taken together can reduce the need for infrastructure capacity by an order of magnitude, along with overhead costs of maintaining it when it's idle.

But beyond that, additional savings in overhead can be achieved by new distributed technologies whose infrastructures are embedded primarily in the endpoints. A distributed infrastructure, Vinay Gupta writes, provides

the same class of services that are provided by centralized systems like the water and power grids, but without the massive centralized investments in physical plant. For example, dry toilets and solar panels can provide high quality services household by household without a grid.⁷⁷

Distributed physical infrastructures benefit from modularity in a way directly analogous to the benefit that immaterial production receives. Blockbuster infrastructure projects become irre-

⁷⁷ Vinay Gupta, "The Global Village Development Bank: financing infrastructure at the individual, household and village level worldwide" Draft 2 (March 12, 2009) <<http://vinay.howtolivewiki.com/blog/hexayurt/my-latest-piece-the-global-village-development-bank-1348>>.

trievable “sunk costs” if the situation changes so that they cannot be completed. But if “half a dam is no dam at all, ...500 of 1000 small projects is half way to the goal.”⁷⁸

Modular architectures have the related virtue of what Robb calls “scale invariance”: the part is able, in case of system disruption, to replicate the whole. In other words the system is fractal (“across all scaling factors..., the properties that define the whole are conserved...”). This means that a networked system of autonomous, largely self-sufficient local industrial ecologies is extremely resilient to shock.

...[S]ystem recovery could be catalyzed and the damage largely mitigated, if our global system was scale invariant. Basically, this means that if we had communities that could produce at the local level many of the essential products and services currently produced at the global level, handling disconnection or buffering turbulence would be of little consequence (also, it would be much easier for us to find ways of protecting or making redundant the products/services that ONLY could be produced at the global level).⁷⁹

V. Conclusion

To summarize, the legacy system of bureaucratic capitalist corporations and their state, educational, and non-profit counterparts is like a Tyrannosaurus Rex dying in a swamp; the counter-economy we are constructing within the interstices of capitalism, using liberatory technologies, is like a swarm of piranha.

The practical implication of cheap production technologies suitable for direct, small-scale production for use in the social economy is that we can secede in place from capitalism with the means of production already in our possession rather than seizing the factories. The practical implication of network organization is that large hierarchical institutions like centralized political parties are no longer needed for coordinating the resistance to capitalism.

Postcapitalist transition strategy is no longer primarily about seizing the “commanding heights” institutions of capitalism, but about building a postcapitalist society and economy outside the control of capitalism. Our organizations are focused, not on storming the ramparts of the old system, but on building the new ones. When it is necessary to directly confront the old system, we simply incapacitate it at minimum cost to ourselves.

[Last Edited October 6, 2020]

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ John Robb, “Resilient Communities and Scale Invariance,” *Global Guerrillas*, April 16, 2009 <<https://globalguerrillas.typepad.com/globalguerrillas/2009/04/resilient-communities-and-scale-invariance.html>>.

Part Two. The Age of Exodus

Chapter Three: Horizontalism and Self-Activity Over Vanguard Institutions

Introduction

New radical ideologies and forms of praxis have emerged, from the mid-20th century on, that reject the major features of the Old Left.

Although I raise issues in a later chapter about the use of “prefigurative” in cases where “interstitial” would in my opinion be more appropriate, the organizational approaches described in this chapter are prefigurative in the proper sense of the term. That is, while “interstitial” is arguably preferable for describing an approach to building the actual *institutional* structure of the successor society within the shell of the existing one, “prefigurative” is perfectly suited to horizontalist political movements insofar as they inculcate the cultural values, habits, or personality styles around which we envision the successor society being constituted.

Horizontalism, as an organizational style, is prefigurative as Carl Boggs defines it: “the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal.” And a horizontalist approach, in prefiguring the libertarian society which is our goal, also hampers propagation of the current institutional culture into post-capitalist society:

Bureaucratization creates obstacles to revolutionary change that were only dimly foreseen by classical Marxism. The expansion of the public sphere and the convergence of state and corporate sectors has meant more centralized and total networks of power and, correspondingly, the erosion of popular democratic initiative. Bureaucratic logic... helps to enforce bourgeois ideological hegemony insofar as it diffuses a culture of organisational adaptation, submission, pragmatism, routine; it depoliticizes potential opposition by narrowing the range of political discourse, by institutionalizing alienation, and posing only “technical” solutions to problems.¹

More recently, Sofa Saio Gradin described prefigurative politics as “the politics of organising in the here-and-now in a way that reflects the society we want to see in the future,” and “about shaping our cultures, norms and social relations, as well as our formal rules and policies, in the image of the society we desire.”²

¹ Carl Boggs. “Marxism, prefigurative communism, and the problem of workers’ control,” *Radical America* 6 (Winter 1977), hosted at LibCom.org <<https://libcom.org/library/marxism-prefigurative-communism-problem-workers-control-carl-boggs>>. Accessed January 26, 2020.

² Saio Sofa Gradin, “Could pre-figurative politics provide a way forward for the left?” *Open Democracy*, January 19, 2020 <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/could-pre-figurative-politics-provide-way-forward-left/>>.

The New Left appeared from the mid-50s on, in the West, as a response to the bureaucracy and managerialism of the Old Left. In the United States and UK in particular, it was catalyzed by reaction against the orthodox Communist Parties, and against the politics of the Labour Party in the UK and the New Deal and official labor movement in the U.S. In the UK it coalesced around *New Left Review* and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the late 50s, with Marxist historian E.P. Thompson as a leading early figure. In the United States shortly thereafter, the nucleus of the growing New Left movement included power-elite sociologist C. Wright Mills (whose “Letter to the New Left” was actually addressed to Thompson), the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Students for a Democratic Society (whose Port Huron Statement was a founding document of the New Left). It was fueled by the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley and the anti-war movement from 1965 on. In addition, New Left scholarship was developed by revisionist historians of “corporate liberalism” like William Appleman Williams at *Studies on the Left*.

Although the New Left was a diverse movement with a number of conflicting currents, it had some elements in common. Particular relevant to our interests are the following:

- A disillusion with bureaucratic institutions and with managerialist “End of Ideology” theories, and a preference for decentralization, participatory democracy and direct action.
- This latter preference for participatory democracy and direct action took the particular form, among other things, of a tendency toward counter-institutions and prefigurative projects like intentional communities and experiments with alternative technology: e.g. Murray Bookchin, Whole Earth, Radical Technology, Paul Goodman, Colin Ward.
- A shift away from the Old Left’s sole focus on the traditional industrial proletariat as agent of history, and toward inclusion of marginalized groups, student intellectuals, unwaged labor, etc.

Autonomist Marxism was heavily influenced by the New Left, and shared many of its central values. Autonomism, in turn, later had a close relationship with Zapatismo and the subsequent cycle of horizontalist movements.

In the next few chapters we will examine in greater detail the different aspects of these reactions to the Old Left, and how they constitute a larger constellation of movements focused on Exodus.

I. The New Left

If there was one defining feature of the New Left, it was a rejection of the bureaucratic and managerial style of the Old Left’s institutions, whether the vanguard Party of Marxism-Leninism, or the political parties, establishment unions and welfare state of Social Democracy and the New Deal.

In Great Britain and the United States, the New Left was initially catalyzed by disillusionment with the orthodox Communist Parties in those countries — first by Khrushchev’s denunciations of Stalinist brutality, and then by the British and American Parties’ feeble response to the Soviet invasion of Hungary.

At the same time, a new generation of socialists was growing dissatisfied with the bureaucratic culture of Atlee's welfare state and its American New Deal counterpart, and the ascendancy of liberal "End of Ideology" frameworks that limited hope for the future to tinkering around the edges of a managerial apparatus that claimed to have mostly relegated poverty and injustice to the imperfect past.

They increasingly saw adherents of this managerialist ideology in liberal politics and government administration as direct counterparts of the Organization Man in corporate bureaucracy, and more broadly as comparable to the Soviet Party Apparatus which framed the future achievement of communist abundance and withering away of the state as an incremental process of minor bureaucratic adjustments by the existing authorities, within the existing institutional framework. By "ideology," Bell and his ilk meant structural critiques of any kind, any analysis which went beyond the piecemeal and individual or failed to take the basic institutional structures of post-industrial capitalism as natural and inevitable, as given.

New Left analysis at this time saw the establishment liberalism — "corporate liberalism" — as its primary enemy, even more so than the reactionary Right. This establishment included the Military-Industrial Complex and other oligopoly corporations, the imperialist foreign policy establishment and its think tanks, the AFL-CIO, the moderate civil rights leadership, and the welfare state bureaucracy (whose purpose was to maintain social control of the surplus population).³

In 1959 E. P. Thompson framed the New Left as the reaction of a generation of leftists who came of age after WWII, against the organizational styles of "American 'Power Elite', Russian 'Bureaucracy', British 'Establishment'..."

1. *The Establishment of Power.* The increasing size, complexity, and expertise required in industrial concerns have contributed to the sense of 'anonymity' of the large-scale enterprise, to the power of the managers, and to the sense of insignificance of the individual producer....
2. *The Establishment of Orthodoxy.* Two factors have combined to generate a climate of intellectual conformity: first, the centralised control, either by great commercial interests or by the State itself, of the mass media of communication, propaganda, and entertainment, and the consequent elimination from them of minority opinions: second, the ideological orthodoxies and heresy-hunting which have been a by-product of the Cold War....
3. *The Establishment of Institutions.* Here the post-war generation encounter institutions which had already become 'set' in their leadership, bureaucracy, procedures and policies, in the war or immediate post-war years.... The younger generation have no memories of Labour as a movement of storm and protest, a movement of men struggling and sacrificing to lift themselves and their fellows out of cramping and de-humanising conditions. They were born, rather, into the world of the block vote; it is the trade union that tells them what they can do and what they can't do. They see restriction where their fathers saw mutual support....

³ Paul Jacobs and Saul Landau, *The New Radicals: A Report With Documents* (New York Vintage Books, 1966), pp. 33–34.

And the reaction against these establishments, in turn, carried a new organizational style distinct from that of the Old Left.

[T]he assertion of democracy in the Communist area cannot take place without a hundred contests with the entrenched bureaucracy, its institutions and ideology. And, equally, the regeneration of the Western socialist movement cannot take place without a fundamental break with the policies and orthodoxies of the past decade. And this two-pronged offensive is (it becomes increasingly clear) carrying the left Socialist in the West, and the dissident Communist in the East, towards a common objective. There is a rediscovery of common aims and principles, obscured during the violent era of the Third International. This does not constitute a conversion of sections of the Western labour movement to Communist orthodoxy, nor of disillusioned Communists to liberal social-democracy. It represents, rather, a rejection of both orthodoxies; and the emergence of a New Left which, while it draws much from both traditions, stands apart from the sterile antagonisms of the past, and speaks for what is immanent within both societies. It champions a new internationalism, which is not that of the triumph of one camp over the other, but the dissolution of the camps and the triumph of the common people....

...If there is, as yet, no unified theory of the New Left, there are many common preoccupations.... Confronted by the authoritarianism and anti-intellectualism of the Stalinist deviant of Marxism, Communist dissidence has broken with its scholastic framework and is subjecting the entire catechism to an empirical critique. But at the same time, confronted by the idiocies of the Cold War and the facts of power within Western 'over-developed societies', a taut radical temper is arising among the post-war generation of socialists and intellectuals in the West. In the exchange between the two a common language is being discovered, and the same problems are being thrust forward for examination: the problem of political power and of bureaucratic degeneration: the problem of economic power and of workers' control: the problems of de-centralisation and of popular participation in social control. There is the same rediscovery of the notion of a socialist community; in Britain the Fabian prescription of a competitive Equality of Opportunity is giving way, among socialists, before the re-discovery of William Morris's vision of a Society of Equals; in the Communist world the false community of the authoritative collective is under pressure from the voluntary, organic community of individuals, which, despite all the inhumanities of the past two decades, has grown up within it. There is, East and West, the same renewal of interest in the 'young Marx'; the same concern with humanist propositions; the same re-assertion of moral agency, and of individual responsibility within the flow of historical events. The New Left has little confidence in the infallibility, either of institutions or of historical processes. A true socialist community will not be brought into being by legislative manipulation and top-level economic planning alone. Socialism must commence with existing people; it must be built by men and women in voluntary association.... At every stage, before, during, and after the conquest of power, the voluntary participation of the people must be enlisted, and the centres of power must themselves, wherever possible, be broken up. The New Left is

made up of revolutionary socialists; but the revolution to which they look forward must entail not only the conquest but also the dismantling of State power.⁴

Of the “end-of-ideology” mindset shared by the managerial stratum in the West and its counterparts in the Soviet bloc, C. Wright Mills wrote:

So reasoning collapses into reasonableness. By the more naïve and snobbish celebrants of complacency, arguments and facts of a displeasing kind are simply ignored; by the more knowing, they are duly recognised, but they are neither connected with one another nor related to any general view. Acknowledged in a scattered way, they are never put together: to do so is to risk being called, curiously enough, “one-sided.”

This refusal to relate isolated facts and fragmentary comment with the changing institutions of society makes it impossible to understand the structural realities which these facts might reveal; the longer-run trends of which they might be tokens. In brief, fact and idea are isolated, so the real questions are not even raised, analysis of the meanings of fact not even begun....

Underneath this style of observation and comment there is the assumption that in the West there are not more real issues or even problems of great seriousness. The mixed economy plus the welfare state plus prosperity — that is the formula. US capitalism will continue to be workable, the welfare state will continue along the road to ever greater justice. In the meantime, things everywhere are very complex, let us not be careless, there are great risks....

All this is just the sort of thing that I at least have always objected to, and do object to, in the “socialist realism” of the Soviet Union.

There too, criticism of milieux are of course permitted — but they are not to be connected with criticism of the structure itself; one may not question “the system.” There are no “antagonistic contradictions....”

...In Uzbekistan and Georgia as well as in Russia. I kept writing notes to myself, at the end of recorded interviews: “This man talks in a style just like Arthur Schlesinger Jr....”

So far as the *historic agency of change* is concerned, the end-of-ideology stands upon the identification of such agencies with going institutions; perhaps upon their piecemeal reform, but never upon the search for agencies that might be used or that might themselves make for a structural change of society.⁵

The Port Huron Statement of 1962, founding document of SDS, called for what principal author Hayden called “participatory democracy”:

a democracy of individual participation, governed by two central aims: that the individual share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his

⁴ E.P. Thompson, “The New Left,” *The New Reasoner* No. 9 (Summer 1959), hosted at Marxists Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/thompson-ep/1959/newleft.htm>>. Accessed October 6, 2018.

⁵ C. Wright Mills, “Letter to the New Left” (1960), in Irving Louis Horowitz, ed. *Power, Politics and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1963), pp. 248–50.

life; that society be organized to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation.

The governing economic principle: “work should involve incentives worthier than money or survival. It should be educative, not stultifying; creative, not mechanical; self-directed, not manipulated, encouraging independence, a respect for others, a sense of dignity, and a willingness to accept social responsibility....” And “major social institutions — cultural, educational, rehabilitative, and others — should be generally organized with the well-being and dignity of man as the essential measure of success.”⁶

Hayden, writing in *Dissent* four years later, dismissed in much harsher terms the liberal claim to have transcended the contradictions of history through the application of proper expertise. The majority of Americans were

at the bottom, or in the middle, of organizations whose official purposes are justified in abstract terms. Their views, inherited from their families or implanted by the school system, and fed every day by the mass media, permit them to screen out threatening information or alternative ways of seeing the world.

The usual way to “escape” the trapped condition of ordinary Americans is to ascend to higher levels of influence and knowledge in some key institution. But while an overview of society is gained from these positions, a new trap is waiting. For entry into higher organizational circles depends upon accepting their general design and purpose. This means that people in “responsible” positions are most often blind to immoral consequences of their work....

This national trance depends upon one crucial assumption: that American society is being improved domestically. The legitimacy gained by the industrial unions, the liberal welfare legislation which was passed in the thirties and forties, and now the civil rights and anti-poverty reforms of the sixties — these are seen as part of a long sweep toward a society of economic and social justice...

...The tragedy, however, is not simply that these programs fall short of their goals. Rather, the goals themselves are far from desirable to anyone interested in greater democracy and a richer quality of social life. Welfare and public housing policies, for instance, are creating a new and public kind of authoritarianism. Public relief clients and tenants, lacking any protective organizations, are subject to the caprice and cruelty of supervisors, investigators, and local machine politicians. Similarly, labor and civil rights legislation creates tools for government intervention at moments of sharp social conflict, without really changing the tyrannical conditions in which millions of workers and Negroes live. The full employment and anti-poverty acts, along with the relief measures of the thirties, give the government power to cushion the economic situation just short of the point of mass unemployment. Programs such as urban renewal serve as the major domestic outlet for investment capital and, consciously or not, as a means of demoralizing and politically fragmenting the poor. The national government thus becomes the chief force for stabilizing the private economy and

⁶ “Port Huron Statement,” in Jacobs and Landau, pp. 155–156.

for managing social crisis. Its interests, institutions and personnel have merged with those of high finance and industry.

...[I]t appears that the American elite has discovered a long-term way to stabilize or cushion the contradictions of our society. It does this through numerous forms of state intervention, the use of our abundant capacity for material gratification, and the ability to condition nearly all the information which people receive.... Except for temporarily boosting income for a few people, this entire reformist trend has weakened the poor under the pretense of helping them and strengthened elite rule under the slogan of curbing private enterprise. In fostering a “responsible” Negro and labor leadership and bringing it into the pseudopluralist system of bargaining and rewards, a way has been found to contain and paralyze the disadvantaged and voiceless people....

...Slowly an elite is formed, calling itself the liberal-labor community. It treats the rank-and-file as a mass to be molded; sometimes thrust forward into action, sometimes held back....

The pressures which influence these leaders come, not primarily from below, but from the top, from the most powerful men in the country. Sometimes bluntly and sometimes subtly, the real elite grooms responsible trade union and civil rights leaders. The leaders’ existence comes to depend upon the possibility of receiving attention from the President or some top aide, and they judge organizational issues with an eye on this possibility. There is usually no question about the leaders’ primary loyalty to the “national interest” as defined by the Administration, even though they always believe their judgments are independently made. Thus most of the civil rights leadership in 1964, fearing the Goldwater movement and hoping for civil rights legislation from a victorious Johnson Administration, called for a “moratorium” on mass demonstrations. The labor leadership performed the same function for the same reasons during World War II....⁷

To the Free Speech Movement, the university — as exemplified by Berkeley in particular— “appeared to be the living example of the integration of liberalism with actual policy,”

for its physical scientists do research on behalf of the military, and the social scientists provide the government with vast amounts of material designed to implement foreign and domestic policies.

The university has also achieved a fruitful integration with large corporations throughout the nation. Its agricultural science departments are tied closely to the large growers; university graduates are placed in corporations; and the university provides basic research for every level of corporate needs.

...It seemed to have defined its educational function as one of producing for society’s needs as defined by government and the large corporations....⁸

⁷ Tom Hayden, “The Politics of ‘The Movement,’” *Dissent*, November/December 1966 <<https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/tom-hayden-politics-of-the-movement-1966>>. Accessed September 23, 2018.

⁸ Jacobs and Landau, p. 60.

Various thinkers like Immanuel Wallerstein, and Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, have treated the New Left uprisings of 1968 as a transitional phase to the fully horizontal movements of the 1990s (about which more later in this chapter).

For some indication of the extent to which the New Left was a departure from the institutional approaches of the Old Left, and prefigured the post-1994 horizontalist movements, we need go no further than a debate within *Studies on the Left* between two groups adopting positions respectively framed by one of the parties to the debate as horizontalist and centralist. In retrospect, their differences appear to be largely a matter of emphasis; even the supposedly institutionalist side took what we would consider a highly libertarian and decentralist approach.⁹

In “Up From Irrelevance,” the self-styled advocates of horizontalism (Tom Hayden, Norm Fruchter and Stanley Aronowitz) took specific issue with the editors’ call for

a “radical center” that could serve as a communications and coordinating agency linking the new insurgents with the traditional left. While this new center should be built around the insights and needs of the new radicals, the editorial argued, it should make a basic place for the older radicals who are now lodged in single-issue groups (traditional civil rights, educational reform, peace activity) where their radicalism is subdued and isolated from the new movements....

Proposing a “radical center” assumes there is a sufficiently large radical movement in need of coordination; or, at least, it assumes that a “radical center” could forge existing materials into such a movement. But, as *Studies* also pointed out, the new movements are in their infancy.... Assuming these movements must and will expand..., it seems rather early to pull them into a national center. The critical work still remains at the *base*, and only an overemphasis on the *image* of a national movement can make one believe it exists. We ought not to fall into the trap of confusing widespread outbursts [“sit-ins, teach-ins, freedom votes, wildcat strikes”] with a solid movement.

Hayden et al noted that the left wing of the civil rights movement (SNCC, Freedom Democratic Party, etc.) was still partially dependent on the moderate civil rights establishment.

Certainly it is desirable to loosen this conservative grip. But for this to take place, there must be something to break *toward*: other people in the society who together can make up an alternative community to the establishment. But such people are not available at the present time in sufficient numbers and strength and, unless they are, it is hollow to call for a “radical center.”

If this is true, it is irrelevant also to “choose” between the political alternatives which usually are presented to radicals: working within the Democratic Party for realignment versus independent political action. The new movements which give us hope *are* realigning the Democratic Party even though they often work outside the Party and their values go far beyond those of the Democratic leadership. The new movements are neither fully dependent nor independent; at present, they are creating tensions in both directions.

⁹ *Studies on the Left* vol. 5, no. 2 (Spring 1965), “Up From Irrelevance” and “Reply,” reproduced in Jacobs and Landau, pp. 267–279.

In the case of the Freedom Democratic Party, the movement was forced to rely to some extent on the establishment Democratic Party, and had limited ability to push it towards realignment, because it lacked a sufficiently numerous or mobilized base.

This means that, instead of assuming that a viable radicalism is present, an assumption which leads to the idea that a “radical center” is needed, we instead ought to focus on the obstacles to a radical movement in the first place.... Almost everyone develops a vested interest of some kind in the American system as a whole, and within the system there are virtually no legitimate places from which to launch a total opposition movement. Politically, any group looking for a radical alternative to liberal-left politics seems to be either isolated and destroyed, or swallowed into an uncomfortable coalition with the leadership of labor, civil rights and religious organizations.

...What we seek to make viable, against the grain of an affluent and coercive society, is a thoroughly democratic revolution, in which the most oppressed aspire to govern and decide, begin to practice their aspiration, and finally carry it to fulfillment by transforming decision-making everywhere.... Power in America is abdicated by individuals to top-down organizational units, and it is in the recovery of this power that the movement becomes distinct from the rest of the country, and a new kind of man emerges....

What we should try to do... is assume that we have failed so far to discover the relationships and the forms that will free individuals to think and work as radicals, and build a movement where “everybody is a leader.” Not until then will a “center” reflect anything radical and deep in society.

...My own feeling is that too many traditional leftists are still engulfed by the Communist-anti-Communist debate [or] adhere to overly bureaucratic conceptions of organizing... to be considered mainstays of a new movement. The many people who are exceptions to this general picture should concentrate on organizing the millions of people who never experienced the history of the American left, instead of attempting to reconstruct their old-left colleagues.¹⁰

In reply, the defenders of the previous issue’s editorial (James Weinstein, Stanley Aronowitz, Lee Baxandall, Eugene Genovese and Helen Kramer) clarified that by “center” they meant something completely different from the reading of Hayden et al.

When we spoke of the need for a new radical center we did not have in mind an organizational short circuit of the new experiments with community organization. Our use of the term was ideological, not organizational; what we sought was discussion, analysis, examination of all these social movements with a view to finding common programs, a common attitude toward existing American social organization, a common vision of a new society, and a long-range strategy for putting together a coalition that might have some political relevance.¹¹

¹⁰ Tom Hayden et al, “Up From Irrelevance,” in Jacobs and Landau, pp. 268–272.

¹¹ Weinstein et al, “A Reply,” in Jacobs and Landau, p. 277.

Beyond that, they argued, their respective positions were more similar than Hayden et al made them out to be.

Our proposal was not to solve the problem with new “organizational formulas,” but to begin the search for effective strategies to challenge and change this society. Our goals are the same as Hayden’s. We agree on the need to build a movement that is fully conscious of the need to transcend the values and priority systems of America’s present rulers. We disagree on the need for radicals to discuss and work out the necessary theories and strategy of social change.

Underlying this disagreement is a difference over the nature of potential radical constituencies, and a confusion between the problem of organizing the poor and that of working toward a coalition of radical constituencies capable of becoming an effective political force on the left. Hayden’s concern is with the former; ours is with the latter. We focus on different problems, but there is nothing inherently contradictory or mutually exclusive in our two approaches.... [Hayden believes that] the poor, both in the rural South and the Northern ghettos, are the only potentially radical mass constituencies...

...Assuming that the poor can be fully organized and will become fully conscious of the need for radical politics, by themselves they must remain impotent. There are not enough of them, nor do they command sufficient resources to constitute a political force that can win power.... [Hayden] presents no prospective for organizing a mass radical student movement, and explicitly denies or ignores the existence of other possible components of a radical coalition. Yet if a significant movement is to be built it must be around a coalition large enough, at least in theory, to contest for political power.... Programs of action should be developed to facilitate connections between the various components — including the poor — when they become sufficiently conscious to engage in explicitly political action. Such a coalition needs a common view of the existing society, common programmatic demands (or at least complementary ones), a common vision of a new form of social organization designed to satisfy human needs. We feel it is necessary to begin the theoretical work on which such a movement can be based.¹²

And in the previous issue’s editorial, the editors were actually in substantive agreement with Hayden for the most part on the proper approach towards Old Left radicals: that is, they saw their “new radical center” as a way of reorienting directionless Old Leftists around the New Left paradigm.¹³

Likewise, they agreed with Hayden on the organizational style that distinguished the New from the Old Left.

Those who, consciously or not, adopt a “Leninist” concept of political organization offer structural or administrative solutions for political and ideological problems. Such an approach... can only inhibit the search for new political forms, can only

¹² *Ibid.* pp. 273–276.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 278.

stifle the kind of initiative and experimentation in the development of radical consciousness and program which is the strength of SNCC in Mississippi and some of the ghetto projects in the North. We do not propose “democratic centralism” or highly disciplined structures when we assert the need for a radical center. In this sense, the experience of radical organizations in the United States since the early 1920s is useless. Organizationally one must go back to the old Socialist Party of Debs to find any meaningful precedents.... Local Socialist organizations then had their own press, developed their own programs, adopted different tactics.¹⁴

II. Autonomism

From the beginning autonomism was about the self-activity of the working class itself, independently of official institutions like parties and unions.

Harry Cleaver’s development in the ‘60s and ‘70s as a Marxist — and particularly as an autonomist — was in large part a reaction against the “one-sided” nature of dominant Marxist analyses: “the one-sidedness of most of these Marxist traditions with their focus on the mechanisms of capitalist exploitation and their inability to theorize working class self-activity.”¹⁵

Precisely because of this focus, the interpretations failed to grasp the initiative of those resisting and attacking capital and, by so failing, they could not even accurately understand the actions of capital itself — which always developed in an interplay with that resistance and those attacks.¹⁶

A major influence on the development of autonomism was the Johnson-Forest tendency, which was an offshoot of (Schachtmanite) American Trotskyism;¹⁷ it held that vanguard parties were obsolete because the working class had internalized the ideology, and instead focused on the working class’s own self-action outside of official socialist parties and unions (e.g. wildcat strikes and direct action).

Raya Dunayevskaya — the “Forest” of the Johnson-Forest tendency — objected to the dominant tendency to focus on the objective laws of capitalist development at the expense of working class agency, and emphasized the importance of “the strife between the worker and the machine against dead labour’s domination over living labour...”¹⁸

Cleaver was heavily influenced by the other half of the Forest-Johnson tendency: C.L.R. James. James’s book *Facing Reality* “was distinguished by the premise... that the socialist society already existed within the shell of the old society. The task of revolutionaries was to recognize, record, and enhance its existence.” In developing an analysis focused on worker self-activity, he was also heavily influenced by the “bottom-up” histories of E.P. Thompson and Christopher Hill, the

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 279.

¹⁵ Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically* (Edinburgh and San Francisco: AK Press, 1979, 2000), p. 14.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 11.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 12.

¹⁸ Quoted in Peter Hudis, *Marx’s Concept of the Alternative to Capitalism* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), pp. 32–33.

autonomism of Negri, the libertarian Marxism of Rosa Luxemburg and Anton Pannekoek, and the anarchism of Pyotr Kropotkin and Emma Goldman.¹⁹

Italian autonomism was a New Left movement centered on the struggles of factory workers who took direct action “autonomously from, and often against, the influence of either trade unions or the Party.”²⁰ Similar direct action was meanwhile occurring in the U.S. as the New Deal labor accord broke down and auto industry workers engaged in wildcat strikes in direct violation of labor contracts and direct defiance of their own union leadership.

By “reading *Capital* politically,” Cleaver means reading it from the perspective of the working class as revolutionary subject. “This I would argue is the only kind of reading of Marx which can properly be said to be from a working-class perspective because it is the only one which speaks directly to that class’s needs for clarifying the scope and structure of its own power and strategy.”²¹

Autonomism emphasizes a strand of Marx’s own thought that has been largely neglected in establishment “Marxism” (the mechanistic official Marxism of the Second International, systematized by Engels, Kautsky and Plekhanov; which in turn became the primary raw material for the official Marxist-Leninist “diamat” of the Comintern in the 20th century, developed largely after Lenin’s death by Stalin).

The one feature that united most Marxist political economy in the Second International and from WWI on, which transcended divisions between social democrats and revolutionaries, was that “their restriction of the scope of Capital and of the derived theories of crisis and imperialism to the realm of political economy both limited the comprehensiveness of their analysis, leaving major aspects of the system uncriticized, and made it one-sided: they analysed capitalist growth and accumulation independently of working-class initiative.”²²

The Old Left treated workers as passive in the face of a history dictated by capital’s laws of motion.

We are presented with elaborately detailed critical interpretations of this self-activating monster in a way that completely ignores the way actual working-class power forces and checks capitalist development. Marx saw how the successful struggle for a shorter working day caused a crisis for capital. These political economists do not: they see absolute surplus value as a reified abstract concept. Marx saw how that struggle forced the development of productivity-raising innovations which raised the organic composition of capital. He thus saw relative surplus value as a strategic capitalist response. These political economists do not: they see only competition between capitalists. Marx saw how workers’ wage struggles could help precipitate capitalist crises. These political economists see only abstract ‘laws of motion’.²³

¹⁹ Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically*, pp. 11–14; Matthew Quest, “Observing Properly Changing Forms of Spontaneity and Organization: Creative Conflicts in C. L. R. James’ Hegelian Dialectics and Political Philosophy,” *Science & Society* 80:1 (January 2016), p. 128.

²⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 64–65.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 30.

²² *Ibid.* p. 24.

²³ *Ibid.* p. 45.

This “Mode of production” analysis treated the working class as a passive chess-piece moved by the forces of history.²⁴

So in summary the Old Left shared a common tendency of leaving politics (and specifically working class politics) out of their reading of *Capital*.

One basic criticism of reading *Capital* as political economy was that it accepted the tradition of making a sharp dichotomy between economics and politics and confined *Capital* to the former sphere.... Whether in the case of the revived Marxist tradition of crisis theory or in the case of neo-Marxist Keynesianism, the analysis focuses predominantly on the development of capital itself — defined autonomously from the class struggle. Political economy, in short, has concerned the theorization of the capitalist factory as the site of the production of surplus value together with the circulation and realization of value. Within the factory capitalist domination is seen to be virtually complete. Although workers might legitimately struggle to keep wages from being depressed in periods of crisis, such ‘economistic’ struggles are ultimately confined within the dynamic of capitalist growth and cannot pose any real threat to its existence. The inevitable conclusion of this kind of analysis is to place all hope for effective struggle in the ‘political’ sphere, which usually implies support for some form of party organization. In such a situation the discussion of the rise and organization of class struggle generally turns around the question of ‘class consciousness’.... With respect to this issue, as we have seen, Marxist orthodoxy has been associated with the answer given by the Lenin of *What Is to Be Done?*: namely that the workers would be educated by a specialized party of professional revolutionaries who alone can see beyond the particular economistic interests of each group of workers to the interests of the class as a whole.²⁵

Social Democratic economism and Stalinist diamat, each in its own way, minimized the subjectivity and agency of ordinary people relative to either the material forces of history or vanguard institutions.

Autonomism was a reaction against this tendency. In 1964, Italian autonomist Mario Tronti wrote:

Capitalist society has its laws of development: economists have invented them, governments have imposed them, and workers have suffered them. But who will uncover the laws of development of the working class? Capital has its history, and its historians write it — but who is going to write the history of the working class?...

We too have worked with a concept that puts capitalist development first, and workers second. This is a mistake. And now we have to turn the problem on its head, reverse the polarity, and start again from the beginning: and the beginning is the class struggle of the working class. At the level of socially developed capital, capitalist development becomes subordinated to working class struggles; it follows behind them, and they set the pace to which the political mechanisms of capital’s own reproduction must be tuned....

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 48.

²⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 51–52.

Today the strategic viewpoint of the working class is so clear that we wonder whether it is only now coming to the full richness of its maturity. It has discovered (or rediscovered) the true secret, which will be the death sentence on its class enemy: the political ability to force capital into reformism, and then to blatantly make use of that reformism for the working class revolution....²⁶

In undertaking a *political* analysis, Cleaver starts from the perspective of the working class itself — “the struggles of the workers themselves, not of their ‘official’ organizations (trade unions, parties, etc.)” — and “the self-activity of the class that makes it more than a victimized cog in the machinery of capital and more than a fragmented mass requiring instruction in its class interests.”²⁷

And according to Cleaver “the pattern of development of capitalist society (including its crisis) is the outcome of the confrontation of two active class subjects, and involves the growth of the working class along with the expansion of capital.”

From this perspective, revolution appears when working class struggles throw capital into a crisis to which it is unable to fashion a solution.... The rupture of capitalist control spreads and grows, overthrowing more and more of the social relations that capital created to reinforce its imposition of work. We understand by the capitalist “integument is burst asunder” the ripping apart by the working class of the entire capitalist social system shaped around imposed labor. The expropriation of the capitalist is not simply the expropriation of their “property” in any usual sense, it is rather the reappropriation of the whole social order. Moreover, it is clear enough in Marx that expropriation here means the freeing of that social order from capitalist organization such that a wholly new society can be constructed. Thus it means the end of the commodity form, of the fetishism of production, the hierarchy of work, the alienation of labor, and so on.

Although Marx and Engels rarely indulged in utopian speculation about post-capitalist society, their observations of the pattern and content of working class struggle led them again and again to emphasize how the revolutionary destruction of capital would involve, in a fundamental way, the liberation of people from a life sentence of hard labor. Already in 1844 Engels saw in his *Critique of Political Economy* how the development of productivity during the capitalist period would create the possibility of reducing “to a minimum the labor falling to the share of mankind.”

This early insight received extensive theoretical elaboration by Marx in the *Grundrisse*. He clearly perceived how the rise in the organic composition of capital and in the associated productivity of labor reduced the need for work, making its imposition more and more difficult. This creates a problem only for capital. For the working class, on the other hand, it is a continual expansion of its potential ability to reduce necessary labor to a minimum. Revolution must be precisely the creation of a new

²⁶ Mario Tronti, “Lenin in England” *Classe Operaia* Issue No.1, January 1964. Hosted at Marxist Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/it/tronti.htm>>. Accessed Oct 29, 2018.

²⁷ Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically*, p. 58.

historical situation in which, as Marx said, “disposable time will grow for all.... The measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labor-time, but rather disposable time.” Of the content of this time, Marx spoke only of the “free development of individualities,” of the expansion of the multidimensional self-defined needs and activities of the working class. Ultimately this is what defines the working class as a revolutionary subject, not only the negative power to abolish capital but the positive power to increasingly define its own needs, to carve out an expanding sphere of its own movement and to create a new world in the place of capitalism.²⁸

In a footnote to a more recent reprint of the article quoted above, Cleaver adds:

In the time since this essay was written two things have become clearer. First, that revolution involves the working class going beyond its status as “working” class to become a multiplicity for which the activities that we now regroup under the rubric of “work” become but moments in a broader process of self-realization. Second, that what the people who make up that multiplicity create in the place of capital is not “a new world” but, as the Zapatistas have pointed out, many new worlds whose interaction form the stuff of post-capitalist politics.²⁹

Nick Dyer-Witheford, another autonomist, criticized the Old Left in similar terms. Their failing is a tendency towards technological determinism which reduces the agency of the working class — its central role in its own self-liberation — to almost nothing. Rather an almost inevitable transition is driven by the forces of production or social relations of production.³⁰

He criticized, similarly, the excessive technological determinism of theorists of work-discipline like Braverman and Marglin, and David Noble’s work on deskilling through automated CNC machine tools.³¹ According to such analyses the ruling class, by definition, always selects among the variety of technological alternatives for one that best serves its interest; it follows that the ruling classes’ need for control is built into whatever technology is in use and therefore is exploitative by its very nature.³²

This approach is useful, Dyer-Witheford admits, because it sees through the liberal capitalist techno-utopian project’s treatment of technology as class-neutral and positive-sum, and points to the very real class agenda embodied in that project.³³ But its shortcomings are far more significant. It makes the mistake of equating “capitalism’s intentions and its capacities,” and “ignores the consequences of [workers’] counter-strategies and resistances.” In particular, it neglects “the possibility — particularly apparent in the field of media and communications technologies — that capital’s laboring subjects may find real use-values, perhaps even subversive ones, for the new technologies.”³⁴

Autonomism, in contrast, stresses the working class’s role as creative subject of revolutionary struggle, actively laying the basis for a new society.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 59–60.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 60n.

³⁰ Dyer-Witheford, pp. 43–47.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 48–49.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 53–54.

Far from being a passive object of capitalist designs, the worker is in fact the active subject of production, the wellspring of the skills, innovation, and cooperation on which capital depends. Capital attempts to incorporate labor as an object, a component in its cycle of value extraction, so much *labor power*. But this inclusion is always partial, never fully achieved. Laboring subjects resist capital's reduction. Labor is for capital always a problematic "other" that must constantly be controlled and subdued, and that, as persistently, circumvents or challenges this command.³⁵

Workers, autonomists argue, "are not just passive victims of technological change but active agents who persistently contest capital's attempts at control." One of the most important forms this contestation takes is workers use of "their 'invention power' — the creative capacity on which capital depends for its incessant innovation — in order to reappropriate technology."³⁶

In both his rejection of workerism and his celebration of working class self-activity, Dyer-Withford's analysis is rooted in Negri's *Grundrisse*-based approach to Marx, a treatment of class antagonism framed around the working class as revolutionary subject and constitutive element of communist society, and its historic role of abolishing "work" as a conceptual category as it now exists.

The mainstream, mechanistic line of Marxist analysis by the Old Left saw *Capital* as the crowning achievement of Marx's theoretical system, and after the discovery and publication of the *Grundrisse* tended to treat the former as having distilled everything of importance in the latter. Negri, on the other hand, sees *Capital* as only a partial completion of the larger project outlined in the *Grundrisse*.³⁷ Marx himself, in a letter to Engels in February 1858, outlined a six-volume project entitled *Critique of Political Economy*:

- Capital
- Landed Property
- Wage Labour
- The State
- International Trade
- World Market³⁸

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 70–71. The exploitation of open-source versions of small-scale production technology in order to shift production into the commons sector, as described in the previous chapter, is an example of such reappropriation.

³⁷ Antonio Negri, "Marx Beyond Marx: Working Notes on the *Grundrisse* (1979)," in Antonio Negri, *Revolution Retrieved: Writings on Marx, Keynes, Capitalist Crisis and New Social Subjects, 1967–1983*. Volume 1 of the Red Notes Italian Archive. Introductory Notes by John Merrington (London: Red Notes, 1988), p. 166.

³⁸ Quoted in Martin Nicolaus "Foreword" to Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*. Translated by Martin Nicolaus. (Penguin Books, 1973), p. 54n. Marx repeatedly restated this outline in subsequent correspondence, according to commentator Martin Nicolaus, and left no evidence of ever having abandoned this plan for the project. In fact Nicolaus quotes Marx, in Vol. III of *Capital*, mentioning the world market — the subject of the originally projected sixth volume — as a subject outside "the scope of this work," which would be developed in "its eventual continuation." *Ibid.*, p. 54. And in an 1862 letter to Engels, he affirmed that the projected three volumes of *Capital* were basically an edited version of the "Chapter on Capital" in the *Grundrisse*. *Ibid.*, p. 58. Negri's view also has in its favor the fact that by far the majority of the material in the *Grundrisse*, which is to a

The chapter on labor in Volume One of *Capital* did not at all cover the ground envisioned by Marx in the projected book on wage labor; he dealt with it only in part, in “reduced and objective terms” in that chapter, whereas the analysis in the *Grundrisse* that was never incorporated into a separate volume on labor, was intended to link “Marx’s critique of the wage and his revolutionary definition of communism and communist subjectivity.”³⁹

4) The open-ended dynamism of Marx’s “system” is directed wholly towards identifying the relationship between crisis and the emergence of revolutionary subjectivity.... In this regard, the *Grundrisse* is perhaps the most important—maybe the only—Marxian text on the question of *transition*, and it is curious to note that among the thousand and one positions published on the question of transition, this fact goes completely unregarded.⁴⁰

Translated into plain language, analysis of the working class in terms of “revolutionary subjectivity” and its role in the transition means looking at the actual working class as it exists right now, how it exercises agency through its actual practices, forms of organization and activity, and how those practices and organizational forms prefigure (or form the nucleus of) the future communist society it will create.

More recently, in language much like Cleaver’s, John Holloway challenged the vulgar Marxist focus on capitalism as a closed “system” or “structure,” framing it instead as a contested process in which he chose to emphasize the “doing” of the working class in resisting the ongoing imposition of commodification and abstract labor, and creating prefigurative cracks in the system where the law of value does not apply. Starting from the “party-centered thinking that had dominated Marxist discussion” before the 1994 EZLN uprising, he wrote:

If capitalism is understood as a closed system governed by the “laws of capitalist development,” then class struggle will be focused on building the organisation that can break this system with its laws and logic, and this organisation is generally understood to be the Party. However, if the nouns are changed into verbs..., then all this changes....

The first thing that changes is the direction of struggle. Instead of thinking of struggle as being our struggle against an established system of domination, we come to understand that this “established system” is a constant and desperate struggle to impose itself as a coherent logical system and reproduce itself as such. Money is not a thing, nor is it a stable form of social relations, it is a constant struggle to form people’s behaviour in a certain way, a struggle that involves the employment of millions and millions of police, supported by psychologists, teachers, parents, and so on, and that quite literally leads to the death of thousands and thousands of people each day from violence, starvation, and untreated curable diseases. Capitalism is an

large extent coextensive with that (although broken down into readable form and more coherently organized) in the *Preface to the Critique of Political Economy* and the three volumes of *Capital*, is a single bulky “Chapter on Capital.” This strongly suggests that, aside from occasional writings, Marx’s body of major work did not go far beyond the first volume of the originally envisioned six-volume *Critique of Political Economy*.

³⁹ Negri, “Marx Beyond Marx,” p. 166.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

attack, an unceasing aggression against us, forcing us out of bed and off to work each morning, pushing us to work faster in the factory or the office or the university, coercing students and teachers to direct their concerns to that which will increase the profitability of capital, driving peasants off the land, destroying communities. It is an attack that constantly provokes resistance-and-rebellion and is never sure of its outcome....

The logic of capital is not separate from struggle: it *is* struggle. Marx gives a succinct summary of the laws of capitalist development: “Accumulate, accumulate! That is Moses and the Prophets!...” But accumulation is constant struggle; there is nothing automatic about it....

...The struggle against capital is the refusal to accept the reproduction of its logic; it is... the cracking of its totalising. These refusals... have not yet broken the constantly renewed drive of the logic of capital, but they do suggest a very different concept of revolutionary politics. The possibility of revolution is not a question of building the organisation that will one day take state power and break capital: rather it is the recognition, creation, expansion, multiplication, and confluence of all these breakings of the logic of capital, all these creations of different ways of doing things.⁴¹

Capitalism is indeed a “system” that follows laws and is subject to crisis tendencies, but those crisis tendencies are not an impersonal force we have to wait on to work its dialectical magic while we look forward to the Revolution that will occur when the augurs of historical materialism tell us conditions are ready.⁴²

Crisis is the expression of capital’s incapacity to exploit us sufficiently to secure its own profitability, of its inability to submit us to its logic, to shape our daily activity in a way that guarantees its constant expansion: in that sense *we* are the crisis of capital, and capital’s struggle is the struggle to subordinate us more effectively.

Primitive accumulation is not simply a past event that occurred at the establishment of capitalism; but an ongoing process that continues to be written in letters of fire and blood. Indeed the “establishment of capitalism” itself is an ongoing process, whose success is by no means guaranteed.

...[T]he reproduction of capital cannot be conceived of in any static sense as the automatic renewal of pre-given forms of social relations... [T]here is constant resistance to the reproduction of capitalist domination and this resistance itself impels the constant reformulation of the relations of domination.... Inevitably, this reformulation is always a struggle to impose or reimpose certain forms of social relations, to contain social activity within or channel social activity into those (developing) forms.⁴³

⁴¹ John Holloway, “Preface: From Nouns to Verbs,” *We Are the Crisis of Capital: A John Holloway Reader* (PM Press, 2019), xi-xiii.

⁴² *Ibid.* xiv.

⁴³ Holloway, “The State in Everyday Struggle,” in *Ibid.* p. 15.

III. The 1968 Movements and the Transition to Horizontalist Praxis

David Graeber argues that the 1968 movements were “the first move in the opposite direction” from the Bolshevik Revolution. While the latter was in the Jacobin tradition of revolutionizing society from above, the “world revolution of 1968... was more anarchist in spirit”: It was characterized by “the revolt against bureaucratic conformity, the rejection of party politics, the dedication to the creation of a new, liberatory culture that would allow for genuine individual self-realization.”⁴⁴

Immanuel Wallerstein, going further, saw 1968 as the key event of the 20th century, the beginning of the fracturing of the capitalist world system: “...it was the most important historical event of the twentieth century. It dwarfs the Russian Revolution. It dwarfs 1989.”⁴⁵ As his interviewer, Gregory Williams, added, contrary to the mainstream perception that 1968 was a flash in the pan with no lasting effect, it never died out. 1989, the Seattle movements and 2011 movements were all aftershocks.⁴⁶

Wallerstein distinguished the movements of the 1968 uprisings from those of the Old Left. The latter, as he described it, was composed of movements that “emerged as bureaucratic structures” like political parties and labor unions, and believed that “the immediate source of real power was located in the state apparatus and that any attempt to ignore its political centrality was doomed to failure, since the state would successfully suppress any thrust towards anarchism or cultural nationalism.”

The New Left, a loose collection of tendencies that encompassed most of the 1968 movements, amounted to a considerable break from that model. To the extent that the Old Left had triumphed either in Social Democratic, Marxist-Leninist, or radical post-colonial regimes, the successes had been limited by the countries’ ongoing role in the global division of labor within the capitalist world system.

The conclusion that the world’s populations drew from the performance of the classical antisystemic movements in power was negative. They ceased to believe that these parties would bring about a glorious future or a more egalitarian world and no longer gave them their legitimation; and having lost confidence in the movements, they also withdrew their faith in the state as a mechanism of transformation. This did not mean that large sections of the population would no longer vote for such parties in elections; but it had become a defensive vote, for lesser evils, not an affirmation of ideology or expectations.⁴⁷

There have been some lasting features of the post-1968 movements, in contrast to the Old Left. Most notably, according to Wallerstein, they have rejected the primacy or hegemony of the

⁴⁴ David Graeber, “Situating Occupy Lessons From the Revolutionary Past,” InterActivist Info Exchange, December 4, 2011 <<http://interactivist.autonomedia.org/node/36685>>.

⁴⁵ Gregory P. Williams, “Special Contribution: Interview with Immanuel Wallerstein,” *American Sociological Association* vol. 19 no. 2 (2013), p. 208. <http://content.csbs.utah.edu/~mli/Economics%207004/Williams_Interview_vol19_no2.pdf>.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Wallerstein, “Revolts Against the System,” *New Left Review* 18 (November-December 2002) <<https://newleftreview.org/issues/II18/articles/immanuel-wallerstein-new-revolts-against-the-system>>.

conventional “proletariat” in the socialist movements of the imperial core, and of the majority national identity in national liberation struggles. And they have rejected the demands of those in control of the institutional machinery of such movements that all other issues be rejected as secondary, and postponed until “after the revolution.” In 1968 the concept of the “leading role” of the industrial proletariat “was being challenged on the grounds that the industrial proletariat was and would always structurally remain just one component among others of the world’s working class.” The Old Left treated womens’ liberation struggles, racial justice movements, etc., as “at best secondary and at worst diversionary.”

The “old left” groups tended to argue that their own achievement of state power had to be the prime objective and the prior achievement, after which (they argued) the secondary oppressions would disappear of themselves or at least they could be resolved by appropriate political action in the “post-revolutionary” era.⁴⁸

Despite these official dogmas it had become clear that the stereotypical “proletarian” of vulgar Marxism was no more representative of the laboring strata in the mid-20th century than in the mid-19th, and would probably never be. The national identities lionized by national liberation movements were likewise largely mythical, constructed at the expense of national minorities and other oppressed groups. And in countries where parties of the Left *had* come to power, it was clear that oppression along racial, gender and other axes had been addressed “after the revolution” hardly better than before. 1968 reflected the realization of these facts.

After 1968, none of the “other” groups in struggle — neither women nor racial “minorities” nor sexual “minorities” nor the handicapped nor the “ecologists” (those who refused the acceptance, unquestioningly, of the imperatives of increased global production) — would ever again accept the legitimacy of “waiting” upon some other revolution.⁴⁹

Wallerstein observed that the rise of post-1968 politics had reopened debate “on the fundamental strategy of social transformation,” and that it would be “the key political debate of the coming twenty years.” But given that he wrote in 1989, before both the fall of communism in the Soviet camp and the beginning of the EZLN insurgency in Chiapas, his remarks were entirely tentative and inconclusive.⁵⁰

He did note, among the list of unanswered questions, the following:

1. Is it possible to achieve significant political change without taking state power?
2. Are there forms of social power worth conquering other than “political” power?
3. Should antisystemic movements take the form of organizations?
4. Is there any political basis on which antisystemic movements, West and East, North (both West & East) and South, can in reality join hands?⁵¹

⁴⁸ Immanuel Wallerstein and Sharon Zukin, “1968, Revolution in the World-System: Theses and Queries,” *Theory and Society* vol. 18 no. 4 (July 1989), pp. 437–438.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 439.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 440–442.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 442–446.

These questions, written from the standpoint of 1989, carry considerable irony for those of us today who read them in light of the answers since given by the Zapatistas, the Seattle movement, the Arab Spring, M15 and Syntagma, Occupy, and all the offshoots like Black Matters that persist to the present day. The entire period since 1994 has been an extended series of answers to the questions Wallerstein asked in 1989.

Writing over twenty years later, Wallerstein himself was able to characterize the post-1968 period much more definitively with those events in retrospect. In addition to the fluid and somewhat unpromising mix of new movements that existed in the late 1980s — Radical Maoist movements inspired by the Cultural Revolution that fizzled out in the 70s; issue-oriented movements like the Greens and racial and gender justice groups; and human rights and civil society organizations — had arisen, far more importantly, the anti-globalization movements of the 90s.⁵²

IV. The Post-1994 Movements

Negri and Hardt see the post-1968 wave of movements supplanting the Old Left as analogous to the social factory supplanting Fordist production. A focus on self-activity and subjectivity means that the multitude, which grew out of the post-Fordist model of organizing production, carries that model over into the conduct of political struggle; and this model of conducting political struggle, in turn, prefigures the organization of post-capitalist society. Although for them this was to some extent a qualitative feature of the Left for the entire post-1968 period, it has been especially true of the post-1994 movements with their increased reliance on network communications. The post-Fordist evolution of praxis reached its full development in the “horizontalism” of the post-1994 networked movements.

Organizations for networked struggle overlap to a large extent with the organization of post-Fordist production, which permeates society at large. If post-Fordist production is coextensive with society at large — the “social factory” — then so is the revolutionary subject.⁵³

All the different forms of waged and non-waged labor throughout society, and the relationships between them, are creating the body of a new society. “[T]he singular figures of post-modern labor do not remain fragmented and dispersed but tend through communication and collaboration to converge toward a common social being...”

...This common social being is the powerful matrix that is central in the production and reproduction of contemporary society and has the potential to create a new, alternative society. We should regard this common social being as a new flesh, amorphous flesh that as yet forms no body. The important question at this point is what kind of body will these common singularities form? One possibility is that they will be enlisted in the global armies at the service of capital.... This new social flesh, in other words, may be formed into the productive organs of the global social body of capital. Another possibility, however, is that these common singularities organize themselves autonomously through a kind of “power of the flesh.”... The power of the flesh is the power to transform ourselves through historical action and create a new world.⁵⁴

⁵² Wallerstein, “Revolts Against the System.”

⁵³ Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (Penguin, 2005), p. 82.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p. 159.

For Negri and Hardt, the central question is whether this new networked social body will remain organized as a social factory under the control of capital, or will cast capital aside as superfluous. To date “the common productive flesh of the multitude has been formed into the global political body of capital, divided geographically by hierarchies of labor and wealth and ruled by a multilevel structure of economic, legal, and political powers.” Our hope for the future, in contrast, is that “the productive flesh of the multitude can organize itself otherwise and discover an alternative to the global political body of capital.”⁵⁵

...Our point of departure is our recognition that the production of subjectivity and the production of the common can together form a spiral, symbiotic relationship. Subjectivity, in other words, is produced through cooperation and communication and, in turn, this produced subjectivity itself produces new forms of cooperation and communication, which in turn produce new subjectivity, and so forth.... Perhaps in this process of metamorphosis and constitution we should recognize the formation of the body of the multitude, a fundamentally new kind of body, a common body, a democratic body.... If the multitude is to form a body..., it will remain always and necessarily an open, plural composition and never become a unitary whole divided by hierarchical organs.⁵⁶

The organization of struggle, like the organization of production, is stigmergic.

In economics we can see numerous instances in which unitary control is not necessary for innovation and that, on the contrary, innovation requires common resources, open access and free interaction.⁵⁷

The multitude’s networked methods of struggle are a direct outgrowth of the changes in the organization of production by which the multitude itself has been constituted.

...The global cycle of struggles develops in the form of a distributed network. Each local struggle functions as a node that communicates with all the other nodes without any hub or center of intelligence. Each struggle remains singular and tied to its local conditions but at the same time is immersed in the common web. This form of organization is the most fully realized political example we have of the concept of the multitude. The global extension of the common does not negate the singularity of each of those who participates in the network. The same global cycle of struggles organizes and mobilizes the multitude.

This was in contrast to “the dominant organizational forms of our recent past,” which was “based on the identity of the struggle, and its unity is organized under central leadership, such as the party.”

At the 1999 Seattle protests, for example..., what most surprised and puzzled observers was that groups previously thought to be in opposition to each other — trade

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 189.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 189–90.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 337.

unionists, environmentalists, church groups and anarchists, and so forth — acted together without any central, unifying structure that subordinates or sets aside their differences.... In practice the multitude provides a model whereby our expressions of singularity are not reduced or diminished in our communication and collaboration with others in struggle, with our forming greater common habits, practices, conduct, and desires—with, in short, the global mobilization and extension of the common....

....The new cycle of struggles is a mobilization of the common that takes the form of an open, distributed network, in which no center exerts control and all nodes express themselves freely.⁵⁸

And the post-capitalist society of the future, in turn, will be an extension of this same organizational logic.

If this has all been true of the New Left since the 1960s, the trend has been intensified by the collapse of both Marxism-Leninism and Social Democracy in the face of neo-liberalism. As Peter Critchley argues:

With the demise of state socialism — the collapse of Communism and the internal degeneration of Social Democracy — one is witnessing the potential re-emergence of an independent socialist politics....

The reemergence of socialism ‘from below’ challenges the way that socialism has been institutionalised in the form of ‘the party’, Social Democratic or Communist....

Authors and traditions long suppressed by Second International orthodoxy, Nazism and Communism, and the Cold War could now be recovered as the hold of dominant perspectives began to weaken. Individuals like Luxemburg, Korsch, Pannekoek and Gorter, Mattick and Landauer, whose own socialisms had been suppressed by dominant political interests, could now be presented as offering an alternative. Gramsci’s attempts to define a new socialist politics could now be appreciated without having to suppress critical insights for reasons of party. The difficulties and ambiguities that Lukacs’ found himself in within the international Communist movement could now be resolved on the side of socialist revolution.

Perhaps the most important development of all is the opportunity that this collapse of old certainties and orthodoxies affords to actually read Marx without political blinkers. Marx has been released from the straight jacket that Social Democracy and Communism have imposed upon him. And Marx’s emancipatory and critical project has been long submerged under the claims that Social Democracy and Communism have made to monopolise socialism and the working class constituency. One need no longer produce a marxism for the parties, a process which begun with the Second International.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 217–218.

⁵⁹ Peter Critchley, “The Lost Tradition of Marxism and Anarchism,” in Critchley, *Beyond Modernity and Postmodernity: Vol 6 Associational Socialism* (1997) <https://www.academia.edu/788032/The_Lost_Tradition_of_Marxism_and_Anarchism_-_the_Third_Stream_of_Socialist_Thought>.

Graeber, an anarchist who played a major part in the formation of the Occupy movement, describes the networked movements of the 1990s and 2000s as “a kind of continual series of tiny ‘68s...”

After the Zapatista world revolution — they called it the Fourth World War — began in ‘94, such mini-‘68s began happening so thick and fast the process almost seemed to have become institutionalized: Seattle, Genoa, Cancun, Quebec, Hong Kong... And insofar as it was indeed institutionalized, by global networks the Zapatistas had helped set up, it was on the basis of a kind of small-a anarchism based on principles of decentralized direct democracy and direct action. The prospect of facing a genuine global democratic movement seems to have so frightened the US authorities, in particular, that they went into veritable panic mode. There is of course a traditional antidote to the threat of mass mobilization from below. You start a war. It doesn’t really matter who the war is against. The point is just to have one; preferably, on as wide a scale as possible. In this case the US government had the extraordinary advantage of a genuine pretext — a ragtag crew of hitherto largely ineffective right-wing Islamists who, for once in history, had attempted a wildly ambitious terrorist scheme and actually pulled it off. Rather than simply track down those responsible, the US began throwing billions of dollars of armament at anything in sight. Ten years later, the resulting paroxysm of imperial overstretch appears to have undermined the very basis of the American Empire. What we are now witnessing is the process of that empire’s collapse.⁶⁰

Wallerstein, similarly, called the 1994 EZLN uprising “the beginning of the counteroffensive of the world left against the relatively short-lived successes of the world right between the 1970s and 1994.... What the Zapatistas did was to remind them (and the world left) that there was indeed an alternative....” The uprising “paved the way to the successful protests at Seattle in 1999 and then elsewhere....”⁶¹

The EZLN itself, as the movement that launched a quarter-century wave (so far), is remarkable in that it was an organization with fairly conventional Marxist-Leninist roots, and was expected to follow the trajectory of previous such abortive guerrilla warfare efforts — but instead followed an unprecedented path both in its rejection of the standard M-L playbook, and in its success. As John Holloway remarks,

it is precisely the fact that they are not an orthodox guerrilla group that has confounded the state time and time again in its dealings with them. It is precisely the fact that they are not an orthodox group of revolutionaries that makes them theoretically and practically the most exciting development in oppositional politics in the world for many a long year.⁶²

The original founders of EZLN had been members of the Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional (FLN), a guerrilla organization that was created in 1969 in Monterrey and driven underground in the

⁶⁰ Graeber, “Situating Occupy Lessons From the Revolutionary Past.”

⁶¹ Immanuel Wallerstein, “The Neo-Zapatistas: Twenty Years After,” *Immanuel Wallerstein*, May 1, 2014 <<http://www.iwallerstein.com/neozapatistas-twenty-years/>>.

⁶² Holloway, “Dignity’s Revolt,” in *We Are the Crisis of Capital*, pp. 116–117.

early 1970s. Its guiding principles were “the science of history and society, Marxism-Leninism, which has demonstrated its validity in all the triumphant revolutions of this century,” and it described its goal as “the taking of political power by the workers of the countryside and of the cities of the Mexican Republic, in order to install a popular republic with a socialist system.” During their time underground they cross-pollinated with members of other armed Leftist organizations and formed the EZLN in the early ‘80s.⁶³

From then on until their emergence on New Years Day 1994, they engaged in a process of growing interaction with Indigenous communities in the Lacandon jungle of Chiapas that led, especially from the late ‘80s on, to the Indigenous population’s takeover of most leadership functions and the organization discarding most of the major bullet-points of orthodox Leninism. As Subcommandante Insurgente Marcos stated in mid-1995, their “conception of the world and of revolution was badly dented in the confrontation with the indigenous realities of Chiapas.” The initiative in this collaboration was taken largely by the local peasants, who requested EZLN help in their ongoing struggle with the national government and its attacks on their communal land rights, and who came to comprise the bulk of EZLN membership. As Holloway described it, “the EZLN was transformed from being a guerrilla group to being a community in arms.”⁶⁴

Central to the EZLN’s retreat from orthodox Marxist-Leninist ideology was its abandonment of vanguardism. As recounted by Marcos in a late 1995 interview, “The original EZLN, the one that is formed in 1983, is a political organization in the sense that it speaks and what it says has to be done. The indigenous communities teach it to listen, and that is what we learn.”⁶⁵ And he is quoted elsewhere:

I think that our only virtue as theorists was to have the humility to recognize that our theoretical scheme did not work, that it was very limited, that we had to adapt ourselves to the reality that was being imposed on us.

This was more than just talk. The abandonment of vanguardism was reflected in two of the basic organizing principles of the Zapatista movement: “*preguntando caminamos*” (“asking, we walk”) and “*mandar obedeciendo*” (“to command obeying”), which in practice required community-wide consensus decision-making, and leadership positions that were recallable at will.⁶⁶

The significance of all this can’t be exaggerated. The departure from orthodox Leninist praxis was fundamental. To quote Holloway again:

Above all, learning to listen meant turning everything upside down.... [The revolutionary tradition of talking] has a long-established theoretical basis in the concepts of Marxism-Leninism. The tradition of talking derives, on the one hand, from the idea that theory (class consciousness) must be brought to the masses by the party and, on the other, from the idea that capitalism must be analysed from above, from the movement of capital rather than from the movement of anti-capitalist struggle. When the emphasis shifts to listening, both of these theoretical suppositions are undermined. The whole relation between theory and practice is thrown into question:

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 116–117, 117n.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 117–118, 117n.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

theory can no longer be seen as being brought from outside but is obviously the product of everyday practice.⁶⁷

This is a direct repudiation of the tenets of Leninism that “the struggles of the working class... cannot rise above reformist demands, unless there is the intervention of a revolutionary party.... The self-emancipation of the proletariat is impossible.”⁶⁸

Another relevant feature of the EZLN’s new style of praxis is its adoption of a horizontalist model in its relation to other groups. Marcos stated that the EZLN saw other groups pursuing their own struggles — “in the meda, ...in the trade unions, in the schools, among the teachers, among the students, in groups of workers, in peasant organisations” — as “accomplices” with whom the EZLN’s struggle resonated, people “tuned in to the same frequency” with whom the EZLN had many things in common, but over whose struggles the EZLN claimed no leadership. This was true not only of popular struggles in Mexico, but of their echoes and mirrors “in the streets of Europe, the suburbs of Asia, the countryside of America, the towns of Africa, and the houses of Oceania....”⁶⁹

This organizational and strategic approach evoked no little skepticism from the orthodox Left, according to Patrick Cuninghame and Carolina Ballesteros Corona. The more dogmatic sections of the international radical Left looked askance at the EZLN’s

strategy for revolutionary transformation to a post-capitalist society which is based not on a vanguardist seizure of the state and the commanding heights of the economy, let alone parliamentary reformism, but on an alliance with other grassroots social movements, including the Colonos, rural migrant squatters on the periphery of the main urban centres, the students, gay and women’s movements, and the independent unions of teachers, electrical and transport workers. The EZLN has refused to lead or hegemonize this gathering network of movements, but instead has sought to struggle side-by-side with them, consulting civil society at every stage in its negotiations with the government, also through self-organised referenda on a national scale to hear their opinions and suggestions for changes in its strategy.⁷⁰

In terms of attempts at organizational coordination with other movements, one-off meetings and congresses (e.g. the National Democratic Convention in Summer 1994 which brought thousands of activists to the jungles of Chiapas, a 1995 consultation on the future of the EZLN attended by over a million people, etc.) resulted in astonishing success and generated significant enthusiasm around the world. On the other hand attempts at establishing permanent institutional ties with other struggles nationally and worldwide, with standing coordination bodies, largely fizzled out. This demonstrates, Holloway infers, that the main real force of the EZLN has been “the much less structured notion of resonance...”⁷¹

The EZLN uprising, and the global movement in support of it, were the beginning of a wave of networked global insurgencies against neoliberal capitalism that has lasted to the present day.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 137–138.

⁷⁰ Patrick Cuninghame and Carolina Ballesteros Corona, “A Rainbow at Midnight: Zapatistas and Autonomy,” *Capital & Class* 22:3 (October 1998), p. 16.

⁷¹ Holloway, “Dignity’s Revolt,” pp. 138–139.

Aside from some demonstrations in the 90s in Europe (the 1998 Multilateral Agreement on Investment and J18 in 1999, in particular), organized through the same pattern of networking of affinity groups that has characterized the entire wave of struggles, the next notable large-scale point on the timeline was the Seattle anti-WTO demonstration of 1999. The Seattle demonstrations were the first in a series that targeted meetings of every major multilateral institution through 2000 and 2001, along with both American major parties' nominating conventions in 2000. They largely petered out in the wave of post-9/11 repression, aside from a large-scale wave of demonstrations in opposition to the Iraq war in early 2003.

The Wisconsin demos against Scott Walker in 2010 prefigured Occupy. And in early 2011, sparked by revelations in the Wikileaks dump of State Department cables by Chelsea Manning, the Arab Spring began with a wave of protests that brought down the Tunisian government. The Arab Spring inspired the M15 movement in Spain, Syntagma in Greece, and Occupy in the United States — a massive wave of protests whose aftershocks (Black Lives Matter, BDS, prison strikes, and NoDAPL among many others) persist to the present.

Aside from these summary paragraphs I have no inclination — let alone space — to recapitulate their history in greater detail. The comments below are about the wave of movements as a whole.

A common feature of the post-1994 struggles is that such networked struggles tend to reproduce themselves from place to place. Note that the following extended passage by Negri and Hardt was written after the Seattle movement, but before the Arab Spring:

Extensively, the common is mobilized in communication from one local struggle to another. Traditionally... the geographical expansion of movements takes the form of an *international cycle of struggles* in which revolts spread from one local context to another like a contagious disease through the communication of common practices and desires.... In each of these cycles of struggles, the common that is mobilized extensively and communicates across the globe is not only the commonly recognized enemy — such as slavery, industrial capital, or colonial regimes — but also common methods of combat, common ways of living, and common desires for a better world....

A new international cycle finally emerged around the issues of globalization in the late 1990s. The coming-out party of the new cycle of struggles were the protests at the WTO summit in Seattle in 1999.... Suddenly the riots against IMF austerity programs in one country, protests against a World Bank project in another, and demonstrations against NAFTA in a third were all revealed to be elements of a common cycle of struggles. The cycle of struggles has been consolidated in a certain sense at the annual meetings of the World Social Forum and the various regional social forums. At each of these social forums activists, NGOs, and intellectuals meet to exchange views on the problems of the present form of globalization and the possibilities for an alternative form. Each social forum also functions as a celebration of the commonality that extends throughout the various movements and revolts across the globe that form this cycle.... We should emphasize, once again, that what the forces mobilized in this new global cycle have is not just a common enem... but also common practices, languages, conduct, habits, forms of life, and desires for a better future. The cycle, in other words, is not only reactive but also active and creative....

The global mobilization of the common in this new cycle of struggle does not negate or even overshadow the local nature or singularity of each struggle. The communication with other struggles, in fact, reinforces the power and augments the wealth of each single one....

The global cycle of struggles develops in the form of distributed network. Each local struggle functions as a node that communicates with all the other nodes without any hub or center of intelligence. Each struggle remains singular and tied to its local conditions but at the same time is immersed in the common web. This form of organization is the most fully realized example we have of the multitude.⁷²

It is, accordingly, a mistake to talk about the “death” of networked movements like Occupy. Even asking “What happened to Occupy?” or “What happened to M15?” as though they were discrete entities with a beginning and an end reflects a misconception as to their nature. It makes more sense to think of the whole trajectory of movements including the Arab Spring, M15 and Syntagma, Madison, Occupy, and its successors, as one loose global network of associated networked movements. This networked movement is always throwing up new avatars, with new names, which appear to decline after a while. But when something new arises — and it always does, whether in the same country or halfway around the world — it’s built on the same infrastructure and foundations, and the same social capital, as its predecessors. Here’s how Nathan Schneider described the phenomenon in an interview:

[Occupy] very powerfully succeeded at introducing activists from around the country to one another and turned a lot of people into activists that weren’t before. It produced a tremendous number of networks, both online and offline, which continue to mobilize people on a number of fronts, though few are still called Occupy.

It also won a ton of disparate victories in communities across the country, from small and large labor disputes, a dramatic reduction in stop and frisks in New York, to the overturning of regulations concerning the policing of the homeless in various cities. It strengthened and encouraged various types of political organization as well as turned movements into international networks around the world that didn’t exist before.⁷³

John Holloway dismisses concerns about the institutional continuity or persistence of any particular movement.

I think there is an accumulation of experience, and also an accumulation of growing awareness that spreads from one country to another, that capitalism just isn’t working and that it is in serious problems... There is a growing confidence perhaps that the cracks we create or the crazinesses we create may really be the basis for a new world and a new society, and may really be the only way forward.

What I don’t like about the idea of perpetuation is that it has to be a smooth upward progress. I don’t think it works like that. I think it’s more like a social flow of

⁷² Negri and Hardt, *Multitude*, pp. 213–217.

⁷³ Joel Dietz, ““Occupy Wall Street turned movements into international networks that didn’t exist before,” *OuiShare*, January 7, 2013 <<http://ouishare.net/2013/01/nathan-schneider-occupy-wall-street/>>.

rebellion, something that moves throughout the world, with eruptions in one place and then in another place. But there are continuities below the discontinuities. We have to think in terms of disrupting bubbling movements rather than thinking that it all depends on whether we can perpetuate the movement in one place. If we think in terms of perpetuation in one place, I think at times it can lead us into either an institutionalization, which I think is not much help, or it can lead us into a sense of defeat, perhaps, which I don't think is right.⁷⁴

The 2011 movements have permanently changed the general environment. As Stacco Troncoso put it:

Think of a sugar cube. Held in your hand it is compact, with a recognizable shape and texture, easy to measure and describe. Drop the sugar cube into a cup of coffee and stir that around. Magic! The cube has disappeared. Take a sip, though, and you'll agree that the flavor has changed.

As already mentioned, the ripples of the 2011 movements were, in fact, quite powerful. They include the BDS shutdown of ports, Black Lives Matter, and NoDAPL. The Bernie Sanders presidential campaign of 2016 was infused with energy from Occupy, and in Spain the new municipalist movements of Barcelona and Madrid were driven in large part by veterans of M15.⁷⁵ Since January 2017 the wave has continued in the form of movements in resistance to Trump, like demonstrations shutting down ICE headquarters in many cities in protest against children in cages, and above all as of this writing (September 2020) the BLM uprisings after the George Floyd murder.

And the arc of movements from 2011 to the present has staying power, in part, because it reflects the consciousness of a generation that was galvanized by a set of common experiences. Participants in recent uprisings in Latin America, Lebanon, and Hong Kong, the Extinction Rebellion protestors in London, etc., are young Millennials and Generation Z, the younger brothers and sisters of those who participated in the 2011 wave — as *The Guardian's* Jack Shenker puts it, “the children of the financial crash.”

Each of these upheavals has its own spark – a hike in transport fares in Santiago, or a proposed tax on users of messaging apps like WhatsApp in Beirut – and each involves different patterns of governance and resistance....

And yet it's clear that we are witnessing the biggest surge in global protest activity since the early 2010s, when a “movement of the squares” saw mass rallies in capital cities across the Arab world, followed by Occupy demonstrations in the global north. Historically speaking, the past decade has seen more protests than at any time since the 1960s....

The most significant connection is generational. The majority of those protesting now are the children of the financial crisis – a generation that has come of age during

⁷⁴ Jerome Roos, “Talking About a Revolution With John Holloway,” *John Holloway*, April 13, 2013 <<http://www.johnholloway.com.mx/2013/05/01/talking-about-a-revolution-with-john-holloway/>>.

⁷⁵ Stacco Troncoso and Ann Marie Utratel, “Commons in the time of monsters: How P2P Politics can change the world, one city at a time,” *Commons Transition*, June 5 <<http://commonstransition.org/commons-time-monsters/>>.

the strange and febrile years after the collapse of a broken economic and political orthodoxy, and before its replacement has emerged.⁷⁶

The most important thing to remember, as Graeber pointed out, is that “once people’s political horizons have been broadened, the change is permanent.

Hundreds of thousands of Americans (and not only Americans, of course, but Greeks, Spaniards, and Tunisians) now have direct experience of self-organization, collective action, and human solidarity. This makes it almost impossible to go back to one’s previous life and see things the same way. While the world’s financial and political elites skate blindly toward the next 2008-scale crisis, we’re continuing to carry out occupations of buildings, farms, foreclosed homes, and workplaces — temporary or permanent — organizing rent strikes, seminars, and debtors’ assemblies, and in doing so, laying the groundwork for a genuinely democratic culture, and introducing the skills, habits, and experience that would make an entirely new conception of politics come to life.⁷⁷

The rise of networked, horizontal resistance movements has given rise to a growing dichotomy between the old-line, verticalist Institutional Left and the new autonomous Left. As described by Cristina Flesher Fominaya,

[t]he classic organizational model of the Institutional Left is *representative*, with vertical structures..., decision-making through a voting system or through negotiations between representatives, and a clear division of labour...

...The Institutional Left model defends the transformation of society through its institutions, either by controlling them or by influencing them....

The autonomous model, for its part rejects representative democracy and majority rule; instead, it defends a participatory model, based on direct democracy and self-governance, with horizontal (non-hierarchical structures, decision-making through consensus....

The network form of organization and communication allows for the integration and interaction of multiple issues and identities.... The networks are ‘biodegradable’, dissolving and regenerating into new forms of organization and action....⁷⁸

The horizontal movements of the last few decades differ from the revolutionary movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries, among other ways, in that the methods of struggle are becoming more and more prefigurative — in Marina Sitrin’s words, movements

⁷⁶ Jack Shenker, “This wave of global protest is being led by the children of the financial crash,” *The Guardian*, October 29, 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/oct/29/global-protest-children-financial-crash-hong-kong-london>>.

⁷⁷ David Graeber, *The Democracy Project: A History, a Crisis, a Movement* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2013), xix-xx.

⁷⁸ Cristina Flesher Fominaya, *Social Movements and Globalization: How Protests, Occupations and Uprisings are Changing the World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 67, 69.

that are creating the future in their present social relationships. Unlike past movements, social change isn't deferred to a later date by demanding reform from the state, or by taking state power and eventually, instituting these reforms.... [T]heir strategy for the creation of a new society is not grounded in either state dependency or the taking of power to create another state. Their intention is, to borrow John Holloway's phrase, to change the world without taking power.⁷⁹

Sitrin, in the Introduction to her book of the same name, says *horizontalidad* was a word coined to reflect the principles of the new social movements in Argentina, "a break with vertical ways of organizing and relating" based on "democratic communication on a level plane."

They are working class people taking over factories and running them collectively. They are the urban middle class, many recently declassed, working to meet their needs in solidarity with those around them. They are the unemployed, like so many unemployed around the globe, facing the prospect of never finding regular work, yet collectively finding ways to survive and become self-sufficient, using mutual-aid and love. They are autonomous indigenous communities struggling to liberate stolen land.

In Argentina, these active movements are now communicating, assisting, and learning from one another, and thus constructing new types of networks that reject the hierarchical template bequeathed to them by established politics.⁸⁰

S. Tormey's description of the global movement against the Iraq war in early 2003 sounds a lot like the networked movements that have arisen since:

What they (virtual networks) fostered was a form of interaction that preserved the autonomy and integrity of the constituent parts. No group was subject to the will of another. No group had to recognize one as a leading group or as the 'vanguard' of the movement. There was no need for bureaucracy, permanent staffs, officials, 'leadership', or even premises, beyond somewhere to house a server. Here was a form of interaction that denied the need for the very institutional and logistical framework that had for a century defined the terms and conditions of political activism.⁸¹

Negri and Hardt wrote that the 2011 movements "share[d] their internal organization as a multitude."

The foreign press corps searched desperately in Tunisia and Egypt for a leader of the movements. During the most intense period of the Tahrir Square occupation, for example, they would each day presume a different figure was the *real* leader.... What the media couldn't understand or accept was that there was no leader in Tahrir

⁷⁹ Marina Sitrin, *Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina* (Oakland: AK Press, 2006), p. 4.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.

⁸¹ S. Tormey, *Anti-Capitalism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2004) p. 65, in Athina Karatzogianni, "The Impact of the Internet during the Iraq war on the peace movement, war coverage and war-related cyberattacks," *Cultural Technology and Policy Journal* vol. 4 no. 1 (2004) <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/cdrg/Downloads/iraq_war.pdf> p. 5.

Square. The movement's refusal to have a leader was recognizable throughout the year but perhaps was most pronounced in Wall Street. A series of intellectuals and celebrities made appearances at Zuccotti Park, but no one could consider any of them leaders; they were guests of the multitude. From Cairo and Madrid to Athens and New York, the movements instead developed horizontal mechanisms for organization. They didn't build headquarters or form central committees but spread out like swarms, and most important, they created democratic practices of decision making so that all participants could lead together.⁸²

It is true that these struggles confront the same enemy, characterized by the powers of debt, the media, the security regime, and the corrupt systems of political representation. However, the primary point is that their practices, strategies, and objectives, although different, are able to connect and combine with each other to form a plural, shared project. The singularity of each struggle fosters rather than hinders the creation of a common terrain.

...[T]hese movements were born in something like a communicative laboratory, and indeed, the glue that hold them together seems initially to be linguistic, cooperative, and network based (like many forms of cognitive labor)... The horizontal decision-making processes of the multitude require temporal autonomy. The communication of slogans and militant desires often begins in small community and neighborhood groups, but then at a certain point spreads virally....

...Small groups and communities find ways to connect with one another and to create common projects not by renouncing but by expressing their differences. Federalism is thus a motor of composition.

...The pluralism of struggles that emerge from differing traditions and express different goals combines with a cooperative and federative logic of assembly to create a model of constituent democracy in which these differences are able to interact and connect with each other to form a shared composition. We have thus seen so far a plurality of movements against global capital, against the dictatorship of finance, against the biopowers that destroy the earth, and for the shared open access to and self-management of the common....

It should be obvious in this context that the modern political party — either in its representative, parliamentary form or in its vanguard form — cannot serve as an organ of this kind of decision making. In the past, parties have frequently sought to recuperate the energy and ideals of social movements in order to legitimate their own power. You have done your work in the streets, they tell the multitude; now go home and let us take up the cause in the halls of government.... [But t]he power of decision created by the movements must reside with those who are acting and cannot be transferred beyond that common terrain.⁸³

...These movements are powerful not despite their lack of leaders but because of it. They are organized horizontally as multitudes, and their insistence on democracy at

⁸² Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Declaration* (2012) <<https://antonionegriinenglish.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/93152857-hardt-negri-declaration-2012.pdf>>, p. 7.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 59–61.

all levels is more than a virtue but a key to their power. Furthermore, their slogans and arguments have spread so widely not despite but because the positions they express cannot be summarized or disciplined in a strict ideological line. There are no party cadres telling people what to think, but instead there exist discussions that are open to a wide variety of views that sometimes may even contradict each other but nonetheless, although slowly, develop a coherent perspective.⁸⁴

Harry Cleaver also stressed the plurality of movements involved:

...[T]he common opposition to capitalism is not accompanied by the old notion of a unified alternative project of socialism. On the contrary, such a vision is steadily being displaced by a proliferation of distinct projects and a common understanding that there is no need for universal rules.⁸⁵

Party lines and official ideologies/platforms raise the thresholds of coordinated action. With no single official ideology, but only a common orientation against the system of power, groups with many ideologies can participate in a direct action based only on their shared immediate objective, thereby raising the size of the swarm involved. Ideological litmus tests above and beyond agreement on a particular direct action change the permissionless nature of participation and exclude all who do not buy into the entire ideology as a package.

The networked resistance movements of recent years have been governed by the same stigmergic principles of organization shared by peer-to-peer culture in general in the networked age. As W. Lance Bennett, Alexandra Segerberg and Shawn Walker note, peer production includes not only open-source software and Wikipedia but

collaborative activist projects such as the network of Independent Media Centers (IMCs) of the global justice movement. Such projects may involve vast numbers of dispersed and differently engaged individuals that come together to create a common good — be it protest or software — around which further collective action will revolve. Despite the open-ended nature of such participation, peer-produced projects involve self-motivated production and self-organization: participants ideally contribute to the project in modular and granular ways and help shape the conditions of the action so that the projects build on self-selection and decentralization rather than coercion and hierarchically assigned tasks.⁸⁶

More recently, Nicholas Hildyard of Corner House sees radical movements as primarily about developing the agency of oppressed and exploited people themselves rather than influencing existing institutions. He doesn't preclude "making policy demands that are directed at reforming existing institutions." But the primary focus, from the perspective of the producing classes as revolutionary subject, is on demands that "arise from the pressing need to build alliances and to

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁸⁵ Harry Cleaver, "Deep Currents Rising: Some notes on the global challenge to capitalism." Werner Bonefield, ed. *Subverting the Present, Imagining the Future: Insurrection, Movement, Commons* (New York: Autonomedia, 2007) <<http://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/DeepCurrentsRisingFinal2.htm>>. Accessed May 22, 2019.

⁸⁶ W. Lance Bennett, Alexandra Segerberg and Shawn Walker, "Organization in the crowd: peer production in large-scale networked protests," *Information, Communication & Society*, 17:2 (2014), p. 6.

expand political space.”⁸⁷ Justice becomes a matter of discovery by the revolutionary subject — “the process of discovery itself shapes ‘justice’ through the relationships it forms and the new class conflicts that may emerge from those relationships.”⁸⁸ And the coalescence of a revolutionary subject on a macro scale is the result, not of organizational mass and central coordination on the Old Left model, but the spontaneous proliferation of horizontal ties of solidarity between movements engaged in the process of combating the injustice where they live and creating space for building a new society.

It is a product of those flashes of mutual recognition where people come to see something of their own struggle in someone else’s, and vice versa where they come to identify with others who may have quite different interests and to whom they may previously have been indifferent or even opposed; and where they are drawn together not so much because they come from or are ‘embedded in absolute sameness’, but because they come to realise that their life courses are being ‘determined by ultimately similar processes and outcomes’. In this process, they open themselves up to the realisation of something previously unrecognised, shifting the boundaries of what is ‘possible’ in the process.⁸⁹

We constitute ourselves a revolutionary subject through the relationships we form in process of our local efforts at building a new society.

To the extent that struggles emerge from the process of building counter-institutions at a local level or issue level, and the opposition we face from power structures in that process, the revolutionary potential of stigmergic organization reveals itself in its power to instantly facilitate global awareness, shift resources, and to transform the struggle of each into the struggle of all in an unprecedented manner.

Hildyard shows an especial fondness for the kinds of precedents in working class self-organization described by thinkers like Pyotr Kropotkin, E. P. Thompson and Colin Ward.

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when working-class culture was being constructed through myriad relationships that brought an expanded awareness of oppression, working class life went on ‘more or less entirely outside of society’: unions, dissenting church groups, workers’ clubs, reading groups, worker-run creches, mutual aid societies and other cornerstones of working-class communities arose partly because wider society ignored working-class needs for schooling, health-care and childcare.... To survive, workers were reliant on their own institutions and support networks. These were not only a response to the deprivations suffered: they were also a conscious attempt to build an ‘alternate social and moral order’.⁹⁰

And today, the increasingly precarious and lumpenized working class “is re-emerging to forge new cultures of provisioning, nurturing and mutual support to weather the destruction that the

⁸⁷ Nicholas Hildyard, *Licensed Larceny: Infrastructure, Financial Extraction and the Global South* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), p. 90

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

whirlwind of neoliberalism is inflicting.”⁹¹ “Rather than looking for a ‘to do’ list that will be implemented by someone else, they are building their own power ‘to do’....”⁹²

[Last Edited October 6, 2020]

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 99.

Chapter Four: The Abandonment of Workerism

I. The Limited Relevance of Proletarianism in the Mass Production Age

Even at the height of the industrial age, the proletariat *never* became a unified or homogenous class, or lost its local cultural traditions. *Déclassé* skilled artisans played a leading role in working class radicalism in the early-to-mid 19th century, and skilled workers on the shop floor under the gang system later played a leading role in the development of movements like syndicalism.

And the industrial proletariat never incorporated the entirety of the producing classes. There were always islands of small-scale production for use in the social/informal economy even by industrial workers themselves. They were marginalized by the political power of capital, not by the superior efficiency of large-scale capitalist production. There were also islands of self-employment, and the so-called lumpenproletariat was far more politically significant than made out to be in Marx's schema.

For that matter the industrial proletariat itself, as James Scott points out, never entirely surrendered its "petty bourgeois" dreams of independence on a bit of village land or in an artisan shop.

Petty bourgeois dreams infuse the imagination of the industrial proletariat.... The reddest of the red proletarians, the militant coal miners and steelworkers of the Ruhr in 1919, on whom Lenin reposed his revolutionary hopes, are a striking case in point. When asked what they wished for, their desires were remarkably modest. They wanted higher wages, a shorter day, and longer rests, as one might expect. But beyond what Marxists would disparagingly call "trade-union consciousness," they yearned to be treated honorably by their bosses (and called "Herr X") and aspired to have a small cottage with a garden to call their own. It is hardly surprising that a newly industrialized proletariat would retain social aspirations from their village origins, but their demand for the amenities of social respect and for the cultural trappings of an independent life on the land ill fit either the stereotype of an "economistic" working class with both eyes fixed on the loot or that of a revolutionary proletariat.

Over the past several decades, standard opinion polls in the United States have asked industrial workers what kind of work they would prefer to factory work. An astonishingly high percentage pines to open a shop or a restaurant or to farm.¹

¹ James C. Scott, *Two Cheers for Anarchism* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 91.

It's hard not to suspect that many contemporary Marxist-Leninists would find Marx himself insufferably "liberal" or "petty bourgeois." The industrial proletariat's own ideal existence could be described, only slightly tongue-and-cheek, as "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, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic." There is a fairly close parallelism between Marx's vision of the emancipated communist future, and of the evicted and proletarianized peasant's memory of village life and independence on the commons. And leaving aside the dubious vulgar Marxist proposition that industrialization on the capitalist model was more objectively "progressive" than would have been — say — bridging the gap between eotechnic and neotechnic with a hypothetical Mumfordian alternative, it is true in any case that the new technologies we described in Chapter Two open the possibility of achieving this utopian communist existence of the future without further intervening proletarianization.

It's ironic that Lenin said the working class, left to itself, could only achieve "trade union consciousness." Proletarianization itself in the 19th century was a powerful force for de-radicalizing the working class. The most radical socialist ideas, as recounted by E.P. Thompson, came from petty bourgeois/skilled artisan elements like master weavers, printers, etc. And syndicalism emerged mainly from master craftsmen on the shop floor, when direct organization of factory work was still carried out under their direction in the gang system.

The industrially organized "army of labor" Marx and Engels had so much faith in actually habituated workers to being directed by a hierarchy of labor leaders who, in turn, were vulnerable to the Iron Law of Oligarchy and cooptation within a reformist labor accord. It also opened the way to deskilling under the 20th century Taylorist/Fordist mass production regime, which eliminated the very bases of independence within the production process from which so much radical/syndicalist thought had been generated. So the proletariat, Marx's own hope for the nucleus of a "historic bloc," was actually rendered capable only of trade union consciousness by the process of proletarianization itself.

II. Technology and the Declining Relevance of Proletarianism

The most promising way out is deproletarianizing production technology that recreates skilled artisan labor as the nucleus of a new, post-proletarian and post-mass production historic bloc. In which model, secession will replace conquest of power as the revolutionary model.

And now that cheap, ephemeral tools for small-scale production are becoming radically cheaper and more efficient, the potential to challenge the power of capital from outside the organized industrial proletariat is increasing enormously.

Since the formative period of the Old Left — and especially in the past two decades — the conventional full-time wage employment model has become increasingly irrelevant. The size of the full time wage labor force has steadily shrunk as a portion of the total economy; both the permanently unemployed and the precariat (i.e. the underemployed, part-time workers, temporary workers, and guest workers) have grown as a share of the economy. For these workers the old model of a workplace-based social safety net does not exist, and it has been radically scaled back even for remaining full-time workers.

Further, the precariat for the most part do not identify with the workplace or wage employment in the same way that their parents and grandparents did, and often have value systems more

in common with earlier socialists who saw their economic identity in terms of social or guild relations outside the workplace. To quote Guy Standing

Put bluntly, the proletariat's representatives demand decent labour, lots of it; the precariat wishes to escape from labour, materially and psychologically, because its labour is instrumental, not self-defining. Many in the precariat do not even aspire to secure labour. They saw their parents trapped in long-term jobs, too frightened to leave, partly because they would have lost modest enterprise benefits that depended on 'years of service'. But in any event, those jobs are no longer on offer to the precariat. Twentieth-century spheres of labour protection — labour law, labour regulations, collective bargaining, labourist social security — were constructed around the image of the firm, fixed workplaces, and fixed working days and work-weeks that apply only to a minority in today's tertiary online society. While proletarian consciousness is linked to long-term security in a firm, mine, factory or office, the precariat's consciousness is linked to a search for security outside the workplace.²

III The Abandonment of Proletarianism by the New Left

Meanwhile, new Leftist movements have arisen based on labor's actual experience of alienation from the workplace, and resurrecting pre-existing "utopian" models of socialism based on leisure and the dissolution of work into social life.

The first step away from the workerism of the Old Left came with the New Left's emphasis on marginalized communities outside the industrial workforce, and on building community-based rather than primarily workplace-based alliances for social change.

Tom Hayden, writing in 1966, sketched out a Movement centered not on the industrial proletariat, but on the poor of all races — and particularly the rural southern black poor and the poor of the northern ghettos. To the extent that poor whites had been mobilized alongside them, "these organizing efforts were led by local people or independent organizers outside the structure of the labor movement." And "a coalition of poor whites with Negroes depends, most of all, on whether a way can be found to organize workers independent of AFL-CIO routines." And to the labor organizations participated in such coalitions, it would be as part of larger community alliances.

Concretely, that means democratic control by the workers of their union locals, and the entry of those locals into political activities and coalitions on the community level. It also means community action and organization among the millions of low-paid workers presently outside the labor movement....

An organizational form that suggests the style of such a movement is the "community union," involving working-class and poor people in local insurgency. Open and democratic, the community union offers a real alternative to the kind of participation permitted in civil rights groups, trade unions and Democratic party machines. It might take a variety of forms: block clubs, housing committees, youth groups, etc.

² Guy Standing, *A Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens* (London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 17–18.

The union's insistence on the relevance of "little people," as well as its position outside and against the normal channels, would create a rooted sense of independence among the members.

Alongside the poor, another major component of Hayden's Movement was radical students rejecting the Organization Man lifestyle of their parents, which they were expected to pursue as a matter of course. And the role of students went beyond alliance with the poor in support of the latter's goals.

Now it appears that students are finding ways to organize effectively around other problems too: university reform and peace.... On many campuses students are beginning to form unions of their own, as well as independent seminars pointed toward the eventual organization of a "free university." In addition, they are beginning to mobilize community action against the Vietnamese war — thereby encountering their friends already at work among the poor. These efforts may thread the several protest movements in the country into a grassroots coalition.

And finally, the Movement took in a growing number of alienated professionals within the bureaucratic machinery of capitalist state and corporation, the press, and the welfare apparatus.

Insurgency within American institutions is spreading: professors fighting their administrations, lawyers against the bar association, welfare workers against the political machine, muckrakers against the press establishments. This insurgency is bound to increase as the new generation of student activists graduates into the professions. And it is an insurgency which needs a movement of poor people, insistently demanding new social purposes from the professionals.³

Autonomist Marxism continued and further developed the anti-workerist themes of the New Left. The autonomist Harry Cleaver, writing in the 1970s, observed a shift in contemporary industrial workers' struggles from a demand for workers' control to the refusal of work itself, along with a shift to struggles outside the wage system altogether and in the spheres of social reproduction of labor power and a shift from insurrectionist to prefigurative strategies.

First, the continuing spread of Taylorist and Fordist deskilling produced such an alienation of young workers from work that, by the 1960s, the desire to take over work and make it less alienating was being more and more replaced by its simple refusal. They didn't want control; they wanted out. Second, the refusal of work on the job was increasingly accompanied by a refusal of the unwaged work of reproducing labour power in life outside the formal job. Moreover, the refusal of both kinds of work was accompanied by new kinds of non-work activity. Against the 'cultural' mechanisms of domination, highlighted and analyzed by the critical theorists, was being pitted a 'cultural revolution' in the 1960s that continued on into the 1970s and since. Indeed, the self-activity of the women's movement, the student movement,

³ Tom Hayden, "The Politics of 'The Movement'," *Dissent*, November-December 1966
<<https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/tom-hayden-politics-of-the-movement-1966>>. Accessed September 23, 2018.

the environmental movement and of many peasant struggles quite self-consciously set out to elaborate new ways of being, new relationships among people and between humans and nature. As opposed to the traditional Leninist view that building a new society could only occur after revolution-as-overthrow-of- capital, these new movements that were rapidly undermining the Keynesian capitalist world order demanded, and indeed were undertaking, the building of 'the future' in the present.⁴

Cleaver saw autonomism as a shift away from "workerism" and to "the people." Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, and their followers in the *Monthly Review* group,

still defined the working class only as wage workers and thus identified the struggles of unemployed Black Panthers, militant Students for a Democratic Society, radical feminists, or welfare rights activists as being outside that class. All that could be seen of the working class within this perspective were the hard-hat attacks on antiwar demonstrators. What place could there be for Marx in a vision in which the working class had sold out and allied with the capitalist class and the only true revolutionaries were nonworking-class students, women, Third World minorities, and peasants? In the place of the vision of the working class as the major protagonist in the struggle emerged that of 'the people'.⁵

The dominant forms of Marxist theory, framed around the capitalist factory and its workers, were becoming obsolete. That is, they were guilty of

a reading of *Capital* that is not only limited to being a passive interpretation, but which also, by restricting itself to the 'economic' sphere or 'base' effectively, makes of political economy the theory of the capitalist factory and its waged workers alone. This has the effect of excluding the rest of society from the analysis — not only the state and party politics but also the unemployed, the family, the school, health care, the media, art, and so on.... Yet it is precisely in these 'other' social spheres that many of the major social conflicts of today are occurring. At the turn of the century, when working-class struggle was located primarily (but not uniquely by any means) in the factory, there was perhaps some excuse for reading *Capital* as a theoretical model of the capitalist factory. But as a result of the extensive social engineering of the 1920s and 1930s through which capitalist social planners sought to restructure virtually all of society, and as a result of the nature of recent social struggles against such planning, such interpretations today are grossly inadequate.... Orthodoxy revived historical materialism and tried to shove peasant revolts into the box of pre-capitalist modes of production. Student revolts were classified as either petty bourgeois or lumpen. Women's revolts were within the framework of some 'domestic' mode of production. All were thus set aside as unimportant secondary phenomena because they were not truly working class. This of course set up the Party once again as the mediating interpreter of the real working-class interests and justified the attempt to repress or co-opt these struggles.

⁴ Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically* (Edinburgh and San Francisco: AK Press, 1979, 2000), pp. 17–18.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40.

...We can thus see that one great weakness of reading Marx as political economy has been to isolate and reduce his analysis to that of the factory....⁶

The Italian autonomists, according to Cleaver, abandoned the workerism of the Old Left and in fact adopted in its place the “refusal of work.”

This position was also supported theoretically by the abandonment of the old leftist perspective on work (which was rooted in the skilled workers’ experience from the period of early capitalism through the councils and soviets): that the struggle was to liberate work from capital, to achieve nonalienated work. As Tronti pointed out, under the conditions of the unskilled mass worker, work itself could only be seen as a means of social control to be abolished, not upgraded. This understanding led directly to the realization that the basic characteristic of working-class struggle in this period is not only an escape from capital but also an escape from existence as working class. The aim of the mass worker is to cease to be a worker, not to make a religion of work.⁷

According to Cleaver, Marx’s own non-workerist view (i.e., compared to the dominant form of “official Marxism” formulated by Engels, Kautsky et al after his death) of political agency in the transition was closely linked to his views on liberation from work *after* capitalism.

Time and again Marx’s evocation of post-capitalist society involves the image of the individual (and collectivity) doing many things, not just working. The transcendence of alienation can only come with such a quantitative reduction of work that work becomes one, among other, integral aspects of a richly diverse human existence. The liberation of work can only come with the liberation from work, that is to say from the capitalist reduction of life to work. Once we see these things, we are freed from the productivism of all the old socialist illusions; we are free to think about struggle, revolution and freedom in terms of the simultaneous demotion of work from the center of life and its restoration as one means, among others, of fulfilling human development.⁸

And working class movement’s goals in Marx’s time were arguably closer to this vision than to that of the Old Left.

From the very beginning, as illustrated by Marx’s account of the fight over the working day, the working class resisted the imposition of the wage system and commodification of labor-power, not so much by fighting for increased control over work as by fighting to liberate as much free time as possible. The working class’s struggle was for freedom from work — leisure.⁹

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 43–44.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 58–59.

⁸ “An Interview With Harry Cleaver” *vis-a-vis* 1 (Autumn 1993). Translated from Italian

<<https://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/InterviewwithHarryCleaver.html>>. Accessed May 19, 2019.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 86–87.

Cleaver saw the new currents of the Left as seizing on the post-scarcity vision of the “Fragment on Machines,” abandoning the traditional Old Left demand for “full employment” in favor of a universally shortened work week in keeping with the amount of labor needed to produce the existing standard of living.¹⁰

Accordingly, the struggle today for escape from labor time and autonomy is entirely continuous with a vision of the future in which communism is “free time and nothing else.”

The power of refusal is the power to carve out times and spaces relatively free of the capitalist imposition of work.... The power of self-valorization is the power to fill those spaces with alternative activities and new forms of sociality — to elaborate the communist future in the present.¹¹

...[H]is understanding of both the role of imposed work in capitalism and the long history of the workers struggle to reduce it led him to believe that in post-capitalist society free time as the basis for the “full development of individuality” would replace labor as the source of value in society. Thus, post-capitalist society would most likely be characterized, at least in part, by the open-endedness characteristic of “disposable time,” an expanding sphere of freedom which would allow a multi-sided development of the individual and of society.¹²

At the same time, the revolutionary subject ceases to be defined by the hegemony of a historically progressive industrial proletariat, and instead becomes an interlinkage of many self-defined struggles against not only capital’s domination of the workplace but all the interlinked forms of domination.

There can no longer be any doubt that proliferating interconnections among diverse, geographically dispersed, grassroots social struggles – e.g., those of waged workers (often precariously waged), indigenous peoples, human rights advocates, ethnic and cultural minorities, environmentalists, women, students, immigrants – are resulting in a deepening and broadening threat to the contemporary capitalist social order. On the one hand, it is the very proliferation, intensity and interlinkages of struggles attacking one or another dimension of capitalist domination that is so striking – virtually all types of existing social relationships of control are being challenged.¹³

The model of revolutionary struggle is no longer an alliance of progressive forces under the leadership of the proletariat, but “a diversity of social projects” or “acceleration of struggles,” all

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Cleaver. “Socialism” (1992). Published in Wolfgang Sach(ed), *The Development Dictionary: Knowledge as Power* (London: Zed Books, 1992) <<http://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/socialismessay.html>>. Accessed June 2, 2019.

¹³ Cleaver. “Deep Currents Rising: Some notes on the global challenge to capitalism.” Werner Bonefield, ed. *Subverting the Present, Imagining the Future: Insurrection, Movement, Commons* (New York: Autonomedia, 2007) <<http://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/DeepCurrentsRisingFinal2.htm>>. Accessed May 22, 2019.

working together to build “a post-capitalist politics of difference without antagonism.”¹⁴ The goal becomes “circulation of struggle”:

The question, ‘How can we build our own power to refuse work or to self-value in our own way?’ becomes, ‘How can we link up with others so that our efforts do not remain isolated but are mutually reinforcing?’...

...The strength of relatively small groups, such as the Palestinians, the black freedom movements in southern Africa, or the Zapatistas in southern Mexico, has always been largely due to their ability to build networks of alliance to circulate their struggles beyond their specific locales to other groups in other parts of the world.¹⁵

Cleaver’s analysis of the collective subject in many ways anticipated, or was contemporaneous with, Toni Negri’s views on knowledge workers, the social factory, etc.

With respect to the current period of crisis and restructuring, some Italian and French theorists of working class autonomy have suggested that at the heart of the current crisis of capitalism is a new kind of working class subjectivity which is replacing that of the mass worker. They suggest that only by understanding the positive characteristics of that subjectivity, which ruptured capitalist control and continues to defy its present efforts at subordination, can we understand either those efforts or the emergent possibilities of liberation. One early characterization of this new subjectivity (which is actually seen as a diversity of subjectivities) was that of a new “tribe of moles” — a loose community of highly mobile, drop-out, part-time workers, part-time students, participants in the underground economy, creators of temporary and ever changing autonomous zones of social life that forced a fragmentation of and crisis in the mass-worker organization of the social factory. Another characterization has been that of the “socialized worker” which focuses on how the crisis of the social factory has been generated precisely by a subject whose self-activity in all moments of life challenges the fabric of capitalist control. Within the interpersonal interactions and exchanges of information that they associate with the “computer and informational society,” these theorists believe to have identified an increasingly collective appropriation of (i.e., control over) “communication.” The analysis runs as follows: the period of mass production was characterized by radical divisions between and within mental and manual labor (both within and outside of the factory) that limited daily participation in any kind of collective system of interactive communication to a small minority of skilled workers (e.g., engineers and scientists) — this was a continuation of the same divisions both Kropotkin and Marx condemned. However, the dynamics of the class

¹⁴ Cleaver, “Theses on Secular Crisis in Capitalism: The Insurpassability of Class Antagonisms.” This is a reworked version of a set of notes presented to the session on “Secular Crisis in Capitalism: Attempts at Theorization” at the Rethinking Marxism Conference, Amherst Massachusetts, November 13, 1992. Published in C. Polychroniou and H.R. Targ (eds), *Marxism Today: Essays on Capitalism, Socialism and Strategies for Social Change* (Westport: Praeger, 1996) <<http://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/secularcrisis.html>>. Accessed June 2, 2019.

¹⁵ Cleaver, “Work Refusal and Self-Organisation.” In Anitra Nelson and Frans Timmerman, *Life Without Money: Building Fair and Sustainable Economies* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), p. 66. <<http://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/WorkRefusalFinal.pdf>>.

struggle has increasingly forced a spatial and temporal recomposition of work that is undermining that division. On the one hand, automation has been dramatically reducing the role of simple manual labor — increasingly in the “service” sector as well as in manufacturing. At the same time, the needs of global coordination and continuous innovation have expanded not only the role of mental labor but its collective character, creating ever more jobs that require the manipulation of information flows, intelligent and informed decision making within production, independent initiative, creativity and the coordination of complex networks of social cooperation. The essential point is that at a social level, these developments embody the adaptation of capitalist command to the emergence of an increasingly independent collective subject whose self-organization of essentially intellectual work and play repeatedly outruns capital’s ability to limit and control it.¹⁶

The analysis of this emerging collective subject has suggested that it has begun to impose its hegemony on the class composition as a whole, much in the way the “mass worker” dominated the prior “Fordist” period of capitalist development. In other words, while during the period of the “mass worker” (Fordism) neither all nor even most workers were employed in factories on assembly lines, nevertheless they formed the paradigmatic core whose organization influenced all others. The argument is that, in the present period, the new attributes of this collective subject (inter-linked intellectual cooperation, appropriation of social communication) are constituting differentiated communities with new values and rejecting traditional politics and labor organization. They are also increasingly coming to characterize the class as a whole as they take on, more and more, the political role of igniting, solidifying and linking social struggles. This grounding of the collective processes of constitution in communication is a common characteristic in the development of an array of “new social movements” that have been widely seen to be the most important components of social confrontation in this period.¹⁷

Note that this reference to “new social movements” was written in 1992, two years before the launch of the EZLN uprising in Chiapas, and long before the Seattle anti-globalization movement — let alone the Arab Spring, M15, Syntagma, Occupy, BLM or NoDAPL.

Continuing on to Negri himself, this shift away from workerism is reflected in his and Hardt’s substitution of the “multitude” for the traditional Marxist conception of the proletariat. The multitude, unlike the industrial proletariat, is coextensive with the productive activity of society at large — basically extending to “all those who work under the rule of capital and thus potentially

¹⁶ Cleaver, “Kropotkin, Self-valorization And The Crisis Of Marxism” Paper presented to conference on Pyotr Alexeevich Kropotkin (Moscow, St. Petersburg and Dimitrov, December 8–14, 1992). Organized by the Russian Academy of Science on its 150th anniversary. Published in *Anarchist Studies*, edited by Thomas V. Cahill, Department of Politics, Lancaster University, Lancaster, United Kingdom, February 24, 1993, p. 11

<<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/harry-cleaver-kropotkin-self-valorization-and-the-crisis-of-marxism.pdf>>. Accessed May 29, 2019.

¹⁷ Cleaver, “Marxian Categories, the Crisis of Capital and the Constitution of Social Subjectivity Today.” Paper presented to the session on “Considering the Side of Wage Labor” at the Rethinking Marxism Conference on “Marxism in the New World Order: Crises and Possibilities,”

Amherst, Massachusetts, November 14, 1992 <<http://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/MARXIAN-CATEGORIES.html>>. Accessed May 31, 2019.

as the class of those who refuse the rule of capital.” This is a major change from 19th and 20th century conception of the working class, which was limited to industrial workers — or at most to wage laborers.

The working class is thought to be the primary productive class and directly under the rule of capital, and thus the only subject that can act effectively against capital. The other exploited classes might also struggle against capital but only subordinated to the leadership of the working class.... The concept [of multitude] rests... on the claim that there is no political priority among the forms of labor: all forms of labor are today socially productive, they produce in common, and share too a common potential to resist the domination of capital.... In order to verify this concept of the multitude and its political project we will have to establish that... the conditions exist for the various types of labor to communicate, collaborate, and become common.¹⁸

Those “excluded from waged labor — the poor, the unemployed the unwaged, the homeless, and so forth” are still part of the multitude, “because these classes are in fact included in social production.”¹⁹

...Today..., to the extent that social production is increasingly defined by immaterial labor such as cooperation or the construction of social relationships and networks of communication, the activity of all in society including the poor becomes more and more directly productive.²⁰

...Just as social production takes place today equally inside and outside the factory walls, so too it takes place equally inside and outside the wage relationship.²¹

According to Cleaver the autonomists took the pessimistic Frankfurt School view of society at large as subjected to Taylorist logic and turned into an extension of the factory, and turned it on its head. If society as a whole is a “factory” for reproducing labor-power — not only materially but culturally and ideologically — then society as a whole also becomes an arena for class conflict. The struggle against capitalism ceases to be a project merely of workers in the factories, and unites diverse struggles of racial minorities, women, students, environmentalists, etc., in the larger social sphere against the reproduction of capitalism at a systemic level. Rather than cementing capitalist control within the factories, the “social factory” forced capital to defend itself on a society-wide front.²²

Capital expanded into the “social factory” to incorporate education, unpaid housework, etc., into underwriting the costs of reproducing labor-power for free that otherwise might have required increased wages. Labor correspondingly shifted from a fight over the working day alone into a refusal of work altogether — fighting not only to reduce the pace of work or reclaim free time on the job, but contesting the capitalist nature of so-called “free time” in the social factory outside the job and fighting to make it actually free.²³

¹⁸ Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (Penguin Books, 2004), pp. 106–107.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

²² Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically*, pp. 70–71.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 124–125.

Negri and Hardt elaborate in greater detail the ways in which capitalist control is grounded in society at large rather than the factory:

...The center of gravity of capitalist production no longer resides in the factory but has shifted outside its walls. Society has become a factory, or rather, capitalist production has spread such that the labor power of the entire society tends to be subordinated to capitalist control. Capital increasingly exploits the entire range of our productive capacities, our bodies and our minds, our capacities for communication, our intelligence and creativity, our affective relations with each other, and more. Life itself has been put to work.

With this shift the primary engagement between capitalist and worker also changes. No longer is the typical scene of exploitation the capitalist overseeing the factory, directing and disciplining the worker in order to generate a profit. Today the capitalist is farther removed from the scene, and workers generate wealth more autonomously. The capitalist accumulates wealth primarily through rent, not profit — this rent most often takes a financial form and is guaranteed through financial instruments. This is where debt enters the picture, as a means to maintain and control the relationship of production and exploitation. Exploitation today is based primarily not on (equal or unequal) exchange but on debt, that is, on the fact that the 99 percent of the population is subject — owes work, owes money, owes obedience — to the 1 percent.²⁴

First, production is now realized at both the local and global levels in the frame of the common: labor power has become common, life has been put to work, capitalist development in the form of financialization centrally involves exploitation of the common, and so forth. Second, capitalist development is plagued by an irresolvable economic, social, and political crisis. This crisis can be explained in part, at least, by the fact that whereas productive forces are becoming increasingly common, relations of production and property continue to be defined by individualistic and privatistic rules and norms, which are unable to grasp the new productive reality and are completely external to the new common sources of value.²⁵

The “dominant forms of subjectivity” that emerge in this crisis period of late capitalism include “four primary subjective figures—the indebted, the mediatized, the securitized, and the represented — all of which are impoverished and their powers for social action are masked or mystified.”²⁶

The hegemony of finance and the banks has produced *the indebted*. Control over information and communication networks has produced *the mediatized*. The security regime and the general state of exception have constructed a figure prey to fear and yearning for protection — *the securitized*. And the corruption of democracy has

²⁴ Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Declaration* (2012) <<https://antonionegriinenglish.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/93152857-hardt-negri-declaration-2012.pdf>>, p. 16.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

formed a strange, politicized figure — *the represented*. These subjective figures constitute the social terrain on which — and against which — movements of resistance and rebellion must act.²⁷

The previous state of isolation in these individual prisons is replaced by a recomposition. And the new sense of subjectivity is expressed by a refusal and inversion of all the various forms of control. Refusal of debt is an enormous threat to the system,²⁸ obviously, through such means as organized debt strikes in the developed world, repudiations of foreign debt by developing countries, etc.

The refusal and inversion of mediatization comes from recuperating media and using social media as a means of coordinating protest, asserting mastery over it, turning it into “tools for our collective self-reproduction.”²⁹

Refusal of securitization comes from recognizing that power is a relationship which requires the cooperation of the ruled. We cease to be securitized by “obeying when the forces of power [are] watching and subverting that power in hidden spaces.”³⁰ James Scott’s treatment of Zomian populations in *The Art of Not Being Governed*, and their escape by rendering themselves illegible, is relevant here. And ultimately people often defeat power simply by refusing to be afraid any more, as when Mubarak was brought down by the refusal of the Tahrir Square protestors.³¹ Consider case studies by civil resistance scholars of (for example) the Shah’s regime, where every police repression of a crowd resulted in even more people showing up for the funerals, and more the next time after that was repressed, and so on, until finally the Shah’s inner circle melted away and the palace guards defected and he had to evacuate.

Finally, refusal of representation entails exodus from participation in the political process, and acting as the constituent power for a new system.³²

In this model, revolutionary subjectivity emerges from the shared sense of indebtedness and other forms of subordination and control that encompass our relationships in society at large, as opposed to Marx’s idea of subjectivity emerging among workers in a factory from their shared experience of participating in production. The subjectivity is that of the multitude in the social factory, versus that of the proletariat in an industrial factory.

The identity of the new subject who emerges from the social factory at large is that of the *commoner*.

The commoner is... an ordinary person who accomplishes an extraordinary task: opening private property to the access and enjoyment of all; transforming public property controlled by state authority into the common; and in each case discovering mechanisms to manage, develop, and sustain common wealth through democratic participation. The task of the commoner, then, is not only to provide access to the fields and rivers so that the poor can feed themselves, but also to create a means for the free exchange of ideas, images, codes, music, and information. We have already seen some of the prerequisites of accomplishing these tasks: the ability to create

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 36–37.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 45.

social bonds with each other, the power of singularities to communicate through differences, the real security of the fearless, and the capacity for democratic political action. The commoner is a constituent participant, the subjectivity that is foundational and necessary for constituting a democratic society based on open sharing of the common.

The action of “commoning” must be oriented not only toward the access to and self-management of shared wealth but also the construction of forms of political organization.³³

IV. The Abandonment of Workerism in Praxis

In this last section, we shift our focus to actual resistance movements engaged in direct struggle. The post-1994 cycle of movements has continued the move away from workerism that began with the New Left.

The EZLN, whose 1994 uprising in Chiapas kicked off the massive wave of horizontalist movements that persists to this day, focuses on “civil society” rather than “class.”

The EZLN do not use the concept of “class” or “class struggle” in their discourse, in spite of the fact that Marxist theory has clearly played an important part in their formation. They have preferred instead to develop a new language, to speak of the struggle of truth and dignity.... In looking for support, or in forming links with other struggles, they have appealed not to the working class or the proletariat but to “civil society.” By “civil society” they seem to mean “society in struggle” in the broadest sense: all those groups and initiatives engaged in latent or overt struggles to assert some sort of control over their future, without aspiring to hold government office.³⁴

In other words, the “revolutionary subject” is all oppressed groups, united in their struggle against all forms of domination. “Revolution can only be thought of in this scheme as the cumulative uniting of dignities, the snowballing of struggles, the refusal of more and more people to subordinate their humanity to the degradation of capitalism.”³⁵

Holloway’s objection to a primary focus on the working class is related to his autonomist perspective, in which the struggle against capitalism is an open-ended struggle to contest its imposition of commodified labor, and to prevent its reimposition on a daily basis. The concept of a working class as the primary agent of struggle presupposes the very thing that autonomists object to: the idea of capitalism as a closed system, currently set in place, and the commodification of labor as a done deal.

In this approach, any definition of the working class is based on its subordination to capital.... Capitalism, in this approach, is understood as a world of predefined social relations that are firmly fixed or fetishized. Thus, working-class struggle is understood as starting from the pre-constituted subordination of labour to capital.³⁶

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 88–89.

³⁴ John Holloway, “Dignity’s Revolt,” in *We Are the Crisis of Capital: A John Holloway Reader* (Oakland: PM Press, 2019), p. 141.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

But autonomism sees the struggle against capitalism as just the opposite: a struggle, across the whole of society (not just in the workplace), to contest such subordination in the first place.

...[T]he conflict does not take place after subordination has been established, after the fetishised forms of social relations have been constituted: rather it is a conflict *about* the subordination of social practice, *about* the fetishization of social relations. The conflict is between subordination and insubordination.... Class struggle does not take place within the constituted forms of capitalist social relations: rather the constitution of these forms is itself class struggle. This leads to a much richer concept of class struggle in which the whole of social practice is at issue.³⁷

Because the expansionary logic of capitalism requires commodifying ever larger spheres of life, subjecting new areas to the cash nexus, privatizing and enclosing more areas of common life, imposing neoliberal models of austerity in new venues, it follows that every area of life — not just the workplace — is a site of struggle against capitalism.³⁸

And in a very real sense the struggle is not so much by labor as against labor, in the sense of abstract labor (the commodification of our activities).

It becomes clear that we cannot think of class struggle as labour against capital because labour is on the same side of capital, labour produces capital. The struggle is not that of labour against capital but of doing (or living) against labour and therefore against capital.³⁹

Drawing on the experience of the 2011 protests and their use of social media, Negri and Hardt argue for the central role of communications technology in the emergence of the commoner as subject.

The constituent power of the common is... closely interwoven with the themes of constituent power — adopting new technologies (cellular technologies, Twitter, Facebook, and more generally the Internet) as vehicles of experimentation with democratic and multitudinary governance.⁴⁰

The centrality of knowledge and knowledge workers to the current model of capitalism, and the requirements that entails, threaten to undermine capitalism.

We live in a society in which capital functions increasingly by exploiting the production and expression of knowledge, a society of cognitive capitalism. Knowledge constitutes ever more the heart of social relations, in terms of both capitalist control and the resistance of living labor. It is thus no coincidence that, in the current cycle of struggles, a large part of the activists are students, intellectual workers, and those working in urban service jobs — what some call the cognitive precariat.... The proliferation of struggles and their performative character are grounded in the new nature of labor power. As the centrality of cognitive labor becomes hegemonic, it permeates and is crystallized in these forms of struggle. In the passage of these movements from

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 144–145.

³⁸ Holloway, “Where is Class Struggle?” in *We Are the Crisis of Capital*, pp. 186–187, 188.

³⁹ Holloway, “1968 and the Crisis of Abstract Labour,” in *We Are the Crisis of Capital*, p. 224.

⁴⁰ Negri and Hardt, *Declaration*, p. 55.

protest to constituent process, then, the demand for the publicity and transparency becomes central.

Any effort to discipline or repress the curiosity, vitality, or desire for knowledge of cognitive workers reduces their productivity. These qualities are essential to contemporary economic production, but they also open new contradictions regarding the exercise of power and the legitimacy of representation. In fact, curiosity, vitality, and desire for knowledge demand that the opacity and secrecy of power be destroyed.⁴¹

Things like Chelsea Manning's document dump — and Snowden's, which happened after Negri's and Hardt's time of writing in *Declaration* — display the problematic character of knowledge work for capital and the state. "If the state is not willing to initiate a process of Glasnost, opening its secret vaults and making transparent its operations, then these militants will help it do so quickly."⁴²

Subjectivity is produced by such forms of activism — heavily mediated by the new communications technologies — as "discussing, learning and teaching, studying and communicating, participating in actions..."⁴³

The declining role of the traditional industrial proletariat as revolutionary subject, and of control of the workplace, in postcapitalist transition is closely related to the shift from ruptural to interstitial transitional models. As Cleaver observes:

...Resources are limited, so Marxists have always looked for those sectors of the working class that seem to have the most leverage or seem to be the most dynamic and are those who are most likely to be on the foreground of the class struggle. It is easy to understand why they have done it; I just don't think we can afford to have that attitude anymore. We need to recognize that capital is global. Struggles are happening all over the place, and our problem is connecting them up in such a way that makes them all stronger.... Our problem, our big problem, is to understand concrete struggles taking place all over, but on the other hand we need to understand the connections....

What we see by looking historically are these cycles of struggle. What hasn't been studied enough is the formation of movements and how they gel and come together. You have these molecular struggles going on all the time and all over the place, but under what circumstances do they begin to link up? How does that linkage catalyze? It is like a formation of crystal from a liquid.⁴⁴

It makes no sense to look for *the* revolutionary subject, in other words, because we're not looking for a vanguard to lead a revolutionary struggle. We're looking for those engaged in building the future society, in the interstices of capitalism, and people are engaged in that effort in every sector of society. *The "revolutionary subject" is the entire future society in the making, here and now, and the task is to keep building it.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁴⁴ Harry Cleaver interview with Kevin Van Meter, quoted in Van Meter, *Guerrillas of Desire: Notes on Everyday Resistance and Organizing to Make a Revolution Possible* (Chico, Oakland, and Baltimore: AK Press, 2017), p. 46.

Murray Bookchin argued, likewise, that we are engaged in constituting a “self” — a subject — through the process of building the new society.

There can be no separation of the revolutionary process from the revolutionary goal. *A society based on self-administration must be achieved by means of self-administration.* This implies the forging of a self... and a mode of administration which the self can possess. If we define “power” as the power of man over man, power can only be destroyed by the very process in which man acquires power over his own life and in which he not only “discovers” himself but, more meaningfully, formulates his selfhood in all its social dimensions.

Freedom, so conceived, cannot be “delivered” to the individual as the “end product” of a “revolution.”... The assembly and community cannot be legislated or decreed into existence. To be sure, a revolutionary group can purposively and consciously seek to promote the creation of these forms; but if assembly and community are not allowed to emerge organically, if their growth is not instigated, developed and matured by the social processes at work, they will not be really popular forms. Assembly and community must arise from within the revolutionary process itself; indeed, the revolutionary process must be the formation of assembly and community, and with it, the destruction of power.... [Assembly and community] must be created as *modes of struggle* against the existing society, not as theoretical or programmatic abstractions.

It is hardly possible to stress this point strongly enough. The future assemblies of people in the block, the neighborhood or the district — the revolutionary sections to come — will stand on a higher social level than all the present-day committees, syndicates, parties and clubs adorned by the most resounding “revolutionary” titles. They will be the living nuclei of Utopia in the decomposing body of bourgeois society.⁴⁵

[Last edited September 25, 2020]

⁴⁵ Murray Bookchin, “The Forms of Freedom,” in *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*. Second Edition (Montreal and Buffalo: Black Rose Books, 1986), pp. 189–190.

Chapter Five: Evolutionary Transition Models

Introduction and Note on Terminology

Although I use “gradualism” and “continuity” for lack of other sufficiently concise terms, they are probably somewhat misleading if taken without explanation. Non-capitalist and commons-based alternatives may grow in the interstices of capitalism, and increase in size relative to the system as a whole, and capitalism may become less extractive over time. Some government and corporate organizations may survive through the transition and into some indefinite period of the successor system, although their character will change along with their relationships to the surrounding society and the core logic around which it is organized.

That does not mean that the transition will be gradual and continuous in the sense that there are no abrupt changes or discontinuities. In fact the tipping point between systems may be quite dramatic. But the tipping point will be the result of cumulative, less dramatic changes which have previously occurred within the old system. The systemic tipping point, as Derk Loorbach (director of the Dutch Research Institute for Transitions at Erasmus University of Rotterdam) argues, will be the culmination of long-term processes which have occurred over decades.

Systems have a dynamic equilibrium, in which many small and gradual changes occur. There are dominant values and structures that give a lot of stability, it is something that cannot be changed easily. Yet, at some point, the system itself gets under pressure to change, and the system itself resists against these changes. This means that the pressure becomes so high that at a certain moment the whole system transitions to a different phase, a completely new kind of equilibrium. This transition process is not gradual. A slow change is followed by a chaotic period of severe changes when different processes reinforce each other, until slow adjustments finally occur in a new stable phase...

...It is not possible to predict when and how transitions take place, to know exactly which crisis triggers or accelerates them, but we do know that it is inevitable that there are tipping points on which alternatives break through....

In the early stages of transitions, it is mainly particularly alternative people who don't eat meat, or who work with social economy or install solar panels. But as the system is getting more in crisis, more people who are part of the system start to think about the change, as do business people or people in policy. When these two groups can be connected — the alternatives and the people in the system willing to change — new combinations will emerge.¹

¹ Bart Grugeon Plana, “Want to Change the System? ‘Become the System,’” *Shareable*, October 4, 2017 <<https://www.shareable.net/want-to-change-the-system-become-the-system/>>.

It's comparable to a phase transition between states of matter. A solution may gradually become super-saturated beyond the crystallization point, and yet remain entirely liquid until a sudden jar triggers the actual crystallization. At that point the transition from liquid to solid will be almost instantaneous and quite dramatic.

The primary difference between the "gradualist" transition model we consider in this chapter, and the ruptural models of the Marxists and others on the revolutionary Left, is one of emphasis. Marx saw revolution as the culmination of a long process of interstitial development by which the preconditions of communism were created within the capitalist system. But for Marx, the actual institutions of the successor society could not function under the control of workers, or otherwise function as parts of a coherent post-capitalist system, until the commanding heights of the state and monopoly capital had been seized through some form of political action.

We, on the other hand, see a fully functioning post-capitalist system developing here and now, as more and more cooperative or commons-based institutions arise and coalesce into a whole. If there is violence involved in the actual tipping point, it will not be because a seizure of state power is necessary for us to fully construct post-capitalist society. It will be because the forces of capital and the state attempt to thwart the construction in which we are engaged. Ideally, we will either achieve sufficient superiority in the correlation of forces with capitalism to manage a peaceful transition and persuade the commanding forces of the old system to accept a negotiated loss of power, or we will have sufficient superiority to defeat their rear guard action with minimal violence. But in either case, it is preferable that it be left to them to initiate violence and that their defeat serve to ratify the systemic transition.

All these things should be borne in mind as we use "gradual" or "gradualism," in the rest of this chapter, as terms of convenience.

I. Comparison to Previous Systemic Transitions

Insofar as rentier capitalism and state/corporate hierarchies, and networks and commons, respectively, are the characteristic forms of organization of two successive social systems, the process of transition — like the previous transitions from the Western Roman Empire to feudalism, and from feudalism to capitalism — itself becomes a subject for study.

Along with the shifts we have previously examined — from mass-based organization to horizontalism, etc. — there has been a corresponding shift from the Old Left focus on abrupt breaks to new movements' emphasis of gradualism and continuity.

A common theme among those who envision a gradual transition to postcapitalism is the parallel with the earlier transition from feudalism to capitalism, and before that with the rise of feudalism after the fall of Rome. And as with those previous transitions, they see the primary indications of the form to be taken by the successor society as the prefigurative institutions being built "within the shell of the old."

James Livingston, for example, explicitly draws on previous transitions as models for the hierarchy-network transition, in preference to the Old Left's preference for transitional models that are abrupt, insurrectionary, and equated largely to seizure of the state and/or the means of production (like the French and Russian revolutions). The transition to post-capitalism could easily be a decades-long, relatively gradual process resembling the decay of the Western Roman Empire and of feudalism. He writes:

What happens when we stop looking for socialism in all the wrong places?

Start here. When we think about the transition from feudalism to capitalism, we take the long view — we scan the four centuries from 1400 to 1800, looking for signs of fundamental but incremental change. To be sure, we assume that the great bourgeois revolutions of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries were both symptoms and causes of this transition.... Still, we know these early modern movements can't be compared to the communist parties that created state socialism in twentieth-century Russia, China, and Cuba, because in these more recent instances, self-conscious revolutionaries organized workers and peasants to overthrow capitalism and create socialism....

In short, capitalism was the *unintended consequence* of bourgeois revolutions, whereas socialism has been the avowed purpose, or at least a crucial component, of every revolution since 1911....

...We don't measure the transition from feudalism to capitalism only by assessing the social origins and political-economic effects of bourgeois revolutions — we'd have to be daft to do so. Instead we ask when, how, where, and why social relations were transformed, over many years, so that a new mode of production and new modes of consciousness, emerged to challenge (if not supplant) the old. Or rather..., we ask *when* capitalism became the hegemonic mode in a mongrel social formation that contained fragments of a residual feudalism and harbingers of a precocious socialism. We don't think that capitalism was created overnight by revolutionary parties....

Why, then, would we look for evidence of socialism only where a state seized by radicals of the Left inaugurates a dictatorship of the proletariat? Or, to lower the rhetorical volume and evidentiary stakes, why would we expect to find socialism only where avowed socialists or labor parties contend for state power? We should instead assume that socialism, like capitalism, is a cross-class cultural construction, to which even the bourgeoisie has already made significant contributions — just as the proletariat has long made significant contributions to the cross-class construction we know as capitalism. What follows?...²

Paul Mason, in *Postcapitalism*, also frames post-capitalism as something emerging primarily through an evolutionary process similar to the emergence of the feudal from the classical political economy and the capitalist from the feudal, rather than on the revolutionary models of the twentieth century.

Capitalism... will not be abolished by forced-march techniques. It will be abolished by creating something more dynamic that exists, at first, almost unseen within the old system, but which breaks through, reshaping the economy around new values, behaviours and norms. As with feudalism 500 years ago, capitalism's demise will be accelerated by external shocks and shaped by the emergence of a new kind of human being. And it has started.³

² James Livingston, "How the Left Has Won," *Jacobin*, August 2012 <<http://jacobinmag.com/2012/08/how-the-left-has-won/>>.

³ Paul Mason, *Post-Capitalism: A Guide to Our Future* (Allan Lane, 2015), xiv.

The socialists of the early twentieth century were absolutely convinced that nothing preliminary was possible within the old system. ‘The socialist system,’ Preobrazhensky once insisted categorically, ‘cannot be built up molecularly within the world of capitalism.’

The most courageous thing an adaptive left could do is to abandon that conviction. It is entirely possible to build the elements of the new system molecularly within the old. In the cooperatives, the credit unions, the peer-networks, the unmanaged enterprises and the parallel, subcultural economies, these elements already exist.⁴

Mason sees the new social forms as a new system arising “within the shell of the old,” that will first build local counter-institutions within the interstices of capitalism, coalesce and finally supplant it.

Almost unnoticed, in the niches and hollows of the market system, whole swathes of economic life are beginning to move to a different rhythm. Parallel currencies, time banks, cooperatives and self-managed spaces have proliferated, and often as a direct result of the shattering of old structures after the 2008 crisis.

New forms of ownership, new forms of lending, new legal contracts: a whole business subculture has emerged over the past ten years, which the media has dubbed the ‘sharing economy’. Buzz-terms such as the ‘commons’ and ‘peer-production’ are thrown around, but few have bothered to ask what this means for capitalism itself.⁵

He argues that the technologies and institutions of post-capitalism are unleashing productive forces that cannot be contained within the productive relations of capitalism, and therefore must eventually “burst out of their capitalist integument” and become the basis for a fundamentally new system.

...[T]he technologies we’ve created are not compatible with capitalism — not in its present form and maybe not in any form. Once capitalism can no longer adapt to technological change, postcapitalism becomes necessary. When behaviours and organizations adapted to exploiting technological change appear spontaneously, post-capitalism becomes possible.⁶

*Today, the main contradiction in modern capitalism is between the possibility of free, abundant socially produced goods, and a system of monopolies, banks and governments struggling to maintain control over power and information. That is, everything is pervaded by a fight between network and hierarchy.*⁷

First, information technology has reduced the need for work, blurred the edges between work and free time and loosened the relationship between work and wages.

Second, information goods are corroding the market’s ability to form prices correctly. That is because markets are based on scarcity while information is abundant. The

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xv.

⁶ *Ibid.*, xiii.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

system's defense mechanism is to form monopolies on a scale not seen in the past 200 years—yet these cannot last.

Third, we're seeing the spontaneous rise of collaborative production: goods, services and organizations that are appearing that no longer respond to the dictates of the market and the managerial hierarchy.⁸

In the meantime, he sees capitalism attempting to prolong its own life by incorporating the new technologies and social relationships into a corporate institutional structure, and enclosing them as a source of rents.

Once you can copy and paste something, it can be reproduced for free. It has, in economics-speak, a 'zero marginal cost'.

Info-capitalists have a solution to this: make it legally impossible to copy certain kinds of information....

With info-capitalism, a monopoly is not just some clever tactic to maximize profit. It is the only way an industry can run....

...Only intellectual property law and a small piece of code in the iTunes track prevent everybody on earth from owning every piece of music ever made. Apple's mission statement, properly expressed, is to prevent the abundance of music.⁹

If the seeds of the successor society already exist within the interstices of capitalism, as they did in the decaying classical and feudal orders, there is another side to the equation. The new system may be already gestating within the shell of the old, but for it to emerge as a full-blown successor system the old capitalist system must in the meantime succumb to its terminal crises to make way for it. Just as the seeds of the new system within the dying body of capitalism parallel the prefigurative institutions of late antiquity and feudalism, capitalism is coming up against limits to its further growth that parallel similar limits reached by previous systems.

Michel Bauwens¹⁰ of the Foundation for Peer-to-Peer Alternatives compares the systemic crisis of capitalism to those of its predecessors as crises of extensive development, resulting in replacement by systems that are better at intensive development. Commons-based peer production is a post-capitalist mode of production that will succeed capitalism, growing out of it in a manner analogous to how the manorial economy emerged from the collapse of the slave economy of classical antiquity and capitalism emerged from late feudalism. And like the previous transitions, peer-production will evolve as a solution to the crisis tendencies of late capitalism when the latter reaches its limits. In every case the phase transition follows the same pattern: "1) systemic crisis ; 2) exodus 3) mutual reconfiguration of the classes."

In the Roman Empire, the low productivity of slaves meant expansion was possible only through spatial conquest. In the transition to feudalism, the Empire from the third century on ceased to expand because the cost of expansion exceeded its benefits. As a result, it was unable to pursue a further course of extensive development based on the expansion of slave labor

⁸ *Ibid.*, xv.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 117, 119.

¹⁰ See footnote under first listing of his name in the Bibliography for a disclaimer regarding Bauwens' problematic behavior in recent years.

because the supply of slaves dried up, as did the tax base derived from new tributaries. Slaves themselves ran away, as well as being offered their freedom by Germanic tribes in return for causing the surrender of their cities.

The successor system solved the problem with more intensive use of existing resources: “a reorientation of some slave owners, who shift to the system of *coloni*, i.e. serfs. I.e. slaves are partially freed, can have families, can produce from themselves and have villages, giving the surplus to the new domain holders.” The process took centuries to complete, with the consolidation of the feudal system occurring only in the tenth century.

The transition now underway is from capitalism to commons-based peer production.

Again, we have a system faced with a crisis of extensive globalization, where nature itself has become the ultimate limit....

What we have then is an exodus, which takes multiple forms: precarity and flight from the salaried conditions; disenchantment with the salaried condition and turn towards passionate production. The formation of communities and commons are shared knowledge, code and design which show themselves to be a superior mode of social and economic organization.

The exodus into peer production creates a mutual reconfiguration of the classes. A section of capital becomes netarchical and ‘empowers and enables peer production’, while attempting to extract value from it, but thereby also building the new infrastructures of cooperation.

This process will take time but there is one crucial difference: the biosphere will not allow centuries of transition. So the maturation of the new configuration will have to consolidate faster and the political revolutions come earlier.¹¹

Late capitalism, according to Bauwens and Franco Iacomella, is beset by systemic crises resulting from two main structural irrationalities: an imperative of permanent growth based on artificially cheap material resources, and economic rents based on the artificial scarcity of information goods. So the system simultaneously outstrips the availability of subsidized material inputs, while hindering the sharing of innovations and discouraging cooperation.¹²

These structural contradictions have always made for reduced efficiency and irrationality. But in recent decades they have resulted in increasingly chronic crisis tendencies, which amount to a terminal crisis of capitalism as a system. Both artificial abundance and artificial scarcity have been integral to capitalism since its beginnings five centuries or so ago, and absolutely essential for the extraction of profit. But capitalism is becoming increasingly dependent on both artificial abundance and artificial scarcity for its survival at the very same time that the state’s ability to provide them is reaching its limits and going into decline. Hence a crisis of sustainability.

Capitalism has pursued a model of growth based on the extensive addition of artificially cheap inputs. This has been possible either because the colonial conquest of the world outside Europe

¹¹ Michel Bauwens, “Three Times Exodus, Three Phase Transitions” *P2P Foundation Blog*, May 2, 2010 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/three-times-exodus-three-phase-transitions/2010/05/02>>.

¹² Bauwens and Franco Iacomella, “Peer to Peer Economy and New Civilization Centered Around the Sustenance of the Commons” in David Bollier and Silke Helfrich, eds., *The Wealth of the Commons: A World Beyond Market and State* (Levellers Press, 2013). Online version at <<http://wealthofthecommons.org/essay/peer-peer-economy-and-new-civilization-centered-around-sustenance-commons>>.

has given the extractive industries privileged access to mineral deposits, fossil fuels and other natural resources, or because capitalist states have socialized the cost of providing important material inputs to the corporate economy like transportation and communications infrastructure and the reproduction of trained labor-power.

Western states have engaged in constant wars, not only directly intervening with military force and maintaining military and naval forces all over the world, but backing death squads and terrorist dictators like Suharto, Mobutu and Pinochet, to guarantee continued global corporate control of local land and natural resources. The main role of the US Navy is to keep the major sea lanes open at general taxpayer expense to subsidize the transportation of oil and other looted natural resources from the Global South, and to provide secure shipping lanes for container ships hauling offshored production back to the shelves of Walmart.

The problem is that when a particular factor input is subsidized and artificially cheap, a business will consume increasing amounts of it as it substitutes it for other factors. And at the same time, capitalism has been beset by a long-term tendency, since the depressions of the late 19th century, towards crises of overinvestment and excess capacity, demand shortfalls and declining organic rates of profit.

This means that an ever growing amount of state subsidies, and ever larger inputs of subsidized material inputs, are necessary just to keep the corporate economy running artificially in the black. In the words of James O'Connor, in *Fiscal Crisis of the State*, the state must subsidize a perpetually increasing share of the operating costs of capital, or utilize an ever growing share of otherwise idle productive capacity and investment capital, to keep the economy out of depression.

The result is two forms of input crisis. First the fiscal crisis of the state, as the state must run increasingly large deficits, and incur increasingly large debt, in order to meet the constantly increasing demands for subsidized education, transportation infrastructure and foreign imperial wars. Of course the growing deficits are also necessary in their own right, for stimulating aggregate demand and countering the chronic crisis of excess capacity. And the growing debt, which is sold to the rentier classes, soaks up trillions in surplus investment capital that would otherwise lack a profitable outlet.

Second, Peak Resource crises like Peak Oil result when capitalism's requirement for endless extensive growth encounters the finitude of natural resources.

Capitalism — like every other class society in history — has likewise depended since the beginning on artificial scarcities. Such scarcities include all forms of artificial property rights that erect barriers between labor and natural productive opportunities, so that producers can be forced to work harder than necessary in order support privileged classes in addition to themselves. Capitalism inherited the artificial property rights in land of earlier systems of exploitation, by which vacant and unimproved land is engrossed and held out of use on a continuing basis, such engrossed land is made available to cultivators only on condition of paying tribute to the engrosser, or a landed oligarchy is superimposed on existing cultivators; the Whig landed oligarchy were agrarian capitalists who inherited the concentrated land holdings that emerged from the enclosures of bastard feudalism. Other forms of artificial scarcity are regulatory entry barriers that impose unnecessary capital outlays for undertaking production or limit the number of producers, regulations that impose artificial floors under the cost of subsistence, restraints on competition between producers that facilitate administered pricing, and restraints on competition in the issuance of credit and currency that enable those engaged in that function to charge usurious prices for it. Perhaps the most important form of artificial scarcity today is so-called “intellectual property,”

which is a legal monopoly on the right to perform certain tasks or use certain knowledge, rather than engrossment of the means of production themselves.

Artificial scarcity, like artificial abundance, is becoming increasingly unsustainable. Copyright is rapidly becoming unenforceable, as the proprietary content industries are learning to their dismay. And the implosion of necessary capital outlays for manufacturing and of the feasible scale for micro-manufacturing, coupled with the ease of sharing digital CAD/CAM files, is raising the transaction costs of enforcing industrial patents to unsustainable levels. The transaction costs of patent enforcement were relatively low when a particular manufactured good was produced in only a few basic models by a handful of industrial corporations, and marketed through a handful of retail chains; when proprietary designs and all sorts of unauthorized knockoffs and modifications can be digitally distributed and produced for local consumption in tens of thousands of neighborhood garage factories, enforcement becomes a nightmare.

Intensive growing techniques like Permaculture are far more efficient in terms of output per acre than factory-farming, thus reducing the necessity and value of engrossed land for people to feed themselves. And the explosion of vernacular building technologies, coupled with the fiscal exhaustion of states that enforce zoning regulations and building codes and the like, means that the imposition of artificial costs of comfortable subsistence is likewise becoming unsustainable.

“Cognitive capitalism” is increasingly dependent on p2p productive relations and communications infrastructures, and is attempting to incorporate them into its old corporate framework as a way of injecting life into the dying system. But it is a force that cannot be contained within the institutional framework of the old society, and can only come into its full development as the basis for a successor society.

Companies have used these technologies to integrate their processes with those of partners, suppliers, consumers, and each other, using a combination of intranets, extranets, and the public internet, and it has become the absolutely essential tool for international communication and business, and to enable the cooperative, internationally coordinated projects carried out by teams.... Politics, culture, and science are equally changed by distributed practices enabled by the new technological infrastructure.¹³

So the general conclusion of all the above has to be the essentially cooperative nature of production, the fact that companies are drawing on this vast reservoir of a ‘commons of general intellectuality’, without which they could not function. That innovation is diffused throughout the social body.¹⁴

...Just as post- or late feudal society and its absolutist kings needed the bourgeoisie, late capitalist society cannot survive without knowledge workers and their P2P practices. It can be argued that the adoption of P2P processes is in fact essential for competitiveness: a strong foundation of P2P technologies, the use of free or open source

¹³ Section 2.1.B. The emergence of peer to peer as technological infrastructure, in Bauwens, *The Peer to Peer Manifesto: The Emergence of P2P Civilization and Political Economy* (MasterNewMedia: November 3, 2007) <http://www.masternewmedia.org/news/2007/11/03/the_peer_to_peer_manifesto.htm>.

¹⁴ Section 3.1.B. The Communism of Capital, or, the cooperative nature of Cognitive Capitalism, in Bauwens, *The Peer to Peer Manifesto*.

software, processes for collective intelligence building, free and fluid cooperation, are now all necessary facets of the contemporary corporation.¹⁵

Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt explicitly describe postcapitalist society as growing out of the surplus resulting from the fact that the multitude creates value faster than it can be appropriated by capital. The common is a positive externality created by the multitude, which capital parasitizes on. But more importantly, the multitude creates this social capital faster than capital can enclose it, and thus builds a new society in part outside the boundaries of capital.¹⁶ This surplus produced by the common, which cannot be fully expropriated by capital, “is the basis on which antagonism is transformed into revolt.”¹⁷

As in previous transitions, the gravedigger mode of production and the gravedigger class which are driving the old system to crisis are also the core of the successor system which is emerging from it. Bauwens sees commons-based peer production as the core logic of the post-capitalist successor society.

A new class of knowledge workers, in its broad sense already the majority of the working population in the West, and poised to be in the same situation elsewhere in a few decades, are creating new practices and tools that enable them to do what they need to do, i.e. knowledge exchange. As they create these new tools, bringing into being a new format of social exchange, they enable new types of subjectivation, which in turn not only changes themselves, but the world around them. When Marx wrote his Manifesto, there were only 100,000 industrial workers, yet he saw that this new social model was the essence of the new society being born. Similarly, even if today only a few million knowledge workers consciously practice P2P, one can see the birth of a new model of a much larger social consequence. This new model is inherently more productive in creating the new immaterial use value, just as the merchants and capitalists were more effective in the material economy.¹⁸

This is fundamentally different from the core logic of capitalism. It will be steady-state and sustainable, with true cost pricing, in its use of physical resources, and it will permit the free replication, sharing and use of information without limit.¹⁹

The technologies and other developments we surveyed in Chapter Two — cheap, ephemeral production technologies and networked communications technologies that are capable of coordination without high administrative overhead — are the material basis for the more intensive economic model of capitalism’s successor. And as Douglas Rushkoff suggested, its logic is fundamentally at war with capitalism’s requirement for extensive growth. Although he focused on the role of communications technology, the same phenomenon is occurring in the realm of physical production thanks to the imploding cost of micro-manufacturing tools.

¹⁵ Section 7.1.B. P2P, Postmodernity, Cognitive Capitalism: within and beyond, in Bauwens, *The Peer to Peer Manifesto*.

¹⁶ Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (Penguin, 2005), pp. 147–148.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 212.

¹⁸ Section 7.1.A. Marginal trend or premise of new civilization? in Bauwens, *The Peer to Peer Manifesto*.

¹⁹ Bauwens, *The Peer to Peer Manifesto: The Emergence of P2P Civilization and Political Economy* (MasterNewMedia: November 3, 2007) <http://www.masternewmedia.org/news/2007/11/03/the_peer_to_peer_manifesto.htm>.

The fact is, most Internet businesses don't *require* venture capital. The beauty of these technologies is that they decentralize value creation. Anyone with a PC and bandwidth can program the next Twitter or Facebook plug-in, the next iPhone app, or even the next social network. While a few thousand dollars might be nice, the hundreds of millions that venture capitalists want to—need to—invest, simply aren't required....

The banking crisis began with the dot.com industry, because here was a business sector that did not require massive investments of capital in order to grow.... What's a bank to do when its money is no longer needed? Especially when contraction is not an option?

So they fail, the tax base decreases, companies based more on their debt structures than their production fail along with them, and we get an economic crisis. Yes, the Internet did all this.²⁰

The post-capitalist social formation will be one in which commons governance, horizontal networks and p2p organization will replace the corporate-state nexus as the core, with markets and administration persisting in reduced, peripheral form and characterized by their relationship to networks.

Commons-based peer production, as an alternative to both the capitalist corporation and the state, enables

the direct social production of use value, through new life practices that are largely outside the control of capital, and with means of production which have been socialized to a very significant degree. These new processes are post-capitalist rather than capitalist, in the sense that they no longer need any specific role of capital for their reproduction.²¹

Although commons-based peer production first appeared in the immaterial sphere, new technological possibilities for the widespread ownership of cheap, small-scale material production tools and distributed aggregation of capital have laid the groundwork for the same mode of production to spread rapidly into the physical realm as well.

- P2P can arise not only in the immaterial sphere of intellectual and software production, but wherever there is access to distributed technology: spare computing cycles, distributed telecommunications and any kind of viral communicator meshwork.
- P2P can arise wherever other forms of distributed fixed capital are available: such is the case for carpooling, which is the second most used mode of transportation in the U.S.
- P2P can arise wherever the process of design may be separated from the process of physical production. Huge capital outlines for production can co-exist with a reliance on P2P processes for design and conception.

²⁰ Douglas Rushkoff, "How the Tech Boom Terminated California's Economy," *Fast Company*, July 10, 2009 <<https://www.fastcompany.com/1307504/how-tech-boom-terminated-californias-economy>>.

²¹ Bauwens, "Interview/ on Peer to Peer Politics with Cosma Orsi," *P2P Foundation Blog*, April 10, 2008 <<http://blog.p2pfoundation.net/interview-on-peer-to-peer-politics-with-cosma-orisi/2008/04/10>>.

- P2P can arise wherever financial capital can be distributed....
- P2P could be expanded and sustained through the introduction of universal basic income.²²

The state and market will continue to exist, but will take on a fundamentally different character, defined by its relation to the larger society—with the commons as its hegemonic institution—into which it is embedded. The markets will be non-capitalist — without the artificially cheap material inputs or the rents from artificial scarcity — and the state will increasingly take on the character of a networked support platform in its relationship to self-managed, horizontal civil society organizations.²³

The public sector of the P2P economy is neither a corporate welfare state at the service of a financial elite, nor a welfare state that has a paternalistic relation to civil society, but a Partner State, which serves civil society and takes responsibility for the metagovernance of the three spheres. The Partner State is dedicated to supporting “the common value creation of the civic sphere”; the “market” and the “mission-oriented” activities of the new private sphere; and all the public services that are necessary for the common good of all citizens....

The essential characteristic of the new system is that the commons is the new core, and a variety of hybrid mechanisms can productively coexist around it, including reformed market and state forms.²⁴

Christopher Wright, working from a Marxist perspective, uses the same gradualist transitional analogies (the transition from feudalism to capitalism, etc.) as the thinkers surveyed above.

To salvage Marx’s intuition, and in fact to make it quite useful, it’s necessary to tweak his formulation. Rather than some sort of “absolute” fettering of productive forces by capitalist relations, there is a *relative* fettering — relative to an emergent mode of production, a more democratic and socialized mode, that is producing and distributing resources more equitably and rationally than the capitalist.

A parallel (albeit an imperfect one) is the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Feudal relations certainly obstructed economic growth, but it wasn’t until a “competing” economy — of commercial, financial, agrarian, and finally industrial capitalism — had made great progress in Western Europe that the classical epoch of revolution between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries burst onto the scene. *Relative to capitalism*, feudalism was hopelessly stagnant, and therefore, once capitalism had reached a certain level of development, doomed.

Crucially, the bourgeoisie’s conquest of political power wasn’t possible until capitalist economic relations had *already*, over centuries, spread across much of Europe. *There had to be a material foundation for the capitalist class’s ultimate political victories: without economic power — the accumulation of material resources through institutions they controlled — capitalists could never have achieved political power.* That is to

²² Bauwens and Iacomella.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

say, much of the enormously protracted social revolution occurred *before* the final “seizure of the state.”²⁵

But this shift in framing requires, in place of the abrupt or revolutionary transition scenarios of orthodox Marxism, something like the interstitial approach described in later chapters.

If historical materialism is right, as it surely is, the same paradigm must apply to the transition from capitalism to socialism. The working class can never complete its conquest of the state until it commands considerable economic power — not only the power to go on strike and shut down the economy but actual command over resources, resources sufficient to compete with the ruling class. The power to strike, while an important tool, is not enough. Nor are mere numbers, however many millions, enough, as history has shown. The working class needs its own institutional bases from which to wage a very prolonged struggle, and these institutions have to be directly involved in the production and accumulation of resources. Only after some such “alternative economy,” or socialized economy, has emerged throughout much of the world alongside the rotting capitalist economy will the popular classes be in a position to finally *complete* their takeover of states. For they will have the resources to politically defeat the — by then — weak, attenuated remnants of the capitalist class....

What we must do, then, is to laboriously construct new relations of production as the old capitalist relations fall victim to their contradictions. But how is this to be done? At this early date, it is, admittedly, hard to imagine how it can be accomplished. Famously, it’s easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.

But two things are clear. First, a significant amount of grassroots initiative is necessary. The long transition will not take place only on one plane, the plane of the state; there will be a tumult of creative energy on sub-state levels, as there was during Europe’s transition into capitalism.... The many forms of such energy can hardly be anticipated, but they will certainly involve practices that have come to be called the “solidarity economy,” including the formation of cooperatives of all types, public banks, municipal enterprises, participatory budgeting, mutual aid networks, and so on. In a capitalist context it is inconceivable that states will respond to crisis by dramatically improving the circumstances of entire populations; as a result, large numbers of people will be compelled to build new institutions to survive and to share and accumulate resources. Again, this process, which will occur all over the world and to some degree will be organized and coordinated internationally, will play out over generations, not just two or three decades.

In the long run, moreover, this solidarity economy will not prove to be some sort of innocuous, apolitical, compatible-with-capitalism development; it will foster anti-capitalist ways of thinking and acting, anti-capitalist institutions, and anti-capitalist resistance. It will facilitate the accumulation of resources among organizations committed to cooperative, democratic, socialized production and distribution, a rebuilding of “the commons,” a democratization of the state. It will amount to an entire

²⁵ Christopher Wright, “Revolution in the Twenty-First Century: A Reconsideration of Marxism,” *New Politics*, May 5, 2020 <<https://newpol.org/revolution-in-the-twenty-first-century-a-reconsideration-of-marxism/>>.

sphere of what has been called “dual power” opposed to a still-capitalist state, a working-class base of power to complement the power of workers and unions to strike.²⁶

This “long revolution” will be international because, as Marx understood, “socialism in one country” is impossible. However:

What he didn’t understand was that the only way a revolution can be international is that it happen in a similar way to the centuries-long “bourgeois revolution” in Europe and North America, namely by sprouting first on the local level, the municipal level, the regional level, and expanding on that “grassroots” basis.²⁷

Wright, in contrast to a view he attributes to “the anarchists,” sees this counter-power strategy as requiring some engagement with the state.

The second point is that, contrary to anarchism, it will be necessary to use the state to help construct a new mode of production. Governments are instruments of massive social power and they cannot simply be ignored or overthrown in a general strike. However unpleasant or morally odious it may be to participate in hierarchical structures of political power, it has to be a part of any strategy to combat the ruling class.²⁸

And he is optimistic that the state will implement many of the foundations of post-capitalism piecemeal, as non-reformist reforms that cannot be rolled back, out of sheer strategic necessity. Just as ordinary people turn to the solidarity economy out of necessity, in the face of stagnation, unemployment, and retrenchment of the welfare state, the capitalist state itself will be forced out of necessity to incorporate elements of the solidarity economy and enlist them as allies, because of its own hollowing out and fiscal exhaustion.

...[W]hat the retrenchment of government’s public functions is making possible, for the first time ever, is the paradigm of revolution that I described above when critiquing Marx’s theory. Given the state’s growing incapacity to assuage discontent, movements of a decentralized, semi-interstitial, regional, democratic character are emerging to fill the vacuum. In the long run they, or the institutions they spawn, will probably take over many of the functions of the national state, such as the provision of social welfare. Even more importantly, they will enable the construction of new production relations in the shell of a corporate capitalist economy that cannot provide billions of people with a livelihood.²⁹

The process bears considerable resemblance to that by which the Roman state, similarly exhausted, out of necessity delegated an increasing share of its security functions to the very Germanic tribes whose incursions it had been fighting.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Wright, *Worker Cooperatives and Revolution: History and Possibilities in the United States* (Bradenton, FL: Boot-Locker, 2014), p. 194.

²⁸ Wright, “Revolution in the Twenty-First Century.”

²⁹ Wright, *Worker Cooperatives and Revolution*, p. 160.

One way the future may play out is that such reforms, eventually supported by much of the elite, continue to spread for many decades as social instability increases. They build up a constituency that acquires a vested interest in their maintenance and expansion. Since national governments and bureaucracies are simultaneously becoming ever more dysfunctional and inadequate to the task of ensuring social order, the “reforms” typically amount to a partial ceding of powers to the regional, local, and international scales. Military and police repression of far-left movements continues in many places, and such movements or parties are rarely permitted to capture national governments (because they’re too important), but on less visible scales, such as the local and regional, “the people” do have more and more say in governance — because the elite finds it necessary to make some concessions, and it’s less dangerous to do so on lower levels of governance than on higher levels.³⁰

And the state will do these things despite the appeal of — and occasional resort to, from place to place — fascism and repression, because fascism is not a sustainable long-term strategy.

Activists and organizations will pressure the state at all levels, from municipal to national, to increase funding for the solidarity economy. In fact, they already are, and have had success in many countries and municipalities, including in the U.S. The election of more socialists to office will encourage these trends and ensure greater successes. Pressure will also build to fund larger worker cooperatives, to convert corporations to worker-owned businesses, and to nationalize sectors of the economy. And sooner or later, many states will start to give in.

Why? One possible state response to crisis, after all, is fascism. And fascism of some form or other is indeed being pursued by many countries right now, from Brazil to Hungary to India to the U.S. But there’s a problem with fascism: by its murderous and ultra-nationalistic nature, it can be neither permanent nor continuously enforced worldwide. Even just in the United States, the governmental structure is too vast and federated, there are too many thousands of relatively independent political jurisdictions, for a fascist regime to be consolidated in every region of the country. Fascism is only a temporary and partial solution for the ruling class. It doesn’t last.³¹

Instead, it will attempt to incorporate as allies the nascent institutions of the post-capitalist society and economy, just as the monarchs and landed classes did with the rising bourgeoisie (and the late Western Roman Empire did with the Germanic tribes).

The other solution, which doubtless will always be accompanied by repression, is to grant concessions to the masses. Here, it’s necessary to observe that the state isn’t monolithically an instrument of capital. While capital dominates it, it is a terrain of struggle, “contestations,” “negotiations,” of different groups — classes, class subgroups, interest groups, even individual entities — advocating for their interests. Marxists from Engels, Kautsky, and Lenin to Miliband and Poulantzas to more recent writers have felled forests writing about the nature of the capitalist state, but for the

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

³¹ Wright, “Revolution in the Twenty-First Century.”

purposes of revolutionary strategy all you need is some critical common sense.... It is possible for popular movements to exert such pressure on the state that they slowly change its character, thereby helping to change the character of capitalist society.

In particular, popular organizations and activists can take advantage of splits within the ruling class to push agendas that benefit the populace. The political scientist Thomas Ferguson, among others, has shown how the New Deal, including the epoch-making Wagner Act and Social Security Act, was made possible by just such divisions in the ranks of business. On a grander scale, Western Europe's long transition from feudalism to capitalism was accompanied by divisions within the ruling class, between more forward-thinking and more hidebound elements. (As is well known, a number of landed aristocrats and clergymen even supported the French Revolution, at least in its early phases.) Marx was therefore wrong to imply that it's *the working class vs. the capitalist class, monolithically*. This totally Manichean thinking suggested that the only way to make a revolution is for the proletariat to overthrow the ruling class in one blow, so to speak, to smash a united reactionary opposition that, moreover, is in complete control of the state (so the state has to be seized all at once).

On the contrary, we can expect the past to repeat itself: as crises intensify and popular resistance escalates, liberal factions of the ruling class will split off from the more reactionary elements in order to grant concessions. In our epoch of growing social fragmentation, environmental crisis, and an increasingly dysfunctional nation-state, many of these concessions will have the character not of resurrecting the centralized welfare state but of encouraging phenomena that seem rather "interstitial" and less challenging to capitalist power than full-fledged social democracy is. But, however innocent it might seem to support new "decentralized" solutions to problems of unemployment, housing, consumption, and general economic dysfunction, in the long run, as I've said, these sorts of reforms will facilitate the rise of a more democratic and socialized political economy within the shell of the decadent capitalist one....

Much of the ruling class will of course oppose and undermine progressive policies — especially of the more statist variety — every step of the way, thus deepening the crisis and doing its own part to accelerate the momentum for change. But by the time it becomes clear to even the liberal sectors of the business class that its reforms are undermining the long-term viability and hegemony of capitalism, it will be too late. They won't be able to turn back the clock: there will be too many worker-owned businesses, too many public banks, too many state-subsidized networks of mutual aid, altogether too many reforms to the old type of neoliberal capitalism (reforms that will have been granted, as always, for the sake of maintaining social order). The slow-moving revolution will feed on itself and will prove unstoppable, however much the more reactionary states try to clamp down, murder dissidents, prohibit protests, and bust unions....

Just as the European absolutist state of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries was compelled to empower — for the sake of accumulating wealth — the capitalist classes that created the conditions of its demise, so the late-capitalist state will be compelled, for the purposes of internal order, to acquiesce in the construction of non-capitalist

institutions that correct some of the “market failures” of the capitalist mode of production. The capitalist state will, of necessity, be a participant in its own demise. Its highly reluctant sponsorship of new practices of production, distribution, and social life as a whole — many of them “interstitial” at first — will be undertaken on the belief that it’s the lesser of two evils, the greater evil being the complete dissolution of capitalist power resulting from the dissolution of society.³²

II. The Nature of Post-Capitalist Transition

Partner State. The Saint-Simonian idea of replacing legislation over human beings with the “administration of things” has since appeared in many iterations, starting with Proudhon’s “dissolution of the state in society” in *General Idea of the Revolution*. Proudhon continued to develop this model through his intellectual career, according to Shawn Wilbur.

In 1887..., more than twenty years after the death of anarchist pioneer Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Frédéric Tufferd wrote:

The most incredible confusion is that between the government and the State. I am an anarchist, as Proudhon was, for like him I want to abolish government, the principle of authority in the State, in order to replace it by an responsible and controllable administration of the public interests; but I do not want, with Bakunin, to abolish the State. The word State comes from stare, to hold, to persist; the State is thus the organized collectivity. Just as the commune is the local collectivity, the State is the national collectivity which has lasted, lasts, and will last as long as the nation itself.

...Then, during the Second Empire..., Proudhon began to advance an alternate account, in which he found that government and the State were indeed separable, and that the non-governmental functions of the State, though modest in comparison to those attributed to its authoritarian forms, served vital roles in society — even when the political forms of society approached *anarchy*.³³

It was in *The Theory of Taxation*, also published in 1861, that the citizen-State finally emerged.... He reaffirmed that the State had a “positive reality,” manifesting itself as a “power of collectivity,” issuing from the organized collective, rather than imposed on it from outside, and thus possessing rights — of the sort introduced in *War an [sic] Peace* — but no authority. He asserted that in a regime of liberty it too must be ruled, like the citizens, only by reason and by justice — because, as he put it, “it is itself, if I may put it this way, a sort of citizen.” This image of the citizen-State, neither master nor servant, and located “on the same line” as the other citizens, may be the simplest characterization possible of Proudhon’s complex and elusive ideal for the State.³⁴

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Shawn Wilbur, “Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: Self-Government and the Citizen-State,” *The Libertarian Labyrinth*, June 2013 <<http://archive.vn/vOZR1>>, pp. 1–2.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

The Partner State is very much in this tradition, as John Restakis describes it:

The idea of the Partner State proceeds directly from the principle that civil society is the source of political legitimacy in a democracy. In this view, the state is in the service of civil society as a vehicle to advance and protect the common good.

Thus, the Partner State is above all an enabling state. Its primary purpose is to maximize the capacity of civil society to create social value and to act as the primary agent in the formation of public policy. It is citizens, acting through civil institutions that they control, that ultimately decide and direct the implementation of public policy. The enabling role of the state is not confined to the promotion of social value. It also entails the promotion of open access to the economy. It provides space for the operation of many models of entrepreneurship, including collective and commons-based forms of enterprise such as cooperatives and peer-to-peer networks, and the promotion of participatory politics.

The Partner State enlarges the scope of personal autonomy and liberty and guarantees personal economic security while reinforcing the social bonds that build healthy communities and a vibrant civil society. Central to this process is the democratization of the state itself. Ultimately, the Partner State acts primarily as an administrative support for the coordination of policies decided upon by institutions of civil society on the basis of cooperative, direct democracy.³⁵

The idea of the Partner State originated with Cosma Orsi, and was picked up by Michel Bauwens of the Foundation for Peer-to-Peer Alternatives. Bauwens, building on Orsi's work, sees the Partner State as a sort of "peer-to-peer state," organized on stigmergic rather than democratic principles.

First of all, these communities are not democracies. Why is that so? Because democracy, the market, and hierarchies are all modes of allocation of scarce resources. In hierarchy, our superiors decide; in the market, prices decide; in a democracy, "we" decide.

But where resources are abundant, as they are with knowledge, code, and design — which can be copied and shared at a marginal cost — they are truly unnecessary.³⁶

So the Partner State, arguably, is not so much a "government" as a system of *governance*. It need not be a state at all, in the sense of an institution which claims the sole right to initiate force in a given territory. It is, essentially, a nonstate social association — or support platform — for managing the commons, extended to an entire geographical region.

Peer production also rests on a sometimes costly infrastructure of cooperation. There would be no Wikipedia without the funding for its servers, no free software or open hardware without similar support mechanisms. This is why open source communities have created a new social institution: the for-benefit association.... [T]he new

³⁵ John Restakis, *Cooperative Commonwealth & the Partner State* (The Next System Project, 2017), p. 11

³⁶ Bauwens, "The 'welfare state' is dead — long live the 'partner state'?" *Al Jazeera English*, March 15, 2012 <<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/03/20123111423139193.html>>.

for-benefit associations have only an active role in enabling and empowering the community to cooperate, by provisioning its infrastructure, not by commanding its production processes. These associations exist for the sole purpose of ‘benefiting’ the community of which they are the expression....

Now, here is the kicker, how would you call an institution that is responsible for the common good of all the participants, in this case, not the people involved in a similar project, but the inhabitants of a territory? I would argue that this type of for-benefit institution has a very similar function to what we commonly assign to the state....

Can we then, imagine, a new type of state? Enter the concept of a Partner State! The Partner State... is a state form that enables and empowers the social creation of value by its citizens. It protects the infrastructure of cooperation that is the whole of society. The Partner State can exist at any territorial level, as a set of institutions that protect the common good and enable the citizens to create value. It does, on a territorial scale, what the for-benefit institutions do on a project-scale. While the for-benefit associations work for the commoners as to particular projects, the Partner State works for the citizens.³⁷

Bauwens and Vasilis Kostakis argue, similarly, that the Partner State is part of a larger ecology commons. In a commons-based economy, an ecology of enterprises (ideally mostly cooperative or peer-to-peer) grows up as a value-added layer on top of information and natural resource commons. The small-scale institutions for managing and supporting the commons — e.g. the Mozilla Foundation, Wikimedia Foundation, etc. — are mini-Partner States. To turn that around, the Partner State is a sort of commons-administering foundation writ large, a meta-organization supporting the commons and civil society.

In our vision, a commons-centric society would ideally have:

- a productive civil society that would contribute to the commons,
- a generative market that would create added value around the commons,
- a partner state, which is emerging prefiguratively in some urban practices, such as the Bologna Regulation for the Care and Regeneration of the Urban Commons or some policies of the Barcelona En Comú citizen platform.

In this vision, the partner state would be the guarantor of civic rights, but also of the equal contributory potential of all citizens. Without this function, communities could have unequal access to resources and capabilities, perpetuating inequality. In our vision, the state form would gradually lose its separateness from civil society, by implementing radically democratic procedures and practices.³⁸

Another good description comes from Stacco Troncoso and Ann Marie Utratel:

³⁷ Bauwens, “Evolving Towards a Partner State in an Ethical Economy,” in Andrea Botero, Andrew Gryf Paterson and Joanna Saad-Sulonen, eds., *Towards Peer Production in Public Services: Cases from Finland* (Helsinki: Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture, Department of Media, 2012), pp. 57–58.

³⁸ Bauwens and Vasilis Kostakis, “Peer-to-peer production and the partner state,” *Red Pepper*, Aug. 27, 2017 <<http://www.redpepper.org.uk/peer-to-peer-production-and-the-partner-state/>>.

Imagine a radically reconfigured and democratically accountable structure. One that, while preserving the more desirable characteristics of the Welfare State — social and public health provision and large infrastructure management and upkeep — radically democratizes them. It would do away with the State's cozy symbiosis with market entities, while deconstructing its pernicious monopolies over money creation and exchange, and property and judicial rights. A second radical set of measures would prohibit the structural enforcement of inequality and the often violent repression of emancipatory alternatives. This structure would function in much the same way as foundations do in the Open Source software economy: providing the infrastructure for cooperation and the creation and upkeep of commons but not directing the process of social value creation and distribution. In other words, it would empower and protect the practice of commoning.

This enabling metastructure — often referred to as “The Partner State” — would also take on new functions derived from already existing P2P/Commons practices. Among these, we would see a promotion of real, needs-oriented entrepreneurship, bolstered by explicit recognition and support of bottom-up productive infrastructures, such as Open Coops, mesh wireless networks or community renewables through public-*Commons* partnerships. It would allow commoners to repurpose or take over unused or underutilised public buildings for social ends while giving legal recognition to the act of commoning, whether through copyleft-inspired property-law hacks or through a longer process of gradually institutionalizing commons practices. Its grassroots democratizing ethos would create new financing mechanisms and debt-free public money creation, which, alongside social currencies, could fund environmentally regenerative work and the creation of new, distributed Open-source infrastructure. These would be supported by taxation schemes favouring the types of labor described above, while penalizing speculation, parasitic rents and negative social and environmental externalities. The overall system has to be kept in check through a pervasive culture of participatory politics — made feasible through its attendant pedagogy — to involve a newly enfranchised citizenry in the deliberation and real-time consultation of political and legislative issues and budgeting. In issues of power, the Partner State shifts to being a fluid facilitator to assist and emancipate the bottom-up counter-power that keeps it in check.³⁹

For Christian Iaione, it is a platform that follows an open-source logic and is organized below. And to some extent it recapitulates the polyarchic systems of governance that predated the Westphalian nation-state and its model of sovereignty.

For this reason, we need to re-think the organization and the culture of institutions in a framework of open-source and circularity: we need a State-Platform that does not want to guide the process but choses [sic] to act from below, supporting a circuit of relationship and allowing the above-mentioned actors [public, private, third

³⁹ Stacco Troncoso and Ann Marie Utratel, “Commons in the time of monsters: How P2P Politics can change the world, one city at a time,” *Commons Transition*, June 5, 2017 <<http://commonstransition.org/commons-time-monsters/>>.

sector, cultural institutions such as schools and universities, single citizens and social innovators] to become authors and actors of general interest. The State-Platform must break the monopoly of public care of the general interest, without withdrawing from the care of those interests which are inescapably public and becoming a system administrator, as it happens in the web.... We took thirty or forty years to have the social state we inherited, which was born exactly as the contemporary collaborative state is emerging in the co-working spaces, in enterprises, in community cooperatives, in fab labs, in impact hubs, in cultural and creative collectives and enterprises, in the collective management of the commons and so on....[T]hese people are reconstructing and regenerating the State starting from its foundations. If we look back into the history of the Social State and of its birth, we understand that it originated in society, in neighborhood associations, in self-managed mutual aid societies, in the world of cooperation and in workers' unions of first generation. From there the first mutual aid insurances against on-the-job injuries were generated, together with the first forms of income support. An old fox such as Otto Von Bismarck, who had foreseen what was happening, before being removed from power was able to build the Social State. He did so working from above, with a top-down approach, as he knew that hadn't he laid the foundations of the social state, the social state would have anyway emerged from the bottom-up action of these ante litteram innovators, that would definitely not have confirmed him in his role.⁴⁰

...[A] new form of State, a State which is plural because distributed, because it can be found in the different worlds of society, economy and knowledge and not anymore confined to the offices and hallways our institutions. Thus, a program of large-scale experimentation is needed to regenerate institutions, a program able to strengthen administrations' institutional capacity to manage change without suffocating it nor attempting to direct it. The State should accompany, enable, monitor and value such change by becoming a platform. A State-Platform will be ready to make his time, competences, human, technical and logistic resources available in order to organize processes and territorial laboratories where things begin to happen regardless of the administration, but in a more controlled and legitimate way. It will grant everyone the possibility to experiment, allowing everyone to be informed on what projects others citizens are undertaking and perhaps to join them. Making sure that basic norms on security and inclusion are respected, it should provide a free license to experiment and imagine. The multitude of mistakes made and even more of lessons learnt should become the base from which we begin to re-think the State in the XXI century.⁴¹

The model is closely paralleled by Abdullah Ocalan's third principle of Democratic Confederatism, whose "decision-making processes lie with the communities."

Higher levels only serve the coordination and implementation of the will of the communities that send their delegates to the general assemblies. For limited space of time

⁴⁰ Christian Iaione, "The Platform-State. Government as an enabler of Civic Imagination and Collaboration," in *The City as a Commons Papers: The founding literature and inspirational speeches* (CO-Cities, LabGov et al, 2019), pp. 32–33.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

they are both mouthpiece and executive institutions. However, the basic power of decision rests with the local grass-roots institutions.⁴²

Tommaso Fattori, an activist in the Italian Water Commons movement, discussed the Partner State in the context of commonification of public services:

The field of Commons can be for the most part identified with a public but not-state arena, in which the actions of the individuals who collectively take care of, produce and share the Commons are decisive and fundamental.

In this sense, Commons and commoning can become a means for transforming public sector and public services (often bureaucracy-bound and used to pursue the private interests of lobby groups): a means for their commonification (or commonalization). Indeed, there are many possible virtuous crossovers between the traditional public realm and the realm of Commons.

Commonification goes beyond the simple de-privatization of the public realm: Commonification basically consists of its democratization, bringing back elements of direct self-government and self-managing, by the residents themselves, of goods and services of general interest (or participatory management within revitalized public bodies). Commonification is a process in which the inhabitants of a territory regain capability and power to make decisions, to orientate choices, rules, and priorities, reappropriating themselves of the very possibility of governing and managing goods and services in a participatory manner: it is this first-person activity which changes citizens into commoners....

These are resources which do not belong to and which are not at the disposal of governments or the State-as-person, because they belong to the collectivity and above all, to future generations, who cannot be expropriated of their rights. Distributed participatory management and self-government, inclusion and collective enjoyment, no individual exclusive rights, prevalence of use value over exchange value, meeting of primary and diffuse needs: commons, in this understanding, means all these things.... This is a road which could be the beginning of a general transformation of the role of the state and of local authorities into partner state, “namely public authorities which create the right environment and support infrastructure so that citizens can peer produce value from which the whole of society benefits.”...⁴³

Massimo De Angelis. Like the other gradualists we’ve looked at, Massimo De Angelis frames the transition in terms of a shifting balance between a decaying system in being and a successor system coming into being within it.

As George Caffentzis writes in his cover blurb, De Angelis does for the commons what Marx did for capital. He posits the C-M-C circuit as part of a complementary commons circuit or circuit of social reproduction, alongside Marx’s circuit of capital (M-C-M).

⁴² Abdullah Ocalan, *Democratic Confederalism*. International Initiative Edition (London and Cologne: Transmedia Publishing Ltd, 2011), p. 33.

⁴³ Excerpts from a text prepared by Tommaso Fattori as part of the book-project “Protecting Future Generations Through Commons,” organized by Directorate General of Social Cohesion of the Council of Europe in collaboration with the International University College of Turin. Quoted in “Research Plan,” FLOK Society Wiki <http://en.wiki.floksociety.org/w/Research_Plan> Accessed August 9, 2014.

While for Marx the commodity is the elementary form of capitalist wealth, so for me common goods are the elementary form of wealth of a postcapitalist world.⁴⁴

De Angelis criticizes Marx for largely focusing on capital, to the neglect of the role that the commons play in social reproduction under capitalism.⁴⁵

C-M-C is a “selling-in-order-to-buy circuit.”⁴⁶ The difference between the two circuits is that “[t]he first has at [sic] its goals the satisfaction of needs, and money here is a mere means for the satisfaction of these needs. The second has as its goal the realization of money: the means becomes here the end.”⁴⁷

This selling-in-order-to-buy circuit is nothing more than a membrane of exchange between commons and capital systems, the boundary separating commons from capital. As a subset of a larger commons circuit, the simple selling-in-order-to-buy circuit only appears as contingently necessary, and different commons may be distinguished by the degree of their dependence on capital’s monetary circuits.⁴⁸

The point is that unlike the capital circuit, the simple commodity circuit is just a means, hence scalable, depending on the external context, to the structure of needs and desires and the resources that can be mobilised in non-commoditised forms (through for example pooling, gift circuits or administrative transfers).⁴⁹

Hence the commons, by growth, can reduce its need for interaction with the circuit of capital via the cash nexus, and incorporate more and more basic functions of life into itself.

The commons are constrained by the fact that they coexist with capital and the state.

It is up to the commons, therefore, to develop their own politics to attempt to shift these constraints....⁵⁰

The commons and capital circuits have coexisted since the beginning of capitalism, with the boundary and correlation of forces between them constantly shifting. The “structural coupling” between the two circuits “allows one system to access and use the complexity of other systems.” The correlation of forces at any given time determines the comparative power of the commons circuit and capital circuit in setting the terms of their mutual interface through the cash nexus, and whether the boundary between them is such that capital on net uses the commons as a means to its own ends more than the commons uses capital, or vice versa.⁵¹

⁴⁴ Massimo De Angelis. *Omnia Sunt Communia: On the Commons and the Transformation to Postcapitalism* (London: Zed Books, 2017), p. 18.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 21.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. 22.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 176.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p. 22.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 192.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 13.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* pp. 24–25.

...even if it is true that capital can co-opt commons, the opposite is also true: the commons can access the complexity of capital systems for their own development.⁵²

Commons and capital are two distinct, autonomous social systems; that is, they both struggle to 'take things into their own hands' and self-govern on the basis of their different and often clashing, internally generated codes, measures and values. They also struggle to be distinct autopoietic social systems, in that they aim to reproduce not only their interrelations but also the reproduction of their components through their internally generated codes and values. They do this of course, in a clear, distinctive way. Capital can reproduce itself only through profit and its accumulation, which ultimately imply the exploitation of labour, the creation of divisions among the working class, and the trashing of nature. Commons can reproduce through commoning, doing in common, which is a social process embedded in particular values that defines a sharing culture in a given time and context, through which they reproduce resources and the community that comprises them.... Commons are generated in so far as subjects become commoners, in so far as their social being is enacted with others, at different levels of social organization, through a social practice, commoning, that is essentially horizontal and may embrace a variety of forms depending on circumstances..., but ultimately is grounded in community sharing. Capital, by contrast, tends to objectify, instrumentalize and impose hierarchical order....

...[T]he commons and capital/state are often linked, coupled through the buying-and-selling site of the market, that is, the 'economy'. Both capital and the commons buy and sell, although with different priorities and as parts of different movements.... Capital buys in order to sell at a profit... or as means of production, to turn resources into commodities.... Commons, on the other hand, tend to sell commodities in order to buy means of sustenance and reproduction. For example, some members of a household sell their labour power to gain an income in order to be able to purchase the goods necessary for reproduction of the household; or an association engages in petty trade to fund itself; or a social centre sells beer at a concert to purchase the materials to build a kitchen. Buying in order to sell and selling in order to buy are two opposite praxes..., the former governed by a life activity ultimately wasted in accumulation and the latter governed by the needs and desires of reproduction.... In other words..., while reproduction of labour power is a feature of the commons production of the commodity labour-power sold to capital, capital does not necessarily control (or controls only in part through the state and the education system) the labour of reproduction which is fundamental to the commons.

...Furthermore, the environment of present-day commons is dominated by capital loops, the circuits of capital that all wish to enclose and all wish to turn into a profitable enterprise and overwork or destitution for others. If we were to take the large, bird's-eye view of history, of the original accumulations of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries in South America, Africa, Asia and Europe up to the most recent transition from the post-1945 Keynesian deal to neoliberal, several books could be

⁵² *Ibid.* p. 25.

written about the co-evolution of capital and the commons, about how commons sustained the enclosures of the former by regenerating newer forms in different areas, and how capital has regenerated itself under the impulse of commoner struggles on the shop floor, in neighbourhoods, in bread or antiracist riots or women's struggles.⁵³

I would add that books could be written — and I think a couple actually have been by Kropotkin at least — on how the commons was the fundamental basis of human society from the first neolithic open field villages until the rise of class differentiation and the state, and that successive systems of class exploitation and class states since then have been parasitic layers extracting surpluses from the commons.

With the rise of hyper-efficient small-scale means of production not amenable to centralized capitalist control, and the revolution in networked many-to-many communications, we're entering a new transition period in which the productivity of the commons is becoming too great for capital to successfully enclose or parasitize upon, and in which the commons will ultimately reabsorb the whole of life and leave the parasitic economic classes and their state to starve.

De Angelis refers to the stocks of common goods that accumulate within commons systems and are available to them for internal use as "commonwealth."

Like capital, commonwealth is thus a stock, but unlike capital the flows it generates possess different goals and it is enacted through different practices. However, like any other systems including capital, its flows aim at going back to stocks, reproduce them, replenish them and enrich them...⁵⁴

And the intensification of capitalist crisis and further proletarianization "creates the conditions for the flourishing of reproduction commons..."⁵⁵

De Angelis's picture of the growing commons circuit, as the foundation for post-capitalist society, is a virtual mirror-image — albeit on a higher technical level — of Marx's picture in *Grundrisse* of direct co-production for use in the commons in pre-capitalist times.

Capitalism could only come into existence, Marx argues, when labor was made "free," that is separated from "the objective conditions of its realization — from the means of labour and the material for labour." It was necessary to nullify the right to both small-scale free landed property and to communal landed property like that of the open-field village.

In either form of peasant proprietorship, as it existed before robbery and enclosure, "the individuals relate not as workers but as proprietors —"

and members of a community, who at the same time work. The aim of this work is not the *creation of value*... rather, its aim is sustenance of the individual proprietor and of his family, as well as of the total community.⁵⁶

Property therefore means *belong to a clan* (community)...; and, by means of the relation of this community to the land and soil, [relating] to the earth as the individual's

⁵³ *Ibid.* pp. 103–107.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p. 111.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 279.

⁵⁶ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* pp. 471–472.

inorganic body; his relation to land and soil, to the external primary conditions of production... as to a presupposition belonging to his individuality, as modes of his presence.⁵⁷

Property, then, originally means... the relation of the working (producing or self-reproducing) subject to the conditions of his production or reproduction as his own.... This relation as proprietor... presupposes the individual defined as a member of a clan or community....⁵⁸

This was true of open-field villages, it was true of individual household possession by right as members of a clan, it was true of rights of access by members of an urban commune to the public lands outside the town walls, and it was true of Roman rights to cultivate a share of the *ager publicus*. In every case the individual was born with a right of access, guaranteed by custom, to the means of direct production for subsistence, as well as membership in a social support network against incapacitation or old age. “The property in one’s own labour is mediated by property in the condition of labour...” flowing from one’s membership in the commune.⁵⁹

The existence of an independent base of guaranteed subsistence, as a member of a solidaritarian community, was an obstacle to creating an economy based on the extraction of surplus value from wage laborers. The necessity of competing with the possibility of direct production for subsistence undermined the ability of employers to command labor in the amounts they desired, and for the wages they were willing to pay; it greatly reduced the rate of profit they could expect to obtain. The creation of a capitalist wage system required the violent suppression of peasant rights to the land, either as individual small-holders or members of a commune, and their reduction to utter dependence on wage labor — on the employer’s terms — for survival. The circuit of capital presupposes the divorce of the individual from “their previous relations to the *objective conditions of labour*.”⁶⁰

Conversely, the renascence of the commons and expansion of the commons circuit presuppose reuniting productive property with commoners, and reincorporation of the means of production into the commons. The commons, as the locus of direct production of use-value, and for insurance against risk and mutual aid in time of need, again — as before — undermines the ability of capitalist employers to compel labor on their own terms, and will create a positive feedback process in which each expansion of the capacity of the commons further weakens the extractive capability of capital, and each weakening of capital causes still more subsistence needs to be met in the commons instead of the cash nexus. Capitalism imposed wage labor by suppressing the commons, as described by Marx; and as described by De Angelis, the recomposition of the commons will break the power of the wage system.

Again, this renewed and expanded commons mirrors the pre-capitalist commons *on a higher technical level*. Writing of the pre-capitalist commons, Marx noted that forms of production

in which the community presupposes its subjects in a specific objective unity with their conditions of production, or in which a specific subjective mode of being presupposes the communities themselves as conditions of production, necessarily correspond to a development of the forces of production which is only limited, and

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 492.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 495.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 476.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 497–498, 503.

indeed limited in principle. The development of the forces of production dissolves these forms, and their dissolution is itself a development of the human productive forces.⁶¹

It is questionable whether this was ever true, whether it was ever necessary to go through another stage of class exploitation, in order that the forces of production be further developed to overcome scarcity and lay the foundations for post-capitalist abundance; Lewis Mumford, for example, lays out plausible scenarios for the development of productive forces through a continuation of the eotechnic model, and their direct continuation into something like the neotechnic, without anything like the Enclosures and Dark Satanic Mills as a necessary means of accumulation. But in any case — as already noted in a previous chapter — developments in recent decades of the radical cheapening of small-scale means of production suited to the household economy and to the commons makes possible a shift to the commons as the primary locus of material progress.

His mention of abolishing the worst aspects of capital and state echoes ideas found in similar thinkers of shifting the nature of states (ranging from Saint-Simon's substitution of "administration of things" for "governance of people" to Proudhon's "dissolving the state in society" to Orsi's Partner State) and corporations (experiments in self-management, open-sourcing IP, etc.) even under the existing system, in order to make them somewhat less extractive and hierarchical, and lay the groundwork for a fundamental alteration in their character when the larger system they are a part of reaches its tipping point. The nature of the corporation or state agency is determined by the nature of the larger system of which it is a part (e.g. the evolution of craft guilds from a cooperative ethos at the height of the Middle Ages to an essentially corporate capitalist model dominated by large masters engaged in the export trade in early modern times). The legacy institutions that are able to negotiate the transition process and survive with some degree of organizational continuity in the successor society may still have the same names, but they will be largely different in substance.

[Last Edited October 7, 2020]

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 496.

Chapter Six: Interstitial Development and Exodus over Insurrection

Introduction

If the New Left did not altogether abandon the ideas of insurrectionary assault and seizure of control of the preexisting institutions of state and corporation, it at least favored, far more than the Old Left, a concurrent interstitial approach of building counter-institutions as the nucleus of a future society.

Tom Hayden, writing in 1966, put it in language that would sound entirely familiar to those involved in the Italian social centers of the 70s, the Argentinian recuperated factories, or today's municipalist movements in Barcelona and Madrid:

To summarize: the Movement is a community of insurgents sharing the same radical values and identity, seeking an independent base of power wherever they are. It aims at a transformation of society led by the most excluded and "unqualified" people. Primarily, this means building institutions outside the established order which seek to become the genuine institutions of the total society. Community unions, freedom schools, experimental universities, community-formed police review boards, people's own anti-poverty organizations fighting for federal money, independent union locals — all can be "practical" pressure points from which to launch reform in the conventional institutions while at the same time maintaining a separate base and pointing towards a new system. Ultimately, this movement might lead to a Continental Congress called by all the people who feel excluded from the higher circles of decision-making in the country. This Congress might even become a kind of second government, receiving taxes from its supporters, establishing contact with other nations, holding debates on American foreign and domestic policy, dramatizing the plight of all groups that suffer from the American system.¹

And if this is only partly true of the New Left, it is much more fully true of subsequent phenomena like autonomism and the post-1994 horizontalist resistance movements.

Note on Terminology. The term "interstitial" overlaps somewhat in meaning with "prefigurative," and the two words are often used more or less interchangeably among the same general currents of the Left. I used "prefigurative" more myself in earlier drafts of this book than in the final one, but decided it had shades of meaning that were unsatisfactory.

¹ Tom Hayden, "The Politics of 'The Movement,'" *Dissent*, November-December 1966 <<https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/tom-hayden-politics-of-the-movement-1966>>. Accessed September 23, 2018.

For me “prefigurative” carries a whiff of idealistic lifestylism, whereas “interstitial” suggests actually building the new society here and now rather than just prefiguring it. As an illustration: Marx saw worker worker cooperatives as “prefiguring” postcapitalist society in that they showed what was possible, but he didn’t consider them feasible on any significant scale under the material conditions of capitalism; rather, they were something that could only become actual building blocks of society “after the Revolution.” The new municipalist movements today, to take a contrasting example, see community land trusts, alternative currencies, neighborhood gardens and workshops, etc., not just as “prefigurations” of the future society but as the actual beginnings of it: things that will grow and coalesce into the core of the postcapitalist system and eventually supplant capitalism.

And among its advocates, prefigurative politics is used more in the first sense — that is, as Marx saw cooperatives — than in the second. Present-day writer Sofa Saio Gradin, for example, describes it as “the politics of organising in the here-and-now in a way that reflects the society we want to see in the future,” and “about shaping our cultures, norms and social relations, as well as our formal rules and policies, in the image of the society we desire.” It’s more about the attitudes it encourages (“the daily behaviours, assumptions and relationships of the general population”) than any actual post-capitalist institutions that will persist through the phase transition.²

And one of the first people to use the term in its current sense, Carl Boggs, defined it as “the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal.”

The interstitial approach is ideally suited to remedy the defects of prefiguration, as Boggs complained of it:

The dilemmas of modern prefigurative movements came from the legacy of the entire prefigurative tradition, which in contrast to Leninism and structural reformism sought to affirm the actuality of revolutionary goals. In rejecting a vanguardism, they often ignored the state and the problem of power; in stressing the prefigurative side, they downplayed the task of organization. And like the organized Marxist movements, they ultimately failed to articulate a democratic socialist theory of transition. The instability and vulnerability of dual power necessitates rapid movement toward a broad system of nationwide revolutionary authority; without this, as history shows, local structures are unable to translate popular energies into a sustained movement that is both prefigurative and politically effective. What is required, and what the entire prefigurative strategy lacks, is a merging of spontaneism and the “external element,” economics and politics, local democratic and state power struggles. But the recent experiences of radical movements in capitalist countries reflect a continued polarization between prefigurative and statist strategies that is harmful to such a possibility.³

² Saio Sofa Gradin, “Could pre-figurative politics provide a way forward for the left?” *Open Democracy*, January 19, 2020 <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/could-pre-figurative-politics-provide-way-forward-left>>.

³ Carl Boggs, “Marxism, prefigurative communism, and the problem of workers’ control,” *Radical America* 6 (Winter 1977), hosted at LibCom.org <<https://libcom.org/library/marxism-prefigurative-communism-problem-workers-control-carl-boggs>>. Accessed January 26, 2020.

Interstitial development is precisely the organizational approach, addressing the problem of power and providing the theory of transition, that Boggs found lacking.

I. The Split Within Autonomism

Although autonomism shares many areas of commonality, there is a major difference in approach between (on the one hand) Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, and (on the other) Harry Cleaver, Silvia Federici, John Holloway and Massimo De Angelis. Both sides of the split stress the importance of interstitial development and of working class agency and subjectivity in post-capitalist transition. But Negri et al see capitalism as a totalizing system without an outside, which has already enclosed the whole of society via the social factory. The intangibles we already occupy (the knowledge we carry in our heads, the social relationships in society outside the factory, etc.) are the primary sources of productivity, but they are all within the circuit of capital. It therefore remains only to understand that we're already *in* communism, in the sense that capitalism has created all the prerequisites of communism within itself, that we're already in possession of most of the means of production, and that all that remains to us is to cut off capital as a superfluous node. As Angelos Varvarousis put it:

Hardt and Negri do not view the commons as relatively independent social systems of resource management. Instead, they focus on the more abstract level of the production of "the common" as an inseparable social force that is already taking shape due to the informatization and "cognitization" of production. For them, the expansion of commoning practices and of the "common" as a distinct mode of social relations does not take the form of a counterpower or resistance to capital but is immanent in capitalism's process of evolution....⁴

On the other hand, Federici et al deny that capitalism is a completed, totalizing system. The circuit of capital has totalizing imperatives of valorization and accumulation; but it is in a constant struggle to reproduce itself against other contending spheres like the commons, which are resisting enclosure. So building a post-capitalist system requires treating the autonomous commons as building blocks and expanding them.

If we first strip away Negri et al's false understanding of capitalism as a totalizing system with no outside, we're still left with two areas of emphasis by the contending sides that are more complementary than contradictory. What's needed is a synthesis that incorporates the positive sides of both.

II. The Shift From the Factory to Society as the Main Locus of Productivity

A major theme of the Negri, Hardt and Dyer-Witheford wing of autonomism is the way in which workers' own social relationships have become the main source of productive capital, as

⁴ Angelos Varvarousis, "The rhizomatic expansion of commoning through social movements," *Ecological Economics* 171 (2020) <https://www.academia.edu/42114744/The_rhizomatic_expansion_of_commoning_through_social_movements>, p. 3.

physical capital has declined in importance relative to human capital and production has taken on a networked, horizontal character. And at the same time, the boundaries between this increasingly social production process and the rest of life — the spheres of consumption, family life, lifelong learning and the reproduction of labor-power — are becoming more and more blurred. As Nick Dyer-Witheford writes:

The activities of people not just as workers but as students, consumers, shoppers and television viewers are now directly integrated into the production process. During the era of the mass worker, the consumption of commodities and the reproduction of labor had been organized as spheres of activity adjunct to, yet distinct from, production. Now these borders fray.... Work, school, and domesticity are re-formed into a single, integrated constellation.⁵

And the growing centrality of network communications and information to all forms of production, and the penetration of this networked culture into the entire cultural sphere, means that it becomes a familiar part of the worker's life.⁶

When workers' skills and social relationships become the main form of capital, the converse is that — in contrast to the days when "capital" was expensive, absentee-owned physical capital that workers were paid to come to a physical location and work — workers are in direct possession of a much larger share of the prerequisites of production.

Likewise, as Dyer-Witheford paraphrases Negri, "the new communicative capacities and technological competencies manifesting in the contemporary work force..."

exist in "virtual" form among the contingent and unemployed labor force. They are not so much the products of a particular training or specific work environment but rather the premises and prerequisites of everyday life in a highly integrated technological system permeated by machines and media.⁷

In Negri's own words, "the raw material on which the very high level of productivity is based — the only raw material... which is suitable for an intellectual and inventive labour force — is *science, communication and the communication of knowledge*." To extract profit from the cooperative relationships between workers, capital "must... appropriate communication. It must expropriate the community and superimpose itself on the autonomous capability of manufacturing knowledge..."

The socialized worker's labour is more productive than that of the mass worker. It is endowed with a very high level of productive potential because it is capable of setting in motion the productive potentiality of the whole of society.... At all levels and in all contexts, community has increasingly become the foundation of the productivity of labour.... Today capitalist expropriation no longer takes place through wages alone. Given the conditions we have described, expropriation no longer simply consists in the expropriation of the producer, but, in the most immediate sense, in the

⁵ Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggle in High-Technology Capitalism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), pp. 80–81.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

expropriation of the producers' community.... Advanced capitalism directly expropriates labouring cooperation. Capital has penetrated the entire society by means of technological and political instruments... to anticipate, organize and subsume each of the forms of labouring cooperation which are established in society in order to generate a higher level of productivity. Capital has insinuated itself everywhere, and everywhere attempts to acquire the power to coordinate, commandeer and recuperate value.⁸

But in doing this, capital must diffuse the informational tools of production into workers' hands. And the skills and social relationships capital profits off of become an inseparable part of the worker's mind and personality. Unlike the case of the physical factory, where management could search workers' lunchboxes for tools and parts on the way out the door, employers cannot force workers to upload their knowledge and skill, or their social relationships, to a company mainframe when they clock out. The implication, as Dyer-Witheford sees it:

By informing production, capital seems to augment its powers of control. But it simultaneously stimulates capacities that threaten to escape its command and overspill into rivulets irrelevant to, or even subversive of, profit.⁹

In many areas of production, I would add, the communication and information processing tools used in the workplace are becoming virtually indistinguishable from those used in the social sphere. Wikis and blogs, and social media like Twitter, developed primarily for use outside the workplace, have been seized on by champions of the "Wikified Firm" or "Enterprise 2.0" as tools for coordinating production within the workplace. At the same time, open-sourced desktop or browser-based utilities are frequently more productive and usable than the proprietary "productivity software" forced on workers in the workplace. As Tom Coates put it, "the gap between what can be accomplished at home and what can be accomplished in a work environment has narrowed dramatically over the last ten to fifteen years."¹⁰

Since Marx's day, according to Negri and Hardt, his simple schema of the circuit of capital (production and circulation) has expanded to encompass virtually all of society, including both the reproduction of nature and the reproduction of labor-power—the "social factory."¹¹

The concept of the social factory was introduced in "Factory and Society," Mario Tronti's 1962 article in *Quaderni Rossi*: capital colonizes "the whole of society" with the result that society becomes "a function of the factory and the factory extends its exclusive domination over the whole of society."¹²

Negri argued that Marx himself anticipated this concept in *Grundrisse*. Capital is forced to overcome every barrier to realization in the circulation process by transcending it and incorporating it into itself, so that an ever greater share of all social activity is incorporated into the circuit of capital.

⁸ Antonio Negri, "Expropriation in Mature Capitalism," in *The Politics of Subversion: A Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century*. Translated by James Newell (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1989), pp. 115–116.

⁹ Dyer-Witheford, p. 85.

¹⁰ Tom Coates, "(Weblogs and) The Mass Amateurisation of (Nearly) Everything..." Plasticbag.org, September 3, 2003 <http://www.plasticbag.org/archives/2003/09/weblogs_and_the_mass_amateurisation_of_nearly_everything>

¹¹ Dyer-Witheford, pp. 91–92.

¹² Cited by Harry Cleaver in *Rupturing the Dialectic: The Struggle Against Work, Money, and Financialization* (Chico, Oakland, Edinburgh, Baltimore: AK Press, 2017), p. 60.

Circulation produces the socialization of capital. Marx fully appreciates this passage to social capital and stresses it: “there opened up for us the prospect, which cannot be sharply defined yet at this point, of a *specific relation of capital to the communal, general conditions of social production*, as distinct from the conditions of a *particular capital* and its *particular production process*.” Therefore the leap to “social capital,” like the leap to “social labor” is not a generic one. It is a *qualitative leap which permeates the category of capital*. Society appears to us as capital’s society. It is through this passage that all social conditions are subsumed by capital, that is, they become part of its “organic composition.”¹³

Harry Cleaver cites Negri’s observation that capital has pursued the “subsumption of society”:

(i.e., reshaping of all of human activities as work that contributes to its expanded reproduction)....

As all human activities are being subsumed by capital as work, Negri and others argue, it becomes impossible to distinguish work from nonwork, “the division between work time and non-work time” breaks down. Under such conditions, he argues, appropriating a concept from Foucault, life becomes “biopolitical labor,” and it becomes impossible to quantify and measure labor that produces value (abstract labor) as something distinct from other human activity.¹⁴

III. Negri et al vs. the Commons

Negri does not envision a transition strategy based on shifting to direct production for use in the commons sector outside capitalist control, but rather envisioned working class self-valorization as something taking place *within* the totalizing sphere of capital as a result of the contradictions of an overall system that capital itself has created. For him the primary significance of working-class self-valorization as an antagonist to the circuit of capital is the expansion of the scale of necessary labor and consumption entailed in both the reproduction of labor power and the realization of capital; this increased scale shifts the balance of power between labor and capital so that the former attains the capability of ending capitalism from *within*, not from *outside*.

Here a fundamental law of the transition to communism is clarified: *the transition is possible when the working class, instead of being moved by capital, moves itself and subordinates capital to its own forms of behavior*. This material and objective dictatorship of the class over capital is the first fundamental passage of transition, most obviously when the relationship does not result in the capitalist mediation of development, but rather in the workers’ mediation of capital’s crisis.¹⁵

¹³ Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*. Translated by Harry Cleaver, Michael Ryan and Maurizio Viano. Edited by Jim Fleming (New York: Autonomedia, 1991), p. 114.

¹⁴ Harry Cleaver, *Rupturing the Dialectic: The Struggle Against Work, Money, and Financialization* (Chico, Oakland, Edinburgh, Baltimore: AK Press, 2017), pp. 96–97.

¹⁵ *Proletarians and the State: Toward a Discussion of Workers’ Autonomy and the Historic Compromise* (1975), in Negri, *Books for Burning: Between Civil War and Democracy in 1970s Italy*. Translations edited by Timothy S. Murphy.

Self-valorization does include some interstitial and prefigurative effort, but the primary focuses of this effort are the refusal of work and direct appropriation — i.e. demanding a greater share of the social product created by capitalism with less work, not building alternative institutions.¹⁶ Refusal of work increasingly comes to forefront as a spontaneous phenomenon. “The communist contents of the program begin to be expressed from the lowest level of worker behavior such as absenteeism, sabotage, direct-individual and group-appropriation, etc.”¹⁷ For Negri the refusal of work is “*the content of the process of self-valorization*,” and the refusal of work “*is first and foremost sabotage, strikes, direct action*.”¹⁸ He sees the shifting balance of power as significant insofar as it empowers working class struggle against capital *within* the social factory, rather than the direct creation of a postcapitalist society in spaces outside the control of capital.

Negri at times uses language that could be interpreted as referring to direct production for use in the social sector: “the progress of the process of self-valorization is measured positively by the multiplication of socially useful labor dedicated to the free reproduction of proletarian society.”¹⁹ But as Michael Ryan clarifies in his Epilogue to *Marx Beyond Marx*, this refers to obtaining a space for independent reproduction (“developing the independence of its own processes of reproduction”) through a “social wage,” or something like a Basic Income (“the class’ reappropriation of the mechanisms of its own reproduction (via public expenditure)”).²⁰ Still, Negri’s “refusal of work” is fully consistent with — and magnificently exemplified by — Massimo De Angelis’s later advocacy of direct production for use in the commons.

Autonomist thinkers like Federici, Holloway and De Angelis have subsequently developed these possibilities in explicit form, in contradiction to Negri’s vision of capitalism as a system without an outside. It follows from all this that the main form of revolution ceases to be seizing the factories, whether social or literal, and instead becomes — in the term coined by Negri and Hardt in *Commonwealth* — “exodus.” It is feasible to undertake an ever larger share of production of life’s necessities in the social sphere, in self-provisioning in the informal economy, through commons-based peer production, or through cooperative labor by workers using affordable high-tech tools in their own homes and shops. And the social relationships which capital has enclosed as a source of profit are vulnerable to being repurposed in the form of counter-institutions.

IV. Theoretical Implications

The Vulnerability of the Social Factory. The concept of “Exodus,” developed in the last book of the *Empire* trilogy (*Commonwealth*), envisioned the share of capitalist production that was directly administered by workers, based on their direct occupancy of the means of informational production and the superfluity of capital, enabling workers to simply cut capital out of the process altogether.

Translated by Arianna Bove, Ed Emery, Timothy S. Murphy and Francesca Novello (London and New York: Verso, 2005), p. 162.

¹⁶ *Workers Party Against Work* (1973) in Negri, *Books for Burning*, p. 84.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁸ *Domination and Sabotage: On the Marxist Method of Social Transformation* (1977), in Negri, *Books For Burning*, p. 270.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

²⁰ Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx*, p. 215.

...the trend toward the hegemony or prevalence of immaterial production in the processes of capitalist valorization.... Images, information, knowledge, affects, codes, and social relationships... are coming to outweigh material commodities or the material aspects of commodities in the capitalist valorization process. This means, of course, not that the production of material goods... is disappearing or even declining in quantity but rather that their value is increasingly dependent on and subordinated to immaterial factors and goods.... What is common to these different forms of labor... is best expressed by their biopolitical character.... Living beings as fixed capital are at the center of this transformation, and the production of forms of life is becoming the basis of added value. This is a process in which putting to work human faculties, competences, and knowledges — those acquired on the job but, more important, those accumulated outside work interacting with automated and computerized productive systems — is directly productive of value. One distinctive feature of the work of head and heart, then, is that paradoxically the object of production is really a subject, defined... by a social relationship or a form of life.²¹

Capitalist accumulation today is increasingly external to the production process, such that exploitation takes the form of expropriation of the common.²²

...[C]lass struggle in the biopolitical context takes the form of exodus. By exodus here we mean... a process of subtraction from the relationship with capital by means of actualizing the potential autonomy of labor-power. Exodus is thus not a refusal of the productivity of biopolitical labor-power but rather a refusal of the increasingly restrictive fetters placed on its productive capacities by capital.... As a first approximation, then, think of this form of class struggle as a kind of maroonage. Like the slaves who collectively escape the chains of slavery to construct self-governing communities and quilombos, biopolitical labor-power subtracting from its relation to capital must discover and construct new social relationships, new forms of life that allow it to actualize its productive powers. But unlike that of the maroons, this exodus does not necessarily mean going elsewhere. We can pursue a line of flight while staying right here, by transforming the relations of production and mode of social organization under which we live.²³

But this vision is of a communist society already in being, which workers simply take over from inside. There is another, entirely different, autonomist vision which we will examine below.

The Vulnerability of the Social Factory to the “Outside.” The other autonomist vision, rather than treating capitalism as a totalizing system with no “outside,” which is creating communism through its own internal laws of motion, views the reproduction of capitalism as a contested process in which we constantly create our outside to the system, in the form of commons-based counter-institutions which together constitute a parallel counter-system in process of withdrawing resources from capitalism and supplanting it. Bengi Akbulut describes the role of the commons in this tendency:

²¹ Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2009), pp. 132–133.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 137.

²³ Negri and Hardt, *Commonwealth*, pp. 152–153.

In particular, this approach [the Autonomist Marxist approach epitomised by the works of Caffentzis, Federici, De Angelis and more broadly the Midnight Notes Collective] conceptualises the commons as social spheres of life the main characteristics of which are to provide various degrees of protection from the market. That is, the commons form modes of social reproduction and accessing social resources that are not mediated by the market. They are non-commodified forms of fulfilling social needs such as obtaining social wealth and organising social production....

Seen this way, commons are no longer limited to shared forms of natural and social wealth, but include forms of relationships, networks, practices and struggles that provide (varying degrees of) access to means of material and social reproduction outside of the mediation of the market. This conceptualisation goes beyond an understanding of commons as existing, pre-defined entities, and rather points to the amalgam of social relations and practices that produce and reproduce commons.... Moreover, this emphasises not only the commons as process but also the particular characteristics of their constitutive social practices. Accordingly, commons are forms of non-commodified wealth to be used by all, sites of collective cooperative labour and regulated non-hierarchically. More specifically, then, commons emerge as spaces of social reproduction accessed equally by all, autonomous of intermediation of the State or the market, where reproduction and production takes place under collective labour, equal access to means of (re)production and egalitarian forms of decision-making.

Within this context, time banks, urban gardens, land and urban squats, food coops, local currencies, 'creative commons' licenses and bartering practices, in addition to communal control and use of resources, emerge as contemporary forms of commons. These examples represent practices in self-provisioning outside the logic of markets and, to varying extents, embody a collective form of self-reproduction.... They are also venues of knowledge production, intergenerational transmission/ exchange and of reproduction of social relationships, as well as a medium for the encounter of diverse cultural practices. Similar examples of commoning are: appropriations of unused plots of public land for subsistence farming by landless rural and urban women; local currencies and bartering practices that represent networks of exchange outside of market relations; and community governance of water through committees, such as those set up in Cochabamba, Bolivia.

As the examples above suggest, this approach defines commons not necessarily (or exclusively) by their common-pool resource characteristics (rivalry in consumption and non-exclusion of users), but rather by the degree of autonomy they provide from capital and State, and the type of social relationships that constitute them.²⁴

This autonomist counter-tendency arguably goes back at least to Harry Cleaver who, even while promoting Negri's thought, quietly shifted his emphasis. Rather than viewing all of society as already subsumed in the "social factory," Cleaver promotes a "ruptural" strategy (in a

²⁴ Bengi Akbulut, "Commons," in Clive L. Spash, ed. *Routledge Handbook of Ecological Economics: Nature and Society* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 399–400.

somewhat idiosyncratic use of the term) of creating and expanding areas of life that are outside capitalist control. He does so, however, in a way that shares some of Negri's and Hardt's terminology (e.g. "refused work") and maintains some commonalities with their worldview.

Against the capitalist project of infinite totalization and expansion, people have resisted commodification, defended the commons, and refused work. Every successful resistance, every rupture of existing capital-labor dialectics, whether in the factory, office, school, or home, has limited or set back capitalist expansion.²⁵

...The rupture of [capital's] command... often involves the destruction of existing relationships only in the sense of freeing them from capital's grip and of reorganizing them in healthier, more appealing ways.²⁶

Cleaver also borrows Negri's term "self-valorization," although developing it in directions that imply a significant divergence from his totalizing view of capitalism.

Negri's concept of "self-valorization" aimed at... showing how the power of refusal could and must be complemented by the power of constitution. In many ways his concept expressed the side of workers struggles, especially those of young workers, which was coming to the fore in the late 1960s and early 1970s: the creative use of times, spaces and resources liberated from the control of Italian and multinational capital — uses such as the proliferation of "free radio stations" or the widespread development of women's spaces which, along with many other self-managed projects, helped constitute what many came to call "the counter-culture..."

...Alongside the power of refusal or the power to destroy capital's determination, we find in the midst of working class recomposition, the power of creative affirmation, the power to constitute new practices....

The relationship between the refusal of capital's determination and the affirmation of self-valorizing activities is an intimate one. The power of self-valorization is largely the power to fill the spaces liberated from capitalist domination with alternative, autonomous projects....

An important part of Negri's elaboration of the concept of self-valorization is his recognition that, unlike valorization and unlike most socialist visualizations of communism, it does not designate the self-construction of a unified social project but rather denotes a "plurality" of instances, a multiplicity of independent undertakings — not only in the spaces opened within and against capitalism but also in their full realization. Communism, for Negri, is thus not only a self-constituting praxis, but also the realization of "multilaterality" of the proletarian subject, or better, of a subject which in its self-realization explodes into multiple autonomous subjects.²⁷

²⁵ Cleaver, *Rupturing the Dialectic*, p. 123.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

²⁷ Cleaver. "The Inversion of Class Perspective in Marxian Theory: from Valorization to Self-Valorization" in W. Bonefeld, R. Gunn and K. Psychopedis (eds) *Essays on Open Marxism*, (London: Pluto Press, 1992), pp. 19–21. <<http://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/Inversion.pdf>>. Accessed May 29, 2019.

As the above quote suggests, one major form of such self-valorization is building a parallel society and economy outside the control of capital, in which we can replace commodified relationships and production with direct production for use.

De-commodification therefore involves the bypassing of sales and exchange-value in favor of folks directly realizing the use-values of goods, services, and their own abilities. Such a bypassing happens sporadically, when goods and services are directly appropriated by workers, on the job or off, and it happens much more systematically in activities such as peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing, especially of software, music, video, and film. Such activities, by appropriating goods directly, remove them from the market and undermine the ability of capitalists to realize surplus value and profits, and thus the continuing value of the labor employed as a means of social control. The adaptation and diversion of workers' abilities to their own autonomous pursuits also undermines their employers' control....

Another kind of bypassing takes place when we undertake to meet our needs and satisfy our desires directly — without the mediation of money, markets, or commodities — in ways that go beyond the mere reproduction of our lives as labor power to be sold in some capitalist labor market for a wage or salary. On a small scale, such direct meeting of needs has a long history, especially in small rural communities, not only in the behavior of families but also in collective collaboration for raising houses and barns, sharing seeds, gathering crops, or fishing. In cities there have always been communities, especially immigrant working-class ones, where folks help each other out in a variety of ways, many of which involve no money or exchange.²⁸

This amounts to taking our creativity, which is currently appropriated and alienated from us by capitalism, outside capitalist control.

One of the most important insights of Marx's analysis of capitalism is that it is a way of organizing life that is intrinsically lifeless, it endlessly reproduces itself (where it has the power) but the only newness in that reproduction comes from those aspects of people's imagination and creativity which it has been forced, and able, to harness, to constrain within the limits of its own reproduction....

Once we recognize that the source of invention and innovation in society lies not within the system of domination itself (which can only harness it at best — and often represses it) but in the autonomous activities of the people within the system, once we see that we are the real source of change and the architects of the future, then we can see two other things: first, that our task is to eliminate the constraints on our creativity imposed by capitalism (or any other system of domination) and second, between the millions of moments of creation and the moments of repression or cooptation, there exist spaces in which new things, new ways of being are created that go beyond the way things are. It is only the content of these spaces that can provide us with alternative futures.²⁹

²⁸ Cleaver, *Rupturing the Dialectic*, pp. 275–279.

²⁹ Cleaver, "Industrialism or Capitalism? Conviviality or Self-Valorization? Some Notes on Ivan Illich's *Tools for Conviviality*" (Austin, TX: August 2, 1987 <<http://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/hmconillich.html>>. Accessed May 22, 2019.

In his Introduction to *Marx Beyond Marx*, he stresses this theme in Negri's work in a way that subtly shifts the emphasis away from Negri's original intent. The replacement of capitalism by socialism, and the construction of a post-capitalist society, is an ongoing, interstitial process.

Because capital's central means of social domination is the imposition of work and surplus work, the subordination of necessary labor to surplus labor, Negri sees that one of the two most fundamental aspects of working class struggle is the struggle against work. Where profit is the measure of capitalist development and control, Negri argues that the refusal of work measures the transition out of capital. The refusal of work appears as a constituting praxis that produces a new mode of production, in which the capitalist relation is reversed and surplus labor is totally subordinated to working-class need.

The second, positive side to revolutionary struggle is the elaboration of the self-determined multiple projects of the working class in the time set free from work and in the transformation of work itself. This self-determined project Negri calls self-valorization. Communism is thus constituted both by the refusal of work that destroys capital's imposed unity and by the self-valorization that builds diversity and "rich, independent multilaterality."³⁰

(Of course Negri, unlike Cleaver, sees this interstitial development as something the workers are doing *within* capitalism, taking advantage of the changing structure of production brought about by capitalism itself and simply taking it over as a whole. In this he resembles the accelerationists.)

Cleaver sees the future post-capitalist society as an outgrowth and coalescence of the working class's projects here and now. Rather than drawing up blueprints for the future, he commends Kropotkin's approach of identifying tendencies in the existing society and the direction in which they are developing. Like Kropotkin, Cleaver sets us the task of "how to discover tendencies in the present which provide alternative paths out of the current crisis and out of the capitalist system."³¹ Thus the autonomist approach

redefines the 'transition' from capitalism to communism in terms of the elaboration from the present into the future of existing forms of self-valorisation or commons. Communism is reconceptualised in harmony with Kropotkin's views, not as a some-day-to-be-achieved utopia but as a living reality whose growth needs only to be freed from constraint.

³⁰ Cleaver, "Introduction," Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1991) <<http://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/mbmhmcintro.html>> Accessed May 28, 2019.

³¹ Cleaver. "Kropotkin, Self-valorization And The Crisis Of Marxism" Paper presented to conference on Pyotr Alexeevich Kropotkin (Moscow, St. Petersburg and Dimitrov, December 8 – 14, 1992), organized by the Russian Academy of Science on its 150th anniversary. Published in *Anarchist Studies*, edited by Thomas V. Cahill, February 24, 1993, pp. 5, 7. <<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/harry-cleaver-kropotkin-self-valorization-and-the-crisis-of-marxism.pdf>>. Accessed May 29, 2019.

Like Kropotkin's studies, such efforts to discover the future in the present were based not only on a theory of collective subjectivity but also on empirical studies of real workers in action.³²

Silvia Federici, John Holloway and Massimo De Angelis likewise treat the commons as a challenge to capitalist hegemony from outside, but go beyond Cleaver in making their break with Negri fully explicit.

Federici refers dismissively to Negri's belief that capitalism, by informatizing production and organizing the economy around networked communications, is already creating a society based on the commons. She likewise dismisses the corollary view that the only remaining task for the Multitude is to cut the capitalists out of the communist society they've created.³³

In her own thought, going back to the 70s, she has emphasized the agency of ordinary people – women in particular – in building the structure of communist society, and criticized the vulgar Marxism of the conventional Left in viewing capital as the main progressive agent of history in laying the groundwork for communism.³⁴

But you don't need to enter a factory to be part of a working class organization. When [Carol] Lopate argues that "the ideological preconditions for working class solidarity are networks and connections which arise from working together" and "these preconditions cannot arise out of isolated women working in separate homes," she writes off the struggles these "isolated" women made in the 1960s (rent strikes, welfare struggles etc.). She assumes that we cannot organize ourselves if we are not first organized by capital; and since she denies that capital has already organized us, she denies the existence of our struggle.³⁵

She stresses above all the importance of organizing the social sectors involved in the reproduction of everyday life as a commons outside the control of the circuit of capital, in order to provide a base for resistance and for the construction of post-capitalist society.

If the destruction of our means of subsistence is indispensable for the survival of capitalist relations, this must be our terrain of struggle....

Like every form of self-determination, women's liberation requires specific material conditions, starting with control over the basic means of production and subsistence....[T]his principle holds not only for women in the "Third World," who have been major protagonists of land struggles to recover land occupied by big landowners but also for women in industrialized countries. In New York, women are defending from bulldozers their urban gardens, the products of much collective work that brought together entire communities and revitalized neighborhoods previously considered disaster zones.³⁶

³² Cleaver. "Work Refusal and Self-Organisation." In Anitra Nelson and Frans Timmerman, *Life Without Money: Building Fair and Sustainable Economies* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), p. 56 <<https://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/WorkRefusalFinal.pdf>>.

³³ Silvia Federici, "Feminism and the Politics of the Common in an Era of Primitive Accumulation" (2010), in *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), p. 142.

³⁴ Federici, "Counterplanning from the Kitchen" (1975), in *Revolution at Point Zero*, pp. 28–30.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

³⁶ Federici, "Women, Globalization, and the International Women's Movement" (2001), in *Revolution at Point Zero*, pp. 89–90.

What is needed is the reopening of a collective struggle over reproduction, reclaiming control over the material conditions of our reproduction and creating new forms of cooperation around this work outside of the logic of capital and the market. This is not a utopia, but a process already under way in many parts of the world and likely to expand in the face of a collapse of the world financial system. Governments are now attempting to use the crisis to impose stiff austerity regimes on us for years to come. But through land takeovers, urban farming, community-supported agriculture, through squats, the creation of various forms of barter, mutual aid, alternative forms of healthcare — to name some of the terrains on which this reorganization of reproduction is more developed — a new economy is beginning to emerge that may turn reproductive work from a stifling, discriminating activity into the most liberating and creative ground of experimentation in human relations.

As I stated, this is not a utopia. The consequences of the globalized world economy would certainly have been far more nefarious except for the efforts that millions of women have made to ensure that their families would be supported, regardless of their value on the capitalist labor market. Through their subsistence activities, as well as various forms of direct action (from squatting on public land to urban farming) women have helped their communities to avoid total dispossession, to extend budgets and add food to the kitchen pots. Amid wars, economic crises, and devaluations, as the world around them was falling apart, they have planted corn on abandoned town plots, cooked food to sell on the side of the streets, created communal kitchens... thus standing in the way of a total commodification of life and beginning a process of reappropriation and recollectivization of reproduction that is indispensable if we are to regain control over our lives. The festive squares and “occupy” movements of 2011 are in a way a continuation of this process as the “multitudes” have understood that no movement is sustainable that does not place at its center the reproduction of those participating in it, thus also transforming the protest demonstrations into moments of collective reproduction and cooperation.³⁷

She also criticized conventional Marxism in language in much the same way she criticized Negri — and compared it unfavorably to Kropotkin’s approach — for treating the organization of cooperative labor as a progressive function of capital and something imposed on the working class as a passive object.

...[Marx] discussed “cooperation” only in the process of commodity production overlooking the qualitatively different forms of proletarian cooperation in the process of reproduction which Kropotkin later called “mutual aid.”

Cooperation among workers is for Marx a fundamental character of the capitalist organization of work, “entirely brought about by the capital[ists],” coming into place only when the workers “have ceased to belong to themselves,” being purely functional to the increase in the efficiency and productivity of labor. As such, it leaves

³⁷ Federici, “The Reproduction of Labor Power in the Global Economy and the Unfinished Feminist Revolution” (2008), in *Revolution at Point Zero*, p. 111.

no space for the manifold expressions of solidarity and the many “institutions for mutual support” — “associations, societies, brotherhoods, alliances” — that Kropotkin found present among the industrial population of his time. As Kropotkin noted, these very forms of mutual aid put limits to the power of capital and the State over the workers’ lives, enabling countless proletarians not to fall into utter ruin, and sowing the seeds of a self-managed insurance system, guaranteeing some protection against unemployment, illness, old age and death.

...Feminists have rejected the centrality that Marxism has historically assigned to waged industrial work and commodity production as the crucial sites for social transformation, and they have criticized its neglect of the reproduction of human beings and labor power. The feminist movement’s lesson has been that not only is reproduction the pillar of the “social factory,” but changing the conditions under which we reproduce ourselves is an essential part of our ability to create “self-reproducing movements.”³⁸

She saw the commoning of the reproduction of everyday life as a form of “the cooperation we develop among ourselves,” and “the seeds of the new world.” “These efforts need to be expanded. They are essential to a reorganization of our everyday life and the creation of nonexploitative social relations.”³⁹

Like Massimo De Angelis (as we will see below) she viewed the reclamation of the agricultural commons and food security/sovereignty as especially vital in creating a commons-based sphere of social reproduction outside the sphere of capital.

Land is the material basis for women’s subsistence work, which is the main source of “food security” for millions of people across the planet. Against this background, I look at the struggles that women are making worldwide not only to reappropriate land, but to boost subsistence farming and a noncommercial use of natural resources. These efforts are extremely important not only because thanks to them billions of people are able to survive, but because they point to the changes that we have to make if we are to construct a society where reproducing ourselves does not come at the expense of other people nor present a threat to the continuation of life on the planet.⁴⁰

...[S]ubsistence agriculture has been an important means of support for billions of workers, giving wage laborers the possibility to contract better conditions of work and survive labor strikes and political protests....⁴¹

As we have seen, in cities across the world, at least a quarter of the inhabitants depend on food produced by women’s subsistence labor. In Africa, for example, a quarter of the people living in towns say they could not survive without subsistence food production. This is confirmed by the UN Population Fund, which claims that

³⁸ Federici, “On Elder Care Work and the Limits of Marxism” (2009), in *Revolution at Point Zero*, pp. 120–122.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁴⁰ Federici, “Women, Land Struggles, and Globalization: An International Perspective” (2004), in *Revolution at Point Zero*, p. 127.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

“some two hundred million city dwellers are growing food, providing about one billion people with at least part of their food supply...”

We can also see that subsistence production is contributing to a noncompetitive, solidarity-centered mode of life that is crucial for the building of a new society. It is the seed of what Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and Maria Mies call the “other” economy, which “puts life and everything necessary to produce and maintain life on this planet at the center of economic and social activity” against “the never-ending accumulation of dead money.”⁴²

In another essay she discusses the potential of commons as “the foundation of a noncapitalist economy,” stressing in particular the importance of urban gardens and the food commons as engaging in direct production for use, thereby presenting a way of restoring people’s control over part of the reproduction process outside the control of the state or the market economy.⁴³

Taken all together, then, shifting all the prerequisites for reproduction of human life from the cash nexus to commons-based institutions in the social economy gives us the basis for immediate resistance against the exploitative power of capital, and a foundation for the further construction of post-capitalist society. It’s also a way for people in the Global North to combat imperialist wealth extraction.

For us, in North America, an added lesson is that by pooling our resources, by reclaiming land and waters, and turning them into a common, we could begin to de-link our reproduction from the commodity flows that through the world market are responsible for the dispossession of so many people in other parts of the world. We could disentangle our livelihood, not only from the world market but from the war-machine and prison system on which the hegemony of the world market depends....

The times are propitious for such a start. As the capitalist crisis is destroying the basic element of reproduction for millions of people across the world, including the United States, the reconstruction of our everyday life is a possibility and a necessity. Like strikes, social/economic crises break the discipline of the wage-work, forcing upon us new forms of sociality.... Today, as millions of Americans’ houses and cars have been repossessed, as foreclosures, evictions, the massive loss of employment are again breaking down the pillars of the capitalist discipline of work, new common grounds are again taking shape, like the tent cities that are sprawling from coast to coast. This time, however, it is women who must build the new commons, so that they do not remain transient spaces or temporary autonomous zones, but become the foundation of new forms of social reproduction.

If the house is the *oikos* on which the economy is built, then it is women, historically the house-workers and house-prisoners, who must take the initiative to reclaim the house as a center of collective life..., allowing for the sharing and circulation of community possessions, and above all providing the foundation for collective forms of reproduction.⁴⁴

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁴³ “Feminism and the Politics of the Common in an Era of Primitive Accumulation,” pp. 141–142.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 144, 146–147.

John Holloway, another thinker in the autonomist tradition, argues for treating capitalism, not as a completed totality, but as a system that is recreated every day using our own labor.

...The problem is not to destroy that society but to stop creating it. Capitalism exists today not because we created two hundred years ago or a hundred years ago, but because we create it today. If we do not create it tomorrow, it will not exist.

...We take an active part in constructing the domination that oppresses us, the obscenity that horrifies us. We create surplus value, we respect money, we accept and impose unreasoned authority, we live by the clock, we close our eyes to the starving. We make capitalism. And now we must stop making it....⁴⁵

...When Marx says at the beginning of *Capital* that the commodity stands outside us, alien to us, but its secret is that we made it..., then our reaction is one both of horror and of hope. We are astonished that we should spend our lives making objects that deny our existence, that are alien to us and dominate us, but at the same time we see hope, because those objects depend totally upon us for their existence: our doing is at the centre of everything, our doing is the hidden sun around which everything revolves.⁴⁶

For Holloway the way to stop re-creating capitalism is to progressively shift more and more of our doing into activities that create a different way of doing things.

A sustained global mass strike would destroy capital completely, but the conditions for that do not exist at the moment. It is hard to see how everybody in the world could be persuaded to refuse to work for capital at the same time.

For the moment at least, the only way of thinking of revolution is in terms of a number of rents, tears, holes, fissures that spread through the social fabric. There are already millions of such holes, spaces in which people, individually or collectively, say, “NO, here capital does not rule, here we shall not structure our lives according to the dictates of capital.” These holes are refusals, disobediences, insubordinations. In some cases (the EZLN in Chiapas, the MST in Brazil, the uprising in Bolivia, the piqueteros and *asambleas barriales* in Argentina, and so on), these insubordinations, these holes in the fabric of capital are already very big. The only way in which we can think of revolution is in terms of the extension and multiplication of these disobediences, of these fissures in capitalist command.⁴⁷

But refusals aren’t enough by themselves because refusal, by itself — refusing to sell our labor power — leaves us facing the threat of starvation. “Refusal to work under capitalist command is difficult to maintain unless it is accompanied by the development of some sort of alternative doing.”⁴⁸ Such alternative doings include

⁴⁵ John Holloway, “Stop Making Capitalism,” in *We Are the Crisis of Capital: A John Holloway Reader* (Oakland: PM Press, 2019), pp. 210–211.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

people occupying factories or schools or clinics and trying to organise them on a different basis, creating community bakeries or workshops or gardens, establishing radio stations of resistance, and so on. All these projects and revolts are limited, inadequate and contradictory (as they must be in a capitalist context), but it is difficult to see how we can create an emancipated doing other than in this interstitial form, through a process of interweaving the different struggles against doing work, knitting together the different doings in-and-against-and-beyond capital...

...The emancipation of doing is the movement of anti-fetishisation, the recovery of creativity. Only in this way can the fissures become poles of attraction instead of ghettos, and only if they are poles of attraction can they expand and multiply.⁴⁹

Stop making capitalism: refuse. But this involves a second moment: do something else instead. This something else is a prefiguration, the embryo of a society yet to be born. To what extent can this embryo grow in the womb of existing society?...

Rupture does not mean that capitalism vanishes. The fissures do not mean that capitalism disappears. But rather than think of revolution as an event that will happen in the future (who knows when) and be relatively quick, it seems better to think of it as a process that is already under way and may take some time, precisely because revolution cannot be separated from the creation of an alternative world.⁵⁰

Holloway uses “communising” as a collective term for these rents, holes and fissures, amounting cumulatively to something very like the commons-based counter-economy Massimo De Angelis (see below) envisions.

Communising not just as verb but in the plural: communisings. The flowing of many babbling brooks and silent streams, coming together, parting again, flowing toward a potential sea....

Not communism-in-the-future but a multiplicity of communisings here and now. Does this mean that there can be no radical break with capitalism? Certainly not. We have to break the dynamic of capital, but the way to do it is not by projecting a communism into the future but by recognising, expanding, and multiplying the communisings (or cracks in the texture of capitalist domination) and fomenting their influence. It is hard for me to imagine the overcoming of capitalism other than through the confluence of communisings into a torrent that marginalises capital as a form of organisation and renders its violence ineffective.⁵¹

Holloway pointed out, in an earlier quote, that while capitalism could be destroyed by a universal mass strike, such a strike is not feasible. But as he suggests here, the changing correlation of forces between capitalism and the ecosystem of interstitial alternatives we are building creates a state of affairs in which the success of such rural efforts may become more likely.

As the commons-based counter-economy gradually grows and progressively greater shares of both effort and consumption are withdrawn from the sphere of commodity exchange and

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 218–219.

⁵¹ Holloway, “Communiste,” in *We Are the Crisis of Capital*, p. 276.

accumulation, we gradually achieve larger and larger amounts of slack, and the ability to walk away from the table for longer periods of time; at the same time, as the sphere of society in service to capitalism's accumulation imperative shrinks, capitalism becomes increasingly fragile to shocks. And as participants in the successor system, on their side, obtain more resources and slack and space as a margin against short-term vulnerability, they will inevitably be emboldened to inflict more, more frequent, and larger shocks on capitalism at the very time it becomes more vulnerable to them.

The universal strike is far from the only large-scale shock to which capitalism is vulnerable. For example as capitalism becomes increasingly dependent on credit expansion, investment bubbles and the FIRE economy for maintaining aggregate demand, it becomes to that extent vulnerable to other mass actions like debt strikes by the population of the imperial core, and coordinated national debt defaults by debtor nations of the Global South. And in an era of distributed, just-in-time capitalism, even partial labor strikes against key nodes in the logistic system can have mass disruptive effects far beyond their immediate scale.

Like Federici, Massimo De Angelis not only treats interstitial, commons-based development as the basis for constructing post-capitalist society, but he explicitly distinguishes his approach from Negri's quasi-accelerationism.

Thus, despite a common root in the theoretical milieu of what has been called autonomist Marxism, there is a difference between, say, a politics that looks to the 'creative,' 'immaterial' workers almost as the 'vanguard' of the revolution and those like myself who look instead to the Zapatistas and other similar commoners, especially the indigenous, the peasants, the just-in-time factory workers in the 'free trade zones' of the third world, the peasant mothers, the slum communities struggling in a variety of contexts for livelihoods and dignity.⁵²

Although he refers to it as "traditional Marxism" in general, his critique applies specifically to Negri's and Hardt's version of autonomism:

To simplify, the narrative goes something like this: *before capitalism* there are enclosures or 'primitive accumulation'. These processes of expropriation are preconditions of capitalism, because they create and develop markets for commodities such as labour power and land. Once the job is done, we can stop talking about enclosures (or primitive accumulation) and must instead talk about 'capital logic'. 'Primitive accumulation' and 'capital logic' are thus distinctly separated, and therefore become the subject matter of two distinct *Marxist disciplines*....

In this [i.e. the real] world, enclosures are a value practice that clashes with others. It is either capital that makes the world *through commodification and enclosures*, or it is the rest of us — whoever is that 'us' — that makes the world through counter-enclosures and commons. The net results of the clashes among these social forces and their corresponding value practices Marx calls 'class struggle'...

...The ongoing struggles for commons within the current global justice and solidarity movement are... not appreciated for what they are: budding alternatives to capital.

⁵² Massimo De Angelis, *The Beginning of History: Value Struggles and Global Capital* (London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2007), p. 4.

Marxian-inspired thinking cannot join the intellectual and political endeavours to shape alternatives in the here and now because its framework is *for* another ‘ism’ projected into an unqualified future, and generally defined by a model of power that needs a political elite to tell the rest of us why power cannot be exercised from the ground up, starting from the now. Thus, while current movements around the world are practising, producing and fighting for a variety of different commons... traditional Marxist theoreticians cannot conceptualise these movements in terms of categories familiar to them. They thus endeavour to *reduce* these movements to those familiar categories, and when they do that, their contribution to the rich debate on alternatives is poor indeed, of the type: ‘one solution, revolution’.⁵³

For De Angelis the establishment of the precondition of capitalism — the separation of workers from their means of production — is not a one-time process in the founding era of capitalism, but an ongoing process by which commons are continually enclosed. And it is a contested process in which subject populations resist enclosure of their commons, and create and expand new commons as bases of resistance.⁵⁴ From this it follows that the separation of workers from their means of production is never complete, but only a matter of degree; and from this it follows, further, that at any given time there is a correlation of forces of production between those owned by capitalists and incorporated into the expansionary circuit of capital, and those in the social economy or commons which are engaged in direct production for use outside the cash nexus.

As for the role of the commons in De Angelis’s own vision, he sees them as a “means of access to social resources independently from disciplinary markets. In other words, we need to extend the realm of commons in more and more spheres of our social doing..., to reduce the level of dependence on the markets and run our lives as free social individuals.”⁵⁵

He refers, in language much like David Graeber’s “everyday anarchism,” to the “non-capitalism of our lives”:

the spheres of relations, value practices, affects as well as forms of power relations, conflict and mutual aid that we constitute beyond capitalist relations of production, perhaps within its reach, but yet constituted in different modes and therefore articulated by different value practices.⁵⁶

Commons-based counter-institutions are a barrier to the expansion and valorization of capital, and an impediment to its imperative to accumulation. If they can be coalesced and expanded as a coherent counter-system at the expense of capital, or even halt its growth, it will amount to ring-barking the tree of capitalism and causing its eventual decay and collapse. Building the commons starves expansionary capital of oxygen, removes resources from it, and deploys those resources to building a system under our control instead.⁵⁷

This struggle is *class* struggle in so far as the social forces guided by non-monetary values posit themselves as limits, in given contexts and conditions, to capital’s accu-

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 134–135.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 136–137.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

mulation, to the pursuit and accumulation of monetary value at whatever scale of social action.

...Unless the different value practices posited by these movements are able to weave themselves into self-sustaining social feedback processes that are alternative to the parametric centre of capital's value mechanism and its corresponding mode of relations, these struggles risk being either repressed or assimilated into capitalism's evolving forms. We need to work through a politics of value that problematises strategically how we sustain new social relations of production, new value practices through which we reproduce our individual livelihoods and their articulation, vis-à-vis the value practices of capital that, through enclosures and a pointless competitive rat race, reproduce scarcity while we could be celebrating abundance....

Indeed, in order to be subsumable, struggles must to some extent be dispersed across the social field, because their dispersion and relative isolation facilitates their integration into capitalist markets. If struggles circulate and coagulate, there emerges a political recomposition that is able to articulate all these values opposing capital's value, to sustain them, to give force to their constitutive action as a new mode of relations, an *absolute* limit to capital in that it is a limit to the production of its value.⁵⁸

In a subsequent work, *Omnia Sunt Communia*, he ties his hopeful vision of a post-capitalist future constructed on the commons together with the promise of the wave of horizontalist movements that occurred since *The Beginning of History*.

[I]n the last few years we have witnessed several cases of alignment of social movements to the commons, a commons which offers great potential....

...I believe there is a social revolution in the making that, if recognised and able to attract more energies from people around the world, could give us a chance to embark on a process of transformation towards postcapitalist society. My underlying conception of revolution is aligned to that of Marx which sees social revolutions — that is, the growth of alternative modes of production — as the material condition for any political revolution. A radical transformation of our world implies that people come together into communities that develop these alternatives to the logic of capitalism, multiply them and interconnect them: I understand commons to be such alternatives.⁵⁹

A huge portion of our lives takes place within the commons, particularly those social functions involving the reproduction of labor power and of the larger social fabric.

We are generally born into a commons, even if it only consists of interactions with our parents or carers, siblings and friends.... Values practices, such as loyalty to friends, conviviality, mutual aid, care, and even struggles, are developed in the commons....

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 191–193.

⁵⁹ De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia: On the Commons and the Transformation to Postcapitalism* (London: Zed Books, 2017), pp. 10–11.

As soon as these networks of social cooperation develop into systemic patterns in neighborhood associations, cooperatives, social centres, food networks and social movements (and given the development of communication and information technologies), these commons-based forms of social cooperation have the potential to expand and reshape their boundaries... and give rise to commons ecologies, that is, plural and cooperating commons with institutions and arrangements we cannot predict.⁶⁰

He advocates a synergy between the commons and the new horizontalist social movements, such that

...they are weaved [sic] in virtuous cycles with their own task: the social movement to shift the subjective and objective constraints set in place by state and capital, and the commons to expand in this new space with new commons-based modes of production.⁶¹

The strategic problem faced by postcapitalist commons is... how to extend the boundaries of their operations, through development, boundary commons and commons ecologies [i.e. uniting commons into larger interconnected systems], to include the ecological and capitalist systems with which they interrelate.⁶²

He argues that the most critical area of expansion of the commons is “all those activities that serve the immediate purpose of reproducing life...” like “accessing healthy food, housing, water, social care and education.”

How can commonwealth be used to create a new commons system, one that increases the incidence of alternative modes of production, and increases the independence of commoners from capitalist systems...? How can commonwealth be used in order to increase the power of the commons vis-a-vis capital?... Capital can reproduce itself only by putting to work the physical, mental, and affective energies of people for its own purpose: accumulation.... But the one thing upon which the power of capital is ultimately based, the one thing that enables it to deploy all the other means of its power, is... its ability to control, manage, distribute and shape the meaning of resources that are directly responsible for sustaining human and social life: water, land, food, energy, health, housing, care and education and their inter-related cultures in the first place. An increased ability to govern collectively these resources, to democratise their reproduction, to commonalise them by keeping state and market at bay, are conditions for emancipation for all in all other spheres of life and for make [sic] these spheres of life into a type of commonwealth that is enabled to feel a distance from capital.... To have access to these resources would allow people and communities not only to grow more resilient, to share conviviality and enjoy life, but to build a common social force to expand their power vis-a-vis capital....

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 12.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* p. 25.

⁶² *Ibid.* p. 128.

In summary, commons that make use of the commonwealth more directly linked to (re)production of bodies and the earth is a condition for the expansion of commoners' empowerment vis-a-vis capital, and a condition of the reduction of the degree of dependence on capital markets.... It corresponds to the development of a sphere of autonomy from capital....⁶³

This fundamental stratum of commons would, in turn, "form the material basis of a new commons renaissance in many spheres, building its foundation on these reproductive commons."

This is because not only would they give us the benefit of new communities, new cultures, and new methods of establishing wellbeing, security and trust within complex organisation, they would also protect us from the whims of financial markets, and especially, increase our security and power to refuse the exploitation of capitalist markets. The more that capital can blackmail us into poorer conditions, higher insecurity and ever-more gruelling work rhythms, the less we have the power to refuse its logic. Conversely, this power grows the more we have alternative means for our reproduction.⁶⁴

The Parliamentary Enclosures of common pasture, wood, and waste in the UK were carried out to facilitate the kind of blackmail De Angelis writes of; they were motivated by the fact that independent access to the means of subsistence enabled labor to accept or refuse wage labor on its own terms. In the propertied classes' press of the late 18th century capitalist farmers complained that, because of access to subsistence from pasturing livestock on the commons, gathering food and firewood from common woodland, and the possibility of the landless cottaging on the waste, the rural laboring classes only felt the need to work for wages intermittently. Because of their ability to fall back on the commons, they could not be forced to work as long or as hard as their employers wished.

For De Angelis, the circuit of capital coexists alongside a complementary circuit of the commons.

...C-M-C describes not only the general metabolism of the reproduction of labour-power, but also the circuit of production of commodities involving self-employed, petty producers, craft people, small organic farmers, reclaimed factories, water associations and so on, as they bring their commodities to the market and couple their system circuits based on needs to the economy.... The point is that unlike the capital circuit, the simple commodity circuit is just a means... to the structure of needs and desires and the resources that can be mobilised in non-commoditised forms (through for example pooling, gift circuits or administrative transfers).

In this sense, the commodities in C-M-C circuits are a moment of a social process of production that runs parallel to and is socially integrated with, in specific forms and modes of coordination, a non-commodity production.⁶⁵

⁶³ *Ibid.* pp. 137–140.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 13–14.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 192–193.

The commons circuit's analog to capital's expansionary circuit (closely parallel to Negri's concept of working class self-valorization, as Cleaver interprets it) is "boundary commoning."⁶⁶ As more activities and sources of sustenance are incorporated into the commons on a non-commodity basis, and the necessary inputs of those activities in turn are recursively incorporated, the boundary between circuits shifts in favor of the commons circuit and incorporates a larger share of society, the balance of power shifts from the capital circuit to the commons circuit and the commons has increasing say over the terms on which it interfaces with the capital circuit.

This parallels the writing of Jane Jacobs and Karl Hess on import substitution — in both cases starting with repair, gradually expanding piecemeal via the production of selected spare parts, progressing to filling in gaps in supply chains, and culminating in the production of entire ecosystems of goods — as a way of achieving community.

Through commoning, the commons not only can develop new forms of social cooperation with other commons to meet new needs, or increase the non-commodity... diversity of its resources..., it can also establish new markets (such as participatory guarantees or some aspects of fair trade), and bring to the markets goods that fill an old need in new ways, with attention to environmental issues, producer pay, quality or minimisation of distance travelled of goods. Commoning also produces local supply chains to reduce the dependence of an area on capitalist commodities and revitalise a local economy. Commoning can thus organically articulate existing skills and resources over a territory, helping a depressed region to realise the wealth that resides hidden with it.⁶⁷

De Angelis denounces the "fallacy of the political," which sees radical change as an abrupt process brought about through the seizure of political power. Rather, it is a long-term process that involves "the actual production of another form of power" by building commonwealth over time and expanding it at the expense of the capital circuit.

This conception obviously implies that for a historically defined period, both commons and capital/state cohabit the social space, their struggles and relative powers giving shape to it, with the result that unevenness and contradictions are many, as well as strategic games to colonise the other's space with one's own values and de-colonise one's own space from the other's values. The struggle is therefore continuous.⁶⁸

He calls for a social revolution based on the "multiplication of existing commons," and "coming together and interlacing of the different commons so as to leverage social powers and constitute ecology and scale" and "*growing commons powers vis-a-vis capital and the state.*"⁶⁹

The process of social revolution is ultimately a process of finding solutions to the problems that capital systems cannot solve.... This implies the establishment of multi-scalar systems of social action that reproduce life in modes, systemic processes, social

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 251–252.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p. 276.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 358.

relations and value practices that seek an alternative path from the dominant ones and that are able to reproduce at greater scale through networking and coordination....⁷⁰

...The effect of a significant number of commons ecologies in a single area is intense: it produces a new culture, norms, networks of support and mutual aid, virtuous neighborhoods and villages. For sustained social change to occur, commons ecologies need to develop and intensify their presence in social space up to a point where they present a viable alternative for most people. This point is the point of *critical mass*.⁷¹

“Territorialisation” — building up an interlinked ecology of commons, and particularly those involving survival and subsistence, in recuperated areas—is especially important.

I suggest we should take Marx’s warning about radical transformation beyond capitalism seriously, when he says in *Grundrisse* that if we do not find concealed in society as it is the material conditions of production and the corresponding relations prerequisite for a classless society, then all attempts to explode it would be quixotic.⁷²

Similarly, Bengi Akbulut argues that the multiplication and interconnection of commons serves as a buffer, making the need to sell one’s labor on the capitalists’ terms less pressing and immediate.

A congelation of alternative economies (such as cooperatives/collectives) would offer concrete pathways of solidarity and mutual support by relieving the pressure of market competition, acquiring start-up capital or securing inputs. It would thus provide a leeway, so to speak, to keep alternative economic organizations afloat in times of economic hardship or unexpected expenses.⁷³

The corollary is that the formation of the successor society will be an open-ended process, not the blueprint of any vanguard leadership, and its form will emerge from the self-creation of the commoners as creative subject.

It is only when a class of social subjects emerges out of a new mode of production that they helped to shape, sustain and develop that there emerges a new social force to contrast with capital and the state, to deeply transform them, even to commonise them and abolish their worst aspects. Thus the *class for itself* that Marx contrasts with the class *in itself* defined by capitalist exploitation, is the class of struggling *commoners*, the new subjectivity empowered by the new ecology of social systems they have set in place and intertwined: the commons.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p. 270.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* pp. 288–289.

⁷² *Ibid.* p. 27.

⁷³ Bengi Akbulut, “Cooperative economies as commons: Labour and production in solidarity,” in Derya Özkan and Güldem Baykal Büyüksaraç, Editors, *Commoning the City: Empirical Perspectives on Urban Ecology, Economics and Ethics* (Routledge, 2020), pp. 202–203.

⁷⁴ De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia*, pp. 275–276.

De Angelis sees a cybernetic principle called Ashby's Law, or the Law of Requisite Variety ("in order to have a system under the control of a regulator, the variety of the regulator must match the variety of the system"; "the greater the variety of the system in relation to the regulator, the greater is the need of the regulator to reduce the system's variety or increase its own variety") as both a source of hope and a strategy for victory.⁷⁵

State regulations like health and safety rules are often a means by which capital artificially simplifies society by suppressing the commons, either by imposing administrative costs and technically unnecessary capital outlays on the commons that small-scale production cannot absorb, or forcing it into illegality and thereby marginalizing it. For example: "Different households are discouraged from trusting each other when they cannot share at a school party their cakes and biscuits made at home, but instead have to show that they have purchased the product." Likewise organic certification regimes with such high costs that only relatively large producers can afford them, effectively keeping small producers from legally using the "organic" label. The commons sector has in some cases responded by devising its own certification regimes enforced along Ostromite lines by the participants themselves, although the formal legality of such practices varies from location to location and the attitudes of local political authorities.

To achieve victory the commons sector must increase its internal capacity to self-regulate, while overloading its variety relative to the regulator in order to overload the latter with information, so that "the state/capital regulator... is left with the increasingly impossible task of matching society's variety in order to regulate."⁷⁶

I would add that a self-governed system's regulatory capacity is inherently greater in variety relative to the internal matter to be regulated because the complexity and enforcement costs of regulation are directly proportional to the conflict of interest between regulators and regulated.

In addition, new technologies of decentralized and small-scale production that make the commons increasingly efficient relative to state and capital also have the effect of increasing the complexity of the commons relative to state regulators. For example, the enforcement of industrial patents traditionally assumed very low transaction costs because most production was carried out by a few large manufacturing corporations, consisted of a few major variations in product design, and was marketed through a handful of major retail chains served by a centralized distribution network. When the product ecology expands by orders of magnitude to include a whole host of open-source designs or pirated proprietary ones available as CAD-CAM files on a micro-manufacturing version of The Pirate Bay, and they're produced for neighborhood consumption by hundreds of thousands of garage factories run by workers cooperatives of a few people each, the transaction costs of enforcement become astronomical.

Finally, in the event that state and corporation attempt to render the commons more governable by forcibly simplifying them (making them more legible, in James Scott's terminology), the enforcement of such measures is itself a form of regulation that can be thwarted by making the task of enforcement more complicated than the regulators can cope with (in particular, technologies of evasion or circumvention like encryption).

The disruptive effect on the regulator's ability to cope with complexity can be greatly intensified, as well, when commons-based social movements engage in the kinds of leaderless swarming

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p. 383.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 384–385.

or saturation attacks described by John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt in their work on networked resistance.

If commons movements become the expression of a political recomposition that is one with a *mode of production* to expand, to develop and to set against the dominant mode of production, then we have acquired a common sense-horizon, not one that establishes a future model, but a present organisational unit that seeks to evolve and have a place in the contemporary cosmopolitan and globalised world because its power resides in diversity, variety and complexity....

A society is in movement because a large part of it is constituting itself in terms of a growing web of interactive commons, capable of sustaining livelihoods... and of deploying its social force not only to resist enclosures but to sustain and expand its commons. In short, emancipatory social transformation is predicated not only on increasing complexity, but also on the multiplication of commons governing such a complexity.⁷⁷

Like De Angelis, Nick Dyer-Witheford proposes a strategy of interstitial development based on the commons, with an entire ecosystem of counter-institutions coalescing into a successor system (what he calls the “circulation of commons”) on De Angelis’s boundary commoning model.

Let’s suppose that a publicly-funded education institution (social commons) produces software and networks that are available to an open source collective (networked commons), which creates free software used by an agricultural cooperative to track its use of water and electricity (ecological commons). This is a micro model of the circulation of the common.

This is a concept of the common that is not defensive, not limited to fending off the depredations of capital on ever-diminishing collective space. Rather it is aggressive and expansive: proliferating, self-strengthening and diversifying. It is also a concept of heterogeneous collectivity, built from multiple forms of a shared logic, a commons of singularities.... It is through the linkages and bootstrapped expansions of these commons that commonism emerges.

This concept has a clear affinity with the movements of solidarity economics that emerged from Latin America and are now gaining increasing attention in North America and Europe. Broadly defined, these aim to link self-managed and worker-owned collectives, cooperative financial organisations and socially-responsible consumption practices to create expanding economic networks whose surpluses are invested in social and ecological regeneration. Euclides Mance, one of the theorists of the movement, writes of such ‘socially based cooperation networks’ reinforcing their component parts until ‘progressive boosting’ enables them to move from a ‘secondary, palliative or complementary sphere of activity’ to become a ‘socially hegemonic mode of production’. This type of activity... seems to resemble the sort of cell-growth of commons envisaged here....⁷⁸

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 386–387

⁷⁸ Nick Dyer-Witheford, “Commonism,” *Turbulence* 1 (2007) <<http://www.turbulence.org.uk/turbulence-1/commonism/>>.

Although his focus is on interstitial development, like Erik Olin Wright and others he sees it as not excluding a parallel strategy of non-reformist reforms.

In my view... a commonist project would gain coherence and focus by agreement on a set of high level demands to be advanced... at the national and international level, demands that could be supported by many movements even as they pursue other more local and specific struggles and projects. These demands might include some briefly discussed here: for example, a guaranteed global livelihood, carbon-emission rationing and adoption of free and open-source software in public institutions.

Such demands would be radical but not, in a negative sense, utopian. Success would not mean we had won: it is conceivable that capitalism could persist with these provisions, although they would represent a planetary 'New Deal' of major proportions. But achieving them would mean, first, that the movement of movements had won something, averting harms to, and bestowing benefits on millions; and, second, it would mean that we were winning: these altered conditions would create opportunities for new collective projects and waves of organising that could effect deeper transformations, and the institutions of new commons.⁷⁹

Elsewhere he defines the circulation of commons as the process in which "eco-social labour and networked commons each reinforce and enable the other: in which the common goods and services generated by associations at one point in the circuit provide inputs and resources for associations at another."⁸⁰

Writing with Greig de Peuter, he repeats his call — which we saw above — for "the *circulation of the common*."⁸¹

...From the perspective of cultivating economic autonomy, the development of links within the cooperative sector itself is of great significance. The sixth principle in the Statement of Cooperative Identity is "cooperation among cooperatives" — an ethos of mutual aid that encourages individual coops to support one another and contribute to the development of a parallel economy through practices of inter-cooperation. In this way, coops would reduce their dependence on, and seek to gain autonomy from, conventional capitalist enterprises....

In addition to the formation of coop associations (e.g. International Cooperative Alliance), one possible manifestation of cooperation among cooperatives is inter-cooperative sourcing — the sourcing of products and services from other coops.... These are examples of a "cooperative economy," in which an objective is "the creation of a social structure capable of supplanting ... profit-making industry...."

Another example of inter-coop cooperation is the development of means of financing for coops. Under-capitalization is a chronic problem in the coop sector; this explains the disproportionate number of worker-coops in lines of business that are often more

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Dyer-Witthford, "The Circulation of the Common," Talk at the University of Minnesota, April 2009 <https://www.globalproject.info/it/in_movimento/nick-dyer-witthford-the-circulation-of-the-common/4797>.

⁸¹ Greig de Peuter and Nick Dyer-Witthford, "Commons and Cooperatives," *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action*, Vol. 4 No. 1 (Summer 2010), p. 32.

labour intensive rather than capital intensive. Credit unions are hence of strategic importance in the development of a cooperative sub-system....

There are also examples of coops and associations based in the North establishing education programs where groups of people visit the South and aid communities in setting up coops, as an approach to cooperative international development....

Practices of cooperation among coops suggest the possibility that within the overall global system of capital a non-capitalist sub-system might grow its counter-power, reduce reliance on the primary system, and potentially render it redundant. In inter-coop cooperation we see at least a nascent possibility of how the social product of the labour commons can contribute to the expansion of a new system which seeks to continually enlarge its autonomy.⁸²⁸³

For example, “Brazil’s solidarity economy system... arises from movements of workers and landless peasants, infused by liberation theology traditions, and by the history of quilombos (self-governing communities) of escaped slaves.”

Strongest in agricultural production, the sector also includes industrial, service, and software components. It links workers cooperatives and self-managed enterprises with alternative financial institutions, consumer cooperatives, and fair trade systems in an attempt to create a self-reinforcing network of economic activities in which participants’ activities are informed by an ethical and political sense of shared social responsibilities. The units of these networks are conceived not just as individually following principles of social and environmental justice, but providing inputs for each other, to create an inter-cooperative, self-expanding system.⁸⁴

Because of its stigmergic, modular architecture, Negri argues, the circulation of commons model has advantages of low overhead and agility for outcompeting the capitalist system within whose bowels it is growing. For the same reason, it is something that can develop gradually without requiring an all-or-nothing transition.

...[W]e can start to build it now. Such a project need not predicate an instant abolition of the market, only the transformation from central system to a sub-system, surrounded by, and subordinated to a more powerful ‘commons’ dynamics.... This does not preclude a punctual moment or moments of radical crisis. It suggests that the circulation of the commons have to precede such a moment, to establish its pre-conditions, and extend beyond it, to actualize its potential.⁸⁵

Finally, his strategy of engaging with the state — a subject we will address in more depth in a later chapter — involves pushing in the direction of something like a Partner State: “Zizek is correct when he says the true task is neither to take over the state, nor to smash the state, but

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 45–46.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 46–47.

⁸⁵ Dyer-Witheford, “The Circulation of the Common.”

to ‘make the state itself work in a non-statal mode’ — as a machine for incubating and growing commons.”⁸⁶

And of course engagement with the state does not alter the secondary character of such engagement.

This is not necessarily a model of changing the world without seizing power. The role of the state in co-management initiatives, such of those of the Venezuelan and Brazilian governments we noted earlier, may be vital in allowing the circulation of commons to attain a critical mass. Our concept does, however, suggest that growth and interconnection of the commons have to precede such state interventions, to pre-figuratively establish the necessary preconditions. It must also grow beyond the moment of such direct interventions, in a proliferation of self-starting components that exceeds centralized control. In this sense, the idea of the circulation of the commons is a concept from and for the Marxian tradition of autonomous free association.⁸⁷

J.K. Gibson-Graham (actually a composite of Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham) are another significant contributor to this tradition. Their book *A Postcapitalist Politics*, in particular, is a full-scale, head-on assault and demolition of what vulgar Marxists call “historical materialism” — as well as on similar approaches by left-accelerationists. They took the successes of second-wave feminism as a model in their human- and agency-focused analysis of economic struggles.

The achievements of second-wave feminism provide, for us, the impetus for theorizing a new global form of economic politics. Its remapping of political space and possibility suggests the ever-present opportunity for local transformation that does not require (though it does not preclude and indeed promotes) transformation at larger scales. Its focus on the subject prompts us to think about ways of cultivating economic subjects with different desires and capacities and greater openness to change and uncertainty. Its practice of seeing and speaking differently encourages us to make visible the hidden and alternative economic activities that *everywhere* abound, and to connect them through a language of economic difference. If we can begin to see noncapitalist activities as prevalent and viable, we may be encouraged here and now to actively build on them to transform our local economies.⁸⁸

In the realm of economic struggle, “[l]ocally based social movement interventions all over the world” (e.g. slum dwellers movements, community-based enterprises, and other movements “spearheaded by the poor themselves”) “are already embodying many of the features of the political imaginary we have been tracing, building new economic futures within a clearly enunciated commitment to a politics of possibility.”⁸⁹

Their approach is the direct opposite of the vulgar Marxist self-parody version of “historical materialism,” which they characterize as

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ De Puyter and Dyer-Witheford, p. 47.

⁸⁸ J.K. Gibson-Graham. *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xxiv.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, xxv.

a historical stage theory of economic evolution in which capitalism is situated at the pinnacle of development and all other forms of economy are represented as precapitalist or as forms of primitive capitalism. For the remnant true believers, communism, capitalism's other, is posed as a future utopia, yet to be realized in any concreteness, while capitalism remains the present, fully developed form of economy.⁹⁰

This vulgar Marxist approach, accordingly, puts its focus on political action to achieve postcapitalist transition almost entirely at the systemic level ("a global-scale apparatus of power that must be addressed and transformed before [local struggles'] activities can succeed or be extended").⁹¹

Gibson-Graham, in contrast, see transition as the outgrowth of millions of local actions.⁹² Like Holloway, they stress the complexity and open-endedness of reality and the contested nature of capital's self-reproduction process, and dismiss the idea of capitalism as a totalizing system which must inevitably coopt any attempts at building a postcapitalist society "before the Revolution." Instead they propose a "weak theory" that

couldn't know that social experiments are already coopted and thus doomed to fail or to reinforce dominance; it couldn't tell us that the world economy will be transformed by an international revolutionary movement rather than through the disorganized proliferation of local projects.⁹³

Rather than seeing present-day society as a hegemonic capitalist system that incorporates and coopts all attempts at non-capitalist construction, they see it as a "landscape of economic difference, populated by various capitalist and noncapitalist institutions and practices..."⁹⁴

In their approach to local organizing, they use an iceberg to illustrate the majority of total production that is not commodity production by wage labor within capitalist firms. The latter is represented by the portion of the iceberg above the water line. Below the water is a much larger portion consisting of productive activity within schools, on the street, in neighborhoods, within families, unpaid, in church/temple, the retired, between friends, gifts, self-employment, volunteer, barter, moonlighting, children, informal lending, not for market, illegal, not monetized, self-provisioning, under-the-table, producer cooperatives, consumer cooperatives, and non-capitalist firms....

By marshaling the many ways that social wealth is produced, transacted, and distributed *other* than those traditionally associated with capitalism, noncapitalism is rendered a positive multiplicity rather than an empty negativity, and capitalism becomes just one particular set of economic relations situated in a vast sea of economic activity.⁹⁵

They take child care as an example of "reading for difference"; the function is performed by a large range of commodified and non-commodified, capitalist and non-capitalist, formal and informal, etc., actors. A conventional Marxist emphasizing capitalism as a totalizing system would

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, xxvi.

⁹² *Ibid.*, xxvi.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

treat the informal, non-waged forms of child care as simply being coopted into the capitalist function of reproducing labor-power. But they note that they're part of an informal economy that exists alongside capitalism and reproduces itself for its own purposes as well as to some extent reproducing labor power for capital.⁹⁶ I would argue, in addition, that the actual role of reproductive activities in the informal sector — whether it serves primarily itself or capital — depends on a shifting balance of power between the commons and capitalism. The commons can be coopted to create a positive externality for capital, but it can also serve as a base of independence that increases our bargaining power *against* capital.

To follow through with the project of constructing a counterhegemonic politics..., we need to identify an alternative fixing of economic identity around a new nodal point.... [O]ur concern for creating an environment for the cultivation of new economic subjects leads us on to tentatively propose the community economy as an alternative.⁹⁷

The community economy is basically a way to take all the different forms of production in the non-capitalist, underwater portion of the iceberg mentioned above, and “multiply, amplify, and connect” them as a counterhegemonic alternative to capitalism.⁹⁸ Given the wide array of non-capitalist ways of meeting needs already in existence, their approach is one of “starting with what is at hand to begin to replenish and enlarge the commons...”⁹⁹

A full audit of livelihood practices, including the contribution of nonmarket transactions and unpaid labor, allows for reflection on what the community is nourished by (rather than what it lacks) and for public discussion of which of these practices could be strengthened or extended.¹⁰⁰

Some of their research projects in creating community subjectivity involved encouraging a change in local perceptions of the economy, including a shift in focus to all the non-capitalist economic activities in the submerged part of the iceberg, and “mapping” those activities to create awareness of just what resources were available to a community economy outside the control of capital.¹⁰¹

One of the goals of the action research projects was to flesh out, through a community inventory, a diverse economy in which capitalist enterprises, formal wage labor, and market transactions occupy only the visible tip of the economic iceberg.... By giving a place in the diverse economy to activities that are often ignored (collective enterprises, household and voluntary labor, transactions involving barter, sharing and gift giving, and so forth), we hoped to refigure the identity and capacities of the regional economy. And by recognizing the particularity of people's economic involvements, including their multiple economic identities (in addition to being unemployed with respect to capitalist employment, for example, a person can be employed

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 73–74.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 144–146.

in household, neighborhood, and other noncapitalist activities), we were attempting to reframe the identities and capacities of individuals. We undertook slightly different reframing exercises in each site, but central to each exercise was the involvement of community researchers. Initially it was they who were the subjects of reframing within a new discourse of economy and region.¹⁰²

This was followed up by “a brainstorming session to imagine the community-based projects they could be interested in building,” resulting in the suggestion of almost fifty ideas for “actual activities that might be undertaken by newly authorized subjects of the community economy.”¹⁰³ These included, among many things, tool libraries, repair shops, assorted forms of craft and small shop production, community gardens, seed banks, rainwater harvesting systems, and free schooling arrangements that connected would-be pupils with those who had things to teach.¹⁰⁴

The result in one community (Monash, a former one-industry region in Australia abandoned by its main state-capitalist employer), was a shift from a sense of powerlessness in the face of a totalizing entity called “the Economy” that was run by “them,” to a gradually developing sense of agency and empowerment as they employed their large inventory of resources and skills outside the capitalist system.¹⁰⁵

Note on Synthesis. Again, if we strip away Negri’s framing of capitalism as a completed and universal system, and his excessive focus on the technical and information workers as a quasi-vanguard or core of the Multitude, his treatment of the progressive dematerialization of production and the possibility of cutting capital out of it is actually quite relevant to the commons-based interstitial models of Federici, De Angelis et al. Dematerialization, arguably, can be applied not only to the growing role of information and coordination as a source of productivity, but also to the cheapening and ephemeralization of physical production technology we considered in Chapter Two. This development makes high-tech, small-scale direct production for use in the commons increasingly feasible. So dematerialization not only makes possible worker control of existing production *within* the sphere of capital, but also shifting a great deal of production *from* the sphere of capital and into the sphere of the commons.

The Broader Interstitial Milieu. Although I’ve focused on autonomism so far, autonomism is only one part of a much broader milieu of movements that share an interstitial approach. It’s commonly associated with the Wobbly slogan, from the Preamble to the I.W.W. Constitution, “forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.”

The term “interstitial strategies” itself — as opposed to “ruptural strategies” — was coined by Erik Olin Wright. (In Wright’s schema the interstitial strategy is one of two “metamorphic” strategies; the other metamorphic strategy is “symbiotic,” which envisions treating the state as terrain for struggle “in which the possibility exists of USING THE STATE to build social power both within the state itself and in other sites of power.”

In ruptural strategies, “*classes organized through political parties*” are the primary actors, and the goal is seizure of state power by a “*frontal attack on the state*” in order to transcend capitalism through state policy.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 144.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 153–154.

¹⁰⁶ Eri, Olin Wright. *Envisioning Real Utopias* (London and New York: Verso, 2010), pp. 305–306.

Interstitial strategies “operate *outside the state* and try as much as possible to avoid confrontations with state power.”

The core idea is to build counter-hegemonic institutions in society. There might be contexts in which struggles against the state could be required to create or defend these spaces, but the core of the strategy is to work outside the state.

Rather than being brought about by a sharp revolutionary break followed by state-driven transformation, interstitial transition is “more like a complex ecological system in which one kind of organism initially gains a foothold in a niche but eventually out-competes rivals for food sources and so comes to dominate the wider environment.”¹⁰⁷

Like other theorists considered earlier in this chapter, Wright mentions the transition from feudalism to capitalism as an example of interstitial transformation. He mentions the reference to “forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old” in the I.W.W. Preamble and Colin Ward’s statement that “the parts are already at hand” in *Anarchy in Action* as examples of interstitialism as a conscious strategy. He also cites the WSF slogan “another world is possible”:

much of what they have in mind are anarchist-inflected grass-roots initiatives to create worker and consumer cooperatives, fair-trade networks, cross-border labor standards campaigns, and other institutions that directly embody the alternative world they desire in the here and now.¹⁰⁸

Although interstitial and symbiotic strategies are conceptually distinct, and many of the advocates of each disparage the other, Wright considers them potentially complementary.

These differ primarily in terms of their relationship to the state. Both envision a trajectory of change that progressively enlarges the social spaces of social empowerment, but interstitial strategies largely by-pass the state in pursuing this objective while symbiotic strategies try to systematically use the state to advance the process of emancipatory social empowerment. These need not constitute antagonistic strategies — in many circumstances they complement each other, and indeed may even require each other.¹⁰⁹

Even the more insurrectionary anarchist schools, although they pursue ruptural strategies, differ on average from vulgar Marxists insofar as they see the revolutionary rupture as the culmination of a previous interstitial process.

Where they differed sharply was in the belief of what sorts of transformations were needed within capitalism in order for a revolutionary rupture to plausibly usher in a genuinely emancipatory alternative. For Marx, and later for Lenin, the central task of struggles within capitalism is to forge the collective capacity of a politically unified working class needed to successfully seize state power as the necessary condition for overthrowing capitalism. The task of deep social reconstruction to create the environment for a new way of life with new principles, new forms of social interaction and reciprocity, would largely have to wait until “after the revolution.”

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 306–307.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 323–325.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

For revolutionary anarchists, on the other hand, significant progress in such reconstruction is not only possible within capitalism, but is a necessary condition for a sustainable emancipatory rupture with capitalism. In discussing Proudhon's views on revolution, Martin Buber writes,

[Proudhon] divined the tragedy of revolutions and came to feel it more and more deeply in the course of disappointing experiences. Their tragedy is that as regards their positive goal they will always result in the exact opposite of what the most honest and passionate revolutionaries strive for, unless and until this [deep social reform] has so far taken shape before the revolution that the revolutionary act has only to wrest the space for it in which it can develop unimpeded.

If we want a revolution to result in a deeply egalitarian, democratic, and participatory way of life, Buber writes,

the all-important fact is that, in the social as opposed to the political sphere, revolution is not so much a creative as a delivering force whose function is to set free and authenticate — i.e. that it can only perfect, set free, and lend the stamp of authority to something that has already been foreshadowed in the womb of the pre-revolutionary society; that, as regards social evolution, the hour of revolution is not an hour of begetting but an hour of birth — provided there was a begetting beforehand.

A rupture with capitalism is thus necessary in this strategic vision, but it requires a deep process of interstitial transformation beforehand if it is to succeed.¹¹⁰

The strategy of seeing contemporary counter-institutions within our own society as the seeds of the future society is, in part, a rejoinder to Marx's dismissal of utopians as "writing recipes for cook-shops of the future." As the authors of a book on dual power from the Next System Project argue:

Karl Marx famously criticized utopians as trying to "write recipes for the cook-shops of the future." By this, he meant that utopians imagine they can design a new society from scratch and bring it into being by sheer force of will.... By contrast, Marx's method of analysis grapples with the complex and dynamic process by which societies change. He believed that only by carefully examining the social relations, incentive structures, and class dynamics of a society can we understand its path going forward. In Marx's view, every social system is a complex process rather than a static essence, and each system contains the seeds of its successor, which need only be encouraged to grow for change to come about.

In our view, the answer to political change lies between the utopians and Marx. There is some truth to Marx's claim that describing a desired future is a waste of time; devising complex utopias does little to guide us politically or strategically if it is divorced from the process through which such ideas could feasibly come about. Yet

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 328–329.

neither can we sit by critiquing the current economic and political landscape while we wait for “inevitable” revolution. The next-system vision spelled out here can and must be enacted in our communities today as an essential, intermediate step toward realizing a revolutionary vision for the planet.

The next system is more likely to succeed and endure if we steadily transform existing institutions, modes of production, and ways of relating to one another rather than try to conjure up a whole new system out of thin air.... Filling in the gaps between “scientific” socialist analysis and utopian imagination, we have attempted something the Left has always struggled to create: a realistic transition model to a post-capitalist world.¹¹¹

Further, citing Hannah Arendt’s argument that all political systems depend on popular cooperation for their survival, and that systems are ultimately overthrown by the withdrawal of public support, they point out that counter-institutions are needed to empower such withdrawal.

The understanding that power emerges from collective action, rather than from force, is a key component of our transitional vision.

As a revolutionary political strategy, however (rather than a mere description of certain past political events), Arendt’s theory of power requires several modifications. First, without preexisting mass organization, the public has no way to collectively withdraw its support....

Second, most people will never even consider retracting support for governing institutions if they don’t see viable alternatives.... The organization of unions, worker-owned firms, and housing cooperatives is what makes socialism a real, lived possibility around which greater movement-building can occur.

Third, withdrawal has serious costs. Even absent violent repression (a feature of even today’s most liberal democracies), we are made dependent on capitalist and state institutions for access to basic survival needs and avenues for collective action. Transcending capitalism and the state thus requires having alternative institutions in place to meet those needs and organize people to act powerfully in concert with one another.

Fourth, we cannot neglect the preformation of the post-revolutionary society — the need to actively create institutions to replace the ones we have now.¹¹²

In their treatment of the dual power institutions building the future post-capitalist society, the co-authors focus heavily on the local.

In early stages, crafting the political infrastructure of radical democracy and libertarian socialism will be mainly local, through outgrowths and codifications of existing social processes that can be expanded into mainstream practice and incorporated into a broader strategy. The community institutions proposed here are modular. They can stand alone as individual projects, fine-tuned to solve specific problems

¹¹¹ John Michael Colón, Mason Herson-Hord, Katie S. Horvath, Dayton Martindale, and Matthew Porges, *Community, Democracy, and Mutual Aid: Toward Dual Power and Beyond* (The Next System Project, April 2017), pp. 2–3.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6

created by the current system's failures, but they are designed to be organized as a network. By working together and mutually reinforcing one another, these institutions can qualitatively change the power relations of a city or neighborhood, and lay the groundwork for new macro-structures of self-governance and civil society....

Particular institutional arrangements will likely depend on local needs and conditions, but possibilities include worker-owned cooperatives, neighborhood councils, community land trusts, local food distribution systems, mutual aid networks, community-owned energy, popular education models, time banks, childcare centers, community health clinics, and more.¹¹³

The interstitial approach, in which the successor society is an emergent system coalescing from seeds that develop in the present, differs from the “recipes” Marx derides (what some might call “bike shedding” today) in that it treats the development of the future society as an open-ended process whose details can be left to the future.

Chris Dillow, a Marxist economist in the UK, argues against such cookshop recipes or bikeshedding from the standpoint of bounded rationality and unintended consequences,¹¹⁴ and quotes Erik Olin Wright on the proper approach. Wright advised against drawing up detailed blueprints in advance.

What can be worked out are the core organizing principles of alternatives to existing institutions, the principles that would guide the pragmatic trial-and-error task of institution-building. Of course, there will be unintended consequences of various sorts, but these can be dealt with as they arrive “after the revolution.” The crucial point is that unintended consequences need not pose a fatal threat to the emancipatory projects themselves.¹¹⁵

David Bollier makes a similar argument for an open-ended approach based on complexity science:

By the lights of complexity science, stable, successful systems cannot be constructed in advance by having brilliant minds devise sophisticated blueprints – the model of God as the absent watchmaker. Rather, successful systems must evolve organically through the self-organized, free interplay of adaptive agents which follow simple principles at the local level. No definitive big-picture knowledge or teleological goals can be known at the outset. Instead of presuming that an a priori, comprehensive design system should be followed to produce the best outcomes, complexity theory takes its cues from biophysical evolution and asserts that the best results will arise if intelligent, living agents are allowed to evolve over time toward optimum outcomes in supportive environments. The schemas or agents that survive and thrive will be

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 8.

¹¹⁴ Chris Dillow, “In defence of conservative Marxism,” *Stumbling and Mumbling*, February 10, 2019 <https://stumblingandmumbling.typepad.com/stumbling_and_mumbling/2019/02/in-defence-of-conservative-marxism.html>.

¹¹⁵ Erik Olin Wright, “The Real Utopias Project: a general overview” (April 2010) <<https://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/OVERVIEW.html>>.

the ones capable of prevailing against competitors and reproducing; less capable agents will be shunted to niches or die, according to principles of natural selection....

What results through this process is a higher level of organization known as emergence. “Living systems always seem to emerge from the bottom up, from a population of much simpler systems,” writes science journalist M. Mitchell Waldrop. A mix of proteins, DNA, and other biomolecules coevolved to produce a cell. Neurons in the brain come together to produce cognition, emotions, and consciousness. A collection of ants self-organize themselves into a complex ant colony.

“In the simplest terms,” complexity author Steven Johnson write, complex systems “solve problems by drawing on masses of relatively stupid elements, rather than a single, intelligent ‘executive branch.’ They are bottom-up systems, not top-down. They get their smarts from below.” Johnson continues: “In these systems, agents residing on one scale start producing behavior that lies one scale above them: ants create colonies, urbanites create neighborhoods; simple pattern-recognition software learns how to recommend new books. The movement from low-level rules to higher-level sophistication is what we call emergence.”

The agents within any complex adaptive system do not deliberately plan or create a higher, more sophisticated level of social organization; they are motivated chiefly by local circumstances and knowledge. And yet, when the micro-behaviors of agents relying on Vernacular law reach a critical stage of interconnection and intensity, they actualize new flows of energy and vision. An *emergent new system* arises in an almost mysterious fashion.¹¹⁶

The same theme was tied to the concept of attractor institutions in an extended Twitter thread by a polymathic leftist who goes by the handle Yung Neocon. The proper strategy, he argued, was to eliminate the core axes of extraction in the present system (in his opinion prisons and private land ownership), set up a handful of “attractor institutions” around which the new society could crystallize, and then let emergence do its thing.

A bad faith critic would be inclined to say I am all negative (by focussing on ending extraction, enclosure, retribution, prisons, and private land monopoly), but this isn’t fair — I’m simply an agnostic/pluralist about what the positive post-emancipation project would be

There are many social systems, when stated in ‘ideal’ terms, I would be fine living with, for the most part — gift economies, communization, FALSC, mutualist hobby markets + common ownership, Parecon/Participatory Planning, cybernetic socialism, council communism, etc.

Would I be comfortable positing any of these as the final state? or sufficient? or perfect? or superior to the other alternatives presented? or the only available options? absolutely not on all counts.

¹¹⁶ David Bollier, “Vernacular Law and Complexity Science: Two Guides for Creating Urban Commons,” in LabGov, *The Co-Cities Open Book: Transitioning from the Urban Commons to the City as a Commons* (2018), pp. 72–73.

I also trust people, and do not think we can, let alone need, to figure out every detail ahead of time — such arrogant confidence in the ability to predict, plan, control, and address contingencies, localities, novelties, etc, is fatal to success & emancipation.

If I were to somewhat mis-use the terminology of complexity & systems, I think our positive projects are best seen as ‘attractors’ — focal points around which dynamic systems adapt & to which they tend; catalysts & resources for action, but not pre-determined outcomes.

On the other hand, it IS really easy to see what in the current world, and in history, we want destroyed — so, for example, for me these basically come down, at the end of it, to prisons and private landownership, two vices which interpenetrate nearly every other....

Thinkers, ranging across eras, disciplines & ideologies as Aristotle, Ibn-Khaldun, Smith, Darwin, Kropotkin, Hayek, Taleb, Ostrom, Meadows, Bookchin, Scott, Polanyi, Collins, Sahlins, Ward, Graeber & others, emphasize complex, evolved, decentralized, organic systems.

These emerge in time & space through slow plodding, tacit knowledge, learning, trial & error, cooperation, evolution, selection, internalization, canalization, and so on, without unitary top-down planners global/universal in time & space....¹¹⁷

Perhaps the best explanation of the interstitial strategy comes (again) from Erik Olin Wright, the person most famously associated with that term:

It is grounded in the following idea: all socioeconomic systems are complex mixes of many different kinds of economic structures, relations, and activities. No economy has ever been — or ever could be — purely capitalist. Capitalism as a way of organizing economic activity has three critical components: private ownership of capital; production for the market for the purpose of making profits; and employment of workers who do not own the means of production.

Existing economic systems combine capitalism with a whole host of other ways of organizing the production and distribution of goods and services: directly by states; within the intimate relations of families to meet the needs of its members; through community-based networks and organizations; by cooperatives owned and governed democratically by their members; though nonprofit market-oriented organizations; through peer-to-peer networks engaged in collaborative production processes; and many other possibilities.

Some of these ways of organizing economic activities can be thought of as hybrids, combining capitalist and noncapitalist elements; some are entirely noncapitalist; and some are anticapitalist. We call such a complex economic system “capitalist” when capitalist drives are dominant in determining the economic conditions of life and access to livelihood for most people. That dominance is immensely destructive.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Yung Neocon, Twitter, Sept 26 2018 <<https://twitter.com/yungneocon/status/1045047763258535951>> (et seq).

¹¹⁸ Erik Olin Wright, “How to Be an Anticapitalist Today,” *Jacobin*, December 2, 2015 <<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/12/erik-olin-wright-real-utopias-anticapitalism-democracy/>>.

(We should note here that many Marxists and adherents of other revolutionary traditions deny that significant non-capitalist elements can function in a non-capitalist way within a predominantly capitalist system. They are either coopted or forced into de facto self-exploitation. So the only way to achieve non-capitalist alternatives on a significant scale is to overthrow system as a system all at once. It's either all or nothing. Wright and other interstitialists, like Federici and De Angelis and others we discussed earlier, hold on the contrary that there is an "outside" to capitalism here and now, that can be built on and expanded and challenge it from the inside. For them, capitalism is not a total, all-or-nothing system but something that can change in character over time as non-capitalist elements develop within it.)

One way to challenge capitalism is to build more democratic, egalitarian, participatory economic relations in the spaces and cracks within this complex system wherever possible, and to struggle to expand and defend those spaces.

The idea of eroding capitalism imagines that these alternatives have the potential, in the long run, of expanding to the point where capitalism is displaced from this dominant role.

An analogy with an ecosystem in nature might help clarify this idea. Think of a lake. A lake consists of water in a landscape, with particular kinds of soil, terrain, water sources, and climate. An array of fish and other creatures live in its water, and various kinds of plants grow in and around it....

In such an ecosystem, it is possible to introduce an alien species of fish not "naturally" found in the lake. Some alien species will instantly get gobbled up. Others may survive in some small niche in the lake, but not change much about daily life in the ecosystem. But occasionally an alien species may thrive and eventually displace the dominant species.

The strategic vision of eroding capitalism imagines introducing the most vigorous varieties of emancipatory species of noncapitalist economic activity into the ecosystem of capitalism, nurturing their development by protecting their niches, and figuring out ways of expanding their habitats. The ultimate hope is that eventually these alien species can spill out of their narrow niches and transform the character of the ecosystem as a whole....

[The process of transition from feudalism to capitalism] may have been punctuated by political upheavals and even revolutions, but rather than constituting a rupture in economic structures, these political events served more to ratify and rationalize changes that had already taken place within the socioeconomic structure.

The strategic vision of eroding capitalism sees the process of displacing capitalism from its dominant role in the economy in a similar way: alternative, noncapitalist economic activities emerge in the niches where this is possible within an economy dominated by capitalism; these activities grow over time, both spontaneously and, crucially, as a result of deliberate strategy; struggles involving the state take place, sometimes to protect these spaces, other times to facilitate new possibilities; and eventually, these noncapitalist relations and activities become sufficiently prominent

in the lives of individuals and communities that capitalism can no longer be said to dominate the system as a whole....

The only hope for an emancipatory alternative to capitalism — an alternative that embodies ideals of equality, democracy, and solidarity — is to build it on the ground and work to expand its scope.¹¹⁹

[Last edited October 7, 2020]

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Chapter Seven: Interstitial Development: Practical Issues

I. Post-1968 (-1994?) Movements

Unlike the old revolutionary movements, the new horizontal movements for the most part aren't fighting to *capture* anything. Richard Gunn and Adrian Wilding argue that "Occupy is not to be assessed strictly in terms of... its effect upon government policy," but rather in terms of "the alternative public space that it creates and the mutual recognition between individuals that... it brings into existence...."¹

This applies not just to Occupy, but more generally to all the horizontalist movements of the past two decades.

According to Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt the EZLN (Zapatista National Liberation Army) was perhaps the first movement with both feet — or at least one and a half — firmly planted in the networked world.

The Zapatistas, which were born and primarily remain a peasant and indigenous movement, use the Internet and communications technologies not only as a means of distributing their communiques to the outside world but also... as a structural element inside their organization.... Communication is central to the Zapatistas' notion of revolution, and they continually emphasize the need to create horizontal network organizations rather than vertical centralized structures.

Despite some hat tipping to the old guerrilla army model in their nomenclature, "their goal has never been to defeat the state and claim sovereign authority but rather to change the world without taking power."²

Of course even the guerrilla model itself had already undergone some transformation post-1968:

The most obvious change was that guerrilla movements began to shift from the countryside to the city, from open spaces to closed ones. The techniques of guerrilla warfare began to be adapted to the new conditions of post-Fordist production, in line with information systems and network structures. Finally as guerrilla warfare increasingly adopted the characteristics of biopolitical production and spread throughout the entire fabric of society, it more directly posed as its goal the production of subjectivity — economic and cultural subjectivity, both material and immaterial. It was not just a matter of "winning hearts and minds," in other words, but

¹ Richard Gunn and Adrian Wilding, "Alternative horizons – understanding Occupy's politics," Heathwood Press, January 27, 2014 <<http://www.heathwoodpress.com/alternative-horizons-understanding-occupys-politics/>>.

² Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (Penguin, 2005), p. 85.

rather of creating new hearts and minds through the construction of new circuits of communication, new forms of social collaboration, and new modes of interaction. In this process we can discern a tendency toward moving beyond the modern guerrilla model toward more democratic network forms of organization....

The real transformation of guerrilla movements during this period...has little to do with urban or rural terrain.... The small mobile units and flexible structures of post-Fordist production correspond to a certain degree to the polycentric guerrilla model, but the guerrilla model is immediately transformed by the technologies of post-Fordism. The networks of information, communication, and cooperation—the primary axes of post-Fordist production—begin to define the new guerrilla movements. Not only do the movements employ technologies such as the Internet as organizing tools, they also begin to adapt these technologies as models for their own organizational structures.³

As John Holloway puts it, Zapatismo's nature as an "open-ended" movement "is summed up in the idea that it is a revolution not a Revolution...."

It is a revolution, because the claim to dignity in a society built upon the negation of dignity can only be met through a radical transformation of society. But it is not a Revolution in the sense of having some grand plan, in the sense of a movement designed to bring about the Great Event that will change the world. Its revolutionary claim lies not in the preparation for the future Event but in the present inversion of perspective, in the consistent insistence on seeing the world in terms that are incompatible with the world as it is: human dignity. Revolution refers to present existence not to future instrumentality.⁴

This small-r revolution means that "the concept of revolution can no longer be instrumental."

Our traditional concept of revolution is as a means to achieve an end, and we know that in practice this has meant using people as a means to an end. If dignity is taken as a central principle, then people cannot be treated as a means: the creation of a society based on dignity can only take place through the development of social practices based on the mutual recognition of that dignity. We walk, not in order to arrive at a promised land, but because the walking itself is the revolution. And if instrumentalism falls as a way of thinking, so too does the lineal time that is implicit in the traditional concept of revolution, the clear distinction between before and after. There is no question of first revolution, then dignity: dignity itself is the revolution.⁵

And once revolution ceases to focus on a big Event like seizure of power, or ruptural confrontation with capital at some specific future point in time, what becomes central instead is

the construction of our own world.... This is still class struggle, it is still confrontation with capital.... But insofar as possible, we seize the initiative, we seize the agenda....

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 81–82.

⁴ Holloway, "Dignity's Revolt," in *We Are the Crisis of Capital* (Oakland: PM Press, 2019), p. 126.

⁵ Holloway, "Zapatismo and the Social Sciences," in *We Are the Crisis of Capital*, p. 199.

By making the development of our own creativity (our own power-to-do) the centre of the movement, capital is revealed as a parasite, constantly forced to run after us.⁶

To the extent that the EZLN has carried out governance functions in liberated portions of Chiapas, it has done so in a prefigurative manner, including — much like the Black Panthers in Oakland — a robust program of counter-institution building.

Comandante Hortensia went on to explain how over the past two decades, they have constructed their own autonomous government, complete with their own health and education system, based in the indigenous traditions of their ancestors. Despite the continual efforts of the “neoliberal bad government” to displace them from their land, the Zapatistas have successfully recuperated thousands of acres of land on which they have constructed communities that are governed “from the bottom up.”⁷

And David Graeber argues that the cycle of struggles from 1994 to the present had its origins in anarchist praxis.

The very notion of direct action, with its rejection of a politics which appeals to governments to modify their behaviour, in favour of physical intervention against state power in a form that itself prefigures an alternative — all of this emerges directly from the libertarian tradition. Anarchism is the heart of the movement, its soul; the source of most of what’s new and hopeful about it.

It was an international network called People’s Global Action, for example, that put out... the original call for protest against the 1999 WTO meetings in Seattle. And PGA in turn owes its origins to the famous International Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism, which took place knee-deep in the jungle mud of rainy-season Chiapas, in August 1996.... People from over 50 countries came streaming into the Zapatista-held village of La Realidad. The vision for an ‘intercontinental network of resistance’ was laid out in the Second Declaration of La Realidad: ‘We declare that we will make a collective network of all our particular struggles and resistances, an intercontinental network of resistance against neoliberalism, an intercontinental network of resistance for humanity’....

This, the Declaration made clear, was ‘not an organizing structure; it has no central head or decision maker; it has no central command or hierarchies. We are the network, all of us who resist.’⁸

Like many of the prefigurative movements that came after it (notably the alternative economy experiments arising out of Syntagma in Greece), Argentine horizontalism included lots of grass-roots projects in building a counter-economy to support some degree of secession and pursuit

⁶ Holloway, “Zapatismo Urbano,” in *We Are the Crisis of Capital*, p. 205.

⁷ Andalusia Knoll and Itandehui Reyes, “From Fire to Autonomy: Zapatistas, 20 Years of Walking Slowly,” *Truthout*, January 25, 2014 <<http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/21427-from-fire-to-autonomy-zapatistas-20-years-of-walking-slowly>>.

⁸ David Graeber, “The New Anarchists,” *New Left Review* 13 (January-February 2002) <<http://newleftreview.org/II/13/david-graeber-the-new-anarchists>>.

of livelihood independent of the capitalist economy. “Projects range from bakeries and organic gardens, to alternative medicine clinics, education and schools, to raising animals and taking over land for housing and food production. Many of the hundreds of recuperated factories and other workplaces formed horizontal linkages to barter their respective outputs with one another (for example, a cooperative clinic providing free healthcare to printing factory workers in return for free printing of all their material).⁹

There’s been a fundamental shift, in the post-1994 wave of movements, from what Gramsci called a “war of maneuver” (contesting control of the “commanding heights” of political and economic institutions) to a “war of position” (a prolonged process of culture change and institution-building within civil society with the goal of surrounding the state as the last bastion of capitalist power). But there’s a major difference even with Gramsci’s formulation. Gramsci intended the war of position only to be undertaken as a period of preparation for eventually storming the bastions of political control. He still saw a War of Maneuver as the final step; it was just to be postponed until the cultural sappers had finished their preparatory work.

The new movements see the modes of production and social organization facilitated by new technologies as opening the possibility for seceding and building a new society within the interstices of the old one, without ever attempting a seizure of power. We no longer need the obsolescent institutions of state and capital. We just need to tear down their enclosures of the social economy we’ve already built – and that can be done, to a large extent, by circumvention rather than conquest.

In modern networked organizations — perhaps better called networked *counter-societies* — the attacks and resistance against the enemy are primarily aimed at defending the internal space for self-organization against attempts at suppression.

Negri and Hardt, in *Declaration*, likewise see the role of violence in a ruptural transition as largely in defense of, or ratifying, changes that have already taken place interstitially. They counsel continuing to work, “building the new society within the shell of the old,” against that day.

Even when tempted by despair, we should remember that throughout history unexpected and unforeseeable events arrive that completely reshuffle the decks of political powers and possibility. You don’t have to be a millenarian to believe that such political events will come again. It’s not just a matter of numbers. One day there are millions in the streets and nothing changes, and another day the action of a small group can completely overturn the ruling order. Sometimes the event comes in a moment of economic and political crisis when people are suffering. Other times, though, the event arises in times of prosperity when hopes and aspirations are rising. It’s possible, even in the near future, that the entire financial structure will come crashing down. Or that debtors will gain the conviction and courage not to pay their debts. Or that people will en masse refuse to obey those in power. What will we do then? What society will we construct?

We can’t know when the event will come. But that doesn’t mean we should just wait around until it arrives.¹⁰

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 15.

¹⁰ Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Declaration* (2012) [page references reflect pdf document pagination of unpaginated original with some duplicated pages]

They cite Hayek and the Mont Pelerin Society, Friedman and the Chicago School (with their focus on laying the intellectual infrastructure to be ready to take advantage of a crisis to impose neoliberalism through Crisis Capitalism) as a positive example for the Left.¹¹

This paradoxical task of preparing for an unforeseen event may be the best way of understanding the work and accomplishments of the cycle of struggles of 2011. The movements are preparing ground for an event they cannot foresee or predict. The principles they promote, including equality, freedom, sustainability, and open access to the common, can form the scaffolding on which, in the event of a radical social break, a new society can be built. Moreover, the political practices that the movements experiment with — assemblies, methods of collective decision making, mechanisms for not only the protection but also the expression and participation of minorities, among others — serve as a guide for future political action. Much more important, though, than any of the constitutional principles or political practices, the movements are creating new subjectivities that desire and are capable of democratic relations. The movements are writing a manual for how to create and live in a new society.¹²

Going beyond their direct comments, the “scaffolding” being built is not simply ideological or intellectual, and not just a toolkit of governance practices. And the “new society” is not something to be built “in the event of a radical social break.” The scaffolding includes economic and social counter-institutions here and now. And as much as possible of the new society should be built and already in place, from the coalescence of these counter-institutions into an emergent counter-system, when the radical social break occurs. However long it takes until the final break occurs, in the meantime the crisis tendencies of late capitalism continue, along with growing precarity and underemployment, and both state- and employer-based social safety nets continue to erode. Responding to the mounting material pressures under which people are placed by these crisis tendencies is the “killer app” of the counter-institutions here and now, and it is by responding to these material realities in a way that offers a material alternative to capitalism that we will build the new society within the shell of the old. When the radical break occurs, it should simply amount to a breaking of the shell and a putting paid to the last of the old society.

Electoral politics in the UK and US: a libertarian shift on the Left?

In the United States in the 1970s, for several years after the collapse of Consensus Capitalism, there appeared to be potential for an alternative path based on further exploiting the disintegration of the New Deal labor accord and pushing further left with a refusal of work, subversion of the wage system and capital accumulation, etc., and promotion of decentralist, left-libertarian models of organization. These possibilities were exemplified by Harry Boyte’s *The Backyard Revolution*, *Radical Technology*, the People’s Bicentennial Commission and their *Common Sense II*, and a wide variety of policy experiments with employee ownership and self-management. Instead the danger from this nascent decentralist and populist movement was headed off, and coopted, by the fake populism of the New Right.

<<https://antonionegriinenglish.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/93152857-hardt-negri-declaration-2012.pdf>>, pp. 86–87.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 87–88.

In the UK this approach, broadly speaking, focused on economic decentralization and economic democracy. Under Tony Benn, Wilson's secretary of state for industry, there was some experimentation with worker cooperatives and economic democracy.¹³

One Labour response to de-industrialization involving the placement of failing industrial enterprises under worker management and their conversion to new forms of production. Robin Murray, an activist on the Labour left, describes the movement's encounter with the libertarian possibilities of post-Fordist production:

Throughout the 1970s, and right up until the drafting of Labour's London Manifesto for the 1981 municipal elections, the predominant economic paradigm was Fordism: left economic industrial strategy was based on the idea of scale and rationalisation. The critique of industrial Britain across the political spectrum was that it was backward. It had too many old family firms, who underinvested and weren't good at managing. What was needed was to modernise them, by encouraging amalgamations, increasing investment and appointing professional managers. That approach underpinned industrial policy in the 1960s, but it was then given a 'leftward flip' in the 1970s, when Tony Benn (a key figure of the Labour left in the 1970s and 1980s) took it up, with the idea of marrying these modern 'forces of production', with greater democratic control.¹⁴

Murray and some others on the Labour left, from the late 70s on, encountered information from the Italian flexible specialization industrial model, and scholarly specialists on it like Charles Sabel and Piore, that undermined the Party's archaic Galbraithian/Chandlerian industrial technology. Networked industrial ecologies of dozens of firms of dozens of workers each in northern Italy were collectively producing output on the same scale as a single British firm employing thousands, but with two-thirds the unit cost. This seemed to open up the possibility of a production model that made real democratic control on the shop floor feasible in a way that it wasn't feasible under Fordism.¹⁵ Unfortunately, the triumph of Thatcherism was at the very same time closing off this decentralist path; and when the Party did regain power, it was under a Blairite platform.

And today, following the mass reaction to the perceived failure of neoliberalism in the Great Recession, we once again see the rise of a new Left with libertarian socialist sensibilities, centered on the Millennials and Gen Z, Great Recession/Occupation generation, etc., exemplified by Sanders in the US and Miliband and Corbyn in the UK, respectively.

The reaction against neoliberalism was accompanied by a renaissance of heterodox economic thought on the Left, as described by Andy Beckett.

The new leftwing economics wants to see the redistribution of economic power, so that it is held by everyone — just as political power is held by everyone in a healthy democracy. This redistribution of power could involve employees taking ownership

¹³ Andy Beckett, "The new left economics: how a network of thinkers is transforming capitalism," *The Guardian*, June 25, 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/jun/25/the-new-left-economics-how-a-network-of-thinkers-is-transforming-capitalism>>.

¹⁴ "Post-Post-Fordism in the Era of Platforms: Robin Murray talks to Jeremy Gilbert and Andrew Goffey," *New Formations* 84/85 (June 22, 2015), pp. 185–186.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 186–187, 190.

of part of every company; or local politicians reshaping their city's economy to favour local, ethical businesses over large corporations; or national politicians making co-operatives a capitalist norm.

This "democratic economy" is not some idealistic fantasy: bits of it are already being constructed in Britain and the US... "If we want to live in democratic societies, then we need to ... allow communities to shape their local economies," write Joe Guinan and Martin O'Neill, both prolific advocates of the new economics, in a recent article for the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR)....

The new economists' enormously ambitious project means transforming the relationship between capitalism and the state; between workers and employers; between the local and global economy; and between those with economic assets and those without. "Economic power and control must rest more equally," declared a report last year by the New Economics Foundation (NEF), a radical London thinktank that has acted as an incubator for many of the new movement's members and ideas.

In the past, left-of-centre British governments have attempted to reshape the economy by taxation – usually focused on income rather than other forms of economic power – and by nationalisation, which usually meant replacing a private-sector management elite with a state-appointed one. Instead of such limited, patchily successful interventions, the new economists want to see much more systemic and permanent change. They want – at the least – to change how capitalism works. But, crucially, they want this change to be only partially initiated and overseen by the state, not controlled by it. They envisage a transformation that happens almost organically, driven by employees and consumers....¹⁶

Under Miliband and Corbyn, Labour not only shifted further to the left but increasingly focused on economic democracy (e.g. cooperative governance and self-management, as opposed to the Morrisonian model of managerialism) to an extent never before seen.

Labour's 2019 manifesto aimed at "a bold transformation of the British economy organised around ownership, control, democracy, and participation."

...'Co-operatives, shared ownership, and workplace democracy', John McDonnell has stated, 'all have a central role to play here'.... Corbyn, for his part, has promised 'decisive action to make finance the servant of industry not the masters of all' and called for local councils to be given more freedom to run utilities and services in order to 'roll back the tide of forced privatisation' and allow communities to shape and secure their economic future. Not since the 'seventies and early 'eighties – when the Party was committed to bringing about what Tony Benn termed 'a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of power and wealth in favour of working people and their families' – has Labour put forward as bold a plan for the transformation of Britain. Instead of the extractive and concentrating forces of corporate capitalism, the emerging new political economy is circulatory and place-based, decentralising economic power, rebuilding and stabilising regions and local communities, allowing for the possibility of real democracy and participation, and providing the long-run

¹⁶ Beckett, *op. cit.*

institutional and policy support for a new politics dedicated to achieving genuine social change...

The Labour Party started to face up to the limitations of ‘merely redistributive’ economic strategies under the leadership of Ed Miliband, whose thinking on predistribution offered at least the beginnings of a radical reinvention of social democracy.... In this sense, Miliband was ahead of his time – and it’s encouraging to see more ambitious institutional thinking now coming from sources such as the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), with ideas around the transformation of corporate governance and the creation of a citizens’ wealth fund emanating from the promising Commission on Economic Justice....

...For socialists, responses to capitalist private ownership of the economy have traditionally divided along two main lines. In greatly simplified terms, state socialism placed ownership and control of capital with the state, whereas social democracy left it largely in private hands but sought to redistribute the returns through taxation and transfers. A neglected third tradition, however, largely eclipsed by the left’s great twentieth-century projects, is to be found in the long-running socialist commitment to economic democracy.¹⁷

Labour’s Land for the Many program, aimed at remedying the concentrated ownership of half the UK’s land by one percent of the population, envisioned forced sale of abandoned or derelict properties, replacement of council taxes with land value taxation, and the creation of community land trusts.¹⁸

In Preston, the local Labour government experimented with a municipalist model inspired in part by the work of Gar Alperovitz.

Preston’s hilltop city centre, which had been fading for decades, now has a refurbished and busy covered market, new artists’ studios in former council offices, and coffee and craft beer being sold from converted shipping containers right behind the town hall. All these enterprises have been facilitated by the council. Less visibly, but probably more importantly, the city’s large concentration of other public sector bodies – a hospital, a university, a police headquarters – have been persuaded by the council to procure goods and services locally whenever possible, becoming what the Democracy Collaborative calls “anchor institutions.” They now spend almost four times as much of their budgets in Preston as they did in 2013.¹⁹

But immediate hopes for the new-model Left in the UK were resoundingly smashed by the December 2019 General Election.

An analysis in *The American Prospect* published shortly before the election is even more relevant in its aftermath. At a Chingford community assembly in the London area,

¹⁷ Joe Guinan and Martin O’Neill, “The institutional turn: Labour’s new political economy,” *Renewal* 26 No. 2 (June 15, 2018). <<http://renewal.org.uk/articles/the-institutional-turn-labours-new-political-economy>>

¹⁸ John Trickett, “Land for the Many,” *Tribune*, June 2019 <<https://tribunemag.co.uk/2019/06/land-for-the-many>>; George Monbiot (editor), Robin Grey, Tom Kenny, Laurie Macfarlane, Anna Powell-Smith, Guy Shrubsole, Beth Stratford, *Land for the Many: Changing the way our fundamental asset is used, owned and governed* (Labour, 2019) <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/12081_19-Land-for-the-Many.pdf>.

¹⁹ Beckett, *op. cit.*

People wonder if a universal basic income trial could be run in their area, and they discuss sustainable local farming and business tax breaks that could be linked to environmentally sustainable practices. One woman suggests giving local councils the power to reclaim vacant storefronts in order to house the homeless; later in the summer, Labour proposes such a policy, under which local authorities could take properties which have been vacant for 12 months and offer them to startups, cooperative businesses, and community projects. Another participant suggests training green mechanics, which, [Director of the Centre for Labour and Social Studies and unsuccessful Labour MP candidate Faiza] Shaheen tells me, sticks out to her because her father was a car mechanic and it had become hard for him to work with new engines.... This is one of the major goals of these events and of the COU in general: to build Labour's policy manifesto from the grassroots....

"When Thatcher closed down the pits and the steelworks, it was not only those jobs that went, but it was also the kind of collective political community culture and institutions," [Labour Party Director of Community Organising Dan] Firth says. "Part of what we are trying to do is to rebuild that culture and to put the Labour Party back in the center of communities which it hasn't been part of for some time."

One local fight is the fight to stop the demolition of both private and council flats in Westminster on land owned by "the 28-year-old Duke of Westminster, a multibillionaire," whose company "plans to bulldoze the buildings to build luxury housing there...."²⁰

In the immediate aftermath of the loss, Chris Smaje proposed an ecology of libertarian community economies as the new social base for post-Corbyn Labour.

...[T]he Labour Party's malaise has deep historic roots that long pre-date Corbyn's tenure, relating to the demise of the organized industrial working-class and its forms of community-building and self-education. What's now needed to create an electable left populism is longer-term community-building of another kind, promoting locally shared spaces and resources, environmental care and economic autonomy that tries to build bridges among whoever's locally in place.²¹

Labour MP Alex Sobel similarly proposed a new approach based on community activism and rebuilding municipal economies on a democratic basis:

One idea is an organising model [in post-industrial communities] based on visible, practical and helpful grassroots action, delivered all year round. Advice hubs providing support could take the form of co-ops or social enterprises. They might provide benefits help, housing advice or a warm meal. They could be funded by the party, local fundraising efforts or trade unions and run with voluntary support. Some groups could aspire to owning the buildings from which they operate, creating real and long-term community anchors.²²

²⁰ Sarah Jaffe, "Labour's Secret Weapon," *The American Prospect*, September 19, 2019 <<https://prospect.org/world/labour-secret-weapon-uk/>>.

²¹ Chris Smaje, "Let us Eat Brexit," *Small Farm Future*, December 16, 2019 <<https://smallfarmfuture.org.uk/2019/12/let-us-eat-brexit/>>.

²² Alex Sobel, "Labour doesn't have to wait five years to start rebuilding communities," *The Guardian*, December 20, 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/dec/20/labour-rebuilding-communities-tory-cuts>>.

II. Strategy

From a strategic standpoint, Exodus confers enormous advantages on those who adopt that approach. Our fight no longer requires us to contest the ruling class's control of the means of production and state administration, as in previous revolutions, but only to create a society of our own without interference.

Individualist anarchist Katherine Gallagher outlined the strategy several years ago in a series of tweets on Twitter:

For me it's about stretching out our networks of what's possible across borders, about decentralizing... "We" will be transnational, and distributed. We won't be encircled by "them," but woven through their antiquated structures, impossible to quarantine off and finish. I'm not a pacifist. I'm not at all against defensive violence. That's a separate question to me of overthrow. But to oversimplify, when it comes to violence, I want it to be the last stand of a disintegrating order against an emerging order that has already done much of the hard work of building its ideals/structures.... Build the society and defend it, don't go forth with the guns and attempt to bring anarchy about in the rubble.

I think technology is increasingly putting the possibility of meaningful resistance and worker independence within the realm of a meaningful future. So much of the means of our oppression is now more susceptible to being duplicated on a human scale (and so much of patent warfare seems to be aimed at preventing this).

And I think we should be working on how we plan to create a parallel industry that is not held only by those few. More and more the means to keep that industry held only by the few are held in the realm of patent law. It is no longer true that the few own the "lathe" so to speak, nearly as much as they own the patent to it. So we truly could achieve more by creating real alternative manufacture than seizing that built. Yes, there will be protective violence, but it's not as true as it was in the past that there is real necessary means of production in the hands of the few. What they control more now is access to the methods of production and try to prevent those methods being used outside of their watch. Again, I'm not saying that the "last days" of the state won't be marked by violence. But I am saying we now have real tactical options beyond confronting them directly *until* they come to us.²³

Indeed, when the state brings about the revolutionary rupture by initiating force against the nascent system emerging in its midst, the resulting violence may serve only to ratify the transition after the fact.

In most cases, the work being done to build decentralized systems, will be opaque to the people running the existing system. It won't look like a threat until they have already won (the model for this is how feudalism was replaced by markets — the

²³ Paragraph divisions mine. Originally a string of tweets by Katherine Gallagher (@Zhinxy, account now defunct) in July 2012.

nobles didn't know they had lost, as an institution, until they lost their castles to creditors).²⁴

Whatever violence does occur at the final transition will be primarily defensive, not constitutive. The 500-odd-year-old capitalist system, like previous historic systems, is not a monolithic unity but a collection of mutually interacting social formations — some in ascendancy, some in decline. It follows that the supplanting of capitalism need not involve a dramatic rupture on the part of a monolithic unity of progressive forces. As Eugene Holland argues,

the requirement of such a radical systemic break is necessary only when you conceive of a society or mode of production as a total system in the first place.... Construing such elements in terms of dominant, residual, and emergent improves utopian prospects considerably, inasmuch as there would presumably be positive elements to affirm (the “emergent” ones) alongside the negative ones to critique and reject (presumably all the “dominant” ones)....²⁵

Negri and Hardt, likewise, take the position that if violence occurs it will be when the forces of the old order attempt — and fail — to thwart the transition.

...our current situation is propitious... because the constituent power of the multitude has matured to such an extent that it is becoming able, through its networks of communication and cooperation, through its production of the common, to sustain an alternative democratic society on its own. Here is where the question of time becomes essential. When does the moment of rupture come?... Revolutionary politics must grasp, in the movement of the multitudes and through the accumulation of common and cooperative decisions, the moment of rupture... that can create a new world.²⁶

And in this context, they argue that the primary role of violence in the transition is not the revolutionary seizure of power, but defensive violence to protect the counter-institutions we have built against a final, last-ditch attempt at suppression by the capitalist state. They note that Moses and Aaron had to defeat Pharaoh's pursuing forces in order to complete the exodus successfully. “Every exodus requires an active resistance, a rear-guard war against the pursuing powers of sovereignty.”²⁷

An important corollary of this principle of defensive violence is that, from the perspective of democracy, violence cannot create anything but can only preserve what has already been created.... Democratic violence can only defend society, not create it. This is equally true in revolutionary situations. Democratic violence does not initiate the revolutionary process but rather comes only at the end, when the political and social transformation has already taken place, to defend its accomplishments.²⁸

²⁴ John Robb, “Hypercentralized or hyperdecentralized? Both...,” *Global Guerrillas*, September 19, 2013 <<http://globalguerrillas.typepad.com/globalguerrillas/2013/09/hypercentralized-or-hyperdecentralized-both.html>>.

²⁵ Holland, *Nomad Citizenship*, p. 169.

²⁶ Negri and Hardt, *Multitude*, p. 357.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 342.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 344.

To quote Holland again, however abrupt and dramatic the final rupture may seem, it is only the culmination of a long preexisting process of — again — “building the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.”

Following 1640, 1776, 1789, 1848, 1917, and 1949, we have been fixated on the image of revolution — of punctual, violent, wholesale transformation — as the most desirable (and often the only acceptable) mode of social change. But revolution is not the only mode of social transformation: feudalism, for instance, arose piecemeal following the decline of the Roman Empire, in a process that took centuries to complete.... Immediate and total social transformation of the revolutionary kind is not absolutely necessary for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that capitalism is not a total system to begin with. Alternatives are not only always possible, they in fact already exist. Inasmuch as the secret of so-called primitive accumulation is that it is actually first and foremost a process of dispossession — ongoing as well as primitive — one answer... to the question of what is to be done is thus to initiate a slow-motion general strike. Seek out actually existing alternative modes of self-provisioning — they are out there, in Remarkable number and variety — and also develop new ones; walk away from dependence on capital and the State, one step, one stratum, at a time, while at the same time making sure to have and continually develop alternative practices and institutions to sustain the movement. To effectively replace capitalism and the State, a slow-motion general strike must indeed become-general or reach critical mass or bifurcation point eventually, but it doesn’t have to be all encompassing right from the beginning or produce wholesale social change all at once: it can start off small and/or scattered and become-general over time....

Hegemonic thinking (i.e., thinking that social change is always and only a matter of hegemony)... leads to the double impasse of “revolution or reform”: given its totalizing view of society, one must either seek the total and utter demolition of that society through revolution or settle for piecemeal reforms that ultimately have no decisive effect on it. But society is not a totality: it is a contingent assemblage, or assemblage of assemblages. Nomad citizenship thus proposes... a variety of “small-scale experiments in the construction of alternative modes of social, political and economic organization [as] a way to avoid both waiting forever for the Revolution to come and perpetuating existing structures through reformist demands.”²⁹

...[T]he key difference between every ordinary strike and the general strike is that while the former makes demands on capitalist employers, the latter simply steps away from capital altogether and — if it is to succeed—moves in the direction of other form(s) of self-provisioning, enabling the emergence of other form(s) of social life — for example, nomad citizenship and free-market communism.

...[T]he slow-motion general strike is, in an Important sense, neither reformist nor revolutionary. It does not employ violence in direct confrontation with the capitalist State and is therefore unlikely to provoke State violence in return, yet neither does

²⁹ Eugene Holland, *Nomad Citizenship: Free-Market Communism and the Slow-Motion General Strike* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), pp. 149–150.

it rely on and thereby reinforce the existing practices and institutions of capital and the State....

...Vital to the success of a slow-motion general strike is its sustainability: the unremitting process of dispossession of capital known as *primitive accumulation* must actually be reversed....³⁰

The large-scale transition may appear to take place as a comparatively sudden phase change, but only after the ground has been prepared by a prolonged Gramscian “war of position” in civil society. To quote Jay Ufelder, “revolutionary situations [are] an emergent property of complex systems.”

One of the features of complex systems is the possibility of threshold effects, in which seemingly small perturbations in some of the system’s elements suddenly produce large changes in others. The fragility of the system as a whole may be evident (and therefore partially predictable) from some aspects of its structure, but the timing of the revolutionary moment’s emergence and the specific form it will take will be impossible to anticipate with any precision.

In this version of politics, the emergence of rival organizations is as likely to be a consequence of the system’s failure as a cause of it.³¹

Capt. B.H. Liddell-Hart, an apostle of maneuver warfare and the indirect approach, cited Lenin’s “vision of fundamental truth” that

‘the soundest strategy in war is to postpone operations until the moral disintegration of the enemy renders the delivery of the mortal blow both possible and easy’. This is not always practicable, nor his methods of propaganda always fruitful. But it will bear adaptation — ‘The soundest strategy in any campaign is to postpone battle and the soundest tactics to postpone attack, until the moral dislocation of the enemy renders the delivery of a decisive blow practicable.’³²

And attempts at transition by revolutionary or insurrectionary means — Gramsci’s so-called “War of Maneuver” — tend overwhelmingly to be counterproductive in the modern era, according to Amador Fernández-Savater.

Okay, so, the key features of the “war of maneuver” are: speed, limited appeal, and frontal attack. Gramsci makes his arguments via Trotsky’s “permanent revolution,” George Sorels’ general strike, Rosa Luxembourg’s worker insurrection and, particularly, the Leninist power grab. These images of revolutionary change clash, time and again, with European and Western reality: the bloody repression of the Spartacist movement in Germany (1918), the disbanding of worker’s councils in Italy during

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 155–156.

³¹ Jay Ufelder, “ISO Revolution, Organized Opposition Not Req’d,” *Dart-Throwing Chimp*, September 7, 2012 <<http://dartthrowingchimp.wordpress.com/2012/09/07/iso-revolution-organized-opposition-not-reqd/>>.

³² B. H. Liddell-Hart, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach* (New York: Praeger, 1954), p. 164.

the *Bienno Rosso* (1919–20), and so on. To avert a predictable sense of frustration and to keep actively aspiring to social change, we have to *reimagine revolution*.³³

Previous struggles, of course, have involved efforts to reduce dependence on the wage system. In the early to mid-19th century, for example, Owenite craft unions set up cooperative shops for independent production by the unemployed, and traded their output with that of other unions using labor notes. But their goal was to win the strikes and go back to work in their old shops on better terms.

And according to John Curl, later attempts by the Knights of Labor to create worker cooperatives foundered on the capitalization requirements.

This struggle is different, in that such economic secessionism is at the heart of it. There's no need for us ever to go back to the capitalists' factories, let alone fight for control of them. We can feed ourselves using intensive cultivation techniques like Permaculture on small amounts of land, and let the giant subsidized agribusiness plantations go back to prairie. We can produce for ourselves in neighborhood garage factories, home microbakeries, open-source ride-sharing platforms, and the like, and let their giant factories full of obsolete machinery turn to rust.

As technological progress makes the physical capital required for production cheaper and cheaper, and brings it back within the realm of ownership by individuals and small cooperative groups — like the craft tools that prevailed before the industrial revolution — the main source of productivity becomes human cooperation itself, and knowledge as a commons.

This means that the rentier classes can no longer extract surplus labor from the population by controlling access to the physical means of production. It must enclose our social relationships themselves as a source of rents.

According to Negri and Hardt, class struggle increasingly takes the form, not of an attempt to storm the physical means of production, but of “exodus” — “a process of subtraction from the relationship with capital by means of actualizing the potential autonomy of labor-power.”

For them, of course, this autonomy referred to the autonomy of labor processes created by capitalists themselves — not to commons-based institutions created *outside* capitalism. But the principle applies equally well in the latter case. For the first time in two hundred years, the radical cheapening of physical capital and the primacy of human capital mean that we can adopt a revolutionary strategy that's not based on somehow obtaining control of the ruling class's institutions and concentrations of capital.

Massimo De Angelis, as we saw in the previous chapter, views the history of capitalism as a continually shifting correlation of forces between capital and the commons sector. And his strategic approach to the postcapitalist transition, much like that of these other thinkers, is to build up the commons sector at the expense of capital and the state.

In this environment, large-scale demonstrations are still useful. But their purpose is no longer the same as in the cities of Europe in 1848, Petrograd in 1917, or Barcelona in 1936. Their purpose is no longer to organize and fight pitched battles in the process of contesting control of the state and the means of production. Their purpose now is educational: to undermine the legitimacy of the regime in the eyes of the general public, to show people they don't need to be free, and to serve as a giant school and clearing house — in the wonderful phrase of Ralph Borsodi and Mildred Loomis, a “school for living.”

³³ Amador Fernández-Savater, “Strength and Power: Reimagining Revolution,” *Guerrilla Translation!*, July 29, 2013 <<http://guerrillatranslation.com/2013/07/29/strength-and-power-reimagining-revolution/>>.

As Angelos Varvarousis argues, horizontalist protest movements exist in symbiosis with commons-based counter-institutions, with the protest movements giving birth to waves of institution-building, and the ecology of counter-institutions in turn serving as the base from which future waves of protest are launched.

Commoning that takes place during the most contentious and visible phases of social movements does not always evaporate after mobilizations are over, but it can be disseminated within the social fabric and, at the same time, it can create new social fabric. This expansion of the commons especially in periods of crisis and destabilization usually takes place rhizomatically. The commons of the social movements, thus, are not just temporal forms of commoning but liminal commons; commons that facilitate transitions and may transform into or give rise to other, more stable, forms of commoning in their wake....

...[T]he rhizomatic expansion of the commons was not simply related to the Greek movement of the squares but to a great extent can be regarded as its “transmutation.”... [T]he commons that multiplied in Athens and Barcelona (and partly in Istanbul) in the wake of the respective movements of the squares should be conceptualized as social outcomes of these social movements. Social outcomes signify the “alternative social infrastructure within different spheres of social production and reproduction like health and care provision, education, food production, housing, finance and others. They are characterized by their dynamic interaction with the more visible periods of the social movements, as they incarnate practices, imaginaries, collective memories and innovations emerged and practiced during such periods and disseminated through the social fabric afterwards.”³⁴

...Examples of these initiatives [commoning projects in Greece after the 2011 protests] include social clinics and pharmacies, workers’ cooperatives, occupied urban spaces, time banks and alternative currencies, neighborhood assemblies and solidarity exchange networks, urban gardens, farmer or consumer cooperatives, farmers’ markets without intermediaries, artist and publishing collectives, and a single occupied factory....

Social clinics are ventures that aim at providing healthcare services to those excluded from the public health system. Some also aim at resisting and toppling dominant public health policies, as well as developing a new model for a different provision of healthcare services. They hardly existed before 2011 but have multiplied afterwards. In 2014 there were 72 known initiatives. The majority of them were initiated between 2011 and 2012.

Solidarity hubs are ventures mainly active at the local neighborhood level, which aim at reconstructing broken social cohesion through a series of actions such as social kitchens, distribution of “food parcels,” free lessons or clothing distribution. Some appeared and disappeared quickly, while others have been more enduring and exist to this day; this fluidity makes it difficult to estimate their number. In any case, while

³⁴ Angelos Varvarousis, “The rhizomatic expansion of commoning through social movements,” *Ecological Economics* 171 (2020), p. 5 <https://www.academia.edu/42114744/The_rhizomatic_expansion_of_commoning_through_social_movements>.

they were non-existent before 2011 (or at least there were very few and had different names and repertoires of action), there were over 110 of them in 2014.

Direct producer-to-consumer networks were also popularized after 2011, especially between 2012 and 2014. Indicatively, while they were non-existent or unknown before 2011, there were 47 recorded networks in 2014. Other forms of social and solidarity economy did also emerge during the crisis and after 2011. 70% of the existing social and solidarity economy organizations were created after 2011. The organizations in this economic field are both formal and informal and range from social enterprises to informal time banks and alternative currencies. In 2017 the total number of organizations across the country was estimated at 1500.³⁵

To quote one Syntagma participant: “There is no doubt that the days of the squares were, and to some extent still are, a point of reference both for our lives and for the projects we are developing since then. It was like a train that came through Athens in those days, and many of us jumped on to go towards the unknown.”³⁶

Of course the relationship between movements and commons is mutual and symbiotic.³⁷

Not only do social movements create social outcomes, but also social outcomes become the basis upon which new social movements may develop. This is evident in the relation between the December 2008 revolt and the 2011 movement of the squares. For instance, popular assemblies were direct social outcomes and commoning projects that sprung from the revolt; after being briefly suspended, they were reactivated to form part of the alternative social infrastructure of the commoning projects that developed out of the square. To be sure, every movement creates its own forms of organization, narratives and sets of practices; my aim here is not to promote a reductive view of the Syntagma movement as a mere continuation of the December revolt, as it was not.... However, an important element of continuity between the 2008 and 2011 mobilizations lies indeed in the practice of commoning.³⁸

The expansion of commoning institutions in 2011 was rhizomatic: “a-centered, unplanned and non-linear...” The individual nodes, severally, were established independently of one another, and not through seeding or mitosis from pre-existing nodes. There was no “organic relation or pre-planned agenda” connecting them. The explosion of (for example) hundreds of cooperative clinics “just happened.”³⁹

This is not to say that the organizers of new nodes were unaware of similar activity elsewhere — simply that they acted on their own initiative. As Varvarousis describes it, rhizomatic expansion sounds like stigmergic coordination, in which individual nodes coordinate their activity with larger movements through a background medium rather than direct negotiation:

Rhizomatic expansion is characterized by the simultaneous emergence of various commoning projects in different places and times, a phenomenon that in biology is

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

called punctuation. This happens within a highly accelerating spiral, in which new projects do not know each other and are very loosely connected, primarily through unforeseen encounters.⁴⁰

Mass and scale, and the seizure of major institutions from the ruling class, are no longer of primary importance.

Anthropologist David Graeber has been influenced by the same autonomist tradition Hardt and Negri come from. In response to Russell Brand's query about formulating "a centralized revolutionary movement to coordinate transition," he replied:

well, my own approach is to avoid constituting any sort of new authority, ... my dream is to create a thousand autonomous institutions that can gradually take over the business of organizing everyday life, pretty much ignoring the authorities, until gradually the whole apparatus of state comes to seem silly, unnecessary....⁴¹

This focus on building counter-institutions rather than insurrectionary assault has obvious advantages from a strategic perspective.

A strategy of building the new society within the interstices of the old one has the notable advantage of not presenting large, high-value targets to the enemy. As a character in Kim Stanley Robinson's *2312* argued:

"Build housing or do land work. Make it that kind of revolution, one of the nonviolent ones. If something happens fast enough they call it a revolution whether guns go off or not."

"But the guns are there."

"Maybe they are, but what if no one dares to shoot them? What if what we did was always too innocuous? Or even invisible?..."

"If you are clear about your intentions, Swan, there will be opposition.... Any change will be opposed. And by serious opposition. I mean violence."

"If they can find the way to apply it. But if there's no one to arrest, no one to beat back, no one to scare..."⁴²

The Byzantine general Belisarius's strategic approach — the strategic offensive combined with tactical defensive — was an excellent illustration, by way of military analogy, of Gramsci's War of Position. His reconquest of North Africa, Italy and Spain was, military historian B.H. Liddell-Hart writes,

the more remarkable because of two features — first, the extraordinarily slender resources with which Belisarius undertook these far-reaching campaigns; second, his consistent use of the tactical defensive. There is no parallel in history for such a

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴¹ Robert Kirchner, "Russell Brand's Revolution," Center for a Stateless Society, February 24, 2015 <<http://c4ss.org/content/36011>>.

⁴² Kim Stanley Robinson. *2312* (New York: Orbit Books, 2012), pp. 356, 358.

series of conquests by abstention from attack. They are the more remarkable since they were carried out by an army that was based on the mobile arm — and mainly composed of cavalry. Belisarius had no lack of audacity, but his tactics were to allow — or tempt—the other side to do the attacking.⁴³

...Belisarius had developed a new-style tactical instrument with which he knew that he might count on beating much superior numbers, provided that he could induce his opponents to attack him under conditions that suited his tactics. For that purpose his lack of numbers, when not too marked, was an asset, especially when coupled with an audaciously direct strategic offensive. His strategy was thus more psychological than [an attack on the enemy's logistics]. He knew how to provoke the barbarian armies of the West into indulging their natural instinct for direct assault; with the more subtle and skilful Persians he was able at first to take advantage of their feeling of superiority to the Byzantines, and later, when they learnt respect for him, he exploited their wariness as a means of outmaneuvering them psychologically.⁴⁴

Gallagher's model for transition from one system to another in the quote above is a perfect illustration of the principle of avoiding direct battle when possible and forcing the enemy to initiate it on unfavorable ground when it does occur. To quote Liddell-Hart again,

For even if a decisive battle be the goal, the aim of strategy must be to bring about this battle under the most advantageous circumstances. And the more advantageous the circumstances, the less, proportionately, will be the fighting.

The perfection of strategy would be, therefore, to produce a decision without any serious fighting.⁴⁵

The difference between being the first to occupy superior ground and then assuming the tactical defensive, and a head-on assault to destroy the enemy physically, is the difference between an alternate history Longstreet occupying Little Round Top on July 1, 1863 and Pickett's Charge. T. E. Lawrence characterized advocates of the latter responses as those "who would rather fight with their arms than with their legs."⁴⁶

The proper goal is "not so much to seek battle as to seek a strategic situation so advantageous that if it does not of itself produce the decision, its continuation by a battle is sure to achieve this"⁴⁷ — by a battle, I would add, which is initiated *by the enemy*.

On the other hand, committing prematurely to a particular line of attack renders our own position less advantageous by reducing the number of options that remain open for the future. One of the recurring methods Liddell-Hart points to as an example of the "indirect approach" is pursuing a route of advance that always threatens two or more alternate objectives at the same time; the enemy must divide its defensive forces between them, while the attacker can either decide at the last minute which one of them to concentrate its forces against — or even bypass

⁴³ Liddell-Hart, pp. 59–60.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 72.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

⁴⁶ T. E. Lawrence, letter to B.H. Liddell-Hart, in *Ibid.* p. 363.

⁴⁷ Liddell-Hart, p. 365.

all defending enemy forces and keep pushing to the rear. A dedicated line of attack,, on the other hand, enables the enemy to concentrate its available forces along a known axis.

Applying the same principle to the revolutionary transition, pursuing a strategy of counter-institution building without attempting a decisive frontal assault on the old system has the effect of *creating* alternative objectives, in the sense of leaving the entire system in a state of vulnerability.

Counter-institutions starving the corporate state and engaging in constant, partial disruption will result in incremental state retreat from marginal areas based on cost-benefit ratios, without ever posing enough of a one-time threat to make an all-out counter-assault worth the state's while. The state will simply retreat into smaller and smaller islands of governability.

At the same time, a strategy of counter-institution building is also much more compatible with a prefigurative approach to politics. The demands for insurrectionary conquest of the state and capital are often directly at odds with the kind of successor society we want to build.

[October 7, 2020]

Chapter Eight: Interstitial Development: Engagement With the State

The primary tendency of leftist movements with interstitial development models has been to emphasize Exodus and the building of counter-institutions as a reaction, not only against seizing political power, but against engagement with the state in all its forms.

According to Negri and Hardt, the role of the state in the postcapitalist transition will be quite secondary compared to its role in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The relationship between the dominant class and the state is the opposite of that Hobbes described at the dawn of the modern era. The “nascent bourgeoisie”

was not capable of guaranteeing social order on its own; it required a political power to stand above it.... The multitude, in contrast to the bourgeoisie and all other exclusive, limited class formations, is capable of forming society autonomously....¹

And this approach, as we have already noted, has largely characterized the post-1994 networked movements. David Graeber cited the “Buenos Aires strategy” from the Argentine meltdown as a model for Occupy:

Essentially, the strategy is to create alternative institutions, based on horizontal principles, that have nothing to do with the government, and declare the entire political system to be absolutely corrupt.... Hence after the popular economic collapse in Argentina in 2001, a popular uprising that ousted three different governments in a matter of months settled into a strategy of creating alternative institutions based on the strategy of creating alternative institutions based on the principles of what they themselves called “horizontality”; popular assemblies to govern urban neighborhoods, recuperated factories and other workplaces..., self-organized unemployed associations..., even, for a while, an alternative currency system.²

John Holloway argued, in similar terms, that Occupy shouldn’t be concerned with influencing state policy or taking control of the present system — which is becoming increasingly impossible — but with seceding from the system and telling capital to go to hell.

...[P]erhaps we can hope that non-state oriented politics will become more and more common and more widespread throughout society....

As a refusal?

¹ Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York, 2004), xvii-xviii.

² David Graeber, *The Democracy Project: A History, a Crisis, a Movement* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2013), p. 267.

Yes, as a refusal. As a kind of total breakdown of the old way of doing things, which might bring a few little benefits but really it didn't take anybody very far. And I think that more and more people are being forced to reinvent their politics or reinvent their ideas about politics, both in terms of protests — but also I think in terms of creating alternatives. If the system has no room for us, if the system simply leaves 50% of young people unemployed, if state benefits are cut back, if the state absolutely refuses to negotiate, if the police become more repressive, then I think we are forced not only to think of creative forms of protest but also ways of how we actually survive and how we actually create alternative ways of living.... But I think what the crisis is also telling us is that *that's* the way to go, but that we haven't gone far enough yet. We're not yet in a situation where we can just tell capital to go to hell and survive without it.... But I think that's the direction we have to go in.³

Holloway refers to that approach as “changing the world without taking power.” That means

to create, within the very society that is being rejected, spaces, moments, or areas of activity in which a different world is prefigured. Rebellions in motion. From this perspective, the idea of organization is no longer equivalent to that of the party, but rather entails the question of how the different cracks that unravel the fabric of capitalism can recognize each other and connect....

...In the last twenty or thirty years we find a great many movements that claim something else: it is possible to emancipate human activity from alienated labor by opening up cracks where one is able to do things differently, to do something that seems useful, necessary, and worthwhile to us; an activity that is not subordinated to the logic of profit.

...The world, and each one of us, is full of these cracks....

If we're not going to accept the annihilation of humanity..., then the only alternative is to think that our movements are the birth of another world. We have to keep building cracks and finding ways of recognizing them, strengthening them, expanding them, connecting them; seeking the confluence or, preferably, the commoning of the cracks.

...[L]et's bear in mind that a precondition for the French Revolution was that, at a certain point, the social network of bourgeois relations no longer needed the aristocracy in order to exist. Likewise, we must work to reach a point where we can say “we don't care if global capital isn't investing in Spain, because we've built a mutual support network that's strong enough to enable us to live with dignity.”⁴

Holloway sees socialist models based on taking state power as reproducing rather than abolishing the capital-labor relationship in many ways. It takes for granted the existence of alienated wage labor under capitalism, set over against institutional structures like corporate management

³ Jerome Roos, “Talking About a Revolution With John Holloway,” *John Holloway*, April 13, 2013 <<http://www.johnholloway.com.mx/2013/05/01/talking-about-a-revolution-with-john-holloway/>>.

⁴ Amador Fernández-Savater, “John Holloway: cracking capitalism vs. the state option,” *ROAR Magazine*, September 29, 2015 <<https://roarmag.org/essays/john-holloway-cracking-capitalism-vs-the-state-option/>>.

and the state which are separate from and above labor. The traditional Left aims at capturing these structures and using them for the benefit of labor:

...a movement that struggles to improve the living standards of workers (considered as victims and objects) immediately refers to the state. Why? Because the state, due to its very separation from society, is the ideal institution if one seeks to achieve benefits for people. This is the traditional thinking of the labor movement and that of the left governments that currently exist in Latin America.⁵

The state option, including the seizure of state power by movements like Syriza and Podemos,

entails channeling aspirations and struggles into institutional conduits that, by necessity, force one to seek a conciliation between the anger that these movements express and the reproduction of capital. Because the existence of any government involves promoting the reproduction of capital (by attracting foreign investment, or through some other means), there is no way around it. This inevitably means taking part in the aggression that is capital. It's what has already happened in Bolivia and Venezuela, and it will also be the problem in Greece or Spain.⁶

As Holloway observes in his analysis of the Zapatista rejection of state power, "The state, any state, is so bound into the web of global capitalist social relations that it has no option, whatever the composition of the government, but to promote the reproduction of those relations...."⁷

Ana Cecilia Dinerstein echoes Holloway's framing of the essentially capitalist nature of the state.

The problem of translation became evident to me during my research with social movements in Latin America during 'the pink tide' period, at the beginning of the XXI Century. On the one hand, new autonomous movements emerged and regarded themselves as *prefigurative*, for they offered a myriad of autonomous initiatives that shaped the politics of the time through radical pedagogies; cooperative work, art, entertainment and care; new forms of defending indigenous traditions and customs; horizontal democracy; environmental awareness and territorialized resistance cultivated in imaginative forms on a day-to-day basis in neighbourhoods, squares, the countryside, jungles, and harbours. This change in social movements and activism that expanded into Europe, (particularly but not exclusively Southern Europe), a decade later, indicated a shift from a *claim-making role* to a *prefigurative role* based on the articulation of alternative practices, which I have called 'concrete utopias.'

However, what also became apparent during 'the pink tide' period, was that the integration of movements' concrete utopias into the political, legal and policy instruments of governability required their deradicalisation. As left governments worked to incorporate movements' ideas, demands and practices into state institutions, legal apparatuses and other state structures, (after initially repressing them, in some

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ John Holloway, "Dignity's Revolt," in *We Are the Crisis of Capital: A John Holloway Reader* (PM Press, 2019), p. 135.

cases) they rendered *invisible* everything that does not fit into the State's existing parameters of legibility. In doing so, they inhibited social movements' most important innovations....

We should know by now that the state will never be *the* political form of organisation for radical change, but it is a political mediation. By political mediation I mean that the State is not simply an instrument of regulation, co-optation, coercion, and oppression. It is the political form of capitalist social relations and therefore intervenes in the process of shaping our form of existence and resistance. As a mediation, the state 'intervenes' in the appropriation of grassroots autonomous practices by power by legalising them or monetising them. In doing so, it works to force grassroots autonomous practice into forms which fit the capitalist/ patriarchal/colonial demarcation of reality.

The Left must come to terms with the idea that the State is not synonymous with the government. It must recognise that the State is not a state *in* a capitalist society, i.e. a neutral arena on which the common good is decided, but a *capitalist* state. The state is a class state. Its 'relative autonomy', makes both reform on behalf of the working class and capitalist accumulation possible, but the state will *ultimately* function to preserve a legal order based on private property.⁸

The new networked, horizontalist movements take just the opposite approach from the reproduction of capitalist relations — inadvertent or not — by leftist parties in the state:

The rejection of alienated and alienating labor entails, at the same time, a critique of the institutional and organizational structures, and the mindset that springs from it. This is how we can explain the rejection of trade unions, parties, and the state that we observe in so many contemporary movements, from the Zapatistas to the Greek or Spanish *indignados*.⁹

In any case a movement focused on electoral politics will entail a selection of some priorities over others, and if allowed to will divert all the resources at its disposal to those priorities at the expense of the rest.

No matter how much lip service is paid to the movement and its importance, the goal of the conquest of power inevitably involves an instrumentalisation of struggle. The struggle has an aim: to conquer political power. The struggle is a means to achieve that aim. Those elements of struggle which do not contribute to the achievement of that aim are either given a secondary importance or must be suppressed altogether: a hierarchy of struggles is established. The instrumentalisation/hierarchisation is at the same time an impoverishment of struggle. So many struggles, so many ways of expressing our rejection of capitalism, so many ways of fighting for our dream of a different society are simply filtered out, simply remain unseen when the world

⁸ Ana Cecilia Dinerstein, "Why does the political left fail grassroots movements?" *Open Democracy*, May 20, 2020 <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/why-did-latin-americas-social-movement-governments-fail/>>.

⁹ Fernández-Savater, *op. cit.*

is seen through the prism of the conquest of power. We learn to suppress them, and thus to suppress ourselves. At the top of the hierarchy we learn to place that part of our activity that contributes to ‘building the revolution’, at the bottom come frivolous personal things like affective relations, sensuality, playing, laughing, loving. Class struggle becomes puritanical: frivolity must be suppressed because it does not contribute to the goal. The hierarchisation of struggle is a hierarchisation of our lives and thus a hierarchisation of ourselves.

The party is the organisational form which most clearly expresses this hierarchisation. The form of the party, whether vanguardist or parliamentary, presupposes an orientation towards the state and makes little sense without it. The party is in fact a form of disciplining class struggle, of subordinating the myriad forms of class struggle to the overriding aim of gaining control of the state. The fixing of a hierarchy of struggles is usually expressed in the form of the party programme.¹⁰

States, as Theodoris Karyotis writes of Syriza, are “much more understanding of the type of struggles that envision a stronger state as the mediator of social antagonisms.” Unfortunately, the Greek public’s relieved welcome for Syriza, motivated by a desire for a “demobilization, and... institutionalization of the struggles,” resulted “the curtailing of demands that did not fit into a coherent program of state management — including most projects that revolve around popular self-management of the commons.”

The “real constituent power,” he notes, “the real agents of social change,” are “tangible, everyday collectives and individuals rooted in concrete struggles at the local level, disrupting the flow of power and bringing forward alternatives.”

Karyotis warns that “we should beware the transformation of the party, initially approached as an “instrument” of the movement, into an organizational and discursive center point,” and that “getting sucked into the discourse of state administration and electoral politics entails a visible danger of incorporation of movements into the dominant political order.” Rather:

To approach self-determination, organized society should find creative ways to constitute itself as a counterpower, without becoming absorbed within the existing institutions of power. There is no doubt that the movements’ relationship with the state, even with a nominally “progressive” government, should remain autonomous, confrontational and antagonistic.¹¹

David Bollier and Silke Helfrich observe, similarly, that “the Greek political coalition led by Syriza discovered that its stunning electoral victory, nominally giving it control of a sovereign state, was not enough.”

The Greek state was in fact still subordinated to the power of international capital and the geopolitical interests of other states. The rise of Indigenous politician

¹⁰ John Holloway, *How to Change the World Without Taking Power*. New Edition. Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (Ann Arbor and London: Pluto Press, 2002, 2005), pp. 16–17.

¹¹ Theodoros Karyotis, “Chronicles of a Defeat Foretold,” *ROAR Magazine*, Winter 2015 <<https://roarmag.org/magazine/syriza-movements-power-commons/>>.

Evo Morales to the presidency of Bolivia revealed a similar lesson: even smart, well-intentioned electoral movements have trouble transcending the deep imperatives of state power because the state remains tightly yoked to an international system of capitalist finance and resource extraction.

They cite Pablo Solón Romero, a Bolivian activist and former Bolivian ambassador to the UN, on the example of his country:

Fifteen years ago [in the early 2000s], we had a lot of commoning in Bolivia — for forests, water, justice, etc. To preserve this, when our enemy was the state and privatizing everything, we decided we would take the state. And we succeeded! And we were able to do good things. Now we have a plurinational state. That's positive. *But* ... ten years later, are our communities stronger or weaker? They are weaker! We can't do everything that we wanted to do via the state. The state and its structures have their own logic. We were naïve. We didn't realize that those structures were going to change *us*.¹² —p. 296

Andreas Karitzis ascribes the failure of Syriza in Greece to its almost exclusive focus on popular mobilization and electoral politics. He “came to the conclusion that one major failure of the Left is that it lacks a form of governmentality which matches up with its own logic and values.” He recommends, instead:

A network of resilient, dynamic and interrelated circuits of co-operative productive units, alternative financial tools, local cells of self-governance, community control over infrastructure facilities, digital data, energy systems, distribution networks etc. These are ways of gaining a degree of autonomy necessary to defy the despotic control of the elites over society.¹³

Rather than selling them out as in Greece, the Chavez (to some extent) and Maduro (much more so) administrations actively coopted or suppressed the communalist counter-institutions of the Bolivarian movement. As described by Katrina Kozarek, the role of the communes in Bolivarian ideology is quite impressive:

Within the communes, and the Bolivarian Revolution in general there are several types of property, there is of course private property, what belongs to individuals, there is public property which belongs to the state, there is social property, which belongs to the state, but the people are involved in the control of the property and direct social property, which belongs directly to the communes or the communal councils.

This is important for the principal [sic] of sovereignty of the communal system, because it allows the communes to acquire goods, services, resources and even businesses that do not serve individuals, but rather the common good under collective administration. And this is necessary for the execution of communal policies.

¹² David Bollier and Silke Helfrich, *Free, Fair and Alive: The Insurgent Power of the Commons* (Gabriola Island, B.C., Canada: New Society Publishers, 2019), p. 296.

¹³ Bollier, “Andreas Karitzis on SYRIZA: We Need to Invent New Ways to Do Politics,” P2P Foundation Blog, Feb. 6, 2017 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/andreas-karitzis-syriza-need-invent-new-ways-politics/2017/02/06>>.

Every commune has a communal bank, which is a bank account that is communal property, and is administrated by the commune for the execution of its own projects and policies. In theory, at least, the communes should develop direct social companies which create not just employment, but resources that can then be used for the execution of policies and projects....

The organic law of the Communes states that the purpose of communes is to promote the Communal state, setting up a political, social and economic horizon for the Bolivarian Revolution and 21st century socialism, the realization of “*a system of government that opens with unlimited amplitude the necessary spaces where the people, the popular masses, are deployed creatively and effectively, for them to obtain control of power in order to make the decisions that affect their daily life and their historical destiny.*” as Chavez put it in his manifesto Libro Azul.

When we talk about the communal state, it means gradually replacing almost the entire current political and economic system with a new system based on the communes integrated in communal cities and regional federations that then articulate policies, production and projects on national level. It implies going from a concept of government that is “top down” to a concept that is “bottom up” as well as transforming on a national level the relations of property, production and administration of resources.¹⁴

George Ciccariello-Maher stresses that the communalism represented by the Bolivarian movement has much older roots in Venezuela than Hugo Chavez, and that in order to maintain its own integrity and independence it must exist in something of a dual power situation with the Venezuelan state:

...Decades ago, revolutionary militants struggling to connect with the masses jettisoned any expectation of a “Winter Palace” moment in favor of a more profound understanding of the importance of prolonged processes and hegemonic struggles. More recently, the contours and dynamics of the Bolivarian Process have made it clear to anyone in doubt that the state — and especially the bloated bureaucratic monstrosity that is the Venezuelan state — is not something to be simply “seized” by either the ballot or the bullet. As a result, in the words of [Roland] Denis, “The old slogan of ‘dual power’ (bourgeois and working-class) valid for the summit of the revolutionary movement today becomes a permanent strategy in accord with the need for the organization of a socialized and non-state power.” What once expressed the revolutionary *moment* par excellence now becomes a continuous process..., dual power no longer understood “from above” but “from below” and in a tense interplay with existing institutions.¹⁵

¹⁴ Katrina Kozarek, “Venezuela’s Communes: a Great Social Achievement,” *Counterpunch*, November 24, 2017 <<https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/11/24/venezuelas-communes-a-great-social-achievement/>>.

¹⁵ George Ciccariello-Maher, “Building the Commune: Insurgent Government, Communal State,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 113:4 (Fall 2014), pp. 802–803. Denis quote from “Revolución vs. gobierno (III): De la izquierda social a la izquierda política,” *Proyecto Nuestramérica-Movimiento*, 13 de Abril, August 11, 2006 <aporia.org/ideologia/a24361.html>.

María Pilar García-Guadilla writes that “[t]he experience of the communes reveals a central truth about Chavismo: it contained both the decentralizing, horizontal dynamics of community organizations and social movements alongside centralizing, vertical dynamics.”

The latter have proved deeply damaging to the democratic aspirations that many had for the Chavista experiment....

After the coup d’état of 2002 — in which Chávez was briefly removed from office — and the oil strike of 2002–2003, Chávez radicalized his discourse and political project. He excluded the opposition from playing a role in public policy and tried to take control of state institutions, including the state oil company, PDVSA. Meanwhile, the Chavista project of inclusion and social justice relied on an economic development model dependent on the extraction of natural resources, most notably oil but more recently including large-scale mining projects such as the Orinoco Mining Arc. Although the government has labeled this project “sustainable,” it involves opening more than 40,000 square miles in a fragile ecosystem inhabited by indigenous communities to transnational corporations.... This model does not break with neoliberal developmentalism and contradicts the government’s anti-globalization discourse....

The achievements of the policies that tried to bring about the participation of popular organizations and social movements in the management of local, regional, and national levels of government have been uneven.... On the one hand, communal council policies were based on a Gramscian conception of democratic participation at the local or community level, compatible with representative democracy; on the other hand, participation was linked to an orthodox Leninist conception of direct democracy intended to substitute representative democracy at the local and regional levels with a radical democracy at the national level through the communal state. These tendencies created acute conflicts.

While many urban commune experiences have been a failure, there are some successful experiences of rural communes. One of the most emblematic, given its high agricultural and livestock production and its high levels of participation, is known as El Maizal. Spanning two states and including more than 9,000 people as of 2018, El Maizal is an important part of the local economy. The means of production are held in common and decision-making is done through a Communal Parliament composed of fifty-two members and three executive spokespeople.

Nonetheless, even in the few successful experiences, there are frequent conflicts between the state and the communes due to bureaucratic requirements, the state’s pressure to institutionalize them, and the communes’ attempts to defend their autonomy. For example, El Maizal has taken over abandoned state projects and experienced troubles with the state-run agricultural enterprise, which is supposed to purchase the commune’s surplus and provide it with supplies. In May 2018, one of the commune’s leaders was briefly arrested for buying black market supplies when the state-run supplier did not provide necessary materials on time (because those materials were also being sold on the black market). Some communes also complain that when there were disagreements with the government guidelines and policies, the government did not consult with them. They also argue that leaders were often

imposed by the state, and that they responded to political rather than social needs and were under increasing control of the state, the ruling party, and more recently the military.¹⁶

García-Guadilla quotes Roland Denis, former Vice-Minister of Planning and Development, in a 2006 interview:

We tried to deepen community control, that is to say, to give to the communities the power that is needed to develop new relations with the state; relations of co-governance and co-management. This practice caused resistance from the existing institutions, from the “old state” that continues to exist in Venezuela, in spite of the changes. There is no concrete vision within the Chávez government, as to how bureaucratic and economic interests could be effectively eliminated, so as to deeply transform the state.

The communes and communal institutions were, for the most part, effectively coopted by the state’s distribution of oil revenue patronage, and converted into de facto transmission belts of state policy in a manner similar to what happened to the soviets and factory committees under the Bolshevik regime.

Within a highly corrupt and inefficient system, the communes became a mechanism to redistribute oil revenue and, in moments of political crisis, to mobilize political support for the government...

The communal network, born under state tutelage, has produced serious dilemmas for communes and social movements. Joining the state organizational network makes it more difficult to preserve their autonomy and creates debilitating compromises. For this reason, members of the most successful communes developed dual memberships, as members of the commune and of the “movimiento comunero” (commune movement) at the same time. In some cases, the state officially tried to replace social movements it accused of “excessive” radicalism — in other words, of taking critical positions — by promoting para-movements and excluding social movements from events like the World Social Forum.

The economic crisis has deepened the politics of clientelism, in which political loyalty is rewarded with economic benefits. The new Local Committees on Food Supply (CLAPs), which distribute basic goods in coordination with the military and the ruling party, have relegated communal councils to a distant secondary role.¹⁷

Kozarek echoes this analysis, stressing the dependence of the communes on distribution of revenues from the central government: “most of the resources allocated to the communal bank come from the national government on the basis of projects sent to institutions for their approval, undermining two necessary elements of sovereignty, production and self-determination.”¹⁸

¹⁶ María Pilar García-Guadilla, “The Limits of Chávez’s Communal State,” *Dissent*, February 7, 2020 <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/chavez-communal-state-venezuela>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

¹⁸ Kozarek, “Venezuela’s Communes.”

Venezuelan sociologist Edgardo Lander describes the dynamic in similar terms. The state under Chavez's and Maduro's leadership has pursued largely the same developmentalist, authoritarian high modernist model as its neoliberal predecessors. And the entire project has been weakened by the fact that the social sector is almost entirely dependent on the distribution of oil revenues from the state, rather than developing autonomous productive capacity outside of both the state and capitalist sectors. "Most of the popular base organizations had no possibility of autonomy because they lacked their own productive capacity."

Unfortunately, the cooptation of communalist institutions, and their subsumption into the apparatus of the state, were to a large extent built into the legal and ideological framework established under Chavez. Although the 1999 Constitution placed at least equal emphasis on communal and participatory democracy compared to representative democracy, this was counteracted in practical terms by the vesting of sovereign authority in a unitary, monolithic "people" from whom all power derived.

Chávez's revolution interpreted "constituent power" to be embodied by the "people" — its sole source of authority. The elected constituent assembly not only had the power to write a new constitution but also authority above all "constituted" powers, including the existing legislature and judiciary. Chávez's first constituent process was nonpolarized, inclusive, participatory, and institutional; it included diverse organizations, institutions, and citizens. As a result, the 1999 Bolivarian Constitution reflects political-ideological differences. Despite these differences, the constitution defines the government's source of power as the unitary "people" (*el pueblo*), rather than employing the liberal democratic concept of pluralism, where competing individual interests coincide. This view of the people as a homogenous whole would become the primary source of polarizing political-ideological conflicts.

One of the first polarizing conflicts in fact involved the definition of the *constitutional sovereign*, or source of constitutional authority, and how to best interpret the *will* of the people. In the 1999 National Constituent Assembly, the *sovereign* was defined as a unitary, indivisible mandate, rather like Rousseau's concept of a singular and unequivocal "general will." In contrast to the 2008 Ecuadorian and 2009 Bolivian constitutions, Venezuela's constituent members defined themselves as representing the will of the people, as opposed to the will of different regions; ethnic groups; or religious, social, economic, and political interests.¹⁹

From the beginning, this ruled out the conception of democracy as something flowing upwards as an emergent property of polyarchic institutions below, or of the state as being simply a platform to facilitate the self-governance activity of such institutions. And in practical terms, it meant that despite the lip-service paid to participatory democracy in the communes, the communes would tend to be treated as municipal corporations subject to the unitary sovereign authority of the "people" emanating from above. So Venezuela wound up once again reenacting the

¹⁹ María Pilar García-Guadilla and Ana Mallen, "Polarization, Participatory Democracy, and Democratic Erosion in Venezuela's Twenty-First Century Socialism," preprint of article published in Special Issue of the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, January 2019 <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329828225_Polarization_Participatory_Democracy_and_Democratic_Erosion_in_Venezuela's_First_Century_Socialism>, pp. 8–9, 10

Westphalian state model of early modern Europe, with all that it entailed — absolute, indivisible sovereignty, “no state within the state,” etc. — in the minds of the civil lawyers and politicians.

Miriam Lang, an associate professor for Environmental and Sustainability Studies from Ecuador, adds that it represents a broader problem of vanguardist culture in leftist electoral movements undermining the autonomy and initiative of social movements.

One problem is that the progressive governments, to the degree that their members came from social movement processes and protests with a left-wing political identity, have taken on a sort of *vanguard* identity, as if they know what people need. So spaces for real dialogue and partnership with people of a diverse nature have been lost. And political participation has become a type of applause for whatever project the government leaders are proposing.... There are many examples in European history that incline me to think this is an inevitable dynamic, one that we underestimate a lot. The lefts that come to lead in the state apparatus end up immersed in powerful dynamic characteristic of those apparatuses and they are transformed as persons, through the new spaces in which they move, because the logics of their responsibilities provide them with other experiences and begin to shape their political horizons as well as their culture. Their subjectivity is transformed, they embody the exercise of power.²⁰

Despite all this, in my opinion a primary focus on constructing counter-institutions — “building the new society within the shell of the old” — and not attempting to initiate a rupture, should not imply a refusal in principle to engage with the state in any way. Building prefigurative institutions at the municipal level is not sufficient by itself, without recognizing the real danger of repression by reactionary forces at the nation-state level. Efforts like Syriza and Podemos have been failures to the extent that they were tried as primary venues for implementing post-capitalist transitional agendas; but they are indispensable for running interference on behalf of the local, prefigurative movements and giving them a safe space in which to grow.

Erik Olin Wright, while sympathetic to the interstitial approach, doubts that it is sufficient by itself. Although he advocates interstitial development of post-capitalist institutions as the primary strategy, it is necessary to combine it with some form of social democratic electoralism.

Interstitial strategies may create enlarged spaces for non-commodified, non-capitalist economic relations, but it seems unlikely that this could sufficiently insulate most people from dependency on the capitalist economy and sufficiently weaken the power of the capitalist class and the dependency of economic activity on capital accumulation to render the transition trough in the revolutionary scenario short and shallow. And while interstitial strategies may expand the scope of social empowerment, it is difficult to see how they could ever by themselves sufficiently erode the basic structural power of capital to dissolve the capitalist limits on emancipatory social change.²¹

²⁰ “Latin America: End of a golden age? Franck Gaudichaud interviews Miriam Lang and Edgardo Lander,” *Life on the Left*, February 14, 2018 <<https://lifeonleft.blogspot.com/2018/02/latin-america-end-of-golden-age.html>>.

²¹ Erik Olin Wright. *Envisioning Real Utopias* (London and New York: Verso, 2010), p. 335.

Elsewhere he writes: “Eroding capitalism is not a fantasy. But it is only plausible if it is combined with the social-democratic idea of taming capitalism.”

We need a way of linking the bottom-up, society-centered strategic vision of anarchism with the top-down, state-centered strategic logic of social democracy. We need to tame capitalism in ways that make it more erodible, and erode capitalism in ways that make it more tamable.²²

One reason for his pessimism is that Wright rejects the assumption that capitalism is necessarily a system with an end as well as a beginning, or that interstitial processes of creating counter-institutions can exploit its systemic crises.²³

Nevertheless, Wright is not necessarily pessimistic about the idea of post-capitalist transition as such. As noted in a previous chapter, he sees a role for the symbiotic approach of engaging the state alongside that of interstitial evolution in a larger metamorphic strategy.²⁴

While he is wrong to neglect the fundamental shift in correlation of forces resulting from the terminal crises of capitalism interacting with new technical possibilities for production in the commons, he is entirely correct in my opinion in refusing to treat the state as a monolithic entity and raising the possibility of engaging or transforming parts of it. And the possibility of “non-reformist reforms” should not be dismissed.

Negri and Hardt modified their strategic approach to some extent after completing the *Empire* trilogy, accepting the need for some admixture of verticalism within the overall horizontalist approach.

For one thing, there are pressing needs (the imminent dangers we face from austerity, ecological destruction and the advance of fascism) that won’t wait until the constituent process is complete and we’ve built a new form of governance.... Another realm where counterpowers are needed... regards the human necessities for food, health, and shelter, which can be addressed in part through access to the common.²⁵

Despite her seemingly pessimistic analysis quoted earlier, Dinerstein offered some hopeful advice for dual power movements on the ground and leftist electoral parties, in their relations with each other. The advice amounts, essentially, to the leftist parties standing to the side and handing the mic to the prefigurative movements, and to the movements constructing dual power to pressure the state toward a Partner State institutional model coextensive with civil society.

The question then is not how can left governments encourage radical change from the very institutions, political dynamics and structures of the State? The question is in what ways can prefigurative movements, grassroots innovative practices, and citizens’ initiatives push for a *prefigurative translation* from the government? How can they prevent the government of the Left from transforming their radical action

²² Wright, “How to Be an Anticapitalist Today,” *Jacobin*, December 2, 2015 <<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/12/erik-olin-wright-real-utopias-anticapitalism-democracy/>>.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 89–107.

²⁴ Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*, pp. 335–336.

²⁵ Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Declaration* (2012) <<https://antonionegriinenglish.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/93152857-hardt-negri-declaration-2012.pdf>>, pp. 51–52.

into governable practices, institutions, ideas, and legislation that will obliterate the concrete utopian element of their actions?...

By prefigurative translation I mean an engagement with the creative process of transformation that is already taking place at the grassroots, within what I call the ‘beyond zone of movement collective action’. Prefigurative translation is a form of translation that requires co-construction of policy. But not only this. Such co-construction must engage with what is already being proposed and experienced by grassroots movements instead of attempting to filter radical elements to prevent them from entering the policy realm....

If the party recognises that change comes from below, from the process of deployment and expansion of movements’ alternative-creating capacity, that is being experimented with in what I call *the beyond zone* of movements activity, policy should be *prefigurative too*. This means that the left in power should render *visible* what is already being proposed and experienced at the grassroots. This does not mean to ‘learn’ from the movement’s alternatives, but to facilitate the emergence of a collective intellect that can create alternative forms of politics. That is to let the society in movement govern....

The vital goal of autonomous struggles is to overcome the differentiation between the state and civil society.²⁶

Even acting from outside the state, elements of the existing system like the procedural rules of the regulatory bureaucracies and the judicial system can be turned against it and used as counterpowers. Negri and Hardt write:

Absolutely essential in this effort is the work that so many are doing today that use the legal means of national and international systems as a kind of counterpower. Class action suits against polluting corporations; human rights demands against war, torture, and police abuse; and advocacy for refugees, migrants and inmates — these actions use the power of the judge against that of the king, exploiting elements of the legal system against the sovereign power.²⁷

Exploiting the capitalist state’s rules against it is a powerful, low-cost weapon to impede their functioning. The state, like a demon, is bound by the laws and internal logic of the form it takes. To borrow a line from Ghostbusters, “Choose the form of the destructor.” When a segment of the bureaucracy is captured by its own ideological self-justification, or courts by the letter of the law, they can be used as a weapon for monkey-wrenching the larger system. Bureaucrats, by following the letter of policy, often unwittingly engage in “work-to-rule” against the larger system they serve.

The state, like any authoritarian hierarchy, requires standing rules that restrict the freedom of subordinates to pursue the institution’s real purpose, because it can’t trust those subordinates.

²⁶ Ana Cecilia Dinerstein, “Why does the political left fail grassroots movements?” *Open Democracy*, May 20, 2020 <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/why-did-latin-americas-social-movement-governments-fail/>>

²⁷ Negri and Hardt, *Declaration*, p. 53.

The state's legitimizing rhetoric, we know, conceals a real exploitative function. Nevertheless, despite the overall functional role of the state, it needs standard operating procedures to enforce predictable behavior on its subordinates.

And once subordinates are following those rules, the state can't send out dog-whistles telling functionaries what "real" double-super-secret rules they're "really" supposed to follow, or to supplement the countless volumes of rulebooks designed to impose predictability on subordinates with a secret memo saying "Ignore the rulebooks." So, while enough functionaries may ignore the rules to keep the system functioning after a fashion, others pursue the letter of policy in ways that impair the "real" mission of the state.

Unlike the state and other authoritarian institutions, self-organized networks can pursue their real interests while benefiting from their members' complete contribution of their abilities, without the hindrance of standard operating procedures and bureaucratic rules based on distrust. To put it in terms of St. Paul's theology, networks can pursue their interests single-mindedly without the concupiscence — the war in their members — that weakens hierarchies.

So we can game the system, sabotaging the state with its own rules.

In *Declaration*, Negri and Hardt advocate a sort of symbiotic relationship or division of labor between the horizontalist movements, on the one hand, and more-or-less allied progressive parties within the state.

...From the 1990s to the first decade of this century, governments in some of the largest countries in Latin America won elections and came to power on the backs of powerful social movements against neoliberalism and for the democratic self-management of the common. These elected, progressive governments have in many cases made great social advances.... When these governments are in power, however, and particularly when they repeat the practices of the old regimes, the social movements continue the struggle, now directed against the governments that claim to represent them.

A quasi-institutional relationship has thus developed between social movements and governments. Throughout the twentieth century, socialist practices established a typology of such relationships as *internal* to the political structure — the dynamic between trade union and party, for example, was internal to the functioning of the party, and when in power, socialist governments configured the activities of social movements as within their ruling structures. That internal relation derived from the fact (or assumption) that the union, the party, the social movements, and the government operated according to the same ideology, the same understanding of tactics and strategy, and even the same personnel...

The socialist tradition that posits such an internal relationship between social movements and parties or ruling institutions, however, has been broken. Instead one of the characteristics we have observed in these Latin American countries during this period is the decisive *externality* and thus separation of the social movements with regard to organizational practices, ideological positions, and political goals....

This external relationship between movements and governments has the power to set in motion a significant transformation (and diminution) of the directive aspects of government action. It could, in other words, force the mechanisms of government

to become processes of governance; the sites on which different political and administrative wills are engaged could become multiple and open; and the governing function can dilute sovereign power to become instead an open laboratory of consensual interventions and plural creations of legislative norms.²⁸

Richard Bartlett (a cofounder of Loomio and participant in Enspiral) hints at a similar division of labor, or rather cooperative coexistence, in the new municipalist movements:

Another uncomfortable coalition you see in Spanish cities is the collaboration between A) the people who understand the state apparatus as a means of redirecting civil unrest into channels that support the status quo, and B) the people who understand the state apparatus as one of the most effective levers in catalysing social change. In most parts of the world, this is a boring argument between radicals and liberals, an endless ping pong match where each team claims to have the One True Strategy while the Evil Others are undermining the struggle. In Spain activists have made peace with this tension, courageously taking the reins of institutional power while maintaining the grassroots mandate and accountability. For example, the most radical political conference I've been to was mindblowing not just because the speakers were incredible, but especially when you consider the event was hosted by the same people who run the Barcelona city government.

To name this tension between street movements and institutional power, in Madrid they coined the term *extitución*...²⁹

Bernardo Gutiérrez described the concept this way: "If institutions are organizational systems based on an inside-outside framework, *extituciones* are designed as areas where a multitude of agents can spontaneously assemble. Liquid, flexible, inclusive, itinerant, post-it *extituciones*."³⁰

Daniel Chavez, in Uruguay, also takes a nuanced view of the division of effort between social and political action, based on "my increasingly pessimistic interpretation of the outcomes of our progressive of [sic] left governments" in the so-called Pink Tide.

After having followed very closely the processes of Venezuela, Ecuador, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil, and to a lesser extent also those of Bolivia and Nicaragua, I think we should ask ourselves up to what point is it possible for the left to get involved in government without losing autonomy and our utopian perspective. In other words: is it possible to operate within the state apparatus without being caught in the demobilising logic of institutional power? Unlike some of the friends I mentioned before, I don't have a single or categorical answer to such question. I still believe that the state has a very important role to play, but I'm also convinced that it is now imper-

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 71–73.

²⁹ Richard Bartlett, "Organizing Beyond Organizations: Good News Stories from Spain and Taiwan," Center for a Stateless Society, May 20, 2018 <<https://c4ss.org/content/50824>>.

³⁰ Bernardo Gutiérrez, "The Madrid P2P Commune," *Guerrilla Translation!*, May 22, 2014 <<https://guerrillatranslation.wordpress.com/2014/05/22/the-madrid-p2p-commune/>> (translation of Spanish language article which originally appeared at *20minutos*).

ative for the left to get rid of its obsolete state-centric vision and open up to fresh perspectives like those of the commons.³¹

In actual practice, governments like those of Evo Morales in Bolivia and Chavez/Maduro in Venezuela which officially proclaimed an alliance with social movements outside the state and avowed their support for popular, libertarian socialist, or horizontal institutions, wound up frequently undermining or sucking energy from such institutions, and pursuing the kinds of developmentalist or extractivist agendas typically associated with the authoritarian Left.³²

As part of a possible solution, Chavez suggests importing aspects of the European municipalist model.

The side of the European left most active side in the promotion of the commons is that linked to struggles around the right to the city and the citizen platforms that won local office in several Spanish cities. Today, an important part of the European left perceives the city as the privileged space for political, social and economic experimentation, without seeing cities as isolated entities or at the margin of processes aimed at changing the state on a national scale, but recognising their growing significance in the new regional and world order. It's not by chance that the fight against climate change or for the recovery of public services are led by networks of progressive local governments. *Barcelona En Comú*, the citizen coalition that now governs the Catalan capital, in particular, is a very powerful source of inspiration of regional and world importance.... Barcelona is today a laboratory for the design and testing of multiple initiatives inspired by the principle of the commons.³³

He also finds inspiration in Jeremy Corbyn's proposals to reverse Thatcher's privatizations — but without organizing public enterprises on Morrison's managerial-statist model this time around.

But renationalisation, from this perspective, does not simply implies that the state retakes control by going back to the obsolete state-owned companies of the past, but rather the combination of different forms of public ownership and management. In short, Labour proposes not merely to re-nationalise companies that had been privatised during Thatcherism and Blairism, but to reconvert the big banks and other financial institutions that during the crisis had been saved from bankruptcy with public monies into a network of local banks based on mixed ownership (state and social), or the creation of new municipal utilities. The party is committed to create new municipal utilities... that propose the de-privatisation of power through the launch of new public enterprises, rooted in a more democratic type of management based on the active participation of users and workers, being environmentally sustainable, and securing services with affordable rates for the entire population.³⁴

³¹ "The commons, the state and the public: A Latin American perspective. An interview with Daniel Chavez," *tni*, August 1, 2018 <<https://www.tni.org/en/article/the-commons-the-state-and-the-public>>.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.* Steve Rushton makes a similar point about Venezuela at greater length in "Rebel Cities 15: Municipalism in Venezuela Offers a Pathway Beyond Authoritarianism," *Occupy.com*, November 11, 2018 <<http://occupy.com/article/rebel-cities-15-municipalism-venezuela-offers-pathway-beyond-authoritarianism>>.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Even for Holloway, pressuring the state from outside occupies a significant place in political strategy:

The problem of revolutionary politics is not to win power but to develop forms of political articulation that would force those in power to obey the people (so that, fully developed, the separation between state and society would be overcome and the state effectively abolished).³⁵

Paul Mason is in the general autonomist tradition, insofar as he envisions putting the primary emphasis on the spontaneous rise of new institutional forms like peer networks, and treating state action as simply a way to run interference for or boost these institutional forms, rather than (as with the Old Left) the primary instrumentality for actually *creating* the new society.

Still, he also sees the state playing a vital role in managing the transition, certainly to a greater degree than in Holloway's model, or in Negri and Hardt's horizontalist vision. All the individual elements — cooperatives, peer-networks, and the like — will only coalesce into post-capitalism if "we... promote them with regulation just as vigorous as that which capitalism used to drive the peasants off the land or destroy handicraft work in the eighteenth century."³⁶ Post-capitalism may offer an "escape route" —

but only if these micro-level projects are nurtured, promoted and protected by a massive change in what governments do.

...Collaborative production, using network technology to produce goods and services that work only when they are free, or shared, defines the route beyond the market system. It will need the state to create the framework....³⁷

At the same time, he tries to leave open the possibility of diversity of strategic approaches.

What happens to the state? It probably gets less powerful over time — and in the end its functions are assumed by society. I've tried to make this a project usable both by people who see states as useful and those who don't; you could probably model an anarchist version and a statist version and try them out.³⁸

(And in fact what Mason calls the "wiki-state"³⁹ is a lot like the "Partner State.")

Finally, most of these thinkers have largely abandoned, along with the Old Left's emphasis on insurrectionary transitions or abrupt changes of regime, the distinction between "reform" and "revolution."

Indeed Negri and Hardt, in *Multitude*, treat the distinction between the two as meaningless.

We say this not because we think that reform and revolution are the same thing, but that in today's conditions they cannot be separated. Today the historical processes of transformation are so radical that even reformist proposals can lead to revolutionary

³⁵ Holloway, "Dignity's Revolt," p. 135.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, xv-xvi.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

change. And when democratic reforms of the global system prove to be incapable of providing the bases of a real democracy, they demonstrate even more forcefully that a revolutionary change is needed and make it even more possible. It is useless to rack our brains over whether a proposal is reformist or revolutionary; what matters is that it enters into the constituent process.⁴⁰

Harry Cleaver reads Marx as at least suggesting the possibility of a gradual transition process. In his discussion in *Critique of the Gotha Program* of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, Cleaver notes, “Marx raises the question, but does not answer it, as to ‘what social functions will remain in existence [in communist society] that are analogous to present state functions?’” This amounts, among other things, to “a general prophecy that capitalism — a mode of social organization that itself took centuries to transform, to some degree, virtually every nook and cranny of society — will not be done away with all at once.” And, he adds, Marx himself does not specify what social functions will remain in existence in communist society. At any rate working class power is not an all or nothing thing. Over the years workers have sometimes had, to a greater or lesser extent, “the power to determine elements of transformation and new alternatives.” And they have exercised this power, at various times and places, “in many different ways.”

We have often successfully struggled to transform aspects of the capitalist world to better meet our needs and desires. We have also, repeatedly, crafted more appealing alternatives. That we have not succeeded in transforming all, or even most, aspects of capitalism and that we have sometimes been unable to prevent our alternatives being either crushed or co-opted, should neither blind us to our successes nor prevent us from building on them to further transform “the present state of things.”⁴¹

Cleaver proposes, in place of the old distinction between reform and revolution that dominated the Old Left, a new one by the Midnight Notes Collective between “*inside* capitalism (i.e., consistent with its dynamic) or *outside* of it (i.e., *autonomous*, constituting real alternatives).” He quotes the Collective from their *Promissory Notes* pamphlet:

autonomous struggles strive to create social spaces and relations that are as independent of and opposed to capitalist social relations as possible. They may directly confront or seek to take over and reorganize capitalist institutions (a factory, for example) or create new spaces outside those institutions (e.g., urban gardening or a housing cooperative) or access resources that should be common. They foster collective, non-commodified relations, processes, and products that function to some real degree outside of capitalist relations and give power to the working class in its efforts to create alternatives to capital.

This takes us back to Cleaver’s ruptural strategy of opening, expanding and linking up spaces outside the logic of capital:

⁴⁰ Negri and Hardt, *Multitude*, p. 289.

⁴¹ Harry Cleaver, *Rupturing the Dialectic: The Struggle Against Work, Money, and Financialization* (Chico, Oakland, Edinburgh, Baltimore: AK Press, 2017), pp. 239–240.

If Marx's perception was correct, and I think our historical experience since his time has confirmed it, we are no more likely to be able to abolish money all at once than we are to abolish capitalism as a whole. If so, then it seems to me, the most practical and productive way to proceed is to examine the steps that we have taken in the past, and that we might take in the future, to figure out how to advance progressively toward both objectives. Those steps include both those that restrict the sphere of money and exchange — while expanding spheres free of it — and those that involve the diversion of money for our own purposes, including funding programs designed to reduce or eliminate the need for it. As we strive to marginalize and ultimately squeeze money, exchange, markets, and capitalism entirely out of our lives, both kinds of steps constitute a subversion of capital's own use of money.⁴²

I don't think any of the old privileged strategies of attacking the state with the objective of abolishing it immediately and in toto, or trying to build a cadre of professional revolutionaries to talk everyone else into uniting to overthrow the government and seize state power, are likely to be any more effective in getting us beyond capitalism in the future than they have been in the past. Instead it seems to me that the best we can do is to be clear about what, concretely, we want to get rid of, and then set about trying to do so, while simultaneously fighting for more time, space, and resources to experiment with, and elaborate alternatives to virtually every aspect of capitalist society.⁴³

The time and space he writes of entail, specifically, the fight for increased free time outside the wage relationship, and social spaces that (to quote *Promissory Notes* again) “strengthen the commons and expand de-commodified relationships and spaces.”

Social democratic versions [of the commons] include such things as health care, education, social security — however imperfectly realized. However, does the struggle also support bringing the bottom up, expanding inclusiveness and participatory control? On the other hand, are autonomous sectors able to avoid commodification (avoid being turned into business products or services for sale)? Even if they cannot do so completely, can they maintain a political stance and active behavior that pushes towards non-commodity forms? More generally, how can the working class on small or large scales create forms of exchange that are or tend toward being de-commodified? Create markets (forms of exchange) that do not rule lives and livelihoods? Reduce the reach of commodification and capitalist markets on people's life?⁴⁴

Marx himself, Cleaver also notes, supported reforms involving the shortening of the work day, increased pay, and the like — not just as exercises in building working class consciousness for the future revolution, but in altering the balance of power here and now and expanding the realm of freedom.

⁴² *Ibid.* pp. 240–241.

⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 266.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 275.

None of these objectives would end capitalism, but making gains in each of these battles would strengthen workers, rupture existing forms of capitalist command and exploitation, and bring about material transformations in the organization of class relationships. It was the success of workers' struggles in forcing down the length of the working day... that drove capitalists to invest more heavily in machinery, reducing the amount of work required to produce each unit, and at least potentially reducing the amount of work required to meet workers' needs. Success in increasing wages could have the same effect. Struggles to either raise wages or limit capitalist efforts to reduce them could not only preserve the material grounds of workers' strength but also provide experience in self-organization and militant action that would facilitate future struggles.⁴⁵

André Gorz's distinction between "reformist" and "non-reformist" reforms is useful here. Gorz argued that, if the choice between capitalism and socialism is seen as a one-time, all-or-nothing thing, so that no evolution towards a post-capitalist society is possible so long as capitalism exists, then labor is put in the strategically untenable position of postponing all fights for material improvement until "after the Revolution." Although the workers' movement risks having any particular reform coopted by capitalism for its own purposes, it's a necessary risk compared to the certainty of irrelevance otherwise; since insurrectionary seizure of power is impossible, doing nothing in the meantime weakens labor's position. Given this, one safeguard against cooptation is to be consciously guided by the "non-reformist" standard in pursuing reforms.⁴⁶

Is it possible from *within* — that is to say, without having previously destroyed capitalism — to impose anti-capitalist solutions which will not immediately be incorporated into and subordinated to the system?⁴⁷

...[A non-reformist reform bases the possibility of attaining its objective on the implementation of fundamental political and economic changes. These changes can be sudden, just as they can be gradual. But in any case they assume a modification of the relations of power; they assume that the workers will take over power or assert a force (that is to say, a non-institutionalized force) strong enough to establish, maintain, and expand those tendencies within the system which serve to weaken capitalism and to shake its joints....

...The only possible line for the movement is to seize, from the present on, those powers which will prepare it to assume the leadership of society and which will permit it in the meantime to control and to plan the development of the society, and to establish certain limiting mechanisms which will restrict or dislocate the power of capital.⁴⁸

In other words, whether a reform is "reformist" or "non-reformist" depends not on whether it presents an obvious and objective appearance, to both capital and labor, of incompatibility with the present power structure. It depends on how it will affect the long-term balance of power

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 235–236.

⁴⁶ André Gorz, *Strategy for Labor: A Radical Proposal* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), pp. 5, 8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 6.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p. 8.

between labor and capital, and be exploitable by the former as leverage against the latter to impose still further concessions in the future.

Another criterion for distinguishing reformist from non-reformist reforms is who controls the implementation.

Structural reform is by definition a reform implemented or controlled by those who demand it. Be it in agriculture, the university, property relations, the region, the administration, the economy, etc., a structural reform *always* requires the creation of new centers of democratic power.

Whether it be at the level of companies, schools, municipalities, regions, or of the national Plan, etc., structural reform always requires a *decentralization* of the decision making power, a *restriction on the powers of State or Capital*, an *extension of popular power*, that is to say, a victory of democracy over dictatorship of profit. No nationalization is *in itself* a structural reform.⁴⁹

The alternatives can also be framed as “subordinate” vs. “autonomous” powers. The pursuit of autonomous power is “a strategy of *progressive* conquest of power by the workers...”⁵⁰

...To assert that every reform, so long as political hegemony does not belong to the working class, is of a reformist character and only results in a preservation of the system, making it more tolerable, is to argue from a fallacious schematicism insofar as workers’ power is concerned. For while it is true that every reform (for example, nationalization and economic planning) is absorbed a system and ends up by consolidating it so long as it leaves the power of the capitalist state intact, and as long as it leaves the execution and administration of the reform in the hands of the State alone, it is also true, inversely, that every conquest of *autonomous* powers by the working class, whether these powers be institutionalized *or not*, will not attenuate class antagonisms but, on the contrary, will accentuate them, will yield new opportunities for attacking the system, will make the system not more but less tolerable by sharpening the conflict between the human demands of the workers and the inert needs of capital. One must indeed be a poor Marxist to believe that in the framework of the capitalist relationships of production, the fundamental contradictions between labor and capital can be attenuated to the point of becoming acceptable when the workers’ local conquest of power gives them a richer and more concrete consciousness of their power as a class.⁵¹

Paul Mason writes, similarly, of policy measures that, by shifting bargaining power and lowering the rate of extraction, simultaneously promote both postcapitalist transition and liberal capitalism in the interim. In the event of a city like Barcelona adopting basic income and promoting commons-based peer production, he asks,

Would capitalism collapse?

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 8n

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 9–10.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p. 33.

No. The desperate, frantic “survival capitalists” would go away — the rip-off consultancies; the low-wage businesses; the rent-extractors.

But you would attract the most innovative capitalists on earth, and you would make the city vastly more livable for the million-plus people who call it home.⁵²

Regarding the rather slippery distinction between “reform” and “revolution,” and the question of the relationship of commons-based counter-institutions to the existing system in the interim, Vangelis Papadimitropoulos’s threefold classification schema of analytic approaches is useful.

Whereas the liberal theory places the Commons between the state and the market, the reformist theory argues for the reforms necessary that could force capitalism to adjust to the Commons in the long run. In contrast to both the liberal and the reformist, the anti-capitalist theory supports the development of the Commons against and beyond capitalism.⁵³

That is, the liberal theory assumes the commons will coexist alongside state and market, as parts within a functional division of labor, as a normal state of affairs which persists indefinitely. The reformist theory views capitalism as a system with an end, but sees that end as a gradual process that will be brought about by capitalism adjusting to the commons over the long run. The commons will “replace capitalism from within, just as capitalism did with feudalism.... Commons-based peer production can beat capitalism on its own ground: that is, competition. Technology can render the Commons more competitive in relation to capitalism and pave the way for a post-capitalist ethical economy supported by a partner state.”⁵⁴

The anti-capitalist view, as represented by George Caffentzis and Silvia Federici, agrees with the reformists that capitalism will come to an end. In the meantime, the commons serve as an ecology of counter-institutions that protect us from the worst aspects of capitalism and also serve as the seeds of the post-capitalist society:

From the ‘free software’ to the ‘solidarity economy’ movement, a whole world of new social relations is coming into existence based on the principle of communal sharing, sustained by the realization that capitalism has nothing to give us except more misery and divisions. Indeed, at a time of permanent crisis and constant assaults on jobs, wages, and social spaces, the construction of commons – ‘time banks’, urban gardens, Community Supported Agriculture, food coops, local currencies, ‘creative commons’ licenses, bartering practices – represents a crucial means of survival. In Greece, in the last two years, as wages and pensions have been cut on average by 30 percent and unemployment among youth has reached 50 percent, various forms of mutual aid have appeared, like free medical services, free distributions of produce by farmers in urban centres, and the ‘reparation’ of the electrical wires disconnected because the bills were not paid.

However, commoning initiatives are more than dikes against the neoliberal assault on our livelihood. They are the seeds, the embryonic form of an alternative mode

⁵² Paul Mason, “Postcapitalism and the City,” P2P Foundation Blog, October 12, 2016 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/postcapitalism-and-the-city/2016/10/12>>.

⁵³ Vangelis Papadimitropoulos, “The Politics of the Commons: Reform or Revolt?” *tripleC* 15/2 (2017), p. 563.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 568.

of production in the make. This is how we should view also the squatters' movements that have emerged in many urban peripheries, signs of a growing population of city dwellers 'disconnected' from the formal world economy, now reproducing themselves outside of state and market control.⁵⁵

Anti-capitalist commons, then, should be conceived as both autonomous spaces from which to reclaim control over the conditions of our reproduction, and as bases from which to counter the processes of enclosure and increasingly disentangle our lives from the market and the state. Thus they differ from those advocated by the Ostrom School, where commons are imagined in a relation of coexistence with the public and with the private. Ideally, they embody the vision that Marxists and anarchists have aspired to but failed to realize: that of a society made of 'free associations of producers', self-governed and organized to ensure not an abstract equality but the satisfaction of people's needs and desires. Today we see only fragments of this world (in the same way as in late Medieval Europe we may have seen only fragments of capitalism) but already the commons we build should enable us to gain more power with regard to capital and the state and embryonically prefigure a new mode of production, no longer built on a competitive principle, but on the principle of collective solidarity.⁵⁶

They differ from the reformists in that they see no point in trying to change the character of capitalist institutions in the interim, or shift the capitalist system from within. In fact attempting to do so carries the risk of cooptation, with capitalism incorporating free and open-source information into its physical production models and thereby prolonging its own life.

They argue that the digital or immaterial Commons cannot have an autonomous substance in their own right, as they depend for their reproduction on both capitalism and the material commons. The digital or immaterial Commons should connect instead to the material Commons and form an alliance of anti-capitalistic Commons developing against capitalism....

But as Papadimitropoulos points out, the fact that both reformists and anti-capitalists see the end of capitalism as a prolonged process, in which the commons exist within the interstices of the old society, renders the precise boundary between them rather unclear.⁵⁷

What both the liberal and the anti-capitalist versions of the Commons... miss is the likelihood of technology bridging the gap between material and immaterial production, thus challenging the monopoly of capitalism on the means and resources of production. The combination of the Internet, free software, 3D printers and artificial technology may render large-scale material production redundant, forcing corporations to adapt in the long run to the decentralisation and commonification of production. Therefore, the model of an open cooperativism between ethical market entities,

⁵⁵ George Caffentzis and Silvia Federici. "Commons against and beyond capitalism." *Community Development Journal* Vol 49 No S1 (January 2014), p. i95.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. i101.

⁵⁷ Papadimitropoulos *op. cit.*, p. 573.

the partner state and the Commons carries significant potential for the future development of the Commons, since corporatism and the state are not going to wither away anytime soon.⁵⁸

What the anti-capitalist version misses in comparison to the reformist is a ‘realistic’ plan of a transition from capitalism to the commons....⁵⁹

Most importantly, I would argue, the two approaches — exodus by means of a counter-economy created outside the capitalist system, on the one hand, and shifting the character of the overall system and its legacy institutions from within on the other — are not mutually exclusive. Regardless of what terminology is used, the fact of the matter is that all commons-based institutions, no matter how anti-capitalist the intent of those participating them, will interact to some extent with the capitalist system as a matter of simple necessity. Since the anti-capitalists themselves recognize that the commons will exist alongside capitalism for some indeterminate period of time, there’s no reason the commons cannot condition the institutions of capital and state at the same time they’re constructing the successor society.

What’s more, institutions that were governed by the core logic of one system may well navigate the systemic transition while maintaining the same name and some degree of institutional continuity, despite a change in character corresponding to their relationship to the changing larger system in which they are embedded. A craft guild in 1500 might have the same name as, and organizational continuity with, a craft guild that existed in 1200; yet in the one case it would be a mercantile capitalist corporation, and in the other a democratically governed federation of master craftsmen, with its character in both cases defined by the respective capitalist and feudal systems of which it was a part.

Massimo De Angelis sees the task of the commons movement as not only to build a counter-economy outside the state and capital, but also to shift the character of the state and capital themselves in a more commons-like direction through engagement with them.

A commons movement is not simply a movement against the valuation processes and injustices of capital as well as the hierarchies of the state, but a movement that seek [sic] to commonalize many functions now both in private and state hands, especially those functions that have to do with social reproduction, and that define the quality and the quality of services available....

Aside from the strategy of creating commons from the ground up..., another strategy is to *commonalize* its existing private or public systems and transform them into resilient organisations, which in turn imply [sic], much deeper democratisation and cooperation, namely basic commons coordinates.

The objective to turn more and more spheres of societies into sustainable and resilient spheres thus coincides with that of adopting commons as a central kernel of the architecture of a new mode of production integrating many types of modes of production....

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 575.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 576.

Commonalisation means to shift a public or private organisation into a commons or, more likely, into a web of interconnected and nested commons giving shape to metacommonality, with the overarching goal of resilience....

For a public institution or private corporation, commonalisation does not mean that a given final result is optimal, but that a process has begun along which there is a collective effort, through the commoners' democratic management of constraints, costs, and rewards, to increase all sorts of commoning across different social actors involved in the corporation or public service....

- the parameter of democracy: democratisation of a state service or a corporation along a scale that has as its two opposite poles management versus direct democracy...;
- maximum accountability and transparency and the ability to recall every public servant... and other stakeholder involved in the production of the service;
- opening the boundaries between different types of practices and subjects thus allowing maximum cognitive diversity as well as increasing the porosity of the system boundaries to a variety of subjects, knowledges and practices....⁶⁰

He mentions Barcelona en Comu as an example, with experiments like participatory budgeting and open policy proposal wikis.⁶¹

Likewise, he refers to the commons being able to make use of capital on favorable terms “because there is an echo of the commons inside capital or state systems, and thus it is possible to define meta-commonal relations across capital, state and commons.”⁶² It is important to remember that state agencies and capitalist corporations are not monoliths; they are governed by hierarchies precisely because the individuals and social groups within them all have interests that may not coincide with the official goals of the organization or the interests of its leadership, so that it becomes necessary to resort to power relations in order to enclose their cooperative interactions — interactions that may function, internally, on the basis of something like Graeber’s “everyday communism” — as sources of value for the organization.

As previously noted, authoritarian institutions are always subject to concupiscence, the kind of “war within their members” that St. Paul described in the individual. We already saw how this plays out in bureaucracies being hamstrung by their own internal rule. But it also shows itself through the converse: the fact that they’re made up of human beings with minds of their own who sometimes *don’t* stick to the script.

The commons sector can often hope to find friendly individuals and subcultures within the “Belly of the Beast.” We can pursue tactical alliances with dissident subgroups within the state bureaucracy, appealing to their genuine attachment to the stated missions of the agencies they work for in ways that undermine their real missions.

Bollier and Helfrich take a similar view of the state, arguing that an understanding of how state power works leads to the inference that there is “no such thing as the state.”

⁶⁰ Massimo De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia: On the Commons and the Transformation to Postcapitalism* (London: Zed Books, 2017), pp. 340–341, 344.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* p. 45.

⁶² *Ibid.* p. 322.

A relational approach to state power helps us envision all sorts of piecemeal ways of advancing the commons. All can contribute to a more consequential, transformative agenda that will reconfigure power relations 1) within the state institutions; and 2) between them and commoners. If we can focus on the different agents and layers of state power instead of the fictional monolith known as “the state,” we can imagine other ways of involving the public in the day-to-day business of governing. We can get a glimpse of the possibilities in open platforms that invite citizens to help city councils in urban planning, government websites that encourage citizen feedback about public services, participatory budgeting programs that let citizens make spending decisions, and government support for co-housing and volunteer networks for the elderly. A fruitful collaboration between a commons and the state can arise because commoners can provide services that neither commercial enterprises nor government agencies can or want to provide.⁶³

Once we choose to see the state not as an omnipotent monolith but as a configuration of power that varies a great deal and is even parochial and vulnerable in certain respects, we can begin to imagine ways to alter state power in piecemeal ways, as opportunities arise. We can see how social practices and relations can help us transform state power, at least at some incremental level. While modalities of governance and state authority vary immensely, people in more intimate local contexts experience politics as more accessible, adaptable, and accountable.⁶⁴

Much of the disagreement on the Left about the role of electoral politics results from the lack of a common understanding of its purpose. Take, for example, the conflict between those who vote for an establishment Democratic Party nominee in the interest of harm reduction, and those who say “the two parties are the same.” It is a mistake in my opinion to view electoral politics as the primary means of pursuing progressive change. Voting for the “lesser evil” is not necessarily “liberal” or “reformist”; rather, it is fully compatible with an interstitialist approach that sees the development of counter-institutions outside the state as the primary means of building the successor society. In this view, one votes the lesser evil — e.g., voting for an establishment Democrat against Trump — in order to stave off the worst of the immediate fascist threat and buy time, and to create breathing space for the primary project of building counter-institutions. The purpose of electoral politics is not to build the successor society, but to create the least unfavorable background conditions for doing so.

So while promoting candidates like Sanders or Corbyn is worthwhile as a long-shot effort at creating an especially favorable environment — who wouldn’t prefer pursuing interstitial development against a background of universal healthcare, basic income, drastically reformed copyright, or cooperatively-governed public services? — even replacing Trump with someone who is not Trump is a real and significant improvement. To argue otherwise entails some accelerationist assumptions (“the worse, the better,” etc.) that do not bear close scrutiny.

Immanuel Wallerstein advocated a similar strategy of simultaneously engaging the state with the primary goal of mitigating harm, and building independent social structures of our own. There is no way of avoiding the necessity for

⁶³ Bollier and Helfrich, *Free, Fair and Alive*, pp. 289–290.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

short-term defensive action, including electoral action. The world's populations live in the present, and their immediate needs have to be addressed. Any movement that neglects them is bound to lose the widespread passive support that is essential for its long-term success. But the motive and justification for defensive action should not be that of remedying a failing system but rather of preventing its negative effects from getting worse in the short run.

But this must be combined with “the establishment of interim, middle-range goals that seem to move in the right direction.”

I would suggest that one of the most useful — substantively, politically, psychologically — is the attempt to move towards selective, but ever-widening, decommodification.... Industries, especially failing industries, should be decommodified. This does not mean they should be ‘nationalized’ — for the most part, simply another version of commodification. It means we should create structures, operating in the market, whose objective is performance and survival rather than profit. This can be done, as we know, from the history of universities or hospitals — not all, but the best. Why is such a logic impossible for steel factories threatened with delocalization?⁶⁵

In my opinion, the key to a division of labor is adopting ahead of time an understanding aimed at preventing political parties from sucking the energy and life out of the counter-institution building effort in civil society, and diverting it instead into parliamentary politics. The solution is to establish ahead of time that the primary axis of post-capitalist construction is interstitial, i.e., actually building the successor society here and now. Electoral politics and participation in the policy process is entirely secondary and auxiliary.

But it requires a realist approach to the division of labor, which will persist regardless of whether the political arm achieves state power. The social movements must be firm in their understanding that their purpose is to construct the successor society within the interstices of the existing one, through the creation and development of counter-institutions, regardless of who controls the state. And they must be openly resolved not to defer to the party in power, even if it is an offshoot of their own movement, or allow it to constrain their range of alternatives. As Bollier and Helfrich put it,

social movements are more likely to be transformative if they develop parallel economies with *structural independence* from the conventional market/state. This means also that commons are more likely to survive and retain their independence if they are *less* entangled with the conventional economy and state power, and if they can rely on internal systems (Peer Governance, knowledge-sharing, federated support from other commoners) for resilience. At the same time, it is imperative to engage with state power through elections and traditional advocacy, if only because that field of action can change the conditions for widening spaces of commonality. It is too consequential to be ignored.

⁶⁵ Immanuel Wallerstein, “Revolts Against the System,” *New Left Review* 18 (November-December 2002) <<https://newleftreview.org/issues/II18/articles/immanuel-wallerstein-new-revolts-against-the-system>>.

So commoners need a two-track mindset in dealing with state power: a primary focus on building the new — keeping the conceptual insights above in mind — while also attempting to neutralize the old.⁶⁶

And while the electoral or revolutionary party is still entirely an opposition party, with no immediate hope for power, it must be given to understand that the social movements will not recognize its authority to restrain their efforts in constructing the successor society. The political arm's central purpose, whether in or out of power, is to run political interference on behalf of the social movements, and to maximize their space for independent action — whether it be through popular mobilization against domestic and international forces, or in negotiations with neoliberal actors abroad. In face both the political and social arms must operate from the explicit understanding that the latter will always maintain their entire independence, and will not be bound by any concessions made by the political arm (as was the case with Syriza in its negotiations with the European Central Bank). Rather, it is to be understood that the entire autonomy of the social movements will serve to cloak the political arm with plausible deniability, enabling it to play “good cop” in negotiating with the United States, IMF or whomever, and to say “We’d like to grant this concession, but we have no authority to enforce it on the local communes. If we make a deal they don’t like, they’ll just do something even more radical than they’re doing now.”

[Last Edited October 7, 2020]

⁶⁶ Bollier and Helfric, *Free, Fair and Alive*, pp. 300–301.

Part Three. Seeds beneath the Snow

Chapter Nine: The Commons Sector and the Theory of Municipalism

Introduction

Throughout this book, we have made repeated references to the existence of a parallel commons-based economy alongside the capitalist one, the terminal crisis tendencies of capitalism, and the interstitial coalescence of the commons-based economy as a successor to the dying capitalist system. But the discussion has been mostly theoretical up to this point, and needs to be fleshed out in concrete terms.

Accordingly, this final section of the book has two general themes (both of which will be frequently referenced throughout, rather than being treated sequentially). First, the actual building blocks of the post-capitalist society. We already examined, in Chapter Two, the ways in which changes in production and communications technology have rendered obsolete the Old Left focus on seizing the means of production; and we examined, in subsequent chapters, the implications of general trends like the social factory and the growing importance of our social relationships as sources of productivity for revolutionary strategy. Now, having examined the forest, we take a closer look at the trees.

We're not simply adopting more decentralized production technologies or organizational forms, but coalescing all these building blocks into a fundamentally different economic paradigm. The problem to date is that technologies have been selected for or against based on the values of a larger system of control. Fortunately, for reasons already discussed, this system has become unsustainable and is in the process of disintegrating. In creating the successor system, we must select for the technologies and organizational forms that serve our needs for survival, as the system we formerly depended on decays.

These new technologies and social forms by themselves would be of limited significance if we had no reason to expect their widespread adoption. Regardless of their abstract superiority in terms of material efficiency or amenability to human nature, these things might remain largely theoretical for the indefinite future absent some plausible way of overcoming the inertias and path dependencies of the present system.

This leads us to our second theme: the crisis conditions of capitalism as a system, and the crisis conditions of capitalism in everyday lives of ordinary people, intersect with the new liberatory possibilities of the new technologies and social forms to create a "perfect storm." In a time of declining total work hours, underemployment and precarity, and the collapse of state- and employer-based social safety nets, the "killer app" of the commons-based counter-economy and direct production for use is survival. As Neal Gorenflo explained the inspiration for the title for an anthology:

About six months ago, a weather-beaten, middle-age man asked me for money on the platform of the Mountain View Caltrain station.

I gave him three dollars. He thanked me, and asked what I did for work. I introduced myself, learned his name (Jeff) and we shook hands. I pulled out a card from my computer bag, and handed it to him as I told him that I publish an online magazine about sharing.

Jeff lit up, “Oh I get that, when you’re homeless, it’s share or die.”¹

This “killer app” function of direct production for use, in the parallel social economy, is at the heart of the “Plenitude” that Juliet Schor promotes as a model for post-capitalist transition.

As individuals take up the principles of plenitude, they are not merely adopting a private response to what is perforce a collective problem. Rather, they are pioneers of the micro (individual-level) activity that is necessary to create the macro (system-wide) equilibrium....²

It amounts to a “parallel economy developing” — of necessity — “amid the wreckage of the collapse.”³

Luis Razeto Migliaro, in a book on the solidarity economy, frames it as something like the stone that the builders refused:

The skills and competencies of the popular sector, which are superfluous to the demands of the market and the world of formal economy, have not gone unused just because the companies and the State fail to employ them. Having been excluded from both employment and consumption in the formal sector, and still facing the crucial challenge of subsistence, the world of the poor has become economically activated, giving rise to the many different activities and organizations which make up what we call the “popular economy.”

The popular economy combines traditional resources and capacities for labor, technology, organization, and commerce with others of a modern type, giving rise to an incredibly heterogeneous and varied proliferation of activities oriented to securing subsistence and the means of daily life. It thrives and expands by seeking out interstices and opportunities in the market, finding ways to make use of benefits and resources provided by public services and subsidies, and inserting itself into projects promoted by non-governmental organizations. Sometimes it even manages to reconstruct reciprocal and cooperative economic relations of the type that predominated in more traditional forms of economic organization.⁴

He divides it up into three main categories of activity:

¹ Neal Gorenflo, “Preface,” *Share or Die: Voices of the Get Lost Generation in the Age of Crisis*. Edited by Malcolm Harris with Neal Gorenflo (New Society Publishers, 2012), xi.

² Juliet B. Schor, *Plenitude: The New Economics of True Wealth* (New York: Penguin, 2010), p. 3.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴ Luis Razeto Migliaro, “Chapter 2 — The Road of the Poor and the Popular Economy,” *Grassroots Economic Organizing*, February 11, 2019 <<https://geo.coop/story/solidarity-economy-roads-chapter-2>>.

- a. Labor for personal benefit, performed by innumerable independent workers who create goods, provide services, or sell on a small scale, be it at home, on the street, in the public square, on public transport, at community fairs, or other places where people gather. In a study of self-employed workers in Chile, three hundred distinct informal “occupations” were identified.
- b. Family micro-enterprises, operated by one to three people, preparing goods or selling on a small scale, using their living space or an adjacent space for a workplace and store. The phenomenon of micro-enterprises has become so widespread in the popular districts of the big cities of Latin America that it is normal to find them in one of every four or five homes.
- c. Popular economic organizations, that is, small groups or associations of people or families who collectively manage their scant resources so as to develop activities that generate income or provide services to satisfy the basic needs of work, food, health, education, housing, etc. on a basis of cooperation and mutual aid. Solidarity workshops, housing committees, “buying together,” community utilities, “building together,” family gardens, and community development programs are some of the most widespread types.

And this popular economy has arisen and expanded, not as a temporary phenomenon, but as a long-term response to crisis tendencies of capitalism which force “the poor and the marginalized to find in themselves the necessary forces for subsistence.”⁵

Ben Reynolds describes it, similarly, as capitalism eroding its own foundations:

At the same time, capitalism gnaws away at its own foundations. While industrial capital centralizes, distributed production places a widening range of productive technologies in the hands of individuals. Some of these technologies facilitate capitalism’s growth, but others foretell something different. Instead of producing things for exchange and profit, people cooperate with one another and produce things directly for their own use. They eschew private property and copyright, sharing goods freely.

In this new world, scarcity is artificial. Armed with their own machines, the people square off against industrial capital and they often win. There is a cost to this victory. The rise of a mode of production based on freely shared work and use cannot simply coexist with wage labor and exchange value. While it remains trapped within a capitalist society, distributed production cannot flourish to its full extent. Instead, it acts as a steadily growing vision of a new world within the shell of the old: a world without scarcity and a world without labor.⁶

Silvia Federici sees such measures as a response not only to economic pressures in the wake of the 2008 crash, but to the austerity promoted around the world by the Washington Consensus over the past several decades.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Ben Reynolds, *The Coming Revolution: Capitalism in the 21st Century* (Hampshire, UK: Zero Books, 2018), p. 202.

It is not a coincidence that in the last few years, in Greece, as wages and pensions have been cut on average by 30 percent and unemployment among youth has reached 50 percent, several forms of mutual aid have appeared, including free medical services, free distributions of produce by farmers in urban centers, and the ‘repair’ by electricians of wires that were cut because the bills were not paid.⁷

But all these expedients are more than just a reaction to immediate circumstances. They’re the beginnings of a new world that will be thriving long after capitalism is gone.

We must stress, however, that the commoning initiatives we see proliferating around us — ‘time banks,’ urban gardens, community-supported agriculture, food co-ops, local currencies, Creative Commons licenses, bartering practices, information sharing — are more than dikes against the neoliberal assault on our livelihood. They are experiments in self-provisioning and the seeds of an alternative mode of production in the making. This is also how we should view the squatters’ movements that have formed in many urban peripheries throughout the world since the 1980s, products of land expropriations but also signs of a growing population of city dwellers ‘disconnected’ from the formal world economy, now organizing their reproduction outside of state and market control. As Raúl Zibechi suggests, these urban land squats are better envisioned as a “planet of commons.”...⁸

I. The Growth of the Commons Sector As a Lifeline

Although many Leftists dismiss exodus-based strategies as “lifestylism,” they are in fact building a counter-system that — for all the reasons examined in Chapter Two — uses resources more efficiently than capitalism.

We live in a time of terminal crisis for centralized institutions of all kinds, including their two most notable forms: states and large corporations. Both a major cause and major symptom of this transition is the steady reduction in the amount of labor needed to produce a given level of output, and consequently in total aggregate demand for wage labor. This shows up in shrinking rates of workforce participation, and a shift of a growing part of the remaining workforce from full-time work to part-time and precarious employment (the latter including temporary and contract work). Another symptom is the retrenchment of the state in the face of fiscal crisis and a trend towards social austerity in most Western countries; this is paralleled by a disintegration of traditional employer-based safety nets, as part of the decline in full-time employment.

The same technological trends that are reducing the total need for labor also, in many cases, make direct production for use in the informal, social and household economies much more economically feasible. Cheap open-source CNC machine tools, networked information and digital platforms, Permaculture and community gardens, alternative currencies and mutual credit systems, all reduce the scale of feasible production for many goods to the household, multiple household and neighborhood levels, and similarly reduce the capital outlays required for directly producing consumption needs to a scale within the means of such groupings

⁷ Silvia Federici, “Commons against and beyond Capitalism (with George Caffentzis),” in *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (Oakland: PM Press, 2019), p. 88.

⁸ Federici, “Commons against and beyond Capitalism,” p. 89.

Put all these trends together, and we see the old model of secure livelihood through wages collapsing at the same time new technology is destroying the material basis for dependence on corporations and the state.

But like all transitions, this is a transition not only from something, but *to* something. That something bears a more than passing resemblance to the libertarian communist future Pyotr Kropotkin described in *The Conquest of Bread* and *Fields, Factories and Workshops*: the relocation of most economic functions into mixed agricultural/industrial villages, the control of production by those directly engaged in it, and a fading of the differences between town and country, work and leisure, and brain-work and muscle-work.

In particular, it is to a large extent a transition to a post-capitalist society centered on the commons.

Micro-Manufacturing and Self-Provisioning. It's fortuitous that the same cheap, ephemeral small-scale production technologies that are helping to bring about the terminal crisis of capitalism from surplus capital, are also offering a safety net for those unemployed or underemployed by the dying capitalist system.

Historically, the household sector has presented something of a dilemma to capital. Throughout the history of capitalism, according to Immanuel Wallerstein, workers have used the household as a unit for pooling risks, costs and income among laborers and non-laborers. Capital has encouraged this household economy insofar as it externalizes the reproduction of labor power on society at large, so that unpaid labor carries out the reproduction of labor power. At the same time, it has balanced this strategy against the need to prevent the household from getting so large that its risk and cost-pooling functions lead to an unacceptable increase in the bargaining power of labor. "The household as an income-pooling unit can be seen as a fortress both of accommodation to and resistance to the patterns of labor-force allocation favored by accumulators."⁹

This is true of the commons in general, as Brigitte Kratzwald argues:

The ambivalence of the commons in capitalism stems from one of capitalism's biggest contradictions: capital cannot reproduce itself. In order to survive, it needs resources from outside. This is one reason why, in opposition to other opinions, capitalism can never be a totality; several modes of production exist simultaneously in every society. The sources from which capital takes what it needs so that the production of added value can function are unpaid work (usually from women), natural resources, and commons. Capital is very successful in making commons and other resources outside of itself useful for its own ends.

On the other hand... the production, use, and tending of commons creates a certain amount of independence from the dominant system for people.¹⁰

As James O'Connor noted in *Accumulation Crisis*, mass consumption has been "an Achilles heel of capitalism."

⁹ Immanuel Wallerstein, "Household Structures and Labor-Force Formation in the Capitalist World Economy," in Joan Smith, Immanuel Wallerstein, Hans-Dieter Evers, eds., *Creating and Transforming Households: The constraints of the world-economy* (Cambridge, New York, Oakleigh, Victoria, Paris: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 16.

¹⁰ Brigitte Kratzwald, "Urban Commons – Dissident Practices in Emancipatory Spaces," in Mary Dellenbaugh, Markus Kip, Majken Bieniok, Agnes Katharina Müller, Martin Schwegmann (eds.), *Urban Commons: Moving Beyond State and Market* (Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag GmbH, 2015), p. 39.

This is so because of the irreducible autonomy of the process of reproduction of labor-power.... [Reproduction takes place] outside capitalist relations of production. This means that in the model of full capitalism individual workers and their families utilize accumulated stocks of “means of subsistence production,” e.g., housing, consumer durables. While this creates potentials for capital to shift the burden of reproduction costs of labor-power to the household and community, it also creates potentials for the working class to hoard labor-power or withdraw labor-power from capital on a mass basis.¹¹

In regard to the latter, “the accumulated stocks of means and objects of reproduction within the household and community took the edge off the need for alienated labor.”¹²

Further, O’Connor observed, labor has tended to respond to cyclical periods of reduced employment by shifting the means by which it obtains its needs in part from wage labor to self-provisioning, or direct production for use in the household and social sector.

Labor-power was hoarded through absenteeism, sick leaves, early retirement, the struggle to reduce days worked per year, among other ways. Conserved labor-power was then expended in subsistence production.... The living economy based on non- and anti-capitalist concepts of time and space went underground: in the reconstituted household; the commune; cooperatives; the single-issue organization; the self-help clinic; the solidarity group. Hurrying along the development of the alternative and underground economies was the growth of underemployment (full employment at less than a living wage), which originated in the expulsion of living labor from large-scale capitalist enterprise, and mass unemployment associated with the crisis of the 1980s. “Regular” employment and union-scale work contracted, which became an incentive to develop alternative, local modes of production.

During the 1970s, localized, fragmented, anarchic, and half-formed struggles squeezed capital from all sides. New social relationships of reproduction and alternative employment, including the informal and underground economies, threatened not only labor discipline, but also capitalist markets. Demands to employ local savings in credit unions and local cooperatives threatened capital’s control of money and credit. Alternative technologies threatened capital’s monopoly on technological development. Environmental movements which fought to prevent resources from becoming commodities (or to decommodify resources) threatened capital’s control of land, natural resources, and energy sources. Hoarding labor-power threatened capital’s domination of production. Withdrawal of labor-power undermined basic social disciplinary mechanisms and capital’s control of the supply of labor.¹³

And the present ongoing decline in demand for labor — i.e., since 2000 — is not cyclical. It’s systemic. It follows that workers will, as a matter of necessity, permanently shift a growing share of production into the social or informal economy. As Juliet Schor describes it:

¹¹ James O’Connor, *Accumulation Crisis* (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 152–153.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 184.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 185–186.

Work less in the declining market, but use those freed-up hours productively, to invest in new skills and activities. Some of the time will be deployed to replace higher-priced food, energy, and consumer goods with homemade or community-produced alternatives. Some will be used to invest in social relationships, another form of wealth. And some hours will be spent in high-return leisure activities requiring relatively little monetary outlay. These substitute for the expensive commodities of the faster-paced, higher-income lifestyle.¹⁴

Schor cites a University of Michigan scholar, Frithjof Bergmann, who wrote during the recession of the early '80s of what he called the New Work — a strategy for dealing with industrial stagnation and unemployment — in terms much like O'Connor's:

Bergmann's system had three components: First, radically cut hours in factories, to about twenty per week, in a bid to preserve jobs. Second, help under- and unemployed workers figure out their life's calling, that is, the type of work they most wanted to be doing, and support them to get going with it, irrespective of whether it would yield income. And third, promote a series of advanced or smart-technology methods for producing the basics of life without arduous labor. His term was high-tech self-providing.¹⁵

Thanks to open-source tabletop CNC routers, milling machines, lathes, cutting tables, 3D printers and so on that can be built for tiny fractions of what their proprietary commercial counterparts cost, direct production of consumption goods and household appliances for use is more economically feasible than ever.

As far back as the 1920s and '30s, Ralph Borsodi was arguing that the growing proliferation of small-scale powered machinery was making it more economical to produce a major share of consumption goods directly in the household than to work for wages to buy them from factories.

Colin Ward advocated community workshops as a means by which the employed and unemployed could pool their individually owned tools, reduce idle capacity, and satisfy an increased share of consumption needs outside the wage system.

Couldn't the workshop become the community factory, providing work or a place for work for anyone in the locality who wanted to work that ay, not as an optional extra to the economy of the affluent society which rejects an increasing proportion of its members, but as one of the prerequisites of the worker-controlled economy of the future?¹⁶

He quoted Keith Paton, writing in a pamphlet for the Claimants' Union, that "electrical power and 'affluence' have brought a spread of intermediate machines, some of them very sophisticated, to ordinary working class communities."

Even if they do not own them... the possibility exists of borrowing them from neighbours, relatives, ex-workmates. Knitting and sewing machines, power tools and other

¹⁴ Schor, *Plenitude*, p. 107.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹⁶ Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (London: Freedom Press, 1982), p. 108.

do-it-yourself equipment comes in this category. Garages can be converted into little workshops, home-brew kits are popular, parts and machinery can be taken from old cars and other gadgets. If they saw their opportunity, trained metallurgists and mechanics could get into advanced scrap technology, recycling the metal wastes of the consumer society for things which could be used again regardless of whether they would fetch anything in a shop. Many hobby enthusiasts could begin to see their interests in a new light.¹⁷

Karl Hess advocated a similar approach — “shared machine shops” — in *Community Technology*. It might be hosted in “some other public facility, used in its off hours,” he wrote, or hosted in its own dedicated space. Besides pooling individual power tools, as Ward described, Hess also suggested stocking it with “cast-off industrial tools, with tools brought from government surplus through the local school system,” etc. Such a machine shop in an inner city might be used “for the maintenance of appliances and other household goods whose replacement might represent a real economic burden in the neighborhood.” Combined with a neighborhood storehouse for left-over construction materials, defunct appliances, and so on, the machine shop could:

redesign cast-off items into useful ones. Discarded refrigerators, for instance, suggest an infinity of new uses, from fish tanks... to numerous parts as each discarded one is stripped for its components, which include small compressors, copper tubing, heat transfer arrays, and so on. The same goes for washing machines....¹⁸

A good example of the potential of present-day technology is the Global Village Construction Set, a collection of open-source machine tools designed, prototyped and built at Open Source Ecology’s Factor e Farm demonstration site. It’s an entire ecosystem of machine tools. Along with the micro-manufacturing machinery (3D printer, laser cutter, drill press and fourteen other machines), the GVCS includes construction machinery (sawmill, compressed earth block maker, etc.), farm machinery (tractor, etc.), and household production goods like a bread oven. Most of the components of the machines — many of which are modular and used throughout the entire ecology of designs — can be produced with the Construction Set’s own machine tools, and the inclusion of an induction hearth in the manufacturing collection means they can not only smelt metal from local scrap, but their own production is closed-loop.¹⁹ Most of the individual manufacturing machines can be made for anywhere from a thousand (most common) to a few thousand dollars in materials; a few super expensive items (e.g. \$50,000 for a machine to extract aluminum from clay) would obviously have to be a shared resource between a number of shops in a larger community. And the open-source car, truck and combine run a mid-range price of \$8,000 or more.

Local industrial ecologies grow, as Jane Jacobs described it in *The Economy of Cities*, by discovering creative uses for locally generated waste and byproducts, and using such innovative technologies to replace imports.²⁰ Here’s how she describes the process of import substitution:

¹⁷ Keith Paton, *The Right to Work or the Fight to Live?* (1972), quoted in *Ibid.* pp. 108–109.

¹⁸ Karl Hess, *Community Technology* (New York, Cambridge, Hagerstown, Philadelphia, San Francisco, London, Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Sydney: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1979), pp. 96–98.

¹⁹ <<http://opensourceecology.org/gvcs/>>; <http://opensourceecology.org/wiki/Global_Village_Construction_Set>.

²⁰ Jane Jacobs, *The Economy of Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969, 1970).

Cities that replace imports significantly replace not only finished goods but, concurrently, many, many items of producers' goods and services. They do it in swiftly emerging, logical chains. For example, first comes the local processing of fruit preserves that were formerly imported, then the production of jars or wrappings formerly imported for which there was no local market of producers until the first step had been taken. Or first comes the assembly of formerly imported pumps for which, once the assembly step has been taken, parts are imported; then the making of parts for which metal is imported; then possibly even the smelting of metal for these and other import replacements.²¹

Hess's earlier reference to appliance repair is the logical beginning of such a chain of import substitution. As the national transportation infrastructure and freight industry capacities both shrink under the impact of Peak Oil and fiscal exhaustion, small garage, backyard and neighborhood shops can take up the slack of the crumbling corporate logistic chains by custom machining replacement parts that are no longer available through regular channels, in order to keep aging appliances working. As the number of shops engaged in such production increases, and the variety of products produced, they can produce parts for an increasing share of entire appliances, and then proceed to producing original modular accessories for existing appliances, and then producing open-source appliance designs from scratch.

Hess and David Morris, in *Neighborhood Power*, suggested a progression from retail to repair to manufacturing: "repair shops begin to transform themselves into basic manufacturing facilities...."²² Retail outlets might rely on community-supported agriculture as their main source of supply, move on to a small cannery, and then to a glass recycling center to trade broken bottles and jars for usable ones on arrangement with the bottling companies.²³

That's exactly the process by which the Japanese bicycle industry developed, according to Jane Jacobs (Hess and Morris — perhaps in an uncredited allusion to Jacobs — also suggested bike retail shops adding maintenance facilities and then producing the most vital parts, and finally entire bicycles). Jacobs writes:

...[S]hops to repair [imported bicycles] had sprung up in the big cities.... Imported spare parts were expensive and broken bicycles were too valuable to cannibalize the parts. Many repair shops thus found it worthwhile to make replacement parts themselves — not difficult if a man specialized in one kind of part, as many repairmen did. In this way, groups of bicycle repair shops were almost doing the work of manufacturing entire bicycles. That step was taken by bicycle assemblers, who bought parts, on contract, from repairmen: the repairmen had become "light manufacturers."²⁴

As a contemporary example, today in India, according to Don Tapscott and Anthony Williams, villagers use fab labs "to make replacement gears for out-of-date copying machines...."²⁵

²¹ Jacobs, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations: Principles of Economic Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984).

²² Karl Hess and David Morris, *Neighborhood Power: The New Localism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), p. 69.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

²⁴ Jacobs, *Economy of Cities*, pp. 63–64.

²⁵ Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams, *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything* (New York: Portfolio, 2006), p. 213.

Cohousing, Microvillages, and Other Units for Organizing Co-Production and Pooling Costs, Risks, and Income. Under 20th century capitalism, the ideal household from the employer's standpoint was a nuclear family severed from the local community and extended kin network. But as labor force participation continues to decline, we can expect average household size to increase and for multiple households to aggregate into larger communities. In *The Desktop Regulatory State*, I predicted that economic trends would lead to a shift from the social model centered on the nuclear family household as the basic unit in a larger atomized society to one organized around larger primary social units, ranging from extended family compounds and cohousing projects of a few families to larger micro-villages.

...First, we will experience a period characterized by “hollowed-out states,” in which the eroding tax base coupled with rising unemployment means states’ obligations for public services (fire, police, schools, streets, utilities, etc.) and the social safety net will far outstrip their revenues. As a result, states will steadily retreat from the social field and take an increasingly minimalist approach to public services. Second, total work hours per capita will gradually decline and rates of unemployment and underemployment will creep slowly upward. Third, as a matter of necessity, the unemployed and underemployed will shift a growing share of their needs from purchases with wages to self-provisioning, gifting and barter in the household and informal sectors. Fourth, as both the government and employer-based welfare states erode, the informal sector will of necessity evolve mechanisms for pooling income and risks and spreading costs.

This is likely to take the form, specifically, of people coalescing into primary social units at the residential level (extended family compounds or multi-family household income-pooling units, multi-household units at the neighborhood level, coordinated self-provisioning in micro-economies organized on residential blocks or cul-de-sacs, urban communes and other cohousing projects, squats, and stand-alone intentional communities), as a way of pooling income and reducing costs. As the state’s social safety nets come apart, such primary social units and extended federations between them will fill the vacuum.

At the end of the shift, the social norm would be for the individual to be “born into a framework in which they are guaranteed a share in possession of communal land [and/or access to the community workshops] and are offered social safety net protections in the event of illness or old age, in return for observance of communally defined social obligations.”²⁶ In this, they would be a return to many of the features of early human communities (hunter-gatherer, horticultural, etc.) founded on sense of common blood ties whether real or mythical, bonds of reciprocity, etc. As Murray Bookchin describes their features:

complete parity or equality between individuals, age-groups and sexes; usufruct and later reciprocity; the avoidance of coercion in dealing with internal affairs; and finally, what Radin calls the “irreducible minimum” — the “inalienable right” (in Radin’s words) of every individual in the community “to food, shelter and clothing”

²⁶ Kevin Carson, *The Desktop Regulatory State: The Countervailing Power of Individuals and Networks* (Center for a Stateless Society, 2016), p. 320.

irrespective of the amount of work contributed by the individual to the acquisition of the means of life.²⁷

Economically, such primary units would function as integrated village economies of intensive horticulture and high-tech micro-manufacturing, much like — as I mentioned above — Kropotkin described in *Fields, Factories, and Workshops*.

Eric Hunting echoes this vision of hollowed-out states, with people turning to relocalized production and community sharing economies, in *Solarpunk*. Here are some passages in which he describes the lifestyle of the early and mid-Solarpunk Era:

Increasingly, we can no longer count on ‘the system’, the authorities, our political leaders, and their institutions to do the right things in a crisis or maintain the essential social contract all government and the market economy represent. Upper levels of government are becoming decrepit and dysfunctional, corrupted by corporate influence and afflicted by an endemic cultural nihilism. Increasingly, we see certain demographic groups, certain communities, abandoned and betrayed by government and corporate/finance interests in times of crisis — often of those institutions’ own making. That’s the basic story of Flint Michigan. And it’s happening to a growing number of communities around the globe. With increasing frequency of environmental disasters and economic disruptions, this can only get worse....

In response we see some towns and cities assuming more local responsibility for their critical needs. They adopt open source software when they realize the exploitation and unreliability inherent to branded software. They develop municipal/cooperative telecommunications and power when corporate services turn into exploitative hegemonies. They cultivate urban farming in response to the often racially-motivated abandonment of poor communities by large corporate supermarket chains. They adopt local scrips — local money — to encourage patronage of locally-owned business and try to prevent that economic extraction by outside interests. And most recently, they are beginning to cultivate the local use of the new technologies of production in the hopes of encouraging more reliance on locally-made goods rather than those of extractive, distant, corporations. The envelope of ‘municipal utility’ is expanding in people’s minds to cover more of what our lifestyles depend on. This is the beginning of the Global Resilience Movement, though it still remains small in proportion to the emerging threats. There’s resistance, of course, but the trend persists because the ‘system’, at a fundamental level, simply isn’t doing its job anymore and people don’t just lay-down and die when that happens. They find another way.

And with this increasing local-reliance, be it on the household level, the community/neighborhood level, or regional networks of communities, will come the realization of an increasing economic and political autonomy and a waning of the upper levels of state authority — starved as it will soon be of tax revenue as the middle-class hollows-out and after the huge expenses of futile Global Warming abatement projects.

²⁷ Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Palo Alto: Cheshire Books, 1982), p. 56.

Grandiose sea level abatement projects, intended to preserve the wealthiest or most politically important cities and their historic landmarks (and invariably planned far too late...), have generally turned into boondoggles and broken the backs of regional or national economies. The insurance industry has abandoned whole states or geographic regions, triggering real estate market collapse and general economic failure. Poorer communities are increasingly abandoned by their government to their growing spectrum of problems. There are shortages and infrastructure failures. Mass protests, riots, and looting. Violent crackdowns by increasingly desperate authorities. Mass migrations inland and northward. New settlements — with and without authorization — emerge in unlikely places, some created by the displaced and poor, some by militarized gangs, others by Survivalists and eco-activists, others by followers of crazed demagogues, religious fanatics, some fortress-like enclaves of the wealthy. Some communities turn into antagonistic armed camps, but often illicit a violent response from what remains of national militaries — their armories shrinking but deep. All sorts of community ‘movements’ are ascendent in the wake of waning central/upper authority.

...Land is being reconsolidated into regional commons and individual land ownership is slowly disappearing in most places, replaced by Georgist property models after real estate markets collapsed. No mass confiscation of property was ever needed, except in places deemed uninhabitable due to climate impacts. Once the real estate market collapsed, there was no point to hoarding it. No money to be made when there’s no money to be had...

...These interventionists would be highly skilled in approaches to adaptive reuse of existing older buildings, with this dominating the architectural aesthetic of the time. Much as obsolete urban industrial buildings saw adaptation by a generation of artists and hipsters with the ‘lofting’ movement of the past, we would expect a similar fate for today’s office buildings, corporate and light industrial ‘parks’, and retail structures.... We can imagine them transformed by clever retrofit into eclectic self-contained communities akin to Hans Widmer’s Bolos.... We would also anticipate the growth in temporary or accidental settlements compelled by the forced migration of populations due to Global Warming impacts. Here a ‘nomadic’ approach to architecture would be the convention with the immediate demand for basic shelter, sometimes made with makeshift and recycled/upcycled elements like shipping containers, container shelter frames, and upcycled old vehicles, that transition over time to more permanent habitation should such ‘camps’ be allowed or compelled to remain persistent.²⁸

²⁸ Eric Hunting. Solarpunk: Post-Industrial Design and Aesthetics (July 2020) <<https://medium.com/@erichunting/solarpunk-post-industrial-design-and-aesthetics-1ecb350c28b6>>.

William Irwin Thompson envisioned post-capitalist village economies — “metaindustrial villages” — as recapitulating the four stages of human economic history (paleolithic hunter-gatherer, horticultural, industrial and cybernetic) in a higher synthesis based on post-scarcity technology.

DECENTRALIZATION of cities and the miniaturization of technology will alter the center-periphery dialectic of traditional civilization and make a whole new cultural level possible. What will take place in the metaindustrial village will be that the four classical economies of human history, hunting and gathering, agriculture, industry, and cybernetics, will all be recapitulated within a single deme. We will look back to where we have been in history, gather up all the old economies, and then turn on the spiral in a new direction.

The hunting and gathering economy could focus on the gathering of wood, wind, and sun. In a way, the work of the New Alchemy Institute is to create a food and energy base for a small tribal band of people living in isolated circumstances.... New Alchemy is not a civilized strategy; it is not going to feed the huddled masses of New York and Calcutta; it either will be co-opted and absorbed by conglomerate NASA as the ecology of a space colony or will enable small groups to live in dispersed settlements — or both.

The agricultural economy of the metaindustrial village would focus on organic gardening and the replacing of fossil-fuel agribusiness with natural cycles in the food chain. Since the shift from gardening to field tillage with the plow originally displaced women from food production, the return to ecologically sophisticated gardening enables women to return to take up significant roles in the economy of the village, and thus to overcome the sexual alienation characteristic of industrial society.

The third economy of the community would be industrial, and this is where I part company with many critics of contemporary culture. The metaindustrial village is not anti-industrial and Luddite; there will be industry and technology, but they will be brought down to scale as workshops in converted barns. A village could produce artistically beautiful glass bottles which could be kept as art objects or reused as containers in place of plastics. Or the village could produce bicycles, clothing, rotary tillers, or other well-crafted and durable instruments. In a return to the mystery of the craft guild, particular communities could focus on the revival of particular crafts and industries. Whatever the industry chosen, the scale of the operation would be small, in harmony with the ecosystem of the region, and devoted more to a local market than an international one.

The fourth economy of the community would be postindustrial, or cybernetic. The characteristic feature of a postindustrial economy is the emphasis on research and development and education. Since the entire village would be a contemplative educational community..., the adventure of consciousness would be more basic to the way of life than patterns of consumption. Everyone living in the community would be involved in an experiential approach to education, from contemplative birth... to contemplative death.... And at the various stages of life in between, the entire community would function as a college, in which children and adults would work to-

gether in gardening, construction, ecological research, crafts, and classes in all fields of knowledge.²⁹

In many ways, all this is a recapitulation of the pre-capitalist past, on a higher post-capitalist technological level. William Morris and Pyotr Kropotkin, apostles of the decentralizing potential of electrical power, were both inspired by an idealized vision of the late medieval towns.

The separation of the household from the locus of economic production largely paralleled the separation of the producing classes from the means of production.

In the medieval commune, the workshop was a home: it was the locus not only of highly individualized technical activities, but also... of complex personal and cultural responsibilities. With the emergence of the factory, home and work place are separated. The factory is a place to which the worker goes in order to expend his human powers — powers that are steadily degraded to the degree that they are abstracted and quantified as mere “work time” — in the service of increasingly anonymous owners and administrators....

...The guild, which unites homes that are also workshops, imparts a distinctly domestic character to the commune: it turns the city into a home, into an authentic human community that graduates personal affiliations and responsibilities to a social level.

...The factory requires the separation of the small, independent producer from the means of production....³⁰

Compare this to the high-tech craft shops in Emilia-Romagna, which have once again become integrated with the home: the upper floors of the factory are living quarters.

And the reintegration of food production into urban life — cities and towns largely self-sufficient in fruits and vegetables and small livestock, owing to rooftop and empty lot gardening and a shift to edible landscaping, and supported by cereal grains and other staple field crops in an immediately surrounding belt — is very much a return to older and in many ways more efficient models. As Bookchin noted, “the immense development of industry over the past century has created a remarkable opportunity for bringing land and city into a rational and ecological synthesis. The two could be blended into an artistic unity that would open a new vision of the human and natural experience.”³¹

And in fact there has been a renaissance of the urban village model around the world as an actual practice. As Amanda Abrams explains, “urban village” refers both to communities with mixed-use design, and to the relationships between the people living in them.

Search for “urban village” online and many of the entries that come up will refer to an urban planning concept of residences clustered near shops and offices. In the U.S. in particular, it’s a fairly new idea that focuses on neighborhood design. But an

²⁹ William Irwin Thompson, *Darkness and Scattered Light*, quoted in “Meta-Industrial Villages: what happens after the miniaturisation of technology?” P2P Foundation Blog, April 18, 2015 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/meta-industrial-villages-what-happens-after-the-miniaturisation-of-technology/2015/04/18>>.

³⁰ Murray Bookchin, *The Limits of the City* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 51–53.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

urban village is traditionally much more than a physical space. It's a network of relationships; a community of interrelated people. Similarly, a true urban village isn't just a real estate grid and the marketplace exchanges that occur there. Among those who focus on sharing and the commons, it's a term that refers to a collaborative way of life — a relatively small, place-based urban community where people cooperate to meet one another's many needs, be they residential, economic, governmental, or social. In the process, they wind up transforming their own experience of that community.

And these kinds of urban villages are on the rise around the world, especially throughout northern Europe. Metropolises like Berlin and Copenhagen host do-it-yourself communities like Holzmarkt and the long-running Christiania. Israel is seeing a growth in urban kibbutzim. In South Korea, Seoul is aiming to establish "sharing villages" throughout the city. While ecovillages and intentional communities are still more popular in rural areas, where agriculture plays a key role, urban villages are seen by their proponents as a natural and obvious antidote to the problems of climate change, economic inequality, and social isolation....

While cohousing complexes may qualify, an urban village doesn't have to be a physical space that's built from the ground up. It can simply be a concept and an activity that's overlaid on an existing urban community — a much faster process than the seven years the average cohousing project requires to come to fruition.³²

There is a great deal of potential in the retrofitting suggested in the second paragraph of the above quote. Unlike James Kunstler who envisions split-level ranch homes and shopping districts decaying in the abandoned suburbs post-Peak Oil, I believe such areas can be modified fairly quickly into real, mixed-use communities in the face of strong incentives to do so. Given the availability of cheap tabletop machinery, intensive gardening techniques, household baking, brewing, and sewing equipment, and the like, turning a cul de sac into a productive economy of small workshops, edible landscaping, home-based micro-enterprises and neighborhood bazaars is entirely feasible. Likewise, it's easy enough to imagine a former shopping mall filled not only with small shops but residential quarters and workshops, the parking lot covered with raised beds and fruit trees, and the roof with solar panels, rainwater harvesting, and more garden beds.

Solidarity Economy in Brazilian Favelas. This is one of the most relevant examples for our purpose, because it involves some of the most impoverished people in the Global South, improving housing and infrastructure and bootstrapping a subsistence economy with decentralized technologies out of material necessity. In this regard, they are a case study of how people in a variety of contexts will develop commons-based economies to support themselves, not as a lifestyle choice, but because the corporate and state support infrastructures they depended on have collapsed.

In the face of public neglect, favela residents are expert at doing things for themselves, many times coming together to do so collectively....

³² Amanda Abrams, "Why 'urban villages' are on the rise around the world," Shareable, February 1, 2018 <<https://www.shareable.net/why-urban-villages-are-on-the-rise-around-the-world/>>.

There are many examples of this in both consumption and labor: favelas have been practicing collective consumerism since their inception (and well before the “sharing economy” was trendy); favelas come together in *mutirão* collective work sessions for infrastructure upgrades, such as building sewerage systems or cleaning up abandoned lots; and *favelados* (favela residents) have come together in work collectives, such as the baking and skills sharing collective Mangarfo....

These grassroots collective economic practices are all examples of the “solidarity economy” that exists in favelas and in other communities all over Brazil and the world. Solidarity economy has many definitions but, most broadly, is both an umbrella term and a movement that seeks to promote alternative economic structures based on collective ownership and horizontal management instead of private ownership and hierarchical management. Such structures include community banks, credit unions, family agriculture, cooperative housing, barter clubs, consumer cooperatives, and worker cooperatives or collectives, most well-known in Brazil in the industries of recycling and crafts. The goal is to decentralize wealth, root wealth in communities, and financially and politically empower stakeholders participating in these structures toward another, more just, economy....

As Brazil’s former National Secretary of Solidarity Economy, Paul Singer..., said in a public assembly in Porto Alegre [in 2016]: Solidarity economy is predominantly “spread by women, young people, the unemployed — by all of the victims of capitalism.”³³

If there’s a test case for the argument that cheap, ephemeral production technologies (small-scale manufacturing with open-source tabletop CNC tools, DIY Bio, high-yield intensive horticulture, etc.) can enable economic bootstrapping on small amounts of capital, and enable secession or “Exodus” from capitalism by reducing capital intensiveness of production, it will be in such communities.

Secession of the Commoners vs. Accelerationism. From the perspective of the individual household in the near to medium term the main question will be how to survive now in the face of under-/unemployment. And that means a radical shift to self-provisioning. In the medium-term, the closest approach to abundance from the subjective standpoint of a household will not be the availability of goods approaching “zero marginal cost” via automated supply chains and the “Internet of Things” (as envisioned by Jeremy Rifkin, the left-accelerationists and others). It will be, rather, an updated version of Borsodi’s import-substitution and Vinay Gupta’s “buying out at the bottom” (i.e. taking advantage of the possibilities of ultra-efficient, ephemeral technology for supporting a comfortable lifestyle by doing more with the waste byproducts of capitalism than capitalism could do with the original resource inputs), to engage in direct production for use outside the wage economy.

The biggest failure of accelerationism is its assumption that capitalism’s path of globalization is efficient and just needs to be socialized and taken to its logical conclusion, instead of seceded from. Automated global supply chains and the Internet of Things may well be part of the final

³³ Anna Cash, “Solidarity Economy Part I: Cooperative Development in Rio and Beyond,” *Shareable*, Jan. 10, 2017 <<http://www.shareable.net/blog/solidarity-economy-part-i-cooperative-development-in-rio-and-beyond>>.

post-scarcity package, but only for those goods that can genuinely be produced more efficiently for large market areas than in Kropotkinian/Borsodian agro-industrial villages.

And perhaps more importantly, the hypothetical timelines for the accelerationist and secessionist scenarios are mostly incompatible. The same economic forces that drive growing under-employment and necessitate shift to self-provisioning as a matter of survival — Peak Oil, falling direct rate of profit, economic volatility, falling aggregate demand and idle capacity — are likely to simultaneously drive economic relocalization and the shortening of industrial supply and distribution chains.

II. Municipalism: The City as Commons and Platform

If the building blocks of commons-based societies are appearing at a time when the commons are most needed for survival, these trends are coming together most significantly at the municipal level in particular. Resurrected forms of the pre-modern natural resource commons, modern commons for mutual aid and social reproduction functions, and most recently the new information commons, are all becoming intertwined into larger systems.

And as right-wing authoritarian governments proliferate across the West, and even nominally leftist national governments fall victim to blackmail by global neoliberal forces, the municipal level offers the most hope for fundamental institutional change.

The election of Trump has not occurred in a vacuum. Across the West, we are witnessing a wholesale breakdown of the existing political order; the neoliberal project is broken, the center-left is vanishing, and the old left is at a loss for what to do. In many countries, it is the far right that is most successful in harnessing people's desire to regain a sense of control over their lives. Where progressives have tried to beat the right at its own game by competing on the battleground of the nation-state, they have fared extremely poorly, as recent elections and referenda across Europe have shown. Even where a progressive force has managed to win national office, as happened in Greece in 2015, the limits of this strategy have become abundantly clear, with global markets and transnational institutions quickly bullying the Syriza government into compliance.³⁴

Stacco Troncoso and Ann Marie Utratel start from Gramsci's epigram "The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters," arguing that it's the triumph of monsters like Trump and other authoritarian national leaders that seems to block the transition from a capitalist to a post-capitalist society. The answer, they say, is to bypass the national state and organize a commons-based, P2P successor society by building counter-institutions "one city at a time."

So, where is the margin for action, if change from within is effectively blocked by the structural constraints of statist politics and the electoral arena?...

³⁴ Kate Shea Baird and Steve Hughes, "America Needs A Network Of Rebel Cities To Stand Up To Trump," Popular-Resistance.org, December 17, 2016 <<https://popularresistance.org/america-needs-a-network-of-rebel-cities-to-stand-up-to-trump/>>.

Amid this increasingly bleak political landscape, affinity-based networks and communities using P2P dynamics and building commons have been taking action. Small-scale innovations in many fields are paving the way for true, sustainable resource management and grounded social cohesion. In governance, food growing, service provision, science, research and development, education, even finance and currency, these community-enabled developments demonstrate how differently our lives could be organized. Many of these place-based efforts are being documented and replicated worldwide through the Internet, in the process re-seeding the knowledge Commons from which they draw. This is done through commons enabling, aka P2P (peer-to-peer, person-to-person, people-to-people) technologies, which are gaining momentum as forces for constructive change. They enable small group dynamics at higher levels of complexity and enable the reclamation of power.

With this power, people can create innovations in production, open book accounting, and the stewardship of natural, cultural or digitally derived commons — but also in governance. Together, all of this forms the building blocks of a truly bottom-up system.³⁵

Contrast the victory of reaction and the failure of left-wing challenges at the national level — e.g. Trump’s election in the United States, Brexit and Johnson in the UK, Bolsonaro in Brazil, and the failure of Syriza’s national government in Greece — with the accomplishments of the Spanish Left at the municipal level.

In 2014, activists in the country were wrestling with a similar conundrum to their counterparts in the US today: how to harness the power of new social and political movements to transform institutional politics. For pragmatic rather than ideological reasons, they decided to start by standing in local elections; the so-called “municipalist wager.” The bet paid off; while citizen platforms led by activists from social movements won mayoralties in the largest cities across the country in May of 2015, their national allies, *Unidos Podemos*, stalled in third place at the general elections in December later that same year.

In Spain, this network of ‘rebel cities’ has been putting up some of the most effective resistance to the conservative central government. While the state is bailing out the banks, refusing to take in refugees and implementing deep cuts in public services, cities like Barcelona and Madrid are investing in the cooperative economy, declaring themselves ‘refuge cities’ and remunicipalizing public services.³⁶

The most notable example is Barcelona, as we will see below. But M15 activists have created Left governments in other Spanish cities as well, like A Coruña and Valencia, and promoted commons-based local agendas. Even in the supposedly conservative city of Madrid, the *Ahora*

³⁵ Stacco Troncoso and Ann Marie Utratel, “Commons in the time of monsters: How P2P Politics can change the world, one city at a time,” *Commons Transition*, June 5 <<http://commonstransition.org/commons-time-monsters/>>.

³⁶ Baird and Hughes, *op. cit.*

Madrid movement won control of local government.³⁷ Ahora Madrid itself was elected with a peer-produced platform:

The fact that we built a totally open platform that people could trust was one of the big draws for Ahora Madrid.... A month before the election, we thought that there was no way we could win the elections, it was totally impossible! No one knew about our party....

But we were really open, and our attitude was like, “ok, *you* take control of it! You can control the campaign, control everything. It’s *your* party, you can do whatever you want!” And that’s how we built trust, people really trusted this.... In one or two months, we had a very good shot at winning — and with no money. The money we had was raised through crowdfunding, and it wasn’t all that much either. We did it... without any of the kind of power that everybody assumes is necessary to win elections: money, the media, etc.... Common citizens who self-organized...and won!³⁸

The local citizen-based parties in Spain pursue agendas that involve turning city governments into something resembling the Partner State model discussed in previous chapters; they

are trying to transform government itself and political norms. Inspired by Occupy-style movements working from the bottom up, local municipal parties want to make all governance more transparent, horizontal, and accessible to newcomers. They want to make politics less closed and proprietary, and more of an enactment of open source principles. It’s all about keeping it real....

To devise a party that avoids hierarchical control, centralized power and celebrity-leaders, Ahora Madrid developed an open process that invites anyone to join and participate. One tool is an online proportional voting system called Dowdall — the same one used for a European singing contest, Eurovision. The system allows citizen-voters to give differently weighted points to people running for different positions in the government. The party leader cannot automatically dictate the party’s slate of candidates. This allows for a wider diversity of party leaders. Ahora Madrid’s people in city government include ecologists, political independents, traditional party people, and others. Ahora Madrid’s party program was similarly built through an open, collaborative process, said [Director of Citizen Participation Miguel] Arana. There were working groups and then Internet voting on the proposed agenda.

The city’s open-source approach to government includes citizen initiatives (when online policy proposals are backed by 1% of voters, they go to a referendum and if approved become official policy), and participatory budgeting with control over 60 million euros.³⁹

³⁷ Stacco Troncoso, “This is how people power wins an election: the story of Ahora Madrid,” P2P Foundation Blog, Dec. 29, 2016 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/this-is-how-people-power-wins-an-election-the-story-of-ahora-madrid/2016/12/29>>.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ David Bollier, “Reinventing Politics via Local Political Parties,” P2P Foundation Blog, Jan. 5, 2017 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/reinventing-politics-via-local-political-parties/2017/01/05>>.

For that matter, people in Greece are responding to the failure of Syriza by turning increasingly to local counter-institutions. In Athens, informal local movements are reclaiming public spaces like parking lots and unused municipal office buildings. For example, a former parking lot on the edge of the Exarchia community was dug up to build Navarinou Park, a community garden now administered by a committee of neighborhood residents.

“What we are witnessing is an explosion of social networks born of bottom-up initiatives,” says [architecture professor Stavros] Stavrides, who was among the activists whose spontaneous efforts stopped the lot being turned into a parking space in late 2009. “Navarinou heralded this new culture, this new spirit of people taking their lives into their own hands. They know that they can no longer expect the state to support them and through this process, they are discovering how important it is to share....”

Increasingly, local associations, resident committees, and solidarity groups are forging ties, exchanging know-how, giving shape to new concepts of co-existence, and in so doing, reshaping public space.⁴⁰

Of course, this isn’t all just a response to the disappointing performance of the Syriza government. Despite being eclipsed in visibility by the political activity of the Syriza party, commons-based economic counter-institutions were a major part of the Greek population’s way of coping with the post-2008 economic crisis, and had close ties to the Syntagma insurgency.

Hollowed out by the corrosive effects of austerity, large tracts of Athens’ inner city have become a landscape of decay that has allowed others to move in. Public buildings — from abandoned municipal offices to theatres, market places, and cafes — have been squatted and taken over.

An unofficial support network has evolved with self-managed health clinics, collective kitchens, neighborhood assemblies, community groups and language schools mushrooming. Backed by people from all walks of life, the initiatives have taken off on a wave of solidarity following the demise of the welfare state. At last count, there were over 400.

“There are initiatives scattered throughout the city that show it is not paralysed by the crisis,” Stavrides says. “And they are happening when most of us feel powerless in front of policies and decisions taken in our name.”⁴¹

The Social Cultural Centre of Vyronas, established in an abandoned municipal building by a public occupation to prevent it being “privatized,” serves “workers, the unemployed, pensioners, migrants, and youth”; “gives lessons in foreign languages, history, philosophy, tai chi, traditional dance, guitar and photography. A collective kitchen operates twice a week alongside a library and cinema.”⁴²

⁴⁰ Helena Smith, “Athens’ unofficial community initiatives offer hope after government failures,” *The Guardian*, Sept. 21, 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/sep/21/athens-unofficial-community-hope-government-failures>>.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

These initiatives take place against the backdrop of a relatively commons-friendly city government.

Giorgos Kaminis, Athens' progressive mayor, has created a municipal post that actively courts community initiatives in a bid to modernise local administration and improve the quality of life. Amalia Zepou, a former documentary-maker who holds the post as vice mayor for civil society and municipality decentralisation, has created a platform for community projects, SynAthina, where citizens exchange information, find partners, and get in touch with city hall and potential sponsors. The aim, she says, is to reinvigorate the democratic process.⁴³

Such "Rebel City" projects are the most promising avenue for resistance to neoliberal capitalism and the rising neo-fascist movements, for implementing post-capitalist alternatives, and for weathering the post-capitalist transition. Those of us in the anarchist milieu and the rest of the Left, who are interested in models for building the institutions of a successor society, should devote a great deal of attention to the role of local community as a platform for change.

Partner State, Rebel Cities, Libertarian Municipalism and Other Theoretical Models. If there is any hope of government evolving into something less statelike, it lies at the municipal level. Stacco Troncoso argues that the commons-based state is most prevalent, and most feasible, at the city level.

I think the city level is where the commons are most embedded at the moment. If you look at the experiences of Barcelona, at Seoul in Korea, at Frome in the UK or at Grenoble in France, at the Co-Bologna experiment in Italy (as well as Co-Mantova, Co-Palermo, Co-Battaglia) — these represent a poly-centric governance model where policy-making is actually done at the grassroots level. It empowers citizens' groups to make policy proposals.... Policy-making is opened up to citizen collectives, while the city becomes an enabling mechanism to realise these projects. Cities cooperate in new ways through a new translocal urban level that didn't exist before. So, for example, 40 cities worldwide have coalesced to regulate Uber and I think it would be worthwhile to actually start mapping these initiatives. The same with fighting climate change and the coalitions of cities going much further than the state level. Another level is what I call 'neo-tribes' — mostly knowledge-workers travelling around the world, working from different places, and creating this whole infrastructure of global cooperation in physical places, like co-working and fabbing. So, give that another 10–15 years and we'll have different types of transnational structures, like guilds of the Middle Ages. There are a lot of forces on the ground doing urban gardening, using fab-labs co-working, alternative currencies, community support of agriculture... These people *are there*, but I don't think they are sufficiently mobilised for political projects.⁴⁴

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Stacco Troncoso, "Finding Common Ground 6: Constructive confrontation or constructive tension – The State and the Commons," *P2P Blog*, Jan. 2, 2017 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/finding-common-ground-6-constructive-confrontation-or-constructive-tension-the-state-and-the-commons/2017/01/02>>.

David Bollier, in a talk in the Netherlands, cited Graeber's observation that the mainstream Left has no answer to bureaucracy. He suggested the commons as such an alternative, to state bureaucracy as well as to the market. Instead of the bureaucratic state, we get a model of the state as facilitator or partner, collaborating with the public rather than issuing rules.⁴⁵

The Partner State can be seen as a paradigm shift, from the state conceived as a managerial hierarchy to the state conceived as a stigmergically organized peer-network. To quote Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt:

We might also understand the decision-making capacity of the multitude in analogy with the collaborative development of computer software and the innovations of the open-source movement. Traditional, proprietary software makes it impossible for users to see the source code that shows how a program works.... When the source code is open so that anyone can see it, more of its bugs are fixed, and better programs are produced: the more eyes that see it and the more people allowed to contribute to it, the better a program it becomes.... As we noted earlier with regard to "swarm intelligence," we are more intelligent together than any one of you is alone.... One approach to understanding the democracy of the multitude, then, is an open-source society, that is, a society whose source code is revealed so that we all can work collaboratively to solve its bugs and create new, better social programs.⁴⁶

Among the Co-Cities Protocol's "design principles... for transitioning from urban commons projects to the city as a commons," LabGov includes the "Enabling State," which is

the design principle that expresses the role of the public authority or the State in the governance of the commons and identifies the characteristics of an enabling state that facilitates collective actions for the commons. As highlighted by Sheila Foster in her first study on the urban commons, the presence of the State acting as an enabling platform for collective actions might represent a key factor for the success of community projects on the urban commons.⁴⁷

The Enabling State or Partner State also has its counterpart at the neighborhood level as well:

Social and Economic Pooling is the dimension that helps understand the distinction between an urban governance scheme based on co-governance, where different neighborhood actors (i.e. public, private, knowledge, social, civic) share, co-manage, regenerate the urban commons, and an urban governance scheme based on urban pools, where the aforementioned actors coalesce to transform the neighborhoods into social and economic enabling platforms thereby creating self-standing collective institutions based on sustainable, social and solidarity, collaborative, cooperative and circular economic ventures.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ "David Bollier and the City as a Commons," P2P Foundation Blog, September 13, 2016 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/david-bollier-city-commons/2016/09/13>>.

⁴⁶ Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Multitude*, pp. 339–340.

⁴⁷ LabGov, *The Co-Cities Open Book: Transitioning from the Urban Commons to the City as a Commons* (2018), p. 8.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

As we noted in a previous chapter: regardless of the abstract nature of the state, on the concrete level it is made up of individual human beings — many of whom are amenable to working with prefigurative social movements, promoting them “within the belly of the beast” to the extent of their individual abilities. As Graeber argues:

...I have been excited by the Corbyn phenomenon because I know the people involved, and I know they’re actually serious about trying to create a synergy between people working in the system and those working outside. Syriza never was, really; they co-opted and destroyed everything they touched. Podemos seems very uneven and often very disappointing in this regard. The Corbyn and McDonnell people, by contrast, really want to see if they can do it right. And this is important because if anti-authoritarian movements actually are going to win, it can only be by creating that sort of synergy in the short to medium term — unless we’re talking about some catastrophic collapse, which of course might happen, but is nothing we can in any way bank on.

We have to figure out a way for those who want to preserve a prefigurative space where they can experiment with what a free society might actually be like — which necessarily means not having any systematic relation with political parties, funding bodies, anything like that — to actually work with those who are trying to create more modest and immediate changes within the system, which is beneficial to both of them. So one piece of advice would be: think hard about how to do this.⁴⁹

This is similar to the phenomenon Hillary Wainwright describes, where grass-roots citizens coalitions operating outside conventional political parties engage in electoral politics, but retain their quasi-official character even when elected, and retain as well their ties to movements outside the state.

I think the key feature of the present political situation is the development of movements often associated with new political parties, or, in the case of Britain for example, within and without the traditional Labour party. These movements are not just about protest and demonstrations, they reflect the alienation of citizens from the political process, including parties and the state. They reflect a process that’s gone on since 1968, which is citizens asserting themselves as knowledgeable, productive actors. The logic of alternatives created in the here and now and the refusal of existing relations, based on the presumption that things could be different, is continuing today through the environmental movement, energy cooperatives, community gardens, alternative care systems, and so on. What the commons captures is that notion of self-organisation and the creation of a material force, autonomous from the existing political sphere. And this is where the participation element comes in, based on the notion of people as knowing citizens. Citizens are alienated from the way the state treats them, as mere cogs; a statistic.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ David Graeber, “Fancy Forms of Paperwork and the Logic of Financial Violence,” *ROAR Magazine*, December 2016 <<https://roarmag.org/magazine/david-graeber-interview-debt-occupy/>>.

⁵⁰ Troncoso, “Finding Common Ground 6.”

Rob Hopkins remarked, in the specific context of Transition Town Monteveglio, on how exciting

it starts to look like when that bottom-up approach that is Transition meets an engaged, proactive local authority who are also thinking in terms of localisation and resilience. And that interface where those two things meet is really, really important and a fascinating area that's starting to emerge. How can a council best support the Transition process rather than drive it?⁵¹

Ross Beveridge and Philippe Koch argue that the municipal level of governance requires us either to redefine the features traditionally attributed to the state (so that significantly less “sovereign” or “Westphalian” entities qualify), or to blur the distinction between state and non-state at the local level. On the one hand, the various functions and components conventionally bundled together in the conception of state power are to a large extent “disaggregated” at the municipal level. On the other, the entities formally subsumed under the “state” at the local level take on an “everyday” character that overlaps both in functions and personnel with non-state social and economic institutions.

...[A] transformed local state entails opportunities for political actions that are not at hand in a context where the state preserves its sovereignty, bureaucratic domination and legitimacy either on the national or local level. Thus it should not come as a surprise that many anti-austerity struggles perceive formal politics, representative channels of interest articulation and implementation, as wanting and unproductive. Some activists aim to transform parts, nodes or processes within the local state for their own advantage. A slowly disaggregating state does not imply that political authority or the legitimacy of collective forms of governance dissolves at all scales. But it does mean that the (local) state in its institutional form is not the only, possibly not even the most important, addressee of political demands.... The vision of the local state apparent is one more embedded in urban society and more nurtured by the urban everyday, not the sole arbitrator or source of political authority. This can be read as an attempt to make the local state more hybrid in the sense of encouraging the enmeshing of local state organisations and non-state organisations grounded in urban society.

In a context where the division between state and autonomous forms of collective actions is blurred, the local state as a plane of politics becomes problematised. The idea of a new, radical municipalism can be perceived in this manner.... The local state as an organisational form of collective action remains important but only as fair [sic] as institutional logics and practices are adapted to claims for self-government and everyday needs.⁵²

⁵¹ Rob Hopkins, “In Transition 2.0: a story of resilience and hope in extraordinary times.” YouTube, Nov. 25, 2013 [transcription mine] <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFQFBmq7X84>>.

⁵² Ross Beveridge, Philippe Koch, “Contesting austerity, de-centring the state: Anti-politics and the political horizon of the urban” (August 2019). Pre-proof version of the article published with *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335526117_Contesting_austerity_de-centring_the_state_Anti-politics_and_the_political_horizon_of_the_urban>, pp. 14–15.

...The local state becomes a crucial political field of contestation against austerity programs but, at the same time, turns into the site where urban society experiments with forms of self-government and activism embedded in the everyday experiences of citizens.⁵³

Davina Cooper, similarly, conceptually breaks down the local state into a plural or even contradictory system, and renders many of its components “quotidian”:

...Alongside those who see the only “good” states as workers’ states, or states in the process of “withering away,” are those who find transformative potential even in the depths of liberal capitalist states as they uncover contradictions, inconsistencies, and plurality in state systems, logics, actors and rationalities.... Progressive actions may also be unofficial, or initiated by subordinate state actors drawing on residual or unintended resources....

...Given such variety, given also the state’s rich conceptual history, and apparent capacity for new conceptual futures, is it possible to reimagine the state in ways that displace the currently “vertical” tropes of “the state as an institution somehow ‘above’ civil society, community, and family”?.... Adopting a more pluralist, quotidian account of the state, by contrast, offers a different political strategy in which the state is embedded and enmeshed with everyday life, while also cut down to size; where the nation-state, with its histories of exclusions, dominations, exploitative extractions and claims to prestige and grandeur, is just one kind of state among others in a list that could also include guerrilla, micro, city, regional, and global states.⁵⁴

And Bertie Russell proposes, in place of “a political strategy that identifies the institution as a ‘thing’ to be captured,” instead framing the local “governing infrastructure” as “a series of processes and social relationships to be ‘hacked’ and opened outwards....”⁵⁵

In fact, it is arguably quite possible to sever the Partner State altogether from even residual forms of sovereign police power over all the individuals in a contiguous geographical area. It is possible to have an entire polycentric ecosystem of commons-based institutions with self-selected memberships, or made up of users of a particular common resource, with substantially overlapping memberships, and large minorities or even majorities of those in the same area being members of most of them. In that case adjudication or negotiation of the relationships between them will cause a body of “common law” to emerge for the system as a whole, with a substantial degree of de facto coordination over a common geographical area.

Neighborhoods and communities do not have to be subject to a single majority rule, as such, in order to have democratic governance. Neighborhood coordinating bodies as such, in a post-state society, may not include every single resident as a participant, and therefore not exercise binding authority. Their governance processes may affect only a majority, or even a plurality,

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁵⁴ Davina Cooper, “Prefiguring the State,” *Antipode*, Oct 31, 2016 <https://www.academia.edu/29589089/Prefiguring_the_state>, pp. 5–6

⁵⁵ Bertie Russell, “Beyond the Local Trap: New Municipalism and the Rise of the Fearless Cities,” *Antipode* (January 2019) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330290252_Beyond_the_Local_Trap_New_Municipalism_and_the_Rise_of_the_F>, n.p.

of residents who choose to participate in the governance bodies and abide by their decisions. But the infrastructures and resources serving a majority of those who live in a neighborhood or community may well be cooperatives or commons subject to communal governance. It is likely that the various infrastructures serving a neighborhood or community will constitute an overlapping series of bodies within that geographical area. And those bodies — governed as cooperatives, or on Ostrom’s common pool resource model — will coexist as parts of a polycentric framework, with a body of common law arising to adjudicate relations between them. This body of common law will be binding internally on the members of the associations which agree to them — thus effectively coordinating, directly or indirectly, the entire population of the area in one way or another.

Matthew Thompson uses the label “autonomist” for municipalist projects that are driven primarily by social movements and counter-institutions rather than engagement with local government. Autonomist municipalism aims “for a stateless polis of confederated cooperatives, communes and assemblies through collective self-organising, motivated by anti-statist struggles for bio-regional and cultural self-determination...”⁵⁶ As we will see in more detail later, Thompson sees Cooperation Jackson as a project that straddles the line between the autonomist approach and the more conventional political approach of Cleveland and Preston, but has steadily gravitated to the autonomist side of the line (especially since the death of Mayor Chokwe Lumumba).⁵⁷

David Harvey sees “Rebel Cities” as the primary base for struggle against capitalism, as well as the organizational core of the successor society. A model of radicalism centered on the city as a geographical base can be class -oriented, but will have to abandon the Old Left’s workerist emphasis and focus on workplace-based struggles.

When a city-wide struggle does acquire an iconic revolutionary status, as in the case of the Paris Commune of 1871, it is claimed (first by Marx, and even more emphatically by Lenin) as a “proletarian uprising” rather than as a much more complicated revolutionary movement — animated as much by the desire to reclaim the city itself from its bourgeois appropriation as by the desired liberation of workers from the travails of class oppression in the workplace. I take it as symbolic that the first two acts of the Paris Commune were to abolish night-work in the bakeries (a labor question) and to impose a moratorium on rents (an urban question). Traditional left groups can therefore on occasion take up urban-based struggles, and when they do they can often be successful even as they seek to interpret their struggle from within their traditional workerist perspective.⁵⁸

I see no reason why it should not be construed as both a class struggle and a struggle for citizenship rights in the place where working people lived. To begin with, the dynamics of class exploitation are not confined to the workplace. Whole economies of dispossession and of predatory practices... with respect to housing markets, are a case in point. These secondary forms of exploitation are primarily organized by merchants, landlords, and the financiers; and their effects are primarily felt in the living

⁵⁶ Matthew Thompson, “What’s so new about New Municipalism?” (February 2020) Forthcoming in *Progress in Human Geography* <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339018019_What%27s_so_new_about_New_Municipalism>, p. 9.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵⁸ David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to Urban Revolution* (Verso Books, 2012), pp. 120–121.

space, not in the factory. These forms of exploitation are and always have been vital to the overall dynamics of capital accumulation and the perpetuation of class power. Wage concessions to workers can, for example, be stolen back and recuperated for the capitalist class as a whole by merchant capitalists and landlords and, in contemporary conditions, even more viciously by the credit-mongers, the bankers, and the financiers. Practices of accumulation by dispossession, rental appropriations, by money- and profit-gouging, lie at the heart of many of the discontents that attach to the qualities of daily life for the mass of the population. Urban social movements typically mobilize around such questions, and they derive from the way in which the perpetuation of class power is organized around living as well as around working. Urban social movements therefore always have a class content even when they are primarily articulated in terms of rights, citizenship, and the travails of social reproduction

The fact that these discontents relate to the commodity and monetary rather than the production circuit of capital matters not one wit [sic]: indeed, it is a big theoretical advantage to reconceptualize matters thus, because it focuses attention on those aspects of capital circulation that so frequently play the nemesis to attempts at worker control in production. Since it is capital circulation as a whole that matters (rather than merely what happens in the productive circuit), what does it matter to the capitalist class as a whole whether value is extracted from the commodity and money circuits rather than from the productive circuit directly? The gap between where surplus value is produced and where it is realized is as crucial theoretically as it is practically. Value created in production may be recaptured for the capitalist class from the workers by landlords charging high rents on housing.⁵⁹

Traditional Marxist analysis plays up the vanguard role of the industrial proletariat at the expense of community institutions.

Most struggles waged by factory-based workers turn out, on inspection, to have had a much broader base. Margaret Kahn complains, for example, how left historians of labor laud the Turin Factory Councils of the early twentieth century while totally ignoring the “Houses of the People” in the community where much of the politics was shaped, and from which strong currents of logistical support flowed. E. P. Thompson depicts how the making of the English working class depended as much upon what happened in chapels and in neighborhoods as in the workplace. The local city trades councils have played a much-underestimated role in British political organization, and often anchored the militant base of a nascent Labour Party and other left organizations in particular towns and cities in ways that the national union movement often ignored. How successful would the Flint sit-down strike of 1937 have been in the United States had it not been for the masses of the unemployed and the neighborhood organizations outside the gates that unfailingly delivered their support, moral and material?

Organizing the neighborhoods has been just as important in prosecuting labor struggles, as has organizing the workplace. One of the strengths of the factory occupations

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 128–129.

in Argentina that followed on the collapse of 2001 is that the cooperatively managed factories also turned themselves into neighborhood cultural and educational centers. They built bridges between the community and the workplace. When past owners try to evict the workers or seize back the machinery, the whole populace typically turns out in solidarity with the workers to prevent such action. When UNITE HERE sought to mobilize rank-and-file hotel workers around LAX airport in Los Angeles, they relied heavily “on extensive outreach to political, religious and other community allies, building a coalition” that could counter the employers’ repressive strategies. But there is, in this, also a cautionary tale: in the British miners’ strikes of the 1970s and 1980s, the miners who lived in diffuse urbanized areas such as Nottingham were the first to cave in, while those in Northumbria, where workplace and living-place politics converged, maintained their solidarity to the end. The problem posed by circumstances of this sort will be taken up later.

To the degree that conventional workplaces are disappearing in many parts of the so-called advanced capitalist world (though not, of course, in China or Bangladesh), organizing around not only work but also around conditions in the living space, while building bridges between the two, becomes even more crucial. But it has often been so in the past. Worker-controlled consumer cooperatives offered critical support during the Seattle general strike of 1919, and when the strike collapsed militancy shifted very markedly towards the development of an elaborate and interwoven system of mainly worker-controlled consumer cooperatives.

As the lens is widened on the social milieu in which struggle is occurring, the sense of who the proletariat might be and what their aspirations and organizational strategies might be is transformed. The gender composition of oppositional politics looks very different when relations outside of the conventional factory (in both workplaces and living spaces) are brought firmly into the picture. The social dynamics of the workplace are not the same as those in the living space. On the latter terrain, distinctions based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and culture are frequently more deeply etched into the social fabric, while issues of social reproduction play a more prominent, even dominant role in the shaping of political subjectivities and consciousness.⁶⁰

Harvey points to Fletcher and Gapasin’s recommendation, in *Solidarity Divided*, that the US labor movement should organize cities as well as workplaces, and empower cross-sector urban councils. Unions must build alliances with metropolitan social blocs.⁶¹ Among the examples of city-based radicalization Harvey notes are “Red Bologna” in the 1970s,⁶² and the Water Wars of Cochabamba, Bolivia, in 2000. The latter forced out Bechtel and Suez corporations. Uprisings in El Alto, a city overlooking La Paz, subsequently forced out two neoliberal presidents in 2003 and 2005, and paved the way for the Evo Morales administration. Another uprising and occupation in Cochabamba, which forced out the conservative city administration, thwarted a right-wing attempt to oust Morales in 2007.⁶³ The political environment out of which these uprisings occurred

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 132–133.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* p. 134.

⁶² *Ibid.* p. 135.

⁶³ *Ibid.* p. 141.

in El Alto included a number of overlapping radical traditions: the neighborhood assemblies and their federal organization for the city as a whole; associations of vendors, transport workers and precarious/informal workers of all sorts; more conventional trade unions (the most important of which was the teachers' union which, like that in Oaxaca, was quite militant).⁶⁴

He goes on to speculate on how the same Rebel City model of struggle might be duplicated elsewhere.

Imagine in New York City, for example, the revival of the now largely somnolent community boards as neighborhood assemblies with budget-allocation powers, along with a merged Right to the City Alliance and Excluded Workers Congress agitating for greater equality in incomes and access to health care and housing provision, all coupled with a revitalized local Labor Council to try to rebuild the city and the sense of citizenship and social and environmental justice out of the wreckage being wrought by neoliberal corporatist urbanization....⁶⁵

Policies for a postcapitalist transition that can be adopted at the local level include a local basic income, replacing the “privatization” of public assets with commons governance, promoting collaborative forms of organization and production, and in particular promoting the data commons. In the case of Barcelona, Paul Mason has an extensive laundry list:

Suppose Barcelona did these things:

- Brand itself as a city of commons and collaborative production
- End privatisation
- Massively reduce the cost of basic services like housing, transport, education, and health so that being in the precariat became more survivable
- Build an agent-based, complex model of the economy, with real inputs, so that participatory democracy could model complex decisions
- Prefer and promote collaborative organisations over both the centralised state and the market solutions
- Institute a citizens basic income, conditional on some participation on non-profit activities
- Decree that the networked data of the population as it uses public services is non-ownable. Would capitalism collapse?

No. The desperate, frantic “survival capitalists” would go away — the rip-off consultancies; the low-wage businesses; the rent-extractors.

But you would attract the most innovative capitalists on earth, and you would make the city vastly more livable for the million-plus people who call it home.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 147–148.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 151.

⁶⁶ Paul Mason, “Postcapitalism and the City,” P2P Foundation Blog, October 12, 2016 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/postcapitalism-and-the-city/2016/10/12>>.

David Bollier argues that cities are “[o]ne of the most promising places to start building a new polity.”

In Barcelona, Bologna, Seoul, and many other cities, citizen movements based on the ideas of “the city as a commons” and of “sharing cities” are taking root. Both approaches assert the shared interests of ordinary residents over those of the usual overlords of city government — real estate developers, economic elites, “starchitects,” and urban planners. They recognize the city and its public spaces, communities and opportunities as products of commoning. A commons framing is deliberately invoked to make new moral and political claims on common resources in urban settings — and so inaugurate a self-feeding spiral of social practice and a new discourse. Citizens acting as commoners can insist on greater citizen participation not just in policymaking but in directly developing innovative projects and solutions. Network platforms can foster all of these goals.

In Bologna, for example, the city government is undertaking a landmark reconceptualization of how government might work in cooperation with citizens. Ordinary people acting as commoners are invited to enter into a “co-design process” with the city to manage public spaces, urban green zones, abandoned buildings and other urban resources. The formal legal authority for this innovation, the Bologna Regulation for the Care and Regeneration of Urban Commons, is now being emulated by other Italian cities.

City governments could augment this general approach by building new tech infrastructures that enable greater citizen engagement. For example, instead of ceding the software infrastructure for taxi service or apartment rentals to Uber, Lyft, Airbnb and other well-financed “gig economy” corporations, city governments could require the use of shared open platforms for such market activity. This could enable multiple players to compete while improving regulatory oversight of basic labor and consumer protections, and privacy protection for personal data....

Network platforms are an especially attractive way to actualize the idea of “the city as commons” because they can enact all sorts of open source principles: low barriers to participation, transparency of process, bottom-up innovation, social pressure for fair dealing and resistance to concentrated power and insider deals.

One powerful way to advance commoning in cities is through the skillful use of open data. The ubiquity of computing devices in modern life is generating vast floods of data that, if managed cooperatively, could improve city life in many creative ways. Open data systems could be used to host participatory crowdsourcing, interactive collaborations among citizens and government, and improvements in municipal services (street repairs, trash removal, transportation).

City governments (or state or federal governments, for that matter) could leverage bottom-up, interactive collaborations... by developing their own open APIs [application programming interfaces] on electronic networks — similar to those used by the iPhone and other platforms. This would enable governments to collect real-time data and make more dynamic, responsive choices “in cooperation” with its citizens.

City governments could also perform automatic oversight of regulated entities without the complexities of conventional regulation. Sensors for water or air quality, for example, could provide real-time data portraits of an airshed or watershed. By using tamper-proof data-flows from remote devices, some of the expense of in-person inspections could be avoided and the quality of enforcement improved.

The huge potential of open data networks raises important questions about governance structures, however. How should crowdsourced information be managed and governed — by proprietary companies? City governments? Citizens as commoners? As the controversial growth of Uber and Airbnb has shown, there are great risks in such power being held by a few large tech companies answerable primarily to investors. Yet very few city governments have shown leadership in using networked systems to advance public designs for public purposes. There is a need to set forth some commons-based governance alternatives because they are the most likely to align civic needs and realities with the ultimate policies and decisions.

Fortunately, there are a number of pacesetter projects experimenting along these lines. In addition to the Bologna Regulation..., the European Cultural Foundation is actively exploring the role that artistic and cultural commons can play in improving cities. The Ubiquitous Commons project is developing a prototype legal/technological toolkit to empower people to control the personal data they generate from countless devices, especially in urban contexts. The Open Referral Initiatives is developing a common technical language so that information systems can “speak” to each other and share community resource directory data. The beauty of these and other initiatives is that they invite broad participation and address immediate, practical needs while contributing to a very different paradigm of governance — one that fosters commons and commoning.⁶⁷

For both the municipality as a platform and transnational networks of municipal platforms, the primary function of the one-time state as governance institution is to legally define and enforce rights to the common. Along with this goes the infrastructural function of actively supporting and encouraging a wide variety of commons-based institutions, and promoting their coalescence into a coherent whole. The primary actors in building the new system are “ordinary people acting as householders, makers, hackers, permaculturists, citizen-scientists, cooperativists, community foresters, subsistence collectives, social mutualists, and commoners”; the municipal and federal “governments” are merely supportive.⁶⁸

Through network-based cooperation and localized grassroots projects, millions of people around the world are managing all sorts of bottom-up, self-provisioning systems. There are also many new types of citizen-actors and mobilizations seeking system change, ranging from cultural surges such as Occupy, the Arab Spring and the Las Indignadas to more durable long-term movements focused on cooperatives, degrowth, the solidarity economy, Transition Towns, relocalized economies, peer pro-

⁶⁷ David Bollier, *Transnational Republics of Commoning: Reinventing Governance Through Emergent Networking* (Friends of the Earth, 2016) <<https://www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/transnational-republics-commoning-reinventing-governance-through-emergent.pdf>>, pp. 22–25.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 26–27.

duction, and the commons. These movements are developing new visions of “development” and “progress,” as seen in the *buen vivir* ethic in Latin America, for example, or in “go local” movements in the US and Europe, and the FabLabs and makerspaces. The new models also include alternative currencies, co-operative finance and crowd equity investments to reclaim local control, transition and indigenous peoples’ initiatives to develop sustainable post-growth economies, the movement to reclaim the city as a commons, and movements to integrate social justice and inclusive ethical commitments into economic life. These movements are not only pioneering new types of collective action and provisioning, but also new legal and organizational forms. The idea of “generative ownership” as a collective enterprise is being explored by leaders of co-operative finance, community land trusts, relocalized food systems and commons-based peer production. Each is attempting to demonstrate the feasibility of various commons-based ownership structures and self-governance – and then to expand the use of such models to show that there are attractive alternatives that can mature into a new economic ecosystem.

The general approach here is to change the old by building the new. The demonstration of feasible alternatives (renewable energy, cooperativism, relocalization, etc.) is a way to shift political momentum, constitute new constituencies for system change, and assert a new moral center of gravity. To work, however, the alternatives incubated *outside* the existing system must achieve a sufficient coherence, intelligibility, scale, and functionality.

The commons can act as a shared meta-language among these highly diverse groups because the commons expresses many of the core values and priorities of many “system-change” movements. Like DNA, which is under-specified so that it can adapt to local circumstances, the commons discourse is general enough to accommodate myriad manifestations of basic values and principles. More than an intellectual framework, the commons helps make culturally legible the many social practices (“commoning”) that are often taken to be too small and inconsequential to matter – but which, taken together, constitute a different type of economy. In this fashion, the commons discourse itself has an integrative and catalytic potential to build a new type of networked polity.⁶⁹

Professor Christian Iaione (who heads the Laboratory for the Governance of Commons, or LabGov, at LUISS University) has been active in promoting the Partner State model at the municipal level. He was a primary figure in drafting Bologna’s Regulation for the Care and Regeneration of Urban Commons, adopted in 2014, which came out of LabGov’s “City as a Commons” project. “This regulation allows citizen coalitions to propose improvements to their neighborhoods, and the city to contract with citizens for key assistance. In other words, the municipality functions as an enabler giving citizens individual and collective autonomy.”

The Bologna regulation is a 30-page regulatory framework outlining how local authorities, citizens and the community at large can manage public and private spaces

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

and assets together.... As such, it's a sort of handbook for civic and public collaboration, and also a new vision for government. It reflects the strong belief that we need a cultural shift in terms of how we think about government, moving away from the Leviathan State or Welfare State toward collaborative or polycentric governance.⁷⁰

Since then dozens of Italian cities have adopted similar regulations, including the CO-Mantova project in Mantua — which Iaione was also involved in developing — “set up for citizen-based social innovation using a multi-stakeholder approach....”

CO-Mantova is a prototype of a process to run the city as a collaborative commons, i.e. a “co-city.” A co-city should be based on collaborative governance of the commons whereby urban, environmental, cultural, knowledge and digital commons are co-managed by the five actors of the collaborative/polycentric governance — social innovators (i.e. active citizens, makers, digital innovators, urban regenerators, urban innovators, etc.), public authorities, businesses, civil society organizations, knowledge institutions (i.e. schools, universities, cultural academies, etc.) — through an institutionalized public-private-citizen partnership. This partnership will give birth to a local peer-to-peer physical, digital and institutional platform with three main aims: living together (collaborative services), growing together (co-ventures), making together (co-production).

The project is supported by the local Chamber of Commerce, the City, the Province, local NGOs, young entrepreneurs, SMEs [small and medium-sized enterprises], and knowledge institutions, such as the Mantua University Foundation, and some very forward-looking local schools.

The first step was “seeding social innovation” through a collaborative call for “Culture as a Commons” to bring forth social innovators in Mantua. The second step was the co-design laboratory “Enterprises for the Commons,” an ideas camp where the seven projects from the call were cultivated and synergies created between projects and with the city. The third phase was the Governance camp, a collaborative governance prototyping stage which led to the drafting of the Collaborative Governance Pact..., the Collaboration Toolkit and the Sustainability Plan, which was presented to the public during the Festival of Cooperation on November 27th last year.

The next step is the fourth and final phase: the governance testing and modeling through the launch of a public consultation in the city on the text of the Pact and a roadshow generating interest in CO-Mantova among possible signatories belonging to the five categories of collaborative governance actors. We are also [sic] may have CO-Mantova opening up a Commons School.⁷¹

Applying the Partner State concept at the local level, we get something resembling, in some ways, Murray Bookchin's Libertarian Municipalism. But there are also major differences.

⁷⁰ “‘The City as Commons’ with Professor Christian Iaione,” *Commons Transition*, March 2, 2016 <<http://commonstransition.org/the-city-as-commons-with-professor-christian-iaione/>>.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Bookchin proposes a fairly uniform model of “municipalized economies,” in which “land and enterprises [are] placed increasingly in the custody of the community more precisely, the custody of citizens in free assemblies and their deputies in confederal councils.”⁷² Communalism

seeks to integrate the means of production into the existential life of the municipality such that every productive enterprise falls under the purview of the local assembly, which decides how it will function to meet the interests of the community as a whole.⁷³

Bookchin’s model is, in my opinion, far too monolithic — a monoculture of municipal enterprises, controlled by popular assemblies with monopolies on power in their respective neighborhoods, rather than a diverse ecosystem of commons-based projects. In contrast to the emergent, stigmergic evolutionary models celebrated by most advocates of commons-based institutions, Bookchin argues for “One Big Movement” to promote a uniform model of municipal ownership and make sure all its local iterations are on the same page.

In fact Bookchin comes across as actively hostile to stigmergic, permissionless, or polycentric governance — the variety of what he patronizingly dismisses as “communitarian” counter-institutions like “so-called alternative economic and living situations such as food cooperatives, health centers, schools, printing workshops, community centers, neighborhood farms, ‘squats,’ unconventional lifestyles, and the like.” In their place he fetishizes politics and majoritarianism as such even when agreement and permission are unnecessary, using “popular power center” and “collective power” as god terms, and envisions local economic institutions uniformly subject to popular assemblies which democratically work out a common political vision governing everything subordinate to them.⁷⁴

In this regard, despite all his criticism of the Old Left for its emphasis on centralization and hierarchy, Bookchin himself is very much in the tradition of the Old Left insofar as he lionizes organizational mass and coordination, and envisions a future society organized around a schematically imposed template rather than an organic mixture of diverse institutions. For Bookchin, the city, rather than being an emergent ecosystem made up of many different types of horizontally linked institutions, is simply a set of institutions all owned and managed by the popular assemblies. By requiring deliberation and majority votes even when agreement on common policy is unnecessary, his model effectively destroys the very basis of networked institutions’ superior agility over the dinosaur hierarchies they’re replacing.

Bookchin strawmans anarchism as somehow ignoring the middle realm between “a workaday world of everyday life that is properly social” including the home and workplace, and all the individual counter-institutions like the cooperatives and such that he lists above, on the one hand, and the state on the other. At the same time, he accuses anarchists of conflating the political realm — which amounts to what most people would call “governance” and involves the coordination of social life — with the state. But he himself conflates the middle realm of civil society, and the governance function, with the particular organizational form of the municipal assembly, and

⁷² Murray Bookchin, “Libertarian Municipalism: An Overview” (April 3, 1991). The Anarchist Library. Accessed Jan. 17, 2016 <<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/murray-bookchin-libertarian-municipalism-an-overview>>.

⁷³ Bookchin, “The Communalist Project” (2002), in Debbie Bookchin and Blair Taylor, eds., *The Next Revolution: Popular Assemblies & the Promise of Direct Democracy* (London and New York: Verso, 2015), p. 19.

⁷⁴ Bookchin, “Thoughts on Libertarian Municipalism.” Keynote speech for conference “The Politics of Social Ecology,” Plainfield, Vt., Aug. 26–29, 1999 <<http://social-ecology.org/wp/1999/08/thoughts-on-libertarian-municipalism/>>.

pretends that the only choice is between his Rosetta Stone model of popular assemblies and the atomism he attributes to the anarchists.⁷⁵ Municipal assemblies are the one, true, only possible form that coordination and governance can take; either they do it, or it doesn't get done. "Either municipalized enterprises controlled by citizens' assemblies will try to take over the economy, or capitalism will prevail in this sphere of life with a forcefulness that no mere rhetoric can diminish."⁷⁶

Contrast Bookchin's monoculture of "municipalized enterprises controlled by popular assemblies" with a polycentric governance model characterized a wide variety of overlapping commons-based institutions, cooperative enterprises, community-owned enterprises and so forth, with partially interlocking memberships and a loose "common law" of governance rules worked out horizontally between them.

A good example of this can be found in the fictional northern New England society of the 22nd century, which has emerged from the 20th century "Time of Troubles," in Roy Morrison's *Eco Civilization 2140*. Some, but nowhere near all, local economic functions in Warner, N.H. are carried out by community stakeholder cooperatives; some are socially owned rather than being municipal government property (community-based), while others are actually municipal property (town-based). The people of Warner meet as owners of Warner Community Enterprises to make business decisions for the cooperatives on the same week the annual Town Meeting is held. The dividing line between community-based and town-based is really not very sharp; some community-based cooperatives are fairly closely intertwined with town governance, while some town-based cooperatives have charters that grant them a high degree of autonomy in their operations.

And the community-based and town-based cooperatives coexist with a wide variety of other local consumer or worker cooperatives. In some cases, the municipal cooperatives or socially-owned stakeholder cooperatives have partial ownership stakes in private cooperatives.⁷⁷

Beyond institutions for pooling costs and risks and providing common access to productive resources on the retail level — like the multi-family cohousing arrangements, micro-villages and sharing institutions we looked at in the previous section — cities as a whole can provide commons infrastructures and platforms at the municipal level to support the variety of smaller projects within their bounds.

And this does not by any means have to be done under the auspices of official municipal government — even one domesticated as a Partner State. Urban-based resistance movements have a long history of providing alternative infrastructures for social support. Consider, for example, the school lunch programs, daycare centers and community patrols organized by the Black Panthers Party. Or — as David Harvey notes — the construction by Hamas and Hezbollah "of alternative urban governance structures, incorporating everything from garbage removal to social support payments and neighborhood administrations."⁷⁸

Commons-based institutions — platform cooperatives for sharing spare capacity of assets like cars and housing, community gardens, Fab Labs, community land trusts, information commons,

⁷⁵ Bookchin, "A Politics for the Twenty-First Century" (1998), in *The Next Revolution*, p. 47.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁷⁷ Roy Morrison, *Eco Civilization 2140: A Twenty-Second-Century History and Survivor's Journal* (Writer's Publishing Cooperative, Inc., 2006), pp. 15–21.

⁷⁸ Harvey, p. 117.

and community currencies — can integrate horizontally to form an interlocking, mutually supporting post-capitalist ecosystem for the city as a whole.

Bollier envisions commons-based urban economies with components like

- Creative Commons Licensing, which enables people to share and freely use creative works
- FabLabs and Makerspaces, which are new social forms for creating valuable stuff through a commons-based collaboration
- Platform Cooperatives, which create shared platforms “as an antidote to the so-called death stars” of the sharing economy
- Alternative Currencies as a way to retain some of the value created regionally as opposed to having it siphoned away
- Non-digital commons projects, including land trusts, urban agriculture and community gardens, and participatory budgeting projects which empower citizens to work with city leaders to create budget priorities.⁷⁹

[October 7, 2020]

⁷⁹ Cat Johnson, “How Can We Redesign Cities as Shared Spaces?” *Shareable*, Jan. 9, 2017 <<http://www.shareable.net/blog/how-can-we-redesign-cities-as-shared-spaces>>.

Chapter Ten: Municipalism: Local Case Studies

I. North America

Cleveland's Evergreen Initiative. The Evergreen Cooperative Initiative, according to Guy Alperovitz, is heavily influenced by the example of Mondragon,

the world's most successful large-scale cooperative effort (now employing 100,000 workers in an integrated network of more than 120 high-tech, industrial, service, construction, financial and other largely cooperatively owned businesses).¹

It was the first in a series of municipalist movements, later including the Preston Model in the UK among others, based on the "community wealth building" model promoted by Alperovitz and the Democracy Collaborative. As described by Joe Guinan and Martin O'Neill:

Community wealth-building is a local economic development strategy focused on building collaborative, inclusive, sustainable and democratically controlled local economies. Instead of traditional economic development through locational tax incentives and public-private partnerships, which wastes billions to subsidise the extraction of profit by footloose corporations with no loyalty to our local communities, community wealth-building supports democratic collective ownership of the economy through a range of models. These include worker cooperatives, community land trusts, community development financial institutions, so-called 'anchor' procurement strategies, municipal and local public enterprise, and – as it is hoped will increasingly become the case – public and community banking. Community wealth-building is economic system change, but starting at the local level.²

The project had its origins in a study trip to Mondragon sponsored by the Cleveland Foundation,³ and is described by Andrew MacLeod as "the first example of a major city trying to reproduce Mondragon."⁴ Member enterprises are expected to plow ten percent of pre-tax profits back into the development fund to finance investment in new cooperatives.

The Evergreen Cooperative Laundry, which opened in late 2009, was the first of some twenty initially projected cooperatives (most of which, as it turned out, didn't materialize). The second, Ohio Cooperative Solar, installs solar power equipment on the roofs of local government and

¹ Guy Alperovitz, Thad Williamson and Ted Howard, "The Cleveland Model," *The Nation*, February 11, 2010 <<https://www.thenation.com/article/cleveland-model/>>.

² Joe Guinan and Martin O'Neill, "From community wealth-building to system change: Local roots for economic transformation," *IPPR Progressive Review*, Spring 2019, p. 385.

³ "Cleveland Goes to Mondragon," *Owners at Work* (Winter 2008–2009), pp. 10–12 <<http://www.oeockent.org/download/cooperatives/clevelandgoesmondragonwinter0809oaw.pdf.pdf>>.

⁴ "Mondragon, Cleveland, Sacramento," *Cooperate and No One Gets Hurt*, October 10, 2009 <<https://coopgeek.wordpress.com/2009/10/10/mondragon-cleveland-sacramento/>>.

non-profit buildings). The laundry intended to market its services primarily to Cleveland-area hospitals and other healthcare institutions. A third and fourth enterprise, a cooperative greenhouse and the *Neighborhood Voice* newspaper were (as of early 2010) scheduled to open in the near future. The greenhouse was projected to produce “more than 3 million heads of fresh lettuce and nearly a million pounds of (highly profitable) basil and other herbs a year, and will almost certainly become the largest urban food-producing greenhouse in the country.”⁵ The greenhouse did, in fact, open in early 2012.⁶

Evergreen is backed by “stakeholders in the local economy, local government and universities.” In addition to marketing to the local community, the new enterprises are geared to “serving local ‘anchor institutions’ — the large hospitals and universities — that will provide a guaranteed market for a portion of their services.” The Evergreen initiative gets financing from the Cleveland Foundation and “other local foundations, banks, and the municipal government.” As of early 2010, the Evergreen Cooperative Development Fund was capitalized at \$5 million and is expected to raise \$10–12 million more.⁷

Besides the Cleveland Foundation, other important stakeholders are the Cleveland Roundtable and the Democracy Collaborative. The Roundtable is a project of Community-Wealth.org; Community-Wealth, in turn, is a project of the Democracy Collaborative at the University of Maryland, College Park. All three organizations are cooperating intensively to promote the Evergreen Cooperative Initiative.⁸

Apparently, the planned rollout of twenty enterprises was too ambitious; the initiative suffered some setbacks at the outset, trying to expand too quickly into too many areas at once before its core laundry business was operating at full capacity. It regrouped under a new CEO in 2014, and in mid-2016 a business writer described it as “emerging from its startup phase.” It still consisted of the original three core enterprises, the laundry, solar installation enterprise, and greenhouse, employing about 120 people with revenues of \$6 million.⁹

Evergreen Business Services is an incubator organization within the Evergreen umbrella that provides advice and support (including business plan reviews, feasibility studies, shared services consulting and business consulting) for new cooperative enterprises built on the model of the original three Evergreen enterprises.¹⁰

Alperovitz described it as “one of the largest and most promising experiments in cooperative economics ever attempted in the United States, with an unprecedented number of local stakeholders at the table.”¹¹

On the negative side, some observers feel the central role of conventionally structured legacy institutions as anchors or hubs has influenced the organizational style of the Evergreen cooper-

⁵ Alperovitz *et al.*

⁶ “Greenhouse,” *Evergreen Cooperatives* <<http://www.evgo.com/gcg/greenhouse/>>. Captured November 10, 2017.

⁷ Alperovitz *et al.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ David Brodwin, “Evergreen Cooperative is a Cleveland Jobs Success Story,” *US News*, July 21, 2016 <<https://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2016-07-21/evergreen-cooperative-is-a-cleveland-jobs-success-story>>.

¹⁰ “Evergreen Business Services,” *Evergreen Cooperatives* <<http://www.evgo.com/business-services/>>. Captured November 10, 2017.

¹¹ Alperovitz *et al.*

atives for the worse. Matthew Thompson describes the Cleveland model, much like Preston, as a “technocratic, think tank project.”

Although crucial local government support was eventually secured, the scheme was created by the US-based Democracy Collaborative and funded primarily by the Cleveland Foundation, one of the largest American philanthropic ‘community foundations’, endowed with \$1.8 billion. These technocratic and philanthropic origins place it outside local democratic control and arguably more in the realm of international municipalism.¹²

Laurie Charles and her friends in the Bay Area cooperative movement compared the Evergreen “community anchor” model unfavorably to what they called the Bay Area’s “sourdough” model of finance:

Financialisation increases alienation, in a Marxist sense. A self-financed cooperative, or a cooperative seeded and financially linked to local communities and other cooperatives rather than to banks and financial markets, is less burdened by the drive for primitive accumulation and growth-to-survive, and less likely to have its purpose twisted by a creeping Toyotist model of production in which its labour is dictated to it by a customer who has only signed a contract with a WSDE [worker self-directed enterprise] to make it harder for its workforce to unionise....

The Arizmendi model of finance is lauded both by radicals within NoBAWC [Network of Bay Area Worker Cooperatives] member workplaces and by supporters of the tax-funded Evergreen model, because it funded itself without the need for a bank.... Innosanto, my informant from the radical Design Action Collective in Oakland..., was a worker-owner at Inkworks, a progressive printing cooperative, before founding Design Action. He explained to me that as design technology and the demands of the industry changed, the workflow of graphic design became different to that of printing, so the cooperative split voluntarily because stopping the workflow of heavy printing for graphic design projects would have been inefficient. Innosanto and his co-founder initially wanted to finance Design Action with seed funding from Inkworks, inspired by the Arizmendi model, but due to the “inertia of an older co-op” the plan was dropped, which he told me was “one of my disappointments about it.” Fortunately the set-up costs for the enterprise were low, which meant that it was secure from being trapped by a rentier — but being seeded from another cooperative rather than private finance would have made its founding faster and more efficient, and less capital would have been extracted from it through debt....

A pleasant metaphor frequently used by Tim to promote how Arizmendi grows new cooperatives and how it helps the individual to grow is that of a sourdough culture, a metaphor with several layers. The first is literal: when a new Arizmendi bakery is opened, one of the mature bakeries provides a part of their original sourdough culture to the new one, which then “takes on a unique flavour at its new location.”

¹² Matthew Thompson. “What’s so new about New Municipalism?” (February 2020) Forthcoming in *Progress in Human Geography* <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339018019_What%27s_so_new_about_New_Municipalism>, p. 11.

This is analogous to the economic model, in which not only does the finance come from other bakeries, so too does the experience, with personnel for the new bakery being taken on to train in an existing Arizmendi with experienced worker-owners to learn both the trade and how to practice democracy on a daily basis. This intersects with the third layer; that a person joining an existing cooperative becomes, like a daily sourdough starter of flour and water, a part of the culture (what a fortunate symbol for an anthropologist to stumble upon!)....

Dave laughed when I asked his view on the sourdough metaphor..., but later confirmed much of its relevance when I asked him about his view of the Evergreen co-operatives. Aside from his concern that the board of directors is populated by CEOs from the anchor institutions and the workers' control is less than that of the clients, he pointed out that it costs the Cleveland taxpayer over a million dollars per job created by the Evergreens.

"If we had a fraction of that money we'd be able to do a lot more with it...the culture in the Bay Area is different than it is in the Mid West. We have the greatest concentration of worker cooperatives in the country, and the lowest number of professional consultants. In the Mid West you have very few worker cooperatives but they have a huge number of consultants, and centres, and think tanks, and to me it's a little bit strange because you've got all this infrastructure and nothing to show for it, while here you have a lot of co-ops and we're developing the infrastructure after the coops have been in existence rather than the other way around, and so sometimes people get excited about the Evergreen project because it's big numbers, and intellectuals like Alperovitz and Richard Wolff seem to not be as interested in us because it's not glamorous and they can't point to this giant example, rather they should point to these 250 smaller examples that have been in business for a long time. I'm concerned about creating this giant structure out of a vacuum and hoping for the best. I'd rather build in areas that already have something and put resources in areas where people have done it themselves".¹³

Aside from the high overhead, the involvement of more conventional, hierarchical legacy institutions more generally pushed the new cooperatives towards a conventional corporate or bureaucratic model.

When I brought the question to Dave he was more sceptical, partly, he said, because "I belong to an anarchist tradition" where nationalism is regarded at best with unease — part of his concern about the Evergreen model's anchor institutions is that "though some of them are public, like the university, they're run like a corporation, even if they're an industry where profit should not be the primary role...education, healthcare — it IS in the United States."¹⁴

Jackson. The Jackson Plan was a community development initiative in Jackson, Mississippi, growing out of decades of previous activism by the New Afrikan People's Organization and the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement. In the 1970s the Detroit-based Provisional Government of the

¹³ Laurie Charles, "Venture Socialism: Cooperation and the Political Economy of Hope in San Francisco." In partial fulfillment of a B.A. in anthropology (Goldsmiths, University of London), pp. 15–19.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

Republic of New Afrika, which grew out of the New Afrikan Independence Movement, purchased land to settle in Mississippi. Former Jackson mayor Chokwe Lumumba was part of that project. Its slogan was “Free the Land.”

That slogan and the idea of self-determination converge into the agrarian question as Fanon and Cabral framed it – land as the irreducible basis for a people to control their lives and take hold of society’s productive forces, alongside the need not merely for juridical ownership but political control over that land.

In 1984, Lumumba broke with the NAIM to found the New Afrikan People’s Organization, which argued land “constitutes the material basis upon which we can exercise our collective will.” It went on to establish the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (MXGM) as its wing for political action and mass work. Multiple streams then came together into Cooperation Jackson. First was the Jackson branch of the MXGM. It did base work in the area. It built up youth programs and helped hundreds of young people to make it to college....

Based on their assessment that a coherent developmental alternative and a path to reach it was needed, MXGM drafted the Jackson-Kush Plan....¹⁵

The MXGM elaborates on the more recent history of the movement of the Jackson Plan, which

is being spearheaded by the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (MXGM) and the Jackson People’s Assembly....

The Jackson Plan has many local, national and international antecedents, but it is fundamentally the brain child of the Jackson People’s Assembly. The Jackson People’s Assembly is the product of the Mississippi Disaster Relief Coalition (MSDRC) that was spearheaded by MXGM in 2005 in the wake of Hurricane Katrina’s devastation of Gulf Coast communities in Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama and Texas. Between 2006 and 2008, this coalition expanded and transformed itself into the Jackson People’s Assembly. In 2009, MXGM and the People’s Assembly were able to elect human rights lawyer and MXGM co-founder Chokwe Lumumba to the Jackson City Council representing Ward 2.¹⁶

The Three Pillars of the Plan include direct democratic People’s Assemblies and the support for progressive political candidates. But most interesting for our purposes is the third pillar,

to build a local Solidarity Economy that links with regional and national Solidarity Economy networks to advance the struggle for economic democracy.

Solidarity Economy as a concept describes a process of promoting cooperative economics that promote social solidarity, mutual aid, reciprocity, and generosity. It also

¹⁵ Max Ajl, “A Socialist Southern Strategy in Jackson,” *Viewpoint Magazine*, June 5, 2018 <<https://www.viewpointmag.com/2018/06/05/a-socialist-southern-strategy-in-jackson/>>.

¹⁶ “The Jackson Plan: A Struggle for Self-Determination, Participatory Democracy, and Economic Justice,” *Malcolm X Grassroots Movement*, July 7, 2012 <<https://mxgm.org/the-jackson-plan-a-struggle-for-self-determination-participatory-democracy-and-economic-justice/>>.

describes the horizontal and autonomously driven networking of a range of cooperative institutions that support and promote the aforementioned values ranging from worker cooperatives to informal affinity based neighborhood bartering networks.

Our conception of Solidarity Economy is inspired by the Mondragon Federation of Cooperative Enterprises based in the Basque region of Spain but also draws from the best practices and experiences of the Solidarity Economy and other alternative economic initiatives already in motion in Latin America and the United States. We are working to make these practices and experiences relevant in Jackson and to make greater links with existing cooperative institutions in the state and the region that help broaden their reach and impact on the local and regional economy. The Solidarity Economy practices and institutions that MXGM is working to build in Jackson include:

- Building a network of cooperative and mutually reinforcing enterprises and institutions, specifically worker, consumer, and housing cooperatives, and community development credit unions as the foundation of our local Solidarity Economy
- Building sustainable, Green (re)development and Green economy networks and enterprises, starting with a Green housing initiative
- Building a network of local urban farms, regional agricultural cooperatives, and farmers markets. Drawing heavily from recent experiences in Detroit, we hope to achieve food sovereignty and combat obesity and chronic health issues in the state associated with limited access to healthy foods and unhealthy food environments
- Developing local community and conservation land trusts as a primary means to begin the process of reconstructing the “Commons” in the city and region by decommodifying land and housing i, Louisiana, Alabama and Texas.
- Organizing to reconstruct and extend the Public Sector, particularly public finance of community development, to be pursued as a means of rebuilding the Public Sector to ensure there is adequate infrastructure to provide quality health care, accessible mass transportation, and decent, affordable public housing, etc.¹⁷

Cooperation Jackson’s Kali Akuno explains the background of the project’s solidarity economy vision in, among other places, the Mondragon system and Emilia-Romagna’s cooperative economy.

One of my major contributions to that plan was really incorporating the Solidarity Economy framework within it and contributing what I had studied from a deep, deep dive into a study of the Mondragon and Emilia Romangna cooperatives — as well as some of the work that was being done by that Zapatistas. So, I just really brought that to the fore and tried to incorporate that within the Jackson-Kush Plan, which

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

eventually wound up becoming a core component of debate and study within that organization. As we launched a major phase of that plan's execution in 2013 with the election of Chokwe Lamumba [sic] to Mayor of Jackson, one of the main things that we were trying to move and shift as a result of pursuing that office was changing some of the municipal policies to make it so that it would be easier for a grassroots communities, working-class communities, to actually develop cooperatives to make a contribution towards the local economy, but also to put more direct control in worker hands. Unfortunately, Chokwe died shortly after, too soon before we could really execute what we all had in mind in terms of those policies. But the plan to move forward and to try to execute that vision, that moved forward and that became Cooperation Jackson.

And as his comments on the original vision for the first Mayor Lumumba's campaign suggest, the electoral movement was intended to empower the creative work of ordinary people already engaged in building the solidarity economy — not to build it for them.

A core element that cooperatives speak to are questions of self-reliance and self-sufficiency, particularly regarding historically oppressed, exploited, and marginalized communities. In order to change that situation it has to start from within, and with the resources and the talents that you yourself possess. We've got to be very clear that there are no external saviors coming to save the day. And that our liberation is in our own hands ultimately....

Another key thing that I will say is that the solidarity economy is not something that we have to invent or parachute or convince people of. Given the vast majority of people's economic situation, if there wasn't some level of solidarity that people were practicing — particularly with their families and their extended loved ones — many people just wouldn't make it through the day or the month. You know, paying bills, eating, providing child care support to each other. There's a great deal of solidarity that already exists as an informal solidarity economy, and what we're just trying to do in many respects is to build on that foundation and move it from an informal set of practices and relationships to a more formal set of practices and relationships, and create a dynamic wherein, you know, people can exchange, trade, and barter, and still share with each other across familial relationships or just basic communal relationships. And trying to scale that up so that we can do time-banking, perhaps throughout the city in the next couple of years. We're also working on an alternative currency. You know, so this organic composition already exists in that community and our challenge is how to connect it much more explicitly to the formal piece.¹⁸

Akuno “envision[s] an entire economy of co-ops working together, and running independently from the dominant economy — co-op farms selling to co-op restaurants, co-op dry cleaners taking out loans from co-op banks.”

¹⁸ “Cooperation Jackson's Kali Akuno: ‘We're trying to build vehicles of social transformation,’” *P2P Foundation Blog*, August 27, 2008 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/cooperation-jacksons-kali-akuno-were-trying-to-build-vehicles-of-social-transformation/2018/08/27>>.

His dream is to create a “sister network” of co-ops across the globe, all working with one another to create an economy parallel to the one we live in but governed by different rules.

“It’s not just about surviving,” he emphasizes. “We want to build a new economy, a new society. In order to do that, you have to survive, but you have to also grow and reach out and change people’s minds in the process.”

Cooperation Jackson aims to become the nucleus of a worker-owned and -controlled local economy for the black population, outside the capitalist system. It currently operates an “urban farming collaborative” called Freedom Farms, and the Chokwe Lumumba Center for Economic Democracy and Development, “a community center and small-businesses incubator.” It’s currently in process of building a cafe that includes a catering business. It’s buying up land — twenty-five lots so far, with the intention of buying fifty more — in order to create a community land trust. In addition, it’s crowdfunding “a production and fabrication center — essentially a flexibly configured factory that can be used for small-time manufacturing.”¹⁹

Max Ajl elaborates on the way the various components of the solidarity economy are intended to work together:

These principles take on programmatic form in the dense network which Cooperation Jackson is trying to build. First, the local cooperatives. Second, a cooperative incubator. Third, a cooperative school and training center. And fourth, a cooperative union and bank. This last component is crucial, because capital is necessary for systematic and harmonized development. We are accustomed to thinking of capital as the monopoly of the wealthy. This has truth. But capital also exists in banks, and banks have capital in part because they have depositors. Credit unions need not use their capital for stock-market speculation or bond purchases. They could equally use it to support communities and municipalities like Jackson trying to take control of their productive future. Although, it must be noted that that [sic] such a stage can only be intermediary, given that currency itself is a tool of capitalist domination. Hence part of Cooperation Jackson’s pedagogy involves discussion and interest in alternative- or crypto-currencies, as technologies useful for breaking with that tool of control.²⁰

And as Kali Akuno explains, Cooperation Jackson’s project of building a local solidarity economy is meant to be undertaken in parallel with, and solidarity with, a number of other struggles providing political cover and creating space for each other:

Organizing is the answer [for dealing with betrayal and dismissal of the Green New Deal from centrist Democrats like Pelosi]. We have to organize a strong independent base to advance the transition program we need, be it the Green New Deal or anything similar. Without that this epic issue will be held hostage to forces seeking

¹⁹ Peter Moskowitz, “Meet the Radical Workers’ Cooperative Growing in the Heart of the Deep South,” *The Nation*, April 24, 2017 <<https://www.thenation.com/article/meet-the-radical-workers-cooperative-growing-in-the-heart-of-the-deep-south/>>.

²⁰ Ajl, “A Socialist Southern Strategy in Jackson.”

to maintain the capitalist system as is, whether it be the Democratic or Republican variety of this worldview and its articulated interests. And we have to build this base to advance two strategies at once.

One, we have to organize a mass base within the working class, particularly around the job-focused side of the just transition framework. We have to articulate a program that concretely addresses the class's immediate and medium-term need for jobs and stable income around the expansion of existing "green" industries and the development of new ones, like digital fabrication or what we call community production, that will enable a comprehensive energy and consumption transition. This will have to be a social movement first and foremost, which understands electoral politics as a tactic and not an end unto itself.

For our part, one of the critical initiatives that we as Cooperation Jackson are arguing for is the development of a broad "union-co-op" alliance that would seek to unite the three forms of the organized working-class movement in this country — i.e. the trade unions, workers' centers, and worker cooperatives — around what we call a "build and fight" program. It would seek to construct new worker-owned and self-managed enterprises rooted in sustainable methods of production on the build side and to enact various means of appropriation of the existing enterprises by their workers on the fight side, which would transition these industries into sustainable practices (or in some cases phase them out entirely). We think this is a means towards building the independence that is required to dictate the terms of the political struggle in the electoral arena.

The second strategy calls for mass civil disobedience, as we witnessed at Standing Rock. We have to recognize that the neoliberal and reactionary forces at the heart of the Democratic Party are only part of the problem. The main enemy is and will be the petrochemical transnationals. We have to weaken their ability to extract, and this entails stopping new exploration and production initiatives. This is critical because it will weaken their power, particularly their financial power, which is at the heart of their lobbying power. If we can break that, we won't have to worry about the centrists....²¹

Following the death of Chokwe Lumumba his son, also named Chokwe, was elected mayor on June 7, 2017 with 93% of the vote.²²

Matthew Thompson characterizes Cooperation Jackson, despite some municipal government involvement under both Mayors Lumumba, as an "autonomist" municipalist movement focused primarily on social and economic counter-institutions rather than on the kinds of state-centered initiatives in Cleveland and Preston. It has been

moving progressively away from engaging with the local state towards building autonomous alternatives. Activists describe their approach as 'dual power' – "build-

²¹ "It's Eco-Socialism or Death: An Interview With Kali Akuno," Jacobin, February 15, 2019 <<https://jacobinmag.com/2019/02/kali-akuno-interview-climate-change-cooperation-jackson>>.

²² Jamiles Lartey, "A revolutionary, not a liberal: can a radical black mayor bring change to Mississippi?" *The Guardian*, Sept. 11, 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/sep/11/revolutionary-not-a-liberal-radical-black-mayor-mississippi-chokwe-lumumba>>.

ing autonomous power outside of the realm of the state” in the form of popular assemblies and a “broader platform for a restoration of the ‘commons’” whilst only engaging electoral politics on a limited scale in order to build radical voting blocs and elect candidates drawn from the ranks of the assemblies themselves. Wielding the power of formal municipal institutions is a means to incubate and protect the development of a democratic solidarity economy from racist-state-capitalist incursion. Elected in 2013, the radical socialist mayor Chokwe Lumumba embodied dual power in his pledge to make Jackson the “most radical city on the planet” and to materialise Cooperation Jackson’s aim: to socialise the means of production and democratise society. Since his untimely death in 2014, and his son’s election with a weaker mandate, Cooperation Jackson has turned away from electoral politics to focus on socioeconomic autonomy and Black self-determination. Economic autonomy, ecological self-sufficiency and non-monetary exchange are being pursued through interconnected experiments in alternative currencies, time banking, food growing, renewable energy, circular waste reuse, community-owned housing, digital fabrication laboratories, makerspaces and worker-owned co-ops. The co-ops are organised as a federation democratically accountable to the community. A cooperative school provides political education; a community loan fund patient capital. All developed on land owned by a community land trust, reinvesting surpluses to create (relatively) autonomous circuits of value.²³

On the downside, Lumumba’s freedom of action has been limited by preemptive action from the Republican-controlled state government — at the same time as a growing split between Cooperation Jackson and Lumumba’s electoral arm.

...[T]wo years into his administration, the relationship between city hall and the grassroots has soured. Without an alliance with city hall, hopes of leveraging city procurement, labor law, or other aspects of municipal power to build cooperatives have diminished. The rupture has been made worse by an exodus of grassroots activists to city hall. According to Themba-Nixon, “Virtually all the organizers working on the People’s Assembly were called into service for the administration with MXGM, even recruiting organizers and staff from outside Mississippi.”

The movement is coming under pressure from the state as well. The state legislature, dominated by Republicans, maneuvers to put municipal resources that bring money into the city, such as the airport and the city zoo, under state authority...

With a city government hemmed in by state authorities and starved for cash, and a split between elected reformers and the grassroots, today Cooperation Jackson focuses on the economic self-determination aspect of the Jackson-Kush Plan. Following the cooperative model of Mondragón in Spain, it aims to create a federation of workers’ cooperatives. Cooperation Jackson operates at the same time as a vehicle for political education, and a structure enabling administrative, financial, and material solidarity.

²³ Thompson, “What’s so new about New Municipalism?” p. 10.

In a vision evocative of Afrofuturism, Cooperation Jackson hopes to help Jackson residents fabricate their own affordable housing at a “FABLAB” outfitted with 3D printers, computer numerical control machines, and other tools of what some call the fifth industrial revolution. It has also launched Freedom Farm Cooperatives, aiming to realize food sovereignty through urban farming. Cooperation Jackson is also working to buy property to create a community land trust to secure affordable housing and to prevent gentrification in West Jackson, currently one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city.

The movement in Jackson faces unrelenting pressure from the white-supremacist Mississippi power structure. The Lumumba administration itself is reckoning with the limitations of municipal power, at times caving to austerity imperatives — for example, through the regressive sales tax to pay for infrastructure improvements. And in 2018 the city ended up in the uncomfortable role of cutting off water for households that cannot pay their bills. The split between the Lumumba administration and Cooperation Jackson has weakened the movement, depriving solidarity economy initiatives of the lever of municipal government power. Cooperation Jackson is working through the difficulties of inventing new forms of social relations under the constant pressure of capitalism and racism; many obstacles to achieving the movement’s more ambitious goals remain ahead.²⁴

Akuno himself has sometimes obliquely hinted at this split:

The Jackson Plan is a major initiative in the effort to deepen democracy and build a solidarity economy. To the extent that this plan calls for a critical engagement with electoral politics, we take heed of the lesson and warning issued by Guyanese professor Walter Rodney:

‘I say this very deliberately. Not even those of us who stand on this platform can tell you that the remedy in Guyana is that a new set of people must take over from an old set of people and we will run the system better. That is no solution to the problems of Guyana. The problem is much more fundamental than that.

‘We are saying that working-class people will get justice only when they take the initiative. When they move themselves. Nobody else can give [freedom] as a gift. Someone who comes claiming to be a liberator is either deluding himself or he is trying to delude the people.... So long as we suffer from a warped concept of politics as being leadership, we’re going to be in a lot of trouble.’

We draw two lessons from this statement and the history associated with it. One, that to engage is to not be deluded about the discriminatory and hierarchal nature of the system, nor deny its proven ability to contain and absorb resistance, or to reduce radicals to managers of the status quo. We have to fight in every arena to create democratic space to allow oppressed and exploited people the freedom and autonomy to ultimately empower themselves.

²⁴ Erik Forman, Elia Gran, Sixtine van Outryve, “Socialism in More Than One City,” *Dissent*, Volume 67, Number 1 (Winter 2020), pp. 142–143

The second lesson regards leadership. MXGM believes that leadership is necessary to help stimulate, motivate, and educate struggling people, but that leaders and leadership are no substitutes for the people themselves, nor for an autonomous mass movement with distributed or horizontal leadership.²⁵

So has Cooperation Jackson as an organization:

We, Cooperation Jackson, were not largely responsible for the election of the current administration in Jackson, many of our members were part of the broad coalition that helped the administration get elected. This is critical for everyone to note and learn from in regards to understanding municipal politics and power.²⁶

And Akuno, elsewhere, expressed himself much less obliquely:

...[W]hile I disagree with many of the policy and programmatic priorities articulated by the Mayoral administration of Chokwe Antar Lumumba thus far, as well as Mayor Lumumba's increasing public alignment with the Democratic Party (particularly the so-called Bernie wing of the Party), I have a vested interest in doing all that I can to help the Lumumba administration succeed. I am committed to struggling with the administration internally where possible and externally when necessary, to stay the course of pursuing radical social transformation as articulated in the Jackson-Kush Plan.

...[O]f all the things that the J-K Plan conveys, the component of it that has far and away drawn the most attention has been its electoral component. Like it or not, this has been the primary source of inspiration engendered by this document. Given how the media is focused in this society, and how power is too often narrowly understood, this sadly is what the overwhelming majority of people focus on in reference to the radical work in Jackson. ...[T]he electoral component of the strategy was originally intended to be an adjunct component of a broader objective, which was to build a transformative, anti-colonial power from the ground up through the People's Assembly as an autonomous vehicle of self-governance that would engage in a developmental process of socialist construction by building a dynamic social and solidarity economy on the local level to create new social relations and means of production (which is the mission of Cooperation Jackson). Building a new independent political party that would engage in electoral politics, but not be bound by its pursuits, was just one component of this radical strategy....

When me and my comrade Kamau Franklin first conceived of the idea and advanced the proposal to NAPO and MXGM that Chokwe Lumumba run for mayor in 2008, our primary objective was to use the campaign to: a) gather concrete information about who and how many people in Jackson believed in and would openly support the pursuit of New Afrikan (Black) self-determination and sovereignty, and b) to use the data gathered from this social experiment to advance our base building work

²⁵ Kali Akuno, "Jackson Rising," *Red Pepper*, April 30, 2018 <<https://www.redpepper.org.uk/jackson-rising/>>.

²⁶ "Building a Solidarity Economy in Jackson, Mississippi," *Cooperation Jackson*, October 10, 2019 <<https://cooperationjackson.org/blog/2019/10/10/building-a-solidarity-economy-in-jackson-mississippi>>.

in the city (and beyond) to build power. The power we were focused on building was the enhancement of the capacity of a self-organized community to collectively exercise its will by transforming the social means to meet its material and social needs. The focus was on changing social relationships from below, by moving people to pool their resources, skills, and intellectual capacities to more effectively utilize what they have to improve their lives and to struggle to either build or appropriate the resources (land, capital, and social institutions) needed to suit this end. It should be noted, that we did not rule out the notion that Chokwe should win the election, but this was not our initial focus.

However, in the process of agreeing to pursue this course of action, comrades in the Jackson chapter (keep in mind that neither I or Kamau lived in Jackson in 2008) stated that they did not want to engage in a “symbolic action,” that they wanted to “win,” meaning actually attain the office.... Given that we had done some preliminary research on the possibility of winning an election that was favorable, I initially offered no resistance to this notion. For my part, I went along with this notion because I thought that we all agreed with the power building objectives stated above. As it turns out, we did not.... We did not agree on whether the victory was defined as building power, or winning and holding office. Or, if the answer was both/and, how would this advance the liberation of Black people within the US in the short and midterm? How would this victory support the building of the New Afrikan Nation, the decolonization of Turtle Island, and the dismantling of the US government? We moved forward on the basis of assumptions, not on the basis of concrete clarity. And moving forward on this basis is what has led us to the impasse that we find ourselves in today....

As a result of this compromise, winning elections became the primary focus of the “on the ground” work in Jackson from 2009 on. In practice this election centered focus has translated into downplaying the politics of the New Afrikan Independence Movement, limiting public discussion of the Jackson-Kush Plan, crafting a more “popular” political platform called the “people’s platform” that orientated itself towards the restitution of a welfare state as opposed to the construction of socialism, and making public overtures to appease capital expressed in statements that “Jackson is open for business” and “we want corporations to come here and get rich.” All of these moves were made to enable the candidates to become more “electable.” These actions and orientations are in contradiction with the focus and pursuits of the original campaign proposal. This development sadly repeats a time worn pattern of revolutionaries throughout the world over the past 200 + years who turn to electoral politics to allegedly transform the system from within, who along the way get transformed by the system and step by step become revisionists, reformers, and agents of neo-colonial subjugation and neo-liberal social destruction.

...For my part, I see electoral politics as a field of struggle that revolutionaries cannot ignore, given the balance of forces in society as a whole. But, I don’t think we need to give much of our limited time and energy towards this pursuit. Rather, I argue that we need to put the majority of our time and energy into building working class organizations that are focused on enhancing the productive capacities of the class in

its comprehensive composition (meaning those who are employed, under employed, structurally unemployable, those who labor in the fields, and those who labor in prison) and amassing the skills and resources to transform society and defeat the corrosive powers of capital.

...If anything, without a major course correction, the Lumumba administration is structurally poised to reenact an “American” version of the neo-liberal tragedy currently being executed and administered on the Greek people by Syriza.²⁷

The split was further dramatized by the appearance of rival People’s Assemblies in summer 2020. The original Jackson People’s Assembly was long-time governance body chaired by Rukia Lumumba, the mayor’s sister. The Jackson People’s Assembly’s vision for the future, as described by an official document, is to be incorporated into the formal policy process as an a sort of officially endorsed open government initiative. “The current Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba (allows) the development of the People’s Assembly as an autonomous structure that will eventually be an institution of government that through legislation will be an entity city government must utilize for community input and engagement in local government decision-making.” Rukia Lumumba stated that “the basis of the assembly is actually as a link between the government and the people.”

The Real People’s Assembly, on the other hand, views its relation to JPA in an adversarial light:

[Jackson finance worker Greg] Griffin said he and Jackson-based lawyer Adofo Minka, who writes columns for this newspaper, formed a coalition on June 30. “Out of that coalition, we formed the group that is called the Real People’s Assembly.”...

Minka made it clear that the RPA is designed as an alternative to the Lumumba’s approach, explicitly saying so in a document containing its resolution at the end of the meeting, which Minka shared with the Jackson Free Press.

“Ordinary people recognize that the original pretense to a movement for popular assemblies never taught commoners how to be independent from city government and to take action to govern themselves. Now the process of popular government as self-directed liberating activity is underway,” the RPA document said.

The basic concept of both people’s assemblies is a focus on gathering together to express ideas on the direction the city of Jackson should go. Both define their end-goal as some form of direct democracy, though they differ in the definition of what the term means.

For RPA, direct democracy means the people determining what will happen and taking the initiative themselves to make it so.

For JPA, the goal is to become a legal government entity through future legislation, achieving the rule of the people and changing government from within. RPA, in contrast, believes that the government cannot reform itself and that the people must replace it by direct rule.

²⁷ Kali Akuno, “Casting Light: Reflections on the Struggle to Implement the Jackson-Kush Plan, Part 1: A Response to Comrade Bruce Dixon,” *Black Agenda Report*, November 29, 2017 <<https://www.blackagendareport.com/casting-light-reflections-struggle-implement-jackson-kush-plan-part-1-response-comrade-bruce-dixon>>.

Illustrating the difference, Mayor Lumumba and his wife, Ebony, were part of the July 11 JPA meeting, attended by more than 80 people virtually. City and administration officials spoke at the Lumumba assembly, as they often do at length at the traditional people's assemblies.

RPA, on the other hand, is committed to excluding the mayor and his administration's officials. The leaders are openly critical of the mayor, with Minka often critiquing Lumumba's decisions, particularly on police violence and allowing the Jackson Police Department to work with the federal government on Project Eject.

The organizers also do not believe it is possible for the government, or those close to it, to organize a real people's assembly.

"Unlike a city council or PTA meeting, the RPA was not reported to by elite administrators or politicians, leaving a few minutes for ordinary people to express themselves and be ignored," the RPA resolution document stated. "The meeting established an overwhelming consensus that the RPA is not a place where professional politicians, police or surveillance operatives in uniform or plain clothes, are welcome...."

That is, what the newer RPA prohibits is embedded in the traditional JPA model....

"The Real People's Assembly is not associated with the Jacks [sic] People's Assembly associated with Mayor Lumumba's administration, the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement and the People's Advocacy Institute. It is an independent body that will act independent of the government and will not be subordinated to any government officials," Minka told the Jackson Free Press.

"It is looking to establish its own independent self-government so that ordinary people can arrive on their own authority and control their own political, economic, social ecology and judicial affairs within the city of Jackson...."

Minka says RPA aims to organize and place "ordinary people at the center of what we do and people being able to arrive at their own authority, instead of giving their authority to a government that is rooted in hierarchy and domination."²⁸

Probably the most realistic approach is to view the two assemblies as complementary tracks of the sort of dual strategy examined in Chapter Eight. The RPA is the primary axis of self-organization both for the task of actually constructing the new society within the shell of the old, and for orchestrating pressure on the municipal government from outside. The JPA plays a secondary role, in taking advantage of whatever limited opportunity is presented for direct participatory governance, and shifting the government in a Partner State direction through direct engagement. The important thing is to see the secondary track for what it is, and under no circumstances authorize those participating in JPA to bind those engaged in the primary action of counter-institution building in any way.

In any case the damage from this split has been mitigated by the fact that Akuno and Cooperation Jackson from the beginning saw electoral politics, not as the primary driver for implementing their vision, but as a way of opening up opportunities for initiatives undertaken from the outside.

²⁸ Kayode Crown, "Moving Jackson Forward: Opposing Visions of a People's Assembly," *Jackson Free Press*, August 5, 2020 <<https://www.jacksonfreepress.com/news/2020/aug/05/moving-jackson-forward-opposing-visions-peoples-as/>>.

So the disaffection between the electoral and social wings of the movement has not sucked the life out of the latter the way the Syriza government did the Syntagma movement in Greece.

In an inversion of the civil rights movement strategy of leveraging the federal government against local white-supremacist elites, Jackson activists see municipal government as a tactical space where their movement can gain strength. The strategy, in the words of Kali Akuno, cofounder and director of Cooperation Jackson, is to use the power of city hall to help create the base for a social and solidarity economy — by ensuring a stable market and access to capital for workers’ cooperatives through city contracts and credit unions, and by opening access to expertise, training, and other resources.²⁹

Seattle. The Neighborhood Action Coalition (NAC) was set up following Trump’s election, with a focus on protecting marginalized groups against hate crimes. Unlike the Occupy movement with its city-wide general assemblies, NAC has chapters in each city district.

Each neighborhood chapter is empowered to select its own activities and many groups have evolved through door-to-door listening campaigns. The NAC is creating new forms of encounter between citizens and city officials.

The NAC’s Nikkita Oliver, a Black Lives Matters activist, ran for mayor this year (unsuccessfully) on a platform of radical government accountability.³⁰

Portland. Portland Assembly enrolls new members in existing neighborhood associations. “They are currently working to create a citywide, pro-homeless coalition; they advocate for radical reformation of the police.” PA was in the news recently when members in Black Bloc attire obtained asphalt and fixed neglected potholes themselves.³¹

Kitchener. Inspired by ecological economist Tim Jackson, the Kitchener, Ontario economic development commissioner launched the “Make It Kitchener” campaign to “help transition Kitchener into a new economic phase.

Manufacturing was previously a main source of employment, but Kitchener lost out to Hamilton, Ontario as a primary place for investors. As the manufacturing companies closed, and the sister-city of Waterloo, Ontario began devoting immense resources into becoming a hub for tech industries, Kitchener was struggling to find its innovative place. Make It Kitchener is the city’s attempt to give citizens something new to buy into at a municipal level. The city invested in programs to reskill those that had lost their manufacturing jobs to join new employment opportunities, funded artists and makers in residence at any local business to boost local sales, paid for maker activity nights at local libraries such as repair cafes, helped support the development of local maker spaces, and began giving out up to \$20 000 CND to any group of community members that had a small project that would improve their local areas.

²⁹ Foreman *et al.*, “Socialism in More Than One City,” pp. 140–142.

³⁰ Eleanor Finley, “The New Municipal Movements,” *P2P Foundation Blog*, Sept. 26, 2017 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/the-new-municipal-movements/2017/09/26>>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Because of the city's commitment to a community-oriented, citizen empowering, and local production initiative, Kitchener is now a hub in Ontario for local economic development. The municipality saw a significant reduction in waste, revitalized the local theatre, is a hub for various kinds of start-ups (food, tech, artists), has a vibrant sharing economy with tool libraries and sharing services, and has successfully revitalized the suburbs by giving community grants. The city has also repeatedly refused to allow significant gentrification of their downtown core, rejecting a number of property-led development proposals oriented purely to return on capital investment. Kitchener is an example for how municipalities can implement maker principles to help fund citizen innovation. Kitchener is now one of the top 25 start-up ecosystems in the world and the start-up density is second only to Silicon Valley. In under 20 years, Kitchener created over 30 000 tech jobs used to improve systems across the world.³²

Montréal. In the 1960s, according to Aaron Vansintjan and Donald Cuccioletta, citizens there “started up *groupes populaires* like citizens’ committees, collective childcare, cooperative housing and businesses, community-run clinics, neighborhood food cooperatives — the first of their kind in Quebec and Canada — and political action committees.”

Residents of the Milton-Parc neighborhood organized what became the largest housing cooperative in North America. Citizens’ assemblies and tenant associations sprang up in different neighborhoods to coordinate these efforts. By the end of the 1960s, Montreal’s residents had built an ecosystem of mutual aid organizations by and for the working class.

At the same time, union leaders, recognizing the immense power coming from the *quartiers populaires* (people’s neighborhoods), began to see the need for a “second front” (*deuxième front*) beyond traditional labor organizing. In 1969, the FRAP (Political Action Front) — a coalition of grassroots municipal activists and autonomous political action committees based in the neighborhoods — formed a party and ran for city elections.

Its progress was derailed to some extent by the Quebec independence movement and a kidnapping campaign by some of its hardliners, followed by military occupation of Montréal, the arrest of many FRAP leaders, and its failure in the elections. Nevertheless a general strike of 300,000 workers organized by Quebec unions did a lot to maintain the radical tradition of the city’s neighborhoods — and politicians’ fear of it.

Through the ‘80s the expansion of the welfare state and its cooptation of autonomous social movements and institutions had done more than anything to sap the radical tradition of strength.

By the 1990s, the Quebec government had helped create a class of professional “community organizers” who spent much of their time competing for government funding, while having little incentive to help build up people-power.

³² Kaitlin Kish and Stephen Quilley, “Work, labour, and regenerative production” (draft version), in Robert Costanza, Jon D. Erickson, Ida Kubiszewski, Joshua Farley, eds., *A Research and Action Agenda for Ecological Economics* (Edward Elgar Publishing, Incorporated, May 29, 2020).

Fast forward to 2012, in the aftermath of the 2011 horizontalist movements, when the Montréal municipalist movement took on new life on the model of M15 and the post-M15 municipal movements in Spain.

...[T]he massive student strike — the Maple Spring — sought to block tuition increases imposed by the Liberal government. An estimated 250,000 students from universities and community colleges went on strike across the province. Students were organized in a leaderless horizontal confederal model. Ordinary people joined the daily protest marches and began to self-organize neighborhood-based assemblies, which briefly confederated before withering away when the movement lost its momentum.

Today, Montréal's social movements are once again turning toward radical municipalist action.

In 2018, activists opened Bâtiment 7, a huge self-run autonomous cooperative center in the working-class area of Pointe Saint-Charles, the same neighborhood where the first community health clinic was established in 1968.

Residents of Milton-Parc are organizing a series of conferences on municipalism and advancing a dual power framework. In response to the election victory of *Projet Montréal*, a “progressive” — but largely neoliberal — municipal party, radicals formed the Montreal Urban Left, an organization seeking to bring together radical municipal struggles around the city.

Throughout Montréal, there is a renewed interest in cooperative housing, and a growing movement for social housing and tenant rights, largely as a reaction to gentrification. Indeed, the housing movement is today emerging as the key struggle.³³

II. Europe

Barcelona and Other Spanish Cities. The new municipalist movement first appeared in Spain, growing out of M15's cross-pollination with several other phenomena. The M15 movement remained vibrant at the local level, both in building economic counter-institutions and in municipal politics, despite the abandonment of its occupation camps in 2011. Despite the triumph of right-wing parties at a national level, towns and cities all over Spain have elected local political movements derived from M15, and pursuing a variety of post-capitalist agendas based on cooperatives and the commons. As Stacco Troncoso and Ann Marie Utratel describe it:

In the spring of 2014, spurred on by Podemos' success in the European elections, a group of activists met in *el Patio Maravillas*, one of Madrid's most prominent occupied social centers. “We're going to win this city,” they announced. They began organizing, enabling unprecedented levels of citizen participation and facilitating a

³³ Aaron Vansintjan and Donald Cuccioletta, “The Radical History of Neighborhood Organizing in Montréal,” *ROAR Magazine* Issue #9 (Autumn 2019), <<https://roarmag.org/magazine/dual-power-then-and-now-from-the-iroquois-to-cooperation-jackson/>>.

common space for previously unaffiliated and disaggregated political actors. Anyone who agreed with the basic principles and wanted to be present could propose him or herself as a candidate on fully open and participatory electoral lists.

A month or so earlier, activists from Barcelona launched a manifesto to invite existing social movements and political organizations to converge around four fundamental objectives:

1. Guaranteeing the citizenry's basic rights and a decent life for all,
2. Fostering an economy that prioritizes social and environmental justice,
3. The participative democratization of institutions,
4. To meet an ethical commitment towards citizens.

The call for convergence was an astounding success, and Guanyem Barcelona, publicly represented by anti-eviction and right to housing campaigner Ada Colau, begins its yearlong mutation into Barcelona en Comú, an “instrumental” electoral coalition comprising a variety of actors from social movements and anti-establishment political parties working together to take back the city.

Ignored or decried in the popular media, these coalitions, much like the 15-M and Occupy encampments, replicated themselves in other locales, forming alliances and swarming around shared values and beliefs. The process was messy, effervescent and busy. No one had tried this before and there is no instruction manual; in practice, it can only be written together.

Against poll expectations, a hostile media, and entrenched political interests, these parties overwhelmingly won in Spain's main cities, not only Madrid and Barcelona, but also in Valencia, A Coruña, Zaragoza, and Cadiz. Podemos, although a participant in many of these coalitions, chose to run the regional (as opposed to the city) ballot on their own. The result? Zero victories in all the places where the citizens' coalitions had triumphed.³⁴

The outcome of the municipal elections was an unprecedented situation, according to Stefanie Ehmsen and Albert Scharenberg.

For the first time in almost 40 years of Spanish democracy, the country's major cities would no longer be ruled by either the Partido Popular (PP) or the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), or any of the other long established political forces, but by new “Municipalist Confluences” such as Ahora Madrid, Barcelona en Comú, and Cadiz Si Se Puede, to name just a few.³⁵

The municipalist victories reflected their roots in the M15 movement, according to Troncoso and Utratel:

³⁴ Stacco Troncoso and Ann Marie Utratel, “Commons in the Time of Monsters: How P2P Politics Can Change the World, One City at a Time,” *Commons Transition*, June 5, 2017 <<https://commonstransition.org/commons-time-monsters/>>.

³⁵ Stefanie Ehmsen and Albert Scharenberg “A Sea Change in the Politics of Spain (and Beyond),” Foreword to Vicente Rubio-Pueyo, *Municipalism in Spain: From Barcelona to Madrid, and Beyond*. City Series, #4 (Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, New York Office, December 2017), p. 1.

Spain's municipalist coalitions were the result of a number of movements representing changes in cultures, mindsets and relations to power. The most notable among these is 15-M and, unlike Podemos, the coalitions can be considered its true political byproducts. Prior to the 2014–2015 electoral cycle, 15-M had also developed strong transversal relations with movements around housing, public health and education and culture. Known as “*las mareas*,” or “citizen's tides,” these were characterized by self-organized protests and capacity building that, although inclusive of traditional actors such as labour unions and political parties, were truly multi-constituent in nature. For example, the public health *marea* would include healthcare professionals, patients, civil workers, health reformers, hospital staff, specific disease-focused associations and help groups, etc., as well as all supporters of the public health service. 15-M itself was also a product of already existing tendencies, with people who had been working in digital activism, free culture, de-growth, the commons and a host of other movements....

Beyond their local concerns and trans-local alliances, all the municipalist platforms have their eye on the transnational dimension in order to form a network of “Rebel Cities.”³⁶

News of Colau's election was widely accompanied by a photo from 2013 of her being hauled away by police during the occupation of a Barcelona bank that was foreclosing on homes.

Barcelona En Comú's first order of business was to fight the gentrification that was driving up rents and destroying old neighborhoods. As part of an attempt to stop outside investors and speculators from buying up local real estate for development and evicting tenants, Colau put a freeze on further construction of hotels and other tourist accommodations.

Barcelona En Comú is limited internally by the fact that it controls only 11 of 44 city council seats. At the same time, it is the political arm of a large social economy movement outside the government, and is involved not only in conventional policy initiatives but also a wide variety of quasi-official initiatives in collaboration with activists in civil society.

Besides fostering greater participation in governance, *Barcelona En Comú* hopes to fortify and expand what it calls the “commons collaborative economy” – the cooperatives, commons and neighborhood projects that comprise a remarkable 10% of the city economy through 1,300 ventures.

For example, there is the impressive Guifi.net, a broadband telecommunications network that is managed as a commons for the benefit of ordinary Internet users and small businesses. The system provides welcome competition to the giant Telefónica by providing affordable Internet access through more than 32,000 active wifi nodes.

The city is also home to Som Energia Coop, the first renewable energy coop in Catalunya. It both resells energy bought from the market and is developing its own renewable energy projects – wind turbines, solar panels, biogas plants – to produce energy for its members.

Barcelona En Comú realizes that boosting that commons collaborative economy is an act of co-creation with commoners, not a government project alone. So the city has

³⁶ Troncoso and Utratel, “Commons in the Time of Monsters.”

established new systems to open and expand new dialogues. There is a group council called BarCola, for example, which convenes leading players in the collaborative economy and commons-based peer production to assess the progress of this sector and recommend helpful policies. There is also an open meetup called Procomuns.net, and Decim.Barcelona (Decide Barcelona), a web platform for public deliberation and decision-making.

It remains to be seen how these bodies will evolve, but their clear purpose is to strengthen the commons collaborative economy as a self-aware, active sector of the city's life. The administration is exploring such ideas as how existing coops might migrate to open platforms, and what types of businesses might be good allies or supporters of the commons collaborative economy.³⁷

In March 2016 Barcelona hosted the Commons Collaborative Economies (or Procomuns) event, which was "focused on commons-oriented peer production and the collaborative economy. This event centered on producing public policy proposals and technical guidelines for building software platforms for collaborative communities...." It issued a series of 122 policy recommendations addressed both to the Barcelona municipal government and to the European Commission. It also focused on guidelines for building software platforms to support the collaborative economy.³⁸

Barcelona has taken a small step towards the Partner State model with decidim.barcelona, a public collaborative platform for making policy proposals.³⁹ Decidim ("we decide" in Catalan)

allows the public to participate directly in government as they would a form of social media, and they have had early success. The city council hosted several organizing events to decide on a strategic plan, and nearly 40,000 people and 1,500 organizations contributed 10,000 suggestions.

According to Xabier Barandiaran, a project leader, one of the functions Decidim supports is participatory budgeting, but

there are many others. Decidim makes possible almost all of them. It is only limited because we are still developing the software and developing new features. We have learned a lot. We have gathered collective intelligence from different expert citizens. All hackers, people interested in their government. We run workshops and open citizen meetings. We came out with a wider spectrum of possibilities for participatory democracy, other than participatory budgeting. There are budgeting pilots in Barcelona. But we did not put all our eggs in that basket. We felt it was more important to identify the problems to bring people together to speak about public services.⁴⁰

³⁷ David Bollier, "Barcelona's Brave Struggle to Advance the Commons," P2P Foundation Blog, Nov. 29, 2016 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/barcelonas-brave-struggle-to-advance-the-commons/2016/11/29>>.

³⁸ Ann Marie Utratel, Stacco Troncoso, "The Commons Collaborative Economy Explodes in Barcelona," Commons Transition, April 18, 2016 <<http://commonstransition.org/commons-collaborative-economy-explodes-barcelona>>.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Kevin Stark, "Barcelona's Decidim Offers Open-Source Platform for Participatory Democracy Projects," *Shareable*, Sept. 4, 2017 <<https://www.shareable.net/blog/barcelonas-decidim-offers-open-source-platform-for-participatory-democracy-projects>>.

The city also actively encourages “sharing economy” ventures on a platform cooperativist model, and is designing a collaborative economy incubator.⁴¹

Two years later, the list of their accomplishments was still more impressive.

Even though housing regulation is not city-run, Barcelona en Comú was able to put a moratorium on new hotel construction, close over 2,000 illegal tourist apartments, sanction Airbnb for illegal establishments, and even begin to expropriate landlords who keep apartments vacant. They set up a sustainable public energy company, a publicly owned dental clinic that offers affordable rates, and the city’s first municipal LGBTQ center. The city created coop businesses for migrants and refugees and is attempting to use city procurement to source from cooperatives. More recently, they enacted a measure requiring that 30 percent of new buildings be used for affordable housing and created an anti-eviction unit. The platform also continues to coordinate neighborhood assemblies and issue-based “commissions” to guide the party’s elected representatives. Currently, Barcelona en Comú has over 15,000 active participants in an online forum built to debate and vote on policies. At the party headquarters, a thermometer chart on the wall tracks the number of people active in grassroots bodies: before the 2019 election it was over 1,500.⁴²

The Barcelona en Comu success in Barcelona inspired, or was accompanied by, similar municipalist successes in a number of other Spanish cities. Unfortunately they suffered electoral setbacks in 2019 everywhere but in Cadiz, and it has emerged that the relationship between the electoral and social wings of the movements has been characterized by frictions similar to those between Cooperation Jackson and Mayor Lumumba, Syntagma and Syriza, etc.

In the case of Barcelona, the losses were caused in part by division over the Catalan independence issue. Many supporters were left feeling betrayed by Mayor Colau’s opposition. But the other municipalist party in Barcelona, CUP, also lost seats despite supporting independence. Colau has also responded to the hostility of the police unions and their barrage of scare propaganda about crime rates by attempting to appease them with tough-on-crime rhetoric. Despite the loss of seats and minority vote, Colau was able to retain the mayor’s office thanks to support from the pro-austerity Socialists — promising a further watering down of the municipalist agenda.

Colau’s attempt to steer a middle course has succeeded only in alienating people in both directions. This happened with her approach to reining in law enforcement abuses:

In the last elections, Colau promised to abolish the riot division of the city police, and in the end all she did was change their name. In effect, she pissed the cops off and mobilized them against her administration without weakening them institutionally.

One of the first campaigns the police and the media waged against the Colau administration was to manufacture a crisis with the *manteros*, undocumented immigrants primarily from sub-Saharan Africa who make their living selling goods like clothing or sunglasses in public areas without permission. The cops fanned the flames

⁴¹ Anna Bergren Miller, “Barcelona Crowdsourced its Sharing Economy Policies. Can Other Cities Do the Same?” *Shareable*, January 18, 2017 <<http://www.shareable.net/blog/barcelona-crowdsourced-its-sharing-economy-policies-can-other-cities-do-the-same>>.

⁴² Forman et al, “Socialism in More Than One City,” p. 137.

through increased harassment and the media created racist fears and annoyances around these vendors, but Colau's solution was insubstantial dialogue ending in a further crackdown on the immigrants....

Likewise with housing, her signature issue:

But as the PAH [Plataforma de Afectados por las Hipotecas — Platform of those Affected by Mortgages] grew and radicalized, it became ever more distanced from its most famous activist turned politician. Most chapters are now staunchly critical of Podemos and the municipalist governments of change it allies with. In Barcelona, the PAH is largely recognized as a fief of BComú, a fact that led the “Obra Social,” the part of the organization that occupies buildings and puts them to social use, to break away.

Meanwhile, BComú and the other governments of change get the credit for “expanding the public housing stock” when in reality, this is an achievement of the PAH and similar grassroots groups, who occupy unused buildings and fight banks tooth and nail to force them to make their repossessed properties available for housing....

A more sordid example comes in the form of Jaume Assens, “third lieutenant” to the mayor and deputy for En Comú Podem, the Podemos-BComú alliance. Before his election on Ada Colau's ticket, he was well known as one of the principal lawyers for the Barcelona squatters' movement. In his very first week upon assuming office, he was already signing eviction orders against families that needed to squat in order to get housing. The new administration, at that time, was careful not to evict social centers or squats connected to a political movement, which meant that unconnected immigrant or gitano families were the most vulnerable.

The much-vaunted agenda to “combat tourism” was actually aimed almost entirely at traditional mass-tourism, while shifting to encourage tech tourism and gentrification.

Colau has fared no better with her labor agenda: “She has engaged in strike-breaking and slander against transportation workers, as denounced by the CGT.”

Perhaps most worrisome, her party has become the vanguard of the “Smart City” model, which is the future of the capitalist city. On a world scale, Barcelona has become a leading Smart City, advancing rational and AI integration of urban management, total surveillance, and completely illusory “green” measures that have completely hoodwinked reformist sectors of the environmental movement, while also attracting additional high tech investment that is helping push out poorer city residents.

Peter Gelderloos' reflections on the lessons of this outcome are relevant to our earlier discussion of issues involved in engagement with the state, and on the need for social movements to focus primarily on their own agenda of institution-building:

Without a doubt, this latest attempt to engage in a “long march through the institutions” has been fueled by the failings of anti-institutional movements that focus

on self-organization. After all, Podemos and many of the affiliated municipal parties were not born as a co-optation of the 15M movement. Many would-be politicians tried, but the people were sick of political parties and they were armed with the historical memory of how consistently political parties had failed us in the past, so they were able to defend their rejection of parties throughout the duration of the movement.

No, these parties were born in the vacuum left behind after the 15M movement died. And it died because we were unable to elaborate our spaces of self-organization to the point where they could take on the self-organization of daily life.

They remained *political* spaces rather than *social* spaces, concerned exclusively with the organization of protests, blockades, strikes, and events. Without a doubt, protests, blockades, and strikes are important, but they are not enough to make a revolution. Even in Barcelona, where the 15M movement matured the most, leaving behind the massive, central plaza occupation — that clunky, disillusioning experiment in direct democracy — and morphed into a versatile, rhizomatic complex of dozens of neighborhood assemblies, we failed to go further.

In those neighborhood assemblies, we began to construct truly social relations, but we did not use those relations to launch practices of mutual aid and expropriation of the social wealth. In only a few cases did the assemblies link up with the housing struggle, generally leaving that to specific, single-issue groups, only occasionally did they open up the metro for free public transport, and as far as I know, never did they break merrily into supermarkets to fill up carts and share the abundance with neighbors struggling to make it to the end of the month. Rather, they focused on protests, opposition to austerity measures, and getting people in the streets, a task made difficult by our pre-existing political identities.

That is not to say that an electoral strategy is fruitless as part of the larger toolkit. But it should be treated as auxiliary, and electoral movements should be treated as allies of convenience rather than relied on significantly.

Though I am critical of municipalism as a strategy, I think it is possible to find common ground within those structures that allow people to fight for housing, to defend their neighborhoods, and to protect their livelihood, as long as such structures preserve their autonomy from the institutions of power and the electoral vagaries of a politics that is by definition bourgeois.⁴³

Catalan Integral Cooperative. The Catalan Integral Cooperative (Cooperativa Integral Catalana — CIC) was created by an assembly of local activists in Catalonia in May 2010, subsequently launching “a series of initiatives and projects around the development (at the local level) of a cooperative economy and a cooperative public system, in which basic needs like food and health care are not commodities but social goods everyone has access to.” The Indignado/M15 movement

⁴³ Peter Gelderloos, “What went wrong for the municipalists in Spain?” ROAR, July 2, 2019 <<https://roarmag.org/essays/what-went-wrong-for-the-municipalists-in-spain/>>.

in the following year, and CIC's participation in it, left the latter much stronger and swelled its membership with activists.⁴⁴

The CIC system is organized into around a dozen committees, with a functional division of labor.

For example, the Economic Management Committee... is responsible for the economic management of the cooperative, the Legal Committee is entrusted with legal matters, the IT Committee deals with the IT infrastructure and so on. In consequence of this division of labour, committees work largely autonomously from each other. To coordinate their activities, the cooperative holds assemblies..., where committee members make decisions collectively based on consensus. In line with the principles of cooperativist and anti-authoritarian organization, these assemblies serve to collectivize the managerial process, thereby ensuring its participative and inclusive character.⁴⁵

Its main objective is “nothing less than to build an alternative economy in Catalonia capable of satisfying the needs of the local community more effectively than the existing system, thereby creating the conditions for the transition to a post-capitalist mode of organization of social and economic life.”

To fulfil the purpose it has set itself, the CIC is engaged in an impressive spectrum of activities: although it was formed just seven years ago, it has already been actively involved in developing infrastructures as diverse as barter markets, a network of common stores, an alternative currency called ‘eco’, a ‘Cooperative Social Fund’ for financing community projects and a ‘basic income programme’ for remunerating its members for their work. By setting up such structures, the CIC aspires to be an organizational platform for the development of a self-sufficient economy that is autonomous from the State and the capitalist market.⁴⁶

In addition to its member cooperatives and collectives, CIC has about six hundred individual self-employed members, “who use the legal and economic ‘tools’ of the cooperative.”

They are mostly independent professionals and small producers (both individuals and collectives) who operate informally without having any legal hypostasis. In Spain, as a general rule, people who start a small business or set themselves up in private practice register with the Tax and Social Security Office as ‘autónomos’. The cost of becoming an ‘autónomo’, however, is prohibitive for a large number of people, given that they have to pay a minimum of around €250 a month. Consequently, for many, the cost of this system precludes the possibility of operating formally. To them, the CIC offers a practical solution: the CIC has set up a series of legal entities, whose legal form its self-employed members can use in order to issue invoices.

⁴⁴ George Dafermos, *The Catalan Integral Cooperative: An organizational study of a post-capitalist cooperative* (P2P Foundation and Robin Hood Coop: October 2017), pp. 6–7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Legally speaking, therefore, auto-ocupados are not members of the CIC, but members of those organizations. In exchange for this service, auto-ocupados have to pay a (minimum) membership fee of €75 every three months. Unlike ‘core members’, however, few of them tend to get involved in CIC’s organizational matters.⁴⁷

It also has around 2500 members in its local exchange network. Together with other local exchange networks in Catalonia, it

forms a crucial component of CIC’s territorial network and of the economic system that it proposes as an alternative to the dominant market.

Alongside this ecosystem of local exchange groups, CIC’s territorial and economic network encompasses the consumer groups that are responsible for the daily operation and management of twenty ‘pantries’ (the so-called ‘rebosts’) across Catalonia. These local consumer groups are connected to each other through CIC’s Catalan Supply Center (CAC), which is the CIC committee coordinating the transportation and delivery of products from the producers to the pantries....

Finally, CIC’s territorial network includes several so-called ‘autonomous projects of collective initiative’. These are basically projects in which the CIC has been involved or is collaborating with.⁴⁸

The Catalan Supply Center, formed in 2012, is entrusted with “creating a logistics network for the transportation and delivery of the products of small producers, who are ‘self-employed’ CIC members, across the entire Catalonia. In effect, it is a ‘public service’ that CIC offers to small producers and consumer-prosumer groups in Catalonia.”

The main infrastructure of the network are the so-called “rebosts,” that is, the self-managed pantries that the CIC has set up all over Catalonia – twenty of them, to be exact – which constitute the “cell” of the organizational structure of the network. Each one of them is run autonomously by a local consumer group that wishes to have access to local products as well as products made (by producers associated with the CIC) in other parts of Catalonia through the list of products provided by the CAC (which currently includes more than a thousand products). The way in which the supply chain is organized is as follows: the products go from the seventy producers that currently supply the network to the two principal rebosts in L’Arn and Villafranca and then are distributed by the CAC vans to the local rebosts, where from the local consumer groups collect them.⁴⁹

The Network of Science, Technique and Technology (XCTIT) is a committee that oversees development of tools and machines for the production facilities in the CIC cooperative network.

The driving force of XCTIT is its conviction that the machines developed by the industry are not appropriate for the needs of commons-oriented projects, which they

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p 8.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

imprison into a relation of dependence with capitalist firms. By contrast, XCTIT develops solutions – which exemplify the principles of open design, appropriate technology and the integral revolution – geared to the needs of small cooperative projects. In this way, XCTIT serves as a “vehicle” for the re-appropriation of science, technique and technology by the new cooperative movement.⁵⁰

CIC is involved in several autonomous projects of collective initiative, “cooperative projects the CIC is connected with through a relation of collaboration, solidarity and mutual aid on the basis of common values and principles.” A leading example

is Calafou, the self-proclaimed “post-capitalist colony” which settled in 2011 in the ruins of an abandoned industrial village in the Catalan county of l’Anoia, about 65km away from Barcelona.

The colony was set up with the participation of several heavily-involved CIC members with the aim of becoming a collectivist model for living and organizing the productive activities of a small community based on the principles of self-management, ecology and sustainability. At the same time, it represents an example of the form that former industrial villages could assume in a post-capitalist era.

...[A]t the moment, the colony accommodates a multitude of productive activities and community infrastructures, including a carpentry, a mechanical workshop, a botanical garden, a community kitchen, a biolab, a hacklab, a soap production lab, a professional music studio, a guest-house for visitors, a social centre with a free shop, as well as a plethora of other productive projects.

Presently, the colony, which has twenty-seven houses..., is inhabited by twenty-two people. For the collective management of housing, Calafou members have set up a housing cooperative, which grants them as tenants only the right to use the space they inhabit. In that way, as tenants do not have the right to re-sell or lease their rights of use to others, the land and the houses of the village remain the unalienable property of the housing cooperative. Thus, based on the above agreement, tenants pay €175 per month for each house....⁵¹

Ghent. Over the past decade, the commons economy has mushroomed in Ghent, growing to comprise some 500-odd commons-based projects. The projects include a community land trust promoted by the local government, numerous co-housing projects, and a thriving local food sector.⁵²

Ghent was the first city to establish a Commons Transition Plan. Michel Bauwens and Yurek Onzia of the P2P Foundations conducted a mapping project⁵³ commissioned by the city government, systematically cataloging commons assets in a shared wiki⁵⁴ “organized by major ‘pro-

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 16, 21–23.

⁵² Mai Sutton, “9 Awesome Urban Commons Projects in Ghent,” *P2P Foundation Blog*, Aug. 28, 2017 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/9-awesome-urban-commons-projects-in-ghent/2017/08/28>>.

⁵³ Such asset-mapping stages are a common part of many municipalist economic projects. See Ellen Friedman, “Mapping Our Shared Wealth: The Cartography of the Commons,” in David Bollier and Silke Helfrich, eds., *Patterns of Commoning*. The Commons Strategies Group (Amherst: Levellers Press, 2015) <<http://patternsofcommoning.org/mapping-our-shared-wealth-the-cartography-of-the-commons/>>.

⁵⁴ <<http://wiki.commonsgent/>>.

visioning’ systems, i.e. food, mobility, housing, etc.” At the same time, they held meetings to promote more interconnections between the main actors in different local economic sectors.

The Flanders region has known a tenfold increase in commons-connected citizen initiatives in the last ten years, but as in many other places, there is still too much fragmentation. We are using the commons narrative to catalyze more convergence across projects, so that they can have a systemic effect on the city ecosystem and even influence policymaking.

Among the possibilities they envision moving forward are organizing a coherent, interconnected local food system, and leveraging the collective purchasing power of local anchor institutions to promote sustainability and the commons-based economy.⁵⁵

The project also proposed new municipal institutions to promote the commons economy on a coherent, comprehensive basis. One of the most important is a City Lab “that helps people develop their proposals and prepares Commons Agreements between the city and the new initiatives, modeled after the existing Bologna Regulation on Commons.” Another is a system of support for startups, including an incubator for commons-based cooperative enterprises and a public bank.⁵⁶

Amsterdam. In the March municipal elections across the Netherlands, Amsterdam elected a progressive council dominated by the green party GroenLinks, resulting in the establishment of a left-leaning four-party coalition. Its program included a digital technologies policy that promoted what amounted to platform cooperativism. Digital technologies

should be designed and implemented around the needs of the city, as expressed by its citizens (rather than its ‘consumers’). Thus, the coalition supports the development of platform cooperatives that provide alternatives to platform monopolists like Uber, and steps up its efforts to open up city data in ways that allow for active participation.

It also had an open/participatory governance agenda and an approach to the social commons reminiscent of the Bologna regulation and its imitators.

Of particular interest is the coalition’s promise to actively support the establishment of new commons (resources that are controlled and managed by the community, for individual and collective benefit) in the areas of ‘energy transition, healthcare, and neighbourhood activities’.

Not coincidentally, the topics of ‘Democratisation’ and the ‘Digital City’ are merged together under one heading in the programme. If we want to prevent the smart city from becoming a digital dystopia, a diversified and intensified urban democratic practice is key. Citizens and communities need to have control of how measuring, tracking and profiling is being done and by who. By developing the democratic or participatory toolbox — including public debate, voting systems, having

⁵⁵ Vasilis Niaros, “First Impressions on the Commons Transition in Ghent: An Interview with Michel Bauwens,” *P2P Foundation Blog*, May 22, 2017 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/first-impressions-commons-transition-ghent-interview-michel-bauwens/2017/05/22>>.

⁵⁶ Dirk Holemans, “How New Institutions Can Bolster Ghent’s Commons Initiatives,” *Shareable*, Oct. 2, 2017 <<https://www.shareable.net/blog/how-new-institutions-can-make-ghent-a-commons-city>>.

rights to ‘challenge’ and suggest self-managed alternatives — many digital ills can be avoided. Already the city has reached out to many Amsterdam initiatives that work on democratisation, participation and stronger neighbourhoods to start working on this agenda together.⁵⁷

Local Case Studies: Frome. The local government of Frome, a town of 25,000 people in the western English county of Somerset, was taken over by the “Independents for Frome” in 2011. Peter Macfadyen, who galvanized the effort, is a member of the Labour Left with a background in the Frome branch of the Transition Towns movement as well as “working for disability charities... [and] founding an eco-friendly local undertakers.”

Although the group (named for its refusal to run under national party labels) eschews platform as a matter of principle, its politics is largely greenish and oriented towards economic relocalization — as could be guessed from the fact that Mcfadyen was previously leader of Transition Town Frome. Mcfadyen questioned local officials about the green policies they had in place — policies regarding Peak Oil, energy descent, resilience in the face of climate change, etc. — and was told “the park.” A group of equally dissatisfied locals who frequently complained about the quality of the town’s government in the pub decided to run for office on a set of principles that Mcfadyen later popularized as “Flatpack Politics” (based on Ikea’s self-assembled furniture). They won ten of seventeen seats on the town council, as well as the mayor’s office (which went to Mel Usher). In 2015 they took all seventeen seats, following Mcfadyen’s replacement of Usher as mayor the previous year. While their agenda in office — consciously inspired to a large extent by the example of Podemos in Spain — has been constrained by policies at higher echelons of government, their accomplishments have nevertheless been significant. They strengthened the local credit union, and a renewable energy cooperative and a tool library/library of things (the Share Shop). The Share Shop was the first facility of its kind in the UK, although the idea has since spread to communities all over the world and been popularized by publications like Shareable. Kate Bielby, also of the Independents, replaced Mcfadyen as mayor in 2015; he now serves as chair of the town council and head of the energy cooperative.

The Frome example, along with Mcfadyen’s book, has inspired other local efforts — mainly in Somerset, but some elsewhere in the UK.

The booklet has so far sold close to 1,000 copies, and Macfadyen is regularly in touch with similar groups of independents in such towns as Liskeard in Cornwall, Newbury in Berkshire, Bradford-on-Avon in Wiltshire, and Wells, Wedmore and Shepton Mallet, all in Somerset. Most notably, on 7 May, people who had directly followed the example set out in his text took control of two councils in very different parts of the country.

One was in Arlesey, a settlement of 5,000 people in Bedfordshire — just under 40 minutes by train from London — whose town council is now run by the Independents for Arlesey group, after they won 14 of its 15 seats. Its founders were alerted to the flatpack democracy idea via Facebook and resolved to shake up the politics of a town that had got used to uncontested elections and a council run by old-school independents. One of the prime movers was 64-year-old Chris Gravett, who says

⁵⁷ Socrates Schouten, “‘Fearless’ Amsterdam government: digital city goes social,” Medium, September 5, 2018 <https://medium.com/@soc_sch/fearless-amsterdam-government-digital-city-goes-social-86b53c1ccd8>.

that whereas the town's ancien régime was “dysfunctional,” he and his colleagues are now set on starting everything from scratch. “We’ve followed the core principles in the Flatpack Democracy book pretty closely,” he says. “We took a lot of advice from it. And I must say: the results were beyond our wildest expectations.”

In Buckfastleigh in Devon (population: 3,326), the Buckfastleigh Independents group have followed a similar path. “This isn’t an affluent community,” says the town’s new deputy mayor, Pam Barrett. “It’s a working-class town that’s been suffering from a real loss of services.” Fired up by the possibilities of localism and their experience of fighting – successfully – to keep open a library and swimming pool, she and other residents resolved to stand for town council seats that had not been contested for “20 or more years.” One of the catalysts, she says, was a box of 10 copies of the Flatpack Democracy booklet, which was brought in by one of her colleagues. “It was articulating what we were already thinking,” she says, “and it helped us take a lot of shortcuts.” On 7 May, they took they took nine of 12 seats, and started running the show.⁵⁸

Open Works (London). The Open Works project in the neighborhood of West Norwood, Lambeth, London, was a prototype system built in 2014–2015 “to discover if a high density of... micro participation activity, built into the fabric of everyday life, has the potential to aggregate and combine to achieve lasting long-term change, both for individuals and for neighbourhoods.”⁵⁹ A joint venture between the Lambeth Council and Civic Systems Lab, the Open Works team co-created

a network of 20 practical projects with 1000 local residents. These projects were inspired by ideas from across the world that offered the potential to support a new and more sustainable way to live our everyday lives.... These 20 projects created new and engaging opportunities for sharing knowledge, spaces and equipment; for families to work and play together; for bulk cooking, food growing and tree planting; for trading, making and repairing and for suppers, workshops, incubators and festivals.⁶⁰

For such projects to achieve long-term sustainability, “participation levels need to reach a threshold where sufficient direct, collective and networked effects can accumulate over time to create compound outcomes.” Preliminary estimates were that “around 10%-15% of local residents would need to be participating regularly at any one time (c. 3 times a week) for multiplier effects to be achieved.”⁶¹

The experience of Stage One, or the first year of the project, suggested

⁵⁸ John Harris, “How Flatpack Democracy beat the old parties in the People’s Republic of Frome,” *The Guardian*, May 22, 2015 <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/may/22/flatpack-democracy-peoples-republic-of-frome>>; “About Peter Mcfadyen and Independents from Frome (IfF) <<http://www.flatpackdemocracy.co.uk/about/>>.

⁵⁹ Tessy Britton et al. *Designed to Scale: Mass Participation to Build Resilient Neighbourhoods* (London: Civic Systems Lab, September 2015) <<http://www.participatorycity.org/report-the-research>>.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

that a fully developed participation ecology should consist of two levels of activity. The first level is a highly accessible and inclusive network of commons-based co-production activity built into everyday life. Building on this foundational level of mass participation in micro activities, the second level would see the development of community businesses, co-operatives and hybrid ventures through platform incubation programmes.⁶²

At the time the report on the project was written, it was entering Stage 2 (“Build complete system”), which was to be a two-year phase of evaluating the feasibility of putting the prototype into widespread operation. Stage 3 would entail “sustaining investment long term.”⁶³

From the first meetings to discuss proposals, the project was coordinated from a headquarters located in an empty shop on the high street in West Norwood. “Citizens were able to come in, propose project ideas or be inspired by ideas already put forward, and began putting them into practice on the same day with no complicated bureaucratic approval process.”⁶⁴ The platform model of supporting projects from the Headquarters “shifted the centre of gravity” and enabled a “new mutual space” to emerge for community governance.⁶⁵ Open Works projects are open-source, and are available for reference in the Project Directory.⁶⁶ The complete list includes:

1. Trade School (a knowledge exchange with barter-based payment for teaching skills)
2. Great Cook (a project for batch-cooking meals in common)
3. Potluck Suppers
4. Start Here (an incubator for young people’s projects, ventures, and businesses)
5. BeamBlock (a fitness enterprise)
6. Bzz Garage (bee-friendly neighborhood gardens and landscaping)
7. Library of Things
8. The Joinery (a platform to connect people’s under-utilized skills with work opportunities)
9. Festival of Ideas (basically a fair to promote public awareness of existing projects and to discuss projects being developed in other communities)
10. Open Orchard (edible landscaping in public places)
11. Rock Paper Scissors (collective retail space)
12. The Stitch (a sewing group and skills exchange, with shared tools and equipment)
13. Out in the Open Season (a community calendar for increasing awareness of participation opportunities in the other projects)

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 218–19.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 226

14. Civic Incubator (practical training for leaders of existing projects to promote further organizational growth and coordination between projects, as well as for people interested in starting new projects)
15. Play Works (an ecosystem of connected projects involving children)
16. Play Streets (one of the Play Works projects – temporarily stops traffic on residential streets so children can play)
17. Department of Tinkerers (another Play Works project – allows children, with adult supervision, to dismantle electrical appliances to see how they fit together, practice working with tools, etc.)
18. Collaborative Childcare (still another Play Works project)
19. Public Office (co-working spaces for freelancers in public cafes)
20. West Norwood Soup (crowdfunded dinner to raise money for community projects)⁶⁷

Preston. According to Matthew Thompson, “local authorities, think tanks and third sector organisations in the UK are adopting the new municipalist moniker to describe municipalisation of local economic circuits of value with priority placed on economic over political democracy.” And this applies particularly to Preston. The Preston model involves

generating and retaining local wealth through harnessing untapped spending powers of anchor institutions – public, non-profit organisations anchored to place with important civic functions, such as universities, housing associations and hospitals – by redirecting institutional budgets towards cooperative firms that employ local labour and produce social value locally rather than profits elsewhere. This is a strategy driven by progressive think tanks led by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) and the Democracy Collaborative, whose ‘community wealth building’ approach contrasts with more radical municipalisms. In a recent report, *New Municipalism in London*, CLES (2019) names Preston alongside Barcelona and Jackson as exemplars of new municipalism before exploring the contributions of three London Boroughs (Camden, Islington, Hackney) to what CLES characterises as an embryonic new municipalist movement in the UK...

The Preston model is adapted from the Cleveland model, both inspired by the Mondragon Corporation in the Basque Country, the world’s largest network of cooperative firms. In a context of industrial decline and severe urban shrinkage, the Cleveland model is cultivating a local movement of ‘Evergreen’ worker-owned co-ops specialising in anchor institutional contracts – laundry, food, renewable energy.... Unlike Cleveland, Preston is driven by elected local government representatives, appearing to share more with municipal socialism. However, these models are ‘municipalist’ in the sense of harnessing the municipal-urban scale to create a systematic, holistic and democratic approach to local economic development through a federated network of worker-owned co-ops accountable to community-owned trusts.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 260–393.

They gesture towards a new urban horizon in which economic democratisation and re-localisation are sought not through direct re-municipalisation but an alternative urban system of non-state actors with the local state as a partner anchor institution.⁶⁸

The Preston model was adopted in response to austerity and dissatisfaction with the conventional model of local economic development. The share of local government revenue coming from the national government fell by more than half. Members of the Preston council led by Matthew Brown looked for ways to get more bang for the pound, in terms of local employment, from municipal spending. This meant abandoning an economic development model based on luring in outside corporations to “create jobs,” along with the traditional model of hiring services from the lowest-bidding outside corporations. Instead, Preston turned to a model of incubating local enterprises and contracting as many services as possible locally.

The shift to spending local funds locally includes both the Preston council itself and other bodies performing public functions.

Brown’s team persuaded six of the public bodies on their doorstep to commit to spending locally wherever possible....

To hear how that conversation sounded from the other side of the table, I visited Community Gateway, which manages 6,500 homes around Preston. In a tower overlooking the docks, where ships once came in, head of finance Phil McCabe explained what the new regime meant to his team. Once they outsourced repairs and grass cutting; now they are inhouse....

In 2015, Lancashire county council put a contract to provide school meals out to tender. That was impossibly large for local firms, so officers broke it into bite-size chunks. There was a tender to provide yoghurt, others for sandwich fillings, eggs, cheese, milk, and so on. One contract was split into nine different lots. It meant officials actually shaping a market to fit their society – and it worked. Local suppliers using Lancashire farmers won every contract and provided an estimated £2m boost to the county.

In 2013 the six local public bodies spent £38m in Preston and £292m in all of Lancashire. By 2017 those totals stood at £111m in Preston and £486m throughout the county. That is a huge turnaround, especially as their budgets shrank from £750m to £616m. The county’s pension fund is now building student accommodation in the city and doing up a hotel. Over the next few months Brown will get two new worker co-ops off the ground – one in IT, the other in food. He talks about establishing a local bank for Lancashire.⁶⁹

The “public bodies” compare roughly to the anchor institutions in the Cleveland model.

The Preston model he [Brown] devised involves 12 of the city’s key employers – including the county constabulary, a public sector housing association, colleges and

⁶⁸ Thompson, “What’s so new about the New Municipalism?” pp. 10–11.

⁶⁹ Aditya Chakraborty, “In 2011 Preston hit rock bottom. Then it took back control,” *The Guardian*, January 31, 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jan/31/preston-hit-rock-bottom-took-back-control>>.

hospitals – buying goods and services locally, to stop 61% of their procurement budget being spent outside of the Lancashire economy....⁷⁰

The council itself has increased the share of funds spent locally from 14% to 28% between 2012–13 and 2014–15.⁷¹ But 28% seemed to be something of a ceiling, given the number of local enterprises capable of serving as contractors. Local officials have attempted to address those constraints by incubating local worker cooperatives.

In February, the first co-op to be established since the authorities began refocusing spending opened in Preston's city center. The Larder sells food made from ingredients sourced locally and teaches people in disadvantaged areas of the city to make their own healthy meals. The café is the culmination of five years of hard work for its founder, Kay Johnson, and while winning catering contracts with local businesses has proved tricky, she and others here hope that the Larder's efforts will be emulated....⁷²

Not only does Preston pursue economic development through the expansion of locally-owned enterprises, to the greatest extent feasible it promotes cooperative and commons-based ownership models.

Instead of traditional economic development through public-private partnerships and private finance initiatives, which waste billions to subsidize the extraction of profits by footloose corporations with no loyalty to local communities, community wealth building supports democratic collective ownership of – and participation in – the economy through a range of institutional forms and initiatives. These include worker co-operatives, community land trusts, community development finance institutions, so-called 'anchor' procurement strategies, municipal and local public enterprise, participatory planning and budgeting, and – increasingly, it is to be hoped – public banking. Community wealth building is *economic system change, but starting at the local level*.⁷³

France. More recently, municipalist movements swept the June 2020 elections in a number of cities in France, in a manner reminiscent of Spain in 2015, according to Xavi Ferrer and Elena Arrontes. In Paris,

the incumbent socialist mayor Anne Hidalgo secured her candidacy for *Paris en Commun*, a party which, whilst more traditional than others of its kind, has a bold commitment to one of the most important aspects of the 21st Century city model: urban sustainable mobility.

⁷⁰ Hazel Sheffield, "Poverty was entrenched in Preston. So we became more self-sufficient," *The Guardian*, February 14, 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/feb/14/poverty-was-entrenched-in-preston-so-we-became-more-self-sufficient>>.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Hazel Sheffield, "A British Town's Novel Solution to Austerity," *The Atlantic*, May 13, 2019 <<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/05/british-town-local-economy/588943/>>.

⁷³ Thomas M. Hanna, Joe Guinan and Joe Bilsborough, "The 'Preston Model' and the modern politics of municipal socialism," *Open Democracy*, June 12, 2018 <<https://neweconomics.opendemocracy.net/preston-model-modern-politics-municipal-socialism/>>.

More important still, green candidates made gains across the rest of France's major cities, winning in Marseille (second largest city in the country), Lyon (third largest), Bordeaux (eighth largest) and Strasbourg (home to the European Parliament headquarters); as well as Nantes, Rennes, Nancy, Rouen... and close behind in second place in Lille and Toulouse.

Alongside this, and this is one of the most encouraging signs of all, over 400 towns and cities presented local electoral candidates that were independent from the larger parties and spearheaded by citizen-led movements. Inspired by radical democracy and citizen participation, they are driven by the same principles that motivated candidates from "Ciudades del Cambio" (Cities of Change) back in 2015 and 2019 across Barcelona, Coruña, Madrid, Cadiz, etc. Of the 410 citizens running for office, more than 80 per cent won representation and 66 of those won the majority, thus securing the mayoral office for the next five years.⁷⁴

[October 8, 2020]

⁷⁴ Xavi Ferrer and Elena Arrontes, "Municipalist France!" *Red Pepper*, August 18, 2020 <<https://www.redpepper.org.uk/municipalist-france/>>.

Chapter Eleven: Municipalism: Building Blocks

Transparency and Participatory Governance. If anything is central to the Partner State goal of becoming less statelike, it is transparency of the government apparatus and direct citizen participation in the process of formulating policy. And if any level of government is suited to participatory governance and the Partner State model, it's the municipal level; hence the concept of P2P Urbanism.

Sheila Foster and Christian Iaione use the terms, variously, “urban collaborative governance,” “enabling state” and “relational state” as near-synonyms for Partner State at the urban level. This is what emerges when the city itself is run as a platform on the same basis as individual commons-based resources, i.e. when we “scale up from the individual resource to the city level the democratic design principles that already characterize existing urban commons management structures.” Urban collaborative governance

resituates the city as an enabler and facilitator of collaborative decision making structure(s) throughout the city, and attends to questions of political, social and economic inequality in cities.¹

...These [democratic design] principles — horizontal subsidiarity, collaboration, and polycentrism — reorient public authorities away from a monopoly position over the use and management of common assets and toward a shared, collaborative governance approach. In other words, the Leviathan state gradually becomes what we call the facilitator, or enabling, state. The governance regime for shared urban resources becomes one without a dominant center but instead one in which all actors who have a stake in the commons are part of an autonomous center of decision making as co-partners, or co-collaborators, coordinated and enabled by the public authority.

Similarly, by thinking of the city itself as a commons, we might look beyond the reigning public regulatory regime in most cities to more collaborative and polycentric governance tools capable of empowering and including a broader swath of urban residents in decisions about resource access and distribution in the city.²

This approach makes it possible

to re-situate the role of the state, or city, as an enabler and facilitator of collaboration and ultimately of political and economic redistribution.... The facilitator state creates the conditions under which citizens can develop collaborative relationships with

¹ Sheila R. Foster and Christian Iaione, “The City As a Commons,” *Yale Law & Policy Review*, July 2016 <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/294090007_THE_CITY_AS_A_COMMONS_Final_Version>, p. 290.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 289–290.

each other, and cooperate both together and with public authorities, to take care of common resources, including the city itself as a resource.³

P2P Urbanism can take the form — as described by Nikos A. Salingaros and Federico Mena-Quintero — of open-source regulatory codes:

In parallel to the free/open-source software movement, designing a city and one's own dwelling and working environment should be based upon freely available design rules rather than some 'secret' code decided upon by an appointed authority. Furthermore, open-source urban code must be open to modification and adaptation to local conditions and individual needs, which is the whole point of open-source.⁴

Let us consider briefly the kinds of participation that can be open to different people. Architects of course deal with the design of buildings. An architect familiar with the needs of a certain region may know, for example, that an 80cm eave is enough to protect three-metre tall storeys from rainfall, in a particular region with a certain average of wind and rain. A builder may be well versed in the actual craft of construction, that to build this kind of eave, with the traditional forms used in this region, requires such and such materials and techniques. The final dweller of a house will certainly be interested in protecting his windows and walls from rainfall, but he may want to have a say in what kind of window he wants: if he wants it to open to the outside, then it must not bump against the wide eave. Thus it is important to establish communication between users, builders, designers and everyone who is involved with a particular environment.

Our hypothetical rainy region will doubtless have similar problems to other similar regions in different parts of the world. P2P-Urbanism lets these geographically separated people connect together to learn from each other's experience. Trial-and-error can be reduced by being able to ask, "who knows how to build windows and eaves that will stand this kind of rainfall?," and to get an answer backed by evidence.⁵

Compare this to the fictional account of the wikified construction process for the Belt and Braces — a sort of combination restaurant/pub, hostelry, community hub, and co-living space — in Cory Doctorow's *Walkaway*. It was built from scavenged materials located by surveillance drones, and put together according to an evolving wikified design by stigmergically organized, permissionless labor using a modified version of UN High Commission on Refugees software.

You told it the kind of building you wanted, gave it a scavenging range, and it directed its drones to inventory anything nearby, scanning multi-band, doing deep database scrapes against urban planning and building-code sources to identify usable blocks for whatever you were making....

³ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

⁴ Nikos A. Salingaros and Federico Mena-Quintero, "A Brief History of P2P Urbanism (*excerpts*)," in *Build the City: Perspectives on Commons and Culture* (Krytyka Polityczna and the European Cultural Foundation, 2015), p. 119.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

These flowed into the job site. The building tracked and configured them, a continuously refactored critical path for its build plan that factored in the skill levels of workers or robots on-site at any moment.⁶

In Taiwan, a large open government movement has made significant accomplishments in opening up policy to citizen participation and critique. At the heart of the movement is g0v, which got its name from setting up alternative versions of government websites with .gov domains changed to .g0v. These digital activists have, among other things, forced the Taiwanese government to revise a treaty with the People's Republic of China and schedule the decommissioning of all nuclear power plants by 2025. Last year Tsai Ing-wen, who ran on a platform of government transparency, appointed a member of g0v — Audrey Tang — as Digital Minister. Under pressure from the citizens' movements, the government has responded by adopting digital tools for crowdsourcing feedback on government policies.⁷

Participatory budgeting is also an integral part of participatory government. It's an innovation identified with Porto Alegre, Brazil, where it was introduced in 1989 under a Workers Party government. Belo Horizonte adopted the policy in 1992, and it subsequently spread to about half of the major cities in Brazil. Participatory budgeting is now an option for all municipal governments. Although a municipality can subject all new capital spending projects to participatory budgeting, in most localities it ranges from 5–15% of the municipal budget.

The model follows an annual cycle: First, the city presents the previous year's budget for review. Then, residents attend neighborhood meetings where they offer proposals and discuss spending decisions relating to social services and big projects.

From the neighborhood assemblies councillors are elected who debate and refine the proposals. Residents also vote for delegates — around 50,000 residents — who end up voting on the final proposals.⁸

Information Commons. Cities and universities are not in a position to alter or replace national and international copyright law. But it is entirely within their capacity to promote information freedom by such means as adopting free and open-source software for official use in preference to proprietary software, and mandating that all research and writing supported by public funds will be in the public domain.

Universities have great potential in their own right for being reorganized along libertarian lines, based on principles of stakeholder governance and self-management. Regarding information in particular, they can encourage faculty to assign readings that are freely available online or published under open licenses, discourage assignment of overpriced textbooks, use their bargaining power as purchaser to sanction price-gouging academic journals and textbook publishers, and encourage faculty to publish in cooperatively governed and non-paywalled publications, or organize coordinated boycotts of shakedown operations like Elsevier altogether. Instead of slavishly

⁶ Cory Doctorow, *Walkaway*. (New York: Tor, 2017).

⁷ Nithin Coca, "Meet g0v, the Open-source, Digital Community Transforming Democracy in Taiwan," *Shareable*, May 16, 2017 <<https://www.shareable.net/blog/meet-g0v-the-open-source-digital-community-transforming-democracy-in-taiwan>>.

⁸ Steve Rushton, "Rebel Cities 13: Porto Alegre in Brazil Shows How Participatory Budgeting Works," *Occupy.com*, September 20, 2018 <<http://www.occupy.com/article/rebel-cities-13-porto-alegre-brazil-shows-how-participatory-budgeting-works>>.

acting as adjuncts of the content industries in enforcing music and movie copyright, they can refuse to provide student information or otherwise cooperate without legally binding orders, and inform students on fair use rights. They can require instructors to accept citations from preprints and other unofficial versions of articles/chapters on personal academic websites or sharing sites like Academia.edu and Researchgate, as alternatives to the versions that appear in paywalled venues. For that matter university and library functionaries can unofficially, as individuals, and with plausible deniability, make students aware of download sites like Library Genesis and B-ok.cc.

Monica Bernardi stresses the need for openness and accountability as a rationale for municipal use of free and open-source software. Public administrations

are important users and providers of software. They procure, fund and support the development of products and services that can affect large groups of people. However, when these endeavours do not involve Free Software, critical questions concerning security, efficiency, distribution of power, and transparency arise. Indeed, in order to establish trustworthy systems, public bodies must ensure they have full control over the software and computer systems at the core of their state digital infrastructure. But right now, this is rarely the case due to restrictive software licenses that:

- Forbid sharing and exchanging publicly funded codes, preventing cooperation between public administrations and hindering further development.
- Support monopolies by hindering competition, with the result that many administrations become dependent on a handful of companies.
- Pose a threat to the security of our digital infrastructure by forbidding access to the source code and creating fixing backdoors and security holes.

On the contrary the kind of software that fosters the sharing of good ideas and solutions, that guarantees freedom of choice, access, and competition, that allows IT services improvement, that helps public administrations regain full control of their critical digital infrastructure, and thus supporting them in becoming independent, is more and more necessary....

But above all, publishing source code is a way to give taxpayers' money back to society.... Public bodies are financed through taxes and they must make sure they spend funds in the most efficient way possible. Under the claim "if it is public money, it should be public code as well," the [Free Software Foundation of Europe] pushes for legislation requiring that publicly financed software developed for the public sector be made publicly available, under a Free and Open Source Software license....

...FS has become a core element of the Barcelona's smart city and digitalization agenda, under the nudging action of Francesca Bria, the Commissioner of Technology and Digital Innovation at the City Council....

...Basically, Barcelona is migrating its computer system away from the windows platform; the strategy is first to replace all user's applications with open-source alterna-

tives, until the underlying Windows operating system is the only proprietary software remaining; in a final step, the operating system will be replaced with Linux.⁹

As Bria herself describes it:

Barcelona City Council has joined the free software movement and supports the use of free and open technology (software, hardware, computing, data) with the aim of achieving full technological sovereignty. This choice allows the digital infrastructures and systems of City Council to be audited publicly in a transparent way. It also facilitates interaction between the local developers' communities and local entrepreneurs and the public administration, which may lead to the development of more stable, secure, accountable and democratically governed digital infrastructures.

This means, in practical terms, that software is "published in public repositories, such as Git hub, with free licences that allow third parties (councils, individuals or companies) to use it, expand on it or improve it." The lack of proprietary licenses is a cost savings. "It also helps to create a network with other administrations for sharing technology and reusing solutions."¹⁰

In some cases FOSS and the information commons overlap with participatory government. For example Barcelona's Decidim platform, already discussed in an earlier chapter, "is entirely and collaboratively built as free software."

As of march 2018 www.decidim.barcelona had more than 28,000 registered participants, 1,288,999 page views, 290,520 visitors, 19 participatory processes, 821 public meetings channeled through the platform and 12,173 proposals, out of which over 8,923 have already become public policies grouped into 5,339 results whose execution level can be monitored by citizens.¹¹

Land Platforms. In general, Community Land Trusts and related institutions are a way of using land titles under capitalist property law to recreate the state of affairs before communal land tenures were nullified and land was commodified on the basis of fee simple commodity ownership. Land can be removed from the capitalist land market, particularly when it is still cheap and can be bought in quantity, and then governed internally by possession and transfer rights closer to a commons-based model. Because they are permanent, they can function as a growing non-capitalist island within the capitalist economy, with land permanently and irreversibly vanishing from the capitalist real estate market much like land bequests to the Church — an immortal corporation — in medieval times. "Creating a stock of permanently affordable housing with a one-time public investment" — as Gregory Scruggs puts it — "and that same affordable housing is kept affordable for generations to come."¹² Pat Conaty and Michael Lewis argue that,

⁹ Monica Bernardi, "Digital Democracy and Data Commons (DDDC) a participatory platform to build a more open, transparent and collaborative society," LabGov, February 21, 2019 <<http://labgov.city/theurbanmedialab/digital-democracy-and-data-commons-dddc-a-participatory-platform-to-build-a-more-open-transparent-and-collaborative-society/>>.

¹⁰ Francesca Bria, *Barcelona digital city: Putting technology at the service of people*. Barcelona Digital City Plan (2015–2019). Ajuntament de Barcelona / Barcelona City Council, 2019 <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/digital/sites/default/files/pla_barcelona_digital_city_in.pdf>, p. 16.

¹¹ Bernardi, "Digital Democracy and Data Commons."

¹² Gregory Scruggs, "'Shared equity' model for U.S. housing boosts home ownership for poorer families," *This Place*, January 21, 2019 <<http://www.thisisplace.org/i/>>.

in addition to cancelling spiralling real estate costs, trusts “preserve over the long term government investments in affordable housing, rather than allowing both public subsidies and capital gains to accrue to whoever sells the house?”¹³

In this regard land trusts are analogous to open information licenses, which use capitalist intellectual property law to create a state of affairs such as would prevail if copyright did not exist at all. And like land trusts, open licenses are characterized by irrevocable, one-way growth in which anything “contaminated” by them becomes permanently free, thanks to share-alike provisions.

Land trusts are also preferable — because more permanent and less prone to reversal following a change of government — to other policy alternatives. Ivo Balmer and Tobias Bernet point out that policies like individual subsidies are extremely vulnerable to budget cuts, and traditional public housing is vulnerable to privatization or demutualization.

In contrast, property rights in a narrower sense are consistently respected in capitalist democracies, regardless of current political majorities. Instruments that are directly linked to the property rights system might thus be capable of decommodifying housing in a more sustainable way and guaranteeing dwellers’ self-organization in the long run.¹⁴

Another function of land trusts is to acquire cheap tax foreclosed homes, in which their current owners can continue to live. The Right to the City Alliance worked with local organizations to build community land trusts in ten cities in 2015 alone. One of these cities was Detroit, where the land trust has organized crowdfunding campaigns to buy up foreclosed properties one at a time and protect residents from eviction. Much more could be done if the project was actively supported at the municipal level; unfortunately the Detroit city government, under an appointed Emergency Manager, isn’t exactly warm on the idea. The city government’s land bank holds title to abandoned property, which it is supposed to return to productive use. Local activists have pressured the government to transfer land bank properties to a land trust, but so far to no avail.¹⁵

Consider the sheer scale of tax-delinquent land in Detroit in the post-2008 decay, as described by Sara Safransky:

City officials categorized a staggering 100,000 lots, or one third of the Detroit’s landed area, as “vacant” and “abandoned.” [John] Hantz’s proposal [to buy 180 acres of land for \$520,000 and build an urban forest on it] was attractive to the financially strapped municipal government because it promised to move the city’s sizable accumulation of tax-reverted property to private ownership....

¹³ Pat Conaty and Michael Lewis, “Affordability Locked In” (Canadian Centre for Community Renewal, Nov 10 2011) <http://communityrenewal.ca/sites/all/files/resource/i42011NOV11_Affordability.pdf>.

¹⁴ Ivo Balmer and Tobias Bernet, “Housing as a Common Resource? Decommodification and Self-Organization in Housing – Examples from Germany and Switzerland,” in Mary Dellenbaugh, Markus Kip, Majken Bieniok, Agnes Katharina Müller, Martin Schwegmann (eds.). *Urban Commons: Moving Beyond State and Market* (Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag GmbH, 2015), pp 180–186.

¹⁵ Abigail Savitch-Lew, “How Community Land Trusts Can Fix Detroit’s Foreclosure Mess,” *YES! Magazine*, Dec. 23, 2016 <<http://www.yesmagazine.org/new-economy/how-community-land-trusts-can-fix-detroits-foreclosure-mess-20161223>>.

...Many residents resist descriptions of Detroit's neighborhoods as "empty" because such characterizations discursively elide the hundreds of thousands of people living in the city.... Moreover, residents claim and re-purpose "vacant" lots outside the purview of government and market-sector support. People assert their rights to land in a variety of ways — from invoking historical loss and racial injustice to establishing gardens and community centers, mowing fields, and squatting in houses — meaning that many properties officially designated as vacant have competing ownership claims, some formal, others informal.¹⁶

Under the predominant model of tax lien securitization, as Paula Segal describes it, cities sell tax debts to speculators. Faced with the piling up of interest and fees, owners often walk away, leaving neighbors to deal with the abandoned property. Sometimes neighborhood residents take repairs on themselves or build community gardens, or squats spring up with squatters improving the property, but all these things take place with no title or confidence in the future, and investors frequently move in without warning years later to enforce their claim and expropriate all the improvements created by the neighborhood.¹⁷ Instead of securitization, Segal recommends municipalities

[c]ompletely eliminate tax lien securitization; replace it with *in rem* foreclosure in which the city acquires tax delinquent private property on the grounds of taxes owed to it, along with programs that transfer these properties into responsible not-for-profit ownership that will provide resources for the community.¹⁸

Another way in which tax-delinquent land might be incorporated into land trusts, with possession restored to the original residents, is suggested by the Tricycle Collective.

Formed in 2014, the Tricycle Collective buys occupied homes at the county auction, often for considerably less than the back taxes owed, and signs ownership back to the occupants. Although this form of temporary tax relief for such families is essential, it leaves them vulnerable to future tax delinquency and does nothing to change the structural forces of the real estate market that drive eviction, residential segregation, and gentrification. The only solution that guarantees housing for low-income citizens is socialization: removing housing from the market altogether.¹⁹

Purchasing as much land as feasible at the low auction prices is the same model by which Strike Debt retires private debt.

Through this CLT, organizers would raise funds to purchase both abandoned and (with the homeowner's or renter's consent) inhabited properties, restore them, and

¹⁶ Sara Safransky, "Rethinking Land Struggle in the Postindustrial City," *Antipode* 49:4 (September 2017), p. 1080.

¹⁷ Paula Z. Segal, "Tax Delinquent Private Property and City Commons," in José Maria Ramos, ed., *The City As Commons: A Policy Reader* (Melbourne: Commons Transition Coalition, 2016), pp. 102–103.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹⁹ John Michael Colón, Mason Herson-Hord, Katie S. Horvath, Dayton Martindale, and Matthew Porges, *Community, Democracy, and Mutual Aid: Toward Dual Power and Beyond* (The Next System Project, April 2017), p. 25.

secure them for income-adjusted affordable housing outside of the market. Like Habitat for Humanity's model, those who receive housing through the CLT would commit a certain number of labor hours (by themselves or someone else on their behalf) to future projects of home restoration to expand the cooperative housing system. We would also assemble a tool library, cutting costs for both home renovation teams and the library's community members.²⁰

Besides incorporating existing homes, such land trusts could also build housing varying in degree of communalism from individual houses to apartments with shared facilities to communal co-living arrangements. They could also intersect with the food sovereignty movement by providing land for community gardens.²¹

This could be combined with the land trust model, with local governments automatically transferring tax-delinquent land to the trusts, restoring them to their original residents at the same time.

Another way to tie the land trust function together with the land acquisition function is through land banks. According to Saki Bailey, land banking is

accomplished often through a city ordinance mandating that properties that remain vacant and in neglect for a specific number of years, can be appropriated by the city, often through property tax foreclosure, and placed back into productive use. Today, as a result of the sudden growth of the model since 2011 (in response to the foreclosure crisis), there are over 172 land banks across the country. Land banks usually take the form of a quasi-public entity, sometimes run directly out of a specific city department, or they can be structured as independent entities, either as corporations or non-profits.

...[Land banks] have a long and independent practice and history, and as a result, present a complementary and powerful strategy in creating permanently affordable housing. To date there are very few partnerships between land banks and CLTs, however more recently, both policymakers and CLTs are realizing that such a partnership may have advantages in overcoming challenges for both models.²²

To take one example: In Richmond, Virginia, the Richmond Land Bank, an initiative of the Maggie Walker Community Land Trust, serves the land acquisition function by "repurposing vacant and tax-delinquent properties for the public interest."²³

The largest community land trust in the United States is the Champlain Housing Trust in Burlington, Vt. In a city of 40,000, it owns 2,000 housing units.²⁴

Closely related is the Permanent Real Estate Cooperative. Those who purchase homes in a PERC have full possession and transfer rights, but their equity — the "resale" price — is limited

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26–28.

²² Saki Bailey, "Why CLTs and city land banks should work together to create permanently affordable housing," *Shareable*, September 25, 2019 <<https://www.shareable.net/river-protection-a-cross-border-effort-to-tackle-climate-change/>>.

²³ Juliana Broad, "Fighting gentrification and displacement: Emerging best practices," The Next System Project, February 19, 2020 <<https://thenextsystem.org/fighting-gentrification-best-practices>>.

²⁴ Conaty and Lewis, "Affordability Locked In."

to purchase price and improvements adjusted for inflation. They can potentially grow quickly to include hundreds or thousands of members.²⁵

Some activist groups engage in intensive data-mapping to systematically catalog all municipal land, in order to pursue a coordinated agenda for commons-based development. For example, the 596 Acres project in Brooklyn identified 596 acres (hence the name) of unused public land in that borough. That's almost a square mile. The political goal is to permanently reserve as much as possible under various forms of common ownership like community gardens, neighborhood parks, and community land trusts, often encouraging the people of a neighborhood to occupy and transform the vacant land in order to create a *fait accompli*.²⁶

In depressed cities where abandonment has approached catastrophic levels, land trusts have the potential to grow on an exceptionally large scale. In the Dudley Street neighborhood in Boston, for example, white flight resulted in some 1300 lots — over 20% of the total in the neighborhood — being vacant. Because of the implosion of real estate prices, the Dudley Street neighborhood initiative was able to incorporate 225 of them.²⁷ In Buffalo, where 23,000 properties were vacant, the PUSH citizen's movement challenged the state housing agency's practice of using the vacant housing to speculate on Wall Street as a source of revenue, and pressured it to turn them over to the community instead.²⁸

Another means of land acquisition is forced sale. This is a legal tool available to cities in Spain's Catalonia region, which Barcelona recently began making use of.

This week, the city's housing department wrote to 14 companies that collectively own 194 empty apartments, warning that if they haven't found a tenant within the next month, the city could take possession of these properties, with compensation at half their market value. These units would then be rented out by the city as public housing to lower-income tenants, while the companies in question could also face possible fines of between €90,000 and €900,000 (\$103,000 and \$1,003,000), according to Spanish news outlets.

The plan builds on previous measures in the city to fill empty apartments. Since 2016, it has been legal for municipalities in the Catalonia region, which includes Barcelona, to take control of properties that have been left without tenants for more than two years.... Now, using a legal tool approved by the Catalonia region in December 2019, Barcelona will have expanded power to actually buy the apartments outright by compulsory purchase, at 50% of market rate.²⁹

²⁵ Janelle Orsi, "Homeownership is Dead. Long Live the Permanent Real Estate Cooperative," P2P Foundation Blog, Oct. 16, 2016 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/homeownership-is-dead-long-live-the-permanent-real-estate-cooperative/2016/10>>.

²⁶ David Bollier, "Using Data Mapping to Help Reclaim Urban Commons," *P2P Foundation Blog*, May 2, 2017 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/using-data-mapping-to-help-reclaim-urban-commons/2017/05/02>>.

²⁷ Penn Lah, "How One Boston Neighborhood Stopped Gentrification in Its Tracks," *Yes! Magazine*, Jan. 15, 2015 <<http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/cities-are-now/how-one-boston-neighborhood-stopped-gentrification-in-its-tracks>>.

²⁸ Taj James and Rosa Gonzalez, "How to turn neighborhoods into nubs of resilience," *Nation of Change*, April 17, 2017 <<https://www.nationofchange.org/2017/04/17/turn-neighborhoods-nubs-resilience/>>.

²⁹ Feargus O'Sullivan, "Barcelona's Latest Affordable Housing Tool: Seize Empty Apartments," *Bloomberg CityLab*, July 16, 2020 <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-07-16/to-fill-vacant-units-barcelona-seizes-apartments>>.

It was also one plank of Jeremy Corbyn's Land For the People program, as we saw in a previous chapter.

There is a great deal of potential, as well, in municipalist movements and community land trusts making cause with squatters' movements, running political interference for their occupations, and attempting to use such occupations as *faits accomplis* in bargaining with local government to regularize them after the fact. In Philadelphia, for example,

single mothers and their children have moved into abandoned, publicly owned buildings, in the most significant housing take over in the country — at a time when millions have lost their jobs and the country is on the brink of another housing crisis. Jennifer Bennetch has helped place unhoused people into vacant homes owned by the Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA), as the founder of Occupy PHA and a member of the Philadelphia Housing Action coalition.... So far, Bennetch and other organizers have housed over 40 people by occupying 11 homes, all owned by the authority whose responsibility it is to match people with public housing. Bennetch says that the families have no intention of leaving, and organizers are currently negotiating with the city to come to a resolution. Elsewhere in the city, unhoused people have escalated their demands for the right to housing by creating two protest encampments, one in front of PHA headquarters and the other in the middle of Center City....³⁰

In the Global South, likewise, one of the most important potential functions of community land trusts is to secure current possession by marginalized populations that has not been formalized under existing conventional law. Both claims under indigenous land tenure, and plots of land occupied in favelas, can be regularized within the community land trust framework. For example, a community land trust was created in San Juan, Puerto Rico to regularize holdings in eight informal communities along the Peña Canal.³¹

Neighborhood and Community Industry. Economic relocation, import substitution and community control of production machinery are all intersecting ways that enable local communities to build independence from corporate power and resilience against unemployment.

Two closely related and overlapping concepts are relevant here: Cosmo-localism, and "Design Global, Manufacture Local" (DGML). Cosmo-localism was originally introduced as a much broader concept in the 1990s by Wolfgang Sachs. Design Global, Manufacture Local is an application of the concept specifically to industrial production. DGML "follows the logic that what is light (knowledge, design) becomes global while what is heavy (manufacturing) is local, and ideally shared."³² As David Bollier and Silke Helfrich elaborate:

People share "light" knowledge and design via peer-to-peer learning and the internet, but build "heavy" physical things such as machinery, cars, housing, furniture, and

³⁰ Mindy Isser, "Single Mothers and Their Children Are Taking Over Abandoned Public Buildings," *In These Times*, July 24, 2020 <<http://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/22675/single-mothers-children-philadelphia-housing-authority-occupy-houseless>>.

³¹ RioOnWatch, "An Informal Settlement in Puerto Rico Has Become the World's First Favela Community Land Trust," *Shareable*, June 1, 2017 <<https://www.shareable.net/blog/an-informal-settlement-in-puerto-rico-has-become-the-worlds-first-favela-community-land-trust>>.

³² "Design global, manufacture local: a new industrial revolution?" *The Conversation*, October 11, 2017 <<https://theconversation.com/design-global-manufacture-local-a-new-industrial-revolution-82591>>.

electronics locally. In the peer production community there is a saying, “If it’s light, share it globally — if it’s heavy, produce it locally...”

In recent years, digital technologies have greatly empowered global collaborations that have local outputs. Global communities of designers, engineers, and programmers are collaborating online to develop design prototypes for everything from farm equipment (tractors, wind turbines, rototillers and soil pulverizers, compressed earth block presses for brickmaking) to high-end scientific microscopes (OpenSPIM) to sailing robots to detect ocean pollution (Scoutbots). All of these machines are licensed to be shareable, open source style. This means that any farmer, scientific researcher, or curious amateur can take advantage of world-class innovation by building their own tools less expensively using modular, adaptable, locally sourceable materials.

Open Source Ecology is one such project that designs diverse non-proprietary types of farm equipment and machinery that can be locally produced. The project started in 2003 in the USA and now has local hubs in Germany, Guatemala, and other locations around the world. An array of architects, engineers, and designers with the WikiHouse project have developed an “open source construction kit” that is akin to “a big IKEA kit for your home that is easy to assemble and affordable.” In a similar vein, the Open Building Institute, an offshoot of Open Source Ecology, builds low-cost, modular houses that are ecological and energy-efficient using techniques that are open source, convivial, and distributed.³³

Cosmo-localism, according to an article in *tripleC*, consists of a “digital commons of knowledge, software and design, combined with localized manufacturing technologies (from 3D printing and CNC machines to low-tech tools and crafts)...”³⁴

Thousands of experts, engineers and scientists can mobilise around such open projects and work on common infrastructures and protocols to better respond to crises.... Local makerspaces could manufacture them with low cost, using shared protocols and practices, based on local materials and capacities, minimising dependence on global supply chains.... With more autonomy locally, and more sharing globally, more agile and resilient production systems may be created to better respond to global crises.³⁵

As examples, the authors mention locally manufactured agricultural tools, rural electrification using small wind turbines, and respirator valves, based on designs in the digital commons.³⁶

Vasilis Kostakis and Chris Giotitsas describe the emergence of the technological prerequisites for cosmo-localism:

³³ David Bollier and Silke Helfrich, *Free, Fair and Alive: The Insurgent Power of the Commons* (Gabriola Island, B.C., Canada: New Society Publishers, 2019), pp. 196–197.

³⁴ Alex Pazaitis, Vasilis Kostakis, Giorgos Kallis, and Katerina Troullaki, “Should We Look for a Hero to Save Us from the Coronavirus? The Commons as an Alternative Trajectory for Social Change,” *tripleC* 18:2 (2020), p. 615.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 618.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 615–617

Cosmolocalism emerges from technology initiatives that are small-scale and oriented towards addressing local problems, but simultaneously engage with globally asynchronous collaborative production through digital commoning....

While the first wave of digital commoning included open knowledge projects, the second wave has been moving towards open design and manufacturing. Contrary to the conventional industrial paradigm and its economies of scale, the convergence of digital commons with local manufacturing machinery... has been developing commons-based economies of scope.... The physical manufacturing arrangement for cosmocalism includes makerspaces, which are small-scale community manufacturing facilities providing access to local manufacturing technologies.

Unlike large-scale industrial manufacturing, cosmocalism emphasizes applications that are small-scale, decentralised, resilient and locally controlled. Cosmolocal production cases such as L'Atelier Paysan (agricultural tools), Open Bionics (robotic and bionic hands), WikiHouse (buildings) or RepRap (3D printers) demonstrate how a technology project can leverage the digital commons to engage the global community in its development....

The technology produced is unlike the equivalent market options or is entirely non-existent in the market. It is typically modular in design, versatile in materials, and as low-cost as possible to make reproduction easier. Through our work we have identified a set of values present in the “technical codes” of such technology which can be distilled into the following themes: openness, sustainability and autonomy. It is these values that we believe lead to an alternative trajectory of technological development that assists the rise of a commons-based mode of production opposite the capitalist one.³⁷

An early promoter of industrial cosmo-localism, Ezio Manzini, paired it with his own concept of “Slow, Local, Open, and Connected” (SLOC). SLOC entails physical production which is small and local, while nevertheless remaining open and connected (in the sense that local physical economies are embedded in a distributed global information network). It is governed by “a new localization principle; products must be designed so that their production can be as near as possible to where they will be used (point of use production).” But it is the open and connected parts of the concept that fundamentally distinguish it from E.F. Schumacher’s earlier “Small is Beautiful” version of decentralization.

Forty years ago, the “small” that Schumacher referred to was really small. In fact, it was so small, it had little chance of influencing things on a large scale. The same can be said for his concept of “local” – it was truly local as it was (quasi) isolated from other locals....

Today, as we have seen, the context is extremely different. Today, the small can be influential on a large scale, as it acts as a node in a global network. The local can break its isolation by being open to the global flow of people, ideas and information.... The

³⁷ Vasilis Kostakis and Chris Giotitsas, “Intervention – ‘Small and local are not only beautiful; they can be powerful’” *Antipode Online*, April 2, 2020 <<https://antipodeonline.org/2020/04/02/small-and-local/>>.

small and the local, when they are open and connected, can therefore become a design guideline for creating resilient systems and sustainable qualities, and a positive feedback loop between these systems.³⁸

Manzini sees cosmo-localism as a “linear evolution” of the logic of lean and just-in-time manufacturing, and a realization of its spirit:

...[D]istributed systems can be seen in general as the lightest and most flexible of fabrication systems, able to create products for specific clients not only when they are needed (customized and just-in-time production), but also where they are needed (or, at least, as near as possible to the place where they are needed)....³⁹

Stacco Troncoso and Ann Marie Utratel observe, similarly, the ways in which DGML promotes ephemeralization, low overhead and radical efficiency:

1. Nonprofit: Objects are designed for optimum usability, not to create tension between supply and demand. This eliminates planned obsolescence or induced consumerism while promoting modular, durable and practical applications.
2. Local: Physical manufacturing is done in community workshops, with bespoke production adapted to local needs. These are economies of scope, not of scale. On-demand local production bypasses the need for huge capital outlays and the subsequent necessity to “keep the machines running” night and day to satisfy the expectations of investors with over-capacity and over-production. Transportation costs — whether financial or ecological — are eradicated, while maintenance, fabrication of spare parts and waste treatment are handled locally.
3. Shared: Idle resources are identified and shared by the community. These can be immaterial and shared globally (blueprints, collaboration protocols, software, documentation, legal forms), or material and managed locally (community spaces, tools and machinery, hackathons). There are no costly patents and no intellectual property regimes to enforce false scarcity. Power is distributed and shared autonomously, creating a “sharing economy” worthy of the name.⁴⁰

“Design Global, Manufacture Local” has a strong affinity for the industrial district model, with its economies of scope and diverse local industrial ecologies, as described by José Ramos.

Because much of what we consume has high manufacturing requirements, there needs to be an orchestration of micro-clusters: local enterprise ecosystems created

³⁸ Ezio Manzini, “Small, Local, Open and Connected: Resilient Systems and Sustainable Qualities,” *Design Observer*, February 6, 2013 <<https://designobserver.com/feature/small-local-open-and-connected-resilient-systems-and-sustainable-qualities/37670>>.

³⁹ Ezio Manzini, “Resilient systems and cosmopolitan localism — The emerging scenario of the small, local, open and connected space,” in Uwe Schneidewind, Tilman Santarius, Anja Humburg, eds., *Economy of sufficiency: Essays on wealth in diversity, enjoyable limits and creating commons*. Wuppertal Spezial No. 48 (Wuppertal: Wuppertal Institut für Klima, Umwelt, Energie, 2014) <<https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/103375/1/777059479.pdf>>, pp. 73–74.

⁴⁰ Stacco Troncoso and Ann Marie Utratel, “Reimagine, don’t seize, the means of production,” P2P Foundation Blog, January 16, 2018 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/reimagine-dont-seize-the-means-of-production/2018/01/16>>.

through networks, sharing and exchange platforms with human supported administration and support that do resource and needs matching. This may also tap the possibility of circular economic / closed loop production.⁴¹

It has, likewise, “a strong commitment to open source and knowledge justice approaches, localization, community learning and sustainable closed loop/circular economy strategies.”

Reuse, repair, repurpose are common words. The potential of the maker movement for cosmo-localism lies in this broad church beginning to learn from each other’s knowledges and capabilities and to collaborate on the design and manufacturing of things that require a high level of coordination or organization.⁴²

The design philosophy it promotes is fundamentally different the one that prevails under capitalism’s incentives to rent extraction, subsidized waste, and planned obsolescence. “It is typically modular in design, versatile in materials, and as low-cost as possible to make reproduction easier.”⁴³

Ramos notes that cosmo-localization may be conducive to a local development strategy centered on “import substitution” — something readers of Jane Jacobs, Colin Ward and Karl Hess will be familiar with.⁴⁴

In addition, addressing growing levels of economic precarity under neoliberalism may be a killer app for which cosmo-localism is particularly suited.

Where people are excluded from the dominant market system, they must create alternative subsistence systems. [Manuel] Castells sees the emergence of ‘new economic cultures’ from populations which, in addition to looking for ways out of the dominant economic system, simply cannot afford to consume goods from the dominant system. In terms of cosmo-localism, both values and need drive a new type of social actor which can leverage the global design commons and community maker space-based production in ways that can produce agency, empowerment and livelihood for people in need. Cosmo-localism potentially creates enterprise opportunities for those people out of work to create livelihoods, or at least to begin to experiment with new production potentials. To the extent that cosmo-localism is seen as a way to support citizen livelihoods, we may see cosmo-localism taken up as state or city supported process.⁴⁵

Cosmo-localism is reflected in many municipalist strategies for economic relocation. The Fab Cities⁴⁶ project, for example, is a joint project of Institute for Advanced Architecture of Catalonia (IAAC), MIT’s Centre for Bits and Atoms (CBA), the Barcelona City Council and the

⁴¹ José Maria Ramos, “Cosmo-localism and Urban Commoning,” in Ramos, ed., *The City As Commons*, p. 63.

⁴² *Ibid.* p. 64.

⁴³ Kostakis and Giotitsas, “Intervention.”

⁴⁴ Ramos, “Cosmo-localism and the futures of material production,” *P2P Foundation Blog*, June 1, 2016 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/cosmo-localism-futures-material-production/2016/06/01>>.

⁴⁵ Ramos, “Cosmo-localism and Urban Commoning.”

⁴⁶ <fab.cities>.

Fab Foundation. It works in cooperation with the global Fab Lab network.⁴⁷ According to the *Fab City Whitepaper*:

In 2014 at FAB10 the mayor of Barcelona invited his colleagues around the world to join the Barcelona pledge: a countdown for cities to become at least 50% self-sufficient by 2054. In 2015 in FAB11 at Boston, 7 new cities joined the Fab City project, including Boston, Cambridge, Ekurhuleni and Shenzhen. This year (2016) Amsterdam city is joining the program, and we expect new cities to commit to the Barcelona pledge at the FAB12 conference in Shenzhen, potentially: London, Copenhagen, Paris, Santiago de Chile, and more.⁴⁸

As Sharon Ede described it, a Fab City “is a locally productive, globally connected, self-sufficient city.”

Fab Labs (Fabrication Laboratories) and makerspaces offer opportunities for people to make and produce what they need for themselves, and to bring back to citizens the skills and knowledge needed to make things.

Makerspaces and Fab Labs are open access workshops, which means that anyone can access a range of production equipment (including but not limited to 3D printers and other means of digital fabrication) and networks of knowledge....

Harnessing these spaces and digital manufacturing technologies in service of the circular economy offers the potential for returning production to cities in the form of distributed manufacturing with microfactories – small scale, cleaner production that is also less wasteful, occurring as-needed, often customised, instead of over-producing for markets.⁴⁹

The first Fab Lab in the network opened in Barcelona in 2014; since then it has been joined by “12 cities, 2 regions, 2 states and 2 countries.”

Today there are over one thousand fab labs across the world, that together function as a distributed production system on a small scale. I can design something in Barcelona, and without using fossil fuel, create the identical product in Cape Town, Wellington or Tokyo.

Our approach is closely linked to the notion of circular economy, in the sense that we aim to shorten and localize production loops. With the right infrastructure and knowledge we could reduce the amount of material that a city imports and rescale globalization. It also allows companies to create social value and not only profit.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Christel van de Craats and Tomas Diez, “The Fab City movement Creating locally productive and globally connected self-sufficient cities,” P2P Foundation Blog, Feb. 15, 2017 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/fab-city-movement-creating-locally-productive-globally-connected-self-sufficient-cities/2017/02/15>>.

⁴⁸ Fab City. *Fab City Whitepaper: Locally productive, globally connected self-sufficient cities* (Barcelona, 2016) <<https://fab.city/uploads/whitepaper.pdf>>, p. 4; Sharon Ede, *The Real Circular Economy: How Relocalising Production With Not-For-Profit Business Models Helps Build Resilient and Prosperous Societies* (Fab City Global Initiative, Post-Growth Institute, 2016), p. 9.

⁴⁹ Sharon Ede, “The Real Circular Economy: How Relocalising Production With Not-For-Profit Business Models Helps Build Resilient and Prosperous Societies” (Post-Growth Institute, December 2016), p. 9.

⁵⁰ Benjamin Tincq, “The Fab City: It’s More Than Just a City Full of Fab Labs,” *Shareable*, Feb. 6, 2017 <<http://www.shareable.net/blog/the-fab-city-its-more-than-just-a-city-full-of-fab-labs>>.

According to the Fab Cities website, “The FAB City is a global project to develop locally productive and globally connected self-sufficient cities.”

FAB City is a new urban model of transforming and shaping cities that shifts how they source and use materials from ‘Products In Trash Out’ (PITO) to ‘Data In Data Out’ (DIDO). This means that more production occurs inside the city, along with recycling materials and meeting local needs through local inventiveness. A city’s imports and exports would mostly be found in the form of data (information, knowledge, design, code).

The project aims to develop prototype industrial districts in all participating cities, with Fab Labs as the nucleus, and circular economies relocalizing as many functions as possible....

The project will entail identifying and mapping

local source materials, manufacturers, producers, artisans and other activities connected to circular economy and local production at neighbourhoods, and scalable to cities. The goal is to bridge with larger scale supply chains, in order to connect supply and demand for local production.⁵¹

In terms of economic relocalization, its goals are relatively modest: to relocalize some 50% of manufacturing by 2054.⁵²

Barcelona’s first Fab Lab inspired a network of Fab Labs in the city itself (designated *ateneus*, or “atheneums”).

Supported by Barcelona’s civic leaders, each Ateneu receives public funds to run popular local events — family days and school visits; training courses and social innovation programs: everything necessary to equip citizens with the digital fabrication nous necessary to ‘materialise their ideas and create their worlds’ (according to the Ateneus slogan). By this vision, high-tech public infrastructure will make it easier for Barcelona’s citizens to lock into a global ‘maker’ network — uploading designs which folks, say, in Singapore, might use; or collaborating in prototyping with FabLabs in São Paulo, adapting ideas produced globally to fit their own local needs.

...In adopting the term ‘Ateneu’ for their workshops, city authorities have evoked a Catalan tradition of social centres where people used to meet up, build bonds, and debate issues about the type of society they want — but which in this case civic leaders wish to associate with selectively.

The first Ateneu opened in July 2013, in an abandoned silk ribbon factory in the Les Corts district. A further 20 workshops are planned to some degree for later down the line....⁵³

⁵¹ Tom Dietz, “Fab City Prototypes – Designing and making for the real world,” *P2P Foundation Blog*, July 6, 2017 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/fab-city-prototypes%e2%80%8a-%e2%80%8adesigning-making-real-world/2017/07/06>>.

⁵² Ede, p. 9.

⁵³ Adrian Smith, “Tooling Up: Civic visions, FabLabs, and grassroots activism,” *The Guardian*, April 4, 2015 <<https://www.theguardian.com/science/political-science/2015/apr/04/tooling-up-civic-visions-fablabs-and-grassroots-activism>>.

Barcelona's experience with ateneus was somewhat shaky, serving as an object lesson in the dangers attendant on promoting a relocalization model driven from the top down by "anchor institutions" rather than by people's self-organization to meet their own daily needs (as we saw elsewhere with regard to Cleveland's Evergreen model).

Whilst setting-up is also relatively straightforward — installing machinery, running courses — the real challenge comes in weaving the workshops into the everyday fabric of the local community....

The experiences around the Ateneu in Ciutat Meridiana highlight these tensions. Ciutat Meridiana is the poorest neighbourhood in Barcelona — unemployment exceeds 20 percent, and family incomes are one third of city averages. The neighbourhood association is constantly in battle with the council over changes to social services, and resisting evictions from mortgage lenders.

So what, exactly, does a high-tech, MIT-inspired workshop, with no immediate role in alleviating the daily crisis of people's lives, have to offer the neighbourhood? Very little, it would seem — at least initially. The people of Ciutat Meridiana needed food, not 3D printers, and the project didn't help itself by siting the workshop in a building that neighbours were already using as a food bank.... Rather than embracing the project, locals were alienated and occupied the Ateneu in protest. Negotiations ensued, eventually leading to two conditions of agreement — the food bank was re-established, albeit elsewhere in the neighbourhood; and the Ateneu would emphasise training and work for young people.⁵⁴

The global network inspired a similar project in Brazil in February 2015, to create a network of 12 public FabLabs.⁵⁵

The Open Source Circular City model, developed by Lars Zimmermann, focuses on local economies that keep value within the community by designing goods for repair, reuse and recycling, and creating the capability for those functions at the local level. The latter capability — which he calls "Reversibility Facilities" — are "something between a *second hand market*, a *repair shop*, a *factory*, a *research facility* and a *Fab-lab*."⁵⁶

The Poblenou neighborhood of Barcelona is a good illustration of two of Jane Jacobs' central principles: import substitution, and conversion of waste byproducts into new inputs. Poblenou, once considered a *former* industrial district which had fallen victim to deindustrialization, "has become a poster child for urban renewal through a bottom-up approach, creating an epicentre of technology and creativity — leading the Catalan paper *Publico* and other media to describe it as a mini Silicon Valley for sustainable industry."

The neighbourhood is spearheading a new urban model of resiliency and local innovation, where citizens are perceived not just as consumers but as producers, empowered through access to digital fabrication tools, and knowledge. Poblenou is today an experimentation playground to build the vision of how we might step away from

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Lars Zimmerman, "The Open Source Circular City—a SCENARIO for City Hackers," *P2P Foundation Blog*, Sept. 8, 2017 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/open-source-circular-city-scenario-city-hackers/2017/09/08>>.

importing most things into the city and export our waste, and instead introduce a circular model, where all resources flow in a closed-loop system within the city itself. In fact, Poblenou is already building the infrastructure to be locally productive and globally connected, in order to produce at least half of what it consumes by 2054, using materials that are sourced locally or reclaimed from waste creating a partly circular model, where waste is remade into new products.

Poblenou is also a major participant in the FAB Cities network. During a special five-day event, the Made Again Challenge,

local workshops, research centers, design agencies and local producers in the neighbourhood was [sic] connected into an ecosystem. Biologists, tech professionals, local makers, craftsmen, IKEA designers, and other trailblazers gathered in Barcelona for the project and collected wasted products from the streets of Poblenou in order to breath new life into materials that were heading to landfill.

Following the success of the Made Again Challenge, the Barcelona city government successfully proposed turning a square kilometer of Poblenou into a Maker District.⁵⁷ The objective of the Maker District is “prototyping a fractal of a Fab City, focusing on...”

- Fabrication & materials: with complementary production ecosystems happening inside the local network of Fab Labs, citizens have the possibility to produce what they consume, recirculating materials inside the neighbourhood and the city to reduce waste and carbon emissions associated with long-distance mass production and distribution chains.
- Food production: growing food on the rooftops of Barcelona. Through urban agriculture practices, citizens can grow part of what they eat turning production of local clean food in a regular part of their lives.
- Energy: Renewable energy production. With the arrival of domestic batteries and the cost drop of solar technologies, citizens have the tools to produce part of their domestic energy consumption.⁵⁸

Following the devastation of Hurricane Sandy in the Sunset Park neighborhood in Brooklyn, the UPROSE environmental group mobilized the community to rebuild using an economic model centered on environmentally friendly, community controlled industry.

...UPROSE has joined forces with labor unions, the Working Families Organization, and business owners to transform Sunset Park’s industrial space into a manufacturing hub that produces environmentally friendly building and construction materials, powered by renewable energy. And they are encouraging these industries to hire locally....

⁵⁷ Tomas Dietz, “Made Again Documentary — The ‘Silicon Valley of sustainability’ in Barcelona,” *P2P Foundation Blog*, July 17, 2017 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/made-documentary%e2%80%8a-%e2%80%8athe-silicon-valley-sustainability-barcelona/2017/07/17>>; Ede, p. 10.

⁵⁸ Ede, p. 10.

...UPROSE consults with residents on the future they want, then arms them with the tools they need to make that vision a reality. Some residents take on the role of block captains and gather input and educate their neighbors on city planning processes. Through partnerships with researchers, residents conduct participatory action research on issues of concern. It's a deeply democratic, holistic approach that builds local power and increases community control over resources – key elements of community resilience.⁵⁹

Alternative Currencies and Credit. Alternative currency systems differ widely in how much actual value they offer to the people of a community. At their worst, LETS systems which entail simply trading dollars earned outside the system for alternative currency notes on a one-to-one basis, in order to use those notes for purchases at participating merchants, are nothing but glorified green stamps systems that (aside from modest discounts) are actually more trouble to use. Thomas Greco refers to it as the Convertible Local Currency model:

Up to now, virtually all community currencies have followed the 'convertible local currency' (CLC) model, including the Bristol Pound and Brixton Pound in the UK, Toronto Dollars and Salt Spring Island Dollars in Canada, and Berkshares in the US. Typically, these currencies are sold for, and can then be redeemed back into, conventional or official money. But even their proponents admit that these currencies have not been effective in achieving economic relocalization.

What really needs to be relocalized is the control of credit, which is the essence of every modern currency.... The fundamental need of communities is for additional means of exchange that supplement the available supply of money in circulation. Communities therefore need to find ways of providing their own home grown liquidity i.e their own means of payment to support their local economies and achieve some measure of self-determination.

The CLC model does not provide the community with additional liquidity. Rather, it substitutes a limited local currency in place of a relatively universal official one. Such currencies bear a strong resemblance to the gift cards that are sold by myriad retail companies like Marks and Spencer and Amazon.⁶⁰

The proper function of a currency system is to create liquidity where it did not exist before and create purchasing power for those who lack conventional money. It primes the pump in an environment where members have useful skills and unmet needs, by advancing credit so that members can trade against future services to obtain present consumption.⁶¹

The idea of currency as a “store of value,” something saved up from past production, or of credit as the lending of past savings, is a capitalist myth that obscures the real nature of money and credit.

⁵⁹ James and Gonzalez, *op. cit.*

⁶⁰ Thomas H. Greco, “Monetary Alchemy: How to Turn Bad Money into Good,” *Open Democracy*, July 11, 2019 <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/monetary-alchemy-how-turn-bad-money-good/>>.

⁶¹ I discussed this in the Introduction to Chapter Six in *The Desktop Regulatory State: The Countervailing Power of Individuals and Networks* (Center for a Stateless Society, 2016), pp. 177–181.

Apologists for the profits of capital argue that labor would not be productive without the contributions of capital. A trucker would not be very productive without a truck, for example. But the truck itself is produced by workers. And the factory that makes trucks is built by workers. And the food and other necessities of life consumed by workers while the factory and truck are being built are also produced by other workers. This “wage fund doctrine” was effectively demolished by radical political economist Thomas Hodgskin. According to Hodgskin, the material subsistence goods advanced to workers aren’t really saved from past production at all, but are produced near-simultaneously with their consumption. All capital goods and all subsistence goods consumed during the production process are created by other workers. Absent the capitalists, workers could carry out this function of continuously advancing their products to each other through some form of mutual credit. It could be organized entirely as a system of flows — no stocks required. All capitalists do — thanks to their having appropriated most wealth through enclosures and other large-scale robberies in past centuries, and having been given a state monopoly on the right to issue credit — is preempt the horizontal channels by which workers might otherwise have mutually advanced their labor products to each other. To quote Hodgskin,

Betwixt him who produces food and him who produces clothing, betwixt him who makes instruments and him who uses them, in steps the capitalist, who neither makes nor uses them, and appropriates to himself the produce of both. With as niggard a hand as possible he transfers to each a part of the produce of the other, keeping to himself the large share. Gradually and successively has he insinuated himself betwixt them, expanding in bulk as he has been nourished by their increasingly productive labours, and separating them so widely from each other that neither can see whence that supply is drawn which each receives through the capitalist. While he despoils both, so completely does he exclude one from the view of the other that both believe they are indebted him for subsistence.... Not only do they appropriate the produce of the labourer; but they have succeeded in persuading him that they are his benefactors and employers.⁶²

So the most valuable alternative currencies are those that are primarily a form of credit and a measure of value — a channel for the mutual advance of credit between producers, even when no one has stored wealth from past production. This is especially true of mutual credit clearing systems on Greco’s model, as well as of time-based barter networks where people put their skills to work performing services for others in the system and obtain purchasing power in return.

As recounted by David Graeber in *Debt*, mutual credit clearing systems were the primary source of liquidity for exchange in medieval villages, before the imposition of specie currency. In their modern incarnation, they vary in how large a deficit they permit members to run; ideally, once trust has been established over time they will allow deficits of up to six month’s of the member’s average account turnover, which amounts to a significant form of micro-credit which can be used for setting up or expanding a small enterprise. Greco has described such systems functioning all over the world.⁶³

⁶² Thomas Hodgskin, *Labour Defended Against the Claims of Capital* (1825) Online text at Marxist Internet Archive, accessed November 12, 2017 <<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/economics/hodgskin/labour-defended.htm>>.

⁶³ Thomas Greco, “Sardex, an emerging model for credit clearing exchanges?” *Beyond Money*, August 20, 2015 <<https://beyondmoney.net/2015/08/20/sardex-an-emerging-model-for-credit-clearing-exchanges/>>.

One particularly successful recent example is the Sardex system in Sardinia.¹⁶⁶ It has around 3000 members and a financial turnover of around 1.5 million Euros per month. Perhaps most important of its qualities is “[e]mphasis on monetizing the unused capacity of members. Connecting unused supplies with unmet needs is a primary benefit of credit clearing services.” It functions primarily as a business-to-business clearinghouse for enterprises located in, or which maintain branches in, Sardinia.

The Open Credit Network also operates on Greco’s model, enabling participating businesses to obtain credit interest-free and to “buy from suppliers even if you have no money,” and enables trade for the community when money is scarce. It also keeps money local and builds community resilience against crashes.⁶⁴

A member begins by joining the directory and posting what their business has to offer and what it needs. The system’s algorithm matches them up with potential suppliers and outlets, and they’re given a line of credit. Members who make connections trade with each other run open accounts and accrue credits and debits.⁶⁵

The network’s credit relationships sometimes take the form of “loops” between a number of participants.

Around 100 businesses have expressed interest in joining The Open Credit Network – everything from farmers, accountants and graphic designers to weavers, IT specialists and printers. Each business has listed some of its ‘offers’ and ‘wants’.

Our job is now to find trading loops between those businesses. Eventually, this will all be automated so that participating businesses can find what they want without having to be part of a ‘loop’.

But for now, we’re initiating trading loops involving 3 or 4 businesses that can trade with each other, to complete a full cycle. Business A provides something for business B, which provides something of the same value for business, C, which provides something of the same value for business A.

We built the required software to run trade accounts for each business, who will be in credit or debit depending on how much they’ve bought from or sold to other members of the network.

Trades can be partly in mutual credit and partly in cash. One credit is equivalent to one pound. Credits can’t be exchanged for pounds, or vice versa.

In our first trading loop Lowimpact.org provided a banner advertisement for Outlandish, who provided web services for Community Regen, who provided fundraising advice for Lowimpact.org with a trade value of £100, but in credits, rather than cash.

Once a business is a member of the Open Credit Network, trading itself is as simple as logging on to the website and filling out a short form. The admin team then check and approve the trades, one account is credited, the other debited and voilà – the businesses get what they want, without having to come up with scarce cash.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ <<https://opencredit.network/>>.

⁶⁵ <<https://opencredit.network/mutual-credit-explained>>.

⁶⁶ “And we’re off! The Open Credit Network conducts its first trades,” *Open Credit Network*, March 29, 2019 <<https://opencredit.network/2019/03/29/and-were-off-the-open-credit-network-conducts-its-first-trades/>>

The ultimate goal is to map all the mutual credit systems in the world and federate them, so that needs beyond the capacity of a given local system's members can be met from outside.⁶⁷

Platform Cooperatives: Sharing Economy and Temp Work. Sharing the idle capacity of capital goods — power tools, cars, etc. — that individual owners seldom utilize to full capacity, in order to spread the overhead burden of ownership out among a larger community, is an important way of lowering individual subsistence costs through access to the commons.

Unfortunately, a major part of the so-called “sharing economy,” as it’s called in the mainstream press, is nothing of the sort. It actually consists of what commons advocates call “Death Stars,”⁶⁸ like Uber or Airbnb. Alessia Palladino distinguishes between

- genuinely collaborative initiatives that promote the sharing of underutilized assets, as well as involve some form of sustainable exchange based on resource inequality, excess capacity, power parity, and the possibility to engage in repeated interactions (e.g., spare guestrooms). Some examples of genuine sharing practices are home-swaps (e.g., HomeExchange), ride-sharing and carpooling platforms (e.g., BlaBlaCar);
- non-collaborative platforms that are not driven by sustainable consumption, but profits (e.g. Uber).

She proposes “a society-based version of the sharing economy, the so-called pooling economy, as opposed to market-based sharing economy initiatives.”⁶⁹

Advocates of platform cooperativism — that is, of organizing the so-called “sharing economy” on a p2p or commons basis rather than through Death Stars — see the municipal level as a primary venue for action. Trebor Scholz defines it as “a way of joining the peer-to-peer and co-op movements with online labor markets while insisting on communal ownership and democratic governance.”⁷⁰

As Mayo Fuster Morell describes it, the commons platform economy is defined by

- (1) favouring peer to peer relations — in contrast to the traditionally hierarchical command and contractual relationships detach from sociability, and mere mercantile exchange— and the involvement of the community of peers generating in the governance of the platform; (2) it is based on value distribution and governance among the community of peers, and the profitability is not its main driving force; (3) it developed over privacy aware public infrastructure, and results in the (generally) open access provision of commons resources that favour access, reproducibility and

⁶⁷ “Mapping the world’s mutual credit networks,” *Open Credit Network*, April 11, 2020 <<https://opencredit.network/2020/04/11/mapping-the-worlds-mutual-credit-networks/>>.

⁶⁸ Neal Gorenflo, “How Platform Coops Can Beat Death Stars Like Uber to Create a Real Sharing Economy,” *Shareable*, Nov. 3, 2015 <<https://www.shareable.net/blog/how-platform-coops-can-beat-death-stars-like-uber-to-create-a-real-sharing-economy>>; Rebecca Harvey, “Platform co-ops: How can workers defeat the ‘Death Stars’?” *Coop News*, June 30, 2016 <<https://www.thenews.coop/106064/topic/democracy/platform-coops-death-star/>>.

⁶⁹ Alessia Palladino, “Cities at the Crossroads in the Regulation of Sharing Economy,” *Studia Regionalia*, vol. 52 (2017), p. 10.

⁷⁰ “Bringing the Platform Co-op ‘Rebel Cities’ Together: An Interview with Trebor Scholz,” P2P Foundation Blog, Oct. 2, 2016 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/bringing-the-platform-co-op-rebel-cities-together-an-interview-with-trebor-scholz/2016/10/02>>.

derivativeness; and finally (4) the responsibility with the externalities generated by the process.⁷¹

The city of Barcelona officially promotes platform cooperatives as an organizational model, as part of its general orientation towards encouraging a local ecosystem of economic counter-institutions. Álvaro Porro, Social Economy Commissioner for Barcelona, argues that the least desirable platform model is proprietary and profit-oriented, with control of information primarily by the firm. The most desirable model, platform cooperativism, is characterized by

- *Collaboration*. Production-consumption-exchange (generally open) of resources and services.
- *Governance*. Platforms where the community of participants or users plays a role in governance.
- *Peer to peer*. Between peers; relationships that tend to be more egalitarian (communities of self-governing contributors).
- *Commons*. A shared property of a common resource, which is accessible. This generally comes with the use of free licenses and technologies (copyleft, creative commons, open access...).⁷²

Platform cooperativism advocates have begun to organize locally in Berlin, Valencia, Oakland, Bologna and other major cities as well.⁷³

As Scholz suggests, the development of a local ecosystem of platform cooperatives, on the basis of economies of scope, can be actively encouraged through enterprise incubators at the municipal level, and the use of municipal property like libraries and museums to host organizational activity.⁷⁴

Besides its high-capacity light rail system and its rejection of some of the more common subsidies to car culture Vancouver has also promoted projects that fall under the umbrella of the sharing economy or platform cooperativism. It actively encourages ride-sharing systems created on a p2p or cooperative model, as well as seeding a large-scale bike-sharing program with stations all over the city.⁷⁵

The classic example of a non-Death Star alternative to Uber is RideAustin. After voters rejected a ballot initiative to overturn city regulation of ride-sharing services in May 2016, Uber and Lyft pulled out of the Austin market. Ride Austin, a non-profit organized by the Austin tech community, launched its app in June. Unlike Uber, which charged drivers a 25% commission, it charged only a flat \$2 booking fee and otherwise left 100% of fares to drivers. RideAustin booked 2.25 million rides in its first 16 months. When the state legislature overturned local ride-sharing regulations, Uber and Lyft reentered the Austin market in Summer 2017 with a predatory pricing

⁷¹ Morell, "Introduction," in Morell (ed.), *Sharing Cities: A worldwide cities overview on platform economy policies with a focus on Barcelona* (Barcelona: Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, 2018), p. 19.

⁷² Álvaro Porro, Commissioner for Social Economy, Local Development and Consumption, Barcelona City Council, "The Barcelona City Council with the local platform economy," in Morell, ed., *Sharing Cities*, pp. 199–200.

⁷³ "Bringing the Platform Co-op 'Rebel Cities' Together."

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Cat Johnson, "10 Ways Vancouver Created a Greener, More Efficient Transportation System," *Shareable*, Jan. 28, 2017 <<http://www.shareable.net/blog/10-ways-vancouver-created-a-greener-more-efficient-transportation-system>>.

strategy (i.e. discounts of up to 50%). RideAustin lost two-thirds of its customers, but RideAustin VP of strategic programs and operations Bobbi Kommineni estimated that

the nonprofit can bottom out at about 20% of the market in the long run. Enough Austinites want to keep Austin “weird” – that is, serviced by locally owned companies – she argues....

“There’s definitely a part of our customer base who are price-sensitive, particularly students, who will switch to the other services,” she says (as well as Uber and Lyft, Fasten is another major competitor). “But we also have a core base that wants to use us versus a big corporation. It’s about doing right by the drivers, ensuring they have a fair wage, and doing right by the community....”

[Arun] Sundararajan believes ride hailing ultimately will be a low-margin, high-volume business, with low barriers to entry. The cost of building an app is coming down all the time, he says, making defending a market position harder and harder for Uber and Lyft and giving more opportunities for workers who want to work for themselves.⁷⁶

In London, the New Economics Foundation recommended the city take a similar approach following transport authorities’ 2017 denial of a license to Uber.

The Foundation believes that now is the moment for TFL and the Mayor of London to go further to provide better working conditions for drivers and higher safety standards for passengers.

The Mayor’s next step should be to start the job of creating ‘Khan’s Cars’: a mutually owned taxi platform for London which would share benefits with drivers and users.⁷⁷

Likewise the cooperative ride-sharing app Eva in Montreal, sponsored by the Desjardins credit union.

It’s like Uber, but aimed at people who want to support a local business. The platform has 500 active drivers, with 500 more in the process of joining, and a growing base of 17,000 users, according to co-founder Dardan Isufi....

Under Eva’s governing rules, both drivers and riders have voting rights, and receive a share of profits, though turning a profit is still unheard of in the ride-sharing business, including for heavyweights Uber and Lyft.

“I like that we can vote on how much of our fares go to the head office,” said Eva driver Imran Karmali, who will be attending his first meeting. Drivers currently contribute 15 percent of their fares towards the fledgling company’s marketing and operating costs, while Uber takes 25 percent.

⁷⁶ Ben Schiller, “Could London Set Up A Nonprofit, Cooperative Alternative To Uber?” *Fast Company*, October 2, 2017 <<https://www.fastcompany.com/40473251/could-london-set-up-a-nonprofit-alternative-to-uber>>.

⁷⁷ “New Economics Foundation Calls For ‘Khan’s Cars’ As Mutually Owned Alternative to Uber,” *New Economics Foundation*, September 22, 2017 <<https://neweconomics.org/2017/09/new-economics-foundation-calls-khans-cars-mutually-owned-alternative-uber/>>.

Isufi began working on Eva two years ago with fellow university student Raphael Gaudreault. He remembers asking Gaudreault, “How hard could it be to start a better ride-sharing platform?” In practice, there’s been no shortage of challenges, like a period of sleepless days and nights rooting out fraudulent activity and creating new protocols....

In line with their cooperative business model, the code for the app is being made available to other local co-ops around the world. The first “social franchise” to register is a drivers’ cooperative in Dhaka, Bangladesh....⁷⁸

Another case of a genuinely user-controlled ride-sharing service, with the user community pooling the costs of ownership, is a program set up in Cantua Creek, a rural community of several hundred people an hour’s drive from Fresno. It’s an impoverished community with many carless people, in a virtual food desert at least 20 minutes from the nearest store, and similarly far from doctors and other necessities. Ridership fees will be set high enough to cover the operating costs of the community’s seven-passenger van. The dispatcher’s office is accessible by landline, avoiding the barriers an app-based system present to those who can’t afford a smart-phone.⁷⁹

Besides competing cooperative platforms, another strategy for blowing up Death Stars like Uber is what Cory Doctorow calls “adversarial interoperability”: creating p2p apps that piggy-back on proprietary platforms, without their permission, and import user data. In the case of ride-sharing, here’s how he describes it:

The real barriers are not technical, but legal.

Tech law is a minefield of overly broad, superannuated rules that have been systematically distorted by companies that used “disruption” to batter their way into old industries, but now use these laws to shield themselves from any pressure from upstarts to seek to disrupt *them*....

Together, the CFAA and DMCA have given digital businesses access to a shadowy legal doctrine that was never written by Congress but is nevertheless routinely enforced by the courts: *Felony Contempt of Business-Model*....

...Uber and Lyft have lengthy terms-of-service that set out the rules under which you are authorized to communicate with Uber and Lyft’s servers. These terms of service prohibit using their servers to locate drivers for any purpose other than booking a ride. They certainly don’t permit you to locate a driver and then cancel the booking and re-book with a co-op app.

And Uber and Lyft’s apps are encrypted on your phone, so to reverse-engineer them, you’d have to decrypt them (probably by capturing an image of their decrypted code while it was running in a virtual phone simulated on a desktop computer). Decrypting an app without permission is “bypassing an effective means of access control” for a copyrighted work (the app is made up of copyrighted code).

⁷⁸ Ryan Hayes, “Worker-Owned Apps Are Trying to Fix the Gig Economy’s Exploitation,” *Vice*, November 19, 2019 <https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/pa75a8/worker-owned-apps-are-trying-to-fix-the-gig-economy-exploitation>.

⁷⁹ Natalie Delgadillo, “How an Eco-Friendly Rideshare Is Changing Life in a Tiny Rural Town,” *Governing*, June 7, 2017 <<http://www.governing.com/news/headlines/gov-eco-friendly-rideshare-cantua-creek-rural-california-unincorporated.html>>.

Uber and Lyft can use DMCA 1201 to stop you from figuring out how to use them to locate co-op drivers, and they can use the CFAA to stop you from flipping your booking from Uber to Meta-Uber.⁸⁰

So the purely technical aspect will have to be combined with a strategy of circumventing enforcement.

In any case, the platform cooperative model is closely aligned with the values of Free and Open Source Software.

Members and supporters of cooperative platforms want to create software and businesses that are fundamentally different from the apps like Uber, Lyft, and DoorDash that currently dominate the market.

“We don’t want to create a poor copy of extractive platforms,” said Jutta Treviranus, Director of the Inclusive Design Research Centre at OCAD University in Toronto. “First of all, we don’t have the money they do. Our measure of success is how far we explore the difficult terrain that extractive platforms ignore.”⁸¹

Besides high-profile examples like ride-sharing and sharing extra space in one’s home with visitors, the sharing economy includes smaller-scale projects like tool libraries and other libraries of things. One pioneer in such efforts is the Toronto Tool Library, which has four locations. In 2016 it opened a Sharing Depot where members can borrow “sporting goods, board games, camping equipment, children’s toys, and party supplies” for a subscription fee of \$50 -100 a year. The project was successful enough to adopt a second branch.⁸² Libraries for lending tools, musical instruments, kitchen appliances and many other things have sprung up in cities around the world.⁸³

Platform cooperatives aren’t limited to capital assets people own. They’re also ideally suited to labor-intensive industries where the main source of value is “human capital,” and outlays for physical capital and other overhead are minimal. These include temp work of all kinds (especially nursing and other healthcare jobs), cleaning services, and the like. The only real overhead that’s actually necessary is someone to coordinate openings with workers, some computer scheduling and payroll software, a dedicated fax and phone account, and a post office box (assuming it isn’t run out of a spare room in someone’s home). And yet for-profit agencies collect a huge share of what clients pay for performing these functions. A cooperative temp agency could drastically reduce the price to clients or raise the pay of workers, or split the middleman rent between clients and workers.

For example in New York six cleaning workers formed their own cooperative, Brightly Cleaning.⁸⁴ Another cleaning cooperative, also in New York, is Up & Go.

⁸⁰ “Cory Doctorow: Disruption for Thee, But Not for Me,” *Locus*, January 7, 2019 <<http://locusmag.com/2019/01/cory-doctorow-disruption-for-thee-but-not-for-me/>>.

⁸¹ Hayes, “Worker-Owned Apps Are Trying to Fix the Gig Economy’s Exploitation.”

⁸² Cat Johnson, “New Sharing Depot Opening Reflects Success of Toronto’s Library of Things Movement,” *Shareable*, April 10, 2017 <<https://www.shareable.net/blog/new-sharing-depot-opening-reflects-success-of-torontos-library-of-things-movement>>.

⁸³ Johnson, “These 5 Lending Libraries Are Redefining the Meaning of Ownership,” *Shareable*, April 19, 2017 <<https://www.shareable.net/blog/these-5-lending-libraries-are-redefining-the-meaning-of-ownership>>.

⁸⁴ Nithin Coca, “How Innovative Funding Models Could Usher in a New Era of Worker-Owned Platform Cooperatives,” *Shareable*, Aug. 28, 2017 <<https://www.shareable.net/blog/how-innovative-funding-models-could-usher-in-a-new-era-of-worker-owned-platform-cooperatives>>.

What would happen if low-wage workers came together to cut out the middleman and build their own platforms? This isn't just a thought experiment. Worker-owned apps are already providing real alternatives to dismal working conditions in the global gig economy.

Up & Go is a home cleaning app owned by workers in New York City. "On other apps, the owners set your wages, but we set our own wages," said worker-owner Esmeralda Flores.

Up & Go cleaners earn \$25 per hour, more than double what workers typically earned independently, according to Project Manager Sylvia Morse. While apps generally take a cut of 20 percent or more, Up & Go only takes 5 percent, which it then reinvests in the platform.

The cleaners, primarily immigrant women from Latin America, cooperatively own the Up & Go code and brand, launched publicly in May 2017. They meet monthly to make decisions on topics like cancellation policies and pricing.

"If you look at other platforms, it's clear they artificially lower prices by subsidizing first-time users and paying as little as possible to their workers. Our value proposition is that our prices are transparent, workers earn a fair wage, and clients receive professional-quality cleaning," said Maru Bautista.

Bautista directs the Cooperative Development Program of the Center for Family Life in Brooklyn. Over the past 13 years, the Center has formed 20 worker-owned co-ops that have generated more than \$13 million in revenue.

The development of Up & Go was guided by three immigrant-led cleaning co-ops over a year-long process of co-design and testing, made possible in part by funding from the anti-poverty Robin Hood Foundation.⁸⁵

A key focus of cooperative temp agencies is the power of member solidarity to guarantee workers' dignity against abuse by customers.

What would an app look like that centers women's safety instead of making it an afterthought? Members of the Self-Employed Women's Association in India are exploring various solutions to this challenge for beauty workers who make home visits such as panic buttons, an anonymous tip line, and doing away with individual worker profiles....

Salonie Hiriyyur, Senior Associate with SEWA's 300,000 member Cooperative Federation, stressed that the co-op model itself adds a layer of safety. "There is an awareness that the worker is backed by a collective. This awareness protects the worker against harassment."⁸⁶

The Federation, she said elsewhere, "is carrying out a number of platform co-op experiments, including a food delivery service, a health co-op combining education work with the sale of

⁸⁵ Hayes, "Worker-Owned Apps Are Trying to Fix the Gig Economy's Exploitation."

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Ayurvedic products like shampoo, and a project with the International Development Research Centre in Chicago to develop domestic work co-ops.”⁸⁷

There are a number of other trans-national federations promoting or incubating gig and temp work cooperatives. New York City was the site for Who Owns the World? in November 2019, a conference for the global platform co-op movement. It was convened by Trebor Scholz, director of the Institute for the Cooperative Digital Economy (itself a subsidiary of the Platform Co-op Consortium at the New School).⁸⁸

And the gig workers’ cooperatives themselves are federated into numerous bodies for mutual support. For example the bicycle delivery federation CoopCycle:

Cooperatives like these are supported by the wider federation of CoopCycle – a ‘platform cooperative’ countering mainstream economic models of platform capitalism. This movement is the effort of workers who sought each other in the hope of a fair alternative to the rampant worker exploitation within the gig-economy.

...In the words of the founders, CoopCycle works against ‘rentier capitalism’ that has led to near economic monopolisation by large companies that do not contribute but only control. The task that platform cooperatives face is to socialise a labour market which sees unfair wages and worsening working conditions under these companies. This unfairness is being challenged by workers worldwide, including by partners of CoopCycle such as Belgium’s Molenbike, Spain’s Mensakas or the UK’s York Collective....

How does one then begin chipping away at such a digital edifice? CoopCycle and similar alternatives like them step in. They provide the critical functions which form the backbone of a gig-economy business. The main moving parts of the platform cooperative would include software, smartphone applications, mapping, insurances and building alliances with potential vendors. The technology that enables all these functions from CoopCycle is free and open for all cooperatives to use.⁸⁹

The idea in all such cases where workers provide their own capital, whether physical or human is – to paraphrase Yochai Benkler – to “use technology to reduce or entirely eliminate those who play a primarily ‘extractive’ role in markets, the players whose main or sometimes only function is to come between the producers or providers of goods and services and consumers.”⁹⁰

At its highest level, the concept of platform cooperativism applies to the city itself as a platform. Municipal governance, when reorganized in accordance with the principles of platform cooperativism, gives us something like the Partner State. Stacco Troncoso and Ann Marie Utratel paint an appealing picture:

⁸⁷ Miles Hadfield, “‘Fire the bosses’: Platform co-ops set out their radical stall,” *TheNews*, November 22, 2019 <<https://www.thenews.coop/144241/topic/technology/fire-the-bosses-platform-co-ops-set-out-their-radical-stall/>>.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Shyam Krishna, “Reclaiming Work: Can Cooperatives Overthrow the Gig Economy,” *Red Pepper*, June 10, 2020 <<https://www.redpepper.org.uk/reclaiming-work-can-cooperatives-overthrow-the-gig-economy/>>.

⁹⁰ Hal Plotkin, “Two Big Reasons for Hope: The Platform Cooperative Consortium Lights Up The Commons,” *Medium*, Jan. 26, 2017 <<https://medium.com/@hplotkin/two-big-reasons-for-hope-the-platform-cooperative-consortium-lights-up-the-commons-8d8fd1ccc6bc>>.

Imagine a radically reconfigured and democratically accountable structure. One that, while preserving the more desirable characteristics of the Welfare State — social and public health provision and large infrastructure management and upkeep — radically democratizes them. It would do away with the State’s cozy symbiosis with market entities, while deconstructing its pernicious monopolies over money creation and exchange, and property and judicial rights. A second radical set of measures would prohibit the structural enforcement of inequality and the often violent repression of emancipatory alternatives. This structure would function in much the same way as foundations do in the Open Source software economy: providing the infrastructure for cooperation and the creation and upkeep of commons but not directing the process of social value creation and distribution. In other words, it would empower and protect the practice of commoning.

This enabling metastructure — often referred to as “The Partner State” — would also take on new functions derived from already existing P2P/Commons practices. Among these, we would see a promotion of real, needs-oriented entrepreneurship, bolstered by explicit recognition and support of bottom-up productive infrastructures, such as Open Coops, mesh wireless networks or community renewables through public-Commons partnerships. It would allow commoners to repurpose or take over unused or underutilised public buildings for social ends while giving legal recognition to the act of commoning, whether through copyleft-inspired property-law hacks or through a longer process of gradually institutionalizing commons practices. Its grassroots democratizing ethos would create new financing mechanisms and debt-free public money creation, which, alongside social currencies, could fund environmentally regenerative work and the creation of new, distributed Open-source infrastructure. These would be supported by taxation schemes favouring the types of labor described above, while penalizing speculation, parasitic rents and negative social and environmental externalities. The overall system has to be kept in check through a pervasive culture of participatory politics — made feasible through its attendant pedagogy — to involve a newly enfranchised citizenry in the deliberation and real time consultation of political and legislative issues and budgeting. In issues of power, the Partner State shifts to being a fluid facilitator to assist and emancipate the bottom-up counter-power that keeps it in check.⁹¹

But far more mainstream attention is devoted to concepts like “Smart Cities” being promoted by capital, that amount to nothing more than Death Star platforms at the municipal level. The term “smart cities” itself dates back to IBM’s coinage “Smarter Cities,” which was a marketing gimmick “to boost sales of enterprise software to city governments as tools for urban planning and administration.”⁹² But even major figures in IBM itself have misgivings about the original vision. For example Steven Adler, IBM’s chief information strategist:

⁹¹ Stacco Troncoso and Ann Marie Utratel, “Commons in the Time of Monsters: How P2P Politics Can Change the World, One City At a Time,” *Commons Transition*, June 5, 2017 <<http://commonstransition.org/commons-time-monsters/>>.

⁹² David Bollier, *The City as Platform: How Digital Networks Are Changing Urban Life and Governance* (Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute, 2016), p. 2.

...when IBM created the idea of smart cities, “our definition was a city that is self-aware.” In the beginning, this was a matter of making a city administration more instrumented and intelligent from the point of view of top-down control. “But increasingly,” said Adler, “we have seen that we need to help citizens participate in the self-awareness of a city. In New York City, there are about eight million residents and 300,000 city employees, and there is no possible way that 300,000 people can know as much about the law, architecture, design, sanitation and other facets of the city as eight million citizens. So how do we get the eight million experts in our city to participate in governing decisions?”⁹³

Of course, that’s not to say Adler’s got the platform co-op gospel or wants to open-source local government. He’s just a more perceptive and reasonable person than average in the belly of the Beast. But plenty of others are explicitly working in that direction. And people like Adler may be the ones we can actually bargain with if sufficient pressure is brought to bear from the outside.

Stefaan Verhulst of GovLab calls for turning citizens into “‘co-designers, co-producers and co-learners,’ with government in developing better city services and processes...” And Chief Technology Officer Peter Marx of the City of Los Angeles strongly hints at something like the commons model as an alternative to both state and “private” sector.

“Private is held up as the panacea of wonderfulness and innovation, and government is cast as an old, gray, stodgy, never-changing bureaucracy. That’s the running vernacular. I think the reality, like all such stereotypes, is rather different. We all know that private [sector] is not a panacea and that government is changing continuously.” We need to get beyond this simplistic narrative, he asserted, and recognize that self-organized citizen engagement as a third force — neither public nor private — holds great promise.⁹⁴

The end goal, David Bollier argues, “is for city governments to regard their resources as flexible, open platforms that welcome citizen-led innovation, rather than government clinging to brittle systems of centralized, rule-driven control.”⁹⁵ City government must be seen, not as something that does things, but as a platform that enables citizens to do things in cooperation with one another. Policy-making must become an open source activity carried out collaboratively by citizens, and facilitated by city government as a platform.

Platform Cooperatives: Public Services and Utilities. Platform cooperatives are also relevant as a model for organizing the delivery of public services — electricity, water, Internet, education, etc. — on a commons basis rather than through either government bureaucracy or corporations. Remunicipalization of utilities and services, after decades of neoliberal privatization, is a global trend. Among many other reasons, cities are learning that the alleged cost savings from corporate privatization were a scam. As Olivier Pettitjean points out, local authorities in Europe have found,

in spite of what private sector propagandists continue to repeat tirelessly, that privatisation is more expensive than direct public management. When, for example,

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Paris remunicipalised its water services in 2010, it saved 35 million euros a year just by foregoing payments to parent companies....

In Newcastle, United Kingdom, the modernisation of signalling and fiber optic cable system was carried out by a new in-house team for about 11 million pounds, compared with more than double this figure that it would have cost if done by a private company. The city of Bergen, Norway, where two elderly care centres were taken back in-house, had a surplus of half a million euros whereas a one million loss was expected. The costs of waste collection and cleaning services decreased from 20 to 10 million euros annually in León, Spain, with remunicipalisation....⁹⁶

And the new wave of remunicipalization — perhaps most notably in Jeremy Corbyn’s onetime policy agenda — differs from the old model of bureaucratic administration in a manner analogous to the way Labour’s industrial nationalization proposals differ from the old managerialist Morrisonian nationalization model.

Importantly, the new wave of public ownership is increasingly understood as needing to avoid some of the limitations of past models — including the overly centralised, opaque, and managerial top-down public corporation model of the postwar period, which was deliberately kept at arm’s length from democratic accountability and control....

The aim is to develop powerful new forms of public ownership that stimulate broad-based participation, increase accountability and transparency, and empower communities and individuals that have traditionally been excluded from economic decision-making. In sum, what is needed is *democratic* public ownership, an approach that that [sic] combines the benefits of broadly shared ownership — such as more equitable distributional outcomes — with the individual and societal benefits of confronting alienation with increased agency and empowerment.⁹⁷

Keir Milburn and Bertie Russell propose private-commons partnerships as an alternative to the conventional model of municipal ownership.

...[T]hey involve co-ownership between appropriate state authorities and a Commoners Association, alongside co-combined governance with a third association of project specific relevant parties such as trade unions and relevant experts. Rather than a mono-cultural institutional form applied indiscriminately PCPs should emerge as an overlapping patchwork of institutions that respond to the peculiarities of the asset concerned, the scale at which the PCP will operate (whether it be city-region wide energy production in Greater Manchester or the commercial activity of a North London market), and the individuals and communities that will act together as commoners.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Olivier Petitjean, “Can Cities and Citizens Reinvent Public Services?” *Green European Journal*, November 25, 2017 <<https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/can-cities-and-citizens-reinvent-public-services/>>.

⁹⁷ Thomas M. Hanna, “Democratising public ownership: Labour’s new consultation,” *New Socialist*, February 25, 2019 <<https://newsocialist.org.uk/democratising-public-ownership-labours-new-consultation/>>.

⁹⁸ Keir Milburn and Bertie T. Russell, *Public-Common Partnerships: Building New Circuits of Collective Ownership* (Common Wealth, June 28, 2019) <<https://uploads->

David Bollier explains that commons are “not the same as government because, in its ideal form, it is about the commoners owning and managing resources as directly and locally as possible. It usually entails a significant measure of participation, transparency, decentralised control and accountability – factors that are not always present when the state is managing a resource.”⁹⁹

Milburn and Russell, much like De Angelis, emphasize the potential of commons to serve as building blocks for an expanding counter-system that increases our bargaining leverage and power of exit from capitalism. This is owing to

the potential of PCPs to emerge as a core element of a transformative socialist project concerned not only with the immediate redistribution of wealth and power, but the development of a self-expanding tendency towards collective self-government and the decommodification of daily life. What is fundamentally novel about PCPs is not their particular institutional form, but how they relate to one another as part of a wider circuit.¹⁰⁰

Individual Commons Associations are also liable to want to capitalise projects along their own supply and value chains, as this is the quickest way to disembed themselves from the circuits of capital. In principle, this is to be encouraged as it facilitates the formation of circuits of commons in specific sectors; yet this tendency must be balanced against the strategic needs of the wider project of socialist transformation. The ability to trigger the self-expansive dynamic of the commons will require the capitalisation of projects most likely to produce a surplus (with energy, water, housing, and transport infrastructure being obvious starting points) and thus allow the capitalisation of further PCPs. Again, this will require an ongoing negotiation between the various participants in the joint enterprise.¹⁰¹

...Reducing people’s reliance on capital for their basic social reproduction helps strengthen our hand in more direct antagonistic forms of struggle. Strikes, for instance, become eminently more winnable when many of our life-support systems – such as energy, water, housing and transport – are commonly owned and governed resources. As the commons circuit grows and encompasses more and more of the vital infrastructure upon which our lives depend, then the ability of capital to exercise leverage through disruption becomes significantly undermined.¹⁰²

Public broadband is an especially important example of how municipal property can contribute to a commons-based city ecology. In many places the city’s fiber-optic infrastructure for supporting public utilities or communications by government bodies has sufficient excess capacity to provide Internet service superior to that provided by telecom companies (which isn’t saying a lot). A good example is the municipal broadband in Chattanooga, affectionately known by locals as “The Gig.” Telecom corporations have fought such efforts tooth and nail, and in many states

ssl.webflow.com/5e2191f00f868d778b89ff85/5e3ab8fc86d23d67f3db6836_Public-Common-Partnership.pdf>, pp. 2–3.

⁹⁹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

obtained legislation to prevent entities like cities, public utilities, and school systems from using the spare capacity of their fiber-optic networks to provide cheap, high-quality broadband service.

But the potential for providing such service, even with only existing infrastructure, is enormous. As it is, many communities have followed Chattanooga's model — Longmont and Santa Monica in California, just to name a couple. Although Colorado law prohibits municipal broadband, localities are allowed to opt out by referendum; as a result, some 26 cities and counties have decided to permit municipal Internet service.¹⁰³ Absent industry-written regulatory prohibitions, most large and medium-sized cities in the United States could probably provide high-quality Internet service. Altogether more than 750 towns, cities, and counties in the US have done so. And 197 other communities have some publicly owned fiber service already available to parts of the community, another 120 have publicly-owned dark (unused) fiber available for use.¹⁰⁴

Local meshworks — “[c]ommunity created and user-managed... decentralized wireless access points connected to each other,” as Sheila Foster and Christian Iaione describe them — are one example.

Mesh networking relies on existing urban infrastructure and the combined efforts of many local actors — including public and private property owners who grant access to buildings and other structures to mount the access points — to create a solution to the “last mile” connectivity gap. The goal of these networks is to bring internet service to communities and populations that lack high speed wireless or broadband access, increasingly seen as a necessary public good or “fourth utility.” In this model, no one owns the entire infrastructure (open and free access), but everyone who wants to access can contribute with their own resources to run the network which, in turn, is managed and governed by the community.

Mesh networks have been established in many European and American cities, including the famed community mesh network in Red Hook Brooklyn designed to overcome the digital divide, to the Detroit, Michigan network which provides connectivity to the 40 percent of its residents without internet access, to the mesh network in Berlin, Germany designed to provide vital internet service to newly arrived migrants living in refugee shelters.¹⁰⁵

There are also many examples of direct, cooperative action by citizens themselves to create Internet service with acceptable levels of quality where none is currently provided.

In rural southern Minnesota over two dozen small towns in four counties, faced with lousy service and slow connections from the corporate service providers, pooled their resources in the

¹⁰³ Nathan Schneider, “A people-owned internet exists. Here is what it looks like,” *P2P Foundation Blog*, August 8, 2017 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/a-people-owned-internet-exists-here-is-what-it-looks-like/2017/08/08>>.

¹⁰⁴ Karl Bode, “More Than 750 American Communities Have Built Their Own Internet Networks,” *Motherboard*, January 23, 2018 <https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/a3np4a/new-municipal-broadband-map>.

¹⁰⁵ Sheila R. Foster and Christian Iaione, “Ostrom in the City: Design Principles and Practices for the Urban Commons,” preprint of chapter in Dan Cole, Blake Hudson, Jonathan Rosenbloom eds., *Routledge Handbook of the Study of the Commons* (forthcoming, 2020) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323323225_Ostrom_in_the_City_Design_Principles_and_Practices_for_the_Urban_Commons> pp. 19–20.

RS Fiber project, which is expected to provide Internet service to 6,000 households.¹⁰⁶ All across the country, rural electric cooperatives are deciding to provide high-speed Internet service to their members as well.¹⁰⁷ In Europe, the Exarchia neighborhood in Athens is organizing Internet service for refugee communities in the surrounding area.¹⁰⁸

Incubator Hubs. As an alternative to startups being bought out by capitalist investors, Schneider proposes “Exit to Community.” Under this model,

the company would transition from investor ownership to ownership by the people who rely on it most. Those people might be users, workers, customers, participant organizations, or a combination of such stakeholder groups. The mechanism for co-ownership might be a cooperative, a trust, or even crypto-tokens. The community might own the whole company when the process is over, or just a substantial-enough part of it to make a difference.

When a startup exits to community, founders should see enough of a reward that they feel their risk and hard work was worth it. Investors should see a fair return for their risk. Most importantly, the key stakeholders should know the company is worthy of their trust and ongoing investment because they co-own it. For a social-media company, this might mean that users have a meaningful say in how their private data is or isn’t used. For a gig platform, it might mean that the gig workers co-determine their working conditions and what is done with the profits they produce. These kinds of outcomes could help prevent the massive accountability crises that now beset today’s most successful venture-backed startups....

Of course it is desirable to create startups under community auspices in the first place, rather than buying them from capitalists. But in some cases that isn’t practical.

Ambitious startups are a risky endeavor, and it may not be fair to distribute that risk with early-stage participants. Also, startups usually need to make a few dramatic pivots early in their life, and having a large community of co-owners would make those hard decisions more difficult than if a small, high-trust group of founders is in charge.... Later, once the company has found its market and its footing, the transition to accountable community ownership will better suit the nature of the business.¹⁰⁹

Municipal Facilities — and Repurposed Vacant Buildings — as Commons. Using city government buildings, along with buildings owned by other community institutions like churches and universities, as hubs for community organizations and activities, is a common theme among decentralist writers like Paul Goodman. The idle capacity of public buildings (like public school buildings in off hours and during summer) can serve as community centers.

¹⁰⁶ Ben DeJarnette, “Tired of Waiting for Corporate High-Speed Internet, Minnesota Farm Towns Build Their Own,” *Yes! Magazine*, Aug. 3, 2016 <<http://www.yesmagazine.org/new-economy/tired-of-waiting-for-corporate-high-speed-internet-minnesota-farm-towns-build-their-own-20160803>>.

¹⁰⁷ Nathan Schneider, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁸ Dan Bateyko, “Athens’ community wifi project Exarcheia Net brings internet to refugee housing projects,” *P2P Foundation Blog*, June 8, 2017 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/athens-community-wifi-project-exarcheia-net-brings-internet-refugee-housing-projects/2017/06/08>>.

¹⁰⁹ Nathan Schneider, “Startups Need a New Option: Exit to Community,” *The Internet of Ownership*, September 16, 2019 <<https://ioo.coop/2019/09/startups-need-a-new-option-exit-to-community/>>.

According to Foster and Iaione, “[a]mong the most prominent sites of... contestation”

include efforts to claim vacant or abandoned urban land and structures for affordable housing and community gardening/urban farming in many American cities, the occupation and reclamation of formally public and private cultural institutions as part of the movement for *beni comuni* (“common goods”) in Italy, and the rise of informal housing settlements on the periphery of many cities around the world.¹¹⁰

Community residents often recuperate abandoned or neglected properties as a commons on their own initiatives, and one of the most important tasks of a municipalist movement is to protect and reinforce such efforts by formalizing or legalizing them.

...[R]esidents who live in these communities often begin using property that has been abandoned and which may be adding to the conditions of blight in the surrounding community. In many cases, community members may begin to treat the property as an open access resource, utilizing it in ways that add value to the surrounding community and/or which produce goods for that community (as in the case of community gardens or urban farms or using abandoned homes to house the homeless). In other instances, public users conduct illegal activities (dumping, crime, etc.), which clearly does not add value to the surrounding community.

Thus, in addition to creating the potential for tragedy, conflict surrounding the use of vacant or underutilized property in distressed cities also has the potential to capture positive value for the community by virtue of using the property to create goods (both tangible and intangible) that can be shared. Unlike Hardin’s tale of tragedy..., opening up access to abandoned or vacant property instead can enhance its value to the community.

Foster and Iaione note that, as we already saw in our discussion of abandoned lots under the heading of land trusts, there is sometimes political conflict because local government prefers to sell unused space for commercial development to expand the tax base.

Members of the community, however, might want to claim the land for “commoning” activities — such as to build a community garden or urban farm which enables residents to produce both tangible (food, green space, recreational space, and public safety) and intangible (social networks, mutual trust, fellowship, a sense of security) goods for the surrounding community.

In other cases, local residents may be pushing to transform the land or vacant structures into affordable housing units, a town commons, a community center, a charter school, or infrastructure for local businesses. In cities still struggling to revitalize their inner core, residents are working to transform entire neighborhoods pockmarked with vacant lots and abandoned property into livable and affordable communities.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Foster and Iaione, “The City As a Commons,” p. 282.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 302–303.

When there is conflict about the future use of open, abandoned or vacant land or structures, the conflict is often highlighted or magnified by the illegal occupation of the resource as a way of claiming it as a common resource. This characterizes a number of social movements in the United States and abroad in which activists occupy vacant, abandoned or underutilized land, buildings and structures as a means of altering the underlying property arrangement of certain goods away from an exclusively owned good (either public or private) to one that is held open for and managed by a community of users.

These movements are responding to what they view as market failures and the failures of an urban development approach which has neglected the provision of goods necessary to human well-being and flourishing. The tactic of occupation is a form of resistance against the enclosure — through private sale or public appropriation — of these goods. Occupation is also a way of asserting that the occupied property has greater value or utility as a good either accessible to the public or preserved and maintained as a common pool resource.

While not explicitly using the language of the “commons,” these contemporary “property outlaws,” are very much staking claim to the property in transition as a common good. For example, in many parts of the United States, as well as in countries such as Brazil and South Africa, activists occupy and squat in foreclosed, empty, often boarded up homes and housing units (including public housing units) as a means to convince municipalities to clear title and transfer these homes and units to communal forms of ownership. This “occupy” or “take back the land” movement is a response to the displacement of homeowners and tenants brought on by the confluence of the housing/ mortgage crisis and the forces of gentrification. As investors move to buy up foreclosed homes at auctions and flip them, or raise rents, nonprofit organizations propose instead to take some of these properties out of the real estate market altogether and to create either limited-equity apartments or long-term affordable rentals.

Moreover, the difficulty and high cost of excluding users, and the potential for rivalry, sometimes result in such abandoned structures becoming sites for illegal drug activities and other nuisances, adding to the visible blight and overall decline of the surrounding community. For this reason, it is perhaps not surprising that local officials (and in some instances local laws) often condone the occupation and transformation of these structures by community members who aim to return the asset to productive use in ways that beautify and improve the properties and, by extension, the surrounding neighborhood. Transferring previously privately held structures to a community land trust, or converting them into deed-restricted housing, would keep these properties perpetually affordable for low- and moderate-income households and would allow the residents to self-manage them as an urban commons.¹¹²

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 303–305. The authors mention Illinois as one jurisdiction in which the law carves out an exception in favor of trespassing when it has the effect of beautifying or adding to the value of vacant, abandoned, or neglected properties.

Sandrina Burkhardt mentions repurposing libraries as common spaces, with the library as “an access center that encourages a resource based, shared economy.”

Think of 3D printing, (wood/sewing/workshops), a library of things and even a library of people (where people meet and share and help each other who would usually not engage with one another)....¹¹³

Besides public buildings in use, vacant and unused buildings can be transformed into community hubs. Giuseppe Micciarelli writes of abandoned and obsolete places which have been recuperated for new purposes in the commons.

We can start from a common situation around Europe: a great number of citizens, local communities, groups of workers, and cultural activists are mobilized in defense – often a discovery – of new kinds of urban commons: ancient buildings, former prisons, abandoned convents and barracks, brownfields and other properties in ruin raised like ghosts in metropolis affected by the crisis.... Similar sites were something in their previous lives: former orphanages, ex schools, ex barracks, psychiatric hospitals, former convents, ex stations.... In such ex places different experiment of self-government and community management have developed. Today a lot of people use them for social, cultural and different kind of activities....

The collective and urban civic use is an innovative, replicable and sustainable model of management of urban commons. This is a form of direct administration of public spaces, such as abandoned historical sites, led by citizenship, without the mediation of any association or other legal entity.¹¹⁴

Italy, in particular, has had a strong recent history of such recuperation, according to Foster and Iaione:

...the Italian movement for “beni comuni” (common goods) utilizes occupation to stake public claim to abandoned and underutilized cultural (and other) structures in an effort to have these spaces either retained as, or brought back into, communal use. The most famous of these occupations is that of the national Valle Theatre in Rome. The theatre had become largely defunct as a result of government cuts for all public institutions, and the Italian Cultural Ministry transferred the management of the theater to the City of Rome. Out of fear by many that the City would then sell it to a developer as part of a larger project for a new commercial center, a collection of art workers, students, and patrons occupied the theater. This occupation was followed by similar occupations of cultural institutions and other structures that were subject to privatization in cities all over Italy. In each case, the occupants’ aim was “to recover

¹¹³ Sandrina Burkhardt, “Repurposing Public Spaces in a City as a Commons: the Library,” in *The City as Commons: A Policy Reader*. Edited by José Maria Ramos (Melbourne: Commons Transition Coalition, 2016), p. 25.

¹¹⁴ Giuseppe Micciarelli, “Introduction to urban and collective civic use: the ‘direct management’ of urban emerging commons in Naples” *Heteropolitics: Refiguring the Common and the Political*. International Workshop hosted at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, September 2017 <https://www.academia.edu/37897151/Introduction_to_urban_and_collective_civic_use_the_direct_management_of_urban_emerging_c> pp. 3–4.

people's possession of under-utilized" structures and "open up" these spaces for the flourishing of common goods like culture.¹¹⁵

The 2014 Bologna Regulation for the Care and Regeneration of the Urban Commons broke ground for such activity. Neil Gorenflo describes it as

a history-making institutional innovation that enables Bologna to operate as a collaborative commons. Now Bologna's citizens have a legal way to contribute to the city. Since the regulation passed one year ago, more than 100 projects have signed 'collaboration pacts' with the city under the regulation to contribute urban improvements with 100 more in the pipeline.¹¹⁶

A number of cities in Italy, most notably Turin and Naples, expanded the Bologna regulation on the commons to provide for recuperating/repurposing abandoned and under-used buildings. The Bologna regulation itself was comparatively tame, according to Daniela Patti:

...[T]his Regulation has the limitation of addressing only the less problematic situations of collaboration between civic and public stakeholders when promoting the urban commons. In fact, collective cleaning of public spaces, paintings of murals or creation of street furniture have been valuable initiatives taking place even more frequently thanks to the legal clarity in which they can take place, but are rather unproblematic in social and political terms. Urban Commons involving higher stakes in terms of ownership, management and economic conditions, as in the case of public buildings or even private ones, are not part of the scope of the Bologna Regulation of the Commons.

The provisions in Turin and Naples, although based on the Bologna prototype, were considerably further-reaching.

Such a challenge was instead recently taken on by the City of Turin, which as many other Italian cities adopted the Bologna' Regulation of the Commons with very small adjustments in January 2016. Within the framework of the Co-City project supported by the Urban Innovative Actions program, Turin aims at developing the experience of the commons towards the creation of an innovative social welfare that will foster the co-production of services with community enterprises. Low cost urban regeneration activities in open spaces as well as buildings will take place and will be financially supported through the European-funded project....

An experience stemming from a different background to the one of Bologna is the Regulation of the Commons in Naples. It was in this city that for the first time in 2011, the juridical definition of Commons was introduced in the City Council's Statute, referring especially to the case of water, which had been object of the national Referendum that same year. The following years, the "Regulation for the Discipline of the

¹¹⁵ Foster and Iaione, "The City As a Commons," pp. 305–306.

¹¹⁶ Neal Gorenflo, "Bologna Celebrates One Year of a Bold Experiment in Urban Commoning," in *Build the City: Perspectives on Commons and Culture* (Krytyka Polityczna and the European Cultural Foundation, 2015), p. 147.

Commons” and the “Principles for the government and management of the Commons” were established.... The focus towards the urban commons was explicit in 2013, when the City Council adopted the Public Space Charter, elaborated by the Biennial of Public Space held that same year in Rome, which aims at the creation of concrete processes towards the promotion of the urban public spaces.

It is in 2014 that the current regulation deliberating on the urban commons in Naples was approved by the City Council.... This approach therefore attempts to foster a logic of self-governance and experimental management of public spaces, aiming at recognising these spaces as commons of collective interest and fruition. In 2016 seven locations in Naples were identified as commons because of the collective commitment of citizens in their regeneration after a long period of abandonment. Before such recognition these spaces were officially identified as illegal occupation of public properties, for which all people involved were subjected to legal persecution.... This is the case of the Je So’ Pazzo initiative taking place in the old mental asylum in the city centre of Naples, where a group of inhabitants, many of whom youngsters, have taken over the space to provide a series of local services, such as music classes, sports facilities and many other community-run activities. Currently the agreement with the Municipalities implies that utility costs of the space are paid by the City Council but all activities related expenses are responsibility of the users. In terms of property rights, the space remains in public ownership and users are granted freely access as long as the activities remain of public interest and open to all citizens.

At first sight the Regulations of the Commons of Bologna and Turin and the one of Naples could appear to be rather similar, having been developed at the same with an overall same objectives, yet they greatly differ in terms of concepts of property and usage of the commons. Bologna and the blueprint in Turin, do not effectively intervene on the property model of the public estates, that remain an asset exclusively managed by the Authority, albeit in the public interest. Even in terms of what is the usage model of these properties, this remains unaltered as the Authority is ultimately responsible for the refurbishment of the estates or for the development of social and economic functions. For this reason, it can be said that the civic-public collaborations to be activated tend to take place in open public spaces with a low conflict threshold. Instead, Naples has attempted to pursue a different model of property and management of the commons. In fact, to be identified as a commons are the buildings themselves, based on a series of social and cultural elements, and not the communities operating in them, therefore avoiding conflicts in terms of public procurement in assigning tenants to a public property. The activities currently taking place within these identified Urban Commons are accepted by the Administration as long as they respect the Commons ethics and guarantee access to citizens.¹¹⁷

Regarding the Turin case, Elena De Nictolis adds, the city’s version of the Bologna Regulation

looks at the transformation of abandoned structures and vacant land in hubs of resident participation, in order to foster the community spirit as well as the creation of

¹¹⁷ Daniela Patti, “Regulating the Commons – What We Can Learn From Italian Experiences,” *Cooperative City Magazine*, November 21, 2017 <<https://cooperativecity.org/2017/11/21/urban-commons-learning-from-italy/>>.

social enterprises that will contribute to reduce urban poverty in different areas of the city....

The regeneration of abandoned or underused spaces in different areas of the city will contribute to create new jobs in the social economy sector through the creation of new enterprises....¹¹⁸

Eleonora de Majo, similarly, describes the measures taken in Naples after the election of a populist Luigi de Magistris, “only supported by local movements and civil society,” in 2011.

The municipality... decided to approve resolutions about the recognition (not legalisation) of a third kind of social spaces, neither public nor private, but common. These resolutions recognised the local assemblies which formed to administer occupied spaces as their only sovereign bodies and, for this reason, as the only decision making bodies.¹¹⁹

Marta Cillero adds more details, involving the city’s 2016 recognition of seven citizen-occupied public properties as “emerging commons and environments of civic development.”

All these buildings were public properties, which had for years been in a terrible state of neglect and decay. Citizens and social movements transformed these spaces into places “that create social capital in terms of collective uses with a commons value.” The seven properties identified by the Resolution... share the fact that Neapolitans were worried about speculation and the possible privatisation of the buildings. This concern drove them to take the decision to act first and restore them to the public interest....¹²⁰

And as Iaione notes, the Naples regulation has in turn inspired copycat policies. The Civic eState Network was created by Naples in cooperation with a number of other European cities — Barcelona, Gdansk, Ghent, Amsterdam, Iasi (Romania) and Presov (Slovakia) — to replicate the same policy.¹²¹

In Montreal, the post-1960s secularization and associated drop in church attendance has resulted in roughly one-sixth of churches being desacralized and sold. Some of these have been transformed into community hubs or cultural centers.¹²²

The Church of England has had similar recent experience with repurposing under-utilized buildings. A number of functions, including sub-post offices and community banks, are housed within church buildings. Some church spires house routers for free community wireless.¹²³

¹¹⁸ Elena De Nictolis, “Co-City Turin: legal tools for citizen–municipal collaboration created to fight urban poverty,” LabGov.City, August 31, 2018 <<http://labgov.city/theurbanmedialab/co-city-turin-legal-tools-for-citizen-municipal-collaboration-created-to-fight-urban-poverty/>>.

¹¹⁹ Eleonora de Majo, “The municipalist revolution,” *International Politics and Society*, December 14, 2018 <<https://www.ips-journal.eu/regions/europe/article/show/the-municipalist-revolution-3155/>>.

¹²⁰ Marta Cillero, “What Makes an Empty Building in Naples a ‘Common Good’?” *Political Critique*, April 25, 2017 <<http://politicalcritique.org/world/2017/naples-common-good-empty-buildings/>>.

¹²¹ Christian Iaione, “Pooling urban commons: the Civic eState,” LabGov, July 1, 2019 <<http://labgov.city/theurbanmedialab/pooling-urban-commons-the-civic-estate/>>.

¹²² Ruby Irene Pratka, “Quebec’s Vacant Church Buildings Resurrected as Community Spaces,” Shareable, March 14, 2017 <<https://www.shareable.net/blog/quebecs-vacant-church-buildings-resurrected-as-community-spaces>>.

¹²³ Stir to Action, “What Does it Mean to Unlock the Next Economy?” *Shareable*, June 7, 2017 <<https://www.shareable.net/blog/what-does-it-mean-to-unlock-the-next-economy>>.

Repurposing existing vacant buildings as community hubs (for activities like “coworking, maker and leisure spaces”) is also preferable, in terms of carbon emissions, to the dedicated construction of new “green” buildings, according to Christiaan Weiler:

Even the most energy-efficient new buildings will likely take up to 20 years to compensate for the energy they spent on the extraction, manufacture and transportation of the building materials required for their own construction....

Large organisations, such as local governments, property developers and investors, mostly manage large assets for the long term and are rarely concerned with temporary and small under-occupied assets because of their small yield. This creates ‘free’ cavities of vacancy like abandoned buildings that have no business model, only security issues. Rather than pay security to watch over empty properties, in The Netherlands it is common to sign temporary contracts with occupants who also improve local security while occupying a home temporarily. This practice is easily extended to nonprofit or small businesses, and offers a low-cost place for local initiatives to grow into feasible social businesses.¹²⁴

Policing. Although the Black Lives Matters protests in 2014, and the renewed protests in 2020, have drawn American attention to police abolition and local police alternatives, such proposals go back at least to the Black Panthers’ neighborhood patrols and community control in the U.S., and have been put into practice elsewhere in the world.

The Movement for Black Lives, in their “Vision For Black Lives” platform (initially drafted in August 2016), called for

Direct democratic community control of local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, ensuring that communities most harmed by destructive policing have the power to hire and fire officers, determine disciplinary action, control budgets and policies, and subpoena relevant agency information.¹²⁵

A number of anarchist and libertarian socialist enclaves around the world have experimented with community peace and security forces, most notably Kurdish Rojava and the EZLN territories in Chiapas. In Rojava the functions are distributed between Asayish (Internal Security Forces) and HPC (Civil Defense Forces).

The Asayish work as traffic controllers, arrest criminals, protect victims of domestic violence, serve as security guards at main governing buildings and control the movement of people and goods from one canton to another. The HPC in contrast, are people trained in basic security who only patrol their own neighborhood. The purpose of both forces is explicitly to protect the people from outside threats such as terrorist forces. It is always the HPC that protects a neighborhood, never the Asayish. The Asayish protects the city while the HPC protects the community. Both organizations have a gender quota of at least 40 percent women, if not more.

¹²⁴ Christiaan Weiler, “Cross-sector ‘third spaces’ incubate social, climate solutions,” *Shareable*, October 9, 2019 <<https://www.shareable.net/zoned-apart-how-the-us-failed-to-share-land-but-should-start-today/>>.

¹²⁵ Movement for Black Lives, “Vision For Black Lives: Community Control” (Original version August 2016, since revised) <<https://m4bl.org/policy-platforms/community-control/>>.

Through this alternative method, the possibility of instituting hierarchies of power and authority are considerably reduced. The people are protecting themselves. Security forces protect those who they live with and interact with daily in the neighborhood. This proximity ensures that violations occur only rarely. When they do occur, the neighborhood communes immediately activate community mechanisms of justice, honor and restoration.

The chances of one group establishing a monopoly over this process are further reduced by the encouragement of everyone in the community to participate in a roster system. Anyone can volunteer. This explicitly includes the elderly, who have to take on more responsibility due to the fact that most young men and women are fighting at the front lines in the war against ISIS. Particularly women are active in civil protection. Nothing restores and empowers the soul of a traumatized, war-torn community more than seeing the matriarchs of a neighborhood stand confidently at street corners wielding AK-47 rifles for the people's protection. These images do not inspire fear and terror; they inspire communal confidence, pride, dignity, self-respect and belonging.¹²⁶

The community justice system in areas under Zapatista control in Mexico shares some similarities, although it has not entirely abolished jails.

Having adopted a position of refusal of any aid from the so called "bad" government, Zapatistas took on the state's function of service provision in communities affiliated with the movement. That meant building their own, community-based justice, education, healthcare and production systems.

The Zapatista justice system has gained trust and legitimacy even beyond the movement's supporters. It is free of charge, conducted in indigenous languages and is known to be less corrupt or partial compared to governmental institutions of justice. But more importantly, it adopts a restorative rather than punitive approach and places an emphasis on the need to find a compromise that satisfies all parties....

Sentences most of the time involve community service or a fine; jail sentences normally do not exceed several days. As Melissa Forbis explains, community jail is usually just a locked room with a partially open door so that people can stop by to chat and pass food. Since the perpetrator often has to borrow money for a fine from his or her family members, the latter are also involved and their pressure helps prevent further transgression. Women-related and domestic issues are addressed by women on the Commission.

Mariana Mora provides a telling illustration of the movement's approach to punishment, documenting a case in which Zapatistas issued a year-long community service sentence for a robbery. Those found guilty were allowed to alternate service with work on their own cornfields so that their families did not have to share in the punishment.

¹²⁶ Hawzhin Azeez, "Police abolition and other revolutionary lessons from Rojava," *ROAR Magazine*, June 6, 2020 <<https://roarmag.org/essays/police-abolition-and-other-revolutionary-lessons-from-rojava/>>.

Although the Zapatistas refer to their security forces as “police,” in material terms they are essentially the same as the proposals of police abolitionists elsewhere for replacing police forces: Unarmed, non-professionalized peace patrols from within the community, and directly responsible to it.

While Zapatistas still have police, it is quite distinct from how we are used to think of it. As Paulina Fernandez Christlieb documents, they are neither armed, uniformed, nor professional. Similar to other authorities, police are elected by their community; they are not remunerated and do not serve in this function permanently. Every community has its own police, while higher administrative levels — those of municipality and region — do not. Decentralized and deprofessionalized, police thus serve and are under control of the community that elects them.¹²⁷

In the United States the police and prison abolitionist movements have gained increasing visibility and support since the first wave of Black Lives Matter protests in 2014. For example, For a World Without Police, a leading abolitionist website, promotes this general approach to abolition:

Disbanding the police means more than the creation of “community peacekeepers” who will continue to enforce capitalist exploitation, oppression and inequality through other means. Along with disempowering and disarming, disbanding police institutions aims at a larger goal: the abolition of police and policing entirely....

Here are some steps to disband the police:

- Transform how we think about crime, conflict and identity. We can break the association between crime and violent punishment, justice and jail cells, and criminality and certain kinds of people. We can expose how “crime” talk is used to dehumanize black, indigenous, NBPOC, poor, queer, unruly and rebellious people. When we don’t think in terms of punishment, control and division, we can begin to imagine what real justice might entail.
- Fight to disband particular police units when they are involved in scandals or otherwise politically vulnerable, as happened to the NYPD Street Crimes Unit that murdered Amadou Diallo in 1999.
- Decommission police precincts when they’re threatened by funding shortages, demographic changes, or challenges by popular protest.
- Organize to drive police forces out of specific institutions, such as schools or hospitals. Instead of replacing them with private security, develop community safety teams that are democratically elected and directed by those they protect.
- Demolish the political power of police unions, including lessening their influence in local governments, and ultimately decertifying and disbanding their unions entirely.

¹²⁷ Anya Briy, “Zapatistas: Lessons in community self-organisation in Mexico,” *Open Democracy*, June 25, 2020 <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/democraciaabierta/zapatistas-lecciones-de-auto-organizaci%C3%B3n-comunitaria-en/>>.

- Once our movement is strong enough, disband police forces entirely in democratic self-governing areas, and replace them with systems of community safety and conflict resolution.¹²⁸

On the occasion of renewed BLM protests following George Floyd's murder by police, *Rolling Stone* reran a 2014 article by Jose Martin outlining a similar laundry list.

1. Unarmed mediation and intervention teams

Unarmed but trained people, often formerly violent offenders themselves, patrolling their neighborhoods to curb violence right where it starts. This is real and it exists in cities from Detroit to Los Angeles....

2. The decriminalization of almost every nonviolent crime...

3. Restorative Justice

Also known as reparative or transformative justice, these models represent an alternative to courts and jails. From hippie communes to the IRA and anti-Apartheid South African guerrillas to even some U.S. cities like Philadelphia's experiment with community courts, spaces are created where accountability is understood as a community issue and the entire community, along with the so-called perpetrator and the victim of a given offense, try to restore and even transform everyone in the process....

4. Direct democracy at the community level

Reducing crime is not about social control.... It's giving people a sense of purpose. Communities that have tools to engage with each other about problems and disputes don't have to consider what to do after anti-social behaviors are exhibited in the first place....

5. Community patrols

This one is a wildcard. Community patrols can have dangerous racial overtones, from pogroms to the KKK to George Zimmerman. But they can also be an option that replaces police with affected community members when police are very obviously the criminals. In Mexico, where one of the world's most corrupt police forces only has credibility as a criminal syndicate, there have been armed groups of Policia Comunitaria and Autodefensas organized by local residents for self-defense from narcotraffickers, femicide and police....

6. Real mental-healthcare¹²⁹

In the aftermaths of both the first wave of Black Lives Matter protests in 2014, and the new wave of protests in mid-2020, a number of local experiments in community-controlled alternatives to policing have emerged. For example the Institute for Nonviolence in Chicago, founded in 2015 following the police murder of Laquan McDonald.

¹²⁸ <<http://aworldwithoutpolice.org/the-strategy/disband/>>.

¹²⁹ Jose Martin, "Six Ideas for a Cop-Free World," *Rolling Stone*, June 2, 2020 <<https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/police-brutality-cop-free-world-protest-199465/>>.

Imagine a world where after being accused of using a counterfeit bill, George Floyd was approached by a community member who helped mediate the situation, rather than the police officer who suffocated him as he begged for his life. A world where Rayshard Brooks was not murdered for falling asleep in his car in a Wendy's parking lot, but given a ride home. A world where Elijah McClain was not choked and injected with ketamine for "acting suspicious," but simply asked by a neighbor how he was doing....

Those in power would have us believe that such a world is impossible — but for the past four years, the Institute for Nonviolence Chicago has been providing a roadmap for what this radical reimagining of justice might look like....

...Whenever there is a shooting, outreach workers arrive at the scene within 30 minutes to advocate against retaliation — and even when they insert themselves in potentially dangerous situations, they do not wear bullet proof vests and refuse to carry weapons....

Although it's impossible to attribute lowering crime levels in Chicago to any one source, Nonviolence Chicago's outreach has been overwhelmingly successful. Between 2016 and 2019, Austin had 47 percent fewer homicides and 45 percent fewer nonfatal shootings. After leading the city in homicides for over a decade, [the Austin neighborhood] had the sharpest reduction in violence in 2018.

Similar organizations have had positive results in other cities, including Philadelphia, Nashville, Oakland and Washington, D.C.

...Nonviolence Chicago focuses on nurturing and empowering at-risk individuals so that they can prevent violence from ever taking place. In 2019 alone, its workers were able to make 45,467 contacts with individuals involved in violence.

"When we do our job, people don't get shot, and they also don't go to jail," Patterson said. "When there's a conflict, we've asked community members to try calling us before they call the police. We've said that in front of the police, and they agree."¹³⁰

In Minneapolis, where the murder of George Floyd initially sparked the new wave of BLM protests, and where the City Council voted to abolish the police department, communities have experimented with citizen patrols.

Across Minneapolis, community-organized citizen patrols have sprung up in recent weeks as confidence in the Minneapolis Police Department has plummeted. Distrust in the agency had been building for years, and now, with emergency responders focused on riots and looting in the hardest-hit part of the city and with the police department's own 3rd Precinct set ablaze, some residents worry that their neighborhoods have been left vulnerable.

Even as riots and violence in the city have subsided, the string of high-profile killings at the hands of Minneapolis police in recent years has prompted calls to defund or

¹³⁰ Loretta Graceffo, "Community peacemakers in Chicago offer a proven alternative to policing," *Waging Nonviolence*, July 14, 2020 <<https://wagingnonviolence.org/2020/07/peacemakers-chicago-proven-alternative-to-policing/>>.

disband the department. A majority of the Minneapolis City Council now supports the idea of replacing it with a new model for public safety.

But in the meantime, residents have taken it upon themselves to create alternatives, including forming armed defense forces...

In [City Council member Jeremiah] Ellison's neighborhood of north Minneapolis, the local chapter of the NAACP has begun to try to do just that: Create a community alternative to police with armed citizen patrols. They call their group the Minnesota Freedom Riders, a reference to the civil rights activists who rode buses through the segregated South in 1961.

On Tuesday, dozens of volunteers, mostly African American, filtered into Sammy's Avenue Eatery, a sandwich and coffee cafe. They checked in with a woman holding a clipboard, who gathered their contact information, asked how many were in their parties, and noted whether they were armed. Almost all of them said they were.

Then each volunteer took a seat as orientation began, led by Minneapolis NAACP President Leslie Redmond.

"Too often, when black people are trying to do the right thing and fight, we are left defenseless, and America has shown us time and time again that they're not coming to our protection," she told the group. "So we've got to protect ourselves."

The project began the previous weekend, just days after Floyd's death, and has grown to 50 volunteers. They divide into groups of three that keep watch at key intersections while others go on patrol.

Redmond said she spoke to Minneapolis Police Chief Medaria Arradondo about the project, and also informed the National Guard. She wasn't asking them for permission, she insists; she just wanted to let them know: "We are activating our community."

"We are out here simply to defend and protect," she told the group of volunteers. "We are not chasing anybody. We're not here to shoot anybody. We are literally here to protect black businesses and our black community."¹³¹

Besides police abolition as such, a number of activists in the United States have called for community control over police, either as a goal in itself or as a step towards abolition. For example Max Rameau:

The primary institution for the exercise of Community Control over Police is the Civilian Police Control Board (CPCB).

To be clear, the power of this body is to exercise control and power over the police, not review or oversight. This is not a review board and, at this stage in history, review boards represent a step backwards and one that further entrenches existing power relationships instead of upending them in favor of the oppressed. We are no longer

¹³¹ Jared Goyette, "Citizen patrols organize across Minneapolis as confidence in the police force plummets," *Washington Post*, June 7, 2020 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/citizen-patrols-make-statement-in-minneapolis/2020/06/06/cc1844d4-a78c-11ea-b473-04905b1af82b_story.html>.

satisfied with the ability to review abuses of our communities, we are in pursuit of the power to end those abuses.

The CPCB must be empowered to establish police Priorities, set department Policies and enforce Practices of the new police force. Even though they do not make the laws, every police department, and even each district inside of a department, establishes policing priorities....

The drive towards Community Control over Police begins by organizing the target city (county or town) into clearly identified policing districts. These districts can be identical to existing commission districts, wards or other political boundaries, or can be drawn up entirely from scratch. The districts should be physically, economically and socially contiguous, enabling Black communities to have their own policing district or districts.

Once each district is delineated, the next phase is to launch a Community Control over Police ballot initiative, wherein each policing district faces a choice: keep their existing police department or start their own. While the rules for launching a ballot initiative differs from one locale to the next, the overall objective is the same in that each community or section of the city has the right to vote for the police department they want....

Once we are able to secure Community Control over Police and ensure that entire communities are empowered to exercise such control, we will be free to re-imagine and re-envision the very nature of policing itself.¹³²

The National Alliance Against Racist & Political Repression (a Chicago group founded in the early 1970s in support of Angela Davis against criminal prosecution) includes the following as entailed in genuine community control:

- A directly-elected all-civilian council
- Final authority over police policy, oversight policy, and budget...
- Full authority on disciplinary measures and legal recourse, including subpoena power and the convening of grand juries
- Hiring and firing power over the police chief or superintendent, all officers on the force, the head of any existing oversight or review boards and offices, and the members of those.
- Full access to all investigations by the oversight or review institutions
- Broaden the scope of investigations to include all allegations of misconduct, including sexual assault
- Negotiation on police union contracts
- Exclude all current and former law enforcement agents...¹³³

¹³² Max Rameau, "Community Control over Police: A Proposition" The Next System Project, November 10, 2017 <<https://thenextsystem.org/learn/stories/community-control-over-police-proposition>>.

¹³³ NAARPR, "Campaign for Community Control of Police" (June 15, 2020) <<https://naarpr.org/updates/campaign-for-community-control-of-police>>.

Jazmine Salas, writing against the background of the Summer 2020 protests, called for just this:

Specifically, community control means a democratically elected civilian council that would give residents final authority on police policies and budgets, disciplinary actions and legal recourse, along with hiring and firing power over all police, including the superintendent. Such a council would be able to intervene immediately to reduce many police abuses. It would also serve as a fundamental first step toward longer-term transformation of law enforcement. It would empower the people who suffer the most under police impunity — Black, Latinx, Indigenous and other oppressed communities. And now is the time to fight for it....

Community control is about exercising our fundamental democratic right not just to have a seat at the table, but to put the police under our oversight. Every action, policy and budget must be subject to the will of the people, allowing for everything from changes to police department practices to reductions in police spending. On their own, corrupt police departments and complicit city councils are unlikely to deliver on movement demands to defund, demilitarize or abolish police, but members of community control councils would be accountable to the communities who elect them. Many campaigns for community control specifically exclude current and former law enforcement officials (and their direct family members) from running for a spot on the council.... These guidelines would give us the power to carry out demands without the risk of the council being co-opted by forces that serve the police.¹³⁴

As Rameau and Salas suggest above, demands to abolish the police *instead* of community control — on the grounds that police “cannot be reformed” — are nonsensical. They’re in keeping with the reform vs. revolution dichotomy popular on much of the Left, which assumes that we are either “under capitalism” or not under it, either one or the other, with the transition from one to another coming entirely from some kind of cataclysmic rupture and not from a series of changes starting under the existing system. In fact community control, as both Rameau and Salas point out, is a prerequisite for abolition. Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò makes this argument in much stronger terms:

...It’s true; the police are white supremacist. But so is the government that policing defends, the same government that abolitionists are petitioning to make change. In the absence of community control, the demand to abolish police is functionally a request for the state to reorganize itself and reshuffle its resources — but the powerful stay powerful and the disempowered stay disempowered. The question is not whether to abolish, then, but who we can trust to do the abolition.

Massive networks of institutions, across jurisdictions, combine to incentivize and stabilize policing as we know it, from prosecutors to prisons to legislatures. Many of these institutions operate most powerfully after the point of arrest. Community control intervenes, surgically: By taking public control over the police who handle the bulk of arrests, we act before other parts of the system can get involved. Without

¹³⁴ Jazmine Salas, “To Transform Policing, We Need Community Control,” *In These Times*, August 25, 2020 <<https://inthesetimes.com/article/jazmine-salas-community-control-police-cpac>>

community control, abolition just means asking a larger set of white supremacist institutions to restructure a smaller set. Instead, we are asking our neighbors.¹³⁵

Elsewhere he argues, likewise, that “community control over police is the best position from which to reach these other laudable goals.”

Instead of asking the elite funders of the police to give them less funding this fiscal year — a process reversible during next year’s budget negotiations, when attention will likely have diminished — we should demand to be the funders of the police, to permanently and directly determine which dollars go where. Instead of asking those who set police departments’ rules of engagement and goals to make them in a more community- minded fashion, we should demand to be the agenda setters.

From the bedrock of community control, further goals to defund, abolish, or differently regulate police are no longer requests made to the state, which is full of actors whose incentives are irretrievably aligned with maintaining the general features of the current system. If and where we want to abolish the police, we can use community control over hiring and firing to simply fire departments out of existence. If we seek to defund police (in the sense of redirecting resources to other aspects of community life), we can use community oversight over personnel, priorities, and budgets to shrink departments to the precise size and shape that we want.¹³⁶

Tying it All Together. In this section we’ve seen a wide variety of municipal initiatives illustrating bits and pieces of a full-blown, commons-based municipal economy. But the different parts are seldom all seen together in the same place. What’s needed is to integrate them into a fully fleshed-out ecosystem of information and land commons, cohousing, community gardens, worker and consumer cooperatives, makerspaces and community workshops, coworking spaces, sharing infrastructures to maximize capacity utilization of capital goods and reduce the need for ownership, infrastructures for sharing or bartering skills like child care, local barter currencies and mutual credit, and so forth.

Imagine a municipal government making a concerted effort to pursue these major commons-oriented policies in a serious manner:

- Inalienable community land trusts incorporating all city- & county-owned land (including tax seizures)¹³⁷
- Municipal wireless piggybacked on spare capacity of city- and utility-owned fiber optic infrastructure (e.g. Chattanooga’s GIG)
- Opening the idle capacity of all municipal buildings for use as community hubs

¹³⁵ Olúfẹ́mí O. Táíwò, “Want to Abolish the Police? The First Step Is Putting Them Under Democratic Control,” *In These Times*, August 25, 2020 <<https://inthesetimes.com/article/abolition-communitycontrol-police-abolition-safety-power-whitesupremacy>>.

¹³⁶ Olúfẹ́mí O. Táíwò, “Power Over the Police,” *Dissent*, June 12, 2020 <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/power-over-the-police>.

¹³⁷ Of course indigent people whose homes were seized for property tax arrears should have first right of refusal for staying in their homes under CLT jurisdiction.

- Open sourcing of all city, county- and public university/community college-funded research, and use of only FOSS office software

Together they would form the kernel of a significant commons-based local economy.

[October 9, 2020]

Chapter Twelve: The Global South and Federation

I. Commons-Based Economies in the Global South

Our survey of municipalist movements so far has been focused overwhelmingly on Europe and North America. But commons-based economic institutions are even more vital as safety nets to the impoverished and precarious people of the Global South — not to mention the fact that the majority of the world's population lives there.

EZLN. We already discussed in Chapter Three, at considerable length, the ideological history of the EZLN and its revolutionary praxis. The following discussion concerns its political governance and economic projects.

The EZLN uprising of New Years Day 1994 was initially a response to the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement, and the Mexican state's extractive policy agenda pursuant to it.

San Cristobal de Las Casas and four other major towns were briefly captured, town-halls ransacked and land ownership documents burnt during a 10- day revolt which the Mexican army attempted to crush through the mass murder of prisoners and the aerial bombing of villages, leaving over 150 dead. However, the rapid national and international mobilisation carried out partially through the Internet, the first of many such 'cyber mobilisations', quickly isolated the corrupt and discredited regime of former President Salinas, forcing it into direct negotiations with the EZLN.¹

Following the 1994 rebellion it was described by the Mexican intellectual Carlos Fuentes as a 'post-modern guerrilla movement... the first rebellion of the 21st century', because, in stark contrast with the rest of Latin America's 'focoist' tradition of armed struggle, it was not interested in the seizure of state power. Instead, the EZLN's strategy has been to build a series of alliances with what they term as 'organised national and international civil society' made up in Mexico of social movements, such as the inner city Asamblea de Barrios (Neighbourhood Assemblies), and El Barzon (The Yoke). The latter is a movement of small and medium scale farmers, business people and general debtors such as mortgage holders, whose struggle to reschedule or cancel their debts has helped to deepen the crisis of the Mexican banking sector. This sector is itself part of an overall tendency towards fragility among Latin American banking which some economists see as the Achilles tendon of the globalisation process. The EZLN's aim is to help to construct a network of such movements, both

¹ Patrick Cuninghame and Carolina Ballesteros Corona, "A Rainbow at Midnight: Zapatistas and Autonomy," *Capital & Class* 22:3 (October 1998), p. 13.

nationally and internationally, against the designs of NAFTA in Mexico and of globalised neoliberalism in general, so transforming society ‘from the bottom upwards’ and autonomously from the political and economic institutions of both the state and the market.²

Land under Zapatista control was subsequently organized into five autonomous areas (caracoles, or snails), and 27 autonomous municipalities.

These self-governing units provide schools, teaching in both indigenous and Spanish languages; and they provide healthcare based in both indigenous and Western knowledge. Economically, cooperatives form a strong part of the economy – not least producing coffee. Community banking is created through credit unions. The whole Zapatista region has around 250,000 inhabitants, covering roughly a third of Chiapas. Neighbouring peoples can also access services.³

In August 2019 the EZLN added seven new caracoles and four new autonomous municipalities, significantly expanding its territory.⁴

The Revolutionary Laws proclaimed in January 1994 included the cancellation of debt for poor people, guarantee of free healthcare, and the freeing of most prisoners. The Revolutionary Agrarian Law expropriated large private farms, allowing their reorganization either as individual small-holdings, cooperatives, or communal lands.⁵

Recoleta. Although the Pink Tide has retreated from most of South America, and neoliberalism seems to be resurgent, the commune of Recoleta – population 157,000 – in the greater Santiago, Chile area is an exception. “Recoleta,” writes Alexander Pinez Pinto, “has developed several programs in the areas of health, housing, cleaning, and education that have public ownership at their core.”

Daniel Jadue, a member of the Communist Party of Chile, has been the mayor of Recoleta since 2012. He won by promising to recover public ownership through participation-based local development and reject the market-based solutions that had turned public services into a matter of business and profit. One of the main challenges was the service provision expenses: The costs of service provision was high due to inefficient contracts that the municipality maintained with private companies. The new municipality council therefore sought to create new public services in areas important to the commune. One of these was education.

In this context, the local government created the Open University of Recoleta (Universidad Abierta de Recoleta, UAR). The goal was to improve access to education and

² *Ibid.* p. 15.

³ Steve Rushton, “Rebel Cities 3: Zapatistas Are Still Trailblazing Worlds Beyond Neoliberalism,” *Occupy.com*, May 10, 2018 <<https://www.occupy.com/article/rebel-cities-3-zapatistas-are-still-trailblazing-worlds-beyond-neoliberalism>>.

⁴ Leonidas Oikonomakis, “Zapatistas announce major expansion of autonomous territories,” *ROAR Magazine*, August 19, 2019 <<https://roarmag.org/essays/zapatistas-announce-major-expansion-of-autonomous-territories/>>.

⁵ Monty Neill, George Caffentzis, and Johnny Machete, *Toward the New Commons: Working Class Strategies and the Zapatistas* (1997) <<https://archive.org/details/TowardTheNewCommonsWorkingClassStrategiesAndTheZapatistas/mode/2up>> “III. Reflections on the Zapatistas’ Strategy,” p. 4.

encourage critical, liberated, and active citizenry. The UAR was developed using the successes of the Free Universities in Europe and Latin America as its inspiration and has been operative since the spring semester of 2019. To bring the initiative to life, the municipality built partnerships with several universities and educational institutions both locally and internationally, like the University of Chile, the University of Santiago and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). A unique feature of UAR is that it is open and free of charge to anyone, also internationals, who wishes to participate both in on-site and online courses offered by the university. As such, it represents a radical alternative to the highly privatized and exclusive educational system seen in the rest of Chile. Today, the UAR offers 150 courses in several disciplines and 3,300 students have taken one or more courses.

...Other initiatives, such as the ‘People’s Real-Estate Agency of Recoleta’ – a local government housing project that ensures investment in affordable housing – and a new workers’ cooperative for cleaning services that secures decent income and labor rights, also form part of the public ownership model Recoleta seeks to promote. The former has already started the building of a housing complex with 38 apartments available to low-income families, and 90 more flats are scheduled for the future.

Additionally, going back to 2015, Recoleta was the first municipality to set up a so-called ‘popular pharmacy’ – a municipal pharmacy that offers cheap medicine for the commune residents that use the public health system....

The ‘popular pharmacies’ model has since been replicated by other local governments all over Chile. Alongside the UAR success, this demonstrates the strategic importance of local governments in overcoming neoliberalism.⁶

Rojava. The PKK’s original ideology was heavily Maoist-influenced, focused on a people’s war against feudal structures in the countryside, under the leadership of the proletariat (represented by the party). Only when the guerrilla struggle has shifted the balance of force sufficiently in the countryside and built up an adequate base, can the army launch its final, conventional assault on the cities. In the 90s, the PKK drifted away from any orthodox model of Marxism-Leninism to its own version of socialism centered on personal transformation, which emphasized the interests of “the whole of humanity” and “exceeds the interests of states, the nation and classes.”⁷

Increasingly from the 90s on, and especially during his imprisonment, Abdullah Öcalan was heavily influenced by Bookchin’s Libertarian Municipalism.

As part of a shift away from its previous emphasis on a Kurdish national character to a new multi-ethnic identity, Rojava has changed its name.

It is now the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS). ‘Rojava’ is Kurdish. For the same reason the crucial women’s movement, Yekîtiya Star, became Kongreya Star. DFNS also welcomes all refugees from surrounding war-torn Syria, respects

⁶ Alexander Pinez Pinto, “How a communist mayor is defeating privatisation in Chile,” *Open Democracy*, April 21, 2020 <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/oureconomy/how-communist-mayor-defeating-privatisation-chile/>>.

⁷ Alex de Jong. “Stalinist caterpillar into libertarian butterfly? – The evolving ideology of the PKK” (2015) <<https://libcom.org/history/stalinist-caterpillar-libertarian-butterfly-evolving-ideology-pkk-alex-de-jong>>.

every international human rights law, and offers a peaceful solution for the whole of Syria.⁸

II. Federation

Post-capitalist cities can't make it alone. For one thing, they're often surrounded by hostile national governments like Trump's. And we have all too many historical examples of isolated radical urban regimes like the Paris Commune being crushed by reactionary governments. The accession to power of reactionary political movements at the level of the nation-state has created a political vacuum. A federation of commons-based municipal movements can occupy the political space at the level of the nation-state, as a challenge to the forces in control of the national government. "We must create a political space so that we can work with others to challenge, with greater strength and from more areas, the democratic deficit imposed by states and markets.... Given that we face adversaries who cross borders, our response must also be transnational."⁹

We confront problems that are global in scale and seek to supplant a global system. Horizontal ties create institutional depth and resilience. And by engaging in mutual support, radical municipalities provide political cover for one another and force hostile governments to deal with them as a cohesive global force. Federated cities are not only the ideal organizational platform for supporting a commons-based society on a global scale, but also serve as a political vehicle through which global civil society – the "Second Superpower" – can speak with a united voice against hostile states. (See, e.g., our earlier discussion of Mexico being blind-sided by the scale of the global reaction to its assault on the EZLN.)

Cooperation Jackson's Kali Akuno explains the strategic value of being part of a global movement in terms that are clearly relevant to the EZLN example.

Cooperation Jackson is a locally situated project, as you noted, but we see ourselves as part of an international, or more appropriately, several international movements. I say this because we don't think the answers to the questions posed are local or national; they are of necessity global. We have to build an international movement to stop runaway climate change and the sixth great extinction event that we are living through right now. There is no way around that.

One of the reasons why we have to build a powerful international movement is to fortify our national, regional, and local movements against the reactionary threats and counter-movements that exist throughout the US, but that are extremely concentrated in places like Mississippi. For instance, on a practical level, being connected to an array of international forces helps give cover to our work in Jackson. We can bring various types of pressure to bear on local reactionary forces whose constant

⁸ Steve Rushton, "Rebel Cities 2: Rojava Shows Pathway Towards a Common Humanity," Occupy.com, April 26, 2018 <<https://www.occupy.com/article/rebel-cities-2-rojava-shows-pathway-towards-common-humanity>>.

⁹ Kate Shea Baird and Steve Hughes, "America Needs A Network Of Rebel Cities To Stand Up To Trump," <https://medium.com/@BComuGlobal>, December 17, 2016 <<https://medium.com/@BComuGlobal/america-needs-a-network-of-rebel-cities-to-stand-up-to-trump-7c07202e7cc2>>.

threats against us can be mitigated (to varying degrees) by acts of economic and political reprisal by our international (and national) allies.¹⁰

An internationalist agenda that emphasizes solidarity with the Global South, in particular, can create synergies that further the construction of post-capitalism everywhere.

1. Policies that create international institutions that work directly with indigenous peoples and communities in the rainforest regions of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, and Oceania to stop the operations of multinational mining, petrochemical, agricultural, fishing, and medical corporations....
2. Policies that promote the development of open source technologies to directly transfer technology and information to peoples throughout the world. This will enable communities to produce the new carbon-reducing or carbon-neutral technologies that are innovated locally, thus eliminating the need for long-distance trade that would fuel more carbon emissions.
3. Policies that will end the international operations of the US-based petrochemical, mining, agricultural, fishing, and medical transnational monopolies. This will enable local production of essential goods and services when and where needed and put a halt to the extraction and accumulation regimes that currently dominate our planet.
4. Policies that eliminate the impositions of the World Trade Organization (WTO) that negate national and local sovereignty, which has been detrimental to the introduction of major climate mitigation initiatives in the US and Canada.¹¹

And when it comes to the problem of “scaling up,” which features prominently in Old Left and verticalist critiques of municipalism, the networked or federal approach is a useful way of achieving scale and coordination without the pathologies and pitfalls of the Old Left’s focus on politics at the nation-state level. Laura Roth and Bertie Russell call this approach “scaling out,” in contrast to the traditional “scaling up” approach of “focusing on a higher level.”

Should these initiatives simply be seen as stepping stones to national government, leaving intact traditional scalar understandings of power that construe the municipality as “nested” under the nation-state? Or do they represent an effort to build an altogether different type of power, disrupting these conventional scales of power in an effort to produce some form of networked, translocal power?...

Despite a commitment to internationalism, the theory and practice of left politics commonly takes the nation-state as the fundamental site of transformative social change. Despite the relative successes of municipalist initiatives, there are still some within these movements who maintain that the “real” aim remains to capture the institutions of the nation-state....

¹⁰ “It’s Eco-Socialism or Death: An Interview With Kali Akuno,” Jacobin, February 15, 2019 <<https://jacobinmag.com/2019/02/kali-akuno-interview-climate-change-cooperation-jackson>>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

The strategy of winning locally, in this view, is understood either as a strategy we are forced to adopt in a time of weakness — the “best we can achieve for now” — or a systematic approach to build our capacity to move to the national scale...

The demand to simply “scale up” municipalism, which tends to be based on a vision where the local state is considered an instrument or tool to be wielded differently on behalf of the working class, is in significant danger of misinterpreting what many within these initiatives are looking to achieve....¹²

The transnational federative approach does not rule out political engagement at the level of the nation-state, but as Kate Shea Baird argues, such engagement should be characterized by loose ties with electoral parties and movements and a primary focus on pressure from outside. This means, in practical terms,

to establish strategic alliances with existing regional or national political actors. If there are parties with similar political goals at national level, it may make sense to support their election campaigns, collaborate with them on joint projects, or bring political demands to their door. Of course, this strategy won't give municipalist organizations direct control or accountability mechanisms in relation to these parties, but it will allow them to support or pressure them from the outside, as appropriate, with a relatively small organizational investment and while maintaining their autonomy.¹³

This latter strategy — analogous to both Great Britain's “balance of power” strategy on the Continent, and to the electoral strategy of the Nonpartisan League in the American Upper Midwest — enables leverage entirely out of scale to actual size.

David Bollier regards legal recognition of commons rights as one of the most central principles of any federal network of municipal platforms. His main analogy is the Charter of the Forest and the Magna Carta under King John, which recognized rights of common access to what had previously been regarded as royal property.¹⁴ In my opinion, this would mean today, at the very least, reorganizing all municipal property, all publicly owned natural resources, all public services, and all publicly owned information as self-managed commons with universal access rights.

The platform-like character of transnational urban networks — in which actual enforcement capability exists only on the part of the local members — is suggested by Sheila Foster and Chrystie Swiney:

Through their collective actions, declarations, and commitments cities around the world are creating their own quasi-binding legal norms and policies outside of the narrow strictures of international law. This is evidenced in the use of legal or quasi-legal agreements — compacts, declarations, action plans, covenants, etc. — adopted

¹² Laura Roth and Bertie Russell, “Translocal Solidarity and the New Municipalism,” *ROAR* No. 8 (September 2018) <<https://roarmag.org/magazine/municipalist-movement-internationalism-solidarity/>>.

¹³ Kate Shea Baird, “Municipalism: an Icarian warning,” *Kate Shea Baird*, June 14, 2018 <<https://katesheabaird.wordpress.com/2018/06/14/municipalism-an-icarian-warning/>>.

¹⁴ Bollier. *Transnational Republics of Commoning: Reinventing Governance Through Emergent Networking* (Friends of the Earth, 2016) <<https://www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/transnational-republics-commoning-reinventing-governance-through-emergent.pdf>>., pp. 25–26.

by cities and (more often) their networks on a particular topic, such as migration or climate change. Though typically lacking in enforcement mechanisms, these documents look and act strikingly similar to international legal agreements signed by nation-states. They require the signature of an officially authorized individual (often a mayor or top city official), formal depositing with a specially designated agency or authority (typically an agency or representative of the agreement's sponsor), and some form of monitoring and reporting, albeit often in the form of self-monitoring and self-reporting. The only thing often missing is the application of sanctions in the event of a violation, but this is also typical of public international law, which in many instances is enforced through "softer" measures, such as shaming and pressure campaigns, rather than typical "hard" enforcement measures.¹⁵

A transnational municipalist platform might formulate model policies as a sort of non-sociopathic ALEC. More importantly, networked global cities might bring to bear sufficient moral pressure to counteract repression and interference with progressive local policies by higher jurisdictions within a single nation-state (like the GOP state government in Mississippi hampering the efforts of Cooperation Jackson). *The Alternative UK* asks:

Imagine a national structure within which communities could say: "After appropriate deliberation, which considered the impact upon our community as well as the broader impact upon the global environment, we the people of [fill in the name of your town or city here] have decided to hold a festival / house the homeless / trial a basic income / prioritise local produce..."

Reading that might make you smile – it sounds so far-fetched. But don't we already have the technical resources to work out 'good practice' for the interconnected, inter-dependent, I-We-World?... What we lack is the organisation to do so. If more towns and cities committed to these practices locally, the national and international bodies would bend towards them.¹⁶

Real-World Steps. There are already nascent movements to creating federal networks of cities, both within individual nation-states and across national borders, without the intermediation of national governments.

developments around inter-municipalism and transnational municipalism are already taking place — and even accelerating. Organizations within many cities are already banding together through coalitions such as the Right to the City Alliance (RTTC), which has put together a progressive platform around issues as wide-ranging as the commons, economic, indigenous and environmental justice, police harassment and migrant rights.

¹⁵ Sheila R. Foster and Chrystie Swiney, "City Networks and the Glocalization of Urban Governance," in Janne Nijman and Helmut Aust, eds., *The Elgar Research Handbook of International Law and Cities* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, forthcoming) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336936626_City_Networks_and_the_Glocalization_of_Urban_Governance>.

¹⁶ "Alternative Editorial: Where To Look," *The Alternative UK*, June 15, 2020 <<https://www.thealternative.org.uk/dailyalternative/2020/6/15/alternative-editorial-where-to-look>>.

Under the banner of “Democracy and Participation,” the RTTC proposes “the right of community control and decision-making over the planning and governance of the cities where we live and work, with full transparency and accountability, including the right to public information without interrogation.” Another core component of the RTTC strategy is internationalism, described in their mission statement as “the right to support and build solidarity between cities across national boundaries, without station intervention.”

A semblance of such internationalism can be found in programs such as Sister Cities International (Rome actually declared Kobane a sister city) and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), which is effectively an international league of municipalities. Relatedly, there are also state-level municipal leagues, and a National League of Cities (NLC). Issue targeted inter-city organizations include 100 Resilient Cities, the Creative Cities Network, International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN), and a number of others. In effect, municipalism, municipalization and regionalism is already being mainstreamed.¹⁷

In Europe, cities controlled by citizen-based parties and undertaking commons initiatives (particularly in Spain) are setting up collaborative platforms to coordinate their agendas and promote the commons-based political and economic model in other European cities (particularly in France).

CommonsPolis — a civil society initiative to create dialogue between progressive municipalist movements, city governments, and European citizens — held an encounter described as “a common space for exchange; cities in transition and citizen struggles” in Paris on November 24, 2016, at the offices of the Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation (FPH) and with the collaboration of the Utopia Movement. Spanish activists from a variety of regions were invited to share with their French counterparts their recent experiences of entering the municipal public administrations, and their efforts to make the political process more participatory and inclusive for citizens. The event was held in Spanish (Castellano) and French, with simultaneous interpretation.¹⁸

The Barcelona en Comú movement, in particular, has been quite active in urban federations at the Spanish, European and worldwide levels.

BComú is not a ‘local’ arm of a bigger political party, and does not exist merely as a branch of a broader strategy to control the central political institutions of the nation-state. Rather, *BComú* is one in a series of independent citizen platforms that have looked to occupy municipal institutions in an effort to bring about progressive social change.

From A Coruña to Valencia, Madrid and Zaragoza, these municipal movements are the direct effort of citizens rejecting the old mode of doing politics, and starting to

¹⁷ Alexander Kolokotronis, “Is America ready for a municipalist movement?” *ROAR Magazine*, November 27, 2016 <<https://roarmag.org/essays/us-anti-fascism-municipalism/>>.

¹⁸ Ana Marie Utratel, “Lessons on Creating Collaborative Political Platforms from Spanish Activists,” *Shareable*, Jan. 3, 2017 <<http://www.shareable.net/blog/lessons-on-creating-collaborative-political-platforms-from-spanish-activists>>.

effect change where they live. Instead of a national party structure, they coordinate through a “network of rebel cities” across Spain. Most immediately, this means coordinating press releases and actively learning from how one another engage with urban problems.

...*BComú* has established an international committee tasked with promoting and sharing its experiences abroad, whilst learning from other ‘rebel’ cities such as Naples and Messina. Barcelona has been active in international forums, promoting the “right to the city” at the recent UN Habitat III conference, and taking a leadership role in the Global Network of Cities, Local and Regional Governments.

These moves look to bypass the national scale where possible, prefiguring *post-national* networks of urban solidarity and cooperation. Recent visits of the First Deputy Mayor to the Colombian cities of Medellín and Bogotá also suggest that links are being made on a supranational scale.

One of the most tangible outcomes of this level of supranational urban organizing was the strong role played by cities in the rejection of the Transatlantic Trade & Investment Partnership (TTIP). As hosts of a meeting entitled ‘Local Authorities and the New Generation of Free Trade Agreements’ in April 2016, *BComú* led on the agreement of the ‘Barcelona Declaration’, with more than 40 cities committing to the rejection of TTIP.¹⁹

Right to the City began in 2007 as a response to urban gentrification and mass evictions of marginalized communities from their historic neighborhoods. It was heavily influenced by

“Le Droite à la Ville” (*Right to the City*) a book published in 1968 by French intellectual and philosopher Henri Lefebvre. In the sphere of human rights, this powerful idea was adopted by the World Urban Forum and elaborated into the World Charter of the Right to the City in 2004. Building from this powerful idea, international principles, and forward looking grassroots organizing, the Right to the City Alliance was established in January 2007.²⁰

Its political platform centers largely on social justice and economic equity:

Land for People vs. Land for Speculation. The right to land and housing that is free from market speculation and that serves the interests of community building, sustainable economies, and cultural and political space.

Land Ownership. The right to permanent ownership of urban territories for public use.

Economic Justice. The right of working class communities of color, women, queer and transgender people to an economy that serves their interests

¹⁹ Stacco Troncoso, “Eight lessons from Barcelona en Comú on how to Take Back Control,” *P2P Foundation Blog*, April 17 2017 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/eight-lessons-from-barcelona-en-comu-on-how-to-take-back-control/2017/04/17>>.

²⁰ “Mission and History,” Right to the City website <<http://righttothecity.org/about/mission-history/>>.

Indigenous Justice. The right of First Nation indigenous people to their ancestral lands that have historical or spiritual significance, regardless of state borders and urban or rural settings.

Environmental Justice. The right to sustainable and healthy neighborhoods & workplaces, healing, quality health care, and reparations for the legacy of toxic abuses such as brown fields, cancer clusters, and superfund sites.

Freedom from Police & State Harassment. The right to safe neighborhoods and protection from police, INS/ICE, and vigilante repression, which has historically targeted communities of color, women, queer and transgender people.

Immigrant Justice. The right of equal access to housing, employment, and public services regardless of race, ethnicity, and immigration status and without the threat of deportation by landlords, ICE, or employers.

Services and Community Institutions. The right of working class communities of color to transportation, infrastructure, and services that reflect and support their cultural and social integrity.

Democracy and Participation. The right of community control and decision making over the planning and governance of the cities where we live and work, with full transparency and accountability, including the right to public information without interrogation.

Reparations. The right of working class communities of color to economic reciprocity and restoration from all local, national, and transnational institutions that have exploited and/or displaced the local economy.

Internationalism. The right to support and build solidarity between cities across national boundaries, without state intervention.

Rural Justice. The right of rural people to economically healthy and stable communities that are protected from environmental degradation and economic pressures that force migration to urban areas.²¹

Right to the City holds urban congresses in different cities, as well as engaging in local activism that includes building united fronts with a variety of social justice organizations, labor movements, etc., at the local level.²²

The Transition Towns movement has been around for some time as an attempt to coordinate municipal policies for energy transition. It was founded by Rob Hopkins, who teaches permaculture at Kinsale College of Further Education in Ireland. He and his students work to create energy descent action plans (EDAPs) for a post-fossil fuel future. At Totnes, Devon, on the Cornish peninsula, he helped organize the first transition town in 2006, and in 2008 wrote the *Transition Handbook* as a guide to replicate the process elsewhere.

....The issue at hand is... one of inventing and promoting 'post-oil' lifestyles that can be built on the reinforcement of communities' 'resilience' — a concept taken from

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² "Our Work," Right to the City website <<http://righttothecity.org/about/our-work/>>.

the environmental sciences that, in this context, designates the ability of a system (here, a community) to resist an external shock (the scarcity of oil). This capacity for 'resilience' amounts to reducing communities' dependency on oil by pursuing an 'energy descent' objective, in other words a reduction in energy consumption, together with a relocation of production, in particular of food....

[M]easures that seek to 'relocate' exchanges, such as locally sourced veg-box schemes, local and complementary currencies, LETS (local exchange trading systems) and time banks or waste recovery centres (places where discarded objects can be reused or recycled) clearly have their place within the Transition Movement. But it is through efforts to reintegrate agriculture into the city that the work of 'transitioners' is most visible. This takes the form of actions and projects (community gardens, composters, crop plantation in public spaces, city roofs used for agriculture) that reflect the fact that the movement's foundations lie in permaculture. This in turn forms "the design 'glue' and the ethical foundations [used] to underpin Transition work."²³

John Robb, a specialist on networked/open-source resistance movements, describes the movement as an "open-source insurgency": a virally replicable, open-source model for resilient communities capable of surviving the Peak Oil transition. As of April 2008, some six hundred towns around the world had implemented Transition Town projects.²⁴

The Transition Towns Wiki²⁵ includes, among many other things, a Transition Initiatives Primer (a 51 pp. pdf file), a guide to starting a Transition Town initiative in a local community.²⁶ It has also published a print book, *The Transition Handbook*.²⁷

Totnes remains a model for the subsequent global movement.

The thinking behind [Transition Town Totnes] is simply that a town using much less energy and resources than currently consumed could, if properly planned for and designed, be more resilient, more abundant and more pleasurable than the present.

Given the likely disruptions ahead resulting from Peak Oil and Climate Change, a resilient community — a community that is self-reliant for the greatest possible number of its needs — will be infinitely better prepared than existing communities with their total dependence on heavily globalised systems for food, energy, transportation, health, and housing.

Through 2007, the project will continue to develop an Energy Descent Action Plan for Totnes, designing a positive timetabled way down from the oil peak.²⁸

²³ Adrien Krauz, "Transition Towns, Or the Desire for an Urban Alternative," in *Build the City: Perspectives on Commons and Culture* (Krytyka Polityczna and the European Cultural Foundation, 2015), pp. 109–111.

²⁴ John Robb, "Resilient Communities: Transition Towns," *Global Guerrillas*, April 7, 2008 <<http://globalguerrillas.typepad.com/globalguerrillas/2008/04/transition-town.html>>.

²⁵ <<http://transitiontowns.org/>>

²⁶ Ben Brangwyn and Rob Hopkins, *Transition Initiatives Primer: becoming a Transition Town, City, District, Village, Community or even Island* (Version 26—August 12, 2008) <<http://transitionnetwork.org/Primer/TransitionInitiativesPrimer.pdf>>.

²⁷ Rob Hopkins, *The Transition Handbook: From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience* (Green Books) <<http://transitiontowns.org/TransitionNetwork/TransitionHandbook>>.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

The most complete Energy Descent Action Plan is that of Kinsale. It assumes a scenario in which Kinsale in 2021 has half the energy inputs as in 2005. It includes detailed targets and step-by-step programs, for a wide range of areas of local economic life, by which energy consumption per unit of output may be reduced and local inputs substituted for outside imports on a sustainable basis. In the area of food, for example, it envisions a shift to local market gardening as the primary source of vegetables and a large expansion in the amount of land dedicated to community-supported agriculture. By 2021, the plan says, most ornamental landscaping will likely be replaced with fruit trees and other edible plants, and the lawnmower will be as obsolete as the buggy whip. In housing, the plan calls for a shift to local materials, vernacular building techniques, and passive solar design. The plan also recommends the use of local currency systems, skill exchange networks, volunteer time banks, and barter and freecycling networks as a way to put local producers and consumers in contact with one another.²⁹

As major parts of the West are experiencing the rise of reactionary national governments, it becomes more important to bypass the nation-state altogether and build counter-institutions at the local level that are federated globally. This is the argument of Baird and Hughes above, as we saw.

There are a number of reasons why city governments are particularly well-placed to lead resistance to Trumpism. Most obviously, much of the popular opposition to Trump is physically located in cities. With their younger, more ethnically diverse demographics, urban voters swung heavily against Trump and, in fact, played a large role in handing Hillary Clinton the majority of the national popular vote.

Not only did Clinton win 31 of the nation's 35 largest cities, but she beat Trump by 59% to 35% in all cities with populations of over 50,000. In most of urban America, then, there are progressive majorities that can be harnessed to challenge Trump's toxic discourse and policy agenda.³⁰

In North America, the most promising attempt at federating municipalist movements is Symbiosis. Symbiosis existed as a research collective at least as early as 2018, coordinating the Fearless Cities conference in July of that year.³¹ The collective submitted a prize-winning paper to the Next System Project, in which it emphasized dual power and interstitial development.

Both concrete and comprehensive, our proposal is to organize practical community institutions of participatory democracy and mutual aid that can take root, grow, and gradually supplant the institutions that now rule ordinary people's lives....

The next system is more likely to succeed and endure if we steadily transform existing institutions, modes of production, and ways of relating to one another rather than try to conjure up a whole new system out of thin air. The heart of our argument is that building networks of radically democratic, cooperative institutions can sustain our communities and our collective struggle in the near term, organize our

²⁹ Rob Hopkins, ed. *Kinsale 2021: An Energy Descent Action Plan*. Version.1. 2005. By Students of Kinsale Further Education College <<http://transitionculture.org/wpcontent/uploads/members/KinsaleEnergyDescentActionPlan.pdf>>.

³⁰ Baird and Hughes, *op. cit.*

³¹ "Symbiosis: a new North American grassroots political network," *ROAR Magazine*, March 1, 2019 <<https://roarmag.org/2019/03/01/symbiosis-movement-congress-announcement/>>.

base to win fights with the state and private sector, begin eroding public support for the current dysfunctional system, and, in time, become the dominant institutions of tomorrow's world.³²

It was officially launched as an organization in January 2019. Its focus on dual power was suggested by the Launch Statement it put out:

Our calls to action are infused with the fierce urgency of now like never before... When we organize, we can resist, but resistance is not governance. Even popularly elected governments disempower ordinary people, by placing an elite political class above us to rule on our behalf... This framework — of building popular power outside the governing institutions of our present system, to challenge and displace those institutions through truly democratic ones of our own — is called “dual power.” Such a process of political transformation is not only revolutionary in changing institutions; it also has the potential to transform ourselves. Radical democracy is a framework for helping to overcome racism, patriarchy, and other social hierarchies, by disassembling the material underpinnings of oppression and unravelling prejudice through common struggle to bring principles of equality to life. It is through this lived practice of cooperation and solidarity that we can learn to be democratic beings, to be citizens, who have re-learned the art of making decisions together.³³

In September 2019 Symbiosis hosted 29 participatory democracy and dual power organizations in Detroit for a “Congress of Municipalist Movements.” The Congress finally agreed on the terms of a confederation, including local movements from Oaxaca to Calgary.

...Members of the network include worker-owned business initiatives, such as Cooperation Jackson, and community organizing platforms, like Olympia Assembly. The network also has partner organizations, such as Black Socialists of America, ROAR Magazine and the Institute for Social Ecology....

One of Symbiosis' partner organizations is the Democratic Socialists of America-Libertarian Socialist Caucus. Founded in 2017 as a section of the larger DSA, the DSA-LSC focuses on “dual power,” challenging the hegemony of the state and capitalism with projects such as community gardens, childcare collectives, tenants' unions, worker cooperatives, and tool libraries.³⁴

Although the groups represented at the Congress represented a broad range of left-libertarian philosophies, with significant disagreements on strategy and praxis, they were able to agree on

³² Symbiosis Research Collective (John Michael Colón, Mason Herson-Hord, Katie S. Horvath, Dayton Martindale, and Matthew Porges), *Community, Democracy, and Mutual Aid: Toward Dual Power and Beyond*. Next System Project National Essay Competition (April 2017) <https://thenextsystem.org/sites/default/files/2017-07/Symbiosis_AtLargeFirst-corrected-2.pdf>, pp. 2–3.

³³ Matt Stannard, “Symbiosis Is Different: Why This Revolutionary Network Could Change Anti-Capitalist Politics,” Occupy.com, April 11, 2019 <<http://www.occupy.com/article/symbiosis-different-why-revolutionary-network-could-change-anti-capitalist-politics>>.

³⁴ Arvind Dilawar, “Grassroots democracies form North American coalition,” *Shareable*, October 23, 2019 <<https://www.shareable.net/bringing-equity-to-the-forefront-of-urban-planning/>>.

six Points of Unity: Direct Democracy, Anti-Hierarchy, Ecology, Solidarity Economy, Revolution From the Ground Up, and Unity in Diversity.³⁵ And again, Symbiosis and its member movements are distinguished from the predominant municipalist model in Barcelona and elsewhere in Europe — “which are more oriented towards electoral politics and social change from ‘inside the institutions’” — by their focus on “the strategy of dual power outside of the state institutions....”³⁶

In the area of civil liberties in the United States, we’ve seen largely uncoordinated instances of resistance at the state and municipal level since Trump’s election as president. A number of U.S. cities have announced their intentions not only to maintain “sanctuary city” status, but to destroy databases that might be used to identify undocumented immigrants for sanction.

With Trump in the White House and GOP majorities in the House and Senate, we must look to cities to protect civil liberties and build progressive alternatives from the bottom up.

“I want New Yorkers to know: we have a lot of tools at our disposal; we’re going to use them. And we’re not going to take anything lying down.” On the morning after Donald Trump was declared the victor in the US presidential election, Mayor of New York, Bill de Blasio, wasted no time in signaling his intention to use the city government as a bulwark against the policy agenda of the President-Elect. The move made one thing very clear; with the Republican Party holding the House and Senate, and at least one Supreme Court nomination in the pipeline, it will fall to America’s cities and local leaders to act as the institutional frontline of resistance against the Trump administration....

Bringing the political conversation back to the local level also has a particular advantage in the current context; the city provides a frame with which to challenge the rise of xenophobic nationalism. Cities are spaces in which we can talk about reclaiming popular sovereignty for a demos other than the nation, where we can reimagine identity and belonging based on participation in civic life rather than the passport we hold.

By working as a network, cities can turn what would have been isolated acts of resistance into a national movement with a multiplier effect. Networks like Local Progress, a network of progressive local elected officials, allow local leaders to exchange policy ideas, develop joint strategies, and speak with a united voice on the national stage.

On the issue of racial equity, an essential question given the racist nature of Trump’s campaign and policy platform, cities across the US have already started to mobilize to combat Islamophobia, as part of the American Leaders Against Hate and Anti-Muslim Bigotry Campaign, a joint project of Local Progress and the Young Elected Officials Action Network. The campaign pushes for local policies to tackle hate crimes against Muslims, including the monitoring of religious bullying in

³⁵ “Our Points of Unity,” Symbiosis <<https://www.symbiosis-revolution.org/points-of-unity/>>.

³⁶ “Symbiosis: federating municipalist movements in North America for real democracy,” Minim Municipalism, October 14, 2019 <<https://minim-municipalism.org/magazine/symbiosis-federating-municipalist-movements-in-north-america-for-real-democracy>>.

schools, intercultural education programmes, and council resolutions condemning Islamophobia and declaring support for Muslim communities.³⁷

Following Trump's election, the number of sanctuary churches in the United States doubled from an estimated 400 to 800. However, it's doubtful that ICE under a Trump administration will continue the Obama policy of largely avoiding invasions of sensitive locations like churches. That raises the issue of direct action as another line of defense.

Sanctuary in the Streets was organized under Obama, in response to the rising number of deportations of Central American refugees — which was overwhelming the physical resources of sanctuary churches.

It mobilizes volunteers to interrupt immigration raids in progress, based on the idea that the members of a church — not just its physical structure — can create sanctuary for vulnerable members of their congregation. To facilitate the campaign, the New Sanctuary Movement set up two hotlines to report ICE activity — one in Spanish and one in Indonesian. At first, the lines received few calls.

Then, the day after the election, there was a huge surge of interest, says Peter Pedemonti, director of the New Sanctuary Movement. "Amidst the despair and disbelief, it was a really concrete campaign that was ready on day one."

As of April, 1,800 people have signed up to participate in Sanctuary in the Streets, up from 65 people last year. With those numbers, the group hopes to be able to deploy volunteers to immigrant-heavy neighborhoods within five minutes of a distress call. Since Trump took office, the hotline has received dozens of calls. In order to be involved in direct action, volunteers must go through a nonviolence training. "We want people not only to know what to do when they get there, but the spirit and tone of what we're doing—that discipline of nonviolence," explains Pedemonti.

Early one morning in March, Turcios got a call from a woman whose neighbor's home was being raided by ICE. Turcios, a small group of volunteers and several other neighbors hurried over and surrounded the home, taking photos and asking agents why they were detaining the man. The crowd grew until the ICE agents said the young man wasn't the person they were looking for and left. Turcios counts this as an encouraging victory.³⁸

On both an American national level and a global level, cities including a major part of the world population have committed to continued pursuit of COP21 carbon emissions-reduction targets.

Climate change will be another contentious issue over the coming years. While much has been made of the policy implications of Trump's claim that global warming was invented by the Chinese, it has been local administrations, rather than the federal government, that have led on the environmental agenda over recent years. Sixty

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Yana Kunichoff, "A revitalized sanctuary movement is spreading to unexpected places, resisting the threats posed by Trump's presidency," *In These Times*, June 2017 <http://inthesetimes.com/features/sanctuary_cities_movement_trump.html>.

two cities are already committed to meet or exceed the emissions targets announced by the federal government and many of the largest cities in the country, including New York, Chicago and Atlanta have set emissions reductions goals of 80 percent or higher by 2050.³⁹

In the last couple of years, the proliferation of commons-based municipal movements in Europe has been followed by the rise of transnational commons bodies.

For the first time commoners from around Europe met in the European Parliament in Brussels. Over 150 Europeans came to Brussels to discuss European politics, policy proposals and the protection of the commons. The aims: To establish new synergies, to show solidarity, to reclaim Europe from the bottom-up and, overall, to start a visible commons movement with a European focus. For the first time Europe's democratically elected Members of the European Parliament exchanged views with a "Commons Assembly" made up of an explosively creative myriad of urban regenerators, knowledge sharers, energy cooperativists, community artists, food producers as well as disruptive social hackers of many different flavours.⁴⁰

Jorge Pinto describes the significance of another assembly in Barcelona, in 2017:

A key characteristic of the current municipalist vision is the fact that, besides the attention given to the city itself, there is a clear global vision: a cosmopolitan sense, in which all citizens feel part of the city but also part of the global community. It was precisely under the banner of municipalism and a vision of a global polis that more than 700 mayors and activists from 180 countries came together in Barcelona, in June 2017, to discuss what 'fearless cities' can do. It might not be too optimistic to argue that this has planted the seeds of a new global and municipalist order – the 'Order of Barcelona' – that could potentially supplant the previous Westphalian order....⁴¹

Another European Commons Assembly was initially planned for Madrid in November 2017, with the mission of taking the accomplishments of the 2016 Brussels Assembly to a higher level.

ECA Madrid and the collaboration with Transeuropa 2017 provides the energy to move the process further along. It is becoming clear that the ECA needs to offer an added value beyond ideational affiliation. Assembly members will have to co-create the resources and practices that will strengthen the movement. That is why the idea of "production" figures so prominently in the discourse around this Assembly. The focus of the assembly this time will be on urban commons, taking advantage of ECAs

³⁹ Kate Shea Baird, Enric Bárcena, Xavi Ferrer and Laura Roth, "Why the municipalist movement must be internationalist," Medium, Dec. 21, 2016 <<https://medium.com/@BComuGlobal/why-the-municipal-movement-must-be-internationalist-fc290bf779f3#.1xyt2ewty>>.

⁴⁰ Sophie Bloemen and David Hammerstein, "Commoners hit the capital of Europe: Commons Assembly in Brussels," The Commons Network, November 22, 2016 <<http://commonsnetwork.eu/commoners-hit-the-capital-of-europe-commons-assembly-in-brussels/>>.

⁴¹ Jorge Pinto, "The Order of Barcelona: Cities Without Fear," *P2P Foundation Blog*, May 4, 2018 <<http://commonsnetwork.eu/commoners-hit-the-capital-of-europe-commons-assembly-in-brussels/>>.

presence in Madrid and Spain to examine strategies, failed and successful, to promote the commons politically and in public policy, including citizens in this process.

In Madrid working groups will focus on specific themes of the commons in the city, to create shareable outputs that bring these local experiences to a broader audience. This creation will nourish the toolbox of the ECA, in turn helping other efforts to support and scale commoning. This opportunity will allow initiatives to learn from and share with each other, attaining a level of technical depth and understanding that is necessary for change, deepening the European political agenda for the commons. At the same time, what is at stake goes beyond the specific themes and issues that color the commons movement.⁴²

It was actually held in October.

[October 9, 2020]

⁴² Sophie Bloemen and Nicole Leonard, “The European Commons Assembly in Madrid for a Renewed Political Force in Europe,” *P2P Foundation Blog*, Oct. 16, 2017 <<https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/european-commons-assembly-madrid-renewed-political-force-europe/2017/10/16>>

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¹ Despite the value of his contributions cited here, I feel obligated to include the following disclaimer regarding Bauwens. From Kevin Carson, Rebecca Conroy, Baruch Gottlieb, Dmytri Kleiner, Cindy Kohtala, Jedediah Walls *et al*, “Letter of Disassociation” (forthcoming), Oct. 29, 2020 draft.

Over the last few years, despite concern from long-standing members and close associates, Bauwens has transformed the P2P Facebook and P2P Foundation Wiki pages into what many of us perceive to be a pulpit for reactionary and conservative politics. This is done to the extent that members who identify as and with women, people of colour and the LGBT community have felt unheard, denigrated and unsafe.

Bauwens’ posts and curation in the P2P Foundation’s Facebook group have increasingly promoted anti-left, anti-feminist, anti-justice “Intellectual Dark Web” and even alt-right videos and talk pieces.* This has been extended to include offshoots like the P2P Research Clusters and P2P Politics and Policy groups. Right-wing tropes are commonly found in the posts Bauwens curated in recent years, including: the claim that anti-racists and feminists promote “reverse racism” and “misandry,” that Black Lives Matter is a “neo racist” movement seeking societal domination, that white privilege theory oppresses whites because of innate characteristics, that the transgender rights movement is “anti-woman,” and that social justice movements seek “inverse status hierarchies” or “reverse hierarchies of domination” in which white males are permanently at the bottom.

To many, Bauwens’ posts and curation regurgitate, in various different forms, the general reactionary trope that “those people don’t just want to be equal, they want to be superior.” Members of the community have repeatedly expressed dismay at this content which promotes many of the same dangerous tropes about “SJWs,” “cancel culture,” “snowflakes” and being “woke” that emerged from post-2014 GamerGate and Channer culture.* As the screenshots of his activity in the Appendix demonstrate, this is neither infrequent nor done in the spirit of advancing discussion of P2P ideas. In fact his constant focus on fighting “identity politics” is pursued to the near total exclusion of advancing the commons.

Bauwens claims the promotion of this content as “open curation” and “promoting discussion.” We believe such rationale is entirely disingenuous. The relevant articles and videos he posts are *only* from the alt right and “Intellectual Dark Web,” and are published without any critical contextualizing. On the contrary, while people are free to say hateful things like “trans women are men,” anyone who challenges the alt right material he presents or defends intersectional analysis, is denounced for apparent “racialism” and banned from the group. The curation is not “open,” but very much *closed*.

From our consistent observations over several years, we are concerned that Bauwens has turned the P2P Foundation’s Facebook groups and discourse on P2P into a reactionary and racist echo chamber. Perhaps most alarmingly, he recently announced that he would surrender leadership of the Facebook groups *only* to a leadership group that embraced the same—explicitly “anti-woke”—ideology, whose tenets are now being added to the P2P Foundation Wiki pages as guiding dogma.

As a result, P2P Foundation’s Facebook groups now exhibit characteristics and promote ideas that look towards right wing, reactionary views. We are concerned that this could potentially serve as a radicalization group, drawing people into far right recruitment.

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[Last edited October 9, 2020]

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