

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Alexander Riccio for the degree of Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies in Ethnic Studies, Sociology, and Philosophy presented on May 26, 2017.

Title: Everyday Movement Against Capitalism: Prospects for a Prefigurative Strategy toward Open Utopia.

Abstract approved:

Robert D. Thompson, Jr.

Across the U.S. social activism is on the upsurge, offering possibilities for a revolution against capitalism. However, these possibilities are potentially undermined by entrenched factionalism amongst the left. At root, such in-fighting is fostered by the creation of false dualistic frameworks on the transition out of capitalism and into the next social system. These frameworks are categorized into two typologies labelled the “strategic” and “prefigurative” camps. Blasting open these dualisms can bridge the left and allow for fresher views on revolution and the role of the state, leadership and vanguardism, the significance of democracy, and the value of utopian dreaming. Replacing these frameworks is a methodology called the radical imagination, which poses that within everyday life exist creative opportunities for rebellion. The radical imagination enables the process of seizing spaces for revolutionary (re)production. By viewing daily life as the struggle against alienation, possibilities abound in capturing previously mundane spaces and injecting them with revolutionary activity.

©Copyright by Alexander Riccio
May 26, 2017
All Rights Reserved

Everyday Movement Against Capitalism:
Prospects for a Prefigurative Strategy toward Open Utopia

by
Alexander Riccio

A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies

Presented May 26, 2017
Commencement June 2017

Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies thesis of Alexander Riccio presented on May 26 2017

APPROVED:

Major Professor, representing Ethnic Studies

Director of the Interdisciplinary Studies Program

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Alexander Riccio, Author

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a thesis requires an extensive amount of social labor, but the end product is presented as the work of a sole author. To the contrary, had it not been for the support and input from dozens of people this work would not exist. I have the following people to thank, and apologize to those that have been left out: to Dr. Robert Thompson, Dr. Joseph Orosco, Dr. Tony Vogt, and Dr. Allison Hurst, I owe an immense amount of gratitude. Each person spent countless hours in conversation discussing topics as vast as Bourdieu's theories on "embodied capital," the development of an anarchist sociological imagination, utopianism, and the fascinating history of marronage. Without this committee, I could never have managed the scope of this work. To the participants in the local Occupy Reading Group, I cannot express how much our bi-weekly discussions over the past four years has sparked my desire for revolution. The education I received through these reading sessions contributed more to my intellectual development than any course in the academy I've encountered. To my union comrades in the SEIU 503, Coalition of Graduate Employees, and I.W.W., I've learned a tremendous amount about what it takes to win the long fights. To my fellow ASAPistas, it is truly impossible to articulate how important working alongside each and every one of you has been to me. Not only have you all taught me valuable lessons about activism and deepened my understanding on matters of leadership, but each of you has contributed to the growth of my own humanity. Our time together has given me wisdom to last multiple lifetimes. I would also like to thank the following individuals for being a part of my intellectual and personal development: Dr. Barbara Muraca, Dr. Kathleen Stanley, David Kreibel, Andrew Cornell, Leonora Rianda, and my mother Caroline Hunter for teaching me that politics is fundamentally about decency. But most of all, my deepest gratitude must be made to my partner, Kerry Hill, for all the endless hours you patiently listened to my unfiltered rants while continuing to give me the encouragement and support that enabled me to work full-time while finishing my degrees and still managing to maintain some semblance of sanity—I'd fall to pieces without you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
I. Introduction	1
II. Sketching a Radically Imaginative Methodology.....	16
<i>The Social Project of Open Utopia</i>	19
<i>Open Utopia: A New Chapter</i>	24
III. Vanguard or Avant-Garde? Revisiting Questions on Leadership	27
<i>An Open Reading on the History of Vanguardism</i>	33
<i>Who Can Lead the Revolution?</i>	40
<i>Dialectics of Oppression and Leadership</i>	48
<i>Open Vanguard's Rupturing Space and Shattering Alienation</i>	55
IV. Terms for a Political Revolution	65
<i>Brief Comments on State Forms and Monopolies</i>	69
<i>Contemporary Expressions of Political Power</i>	73
<i>Democracy: A Once Radical Notion</i>	78
<i>Seeking a Cure for Political Alienation</i>	89
<i>State Power as Tactic Amid Strategy</i>	94
V. Crafting Prefigurative Strategies toward Open Utopia.....	100
Works Cited	111

I.

Introduction

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

Robin D.G. Kelley

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

The following is intended as a dialogue for pushing beyond left factionalism. An enormous amount of revolutionary energy is needed for dismantling capitalism, and we on the left can no longer afford to exhaust our energies in fighting one another.² In what follows I argue that the

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

² The definition I use for the "left" is simplistic but important: groups that subscribe to anti-capitalism and equality are on the left. This definition excludes the majority of liberal-identified groups in the U.S. My aim is not to suggest that liberals should be purged from leftist organizing, or that the left should not work with liberals, but is only to demarcate my intended audience that is already supportive of anti-capitalist programs which liberals, by definition, are not.

left has created false dualistic frameworks in theorizing strategies for a revolution against capitalism. I categorize these frameworks into two typologies which I label the “strategic” and “prefigurative” camps. I will describe the characteristics of these two camps in order to demonstrate that their antagonistic orientation toward the other is based on false dichotomies. Merging these frameworks into one of prefigurative strategy is a clear solution for resolving this antagonism. The crafting of non-dualistic revolutionary frameworks is described below as a praxis of the radical imagination.

Therefore, the following ultimately seeks to explode dualistic thinking amongst the left. Blowing up such dualisms can bridge the left and allow for more open views on revolution and the role of the state, leadership and vanguardism, the significance of democracy, and the value of utopian dreaming. I will argue that the radical imagination can push beyond dichotomous thinking if it is fixed to the project of making an open utopia; one poised to shatter the alienation of everyday life.

The debate on revolution is primarily concerned with the transition out of capitalism. Engaging this debate constructively requires the left to confront the dilemma of how to sustain revolutionary energies during social movements. I propose that the best method for generating lasting revolutionary momentum is by viewing everyday life as an opportunity for rebellion.

I base this argument on the view that the prevailing social order is full of “cracks” and potential “ruptures” which pose a threat to capitalist domination. The system is not stable. Prefigurative strategies against capitalism can develop by locating the spaces where capitalism is weakest. My contention is that these spaces, which I interchangeably refer to as “open” spaces or “cracks,” are most available through the imagination and that orienting our imaginative

capacities to intervene against capitalist alienation on an everyday level will allow revolution to flourish. If we view daily life as the struggle against alienation, then possibilities abound in capturing spaces of everyday life and injecting them with revolutionary activity. This process I call the seizing of space for revolutionary (re)production. Before arriving at this conclusion, it is necessary to blast open the dualistic frameworks prevalent amongst the left.

In this ongoing polemic, revolutionary perspectives oscillate between two camps: the strategic versus the prefigurative. In their ideal types,³ strategic proponents argue that social movements must remain politically grounded and materialist in form, requiring the pragmatic use of available resources and technologies. They emphasize the need for a party organization typically led by a vanguard. Prefigurative proponents, conversely, are more idealistic,⁴ calling for a transformation of ourselves as well as broader society. They care more about the creation of community than political victories and reject parties on grounds that they morph into bureaucracies that stifle spontaneous and organic methods of practice.

What these camps have primarily battled over is a theory of transition beyond capitalism. Yet, as demonstrated below, these dual orientations have created a false dichotomy. Strategy and prefiguration complement each other as means to liberation, and a framework like that

³ An “ideal type” is an analytical tool most associated with Max Weber, who noted the impossibility of social science to perfectly capture all the characteristics of a given phenomena or social construct. Ideal types generalize the essential features of a construct allowing for comparative analysis where it is understood that the comparisons are generalized and not meant to be exact reflections of reality—in essence, then, the point of an ideal type is that it’s necessarily incomplete but sufficient enough for comparative analysis.

⁴ My use here of “materialist” and “idealist” standpoints accords with common use within philosophy and anthropological theory, in which the social world either begins from the fundamental position of the mind or the material world. That said, neither the strategic camp nor prefigurative camp holds strictly to either perspective. Rather, they are marked by tendencies in one direction or the other.

sketched here embraces the radical imagination to eliminate alienation and move everyday toward an open utopia.

Since at least the nineteenth century, the left has squabbled over revolutionary perspectives. Then, politically savvy followers of Marx and Engels disdained “exercises in utopian speculation” without programmatic designs on how to undertake a revolutionary project.⁵ Conversely, other segments of the left rejected what they viewed as authoritarian political strategies as “nothing more than the conquest of existing state power rather than its supersession” (Boggs 1977).⁶

Today, these opposing views have been adapted and expanded theoretically through complex developments far beyond the scope of this examination. That said, it is useful to point out that differing views of how to tell *when* a revolution has happened are also rooted in two “strategic and kinetic” interpretations (Nail 2016:375-381).

Directly referencing the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico, Thomas Nail labels these opposing interpretations as the uppercase and lowercase R/revolution. Uppercase Revolution has philosophical roots in the Aristotelian conception of revolution as “revolving” around the state. Revolutions thus involve a constitutional or internal change in the state’s identity. Such historical legacies of this interpretation of revolution were updated following Marx to incorporate strategic views of seizing the state, employing a party, using a vanguard to lead the masses, and centralizing state power.⁷ Representative of this interpretation, Jodi Dean explains that

⁵ Mainly the band of such Marxist leaders as Lenin, Mao, Castro, etc.

⁶ Most popular among them were such anarchists as Bakunin and the council communists given voice by such figures as Rosa Luxemburg and Anton Pannekoek.

⁷ Marx himself wrote little on the subject, but did seem to subscribe to certain vague notions of “seizing the state,” in his rebuttal to Bakunin posthumously published as “After the Revolution” (Marx and Engels 1978:542-548).

“revolutions...are results, conditions, and effects of politics wherein states are overthrown, dismantled, distributed, reconfigured, [and] redirected” (2012:240). In this centralized state-bound view of revolution, motion returns to the center and the state is wielded instrumentally to sustain revolutionary energies.

Lowercase revolution, says Nail, is a decentralized anti-state view of revolution. In it, intersectional analyses, deeply democratic processes, and horizontalism (meaning specifically anti-hierarchical forms of organization and leadership) shape strategic pursuits of implementing revolution. Nail’s characterization of lowercase revolution also embraces prefigurative processes, which Barbara Epstein explains are marked by consensus decision-making and commitments to non-hierarchy, sometimes called “leaderless structures” (Epstein 2002:333-346). Motion for lowercase revolution is a trajectory like an outward line, external from the state instead of a revolving around it (Nail 2016:375-381). Frequently, uppercase Revolution has been associated with the strategic camp whereas lowercase revolution is cast into the prefigurative camp.

Calls for political strategy, once surveyed in their historical context, tend to be associated with an idea of revolution centered on state power. Once a government is “seized” or toppled, goes the argument, and replaced with a new transitional government, the revolutionary “event” has been accomplished, putting us in a position to start the new society. Proponents of a prefigurative revolutionary transition are less interested in “events” like seizing state power. Instead they tend to focus on revolution as a process where cultures and ethics are transformed into a higher moral plane of existence outside the bounds of state-based authority. Seeking changes in cultural attitudes and social relationships ingrained in daily life, prefigurative

proponents basically equate revolution with cultural transformation that reaches entirely new models of social organization.

Adolph Reed Jr. brings the tension between strategic and prefigurative camps to light when he characterizes the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement of “empty sloganeering... without programmatic or strategic content.” Vaguely defined goals expressed as digestible mantras, argues Reed Jr., displace or preclude effective political strategy with “a call for expiation and moral rehabilitation as political action.” On the whole, Reed Jr. critiques BLM reform-based platform as “politically wrong-headed” since it focuses not on racial disparity’s “magnitude or intensity in general but [on] whether or not it is distributed in a racially equitable way” (*Nonsite* 2016). Tough love, perhaps, but reviewing “A Vision for Black Lives” from *The Movement for Black Lives* website hints at why Reed Jr. came to such conclusions. The document’s core is a call for black dignity and political power, and throughout the authors make it clear that black oppression is the movement’s foremost concern.

This vision shouldn’t surprise readers given the movement’s name. But Reed Jr.’s analysis suggests BLM activists’ notions of oppression springing from “patriarchy, exploitative capitalism, militarism, and white supremacy” might be mere lip service if black suffering is presented as a singular issue separate from class oppression. Isn’t it, he suggests, reductionist to privilege anti-black racism as the bedrock of injustice that must be eliminated before taking on any other issue?⁸

⁸ Use of the expression “exploitative capitalism” is a key red flag. Why the adjective since capitalism’s core inner logic *is* exploitation?

Reed particularly questions BLM's point that racial equity is possible within the parameters of existing economic systems—a construct that privileges uprooting racial oppression as the touchstone for liberatory politics. That idea is echoed by Alicia Garza, an identified leader of BLM, who explains the movement as a response to “a disease which has plagued America since its inception,” and says that to cure this sickness BLM seeks to construct “a transformative vision that touches what’s at the root of the problems we are facing” (*Nation* 2015).

At first blush, these various assertions about “root problems,” whether global capitalism or structural racism, appear to be arguments for the primacy of a class or identity political project.

⁹ Below I will expand more on this particular debate, but for now it is important to note that much more is going on in this dialogue, especially in its crucial subtext on how to constitute a revolution. Initially, BLM's economic justice platform might not seem aimed at broad-based revolution, but consider how often such terms as “transformation” (a contemporary substitute for the out-of-favor “revolution”) are scattered throughout the document. The real argument is about strategy versus prefiguration. Recognizing as much, it becomes clearer Reed Jr.'s position in the debate when he calls for *politically* oriented strategy.

Black Lives Matter is routinely derided for its leaderless structures and lack of clear demands. When such complaints have been put to movement leader Melina Abdullah, she quickly points out that BLM does push for tangible demands, but seeks a vision beyond demands

⁹ Such tensions can accurately be described as the debate over “master categories,” where once people link structural oppression as specifically a result of class exploitation they run the risk of being accused of reductionism. The inverse is true when white supremacy or racism is identified as a linchpin of oppression or when systems of oppression are linked solely to identity categories (such as race or gender).

and are not void of leaders but instead are “leaderful” (PBS 2015). By her own admission, Abdullah’s promotion of different organizing forms within movements recalls the legacy of grassroots leaders like Ella Baker, who championed “group-centered leadership” fixed to local community projects. Cultivating vision and pushing for horizontal leadership as prime movement objectives signals to many a critic the subordination of sound strategic discipline to spontaneity and momentary flashes of bold activity.

Similar debates surfaced during Occupy Wall Street (OWS) and still pepper conversations on the movement, its limitations, and its failures. A *Huffington Post* op-ed penned a year after OWS apparently “failed” claims this failure was due largely to the absence of an “agenda.” “Lack of clear, stated demands was a huge mistake,” writes the author, and this in addition to OWS’s leaderless structure destined it for failure (*Huffington Post* 2012). With the benefit of additional hindsight, veteran journalist-activist Arun Gupta claims more insightfully that OWS was doomed from the beginning because “there are no left forces strong enough in the United States to keep a mass movement flying high.”

Gupta goes on to acknowledge broader limitations and circumstances that the left has yet to reconcile, but in his view OWS suffered because it harbored impractical aspirations. The necessary material conditions needed to realize such dreams simply weren’t there. OWS’s inability to develop strong resistance to eventual state cooptation and violence, which Gupta explains comes with the territory for all social movements, was a matter of “outsized ambitions” that couldn’t be translated into political impact. “Amorphous ‘leaderless’ networks can respond quickly to a crisis” he writes, “but act as quicksand to movement building” (*Counterpunch* 2015). Gupta’s valuable deeper point is that revolution requires historic events, that we can’t (as the

prefigurative model would have it) simply will the desired results. For advocates of strategy, then, prefiguration is at odds with the need to obtain political power.¹⁰

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

This approach includes anti-strategy (because strategies are old hat) and the accumulation of seized territories reconfigured into communes (2009). Challenging the left to embrace militancy and understand the importance of autonomous territories is worthwhile, but strategy-wise The Invisible Committee never moves beyond step one in the process, suggesting that a massive uprising will occur soon and that the next day everything will be remade. But if insurrection does not sustain itself long enough to reach the mass tipping point that The Invisible Committee is counting on, then *how* can we get to the desired future?

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

¹⁰ To be clear, Reed Jr. and Gupta are not proponents of a “pure” strategic camp. Since, as argued here, the dichotomy between strategy and prefiguration is merely academic rather than manifested in practice, the opposite is true. At the risk of overgeneralizing, their arguments are simplified in some ways here to highlight the main features of the debate.

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

Very roughly, strategists view utopia as materially distant and thus impossible to realize in the present since current modes or means of production have not caught up with history's prescribed stages. Since utopia is disconnected from present possibility, strategists have often soured on making it the basis of political polemics—one reason utopian socialists so often come under fire. This view of utopia encourages us to view history as a determined set of "events" leading to the desired future, and any deviation from history's "plan" is dismissed as naïve or revisionist. Ideological orthodoxy and demands for discipline seep into this so-called "blueprint utopia."¹¹

Conversely, proponents of prefiguration see utopia as a temporal possibility that can be brought to earth in the here and now. Utopia, to them, is a lifestyle made by changing practices and interpersonal relationships modeled on new institutions and practices. These utopian institutions include communes, cooperatives, and intentional communities typically governed through democratic practices such as consensus decision-making. Prefigurative perspectives, then, are more invested in creating community instead of a party and typically shy away from formal political power viewing it as inherently corruptible and coopting. In practice, prefigurative energies become so invested in creating community and re-socializing behaviors that mass

¹¹ Recall that these descriptions of utopia are folded into "ideal types," which flattens much of their nuance. More common today amongst blueprint utopians is the quick acknowledgement that history cannot follow according to a rigid plan. Explained by Jodi Dean, a strategic proponent on the whole, "because the revolutionary situation is characterized by unpredictability and upheaval, no iron laws of history provide a map or playbook that revolutionaries can follow to certain victory" (2012:240). Dean does not, however, disavow the strategic positions on political power, discipline, and vanguard leadership.

exhaustion invariably ensues. This fatigue, what I call “burnout utopia,” accounts for the inability to translate utopian practices into sustained revolutionary momentum.

Burnout stems partly from insistence on exclusively localized and autonomous projects. In other words, demands on the state are construed as reformist politics and organizing becomes a “search for pure prefiguration”-- “ a state of fixed purity instead of an ideal we are always in the process of realizing” (Akemi and Busk 2016:114). In parallel fashion, blueprint utopias come as consequences of political purity and orthodoxies whose features have already been described here. Their proponents experience hyper-burnout themselves due to the frustrations inherent in imagining that history accords to one’s own deterministic interpretation.

A synthesis of strategic specificity and prefigurative practice—what I’ll call the radical imagination-- is needed to help pull the left out of its exhausting factionalism. Why call it the radical imagination, instead of a term like praxis? For one, the radical imagination sounds sexier than praxis, and sometimes eye-catching words are needed to grab people’s attention. But, more seriously, the expression reflects the belief that creativity is the greatest force capable of sustaining revolutionary energy, and this latent creativity within daily life is waiting to be unleashed. Synthesizing prefiguration, which is inherently rooted in the everyday, and strategy, which offers the long vision needed to keep revolutionary energy intact, requires building upon the spaces available within the mundane. In this theory, only our¹² imagination can break through the routine and the generic to grasp their radical possibilities. The radical imagination should be

¹² For the remainder of this work I often employ second-person plural “we” language. Following the opinion of Jodi Dean, who explains that objections to using “we” language is “symptomatic of the fragmentation” among the left, I use the second-person plural to “enhance a partisan sense of collectivity” (2012:12). We need to delineate our politics as something shared, even if internally contested, to begin pushing beyond factionalism which magnifies the ways in which we are divided at the expense of understating the ways we are connected.

understood as a method, a practice-based approach to stimulating imaginative capacities where vision serves as the compass toward a revolutionary horizon.

An effective radical imagination, I submit, requires perceiving utopia as an open project—curtailing orthodox blueprints while also preventing burnout. Writers Stephen Shukaitis and David Graeber, while exploring the possibilities of “militant investigation,” articulate a methodological position analogous to the radical imagination: “it is a process of collective wondering and wandering that is not afraid to admit that the question of how to move forward is always uncertain” (2007:11).

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

Strengthening radicalism’s utopic basis may just be the conceptual grounding needed to make a strategic mission more coherent and stable. After all, without a visual conception of where we’re trying to go, how can we possibly develop a strategy for arriving there? Quite possibly, the Marxist movements failed in strategic transitions to socialism because they deliberately lacked a utopian image of the future. Certain Marxist groups trained their rigid theoretical view exclusively on economic progression, depriving themselves of the chance to think about what the world they want to live in might look like *after* the revolution (Boggs 1977). Yet, unacknowledged hints of speculation about the future can be found even within the analyses of orthodox Marxists who subscribed openly to the notion of capitalist growth as a progressive stage necessary toward an eventual communist society. Who, among those who would end our

present systems could feasibly orchestrate a strategy without hopeful dreams, or utopian sensibilities, underpinning their activities? Visionary scholar Walidah Imarisha argues that all of us who seek to change the world “are engaging in speculative fiction,” or utopian dreaming. And this *should* be the case, as Imarisha explains,

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

(2015:3)

Additionally, arguments that entail open utopia at the expense of strategy seem hollow. Are we to suppose that those envisioning utopias live an entirely immaterial existence? Since life is material, in the sense employed by historical materialists, then aren't speculations of a liberated society rooted in real material circumstance? “The subject of the dream is the dreamer,” writes Toni Morrison. Any fictive tale or any fantastic present or future, she means, reflects the life of its inventor (2002). By this reckoning, the strategic implications of open utopia lay embedded in the dream, awaiting cultivation.

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

beyond small autonomous territories or intentional communities. Adopting a notion of open utopia encourages acceptance of oneself without discouraging the urge to push beyond the inherent messiness of organizing practices within capitalist social relations. Such a framework mitigates tendencies toward political purity without slighting the need to unleash the radical imagination in everyday experience to craft a de-alienated society in the here and now.

The radical imagination as methodology is really about unlocking creativity, and the moments we do this come as a result of fun and inspiring activities as well as during the practical organizing work necessary for sound strategy. Demonstrated below, the radical imagination as method generates prefigurative strategies for everyday movement against capitalism. Such everyday movement highlights the need to understand democracy as an inherently radical concept so that our movements can work within, against, and beyond formal state politics. It also opens interpretations of vanguard theories, along with questions on what group or subject is best positioned to lead a revolution. Finally, everyday movement against capitalism implores us to recognize the need for capturing spaces in all arenas of social life. These seized spaces will enable our movements to maneuver into more durable positions for revolutionary action. Over the course of this work, these features of the radical imagination will be explained. Threading together these differing features of everyday movement is the recognition that alienation is a shared form of oppression which requires our understanding of struggles needing to be interconnected and interpersonal.

One powerful way capitalism maintains hegemony is by rendering labor invisible. Such magical thinking also undermines movement organizing because so often the hours of work and social labor that go into organizing a lecture, march, or direct action get taken for granted --small

wonder that organizers appear pressed and unimaginative when asked how to change the world. In stressing the need to be strategic, advocates of this view may actually be trying to correct the lack of awareness of the immense labor needed to arrive at the society they want.

Linking the strategic emphasis on material analysis with prefigurative idealism about alternative social relations offers a promising conceptual model for revolution. At root, change happens on an everyday basis, and in our everyday lives we need fun to keep us energized and hopeful. As well, we need to contest the struggles felt on an everyday level in order to chisel out spaces for imaginative dreaming. For many, the daily suffering experienced under capitalism, and the fight against it, is only bearable by envisioning, and working toward, a humane society. Muses Robin D.G. Kelley, “sometimes I think the conditions of daily life, of everyday oppressions, of survival, not to mention the temporary pleasures accessible to most of us, render much of our imagination inert” (2002:11). Coming together to envision a better world allows us time to breathe, and space to dream, which taps into our deep desires for excitement, thrills, and inspiration while also exposing the ways capitalism falsely claims to fulfill these desires. Such envisioning happens best during strategic use of the everyday.

II.

Sketching a Radically Imaginative Methodology

“The social world,” according to Pierre Bourdieu, “is accumulated history” (1986:241). For Bourdieu, time is a tremendous factor in creating advantages and disadvantages. Power is not simply acquired by an individual in one generation; rather, it is transferred through lineage and legacy from one era to the next. Thus, power “takes time to accumulate.” Failing to recognize history as accumulative results in a reductionist understanding of our current social reality. As Bourdieu reminds us, the accumulation of history is “what makes the games of society...something other than simple games of chance offering at every moment the possibility of a miracle.” Those who overlook accumulated social history typically perceive all social agents on planes of equal opportunity, “where every moment is perfectly independent of the previous one” and “every prize [opportunity] can be attained, instantaneously, by everyone, so that at each moment anyone can become anything” (Bourdieu 1986:241).

Yet, getting accumulated history in our sights has both positive and negative implications. Since the social world is an accumulation of history, by extension social movements entail an accumulation of experience, affect, and knowledge. Along with domination, multiform modes of resistance also accumulate. These include collective efforts to break with the prevailing order— aka “social movement” or (used interchangeably from here on) “social action.” But history also entails accumulated uncertainty and discontinuity, allowing for a “social organization of forgetting” that serves systemic oppression and necessitates a responsive “fight against amnesia” (Dixon 2014:51-52) to challenge such injustices.

In their ethnographic survey of an Argentine shanty-town contaminated by years of oil industry pollution, anthropologists Javier Auyero and Débora Alejandra Swistun ask why local residents of this area don't collectively organize and resist the corporate industries that are poisoning them. Although it appears starkly evident that corporate oil is responsible for this population's suffering, the authors find instead of "cognitive liberation and protest...[the] reproduction of ignorance, doubts, disagreements, and fears" (2009:8) preventing collective action. "Time is responsible for the veiling" (2009:110) of domination, the authors explain: capital power can perpetuate its authority because it can afford to wait while time helps mystify and bewilder the oppressed by simply extending the past into the present.

This confusion stems partly from a view of the past as nothing but a series of inevitable defeats. Yet, only in hindsight are they inevitable and are intrinsic possibilities clouded. In fact, what seems to underpin so many questions about collective action—including the account written by Auyero and Swistun—is an assumption of destined failure where victory is presumed impossible. With this distorting lens over history, the past is remembered primarily as massacre and destruction or as a long-gone time of nice weather and politeness, thus conveying a sense of loss. Time is pregnant with possibilities though: even if time currently serves dominating power, this does not have to be the case.¹³ From this position, where social history and social action are woven both continuously and discontinuously, let's now explore where the jagged threads of utopian ideas meet, going as far back as Thomas More's eponymous text.

¹³ Defeat, destruction, and loss have, of course, been witnessed in history too. Indeed, without an awareness of the tremendous catastrophes of history we can scarcely orient ourselves toward any sound possibilities for the future. That said, we need a more robust and rounded view of history—a sense of deep history—so that we can understand how much potential and possibility was available in historical defeats and not perceive loss as destiny.

Reviewing the genealogical trajectory of utopia reveals the presence of open spaces within the dominant capitalist system. These “cracks,” as John Holloway calls them (2016), represent accumulated movement helping usher in dramatic ruptures—such momentous turning points (or even inflections) of social history as uprisings, material transformations like those at the onset of the Industrial Revolution, political breaks from monarchical power, and so forth. Negative developments have led to many ruptures as well, including the European colonization of the Americas, chattel slavery, and myriad genocidal campaigns against different ethnic populations, among others. Therefore, ruptures, in themselves, do not guarantee positive developments, but rupture can be harnessed or initiated by social action through active use of the radical imagination. Utopia, in this framework, serves as a category of social thought generated by ruptures that create the space for hopeful imagining. Such events lead to broad changes in everyday life, when ways of being and knowing dissolve into new realities and represent the gains achieved primarily through social actions. As the Wobblies note in their preamble, we can articulate the cracks by “forming the structure of the new society in the shell of the old,” and bring about an intentional rupture. We can thus strategically prefigure our futures in the here and now by articulating the cracks in the social imaginary of open utopia.

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

arise from that very process...and always seek for more” (2011:221). Open utopia is in flux,¹⁴ responsive to ruptures and extending the space that connects, or accumulates, until the next rupture. Through it, we discover that social movements, such as the strategic connection of cracks and the articulation of prefigurative action, forms (and can be formed by) the radical imagination.

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

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

The Social Project of Open Utopia

We can pose the point of contact between Europe and what would come to be called the Americas as a grand phenomenological rupture that blasted open the European radical

¹⁴ Movement is not always frenetic, as Bourdieu makes clear even in accumulative social history there are periods of inertia and stagnation—particularly in the experience of everyday life making interventions into the everyday particularly important for revolutionary success.

imagination, shattering rigid convictions in what was known and could be known.¹⁵ Grounding our concept of utopia in this way helps clarify some of the impetus behind Thomas More's master work, where the world from a European perspective suddenly expanded beyond what had been thought real or possible, precipitating both a material and intellectual transformation.

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

Blueprint utopian thought, as briefly detailed, has attracted the criticisms of many, including the twentieth century philosopher Karl Popper. Popper argued that utopias foster an irrational belief in the ability to prescribe scientific social ends (or else lull people into a dogmatic faith that historical processes will bring about the desired utopian society). Such scientific determinism, for Popper, inevitably led to violence, so he called for an end to utopian thinking and the embrace of immediate strategies for eliminating oppression in the present rather than strategies based on abstract ideal futures (Popper 1986:3-9). Popper's warning should be

¹⁵ This does not mean that European elites were *humbled* by their discovery of how little they knew about the world, but they did get exposed in a relative sense to wider imaginative possibilities.

heeded. That said, his conception of utopia reflects exclusively upon a prescriptive tendency within the social imaginary (again, a “blueprint utopia”). This is not the only method available for bringing about utopia. Popper’s call to eliminate concrete oppressions (similar to my proposed methodology) does require the radical imagination to confront the present while cultivating a temporal conception of open utopia.

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

The evidence to suggest More wrote from hope obviously depends on an interpretive choice, not known intentions. Yet, it’s difficult to ignore the similarities of More’s *Utopia* to known indigenous American cultures of the time. Communal lifestyles, collective property, subsistence-based economies, and the storage of goods in “warehouses” (or longhouses) until meted out according to need-- these are features of More’s *Utopia* that were commonplace among the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and other indigenous tribes.

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

imagination and allow dreams and hopes to grow bigger. It is this rupture, this flow of creative energies, which instigated More to write his famous work.

If we flash forward in time, we discover certain moments of rupture occurring again and again with similar social responses from utopian thinkers and movers. Consider Marx and Engels' famous opening of the *Communist Manifesto*: "a spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism" (1978:473). The two penned the words just prior to massive uprisings in Europe sometimes called the "Springtime of the People" or "People's Spring." Not only was the specter haunting Europe, according to Marx and Engels "all the Powers of Old Europe" were seeking to "exorcise" (1978:473) it to remain dominant. Marx and Engels recognized the cracks in capitalist hegemony, and committed to writing the manifesto in the hopes of initiating a rupture—or better yet a total revolution. Their aspirations were almost realized in the rupture of the People's Spring.

Underpinning their motivation for writing the manifesto was a solid conviction that utopia (i.e., eutopia, in the sense of a "good place") was imminent, and its form would be communism. That this reflects a sense of speculative hope is sometimes forgotten by readers of the *Manifesto* because Marx and Engels hammered such "utopian socialists" as Robert Owen, St. Simon, and Fourier for failing to take history into account and attach their utopian ideals to specific strategies rooted in the present material society. Marx and Engels mapped out how and why utopia would be actualized through the formation of an early strategic camp. The *Manifesto*, then, attempts to nudge people, specifically the proletariat, in that direction. Their famous call to action at the end of the *Communist Manifesto*-- "the proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!" (1978:500)—echoes early

utopian literature in its evocation of speculative hope and social dreaming. Clearly, utopia has been present within the strategic camp since its origin.

Manifestoes are not present in all utopian literature. Nor did More think of his work as a call to action. But, recalling that the utopian project is an historical one, we discover the genealogy of utopian manifesto embedded within More's work and then developing into an arc toward political action throughout the centuries before Marx and Engels. Even so, it's a trap to think the trajectory of utopia is historically determined or operates according to some grand human law governing social movement. Instead, we should recognize that the social movement of capitalism's cracks keep utopia open, not closed. In other words, destiny does not control us, but we make our own destiny.¹⁶

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

¹⁶ But not, of course, in the circumstances of our choosing, as any good Marxist would respond.

Socialist contributions toward defining utopia pointed the dream toward practical action, making the dream a reality —what Ernst Bloch labeled “concrete utopias.” By introducing concrete utopia into the utopian lexicon, Bloch intended to provide a sense of utopia as capable of practical action. Like Marx and Engels before him, he encouraged us “to hope materialistically” (quoted in McNally 2016:437) and link our utopian vision to real-world social developments. Jumping forward multiple generations to the failures of Soviet-style communism, the rise in U.S. superpower, the dawn of neoliberal globalization, and an entrenchment of Thatcher’s belief that “There is No Alternative” to capitalism, it’s all too easy to view utopia as a long dead and ossified relic of past social dreaming. Partially to blame, in my view, is that our social histories depict utopias as cold impersonalized versions of strategic revolution devoid of prefigurative ethics. Yet, the fall of the Soviet Union, and with it the notion of centrally planned communism, provided a new rupture in the social imaginary—one proclaiming that “Another World is Possible.”

Open Utopia: A New Chapter

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

An answer came back almost as soon as Fukuyama proclaimed history's end, and that answer has perhaps been articulated best by Grace Lee Boggs, who said "we are the leaders we've been looking for" (PBS 2007). We are the agents of a new society and of change in capitalism. She and other social critics would have us recognize that capitalism is a social power and that, like all social powers, it can be undone through human capacities. Insisting that humans are endowed with real power and that capitalism is a system that reacts to this human power, Holloway tells us that "we are the crisis of capital, and we are proud of it" (2016). Capitalism is actually playing a deceptively aggressive *defense*, while we are on offense, so we can break capitalism's social hold by understanding that we make capitalism and it does not make us. Utopia returns and revolution is viable.

Many social movements after the fall of the Soviet Union operated with this understanding of social power and re-embraced utopian dreaming. David McNally endorses this view, which I share, noting that "international left-wing movements of the 1990s and early 2000s renewed activists' investment in the concept of 'utopia'" (2016:431). He cites the rise of Zapatismo with its call for an "international of hope" (cited in McNally 2016:431) and the creation of the World Social Forum as key moments that led to the reemergence of utopia within the social imaginary of movements. However, the movements McNally points to heavily rely upon a prefigurative framework often embraced at the expense of political strategy. Recalling Thomas Nail's differentiation between R/revolution, the international movements that McNally argues have ignited social movements' interest in utopia fit the mold of lowercase revolution.

These movements, such as Occupy Wall Street, did not go far enough in cultivating the radical imagination, and we must be soberly aware of the need to make our prefigurative forces

“move to the pulse of the concrete” (McNally 2016:437) lest they slide into the self-marginalization of isolated sub-cultures. Holloway urges us to “keep building the cracks [in capitalism] and [find] ways of keeping them, strengthening them, expanding them, connecting them; seeking the confluence or, preferably, the commoning [sic] of the cracks” (2016:xv). The radical imagination, committed to prefigurative strategy, offers an “impure way forward” (Gould 2016:309) by articulating the cracks and pushing for sustained ruptures. It aligns with an open utopia-- a temporal category of ideas not meant to prescribe our reality, but to help guide us toward an uncertain, yet partially tangible, future. In short, prefiguration rehearses a world beyond capitalism while strategy moves us along the pathway toward liberation, making the radical imagination an embodied spirit of open utopia.

III.

Vanguard or Avant-Garde? Revisiting Questions on Leadership

A synthesis of strategic and prefigurative revolution forces engagement with notions of leadership and organization. The efficacy of OWS's and Black Lives Matter's amorphous "leaderless" structures have been called into question. For OWS, its supposed lack of demands and disavowal of official leaders has been faulted for its decline. Where the former is truly a hollow claim,¹⁷ the latter has gained a certain "common sense"¹⁸ amongst Left intellectuals today. "The ideas of autonomy, horizontality, and leaderlessness that most galvanized people at the movement's outset," writes Jodi Dean, "came later to be faulted for conflicts and disillusionment within the movement." Dean highlights how "assertions of leaderlessness as a principle incited a kind of paranoia around leaders who emerged but who could not be acknowledged or held accountable as leaders" (2012:210). A proposed solution has been found in calls to rebuild a vanguard party, rectifying problems of accountability. Dean argues that OWS was led by an unacknowledged vanguard—a disciplined, invisible cadre of organizers that did the bulk of work and held the early movement intact. Admits OWS organizer Sarah Jaffe, "the 'leaderless' structure of Occupy masked the fact that a small core group of people did a large amount of the work" (2013: 201). However, as demonstrated below, the real debate is less about organizational forms and leadership as it is about the constitution of and need for a vanguard to lead today's revolution.

¹⁷ Howard Zinn perhaps captures the demands of OWS best in a speech before his death, "'What, are you a dreamer?' And the answer is, yes, we're dreamers. We want it all" (2012:258).

¹⁸ I refer to the notion of "common sense" made coherent by Antonio Gramsci, who viewed the project of cultural hegemony as one which imposed its own set of accepted values and norms accepted by the population at large, cementing its power.

In this section I will attempt to pull from the best of vanguardist ideas and dispense with their less attractive features, namely the elitist and authoritarian tendencies that contribute to left factionalism. My reason for engaging vanguardist ideas stems from the recognition that where many on the left today shun vanguardism as a matter of theoretical principle, vanguardist practices are still all too common. I contend that these practices remain because the history of vanguardist ideas contains a number of appealing insights. However, the numerous criticisms of vanguardism are valid and should be considered. Therefore, the left today requires a reformulated conception of the vanguard that is neither authoritarian or elitist, and does not commit the same errors made by historical vanguardist groups.

Constructing this new vanguard, in my estimation, requires an analysis which recognizes the following: 1) leadership and oppression are dialectically shaped; 2) the vanguard should not strictly lead the revolution or act as a lone party force, but work as a frontal assault against capitalist power; 3) capitalism profits through dispossession, making it a force in movement without a permanent spatial or temporal center; and 4) since capitalism has no permanent center there will not be a singular vanguard frontal assault, but a multitude of assaults led by the plural vanguards. I conclude that today's vanguards act as a force of movement(s) propelled by the sharing of stories which generate empathy amongst disparate groups, and articulate a collective desire for open utopia where alienation is no longer an oppressive feature of society.

Black Lives Matter participants frequently cite the need to center the voices of its Black leaders (particularly its Black female leaders). According to Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, BLM is "led by women... decentralized and is largely organizing the movement through social media"

(2016:168). Yet BLM is still critiqued for its lack of identifiable leaders. Yamahtta Taylor explains much of this stems from a “division between the ‘old guard’ and the ‘new generation’” (2016:161). Young or first-time activists within BLM “bring new ideas, new perspectives, and often, new vitality to the patterns and rhythms of activism” (Taylor 2016:162). The old guard, or “the civil rights establishment” (Yamahtta Taylor 2016:158), is represented by the likes of Reverend Al Sharpton, Jesse Jackson, and leaders of the NAACP. They view the rise in political activity amongst young Blacks as opportunities for increasing Democrat voter turnout, in turn strengthening their own “political value.”

Fractures between the “old guard” and “new generation” reveal intra group divisions within Black politics. “Black politics” is defined by Lester K. Spence as a substitute for generic terms like “racial politics.” Black politics refers to “the ways different black populations compete over scarce resources, over time, over money, over votes, over public policy, over agenda items, over care, and other resources that have a significant impact on how black communities and the people within them are structured” (2015:7). Identifying the interests of an “old guard” requires locating their class positions and political allegiances. Adolph Reed Jr. notes “the record of the black political regime [aka the old guard] consolidated in the late 1960s and early 1970s is most markedly class-skewed and amounts to at best a sort-of racial trickle down” (*Nonsite* 2016).

Reed Jr. argues the “old guard” acts in concert with neoliberal objectives, but he doubts the “new generation” will break from this tradition. BLM’s anointed spokespersons,¹⁹ for Reed Jr., reflect basic liberal positions which are inadequate for contesting today’s capitalist hegemony. “Alicia Garza and Patrisse Cullors,” he says, “understand advancing a political cause

¹⁹ Namely he refers to Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometti, Alicia Garza, and DeRay Mckesson.

as identical with advancing an individual brand” (*The Black Scholar* 2016). Bruce A. Dixon shares Reed Jr.’s skepticism, asking “to whom are #BlackLivesMatter's leaders accountable, and just where are they taking their ‘movement?’” (2015). BLM, for Dixon, mirrors the spectacle of Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign promising “hope” and “change,” delivering neither. “Maybe movements nowadays are really brands,” he opines, “to be evoked and stoked by marketers and creators when needed. But it's hard to imagine a brand transferring the power from the wealthy to the poor” (2015). Demands for leadership accountability reflect disaffection with BLM’s loose horizontalism. But the real debate is not on leaderlessness or horizontalism, it is on revolutionary strategy. More specifically, it is an extension of vanguard debates today taking form in appeals for either a class-based political movement or an identity-based one.

Reed Jr. and Dixon’s political consciousness is grounded in a socialism which views capitalism as a totality of social and ideological organization. Representing the thrust of their critiques against “fashionable anti-racists” (such as Ta-Nehishi Coates), an editorial by a collective of Black socialist writers chastises those who “have positioned the idea of racial justice as a critique of, rather than an expected consequence of, socialism.” They claim trends in identity politics confirm neoliberal hegemony, “not because a socialist vision countenances racism and other forms of discrimination, but rather because antiracists...remain attuned to a vision of justice defined by ensuring equal access to hierarchically distributed social goods” (*Nonsite.org* 2016).

Ta-Nehishi Coates, in response, argues white supremacy is “a force in and of itself, a vector often intersecting with class, but also operating independent of it” (*The Atlantic* 2016). Coates problematizes the concept of solidarity, writing that “social exclusion works for solidarity,

as often as it works against it.” He explains, “sexism is not merely...a means of conferring benefits to the investor class. It is also a means of forging solidarity among ‘men,’ much as xenophobia forges solidarity among ‘citizens,’ and homophobia makes for solidarity among ‘heterosexuals.’ What one *is* is often as important as what one is not” (*The Atlantic* 2016 emphasis in original). Coates argues against “universalist social programs” championed by his critics by denying that the perpetuation of oppressions linked to race, gender, and sexuality are “the mad plottings [sic] of plutocrats.” Solidarity is not just a force unifying laborers, he argues, it is also employed amongst whites for maintaining white privilege. Such solidarity is a power that confronting the class system does little to break.

A polarity between class politics and identity politics is constructed. Framed by philosopher Nancy Fraser, class programs root their political objectives in redistribution while identity-based programs focus on the “struggle for recognition” or representation (1997:11-40). Attempts are made to locate society’s central oppression where focusing energies on contesting this central oppression is perceived as the most expedient strategy for liberation. Such efforts quickly devolve into what has been labeled “oppression olympics,” which Andrea Smith counters is actually a matter of inadequate analytical frameworks (2012:285-294). Posing strategic dilemmas, she explains, different groups put forth the need to dismantle a particular form of oppression (seen as most salient to keep the system intact) prior to other oppressions. Thus, strategies for liberation can “run into conflict” with one another (Smith 2012:286).²⁰

²⁰ Smith specifically refers to the strategic conflicts within women of color communities, but I find her argument to remain equally true when one considers the claims of class-bound political adherents over exploitation as being the lynchpin source of all oppression.

These positions repurpose certain themes within vanguardist theories. Contained within class versus identity frameworks is the tacit argument that some groups are in a better social position to lead a revolution. Characterized by John Brown Childs, “the Vanguard, holds that there is within society a dominant center from which all else flows. To make positive basic changes in society, it is necessary to understand and control this center” (1989:3). The back-and-forth between a class or identity politics analytically parallels vanguardist theory. A class-based vanguard locates capitalist exploitation as society’s central inner logic, whereas an identity-based vanguard may view racial and ethnic oppression as the center. Like the false dualism between strategic and prefigurative revolutionary perspectives, class and identity politics should not be viewed as either/or perspectives for an effective radical imagination.

In its ideal type a strategic camp embraces revolutionary vanguardism. Prefigurative proponents, conversely, subscribe to leadership that is horizontal and bottom-up; often labeled “leaderless.” However, the ideal types become blurred once class versus identity frameworks are considered. For the strategic camp, a class-based political project has been historically more typical, whereas proponents of prefiguration embraced identity political projects. But it would be inaccurate to claim identity politics reject vanguardism, which appears incompatible with prefigurative perspectives. Adding to this complexity, many strategic advocates accuse prefigurative proponents of hidden vanguardism, tangling the terms of debate in ways not easily understood if we hold to these respective positions in their ideal types. Since it is increasingly difficult to separate strategic and prefigurative camps in relation to vanguardism, one finds potential for threading together these camps’ common linkages. Examining the social history of

vanguardism demonstrates strategic and prefigurative compatibility, enabling the construction of a more coherent radical imagination fixed to open utopia.

An Open Reading on the History of Vanguardism

Discomfort with vanguards stem from their common association with elite and top-down leadership.²¹ Yet an open reading of vanguard history highlights differing inflections than the pejorative vanguard which are instructive for today's revolutionaries. Clear distinctions exist between vanguardism espoused by 1930s anarchists (labeling themselves The Vanguard Group) chronicled by historian Andrew Cornell (2016:113-124) and the self-identification with Leninist vanguardism made by Donald Trump's fascistic chief strategist Stephen Bannon.²² An open social history discovers the cracks within vanguard theory and practice. It cultivates conceptions of leadership which does not dominate, but provokes awareness and creates entry points (or cracks) for inexperienced activists to enter mass movements.

In his short survey on vanguards, David Graeber contends that modern social theory (generated by Henri de Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte) was born in tandem with notions of vanguardism. Explains Graeber, "Saint-Simon was writing in the wake of the French Revolution and, essentially, was asking what went wrong...How can we do it right?" As a corrective to revolutionary failure, Saint-Simon sketched a vision of future society where "artists would hatch the ideas which they would then pass on to the scientists and industrialists to put into effect"

²¹ Most often this conception is attributed to Lenin and his most fervent admirers—the debate over whether Lenin himself was an opportunist, latent dictator, or bottom-up revolutionary is exhaustive. Engaging in this debate risks derailing my purpose here, so I will only make mention of these different positions in passing without taking a firm stance either way, which is genuinely beside the point.

²² According to journalist Ronald Radosh, Bannon in conversation confessed to being a Leninist since Lenin wanted "to destroy the state, and that's my goal too" (*The Daily Beast* 2016).

(2007:306). Strict leadership was not a feature of Saint-Simon's vanguard. Instead, it was led by visionary artists who donned a particular role in world-making. This is the basis for the avant-garde inflection within broader vanguardist theory.

Auguste Comte, conversely, viewed sociology as a discipline capable of improving society through "the regulation and control of almost all aspects of human life according to scientific principles" (2007:307). Graeber contends these positions were eventually reversed, as the left shifted its self-image to scientists improving society (science being in the form of a Marxian social science), while the right saw itself as artists mapping out a vision for a new society (as Hitler and Mussolini imagined themselves doing through their respective fascist projects).

Vanguards viewing themselves as scientists, Graeber poses, align with Marxist groups interested in "a theoretical or analytical discourse about revolutionary strategy." The avant-garde aligns more with political anarchism which "has tended to be an ethical discourse about revolutionary practice" (Graeber 2007:304). These characterizations can be applied to strategic and prefigurative revolutionary camps; with Graeber's description of Marxism according to a strategic camp, and his description of anarchism fitting the rubric of a prefigurative camp (notice his recognition of Marxists being *strategic* and anarchists being concerned with *practice* i.e. prefiguration). Vanguardism's two inflections are of an authoritarian approach regulated by "science," and an artistic (although we'll discover elitist) approach guided by optimism in creativity as a vehicle for revolutionary energies. Popular discourse conflates vanguardism as necessarily its authoritarian variant, whereas its artistic thread is commonly known as an avant-garde.

Adding context, Alan Shandro charts vanguardism's history beginning with the argument that revolution root itself in a working-class movement made popular by Marx and Engels. Working-class movements could achieve success, claimed Marx and Engels, with leadership provided by the communist party. Due to their proximity to capital production, the communist party grasps the significance of material conditions. Informed by this awareness, the party can guide the working-class masses with sound strategy for toppling bourgeois rule. Within the communist party, argued Marx and Engels, exists a potential "connection between theory and practice in the leadership of the working-class movement." Shandro cautions against interpreting this argument as "an oracular vision" where "the vanguard plays the role of prophet." Instead, "the formulation is perhaps more reasonably read as an appreciation that placating the bourgeoisie could never advance the workers' struggle." Therefore, the vanguard would be responsible for establishing "principles of solidarity on a class foundation and dispel the illusion of supra-class solidarity" (2016:440). The bourgeoisie, in short, is constituted by fundamentally opposing interests than those of the proletariat.

A degree of malleability is present in Marx's and Engels' construct of a vanguard, opening possibilities for avoiding elitist or authoritarian characteristics. Orthodox views on the vanguard, explains Shandro, appear after Marx's death. In particular, the work of Karl Kautsky promotes the need for enlightened vanguard leadership. An economic determinist, Kautsky posed that since "capitalist production transforms particular struggles into a universal one" the party in capitalism's most advanced territorial sector is positioned to acquire consciousness able to perceive "the universal interest of the whole working class" (2016:440). The German Social Democratic Party (SPD) became Kautsky's vanguard, who "as a result of their

consciousness...transcend their particular circumstances.” Unsurprising, the SPD were “skilled, urban, Protestant, German, male” workers, and since “socialist consciousness donned the particular lenses of the advanced workers” the SPD’s universalism conformed to Eurocentric views on capitalist development (2016:440).

The working-class and party are further distinguished from each other in Lenin’s *What Is to Be Done?* and *The State and Revolution*. A working-class movement threatened bourgeois dominance, but to overthrow the existing world order²³ a revolutionary vanguard party “distinct from the spontaneous working-class movement” was needed. To defeat the bourgeoisie, coordinated strategies and discipline are essential. “Shifting circumstances demand that the vanguard readjust theory and adapt practice to account for the shifting terrain of battle” (Shandro 2016: 442). Lenin understood capitalism as a plastic system, the ruling class can maneuver around working-class confrontations. Working-class spontaneity could be fractured, atomized, and ultimately crushed. Revolutionary strategy, therefore, is necessarily complex and must be adaptable to account for capitalism’s disorienting counter-assaults. “Discipline and preparation,” explains Jodi Dean, “enable the party to adapt to circumstances rather than be completely molded or determined by them” (2013:241). Lenin’s distinction between class and party was seen by opponents as “providing a rationale for the subordination of workers to the authority of revolutionary intellectuals” (Shandro 2016:443). Figures such as Leon Trotsky and

²³ A world order, according to Lenin, owing to capitalism’s logical development into an imperialist system of globalized exploitation.

Rosa Luxemburg noted the easy slide from Lenin's vanguard party into a dictatorship; supplanting the organic struggles of the working-class.²⁴

Today as a term, "vanguardism" more often refers to sectarian habits amongst the left. This usage, Shandro suggests, became popular during the 1960s in reference to Maoist and Trotskyite organizations. This conception "insinuated that sect-like narcissism was implicit in the very notion of a vanguard party," affirming objections toward any Leninist vanguard. In contrast, "the term 'avant-garde' has been applied to cutting-edge artists or works of art that take a critical stance vis-à-vis the conformism of mainstream art and culture" (Shandro 2016:444). The avant-garde is seen as capable of provoking the sleeping masses, but does not lead them. An avant-garde "acts out its critically innovative character not really as leadership at all but as a kind of internal exile from the stifling conformism of capitalist society" (Shandro 2016:445). Yet a distinction remains between the masses and the avant-garde, comprised of anti-authoritarian and non-conformist critical thinkers.

Vanguard theories are indeed more rich and flexible than commonly held, with potential to be shaped into non-elite and anti-authoritarian constructs. Shandro points to an inference on the vanguard in the *Communist Manifesto* Russian edition 1882. In it, Marx and Engels suggest the character of a vanguard would change if Russia proved to be the battle ground for a proletarian revolution. Such adaptability "denotes [a vanguard as] the first clash of forces, which gives signal for a wider revolutionary explosion." Instead of oracular foresight, a vanguard is shaped by mass events which provoke revolutionary uprisings. Since an avant-garde instigates

²⁴ Anarchists also made this charge against Lenin's vanguard party, finding a particularly clear expression in the essay popularized by Murray Bookchin, "Listen Marxists!"

non-conformism, a vanguard posed as the first clash of forces can encourage the “fusion of artistic provocation and political commitment” (2016:444). Merging vanguard and avant-garde inflections, in turn, evinces the form of the radical imagination.

The basis for an anti-authoritarian conception of a vanguard has been established, but other dilemmas in vanguardism remain. A vanguard can be posed as the frontal assault on power initiating proletarian insurgence against the ruling class. Historically, though, vanguardist thought has also been fueled by frustration with prevailing passivity (or apathy) amongst the masses. Accounting for this, vanguards pose that the masses have internalized their oppression. Marx called this “false consciousness,” enabling class to exist simply in itself instead of for itself. Until the proletariat collectively recognize the source of their domination, they will continue to be a marginal class.

Noam Chomsky elaborates this concern in an interview, stating:

At any particular point in human history people have not understood what oppression is. It's something you learn....as anyone involved in any kind of activism knows—say the women's movement—one of the first tasks is to get people to understand they are living under conditions of oppression and domination. It isn't obvious, and who knows what forms of oppression and domination we are just accepting without noticing them.

(205:222)

Put by anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko, “the greatest weapon of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.” Yet in recognizing the need to raise consciousness, vanguards have often accepted their exclusive ability to access a consciousness perceived as inaccessible to the masses.

The oppressed, for these vanguards, have a collective mind.²⁵ Robin D.G. Kelley writes of this trend within the academy, where “students argue that the problems facing ‘real people’ today can be solved by merely bridging the gap between our superior knowledge and people outside the ivy walls who simply do not have access to that knowledge” (2002:8). For vanguards “the people are seen as totally vulnerable. They have no sense of their past, no understanding of the present, and no vision of the future” (Childs 1989:3). D.G. Kelley argues vanguards do not instill consciousness onto the masses, as “social movements generate new knowledge, new theories, new questions” (2002:8) so that collective action raises individual consciousness, not the other way around. I will return to this point later.

Characterized by John Brown Childs, vanguard elitism flows directly from the view of possessing privileged awareness the masses do not. Vanguards “accept the idea of a dominant center in society” (Childs 1989:4) which corresponds to their preconceptions on society’s ills and needed medicine. The center is either materialist or idealist, where materialists “seek to control economic power and the structures of science and technology” while idealists “seek to control society’s culture—its philosophy, art, and literature” (Childs 1989:4). Illustrating his argument, Childs provides a thorough review of divergent vanguardist positions held by early twentieth-century Black intellectuals like Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and the editors of *The Messenger* journal. These positions will be elaborated below.

In the face of injustice, a sense of urgency and frustration underpin strategic theories on emancipation. Early twentieth-century Black intellectuals faced mass disenfranchisement, deep-

²⁵ I am not suggesting that this is the attitude of Chomsky or Biko, but merely noting the predominance of holding a view that one is somehow more enlightened than the masses, and therefore must show them the light of knowledge.

seeded *de facto* and *de jure* segregation in the North and South, and frequent lynch mobs. No wonder they thought it impossible to wait for the masses to come to consciousness. But in their urgency and passion, the vanguard attempts to “shape all others into its own image and to reject those who take different approaches” (Childs 1989:5), making power grabs and factionalism inevitable which weakens movements.

Who Can Lead the Revolution?

Vanguard theory, in viewing society as having a dominant center, has preoccupied its analysis with locating the best positioned group to lead a revolution. Corresponding to strategic camp’s materialist philosophy and prefigurative camp’s idealist philosophy, the vanguard’s analysis on society’s center flows into beliefs over which social subject is closest to power structures. Propelling this analysis is the vanguard’s desire to determine what group will lead the revolution. Views oscillate on which social subject is most fundamental for reproducing power, but whatever the subject they are posed as the necessary leader of a frontal assault. Commonly today, in contrast to early vanguard ideas, the argument goes that those most impacted by oppression, by rebelling, are best poised to overturn the status quo. Debates rage over which form of oppression is most salient for maintaining dominant power. Believing that one center is the base of society parallels notions that oppression has a single focal point, in both elitist attitudes are common coupled with charges of false consciousness (whether amid the masses or other vanguard groups).

For Marx and Engels, the proletariat (i.e. factory workers) is a revolutionary agent constituted by capitalism’s inner logic. Factory workers, they believed, form the backbone of capitalist economies. The organization of work (Marx called this the “mode of production”)

generated enough surplus to eliminate material deprivation, and provided a model of social order which could be reproduced on a societal level. In contradictory fashion, capitalist modes of labor also discipline the proletariat for efficiency, instilling all the necessary skills and abilities for organizing an egalitarian society. Thus, in a dialectical process, industrial labor sites generate the agents of revolution.

Until recently, I have not understood Marx's and Engels' argument. The experience of work, primarily in restaurants, seemed only to train me for obedience; passivity rather than rebellion a typical outcome among service workers. But over the years as I've engaged in activism, the idea that work instills revolutionary discipline became less quixotic. During protest actions, for example, quick decision-making is a valuable skill as no amount of premeditation can prepare participants for inevitable changes in scenarios on the ground. Further, the needed planning and strategizing prior to any protest action requires a high degree of self-initiative among organizers. Restaurant work is intrinsically rapid, demanding one to be quick (both mentally and physically), alert, and efficient. If one couldn't perform tasks in a snap, they stood little chance of surviving in the industry. After sixteen years of restaurant work, I gained thousands of hours in practice making quick decisions, generating instant strategies to solve problems, and learning self-initiative. Bourdieu observed, "the work of acquisition is work on oneself (self-improvement), and effort that presupposes a personal cost...an investment, above all of time" (1986:187). Service work inscribes a certain configuration and level of social and cultural capital, albeit one perceived as considerably less valuable than other configurations of

capital.²⁶ After years of being governed by the mantra “if you can lean, you can clean,” my ability to adapt to a given scenario began to appear and feel natural, as though innate.

Marx and Engels recognized that nineteenth-century factories in England were structured for efficiency, which instilled worker discipline, and featured the most advanced technologies for capital production. By virtue of their work, the proletariat learns how to wield the machines which could be appropriated for society’s needs. With both the practice-based discipline and technological knowledge, the proletariat were in the greatest strategic position to organize themselves and seize capitalism’s means of production. Being organized as a class of workers was a premise within capitalism, the proletariat organized as workers needed to transition from this premise into a proletariat organized as a party. Jodi Dean elaborates: “[workers] are already organized as workers in a factory, which enables them to become conscious of their material conditions and the need to combine into unions...the party is necessary because class struggle is not simply economic struggle. It’s political struggle” (2016:253). For today’s restaurant industry (particularly its fast-food sectors), Marx and Engels would note the technologies workers learn to operate, their discipline toward efficiency, and their awareness of assembly-line organization for dividing labor into manageable tasks. Though privately I hate to admit it, my experience of maximal exploitation for the express benefit of a few has probably facilitated my growth as an organizer in more ways than I likely will ever know.

One must concede, however, that where Marx and Engels thought nineteenth-century factories in England provided a glimpse into how to organize an entire society, this does not hold

²⁶ Bourdieu identifies four forms of capital: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic. The volume of configuration of these capital forms, along with one’s social trajectory display one’s class position.

true for today's restaurants—or any single industry. Call this the problem of scale. Since the social world is in movement today's organizational forms cannot be reduced to any single model. Nor is the center of society strictly economic.

Materialist-laden theories on progress often harken to the promise (or for idealists the horror) of bureaucratic capitalist efficiency. Representing vanguardism's slide into elitist attitudes, early twentieth-century Black intellectuals proposed different conceptions of a vanguard. Often, they conducted analysis on society through the metaphor of a machine. Views on whether the machine possessed positive or negative qualities depended on the thinker. For Booker T. Washington, a proponent of capitalism, white supremacy is symptomatic of culture's irrationality. Prospects for Black liberation, he posed, require the success of Black capitalism—the capitalist machine can blast away culture's irrational outgrowths. According to Childs, Washington “had an image of the revolutionary power of capitalism to overturn pre-capitalist backwardness” (1989:17). Washington shunned cultural and political modes of resistance as “the political system was itself a prisoner of the irrationality of racism” (Childs 1989:15). He encouraged Blacks to opt for strategy centered on acquiring economic power. “Because racism was emotionally based,” explains John Brown Childs, “[Washington believed] only the precision and cool rationality of the sciences could counteract it” (1989:27). Economic strength alters the power dynamics between Blacks and whites as “cold-hard cash” best counters anti-Black racism. For Washington, a capitalist machine, informed as it is by impersonal science, eliminates all irrational modes of social arrangements. His vanguard was comprised of financiers and Black industrialists, as they were best positioned to lift the Black masses out of oppression.

W.E.B. Du Bois proved to be Washington's fiercest critic. Du Bois rejected the view that white supremacy was due to culture, or the residue of "uncivilized peoples." Instead, he posed it as a function of capitalism birthed in European society. "Modern civilization," argued Du Bois, "had historically demonstrated that its barbarism was fundamental and internal, not simply a product of contact with more innocent peoples" (Childs 1989:31). Europe perpetrated the gravest acts of violence and barbarism in its various quests for empire, creating the capitalist machine in the process. Beyond violence, the machine robs people of their creative drive, rendering the world "soulless" and permeated, in everyday life, with cold instrumental logic. Combating the "barbarism of machine-based civilization had to include the liberation of consciousness" (1989:39). Culture is not a retreat from suffering, it is an active agent in transforming society. Du Bois saw the masses as a "source of vital energy," but such energy "lacked the necessary direction for progress" (1989:18). Du Bois' vanguard was found in an avant-garde of intellectual warriors who through "world literature, art, and philosophy...would form a free zone" (1989:18) capable of seizing "control of the social-physical machine" (1989:34). His vanguard of "enlightened warriors" would be composed of the best Black artists, philosophers, musicians, and writers.

Contrary to both Du Bois and Washington, editors of the socialist journal *The Messenger* argued the machine itself wasn't the problem. They "viewed social machinery as ultimately neutral and measured its value by who controlled it" (Childs 1989:52). U.S. politics are strategically ill-equipped for Black liberation since capitalists control the machine. Such renders Black politicians (Democrat and Republican alike) ineffectual as "they owed their allegiance to the machine [of capitalism]" (Childs 1989:50). Needed to defeat the capitalist machine is a

socialist machine. *Messenger* editors “extolled the virtues of machine-like discipline” (Childs 1989:50) and believed that a socialist machine would blast away capitalist political arrangements and irrational cultural mediums. Culture that abided the machine-rationality of socialism would substitute for anti-scientific culture. Instead of a seizure of the state, they argued for the seizure of “the instruments of persuasion” (Childs 1989:55) as controlling cultural mediums would expose the virtues of socialism and its science. Strategic revolutionaries also marry strategy to “scientific socialism,” insisting it necessary to position strategy within the constraints of existing material conditions. *The Messenger* vanguard was found in the prescient Black leaders who were able to “comprehend the economic roots of struggle and oppression” (Childs 1989:60).

All of the above vanguardists imagined they possessed the “right” consciousness—suggesting they thought one needed the correct analysis of society in order to lead a revolution. Such attitudes are inherently elitist. Writes John Brown Childs, “Vanguard groups are the modern messiahs” (1989:3) who attempt to shape all others in their own image.

Emphasizing the primary role of economics and science, *Messenger* editors viewed exploitation as the lynchpin of oppression. Capitalism is thrown into the dustbin of history once class is abolished (and with it exploitation), opening the path for liberation. Yet, what happens to patriarchy once capitalism is shucked off our collective backs? Will male supremacy end once the class system disappears?

Casting doubt, feminist historian Gerda Lerner argues patriarchy extends as far back as written history. She writes, “the appropriation by men of women’s sexual and reproductive capacity occurred *prior* to the formation of private property and class society” (1986:8). The extent of women’s subordination to men is difficult to overemphasize. “Women have been

systematically excluded from the enterprise of creating symbol systems, philosophies, science, and law” (1986:5), highlighting a history of systematic exclusion and appropriation on the basis of gender, dating long before the emergence of capitalism.

Similar questions hold on the impact ending capitalism will have for domination linked to race, sexuality, and religious identification, or more concretely, white supremacy, cultural imperialism, settler-colonialism, and empire. Oppressions outside exploitation are undoubtedly altered with the abolition of class, but it seems equally true that some or another form of systemic violence, cultural imperialism, marginalization, or powerlessness could emerge after the destruction of capitalist modes of social order.²⁷

Acting on this view, various social movements since the first half of the twentieth-century have splintered off from the primacy of class. Class political projects have fractioned into multiple identity-based movements—civil rights, women’s, and LGBTQ movements to list a few. Robin D.G. Kelley, in surveying twentieth-century Black liberation movements, reports on the trend among socialist organizations to subordinate Black freedom to the class struggle. Critical Black socialist thinkers grew tired of socialist parties downplaying the significance of what they called “the Negro Question.” “The European working class,” they charged, “had too often joined forces with the European bourgeoisie in support of racism, imperialism, and colonialism” (Kelley 2002:178).

Black intellectuals, and socialist sympathizers, such as Ida B. Wells, W.E.B. Du Bois, Claude McKay, and Paul Robeson, challenged the prevailing class orthodoxy within the ranks of Marxist-

²⁷ Iris Marion Young has proposed the above as the five forms oppression takes in contemporary society, in her seminal essay “Five Faces of Oppression” easily accessible online.

inspired organizations. They flipped the analysis, arguing only once white supremacy was dismantled could the class struggle be successfully fought. Therefore, class abolition could not be prior to Black liberation but by necessity must follow the project of dismantling racial marginalization. In the wake of mass disillusionment with the civil rights movement to “achieve all its goals and to deal with urban poverty” (2002:62), critiques of “class reductionism” took stronger hold. The rise of the Black Panther Party (self-described as the vanguard of the revolution), along with successes by Third World liberation movements, cemented positions against viewing the proletariat as the revolutionary vanguard. For Black revolutionaries at the time, “the uprisings of the colonized might point the way forward” (Kelley 2002:178) for a more robust international revolutionary project.

“[Third World liberation] movements...were independent of both the white Left and the mainstream civil rights movement” explains Robin D.G. Kelley. “Directing much of their attention to working-class struggles, urban poverty and racism, and police brutality...a vision of global class revolution led by oppressed people of color” (2002:62) took shape. However, these liberation movements proved limited as well, and in the U.S. Black Power groups like the Black Panther Party “were so concerned with self-defense...that they devoted little time and energy to the most fundamental question of all: what kind of world they wanted to build if they did win” (Kelley 2002:108).

The weakness of political imagination points to the need for embracing the radical imagination, along with placing open utopia as a foundation for contemporary movements. Black Power offered instances of vision and imagination, but ultimately these groups became encumbered in a fight for gaining political inches. Had they committed to sketching the world

they wanted to live in, perhaps this period of radicalism would have endured. Under the weight of a massive assault by the FBI (known as its COINTELPRO program), the bulk of a once powerful Black socialist movement was effectively destroyed.²⁸

Contemporary thinkers, such as Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, have issued a clarion call for resurrecting Black socialist politics. Yamahtta Taylor has also expressed the need to stop framing class and identity as dualistic political projects.

The foibles of the [Communist Party] should not be conflated with the validity of anticapitalism and socialism as political theories that inform and guide the struggle for Black liberation...Far from being marginal to the struggles of Black people, socialists have *always* been at the center of those movements—from the struggle to save the Scottsboro Boys in the 1930s, to Bayard Rustin’s role in organizing the 1963 March on Washington, to the Black Panther Party’s organizing against police brutality.

(Yamahtta Taylor 2016:204-205)

Open possibilities exist for weaving together a class and identity vanguard project. Offering a way forward, Aimé Césaire wrote “I am not going to entomb myself in some strait particularism. But I don’t intend either to become lost in a fleshless universalism...I have a different idea of a universal. It is of a universal rich with all that is particular, rich with all the particulars there are, the deepening of each particular, the coexistence of them all” (quoted in Kelley 2002:179).

Dialectics of Oppression and Leadership

New insights on oppression, its different forms and logics, cast doubt on the proletariat as revolution’s vanguard. With deeper understandings of domination came new theories for

²⁸ COINTELPRO also placed the anti-war left and socialist groups in its cross-hairs. One would be wise to remember that state and private sector violence is always available as a technique to crush resistance movements—regardless of their commitment to non-violence.

dismantling power, and strategies for accomplishing utopia. As well, multiple formulations on the vanguard different than the proletariat have been offered. Common today are calls for taking leadership from oppression's most impacted communities, expressed in rhetoric to "center the voices" of parties directly affected by systemic marginalization. Representing a new ethic of practice, such proposals hold promise in correcting histories which erase and silence contributions from these various groups. But questions remain over what this form of leadership will look like in action.

Far too common today, as well, are positions which essentialize identity and risk ignoring common ground. Framed as singularly unique, forms of oppression are reified to the point where commonalities cannot be drawn between different experiences of domination. Illustrating this tendency, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor reports a scenario where Black Lives Matter organizers accused activists of appropriation for creating the hashtag #MuslimLivesMatter in the wake of a police killing of three Muslim-Americans. The BLM organizers proclaimed that on the surface struggles against anti-Black racism and anti-Muslim hate appear similar, but in actuality are "drastically different" (quoted in Taylor 2016:187). Therefore, to appropriate the slogan #BlackLivesMatter for efforts outside the specific aims of Black freedom commits symbolic violence²⁹ against the organizing efforts of the Black Lives Matter movement. "To conceive of Black oppression and anti-Black racism as so wholly unique that they are beyond the realm of

²⁹ Defined by Bourdieu, symbolic power is a form of capital which confers authority on the part of a subject. A classic example is the dynamic between teacher and student, where the teacher is conferred status as an authority in the classroom and therefore possesses, in symbolic fashion, a power over the student. Symbolic violence, then, in this example could be an event where a student's viewpoint on the class subject matter is mocked by the teacher (*The Forms of Capital* 1986).

understanding and, potentially, solidarity from others who are oppressed” (2016:187), writes Yamahtta Taylor, severely limits our ability to align liberatory projects.

If anti-Black racism is understandable only to African-Americans, how can we locate spaces for solidarity amongst the oppressed and others who wish to participate in anti-oppression movements? “In the contest to demonstrate how oppressions differ from one group to the next,” explains Yamahtta Taylor, “we miss how we are connected through oppression—and how those connections should form the basis of solidarity, not a celebration of our lives on the margins” (2016:187).

Escaping this quagmire appears impossible at times. Yet, if Graeber’s contention that modern social theory and vanguardism developed in tandem holds true, then social theory today can help lay a framework for leadership able to resolve leftist factionalism. In weaving strategic and prefigurative revolutionary perspectives, the radical imagination opens conceptions of vanguardism.

Elaborating on the misleading nature of “leaderless” movements, scholar-activist Harsha Walia notes how “the denial of structure and leadership just creates a layer of unspoken leadership, and informal hierarchies emerge” (2013:196). Offering an alternative, Walia articulates the form of leadership and structure within the No One is Illegal Vancouver (Indigenous Coast Salish territories) chapter of which she is a member: “we have an intentional concept of *antiauthoritarian* and *group-centered* structure and leadership” (2013:197). She explains this is not structureless or leaderless, but “based on the notion of abundance—an abundance of space for voice, empowerment, capacity, and ownership within social movements”

(2013:201). Organizationally, then, the goal is to develop structures brimming with leaders and capable of bringing new leaders into the fold all the while.

Reframing leadership requires recognizing oppression and leadership as dialectical. “There is in reality no one dominant center,” writes Childs, “the economy is no less and no more important than the construction of ideas in literature; the political realm is no more significant than the philosophical or the artistic” (1989:7). The same holds true for oppression, as no single form of oppression sits at center of capitalist totality.

Capitalism is a force in movement. It has no *permanent* center, meaning its power is in multiple focal points. No solitary oppression can be a lynchpin in capitalism, as it is a system of shifting territorial and political paradigms. Instead, capitalism cobbles multiple oppressions together through its constant movement. Engels remarked (to paraphrase), “the bourgeoisie has no way to solve its problems other than moving them around” (quoted in Harvey 2008). The euphemistic word describing this process is “creative destruction.” This entails neighborhood gentrification (another euphemism), enclosures over the commons such as the privatization of water, knowledge, and telecommunications technologies, and so forth. Therefore, the fight against capitalism is not purely economic, but fixates upon “bringing to an end the capitalist cycle of creative destruction—the destruction of destruction” (Dean 2016:252).

For social theory, the framework must approach analysis from an understanding of every oppression as woven together—as the Combahee River Collective state they are “interlocking” (quoted in Lazar 2016). Today critical theory strives to be “intersectional,” evoking legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw’s term coined to correct frameworks which “frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences” (1991:1242) A few important points need to be addressed with the term

intersectionality: One, it is a metaphor established originally in a legal journal that as a term, and not a concept, has limitations in its wording. “Too often this particular metaphor” writes Hilary Lazar, “has been limited by its interpretation of oppression as having an ‘additive’ quality; rather than a more slippery and dynamic relationship” (2016:37). If the boundaries of identity are conceived as permanent borders instead of sliding relational signifiers, connections between identities become lost. In “additive” approaches to oppression, it appears one can check-off the number of oppressed identities they carry to demonstrate they’re in a more oppressed position than others. Within the academy, intersectionality often devolves into individualistic interpretations instead of structural and relational ones.

Two, intersectionality does not highlight the significance of history. Since power is transmitted through generations, an intersectional approach which does not take account of social history limits our collective sense of direction. The trajectory borne from the past is mystifying, and gives no sense of where our potential futures may be heading.

And three, with the term’s cooptation into mainstream academic, and now political, discourse, the concept of class has been effectively eroded from intersectional frameworks. Class today is routinely presented as a white-person phenomenon (as in the “white working-class”) instead of a multi-racial reality. Therefore, in typical frameworks, intersectionality has been limited by not being intersectional enough.

Explains Harsha Walia, “even an intersectional approach that acknowledges the overlapping and layered nature of power and privilege can lead to a flattening of all oppressions” (2013:188). Walia is worth quoting at length on this point:

Antioppression analysis becomes rigid in its categorizations when the question becomes who is *more* oppressed, rather than engaging in a dialogue of *how* oppression, which is relational and contextual, is specifically manifesting and impacting the orientations of our movements...Working in the poorest postal code in Canada, I know that a straight white cisgendered man who is homeless faces a harsher material reality on a daily basis...than me, someone who might be able to count off more forms of oppression, but who does not have to worry about surviving through a cold night on the streets.

(2013:189)

Within academic settings, due to its structural imposition of forcing students and teachers to compete with one another, the notion of intersectionality mirrors individualizing approaches to learning and engagement. This undermines intersectional frameworks, which Kimberle Crenshaw makes clear, are intended to demonstrate intragroup divisions as well as broader structural power dynamics.

Class analysis suffers from individualistic interpretations of intersectionality. One possible reason is the invisibility of class opposed to the “salience” of visible identities. It has been remarked that the poor in the U.S. are among the best dressed poor in the world, highlighting the ability of U.S. residents to “pass” for a different class. Bringing a firm class analysis into social movement frameworks strengthens intersectional understandings of mass movement building. “The popular myth that the United States is a classless society is scorned by most on the left,” writes Betsy Leondar-Wright, “but paradoxically the myth of a classless *movement* lives on” (2014:29 emphasis in original). When removing a framework of class from movement-building, analytical short-sidedness and confusion becomes the norm. Leondar-Wright explains that “in ‘race, class, and gender’ studies, class often plays the role of a conjunction” (2014:34). The

negative economic impacts of racism and sexism might be expressed, but a specific account for class oppression is ignored.

Positioning class solely as an additional factor on other forms of oppression fragments understandings of capitalism along with the projects of colonialism, empire, and white supremacy. “White supremacy expresses itself by obscuring the class antagonism among whites,” explains Yamahtta Taylor. “‘White people’ are typically regarded as an undifferentiated mass with a common experience of privilege, access, and unfettered social mobility...[which] invariably collapses important distinctions among whites into a common experience that simply does not exist” (Yamahtta Taylor 2016:210-211).

Further, while limited class analyses fold the experiences of whites into a monolithic notion of “whiteness,” they also elide intragroup class divisions amongst people of color, women, people with disabilities, and queer people. One finds telling evidence on the magnitude of this after the election of Donald Trump when practically any mention of the “working-class” was implicitly equated with whites—belying the reality that the U.S. has a decidedly multi-racial working-class. “In fact,” corrects Yamahtta Taylor, “the American working class is female, immigrant, Black, white, Latino/a, and more.” Therefore, “immigrant issues, gender issues, and antiracism *are* working-class issues” (2016:216 emphasis in original). Writes Leondar-Wright, “just as a true understanding of class in the United States requires an analysis of institutionalized racism, a true understanding of race requires a class analysis” (2014:33).

Liberal frameworks of intersectionality flatten the dynamics of oppression. Explains Hilary Lazar, “if all forms of subjugation are reduced to a single axis, oppression cannot be contested, and indeed may only be reified” (2016:47). Lazar surveys multiple metaphors for “unpacking the

dynamic, overlapping, and interactive nature of oppression” (2016:38) which include oppression as “interlocking,” or operating through “the matrix of domination.” But at the end of her survey Lazar suggests a different metaphor for overcoming the linguistic limitations of intersectionality, “that of a tangled knot.” Her full explanation is important:

There are countless strands in this knot, each one representing a different expression of domination, and all tightly bound together. Given their entanglement, it is therefore necessary to loosen all the strands if the knot is to be undone. In some moments, however, one strand may need more immediate attention and loosening than others. In other moments, perhaps it may be necessary to pull on multiple strands at once. While the knot of oppression will remain ensnared until all strands are freed, it is vital to understand that interdependent as the thread may be, each must be attended to both as an individual strand and as part of the collective tangle.

(2016:48)

When we think of oppression as a “tangled knot,” the contact between oppressed groups become clear. Experiences are connected, sometimes we crash into each other and at other times we reach out to one another. There’s a chance we won’t collide when driving through an intersection, but a tangled knot illustrates our boundedness. How to relate the connections of oppression, beyond analytic frameworks, brings us back to the question of a vanguard.

Open Vanguard Rupturing Space and Shattering Alienation

The only way to actually conceive of social change is by challenging our own identities, by moving beyond them, by negating them and going beyond. We are verbs.

-John Holloway

Above I’ve described two possible inflections of a vanguard. One considers scientific analysis and disciplined leadership essential for developing revolutionary strategy. The other acts as an aesthetic sanctuary for rebellious artists, and seeks to awaken mass consciousness to inspire collective action. For ease, this can be labeled a difference between the vanguard and

avant-garde. Either inflection can be guilty of elitism which slides into authoritarian leadership. To overcome this problem concepts of a vanguard must take from the best of both inflections, and generate a whole different vanguard approach. This new vanguard embraces the masses spontaneity and creativity, and tries to highlight the commonalities between different groups; particularly in everyday life. In order for this vanguard to remain non-elite, notions of possessing the “correct” consciousness need to be dislodged. All of us are a part of the social landscape, we are all vulnerable to the disorientations of capitalist creative destruction. Our connections to one another will be revealed most through engaging in mass action; our consciousness will not be prior to mass knowledge but will flow from it. Thus, the new vanguard will be shaped by the masses as much as it contributes to mass consciousness.

Leadership and oppression are shaped dialectically, root sources of oppressions provide the basis for developing capable leadership strategies toward liberation. Iris Marion Young, as noted above, proposes five forms of oppression including exploitation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, marginalization, and violence. I propose adding a sixth form of oppression for developing leadership praxis which can avoid the pitfalls of elitist vanguardism; that of alienation.

Described by Marx, alienation is a process whereby “man [sic] (the worker) no longer feels himself to be freely active in any but his animal functions—eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing-up,” so that “what is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal” (1978[1844]:74).³⁰ Capitalism is oppressive beyond the rich getting richer at the majority’s expense. According to Marx (and many social critics) capitalism degrades

³⁰ Some might protest Marx’s apparent anthropocentrism. I would agree, but we can remove the anthropocentric viewpoint and still find Marx’s treatment of alienation valuable.

humans through fixing value to “production” (itself a term related to capital accumulation) and not to their creative capacities or connections to one another. Alienation, then, is the process of turning human subjects into isolated human objects.

Marx believed that one’s individual sense of dignity can only be found in their connection and belonging to a broader group. This is not some vague appeal for conformity or a denunciation of the individual, but a philosophy which understands there is no individual without society as well as society is strongest when the individual is allowed to thrive. He frequently voiced outrage over capitalism’s penchant for dehumanization because his philosophy of revolution viewed communism as a potential state of movement wherein one “strives not to remain something [they] have become, but is in the absolute movement of becoming” (Holloway 2016:7) and becoming with one another. As Marx thought of humankind as a universal subject what he seeks to make clear for us today is that there exists a basic humanity—a humanness—to everyone on the planet.

To shatter alienation, as the sixth form of oppression’s tangled knot, the task for leadership is to map our interconnections in everyday life. Oppression is analytically complex, but on a simple yet deeply important level oppression stems from the inability for groups to recognize other people as human and inherently valuable. By humanizing the “other,” one discovers their own humanity. Solidarity, in essence, is a bond drawn by empathy and shared commitment to dignity. Such bonds are made, on many levels, by sharing the stories of where we have come from, what we have experienced, and how we are connected by such stories. A vanguard, in this sense, does the job of articulating a party as “a vehicle for maintaining a specific

gap of desire” (Dean 2013:207). Collective desire does not erase differences, but turns differences into strengths.

To share stories of oppression shaped by alienation does not go far enough in generating empowered leadership. Stories must also express the desire of the oppressed for a transformation beyond the boundaries of current possibilities. Hence, stories must articulate desire for an open utopia. Precedents for this kind of project are available.

Catalogued by Robin D.G. Kelley, Black surrealism as a cultural movement insisted “any revolution must begin with thought, with how we imagine a New World, with how we reconstruct our social and individual relationships, with unleashing our desire and building a new future on the basis of love and creativity rather than rationality” (2002:193). The “basic principles of surrealism” include the “living, mutable, creative vision of a world where love, play, human dignity, an end to poverty and want, and imagination are the pillars of freedom” (Kelley 2002:158). According to the Chicago Surrealist Group (1976), a surrealist transformation achieves “a free society in which everyone will be a poet” (quoted in Kelley 2002:158). Black surrealism “relentlessly critiqued alienated wage labor,” but also counterpoised their critiques with visions of “utopias...always free of ‘work’...and full of pleasurable leisure” (Kelley 2002:164). Embracing desire sets in motion the “transformation of everyday life as it encumbers us today, the unfolding and eventual triumph of the marvelous” (Kelley 2002:192).

Jodi Dean believes our desire is for collectivity—a connected community which values the contributions of each group. Such a collectivity expresses an antagonism toward the parasitism of the ruling class. Intrinsic to this vanguard project are contestations over constructs of value. “Capitalism not only creates the conditions for precarious labor,” explains Harsha Walia, “it also

defines what can even be characterized as labor” (2013:262). Under capitalist regimes production is exclusively quantifiable. Only what can be measured and held is considered valuable.

Delimiting value to such a restricted sense perpetuates processes of alienation. Every group devolves into an absolute individual, out only for themselves and no others. Writes Harsha Walia, “each of us plays such an atomized role in the global economy—like cogs in a wheel—that our social relations come to mimic that atomization.” A common project for dignity and humanization arises in a vanguard fixed to spreading desire and sharing stories of being alienated. “What will free us is the collective and public recognition,” writes Harsha Walia, “of all bodies, all abilities, all genders, all experiences, and all expressions as inherently valuable, and by virtue of their very existence, as distinctly *human*” (2013:265).

Stories for reshaping value as the things which make us fundamentally human pose the need for a different vanguard. It is one not deliberately instructive but suggestive of where our common projects align and how we can each contribute. Yet, the question of a “revolutionary subject” still hangs in the air. To push beyond such questions, we must dismiss the notion of oppression as being rooted in society’s center.

No single center of oppression exists, capitalist totality is composed of multiple nodal centers. As such, there will not be a lone vanguard “frontal assault,” but a collection of assaults from multiple angles. Extending this further, there can be no single “revolutionary subject,” instead every one of the oppressed can become a revolutionary subject. John Holloway calls this a project of non-identity, which does not imply flattening out differences between groups or imposing conformity for a “greater good.” Non-identity is a change in the grammar of revolution. The question “who is the revolutionary subject” becomes “how can we imagine everyone, any

ordinary person, as a revolutionary subject?" This means "going out to the streets...and trying to see the rebellion inside people" (Holloway 2016:9). Deepening this grammar requires reformulating a singular vanguard to the plural vanguard(s).

In practice, these vanguards might look similar to a scenario imagined by John Brown Childs. He begins in a dense forest, where multiple groups are navigating the forest from different starting positions. "They have no knowledge of each other," he writes, "each group believes itself to be isolated" (1989:6). Cutting through the thickness of the forest, they eventually begin hearing each other's voices. "Even before they can actually see one another," imagines Childs, "they call out greetings and stories of their struggle. Directions are exchanged. Progress is reported" (1989:6). Eventually, the groups reach each other. Along the journey, their various pathways have connected and created a mass clearing in the forest, allowing the groups to see each other face to face. Explains Childs, "this direction did not lead them to an already established place, a fabled El Dorado...rather, as they drew closer they created the place and the moment of clearing" (1989:6).

Childs calls this a process of correspondence. Correspondence takes account of distinct social histories and experiences, and communicates these differences with the intention of locating how each converges with one another. Once identified, the convergences can point to a future where we understand our connections. Correspondence requires a commitment to believing that "everyone has the capacity for conscious analysis and the envisioning of a better world" (Childs 1989:7). Elites, or a small sect of avant-gardes, will not shape such stories of correspondence. They will take shape through the collective movement of the masses.

Vanguards will not act as a directorate (or group above the fray), they will be the organic force of movement propelled by stories.

Movement has always been a key feature of vanguardist ideas, as Jodi Dean points out “Marx and Engels link socialism not simply to the identity of the working class. They link it to working-class *movement*” (2016:257). She argues we should embrace desires for collectivity, which require the left to “turn to the process of movement, recognizing the people as the subject of that movement” (2016:258). The people, in turn, emerge as a crowd which gives itself definition through movement. This movement is one which is *communicated*, where crowds form to signal their desire for collectivity. They signal these desires by raising their voices, chanting, singing, arguing, mic checking, speechifying and more. Stories become connected in the process of moving together as a crowd with multiple voices and points of reference, allowing for an eventual shared politics to take shape.

Dean claims “the crowd doesn’t have a politics,” but rather the “event” of a crowd provides “the opportunity for a politics” (2016:258). She concludes that since the crowd has no politics yet, and therefore no history, reviving the communist party is necessary. “The party does not represent the people as a collective subject,” she writes, “the party responds to this subject...It gives the crowd a history” (2016:259). The need for a party, in essence, boils down to the need for a common language. “When local and issue politics are connected via a common name,” writes Dean, “successes in one area advance the struggle as a whole” (2016:263). But I disagree with Dean on these points. The crowd does have a history, always, and its history is important. To imagine otherwise neglects understanding accumulative social history. Further,

this common language need not be under the label of a communist party; we will discover the language through our movement.

Stories, though, can be told from the lens of hate. Strategic conflicts can still arise from the telling of stories told by white supremacist groups and antiracist movements like Black Lives Matter. Political clarity over the prevailing circumstances is needed. Yamahtta Taylor writes, “we live in a thoroughly racist society, so it should not be surprising that people have racist ideas.” The more important question, she writes, “is under what circumstances those ideas can change.” Identifying the basis for change, Yamahtta Taylor reports “there is a clash between the prevailing ideology in society and people’s lived experience...whether or not a group of workers has reactionary, mixed, or even revolutionary consciousness does not change its objective status as exploited and oppressed labor” (2016:213).

The same holds true for every oppressed group. Consciousness does not alter oppression’s objective conditions, whether it is in the form of marginalization, violence, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, or alienation. The task for vanguards is to locate the spaces where solidarity can be fostered through the sharing of stories. Spaces can be organizational spaces, public spaces, counter-cultural spaces, or anywhere we can communicate desires for collectivity. Highlighting the importance of space, John Holloway writes, “we have to build forms of organization that allow people to articulate their dignities, that encourage people to speak, that encourage people to explain their worries, that encourage people to talk about their concerns, that encourage people to draw out their dignity” (2016:10).

Holloway encourages pushing pass the false duality between class and identity, suggesting our human worth is vastly more rich and abundant than these categories. “We don’t

fit into any boxes, and we don't fit into any identities," writes Holloway, "our politics...is inevitably an anti-identitarian politics." This is a politics which threads class and identity together, because "if we don't recognize how we spill over from our own identities, then...our language becomes too easily integrated, it becomes...reactionary" (2016:33).

Someone once remarked that the United States, and the world at large, does not have as much a division between left and right as it does between top and bottom. Highlighting stories which expose shared grievances against the top provide the basis for recognizing our struggles are connected. Vanguards become ones which do not strictly lead, but map the locations for groups to enter a shared project of liberation. In order to conduct such a project, we must claim spaces which bring together disparate groups. Occupy Wall Street offered insights for this type of experiment. The occupation of public spaces allowed the public to challenge representative democracy and the ruling class expressed as the "1%." Occupation also allowed for a broader appellation of people to locate visible entry-points for engaging in the exchange of stories. Vanguards, then, capture spaces that create entry-points for the masses to share their stories, desires, histories, and visions of a better society. Below I will return to the importance of space in everyday movement against capitalism.

For vanguards, "holding a space for an indeterminate amount of time allow[s] for a more durable politics to emerge" (Dean 2013:221). Such a politics will do best when they go beyond holding a space and sharing stories of grievances. This politics will grow with attempts at sketching a world without alienation (a vision of open utopia), which unleashes the power of our deepest desires for a better future. The Zapatistas carry with them two expressions in line with this view: "walking we ask questions"—to make a "world where many worlds fit." These

vanguards must insist on the dismantling of capitalism, uprooting of white supremacy, smashing of patriarchy, and quashing of all efforts which dehumanize on the basis of abilities and sexuality. Those that propose centering the voices of the most impacted by oppression are correct—these voices need to be centered as they will harbor the most intimate understanding of their group desire and approach to an expansive community void of alienation. This does not mean being at the center, but bringing multiple centers together.

As a way of beginning, we would do well to begin seeing the rebellion, as Holloway says, in each and every one of us perfectly ordinary people.

IV.

Terms for a Political Revolution

Lead up months (now stretching to years) prior to any U.S. presidential election provide ripe reasons to reject political routines and their staid implications for the future. Such political theater illustrates the need for the radical imagination. In the wake of yet another dull, yet strangely spectacular, election cycle of candidates—accurately labeled a battle between neoliberalism and neo-fascism (Stein *Counterpunch* 2016)—conventional wisdom reduces political options to one major-party candidate or the other. Helpless amongst a choice between “lesser-evils,” notions of alternatives are neither entertained or thought of as pragmatic. We are trapped in the deadening fodder of state politics, and without the radical imagination to guide us out we will find no escape.

Even those with a sound critique of the imposing order are found providing wholly superficial strategies. Quick to harpoon Donald Trump’s buffoonery and lambast Hillary Clinton’s centrism they offer as a substitute the fantastic proposal of electing a third-party candidate. To vote is their prime vehicle of strategy, and with it we are left simply to pray for the occurrence of an electoral miracle!³¹ Where is the vision, the imagination, the utopic ideal? I’d rather place my prayers in resurrecting Lucy Parsons from her grave in order to tell us to “never be deceived that the rich will permit you to vote away their wealth” (2010). How can it be that we’ve entered an era where the touting of a “political revolution” is seen as being actualized through the electoral

³¹ Representative of these viewpoints are Green Party leaders as well as journalist Chris Hedges and Seattle city council member Kshama Sawant, to list a few. My intention is not to suggest that the entirety of their political analysis is poor, but in matters of strategic advice and overall vision I find their mantra of third-party revolution wholly inadequate.

process? Rhetorically, “political revolution” appears as a condemnation of oligarchy, of “big-money in politics,” yet the implicit conceptual model demonstrates barely conscious ideas of how to disengage from an oligarchic political machine. A crucial question to ask should be: if a Bernie Sanders or Jill Stein were to win the presidency what would be revolutionized in Washington?

Short answer: not much. To be sure many benefits would occur by breaking up a two-party duopoly, but already a number of nations outside the U.S. have multiple representative parties and they are still plagued by similar divides in wealth and power. This is not a revolution. Additionally, an insurgent democrat would still be stymied by all the typical obstacles preventing progressive policies from implementation under the U.S. representative political system. “Political revolution” cannot be actualized through the channels of representative democracy, because as a political form its existence is to perpetuate capitalist power. The apparatus of U.S. formal state politics, due to meticulous configuration by elite classes, is a *representative oligarchy*. Attempts to democratize this oligarchy with its own instruments are effectively struggles to expand the representation within an oligarchy—not to transform the oligarchy into a new political form. Writes Audre Lorde, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” to which I add that not only will these tools fail to dismantle the master’s house, but their use can often strengthen the house’s structural foundation. (1984:110-113).³²

³² To be sure, Lorde’s criticism was levelled at the academic treatment of feminist thinking which too often overlooked the importance of “race, sexuality, class, and age.” She also took issue with the popularization of a feminist movement which was reform-based and committed to mere “tolerance of difference” as opposed to maximizing differences and strengthening bonds of solidarity for a truly radical liberating politics. Indeed, this quote from Lorde has been invoked routinely and often out of context, but here in regards to sterile political reformism that substitutes as revolutionary politics I find Lorde’s criticism not only appropriate but analogous to the core argument I make against political liberalism. Of course, these political tools do not have to be used in a manner preferred by the existing state, and if thought of as instruments for monkey-wrenching attached to a more ambitious conception of political action the terms of “political revolution” might approach clearer meaning.

Abandoning electoral politics altogether is not a viable strategy either. In the section that follows I intend to demonstrate that the primary limitations of electoral strategies have been in their practical separation of the political, social, and economic spheres, allowing for the privileging of formal state politics as the exclusive site of political agitation. Such separation of spheres is a development inherent in capitalism, therefore strategies which bridge the political, social, and economic offer the best opportunity for dismantling capitalist totality. Connecting the social, political, and economic spheres, I contend, is the basis for real democracy. To accomplish this feat requires employing the radical imagination. Above all, the radical imagination is a method for exploding dualistic frameworks, so by employing it as a method of praxis it becomes clear that we do not face either/or choices in revolutionary tactics. However, privileging the formal political arena as a site of contestation serves to reproduce the state's monopoly over politics (a phenomenon I will explore below) which undermines the efficacy of the radical imagination. Revolutionary aspirations need not shuck the electoral arena entirely, but attempts to gain electoral power should be understood as a tactic within a broader strategic effort to dismantle the political economy of capitalism. It will also be demonstrated that the most expansive changes within the electoral arena have been the result of social movements from below, so then tactics which specifically target the electoral arena have too often been misguided in understanding how social change occurs.

On the left, the separation of spheres is typically expressed through Marxist constructs of a "base" and "superstructure," where the base serves as the economic movement of capital which produces atop it a superstructure of political, social, and ideological forms. Following Ellen Meiksins Wood, the question becomes "does the base/superstructure dichotomy obscure as

much as it reveals about the productive ‘base’ itself?” (1995:26). In order to come to terms of what a political revolution can mean and look like, Wood’s question should be answered in the affirmative. As she explains, “the productive base itself exists in the shape of social, juridical and political forms” (1995:22). The implications of this demonstrate that democracy is a genuinely radical concept, one whose features highlight a society beyond capitalism. Misconceptions about what democracy means is largely due to the term’s cooptation, and subsequent transfiguration, by social and political elites. An examination of democracy (or “direct democracy”) requires pushing beyond the dualism of a base/superstructure, and bridging the social, economic, and political spheres. In pursuit of a political revolution, then, our project need not abandon electoral politics outright but should see gains in electoral power as a tactic toward broader revolutionary changes while not exaggerating the political importance of electoral victories. As a conclusion, the following will demonstrate that real democracy is a force against capitalism.

Social movements such as Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter offer keen insights on how to engage the radical imagination in pursuit of democracy. What these movements seek to create is a formulation of democracy implanted in the everyday, where equality is rendered meaningless until it is experienced during and through routine life. Though I focus specifically on the United States, movements for “everyday democracy,” have in recent years sparked across the world, emblazoned by battle cries of “Enough!” No more oligarchic representational politics, no more diluting of the term “democracy,” and no more domination under capital (Sitrin and Azzellini 2014). More work remains to be done until this cry reaches a decibel capable of shattering alienated politics. Drawing upon the details of a radical imagination could distill an image of attainable everyday democracy while opening pathways for the future. Insisting on the

radical implications of democracy is necessary, as it opens up a conception of democracy as an alternative which stands directly against existing notions of the political.

Brief Comments on State Forms and Monopolies

I will make two claims here in discussing the state that should inform our strategies: 1) analyses over state power must take into account the existing form of the state. For us, this means taking into account the state as a component of capitalist configuration. 2) As a capitalist-form the state possesses four monopolies: legitimate violence, protections of private property rights, monetary forms, and politics. I do not suggest that the state is the primary vehicle of capitalist domination, or that “smashing the state” is above all a primary goal for anti-capitalist revolution. Instead, I maintain that the state we encounter is a complementary expression of capitalist power and necessary for capitalism’s continuation.³³

Prior to elaborating my claims, I feel it important to acknowledge that though the capitalist state possesses certain monopolies, there still exist clear probabilities of tyranny which circumvent the auspices of the state. Just because the state possesses a monopoly on legitimate violence does not preclude the possibility of self-described vigilantes from committing violence against people of color with impunity. As well, where the state monopolizes protections of private property, the administration of private property rests almost squarely in the hands of private capitalists who very well can opt to organize production in a neo-feudal manner where the United States is no exception—just witness the treatment of farm workers housed in shanty-

³³ My thinking on this matter has been influenced foremost by John Holloway, a follower of what Andrej Grubic describes as “the German state derivationist school” which insists that any “debate on the state must be [on] the form that the state takes” (2016:xi).

towns in Woodburn, Oregon.³⁴ Noam Chomsky is lucid on this point when he remarks that “corporations are more totalitarian than most institutions we call totalitarian in the political arena” (1994:9). Importantly, however, is though these examples are considered outside the realm of state power their relationship still accords with the state’s collaboration with capitalist power. In fact, the separation of such forms of coercive power from the state is a product of capitalism itself. Explains Meiksins Wood, “struggles over domination and exploitation which have in the past been inextricably bound up with political power” through capitalist development are transformed “into distinctively ‘economic’ issues” (1995:20). Thus, the transfer of political power from the public sphere to the private sphere is a design of capitalism’s *political economy*.

Existing state forms are consigned to a role within the dynamic of global capitalism, with each state role assumed respective of necessary regional functions for the formation of a capitalist totalizing project.³⁵ Attention to U.S. military might is appropriate, and can lead one toward the valid opinion that as a nation-state the U.S. qualifies as a “super-power,” however it’s important to recognize that the military might of the U.S. does not exclusively benefit those within its national boundaries. Outside nation-states (particularly within the European Union) reap various benefits in both social and economic terms from U.S. military interventions abroad as well. States, then, are uneven complementary groupings of global power weaving together along various points of capital interests.³⁶

³⁴ For an excellent insight into the deplorable conditions of Oregon’s farm workers, I encourage readers to view the documentary *Aumento Ya! A Raise Now!*

³⁵ A crucial distinction must be made here in regards to capitalism’s totalizing project, such a project *seeks to be* total, and spread in a totalizing fashion, but I would not suggest that all social action against capitalism is hopeless because of its totalizing attempts—in fact I make the exact opposite argument throughout this work. Think of it as an open totality, with cracks and ruptures opening spaces within the totality.

³⁶ Not every state benefits in the same way from capitalism’s global dynamic, and indeed a hefty number of states are positioned as peripheral from dominant states who receive the highest import of goods, resources, and labor

Owing to capitalism's global feature, terms such as "neoliberalism" are useful only in their capacity to demarcate a timeframe and specify political projects within capitalism's history. This means that while the welfare state is certainly disappearing, capitalism is not displacing state power. Contrary to the claim that the nation-state is eroding under the regime of transnational capital, states are much more integral in today's world for facilitating capital formation. Scholars Doug Henwood and Leo Panitch point out that money is a national institution, and even in the European Union with close political and cultural ties, as well as economic intermingling on a daily basis, the adoption of a continental currency has been fraught with tensions. Additionally, they note that capital flows more easily through powerful states, not weak ones. "States construct markets and markets depend on states and that's what capitalism is all about" (Lilley et al 2011:78-82). Thus, contemporary states should be registered as capitalist forms.

As capitalist forms, the state possesses multiple monopolies. The first of these monopolies regarding violence is surely more familiar amongst readers, as Max Weber popularized this view in sociological studies with his essay *Politics as a Vocation*. In it, he notes that the state "lays claim to the monopoly on the legitimated use of physical force," but this force is bounded by geographical territory. Rooted in violence, Weber understands that "the modern state is a compulsory association which organizes domination" (1919). Brutal techniques of force administered by police to maintain "social order," forcible eviction from homes, holding of

from capitalism's global configuration. Additionally, the populace within states hardly share evenly in these benefits.

undocumented peoples in “detainment centers” all fall under the category of legitimated physical force monopolized by the state.³⁷

While the above is important for understanding the means of domination employed by the state it can also distract us from identifying other state monopolies. Private property is provided legal protection by the state, as such the maintaining of private property is dependent upon state power. In order to perpetuate the power of private property, at least through legalistic methods, the state legitimates forms of private property through legal codes and guarantees. For example, I cannot simply walk into an abandoned building and claim it as my own even though it may be in disuse. I would be required to go through bureaucratic processes of locating a realtor, acquiring the property through a purchasing loan or some other means of private capital, and sign off on papers and forms which will ultimately transfer power of ownership to me. The same is true if I decide to build a house on unused land, regardless of how remote the unoccupied land may be.

As a final point on this matter, the U.S. has an overt monopoly on private property through its legal mandate of “eminent domain,”³⁸ which the state can use, and has routinely, to seize private property. Typically, this seizure is done in the name of expropriating private property for “public use,” but the state routinely turns over expropriated property for commercialization. For one brief example, consider the federal government’s use of eminent domain for the clearing of rail passages in the early 20th century. As told by Stanley Aronowitz

³⁷ Abuses of state violence can be contested by the national populace, or even on a global stage of public opinion, but ultimately the deploying of state violence and legitimation of such applications of physical force rests in the power of the state.

³⁸ This method of seizing private property is not singular to the United States, in other nations it is either referred to as “expropriation,” “compulsory purchase,” or “resumption.”

such use of eminent domain was “crucial to creating a national rail system” and buffered the power of private steel magnates whose influence allowed them to “make” presidents “and all but set land policy” (2003: 107).

Private property is acquired and transferred through mediums of currency given legal stature by the state. Capital is place-marked by currency, which mediates the accumulation of capital and private property. Look no further for the significance of this than the fact that global commodity value is fixed to the U.S. dollar. So it becomes apparent how the state undergirds protections of two fundamental components of capitalism—money and private property. Owing to this reality, celebrated scholar David Harvey observes that:

Since the power of the capitalist state rests in part on the twin pillars of a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence and monopoly power over monetary affairs and the currency, the breaking of the latter monopoly would ultimately entail a dissolution (rather than the ‘smashing’) of capitalist state power.

(2014:50-52)

Weber and Harvey help identify three monopolies of the state, and I would like to add a crucial fourth monopoly: a monopoly on legitimate politics. Thus, the four monopolies of the capitalist state are legitimate violence, protections of private property, monetary forms, and politics. Particularly underappreciated amongst these monopolies is the firm grip of the state on notions of the political, and I will attempt to draw out the implications of this monopoly below.

Contemporary Expressions of Political Power

Current U.S. state politics reveal power has been consolidated into the hands of a reactionary right-wing, facilitated by a swing to moderate centrism embraced by the Democrat party. The trend is far from new, spearheaded by the Republican party’s “southern strategy” aim to mobilize conservative Christians, alienated whites, and adoption of racially coded positions for

“law and order.” Simultaneously, white flight into the suburbs, in part enabled by Democrats alliance with real estate and financial industries, calcified inter-U.S. power dynamics and help explain the contours of today’s political economy. Yet no analysis of formal U.S. politics would be coherent without noting the unbroken commitment by both parties for empire, a thorough review of which is beyond the scope of this work, but while following the arguments below keep in mind that the ruling class seek total global domination.³⁹

Donald Trump is noted as a buffoon, a foul and insidious embodiment of everything frightening about the politics of hate, but while outwardly he exposes the very real manifestation of what hate has wrought he cannot be separated from the rest of the political class of Republicans (and many Democrats) in that his policies are precisely in accordance with every position the Republican party has adopted for the past several decades. Tax breaks for the wealthiest, a perpetuation of policies which ensure itinerant labor (known colloquially as “building the wall” reminiscent of proposals put forth by George W. Bush), denial of climate-change—Trump *is* the Republican party. Democrats can hardly be claimed oppositional to these policies which intensify cross-axes of oppression. Put simply by Cedric Johnson:

Right-wing economists and Republicans may have launched the war against workers and the edifice of labor rights, civil rights, reproductive freedoms, consumer protections, and public goods and services built by left popular struggles, but the neoliberal project was carried out with pernicious effect in many American cities by the New Democrats.

(*Jacobin* 2016)

³⁹ For an excellent assessment of the Democrats shift to the right, see Mike Davis “What’s the Matter with America?” *In Praise of Barbarians: Essays Against Empire*. Chicago, Haymarket Books, 2007. 42-60. For a comprehensive study of U.S. empire and international resistance against it, see Vijay Prashad *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World*. New York: The New Press, 2007.

However, the major parties are not identical in policy-making. Democrats pledge allegiance to different economic masters, ones which facilitate power via financial and real estate industries (known as FIRE). Labeling Republicans and Democrats as oppositional parties, as liberal versus conservative, obfuscates the real consolidation of the U.S. political economy under a capitalist bloc whose bidding is conducted by both Republicans and Democrats. In effect, they are sub-groups with certain differences interior to the real party; the Party of Capital.

In light of Donald Trump's rise to the U.S. presidency, one does better to take seriously the underlying root causes which propelled such a demagogic neo-fascist to office. "The real issue that needs to be examined," writes Henry Giroux, "is what kind of society produces a Donald Trump" (2017:32). Keeping with Giroux's framework for understanding our present political situation, it becomes crucial to point out how all of these maneuvers have corresponded under the rubric of a broader, global neoliberal political project which has sought to unravel a previous Keynesian form of the capitalist state. Neoliberalism's creed could be expressed adequately enough as one which seeks to "smash the welfare state." Richard J.F. Day provides a succinct summary of neoliberalism's rap sheet:

[The] relatively stable [Keynesian capitalist state] system stayed in place until the 1970s, when it began to be displaced by the neoliberal model, through which capitalism sought increased profits by freeing itself from the fetters of state regulation and working-class resistance. Privatization, deregulation, 'right to work' legislation (union-busting) and fanatical worship of 'the free market' became *de rigueur*... governments of countries of the global South were pushed into 'structural adjustment programmes' that had the same general thrust as in the North, but with greater intensity and much more disastrous results.

(2005:7)

Neoliberalism sits as the present modality of capitalist power, however a return prior to the neoliberal onslaught is not desirable. Capitalism in all its faces is a social system of mass exploitation and inequity. One cannot escape to an idyllic capitalist past, where fairness abounds and a healthy middle-class can live peaceably amongst wealthy power brokers. Such nostalgia present amongst some progressives is not only illusory but glosses over present reality where any capitalist reconfiguration will ensure mass social death. Put simply, an economic system based on constant growth cannot continue on a planet of limits and finite resources. Perpetuation of an economy reliant upon exhaustive resource depletion will guarantee deeper entrenchments of inequity, social stratification, and the intensification of oppressive power dynamics. If for no other reason, the fact that “the web of life of the entire planet is threatened” by capitalism’s commitment to “rapid economic growth without regard to social or ecological costs” (Bellamy Foster 2009:253) should convince anyone that not only is revolution more necessary than ever, but it is inevitable if taken as a scenario which fundamentally alters social life. Writes John Bellamy Foster, “the continuation of the present capitalist system for any length of time will prove impossible—if human civilization and the web of life as we know it are to be sustained” (2009:264), meaning that we are not presented with a matter of *if* revolution will happen, but of what type and form will it take.

Neoliberalism’s capacity for dominance is enabled by broader historical phases of empire. Ellen Meiksins Wood identifies three differing types of historical imperialisms which she calls “empires.” These three iterations of imperialism for Meiksins Wood are “empires of commerce,” “empires of property,” and “empires of capital.” According to Meiksins Wood, “it’s only in capitalism that you have a system in which people are obliged, are compelled, to enter the

market simply to guarantee their own existence and their own self-reproduction.” As a model of organized economic coercion, “the main feature of capitalist imperialism is that it operates as much as possible via economic imperatives, instead of by direct colonial rule” (Lilley et al 2011:27-28). In order to establish rule by economic imperatives, a political ideology has been cultivated for the express purpose of justifying a prevailing economic global order. David Harvey is helpful in articulating precisely how this ideology speaks:

[Neoliberal] theory takes the view that individual liberty and freedom are the high point of civilization and then goes on to argue that individual liberty and freedom can best be protected and achieved by an institutional structure, made up of strong property rights, free markets, and free trade: a world in which individual initiative can flourish. The implication of that is that the state should not be involved in the economy too much, but it should use its power to preserve private property rights and the institutions of the market and promote those on the global stage if necessary.

(Lilley et al 2011:43)

Reflecting upon the political strategy internal to the United States since at least the 1970s, one discovers a neat (even if at times paradoxical) marriage between global neoliberal imperialism and interior state programs of disciplining the population for capital appropriation. Capital’s evolution into an empire, filtered through a neoliberal political project, makes nearly impossible the romantic notion of “seizing the state.” This once powerful call to action is misplaced today⁴⁰ as it cannot account for the complementary configurations of states in maintaining global capitalism. State power is not discrete, but contingent upon broader capital

⁴⁰ As well I remain unconvinced that it ever served as a proper strategic plan, or even accurately grasped the disruptive and ungovernable forces which made the possibilities for revolution in the lead-up to the infamous October Revolution. For a detailed analysis of this see James C. Scott “The Revolutionary Party: A Plan and a Diagnosis”. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. 147-180.

formation which requires inter-state alliances. Germany as a financial titan is reliant upon U.S. military dominance and vice-versa, and these complementary state dynamics web a global network of powerful states. So that “seizing the *states*” would be necessary. The impracticality of such does not need to be spelled out here. All the while state mouthpieces tout the glory of democracy, and laud individualistic freedoms procured by protecting private property and market imperatives. Democracy in this appraisal is the freedom to purchase. “Language” Marxist feminist Silvia Federici writes “is...a terrain of struggle” (*Roar Magazine* 2016), and the labeling of representative oligarchy as democracy renders concrete the state’s monopolization of the political.

Democracy: A Once Radical Notion

Two ways in which democracy is expressed today according to popular discourse is it either needs “restoration” or “remaking.” Such usages can be read as a response to the perception of the U.S. empire on the decline. To restore or remake harkens to a mythologized past when “times were good.” Progressive-minded pundits commonly make lazy rhetorical appeals to “restore our democracy.” For them, fighting for voting rights is the best course that can be taken for the project of restoration, summing up democracy as something rather passive. The job of the public in this conception of democracy is to turn up for a ballot, cast a vote, and then return to regular life of zombie-esque routine. Equally common is the rhetoric of “making America great again.” Little needs to be written on the implied meaning of this view, as I doubt many will disagree that the “good times” for proponents of remaking America is the Jim Crow era. Or, as Arun Gupta helps crystalize, “[Trump’s] followers understand he is really saying ‘Make America White Again’” signaling for the ethnic cleansing of the U.S. (*Counterpunch* 2016).

However, while these two iterations of “restore” and “remake” imply different moral attitudes and include differing factions of the U.S. elite (in this instance possibly the progressive versus the reactionary elites) the same underlying logic of what constitutes democracy is in alignment. What accounts for this distortion in terms, and is it even appropriate to claim that the U.S. is a “thin democracy” as sociologist Erik Olin Wright has, or does this idea of a thinness belie the cooptation of a once radical term in political discourse?

Philosopher Jacques Rancière defines democracy from the viewpoint of reactionary elites as a “utopia of people’s self-governance...or as the anarchic turmoil of individual desires” (2015:57). Democracy slides into chaos if left to its stubborn view of “rule by the people,” because common people cannot think beyond their own self-interests borne out of material deprivation. The world stands divided by “those who are regarded as capable of taking care of common problems and the future, and those who are regarded as being unable to think beyond private and immediate concerns” (2015:66). Ones unable to think are framed as “the public,” the commoners, obstinate as they are in imagining democracy as belonging in the domain of people’s power. For such elites, if the people were to have *their* democracy, we would witness “an increase in demands” which “puts pressure on governments, undermines authority and renders individuals and groups unresponsive to the necessities of discipline and sacrifice” for the “common interests” (2015:55). Under democracy society is supplanted by a “reign of narcissistic ‘mass individualism’” (2015:56) where everyone demands their right to have rights, the center no longer holds, and “the mess, the chaos of democratic life is introduced” (2015:54).

This conception of democracy produces a “paradox,” where in order to have any type of functional democratic society a nation is obliged to have a powerful enough political state that

can manage the “mess” of democracy. Effective “democratic” governments must work to repress the impulses of common people attempting to actualize their notion of a utopian democracy. In Rancière’s words, “democracy as a form of government is threatened by democracy as a form of social and political life and so the former must repress the latter” (2015:55). Unsurprisingly, the republican form of government is preferred by elites as it enables the suppression of democratic practice and substitutes democratic rituals as an empty gesture toward people power.

Marina Sitrin and Dario Azzellini help explain this confusing paradox when they point out that “the logic of representation has always been at the foundation of modern democracy—but not of classical democracy” (2014:42). Central to the distinction between classical and modern democracy (or what many might label “liberal democracy”) are views on the role of representation. Classical democracy, as existed in Ancient Athens,⁴¹ recognizes that a political body configured by electing representatives would “disconnect politicians from common citizens, nourishing corruption and patronage networks” (2014:61). Administration of the Greek city-state was selected by sortition, or what we might call a lottery system. Pan-Africanist Marxist scholar CLR James remarked that “the vast majority of Greek officials were chosen by a method which amounted to putting names into a hat and appointing the ones whose names came out.” James argued today’s administrative specialist holds a valid grudge against the Greek’s democratic system because the practice of democracy exposes that “any worker selected at random could do the work that [the administrator] is doing” (1956).

⁴¹ The purpose of comparing classical and liberal democracy is not to suggest that what we should strive for is a democracy identical to Ancient Athens, as it rested on institutions of slavery and patriarchy, but to highlight key distinctions that have gone too often unnoted in contemporary political discourse.

Readers might imagine that the Athenian administrative system being determined by lottery is symptomatic of the Greek's having little experience with democratic governance, but James points out in fact they "knew representative government and rejected it," because they "refused to believe that the ordinary citizen was not able to perform practically all the business of government" (1956). Athens, then, had the hindsight of practice—a practical knowledge of representation—and they realized representative governance made their democracy incomplete and imperfect. They determined to change this so as to deepen their democratic model. Elites, predictably, hated Athenian democracy, challenging their sense of aristocratic superiority as it did, with Plato even going so far to complain "that even the horses and the asses in the streets walked about as if they also had been granted liberty and freedom" (James 1956).

Additionally, democracy in Ancient Athens existed *prior* to states, rendering impossible the phenomenon of political parties vying for constituent votes. Today, displays of political contests—where in a darkly humorous account Hunter S. Thompson discovered the ripe potential for turning polling figures and delegate counts into an elaborate gambling contest (2012[1973])—are all too familiar spectacles. Accustomed to non-stop campaigning, the broader U.S. public generally accepts such tedium as an unfortunate by-product of democracy that one simply must swallow to enjoy various "freedoms." Anthropologist David Graeber has pointed out, however, that such spectacles of so-called debate and politicking were "for most of human history...an aristocratic phenomenon" where "one need only think of the heroes...of epics, who are constantly engaged in boasting, dueling, vying to...outdo one another with the giving of extravagant gifts" to find an appropriate analogue for our present experience of endless elections (2015:177). Sitrin and Azzellini further explain "since representation did not exist, and the

citizen's assembly was the highest authority, there was also no such thing as a government in the liberal-democratic sense" (2014:61).

Elite distaste for a "utopia of people's self-government" makes much more sense with these clarifications, because after all they are correct in assessing how authority and power are challenged by deep democracy. Fear of "rule by the people," in fact, centered the concerns of elites during the U.S. Revolutionary War. These fears, in part, propelled the early origins of liberal democracy through the creation of the U.S. nation-state—a democracy only by name. A generic rendition of the founding of the nation might go as follows: at the end of the 18th century a group of courageous men came together to resist the tyranny of monarchical British rule by replacing it with a system of governance mandated by "the people." The vision of these men has endured the test of time, and their commitment to making possible rule by the people has produced the freest nation on the planet today. A variation of this story can be read in any elementary school across the country.

Yet, contrary to the fable children are instructed to absorb, the founding fathers were explicit in their attempt to create a political form as a safeguard *against* democracy, some of them (Hamilton, Madison, and Jay in particular) going to pains to document exactly why democracy is such a terrible thing. A representative quote from James Madison, cited as a chief framer of the U.S. Constitution, reads that the government ought to "protect the opulence of the minority against the tyranny of the majority" (*The Avalon Project* 2008) due to the unruly passions of an uneducated mass populace.⁴² Peppered throughout *The Federalist Papers* are principles of

⁴² Note the similarities between these classical anti-democrats and authoritarian vanguardists in their views of "the masses."

government which assume the incapacity of “common people” to govern their own affairs properly. Hamilton states this openly, writing “the republican principle demands that the deliberate sense of the community should govern the conduct of those to whom they intrust[sic] the management of their affairs; but it does not require an unqualified complaisance to every sudden breeze of passion, or to every transient impulse which the people may receive.” In Hamilton’s view people are prone to “sudden passions,” which any qualified governmental representative should, indeed is expected, to dismiss for the sake of a greater good that simple-minded average folk lack the foresight to understand. Indeed, “the people commonly *intend* the *public good*” writes Hamilton, “but their good sense would despise the adulator who should pretend they always *reason right* about the *means* of promoting it.” Therefore, we should forgive the people for their ignorance, because at least they’re well-intentioned—they just don’t know how to implement policies for the common good so better to leave these duties in the hands of a professional class of administrators. He summarizes his point as follows:

When occasions present themselves, in which the interests of the people are at variance with their inclinations, it is the duty of the persons whom they have appointed to be the guardians of those interests, to withstand the *temporary delusion*, in order to give them time and opportunity for more cool and sedate reflection. Instances might be cited in which a conduct of this kind has saved the people from very fatal consequences of their own mistakes, and has procured lasting monuments of their gratitude to the men who had courage and magnanimity enough to serve them at the peril of their displeasure.

(*The Avalon Project* 2008 emphases mine)

Praise be for those select few capable of cooling the delusions of us all. ⁴³ As a brief aside, it is often claimed that the above argument reflects Hamilton's prescience that democracy can lead to demagoguery, and that the institution of an electoral college prevents demagogues from coming to power. 2016 shattered this illusion, and in fact it appears that the existence of an electoral college in the first place, and not the presence of real democracy, is a contributing factor to how an authoritarian walked into the White House.

Commentators on the right tend to opine that the U.S. is not a democracy but a "republic," and here they are absolutely correct. ⁴⁴ *The Federalist Papers* refer to a republican form of government frequently; the authors don't pretend to embrace the anarchy of a people's government. David Graeber has argued that this wariness of democracy on the part of the founding fathers was in large part due to a popular representation during their era of Athenian-style democracy through the literary lens of Thomas Hobbes (a notorious anti-democrat) who believed democracy to be "unstable, tumultuous, [and] prone to factionalism and demagoguery" (2007:345). To this point Marina Sitrin and Dario Azzellini add "the inconvenient fact remains that most of what we know about [Ancient] Athenian democracy today is based on Aristotle and Plato, who both rejected democracy in favor of an elitist ideology" (2014:60). Such presentations of

⁴³ Hamilton is also quoted as explaining how "All communities divide themselves into the few and the many. The first are the rich and wellborn, the other the mass of the people. The voice of the people has been said to be the voice of God; and however generally this maxim has been quoted and believed, it is not true in fact. The people are turbulent and changing; they seldom judge or determine right. Give therefore to the first class a distinct, permanent share in the government...Can a democratic assembly, who annually revolve in the mass of the people, be supposed steadily to pursue the public good? Nothing but a permanent body can check the imprudence of democracy" (quoted in Shawki 2006:25).

⁴⁴ One can find representative conservative views on a number of political issues at www.heritage.org where, among other things, authors state outright that democracy is not desirable, which is why the U.S. is and should remain a republic.

democracy have been commonly read by educated elites who would go on to form the U.S. system of government.⁴⁵

In sum, the founding fathers were not proponents of democracy, and largely this is because they belonged to an aristocratic class; meaning their power came from their position on the social hierarchy—not their favorable meritocratic traits—and it's only logical they sought to implement a system which served their interests. Marx famously remarked that “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas” (1978:172), in the late 18th century the founding fathers were part of the ruling class whose various roles in society were not just wealthy land and slave owners (like George Washington, still the richest president ever to serve),⁴⁶ but also intellectuals, scientists, politicians, and professors—precisely the same class of elites we discover today (Zinn 1995:84). Meaning, contemporary elites are simply repeating the ideas they've inherited from their ancestral class. Yet to mention nearly all of the fifty-plus founding fathers were social elites of the wealthy slave-owning class is viewed as blasphemy—one can deduce for themselves why this is the case.

Of course, this isn't the whole story of the nation's founding. A good deal of political mobilization occurred because of a desire for everyday democracy, especially within the ranks on non-elites. The dominant narrative of these times belies much of the actual activity during the period leading up to and following the creation of the U.S. nation-state, but as Stanley Aronowitz

⁴⁵ Still today we are inundated with these depictions of democracy; how many philosophy courses begin and end with Plato after all?

⁴⁶ As reported by *NBC Business News* on February 20, 2012. Interesting to note that they ranked the top-ten wealthiest U.S. presidents, all of whom weighed in with net assets totaling more than \$30 million.

points out “the story is told from the standpoint of the victors” (2003:46). His explanation is worth quoting at length:

In the midst of conservative political hegemony in recent years the American Revolution has been recoded as the War of Independence, a formulation that revises the meaning of the event. The radicalism of the revolution is denied in favor of an account that portrays it as many of those on the Right of the revolution saw it...Almost never do the historians, even those who emphasize the revolution and its democratic characters, discuss the Anti-Federalists, who, on democratic grounds, opposed the separation of powers.

(2003:46)

Victors, in this equation, would go on to be imprinted in U.S. history books as the “founding fathers” of our democratic nation, placing on full display the convenient shaping of historical narratives which, at least partially, allows for the continuation of distorted terms and traditions. Amidst a climate of increasing nationalism and reactionary hate, we should take seriously the task where “in every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it” (Benjamin 1968:255). Specifically in this instance, as David Graeber has put forth, “if we want to explore the origins of...democratic sensibilities...[it is necessary] to look beyond the sitting rooms of the educated gentry” (2013:177) who are only too quick to rely on reading classical anti-democrats.

Democracy, after all, really is a form of practice. Strange, then, that so much of the mainstream accounts of democracy insist on it being birthed in the minds of great men or exclusively at the site of one ancient city-state.⁴⁷ However, no single person, or small group or

⁴⁷ Strange only absent the understanding of victors still shaping the discourse on democracy.

single culture for that matter, can honestly claim ownership over inventing democracy because the democratic captures a way of life—democracy is a walk, not just a talk. Following this argument, it becomes clear that locating the origins of democracy—whether classical or modern—requires an examination of daily life and realities on the ground. The founding fathers were not just frightened by the implications of democracy because of things they read which took place in Ancient Greece, they were frightened by what they experienced personally—namely the egalitarianism and freedoms which were part of daily practice for many indigenous Americans Madison et al encountered. Graeber explains this straightforwardly,

The first European settlers in North America not only were in the paradoxical situation of being in direct contact with indigenous nations, and being obliged to learn many of their ways just to be able to survive in their new environment, at exactly the same time they were also displacing and largely exterminating them. In the process— at least, according to the scandalized accounts of the leaders of early settler communities—they themselves, and especially their children, began acting more and more like [indigenous people].

(2013:174)

Described by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, the governance practiced in North America which frightened European aristocrats was as follows: “each Indigenous nation or city-state or town comprised an independent, self-governing people that held supreme authority over internal affairs and dealt with other peoples on equal footing...The system of decision making was based on consensus, not majority rule.” She points out “it was the Haudenosaunee constitution, called the Great Law of Peace, that inspired essential elements of the US Constitution” (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014:25-26), of course without attribution. The League of Six Nations’ (constituted by autonomous federations in voluntary association with one another) impact is still reproduced

symbolically in U.S. daily culture. On the Seal of the Union of the United States a bundle of thirteen arrows is pictured, reference to the account by an Onondaga ambassador named Canassatego who “exhausted by having to negotiate with six different colonies...snapped an arrow in half to show how easy it was to break it, then took a bundle of six arrows, and challenged his interlocutors to do the same” (Graeber 2013:175).

To inspect the commonsense narrative for glimmers of workable rebellion might serve as a “gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past,” where the “enemy has not ceased to be victorious” (Benjamin 2007[1968]:255). David Graeber urges us to consider how often victories have been won by people all over the world. Surveying the history of the 1980s anti-nuclear movement and the more recent alter-globalization movement, Graeber contends that in fact in these instances the movements achieved very quickly the accomplishment of their mid-term goals (delegitimizing nuclear power and the institutions of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, respectively), but failed to accomplish many short-term goals of shutting down specific nuclear sites or forums so that it appeared as though they lost. On the contrary, writes Graeber “the first thing we need to do is to recognize that we do, in fact, win some. Actually, recently, we’ve been winning quite a lot” (2011:30).

In keeping with this spirit, I’d like to quickly reference a little-known history of the U.S. Civil War in hopes it helps “spark hope” in a past still not defeated. If we maintain that the Civil War was fought to improve the U.S.’s imperfect democracy (clearly a contestable claim, but for our purposes let’s not trouble the narrative here) we find that this victory was attained not by the strategy or leadership of some great generals and politicians exclusively, but largely by

ordinary people on the ground. Anthropologist James C. Scott explains that during the Civil War within the Confederacy:

Nearly 250,000 eligible whites are estimated to have deserted or to have avoided conscription altogether. The reasons appear to have been both moral and material, as one might expect. Poor whites, especially those from the nonslaveholding hill country, were deeply resentful of fighting for an institution whose principal beneficiaries were often excluded from service by law. Military reverses and what was called the 'subsistence crisis of 1862' prompted many to desert and return to their hard-pressed families. On the plantations themselves, the shortage of white overseers and the slaves' natural affinity with the North's objective, gave rise to shirking and flight on a massive scale...[possibly] the Confederacy was undone by a social avalanche of petty acts of insubordination carried out by an unlikely coalition of slaves and yeomen—a coalition with no name, no organization, no leadership, and certainly no Leninist conspiracy behind it.

(1985:30-31)

Scott considers this history to be one of the greatest unknown campaigns of mass civil disobedience. Democratizing the nation, in this instance, was primarily because common people simply dug their heels into the ground and refused to comply with the will of elites. One could accurately generalize this claim to cover nearly every instance of democratization witnessed in the U.S., which brings me to a crucial point: the brand of democracy which holds common currency today mirrors the intellectual sentiments of our founding fathers, resulting in antagonistic activity against efforts of creating genuinely democratic institutions and ways of life. Fear of the "mess," the "anarchic turmoil of individual desires" is perpetuated through elite hostility against "the people," through persistent misconceptions about what democracy actually looks like in practice—and even in theory.

Seeking a Cure for Political Alienation

Representative democracy is an impediment to human flourishing. Once wonderful notions have mutated into a barely recognizable conception of democracy so thoroughly that we now find ourselves lacking any utopic sensibilities amid political normalcy. A political scientist can provide a dozen formulas explaining how incremental change happens, all the while dampening any notion of fundamental transformation. Have you not heard one of these well-intentioned people intone “as a political scientist, I can tell you why revolution is quite impractical?” An appropriate assessment on the implications of alienation extends Marx’s conception beyond the point of production and into the sphere of politics—particularly into state monopolized politics. Processes of estrangement and alienation within the state political machine are analogous to the mechanisms Marx says objectify labor. This objectification is particularly evident during national and state elections.

Political representation rests on the view that the multiple spheres of social existence are distinct separate domains, generally expressed as the social, political, and economic spheres. As Marina Sitrin and Dario Azzellini explain, “in liberal democracy....the economic and social spheres are excluded from [politics]” (2014:42) while strictly economic matters are outside the auspices of formal representative democracy, seen as private concerns on which politics need not pass judgments. As long as people are “equal” in legalistic forums—a dubious assumption for discussion elsewhere-- democracy has served its purpose. Within this liberal democratic framework, then, equality takes on a specific but inaccurate meaning. No pretense is made that individuals are economically equal; nor can representative forms of democracy register social inequalities beyond bare formal rights and voting privileges.

The separation of the social, economic, and political divides politics from people, ingraining estrangement into the fiber of liberal democracy. Since alienated politics depends on estranging latent political agents from politics (thus quashing the notion that any and all are capable of the political), voting alone isn't a sufficient strategy.⁴⁸ Indeed, if our only political actions are through the state, we contribute to our own political alienation. We help legitimize the state's domination of the political and are then further disciplined by the state machine to think of it as the *only arena of politics*. Nothing about this process is voluntary, but it is indicative of the long tentacles of elite political power and the design of capitalism. Look no further than the economic disposition of the U.S. Congress: as of 2014, the top ten wealthiest congressional representatives had net worths of \$38 to \$357 million (*The Atlantic* 2014) while *half* of the elected representatives are millionaires (*CBS News* 2014). The position of voters is to elect one rich politician or another,⁴⁹ a line-up that deepens the divide of political power.

Inequality borne of an economic division of labor parallels the division between societal spheres in liberal democracy. Marx's observation that "the more the worker produces, the less he [sic] has to consume" is mirrored by the fact that the more voters elect wealthy politicians, the less influence they exert over representatives beholden to the power of capital. While Marx observed that "the more values [a worker] creates, the more valueless, the more unworthy he becomes," we see in politics as usual that the more voters acquiesce to representation by

⁴⁸ As a matter of pragmatism, electoral voting should serve most often as a method of "harm reduction" which Ryan Conrad describes in *Truthout*—namely, acknowledging that harm is inevitable in our current political system so voting can help reduce the amount of inevitable harm we will experience. Conrad would have us subordinate voting to a low-level priority on the list of necessary political activities, but says it can still be minimally helpful in "harm reduction."

⁴⁹ The main exceptions being for local political offices, which hold the least political power.

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

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

As such, it requires us to ask such prior questions as who is the citizen and where is the political arena (Gould 2016:303-309). Or, as Hannah Arendt puts it, “who has the right to have rights?” (quoted in Gould 2016:304). Framing the political, then, are questions requiring imagination to answer.

Today, the answers to such questions are determined through unimaginative bureaucratic processes so biased toward dominant power that they are rarely considered debatable, much less explored in public discourse. “Domination is transfigured into administration,” wrote Herbert Marcuse fifty-plus years ago (1964:32), a trend that has only intensified since. Charting the rise of bureaucratic administration, David Graeber concludes “bureaucracy has become the water in which we swim” (2015:4), accounting for why we don’t balk at the growth of required paperwork in daily life. For Graeber, the structural violence that keeps dominant state power intact is facilitated by increased bureaucracy, which “impose[s] very simple social relations that involve little or no imaginative identification” for those holding power. Thus, “the overwhelming burden of... interpretive labor is relegated to [power’s] victims” (2011:49), who must learn to identify and sympathize with the powerful as a basic survival strategy.⁵⁰ Bureaucracy represents an instrumental logic embedded within capitalist forms of the state. Such impersonal mechanisms of domination narrow the parameters of political possibility, making open utopias seem like pipedreams if they are imaginable at all. As Graeber

⁵⁰ Citing the work of many feminist thinkers who have demonstrated how much of women’s lives are relegated to emotional care for men, Graeber argues that their arguments can be extended into cultural pressures to sympathize with the powerful at large—including the police who are the front guard of executing the violence of the state but yet get the benefit of being humanized through countless television shows and movies. Therefore, the victims of power are always learning to feel the pain of their oppressors.

writes, “the subjective experience of living inside such lopsided structures of imagination is what we are referring to when we talk about ‘alienation’” (2011:55).

Shattering alienation must be central to any vision we construct for an open utopia. A simple, but daring, question for contemporary leftists is: what would life look like without professional bureaucrats? Unfortunately, as David Graeber also opines, today only the right-wing advances a strong critique of bloated administration in government. Meanwhile, the left has all too often failed to think through how radical democracy might cure the political apathy it decries. The rise of the New Left during the 1960s was guided by critiques of political instrumentalism and yearning for community, sometimes called the “beloved community,” with a strong vision of a participatory democracy capable of uniting the social and political spheres (Breines 1982:46-66). These tenets of political thought seem just as pertinent today for cultivating a radical imagination that can reanimate the mass dead zone of human creativity (Graeber 2015). In a climate in which endless bureaucratic protocol provides cover for oppression, nothing short of a commitment to radical democracy and radical imagination can break the unevenly experienced world alienation beleaguering us all.

State Power as Tactic Amid Strategy

Instead of thinking in terms of smashing the state, let’s adopt a metaphor favored by Noam Chomsky. He thinks of the state as a cage we live in while outside of the cage roams a tiger (symbolizing private power). Our immediate strategy, says Chomsky, is not to remove the surrounding cage but to “expand the floor of the cage” with a long view of eventually removing the structure and taming the capitalist tiger (1997). Displacing state power requires reorienting authority and relational positions of power. In turn, my work suggests, that requires localized

bases of activity that can connect with the regional, national, and, ultimately, global. By putting radical democracy at the center of prefigurative strategy, we could root experiments of democratic practice in local everyday life where participation is possible. Injecting real democracy into our political sphere holds out great potential for “withering away” (or rendering benign) the present state because, as Jacques Rancière so eloquently points out, the core of real democracy rests on the idea that “the very ground for the power of ruling is that there is no ground at all” (2015[2010]:58).

Democracy is legitimated by nothing other than its own “anarchic principle” of heterogeneity, spontaneity, and non-qualification; it’s grounded by its own dissolution of political grounding, its own creation and re-creation. Thus, democracy turns differences into strengths. Democracy works in practice only if those who are ignorant, those we might find deplorable, are just as right in joining the table of democratic life and have just as much authority to have their desires respected as anyone else. In other words, if democracy were to actualize its utopian ideal of “rule by the people,” an individual would need no qualifications whatsoever to participate. Not every cook should *learn* how to govern, but every cook *can* govern stands as democracy’s creed.⁵¹

Democracy cannot romanticize the local either. While, as explored here, the basis of real democracy is initially local, the cold truth is that democracy cannot survive as an isolated silo amid a capitalist totality. Within a system comprised of global webs, parochial freedoms and privileges for small groups of people are possible only at the expense of un-freedoms for the

⁵¹ I am not suggesting that democracy should depend solely on this *one* principle of non-qualification (or non-specialization). Any political form creates needs for multiple operating principles; my point here is simply that the logic of real democracy is perforce anti-authoritarian.

majority.⁵² The implications of this sorry fact for strategic movement toward the democratic bids us to reassess how to orient contestations with the state lest the left mistakenly continue what Carl Boggs describes as “a retreat from politics altogether.” Anti-statists, says Boggs, too often get stuck in their critique of statist politics at the expense of elaborating “any theory of transition” toward socialism (1977).

This retreat from political activity, or at least political activity recognizable by the state and institutionalized left, has been largely based on the conflation of *politics* and the state—precisely what is meant by the state’s monopoly on politics. Valid disgust with campaign cycles, corrupt politicians, unaccountable representatives, and conservative activist courts has led many leftists to prioritize state-led politics or even consider the state arena as the *only legitimate realm* of politics—a serious analytical error. Yet, Boggs is only partially correct in accusing the left traditions of “councilism” or “anarcho-communism” of retreating from politics since these traditions tend to generate “local, collective small-scale organs of socialist democracy” as an “escape from questions of the party and state” (1977:363). Indeed, many anti-statist proponents propose reconceptualizing politics as what Chris Dixon calls “another politics” (2014), where “the political, economic, and social spheres are no longer separated” (Sitrin and Azzellini 2014:10). This distinction aside, Boggs’ assessment holds on the need for localized democracy projects to challenge the state since the state will not allow itself to be ignored forever—and since typically it resorts to violence to remind subjects of its power.⁵³

⁵² Indeed, today one need look no further than the mass gulf of wealth possessed by the “global north” compared to the “global south” for reference of how a parochial democracy cannot ever accomplish democracy’s utopian potential.

⁵³ Witness the swiftness in which the state chose to brutally crush all encampments in the U.S. associated with OWS in a little over a week.

If ignoring the state entirely makes for poor strategy, so does contesting the state on its own terms—*integrating* into the state political machine as calls for a Green Party president would have it. Such strategic thinking, instead of being stuck in critique, is stuck in a narrow conception of now. The framing of a third party as bold and radical belies its reality as nothing more than a maneuver into the state and the status quo. A third party poses no conception of strategy or politics outside of the existing political order; it is not a preferred “third camp,” as classical anarchists would say; nor does it expand the floor of the cage or erode the legitimacy of state pleas to be invited to the bargaining table, not on behalf of everyone but to add another (albeit easily outflanked) representational perspective for conversation.

Since it is not viable to smash or seize the state, fresher notions of state resistance are needed. Social theorist Immanuel Wallerstein would have us think of state power as a tactic, not an end. For Wallerstein, capitalism positions itself as a global system (socially, politically, and economically), and, as such, its successes—not its failures— generate economic, political, and ideological dilemmas. In this vicious circle, states’ crucial role in capitalism’s success provides an ideological justification for capitalism’s self-perpetuation. Here, that ideological dilemma helps clarify the limitations of third-party “revolutions.” Also instructive are the lessons drawn by Doug Henwood and Leo Panitch, analysts who note how today’s states are stronger and more necessary for the flow of capital than ever before (Lilley et al:2011). Capitalism’s need for powerful states in turn creates the ideological dilemma Wallerstein identifies.

In particular, points out Wallerstein, the ideological dilemma posed by capitalism has rationalized resistance strategists’ use of nationalist sentiment and its questionable embrace of the state as an instrument for anti-capitalist success. “When the ruling classes have ceased to be

self-confident,” explains Wallerstein, “and are therefore trying to survive in new ways...the acquisition of state power is far from enough to destroy them. It may even perpetuate them” (1984:132-145). We see this ideological dilemma at play in the national liberation movements of nation-states belonging to the “global south,” and such state-based ideological justifications have prevailed in anti-capitalist movements in the “global north” throughout the 20th century as well. Currently, such state-based concepts of revolution are useful only as cautionary lessons, and we must hope that shedding tendencies toward state integration will open up new pathways for anti-capitalist movement.

What is required now in pursuit of revolutionary rupture is an incorporation of radical activity into everyday life. Of primary concern, then, is how to inject energies organically into lived routines, daily experiences, and constant concerns. The despair of every individual must be accounted for daily; the priorities of the single mother working constantly must become high political priorities for all of us. Encompassing revolutionary movement in an everyday fashion requires a deep commitment to using the radical imagination--to synthesizing strategic and prefigurative revolutionary perspectives-- and finding solutions to everyday problems is pivotal! For to be freed from the suffering of the everyday is nothing less than revolutionary in itself.

Everyday movement against capitalism must contend with all institutional power, both state and supra-state, public and private. Required is a conception of possibility both against and beyond today’s models of power and domination—a radical imagination that can orient our revolutionary compass toward an open utopia. And here’s a not so modest but humbly presented proposal for beginning: instead of constituting parties and initiating reforms, our movements can grow both strategically and prefiguratively by cultivating spaces of revolutionary (re)production

where permanent land and residences are available for social reproduction in all radical cultural and democratic activities. (Re)production does not follow a purely economic line of definition, for it is not the reproduction of *things* exclusively. “Rather [reproduction] is a definite form of activity...a definite form of expressing...life, a definite *mode of life*” (Marx 1978:150). In the (re)production of revolutionary spaces, care work is an essential mode of labor, and we share the opportunity to re-socialize our communities with a deep sense of democracy, mutual aid, and fun—all essential to meaningful daily lives.

V.

Crafting Prefigurative Strategies toward Open Utopia

The ultimate totalitarian achievement is the capture of the imagination, and the reinforcement of that conquest as the dominant order is legitimated through processes of sublimation and banalization.

-John P. Clark

Let me attempt to pull together some of these ideas. Through an effective radical imagination one discovers the compatibility of both strategic and prefigurative revolutionary perspectives. At times these dual positions have been fought through egoistic personalities more than actual ideas. A quick example of this is in the ongoing debate amongst anarchists and Marxists on Marx's expulsion of Mikhail Bakunin from the First International. Bakunin and Marx both had big, stubborn, personalities. While their respective views differed on the state and whether the peasant class could be a revolutionary vanguard, these views were not irreconcilable as both genuinely desired a social revolution and an egalitarian world. What proved to be the real source of conflict was each person's, and their followers, vying for power over the International—meaning practice, more than theory, broke up the anarchist and Marxist camps.

I make this seemingly tangential comment to point out that the left has convinced itself that its differences are weaknesses. Such a view has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. To make revolution possible, we can no longer afford to build walls between ourselves, and must begin seeing our differences as strengths. Certainly, both in ideas and social position, we are divided in many ways. But we share more in common than we do in difference. Our connections are in the material bases of everyday life, and in shared visions and desires for a better world. I emphasize the need to embrace open utopia, because the left can come together best through the crafting of visionary dreams where collective desires are harnessed. Sharing desires for a better world allows our visions to unite, and does the hard work of overcoming collective alienation.

Another reason, not yet mentioned, motivates me to urge the left to take utopia seriously— power reproduces itself through concealing its own utopianism. The election of Donald Trump for many has generated a mood where utopia seems the farthest removed topic for discussion from current predicaments. But in fact, Trump’s invocation of “making America great again” reveals the power of utopian narratives. Comparing Trump’s and Clinton’s campaign slogans is revelatory, as Trump’s promise of “renewal” or “redemption” was countered with Clinton’s individualistic promotion “I’m with her.” Clinton’s slogan was a far departure from Democrat’s recent successful rhetorical flourishes of “hope” and “change,” buzzwords that invite the imagination to run wild. Clinton’s campaign slogan insisted on voters identifying with the candidate specifically. While the idea of little girls being motivated by the presence of a powerful woman president may seem a great tool for inspiring voters, the reality is that working class women (and the broader working class in general) do not see themselves reflected in the successes of upper-class white women.

At the same time, Trump did project a vision that appealed to voters, particularly white voters, and this vision is similar to the utopianism that lay at the founding of the U.S. America was seen as a utopian project, the “New World” and “a shining city upon a hill” as put by the puritan John Winthrop. Such utopian vision still permeates this country, and Trump tapped into its narrative power. Therefore, what we witnessed in Trump’s election was a battle of competing utopias where reactionary utopia proved victorious.

Utopia is invoked in reactionary political campaigns, and seeps into the “common sense” of status quo ideology. David Harvey exposes this in his exploration of free market ideologies, with their mantras of an “invisible hand” balancing an unfettered market and insistence that the

arc of history is progressive. “The most effective Utopians in recent times,” he discovers, “have been those of a right-wing persuasion” (2000:176-177). But “the utopian rhetoric of freedom, liberty, and markets conceals so effectively [their utopian content] that we often find it difficult to articulate the pattern of underlying coerced collaborations that otherwise stares us so blatantly in the face” (Harvey 2000:181).

Adding to this, David Graeber points out that modern bureaucracy, itself based in utopian aspirations, also conceals its utopian underpinnings. Graeber contends that “what ultimately lies behind the appeal of bureaucracy is fear of play” (2015:193). Play is defined as “the free expression of creative energies...for its own sake” (2015:192). Games, conversely, are bounded by rules with clear objectives. Following the rules, in games, actually allows the player the opportunity to win the game. Graeber contends that “bureaucracies create games—they’re just games that are in no sense fun” (2015:190). By understanding and obeying the rules of the game (the rules of governance by administration), players can win, in essence, at the games of life. “Games, then, are a kind of utopia of rules” (2015:191). Therefore, even in our arguments on democracy versus republicanism, we are engaging in a duel of utopias. He concludes:

[Utopian bureaucracy has] created a situation where the pursuit of freedom from arbitrary power simply ends up producing more arbitrary power, and as a result, regulations choke existence, armed guards and surveillance cameras appear everywhere, science and creativity are smothered, and all of us end up finding increasing percentages of our day taken up in the filling out of forms.

(Graeber 2015:205)

Since the right maintains power on the basis of its utopian content, needed now is the generation of a mobilizing conception of utopia for our left movements. Notwithstanding my previous criticisms, one very hopeful element in the 2016 election cycle appeared in Bernie

Sanders ability to galvanize people by promoting “political revolution.” Though the details of his political revolution left much to the imagination, the real source of optimism is found in the energies unleashed by millions of people in pushing for dramatic changes in the here and now. Therefore, revolution is back on the table, and utopia fixed to revolutionary projects is precisely the direction we need to take. Generating a utopia needs to employ a radical imagination which is not afraid, and indeed insists, upon a total social revolution against the totality of capitalism. If the left does not generate a more inspired vision, we will continue to be defeated by the utopian projects of the right.

How do we find each other for the project of collective utopian dreaming? Answering this question demonstrates the need for the radical imagination, as its incorporation of the prefigurative and strategic aligns our shared projects in locating spaces for charting revolutionary goals. This means discovering the cracks in capitalism, and using these cracks for revolutionary actions that can initiate intentional ruptures within capitalism’s totality. We will find, in our movement, that there can be no single vanguard leading this campaign but a collection of vanguards connecting multiple centers together. Additionally, it will be apparent that injecting democracy into these centers—these spaces—will reorient authority and power giving our movements a stronger position in which we can deploy more durable revolutionary forces.

The road ahead is necessarily long, revolution will not be a single momentous event but an accumulation of social energies (signaling the importance of cracks and ruptures in the prevailing social order). We should not mourn this fact. As noted above, oppression is not always obvious to the oppressed, and since none of us are outside of society this means that we are inundated today with oppressions we are probably not even aware exist. Revolutionary

processes will allow us to gain deeper insights into the true meaning of freedom and liberation, where the oppressions we are oblivious to today will be the target of future generations that take the reins of revolution. This is only possible in the action of revolution, as the direction of tomorrow does not follow a predetermined arc of progress; the direction is made. For us, we need to craft prefigurative strategies for moving forward. The following is my attempt at sketching what this might look like in action.

Occupy Wall Street offered a window into understanding the importance of democratic daily life. By prioritizing the setting-up of encampments in public parks OWS highlighted the significance of democratic process and deliberation. Occupation was the tactic, and it was coupled with an idea that we could use these seized spaces as democratic public spheres. Capitalist totality seeks the privatization of all space—thus the domination of space entirely. For occupiers, public parks were small cracks in the advance of capitalist totality. Public space is merely the inverse of private space—as what is not private is publically administered by the state and thus void of democratic control. However, the general population tends to view public spaces in a positive light, signaling their rough belief in the need for shared and open spaces. So OWS filled the (ideological) cracks with its own set of ideals, its own utopian project, and immediately sought to cultivate these cracks as spaces for genuinely open participation and deep democracy. In this regard, “the space of Occupy was not only physical, but also symbolic” (Goodwardena 2016:409).

The cracks of public parks were used to confront alienation, but they also offered a glimpse on how to connect the cracks. One of the magical moments of OWS was when it went from being an isolated protest tactic in an obscure New York City park to spreading like wildfire

across the country and around the globe. Park occupation had a strategic brilliance based on its simplicity, which ran as follows: we can turn our public park into a site of democracy, and so can you. It invited ordinary people from all over to engage in the same type of activity. No longer was it seen as necessary to lobby one's congressperson or go through the formal political channels to be active in politics, instead you could just take a walk through the park and engage in political debate, deliberation, and decision-making. What could be more utopian? OWS offered a view of one way our movements can create visible entry-points for the public at large to enter into movement actions—thus they (temporarily) seized spaces for revolutionary (re)production. OWS offered many insights, both through its successes and limitations, and one particular insight is on needing to hold these spaces of revolutionary (re)production longer.

Practically speaking, these spaces could be formed by tying together projects for community land trusts with cooperative businesses⁵⁴ and local political efforts (whether referendums, issue-oriented mobilizations, etc.) all oriented toward establishing present-day commons. Organized labor, Black Lives Matter chapters, environmental organizations, indigenous tribes, and offshoots of Occupy Wall Street (such as Occupy Homes) could unify around these broad-based efforts. Indeed, contemporary movements appear to be shifting in a direction which understands the importance of space. Writes Kanishka Goonewardena, “the events of the Arab Spring...and the Occupy Movement...revealed that ‘space’ is both an essential mediation of politics and an unmediated object of political struggle” (2016:408). Spaces can become blocs of power, interlacing land, politics, and economics with prefigurative practices of

⁵⁴ Such as embodied by the Mondragon system, where a central bank redistributes surpluses back into the networked cooperatives, particularly to strengthen new sites and help fledgling ones.

care work and democratic social life. By seizing space, instead of states, our prefigurative strategies do the work of creating communities bounded by more than their geographical or national character. They create resistance communities.

One could frame this as “neighborhood organizing.” Such has always been central for successful anti-capitalist campaigns, whether of an explicitly labor union front or project of dismantling racial oppression, etc. On the left the conflation of tactics and strategies is constant, but tactics (such as acquiring forms of state power) are means toward end goals—for us that goal is open utopia.⁵⁵ Durable spaces for revolutionary (re)production allow tactics more opportunity for success. Explains David Harvey, in reference to unionization movements in the early twentieth-century, “work-based struggles, from strikes to factory takeovers, are far more likely to succeed when there is...support from...the surrounding neighborhood or community level” (2012:138).

Revolutionary (re)productive spaces, however, imply bigger spaces than neighborhoods. In his work on *Rebel Cities*, David Harvey repeats the concern that capitalist totality requires our movements to take into account the question of scale. “The plain fact is that certain problems,” he writes, “only become visible at particular scales, and it is only appropriate that democratic decisions be made at those scales” (2012:152-153). Harvey’s concern leads him to ponder the possibilities of organizing an entire city. Surveying the history of urban rebellions, spanning a vast terrain in time and space from Paris, Cairo, Cochabamba, and more, Harvey discovers that in times of urban uprisings singular centers of activity are rare. More often, these rebellions spread

⁵⁵ Prefigurative proponents encourage the closing of the gap between tactics and strategy, otherwise called the “means” and the “ends.” This is an important ethical intervention for generating strategies, but it is impossible for the gap between means and ends to disappear entirely.

not only to close geographic locations but across the whole globe. One example includes Paris 1968, which quickly spread to “Chicago, Mexico City, Bangkok, and others” (Harvey 2012:115). The local is a spark which can ignite global conflagrations, and Harvey’s Rebel Cities propose the possibility of city after city, like dominos, succumbing to the will of the people.

Injecting these energies into the everyday requires viewing daily social life as opportunities for rebellion. To display how the radical imagination changes views on strategy, I want to focus briefly on how labor unions can employ this method for revolution. Stanley Aronowitz, an experienced union organizer, issued a convincing argument that the labor movement’s current woes are not due to a lack in unionized numbers—even with small union percentages in the public and private sector millions of union members exist in the nation—but due to a lack in the radical imagination. He urges unions to embrace its radical roots, particularly its militancy and regular use of the strike as a tactic, but understands that the constraints on labor’s collective imagination prevent its revitalization (Aronowitz 2014). A radical vision is not unachievable if unions commit to reassessing their preconceptions.

First, labor union efforts must extend beyond the work site. What is viewed as a form of labor, or of productivity, under capitalist economic regimes has tended to ignore social (re)production as labor. Undertaken primarily by women, (re)production refers to child-raising (which guarantees future labor supplies), food cultivation, general housework, and emotional or interpretive labor which are all necessary for reproducing social life (Federici 2012). Further, opening up conceptions of what is work and who qualifies as a laborer forces the imagination to enlarge and recognize additional forms of labor made invisible in the U.S.—namely, prison labor. Janaé Bonsu, in an article for *Dissent*, urges us to “imagine if prison laborers were entitled to a

minimum wage, overtime pay, and workers' compensation when injured on the job" (2017). The outcome would effectively strike against the core of today's New Jim Crow. Bonsu argues that prison laborers should not be overlooked in unionization campaigns, and persuades readers to understand that if prison workers were seen as a centerpiece of organized labor's strategy the prospects for a revolution would increase dramatically. Here, as well, Bonsu offers a view of finding ways to connect the cracks between different movement groups (*Dissent* 2017).

Encouraging developments are taking place for the radical imagination to reinsert itself into organized labor. Since the 1990s the rise of "worker centers" has increased from approximately 10 locations to over 250 (Bobo and Pebellón 2016). This is a welcome development, as worker centers operate to encourage the creation of cooperative businesses, recreational spaces, educational support services, and more. But we also need unions to begin understanding that their fight is for affordable housing, single-payer healthcare, and less hours of work with guaranteed universal (and livable) incomes, to name only a few critical issues.

In capturing spaces for revolutionary (re)production, imagine if unions shifted the money they dump into the Democrat party into the creation of cooperative living establishments. For union members, they would have access to fixed-rents in areas where their neighbors are their union comrades (yes, they could begin seeing them as comrades instead of co-workers). They could also link these residential areas for union members with land trusts for sustainable farming, along with recreational centers for children and families. From this standpoint, union members can launch their own political initiatives rooted to their local conditions. This would allow them to bolster their already developing revolutionary spaces with political power which would serve

as a buffer between their communities and the larger state without necessarily entering into fruitless direct combat with the state.

Essentially, these prefigurative strategies cultivate a new project for the commons, a concept which has recently gained a lot of political saliency amongst the left. For proponents of the commons, the construct “includes seeds, genes, urban spaces, electromagnetic waves and software programs, languages and cultural works, and many other social realities” (Caffentzis 2016:98). Thus, the commons “are brought into existence every day” (Caffentzis 2016:98). Large unions waste millions upon millions of dollars of their union members’ dues every year on political efforts which have only weakened organized labor in the long run—why not invest in worker communities—worker commons—instead? Argues George Caffentzis, “if we view the commons not as a distant goal but as the movement that negates the present order of things...then the outline of a path emerges” (2016:101).

This is only an idea of how to begin, but exercising the radical imagination reveals and creates possibilities. Community land trusts could help eliminate hunger and homelessness in our neighborhoods, cooperatives could strengthen local economies with businesses less concerned with profit than with providing value and livelihoods for people, and municipal political power can help buffer such projects from the power of the larger state and capital. Encouraging efforts throughout the U.S. and threading them together into a single whole is crucial, and though they won’t look the same internationally, the rough place-based outlines of this strategy can be generalized throughout the world since creativity and local adaptation are at the heart of the radical imagination.

Finding spaces to turn into common spaces, to develop into sites of revolutionary (re)production, can shatter the alienation of daily life and point toward a better horizon—an open utopia. The above is a call for a different world which entails a different global project, one where the “production of space becomes a non-alienating, radical-democratic praxis” (Goonewardena 2016:412)—a product of the radical imagination. Doing so begins by seeing the rebellion inside every ordinary person, creating entry-points for them to connect with vanguards that bring multiple centers together, and injecting democracy into everyday life to eliminate alienation. Let us try now to find these cracks, these open spaces, and commit to deepening the cracks, connecting them, and initiating intentional ruptures before these all-important spaces close.

Works Cited

- Akemi, Romina and Bree Busk. "Breaking the Waves: Challenging the Liberal Tendency within Anarchist Feminism". *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory: Anarcha-Feminisms*. No. 29. Portland: Institute for Anarchist Studies, 2016. 104-119
- Aronowitz, Stanley. *The Death and Life of American Labor: Toward a New Workers' Movement*. London: Verso, 2014.
- How Class Works: Power and Social Movement*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Auyero, Javier and Debora Alejandra Swistun. *Flammable: Environmental Suffering in an Argentine Shantytown*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History". *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 1968. 253-264
- Bobo, Kim and Marién Casillas Pabellón. *The Worker Center Handbook: A Practical Guide to Starting and Building the New Labor Movement*. Ithaca: ILR Press, 2016.
- Boggs, Carl. "Factory Councils: Nucleus of the 'New State'". *Gramsci's Marxism*. London: Pluto Press, 1976. 85-100.
- "Revolutionary Process, Political Strategy, and the Dilemma of Power". *Theory and Society, Vol. 4, No.3*. Autumn, 1977. 359-393
- Boggs, Grace Lee. "Revolution as a New Beginning". *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011. 52-78
- Bonsu, Janaé. "A Strike Against the New Jim Crow". *Dissent*. Winter 2017. Accessed March 28, 2017. <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/prison-strike-mass-incarceration-labor-reparations>
- Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Forms of Capital". *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. Ed. J. Richardson. New York: Greenwood, 1968. 241-258
- Breines, Wini. "Politics as Community". *The Great Refusal: Community and Organization in the New Left: 1962-1968*. New York: J.F. Bergin Publishers, Inc., 1982. 46-66
- Caffentzis, George. "Commons". *Keywords for Radicals: The Contested Vocabulary of Late-Capitalist Struggle*. Eds. Kelly Fritsch, Clare O'Connor, and AK Thompson. Chico: AK Press, 2016. 95-101.
- Chomsky, Noam. *Chomsky on Anarchism*. Oakland: AK Press, 2005.
- "Expanding the Floor of the Cage". *Z Magazine*. April, 1997.
- Secrets, Lies, and Democracy*. Tucson: Odonian Press, 1994.
- Childs, John Brown. *Leadership, Conflict, and Cooperation in Afro-American Social Thought*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989.
- Coates, Ta-Nehishi. "The Enduring Solidarity of Whiteness". *The Atlantic*. February 8, 2016. Accessed March 6, 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/02/why-we-write/459909/>
- Conrad, Ryan. "I'm an Anarchist and I Vote". *Truth-Out*. October 12, 2016. Accessed December 4, 2016. <http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/37922-i-m-an-anarchist-and-i-vote>
- Cornell, Andrew. *Unruly Equality: U.S. Anarchism in the 20th Century*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2016.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color". *Stanford Law Review, Vol. 43, No. 6*. July, 1991. 1241-1299.

- Davis, Mike. "What's the Matter with America?" *In Praise of Barbarians: Essays Against Empire*. Chicago, Haymarket Books, 2007. 42-60
- Day, Richard J.F. "Introduction" *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*. London: Pluto Press, 2005. 1-18
- Dean, Jodi. *Crowds and Party*. London: Verso, 2016.
-*The Communist Horizon*. London: Verso, 2012.
- Dixon, Bruce A. "Where's the #BlackLivesMatter Critique of the Black Misleadership Class, or Obama or Hillary?" *Black Agenda Report*. August 6, 2015. Accessed February 16, 2017. <http://www.blackagenda.com/wheres-the-blacklivesmatter-critique-of-black-political-class>
- Dixon, Chris. *Another Politics: Talking Across Today's Transformative Movements*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2014.
- Dunbar-Ortiz, Roxanne. "Follow the Corn". *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2014. 15-31
- Epstein, Barbara. "The Politics of Prefigurative Community: The Non-Violent Direct Action Movement". *Cultural Resistance Reader*. Ed. Steven Duncombe. London: Verso, 2002. 333-346
- Federici, Silvia. "Social Reproduction: Between the Wage and the Commons." Interview by Marina Sitrin. *Roar Magazine*. June 25, 2016. Accessed September 22, 2016. <https://roarmag.org/magazine/social-reproduction-between-the-wage-and-the-commons/>
-*Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*. Oakland: PM Press, 2012.
- Foster, John Bellamy. "Envisioning Ecological Revolution". *The Ecological Revolution: Making Peace with the Planet*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2009. 253-264
- Fraser, Nancy. "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Postsocialist' Age". *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition*. New York: Routledge, 1997. 11-40.
- Garza, Alicia. "A Q&A With Alicia Garza, Co-founder of #BlackLivesMatter: the force behind the burgeoning movement talks about the resurgent fight for black liberation". Interview by Michael Denzel Smith. *The Nation*. March 24, 2015. Accessed October 2, 2016. <https://www.thenation.com/article/qa-alicia-garza-co-founder-blacklivesmatter/>
- Giroux, Henry. *America at War with Itself*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2017.
- Goldman, Emma. "Anarchism: What it Really Stands For". *Anarchism and Other Essays*. New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1969. 47-68
- Goodwardena, Kanishka. "Space". *Keywords for Radicals: The Contested Vocabulary of Late-Capitalist Struggle*. Eds. Kelly Fritsch, Clare O'Connor, and AK Thompson. Chico: AK Press, 2016. 407-414.
- Gordon, Noah. "How Did Members of Congress Get So Wealthy?". *The Atlantic*. September 9, 2014. Accessed October 10, 2016. <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/09/how-did-members-of-congress-get-so-wealthy/379848/>
- Gould, Deborah. "Politics". *Keywords for Radicals: The Contested Vocabulary of Late-*

- Capitalist Struggle*. Eds. Kelly Fritsch, Clare O'Connor, and AK Thompson. Chico: AK Press, 2016. 303-309
- Graeber, David. "The Iron Law of Liberalism and the Era of Total Bureaucratization". *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy*. Brooklyn and London: Melville House, 2015. 3-44
- "The Utopia of Rules, or Why We Really Love Bureaucracy After All". *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy*. Brooklyn and London: Melville House, 2015. 149-205
- "The Mob Begin to Think and Reason: The Covert History of Democracy". *The Democracy Project: A History. A Crisis. A Movement*. London: Penguin Books, 2013. 150-207
- *Revolutions in Reverse: Essays on Politics, Violence, Art, and the Imagination*. Brooklyn: Automeia, 2011.
- "There Never Was a West". *Possibilities: Essays on Hierarchy, Rebellion, and Desire*. Oakland: AK Press, 2007. 330-374
- Grubacic, Andrej. "Why Holloway?" In *Against, and Beyond Capitalism: The San Francisco Lectures*. By John Holloway. Oakland: PM Press, 2016. vii-xvii
- Gupta, Arun. "Trump's Plan to 'Make America Great Again' is Ethnic Cleansing". *Counterpunch*. November, 7, 2016. Accessed December 8, 2016. <http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/11/07/donald-trumps-plan-to-make-america-great-again-is-ethnic-cleansing/>
- "What Became of Occupy Wall Street?" *Counterpunch*. November 16, 2015. Accessed October 3, 2016. <http://www.counterpunch.org/2015/11/06/what-became-of-occupy-wall-street/>
- Harvey, David. "Private Property and the Capitalist State". *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. 50-52
- *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. London and New York: Verso, 2012.
- "The Right to the City". *New Left Review*, no. 53. September-October, 2008. Accessed March 6, 2017. <https://newleftreview.org/II/53/david-harvey-the-right-to-the-city>
- "The spaces of Utopia". *Spaces of Hope*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000. 133-181.
- Holloway, John. In *Against, and Beyond Capitalism: The San Francisco Lectures*. Oakland: PM Press, 2016.
- Imarisha, Walidah and Adrienne Maree Brown et al. *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*. Oakland: AK Press, 2015.
- Jaffe, Sarah. "Occupy Wall Street Was Humbling to Many of Us". *The Sociological Quarterly*, no. 54. 2013. 198-202.
- James, CLR. "Every Cook Can Govern: A Study of Democracy in Ancient Greece Its Meaning for Today". *Correspondence*, Vol. 2, No. 12. June 1956
- Johnson, Cedric. "An Open Letter to Ta-Nehisi Coates and the Liberals that Love Him". *Jacobin*. February 3, 2016. Accessed February 18, 2017. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/02/ta-nehisi-coates-case-for-reparations-bernie-sanders-racism/>

- Kaplan, Rebecca. "Members of Congress richer than ever". *CBS News*. January 9, 2014. Accessed October 10, 2016. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/members-of-congress-richer-than-ever/>
- Kelley, Robin D.G. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2002.
- Lazar, Hilary. "Until All Are Free: Black Feminism, Anarchism and Interlocking Oppression". *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory: Anarcha-feminisms*. No. 29. Portland: Institute for Anarchist Studies, 2016. 35-50
- Leondar-Wright, Betsy. *Missing Class: Strengthening Social Movement Groups by Seeing Class Cultures*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014.
- Lerner, Gerda. *The Creation of Patriarchy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Lilley, Sasha et al. *Capital and Its Discontents: Conversations with Radical Thinkers in a Time of Tumult*. Oakland: PM Press, 2011.
- Lorde, Audre. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House". *Sister Outsider: Essays & Speeches by Audre Lorde*. New York: The Crossing Press, 1984. 110-113
- Marcuse, Herbert. *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital: Vol.1 A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*. New York: International Publishers, 1987. 43
- Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Ed. Robert Tucker. New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc. 1978.
- McNally, David. "Utopia". *Keywords for Radicals: The Contested Vocabulary of Late-Capitalist Struggle*. Eds. Kelly Fritsch, Clare O'Connor, and AK Thompson. Chico: AK Press, 2016. 431-437
- Morrison, Toni. "Black Matters" *Race Critical Theories*. Eds. Philomena Essed and David Theo Goldberg. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 2002. 265-282
- Moylan, Tom. "Realizing Better Futures, Strong Thought for Hard Times". *Utopian Method Vision: The Use Value of Social Dreaming*. Eds. Tom Moylan and Rafaella Baccolini. Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2011. 191-222
- Nail, Thomas. "Revolution". *Keywords for Radicals: The Contested Vocabulary of Late-Capitalist Struggle*. Eds. Kelly Fritsch, Clare O'Connor, and AK Thompson. Chico: AK Press, 2016. 375-381
- Ostroy, Andy. "The Failure of Occupy Wall Street". *Huffington Post*. July 31, 2012. Accessed December 31, 2016. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/andy-ostroy/the-failure-of-occupy-wal_b_1558787.html
- Parsons, Lucy. *A Lifelong Anarchist! Selected Words and Writings of Lucy Parsons*. Ed. T.S. Greer. Libcom.org. accessed November 28, 2016. <https://libcom.org/library/lifelong-anarchist-selected-words-writings-lucy-parsons>
- PBS. "Black Lives Matter Organizer Melina Abdullah" interview by Tavis Smiley. November 16, 2015. Accessed November 25, 2016. <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/tavissmiley/interviews/prof-melina-abdullah/>
- "Bill Moyers talks with Grace Lee Boggs". *Bill Moyers Journal*. June 15, 2007. Accessed December 5, 2016. <http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/06152007/watch3.html>
- Popper, Karl. "Utopia and Violence". *World Affairs*, vol. 149 no. 1 (Summer 1986) 3-9
- Prashad, Vijay. *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*. New York: The New

- Press, 2007.
- Radosh, Ronald. "Steve Bannon, Trump's Top Guy, Told Me He Was a 'Leninist' Who Wants to 'Destroy the State'". *The Daily Beast*. August 16, 2016. Accessed February 17, 2017. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/08/22/steve-bannon-trump-s-top-guy-told-me-he-was-a-leninist.html>
- Ranciere, Jacques. "Does Democracy Mean Something?". *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. London: Bloomsbury, 2015[2010]. 53-69
- Reed Jr., Adolph. "Splendors and Miseries of the Antiracist 'Left'". *Nonsite*. November 6, 2016. Accessed February 16, 2017. <http://nonsite.org/editorial/splendors-and-miseries-of-the-antiracist-left-2>
- "How Racial Disparity Does Not Help Make Sense of Patterns of Police Violence". *Nonsite*. September 16, 2016. Accessed December 31, 2016. <http://nonsite.org/editorial/how-racial-disparity-does-not-help-make-sense-of-patterns-of-police-violence>
- " #BlackLivesMatter, Labor Unions, & Presidential Politics: A TBS Conversation With Adolph Reed, Part 2." *The Black Scholar*. Interview by Jonathan Fenderson. August 26, 2016. Accessed February 16, 2017. http://www.theblackscholar.org/blacklivesmatter-labor-unions-presidential-politics-tbs-conversation-adolph-reed-part-2-jonathan-fenderson-tbs-associate-editor/#_edn1
- Scholl, Christian. "Prefiguration". *Keywords for Radicals: The Contested Vocabulary of Late-Capitalist Struggle*. Eds. Kelly Fritsch, Clare O'Connor, and AK Thompson. Chico: AK Press, 2016. 319-325
- Scott, James C. "The Revolutionary Party: A Plan and a Diagnosis". *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. 147-180
- *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Resistance*. London: Yale University Press, 1985. 28-31
- Shandro, Alan. "Vanguard". *Keywords for Radicals: The Contested Vocabulary of Late-Capitalist Struggle*. Eds. Kelly Fritsch, Clare O'Connor, and AK Thompson. Chico: AK Press, 2016. 439-446.
- Shawki, Ahmed. *Black Liberation and Socialism*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2006.
- Shukaitis, Stephen and David Graeber. "Introduction". *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations Collective Theorization*. Eds. Stephen Shukaitis, David Graeber, and Erika Biddle. Oakland: AK Press, 2007. 11-34
- Sitrin, Marina and Dario Azzellini. *They Can't Represent Us! Reinventing Democracy from Greece to Occupy*. London: Verso, 2014.
- Smith, Andrea. "Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy". *We Have Not Been Moved: Resisting Militarism in 21st Century America*. Eds. Elizabeth 'Betita' Martinez, Matt Meyer, and Mandy Carter. Oakland: PM Press, 2012. 285-294.
- Spence, Lester K. *Knocking the Hustle: Against the Neoliberal Turn in Black Politics*. Brooklyn: Punctum Books, 2015.
- Stein, Jill. "It's Time for a Second American Revolution." *Counterpunch*. July 4, 2016. Accessed September 22, 2016. <http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/07/04/its-time-for-a-second-american-revolution/>

- Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta. *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016.
- The Avalon Project. "Notes of the Secret Debates of the Federal Convention of 1787, Taken by the Late Hon Robert Yates." Yale Law School. Accessed September 22, 2016. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/yates.asp
- The Federalist Papers, No.71*. Yale Law School. Accessed September 22, 2016. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed71.asp
- The Invisible Committee. *The Coming Insurrection*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009.
- The Movement for Black Lives. "A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom, & Justice". Accessed November 23, 2016. <https://policy.m4bl.org/>
- Thompson, Hunter S. *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012[1973].
- Walia, Harsha. *Undoing Border Imperialism*. Oakland: AK Press/Institute for Anarchist Studies, 2013.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel. "Revolution as Strategy and Tactics of Transformation". *After Liberalism*. New York: New Press, 1995. 210-218
- "Marxism After the Collapse of the Communisms"*. *After Liberalism*. New York: New Press, 1995. 219-231
- "Revolutionary Movements in the Era of US Hegemony"*. *The Politics of the World Economy*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1984. 132-145.
- Warren, Kenneth et al. "On the End(s) of Black Politics". *Nonsite.org*. September 16, 2016. Accessed February 17, 2017. <http://nonsite.org/editorial/on-the-ends-of-black-politics>
- Wood, Ellen Meiksins. *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Zinn, Howard. "Standing Up for Justice in the Age of Obama". *Howard Zinn Speaks: Collected Speeches 1963-2009*. Ed. Anthony Arnove. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012. 258.
- A People's History of the United States: 1942-Present*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1995. 76-102