

READING INTERROGATIONS #9
SOCIOLOGY 929: ENVISIONING REAL UTOPIAS
APRIL 10, 2008
CHAPTER 9. INTERSTITIAL TRANSFORMATION

1. Catherine Willis

Reading the selections from this week helped me put my finger on an issue that relates to the problem that I see of envisioning *the* transformation to a real utopian society. I have a very hard time believing that one transformation is adequate to bring about real utopian society. I feel like our discussions have generally seen these transformations in an ‘end of history’ way (footnote 17; p 11) which precludes the need for constant and continual transformation using the different strategies that we are exploring here (ruptural, interstitial, symbiotic). It assumes that transformation, upon diminishing economic power once will enable us to avoid it (or other forms of it, such as privilege) forever. I am very doubtful of this assumption. For this reason I am partial to the evolutionary anarchist approach because it allows for the process of continual learning, adapting and resisting, more than the other strategies of transformation. **[This is a nice perspective to bring to bear on the problem – the need for perpetually renewed transformation in the vision of the real utopia itself, so that transformation is not simply a problem of *getting there but staying there* – or perhaps even *being there* (if we think of “transformation” as the creative production of social life). Interstitial logics have particular relevance for that conception, since they so deliberately try to prefigure the alternatives. Still, there may be good reason to think of the problem faced by transformation strategies under conditions of a dominant capitalist system as distinctively different from the problems they face once the underlying power configurations have changed.]**

The question of agency and deliberateness is another key issue in this chapter. There is a necessity for actors to see their actions as “part of a strategy for broad social change” (10). While I understand that by the very definition of strategy, an understanding of global objectives is necessary, I still find this problematic. This can be illustrated in the examples that were cited in the chapter. Producer cooperatives, the Quebec daycare system, etc. all seem like pragmatic responses to difficulties, rather than part of a strategy for broader social change. **[By “broad social change” I do not mean that the strategy has to envision a radical transformation of the basic structure of a society, but simply that the interstitial activity is somehow part of a strategy for social improvement or social justice. The Quebec daycare cooperatives are connected to the *chantier de l’economie sociale* which is animated by social movements concerned with community issues and social change. They have a social economy perspective and want to expand its scope. That suffices for my purposes. Some things may just be interstitial *activities* without being interstitial strategies, but even these might under some circumstances be seen as embedded in an interstitial agenda].** Often, worker coops may exist merely to preserve self interest. Do the ones that have an explicit political project differ fundamentally or differently affect their surroundings than the ones

that don't? I would propose instead that the increased experimentation with interstitial strategies as pragmatic responses to lived difficulties will generally help people begin to solve certain difficulties. As limits to fixing these difficulties at the small scale emerge, people can attack issues of the next order (ie, first coop daycare, then subsidising it, then petitioning for a shorter work week) and so on. While they may begin to challenge issues of inequality or other more broadly, their reasons for this may be very pragmatic. In fact I think that this is more likely. **[I agree that interstitial activities may evolve into interstitial strategies, especially as people learn that other such activities exist and begin to see their connections. Social movements play a pivotal role here.]**

Interstitial strategies are distinguished by the fact that “they largely by-pass the state” (1). This needs to be elaborated. I think that interstitial strategies, although they bi-pass the state, are nonetheless highly dependent on it. All of the examples given rely on the state for legal protection or funding (maybe the Kibbutz would be the exception). Unions, charities and coops all are more successful when legally protected. Even fair trade relies on trademark protection. Charitable organisations benefit from tax breaks because of a symbiotic relationship in which capital saw the advantage that it had it allowing charities to provide low cost services. Charities' activities are however controlled by laws that limit the money they can spend on political activities. In that the state and the power of capital thus “allow” these activities, to what extent are they actually symbiotic? What is the distinction between the spaces allowed by capital (interstitial) and the spaces that they allow because it also benefits them (symbiotic). **[This is certainly a tricky issue and I am not sure exactly how best to deal with this. I do not think I want to say that if capitalists “allow” an interstitial activity because, for example, they see it as a kind of safety-valve (eg co-ops reduce the tensions from unemployment) or because the interstitial activity solves a practical problem (eg elder care costs less in the social economy), that this means that the activities in question could not count as interstitial strategies oriented to social justice and transformations. The interstitiality comes from the fact that the activities are not directly organized by and governed by the state and capital, even if it is also the case that legal rules can make them easier or harder to carry out.]**

Lastly, I am confused about the difference between interstitial strategies and processes. I don't know how to comment other than to say that it wasn't clear to me. **[All I am getting at is the deliberate, agency issue here: strategies envision a transformation; an interstitial process simply refers to activities that exist within the spaces/cracks/interstices of the society, but there is no presumption that they are directed at any kind of transformation at all. They are just activities that are not directed by or organized by the state or capital. Now some of these may in fact be not just compatible with capitalism, but functional for capitalism. That is possible. Interstitiality just means that these activities are not governed by the logics of the system.]**

2. Edo Navot

The problem of strategic choice in a long-term revolutionary path should be a matter for a lifetime of thought. Despite whatever critiques I have of these last three chapters, I think I remain agnostic – or at least not-yet-decided – about the central problem of the “optimal” path of social transformation.

I think of the key passages is in pg. 4: “The fact is that no strategy poses a threat to the system in the sense that adopting the strategy today generates effects today or in the near future that would really threaten capitalism. [*sigh*] This is what it means to live in a hegemonic capitalist system...” This is both a strength and a weakness interstitial strategies: they operate under the radar, so to speak, and there is considerable freedom within the United States at least to engage in these strategies. On the other hand, I don’t think interstitial strategies can operate without resistance from the capitalist order through to the actual phase of transformation. I think there will be a threshold past which interstitial activity is either no longer really interstitial, or so common that it becomes a recognized threat for counter-mobilization. Insofar as interstitial strategies are diffused throughout the social order without any sense of solidarity or “recombinant decentralization” – which is empirically true, though not necessarily the case – they are vulnerable to counter-revolution. (This may be more a critique of evolutionary strategy, but I think it applies to revolutionary strategy too if this hypothetical threshold lies before phase II in diagram 9.1, the limits of interstitial transformation within capitalism.) It seems to me that Marx’s objection to interstitial strategies was partly motivated by this. That is, if interstitial strategies are not a coherent movement with solidarity or something like it, which tends to be the case, I have a hard time imagining these strategies catalyzing deep social transformation rather than being “beaten back” by the coherent elements within capitalism. Unions are a good example of this. In the U.S. we have seen first hand how unions without a strong, coherent labor movement can’t even contribute to political change within the American social order, let alone really transform it. I guess the question then becomes what mechanisms or strategies of interstitial transformation provide this coherence? I have a hard time thinking of any...**[I like the way you have framed the problem here: how can interstitial strategies generate broader solidarities and coherence. Coherence and solidarity are not identical issues, but both would seem to be important if interstitial strategies are to have system-transforming effects. However, it is not so clear that such coherence and solidarity need to be a part of the interstitial activities themselves. Perhaps they can be supplied by things like parties that might adopt a strategy of facilitating spaces for interstitial activity. After all, in the erosion of feudal institutions, merchants and protocapitalists did not have a lot of solidarity and coherence on their own, but through their “interstitial activities” (not really interstitial strategies since they were not aiming at transformation) they undercut feudalism. Maybe there is an analogy for eroding capitalism?]**

In addition, I’d like to point out that the small passage I quoted above implicitly conveys that we are thinking about interstitial strategies in the context of advanced capitalist countries exclusively. I think that there is a bigger role for interstitial strategies in the

U.S. in particular if they act to constrain America's ability undermine ruptural strategies in other countries where such strategies are more feasible.

Finally, in sort of a shout-out to Wikipedia, I think there is enormous power in the symbolic achievements of interstitial transformations. When phenomena like the open source movement demonstrates the achievability of something that before it seemed impossible, this ignites a lot of passion and optimism. Perhaps interstitial strategies' power lies in their ability catalyze social activism more than the direct effect of the interstitial strategies themselves (as in figure 9.1). If this is the case they are well-suited to resistance to hegemonic capitalism, as long as they are not the exclusive strategy employed, as long they pave the road to coherent social movements within capitalism and don't just pave the road in terms of material conditions being "ripened" for socialism.

[There is also a more political issue in play here since some of what interstitial strategies may do is transformation of organizational or associational resources of social movements. This is what the interstitial use of the Internet may do, in part: make collective action and coordination, the forming of alternative systems of action, easier in all sorts of ways. This may be a way in which interstitial action itself expands the spaces for interstitial action – rather than needing (always) to have the state enlarge those spaces.]

3. Molly Noble

Role of the State in Interstitial Transformation

I acknowledge the distinction between interstitial and symbiotic transformation in that the former holds that social empowerment is best achieved through transformation of civic and economic spheres whereas the latter puts that emphasis on the state, but I think that regardless of the type of strategy implied by the values of each type of transformation, failure to acknowledge the role of the state in the process of transformation can effectively put blinders on movements that prevent their ability to anticipate and manipulate obstacles. The premise behind interstitial transformation is that it by-passes the state. However, I can't think of any example, including the ones you cited, that have no contact with the state or that aren't influenced by state policies and regulations. **["By-passing the state" doesn't exactly mean "no contact with the state" or "unaffected by the state." Having laws in place which make it legal for workers to form a co-operative, for example, may be critical for a strategy which emphasizes the existence of cooperatives. Having ordinary bourgeois rights of association and free speech may be essential for all sorts of interstitial activities as well. The issue is whether there is a demand on the state to do something or simply allow something to be done. Of course, there will be many situations in which a concrete strategy has both symbiotic and interstitial dimensions: demands for state subsidies could accompany interstitial strategies, for example.]** While specific interstitial strategies may not be geared directly toward the state, there will be some level of interaction. Given that the state provides the organizing structure for society, and that interstitial strategies aim to **transform the state** incrementally, won't interstitial strategies have to be negotiated within

boundaries and spaces set by the state? **[Interstitial strategies are not mainly directed at transforming the state as such, but at transforming social and economic structures. These may have ramifications which affect the state, but they are not really strategies directed at transforming the state (unless, of course, the concept of the state is used in a super-expansive way, as for example, in Althusser's concept of "ideological state apparatuses.")]** In a similar vein, I would challenge your claim that interstitial activity within capitalist firms happens "outside the dictates of the power relations and logic of capitalist production." In fact I would say that much of this activity – whether it functions either to support or undermine capitalism – occurs in a way that negotiates the power relations of capitalism and therefore works very much within its dictates. **[We need to think through this issue. Perhaps I am trying to make too fine a distinction, and perhaps it doesn't work for the within-capitalist firm case. All interstitial activity in some sense or another operates in ways that are "allowed" by the dominant logic of the system. If they were not allowed then they wouldn't happen. To say that there are cracks, niches, interstices, etc. means that there are spaces in which these kinds of things can happen and are thus definitionally "allowed." I was trying to distinguish between that kind of situation and one in which the power-holding actors of the system "dictate" the activity (if we take an agency-perspective on the problem) or in which the logic of the system demands such activity (if we want to take a system-functional perspective). Now, this point is simpler when we look outside of the capitalist firm: when a community group sets up a battered women's shelter which they create and operate, they are doing something that is not directed by the state or other centers of power, even if they are allowed to do so, and even if this relieves some pressure on the system. But when workers form a works council or a health and safety committee within a workplace, they immediately confront the power centers of the firm and enter into some kind of bargaining/negotiation. When a *modus vivendi* is worked out this is a change in the structure of the firm, and probably this should be treated as a symbiotic strategy rather than an interstitial one. I think my brief remarks on interstitial strategies *within* capitalist firms were not so well thought out and perhaps that should be dropped. This needs chewing over.....]** Additionally, if the state does come into play in interstitial strategies, would this also mean that interstitial strategies do possess the potential to challenge political power?

A couple concerns about "interstitial rivals to capitalist organization"

Fair Trade - One of my concerns regarding the Fair Trade movement is that it reinforces or reproduces the consumerist culture that, at least in my mind, is a negative manifestation of capitalism. Also, since the fair trade movement rose in response to the inequalities and exploitation of third world countries generated by capital flight I am concerned that, although it is hard to imagine any strategy that would reverse the trend of globalization, consumer movements like fair trade preclude strategies that would change the dynamic between and separation of production and distribution since it works through the mechanisms of **capitalism (buying and selling)** that create that separation. **[Fair trade in the strong sense of the equal-exchange movement centering on labor rights and worker empowerment works through *markets* but it tries to minimize the extent to which it works through *capitalism* (unless you want to equate all buying and selling**

with capitalism). I am also not so sure it should be called “consumerist” since Fair Trade movements proclaim the importance of placing values other than the satisfaction of consumers self-interest at the center of choices made by consumers. Since people will in any system consume things, and some of the things they consume will be made available through some kind of trade, I don’t think these facts alone should be described as reinforcing consumerist culture. Rather it could be viewed as a transformation of that culture. This is even more the case when fair trade is oriented towards importing from workers cooperatives and the like.]

Social economy, kibbutz and producer cooperative – My general concern with these types of movements is that while they may improve conditions for those directly involved in them, they fail to spur empowerment beyond the limits of a small community. Since each example works within the framework of a functional capitalism what’s to prevent their isolation within the state. More broadly put: are these strategies limited as to the scale they can achieve? **[That, of course, is The Big Question for all of these kinds of things when they are placed at the center of a system-transformation strategy.]**

4. Ricardo Donaire

It is posed as a feature of the interstitial strategy the notion that a deep social reconstruction is not only possible but necessary before rupture with capitalism. This feature differentiates this strategy from the ruptural one, embodied in classical Marxism, where social transformation would only be possible “after the revolution”.

Two issues in this regard:

On the one hand, are not those organizational forms that arise as alternatives to the existing ones pregnant with the characteristics of the old society? The classic example is that of cooperatives, as a particular form of private ownership of associated producers which eventually **could** become traditional capitalist companies. **[I think the issue here is whether this is an inherent or contingent outcome. If cooperatives inevitably become capitalist firms, then you are correct – they would not constitute pre-figurative forms. The alternative is to see them as one of the pathways for enhanced social empowerment, not in the sense that they by themselves would constitute a model for an entirely new socioeconomic order, but that they involve an hybridization of capitalism within which social power is enhanced. It is movement along a pathway – perhaps the social capitalism pathway (as we discussed a few weeks ago). This would be corrosive of capitalist power relations on several scores: 1) it expands the domains within which egalitarian and democratic activities take place, even if still restricted within a privately owned firm; 2) it can set the stage for other transformations which erode those property rights themselves, as for example by linking cooperatives to community land trusts; 3) it undermines the concentrated power of capital over the economy, so that the other pathways have more freedom of action (if all firms were worker owned cooperatives, then democratic forms of social regulation of the economy would be much easier because capital flight would no longer be a threat).]** But even if those forms were "successful" in the sense of maintaining their egalitarian characteristics, why could these forms be considered as the

embryos of a new society? Is it assumed that the new society could emerge by the very progressive advance of these interstitial forms until almost occupying the whole social space? **[There does not have to be an assumption that these forms by themselves would eventually be able to overwhelm ordinary capitalist firms, although this is not an incoherent view. The claim is that they contribute to the erosion of the capitalist quality of the system, but whether or not cooperatives as such would be sufficient to cross a tipping point is another matter. But note: this is not a bad description of how capitalism overwhelmed feudalism: capitalist relations eroded the integrity of the feudal system, ultimately making the system of reproduction of feudalism very weak.]** However, while the development of cooperatives operates within private ownership form, organization of society as a whole based on **the free association of producers implies a qualitative change:** the abolition of that form of ownership. **[It is true that the idea of “free association of producers” is qualitatively different from “private ownership”, but this does not imply that a democratization of the internal operation of firms under egalitarian ownership relations would not constitute a qualitative change. After all, to use an old Marxist idea, quantity and turn into quality. The “privateness” of the private property could become a weak surface feature of socioeconomic power relations by virtue of the ramifications of democratic-egalitarian participation within the organization of firms. I am not saying that this would be the case, but it is not implausible.]** Is it not underlying the interstitial strategy the idea that social transformation takes place through a series of purely quantitative changes (i.e., of degree and not of quality)? And if so, would not this strategy be linked to the reform of capitalism rather than the construction of a new society?

On the other hand, there is the problem of who decides what forms prefigure the new society. For instance, in the fair trade equal exchange it is underlying an idea of equity and justice based on the exchange of goods established as equivalent. In addition to the problem raised above, i.e., the pregnancy of these forms with the characteristics of the old bourgeois society: underlying ideas of (trade) freedom and (goods) equality; besides there it appears the issue of who determines that those (and not others) are the principles that prefigure the new society. Why should the new society be based on these principles and not, for instance, on free willing solidarity where "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need"? **[The principle of radical egalitarianism embodied in the slogan “to each according to need, from each according to ability” is indeed the distributional logic most in keeping with the conception of social justice as “equal access to the material and social means to live a flourishing life.” But this is not an all or nothing affair. It is not the case that unless one fully instantiates that moral ideal, there is no difference from capitalism “To each according to their wealth, from each according to their vulnerability”. Fair trade in its more radical version tries to have consumers of products pay for them in a way that minimizes exploitation. If you have fair trade with workers cooperatives and you pay according to a standard that provides for a “living wage” you are violating the logic of capitalist exchange and inserting a flourishing-principle into the exchange relation. Think this moves in the right direction and does insert new principles into the very idea of exchange. Now, on the question of “who decides” that this is a right principle – I think this should be something that evolves from the democratic-**

egalitarian practices themselves. One of the impulses generated by fair trade is closer dialogue between North and South on these issues and this has affected the character of the fair trade criteria, and of course there emerges more or less radicalized versions of these criteria. This is messy, but I think it can legitimately be seen as prefiguring a society beyond capitalism.]

Here arises the old debate about the "prefiguration" of a new society and the authoritarian nature of such kind of foreshadowing. The prospect of classical Marxism, where the new society is founded "after the revolution", relates to the need for such a society to emerge as a result of the conscious action of the masses. This idea is in contrast to the possibility of "prefigure" the new society, insomuch as the specific institutional forms that this new society would take, will depend on the creativity of people and can not be thought, at the risk of falling into some kind of authoritarianism, outside from the free popular activity. In this sense, does the interstitial strategy not suppose a certain prefigurative and authoritarian nature? **[This sounds nice, but in practice if you do not struggle to prefigure alternatives now, then the post-revolutionary construction is likely to be MORE rather than less authoritarian. There is nothing in interstitial strategies which implies that they are "imposed" on anyone from above, that they are driven by rigid ideological models pursued through authoritarian means. To the contrary, one of the advantages of interstitial strategies is precisely the learning-by-doing aspect, the reliance of creative experimentation within social movements and in dialogue with intellectuals who help disseminate best practices, etc. This is less likely to be authoritarian precisely because the context does not require a concentration of power.]**

5. Wes Markofski

This chapter both legitimates interstitial strategies of social transformation against the skepticism of early Marx while at the same time pointing out the limits of any strategy of system-wide challenge to capitalism that "ignores the state." Some of the limits of interstitial strategies are evident in the trajectories of "interstitial rivals to capitalist organizations" (6), where Wright's final assessment of producer co-operatives and the kibbutz is decline and co-optation, and the Fair Trade equal exchange and social economy strategies, while currently more vibrant, face similar challenges. In the final analysis, the "capturing" of state resources and state power seems a necessary part of sustaining over time direct challenges to capitalist organization and enabling deep and system-wide transformations of social relations under capitalism. That is, the state seems essential for *mobilizing resources* and *expanding the scope of authority* where democratic egalitarian principles are institutionally embodied. While interstitial rivals to capitalist organizations (under liberal democratic conditions) have the autonomy to institute such principles in civil society and economic institutions, the state is necessary to expand the sphere of authority to initiate and enforce emancipatory principles beyond individual organizations or networks of voluntary organizations.

That said, as Wright argues, interstitial processes and strategies *have* contributed to broad and significant social change and *can* play a part in an overall strategy of emancipatory social transformation. Improving the real flourishing of people under capitalism who bear the brunt of its harms, diminishing the severity of a transition trough by establishing successful emancipatory institutions “in the shell of the old” (I.W.W. 3, Proudhon 6, 11), and increasing the likelihood that a transformation does indeed result in democratic egalitarian outcomes rather than authoritarian statist ones (Buber 11) are all important reasons for pursuing interstitial strategies.

Wright’s distinction between interstitial *processes* and *strategies* is particularly interesting. How intentionally revolutionary do institutions have to be to count as interstitial strategies that advance democratic egalitarian alternatives to capitalism? In discussing “candidates for elements of an interstitial strategy” (co-ops, kibbutz, etc), Wright says, “Some are part of grand visions for the reconstruction of society as a whole; others have more modest objectives of transforming specific domains of social life. Some are linked to systematic theories of social transformation; others are pragmatic responses to the exigencies of social problem-solving” (3). The implication is that **legitimate** interstitial strategies may fall into any of these categories. **[My purpose here is not so much to make pronouncements on what counts as a legitimate strategy, but rather to locate the problem of interstitiality within the broad top of logics of transformation. The background context is the diagnosis and critique of capitalism and the framing of alternatives in terms of the “socialist compass”. The meta-thesis is that sustained movement towards social empowerment (and social emancipation more broadly) will not come simply as a by-product of unintended social change; it requires deliberate action (strategies).]** On the other hand, the majority of contemporary producer co-ops are relegated to interstitial *activities* because “for most participants they are no longer part of a broad strategy for building an alternative to capitalism and are certainly not part of an organized anti-system strategy” (8). Additionally, they are “mostly relatively small and local operations” and “often tend to evolve in the direction of conventional capitalist firms”. It seems that in assessing producer co-ops, the criteria for qualifying as an interstitial strategy of social transformation involves **scope** and *intention*: actors must understand their activity as an element of system-wide emancipatory transformation in order to “count”. **[My inclusion of scope as a condition is probably a mistake. Being relatively small and local does not undermine the status as a strategy, since this can still have the character of contributing to a deliberate project of social transformation.]** Or in other words, producer co-ops “may embody some progressive ideals, but they do not pose a threat to the system” (4) and thus fail to count as interstitial strategies. **[Also, I think, not posing a threat to the system is not a reasonable condition on my part for considering something part of a broad interstitial strategy, since being a threat depends upon a wide range of things other than one’s strategies.]** On the one hand Wright defends a broad range of interstitial strategies against common socialist skepticism, on the other hand he assesses many institutional candidates as ‘mere’ interstitial activities when they exhibit limits in terms of the scope or intentionality of their transformative projects. **[You have definitely identified a problem in my exposition here – I will need to modify this. Perhaps the way to say this is that a particular instance of interstitial activity**

can be part of an interstitial strategy without itself being an interstitial strategy. The “strategy” would be for a social movement to encourage and promote the formation of cooperatives; the individual cooperatives would be part of that strategy.]

Perhaps we could think about three dimensions on which to assess the potential of interstitial rivals to capitalist organizations: the extent of internal embodiment of democratic egalitarian principles, the extent to which actors understand their work as an element of an overall challenge to capitalism, and the potential scope (system-wide or sectoral) of their projects. Interstitial strategies need not score high on all three dimensions to contribute to radical emancipatory social transformation, although those that do score high on all three dimensions might have more potential for contributing to radical change.

6. Rodrigo Salgado

The first question refers to the distinction between activities-processes and strategies. An interstitial strategy implies the deliberate development of interstitial activities for the purpose of fundamental transformation of the system. So there is an intentional aspect in the strategies. **[This is inherent in the very idea of “strategy” regardless of content: a strategy is a way of accomplishing something that takes into account the actions of others. Activities, of course, still embody intentionality of actors, but they do not fit into any agenda of transformations.]** It means that the difference between activities and strategies is that the later have a conscious an ideological aspect that the activities doesn't necessary have? Thinking in that way the difference between activities and strategies is that the strategies implies a group of activities under conscious an ideological objectives.

Second, in the chapter you make a distinction between interstitial and symbiotic strategies. You say that they “differ primarily in terms of their relationship to the state: Both envision a trajectory of change that progressively enlarges the social spaces of social empowerment, but interstitial strategies largely by-pass the state in pursuing this objective while symbiotic strategies try to systematically use the state to advance the process of emancipatory social empowerment.” So I assume that there is an idea of “ignore the state” that involves interstitial strategies. You also recognize some social actors or groups that make interstitial activities: producer and consumer coops, battered women's shelters, workers factory councils, intentional communities and communes, community-based social economy services, civic environmental councils, community-controlled land trusts, cross-border equal-exchange trade organizations, and many other things. But some of these actors have indeed relations with the state (demanding some kind of legislation or demanding material support or some kind of taxes protection or accessible credits). In fact there is a specific legislation and state administrations that regulates the coop activities (National Institute of Social Economy in Argentina for example). So, you can say that the coops make symbiotic activities? Is it possible to consider an interstitial strategy with some symbiotic activities or vice versa? What is the specific dimension or element in the relation with the state that makes these strategies distinguishably? **[I do think that interstitial and symbiotic strategies often**

complement each other, and indeed there may be times that a symbiotic transformation becomes a necessary conditions for further advances in interstitial strategies. An example would be a situation in which an obstacle to the expansion of coops might be the lack of adequate credit markets for this kind of firm, or the lack of appropriate forms of bankruptcy rules for cooperatives. An interstitial strategy the focused on building cooperatives could then struggle for changes in these elements of the broader institutional setting by trying to get new legislation passed. Those struggles would presumably have a symbiotic character – expanding social power in ways that solve practical problems in the functioning of the system – but what they accomplish is opening up greater spaces for interstitial strategies.

7. Ruth Sautu

I would like to comment that in Argentina (just say all) small farm or vegetable grower cooperatives have failed. They could do not do away with middle men and large corporation's pressures. In addition internal bureaucratization either (a) created a new type of capitalist firm; b) destroy the cooperative. How those two factors (corrupt leadership & bureaucratization) may be counteracted? **[I don't have any broad solutions to the problem of how to sustain democratic-egalitarian forms within cooperatives since this depends on so many contextual factors. One general issue is the extent to which there are strong social movements that support cooperatives and can help solve some of these issues of middlemen and dependency on capitalist corporations. Some degree of internal bureaucratization is probably inevitable – and maybe even desirable (at least if it means that a range of administrative tasks become routinized and more efficiently carried out) – but to avoid this probably requires more than energy and commitment; it probably also requires training around the issues of collective organization, participation and democracy, conflict resolution, and so on. One of the problems in many cooperatives is the belief that there is no special training needed for these kinds of organizations to work well. So, in addition to social movements one thing that is needed is schools for cooperatives and related support services.]**

8. Julian Rebon

I consider this chapter very interesting. I find very important the analysis of different levels of autonomy in capitalist system. You conceptualize like “interstitial” these freedom degrees of an actor from the dominant logic which organizes the system. I prefer use the term “autonomización” (degrees of autonomy) because emphasizes the process of rupture with a heteronomy. Many of these processes do not just happen because the system has cracks, but rather supposes fights with the heteronomy. The interstitial process sometimes happens in weak spaces of the system and sometimes it builds, in delivered or not delivered forms, new interstitial spaces. **[I very much agree with this – that it is often the case that interstitial strategies involve interstitial struggles. In these terms I think it might be worth distinguishing interstitial struggles with actors and institutional configurations in civil society with interstitial struggles directly**

involving the state. Both are of course relevant. When social movements are interested (for example) in creating battered women's shelters they may have to fight against culturally repressive norms and standards and hostility of communities, as well as zoning rules which may constrain their ability to build these institutions. When Gramsci talks about the war of position in civil society, I think some of this involves fighting associational actors constituted within civil society not simply fighting against the state's restrictions on activities in civil society or fighting against capital's penetration of civil society.]

I find very useful the difference between operate within capitalist firms and rivals with capitalist organization. Could we extend this distinction to other social space or campus? For example, I find very interested use in order to understand interstitial process within and rival to the capitalist state. For example, in the first sense some people develop autonomous activities within state's institution (Universities for example). In other direction, we find the dual power situation (nowadays the zapatist autonomous territories in Chiapas are a good example). Other utilities could be analyses repertoires of confrontation that violate the laws. We find direct action that just violation the law and others forms that build alternatives norms. **[There are also very interesting case studies of informal "courts" and parallel justice systems in urban slums. Boaventura Santos has written a lot about this. These informal parallel legal systems may not, of course, be very emancipatory – they may shade into mafia-type coercion. What goes under the heading "popular justice" may not be very just.]**

I agree with your distinction between "interstitial activities" and "interstitial strategies" but I find a problem. What is the indicator or proxy variable for categorizing a collective action with this terms? Some process (make a coop for example) can be a deliberated strategy of social change for some participating but for other just a profit activity. In this case, when would be a "strategy" and when just an "activity"? **[I don't think that there needs to be a clear and rigid distinction here. From the point of view of participants, there will often be considerable heterogeneity. One can also talk about the strategic use of an interstitial activity: a social movement for the social economy, for example, has a strategic vision for enlarging and deepening the social economy and may therefore contact various groups engaged in interstitial activities and provide them with services, information, maybe resources, and so on in the effort to harness such activities to a broader strategic logic of interstitial transformation. My general claim here is that in order for interstitial activities to effectively contribute to social emancipation and system transformation, they have to be joined into a strategy. Or perhaps, a little more cautiously: to the extent that such activities are linked into a strategy, they are more likely to have transformative effects.]**

9. Tod Van Gunten

What kinds of welfare increases can we reasonably expect to follow from interstitial strategies of transformation? I'm looking at the upward-sloping lines in figures 1 and 2 and thinking about worker cooperatives in particular. Do we expect cooperatives to actually improve *wages* under generally capitalist conditions, that is, while coops have to

compete with capitalist firms? This seems to be highly optimistic, even under the best of circumstances (i.e. supposing for example there are also real utopian mechanisms for financing cooperatives). **[Why is this especially optimistic? If the forces of production are roughly the same in a cooperative and in a capitalist firm – which they would be if credit markets were organized properly for cooperatives), and coops controlled the surplus which they produced, why wouldn't you expect wages to be higher – or (alternatively) work intensity to be lower? Supervision costs would be lower and they wouldn't have to pay dividends to absentee owners.]** I would be interested in knowing what the historical record shows on wage levels in cooperative enterprises. **[Where technology differences don't figure in the comparisons it is my understanding the wages are higher in coops. Compare Union Cab and Madison Taxi in Madison, for example.]** It seems like the main improvement that cooperatives bring is in terms of worker autonomy, and possibly more meaningful attachment to work and better/more flexible conditions in terms of hours worked, etc. (Although the “endless meeting” problem might mitigate the degree to which workers are actually find work in coops more meaningful). But in a generally capitalist context (in which workers presumably have to interact substantially with the capitalist system in order to secure certain goods and services), if wages don't rise substantially, are those upward sloping lines really justified?

A second question concerns the distribution of the benefits of interstitial strategies, whatever those benefits might be. Presumably, in a generally capitalist context, the coexistence of worker cooperatives and capitalist enterprises would lead to divergence of working conditions and possibly livelihoods between workers. Would these processes of stratification lead to barriers to further transformation of either evolutionary or revolutionary kind? In particular, if wages are actually *higher* in the capitalist sector, which seems not implausible, workers would have considerable incentives to “defect” to jobs in non-interstitial enterprises. **[I agree with you that if cooperatives generate lower standards of living even when they have full access to appropriate levels of financing that they would not be attractive to many workers. But if credit market imperfections were really eliminated, then there should be a very wide range of settings in which cooperative production was as efficient as capitalist production. Why do you feel this would not be the case?]** In the discussion of ruptural strategies, an important premise (which I tend to agree with) is that ideological commitment is “not enough” to guarantee continued devotion to the cause – workers have to see material benefits or believe that they are soon forthcoming in order to remain committed. Shouldn't the same premise be applied to workers in cooperative enterprises? What limits do these sorts of incentives pose to ongoing transformation via interstitial strategies? **[The ideological commitment problem might not be as big an issue for cooperatives – assuming that they had access to credit – even if they offered lower wages, because they would not have the downward sloping transition trough with uncertain prospects problem. It is more likely that workers might accept lower wages even in the long run in exchange for flexibility, autonomy, high job security, more interesting work, etc. whereas they might not accept a trajectory of declining wages with uncertain prospects. Ideology might have a tougher job in the ruptural context than in the interstitial context.]**

10. SungIk Cho

Interstitial transformation seems to imply that social transformation toward the egalitarian empowerment takes place through by-passing the state. What is ambiguous here is the process of interstitial transformation in relation to the state itself. Taking labor unions as an example for interstitial transformation, we can see labor unions not merely a socialized economic entity within firms but also an entity embodied through political struggles and within greater political institutional contexts. Also, in case of social economy, the autonomy and expansion of social economy organizations rely upon the state's financial or administrative provisions, although partially. **[To the extent that the social economy is actively subsidized by the state, then it would not constitute a pure interstitial strategy. In the Quebec case the social economy is clearly in part symbiotic – i.e. it solves system-problems in an effective manner (the provision of elder care and childcare at an affordable cost). It remains partially interstitial, however, insofar as it “builds the new society in the shell of the old” and the state does not itself directly organize the activities.]** I think that the reason why interstitial activities are seen as by-passing the state can be explained on the condition that such interstitial activities serve the reproduction of capitalism; that is, interstitial transformation functional to capitalism without critically challenging existing power relations. Even the comprehensive institutionalization of labor unions, developed into corporatism in the national level, has been encapsulated into the late mode of capitalism, so called, organized capitalism. **[As you will see in the next chapter, corporatism is the paradigmatic example of symbiotic transformations. Labor unions as organization have at different times and places engaged in interstitial and in symbiotic strategies.]** By contrast, it is hardly conceivable to see any alternative interstitial strategies transforming extant economic system without being involved in or having conflicts with the state. In this sense, the interstitial transformation can be understood more clearly as two different aspects of functional interstitial strategies and transformative interstitial strategies in their relationship to the state. **[This is an interesting proposal: you are saying that if an interstitial strategy does not confront the state it can only end u being a functional interstitial strategy; in order to be transformative it must confront the state. I am not sure that this is necessarily the case. I think a transformative interstitial strategy probably does need to have the spaces in which it operates validated by the state – or at least not closed off by the state. This means that there may inevitably be struggles over maintaining those spaces.]**

Another issue I want to raise is the distinction between revolutionary interstitial strategies and evolutionary strategies. It seems to me unclear in understanding interstitial transformation. Of the most importance is the way in which evolutionary interstitial strategies eventually erodes and transform existing structural conditions without entailing ruptural changes. Although it is conceivable to see such incremental changes transform existing capitalist systems, the distinction between changes in structural conditions and changes in scope and depth does not explicate such interstitial transformation. Compared to the evolutionary strategy, I think revolutionary strategies are more likely a mixed

social transformation combining interstitial strategies and ruptural strategies, as it is recognized. Thus, the logic of the evolutionary interstitial strategy more represents the nature of interstitial transformation, whereas the revolutionary strategy of interstitial transformation combines a hybrid strategy. **[My general approach to this issue is agnostic: I do not know what the limits of erodability are of capitalist relations because we are so massively far from such limits. In the context of a hegemonic capitalist system in which the room to maneuver is so constricted, I find it hard to make a meaningful judgment about whether or not a tipping point of system-logic change might be possible in the long run given some combination of interstitial and symbiotic transformations, or whether in the end a ruptural break is needed. I also, of course, do not know whether a ruptural break – a *sustainable* ruptural break (as opposed to another valiant failure) – will be possible at some point in the future. As we have noted in earlier sessions, this is why the theory of intensification of crisis tendencies was so important in the revolutionary imagination since it pointed to increasing system vulnerability. The weaker idea of episodically serious crisis (but without a claim about intensification or a prediction about how prolonged any episode might be) adds credibility to ruptural ideas, but does not show that they have much chance of ever succeeding. In this context it seems to me that whatever degree of system-transformation may some day be possible, its prospects are enhanced by the cumulative effects of interstitial and symbiotic transformation.]**

11. Guillaume Neault

This chapter presents a second option to think about social transformation. Interstitial transformation is a distinctive approach to social transformation because it ‘largely bypasses the state’. The chapter identifies two types of interstitial strategies – interstitial transformations within capitalist firms and interstitial rivals to capitalist organization. From this observation, I would like to raise two questions: 1) would we consider potential spaces of ‘interstitiality’ within the state apparatus? 2) does the neo-liberal state play a role in creating interstices?

First, for example, it is quite likely that members of state institutions engage in interstitial activity by resisting against the power relations of the state (eg. state employees protesting against the war or university students fighting tuition fees increase). And, these interstitial activities can be seen as the formative element for the creation of interstitial strategies (eg. TAA). **[These are certainly instances of struggles within these institutions, but what I mean by an interstitial strategy of transformation is strategies that build new kinds of social relations or institutional designs that embody principles of social power. Now that also does happen within specific institutions of the state, not just within firms or in the society at large. A group of undergraduates at Wisconsin organized a course called “Intercultural Dialogues” which addresses problems of race and cultural diversity among students. They wanted this class to be taught by students and for it to combine academic-type discussions with much more experiential learning, including things like learning to dance Salsa and cook Laotian cuisine. They asked me to be the faculty sponsor for**

the course, which I have done. The rules of the university make this possible. The course is directed by them and constitutes a much more empowered form of educational practice than is normal within American universities. That is an instance of an interstitial transformation within the University. Struggles by the teaching assistant association against tuition increases is a good example of a struggle, but I am not sure if it is interstitial transformation.]

Second, the two types of interstitial strategies answer the following question: what is currently observable in terms of social transformation. I would like to ask: under what conditions is an interstitial strategy possible? In the case of the social economy, the curtailment of the welfare state opens the possibility for interstitial strategy. It seems to me that through the dismantling of some social or public policies put in place by the welfare state, the neo-liberal state creates more potential spaces for interstitial strategies. **[The dismantling on the welfare state and its services certainly creates the demand for new strategies, but it may not create the actual spaces. That may have other conditions.]**

I would agree with you that labour unions, producer co-ops, fair trade exchange, etc...largely by-pass the state, but the state sanctions the practices of each of these organizations. If the state didn't tolerate unions, it would be much harder for workers to bargain for better working conditions. My point is that 'largely by-pass' the state might be too strong of a claim. Also, I think that the social economy should be classified as a symbiotic transformation, as the state is engaged on a legal and financial level for the emancipatory transformation of society. In that sense, the social economy is *using* the state. **[Quebec is a special case in which the state has become heavily involved in deepening and expanding the social economy, but in most cases social economy projects and strategies are not subsidized by the state. Where the state becomes heavily involved then this can become a symbiotic process. This of course brings risks with it – the support by the state can become a dependency on the state and thus a vulnerability to the powers that control the state.]**

I enjoyed very much the following formula: 'the important idea is that what appear to be 'limits' are simply the effect of power of specific institutional arrangements, and interstitial strategies have the capacity to create alternative institutions that weaken those limits'. I think you deploy the formula to distinguish between revolutionary and evolutionary anarchism. With that in mind, let us say that an interstitial strategy reached some 'limits' (by the way, what do we mean by limits – innovation, economic, administrative) what will happen next? Is capitalism going to 'capture' the emancipatory meaning of the interstitial strategy? For example, I would argue that Willy street coop has reached 'limits' and while it is a democratic organization, it is also instrumental in the gentrification of the neighborhood. **[It is true in the case of something like the Willy Street Grocery Co-op that it does contribute to the gentrification of that part of town since the existence of a good quality organic grocer makes the area more attractive. I am not sure that this means that "capitalism" has "captured" the emancipatory meaning of the transformation. The emancipatory meaning could still be there, but capitalist interests have simply taken advantage of a market opportunity in the way that capitalists always try to do. Anything which makes a city more livable and attractive would count as something that real estate interests**

could “capture” in this sense. The question is whether this inherently negates the subversive quality of the institution. Penguin books makes money off of publishing *Capital*. It certainly has captured for capitalist purposes this book, but this doesn't mean that the book therefore ceases to contribute to potential transformative struggles.]

12. Santiago Rodriguez

I really enjoyed the chapter and the interstitial transformation is very interesting.

The anarchists and communists from the first part of twentieth century developed emancipatory institutions which included different dimensions in a whole contra-hegemony strategy. I would like to know, what is the relation between the interstitial transformations and education and culture dimensions in social empowerment project? **[I would say – off the top of my head – that interstitial strategies are linked to the educational and cultural dimensions of social empowerment in two ways: 1) education and culture themselves can constitute interstitial projects: popular/community education, street theater, poetry slams, etc. are all interstitial activities which can be part of an interstitial strategy; 2) other kinds of interstitial strategies/projects which are not primarily educational in the content – worker cooperatives, fair trade networks, wikipedia, open source programming, etc. – can serve as “demonstration projects” which can be used to educate people about possibilities.]**

How could be connected the different experiences of interstitial modifications of capitalism such as workers factories, cooperatives, communities councils, popular libraries and so on? **[I guess there are two senses of “connected” here. The first is ideological: how can we tie all of these diverse projects together ideologically so that people come to understand them as coherent elements in a broad strategy? This, I think, is an important task for social movements and political parties that see democratic egalitarianism as their core moral foundation. These movements need to articulate the unifying ideas across this range of practices. The second sense of connection is material: how can these projects actually work together to enhance each others possibilities. This involves trying to build linking institutions that substantively integrate these diverse sorts of projects. Mondragon in Spain created a range of institutions to link together diverse forms of cooperative activity. The *chantier de l'economie sociale* in Quebec to some extent seeks to provide services to the social economy and help increase interactions among its elements.]**

13. Pablo Dalle

What I liked most of this chapter is the idea of connecting the present possible strategic of emancipatory transformation with the interstitial activities on anarchists' traditions. I also think I understood the main thesis of your Real Utopia project: it is possible to

transform the structures and mechanisms of social reproduction of capitalism by incremental modifications. This strategy represents in fact a challenge to exploitation and domination and their corollaries classes' inequalities and privileges, and thus implicates struggles. I will mark two points I would like to discuss.

I think it is necessary to keep the class analysis in the interstitial strategy. By this way the trajectory of social empowerment in the gaps and contradictions of both civil society and state could represent "victories and defeats" for concrete social classes (I am referring to people –micro-). The new institutions represent a challenge to capitalism if they express new forms of social relations...if they could eliminate forms of exploitation and domination. In my view this is in the core of the Real Utopia Project, and the possibility condition for enflourishing social and individual lives. **[I agree with your central idea here – that what is needed for cumulative systemic transformation through metamorphosis is not just interstitial strategies, but interstitial strategies that bear on class relations, that erode power configurations anchored in class. Thus we need a class analysis of interstitial strategy. I don't think this implies a significant restriction on what sorts of interstitial strategies should be supported. Interstitial strategies around domestic violence shelters, for example, deal directly with one of the dimensions of gender-based power and domination and certainly would form part of a wide-ranging interstitial strategy for new institutions. The point of a class analysis would not to say that this is less important than some more directly class based strategy, but rather to connect a feminist interstitial project to class concerns: the need for affordable housing not linked to personal wealth and the need for communities to provide supportive environments for reciprocity and caring shielded from the competitiveness of capitalist markets. Domestic violence shelters are interstitial projects with respect to the housing and community dimensions of class relations (capitalism), and not just gender relations.]**

The other comment refers to the material conditions of interstitial transformation within capitalism. Taking into account the two graphs of the interstitial transformation trajectories, I differ in one point. It is not evident that interstitial changes improve the quality of life. But the problem here is what do we understand by conditions of life? I agree with that idea only if we keep a class analysis. The growing of spaces beyond capitalist relations will probably improve life conditions for those who are exploited in capitalism. But many experiences oriented to an emancipatory project: workers factories, social economy, cooperatives, and artists' communities do not have many resources and they have to endure economic limitations. In one point they could not offer better standard of living than capitalist institution. In my opinion that is a limitation for the symbiotic strategy. What is your opinion about this? **[Interstitial strategies are sometimes a response to crisis and operate under extremely adverse conditions – without credit, without resources, etc. Under these conditions they may in a temporary way offer an improvement in conditions of life for people given the crisis environment, but once the capitalist crisis subsides there will be many exit options for some people, especially people with lots of skills. One of the problems with factory takeovers under crisis conditions, for example, is that the most sophisticated and managerially adept leaders of a takeover – the people with the social and organizational skills to make the coop work – are likely to have the most attractive**

exit options once the crisis is over, and the temptation to jump ship may be irresistible. The result is that the coop is left with a dearth of human capital (not to mention other forms of capital). This is unquestionably a problem and is one of the reasons why it is probably necessary politically to struggle for state support in one form or another, as in Quebec. However, this can also be a trap because of the dependency it creates and because of the transformation of incentives that state subsidies can create. In South Africa I was told of an extremely successful community house-building cooperative run by women in the townships that mobilize community resources for collective construction projects which results in a large number of housing cooperatives being built. Once they got state subsidies, however, then people were attracted to the process because of the ways in which it gave access to external resources and the project became plagued by rent-seeking and various forms of corruption. People became much less willing to provide unpaid volunteer labor in the spirit of extended gift-exchange reciprocities, and eventually the project collapsed. So this is a difficult issue. And of course: **this is precisely why we need explorations of real utopian designs!**]

14. Charity Schmidt

My interrogation will be short this time... it's a busy week! I think my fundamental critique of theories of interstitial transformation is that they underestimate the adaptability of capitalism, and its capacity to absorb initiatives for genuine change (an example being fair-trade or organic goods). EOW essentially agrees, I believe, since he says that such initiatives by themselves cannot "erode the basic structural power of capital." Yet, I find problematic the statement that "there is nothing inherent in the structures of capitalism as such which prevents interstitial strategies from having these transformative effects, and thus an interstitial trajectory towards social emancipation is possible within a world dominated by capitalism." If interstitial change is indeed an underestimation of capitalism, as I believe, what challenge does this misinterpretation pose for proponents of interstitial transformation? Can it lead interstitial actors astray from necessary and deep challenges to capitalism? (p. 13) **[I wish I could really answer this kind of question. In think the problem is this: if we had good confidence in what counts as a "necessary and deep challenges to capitalism" then we could make a clear statement about which activities "leads us astray" and which activities really contribute to transformation. We may be able to say something about which activities impact immediately on the lives of people – including the in-process impacts on the participants in the activities. And maybe we can say something about activities which, if they continue and spread, contradict the dominant, hegemonic logics of the system. But this falls quite short of being able to make strong claims about which activities challenge capitalism "deeply" and which do not. The fact is, that out of rage and frustration and anxiety, there is an awful lot of posturing in radical social movements and political parties in which people proclaim certainty about revolutionary paths and combative stances, but the passion of these assertions does not show that these strategies in fact constitute deep challenges. Passionate challenge and combative challenge need not be "deep" challenge if they have no**

prospects for having deep effects. I go on too long here. Interstitial strategies that build alternative institutions and expand the possibilities for partial counter-system ways of life at least demonstrate that we don't have to live according to the dominant values and power relations, even if by themselves this expansion of spaces does not threaten the system.]

Additionally, interstitial change underestimates the importance of the state as the collective entity of society and therefore misses its existence as a potential space for initiating change in social relations and institutions. Does any initiative that so thoroughly bypasses the state actually provide the possibilities for more than partial change? Does this too have the potential, when not complimented by symbiotic or ruptural transformations, to lead promoters of social change on a less effective path? **[I too believe that a pure interstitial strategy is likely to be self-limiting. Some articulation of symbiotic and interstitial strategies seems essential.]**

The concept of interstitial change makes more sense to me in light of Gramsci's ideas on 'building counter-hegemony' in the period before rupture. This concept renders the role of such change a necessary phase, rather than a strategy in itself. My concern with this, however, is that, generally speaking, engagement in social change initiatives is so often a luxury - that is it is more feasible for intellectuals or middle-class activists, etc, rather than working class folks. **[It may be that "middle class" people have the time and resources to engage in these activities, but they may actually be vastly more important for the lives of working class and poor people, important in the sense of making a practical difference. Certainly in poor countries interstitial activity/strategy has been fiercely engaged in by workers and the poor in some times and places.]** If we accept that, and also follow Gramsci's idea that the real 'truth' comes from the common sense of the working class (or dominated), how can we be certain that interstitial changes are built upon or at least incorporating this ultimate 'truth' and that interstitial changes will eventually take a form that is not only beneficial for the masses, but reflects their experiences and their 'common sense' view of the world? **[The relationship between intellectuals and the working class, or the "middle class" and the working class within all strategies of emancipatory transformation is important and interesting to think about. I don't think this is a special problem for interstitial strategies; it applies to any strategy: the people with time and energy to take on leadership roles in forging strategies are often (though by no means invariably) educated. In my own class framework they occupy *contradictory class locations* and thus are simultaneously dominated and dominating. They thus in a sense do participate in the common sense of the working class – the dominated – because they to suffer from alienation and domination by ruling class centers of power. But they also share in some of the fruits of the hegemonic system of power relations. Thus the contradictory location problem. I see no equilibrium solution here, no institutional design within the process of transformation which solves this problem – the problem of intellectual leadership of social transformation strategies. The best that can be done is to push continually for dialogic, democratic egalitarian forms which impose popular-democratic pressures on leaders and open up the possibility of the agendas of interstitial strategies (and any other strategy of emancipation) being shaped by**

working class and popular “good sense” and not just the mediated forms of that good sense from intellectuals.

15. Hanif Nu'Man

As it relates to interstitial activities, the characterization that somehow any form of “fostering new forms of social relations” is connected to the idea of anarchy is quite troubling. On page 3 you lay out certain types of interstitial activities, and qualify them by stating that some are linked to systematic theories of social transformation while others are pragmatic responses to the exigencies of social problem solving. Without any way of adequately determining the motives for all activity engaged in to solve a social problem (other than, in fact, solving a problem), the suggestion that things done without significant state involvement is equivalent to or, as you say “so closely linked to the anarchist tradition” is counterproductive, and in my view misleading. Is interstitial transformation a synonym for anarchy? If not, then why connect these concepts except for the exclusion of the state, especially when social problem solving rarely starts with the state? How can agents for social change feel confident that creating effective alternatives (without the state’s involvement) which address social issues will not come with the label of anarchist? Is it not possible to operate within the confines of the law, but without the state’s help, and be effective? What part of that possibility is anarchist tradition? **[When I use the term “anarchist tradition” I mean this in the positive sense of a tradition of political thought on the left which challenges forms of domination and oppression, but rejects the state as the institution for remediation. The word “anarchy” has come to mean something like “chaotic disorder”, sometimes even “chaotic destructive disorder infused with violence.” That is not the meaning within the political tradition called “anarchism”. Now, you may be right that identify interstitial strategies for social emancipation with anarchism may be unavoidably misleading, and thus it is a bad idea to make this connection so strongly. I can certainly clarify this in the text. I am not sure, however, what other term to use to identify the political/philosophical tradition for this logic of emancipatory transformation.]**

16. Eduardo Cavieres

I found this chapter very enlightening and clear, and its connection to the ruptural transformation made much more sense to me in this chapter. In general, my main trouble right now is in the relation between these interstitial strategies and its connection to policies. Policies are in general terms, visible means through which states push forwards their agendas. In some sense, I would also think that through policies people connect with states.

Trying to use a simplistic scheme to express my doubts I would say that there are different ways to react in front of a policy. The first one could be to reject and go against

the policy which would be very ineffective because it would probably be suppressed by the state force. A second form would be to form “part” of the process of formation of policies and reach a level of consensus which I understand is a kind of symbiotic strategy. A third one is to say we have nothing to do with the policy as long as it doesn’t prohibit us from doing what we what to do, which could be a form of interstitial strategy. A fourth way of reacting would be for an opposing group to not challenge the policy, but to say let’s use it for are own benefit giving it meanings and purposes that are not original to the policy. For example, schools that operate according to state regulations but use funding to push an agenda that is not part of the intended goals pursued by the government. This is not a result of a consensus, the opposing group is acting within the limits placed by the government but at the same time is trying to move away from its influence.

My sense is that this kind of strategy is becoming kind of common. I personally see this almost in the very limits between the interstitial and the symbiotic strategy. A sort of combination between both. I may not be reading this correctly. But I am just left wondering, if you can move at the interstitial level if you are using the benefits that policies are providing you, or if in that case you are using a symbiotic strategy. **[An interstitial strategy is one that does not put demands on the state to do something, but rather tries to organize social actors directly to engage in some transformative practice. This does not mean, however, that it doesn’t take advantage of opportunities created by state policies, laws, rules, or the like. Thus, if the governance structures of schools make it possible for teachers to engage in some sort of transformative strategy on their own this could count as an interstitial strategy in the sense. This is a case where there is autonomy to act in “spaces” within the educational system. Suppose that the education system was much more centralized and prescriptive, with little room for this kind of action – like the school system in France. This would imply that there was less opportunity for interstitial transformations within the public school system there. This might mean that struggles directed at the state would be needed to open up such spaces. (But note, for terminological clarity: not all demands made on the state or struggles for changes in state policy would be *symbiotic* strategies. A symbiotic strategy is one that involves a “positive compromise” – a policy which simultaneously enhances social power and solves some kind of system problem. Some policies are simply concessions won through struggle which may be desirable, but don’t have this particular character.)]**

17. RODOLFO ELBERT

1. The only (or at least first, if we take into account socialism in the XXth century) example of world-wide social transformation from one social system to another is the transition from feudalism to capitalism. In the first two pages Wright points out that artisans were the **bearers** of interstitial transformation of the system. **[The word “bearer” makes this sound very Althusserian: it is not that artisans were active agents who engaged in these practices; rather the practices were set in motion and they were the “bearers” of these practices. I personally don’t like this rhetoric.]**

This might be true, however he does not discuss the role of the French Revolution, in which those actors that were socially and economically empowered by the interstitial transformation, actually took in their hands the task of governing society. So, besides giving an example of interstitial transformation, our reflection about the first systemic transition can teach us also about the relationship between interstitial and revolutionary transformation. Is it that at some point an interstitial strategy (or social process) leads to revolution? (some of this is addressed in the Paving the route to rupture section)

[Feudalism was already dead by the time of the French Revolution, as it was by the time of the English revolution 150 years earlier. The problem in those cases was that the superstructures remained rigid, linked to the vestiges of the feudal ruling classes. These were political revolutions that transformed the superstructure and unfettered the development of the new social structure. But feudal power had already been deeply undermined. So, the parallel process of socialism would be a strategy within capitalism that eroded capitalist autonomy and power within capitalism through the construction of alternative relations. This was Proudhon's strategy, more or less. Marx felt that the contradiction of forces and relations of production would accomplish this *without strategy*: the falling rate of profit would erode capitalist power and render it moribund.]

2. The chapter relates the interstitial strategy to the anarchist tradition. While this tradition was historically important in the labour movement, I don't think it is still the case. In my opinion, the contemporary version of the anarchist influence might be found in autonomism (for the people in the class, and following Edo's real utopia, you can see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autonomism>, or in es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autonomismo). So, I would like to discuss the relationship of autonomism to the Real Utopias project.

[For all practical purposes I think "autonomism" is very close to anticapitalist anarchism. Anarchism is often used as a general term for this political and philosophical tradition stretching back to Proudhon. The term "autonomism" has been most commonly used for political tendencies or groups in Southern Europe, and it seems to me that it pretty much peaked some time in the 1970s or early 1980s, whereas anarchism has a much broader reference both in earlier periods and in the present.]

18. Roxana Telechea

I send you my doubts

A hierarchy of claims seems to me that it is absent. Are all the types of intermediate activity equal? **[I am not sure what you mean by "intermediate activity"]** I tend to think that individual resistance produces less transformation than an union. Do you think any hierarchy is necessary? Because in an union more wills go in search of the same goals. The sum of wills with the same goals and organized actions they can produce a bigger change. **[The idea of interstitial strategy does not in any way imply strategies of separate individuals rather than associations. I think the idea of interstitial strategy may involve a different approach to linking individual action and collective**

action, but the strategy still is anchored in collectivities – unions, associations, community groups, social movements. And these associations may themselves have some degree of hierarchy, of course.]

This is related with my second doubt. Why we can't think about a political party that agglutinates these demands and goals?. How can the actors see that that they are doing is part of a strategy for broad social change?. How can they find out activities of other actors?

[This is exactly the role – or one role – that parties play. They also are in a critical position to link interstitial strategies – strategies that take place in civil society especially, but also in the “interstices” of other institutions – to symbiotic strategies involving negotiation and compromises with organs of dominant power.]
