Call for papers for an *ephemera* special issue on:

Rethinking prefiguration: Praxis beyond protest

Issue editors: Matthew Wilson and Thomas Swann

It was going to be, we were optimistically told, the anarchist century (Grubacic and Graeber, 2004; Kuhn, 2021). And not just anarchist, but a new anarchism which increasingly looked to prefigurative praxis as its defining principle; the anti-capitalist radicals of the 21st century were going to be building tomorrow today (Raekstad and Gradin, 2019). This surge in prefiguratively-informed social movements – with prefiguration understood in a substantive form (Gordon, 2018), linked inextricably with the rejection of domination, exploitation and inequality – coalesced with, influenced, and helped provide much needed impetus for the emerging academic discourses of alternative organising (Phillips and Jeanes, 2018). More often than not, academic accounts of any such alternative organising will make at least a passing mention to Occupy, the Zapatistas, the movement of movements. And journals like this one have actively engaged with the possibilities opening up – for theory and praxis – by the encounters between these radical movements, anarchists, critical organisation scholars, and, of course, existing and emerging spaces of prefiguration (Stoborod and Swann, 2014). However, over the last ten years we have also witnessed a significant shift in the political landscape,

an 'electoral turn' (Gerbaudo, 2017) back to more conventional forms of party-politics, and a noticeable decline in prefigurative and anarchistic social movements.

Having placed so much importance on the existence of these movements, we believe it is vital that critical organisation scholars engage directly with this changing landscape, and use this as an opportunity to critically reassess the narrative of alternative organising and prefiguration that has come to form something of a common sense within a number of critical disciplines. If organisation can be understood as politics made durable (Parker et al., 2017), what does the electoral turn and related shifts in radical practice mean for the durability of prefigurative politics in what was supposed to be the anarchist century?

While some (de Nadal, 2021; Husted et al., forthcoming) are looking at this process in terms of (re)creating the political party – from the Indignados to Podemos, the squares movement in Greece to Syriza, Occupy to Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn – we want to explore the currently overlooked relationships between the prefigurative, often anarchistic, social movements of the last two decades with other forms of alternative organising.

The models of direct democracy and consensus-decision making used by these movements might have been used to help shake up a cooperative movement well known for its democratic deficit – but was the cooperative movement transformed as a result? Activists may have left Occupy camps and joined or started ethical businesses – but what real social change have these ethical businesses brought about? And if these things happened in the short-term, what have the medium to long-term results been, now that we enter the second decade since the Indignados, Occupy and related movements occurred? Were the values and tactics articulated through radical activist spaces and practices welcomed and applied in more established projects that have to engage in the often-compromising realities of everyday life? Have people come to question or even reject some of these values and tactics, or have they held onto them as best as possible? Has the prefigurative building of a new world continued in smaller, more localised projects which may have been ignored?

Whilst examples of research exist which explore these questions (Galán and Fersch, 2021) we feel we need to address them more explicitly, with a view to understanding the broader political terrain of radical social movements and prefigurative praxis:

- Are new common senses emerging which maintain some of the core principles and attributes articulated by Occupy, but which question and even reject others?

- How are issues of compromise and mission-drift being dealt with by activists in 'the real world', outside of the temporary bubbles of protest camps?

- Are new conversations, scenes, sub-cultures emerging, out of these social movements and into other organisational forms, such as community or municipal projects, cooperative networks or new businesses?

- If this is happening, is it explicit and intentional, or more subtle – and is it contested within existing groups and scenes?

- What scholarship and research (academic and independent) is helping us reflect on this changing landscape of radical politics?

- Are existing frameworks like anarchism, Marxism, feminism and anti-/post-colonialism aiding us in understanding these recent changes?

- Do more recent theorisations and practical agendas, such as intersectionality or queer politics, or fields often overlooked, like action science and systems theory, offer something over and above these more traditional radical political approaches?

- How is this scholarship having an impact on the praxis of radical politics?

As such, we invite theoretical, empirical, practical and personal reflections on the process(es) – political, normative, material, tactical,

and emotional – of moving away from the spectacular protests of Occupy, climate camps, etc., and into more durable and grounded forms of *prefigurative* organising, such as cooperatives, community projects, and ethical businesses. We also welcome reflections on when and why such shifts have *not* taken place – why people have refused to engage in cooperatives, for example, or when they have been attempted and abandoned.

Contributions might consider, but are not restricted to:

- Activists in transition – the daily lives of activists a decade since the Arab Spring, the Indignados and Occupy, fifteen years since the first Climate Camp and almost a quarter of a century since the height of the alter-globalisation movement.

- Radicals in the mainstream – reflections on working within/alongside more conventional, but still alternative, organisations, such as parts of the cooperative movement and emerging articulations of a new municipalism.

- What does it mean to be radical, mainstream, conventional, alternative, and are such terms useful/necessary for creating difference in organising?

- Reflections on compromise – have radicals working within/alongside more mainstream organisations seen success, on what grounds is that success judged, and what have they given up to achieve this success?

- The durability of ideas – how have ideas and practices at the core of social movements between the 1990s and 2000s, such as leaderlessness, consensus decision making, and diversity of tactics, endured?

Contributions

All contributions should be submitted to the issue editors: Matthew Wilson (Matthew.Wilson@nottingham.ac.uk) and Thomas Swann (T.Swann@lboro.ac.uk). *ephemera* encourages contributions in a variety of formats including articles, notes, interviews, book reviews, photo essays and other experimental modes of representation. Information about some of these formats and *ephemera*'s submission guidelines can be found at: www.ephemerajournal.org/how-submit. For our formatting rules, please see the 'Abc of formatting' guide. For further information, please contact one of the special issue editors.

Deadline for submissions: 31 January 2022

All contributions to the special issue should be submitted via email to the issue editors: Matthew Wilson (Matthew.Wilson@nottingham.ac.uk) and Thomas Swann (T.Swann@lboro.ac.uk).

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