

Quest(ion)s of Anarchist Power:  
Rethinking Power-To, Power-Over, and Power-With in the Radical Democratic  
Praxis of Consensus Decision-Making

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## Abstract

In this dissertation I investigate the theory and practice of “power” in social movement organizations that use consensus decision-making, a form of deliberation that espouses radically democratic and anarchist political ideals. Over the past several decades consensus decision-making has grown popular in anarchist-inspired North American social movements. From the environmental direct action alliances of the 1970s to the recent Occupy Wall Street movements of 2011-2012, the consensus process has often been idolized as *the* most radically democratic and anarchist method of decision-making, considered as a way to remove or eradicate “power” from group deliberation. Contrary to this popular discourse, I will argue that we can think more usefully about consensus decision-making as a specific tool *of power* rather than a general ideal *against power*, but only if we understand power more carefully as an essentially neutral concept of collective interaction which can never be removed from any human social relations.

In today’s North American anarchist and radical democratic discourses the meaning of “power” is commonly divided into three separate concepts: power-to, power-over, and power-with. These three concepts are treated as distinct and opposed phenomena, based on a dichotomous theoretical opposition between the freedom of individual agency and the constraint of social structure. My contention is that power-to, power-over, and power-with should actually be understood as interrelated concepts concerning the dynamics of human collective action systems. Thinking of power as a concept that describes the dynamics of collective action systems, I ask a double question: What can the theory of power teach us about consensus decision-making? And, how can we study consensus decision-making as a way to elucidate the

theory of power? Addressing how this double question can help to build a more careful analysis of power in consensus decision-making, I aim ultimately to contribute to the social theory of power as well as to the praxis of anarchist and radical democratic organization.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Figures.....	viii
<b>0) Introductions .....</b>	<b>1</b>
(0.1) Praxis: For the Anarchist Quest(ion) of Power .....	2
(0.2) Practice: Anarchist Discourses of Power and the Consensus Decision-Making Process .....	3
(0.3) Theory: Building a Better Anarchist Concept of Power .....	9
(0.4) Contents: Chapter Overviews .....	16
(0.5) Praxis: For the Anarchist Toolbox of Power .....	19
 <b>Chapter 1) <i>Presenting Consensus Decision-Making as a Tool of Anarchist</i></b>	
<b>Radical Democratic Dual Power .....</b>	<b>23</b>
(1.1) A Rough Guide to the Consensus Decision-Making Process .....	26
(1.2) The Spirit of Consensus Decision-Making: Democracy in the New Social Movements .....	32
(1.2.1) Participatory Democracy .....	34
(1.2.2) Radical Democracy .....	41
(1.2.3) Anarchist Democracy .....	51
(1.3) Anarchist Dual Power Praxis: Radical Democracy and Direct Action .....	59
(1.3.1) Prefigurative Politics (the Left Hand of Dual Power) .....	60
(1.3.2) Contentious Politics (the Right Hand of Dual Power) .....	66
(1.3.3) Radical Democracy and Direct Action (Both Hands Now) .....	70
(1.4) Empowering Anarchist Radical Democratic Dual Power .....	84

<b>Chapter 2) <i>Surveying Anarchist Power Theory</i></b> .....	98
(2.1) The Theory of Power and the Power of Theory .....	101
(2.2) The Anarchist Project and the Agency Perspective on Power .....	107
(2.2.1) The Agency Perspective: the Origin of Power-To .....	110
(2.2.2) The Agency Perspective: the Birth of Power-Over .....	114
(2.2.3) The Anarchist Ethics of Power: Power-To Versus Power-Over .....	122
(2.2.4) The Anarchist Politics of Power: Power-With Versus Power-Over .....	131
(2.3) The Power Theory Duel: the Agency Perspective and the Structure Perspective .....	141
(2.3.1) Applying the Agency Perspective: Privilege and Position in Consensus Decision-Making .....	143
(2.3.2) Agency Versus Structure: Coercive Domination or Systemic Subjection .....	154
(2.3.3) Applying the Structure Perspective: Rules and Roles in Consensus Decision-Making .....	170
(2.4) The Possibility of a Conduct Perspective .....	176
<b>Chapter 3) <i>Constructing a Conduct Perspective to Diagram Power in Anarchist     Collective Action Systems</i></b> .....	190
(3.1) A Conduct Perspective on Power .....	193
(3.1.1) Power-With as Conduct-Ability .....	193
(3.1.2) Power-With as the Middle, Medium, and Milieu of Power Relations .....	199
(3.2) Diagrams for Mapping Power-To, Power-Over, and Power-With in Collective Action Systems .....	222
(3.2.1) Internal and External Relations of Collective Action Systems .....	223
(3.2.2) Consensus Decision-Making and the Power of Anarchist Collective Action .....	237
(3.3) Authoritarian Versus Anarchist Modes of Collective Action Conduct .....	247
(3.3.1) The Authoritarian Head-Body Collective Action System .....	248
(3.3.2) The Anarchist Body-Without-A-Head Collective Action System .....	257

(3.4) Consensus Decision-Making and Anarchist Dual Power .....	274
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#### **Chapter 4) *Analyzing Consensus Decision-Making as Tool of Anarchist Radical***

<b>Democratic Dual Power</b> .....	282
(4.1) The Uses and Abuses of Consensus Decision-Making .....	286
(4.1.1) The Power of Unity: Creating Emergent Solidarity .....	287
(4.1.2) The Power of Uniformity: Conserving Established Solidity .....	296
(4.2) Dual Power Radical Democracy, Revisited .....	308
(4.2.1) The Politics of Insurgent Democracy .....	309
(4.2.2) Anarchist Dual Power Praxis (Both Hands, Again) .....	318
(4.2.3) To Every Job a Tool .....	321
(4.2.4) To Every Power a Season .....	337
(4.3) Empowering Anarchist Radical Democratic Dual Power .....	351
<b>5) Conclusions</b> .....	358
(5.1) Praxis: For the Anarchist Toolbox of Power .....	358
(5.2) Praxis: For the Anarchist Quest(ion) of Power .....	360
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	363

## List of Figures

<i>Figure 1: Agency Perspective — External Inter-Actions of an Atomic Individual</i> .....	224
<i>Figure 2: Structure Perspective — Internal Inter-Actions of a Dividual Totality</i> .....	225
<i>Figure 3: Agency Perspective — Collective Action System Conducted by External Relations</i> .....	227
<i>Figure 4: Structure Perspective — Collective Action System Conducted by Internal Relations</i> .....	228
<i>Figure 5: Structured Agency — Interactive Power-To Conducting Collective Power-Over</i> .....	230
<i>Figure 6: Agentic Structures — Interactive Power-Over Conducting Collective Power-To</i> .....	231
<i>Figure 7: External Relations of Power-To — Instrumentally Contentious Collective Action</i> .....	245
<i>Figure 8: Internal Relations of Power-Over — Communally Prefigurative Collective Inter-action</i> .....	246
<i>Figure 9: The Authoritarian Head-Body Decision-Making Model</i> .....	250
<i>Figure 10: The Anarchist Body-Without-a-Head Decision-Making Model</i> .....	258

## 0) Introductions

This is an investigation of “power” in social movement organizations that use consensus decision-making, a radically democratic and anarchist method of decision-making that has grown popular over the past several decades in North America. The consensus process has been the focus of an anarchist conceptual tradition concerning “power” which I believe must be examined more closely and critically if we are to in fact be able to get the best out of the method. As Gene Sharp, the historian and theorist of nonviolent direct action, has stated: “if we wish to create a society in which people really shape their own lives, and oppression is impossible, then we need to explore alternative ways to meet the society’s basic need for means of wielding power. We also need to explore the origins of political power at a much more basic level.”<sup>1</sup> In this project, I will argue that we can think more usefully about consensus decision-making, as well as other forms of radical democratic anarchist praxis, if we rethink “power.”

In today’s North American anarchist and radical democratic discourses the meaning of “power” is commonly divided into three separate concepts: power-to, power-over, and power-with. These three concepts are treated as distinct and opposed phenomena, based on a dichotomous theoretical opposition between the freedom of individual agency and the constraint of social structure. My contention is that power-to, power-over, and power-with should actually be understood as interrelated concepts concerning the dynamics of human collective action systems. Thinking of power as a concept that describes the dynamics of collective action systems, I ask a double question: What can the theory of power teach us about consensus decision-making? And, how can we study consensus decision-making as a way to elucidate the

theory of power? Addressing how this double question can help to build a more careful analysis of power in consensus decision-making, I aim ultimately to contribute to the social theory of power as well as to the praxis of anarchist and radical democratic organization.

### **(0.1) Praxis: For the Anarchist Quest(ion) of Power**

This is a *praxis of quest(ion)ing power*. *Praxis* is a critical process of developing the link between thought-work and organizational-work. It is the combined activity of thinking about how to change the world so that we may work differently, and working to change the world so that we may think differently. I like to call praxis an act of *quest(ion)ing* because this tricky wording highlights the bond between asking *questions* to wage a *quest*, and waging a *quest* that poses *questions*. The quest is a practical activity and the question is a theoretical activity: works and thoughts. Bringing them together is a praxis activity: working thoughts and thinking works.

In Gilles Deleuze's sense, praxical theory means that "a theory has to be used, it has to work. And not just for itself. If there is no one to use it, starting with the theorist himself who, as soon as he uses it ceases to be a theorist, then a theory is worthless, or its time has not yet arrived."<sup>2</sup> Focusing on the ideas of consensus decision-making and power which are presumed in normal anarchist activist discourse, I aim to *make this project do work* as a critical quest(ion) that can connect the theory of power with the practice of consensus decision-making, for the praxis of challenging our powers as radically democratic anarchic humans.

My quest(ion) is to re-think power in consensus decision-making while also using consensus decision-making as a way to re-think power.

(?) *The question*: on the one side, *theoretically*, the *question* is about the philosophy of power as applied to anarchist radical democratic activity. In this register, I ask theoretical and abstract questions: What is “power?” How do we understand and apply the concept of power to the practice of anarchist radical democracy?

(!) *The quest*: on the other side, *practically*, the *quest* is about empowering anarchist radical democracy — specifically in terms of consensus decision-making, and generally concerning egalitarian organization more broadly. In this register, I ask more goal-specific and object-oriented questions: How is power performed in consensus decision-making? What does consensus decision-making teach us about how to build a concept of power that is most appropriate and useful for anarchist radical democratic praxis?

## **(0.2) Practice: Anarchist Discourses and the Consensus Decision-Making Process**

This is a philosophical interrogation of power theory linked with a technical investigation of the pedagogical discourses and historical traditions of consensus decision-making practices. My focus is on an organizational level of power, within relatively small groups engaged in producing collective action through deliberative decision-making. This is a specific, small-scale focus. It will not cover every aspect of power, but it does deal with one very important part of social movement praxis: as community organizer Jessica Bell says in introduction to a portrayal of consensus processes, “decision-making is essentially about power within a group; who has it, who doesn’t. Decision-making matters.”<sup>3</sup> In the same vein, the first words of Marsha Willard’s

guide to consensus decision-making declare that “decision authority is at the heart of empowerment.”<sup>4</sup>

My focus is on how the discourses of “power” are expressed in consensus decision-making. The study of “discourse,” to draw from social theorist Stuart Hall, refers to “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about — a way of representing the knowledge about — a particular topic at a particular historical moment. [...] Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language.”<sup>5</sup> I analyze the “discourse” of how power is deployed in consensus decision-making manuals, focusing especially on manuals and guides that aim to teach the process to activist groups and small organizations to inspect how the procedures, rules, values, and validations of the process reflect on contemporary anarchist radical democratic activism since the 1960s. My main object of discursive study is a collection of twenty-six consensus manuals written between 1975 and 2013, all of which teach and preach consensus as a technique of deliberation for North American activist movements and grassroots organizations, and were freely available on the internet as of 2013. I have assembled this collection of documents by a saturation search for “consensus decision-making” via online databases, libraries, and websites. This set of documents represents a coherent (but certainly not exhaustive) survey of free and internet-available resources for learning and performing consensus decision-making. Throughout this project, I also make reference to other written materials concerning anarchist democracy, consensus process, and small-group activist dynamics that I have collected at workshops, through facilitators and organizers, in bookshops or online forums, and from archives across the continent. These sources help to fill out a representative pattern of discourse that relates specifically to the anarchist-oriented traditions of consensus decision-making.

The discourses concerning power and democracy that are expressed in the consensus manuals relate most specifically to a historical amalgamation of 1970s feminist, anarchist, and anti-nuclear direct action movements that inherited the traditions of the 1960s civil rights, anti-war, and participatory democratic activism. In 1977, the Center for Conflict Resolution — an organization involved in the growing anti-nuclear and anti-war activism of that time — published their influential *Manual for Group Facilitators*, a document that was largely focused on the techniques and procedures of consensus decision-making defined as:

A decision-making process in which all parties involved explicitly agree to the final decision. Consensus decision making does not mean that all parties are completely satisfied with the final outcome, but that the decision is acceptable to all because no one feels that his or her vital interests or values are violated by it.<sup>6</sup>

Growing throughout the 1980s the process became strongly affiliated with anarchist currents that culminated in the alter-globalization movements of the late 1990s and early 2000s, and more recently blossomed spectacularly in the Occupy Wall Street and General Assembly movements of 2011 and 2012. Today, the process is commonly used by a loosely identified category of “grassroots activists” That is, consensus is broadly used by groups of people who work together to organize demonstrations, direct actions, campaigns, and mobilizations; by those who run infoshops, bookstores, community centres, communes, and conventions; who edit alternative newspapers and journals; and who participate in College and University based social justice organizations. Consensus decision-making is a process of deliberation which aims to allow everyone an equal capacity to influence the course of their group’s collective action. The Rhizome Network, a website project developed in 2012 to provide freely accessible resources for

consensus decision-making, sums it up in a simple bold formula: “consensus is an explicitly non-hierarchical egalitarian process.”<sup>7</sup>

I will often abbreviate my reference to “consensus decision-making,” calling it “consensus process” or simply “consensus.” These shorthands are also normal parlance among those who are engaged with the method. Recognizing that consensus often “operates as one term in a whole chain, or cloud, of associated concepts” for contemporary movement discourses, anarchist historian Andrew Cornell has highlighted that a striking array of value gets packed into the *ideal* of consensus.

This chain includes: participation, empowerment, horizontalism, direct democracy, participatory democracy, community, prefigurative politics, anarchism, and perhaps other terms as well. Because relatively little has been written about consensus, and because many learn the term and its practices in the excitement and chaos of moments of rapid social movement expansion, the meaning of these concepts are often conflated and their relationships to one another are blurred.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that consensus decision-making is linked so intensely to this range of values and ideals makes it especially relevant to democratic activism and scholarship, because it concentrates and intensifies many of the general values and goals espoused by modern democratic ideals more generally. In the same way that a psychologist examines extreme or abnormal mental conditions to shed light on the limits of “normal” mental operation, an inspection of this extreme type of democracy can be very illuminating for understanding the conditions of “normal” democracy. Since the concepts and practices of democracy are such a crucial aspect of modern Western politics, studying consensus decision-making as an extreme case of democracy can provide important insights about the broader social and political developments of our society.

My main purpose, however, is not to contribute abstract formulas concerning democracy in general. Rather, I want to work on a more specific practical contribution to *anarchist radical democracy*. The traditions of anarchism articulate a commitment to, as anarchist scholar David Graeber has written, “creating and enacting horizontal networks instead of top-down structures like states, parties or corporations; networks based on principles of decentralized, non-hierarchical consensus democracy.”<sup>9</sup> However, not everyone likes the title “anarchism,” the historical associations that go with it, or the praxes that it evokes. Even those who share an affinity with these general anarchist principles will often deflect the name in order to avoid its historical baggage, preferring to identify with a looser range of related social movement, activist, and leftist traditions. For instance, rather than use the label “anarchist,” activist and writer Chris Dixon recently wrote about consensus as a crucial tool for “*the anti-authoritarian current*.”

What many activists appreciate about consensus decision-making is that it makes it difficult for a majority to force decisions on a minority, encourages collective problem solving through discussion and compromise, and aims to equalize participation. In the anti-authoritarian current, most small groups and collectives use some form of consensus.<sup>10</sup>

Uri Gordon, activist and political theorist, has also written in this vein, noting that contemporary anarchism derives from the “convergences of radical feminist, ecological, anti-racist and queer struggles, which finally fused in the late 1990s through the global wave of protest against the policies and institutions of neo-liberal globalization.”<sup>11</sup> Using an alternative range of associations and labels allows for a broader affiliation of political streams that may share the values of anti-authoritarian practices without identifying specifically with the European-centric historical traditions, tactics, and cultures of anarchism.

Personally, I also think it's important not to reduce the great array of social justice movements, identities, strategies, and projects to the single banner of anarchism. However, I have chosen to address the ideals and practices of an "anarchist" label mainly because my own political experiences do stem from these traditions. I agree with Dixon: "Depending on your vantage point, the anti-authoritarian current is part of contemporary anarchism, an attempt to move beyond it, or a different political formation altogether. In my view, it is all of these things at once."<sup>12</sup> I grew up into the social movements of the alter-globalization era, from the late 1990s through the 2000s to the present, where my political identity and activist work came together as "all these things at once." Through involvement with anti-authoritarian anarchist organizing and culture I have experienced firsthand the powers and the problems of consensus decision-making. Through those personal experiences I developed a passion for quest(ion)s about anarchism, consensus process, and radical democracy, that ultimately led me to pursue this research project. Learning is for growing, and so I focus my attention on the traditions, practices, and ideas which have contributed to my own growth, and which I also hope to grow out of.

So I focus on a tradition labelled "anarchist" because it names an important set of political experiences, but I don't wish to restrict the importance or the impact of my thoughts to that tradition alone. To be clear, I never want to support the impression that I'm focusing on the consensus process and the anarchist tradition because I believe these to be the only true options for radically egalitarian change. I don't think we should forever rely on consensus decision-making, and the wastelands of anarchist naval-gazing are already too well charted. I choose "anarchist consensus decision-making" as a *focal point for this contribution to a wider revolutionary praxis*. The anarchist discourses of power in consensus decision-making are worth

inspecting because they reveal an especially *extreme* case of egalitarian decision-making methods and ideals, and therefore they can teach us important lessons about egalitarian organization which bear upon a whole range of political praxis for equality. Whether or not you ascribe to the banner (I personally do not wish to bear any single banner — it's hard to do anything else while you're waving a big heavy flagpole), the projects and problems of anarchist politics can provide food for thought to any and all egalitarian, anti-authoritarian, anarchistic, radically democratic social justice-oriented movements.

### **(0.3) Theory: Building a Better Anarchist Concept of Power**

In this dissertation I work on praxical quest(ion)s that I hope can contribute to what Andrej Grubačić has called *anarchist low theory*:

Anarchism does not need a single, anarchist High Theory, a notion completely inimical to its spirit. Much better, we think, would be to apply the spirit of anarchist decisionmaking processes to theory: this would mean accepting the need for a diversity of high theoretical perspectives, united only by certain shared understandings. Instead of being based on the need to prove others' fundamental assumptions wrong, it would seek to find particular projects in which different theories co-exist and reinforce each other. So much more than High Theory, what anarchism needs is low theory: a way of grappling with those real, immediate questions that arise from a transformative project.<sup>13</sup>

Theory is about praxis: transforming our own common sense for the purpose of empowering our own common practice. And, as Karl Marx once put it, this kind of praxical theory “is not a scalpel but a weapon. Its object is its *enemy*, which it aims not to refute but to *destroy*.”<sup>14</sup> My theory will be about empowering the praxis of power in anarchist radical democratic decision-

making, not to refute the powers of oppression, domination, and exploitation... but to destroy them.

But what is to be destroyed? This sentiment of struggle belies the problem which lies in the common sense anarchist discourse of “power.” Anarchist ideals tend to circulate around a starkly defined enemy: when anarchism is conceived as a political philosophy built on the struggle to eradicate any situation where someone or some group exerts power over another person or group, then it is power itself which becomes the enemy. This is also the ideal purpose of consensus decision-making. For instance, the Vernal Project (an online publication of assembled consensus decision-making sources) introduces the technique as

a form of cooperative, non-coercive decision-making. Though simple to describe, this process usually requires great understanding and a fair bit of experience to practice well. Briefly, a group of people gathers together, raises an issue, discusses it, poses various solutions, and then chooses the decision that best satisfies the group. Individual preferences and concerns are considered, but the decision is for the group and so must satisfy the group as best it can — not any individual.<sup>15</sup>

The aim of a consensus decision-making process is to achieve a final decision that enjoys the consent of all involved members, through a process that maximizes engagement and inclusion.

No one is allowed to “have” power, control the group, or exert disproportionate influence over its character and its course.

Power is commonly conceived in this way as the capital P “Power” against which emancipation and equality must fight. When we do finally overthrow it we envision building a beautiful society free from such evil, a utopian idealistic system of true equality where power has no place. The overall purpose of consensus decision-making and anarchist politics are usually

expressed by a grandiose ethical opposition between the good of egalitarianism versus the evil of power. The same opposition between good equality and evil power is common in the traditions of progressive modern politics broadly, and it is especially deeply rooted in both anarchist and radical democratic political philosophy. Political theorist Barry Hindess has reflected, for instance, on the way that the concept of “power” so often symbolically stands in as the name of an abstract “enemy of freedom.” As he says, in the wake of enlightenment philosophy the political idea of “power is introduced to explain why the conditions required by the utopian ideal do not exist.”<sup>16</sup>

These models which depict Power as the name for equality’s enemy are confused by the fact that we also use the word “power” to refer to *our own capacity to overthrow that Power*. This equivocal confusion has inspired many authors, both scholarly and activist-oriented, to construct a categorical difference between the concept of *power-to* that represents the good power and a concept of *power-over* that represents the evil Power. Jonathan Hearn notes, for instance, that this distinction pervades the visions of socialist utopian ideals, and “is foundational to Marx’s analysis of capitalism and his prediction of its demise. It implies the possibility of a world free of alienation, in which we can have as much ‘power to’ as we want without any problems of ‘power over’, of delivering our powers into the hands of others.”<sup>17</sup> In the anarchist discourses which I am studying, the dichotomy between power-to and power-over has been expanded into a three-way distinction between power-to, power-over, and power-with. Power-to is valued as good and natural. It is the free right of individual persons and groups to exert their capacities, to act or to do anything at all. The very opposite of that power-to, power-over represents the evil activities of authority, control, exploitation, domination, or any other mode of “having power over” the

actions of others. This power is the source of repression, domination, and authority — all those arch-enemies to the anarchist project. The third type of power, power-with, depicts the basic manner by which people influence each other in everyday conversation, through symbolic association, by emotional and rational assertions of social influence. Power-with is the kind of communicative power which must be nurtured in the process of democratic deliberation, in order to develop the anarchist means of organizing mutually inter-active egalitarian influence. Cindy Milstein has defined anarchism in these terms as the task of replacing the politics of power-over with the politics of power-with. “The circle A symbolizes anarchism as a dual project: the abolition of domination and hierarchical forms of social organization, or power-over social relations, and their replacement with horizontal versions, or power-together and in common — again, a free society of free individuals.”<sup>18</sup>

I think our efforts to empower a radically egalitarian future are in fact impeded by an unreflective fixation on models of power that separate the evil of “power-over” out from the good of “power-to.” I’m with Michel Foucault when he says that “one can say to many socialisms, real or dreamt: between the analysis of power in the bourgeois state and the idea of its future withering away, there is a missing term – the analysis, criticism, destruction, and overthrow of the power mechanism itself.”<sup>19</sup> The discourses of anarchic democracy usually espouse the notion that “power itself must be overthrown,” but I believe this model resigns us to the big, boring, smashy-smashy acts of an exceedingly blunt critical instrument. We hurt ourselves with this idea. It does not help. It needs work to become a more detailed, more precise instrument.

I endeavour to criticize, destroy, and overthrow the power mechanism that is built into our own anarchisms, real and dreamt – but *not* by criticizing, destroying and overthrowing *power itself!* We have to overthrow certain *mechanisms* of power, yes, but not “power itself.” We need to treat the binary distinction between power-to and power-over with more critical care.

Although I stand with the political goal of defeating “Power” in general, I do not think that the conceptual premises that categorically separate evil-Power from good-power are up to the challenges posed by the anarchist political project. A big symptom of this problem is revealed in how the discourses of consensus tend towards haughty self-righteousness and predetermined moral assumptions. By separating the good from the evil so categorically, and assigning consensus process as the salvation of good power-to against the clutches of evil power-over, any critical attention gets locked into a for-or-against duel between zealots. Zoe Mitchell, who wrote a four part “Critique of Consensus Decision-Making” posted on an Indymedia email discussion list in 2002, remembers that when she began to wonder about the problems of consensus she felt immediately pressured to conform to a culture that had *already established a consensus about the value of consensus*. “Criticizing the process, in many of my detractors’ views, was the equivalent to advocating distant representative democracy, where participation is limited to voting every four years and writing letters to Members of Congress.”<sup>20</sup> This kind of righteousness leads to treating consensus as *absolutely different* than normal democracy, setting up radical anarchist democracy upon an essentializing difference between the right path and everything else. A utopian schism is opened between the ideal form of democracy and the idols of all other forms of democracy.

As Jessica Bell reflects in her consensus guide, “consensus is often viewed as the only decision-making process activist groups should use, presumably because it’s seen as being the only truly participatory democratic decision-making method that groups should use.”<sup>21</sup> However, the problems of power do not hinge on the simple question of choosing to overthrow it or not, and the problems of democracy are not as simple as picking the “only right” method. Against the grain of anarchist common sense, in this dissertation I will argue that we cannot ever essentially divorce manifestations power-to from manifestations of power-over. In order to devise a more critical concept of power that can do better art self-reflective analysis concerning how power is arranged in anarchist organizational forms, we cannot begin by presuming that our power is all good and purged of evil Power. I will approach the problem by explaining power as a phenomenon of human relationships; it can be engaged in many different ways, some more exploitative and oppressive, some less so, but there is always a degree of conflict and contrast within communication and collectivity which cannot be erased. We cannot overthrow power itself without abandoning the collective activity of human interaction. From this perspective, power is with us as long as social interaction is with us... and *social interaction is what makes us*. Some modes of social interaction we consider horrific — dominating, exploiting. Some modes of social interaction we call great — mutually empowering, communally egalitarian. If power is an element of all social relationships then it is a phenomenon that must be *transformed*, not vanquished. We could only vanquish power if we ceased to be collective, communicative, and co-conductive creatures involved in the project of our constitution.

Power cannot be vanquished because it is a concept that depicts something like social energy: as with physical energy, it can be transformed, modified, shaped, and coordinated... but never

destroyed. Building upon this basic premise helps to shift the discourse in more productively technical concerns about *how* power is arranged in various types of collective action systems. In order to break down injustices of hierarchy, statism, patriarchy, racism, colonialism, capitalism, and all the isms by which some people gain more control through exploiting, dominating, and disempowering other people, we have to build new systems of radically anarchist power. We have to treat power in the same sense as the 19<sup>th</sup> century anarchist author Pierre-Joseph Proudhon once wrote of “justice:” “the theoretical and practical progress of Justice is such that we cannot detach ourselves from it in order to see its end. [...] We will never know the end of Right, because we will never cease creating new relations among ourselves.”<sup>22</sup> Gustav Landauer, a German writer and activist who wrote in the European anarchist tradition at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is also widely quoted as defining the State in similar terms: “the State is a social relationship; a certain way of people relating to one another. It can be destroyed by creating new social relationships; i.e., by people relating to one another differently.”<sup>23</sup> In either case, the “new relations among ourselves” or “people relating to each other differently” are the essential activity of power. Power is what happens when people develop collective action systems, and what happens when people are developed by collective action systems. We can only destroy modes of power we deem “evil” by empowering those which we deem “good.” It is a never-ending process of promoting justice.

Power itself has to be reconstructed in a way that works for projects of radical equality — a power theory that can serve feminist empowerment; a power theory that can enable egalitarian work; a power theory that can project progressive politics. As Luce Irigaray has urged in the feminist political register, if feminists “aim simply for a change in the distribution of power,

leaving intact the power structure itself, then they are resubjecting themselves, deliberately or not, to a phallocratic order.”<sup>24</sup> My quest(ion)s for anarchist politics are posed on this front as an attempt to operationalize the idea that, as Foucault argued, “relations of power are not something bad in themselves, from which one must free oneself,” and that therefore “the problem is not of trying to dissolve them in the utopia of a perfectly transparent communication, but to give one’s self the rules of law, the techniques of management, and also the ethics, the *ethos*, the practice of self, which would allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination..”<sup>25</sup> So what are the anarchist communications, rules, techniques, and ethics, which can transform our games of power into those approaching the minimum of domination? How can we evoke a theory of power that helps to clarify the complications of power that arise to determine the different characteristics of anarchist collective action? That’s the quest(ion).

#### **(0.4) Contents: Chapter Overviews**

In *Chapter 1) Presenting Consensus Decision-Making as a Tool of Anarchist Radical Democratic Dual Power*, I will *present* the concepts of radical democracy and anarchist dual power. These concepts drive the historical tradition of consensus decision-making in its affinity with the so-called “new social movements”<sup>26</sup> that since the 1970s have increasingly emphasized anarchist ideals and strategies for transforming society. These articulations of radical democracy and dual power will situate the potentials and problems of the consensus process within the larger contexts of contemporary North American anarchist-oriented social movements.

In *Chapter 2) Surveying Anarchist Power Theory*, I will *survey* the three-way distinction of *power-to*, *power-over*, and *power-with* that has been popular in the anarchist radical democratic

discourses of consensus decision-making. The common anarchist ethic pits the “good” of power-to against the “evil” of power-over, while an associated anarchist politics promotes power-with as the organizational means of vanquishing the evils of power-over. In the process of explaining these concepts, I will describe two key axioms that support an *agency perspective on power*, which is the most common conceptual paradigm of power for both anarchist theory and mainstream North American social and political thought. Then, I will compare how these two agency perspective axioms are logically defined in dichotomous opposition to equivalent axioms of a *structure perspective on power*. Where the agency perspective privileges power-to the structure perspective privileges the focus on power-over, constructing a dichotomous opposition which goes to the heart of modern social theory. As the political theorist Thomas Wartenberg has put it, “the expressions power-to and power-over are a shorthand way of making a distinction between two fundamentally different ordinary-language locutions within which the term “power” occurs. Depending upon which locution one takes as the basis of one’s theory of power, one will arrive at a very different model of the role of power in the social world.”<sup>27</sup> While addressing some useful analytical applications suggested by each perspective, I will argue that they can each offer only a limited and partial understanding of power in general. Ultimately, we need to build another perspective if we want to understand how these two opposite viewpoints can be integrated into a system that allows them to make sense to each other. For a more powerful anarchist theory, we will need a theoretical perspective that can focus on the concept of power-with, a *conduct perspective on power*.

In Chapter 3) *Constructing a Conduct Perspective to Diagram on Power in Anarchist Collective Action Systems*, I will *construct* a theory based on power-with that can integrate the

three concepts of power-to, power-over, and power-with as map for understanding collective action system dynamics. I will begin to explore this new perspective by addressing two new axioms that support the conduct perspective on power, elaborating the general blueprints for a perspective that can theoretically bridge between agency and structure, power-to and power-over. In the next section, I will then devise some preliminary diagrams to illustrate how the concepts of power-to, power-over, and power-with can serve as an instrument for examining the dynamics of collective action systems. Expanding on the classic political philosophical theme of heads and bodies, I will finish the chapter by applying these diagrams to distinguish between authoritarian versus anarchist modes of power. The consensus process can thus be depicted as capable of creating a collective action system that is distinct from the more common authoritarian design based on the emergent synthesis of a voluntary, performative, and transient anarchist solidarity.

*In Chapter 4) Analyzing Consensus Decision-Making as Tool of Anarchist Radical Democratic Dual Power*, I will apply the theoretical tools introduced in chapter 3 to *analyze* how the processes of consensus decision-making can function in two very different manners. The consensus process is a unique tool of anarchist power, but tools do not always work the same way: their power changes depending on circumstances and applications. No tool is good for every job, and the most powerful tools are also dangerous when used incorrectly, irresponsibly, or accidentally. The consensus process can be *used to create an emergent solidarity of collective action systems*, but it can also be *abused to conserve the established solidity of collective action systems*. To help clarify this difference between the uses and abuses of the consensus process tool, I will engage with how the consensus process can be explicated according to the theory of *insurgent democracy*, mainly as developed by political philosophers Miguel Abensour and

Jacques Rancière. In the model of Abensour's *insurgent democracy* and Rancière's *politics versus the police*, democracy is understood as a challenge to any instituted and established form of power, including even those which are supposedly authorized as "fully democratic." The consensus is most useful when it can empower an insurgent democratic movement against established and normalized institutional inequality by creating a new consensus that builds collective action systems of anarchist solidarity. But the consensus process is a hindrance to the same insurgent democratic activities insofar as it functions to conserve an old consensus that reinforces the solidity of instituted inequality. In this second case, insurgent democracy must in fact be wages *against* consensus systems, rather than empowered through them. The value and power of the process depends greatly on its uses and contexts. Recalling the dynamics of anarchist body-without-a-head collective action systems developed in chapter 3, I will finally explore in some of the problematic conditions that lead the consensus process to be applied abusively as a tool for conserving established social solidity.

### **(0.5) Praxis: For the Anarchist Toolbox of Power**

What is anarchist power? What is an anarchist theory of power? How can we conceptualize of power in a way that helps empower anarchist collective action systems? These are the guiding quest(ion)s of my project. Consensus decision-making is a unique and special mode of anarchist power, which I contend is most powerful when used to create emergent solidarity. However, it cannot be treated as the one and only mode of anarchist organization — that mistake transforms its powerful potential into a problematic power. There is no single utopian anarchist power system; there must always be many powers in a diverse and communicative alliance of collective

action systems. My reconceptualization of power-to, power-over, and power-with strives to depict these concepts as dynamic elements present in any type of collective action system, so that they can be more useful for the self-reflexive analysis of anarchist projects than our currently popular concepts of power tend to be.

The work embodied in this dissertation is a construction project, to design some new conceptual tools that could possibly empower the quest(ion)s of anarchist power. This work is intended to begin of a story, to make a proposal, to propose some blueprints and explore some new sense. I'm not settling the truth, or putting a question to rest. I'm setting a course, I'm pushing a quest(ion) into motion. To find out where these quest(ion)s ultimately lead, we must apply them in praxis: continuing to pose questions about who we are, and continuing to pose quests about who we can become.

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<sup>1</sup> Gene Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential* (Boston: Porter Sargent Press, 2005), 27.

<sup>2</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power," in *Desert Islands and Other Texts: 1953-1974*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Mike Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 206.

<sup>3</sup> Jessica Bell, "Decision-Making Guide for Activists," Tools For Change, last modified September 21, 2012, accessed November 13, 2013, <http://www.toolsforchange.net/2012/09/21/group-decision-making-guide-for-activists/>

<sup>4</sup> Marsha Willard, "Building Consensus," Axis Performance, accessed May 30, 2013, <http://www.axisperformance.com/T12cnsns.html>

<sup>5</sup> Stuart Hall, "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power," in *Formations of Modernity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben, 275-33 (Cambridge: Polity Press in association with the Open University, 1992), 291.

<sup>6</sup> "A Manual for Group Facilitators," Center for Conflict Resolution, accessed May 2, 2012, <http://www.spunk.org/library/consensu/sp000762.txt>

<sup>7</sup> "Consensus decision-making: why?" Rhizome Network, last modified April 1, 2011, accessed October 2, 2013 <http://rhizomenetwork.wordpress.com/2011/04/01/consensus-decision-making-why/131002>

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Cornell, "Occupy Wall Street and Consensus Decision Making: Historicizing the Preoccupation with Process," *Is This What Democracy Looks Like?*, accessed February 18, 2014, <http://what-democracy-looks-like.com/occupy-wall-street-and-consensus-decision-making-historicizing-the-preoccupation-with-process/>

<sup>9</sup> David Graeber, "The New Anarchists," *New Left Review*, 13 (Jan-Feb 2002), accessed February 25, 2013, <https://newleftreview.org/II/13/david-graeber-the-new-anarchists>

<sup>10</sup> Chris Dixon, *Another Politics: Talking Across Today's Transformative Movements* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 87.

<sup>11</sup> Uri Gordon, *Anarchy Alive: Anti-Authoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory* (Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2008), 31-32.

<sup>12</sup> Chris Dixon, "Building 'Another Politics': The Contemporary Anti-Authoritarian Current in the US and Canada," *Anarchist Studies* 20.1 (2012), 34.

<sup>13</sup> Staughton Lynd and Andrej Grubačić, *Wobblies & Zapatistas: Conversations on Anarchism, Marxism and Radical History* (Oakland: PM Press, 2008), 43-44.

<sup>14</sup> Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction," in *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (New York: Penguin, 1992), 246.

<sup>15</sup> "Notes on Consensus Decision-Making," Vernal Project, accessed October 30, 2013, [www.vernalproject.org/papers/process/ConsensNotes.pdf](http://www.vernalproject.org/papers/process/ConsensNotes.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Barry Hindess, *Discourses of Power: From Hobbes to Foucault* (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 149.

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Hearn, *Theorizing Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 51.

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<sup>18</sup> Cindy Milstein, *Anarchism and Its Aspirations* (Oakland: AK Press and the Institute for Anarchist Studies, 2010), 13.

<sup>19</sup> Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Mollie Horwitz (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), 130.

<sup>20</sup> Zoe Mitchell, "A Critique of Consensus Process," Indymedia DC, last modified December 10, 2002, accessed September 20, 2012, <http://dc.indymedia.org/newswire/display/42386>

<sup>21</sup> Jessica Bell, "Decision-Making Guide for Activists," Tools For Change, last modified September 21, 2012, accessed November 13, 2013, <http://www.toolsforchange.net/2012/09/21/group-decision-making-guide-for-activists/>

<sup>22</sup> Jamie Heckert, "Listening, Caring, Becoming: Anarchism as an Ethics of Direct Relationships," in *Anarchism and Moral Philosophy*, ed. Benjamin Franks and Matthew Wilson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 187.

<sup>23</sup> Gustav Landauer, *Revolution and Other Writings: A Political Reader* (Oakland, PM Press: 2010), 3.

<sup>24</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 81.

<sup>25</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Final Foucault*, ed. James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988) 18.

<sup>26</sup> On the concept of new social movements, see for instance: Barbara Epstein, *Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991); Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); Alain Touraine, *Return of the Actor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Richard J. F. Day, *Gramsci Is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Wartenberg, *The Forms of Power: From Domination to Transformation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 27.

## Chapter 1) *Presenting Consensus Decision-Making as an Tool of Anarchist Radical Democratic Dual Power*

The contemporary traditions of North American consensus decision-making developed mainly from feminist, anarchist, and environmentalist movements of the 1970s. As noted by the Rhizome Network, an online educational resource for consensus-based process developed in 2011:

There's no doubt these groups are the direct ancestors of the social change groups that now choose to use consensus. They developed specific models, gave us the language we now use around consensus, initiated training programmes and so much more. What's also not in doubt though is that they drew, consciously or unconsciously, on a much longer tradition of communities using decision-making models that enshrined many of the values core to consensus.<sup>28</sup>

In this chapter I will elaborate on how consensus decision-making expresses the values of *radical democracy* and *dual power* that are currently enshrined in North American anarchist social movements.

First of all, consensus decision-making is understood as a technique of *radical democracy*. The concept of “radical democracy” enshrined in consensus process emerged from the experiences of 1960s sense of *participatory democracy* expressed by what is now commonly called the “new social movements.”<sup>29</sup> In this chapter, I will address how contemporary anarchist-inspired social movements conceive of “radical democracy,” in this tradition, as an ideal of egalitarian and inclusive political participation that challenges the perceived failures of mainstream official government forms of mass democracy.

Second, the anarchist tradition of consensus decision-making also emphasizes that it is a process capable of conducting *dual power*. The concept of dual power refers to a movement's capacity to simultaneously empower both prefigurative political pedagogy and contentious political struggle. There are two sides to radical political change. On the one side, a *prefigurative politics of changing our own practices*: the "figure" of the new world we want to create should be "prefigured" in the political practices we use to change the old world. The most oft-quoted representation of this point is probably Gandhi's sweet sound bite, "be the change you wish to see in the world." And on the other side, a *contentious politics of waging struggle against our enemies*: to change the world requires mounting a *contention* against the current states of injustice. These two sides of dual power are most commonly depicted as emphasizing the *means* (prefigurative focus on internal transformation) and the *ends* (a contentious focus on external victory) of political change. Consensus decision-making is supposed to activate dual power because, as one commenter said, it "is a model of the society we want to live in, and a tool we use to get there."<sup>30</sup>

If the values of radical democracy and dual power accurately represent important anarchist *projects*, then they also present important anarchist *problems*. These are the projects/problems which I quest(ion).

In the first case, consensus decision-making relies on a split between an idealized image of radical democracy built on egalitarian participation and an idolized official democracy built on authoritative control. This distinction relies heavily on a starkly moralized and logically dichotomous division between "good" (communion and equality) and "evil" (command and power). The distinctions between an idealized good democracy and an idolized evil democracy

rings with dangerous religious overtones, especially articulated in the history of consensus decision-making. This simplistic division should be quest(ion)ed. I contend that this conceptual model distorts our movements' capacity to build more effective radical democratic institutions. How can we think more strategically about the good and the bad uses of our ideals, rather than moralize about the good and evil drama of our idols?

In the second case, consensus decision-making is supposed to be a dual power, but it usually tips to the prefigurative side of the equation. By privileging the prefigurative over the contentious, many organizations using consensus decision-making have thrown off the balance of dual power. However, I shall argue that the truly radical value of the consensus method remains possible, if we can apply it appropriately as a tool in moments where prefigurative and contentious political practice are mutually balanced. Consensus *can* serve the praxis of anarchist dual power, but not *always*. Not for every problem or in every situation. How can we do better at picturing the balancing act required to create effective dual power?

My intervention into these quest(ion)s will proceed from rethinking the theory of power that is taken for granted in the radical democratic and dual power values of consensus decision-making. For the moment, however those analyses of power will have to wait for their object to come into focus. In this chapter I will visualize the projects of anarchist radical democracy and dual power as they have been developed in the processes, discourses, and histories of contemporary North American consensus decision-making. The remainder of this dissertation will then analyze theories power in order to critically reexamine those projects.

## **(1.1) A Rough Guide to the Consensus Decision-Making Process**

Detailing one of the most extensive contemporary models of consensus process, the Rhizome guide present the procedure's general steps as follows:

Step 1: Be clear and ensure your clarity is shared.

Step 2: Have a broad and inclusive discussion.

Step 3: Pull together, or *synthesise*, a proposal that emerges from the best of all the group's ideas, whilst simultaneously acknowledging concerns.

Step 4: Friendly amendments – tweak the proposal to make it even stronger.

Step 5: Test for consensus – do we have good quality agreement?

Step 6: Make it happen.<sup>31</sup>

The *Rhizome Network* is a British online reference project for consensus decision-making processes that arose in 2011, a product of the excitement generated for the procedures during the assembly movement surge of 2010-2011. These features are shared with the *Seeds for Change* manual, another online reference project source for consensus decision-making technique. The *Seeds for Change* guide offers a similar picture, but further categorizes the process into three larger phases: *opening out*, *discussion*, and *synthesis*, under which are noted six steps:

Step 1: Introduce and Clarify the issue(s) to be decided.

Step 2: Explore the issue and look for ideas

Step 3: Look for emerging proposals

Step 4: Discuss, clarify and amend your proposal

Step 5: Test for agreement

Step 6: Implement the decision<sup>32</sup>

Calling on just one more example, Shawn Ewald's explicitly anarchist-focused manual also distills consensus into three "levels or cycles:"

In the first level, the idea is to allow everyone to express their perspective, including concerns, but group time is not spent on resolving problems. In the second level the group focuses its attention on identifying concerns, still not resolving them. This requires discipline. Reactive comments, even funny ones, and resolutions, even good ones, can suppress the creative ideas of others. Not until the third level does the structure allow for exploring resolutions.<sup>33</sup>

The basic template represented by these broadly outlined phases and steps are common across the varieties of consensus process. The first phase — “opening out” — begins when a group comes together to debate a specific issue according to the premise that anyone involved and interested has the right to join the discussion, to air their concerns and express their ideas about the issue at hand, and to have direct influence on the final decision. In marked contrast to hierarchical systems of decision-making and bureaucratic structures that rule most of our daily lives in North American culture, this assumption that every participant has a direct and equal influence on the outcome of the process is already a radical move. Everyone is encouraged to contribute any ideas to an open and free discussion of the issue, in a brainstorming session that intends to generate as much collective participation as possible.

The second phase — “discussion” — takes the longest. Since no one person, faction, or establishment should control the decision, everyone therefore has to accept that consensus is usually marked by long, trying, and tiring discussions. This phase is the “muddle in the middle,”<sup>34</sup> as a subtitle of the Rhizome guide puts it. Here, the group must open up the discussion to every possible voice if they expect to be able to create a proposal which synthesizes all the positions and perspectives addressed in the previous “opening out” phase. In the muddled middle proposals will be drafted and debated, with opportunity for any concerns, objections, or

modifications to be brought forward in “friendly amendments” — challenges or changes to the proposal that could make it better and/or more amenable to key concerns about its viability.

Supplementary procedures such as “go-rounds” (where every participant is asked to express their basic thoughts on the issue at hand) or “straw-polls” (where a quick, non-final show of hands is used to gauge approximate levels of support for a proposal-in-process) can be implemented to assess the “tone” or “vibe” of members in a group. If the proposal finally lacks sufficient popular support among all members, the muddle must resume anew. Another proposal may be formulated, and the steps will be repeated.

Finally, in the third phase — “synthesis” — the group moves to finalize a decision. When it appears that a proposal has been tailored so as to enjoy everyone’s general support, the group can “call for consensus.” Hopefully, this is where “synthesis” can be reached, where the process of consensus will have produced emergent solutions and ideas through collective deliberation. The ideal goal of finding a proposal that can synthesize all concerns is, understandably, often rather difficult and certainly not always possible. Sometimes, if disagreements are insubstantial or minor, its enough to find a shaky common ground. Sometimes, if disagreements are strong enough, the whole process will either start over or stall completely.

The final “call for consensus” is a key point that distinguishes this process. The *Seeds for Change* manual summarizes these final decision options as follows:

Blocks: I have a fundamental disagreement with the core of the proposal that cannot be resolved. We need to look for a new proposal.

Stand asides: I can’t support this proposal because ... but I don’t want to stop the group, so I’ll let the decision happen without me and I won’t be a part of implementing it.

Reservations: I have some reservations but am willing to let the proposal pass.

Agreement: I support the proposal and am willing to help implement it.

Consensus: No blocks, not too many stand asides or reservations? Active agreement?

Then we have a decision!”<sup>35</sup>

The fact that consensus process culminates in a range of possible final stances represents an integral aspect of the procedure. The process of “calling for consensus” involves more than simply voting “yay” or “nay.” Consensus aims to generate group decisions that enjoy widespread support, but it makes room for a variety of recorded positions concerning the final consented decision. Participants can stand against, they can stand aside, they can stand apart, they can stand with reservations, they can stand alongside. And all these options contribute to developing a more nuanced awareness of just how much popular appeal is held in the decision at hand.

Among these final decision options the “block” is the most unique and special aspect of consensus decision-making. The block provides any individual with the procedural capacity to officially hold power-over the group’s decision. As the Rhizome guide says, “so far the flow we’ve presented could be for any decision-making system looking to maximize participation. It’s at Step 5 that it becomes uniquely consensus. That’s because this is where we entertain the possibility of agreeing to disagree and of the veto (or block, major objection or principled objection — it goes by a lot of names).”<sup>36</sup> The “block” (or “veto,” which tends to be the preferred term in the United Kingdom) represents a unique and distinguishing feature of consensus process. One single person who strongly opposes the proposal can “block” it, usually based on an argument that the proposed decision would contradict the group’s fundamental purposes, principles, or goals. The block is a procedural feature by which any one person can

assert their will upon the entire group, a regulator that levels out any formal authority into portions of individual responsibility. As such, it is often one of the main points at which conflict and problems erupt for the groups using consensus. The procedures of blocking are therefore an important site of power analysis, and I will return in later chapters to deal more carefully with the structural powers invested in the block.

The “stand-aside” option is also important, since it provides individuals with a more tempered means of staking out their difference from the group’s majority. To “stand-aside” means, as stated above in the Seeds for Change Guide, “I can’t support this proposal because ... but I don’t want to stop the group, so I’ll let the decision happen without me and I won’t be a part of implementing it.”<sup>37</sup> Consensus has historically been performed by groups composed of voluntary members who espouse anti-authoritarian, egalitarian, and non-coercive principles. In such groups, no member is bound to obey the group’s commands and no member is able to command the group, so any assent to perform a group-deliberated decision must be voluntarily and freely engaged. The option to “stand-aside” is therefore crucial because it allows for participants to explicitly state that they will not stop the group from making the decision, but they themselves will not take part in performing the decided-upon actions. The “reservation” option serves a similar but less distinct role. It is more oriented towards recording the level of collective enthusiasm for a proposal, offering participants the option to register technical or strategic disagreements, expressing concerns that do not amount to full-scale refusal of the proposal.

There are also common roles and functions which can be assigned to individuals within the process. These roles are usually allotted on a rotating basis. Each meeting should assign a new

person to every role so that no one person becomes too entrenched in the power which is granted by a particular task. Common roles include *facilitator*, *co-facilitator*, *note-taker*, *vibes-watcher*, *process observer*, and *stack keeper*. The *facilitator* has one of the most important jobs in the process, roughly equivalent to “chairing” a meeting. They must be prepared to define an agenda, direct on-topic conversation, summarize group discussions, and reinforce orderly and respectful interactions. Jessica Bell writes that a facilitator “influences what topics will be discussed in a meeting, how these topics will be discussed, and how decisions will be made; helps everyone in the group reach the best outcome possible in the time available; maintains a positive and constructive meeting environment.”<sup>38</sup> A *co-facilitator* shares these duties, if the situation suggests that two heads might be better than one. *Notetakers* take notes, keeping records of decision options, final decisions, action points, task appointments, and other necessary information. A *vibes-watcher* keeps their eye on group emotional relations, checking especially for body-language that could indicate problems such as boredom, frustration, anger which would lead to poor involvement in the deliberation process. A *process observer* is a member who sits-in on a meeting without participating, taking notes on procedural and emotional processes in order to offer helpful feedback for improvement. In the words of the *Consensus Achieved* short manual, *stack keepers* “keep a stack or a list of who would like to speak and calls on people based on who raised their hand first. This keeps dominant or loud members from interjecting over others trying to speak and brings more order to the meeting.”<sup>39</sup> Many groups often now use a *progressive stack*, which requires that the stack keeper gives priority to speakers from normally marginalized groups — giving people who may normally have had more difficulty being heard in normative spaces a better opportunity to express themselves. “If you self-identify as trans,

queer, a person of color, female, or as a member of any marginalized group, you're given priority on the list of people who want to speak — the stack. The most oppressed get to speak first.”<sup>40</sup>

Although these roles have certainly evolved over time, they have remained surprisingly consistent since the developments of consensus process in the 1970s — from my earliest source, Berit Lakey's 1975 “No Magic Facilitation Method”<sup>41</sup> (which specifically discusses the roles for facilitator, process-observer, and vibes-watcher), right up to the most contemporary versions of 2012's *Rhizome* and *Seeds for Change* manuals (which go into a fair amount of detail on all of the above). Ultimately, the point of any role in consensus process is to empower group dynamics and group decisions which are “inclusive, participatory, collaborative, agreement-seeking, and cooperative.”<sup>42</sup> In the tradition of consensus decision-making, these principles are ultimately associated with the *spirit of radical participatory democracy*, which has been a powerful ideal in North American new social movements since the 1960s.

## **(1.2) The Spirit of Consensus Decision-Making: Democracy in the New Social Movements**

The *Rhizome* guide to consensus states that “the common thread with groups using consensus is probably the search for a genuinely egalitarian and inclusive model of democracy.”<sup>43</sup> *Democracy*. First of all, let's consider the literal etymology of that word. The word “democracy” comes from a combination of the Greek word *demos*, meaning a “group” or a “people,” and *kratos*, meaning “power” or “strength” or “force.” For the ancient Greeks who coined the term, *demokratia* meant *a political system of rule where power is organized among a group of equal people*. As a combination of *demos* and *kratos*, the meaning of democracy is literally a matter of organizing

*power among people. Democracy is kratos enacted by/for/from the demos: people-power, the rule of the people.*

The quest(ion) of democracy, literally conceived, is something like this: *how to organize people and power in an egalitarian manner, such that those people are able to equally create and control the powers of their own collective affairs?* By beginning with this literal and abstract definition, I set my sights on a conceptually open-ended orientation to democracy treated first of all as an ideal according to which political organization should be arranged. So, assessing consensus decision-making as a project of democracy, thus far broadly conceived, we can begin to think about the process as an organization of egalitarian people power.

When talking about alternative forms of democracy, as expressed through social movement and revolutionary discourses of the 20th century, we hear talk of *radical* democracy, *participatory* democracy, *deliberative* democracy, *real* democracy, *direct* democracy, *assembly* democracy... There is a broad lexicon of “democracies” to choose from. In this section I engage with the way that the concepts of *participatory democracy* and *radical democracy* are applied to the anarchist projects of consensus decision-making.

First, I will address how consensus decision-making and the new social movement traditions have articulated the theory and practice of *participatory democracy*. For the moment, I will focus on a participatory and deliberative democracy perspective. I do not choose this focus because I think that participatory democracy is necessarily the best theoretical perspective. I begin with this tradition because it is historically associated with my object of study: the contemporary form of anarchist consensus decision-making arose from the 1960s new social movements as a part of the resurgent interest in what was then commonly called “participatory democracy,” expressing

ideals and principles which were further developed theoretically by the deliberative democratic tradition in the 1970s and 1980s. We should recognize how the consensus process used today by anarchist activists owes its lineage to the participatory and deliberative traditions of democratic theory. It is important to emphasize that the concepts of anarchist participatory radical democracy which I outline here represents a general, broad, and principled ideal which reflects the practical spirit of consensus process, rather than any more specific distinctive academic definition which could be attached to any of these terms. However, we should also therefore be prepared to critically examine it according to competing theoretical traditions. Once I have developed my own theoretical approach to the concept of power in chapters 2 and 3, I will return in chapter 4 to consider how an alternative approach to the theory of insurgent democratic theory can provoke more critical analysis of the assumptions inherent in this spirit of consensus decision-making.

### **(1.2.1) Participatory Democracy**

The theoretical traditions of participatory democracy and deliberative democracy are focused on understanding how to develop systems of collective deliberation in which all participants have equal power to affect any political decision which bears upon their own involvement in the collective affairs of their institution. Generally, the deliberative democracy approach considers “democracy” as the process whereby political choices can be achieved through the rational debate of all interested, free, and equal group members. A high quality and quantity of “participation” is required to assert democratic action. Consider this list of necessary qualities for deliberative democracy presented by one of its most prominent theorists, Seyla Benhabib:

(1) participation in such deliberation is governed by the norms of equality and symmetry; all have the same chances to initiate speech act, to question, to interrogate, and to open debate; (2) all have the right to question the assigned topics of the conversation; and (3) all have the right to initiate reflexive arguments about the very rules of the discourse procedure and the way in which they are applied and carried out. There are no *prima facie* rules limiting the agenda of the conversation, or the identity of the participants, as long as any excluded person or group can justifiably show that they are relevantly affected by the proposed norm under question.<sup>44</sup>

In a study concerning how the Alter-Globalization social movements of the 2000s understood their own claim to radical democracy, sociologist Donatella della Porta states that “deliberative participatory democracy refers to decisional processes in which, under conditions of equality, inclusiveness, and transparency, a communicative process based on reason (the strength of a good argument) may transform individual preferences, leading to decisions oriented to the public good.”<sup>45</sup> Participation in deliberative equality requires equal access to the general facility with language activities that are required to engage effectively in public debate. In Elizabeth Anderson’s account, the participatory principle in democracy demands “a kind of standing in civil society to make claims on others, that they respect one’s rights, pay due regard to one’s interests, and include one as a full participant in civil society... Everyone *counts*, and everyone counts *equally*.”<sup>46</sup> The present-day articulations of consensus decision-making clearly exemplify such participatory emphases on language capacities and egalitarian access.

Rhizome’s “Brief History” finds the ancestors of consensus processes in all sorts of places — in the Anabaptists and Quakers, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the San Bushmen, the 13<sup>th</sup> century Hanse League of North Baltic Cities, and, yes, of course, let’s not forget, the Caribbean

Pirates.<sup>47</sup> Many a “brief history of consensus” tries to date the practice as far back as possible, presumably in search of some illustrious ancestral pedigree. These historical digs could certainly unearth interesting critical questions, but my focus is more directly concerned with the principles and procedures of consensus decision-making as it is performed in current North American anarchist-inspired activism. As such, we should focus on a shorter history that more directly influences people’s conceptualizations of what they’re doing in practice today. The more immediate story of consensus is usually said to begin with Quaker deliberative processes and the influence born by Christian pacifist activism on 1960s activism in North America. The Quakers, in particular, were very influential on the lineage that would drive the later developments of consensus for other activist purposes. The Quakers believed that each individual held a private responsibility to act as their conscience dictated in community decision-making, according to each person’s sense of an ethical relation to God. It was with a religious ethical responsibility in mind that the Quakers came together in a “circle of Friends” to act according to their own understanding of being accountable to God, and no one else.

Arguing that by the 1960s many newly developed versions of “participatory democracy” already owed a great deal to Quaker methods, Ethan Mitchell explains that

quakers played critical organizing roles in many cooperatives and intentional communities, as well as in the anti-war and civil rights movements. This provided a great number of possible transmission points to secular activist groups which saw value in conducting business "after the manner of Friends." Consensus appealed to a desire for a more radical democratic process than representative majoritarianism. Moreover, for many young secular radicals, Quakers provided these movements with an ambience of tradition and spiritual authority.<sup>48</sup>

Andrew Cornell traces the legacy of the Quakers influence through the 1950s and into the 1960s movements by way of the Peacemakers, an anti-war organization formed in 1948 that promoted revolutionary nonviolent challenge to the existing social structure.<sup>49</sup> Shaping itself intentionally in contrast to both the socialist-communist movements and to liberal “membership organizations,” Cornell recounts that “the group structured itself as a network of small cells that elected a steering committee, but operated autonomously from one another in pursuit of the organisation’s defined goals.”<sup>50</sup> The organization’s defined goals were, like the Quakers’, idealistically ethical in character, a tone that would have profound effects when disseminated more broadly in the blossoming student movements of the 1960s.

In the early 1960s, radically participatory organizing methods also gained prominence by way of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). SNCC developed in 1960 as a way to continue the momentum started by a wave of African-American student sit-in protests across the U.S. South. As historian Clayborne Carson explains, SNCC activists were distinguished by the way that they “strongly opposed any hierarchy of authority such as existed in other civil rights organisations.”<sup>51</sup> SNCC employed participatory and consensus-oriented models of decision-making as a way to build capacity for leadership among all its members. Young activists were drawn to SNCC as an alternative to the model of mobilization based on authoritarian control, centralized organizational systems, and idolization of leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. or Elijah Muhammed within the civil rights and black power movements of the 1960s. Longtime organizer Ella Baker, who helped facilitate SNCC’s founding conference, famously expressed the general sentiment when remarking that “strong people don’t need strong

leaders.”<sup>52</sup> Instead of relying on the singular charisma of a strong leader, the SNCC process strove to create the collective strength of strong leaders. As SNCC member Bob Moses later recalled:

Folks were feeling themselves out, learning how to use words to articulate what they wanted and needed. In these meetings they were taking the first step toward gaining control over their lives, by making demands on themselves... They were not credentialed people; they did not have high school diplomas for the most part. They were not members of labor unions, or national church associations. Yet through the process, they became leaders.<sup>53</sup>

The importance of collective process was central to SNCC’s initial mobilization strategy because it helped to recruit people who might otherwise have never felt empowered to contribute their skills and knowledge. SNCC developed a sense of cohesive group unity in the process that helped the organization grow as egalitarian.

As the nonviolent ideals and methods of the Peacemakers and Quakers combined with these traditions of collective leadership building in the Civil Rights movement, an ideal of “participatory democracy” gradually coalesced as the popular general expression of radical values for a resurgent student movement in the 1960s. By the late 1970s the practices of consensus decision-making inherited that mantle when they exploded in popularity through mass anti-nuclear mobilization efforts such as the Clamshell Alliance, the Abalone Alliance. By this time, however, the emphasis was more definitively placed on nonviolent and peace-based philosophy derived from the more mainstream and White cultures of the Quakers, peacemakers, and second-wave feminism. George Lakey — founding member of the Movement for a New Society (MNS), a group that contributed significantly to the popularization of consensus during the 1970s and 80s — asserts that an egalitarian and nonviolent philosophy of participatory

democracy is the root purpose of the consensus process: “consensus is a structural attempt to get equality to happen in decision making [...] when we are pushing equality, we are pushing nonviolence.”<sup>54</sup> The bond between nonviolent direct action and consensus decision-making is more than a circumstantial connection. The two practices share essential philosophical and tactical premises, a point which is highlighted in an MNS-affiliated “Handbook on Nonviolent Action” which emphasizes the overall orientation by the point that “nonviolence focuses on communication,” in order to draw a common thread between two techniques that both working by truth-telling, listening, and conviction.<sup>55</sup> MNS member Bill Moyers defines consensus decision-making in this context, specifically as a technique of nonviolent action:

Consensus is a method by which an entire group of people can come to an agreement. The input and ideas of all participants are gathered and synthesized to arrive at a final decision acceptable to all. Through consensus, we are not only working to achieve better solutions, but also to promote the growth of community and trust.<sup>56</sup>

C.T. Butler and Amy Rothstein’s widely influential manual to *Formal Consensus*, which gained prominence through the Food Not Bombs organizations of the late 1980s and early 1990s, echoes that emphasis on the nonviolence of group equality, explaining that the method is deeply vested in a “traditional nonviolence theory [which] holds that the use of power to dominate is violent and undesirable. Nonviolence expects people to use their power to persuade without deception, coercion, or malice, using truth, creativity, logic, respect, and love.”<sup>57</sup>

By the late 1980s, the consensus process had become linked to the principled articulation of egalitarian democratic organization, particularly in North American grassroots activism that focused on the tactics and philosophy of direct action nonviolence tactics, and the specific

influence of MNS can be traced all the way to the present. The ActUp organization, for instance, founded in 1989 as “a diverse, non-partisan group of individuals united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis,”<sup>58</sup> employed a consensus process that they defined in exactly the same words as Bill Moyers’ definition from the Handbook for Nonviolent Action.<sup>59</sup> On the other side of the continent in 1990, the Earth-First affiliated Redwood Summer Gathering of activists, who were organizing to save ancient forests from logging extraction, also used the very same phrases to define their commitment to consensus decision-making.<sup>60</sup> The spirit of nonviolent direct action democracy was still promoted throughout the alter-globalization movement of the 1990s and 2000s, and a good two decades later the Occupy Wall Street Guide seems to have plucked their basic definition of consensus from the very same source, once more repeating its essential purposes almost word for word:

Consensus is an inclusive and non-hierarchical process for group decision making. It is a method by which the input and ideas of all participants are gathered and synthesized in order to arrive at a final decision acceptable to all. Through consensus, we are not only working to achieve better solutions, but paving the way for an egalitarian model of community decision making.<sup>61</sup>

The label of “participatory democracy” which follows this entire historical thread. The emphasis is, of course, on the value of “participation,” and this is indeed one of the primary elements emphasized by scholars of democracy such as Carol Pateman, a prominent writer on deliberative and participatory democratic theory. As she explains, any democratic process worthy of the name must privilege equal and direct participation:

‘Participation’ refers to (equal) participation in the making of decisions, and ‘political equality’ refers to equality of power in determining the outcome of

decisions. ... One might characterise the participatory model as one where maximum input (participation) is required and where output includes not just policies (decisions) but also the development of the social and political capacities of each individual, so that there is ‘feedback’ from output to input.<sup>62</sup>

This is certainly a democratic appeal that echoes with consensus prerogatives, and consensus has usually been validated on grounds such as these. This is a vision of democracy that cannot be satisfied by any practice of representative voting or indirect rule. It is a democracy animated by the idealist spirit of direct and immediate deliberative participation, producing collective decisions by means of rationally and socially responsible conversation among equals.

### **(1.2.2) Radical Democracy**

Consensus decision-making is animated by the challenge of radical participatory deliberative democracy. In the traditions of the new social movements that have risen since the 1960s, a specifically “radical” vision of democracy has been evoked more and more as a way to call up stronger equalitarian dreams and practices specifically opposed to the way the ruling establishment defines and legitimizes itself as “democracy.” In their broad introduction to “democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” James Cairns and Alan Sears establish the contemporary question of democracy according to this kind of conflict: the bureaucratic and governmental institutions of *official democracy* versus the activist and grassroots movements of *democracy-from-below*. They write, “in the official frame, democracy is seen primarily as a form of government — one marked by the election of representatives and by specific rights and freedoms such as freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and the rule of law.”<sup>63</sup> On the other hand,

democracy-from-below “democracy is not about being governed but rather about achieving a society based upon the active, collective self-government of all members.”<sup>64</sup>

Thinking now about “*radical democracy*,” let’s take a moment to reflect on the linguistic root of the word “radical.” The root of the word “radical” is derived from the Latin *radix*, meaning “root.” A *radically literal* definition of *radical democracy* indicates a type of democracy that is *especially deeply rooted* in that ideal democratic proposition of a *political system of rule where power is organized among a group of equal people*. Treating democracy as radical takes people’s political practices to the roots of their ideals: a radical type of democracy would be *more* deeply rooted in the equality of people and power than its “un-radical” alternatives and official democratic iterations. We might now call the idea of radical democracy the “official opposition” to the instituted mechanisms of democracy in the North American political system; it is the ideology that opposes the ruling establishment’s legitimating discourse of official democracy with the challenge of its own ideals. Activists fighting for all sorts of movements — from climate justice to student debt, from indigenous sovereignty to union solidarity — commonly articulate their diverse causes according to the common promise of a *radical democracy*: as a way of pushing for a better, more egalitarian, and more just democratic society.

This general conception of “radical democracy” is a deeply influential ideology for anarchist, anti-authoritarian, egalitarian social movements today. In the sociological tradition, John McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald offer one classic definition of a *social movement* as: “a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society.”<sup>65</sup> Sociologist Alberto Melucci

emphasizes that a social movement must be both collective and contentious: “first, a social movement is a form of collective action which involves *solidarity*, that is, actors’ mutual recognition that they are part of a single social unit. A second characteristic of a social movement is its engagement in *conflict*, and thus in opposition to an adversary who lays claim to the same goods or values.”<sup>66</sup> Here Melucci conceives of a social movement as the collective political activity of striving to determine the organization of the world, always in conflict with other social movements who are trying to determine that organization differently. New social movement theorist Alain Touraine understands social movements as the makers of social order, culture, and meaning; in a Marxist tradition, social movements are the actors of history: “the set of cultural, cognitive, economic, and ethical models by means of which a collectivity sets up relations with its environment; in other words, produces [...] a culture.”<sup>67</sup> Social theorist Manuel Castells also offers a definition based in the deep seat of social conflict, saying that a social movement articulates “purposive collective actions whose outcome, in victory as in defeat, transforms the values and institutions of society.”<sup>68</sup>

Social movements are trying to “move” the organization of their society in a particular direction. But so are other social movements. They inevitably push against each other. Thus, social movements can be conceived as contested action in the hegemony of social organization, competing over the limited resources, means of influence, tactical repertoires, and symbolic ideals that a society has to offer. In this context, there is a strategic project behind the way that social movement actors have come to distinguish between the ideal of *radical democracy* as distinct from other types of *official democracy*. This has been especially true in what scholars often call the *new social movements*. The label “new social movements” roughly describes a

trend that emerged after the transformative years of the 1960s whereby the most popular expression of social movements turned away from old grand narrative frames and tactical repertoires of socialism-communism towards more loosely structured and locally oriented frames and tactics. As Melucci states, the new social movements tended to emphasize “a politics of everyday life and individual transformation,”<sup>69</sup> turning their attention away from the revolutionary historical focus and mass organizational efforts exemplified by labour organizing to address issue-specific challenges through protest, direct action, and lifestyle reforms.

As sociologist Barbara Epstein has said, “the movements of sixties began not with revolution but with the goal of making democracy real.”<sup>70</sup> Consensus decision-making is a part of the *radical democratic collective action frame* that grew out of those dramatic and tumultuous years. Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow define the concept of a *collective action frame* as “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization.”<sup>71</sup> Today, radical democracy has a broad appeal as an overarching collective action frame, a concept that exerts the influence of a *master frame*. As Benford and Snow define it, a master frame acts to coordinate the general symbolic sense of political possibility for a wide group of social movement actors, working as “a kind of master algorithm that colors and constrains the orientations and activities of other movements.”<sup>72</sup> Emerging as a manifestation of the 1960s wave of radical social movements, the purposes and principles enshrined in consensus decision-making carry the specially utopian demands of that era. As was famously scrawled on the walls in Paris during the revolts of May, 1968, the spirit of the 60s called on everyone to *be realistic, demand the impossible*. Osha Neumann recalls how the exuberant 1960s counter-culture affected his own radical vision, instilling a sense of immediacy

to the articulation of prefigurative politics, calling for “‘freedom Now!’ The political culture of the sixties insisted that liberation was not to be deferred. Freedom would not come as the result of a long struggle during which people were unfree. Freedom had to be part of the struggle, an experience that one could grab now. The movement would grow by its shining example.”<sup>73</sup>

Reflecting this turn in ideological resonance of the 1960s American Left, by the early 1970s the ideal of radical democracy had become the brightest political concept for progressive Left-leaning movements in North America, outshining the old stalwart socialism/communism in popularity with young and new activists. Following the arc of this trend from the 1960s into the 1980s, Epstein argues that ‘radical democracy’ “has come to replace ‘socialism’ as the point of reference for what used to be called left politics.”<sup>74</sup> This “turn toward radical democracy involves a turn away from class as a key category of left politics, and also a loss of interest in politics or the question of who controls states (and other governing institutions) and what policies they produce.”<sup>75</sup>

The turn towards radical democracy as a new guiding alternative ideology was especially influential in the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), a perspective apparent in their founding document, the Port Huron Statement, first published in 1962. It is clear that the Port Huron Statement is not appealing for a revolutionary conflict against the American *value* of democracy. Take the following passage: “As a *social system* we seek the establishment of a democracy of individual participation, governed by two aims: that the individual share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life; that society be organized to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation.”<sup>76</sup> SDS evoked the ideals of democracy as a way to downplay the Old Left’s ideological mobilization of

socialism/communism, which was considered by many Americans to be a foreign or somehow un-American set of values and beliefs. On the other hand, the appeal to democracy in this statement comes from inside the already-instituted symbols of American ideology, evoking such ideals as “individuality,” “participation,” “quality and direction of life” to the service of the egalitarian dream. SDS appealed for a *deepening* of the democratic values that are already instituted into American society; it calls for the resurgence of ideal democracy against its idolization, a return to its roots. The Port Huron Statement does not *call out* American democracy, that it should be *attacked and destroyed* by the revolutionary overhaul of alternative ideals. It *calls upon* the tradition of American democracy, that it should be *radicalized* by the appeal of its own ideals. The radical edge of SDS’s vision for participatory democracy can be conceived as coming from inside the idealized claims of official democracy; it is an ideal trying to break out of its shell.

SDS disseminated this vision of participatory democracy to many burgeoning activists, and by the end of the 1960s a generation of college students radicalized during those turbulent times had grown up treating the ideal of participatory democracy as “the visionary call of the 1960s revolution.”<sup>77</sup> Along with a shift away from the frame of class struggle towards the frame of radical democracy, there came a related shift in movement tactics and tone. Increasingly since the “revolutionary vision of the 1960s” took off in North America, the principled tension between the radical ideals and the official idols of “democracy” has driven activist rhetoric and their strategy. Many modern social movements have now taken on this principled purpose, expressing some variant on the promise to challenge the idols of official democracy in North American society with the ideals of their own radical roots.<sup>78</sup> Cairns and Sears articulate, for

instance, that “the struggle for ‘democracy’ in reality has often included vital strands of official and from-below perspectives, sometimes deeply interconnected. Indeed, the accomplishment of official democracy can be seen as a real, if limited and contradictory step in the direction of achieving democracy from below.”<sup>79</sup> Like the communist who appeals to a utopian vision of the egalitarian society-to-come in order to challenge the shortcomings of actually-existing communism, like the Christian who see the ideal of Jesus as an encouragement to improve their own actions, the promise of radical democracy serves as an idealized self-referential cultural challenge. There is a distance within the term “democracy,” stretched between the official and the radical, between the idols that reign over the systematic inequality of modern society’s claim to democratic legitimacy and the ideals that reside at the heart of the promise for a system of radical equality.

This conceptual tension between the idols of official democracy and the ideals of radical democracy is a key factor in understanding how consensus decision-making is valued by its practitioners. In many cases, consensus process relies on promises of ideal radical democracy that are downright grandiose. One of the Rhizome Network authors preaches the vision of consensus with notable flair:

So what is consensus then? At a recent workshop a participant told me a short story which illustrated consensus for them: 2 stonemasons are carving blocks of stone. When asked what he’s doing the first mason says: ‘I’m carving this block of stone.’ When asked the same question the second mason says: ‘I’m building a cathedral.’ Consensus has more in common with that second mason...<sup>80</sup>

This allegory highlights the idea that consensus is not only a practice or tool used in the process of empowering immediately contentious political victories; it is a way to produce radical

democratic ideals in its own actions as an activity that has *higher* vision in mind, working on a stone in the greater construction of “another world.” It appeals to the *ideal* of radical democracy for creating a democracy that is still in the making, the grand vision of a cultural quest.

Consensus decision-making has spearheaded an extraordinarily idealistic and utopian articulation of radical democracy which exists in large part because of the appeal that democratic extremism holds for people who have internalized the Western cultural rhetoric about democracy but wish to move beyond it, to push it deeper, to radicalize it.

This can be powerful, but it can be dangerous. We have to be more careful about how these dynamics play out. This concept of radical democracy has been deeply influential for the anarchist new social movements by, as Elisabeth Clemens writes: “mobilizing individuals around a new (but culturally acceptable) model or inspiring them to use familiar models for new purposes, social movements serve as catalysts for the rearrangement and possible transformation of the array of organizational models that characterizes a society.”<sup>81</sup> Radical democracy expresses a struggle to redefine and reconstruct the dominant frames and practices that presume democracy as simply its official manifestations. The ideological assertions (both symbolically in its rhetorical forms and practically in its organizational forms) of radical democracy are supposed to challenge those presumptions, as the anarchist media group Crimethinc Collective has recently put it, by asking: “could it be that “democracy,” long the catch-word of every revolution and resistance, is simply not democratic enough? What could be more democratic?”<sup>82</sup> What could be more democratic than democracy? ... *Consensus decision-making!* At least, that’s what the consensus decision-makers say. Wherever we hear consensus practitioners tooting their own horns, we find the basic pitch that it is *more* democratic than normal versions of official

democracy, and more, that it is *even more* democratic than the normal versions of radical democracy. In this spirit, the *Seeds for Change* guide opens with a challenge: “What’s Wrong with the Democracy We’ve Got?” They immediately answer themselves:

Power and decision making is taken away from ordinary people when they vote for leaders — handing over power to make decisions to a small elite with completely different interests than their own. Being allowed to vote 20 times for an MP or senator is a poor substitute for having the power ourselves to make the decisions that affect every aspect of our lives.<sup>83</sup>

The Seeds for Change people introduce the consensus process *as a challenge to “the democracy we’ve got:”* that is, it acts as a means of practicing the ideals of radical democracy in contrast and challenge to the idols of official democracy. It represents itself as the true democracy versus fake democracy, actual equality versus acted-out equality. This is an exclamation that invokes the ideals of democracy to challenge people, to push us towards ever greater relations of equality:

consensus decision making is based on the idea that people should have full control over their lives and that power should be shared by all rather than concentrated in the hands of a few. It implies wide-ranging liberty, including the freedom to decide one’s own course in life and the right to play an equal role in forging a common future.<sup>84</sup>

In this sentiment, consensus decision-making is explicitly intended to serve as a force of the radical democratic insurrection against official democracy; it is framed in contrast against any form of decision-making (democratically-labelled or otherwise) that relies on *power over people* rather than the *power of people*.

It is often assumed in this way that government generally requires a practice of power-over equated with domination and control, that the head-body distinction of command-obedience is

the only way to manage political organizations. Take the following position from Stewart Clegg, David Courpasson, and Nelson Phillips, as stated in their massive compendium on theories of power in the field of organizational studies:

Domination and organization are inescapably mutually implicated. Domination requires organization — concerted action by a body of people employed as staff — to execute commands; and, conversely, all organization requires domination in that the power of command over the staff must be vested in an individual or a group of individuals, in an organization of any scale.<sup>85</sup>

On the contrary, the radical democratic ideal proposes that power can be developed in egalitarian inter-actions that needn't vest the power of command in any one person or organizational position, instead vesting power in the entire membership of the organization insofar as they act together as a group, such that there is no difference between those who command and those who enact the dictates of the organization. Democracy is the practice of finding ways to include everyone who is a part of the polis (everyone who is recognized as belonging in the community) to make decisions and act in a public function for that community, displacing any boundary instituted to limit the participation in government by qualification, representation, or right.

Authoritative official democracy retreats from the essence of radical democracy, because it resides in a “fear or lack of faith in the people,” as Paolo Friere has said. “But if the people cannot be trusted, there is no reason for liberation.” In contrast, through radical democratic means “the revolution is not even carried out *for the people*, but *‘by’ the people for the leaders*.”<sup>86</sup> That essential political work that people perform together to determine who they are as a people: the ancient Greeks called this *autonomy*. As the philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis has put it, “autonomy comes from auto-nomos: (to give to) oneself one’s laws. [...] It is the

unlimited self-questioning about the law and its foundations as well as the capacity, in light of this interrogation, *to make, to do* and *to institute* (therefore, also, *to say*).”<sup>87</sup> As authority is essential to official democracy, autonomy is essential to radical democracy. And so it seems that insofar as democracy should remain an autonomous political activity, no answer from up high, no wise directive from an authoritative head should suffice to define it. It is always a practice of quest(ion)ing the “we.” Democracy is present where a people autonomously treats themselves as a political quest(ion): which are the rules that we ought to make? Which is the people we ought to be through those rules? These are the radical quest(ion)s of an autonomous people-power.

*Official democracy treats people-power as a resource to be authoritatively governed by a political institution:* a politics organized by power-over people’s collective actions for some authority to make decisions in the name of “the” people, but without including those people.

*Radical democracy treats people-power as the source by which a political institution is autonomously governed:* a politics organized by power-with among people with equal power-to participate in and to influence the determination of their collective actions.

The *project of radical democracy* is in transforming current practices of official democracy into the potential practices of radical democracy.

### **(1.2.3) Anarchist Democracy**

Consensus decision-making has staked its place in the traditions of mainstream North American activism according to the promises of radical participatory democracy. It was particularly attractive in the early 1970s, when it was presented to a new generation of 1960s-inspired activists as a special way of organizing that could counteract a common and all-too

accepted reliance on centralized, racist, patriarchal, and normalizing systems of authority — all those processes of coordinated control that still prevailed in the institutions of the most popular 1960s radical groups, despite their own appeals to the ideals of a radical democracy. By the early 1970s, a generation of activists had absorbed the ideals of radical democracy as the main standard of value which they could use to criticize the established society's many failures; they would also, of course, inevitably apply that same standard to their own organizational failures. Many would abandon the promise of radical democratic organizing in favour of militant and centrally organized models more associated with Lenin and Mao; the promises of Third World anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist communism seemed a more forceful and more demanding route to revolution.<sup>88</sup> Others would move deeper, doubling down on a radical democratic critique of radical democracy itself to find deeper ways to critique and transcend the problems of authoritarian, hierarchical, exclusionary, and unequal organizational systems that they had run up against in the 60s whirlwind. This is where consensus decision-making made its mark.

Consensus came to prominence during this time, partly at least because it posed as a procedural alternative for feminists who were advancing a critique of the masculine culture and patriarchal tendencies in the New Left; for anarchists who were resolutely opposed to the strict hierarchies carried on by the new communist movements; for on-the-ground civil rights workers who didn't want the bigshot campaign leaders telling everyone what to do and where to protest; and for the general cultural temperament of a new generation turned on by the radically anti-authoritarian aura of the 60s, who longed to realize a utopian way of working together. The turn towards radical participatory democracy and stronger attention to anti-authoritarian practices opened the chance for a resurgence of anarchist traditions that had been making a comeback in

North American radical politics since the 1950s.<sup>89</sup> As Mark Lance has stated, “if anything is essential to anarchism, it is the idea that social decisions are to be taken by everyone affected, and that this inclusion must involve substantive participation of each in deliberation and decision-making. Thus a dispute on the nature of such participation is a dispute about the very essence of anarchism.”<sup>90</sup> Certainly, this radical democratic logic of tension is commonplace in contemporary anarchist and activist discourse, repeated so often that many activists will take the idea of “normal” democracy of official government practices for granted as the natural antagonist for the “true” democracy of radical democratic practices. Radical democracy is taken as the true democratic alternative to the idolized and false claims of official democracy (which, in this vein, sometimes is sardonically called “de-mock-racy”). However, this particular framework has not always been forefront in anarchist traditions, just as it hadn’t always been prominent in earlier left activist traditions generally. The radical democratic emphasis on a tension between the ideals and the idols of democracy can indeed be tracked through the more classical anarchist traditions, but they have developed different associations and different strengths in the contexts of the new social movements.

Before the 1960s experiences altered the symbolic and strategic landscape of North American radicalism, anarchists tended not to call upon the ideals of radical democracy. They spoke of “democracy” more in terms of its official manifestations, and critically attacked it for the lack of equality it institutionalized in society. This tendency is still strong, of course. Contemporary anarchist author Peter Gelderloos, for instance, expresses the popular critical stance against official democracy, arguing that “democracy is an authoritarian, elitist system of government designed to craft an effective ruling coalition while creating the illusion that the subjects are in

fact equal members of society.”<sup>91</sup> That is, the ruling system of modern capitalist society simply uses the idols of democracy as a way to hold power over people. As C. B. Macpherson urges us to remember with virtually the entire span of his scholarship, “it cannot be too often recalled that liberal democracy is strictly a capitalist phenomenon.”<sup>92</sup> At the same time, however, anarchists have long practiced and preached varying modes of people power that support the deeper ideals of democracy. Tom Malleson notes that

although they often lambasted ‘democracy,’ it is undeniable that whenever they started to seriously discuss proposals for alternatives, their visions were always deeply imbued with a democratic ethos. Their ideas were fundamentally visions of radical democracy, of people having equal decision-making power in their associations, even if they tended to shy away from using the word ‘democracy’ in favour of words like ‘bottom-up,’ ‘self-management,’ ‘auto-gestion,’ ‘worker’s control,’ ‘self-government,’ and so on — words which display an unmistakably democratic impulse. Occupy is a perfect example of how deeply entrenched this discourse is today, but Occupy is only one of the most recently prominent cases in a lineage of North American social movements that tout the transformative element of consensus as *the most importantly radical* aspect of democratic politics. And so in this frame proponents of consensus usually claim that their method is *the most radical* of all participatory democratic methods, and as such, provides the best way to learn about how we must make collective decisions.<sup>93</sup>

If you sift through the historically specific nomenclature, it is apparent that, at heart, anarchism and radical democracy share certain basic premises. So, what is it that so closely links contemporary anarchist activism with the concepts of radical democracy? Explained in the pages of an old-fashioned independent newsrag, as a call-out for participation in the 1988 Toronto Anarchist Survival Gathering, “anarchy” means:

a society which is self-governed; people organizing themselves on an equal basis without leaders or bosses; direct democratic control of our workplaces, neighbourhoods and schools, associated with other communities and exchanging goods and services freely. People give what they can to the community and take what they need. A society which finds a balance with the natural environment instead of lording over it. Above all, anarchy is a society where control is decentralized so that all of us have power over our own lives and communities and work cooperatively instead of competitively. Curious?<sup>94</sup>

It's likely that many people are indeed curious. These anarchist principles express the broad appeal for the Western social ideals of individual liberty and democratic equality generally, although for most of Western society these notions would normally be taken as 'ideals' rather than 'projects.' There is an affinity between anarchist and liberal traditions which deserves more serious critical attention. At the moment, however, I aim only to develop an ideological connection between anarchism and democracy. Both anarchism and democracy are historical projects which strive to *radicalize* the principles of Western society, rather than merely assert those principles as idols around which mechanisms of control can be ballasted. The same ideals professed by anarchism are common to liberal Western society, but in their mainstream guises those ideals are treated like the banners of a social fantasy, a tale we tell to the ghosts of our dreams, a story of what we hope is possible but realize isn't, or an isolated struggle waged here and there by some lonely resister. They are turned into idols. As Noam Chomsky recalls, anarchist ideals

grow out of the Enlightenment, their roots are in Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*, Humboldt's *Limits of State Action*, Kant's insistence, in his defense of the French revolution, that freedom is the precondition for acquiring the maturity for freedom, not a gift to be granted when such maturity is achieved. With the

development of capitalism, it is libertarian socialism that has preserved and extended the radical humanist message of the enlightenment and the classical liberal ideals that were perverted into an ideology to sustain the emerging social order.<sup>95</sup>

For a history of movements working in and around anarchism, and for so many more that may or may not have anything to do with the label as such, these are the goals for collective programmes and political projects, the source material for real social organization. They have to be not just idols, not even just ideals: they have to be *practices*. Murray Bookchin has stated the overall specialty of anarchism as rooted in its commitment to practicing what others consider merely as ideals. And so he comments that

no sizeable radical movement in modern times had seriously asked itself if organizational forms had to be developed which promoted changes in the most fundamental behavior patterns of its members. How could the libertarian movement vitiate the spirit of obedience, of hierarchical organization, of leader-and-led relationships, of authority and command instilled by capitalist industry? It is to the lasting credit of Spanish anarchism – and of anarchism generally – that it posed this question.<sup>96</sup>

This is the vision of *anarchist* radical democracy: to intensify and radicalize the commonly accepted values of democracy, in such a way that those values can be more powerfully enacted for immediate communities who practice them. Writing for the War Resisters League Organizer's Manual in 1981, at the height of radical democracy's resurgence as the prime ideology driving the American Left, Carol and Howard Ehrlich put the point of anarchism nicely: "literally, the history of anarchism begins with the first person who opposed the idea that any social group had the right to structure itself so that some of its members dominated other members."<sup>97</sup> Simply put, this mythical history could also represent the birth of democracy. Anarchism promotes the

possibility of a social system in which no one has the right to dominate or exploit any other, for which all people should be engaged in common production of social equality. Anarchism promotes the power of people against systems of power over people, same as radical democracy.

But, again, I'd prefer to keep our attention focused on more immediate and less mythological histories. I am all too aware of the dangers in reducing all things to variations of Anarchism, capital *A* with a caps-lock on the *ISM*. "AnarchISM," as Hakim Bey pronounces with disdain. "Like Sinbad & the Horrible Old Man," this AnarchISM "staggers around with the corpse of a Martyr magically stuck to its shoulders — haunted by the legacy of failure and revolutionary masochism — stagnant backwater of lost history."<sup>98</sup> I don't want to argue that all movements should drop their own baggage and take up the burdens of "Anarchism," capital-A ruler of all things radical. Really, to reduce anything simply to an "ism" is antithetical to the very spirit and traditions of uncapitalized anarchism. And this principle should apply *especially* to anarchism itself: drop the ISM; be the an-arch.

When attending to the tangled lineage of anarchist influence on contemporary North American projects of radical democracy and consensus decision-making, we must take care not to attribute too much power to any one root. Today's anarchist movements are an amalgamation of influences, self-consciously and intentionally so. In this vein, activist and scholar Uri Gordon defines contemporary anarchism as a *coalition against domination*, which has emerged through the

convergences of radical feminist, ecological, anti-racist and queer struggles, which finally fused in the late 1990s through the global wave of protest against the policies and institutions of neo-liberal globalization. This has led anarchism, in its re-emergence, to be attached to a more generalized discourse of resistance,

gravitating around the concept of *domination*. The word domination today occupies a central place in anarchist political language, designating the paradigm which governs both micro- and macro-political relations. The term ‘domination’ in its anarchist sense serves as a generic concept for the various systematic features of society whereby groups and persons are controlled, coerced, exploited, humiliated, discriminated against, etc. – the dynamics of which anarchists seek to uncover, challenge and erode.<sup>99</sup>

Anarchism (like democracy, like feminism, like other -isms that strive against domination and exploitation of any kind) is rooted in the general tone of modern political ideal of equality. In this project, I will continue to treat “anarchism” as an assembly of voices fighting for a *radical* articulation of equality, in the many corners of a greater struggle. In this spirit, Canadian activist and writer Chris Dixon subsumes the current political sense of “anarchism” under the rubric of “another politics.”

Those who are developing another politics identify politically in many different ways and through a variety of legacies of resistance. We call ourselves abolitionists, anarchists, anti-capitalists, autonomists, feminists, horizontalists, radicals, and many other things. Most of us draw eclectically on a variety of influences and traditions. Part of the reason for this, it seems to me, is that we are trying to stay critical, avoid dogmatism, and find what actually works.<sup>100</sup>

This idea of “another politics” is named vaguely, with open-ended allegiance, so as to signify how contemporary radical politics tends towards the intersectional alliance of many traditions, threads, cultures, and histories that have now come together to form a diverse assemblage of movements and activisms, a loose family of political praxis that includes a strong dose of the North American radical democratic traditions.

### **(1.3) Anarchist Dual Power Praxis: Radical Democracy and Direct Action**

Social movements are a struggle to *change* social relations, trying to change the world while changing the way the world is changed: this is a task that the anarchist tradition has often referred to as *dual power*. The bond that shapes a dual power of prefigurative and contentious politics can be illustrated by sharpening our awareness of the way “radical” is spoken in common activist discourse today. We call ourselves “radical” on purpose. It is a title, a self-referential name that we take on as a term of valour and valuation. But when we cut into it more critically, what does this concept really evoke?

Our colloquial evocation of “radical” has two sides to it that align uncannily with the old conception of dual power. Both elicit the bond between contentious political actions and prefigurative political actions. In one sense we evoke the term “radical” to name an activity that directly addresses a problem at its root causes. In another sense, “radical” also refers to the activity of upholding an active commitment to the root of one’s own principles, purposes, and projects. In the first case for something or someone to be called “politically radical” signifies that they are engaged in a *contentious political* practice: it is a performance of critical or practical attack that refuses to settle for reforms, instead striving for revolutionary changes that get to the root causes of a problem. In the second case, for something or someone to be called “politically radical” signifies that they are engaged in a *prefigurative political* practice: it is a performance of basing one’s own political and social practices in different root causes. When we use the term “radical” in its colloquial anarchist activist sense it is split between these two poles of dual power, between representing a contentious politics and a prefigurative politics.

Very often in contemporary activism this split results in a fight over the significance of “being radical,” reverberating an old and ongoing debate about which side of dual power is more important: the prefigurative activity or the contentious activity? Ultimately, dual power is activated when a movement can coordinate both prefigurative and contentious politics in a common praxis. This is not always possible and, in fact, the history of consensus decision-making reveals that the process has often stumbled precisely at this crossroads, grinding down when groups and movements get into a standoff between their prefigurative and contentious goals. In this section, I will address the dynamics of dual power in the ideals of contemporary anarchist radical democracy and consensus decision-making, highlighting this concept as a key goal according to which the technique has been practiced over its history. I will finish the chapter with a look at how a *duel* between the split sides of radical dual power continues to be a chronic disease for the anarchist radical democratic praxis of consensus decision-making.

### **(1.3.1) Prefigurative Politics (the Left Hand of Dual Power)**

When Uri Gordon speaks of contemporary anarchism as the convergence of “radical feminist, ecological, anti-racist and queer struggles, which finally fused in the late 1990s through the global wave of protest against the policies and institutions of neo-liberal globalization,” he could just as well be describing the history of consensus decision-making. Consensus and anarchism have shared many popular turns of fate over the past 40 years or so, a bond that has been tied even tighter by a common association they both also share with post-1960s feminism. During the late 1960s and early 1970s feminists developed several methods of direct and egalitarian interaction as a way to combat masculine and patriarchal assumptions about decision-making,

discussion, and emotional culture. Some of these methods, such as the consciousness raising circles, were focused on sharing and healing in a feminist centred association. Some, such as consensus-based decision-making, were more instrumentally oriented toward sharing power in activist and organizing circumstances. In particular, the feminist movement was directly influential on the anarchist environmentalist direct action cultures of the later 1970s that would come to adopt consensus processes as their formal and central methods of deliberation.

Feminist author C.S., introducing a classic debate between Jo Freeman and Cathy Levine concerning feminist organizational structure in the early 1970s, proposed a convergence of feminism and anarchism based on a shared goal: to fight the dominance of traditionally authoritarian power systems. In pursuit of new ways to break apart the rule of men, demagogues, centralized leadership, and bureaucratic conformism, “the question how do we organise, rather than simply why, had become of great importance.” In pursuing the classically anarchist concern with the means of revolutionary organizing, C.S. claims that “it took feminists to show how libertarian organisation could look. 'Feminism is what Anarchism preaches', wrote Lynne Farrow in 1974. A little simplistic, perhaps, but it was certainly true that the feminist practice of small, leaderless groups was an anarchist ideal.”<sup>101</sup> During the 1970s, the search for new ways of organizing that could transform the powers of traditional privilege and authority led anarchists and feminists to adopt common methods and techniques. As the authors of the Formal Consensus manual would later reflect, “as recently as the 70s, feminists clearly defined the lack of an alternative process for decision-making and group interaction as the single most important obstacle in the way of real change, both within progressive organizations and for society at large.”<sup>102</sup>

Throughout the 1970s, as the question “how do we organize?” (rather than simply “why do we organize?”) took on more importance, the meaning, purpose, and possibilities of how consensus decision-making could contribute to the traditions of radical democracy began to get framed more explicitly as a matter of what would come to be known as *prefigurative politics*.

Consider this passage from the Seeds For Change guide:

If we are fighting for a better society where everyone has control over their own lives, where everyone has equal access to power, where it’s possible for everyone to follow their interests and fulfil their needs, then we need to develop alternative processes for making decisions; processes that recognise everyone’s right to self-determination, that encourage mutual aid and replace competition with co-operation.<sup>103</sup>

From the manuals, we find that the overarching answer to “consensus? — what for?” is some version of this “*fighting for a better society*.” the ideal of radical democracy fighting through its own idols. The particular value of consensus in the tradition of radical democracy, however, digs itself a little further into the ideal, often to the point where consensus proponents claim that their method is the *most* democratic and the *most* radical of all radical democratic methods. They generally based this claim on some variant of its *prefigurative* radicalness.

The literal meaning of “prefigurative” derives from the notion of making that bond between means and ends. It goes something like this. People have a vision of the future society that they want to build (a vision that is distinct from the way their society exists at present) which we can call the “figure” of a revolutionary ends. For a prefigurative politics, this “figure” of the *ends* must be “pre-figured” in the *means* that people use to strive towards the end figure. From this

perspective, any political activity that can properly call itself a *prefigurative politics* must assure that *its means match its ends*.

The introductory pamphlet for decision-making at Occupy Wall Street announces it loud and clear as well:

consensus is an inclusive and non-hierarchical process for group decision making. It is a method by which the input and ideas of all participants are gathered and synthesized in order to arrive at a final decision acceptable to all. Through consensus, we are not only working to achieve better solutions, but paving the way for an egalitarian model of community decision making.<sup>104</sup>

This notion of “paving the way” signifies a commitment to treating consensus as a prefigurative politics, a way to activate the ideals of a movement in its current practices. A point which recognizes the importance of building something up to replace what is being torn down.

Consensus takes the link between principles and procedures in a utopian spirit, and in so doing becomes a unique and special form of political deliberation. This is, in itself, a key point of identifying consensus as a prefigurative political pedagogy. Technically speaking, consensus aims to produce a synthesis of proposals, weaving together ideas to find the most commonly acceptable decision-action for the entire group. As a deliberative method, consensus is committed to developing more collective, innovative, and synthetic decisions. But there’s more. There is also an explicit recognition that the consensus process weaves together members as a way to create a more collective, innovative, and synthetic group identity, and that this practice is inherently valuable in itself as a prefigurative activity for learning how to build egalitarian community. Randy Schutt, who gives workshops and facilitation training for consensus process

in Santa Cruz, California, takes this point as the subtitle of an essay explaining its merits:

*“Consensus is Not Just a Process, but a Valuable Goal.”*<sup>105</sup>

For the proponents of consensus, there is nothing more radically democratic than consensus decision-making. Emerging from the experience of 1960s activists, the value of the consensus process was originally focused on its appeal as a prefigurative method of achieving group unity and harmony, as a way of doing politics differently than before. Instead of allowing the same old culture to dominate — where men, white folks, and the well-and-loudly spoken have most influence over group decisions, the consensus process provided people with a way to structure new forms of equality into their own meetings. Consensus was a hit with people who wanted this prefigurative factor forefront in their activist work, as a means of practicing the kind of radically egalitarian discussion and compromise that would be necessary for building a more holistically democratic society. Although (of course), this radical equality doesn't always work out in practice (and there will be much more on the way that this ideal may sputter and fail in the chapters to come), the ideal is that consensus provides the means for working together to accomplish a collective goal in a manner that works to enhance collective equality in the process.

As the ActUp manual puts it:

consensus is a process for group decision-making. It is a method by which an entire group of people can come to an agreement. The input and ideas of all participants are gathered and synthesized to arrive at a final decision acceptable to all. Through consensus, we are not only working to achieve better solutions, but also to promote the growth of community and trust.<sup>106</sup>

The promise of prefigurative politics carries that strong utopian and idealist spirit that owes so much to the religious sentiments of the Quakers. Even though we now tend to forget about the

Quaker roots of consensus, it is still important to recognize the indelible mark left by the Quaker model on the ethical and spiritual pedagogical tone of consensus, even today. One key point of influence which owes directly to the Quaker elaborations of consensus is the persistent emphasis of nonviolence on which it is premised. Although there are certainly variations of emphasis, consensus is still almost universally promised as a means to change social relations of violence into affinities of communicative nonviolence, and thereby to grow a fundamentally nonviolent culture from the roots of a nonviolent deliberative process.

Even when practiced in non-religious or even anti-religious cultural conditions, the consensus process still tends to carry the idealistic tone of a Christian ethical prerogative to uphold peaceful brotherly respect. The prerogative for nonviolent interactive respect was doubled by the feminist aim to engage in a non-dominating/non-masculine method of interactive equality, and the Movement for a New Society (MNS) can be cited as a key example of this doubled legacy. Through the 1970s and into the 1980s MNS gave hundreds of workshops in consensus and direct action, and their explicit attempt to promote both prefigurative and pragmatic tactics of nonviolence remains an influential ideal today. Until its demise in 1988, MNS grew from its roots in Quaker direct action networks to establish a national presence as a network of feminist radical pacifist collectives. From Cornell, we hear that

MNS popularized consensus decision-making, introduced the spokescouncil method of organization to radicals in the United States, and was a leading advocate of a variety of practices — such as communal living, unlearning oppressive behaviour, and creating cooperatively owned businesses — that are now often subsumed under the rubric of prefigurative politics.<sup>107</sup>

The discourses of consensus tell us that our culture does not teach us to be capable of interacting in these nonviolent manners, so consensus is supposed to serve as a radical method of changing these values, habits, and beliefs so that people can begin to re-learn how they may become equal in political organization. The project of prefigurative politics is not simply, however, an “ethical” process. It requires that people learn new technical skills and develop different practical and strategic capacities. I am studying the discourses presented largely by pedagogical manuals that aim to teach consensus decision-making as a technical method, and these sources (understandably) tend to emphasize the processes of learning as a key to the success of prefigurative political goals. For instance, the Rhizome guide emphasizes that “consensus is an upward spiral. No group has all the attitudes and skills needed to do perfect consensus. But the struggle to use consensus well helps to build those attitudes and skills so that bit by bit the group achieves new heights, overcomes new struggles, deepens its understanding.”<sup>108</sup>

### **(1.3.2) Contentious Politics (the Right Hand of Dual Power)**

The pedagogical focus of prefigurative politics is necessarily instrumental as well as ethical: a technical method to make egalitarian, inclusive, participatory, anti-authoritarian, and non-violent *decisions* that is at the same time a cultural modality to make egalitarian, inclusive, participatory, anti-authoritarian, and non-violent *people*. Marianne Maeckelbergh reinforces this notion when arguing that “prefiguration is something that people do... the alternative 'world' is not predetermined: it is developed through practice and it is different everywhere.”<sup>109</sup> The reason I introduce the relation between ethics and practice into this discussion of pedagogy is because it highlights the often ignored and downplayed side to any prefigurative politics. Prefiguring a new

way of politics is necessarily always also a *fight* because it has to struggle against the ruling politics that is already ingrained in our beliefs, habits, and practices. We emphasize the prefiguring process of asserting our vision of an alternative world, but that can only come through the contentious struggle to overthrow the enemy who controls this world. Thus, the duality between pedagogical prefiguration and contentious struggle has to be treated as an essential bond of radical politics.

Joshua Kahn Russell's blog *Praxis Makes Perfect* is devoted to collecting strategic resources for social movement mobilization, asserting its tagline with a quote from Paolo Friere that captures this spirit and purpose: "What can we do today, so that tomorrow we are able to do what we are unable to do today?"<sup>110</sup> While noting the importance of participatory democracy for 21<sup>st</sup> century anarchism, Cindy Milstein points out that egalitarian decision-making

is not something that people in most parts of the world are encouraged or taught to do, most pointedly because it contains the kernel of destroying the current vertical social arrangements. As such, we're generally neither particularly good nor efficient at directly democratic processes. But through them, people school themselves in what could be the basis for collective self-governance, for redistributing power to everyone.<sup>111</sup>

By "schooling ourselves" to become better at collective self-governance we are struggling against the grain of our already-ingrained schooling, which has focused largely on how to act in hierarchical arrangements of governance. As Milstein notes, this is not something we are encouraged or taught to do — because we are encouraged and taught to do the opposite. We are schooled in the habits of authoritarian obedience and competitive individualism. These are skills

too, not just ethics. And so we will have to un-learn them in the process of learning their alternatives.

Take, for another case, the Rhizome guide's point that "consensus is an explicitly non-hierarchical egalitarian process. That's what it says on the box, and as such it attracts users who already have a commitment to behaving in that way. Of course we don't always live up to our ideals and most of us are brought up with competitive relationships being the norm."<sup>112</sup> This statement implies that to learn consensus as a set of beliefs and practices for radical democratic practices will require unlearning a different set of beliefs and practices. We must not only school ourselves, we must *re-school* ourselves. In order to re-school ourselves for nonhierarchical social arrangements, we will have to fight ourselves, challenge who we are, change what we do. In his manual for consensus, anarchist activist and writer Peter Gelderloos claims that "in building our resistance, we need to resist our own authoritarian habits. In empowering ourselves, we need to become familiar with social power that is based on equality, not exploitation. We need to learn consensus."<sup>113</sup> These comments show how the discourse of prefigurative politics frames consensus as a *counter-pedagogy* to the standardized and normative modes of "authoritarian habits" which presently rule. Gelderloos continues: "an explicit consensus process serves as a crutch or bridge which intentionally reinforces the learning of consensus until a new, cooperative, anti-authoritarian society provides that reinforcement as a matter of course."<sup>114</sup>

A counter-pedagogy like this may have a prefigurative focus, but it is also necessarily a challenge, a struggle, a fight. As Brandon Grey, a participant in Occupy Toronto, reflects: "we'd be fooling ourselves if we thought that by a snap of the fingers we could create a new society here in the park. [...] We're still struggling in the old society, and that means racism, sexism,

ableism, homophobia and transphobia.”<sup>115</sup> The process of transformative prefigurative politics is always also a hegemonic activity, always a conflict; always a fight against who we are, who we were, and who others want to make us be. To be truly effective in its goals, prefigurative politics must also be contentious politics.

I am working here with the meaning of *contentious politics* articulated by social movements scholars Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, as a political engagement which “involves interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else’s interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties.”<sup>116</sup> The only part of that definition that I wish to expand on slightly would be the last element, involving “governments.” Contentious politics shall often involve governments as “targets, initiators of claims, or third parties,” but they needn’t necessarily. It is a practice performed by a group of people who want to change society in some way, the basic practice of a “social movement” as contentious collective action to “move” society. A social movement strives to *move the social*: to push around, rearrange, and redeploy the system of prevailing social institutions. The move does not need to be directed at governments, but could just as well be aimed at moving economic conditions, or at moving social relations of gender, or at reconfiguring race relations, and so on.

The contentious aspects of a social movement means that it does require an antagonist, an enemy, or a combatant: someone or group or system that must be moved. For a broader scope of reference concerning contentious action, we can recall Alberto Melucci’s basic definition of a social movement (to which I referred earlier in this chapter): “first, a social movement is a form of collective action which involves *solidarity*, that is, actors’ mutual recognition that they are part

of a single social unit. A second characteristic of a social movement is its engagement in *conflict*, and thus in opposition to an adversary who lays claim to the same goods or values.”<sup>117</sup>

Expressing the importance of a radical democratic counter-pedagogy, Jamie Heckert calls upon the words of Ursula LeGuin to remember that “all of us have to learn how to invent our lives, make them up, imagine them. We need to be taught these skills; we need guides to show us how. If we don’t, our lives get made up for us by other people.”<sup>118</sup> The work we do on ourselves is always a struggle of some kind against the work that others would do to us, and social movements are a struggle to define a social order by dual power, inside and outside.

### **(1.3.3) Radical Democracy and Direct Action (Both Hands Now)**

In order to balance the two poles of “being radical,” anarchist praxis has to manage the tension between building equality in social organizations and challenging inequality in social organizations. The Seeds for Change manual expresses the appeal of consensus as a way to do this. Metaphorically calling the process a “seedling” which must be carefully nurtured into a full-grown social system, they say that “the alternatives to the current system are already here, growing in the gaps between the paving stones of state authority and corporate control. We only need to learn to recognise them for the seedlings of the different kind of society that they are.”<sup>119</sup>

Such grandiose prefigurative sentiments are common to the rhetoric of consensus, indicating in no uncertain terms that consensus has been developed as a vision that is deeply rooted as a radical democratic ideal means of “being the change we wish to see in the world.” But if those seedlings of a new society are “growing in the gaps between the paving stones,” as the Seeds for Change vision puts it, we also have to realize that no matter how much we may “recognize”

them, no matter how much we may nurture and train them and nurse them and care for them: they are still stuck between paving stones, with no room to grow; they are still going to get trampled by rush hour traffic. Without fighting back, without ripping up the pavement and contentiously staking out more space to protect those seedlings, they won't stand a chance.

To be an effective technique of dual power for anarchist social movements, the prefigurative political focus of the consensus process must ally with its “radical twin,” the other side of the coin that we flip in our regular meaning evoked by calling on ourselves to be “radical.” As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels once said that “in revolutionary activity the changing of oneself coincides with the changing of circumstances.”<sup>120</sup> This idea combining the prefigurative and the contentious can be accessed through many approaches, but one of the most persistent concepts that has influenced contemporary anarchist praxis is the notion of *dual power*. It's a strange lineage, too, since it crosses over from the work of Vladimir Illych Lenin, the distinctly non-anarchist leader of the 1917 Bolshevik communist revolution in Russia, who became one of the European anarchist tradition's most volatile rivals. Lenin first employed this term as a way to describe the special conditions that existed to empower the Russian revolution, using the notion to illustrate that “alongside the Provisional Government, the government of the *bourgeoisie*, *another government* has arisen, so far weak and incipient, but undoubtedly a government that actually exists and is growing — the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.”<sup>121</sup> This “other government” created a situation of “dual power” because it instigated a challenge to the existing ruling state of bourgeois government, not by overtaking control of that official institution, but by producing its own institution from-below. The Soviets posed an alternative power, thus creating a condition of “dual power.” The distinctive features of this “other government” was in its

revolutionary purpose and potential, which, according to Lenin's depiction, was distinct in its external aims (it was "a power based directly on revolutionary seizure"<sup>122</sup>) and also in its internal composition (it was "the direct initiative of the people from below"<sup>123</sup>).

Much later, revived poignantly by a North American revolutionary anarchist tradition of the 1980s and 90s, the idea of dual power has been rejuvenated in a different context, but with the same idea at heart. Writing for the American anarchist federation *Love and Rage* — a loose networking organization which developed anarchist connections across the continent from 1989-1998 — Christopher Day and San Christobal explain that

in the broadest sense of the term, dual power refers to situations in which a) parallel structures of governance have been created that exist side-by-side with old official state structures and that b) these alternative structures compete with the state structures for the allegiance of the people and that c) the old state is unable to crush these alternative structures, at least for a period of time.<sup>124</sup>

A project of dual power is at the heart of consensus when it is treated as a method of group decision-making that can be used by activists to fight for radical equality in the world while at the same time providing those activists with a model of interaction which can model the way they envision performing group decision-making in a radically egalitarian world. Anarchist activist and author Chris Crass (who worked intensely with the development of the Food Not Bombs movement in the 1990s) echoes that basic idea, saying that "the strategy of dual power means that oppressed people can simultaneously organize themselves to fight against the state, and create democratic institutions that prefigure the new forms of social organization of a socialist state."<sup>125</sup>

To find this notion of dual power at work in the organizations who have historically promoted consensus, we can look back to the critical influence of the Movement for a New Society (MNS). MNS first emerged as an offshoot of the anti-war mobilization organization A Quaker Action Group (AQAG), as the project of a few members who believed that that Quaker principles required increasing their investment in radical political strategies. As Andrew Cornell reports, “AQAG presented a proposal to the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) in March of 1971, arguing that the times, and Quaker principles, called for a broad program to combat ecological devastation, militarism, ‘corporate capitalism,’ racism and sexism.”<sup>126</sup> At that meeting, an appeal was made to *radicalize* both prefigurative and contentious politics of AQAG.

We hope to catalyze a movement for a new society, which will feature a vision of the new society, and how to get there; a critical analysis of the American political-economic system; a focus on expanding the consciousness and organizing the commitment of the middle class toward fundamental change through nonviolent struggle, often in concert with other change movements; the organization and development of nonviolent revolutionary groups and life centers as bases for sustained struggle on the local as well as national and international levels; training for non-violent struggle; and a program rooted in changed lives and changed values.<sup>127</sup>

Drawing also on an American tradition of secular socialist pacifism, the recorded statement from that meeting exclaims the doubly radical intention of dual power: to challenge established social order while also developing new forms of social organization in the process.

Their motion did not pass, but after that meeting MNS emerged as an independent organization that would be devoted to pursuing, well, a “movement for a new society.” The founding members of MNS had come of age through the civil rights movements of the 1960s,

combining influences from anarchism, feminism, and the Quakers to build a particular blend of anarchist dual power that would become quite influential to the developing ideological sentiments surrounding consensus decision-making. Betsy Raasch-Gilman, a longtime member of MNS, recounts that organization's goal in step with the balance of dual power:

If we're going to create a power vacuum, if we're going to take down a structure or system, we have to have something ready to go into its place. Because if there is a power vacuum, a counterrevolution will start immediately. That's a given. We have to have something that puts the system in place that we really want to live in. Whether that's a government or a nongovernmental system, we still have to have the pieces ready to put into effect and in place.<sup>128</sup>

Here, Raasch-Gilman expresses the overarching goal of anarchist revolutionary politics as a way of trying to make its prefigurative goals develop in tandem with its contentious goals, consciously formulated as a combined practice requiring what she calls "parallel institutions." Increasingly for anarchist, feminist, environmental, and social justice movements since the early 1980s, consensus has been one of the most common and central "parallel institutions" of dual power.

Chris Crass has said that "the tension in anarchist strategy, then, has been one of determining how to practice liberatory politics in ways that positively impacts those involved and still has real positive impacts for short-term and long-term gains in society."<sup>129</sup> In the North American anarchist traditions which inform today's articulation of consensus decision-making, the balance of that dual power has been most clearly engaged by the task of building *parallel institutions* bonded with *direct action*. When David Graeber reflects that "the original inspiration of Occupy Wall Street was the tradition not just of direct democracy, but of direct action,"<sup>130</sup> he means to

point out that Occupy thrived best when it was treated by participants as both a prefigurative and a contentious practice, as an activity with a praxis of radical dual power at heart. Uri Gordon works with a summary definition of direct action that perfectly fits the dual mode of “radical” as “a dual strategy of confrontation to delegitimise the system and grassroots alternative-building from below.”<sup>131</sup> A movement enacts “direct action” to interrupt the flows of orderly normal business as a way to present an alternative possibility into the structures of American life. Parallel institutions aim to build alternative processes that could support the type of system the movement aims to institute. Basically, direct action is a contentious political strategy to get in the way of business as usual, while parallel institutions are the prefigurative political strategy of how to operate an alternative, better mode of “business as usual.”

As I have recounted, through its use in large-scale occupations and blockades to deter nuclear plant constructions consensus became integral to a wave of activism in the late 1970s that was known as “the direct action movement.” From the beginning, organizers in this movement had a prefigurative political goal at heart, and placed at least as much emphasis on empowering the prefigurative as the contentious aims of their politics. As Barbara Epstein put it, “the direct action movement has been about cultural revolution, its aim not only to transform political and economic structures but to bring to social relations as a whole the values of egalitarianism and nonviolence.”<sup>132</sup> The aims of fostering change through “cultural revolution” were among the main ideal purposes of consensus decision-making in the 1970s, and they remain primary today. Likewise, Noël Sturgeon reflects on her involvement in the direct action movement by pointing out that “the political theory of the movement is not just a reflection of, and resistance to, contemporary structures of power but also a continuance and critique of the American radical

democratic tradition, particularly the sixties movements that are the direct action movement's most immediate ancestors."<sup>133</sup>

The Clamshell Alliance, founded in 1976, was developed as a network of autonomous affinity groups focused on resisting and stopping the construction of a nuclear power plant in Seabrook, New Hampshire. The small group of original alliance members adopted consensus early on, inheriting the formalities of the model from members were directly linked with the direct action traditions of Quakers and the Movement for a New Society (MNS). As reported by L. A. Kauffman,

the organizers of "the Clam," as it was often called, were eager to find a process that could prevent the pitfalls of structurelessness, without resorting to hierarchy. Two staff people from the American Friends Service Committee, the longstanding and widely admired peace and justice organization affiliated with the Society of Friends, or Quakers, suggested consensus.<sup>134</sup>

The Clam implemented a strictly consensus-based decision-making method, under instruction and support provided by the MNS "monster manual" that functioned (first for better, and then, also ultimately, for worse) to make decisions for large groups of people. Its first major direct action was a sit-in at the construction site, during which fourteen hundred people were arrested and held at nearby armouries for two full weeks. During their stay in prison, members continued to effectively maintain collective solidarity concerning demands and responses to the authorities, largely aided, many participants would later affirm, by the consensus process. In the meantime, it was successfully delaying the construction plans of the Seabrook plant.

Excited by their early success, people began to treat the Clamshell Alliance like a supermodel for further anti-nuclear direct action campaigns across the continent. The Clamshell Alliance was

particularly influential because it was a successful large-scale demonstration of the dual power potency in consensus decision-making — it provided a means of developing prefigurative equality among a vast group of diverse members while at the same time clearly articulating a special tool to empower the contentious struggle to stop the power plants. Hence, when describing the Clamshell Alliance in dual power terms as both an opponent and an opposition to the social, economic, and political structures of mainstream America, Gary Downey is expressing the common ideal of dual power which so enthused participants.

As its opponent, the Alliance was an instrumental actor, actively working to stop nuclear power and overcome domination. As its opposite, the Alliance was an egalitarian organization, a collectively of equal citizens seeking to avoid propagating domination through its own actions. The Alliance thus fought domination on both the outside and the inside.<sup>135</sup>

The Clamshell Alliance became a particularly influential flashpoint for consensus decision-making, demonstrating both the possible benefits and the dangers inherent in the process. At first, the alliance found great success in its strict use of consensus, but soon became mired in endless tactical debates due to that same ideological strictness, bogged down by internal strife to the point that nothing could get done. The Clamshell model spread quickly to become the go-to decision-making process for a burgeoning anti-nuclear movement, spawning related organizations across North America. On the West-Coast, the Abalone Alliance was responsible for several successful mobilizations against nuclear power. The same template, drawn originally from the Clamshell Alliance, was presented as the central decision-making process in the direct action blockade/encampment handbook used at Diablo Canyon in 1981, at the Livermore

Weapons Lab in 1982, for the International Day of Nuclear Disarmament in 1983, and during the Pledge of Resistance actions in 1986.<sup>136</sup>

By the mid-1980s the antinuclear direct action movement had exposed a generation of activists to the direct action, feminist, peace movement, and anarchist tradition of consensus decision-making, sowing enough seeds that the process thereafter became distinctly associated with a resurgence of North American anarchist-activist culture. One of these seeds grew into the particularly influential consensus guide *On Conflict and Consensus*. Published in 1987 by C.T. Butler and Amy Rothstein, this manual articulated a more formal and defined set of rules and regulations than those which had often been employed in the direct action movement. Explicitly and importantly, the authors emphasized their method as a process of *Formal Consensus*. The emphasis on “formal” is distinctive because the manual was intended to correct perceived problems with “informal” versions of consensus, problems which the authors had experienced first hand in their activism. As Butler recalls from his experience in the antinuclear direct action movements of the early 1980s,

for almost two years the process of consensus worked well for the Pledge, empowering very large numbers of people to engage confidently in nonviolent direct action. The forerunner of the model of consensus outlined in this book was used throughout this period at spokesmeetings and, particularly well, at the weekly coordinators meetings. However, it was never systematically defined and written down or formally adopted.<sup>137</sup>

Butler’s main purpose in developing a *formal* method of consensus was to respect the prefigurative political power in the process while trying to render it more adept at producing contentious political force.

Through their involvement during the late 1980s with the anarchist group Food Not Bombs (FNB), Butler and Rothstein's method of formal consensus was disseminated widely in North America, likely becoming the single most influential model for anarchist consensus process thereafter. FNB began in 1980 as a network of anti-nuclear activists in Cambridge, Massachusetts, who wanted to provide free food to homeless and hungry people. The project took off quickly, and soon the organizational and procedural methods of FNB spread across hundreds of chapters in the U.S. and around the world. By the mid 1990s, FNB had become an iconic anarchist organization in North America, serving often as a gateway introduction to anarchist politics for young activists who came to it through progressive University and College campus-based activism, and the system of formal consensus spread along with FNB.

It is notable that Butler and Rothstein's model removed itself somewhat more distinctly from the religious aspects of the earlier Quaker models, maintaining the ethical premises of antiauthoritarianism and nonviolence but subduing the religious and spiritual references that had still largely animated the direct action movement discourses. By the time consensus became fully assimilated into the anarchist political repertoire of the late 1990s and early 2000s alter-globalization movement, any explicitly spiritual justifications would be decisively erased. It is at this point that someone like Chris Crass, an anarchist writer and activist who was particularly involved with the late 1980s and early 1990s growth of San Francisco's FNB, could easily construe anarchism and consensus as if they had always been two peas in a pod:

Consensus is a form of making decisions which is based on anarchist principles. Consensus is a decision making process that seeks to empower people to be able to participate in the shaping of and implementation of decisions made by the group. Consensus aims to create a non-hierarchical, anti-authoritarian, cooperative group

structure that decentralizes power and encourages collective participation and responsibility. Part of the struggle to create non-hierarchical organizations is to confront and eradicate racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression and domination which privilege certain people, while keeping most people powerless and voiceless. Because we seek to create organizations — and eventually communities and societies — that empower people and create equality we must work against hierarchy. Anarchism and consensus go together like hot vegan soup and a good day-old bagel.<sup>138</sup>

The fact that Crass concludes his point with comparative reference to “hot vegan soup and a good day-old bagel” shows that he is contributing to a discourse which already presumes a small circle of shared cultural reference points within the traditions of anarchist activism. But, however obscure, these are anarchist reference points hold the same relevance today.

FNB introduces an era from the late 1990s through to the early 2000s in which anarchism had come to be virtually equated with consensus process. Among the manuals that I collected, the most commonly repeated diagrams and charts can be referred back to the original Formal Consensus sources, and it is apparent that many more short introductory guides are borrowing liberally from the same (such as those disseminated by the Public Interest Research Groups in Ontario, or as made available through small, usually anonymous, independent anarchist infoshop resources). This model was most widely acknowledged throughout the alter-globalization movement, finding its particular moment of flashpoint popularity in the fact that it was also used to organize mass resistance to the World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle, 1999. Echoing the experiences of the anti-nuclear movement, the adaptation of consensus to mass summit protest organizing proved to be a challenging and diverse task. Consensus has been applied far and wide during this time. On the one hand, it has worked as a means to organize among people

who may not know each other and may not immediately understand or share each other's political expectations or goals in spokescouncils and large meetings at demonstration convergences, to coordinating movement organizations like the Direct Action Network, Anti-Capitalist Convergence, Global Action Network, the Mobilization for Global Justice,<sup>139</sup> or working collective like Indymedia.<sup>140</sup> And on the other hand, it also became an essential ideal for small group anarchist decision-making, in collective such as bookstores, action groups, and community projects<sup>141</sup> to decide on general organization operations, as well as in affinity groups and street demonstration tactics such as the black bloc, where it helps to determine course of action in situations that require the power of assured solidarity.<sup>142</sup>

Scattered in exuberant directions the consensus process received another of its popularity boosts after the Seattle World Bank protests in 1999, becoming more and more prominent as the proper anti-authoritarian decision-making method for the growing alter-globalization movement of the early 2000s. During those years the ideals of anarchist dual power also enjoyed resurgence in the focus combination of direct action protest events and the prefigurative elements of egalitarian interaction, forged in the process that was bringing anarchist tactics and cultures to the forefront of North American new social movements.<sup>143</sup> Generally expressing the ongoing anarchist dual power vision in the language of the anti-globalization movement, John Holloway asserted that “we are not just saying No to capital, we are developing a different concept of politics, constructing a different set of social relations, pre-figuring the society we want to build.”<sup>144</sup>

The praxis of dual power anarchist radical democracy was, by most accounts, the animating spirit of the alter-globalization movement, its most defining and coordinating feature. The same

dual power spirit and consensus process was eventually handed down to the Occupy protestors who mounted their prominent campaign in the fall of 2011 and the winter of 2012.<sup>145</sup> As Occupy Wall Street participant Manissa Maharawal told Al-Jazeera in the fall of 2012: “If you’re going to join Occupy, you have to get on board with horizontal decision-making. In my mind it’s the reason why this thing has grown so much. Its structure is what allows it to be something that is fairly inclusive.”<sup>146</sup> The fact in the Occupy camps people felt like they had the capacity to share power their political process, rather than suffer under the power of predetermined political systems, was a stark contrast to most political experiences people had up to that point. This, in itself, was a strong reason for Occupy’s success, and it should be counted as a victory for dual power because it opened the door for people to begin to imagine a different mode of political interaction.

Being *able* to get involved is, however, only the beginning of democratic dual power. How do people actually participate meaningfully once they’ve become involved? How does the group actually accomplish meaningful things from that involvement? Explaining the process at Occupy Wall Street, Justin Elliot explains some of these functions:

The working groups were run by a consensus or consensus-based process. That means rather than just taking up or down votes, you strive to come to some kind of agreement, even if imperfect. So even if some people don’t feel fabulous about a decision, the vast majority of people will at least feel decent about it — instead of having 40 percent of the people hating the decision. There is also sometimes a facilitator who pays attention to power dynamics in the group: gender, marginalized voices, race and class.<sup>147</sup>

The occupy camps aimed to develop collective action structures which could engage people to have some involved control in various aspects of the group's overall operations. Active attention to combating racism, sexism, classism, ablism, colonialism, and any other "ism" which contributes to systematic privileging of access to power is an important part of the commitment to encouraging radical anarchist dual power.

When we hear Una Spenser say that the Occupy movement "is a protest, indeed, but it is also an offering,"<sup>148</sup> we should hear the ideal of "dual power." As a "protest" it tries to cause radical change in the systems of the world around it. As an "offering" it aims to conduct that radical change in a radically transformative prefigurative manner. The combination, together, can catalyze "an alternative way of addressing our societal need. That way is direct, participatory democracy where each person is equitable, responsible and fully accountable for the decisions we make about how to govern ourselves. That means getting down to work."<sup>149</sup> *Getting down to work*: the radical direct action of prefigurative and contentious democratic politics. The dual power project is a crucial, although often submerged, factor in the historical traditions and potential futures of consensus decision-making. It is with these potential futures in mind that I endeavour here to apply more critical attention to the way that consensus functions as a tool of radical democracy for anarchist dual power.

Today, movements sharing in the vision of "another politics" (as Chris Dixon calls it) carry on the anarchist dual power praxis of radical democracy and consensus decision-making. The best articulations of consensus decision-making can still instigate the dual power of radically democratic parallel institutions and direct action, as an alternative *and* an opposition; as the possibility of really getting down to the "roots" of what democracy is supposed to accomplish

while challenging other elements of society to do the same. These are the traditions of consensus that I am addressing in my work. All these thoughts on radical democracy, power, and consensus decision-making are built up as a service to movements that still strive to articulate dual power praxis. As Dixon says, “when we consciously link ‘against’ and ‘beyond’ in our organizing, we create possibilities for collective action that fundamentally challenges what is while practically building what we want. This dyad, the two aspects intentionally fused together, is the core promise of another politics.”<sup>150</sup>

#### **(1.4) Empowering Anarchist Radical Democratic Dual Power**

In this chapter I have tracked the modern North American history of the consensus process by following a theoretical account of its spirit and ideals. In structuring my account this way, I aim to highlight the way that I am not only interested with the technical aspects of its practices, nor simply with a detailed story of its purposes, but most specifically I am looking to depict the way that people have variously championed and struggled with the purposes built into its practices. As a practice of radical democracy performed for the projects of anarchist dual power, the consensus process starkly manifests important conceptual and idealistic complexities that are inherent in the vision of dual power. This complication is itself, sometimes, a hindrance to movement effectiveness and innovations. In particular, I will argue that the task of radical participatory democratic dual power which animates the spirit of consensus decision-making has had trouble due to its reliance on the standard anarchist concepts of power according to which its successes and failures tend to be evaluated. By detailing the concepts of power and democracy that are written into manuals and histories of the consensus process, I am focusing on

representing a discursive picture of the ideas about dual power praxis which must be challenged by the alternative theory of power which I shall present in this project.

In the tradition of North American new social movements, how does the historical articulation of radical democracy and dual power affect the deployment of power within the particular deliberative technique that is consensus decision-making? One especially egregious and glaring problem occurs when the dual power prerogative is split apart in such a way that people begin to treat it as a mutually exclusive option, and activists are encouraged to act as though they must choose between a prefigurative faction and a contentious faction. I've seen this happen again and again, and it's always a bad sign.

Down at Occupy Toronto, I once met a guy who told me: "we're all equal here!" I've met "this guy" before. He believes in a grand utopian vision of radical democratic equality, and he believes that we can make it happen right here, right now. We can "be the change." "All you need is love," he sings. He's onto something, abstractly. But he's definitely dead wrong, for real and for right now. By radiating such a smug faith in equality, this guy smothers our ability to transform real and present inequalities. He's the champion for only one side of the radical duality, idolizing *prefigurative politics* in a way that all too often ends up shrivelling the capacity for direct action, retracting the movement into a self-important and insular caricature of egalitarian culture.

Down at Occupy Toronto, there's another guy who'll tell you: "all this preoccupation with making sure 'we're all equal here' is dragging us down." He too believes in a grand vision of radical democratic equality, but he thinks there's too much self-obsessed concern with the processes of equality, it's really just a waste of energy, and we should be organizing primarily for

the sake of pragmatic gains, to change the bigger picture, to beat the system. He says it's going to take a long hard struggle. It's going to take "blood, sweat, and tears." "Fight the power," he shouts. He's onto something, abstractly. But he's also way wrong, for real and for right now. By refusing to engage usefully with the difficult challenge of creating equality in our own organizations, this guy also smothers our ability to transform real and present inequalities. He's the champion for the other side of the radical duality, idolizing *contentious politics* in a way that all too often ends up discouraging parallel institutions, pushing the movement into just another machine for a renewed mode of violent control.

Sometime long ago, during a long long meeting, taking part somewhere along the line of this long long long political tradition, I first had to listen to these guys commandeer a discussion with their counter-blabber. I bet we've all had to listen to these guys blab at one point or another. Some of us have *been* these guys (I sincerely apologize: it's been me at least a few times, for sure). They're usually the type of guys who never shut up. And they're everywhere. So we also tend to get used to them; we try to tune them out, and we keep on carrying on. I remember that first moment, though, when I suddenly recognized the debilitating inanity of their ideological jousting match. I remember how they distracted the rest of the group from actually doing anything, the way we got stuck in our own self-defeating discourses when those guys took over and polarized the entire conversation.

We should call them Scylla and Charybdis, those mythical Greek monsters faced by Odysseus: steer away from one, and you're doomed to the other. Choosing between Scylla the narcissistic utopian and Charybdis the hardened strategist is a dilemma particularly deeply ingrained in the traditions of consensus. As put by the title of a polemic piece circulated in

Occupy, most people are content to ask “to consense or not to consense?,” presuming the issue will rise or fall a dichotomous all-or-nothing hinge. This approach gets some people pronouncing consensus as “the most democratic of all forms of decision-making for it negotiates conflict without the use of force,”<sup>151</sup> while others detract that it is “the absolute worst idea that has ever been introduced to the activist community.”<sup>152</sup> The schism between yay and nay concerning the value of consensus is, very importantly, an integral aspect of its practice. For a long time now, this hard-edged opposition has drawn the battle lines within anarchist consensus process. Against those in Occupy who treated the consensus process as a revolutionary practice in itself, “critics blame consensus decision making for contributing to the unnecessarily gruelling and drawn out nature of OWS meetings, and a serious impediment towards growing the movement beyond activist circles.”<sup>153</sup> Just as it has gathered historical momentum to become the truly revolutionary path for some people, consensus has also accumulated opponents along the way who claim that it stands directly in the way of the truly revolutionary path. When we grandstand for prefigurative politics *or* contentious politics we split our passions down the middle. Facing Scylla or Charybdis, we are forced to choose between two monstrous versions of certain doom.

The tension between these two radical ends of dual power is definitely not unique to consensus. In North American social movements today it comes trailing along with a long train of baggage. As Francesca Polletta has pointed out in her historical study of democracy in 20<sup>th</sup> century American social movements, the schism has resurfaced again and again where “democratic ‘purists’ and ‘pragmatists’ have battled for control of organizations, with each side claiming its own version of what truly democratic deliberation requires.”<sup>154</sup> Over many decades of social movement analysis concerning radical democratic politics in North America, this

particular way of framing the problem has resurfaced in various guises. For instance, when C. Wayne Gordon and Nicholas Babchuk investigated voluntary organizations in the 1950s they highlighted a key contrast between *expressive* versus *instrumental* goals.<sup>155</sup> That is, again, expressive goals which would focus on a prefigurative challenge to the group's own behaviours, versus instrumental goals which would focus on achieving contentious gains in the political arena. In Wini Breines' study of the 1960s New Left she observes a prevalent dichotomy which divided that movement between *prefigurative* versus *strategic* aims.<sup>156</sup> Paul Starr's discussion of the politics of cooperatives and communes in the 1960s and 1970s deployed a framework that distinguished between groups with *exemplary* versus *adversary* orientations.<sup>157</sup> Each of these binaries is but a different set of names for "those two guys" and the repetition of their endless argument. The traditions of radical democracy are all too often staged according to the demand that we choose these sides in absolute terms ("to consense or not to consense?"), demanding a stark and final either/or allegiance ("either you're with us or you're against us").

Why so binary? How do we keep giving up the stage to those two guys? What premises and problems, what conditions and characters, what strategies and ethics keep getting us so stuck on this duel? No strong line between prefigurative idealism and pragmatic realism needs to be drawn, and we should never need to give up the floor to this filibustering blustering. When a certain problem happens over and over, there's something deeply wrong in the productive, generative mode of its inter-actions. There's more at play than tactical demands and analytic clarity — this is an ideological problematic, the repetition of a trauma, a symptom of something stuck in our collective political psyche. A popular adage comes to mind: "insanity is doing something over and over again and expecting different results."<sup>158</sup> People like to quote that one,

from Albert Einstein. While we're calling upon cultural tropes, might as well go the distance and remember that it's also Einstein who famously said "we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them."<sup>159</sup>

So my quest(ion) for the anarchist radical democratic dual power project of consensus decision-making is this: how can we begin to deal with these problems better by *thinking differently* about what "power" means in the composition of dual power praxis?

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<sup>28</sup> “A Brief history of consensus decision-making: Part 1,” Rhizome Network, last modified June 18, 2011, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://rhizomenetwork.wordpress.com/2011/06/18/a-brief-history-of-consensus-decision-making/>

<sup>29</sup> See for instance: Barbara Epstein, *Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991); Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); Alain Touraine, *Return of the Actor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Richard J. F. Day, *Gramsci Is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> Dan Spalding, “Shut the Fuck Up, or How to Act Better in Meetings,” The Anarchist Library, May, 2001, accessed February 22, 2013, <http://anarchalibrary.blogspot.ca/2010/09/shut-fuck-up-or-how-to-act-better-in.html>

<sup>31</sup> “Consensus decision-making: go with the flow,” Rhizome Network, last modified April 3, 2011, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://rhizomenetwork.wordpress.com/2011/04/03/consensus-decision-making-go-with-the-flow/>

<sup>32</sup> “Consensus Decision-Making,” Seeds for Change, accessed September 29, 2013, <http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/consensus>.

<sup>33</sup> Shawn Ewald, “Anarchy in Action: Methods, Tactics, Skills and Ideas,” Anarchy in Action, accessed October 28, 2013, <http://shawnewald.info/aia/>

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## Chapter 2) *Surveying Anarchist Power Theory*

In the first chapter I outlined how consensus decision-making has been conceptualized in the new social movements according to anarchist ideals of radical participatory democracy and dual power. In order to lay the groundwork upon which I shall develop my critical interventions, this chapter will now deal with the concepts of *power* which are common in those same anarchist and consensus decision-making discourses.

In the anarchist traditions of consensus decision-making there is a popular model of power that is based on distinguishing between power-to, power-over, and power-with. In this chapter I will first address how these terms are used in both anarchist thought and the mainstream traditions of 20th century North American social and political thought. The anarchist and the scholarly traditions of power theory share many key elements, presumptions, and axioms, which I label as an *agency perspective on power*. The agency perspective treats power as a matter of causal influence among individual agents who strive to change one another's behaviours. In the agency perspective, power-to posits the innate basic capacity of agents as an *outcome power* or *cause-ability*. Power in general is conceived as the originating in individual agency, to which any further analysis of social power relations is referenced. This sense of power-to represents an essential capacity for action, agency, and freedom, and is treated as basically good. Power-over represents the general idea of coercive influence, *social power*, *control-ability*: the application of power-to by some agents as a means of controlling the power-to of other agents. This sense of power-over represents the general idea of *arche*, the basically evil enemy of an-anarchist ethics. When expressed through the agency perspective, the anarchist ideas of power-to, power-over,

and power-with tend to be built upon the following two axiomatic premises:

*Agency Perspective Axiom #1: Power-to is the capacity for individual agents to act in the world; this power-to is the original source of power in general.*

*Agency Perspective Axiom #2: Power-over is a derivative articulation of original power-to applied as a means of controlling the power-to of others.*

The third concept in the set is *power-with*, which is defined by the anarchist tradition as a communicative, rational, and democratic means of egalitarian influence. It is the capacity to generate collective action through participatory deliberative equality, a *conduct power*, or *communic-ability*. This form of power is normatively valued as good because it provides the political alternative to systemic power-over and motivates the anarchist politics of dual power in radical democracy.

The agency perspective is the most common perspective taken by both anarchist and liberal democratic approaches of North American power theory, but it is not the only available perspective, and, in fact, it can only be coherently defined with reference to its main theoretical antagonist: the *structure perspective on power*. In order to better understand how the agency perspective treats power-to, power-over, and power-with, I will contrast the agency perspective axioms with two equivalent structure perspective axioms.

*Structure Perspective Axiom #1: Power-over is the capacity for a social system to control the actions of its members; this power-over is the original source of power in general.*

*Structure Perspective Axiom #2: Power-to is an effect of original power-over which is caused by subjection of individual agents according to the demands and requirements of their social systemic incorporation.*

I will elaborate on important differences between the agency perspective and structure perspective by detailing, on the one hand, the “three faces of power” tradition as an exemplary case of the agency perspective, and, on the other hand, influential social theorists such as Talcott Parsons, Jeffrey Isaacs, and Michel Foucault as common representatives of a structure perspective.

All of chapter 2 is a *survey*, an assessment of the situation as it stands. My own theoretical interventions must then work on these conceptual contexts by trying to find a new way of cutting across a very deeply entrenched dichotomy that is usually presumed to separate the agency and the structure perspective. My purpose in breaking down the vast array of diverse power theories into these two starkly opposes categories is to represent a key theoretical chasm which defines the topic broadly. The distinction between the two perspectives is a method of coding general theoretical approaches, and is not meant as a definitive analysis concerning any of the specific theorists represented. Certainly, there is more detail in each option than I will be able to articulate here. Instead, I want to outline the looming dichotomous conflict that still hangs over most social and political thought about power.

In explicit theorizations about power, we are still largely stuck on the rusty axis of agency versus structure. Is there room for a third option that isn't stuck on this dichotomous axis between agency and structure? That will be the main question for chapter 3, where I will focus on exploring how a *conduct perspective* focused on power-with can get off that axis and provide better solutions to the common contradictions which hinder agency/structure power theories. The conceptual axiomatic premises of power which I survey in this chapter fixate on distinguishing between good forms of power and bad forms of power, relying on a hard dichotomy between

agency versus structure theories. The hard line of these theoretical perspectives offer some useful viewpoints, but the hard lines tend to cause fixations and blockages in praxis. The opposition between agency and structure perspectives does not produce the kind of flexible analytical tools that the anarchist radical democratic project so desperately needs. I think a different theoretical approach that I will call the *conduct perspective on power* is much more capable of mobilizing dual power with an integrated critique of power that involves both the internal and external relations of collective action systems. The concept of power-with plays an important role in anarchist power theory, but it has been treated largely as a normative intervention of democratic, rational, and communal modes of agentic influence, according to the axioms of the agency perspective. It has been less seriously engaged as a crucial theoretical component of understanding how power works in general. In order to improve the analytical capacities of anarchist praxis, we should put more effort toward developing a conduct perspective based on the general concept of power-with.

### **(2.1) The Theory of Power and the Power of Theory**

The colloquial use of the English word “power” expresses a startling range of intensely contradictory meanings. Consider, for example, the difference between these two popular political slogans: “power to the people” and “fight the power.” Both are liable to be heard at the same rally, read on placards side-by-side, but these two sayings would be contradictory if they referenced the same “power.” “Power to the people to fight the power?” — that’s nonsense. There must clearly be some commonly accepted distinction between “*power* to the people” and “fight the *power*.”

I think that there is an important theoretical clue in this equivocal confusion because it reflects something about how the concepts of power actually work in normal everyday thought. It is important to take ordinary language seriously as reflecting general conditions of social reality. As J. L. Austin has said, “ordinary language is *not* the last word: in principle it can everywhere be supplemented and improved upon and superseded. Only remember, it *is* the *first* word.”<sup>160</sup> So what is the first word about power? The popular source *Dictionary.com* currently lists seven references for “power:”

1. ability to do or act; capability of doing or accomplishing something.
2. political or national strength: the balance of power in Europe.
3. great or marked ability to do or act; strength; might; force.
4. the possession of control or command over others; authority; ascendancy: power over men's minds.
5. political ascendancy or control in the government of a country, state, etc.: They attained power by overthrowing the legal government.
6. legal ability, capacity, or authority: the power of attorney.
7. delegated authority; authority granted to a person or persons in a particular office or capacity: the powers of the president.<sup>161</sup>

The first words on power seem clear enough, but only because we silently attribute clarifying contexts that render some of their meanings quite distinct from the others, and if we pry even a little bit we will find our assumptions about “power” are hiding a confusing tangle of terms.

In most English-language applications, colloquially as well as in the social sciences, “power” is so prolifically symbolic that it supports a whole family of related concepts. As political philosopher Hannah Arendt once said, it is “a rather sad reflection on the present state of political science that our terminology does not distinguish among such key words as ‘power’, ‘strength’,

‘force’, ‘authority’, and, finally, ‘violence’ – all of which refer to distinct, different phenomena and would hardly exist unless they did.”<sup>162</sup> While there have certainly been many attempts at clarifying the issue since Arendt’s sad reflection, the concept of power is still mostly used rather thoughtlessly in the regular discourse of social and political studies. There is literally a *confused contradiction* in the discursive deployments of ‘power:’ wherein dichotomously antagonistic *opposed meanings* (contra-dictions) are *stuck together* (con-fused) in the same word. What does this suggest about the range of concepts that we tie together within the topic of “power?” I think we can improve on a theoretical model of power that takes these contradictory connections more seriously than has previously been attempted.

First of all, I think there is an important clue in the very fact that power covers so much range as a confused and contradictory concept, that it can mean both power-to and power-over at the same time, and that theorists can call up systems in which it represents the very essence of both individual freedom and agency or social structure and subjection. How can we even begin parse out the conflict between these polar problematics? Power is one of those massive concepts in the social sciences that shoots through almost every other idea in the canon. Anthony Giddens is emphatic on this point: “the study of power cannot be regarded as a second-order consideration in the social sciences. Power cannot be tacked on, as it were, after the more basic concepts of social science have been formulated. There is no more elemental concept than that of power.”<sup>163</sup> Bertrand Russell opened his own study of the topic with a similarly bold assertion that “the fundamental concept in social science is Power, in the same sense in which Energy is the fundamental concept in physics.”<sup>164</sup> He goes on to say that “power, like energy, must be regarded as continually passing from any one of its forms into any other, and it should be the business of

social science to seek the laws of such transformations.”<sup>165</sup> Also very much like the concept of energy, the concept of power can work to define and describe almost everything else, yet is itself a strange and elusive mystery. Mark Haugaard and Stewart Clegg have emphasized this point with regard to the study of power, showing that modern social and political philosophies often employ concepts of ‘power’ that are both essentially vague *and* vaguely essential – that is, the concept is ‘essentially vague’ when it is nebulously defined, and ‘vaguely essential’ when it also plays a fundamental but unclear role in larger structures of thought.<sup>166</sup>

Political theorist Steven Lukes represents the concept of power as an “essentially contested concept,” basically because the way that it is understood and depicted in political theory is, as he says, “ineradicably evaluative.”<sup>167</sup> Since the concept is so fundamental to the theoretical architecture of all social and political systems of thought, it tends to shift along with the fundamental differences in evaluative perspective that accord with each different system of thought. Hence, to the extent that the concept of power does get clarified, it will mean something specific to each problematic, taking on an essentially contested distinction equivalent to distinction between systems themselves. So, for instance, Marxist theory and Durkheimian theory will produce essentially distinct concepts of power which may work for each system but will not necessarily be reconcilable with each other. Those two systems of thought have different purposes, different projects, and different powers. They evaluate the world according to their own historical, political, and intellectual goals, and the fundamental differences in how they conceptualize power are just as un/resolvable as the fundamental differences between their competing systems of thought.

If we accept that the general meaning of power will be “essentially contested” no matter what we do about clarifying it, how does this condition affect how we should continue attempting to clarify it? Steven Lukes, for his part, accepts the essential contestedness of the concept and yet still searches for a way to analyze a single reality hiding behind its many contested masks, working to find an “objective determinable answer, such that all reasonable persons will converge in agreeing to its truth.”<sup>168</sup> For Lukes, just because the concept is contested at the same essential level as social theory generally doesn’t mean we cannot make progress towards a better and truer definition of the phenomenon. Lukes takes the rational universalist position in asserting that there is indeed a truth about power that lies behind all of the shifting sands of its contested meaning.

I agree that we can find better definitions of the phenomenon, but not according to the preposterously ambiguous spectre of “all reasonable persons.” Since the concept of power is so intimately entwined with its political projects and theoretical articulations, we should accept that it is necessarily a critically hegemonic concept, bound up with the moralities, projects, values, and politics of its bearers. “Power” is as power does. If we do accept this premise, then it only means that we have to be more pragmatic about recognizing the fit between certain concepts of power and their practical political articulations. Especially because power and truth are so intimately connected with asserting political projects in a conflict of meanings, to claim to a single true meaning for the theoretical concept of power is always a way to gain practical political power. On this problem of essential contestedness I am more inclined to think with Mark Haugaard and Stewart Clegg, who ask us to treat the many different concepts of power as different ways to deal with different problems.

Power is a conceptual tool not a single essence that is eternally contested. A screwdriver can double as a chisel but it is not as fit for the purpose as a specifically designed and appropriate tool. So it is with power. Just as both a screwdriver and a chisel may generically belong to a category of metal-bladed hand tools, so power may collect different devices under its category. Just as a specific tool may be fit for one purpose but not so good for another, so it is with different conceptual tools of power. Different tools arise from overlapping perceptions of power each of which is shaped by particular local language games, which function much as if they were paradigms, shaping certain problems and questions surrounding the concept.<sup>169</sup>

This line of thought leads not to the ultimate discovery of “true power,” but to a self-reflective pragmatism about useful conceptual tools.

There may certainly be some common rational acceptance to be debated among peers who agree to specific meanings of a particular concept, but those agreements are always articulated in the context of political projects that also gain or lose “power” based on how the concept circulates and functions in actual social relationships. Truth is to power as theory is to practice: bonded in *praxis*. I believe that the projects of anarchist dual power will actually benefit from this kind of conceptual ambiguity about power. Any theory which aims to empower the anarchist project must itself be a part of that project’s power; the means should match the end; the practical tools should match the ideals of the project. To devise a theory of power which is *empowering to the anarchist project*, the theory itself has to be treated as a technical engagement that does not establish and assert a truth code for abstract order but rather contributes to a project of developing and applying tools which can expand, somehow, into the real world. Michel Foucault’s perspective is useful here: the political-theoretical problem of power “is not a matter

of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time.”<sup>170</sup>

The traditionally rigid arguments about universalized truth leave us with one big truth and an empty toolbox. Treating concepts of power as tools which can be variously applied for different purposes forces us to accept viable contrasting truths from what may seem to be diametrically incompatible perspectives. But we also need specific tools, powers that are designed for the specific jobs we need to accomplish. In building theories that can act as powerful tools, we must always connect the truth of a concept to the values and projects which it is supposed to serve. In to develop new and innovative tools, therefore, my following investigations aim to survey how anarchist ideas of power fit with the values and ideals of radical democratic dual power. As it is with tools, there are powerful truths that help to understand certain problems but fail entirely to illuminate others. I am concerned with making concepts that are pragmatically true and instrumentally powerful specifically for their quest(ion)s: *we need concepts of power that are true like tools*. We will need assemble a more diverse *toolbox of power concepts*.

## **(2.2) The Anarchist Project and the Agency Perspective on Power**

So what is “power” in anarchist thought? The contemporary North American anarchist tradition has developed a particular interpretive model that distinguishes between three different ideas of power: power-to (which I will also call cause-ability), power-over (which I will also refer to as control-ability), and power-with (which I will also name as conduct-ability). The terms of power-to and power-over tend to be presented as a dichotomous opposites, in a way that is also well-

established in mainstream North American social and political theory.<sup>171</sup> Jonathan Hearn, for instance, has recently redrawn this dividing line when distinguishing between theories that focus on “power as the capacity to realize ends, whether individually or collectively” and those that focus on “power as the control of one agent over others:”<sup>172</sup> that is, between a focus on power-to or a focus on power-over. Power-with is a concept that enters into that opposition from another angle, originally developed by feminist theorists as a way to name a social and non-oppressive type of power that could be mutually relational and egalitarian. Among the first to articulate this idea, in the 1940s Mary Parker Follett suggested the need for a “conception of power-with, a jointly developed power, a co-active, not a coercive power.”<sup>173</sup>

Developed most influentially by feminists in the 1970s who wanted to depict a different sort of power from that which was commonly assumed by a male-driven authoritative-centric perspective, the concept of power-with is now associated generally with alternative, egalitarian, and anarchist political practices. In her 1987 book *Truth or Dare*, Starhawk explains a three-way distinction in the terms of power that she developed through involvement with the feminist, anarchist, and environmentalist movements that I have traced all the way from the anti-nuclear 1970s through to the 2010s Occupy movement: “power-over is linked to domination and control; power-from-within is linked to the mysteries that awaken our deepest abilities and potential. Power-with is social power, the influence we wield among equals.”<sup>174</sup> By the time Starhawk presented this particular version of the conceptual layout, those three terms had already become widely popular within feminist and anarchist movements. In the 1970s and 1980s, feminist accounts of power needed some way to challenge the “bad kind of power” with a “good kind of power,” an “alternate power,” an “*our* power.” The distinction between power-to, power-over,

and power-with provided feminists with a counter-language on power, a way to speak about the *power-over* of authority and coercive control as essentially different from the *power-to* of personal action capacity and empowerment, and especially compared to the *power-with* of mutual aid and collective action capacity. As feminist writer Jean Baker Miller wrote in the mid-1970s, the concept of power has

acquired certain connotations [that] imply certain modes of behaviour more typical of men than women. But it may be that these modes are not necessary or essential to [its] meaning. Like all concepts and actions of a dominant group, “power” may have been distorted and skewed. It has rested almost solely in the hands of people who have lived with a constant need to maintain an irrational dominance; and in their hands it has acquired overtones of tyranny.<sup>175</sup>

The point for feminism is the same as that for anarchist consensus decision-making: power has to be somehow reclaimed from its distorted references in a world premised on domination, violence, inequality, and exploitation. What kind of different power-with can we make in the struggle against the ruling models of power-over?

Contemporary North American anarchist discourse commonly employs these three concepts of power, using them to elaborate on key anarchist values and political ideals. From an anonymous pamphlet entitled *Fundamentals of Anarchism*, for instance, we are given a call-to-arms that applies all three meanings of power in one sentence: “Although those with authority use coercion to maintain power over our lives, we have something more powerful than their coercion: That is our refusal to *obey* them, to *accept* their system or to *believe* what they tell us. But it only works *if we work together*.”<sup>176</sup> This passage begins with the idea of power-over (“those with authority use coercion to maintain *power over* our lives”) but then slides into power-

to (“we have something *more powerful* than their coercion”) in a way that makes that power-to dependent on power-with (“if we work together”). Here we have the general conceptual model laid out in a neat package: three types of “power,” each intentionally differentiated from the others, which focuses on the task of building an alternative “politics of power-with.”

Common models like this tend to privilege the theoretical opposition of power-to and power-over, but I think that the anarchist politics of power-with would be better supported by a theory that roots its thought in the concept of power-with. A theory that truly builds from the emphasis on power-with can only be developed if we take on a *conduct perspective on power*. However, the anarchist theoretical approach to power remains largely tied to an *agency perspective* and its association with an opposite and antagonistic *structure perspective*. Now, first things first. In order to figure out how to build a theory of power-with in alliance with the politics of power-with, we must first understand how current anarchist political values conform to the theoretical assumptions of the agency perspective.

### **(2.2.1) The Agency Perspective: the Origin of Power-To**

*Agency Perspective Axiom #1: Power-to is the capacity for individual agents to act in the world; this power-to is the original source of power in general.*

The agency perspective is rooted in the concept of power-to. In anarchist and liberal discourses, “power” is originally located in the individual person’s ability to cause effects in the world, to exert *cause-ability* through their free, active agency. Martin Luther King Jr. — a person who spent a good amount of time thinking about “power” in the strategic contexts of social justice movements — once wrote that “power properly understood is nothing but the ability to achieve

purpose.”<sup>177</sup> Bertrand Russell treated power in the same way when he defined it basically as “the production of intended effects.”<sup>178</sup> And in another famous definition from Thomas Hobbes we hear that “the power of a man (to take it universally) is his present means to obtain some future apparent good.”<sup>179</sup>

Conceived in this way, power-to is the “cause” in “cause-and-effect.” Thomas Hobbes put this point directly: “Power and Cause are the same thing.”<sup>180</sup> A simplifying statement, no doubt, but a few centuries later Robert Dahl’s attempt to define an empirically-centred methodology for studying power in decision-making forums brought back to the same point: “our way of thinking about power or influence is analogous to the concept of force in mechanics. In mechanics object A exerts force on object B if A produces a change in the velocity of B.”<sup>181</sup> In Dahl’s thinking Power refers to an agent (say, even a social agent or a chemical agent) which is to be held responsible for a consequence that it has been deemed to have had the power to cause. Dahl made this explicit, as I have already noted. Herbert Simon, another noted American social theorist prominent during the mid-twentieth century, also expressed the general tenor of this popular mechanistic-causal philosophy, saying that for “the assertion, ‘A has power over B,’ we can substitute the assertion, ‘A’s behavior causes B’s behavior.’ If we can determine the causal relation, we can define influence, power, or authority, and vice-versa.”<sup>182</sup> Jean Baker, from a perspective rooted in feminist politics, treats power fundamentally as “the capacity to produce a change — that is, to move anything from point A or state A to point B or state B.”<sup>183</sup>

To say that one agent has the *power to* cause effects in the behaviour of another agent is the same as saying that agent has *power over* the affected agent. In this framework, therefore, power-to and power-over are polar concepts which arise at either end of any event in which an agent

can exert external causal influence over another agent. The concept of power-to is essentially entangled with the basic notion of causality, which is why I also sometimes label it *cause-ability*. The axiomatic association of power with causal force is commonplace in social theory, where power-to defines the special kind of *intentional* cause-ability. Rocks may physically cause changes in each others' velocity, regardless of their intentions. Humans, however, *strive* to generate *intended* outcomes. According with the common English expressions about having the "power to do" something or other, this concept of power-to represents the *natural capacity to achieve some goal or cause some effect in the world*. The idea of cause-ability power-to can name the "power" of almost anything, but it always relates back to human goals, serving the purpose of some human motivation. For instance, "battery power" is the power to energize a machine to produce intended effects. "Horse power" is a measure of the torque pressure produced by an engine, related to a number of abstractly standardized equines: the power to push forward a vehicle in achieving the purpose of getting somewhere fast. "Purchasing power" is the capacity to pay for whatever needs to be bought, to obtain some future apparent "goods." In all of these cases, the term power refers to *the means for accomplishing some projected end*: it is ability, capacity, potency, the *power-to \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the verb)*.

By including intentionality in the concept of power, by treating power to as a verb, the physical logic of cause and effect shifts into the *agentic logic* of intention and outcome, where the power-cause connection is fundamentally crucial to modern Western ideals like subjectivity, freedom, and agency. Anthony Giddens, whose contributions have had a lasting effect on the Anglo-American sociological concept of power, conceived of agency as immediately and irrevocably linked to power. They both refer basically to the same thing: the ability to cause

effects in the world. In this way, the concepts of power and agency are equally linked to the idea of ‘action,’ another key concept in the social sciences which Giddens holds is “*logically tied to that of power* [...] Action intrinsically involves the application of ‘means’ to achieve outcomes, brought about through the direct intervention of an actor in the course of events [...] Power represents the capacity of the agent to mobilize resources to constitute those ‘means’.”<sup>184</sup> In this passage, the idea of action is attached to an idea of ‘power’ that is essentially *power-to* (“the ‘means’ to achieve outcomes”). The presence or absence of agency in a particular circumstance can be determined, according to Giddens, “upon the capability of the individual to ‘make a difference’ to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events. An agent ceases to be such if he or she loses the capability to ‘make a difference’, that is, to exercise some sort of power.”<sup>185</sup>

Any model that begins from the assertion or assumption that the natural and essential source of power comes from the power-to of individual agents is taking on an *agency perspective*. Considering power-to as the axiomatically essential source of power is a theoretical premise that reaches far and wide, contributing to a variety of conceptual traditions that may be otherwise quite distinct or even antagonistic. For instance, Torben Bech Dyrberg builds a postmodern philosophical analysis of power that is quite different from Giddens', but nevertheless similar in this foundational respect because he treats “the higher-order structure of power as ‘the ability to make a difference’.”<sup>186</sup> Most of these perspectives do share a basic point which arises from essentializing power-to: when treated as the radical origin of power, the concept of power-to is valued as *essentially good* — in naturalistic, humanistic, spiritual, or philosophical terms. For instance, Starhawk’s anarchist-feminist-pagan account of power introduced to the concept of power-to as *power-from-within*, explicitly expressing a spiritual and innate animating force of

action whence we derive the personal, individual, and natural “power that emerges from within, that is inherent in us as the power to grow is inherent in seed.”<sup>187</sup> Starhawk imbues this definition with the explicit sentimentality of sacred origins, treating it as a mysterious life force that enables creatures to act freely in the world. Feminist author Sarah Lucia Hoagland also picks up this notion of power coming “from within,” describing this as “the power of ability, of choice and engagement. It is creative; and hence it is an affecting and transforming power but not a controlling power.”<sup>188</sup>

### **(2.2.2) The Agency Perspective: The Birth of Power-Over**

*Agency Perspective Axiom #2: Power-over is a derivative articulation of original power-to applied as a means of controlling the power-to of others.*

I will not generally use the term power-from-within, because the term *power-to* is more commonly employed today in the anarchist discourses that frame my critical concern. However, the emphasis on the *from-within* does highlight a key ideological aspect of these power concepts. That is, power-to is commonly treated as the original, generative, internal, natural source of power — as a power that does indeed come “from within” and belongs inalienably to each free individual human agent. Such notions of *power-to* depict an *active capacity to make a difference* that emerges *from-within the individual agent*. From this originating point of reference, further manifestations of power are then understood to arise when the original cause-abilities exerted by separate individual agents come into conflict or cooperation with each other, exerting power-to upon each other so that some agents’ inherent power-to ends up “over-powering” other agents’

inherent power-to. This then, for the agency perspective, is where we situate the birth of *power-over*.

When Starhawk speaks of power-over she means to define a general category of socially coercive actions such as command and obedience, force and threat, authority and subordination, control and exploitation. “In its clearest form,” she says, “power-over is the power of the prison guard, of the gun, power that is ultimately backed by force. Power-over enables one individual or group to make decisions that affect others, and to enforce control.”<sup>189</sup> The notion of power-over as a coercive application of power-to is common in social sciences as well. As we hear from Jonathan Hearn, power is relayed between “power as the capacity to realize ends, whether individually or collectively, and power as the control of one agent over others.”<sup>190</sup> Power-over is a *social power* by which Agent A can coerce the activities of Agent B; or, in other words, it is a *control-ability* which enables Agent A to control the actions of Agent B.

The distinction between a broader sense of outcome power as a *general concept of any causation* and a more limited range of power manifesting in a *specific concept of social causation* is a consequence of the agency perspective’s prioritization of power-to as individual agency, action, or freedom. Thomas Hobbes has been especially influential in blazing this conceptual path between an original power-to and its secondary manifestation as a conflicting power-over. In *Leviathan* Hobbes’ first and most basic definition deals with the sense of power-to as original and natural: “the power of a man (to take it universally) is his present means to obtain some future apparent good.”<sup>191</sup> In this statement Hobbes is self-reflexively aware of “taking it universally” when thinking of power as a desocialized definition that draws on the model of causation borrowed from scientific methodological logic and the principles of physical

force. However, when treating the question of power in a definitely political context, Hobbes switches tone to prioritize a socio-political analysis of power-over which is concerned with a social event where “power” is a relational competition among plural actors. Then, as he begins to shift his focus from the individual power of natural agents onto more political questions, the individual and universal ‘power of a man’ must be considered according to its relations with the powers of other men who are likewise freely empowered. The definition of power therefore appropriately shifts, such that “because the power of one man resisteth and hindereth the effects of the power of another: power is simply no more, but the excess of the power of one above that of the other.”<sup>192</sup>

Hobbes begins from a philosophically abstract sense of power-to which then transforms into the politically analytic sense of power-over. This manner of treating power-over as a relational conflict between agents of power-to depends on the premise that *power-to and action belong originally to a pre-constituted individual agent*. It’s an approach to social relations that is based the billiard-ball notion of causal mechanics, where atomic particles are the presumed basic material of reality and their relations can then be described by cause-effect interactions. This is an ideologically deep presumption about power which pervades Western philosophy in general: power is initially and originally derived from individual agents, and any analysis of social power therefore returns to a final consideration of the individual agent. The following passage from moral philosopher Hannah Pitkin offers a good example of how this analytic position impels theorists to believe that it is vitally important to “distinguish between the expressions of ‘power to’ and ‘power over’.” Pitkin reasons that

if ‘power’ were a label for certain phenomena, such a distinction could not be of great importance, since the two expressions would necessarily involve the same idea of power simply set in different verbal contexts. But if the concept of power is built up out of, abstracted from, its various characteristic expressions and occasions of use, then the idea of power in ‘power to’ may be significantly different from the idea of power in ‘power over.’ That is, indeed, the case. One man may have power over another or others, and that sort of power is relational, though it is not a relationship. But he may have power to do or accomplish something by himself, and that power is not relational at all; it may involve other people if what he has the power to do is a social or political act, but it need not.<sup>193</sup>

Pitkin here differentiates power-to and power-over based on the claim that power-to can be attributed to an *independent asocial cause-ability* concerning people and/or things, while power-over is necessarily defined in terms of the social relations among people. The essence of power is therefore “being able to do things,” whether they apply to people or not.

For the agency perspective the meaning of power-to is the more encompassing concept, from which power-over is derived as a secondary and more limited case. Keith Dowding, an American philosopher who approaches the topic of power from a liberal perspective focused on rational choices, has also been especially explicit about this popular position. Observing that power-to is usually “thought of as the most basic use of the term ‘power’,” he builds upon a rudimentary dichotomy wherein “‘power-to’ and ‘power-over’ may be described as ‘outcome power’ and ‘social power’ respectively, the first because it is the power to bring about outcomes, the second because it necessarily involves a social relation between at least two actors.”<sup>194</sup> In a similar vein, it is also very common to frame this difference between power-to and power-over as depicting a ‘wider’ and ‘narrower’ scope. French political philosopher Raymond Aron makes this same

explicit point, arguing that power should be understood “in the broadest sense of *the capacity to do something* or in the more limited sense of the *capacity to influence the behaviour of others*.”<sup>195</sup> The same conception can be found in Anthony Giddens as well. As I quoted above, Giddens’ more encompassing concept of power is the capacity of an actor to intervene in reality to cause a difference, while a more specific application of that power in social contexts is understood as “the capability to secure outcomes where the realization of these outcomes depends on the agency of others.”<sup>196</sup> Peter Morriss presents another version of this perspective, highlighting that “it is far more common to say that someone has the power *to do something* than it is to say that they have power *over someone*.”<sup>197</sup> Morriss elaborates on the priority of power-to by noting the difference between *affecting* versus *effecting*. As Morriss puts it, “to affect something is to alter or impinge on it in some way (*any way*); to *effect* something is to bring about or accomplish it.”<sup>198</sup> Morriss argues against allowing power to depict any case of “affecting,” claiming that this dilutes the concept until it represents little more than the general notion of making an influence. Rather, we should limit the concept of power to the stronger concept of “effecting,” in cases where it refers to bringing about or accomplishing an end. To make an influence is much more vague and general — we are affected by and we cause affect to many things, all the time, simply by existing in an environment. But to cause effects is more specific, more directed, and more rare. For Morriss, this is the more important and encompassing way to think of power because, as he says, “everything that needs to be said about power can be said using the idea of the capacity to effect outcomes — unless we are mesmerized by a desire to get the notion of *affecting* into ‘power’ at all costs.”<sup>199</sup> Power is the power to cause general effects (inherently a forceful cause), not to have a general affect (inherently a social relationship)

upon another human. That is, even social power comes from the origin of power-to; power is once more rooted in an individualized and naturalized concept of directed cause-ability.

In each of these articulations, “social power” is a limited application of the more fundamental nature of “outcome power.” Where *power-to is outcome power* as the general ability to cause effects (to do something — anything! — to secure outcomes), then *power-over is social power* as a more specific situation that involves causing effects in other people (to do something to others, securing outcomes through influencing others). The Italian sociologist Gianfranco Poggi takes this orientation so far as to explicitly draw a mythical image of outcome power as the inherently special capacity of human beings. Humans are specialists in outcome power, who, in order to survive, must

*make a difference: make a difference to nature, which will not sustain it unless intervened upon by the members of that species themselves; and make a difference to itself, for the manner of that intervention will in turn shape the mode of existence of those men and women, impart to it a more or less distinctive bias, and differentiate it from the mode of existence of other men and women. The widest meaning of ‘power’, then, is the ability to make such a difference; and this ability must be seen as belonging to the very essence of the species.<sup>200</sup>*

“*Homo potens*,” we are dubbed: this species who base their survival on that ‘widest meaning of power,’ the ability to make a difference. But this widest sense of power is only the focus of Poggi’s attention while he is *introducing* his opus. The rest of the book is almost entirely focused on the forms of social power (political, military, cultural, economic). For a specifically social scientific analysis such as Poggi’s, the focus of his work is understandably on social power, power-over. So why is the source of power mythologically granted to outcome power, when it is not even the focus of his analysis? As the British political philosopher Steven Lukes believes, for

sociological and political investigations the notion of power-to is often thought to be “out of line with the central meaning of power as traditionally understood and with the concerns that have always preoccupied students of power.”<sup>201</sup> This may be true if we take social scientists’ stated objectives at their word. For instance, as Thomas Wartenberg says, “a theory of power has, as a first priority, the articulation of the meaning of the concept of power-over because social theory employs this concept as a primary means of conceptualizing the nature of the fundamental inequalities in society.”<sup>202</sup> C. B. Macpherson expresses the same stance, shared by many social and political theorists of power, when he notes that “most of the literature of modern political science, from its beginnings with Machiavelli and Hobbes to its twentieth-century empirical exponents, has to do with power, understood broadly as men’s ability to get what they want by controlling others.”<sup>203</sup>

That same perspective is common for anarchist and feminist traditions, where power-over is the specific focus of critical attention, and especially when it comes to contentious action we focus our analytic strengths on understanding power-over in order to strategize against opponents who threaten to over-power us. I will return more specifically to issues of anarchist praxis shortly, in the following section. The present point is simply this: insofar as we assume the axiomatic premises of the agency perspective, even though we may analytically focus on power-over the concepts of power-to are nevertheless usually privileged as the basic materials of that investigation. Social theorists often ignore or forget about power-to, even while it remains essential to the logic by which their concepts of power-over are explicated. To say that agent A has power-over agent B is basically to say that A has the capacity to control the actions of B; that is, power-over occurs when A has the *power-to* exert control over B. The concept of power-to is

always essential to such formulas for social power. So, I both agree and disagree with Lukes on this point: on the one hand, yes, power-to is not the explicit focus of most social studies of power. But on the other hand, no, it is not simply 'out of line' with that study. It is, rather, quite often silently fundamental to many analyses of social power. Wherever a concept is the most fundamental it is most likely to be taken for granted: just as the foundations of a building are buried and forgettable, but nevertheless continue to support the entire edifice, the category of power-to still usually operates as the crucial basis for analyses of power-over.

The party of statements that I have addressed to illustrate this point (from Giddens, Pitkin, Dowding, Aron, Dyrberg, Poggi, Morriss, and Lukes) all emerge from the traditions of contemporary Western social science which rely, more or less explicitly, on a concept of power rooted in the agency perspective. This is the most common perspective for liberal theory and politics, as well as for radical democratic and anarchist ideologies. These perspectives are oriented by a basic set of modern preoccupations with a concept of natural freedom based on the coherent agency of individual actors, and with the forms of a society that can allow for that notion of freedom to flourish. That is, they represent a theoretical construction which supports and reflects specific ethical values and political projects based in a modern Western enlightenment paradigm. In the next sections I will trace how these aspects of the agency perspective are used to depict anarchist ethical and political values according to the concepts of power-to, power-over, and power-with.

### (2.2.3) The Anarchist Ethics of Power: Power-To Versus Power-Over

The general ethical and political stance upon which consensus decision-making has been designed holds strongly to the same liberal enlightenment paradigm that supports the agency perspective: power-to is a natural source of individual agency, originally free from the clutches of power-over conceived as the social power by which some agents take advantage of the power of others. Power-over is *essentially evil* while power-to is *essentially good*. This ethical stance is stark: it obliges resistance to all forms of power-over, wherever it rears its head. “No Gods, no Masters,” as the old anarchist slogan has it. This, in a nutshell, defines the *ethical* project of anarchism: *power-to versus power-over*.

Social and political theorists working in a broad agency perspective generally conceive of power-over in two main forms. In the first form, power-over represents the event of one agent’s power-to over-powering another’s. In the second form, power-over represents the institutionalization of this over-powering relationship, to the extent that one agent has the legitimate authority and/or the structural support to command and/or control the power-to of another agent. We can illustrate these two versions of power-over paradigmatically by looking at Max Weber’s classic sociological definitions of *Macht* (as “might,” the power of conflictual over-powering) and *Herrschaft* (as “authority” or “domination,” the power of a command-obedience as a direct cause-control form of social influence).

In the first case, says Weber, “*Macht* is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests.”<sup>204</sup> Mainstream North American social science has especially circled around this type of definition of power-over as *Macht*, which can be translated

as “might,” and refers in this way to the power of the sword, where the strongest prevails. In a conflict of “wills,” the contest of power-to between opposed social agents, power-over is thus a depiction of the victor, the one who demonstrates the truth of their power in overcoming resistance. Power definitions that reflect the concept of Weber’s *Macht* played a very influential role in American political science during the 1950s and 1960s, circling first around C. Wright Mills’ assertion that “by the powerful we mean, of course, those who are able to realise their will even if others resist it.”<sup>205</sup> Robert Dahl then launched a methodological critique that recast that idea from an angle more suitable to his behaviorist approach, stating that “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do.”<sup>206</sup> In each of these cases, the subject of the sentence is an active agent: Weber’s “one actor within a social relationship,” Mills’ “the powerful,” and Dahl’s “A.” These active agents are presumed to exist as active before the equation of their power vis-a-vis some other opponent is posed; that is, there is an active agent who then enters into power relations with some other forces, other similarly endowed agents, and treats that relation therefore as a strategic dimension of achieving their presupposed “intended outcomes.” As Steven Lukes put it in his now classic text *Power: A Radical View*,

Power was here conceived as intentional and active: indeed, it was ‘measured’ by studying its exercise — by ascertaining the frequency of who wins and who loses in respect of such issues, that is, who prevails in decision-making situations. Those situations are situations of conflict between interests, where interests are conceived as overt preferences, revealed in the political arena by political actors taking policy stands or lobbying groups, and the exercise of power consists in overcoming opposition, that is, defeating contrary preferences.<sup>207</sup>

Lukes develops his own theory in the same vein, once again adapting the same power formula to argue that “*A* exercises power over *B* when *A* affects *B* in a manner contrary to *B*’s interests.”<sup>208</sup> All of these definitions are oriented around the potency or capacity of predetermined agents acting in conflict, influencing each other’s behaviours, wills, actions, and interests. As I outlined in the previous section, these theorists build up from the origin of power-to of individual agents to then explain power-over as the capacity whereby a social agent causes another agent to do something they would not otherwise do, or the capacity of a social agent to get their own way in a contest with others who also wish to get their own way. Either I get you to do something that is beneficial to me, or I succeed in achieving an outcome beneficial to me despite your attempts to advance your own benefit.

Weber balances the definition of *Macht*, understood as the “might” to over-power others and get what one wants in a social situation despite resistance, with another concept that he calls *Herrschaft*, “the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons.”<sup>209</sup> The concept of *Herrschaft* has been variously and controversially translated into English, most commonly as “domination” or “authority.” Either way, *Herrschaft* differs significantly from *Macht* in that it represents an *institutionally socialized position* of power-over. Consider how we often say “Power” with the implied capital P, using it as a noun to name a “position of authority.” If I am “Power” it means that I have institutional support that increases the probability that I can command others and be obeyed. I will treat the idea of *Herrschaft* as my basic definition of “authority:” the structured predictability of A’s ability to cause B to act as commanded. I think authority is the more specific term to use here, because the

word “domination” tends to have a wider and more encompassing scope. Jonathan Hearn, for instance, treats the concept of domination as the main concern of power in political theory:

When we talk about ‘power’, often what we mean more specifically is domination. *Domination* refers to a situation where an agent exercises relatively stable, ongoing control over the actions of other agents (‘agents’ taken broadly to mean anything from individual persons, to social groups, to organizations and institutions). Domination is not episodic. Relations of domination are, by definition, firmly established, and often naturalized and taken for granted.<sup>210</sup>

This sense of domination can be applied more broadly than *Herrschaft*, since it needn’t refer specifically to the command-obedience relationship. The key notion to remember is that domination is a stable, ongoing condition of power-over whereby the power-to of some agents are systematically privileged at the expense of others.

The condition of authority is clearly involved in asserting a stable relation of control. In the case of *Macht*, we also find that the contest of powers between certain agents can be firmly established as lop-sided and rigged to benefit one side of the relation. In this sense, social and political theories often focus on power-over as a matter of social positioning, privilege, the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, access to resources and economic influence — all of which amount to different means whereby some agents hold power-over as systematic privilege, oppression, or exploitation over other agents in society. The classic sociological topics concerning ‘class/race/gender/privilege/status’ belong to this extended conceptual realm of power-over as various forms of domination.

Steven Lukes also chose to focus his critical energies on a concept of power as domination. For him, this choice reflects on the purposes of critical activity as a way to usefully interrogate

the ways that power comes to coerce people into actions that are against their own real interests. “Power as domination is the ability to constrain the choices of others, coercing them or securing their compliance, by impeding them from living as their own nature and judgement dictate.”<sup>211</sup> For Lukes, this sense of domination must be present to properly name “power,” such that either *Macht* or *Herrschaft* can only properly be called power if they adversely affect the ‘interests’ of the over-powered. That is, “to speak of power as domination is to suggest the imposition of some significant constraint upon an agent or agents’ desires, purposes or interests, which it frustrates, prevents from fulfillment or even from being formulated. Power, in this sense, thus marks a distinction between an imposition, thus understood, and other influences.”<sup>212</sup> Domination must also be considered as possibly occurring in less obvious forms, as the impact not only of authority and events of over-powering, but also in the ways that people’s interests and desires may be manipulated. That is, power can also be considered to exist in the manipulations of ideology and the controls of social structure, whereby agents can be tricked or secretly coerced into accepting domination as natural, normal, and inevitable.

The general model of power-over as domination holds an intimate relationship with violence and the threat thereof. All dominant power holds recourse to the violence of punishment as a means of securing the compliance of its subjects. Even if that punishment is held in bay and remains only latently influential, the threat of a violence that could be imposed serves to maintain power-over those who are subject to it. As Weber also noted in his famous definition of the modern State, any exertion of authority that demands obedience to complex governing bodies must have special recourse to “a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force.”<sup>213</sup> The authority of the states, the kings, the politicians, the leaders, the bosses, and all the rulers will

rely always, in the end, on the threat of a poised sword. This is the kind of relation between power and violence that Mao Ze Dong had in mind when he famously said that “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.”<sup>214</sup> To break political power requires breaking its hold on the monopoly of violence; for most revolutionary programs this is accomplished at some point by over-powering the violence of power with the counter-violence of resistance. This is also the kind of forceful power that Frederick Douglass was speaking of when he counselled that “power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.”<sup>215</sup> Domination holds onto what it has; it takes a fight to break anything loose. This is where we find “Power” — that personified and capitalized institution of domination, gun-toting, pumped-up, and obstinately authoritative. And the liberal tradition that I have identified in the agency orientation of power considers this “Power” to be directly antagonistic with the notion of power-to as representing the essential origin of individual human freedom.

The political philosophy and historical tradition of anarchism is defined in stark opposition to this meaning of power. I’ve already referenced Uri Gordon’s contemporary depiction of the anarchist project as a political movement that specifically works to fight against domination of all kinds. Anarchism, as he says, is

attached to a more generalized discourse of resistance, gravitating around the concept of *domination*. The word domination today occupies a central place in anarchist political language, designating the paradigm which governs both micro- and macro-political relations. The term ‘domination’ in its anarchist sense serves as a generic concept for the various systematic features of society whereby groups and persons are controlled, coerced, exploited, humiliated, discriminated against, etc. – the dynamics of which anarchists seek to uncover, challenge and erode.<sup>216</sup>

This anti-domination stance is essential enough to call it a fundamental tenet of anarchist ethics, and it can be worked into a general definition of anarchist power ethics as a working for the enhancement of power-to as individual freedom by fighting against all forms of power-over as social domination. Howard J. Ehrlich, an avowed anarchist and sociologist who worked with the anti-nuclear and disarmament movements in the late 1970s, wrote that “for anarchists, power is the central issue,” because “to be free from coercion means that one has to live in a society where institutionalized forms of power, domination and hierarchy no longer exist. One should neither submit to nor exercise power over other people.”<sup>217</sup> This statement is perfect for framing the anarchist’s ethical duel between of power-to and power-over: *refuse to be over-powered* — *refuse to over-power* (“one should neither submit to nor exercise power over other people”). This is an essential *ethical quest(ion)* of anarchism: without this basic point (variously phrased as it will be in different circumstances, different movements, and different traditions), the grouping of political philosophies that can be called “anarchist” would lose the main thread of their conceptual continuity.

This anarchist ethic calls upon people to resist being dominated and to resist exerting domination, to resist being exploited and to resist exerting exploitation, to resist having power-over imposed upon them and to resist exerting power-over upon anyone else. The idea of power-over normally functions as the ultimate anarchist enemy, the “anarchist arch enemy.” Being an anarchist means being the power-to that fights a battle against the abstract enemy of power-over: it is a subjective investment written as an ethical prerogative. Nothing good can come of power-over; everything good comes from power-to. It’s a battle: power-over has to be killed in order for anarchism to survive. As found scrawled on the back cover of the 1980s anarchist journal *Open*

*Road*: “whatever doesn’t kill power is killed by it.”<sup>218</sup> The anarchist ethical imperative is to kill power. Paul Goodman, an anarchist writer popular in America during the 1960s, wrote that

anarchism is grounded in a rather definite proposition: that valuable behavior occurs only by the free and direct response of individuals or voluntary groups to the conditions presented by the historical environment. It claims that in most human affairs, whether political, economic, military, religious, moral, pedagogic, or cultural, more harm than good results from coercion, top-down direction, central authority, bureaucracy, jails, conscription, States, preordained standardization, excessive planning, etc. Anarchists want to increase intrinsic functioning and diminish extrinsic power.<sup>219</sup>

And here is another version of that basic anarchist ethical dichotomy: *increase intrinsic functioning (power-to) and diminish extrinsic power (power-over)*. Humanity must abolish power-over from its own repertoire by removing the structural constraints of unnecessary ‘extrinsic power,’ thus allowing the natural *intrinsic* forces of power-to shine unimpeded.

The form of this ethical dichotomy is also deeply rooted in the utopian sentiments of consensus decision-making. Kenneth Boulding, a scholar of nonviolent direct action, employs the the same opposition between power-to and power-over as a key depiction of the 20<sup>th</sup> century progress in both nonviolent activism and feminism. He sees the story as a zero-sum game, a balance of forces, and optimistically claims that “there has been a decline in ‘power over’ or dominance, which is largely though not entirely the power of threat, and the rise of ‘power to do’ or ‘empowerment,’ which is the ability not only to get what we want, but to change what we want, when we find that what we want is not really worth having.” Boulding sees this shift represented especially in “the rise in feminism and the shift from male domination of women into mutual partnerships between the sexes.”<sup>220</sup>

From the Quakers, from the nonviolence peace activists, from the feminists, and from the anarchists — the consensus process has inherited vehement ethical opposition to power-over. In consensus discourses, the ethical opposition of power-to versus power-over goes right to the essence of power-over, declaring that any coercive activity at all is considered not only dominating, but violent. As the Vernal Project expresses, “in this environment, it is considered violent to use power to dominate or control the group process. It is understood that the power of revealing your truth is the maximum force allowed to persuade others to your point of view.”<sup>221</sup> Or, as we hear from the Rhizome guide, consensus has to fight off the very principle of competition itself:

For some reason there’s a tendency in groups to be oppositional. We hear a few ideas, the group narrows them down and then we’re asked to choose between them. It’s either/or. We’re attached to our own thinking which often means that we state our ideas with certainty, we reiterate, we lobby. We don’t trust the group to hear all ideas as equal and take them into equal consideration. This breeds competition — a real obstacle to genuine consensus.<sup>222</sup>

“Competition” is understood broadly as equivalent to *Macht*, the conflictual situation where agents over-power other agents. This is exactly the kind of official democratic assumption that consensus perceives as rooted in power-over, focused in conflicts that must be resolved by accepting a concept of power that is essentially antagonistic and conflict-oriented — “simply the power of one above the other.” The Formal Consensus manual makes the same point against *voting* as a form of power-over, because “often voting occurs before one side reveals anything about itself, but spends time solely attacking the opponent! In this adversarial environment, one’s ideas are owned and often defended in the face of improvements.”<sup>223</sup>

It is necessary to conceive of this division between power-to and power-over for ethical and practical purposes, but if we base the entire theoretical analysis of power solely in this modality we will be reducing our understanding of power to a sorely limited and intractably binary perspective. This ethical division between power-to and power-over will be the focus of further criticism in chapter 3 when we begin to explore the alternative viewpoints of a conduct perspective.

#### **(2.2.4) The Anarchist Politics of Power: Power-With Versus Power-Over**

The traditions of anarchism, feminism, and non-violent direct action that converged into the story of consensus decision-making all share a general belief in the anarchist ethic of power: that the dual power of prefigurative and contentious politics must combine in a praxis that enhances the “freedom” of every individual human’s power-to and resists the “domination” of any power-over wielded by some humans over others. But how can we build a power-to that can fight the forces of power-over without reapplying our own versions of power-over in the process? Uri Gordon asserts this essential anarchist political question, explicitly in the language of power: “The entire premise of anarchist ideas for social change is that society can and should be altered ‘without taking power’ — without building a new apparatus of power-over that would impose different social relations from above.”<sup>224</sup> How can we create systems of interaction that don’t resort to power-over, but can still generate collective power-to? How can we actually work for that ethical goal of making all people’s power-to equally empowered and equally free from power-over? This is, in another nutshell, the *political quest(ion)* of anarchism: how to generate collective *power-with* that can both resist and avoid reproducing *power-over*?

In the *Seeds for Change* manual, consensus decision-making is described as a politics “based on the idea that people should have full control over their lives and that power should be shared by all rather than concentrated in the hands of a few.”<sup>225</sup> This is where *power-with* comes into the equation presented by the anarchist ethical contrast of power-to and power-over. Power-with is a concept that evokes interactive equality, a means by which people can have full control over their lives (individual power-to) by *sharing power* (collective power-with) instead of concentrating it in a few hands (dominating power-over). For the anarchist discourse of power, the concept of power-with represents the way that we can organize our collective actions *without* power-over and *against* power-over. *Without* power-over equals prefigurative power. *Against* power-over equals contentious power. The combination of *without power-over* and *against power-over* equals the *dual power formula for a politics of power-with*.

Individual power-to cannot easily stand against the massive institutions of dominating power-over; only the collective action of power-with can manage to effectively resist and oppose them. The *politics of power-with* therefore comes to represent the *practical possibility* of actually practicing an ethical ideal of being “without and against power-over.” This general ideal of a politics based on power-with is essential to the values of consensus decision-making, a point which is especially clear in its philosophy of nonviolence. The proponents of consensus tend to consider themselves as peaceful rather than violent, cooperative rather than competitive, and interactive rather than oppositional. *On Conflict and Consensus*, first published in 1987 by C.T. Butler and Amy Rothstein, is a particularly influential manual on consensus which is posed as a way to achieve cooperative rather than competitive relationships. Consciously adapting from the Quaker tradition of ethical nonviolence as well as their experiences in the early 1980s direct

action movement, Butler and Rothstein tend to present the value of consensus decision-making based on the claim that it is “the least violent decisionmaking process.”<sup>226</sup> They go on to elaborate the frameworks of violence and nonviolence as a means of transforming power: “traditional nonviolence theory holds that the use of power to dominate is violent and undesirable. Nonviolence expects people to use their power to persuade without deception, coercion, or malice, using truth, creativity, logic, respect, and love.”<sup>227</sup> In this passage the term power is posed in an ethically neutral manner, referring to a general capacity for influence, or, a social cause-ability. First it is noted that power can be used to dominate (the power-over of coercive dominating influence), but then the term shifts to express power-with as a natural interactive condition of human relationships, a more general concept of influence that humans can ‘use’ either violently or non-violently. The Formal Consensus manual is full of contextualizing references like this, and it is clear that Butler and Rothstein created their model with a concept of power-with forefront in mind.

The politics of power-with also draw heavily from second-wave feminist traditions. In those discourses, the debate over the meaning of power is usually posed as a problem: how to create social arrangements in a properly feminist mode, such that the traditionally masculine and dominating types of power-over can be supplanted with what are deemed more egalitarian feminist forms of power derived from mutual and equal empowerment? Feminist author Virginia Held, for instance, writes that the usual sense of power we accept in patriarchal society is equated with power-over: “the power to cause others to submit to one’s will.”<sup>228</sup> The presumption that “power” *is* power-over comes from a socially conditioned acceptance of masculine dominance as the model for how mutual influence is supposed to be organized as a

competitive and conflictual interaction. To equate power with power-over is a product of the patriarchal society in which we live. But there are alternative feminist models of power, and Held therefore promotes the idea of power-with as a kind of feminist counter-move against the masculine-derived prevalence of power-over, proposing instead that we could organize our mutual influence according to power-with, conceived as something like “the power of a mothering person to empower others, to foster transformative growth, is a different sort of power from that of a stronger sword or a dominant will.”<sup>229</sup>

A “*different sort of power.*” What is this different power made of? As Jean Baker writes, “it’s certainly not the kind of power we tend to think of,” because instead of gaining control by coercive commands and dominant orders “the one who exerts such power recognizes that she or he cannot possibly have total influence or control but has to find ways to interact with the other person’s constantly changing forces or powers.”<sup>230</sup> The clearest distinction is right there in the language: this is a power that functions *with* others, not *over* them. This is a power that coordinates mutual empowerments, rather than a power that is used by some to oppress or exploit others. In Nancy Hartsock’s words, the feminist concept of power-with derives from “women’s stress on power not as domination but as capacity, on power as a capacity of the community as a whole,” which ultimately “suggests that women’s experience of connection and relation have consequences for understandings of power and may hold resources for a more liberatory understanding.”<sup>231</sup>

Power-over engenders relationships of obedience and fear. By way of power-with, collective action can avoid any recourse to authority or domination, if it can be built on direct communicative respect. In Starhawk’s account, “respect for authority is fear of power-over;”<sup>232</sup>

“where there’s fear there’s power,” and “where there’s power there’s fear.”<sup>233</sup> Instead of relying on the fear of authoritative command and the threat of forced coercion, power-with tries to evoke positive, compelling, and integrative reasons for bonding the activities of people’s individual power-to into common patterns of collective organization. Kenneth Boulding, historian and theorist of the non-violent direct action movements, calls this idea of “power-with” an *integrative power* because it is supposed to coordinate, involve, and engage people in mutually beneficial interaction. It is “the capacity to build organizations, to create families and groups, to inspire loyalty, to bind people together, to develop legitimacy.”<sup>234</sup> The politics of power-with provides a means of *integrating* the power-to of individual agents in positive bonds. This is a political power built from the connecting force of power-with as an *influence-bonding* relationship, rather than by the separating force of power-over as a *command-fear* relationship.

The politics of power-with nurtures equal power-to influence the collective decision-making outcome, treating the power-to of influence as a shared resource among its individual participants that can generate a collective power-to for the group as a whole. “Consensus is about active participation and sharing power equally. This makes it a powerful tool not only for empowering individuals, but also for bringing people together and building communities.”<sup>235</sup> To recall Starhawk’s description, the individual level power-with is referred to as the “the power of a strong individual in a group of equals, the power not to command, but to suggest and be listened to, to begin something and see it happen. The source of power-with is the willingness of others to listen to our ideas.”<sup>236</sup> That is, power-with thus appears as a concept of *communicability*: the capacity for an agent in a group of people to influence the collective actions of that group through communicative deliberation. The politics of power-with aims to enhance

communic-ability as a means of individual and collective power-to, as a resistance to and a replacement of power-over.

The anarchist project of consensus decision-making draws from these traditions of feminist and nonviolent philosophies to articulate its main purpose: *as a tool for building collective action based on power-with, so as to resist and replace power-over as the main political tool for organizing collective action*. I've now introduced a new notion with this latest definition of power-with that will be integral to my continuing analyses of the anarchist dual power project. What does “*collective action*” mean? In the next chapter I will develop this question more thoroughly, but have based by basic definition on social movements scholar Alberto Melucci's concept which is usefully oriented toward representing the complexity inherent in attempts to organize dual power mobilizations for social change. For Melucci, collective action is:

the product of purposeful orientations developed within a field of opportunities and constraints. Individuals acting collectively *construct* their actions by defining in cognitive terms these possibilities and limits, while at the same time interacting with others in order to ‘organize’ (i.e., to make sense of) their common behaviour. Collective action is not a unitary empirical phenomenon. Whatever unity exists should be considered the result and not the starting point, a fact to be explained rather than assumed. When actors produce their collective action they define both themselves and their environment (other actors, available resources, opportunities and obstacles). Such definitions are not linear but are produced by interaction, negotiation and conflict.<sup>237</sup>

This concept of collective action is intimate with the concept of power. In all three of its meanings, occurs in the contexts of collective action. Power-to as the cause-ability of an agent,

we must remember, should apply not only to the individual agency of personal actions, but also to the collective agency of group actions.

Collective action occurs when different sources of power-to are organized together into a collective power-to, to create a *collective agent* of power-to that is capable of performing actions assembled from the collectivity of its individual parts. This view requires that we accept a systems perspective on power that sees organizations as actors and actors as organizations. As Richard Scott has reflected, “only with the advent of open-system models did organizations themselves become the subject of investigation, viewed variously as responsive systems shaped by environments, as collective actors themselves shaping their context, or as component players in larger, more encompassing systems.”<sup>238</sup> In the case of power-over, the same phenomenon of collective power-to is also at work, but the means for assembling the collective power-to is distinctly different. Power-over is the organization of powers performed in hierarchically and authoritatively coercive modes of connection for the sake of a more powerful agent. The agent with power-over, A, may have coerced or commanded B into performing an action for A’s own benefit in way that is contrary to the benefit of B, and in that case we can say that A has collected the power-to of B into their own power. The process of coercing someone else’s action in conformity with my own projects is a way of making their actions serve my own, and in this process I have made a collective action out of our combined independent actions. Power-over is conceived as a particular way of creating collective action by means of domination, command, coercion, exploitation, and so on. Indeed, most forms of collective action in which we partake every day are of this type: they are systems of *archic collective action*. But, there are also ways to bond the powers of different agents together in more integrative, mutually responsible, and

reflexive manners, without resorting to coercions and authority of power-over. This is the possibility presented by the concept of power-with: to create collective action by means other than power-over. These are systems of *anarchic collective action*.

One of the most popular names for the activity of constructing anarchic collective action by means of the politics of power-with, of course, is *participatory radical democracy*. In radical anarchist and participatory democracy, each individual involved has an equal power-to capacity to influence the decisions that will drive collective actions, no one who has a stake in what is being decided shall be turned away, and everyone who is present is supposed to be able to voice their opinions and be heard before a final decision is made. No one agent is given power-over all the others, and each person's capacity to impact upon the collective's actions is premised on a participatory radical openness, a demand that the process of deliberation be as inclusive as possible of all people's interests, concerns. Consider Iris Marion Young's assertion that "the normative legitimacy of a democratic decision depends on the degree to which those affected by it have been included in the decision-making processes and have had the opportunity to influence the outcomes."<sup>239</sup> Inclusion must be met with active participatory equality. A properly *radical* democracy, we are told, will articulate a formal arrangement of inclusive and egalitarian participation in decision-making power, such that, as C.T. Butler claims for consensus decision-making, "everyone has access to power and every position of power is accountable to everyone."<sup>240</sup> These aims require a praxis for generating collective actions by the politics of power-with.

Butler and Rothstein's Formal Consensus is particularly described in these terms as a method for equalizing "effective outcome power" in collective action decision-making. They treat radical

democratic equality as something that can be “accessed” from the sources of power-to and developed in more inclusive manners by power-with. This is explicitly developed in a section of the Formal Consensus manual that Butler and Rothstein entitle “Equal Access to Power,” where they assert:

Because of personal differences (experiences, assertiveness, social conditioning, access to information, etc.) and political disparities, some people inevitably have more effective power than others. To balance this inequity, everyone needs to consciously attempt to creatively share power, skills, and information. Avoid hierarchical structures that allow some individuals to assume undemocratic power over others. Egalitarian and accountable structures promote universal access to power.<sup>241</sup>

Here a concept of power-to is first depicted in personal differences as well as political disparities. It is tied with a notion of various “effective” cause-abilities, as well as with the idea of natural “inequity” in people’s capacity to be effective. It is then framed as a resource that is often accessed unevenly or made inaccessible to some people, and is associated with either democratic or undemocratic governmental structures. To balance a (seemingly natural) inequity of personal differences, “power, skills, and information” must be creatively shared and made universally accessible and those who would exploit them must be limited. The language of “sharing” and “access” in discussing power, skills, and information suggests that all three are considered to be *resources*.

This perspective is the common position taken in the consensus manuals. For instance, Diane Leafe Christian also identifies “equal access to power”<sup>242</sup> as a precondition of consensus process, as something that must be structurally assured for a good process to proceed. An uneven and guarded distribution of *the power-to affect collective actions* creates situations of domination and

inequality, while an even and accessible distribution of resources generates an egalitarian and nonviolent situation. Power-over is a guarded and uneven method of organizing the power-to affect collective actions, while power-with is an even and accessible method of organizing the power-to affect collective actions. This is a definition of radical democracy according to the mechanisms of accessible participation. Equality in a participatory inclusion and anti-authoritarian system means that no one can be coercively over-powered into performing actions they do not wish to perform, no one is bound by coercive capacity of the institutional practice to “do something they would not otherwise do,” no one is compelled to act “against their own interests” (as Lukes and the liberal perspective would have it).

In attempting to exorcise power-over from its own operations, the consensus process is proposed as a method whereby everyone involved is free to engage in the decision-making process, where everyone’s perspective is equally valued no matter their status in the group, where each individual has the power to express their final say and potentially to call a ‘block’ or ‘veto’ on the proposed decision. All of these aspects are oriented towards accomplishing collectively united actions, where “decisions should reflect the *integrated will of the whole group*.”<sup>243</sup> The greater the egalitarian evenness of group unity, composed by open and equal involvement in decision-making, the less there is any *need* for power-over in that group. Of course, equal access does not automatically mean that everyone can get at the power.<sup>244</sup> A great many problems remain for the politics of power-with, some certainly manageable, some probably intractable. It takes constant work and ongoing communication to break through a culture steeped in the practices of power-over and based on fundamental and categorical social inequalities, but the politics of power-with provides a vision of the anarchist radical democratic

praxis for overthrowing those systems of power-over that control people's lives by coercive domination and systematic exploitation.

### **(2.3) The Power Theory Duel: Agency Versus Structure**

So far, I have traced how the popular categories of power-to, power-over, and power-with can be articulated based on modern theories of power that generally align with an agency perspective. In those traditions, the three terms tend to be used to categorically differentiate between three interrelated but ultimately distinct phenomena, and they can also be used to formulate two key normative values of anarchist ethical and political philosophy: ethically, that power-to should always stand against power-over, and politically, that power-with should provide the collective means of fighting against and organizing without power-over. Taken altogether, those normative formulas define a general anarchist value of power that can be phrased something like this: *the empowerment of power-with and power-to will disempower power-over, and (vice versa) the empowerment of power-over will disempower power-with and power-to.*

In this section I will now delve deeper into the classic theoretical opposition which underwrites the agency perspective axioms (and the anarchist philosophical values which they support) by contrasting the agency perspective on power with its primary theoretical competitor, *the structure perspective on power*. As political theorist Mark Haugaard has explained, most approaches to the theory of power reproduce the essential dualisms of modern social theory by presuming and reiterating a divide “between subject-centred social thought, in which the individual is central, and object-centred theory, where the individual exists as an effect of the social world.”<sup>245</sup> Subject-centred social thought leads to a concept of power based on the agency

perspective, beginning from the individual agent's power-to and treating social power as relations of power-over that may happen between those agents. I have already explored these points in detail. Object-centred theory, on the other hand, supports a structure perspective on power that treats individual agents as the product of social systemic constraints and structures, beginning from a concept of power-over as the social force that controls and shapes how individuals are enabled with specific capacities of power-to that ultimately serve to reinforce the social system as a whole. The structure perspective treats power-over as the primary origin of power, from which all individualized manifestations of power-to are then derived, and thus understands the concept of power-with only as representing the social relational bonds that are used to mould agents into action regimes that conform with the power-over systems for which those agents have been designed.

In North American traditions of social theory, there is an ingrained contrast between subject-centred and object-centred thought, whereby agency and structure are usually taught as if they dichotomously oppose one another. The mainstream agency perspective on power treats any structure perspective as a threat to freedom and liberty of the individual agent's capacity for self-determination. No matter how diverse the structure perspectives may be in actual content, they are unilaterally treated as enemies to any position that respects and affirms the freedom of individual agents. This dualistic feature of the agency perspective is especially poignant in the "three faces of power" debates, as Steven Lukes famously coined the three perspectives in the "American power debates." By focusing on how the three faces of power model opposes some key structuralist and functionalist concepts of power, this section will situate the theoretical terrain as a battle between the agency perspective and the structure perspective.

In the process of assessing the points of conflict between the two agency perspective axioms and two equivalent structure perspective axioms, I will also address some ways that both the agency and the structure perspectives can be usefully applied to analyze anarchist ethical and political problems in consensus decision-making. However, the limitations of the essential dichotomy that separates the two perspectives makes it difficult to reconcile their distinct applications into a common harmonious frame of reference. I believe we have to think about what each perspective offers, and try to understand how their intractable differences could be connected, if only we could see them as interrelated from a different vantage. And so, the following sections are still intended as a *surveying* project, laying out the theoretical landscape, gathering reconnaissance for chapter 3 where I will then shift toward *constructing* a conduct perspective on power that can integrate both the agency and the structure perspective in a model that could be more empowering for anarchist praxis.

### **(2.3.1) Applying the Agency Perspective: Privilege and Position in Consensus Decision-Making**

As a foray into how the agency perspective can provide useful analysis of power in anarchist and consensus decision-making praxis, I will focus on Steven Lukes' account of the debates about democracy and power that emerged from American political science in the 1950s. The so-called "American power debates" provide an exemplary case of the agency perspective and also serve as a useful point of reference for considering the values and limitations inherent in that tradition. Lukes treats Robert Dahl as the keystone figure of the debates, calling his position the "first face of power." Dahl's initial foray into the question of power was triggered by C. Wright Mills'

controversial assertion that American society was, despite its ostensibly democratic and egalitarian institutions, in fact run by a privileged group, or, as he put it, a “power elite.” As Mills defined it (roughly repeating Max Weber’s classic definition), “by the powerful we mean, of course, those who are able to realise their will even if others resist it.”<sup>246</sup> Mills was concerned with addressing a broad social question of inequality, trying to explain the ways that “power” becomes concentrated and controlled by groups of “higher circles,” which he describes as “simply those who have the most of what there is to have, which is generally held to include money, power, and prestige—as well as all the ways of life to which these lead.”<sup>247</sup> Mills was interested how power framed the social processes by which such “higher circles” coordinates and maintained their own status as elite groups who are “able to realise their will even if others resist it.”

Robert Dahl’s most popular definition of power is drawn from a critique that Mills had irresponsibly defined power as a vague feature of social structures that could be properly observed with any scientific accuracy in terms of linear cause-effect relationships. As Richard Merelman expressed, Dahl’s approach to power was distinct because it defined a concept of power that “studied actual behavior, stressed operational definitions, and turned up evidence.”<sup>248</sup> As Lukes also emphasizes, “the stress here is on the study of concrete, observable behavior.”<sup>249</sup> Dahl suggested in most influential article *The Concept of Power*, published in 1957: “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do.”<sup>250</sup> However, later in the same article, Dahl transformed this definition subtly, so that it no longer referred to the *capacity* of one agent to cause a behaviour in another agent, but rather refers to the *effect* of such influence on behaviour, such that power must be *observed* only in the effects of

“a successful attempt by *A* to get *b* to do something he would not otherwise do.”<sup>251</sup> The second definition is the more precise version, since it is more in keeping with the behaviourist prerogatives which animated Dahl’s work.

As Lukes says, Dahl’s power is necessarily “conceived as intentional and active: indeed, it was ‘measured’ by studying its exercise — by ascertaining the frequency of who wins and who loses in respect of such issues, that is, who prevails in decision-making situations.”<sup>252</sup> The concepts applied by Dahl and others in the original “American power debates” are specifically oriented to define and observe “influence” in the democratic decision-making of official American institutions. Nelson Polsby, one of Dahl’s intellectual allies in these debates, asserts that “one can conceive of ‘power’ — influence and control are serviceable synonyms — as the capacity of one actor to do something affecting another actor, which changes the probable pattern of specified future events. This can be envisaged most easily in a decision-making situation.”<sup>253</sup> These statements clearly reveal their axiomatic reliance on an agency perspective that is rooted in a fundamental source of individual *cause-ability* when they treat power as synonymous with influence or control, or as “the capacity of one actor to do something affecting another actor.”

Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz opened up a second dimension to the American power debates (or, as Lukes calls it, a “second face of power”) by arguing against Dahl’s insistence that the power of *A* to get *B* to do something that *B* would not otherwise have done must always be observable in an explicit event of conflict-and-victory. Accepting that power should be defined generically as “*A* affecting the behaviour of *B*,” Bachrach and Baratz first of all agree with Dahl’s limited assertions. “Of course power is exercised when *A* participates in the making of decisions that affect *B*,” they concede. But:

Power is also exercised when *A* devotes his energies to creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are relatively innocuous to *A*. To the extent that *A* succeeds in doing this, *B* is prevented, for all practical purposes, from bringing to the fore any issues that might in their resolution be seriously detrimental to *A*'s set of preferences.<sup>254</sup>

Evoking E. E. Schattschneider's sociological concept of mobilization of bias to elaborate their interjection into the debate, Bachrach and Baratz wanted to find out how power works where "all forms of political organization have a bias in favor of some kinds of conflict and the suppression of others because *organization is the mobilization of bias*. Some issues are organized into politics while others are organized out."<sup>255</sup> Institutions inevitably become coordinated in such a way that their normal operation construes privilege to some people and some positions at the expense of other people and other positions. There is always a structural propensity of organizations that allows some agents to advance certain decisions and repress other decisions, and this will result in cases where power of *A* affecting *B* can occur as a kind of silent and hidden form of conflict.

The first face of power manifests in an observable measurement showing that *A* has overcome the opposition of *B* to achieve a desired outcome in a decision-making situation. The second face of power occurs when it can be shown that *A* has actively maintained dominance by conditioning the terms of what problems are even brought up as possible decisions. As military strategists are eager to note, *it's best to win a battle before the fighting begins*. That is, while it may be fair to say that "*A* has power over *B*" when *A* has won a battle against *B*, the condition of "being in power" may be better described by those cases where *A* can preemptively maintain advantage by avoiding an explicit event of power struggle.

The capacity to exercise this second face of power is more generally in the hands of “the powerful,” those whom Mills referred to as the power elite, increasing the capacity to regulate conflicts which could be a danger to your interests and to avoid unnecessary or dangerous fights. This kind of power is what people actually mean when they speak of “Power” with a capital-P: not only the outcome power that is proven by success in an event of conflict (the kind of power that is expressed by being able to *win* a vote or not), but the socially arranged condition where some agents have the access and ability to define the rules of the game, or, at the very least, a situation in which some agents can disproportionately benefit from the rules of the game (the kind of power that is expressed by being able to *call* a vote or not).

An important way to think about this type of power is to note that those who already benefit from a situational arrangement of power are those who will most likely benefit from doing nothing. This is a key distinction that should help to reveal certain fault lines of privilege-power within a given organizational situation: *For the powerful (A) doing nothing can be a coercive act of power-over, whereas for the power-less (B), this is not the case.* In contemporary anarchist culture, the notion of *privilege* has gotten a lot of attention as a concept that considers these types of power dynamics that prevail in anarchist collective action systems. Marilyn Frye has elaborated on the idea of privilege when stating that “total power is unconditional access; total powerlessness is being unconditionally accessible. The creation and manipulation of power is constituted of the manipulation and control of access.”<sup>256</sup> Someone is privileged when they can get what they want without doing anything (a power-to achieve an end experienced with no resistance). Someone without privilege in a specific circumstance will have to do something to get what they want (a power-to that always has to overcome power-over to achieve its end). That

is, privilege is manifest by a superior's ease with power, by their apparent lack of any need to exert power in the process of getting what they want and their lack of recognition for the possible barriers that they do not face (but that others certainly do) in achieving their intended outcomes. From the agency perspective, this definition sees privilege as manifest by the lack of resistance to accomplishing one's own interests: where *A* gets what *A* wants, *regardless* of what *B* wants and with *no intervention or resistance* from *B* at all. Privilege is all about *A*. There is no concern for *B*, and that's the point. *B* simply does what it "would otherwise have done," what it was already supposed to do, plays its small part in the greater system of normalcy, in a way that contributes to the smooth operations of *A*'s agenda. *A*'s privilege is in the capacity to ignore *B* altogether and still have its agenda fulfilled as a matter of course.

From the other side of the equation, privilege is experienced by the inferior position as a system that makes resources accessible to the superior, and which allows the superior to call upon the inferior as a resource but not vice versa ("total powerlessness is being unconditionally accessible"). James C. Scott's anthropological analysis of "domination and the arts of resistance" offers a good example of this manifestation of power as privilege. In a broad study concerning how superior and inferior social positions develop ritualized interactions, Scott suggests that "the impact of power is most readily observed in acts of deference, subordination and ingratiation."<sup>257</sup> These "acts of deference, subordination and ingratiation" are precisely the type of behaviour that cannot be represented as events of observable conflict. They do not rupture normal relations, rather the contrary. They *are* normal relations; they are the ritualized everyday behaviours which *maintain* a smooth consistency of social activities. While the inferior position is required to perform rule-bound acts of deference, the superior relates back by exhibiting power as the

privilege of “not *having* to act or, more precisely, the capacity to be more negligent and casual about any single performance.”<sup>258</sup> Privilege is power-over operating “casually,” such that the superior-position *does not have to act* in order to have their goals met, and the inferior-position *has to act out, no matter whether or not their goals are being met* (either the subordinate has to enact some form of conflict in order to achieve their own goals, or they must act out a ritualized subordinative performance in order to empower their superior’s goals).

If the in-group wants to be more egalitarian, they will try to incorporate an out-group. The out-group is invited *in*. This seems like *A* is making a move to increase equality with *B*, but the move is down a one-way street: it makes *B* accessible to *A*’s system of power without granting *B* the powers of privilege which coordinate that system. Therefore, if *B* wants to actually do anything within *A*’s group, it will inevitably incite a conflict. When the out-group raises their grievances, the in-group always groans. The men rolls their eyes, tell the women to speak up, then shut off their ears. The white folks talk up inclusivity, then they do nothing about rearranging racist patterns of structured accessibility. The in-group wants access to their inferiors, but if the inclusion of *B* does not radically alter the very conditions of political capacity in that collective action system, then *A* has *incorporated B* into the already established positions of *A*’s system, gaining the power of access to a new subgroup of inferiors without giving anything back.

From an article about Occupy posted on the Toronto Media Coop website, we hear that amidst the excitement for egalitarian process “there have been a lot of people... who are using their sense of entitlement to make their voices heard over those of others.”<sup>259</sup> Within the history of consensus, gender has been the most popular source of criticism concerning how the egalitarian

principle of speaking and listening tends to be subverted. This is mainly because consensus was developed explicitly as a feminist method intent on correcting masculine dominance in political decision-making forums. The dominant literatures of consensus since the 1970s have drawn almost exclusively from a largely white and class-blind context, where, as opposed to race or class, gender tends to be addressed much more frequently as the key issue of inequality. Gender training in speaking and listening produces culturally dominant traits of masculinity that already encourage masculine-identified people to exhibit the self-confidence, willingness to exert influence, and rationalized eloquence that are implicated in effectively “expressing desires and needs.” People come from different inherited patterns of communication which might place them closer or further away from attaining the particular patterns of actions that circulate among the power elite. People also inhabit different social roles based on socio-economic inequalities such as gender, race, class, education, and ability which prepare them differently for the challenges of speaking powerfully. These dynamics of power are, of course, more common than most people want to believe. Writing about the experience of being “a girl in an anarchist boys’ club,” one anonymous author says: “Everything I say out loud in a group is pre-planned, composed. I'm not spontaneous 'cuz yeah I'm shy but mostly I don't trust you to listen without interrupting, treat what I say as valued if I'm not rehearsed.”<sup>260</sup>

Today, the cultural environment of consensus silently encourages and rewards white, middle class, masculine style of confident rhetoric, implicitly augmenting the voices of some people while diminishing the voices of others, thereby structuring an in-group/out-group division of non-decision-making power that often overrides the formal equality of participants. The in-group will always tend to privilege power skills which they themselves are already particularly good at,

and so the members of the anarchist boys club don't have to make decisions about how they speak and they don't have to worry about how they're heard. They can take it for granted. They set up their own forms of expressive power-to as the model for empowered expression in general. "Meetings are often a great bastion of subtle manarchism, particularly in regards to space. Privilege teaches us to find space and fill it."<sup>261</sup>

It's a classic self-centred, colonizing, white guy move to assume that his own reality is the universal model for all of reality and everyone else. This was a problem widely recognized during the Occupy movement, where critiques of such biased essential assumptions flew at the centre from every marginalized perspective, and for good reason. As these authors of an anti-racist and feminist pamphlet on Occupy Baltimore write:

Whiteness and maleness have been duly reinforced as the not-so-secret standard at this occupation, in many ways. One example: an announcement made by a young white man at a GA [General Assembly] that 'everyone is accountable when they speak to media, because they represent the occupation as a whole.' [...] The countless snaps and twinkles in support of such a statement demonstrated clear consensus. Those twinkles expressed a range of assumptions that people who are largely comfortable in their own skin tend to make: being present in a space makes you in charge of its representation; most everyone agrees with you (and should). Those of us that have to daily prepare ourselves for an imminent bash; imminent fight with hostile, privilege-denying strangers; an imminent insult (intended or not), we take issue with this coercion into representation. We don't ask you to represent us (please god no); don't fucking assimilate us to your views, and then make us responsible for them.<sup>262</sup>

This power of privilege is more than merely common in consensus process, it is structured into the process. The consensus process funnels power into positions of implicit cultural privilege.

This is evident when we consider *privilege as the power of doing nothing*. What do I mean by this? To explicate the point, let's take a moment to consider the dynamics of the "the block." Consensus gives the smallest minority the power to stop a decision from being ratified by allowing any one to *block* a decision, whereas the positive assent to a decision involves singing with a chorus. You can say nothing and still technically assent to a decision, whereas opposing it requires standing out, speaking up, and causing a problem. Someone who opposes a decision based on an outsider's perspective must act out to be heard, and risk the exposure that this expression brings upon them. Those who do act out against the consensual tide will usually have to face a group condemning them as rude, violent, arrogant, and oppositional — stigma that is disproportionately born by categorical positions of social powerlessness delimited by race, class, gender, ability, education, facility with speech, and so on. This is what happens to people like Sonny Singh, who recalls the backlash from an Occupy group concerning problems brought forward by a People of Colour (POC) caucus to the general assembly:

As soon as I opened my mouth with our concern, dozens were down-twinkling with looks of disgust on their face, muttering sarcastically to each other, and even shouting out loud, shocked and appalled that I would even ask such a question. The sense in the room was, "There goes POC again causing trouble and holding us up from moving forward." People assumed we were condoning the actions of the "violent" people in question simply because we raised a question about what violence means.<sup>263</sup>

The majority holds the silent and normal power of consensual uniformity which holds the power of privilege as a silent confirmation of normal routine, as a matter of natural uninhibited flow from debate to decision.

Everyone can hear the first face of power: it speaks loud to the crowd, it happens when people listen to you. The second face of power turns some people's voices into background noise: it is the overwhelming din of the crowd; it happens when people cannot hear you. Shouting and swearing and still, no one listens. In the second face, power has changed from discrete event of a coercive conflict to the social privilege of a coercive normalcy: we have gone from a concept of *power as causal* to a concept of *power as casual*! This is a structural technical problem with consensus decision-making — we have to recognize how privilege is built into the concept of consensus itself, such that consensus processes tend especially to magnify the silent power for an in-group. I will address this issue more thoroughly in the analyses of chapter 4. For the moment, suffice it to note that the three faces model of power does apply usefully as a way to expose how consensus does not erase power entirely, but rather promotes a specific shift in its modality: the casual power of privileged no-decision-making is in fact often heightened by the consensus process, perhaps even in proportional adjustment to the way that the process reduces the causal power of conflicting decision-making. In the first case power is an *intervention* in the ongoing arrangement of things in the world which achieves the purpose of the agent.

The second dimension of power reveals an important nuance in power relations: to do nothing is an act of power for the already-powerful. So how to combat the casual concentration of privilege and position — ethnocentric, colonialist, sexist, genderist, racist, ableist, and any other version of self-centred blindness to the disempowerment of others? For the power-less, resistance is manifest by disruption, loudness, conflict — the only way to be heard over the regular buzz of normalized silence is to cause a ruckus, raise a stink, or protest a problem that radically alters the constellation of power. And for the power-full, a basic first step is to challenge the silent

eminence of their own ease.<sup>264</sup> Do something that rattles the normalized privilege to do nothing and still hold power. The author who wrote of their experience in the anarchist boys club suggests a pointed bit of advice, at the very least: “Just shut the fuck up a little. Once in a while.”<sup>265</sup>

### **(2.3.2) Agency Versus Structure: Coercive Domination or Systemic Subjection**

In his philosophically deconstructive treatise on power, Torben Bech Dyrberg illustrates a classically defined separation between those who focus on power as agency and those who try to understand power from the vantage-point of structure. As Dyrberg explains:

The basic assumption of agency conceptions of power is that the relation between agent and structure has to be external. [...] The external relation between agency and structure implies, in other words, that agency is internal to itself — that it is fully constituted, so to speak. The subject is viewed as constitutive, and this means, more concretely, that it is defined apart from, or as prior to, structure, which, again, is one of the main reasons why the latter is usually conceived in terms of external constraints on action.<sup>266</sup>

From the agency perspective, power begins with agents who express power-to (as cause-ability or outcome power), and these agents are conceived as the original source (the atomic particle of power, so to speak) from which of all other power phenomena are derived as various types of interactive combinations (the various modes of power-over or power-with — control-ability social power, or integrative power). Each individual human independently and naturally possess the capacity and the right to exert power-to, and power-over is a relationship of counter-influence between two or more opposing agents, thereby creating *social power* as the asymmetrical

condition where one agent achieves their own power-to in conflict or consensus with the power-to of any other agent(s).

We can recall Keith Dowding's succinct statement as a contemporary expression of this position on power that is especially common to the North American traditions: "'power-to' and 'power-over' may be described as 'outcome power' and 'social power' respectively, the first because it is the power to bring about outcomes, the second because it necessarily involves a social relation between at least two actors."<sup>267</sup> In the "first face" of power, as developed by Dahl and company, power is most clearly a causal ability to influence or control decision-making outcomes. The priority is given to *outcome power* as a more fundamental or natural state of power, and is derived explicitly from the classical empirical idea of causation. *Agency Perspective Axiom #1: Power-to is the capacity for individual agents to act in the world; this power-to is the original source of power in general.* Power-over occurs when the causal outcomes of power-to inhibit or adversely effect the decision outcomes that someone else may have preferred. In other words, power-to happens when someone gets their way, and power-over over happens to someone else who therefore doesn't get their way. *Agency Perspective Axiom #2: Power-over is a derivative articulation of original power-to applied as a means of controlling the power-to of others.*

For the agency perspective, power-to comes first, associated with a foundational concept of cause-ability. Since I've already treated this tradition more thoroughly earlier in this chapter, we can now compare these axioms to their theoretical alternatives presented by the structure perspective. Dahl was concerned that Mills was failing to accept the causal standards of the agency perspective by trying to think of power-over as a product of social codes and systems of

resource distribution. And he was right. Mills was ultimately concerned not with how independent actors influence reach other in open conflict or competition, but rather with how conflict and competition is rigged to benefit some groups instead of others. But Mills is not simply promoting a “wrong” idea of power. It is a very different idea of power which has more allegiance to a structure perspective. This idea of “power” thinks of it more like an economic medium of social functioning rather than as a specific contest that may occur within the terms of that medium. So, for instance, whereas the agency perspective thinks of power as a matter of who wins in a soccer match, the structure perspective thinks of power as defining the rules of “soccer” which structures how the teams are able to operate. This sense of power does not describe qualities and acts of agents; it is responsible for coordinating the categories and activities which are available to describe agents.

This alternate concept of power can be described according to two equivalent and inverted axioms. First, power must emerge originally from the control-ability of power-over, working to coordinate and reproduce the particular collective structures of a social project. *Structure Perspective Axiom #1: Power-over is the capacity for a social system to control the actions of its members; this power-over is the original source of power in general.* Many a critical theorist has argued that the idea of a universal pre-social natural individual is an idea generated by a particular social arrangement: the individual is not a natural original category, but is rather a historical and social construction. Likewise, we may say that the idea of a pre-social natural power-to is the product of a particular arrangement of social power-over: power is not of natural origin, but is rather a historical and social construction of particular arrangements of social structural power-over. One of the most well-travelled of such criticisms derives from Karl

Marx's analysis of the self-serving assumptions made by classical political economists concept of the natural individual as a basic a priori category. As he argues,

Smith and Ricardo still stand with both feet on the shoulders of the eighteenth century prophets, in whose imaginations this eighteenth century individual — the product on one side of the dissolution of the feudal forms of society, on the other of the new forces of production developed since the sixteenth century — appears as an ideal, whose existence they project into the past. Not as a historic result but as history's point of departure. As the Natural Individual appropriate to their notion of human nature, not arising historically, but posited by nature. This illusion has been common to each new epoch to this day.<sup>268</sup>

Marx was interested not in a kind of power that emanated from the natural individual, but the kind of power that constructed a certain type of individual agent *as if it were natural*, as a way to empower a modern capitalist system in need of the legal, mythological, and economic premises supported by that naturalized individual.

At its most intense, this approach leads to a view that there are no agents prior-to or independent-from of the controlling structures of power-over that constitute and coordinate certain illusions as internal components to serve specific functions within their collective organizational systems. As Michel Foucault once put it, the agency perspective derives from its own particular social structural formulations which require a distinctively penal and legal notion of power:

Confronted by a power that is law, the subject who is constituted as subject — who is 'subjected' — is he who obeys. To the formal homogeneity of power in these various instances corresponds to the general form of submission in the one who is constrained by it — whether the individual in question is the subject opposite the monarch, the citizen opposite the state, the child opposite the parent, or the disciple

opposite the master. A legislative power on one side, and an obedient subject on the other.<sup>269</sup>

Foucault's various theoretical excursions (stretched across a wide range of topics and problematics) all depend on a basic premise common to structure perspectives: what we call "power" cannot be simply restricted to the models provided by such juridical, legislative, or authoritative commands. These models provide an agency perspective on power which limits the framework of power to relationships which it itself controls and defines. That is, a belief in agency perspective is itself criticized as being a function of the modern legislative and judicial structures of power-over that strive to create individual agents as disciplined obedience subjects. To break through such monotonous representations of power, we have to begin thinking of it as a much more pervasive social force according to which various relations of conflict and coordination are established among social forces. The structure perspective is understandable only if you accept that the concept of power can be extended to more territory than what is permitted by the contrast between legislative authority and obedient subject, or, inversely, between the power-to of an agent who is originally free from any legislative authority and the power-over of coercive control and dominating subjections.

Instead of assuming that power is a matter of external relations between originally independent agents, the structure perspective treats all the effects of power as internal relations of organizational coordination that take place within a delimited zone of social order. This is a perspective that looks at social phenomena from the top-down to understand power relations as a function of complex coordination for a functioning social totality. As Dryberg puts it, "whilst agency conceptions are solidly rooted in the subject/object dualism, structural conceptions of

power eliminate this dualism by getting rid of the subject. This is done by reducing the subject to subject positions within a structural totality, and this implies that the relation between subject position and structure must be internal.”<sup>270</sup> That is, the structure perspective asserts that power can be creative phenomenon that conditions and assembles subjective agents in the first place, rather than as an external imposition applied upon them after they have already been established. Mark Haugaard describes the structure perspective as perceiving “the ways in which given social systems confer differentials of dispositional power on agents, thus structuring their possibilities for action.”<sup>271</sup> And so we come to *Structure Perspective Axiom #2: Power-to is an effect of original power-over which is caused by subjection of individual agents according to the demands and requirements of their social systemic incorporation.*

Talcott Parsons, an American scholar famous for his adaptation of Max Weber’s work into a system of “functionalist sociology,” is one of the most classically cited representatives of a general structure perspective on power, and brief assessment of his concepts should offer a good introductory illustration of this alternative approach. For Parsons, power is conceived as “a facility for the performance of function in and on behalf of the society as a system.”<sup>272</sup> Power refers to a special kind of influence that is produced by socially legitimized authorities, norms, laws, beliefs, and other forms of structural coordination. Of course, depending on your position, these sources of power-over could certainly be conceived as coercive and dominating in particular instances, but Parsons insists that they are not necessarily so, as a general rule. A social system uses power to construct shared values, shared patterns of behaviour, and shared social identities. In one of his most oft-quoted definitions, we hear from Parsons that power is the

generalized capacity to secure the performance of binding obligations by units in a system of collective organization when the obligations are legitimized with reference to their bearing on collective goals, and where in case of recalcitrance there is a presumption of enforcement by negative situational sanctions — whatever the actual agency of that enforcement.<sup>273</sup>

Power of this sort works to the extent that a social project can integrate an agent into its socialization programme, such that the agent will consent with the goals, purposes, and interests of the social order and act willingly to reproduce them.

For the agency perspective, power-over is a matter of influential control exerted by agents upon other agents; for the structure perspective it is a matter of determining the controls that structure agents themselves as influential. A key point in this shift, and this is evident in Parsons' systemic view, is that power-over is therefore not an inherently evil or bad phenomenon. It can, quite to the contrary, actually be considered as a positive function, even when it is coercive and dominating, because it coordinates social organizational roles in order to garner power-to for the social system as a whole. The various concrete mechanisms of social controls are supported and authorized by a symbolic ideological system of beliefs, rituals, roles, and routines. Clegg, Courpasson, and Phillips express that “symbolic legitimacy is the orderly background within which Parsons' view of power is embedded.”<sup>274</sup> Parsons' theoretical venture is concerned with the task of collective unity and stability where power-over is considered as an ethically neutral means of social coordination. “The range within which there exists a continuous system of interlocking binding obligations is essentially that of the internal relations of an organized collectivity in our sense, and of the contractual obligations undertaken on behalf of its boundaries.”<sup>275</sup> Parsons is talking about how collective agencies are made through the systematic

organization of the social relations which take part within them. The connection of obligations and constraints, sanctions and inducements may be taken as foundational (if we accept Parsons' account) to the power-to which is available to individual agents within that system.

So, to recap: the first difference between these two opposing conceptual perspectives can be posed by the question of origins: where does power come from? The agency perspective says *influential causation of power-to* while the structure perspective says the *structural determination of power-over*. According to each, the other cannot be right. The second difference I want to discuss refers more to the second set of axioms, which defines the linkage between power-to and power-over in each case. The second set of axioms focus on another question of manifestations: what are the social effects of power? The agency perspective says *coercive domination* while the structure perspective says *systemic subjection*. Again: according to each, the other cannot be right.

From the agency perspective, power always manifests socially as a matter of how agents exert causation upon each other by external relations. Agents apply power upon each other, it is experienced as something that comes "over" one's own agency, or is imposed "over" another agent's power. Power of this sort occurs in external relations of cause and effect, but these relations are not always as explicit and obvious as Dahl wanted to maintain. By taking the agency perspective premises upon which Dahl's project was based through permutations of less obvious manifestations of power, Lukes articulates the "second" and "third" faces of power as progressively more covert and more systematically instituted instances of *coercive domination*. This journey takes us to the cusp of a structure perspective, but not over the edge. Lukes remains committed to treating agents as the central protagonists in power theory, explicitly asserting that

his approach “will not attribute power to structures or relations or processes that cannot be characterized as agents.”<sup>276</sup> By following Lukes along his journey to the edge of the agency perspective, we can define another dividing line that constitutes the battle between the two perspective on power (and discuss a few useful details about the various ways to think of power along the way).

The final “third face of power” presented by Steven Lukes suggests a way to go deeper into the covert operations of power than these previous two faces. For the third face, Lukes proposes that power will also be active as “the imposition of internal constraints,” whereby “those subject to it are led to acquire beliefs and form desires that result in their consenting or adapting to being dominated, in coercive and non-coercive settings.”<sup>277</sup> Power is active in its third dimension when any social process intentionally or unintentionally operates by “securing the compliance to domination of willing subjects.”<sup>278</sup> In the cases I discussed concerning the second face of power, *A* and *B* were always treated as at odds; there was a recognized conflict between them, even if it was buried or deflected. Lukes introduces the third face of power by proposing the need to account for how power coordinates a *covert conflict* whereby *A* manipulates *B*'s interests and beliefs so that they accord with *A*'s benefit as opposed to *B*'s.

Lukes' journey through the American power debates culminates in his own definition of “power as domination” that expresses a similar critical orientation to the anarchist ethical philosophy whereby power-over is the derivative evil imposition, oppression, coercive control, or otherwise external impediment to an agent's own “real interests.” While a detailed discussion of how Lukes employs the concept of “real interests” is crucial to fully elaborate his theory, that discussion would take me too far afield from my current focus on illustrating the contrast

between the agency and structure perspectives. At the moment, it will suffice to consider how Lukes' concept of power as domination holds close affiliation with the axiomatic anarchist concept of power-over. As he explains it, "power as domination is the ability to constrain the choices of others, coercing them or securing their compliance, by impeding them from living as their own nature and judgement dictate."<sup>279</sup> How can we identify, analyze, and apply this concept of power as domination? Answering this concern in the essay *Three-Dimensional Power* (which was added to the second edition of his *Power: A Radical View* in 2005) Lukes clarifies that "to speak of power as domination is to suggest the imposition of some significant constraint upon an agent or agents' desires, purposes or interests, which it frustrates, prevents from fulfillment or even from being formulated. Power, in this sense, thus marks a distinction between an imposition, thus understood, and other influences."<sup>280</sup> Power, for Lukes, must always still be defined as a *conflict of interests*, even if it is a conflict that is fully hidden within some form of coerced consensus. We should identify power only where we can identify that there has been some case of coerced interests. Consequently, power conceived this way simply cannot occur in consensual relations. As Terence Ball restates it, "the sort of significant affecting specified by the concept of power involves one agent's ability not only to affect another, but to do so in a way that adversely affect's the other's interests."<sup>281</sup>

The problem of operationalizing a deeper analysis of "power as domination" pervades Lukes' approach to the three faces of power, but the third dimension addresses a power that never even shows its face at all. "Indeed," as Lukes asks, "is it not the supreme exercise of power to get another or others to have the desires you want them to have — that is, to secure compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires?"<sup>282</sup> Indeed, it may be so, but this "supreme exercise of

power” is also more supremely difficult to define, identify, and observe, giving Lukes’ third dimension of power a much more complicated problem than its forebears. In a case where “the dominated,” *B*, may not even recognize or express any resistance or opposition to the desired outcomes of *A*, there may not be any way to observe it. You have to go looking in the shadows in order to discover the places where, according to Lukes, “power is at its most effective when least observable.”<sup>283</sup> As Lukes says, “the three views we have been considering can be seen as alternative interpretations and applications of one and the same underlying concept of power, according to which *A* exercises power over *B* when *A* affects *B* in a manner contrary to *B*’s interests.”<sup>284</sup> The point I wish to emphasize here is that the models which take on the parameters of the “*A* causes *B*” form generally articulate the analytic possibilities inherent an agency perspective on power by treating the concept as a matter of external relations of behavioural causation among individual and independent agents, from the influence of control and conflict to the coercion of systematic domination. On the other hand, the structure perspective cannot support the hard and fast differentiation between individual freedom and structural domination which is a consistent tenet for agency perspective theorists. Jeffrey C. Isaac, for instance, is another influential power theorist who tries to open the concept into those realms of analysis that are more concerned with structural determination than with individual agency. He exclaims his difference from Lukes explicitly by arguing that power should in fact be understood as a function of holding agents’ interests together, rather than as an instance where agents’ interests are posed in conflict. He says:

For Lukes the concept of interest is necessary to the discussion of power insofar as it answers the question of the counterfactual: What would *B* do were it not for *A*’s

behavior? I have argued that this way of thinking about power is mistaken and that rather than treating A's behavior as the cause of B's behavior, we should focus on the structural relations that bind A and B together, viewing these as the material cause of both A's and B's conduct.<sup>285</sup>

For Isaac, power is precisely about what *B* would do normally, as a matter of everyday course, as a production of personality, role, and rule: power as a function of socialization. By addressing the power of socialization we must recognize that power as control-ability no longer has to work through an active agent who initiates responsibility for the conditions of its control.

From the other side of the power theory divide the causal formula so central to the three faces debates — “*A* causes *B*” — is no longer necessary because power is thought of as a conditioned situation in which *A* and *B* are synchronized into a common pattern of behaviour which neither the superordinate nor the subordinate position must willfully enact in order for it to be situationally active. Isaac's critique of the three faces debates leads to a concept of power that is fully integrated into social roles and responsibilities. Isaac explicitly names his approach a theory of *social power*, in order to distinguish it from the causal sense of power that governs the agency perspective orientations. As he says, “rather than A getting B to do something that B would not otherwise do, social relations of power typically involve both A and B doing what they ordinarily would do.”<sup>286</sup>

Moving across the border into the structure perspective means that we cross the limit of identifiable coercion of interests. On this side, power is not necessarily about conflict and coercion. It can instead be entirely constructive of capacities and abilities, and goes as deep as social relations themselves. For instance, social roles and networks of intersecting constraints are coordinated not only by social codes, but also by the concrete demands of concrete objects,

physical buildings, and material tools. The physical things in a human environment are built up by social-economic activity — things are full of materialized power, substantiating the influence of plans, controls, purposes, goals, roles, rules. The buildings we live in, the ways we are incited to move, sit, and sleep; the tools we use, the ways we are enabled to act, communicate, do and think — these are the conditions through which people’s actions are controlled by the structured form of socially produced material things. As Marja Gasterlaars explains in a study concerning how health care establishments manifest templates of proper health, “buildings, things (and rituals) materialize health morality. They ‘make’ people move, and, above all, they embody the identification, separation and finally the removal of ‘dangerous’ dirt; moreover, they ‘show’ people what is healthy.”<sup>287</sup> Of course, to state that social power works through the material organization of our social existence is nothing new. For instance, this is also the basic thesis behind Louis Althusser’s concept of the *ideological state apparatus*: “an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material.”<sup>288</sup>

Michel Foucault is also usually depicted as a prime representative of an extreme structure perspective that tracks the influence of social and physical structures on how people adopt particular belief systems and types of agency. From Terence Ball’s perspective, “Foucault’s focus is not upon isolated individuals but upon individuals as role-bearers implicated in the production and reproduction of relatively enduring and systematically structured social relations.”<sup>289</sup> Such a project squares precisely with the orientation of the structure perspective. In Foucault’s work the notion of a “subject of power” is a key feature which elaborates on the premise that individual agents are a product of the social systems which control and manage them. As Foucault notes, “there are two meanings of the word ‘subject:’ subject to someone else by control and

dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience of self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to.”<sup>290</sup> The word “subject” has a dual meaning, colloquially and theoretically and in both French and English. First, as the agency of power-to: to be a subject is to be one who can “act” in the sense presumed by the agency perspective. And second, as the control of power-over: to be a subject is also to be one who is subjected to a greater power, as in the sense of being subject to a King. The word subject denotes agency of power-to (the one who can act) and also denotes the impact of power-over (to be subjected to one who acts). In Foucault’s many and varied analyses of power, the individual subject is consistently displaced from its classical position as the naturally predetermined originator of agentic power-to. The subject is rather considered as a position generated by a system of social processes, and the agency born by individual subjects must always be understood as derived from the codes and constrictions organized by social relations and systems of social power. This perspective on power considers that “the individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle.”<sup>291</sup> Thus a subject is the agent of any particular capacity for power-to only as an effect of the coordinated structures of power-over in which it lives. Power-over creates and uses individuals as subjects with agency, ultimately to constrain a system of societal relations, to produce its own organizational, cultural, economic, and political ways of life.

A far cry from the agency perspective’s insistence that social power can only act as a constraint or domination upon agents, in these approaches social power is what enables and directs the interaction of agents. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu describes power in

another vein of this perspective, treating power-with as the means or medium of control when he appeals to the concept of *social capital* as functioning in a “field” of possible activities and values. As he says, a field of power “is the space of the relations of force between the different kinds of capital or, more precisely, between the agents who possess a sufficient amount of one or the different kinds of capital to be in a position to dominate the corresponding field, whose struggles intensify whenever the relative value of the different kinds of capital is questioned.”<sup>292</sup> This concept of *relations of force* is an engagement with a very different idea of power-with. For Bourdieu, the field of power represents an essentially hegemonic competition between different social systems, or between different forms of capital, as he says. Power occurs because society is built from competing and cooperating factions who must each aim to establish their own systems of social organization by assuring that their own circuits of power are operating effectively. When one power system does dominate a social scenario it is by establishing an economy of power relations, or a set of relations of force which pervade and are accepted as the proper rules of engagement for all parties involved.

As Bourdieu puts it, the dominant system of power is therefore “not the direct and simple action exercised by a set of agents (“the dominant class”) invested with powers of coercion. Rather, it is the indirect effect of a complex set of actions engendered within the network of intersecting constraints.”<sup>293</sup> That is, the dominant social coordination of powers relies on a set of controls that normally elicit and constrain action paradigms. The structure perspective sees power as coordinating social integration, legitimating authority, and as defining the roles and rules of a consensual social order. These functions of social control-ability represent the very point at which Lukes draws the line for his definition of power based from the agency

perspective, and in that contrast we find one of the inexorable antagonisms of modern social theory. According to Lukes, the key operable question of power has to ask: “when can social causation be characterized as an exercise of power, or, more precisely, how and where is the line to be drawn between structural determination, on the one hand, and an exercise of power, on the other?”<sup>294</sup> The agency perspective wants to understand power *in contrast to* “structural determination,” whereas the structure perspective treats power *as a capacity of* structural determination. For the agency perspective, power exists as a conflict between the social demands and the way that individual agents integrate into those demands, whereas for the structure perspective power exists as a condition in which individual agents will be defined by social demands.

So what is the social effect of power? The agency perspective says *coercive domination of power-over* and the structure perspective says the *systemic subjection of power-to*. According to each, the other cannot be right. They are directly opposed at the limit between coercive domination and systemic subjection. The battle over which side of the line power theory should reside upon has been long and arduous, and shows no sign of abating. In the next chapter, I will propose that we should understand how power always functions across the line, as a bridge that can connect these two conceptual traditions rather than a choice which separates them. Presently, before moving on to that impending project, I wish to address one way that the structure perspective can analyze another side to power analysis, a side which the agency perspective cannot see and which must also be acknowledged as an important way of assessing power in anarchist radical democratic praxis.

### **(2.3.3) Applying the Structure Perspective: Rules and Roles in Consensus Decision-Making**

One of the key points of interest for the structure perspective is how power can be located in the normal social authorization of organizational rules and roles. Critiquing Robert Dahl's agency perspective on power, Stuart Clegg has insightfully addressed an example of power presented by Dahl wherein people must respond to a police officer directing traffic. Dahl originally argued that the officer's power to direct traffic should be considered according to three necessary circumstances: 1) the police officer must instigate the action, shown by a measurable time delay before the driver responds; 2) there must be a direct connection between the event of the officer's action and the event of the driver's response; and 3) the act of the officer must then be shown to have caused the driver to do something they would not otherwise have done.<sup>295</sup> Generally speaking, no one questions the common sense premise that the police officer "has power" in this situation. A key difference between the agency versus the structure perspectives can be determined by how people explain this scene. Dahl's criteria are a textbook case of the basic agency perspective in action: treating power as a causal relation enacted by one agent to impact upon another. Clegg, on the other hand, proposes a structure perspective by emphasizing that power of causal influence should be thought of as inhered in the roles played by the agents, not in any specific actions that they take as individuals. Clegg argues the point by suggesting we think about where the power would go if the police officer was replaced with a random bystander. People would certainly respond differently to the efforts of a bystander directing traffic. Likely, drivers would be less inclined to accept the directives of the bystander, avoiding and ignoring the person's appeal to control their actions in that situation. Hence, the bystander loses the power of influence which the police enjoyed in the operation of the same act. But,

imagine what would happen if the police officer was in plain clothes and the bystander was dressed up in a cop's uniform: then the drivers would obey the apparent police officer and ignore the apparent bystander. They see the roles of those people and afford them certain power accordingly. The power of the police officer and the impotence of the bystander is not an essential natural quality of their agencies; it is rather a relative social characteristic of the roles they take on relative to other social roles.

The relative relationships which individuals take through their social roles situates the most common way that the concept of power-with fits into structure perspectives. Here, power-with refers to a medium or means of power-over, defining the systemic relationships, roles, and routines which are accepted and enacted by individuals in the daily practice of their power relations. The role of a police officer is, in this sense, defined as a structured code of power-with; or, in other words, a structured code of role-relationship parameters. The "police" is a role which demands certain codes of interaction from "citizens," a type of code for the appropriate and available range of interactions between "citizen" and "police officer" as social categories. As Clegg says:

The uniform acts as a symbol which displays a role. The role serves as a shorthand expression for what every motorist knows: motoring is a rule-guided activity, and policemen represent the power of the rules. The rules would be the basis of the policeman's power and not Dahl's three necessary conditions, which are mere occurrences of the rules. Policemen have certain powers because motorists recognize them as embodying certain rules. Just like pieces in a chess game.<sup>296</sup>

The power of *A* to cause the behaviours of *B* resides in the expectations and performances people have concerning their social roles; the options of power are rule and role bound opportunities for

action that are laid out for each individual to conduct their influence on each other. Power is, clearly in this representation, a positive elicitation of actions rather than a coercive control or authoritative domination delimiting actions. People accept that driving is governed by rules, and according to those rules the police officer represents a social position of ‘power’ that can control drivers. The police officer therefore has a certain role to play within the context of the rules of traffic, which is why there is power-over relayed through that position of power-to.

In consensus decision-making the ideal goal is to remove any power differential between individual participants — when considered from the agency perspective this means that there are no *As* who can coerce the actions of other *Bs*. Everyone is an *A* influencing the action of the collective group, *C*. But the collective group itself has rules which assure that this equalization of power occurs in a formal and procedural manner. There are rules and roles which define consensus decision-making as a structural code of power relationships. This is, fundamentally speaking, why it is useful at all to review manuals and guides, processes and procedures. In this project I have studied the rule books of consensus process only because they presumably show something about how the process structurally arranges power relationships. The more power is removed from individual competitive coercion or even from causal privilege, the more it will reside in the normative and normal rules and roles of conduct.

In consensus process roles such as facilitator, vibes-watcher, and stack keeper are meant to be filled on a rotating basis so that no individual is ever associated directly with the structural power they manifest. The power of a rotating role is clearly in the structured position, not in the individual actor. The power in these roles is not associated with individuals themselves, and is not intended to serve anyone’s individual coercive influence, but are meant to make the system

work as a collective formal process. However, on a deeper level the structure perspective on power requires that anarchist egalitarian radical democracy grants people access not only to inclusive and participatory decision-making, but also to the capacity for defining and regulating the rules of inclusivity and participation and decision-making. That is, if power exists in the way that rules and roles structure our action patterns, then egalitarian power should provide an *egalitarian capacity for structuring* those rules and roles. Randall Amster has lucidly asserted this point as a crucial principle of anarchist social organization:

The appearance of power in the anarchist setting is "diffuse" in the sense that every member of the group is equally entitled to be a direct and active participant in the creation of community "norms" and in the entire decisionmaking process itself. In this way, individuals acquire a deeper sense of the meaning and purpose of the "law" extant in the community, rendering superfluous the need for institutionalization and even codification. The benefits of conceiving the "social contract" as an organic, ongoing agreement derived through direct participation and consensus decisionmaking are manifold, not the least of which is to encourage an environment in which cooperation and not competition becomes the predominant aim of both the group and its individual constituents.<sup>297</sup>

Consensus demands that participants have equal power in determining the nature of their collective decisions, but can it also allow for equal and deliberate power in determining the collective structures of their social contract? This is a more difficult task. It is the task of self-reflexive structuration: not a question of having structures of power-over or not having structures of power-over, but a question of how to build the structures of power-with.

To truly organize an anarchist social structure would require treating all expert opinions and distant controls, all sacred beliefs, traditional roles, and accepted rules as matters of immediate

power which are always revisable. Nothing can be simply left to pre-established order, and everyone has to be presumedly qualified to consciously engage with restructuring the collective pattern of group relations. As the French philosopher Jacques Rancière explains

the canonical distinction between the political and the social is in fact a distinction between those who are regarded as capable of taking care of common problems and the future, and those who are regarded as begin unable to think beyond private and immediate concerns. The whole democratic process is about the displacement of that boundary.<sup>298</sup>

Rancière suggests a radical notion of democracy as a government conducted by those who have *no qualification to govern*. He continues to explain this radical conception of democracy with reference to the Greek concept of *arkhêin*, which means “to walk at the head,” “to lead,” or in a political context, “to rule.” The determination of political right is traditionally categorized according to various forms of *arkhê*: will a political system be ruled by birth-right, by expertise, by virtue, by wealth, by strength? The question of the *arkhê* is the question of what will “rule,” or “be the rule of,” the organization of political power. The choice between which quality has the best right to rule will determine the ranking of classic political distinctions: monarchy, technocracy, aristocracy, oligarchy, tyranny. Democracy, however, holds the special place of being specifically *anarchic*, that is: “democracy is the specific situation in which it is the absence of entitlement that entitles one to exercise the *arkhê*.”<sup>299</sup> Democracy means that *no one* is given the title to rule, not even in the name of the people. Therefore, argues Rancière, “the ‘power of the *demos*’ referred to the fact that those who rule are those whose only commonality is that they have no entitlement to govern.”<sup>300</sup>

No rules and no roles can entitle people to qualify for democratic governance. But there are always rules and roles which operate within the structures *of* democratic governance. Simply allowing everyone to take part does not mean that the formal operations of deliberation have no rules and no roles. The difficult task of levelling out structural access to power while also managing the egalitarian arrangement of social rules and roles requires wholly different strategies and analyses than the problems preoccupying the agency perspective's attention on equalizing influence and rooting out domination. All social structure of deliberative method, even anti-authoritarian and democratic ones, organize power capacities which create differential abilities and capacities in the subjects whom they direct. Serious problems of power can arise if a group has too little structure, as Joreen famously examined in her seminal essay on the tyranny of structurelessness in early 1970s feminist movements.<sup>301</sup> Serious problems can also arise from too much structure, or structures which are too strict. Too much structure leads to overwhelming stiffness of process and a barrier to inclusive participation, a problem which Hannah Appel has labelled "the bureaucracy of anarchism."<sup>302</sup> In a study comparing Occupy Wall Street with the German Autonomen movement, Darcy K. Leach argues that simply the amount of rules and roles active in a particular radical democratic process can have a significant effect on the deployment of power therein. Speaking of Occupy, Leach notes that "in complex systems like this, activists often fetishize "the process" they have so painstakingly devised (or as one activist called it, the "bureaucracies of anarchy"), and end up facing unintended and ironically elitist consequences, namely that people get silenced in the name of efficiency and adherence to process."<sup>303</sup>

Yes, social structures code all the rules and roles, the subjections and the systems, in which we develop our sense of self as independent agents and as social actors in relationships. But that

doesn't mean that there is no reciprocal effect, that agents do not also structure their structures.

The problems of structural power is broader than the problems of agentic power because it poses a deeper and more fundamental task: how does a group of people power the structures that empower them? What determines the rules of our game, and how can we alter those rules when we need to?

## **(2.4) The Possibility of a Conduct Perspective**

*“In this corner, the agency perspective:”* treating power as a matter of external relations of conflict and coordination between independently powered agents. *“And in this corner, the structure perspective:”* treating power as a matter of social structures coordinating their internal relations by defining and encouraging subjects to take on roles and act in certain established systems of behaviour. These two dominant strains of thought about power in modern Western social and political theory are locked inside the ring. Their respective proponents spend a lot of critical energy trying to pummel each other into submission. It seems to be an endless duel, however. Neither team appears to be giving up anytime soon.

These days, Michel Foucault tends to be a favourite punching bag for testing out the power of both sides. Agency perspective proponents like to treat Foucault as a straw man for all the weak and evil foibles of the structure perspective, and all that animosity is egged on by hoards of scholars who set him up as a caricatured idol of their own pet structure perspective. Both academics who are sympathetic and those who antagonistic to Foucault's concepts of power often treat him as the banner-bearer for a totalizing structuralist vision of power that leaves no room for the free capacity of individual agents or for liberation projects that could overcome the

many forms of structural domination which rule over people's lives. Ultimately, I believe there is much more nuanced approach to power in Foucault than either his most popular acolytes or his enemies tend to promote, and this promise is best approached from a new perspective that doesn't start in either corner. "*And, in the middle of the ring, twirling in circles...?*"

Foucault's general contribution to power theory is much more appropriately associated with a third approach that draws alliances between agency and structure, finding bonds between them which neither perspective on its own can bring itself to accept. Admittedly, Foucault's flashy language and aggressive approach do often play right into the agency/structure dichotomy's script, particularly when he says things like this: "power is co-extensive with the social body; there are no spaces of primal liberty between the meshes of its network."<sup>304</sup> That quote, contextually adrift as it is, certainly sounds like he's saying that power works *for* the social body, as a means of creating fully internalized network of power relations apart from which we cannot even imagine the possibility of a free individual agent. If the structure perspective is interpreted this way, then any notion of individual agents finding autonomy and freedom in an escape or retreat from power is (depending on who you ask): either 1) simply an illusion; or 2) simply impossible. Neither one is really the answer we want if we're going to keep fighting. So where does a theoretical position like this leave our sense of praxis?

In the North American context, there is a popular refrain that points out Foucault's failure to account for how true resistance can function when power operates so pervasively to condition everything we do. Critical resistance to a supposed "lack of resistance" in Foucault's theories of power applies especially to what has been called his "middle period," lasting roughly from 1970 to 1977 when he focused most emphatically on the study of prisons, sexuality, disciplines,

surveillance, statistics, and governmentality. It is often suggested that during this time Foucault gets himself caught up an idea of power from which no one could escape, an idea of power that totally encompasses all possibility for resistance and therefore within which we would all have to passively accept subservience to the social controls that shape our subjectivities. For instance, prominent American feminist critics such as Nancy Hartsock and Nancy Fraser fear that Foucault's concept of power represents such an omnipresent and micro-normative bond between power-over and power-to that it leaves no room for true freedom, no place for the independence of individuality, and (most importantly) no space for coordinated resistances — so much that, as Jana Sawicki tells it, “the difference between autonomy and internalized domination is erased.”<sup>305</sup> Sheldon Wolin says basically the same when lamenting that, despite Foucault's innovations, “not only does he give us a vision of the world in which humans are caught within imprisoning structures of knowledge and power, but he offers no hope of escape.”<sup>306</sup>

These points may indeed constitute fully coherent arguments, but only insofar as the axiomatic principles of the agency perspective are taken for granted. In fact, I believe, the antagonism presented by this brand of statements reveal an important built-in blindspot of the agency perspective: when you posit the essential source of power in individual agents, it generates a hard barrier between power-to and power-over, between those atomic individuals and the social constraints in which they then find themselves, in the conflicts which they wage against others, and in all the hidden possibilities of being coercively duped into accepting the chains of power (the cause of so much furrow in Lukes' brow). But Foucault's approach requires that the distance between power-to and power-over be effaced; it requires that we think about what it means if we are always empowering power-to via structured capacities of power-over,

and if our involvement in any power-over is always producing some form of power-to. So when he says that there are no spaces of primal liberty between the meshes of power, it is indeed a condemnation of the agency perspective but it is at the same time a condemnation of the structure perspective. Foucault is also quite consciously aiming at promoting a theory of power which does not rely on the control of structures and systems of authority. His project involves one of the most prominent (although, of course, certainly not the only) theoretical endeavours to understand power from a perspective in between power as agency and power as structure.

As Foucault said, “to say that one is never ‘outside’ power does not mean that one is trapped and condemned to defeat no matter what.”<sup>307</sup> Rather, as he later expressed, “it would not be possible for power relations to exist without points of insubordination which, by definition, are means of escape.”<sup>308</sup> But how? What does this mean? The conduct perspective is tasked with elaborating on this question about how we can still act, resist, and strive for revolutionary praxis in the face of a concept of power that affords for no primal spaces of liberty. From the conduct perspective, one is never outside of power because one is never able to step away from the complex *relations of* individuality and structurally according to the conditions of conflict and cooperation which are composed in a given circumstance of collective action and social movement struggles. For, as Foucault put it, conjuring some of the essential concepts required for a conduct perspective, “every power relationship implies, at least in potentia, a strategy of struggle, in which two forces are not superimposed, do not lose their specific nature, or do not finally become confused. Each constitutes for the other a kind of permanent limit, a point of possible reversal.”<sup>309</sup> The conduct perspective begins from a position within *relations of struggle*, thus treating *power-with* as the original concept of power.

In the following chapter I will elicit some key concepts and diagrams which I think can help to clarify how a conduct perspective can work for the anarchist praxis of power. The anarchist project has established a concept of power that is in sync with agency perspective ideals of freedom, individual responsibility, and a politics of anti-hierarchical and anti-domination. A basic weakness of this association has been the way that the agency perspective and the structure perspective are determined *dichotomously*, in favour of a sentimental attachment to the concept of power as independent freedom, cause-ability, natural volition. As Judith Butler has argued, “if power is not reduced to volition, however, and the classical liberal and existential model of freedom is refused, then power-relations can be understood, as I think they ought to be, as constraining and constituting the very possibility of volition. Hence, power can be neither withdrawn nor refused, but only redeployed.”<sup>310</sup> The trick with this move is not to think about it in a way that simply re-articulates the agency perspective in reverse so that power is simply a constraint upon the same concept of volition. When treating power-to as the original, natural, and good origin of individual agency, power-over is pitted as a derivative and evil enemy that must be expelled from anarchist practices, and anarchist praxis is then all about eradicating a simplified caricature of evil power-over, identified solely with its monstrous manifestations. When we split the nature of power into good and evil, everything gets blown up into black-and-white, us-versus-them, virtue-against-vile, freedom-versus-power.

As Todd May has expressed: “that the anarchist *a priori* regarding power is convergent with the nineteenth century’s general conception of the nature of power can be explained, then, as a politically significant failure that bars anarchism from completing the journey down the tactical path along which it traveled.”<sup>311</sup> In order to best empower anarchist praxis, an anarchist theory of

power has to get beyond the analytic poverty of theory that resorts to the binary of good and evil. As Deleuze and Guattari said it: “good and bad are only the products of an active and temporary production, which must be renewed.”<sup>312</sup> The presumptions that settle us into an eternal either/or choice between agency and structure universalizes good and evil as essential opponents, but this format does little to actually help adjust our collective action strategies. In fact, it reproduces a systematic mechanism of oppression that aims to conceal the workings of power. As Judith Butler wrote, “the effort to identify the enemy as singular in form is a reverse-discourse that uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor instead of offering a different set of terms.”<sup>313</sup>

The dual power of radical democratic direct action which is available in consensus decision-making can be useful, if we learn when and where to use it appropriately. In the next chapter I will elaborate on the conduct perspective as a way to reframe the agency and structure perspectives in a way that helps to better conceive of consensus process as a tool of dual power. From the conduct perspective, we can develop a more analytically flexible conceptual toolbox that will help to better understand the challenges we face when practicing the anarchist politics of power-with. The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. We need to redesign the tools of power analysis so that they can help us to build a different kind of house.

How? The *conduct perspective*...

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<sup>275</sup> Talcott Parsons, “On the Concept of Political Power,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 107, No. 3 (Jun. 19, 1963), 237,

<sup>276</sup> Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, 72.

<sup>277</sup> Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, 13.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>281</sup> Terence Ball, “New Faces of Power,” in *Rethinking Power*, ed. Thomas E. Wartenberg (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 18.

<sup>282</sup> Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, 27.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

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- <sup>285</sup> Jeffrey C. Issac, "Beyond the Three Faces of Power: A Realist Critique," in *Rethinking Power*, ed. Thomas E. Wartenberg (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 49.
- <sup>286</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>287</sup> Marja Gasterlaars, "What do Buildings Do? The Health Policy System and the Materialization of Morality," *The Proceedings of Technologies of Representation Conference* (Warwick: Warwick University, 1992).
- <sup>288</sup> Louis Althusser, *On Ideology* (New York: Verso, 2008), 40.
- <sup>289</sup> Ball, "New Faces of Power," 29.
- <sup>290</sup> Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000), 331.
- <sup>291</sup> Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 98.
- <sup>292</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 34.
- <sup>293</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>294</sup> Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, 54.
- <sup>295</sup> Robert A. Dahl, "The Concept of Power" (*Behavioural Scientist* 2, 1957), 204.
- <sup>296</sup> Stewart R. Clegg, *Power, Rule, and Domination: A Critical and Empirical Understanding of Power in Sociological Theory and Organizational Life* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 51.
- <sup>297</sup> Randall Amster, "Chasing Rainbows: Utopian Pragmatics and the Search for Anarchist Communities," Tempe Liberation Corps, accessed November 13, 2014, <http://www.geocities.com/collectivebook/rainbows.html>
- <sup>298</sup> Jacques Rancière, "Does Democracy Mean Something?" in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steven Corcoran (Continuum: New York, 2010), 58.
- <sup>299</sup> Jacques Rancière, "Ten These on Politics," in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steven Corcoran (Continuum: New York, 2010), 30.
- <sup>300</sup> Ibid., 31.
- <sup>301</sup> Joreen, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," in *Radical Feminism*, ed. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle, 1973).
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- <sup>303</sup> Darcy K. Leach, "Culture and the Tyranny of Structurelessness," *The Sociological Quarterly*, 54 (2013), 184.
- <sup>304</sup> Foucault, "Power and Strategies," 142.

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<sup>305</sup> Jana Sawicki, "Feminism, Foucault, and 'Subjects' of Power and Freedom," in *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault*, ed. Susan J. Hekman (University Park: Penn State Press, 1996), 162.

<sup>306</sup> Sheldon S. Wolin, "On the Theory and Practice of Power," in *After Foucault: Humanistic Knowledges, Postmodern Challenges*, ed. Jonathan Arac (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press: 1988), 186.

<sup>307</sup> Foucault, "Power and Strategies," 141-42.

<sup>308</sup> Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 347.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, 346.

<sup>310</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 158.

<sup>311</sup> Todd May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 75.

<sup>312</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 10.

<sup>313</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 19.

### **Chapter 3) *Constructing* a Conduct Perspective to Diagram Power in Anarchist Collective Action Systems**

In the previous chapter I argued that the most common North American discourses of power — colloquial and scholarly, radical anarchist and liberal mainstream — share a focus that is predominantly rooted in an *agency perspective* on power. Considered according to the popular anarchist terminology of power-to, power-over, and power-with the agency perspective sees power essentially as originating in a natural individual power-to which is then secondarily articulated in social relations of power-over. This perspective is logically contrasted to a *structure perspective* on power, which sees power as essentially originating in a systemic power-over exerted by social structures, and then secondarily expressed as the individual agency of power-to by the subjects who act according to the rules and roles which their social structures determine for them. The two perspectives are determined according to a strictly dichotomous opposition so that each resists integration with the other. Each one treats the other as, quite simply, wrong. I contend that the agency and the structure perspectives are both useful, and both can provide valuable analyses. We just need to reorient our analysis of power in a way that can manage to shift between these perspectives. In this chapter I aim to find a way to build that bridge by conceiving of an integrative perspective that originates from their middle, between them, linking them, drawing them together. This is what I will be calling the *conduct perspective*: a way of thinking about power as based on the conduct that bonds collective action systems into expressions of agentic structures and structured agencies.

Chapter 3 is more abstractly theoretical than my other chapters because it is a theoretical construction project, a research and development practice of designing new conceptual tools which should be applied to analyze anarchist consensus decision-making, but may also be applicable to other analyses. The tools I am constructing here are not totally specific to the anarchist projects of consensus decision-making, although I aim their development specifically in that direction. In the first section I introduce some basic concepts and principles of the conduct perspective that treat power-to and power-over as produced by a dialectic polarity rather than a dichotomous opposition. This requires that we shift conceptual focus away from power-to or power-over in order to see power-with as the most important theoretical element of power in general, from which power in general originates.

In the second section I work on a general model of power systems diagrams, where I will draw upon what we have learned thus far about the agency and structure perspectives' emphasis on external versus internal relations to argue that power should be considered as a concept that moves across the boundary between external relations and internal relations of collective action systems. For the conduct perspective, power is always a relation between power-to and power-over that occurs through the composition and conflicts of collective action systems. In the internal relations of collective action systems, power-to is composed for the system as a whole by the power-over controls that organize the collective action system. External to the system, that power-to is met with resistance and/or alliance by other collective action systems that are also organizing their conduct by way of power relation compositions. The relations are fractal and interactive in a process of constituting collective action systems that always have an inside and an outside, with internal and external relations that code a dynamic and invertible bond between

power-to and power-over that are co-produced by the modes of conduct that arise through power-with.

The third part of this chapter will apply those power systems diagrams to analyze the unique kind of collective action system that consensus decision-making is capable of empowering. Collective action systems organize certain modes of power which coordinate internal power-over for external power-to, and collective internal power-to that is applied in relation to external power-over. This sounds confusing, I know: that's what the diagrams are for. The visual representation makes these inverting formulas far more clear. The diagrams depict the abstract model of polarity between power-to and power-over by representing power in a three dimensional relationship that passes across the internal/external boundaries of collective action systems.

This particular conceptual construction is supposed to challenge us to think of anarchist projects not simply as an opposition *to* power-over in general, but as a project that also reconfigures and reinvents its own *specifically anarchist* modes of power-over. The project of dual power is a challenge to make collective action systems that use collectively internal anarchist modes of power-over (prefigurative politics) to empower collectively external anarchist acts of power-to (contentious politics). Consensus decision-making is a process that has the potential to generate this kind of collective action system. To conclude this chapter I will contrast the type of anarchist power-over that consensus decision-making can generate with a more commonly accepted authoritarian model of power-over, in order to reframe the discussion about how power is considered in anarchist dual power praxis so as to think of consensus decision-making in more tactically sensitive capacity.

### **(3.1) A Conduct Perspective on Power**

In this section I will elaborate a conduct perspective on power by explaining two new conduct perspective axioms that contrast with the axioms I introduced earlier in chapter 2 for the agency and the structure perspectives.

*Conduct Perspective Axiom #1: Power-with is the conduct-ability of inter-active social relations; this power-with is the dialectically original source of power in general.*

*Conduct Perspective Axiom #2: Power-to and power-over are a polar manifestation of power-with; neither power-to nor power-over are derivative or secondary, they are dialectically generated together and there can never be a situation where one exists without the other.*

A theory of power-with has to conceptualize *conduct-ability* as the relation between agents who are created through the *difference* of their power interactions within the conditions determined by social power structures. Power exists from the middle out, through the conjuncture between individual inter-actions (an agency perspective view of power-to and power-over as wielded by agents over other agents) and social systems (a structure perspective view of power-over controlling power-to through determined social roles, scenarios, and structures).

In this section, I will address some conceptual terms which help to establish the idea that power originally emerges between the poles of power-to and power-over, growing from the middle of power-with to *simultaneously create both* individual agencies and social structures as interrelated phenomenon, such that the interrelated complexity of power phenomena can be understood by situating power as *a concept that depicts the conduct of collective action systems*.

### (3.1.1) Power-With as Conduct-Ability

*Conduct Perspective Axiom #1: Power-with is the conduct-ability of inter-active social relations; this power-with is the dialectically original source of power in general.*

I begin from the premise that power-with is the “origin” of power. Everything about power theory changes when we reject the presumption that the concept must refer originally to power-to as the capacity of individual agents’ causal motivations, or, alternatively, that it must refer originally to power-over as the mechanism of social control, subjection, and domination. The conduct perspective treats power as primarily a condition of social communicative relations, the mode of inter-action as a means to assemble and disassemble socially collective actors who can affect the actions of each other, themselves, and their common social groupings.

Consider, for instance, Robert Litke's statement that “our ability to interact with each other is obviously dependent upon our (logically prior) capacity as individuals to *act*.”<sup>314</sup> This is a classic representation of the agency perspective on power that asserts a logical priority to the concept of power-to. Against this statement, a conduct perspective asserts that humans are always already socially integrated, and therefore the ability to act is in fact dependent upon our (logically prior) capacity to *interact*. That is, for the conduct perspective *power-with conditions the possibility of power-to*, rather than the other way around. One of the most explicit and formulaic cases of the conduct perspective on power can be found in Michel Foucault’s 1984 essay *The Subject and Power*. In this piece Foucault begins with a retrospective on his career’s journey of theorizing power, admitting that his earlier work tended to efface questions of individual agency and then proposing a model based on the concept of *conduct*. When I call on the concept of power-with as

conduct, I am following Foucault's point that power is not simply to be located in coercion and control, but in so many more ways that people can communicatively influence one another:

perhaps the equivocal nature of the term "conduct" is one of the best aids for coming to terms with the specificity of power relations. To "conduct" is at the same time to "lead" others (according to mechanisms of coercion that are, to varying degrees, strict) and a way of behaving within a more or less open field of possibilities. The exercise of power is a "conduct of conducts" and a management of possibilities.<sup>315</sup>

From this perspective, power always occurs as a relationship of influence that happens "with" (power-*with*), *between relating actors*, from the middle of a relation where actions *conduct* other actions. To *conduct* is to lead or drive actions in a way that does not entirely foreclose the effect of those actions, but rather moulds and influences their possibilities.

Foucault's definition also highlights the way that conduct is localized in two ways that reflect the agency and the structure perspective at once: power occurs as a *communicative causation* in discrete events of inter-active influence (a conduct of conduct, whereby *A*'s actions affect *B*'s actions); and power also denotes the *collective control-ability* to shape the milieu of collective action systems (by managing the possibilities of a social system so that the actors who occupy various social roles within that system are enabled with certain capacities to affect each others' actions).

In Foucault's words: "the term 'power' designates relationships between 'partners' (and by that I am not thinking of a game with fixed rules but simply, and for the moment staying in the most general terms, of an ensemble of actions that induce others and follow from one another)."<sup>316</sup> This is the basic distinguishing feature of a *relationship of power-with*: "in effect,

what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action that does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on possible or actual future or present actions.”<sup>317</sup> The idea that power exists in the relationships between mutually active subjects can, of course, be found in many theories other than Foucault’s. For instance, we may note when Talcott Parsons frames power in a similarly broad manner as the “generalized medium of interchange,”<sup>318</sup> or when Jeffrey C. Isaac defines power as “those capacities to act possessed by social agents in virtue of the enduring relations in which they participate.”<sup>319</sup> Terence Ball describes this approach as a “communicative or linguistic perspective,” which articulates a sense of power that “can best be characterized, *pace* Hobbes, not as an agent-patient but as an agent-agent relation. In this respect, at least, relations of power are relations between (ontological) equals.”<sup>320</sup>

In each of these approaches, the origin of power is in *conduct*, generally speaking. Now, a moment of caution. A great danger in this approach is that it can devolve into treating almost every social phenomenon as a matter of power, and in this chapter I shall aim to be as specific as possible about the concept of power-with as conduct, such that it may ultimately serve as a detailed tool. A tendency towards meaningless generalization is also present in the broad analytic meaning of power-with that are manifested in the common anarchist concepts of *power dynamics*. For instance, in his manual for consensus decision-making Peter Gelderloos asks specifically about the meaning of *group dynamics*. He answers himself by involving power in the mix: “the dynamics of a group are its patterns of interaction, communication, power, and responsibility.”<sup>321</sup> At the conditional level of power-with, this should seem redundant. Patterns of “*interaction, communication, power, and responsibility?*” This is *all* power, we might argue! But

in this phrase Gelderloos is deploying “power” as one term in a list because he uses it as a reference to the more limited and value-inflected sense of power-over as *nefarious* manipulations achieve by way of authority, domination, manipulation, exploitation (and the list goes on). Earlier in his manual Gelderloos uses the term *power dynamics* as a way to explain “group dynamics,” in such a manner that we can clearly see the overlap between the two dynamics. Concerned with way that groups who are using consensus decision-making can sometimes develop insular and unwelcoming habits, he notes that

people who attend a consensus meeting and come away with a bad impression frequently report one of two complaints. Sometimes they feel like they have entered a tight-knit social club with rules that are secret and inscrutable and power dynamics that are cliqueish and impenetrable. At other times, newcomers get the impression that a particular consensus-based group is hyper organized to the point of inefficiency, and almost bureaucratic in its rules and procedures. Both extremes are disempowering.<sup>322</sup>

In this sentence the meaning of *power* in the term “power dynamics” is significantly specific. The mention of “power” in the earlier quote actually means power-over, and the use of “disempowering” in this case is a way of speaking about the frustration of power-to. “Power dynamics” is a way of describing the inter-active conditions of a group, a map of its institutions, interrelations, and influences.

The focus on power dynamics orients analysis towards investigating the *relationships of actions*. A power dynamic is always present in the normalized pattern of practices that coalesce to condition any group’s system of operating processes. Those normal processes can be formed as closed or open, impenetrable or penetrable, cliqueish or welcoming — among myriad other possible characteristics. They could very well be empowering for those on the inside of that

dynamics while disempowering for those on the outside, or vice versa; they could be empowering for some positions within the group, while disempowering for others. This perspective orients towards a vision of power as a dynamic system or a capillary network. Power dynamics do not belong anywhere or emerge from anyone. Power is not situated in a particular authority or place, but rather must be conceived in the way Foucault expressed as “the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the processes which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transform, strengthens, or reverses them;...thus forming a chain or system.”<sup>323</sup> In the sense of “power dynamics” the status of power-with is not merely *held* by an individual agent’s power-to, nor is it simply *ruled* by a social structure of power-over. Rather, power here refers to the conditions of a particular arrangement of inter-active conduct within the context of specific collective action projects. With the notion of power dynamics we can see one of the more common colloquial expressions of a conduct perspective that first and foremost understands power as a condition of relationships between social creatures who engage in communicative inter-actions within a particular collective action system.

The Livermore Direct Action Handbook, distributed to direct action protesters at the Livermore Weapons lab blockade in July of 1982, expresses the power of nonviolence in terms of power-with by stating that “power lies in social dynamics. We can withhold cooperation from those who abuse power, and remove power from them.”<sup>324</sup> Power, understood as inter-active or collective action, signifies a dynamic of assembled relations, social organizational systems, or established roles and rules of conduct. To remove those relations is, in principle, simple enough (although usually not very easy): just refuse to take part in the collective action, and you can

remove the conduits of conduct which support that collective construction of power relationships. Like Etienne de la Boétie famously asserted: “Resolve to serve no more, and you are at once freed. I do not ask that you place hands upon the tyrant to topple him over, but simply that you support him no longer; then you will behold him, like a great Colossus whose pedestal has been pulled away, fall of his own weight and break into pieces.”<sup>325</sup> The voluntary nature of authority as a consensual relationship of social influence is a concept rooted in the inter-activity of power-with, and underwrites the strategic power of civil disobedience. If enough people resist the normal operations that sustain a certain social organizational system, then that system will grind to a halt: because it is essentially built on the dynamics of power-with.

### **(3.1.2) Power-With as the Middle, Medium, and Milieu of Power Relations**

*Conduct Perspective Axiom #2: Power-to and power-over are a polar manifestation of power-with; neither power-to nor power-over are derivative or secondary, they are dialectically generated together and there can never be a situation where one exists without the other.*

From the vantage of a conduct perspective we can think of power as a process of collective action that always involves the mutual coordination of agentic structures (social structures that must be recognized as capable of individuated agency) and structured agencies (individual agents who must be recognized as being conditioned by social structures). By blending the terms of agency and structure, we can start to address a perspective that cannot discount one or the other, but also cannot rely too heavily on one or the other. For a conduct perspective we have to begin understanding power *from the middle* of power-to and power-over: *in the dialectic origins of power-with as a milieu of collective action.*

All the rusty old dichotomies that hinge on the opposition of agency/structure, freedom/ domination, and power-to/power-over tend to fixate social theory in the same interminable either/or debates. To deal with these debates we don't need to answer their questions, we need to ask different questions. We don't need a *solution*. We need a *solvent*. We need *dialectic formulation of power* that can *dissolve* the dichotomous answers and fixations of the agency and structure binary, that can break down the rust that has stiffened the machine so that it can no longer *do anything*.

What does this mean: a *dialectic formulation of power*? I am calling upon a certain concept of dialectics insofar as it relates to *thinking from the middle between opposites*. Generally speaking, a dialectic approach means engaging with a set of concepts that are constructed according to a *contradictory interaction*, attending to the way that opposites are held together in a common structure, the way that a phenomenon can be explained as coordinated by the difference of a unity. Like Vladimir Illych Lenin once summarized it, “the splitting of a single whole and the cognition of its contradictory parts is the *essence* of dialectics.”<sup>326</sup> Dialectics is a conceptual technique I associate with a wide range of practical theoretical methods, but they all must share this characteristic approach towards understanding the way that certain phenomena exhibit an essential contra-diction where two opposed terms have to be understood as existing only because of their interactive opposition.

This is only one basic dialectic theoretical premise: focusing on the *relational polarity between opposites*, compared to dichotomous theories which consider a *binary duality of opposites*. One way to frame the difference between a dialectic and a dichotomous theoretical stance is to note the way the two models differently configure “contradiction.” For a dichotomy,

contradiction *separates* - it drives the two sides apart, erects walls between them, sets them against each other in a battle of zero-sum combat. For the dichotomous approach it is either/or: either power-to is fundamental or power-over is fundamental. It can't be both. They don't get along. For a dialectic conception, contradiction is the condition of integration: the two sides are differentiated by their relationship, as their relationship is what differentiates them. So, for instance, the question of how phenomenological experience occurs cannot be settled by positing the original priority of the subjective or the objective side of experience. Neither the subjective experiencing cogito nor the objective material world is "originally" responsible for the condition of experience: that would be to premise the problem *dichotomously*: literally, in a way that cuts the two sides apart so that they are fundamentally opposable in a zero-sum manner, such that one could destroy or do without the other, such that one could have existed prior to or beyond the influence of the other. A dialectic explanation and method of analysis has to begin from the premise that a dualism between two terms originates from the distinction itself, such that the one and the other are constituted through the design of the differentiation between them — they are not this, not that, but this-and-that or this-not-that: posited by a polar relationship as mirrored sides of the same phenomenon.

A theory of power-with has to build conceptual tools that can see power relations in this kind of dialectic way, such that, as Louis Althusser put it: "there is no longer any original simple unity (in any form whatsoever), but instead, *the ever-pre-givenness of a structured complex unity*."<sup>327</sup> The task of a dialectic theory is to deal with the contradiction and magnetic tension of opposed and conflicting forces that arise from an inter-active common origin. Abstractly, this means that a dialectic relationship between elements (things, agents, entities) is not to be premised on the

grounds that there is “this one” and *then* there is “that one.” *This* does not occur separately from *That*, growing up apart only to romantically cross paths some day. There is an original difference that comes from the “ever-pregivenness of a structured complex unity.” This — AND — That have to be thought of as part of the same relational unity, from which the identity of “This” and the identity of “That” are derived by juxtaposition. The two elements are already a set right from their inception. The relationship itself constitutes both sides of the polarity.

French philosopher Jacques Derrida famously coined a concept that depicts this sense of dialectic origins as emerging from “*differance*,” wherein the relation of *this one* and *that one* doesn’t begin from either one, but from the constitutive *differentiation that separates both ones from each other*:

What is written as *differance*, then, will be the playing movement that ‘produces’ – by means of something that is not simply an activity – these differences, these effects of difference. This does not mean that the *differance* that produces differences is somehow before them, in a simple and unmodified – in-different – present. *Differance* is the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences. Thus the name ‘origin’ no longer suits it.<sup>328</sup>

The agency perspective and the structure perspective both try to locate the origin of power in a lopsided split. For the agency perspective, power-to is the primary cause and power-over is a secondary articulation, a derivative case. For the structure perspective, power-over is the primary cause and power-to is its secondary moment, an intended effect. Power-with is always already in the middle like the *differance* of power-to and power-over, *originally differentiating* between agency and structure so that the independent individual and the social whole are drawn together as a condition of their contrast.

I am working to build a conceptual association between power-to and power-over that grows out towards both poles at once, from the middle, from the *dialectic difference* of power-with. In the same spirit as the work Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, I strive for a theoretical process that both expresses and enacts this dialectic process, a way of seeing power as “proceeding from the middle, through the middle, coming and going rather than starting and finishing,”<sup>329</sup> to “establish a logic of the AND, overthrow ontology, do away with foundations, nullify endings and beginnings.”<sup>330</sup> According to the “logic of the AND,” a dialectic *difference* is properly a trinity that takes into account the *This*, the *That*, and the *relation* which posits This and That as mutually constitutive. Power-with is that bond. It is the “AND” which generates a relation between the poles of power, power-to and power-over.

Power-with provides the conceptual ‘and’ between ‘this’ power-to and ‘that’ power-over. This relationship can be conceived in several different modes, and in order to track some of its variations I will make use of another conceptual twist offered by Deleuze and Guattari in their use of the word “*milieu*.” As Brian Massumi explains, the French word “*milieu* means ‘surroundings,’ ‘medium’ (as in chemistry), and ‘middle.’ In the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, ‘milieu’ should be read as a technical term combining all three meanings.”<sup>331</sup> In treating power-with as a crux of my conduct perspective, I will analyze its nature as the milieu of power theory in these three different modes:

1) Power-With is the *Middle* of Power

Power-To <— (Power-With) —> Power-Over

As a middle, power-with is the conceptual bridge between power-to and power-over, the condition of connection and communication which links and spans those two poles of power.

Power-to and power-over are always dialectically constituted in an original *differance* through the middle of power-with.

2) Power-With is the *Medium* of Power

Power-To  $\longrightarrow$  ...Power-With...  $\longrightarrow$  Power-Over (Agency Perspective)

Power-To  $\longleftarrow$  ...Power-With...  $\longleftarrow$  Power-Over (Structure Perspective)

Power-with is the medium by which power-to and power-over are implemented. As the conduit, the means, and the method by which power is exerted, power-with is the mode of passage between one active point and another in a power relation. Like media through which information is transmitted, like the copper wire through which electrical power travels towards its effective goal, like economic practices which conduct wealth from one place to another: power-with is the medium the conducts the capacities and consequences of power's actions and reactions.

3) Power-With is the *Milieu* of Power

(PW: PT  $\longleftrightarrow$  PO :PW)

Power-with is also a concept that represents a collective action environment, a milieu or place in which particular codes of power are prevalent. Power relations are organized in systems that hold space and that have limits. To think of power in a systemic way is to determine how power-with shall coordinate the interactions of power-to and power-over in a particular scene, space, or place. Thus, the concept of the milieu defines a patterned system of inter-actions, the environment or scene which conditions a specific inter-action, the set of assembled social structures which serves to conduct relations of power-to and power-over according to institutionalized, habitualized, and codified communicative patterns. To think of power-with as depicting a milieu of power can highlight the way that power should be understood as a set of

complex structured relations which organize regular systems of inter-active power-to and power-over.

I will elaborate now on this framework of *power-with as middle, medium, and milieu of inter-active organization* as a way to recalibrate the conceptual relations of power-to, power-over, and power-with, so that we can be more prepared to apply these concepts in the coming analysis of collective action systems.

let's begin with the first point: power-with is the *middle* of power relations. This means that power-to and power-over are always bonded opposites, polar forces generate simultaneously as dual terms of an influential interaction. *The middle is magnetic*: it generates power-to and power-over as polar manifestations of the same phenomenon of a power-with interactive relationship of influence. The magnetic polarity of the power relation can be inverted. Looking out, into external relations, an agent experiences power-to as a positive cause-ability acted into a social milieu where it must meet externally resistant forces, which are labelled as a negative power-over insofar as they present an oppressive control or a hindrance (PT+  $\longrightarrow$  PO-). From the other direction, looking internally to consider how an agent maintains their own coherence, power-over is the positive capacity to control and coordinate internal collective power dynamics, which may have their own capacities to control and coordinate and/or to resist control and coordination (PO+  $\longrightarrow$  PT-).

One important point of treating power-with as the middle of a invertible magnetic relation between power-to and power-over is to always consider that power and resistance are bonded. If we accept that power can only be acted upon agents who retain a baseline capacity for liberty in relation the controls which are imposed upon them, then it makes perfect sense to say, as Michel

Foucault often does, that power and resistance is a relationship which is built into the phenomenon of power. In the *History of Sexuality—Volume I*, for instance, Foucault calls on resistances as the “odd term in power; they are inscribed in the latter as an irreducible opposite.”<sup>332</sup> Astoundingly (to my understanding at least), critics often say there’s no room for “liberty” or “freedom” or “resistance” in Foucault’s concepts of power; that his is a totalizing structure perspective from which the only possible conclusion is that we are all subjugated automatons. But it is only by failing to recognize or understand the essential axiomatic difference between the standard agency perspective and the alternative conduct perspective that this interpretation is possible.

Jeffrey T. Nealon, in his own defence of Foucault against the variety of criticism, quotes a representative snippet of the prevailing agency perspective dogma from the English translators’ introduction to Alain Badiou’s *Infinite Thought*. It bears repeating here as a representative sample of the way that those who are wedded to the agency perspective tend to misinterpret Foucault’s approach:

In his middle period, Foucault argued that networks of disciplinary power not only reach into the most intimate spaces of the subject, but actually produce what we call subjects. However, Foucault also said that power produces resistance. His problem then became that of accounting for the source of such resistance. If the subject — right down to its most intimate desires, actions, and thoughts — is constituted by power, then how can it be a source of independent resistance? For such a point of agency to exist, Foucault needs some space that has not been completely constituted by power, or a complex doctrine on the relationship between resistance and independence. However, he has neither. In his late work, he

deals with this problem by assigning agency to those subjects who resist power by means of an aesthetic project of self-authoring.<sup>333</sup>

This kind of criticism reflects more upon the critic's own presuppositions than it does upon the actual purpose and process of Foucault's work, entirely missing Foucault's sense of describing power as a complex structured relation of interactions which is coextensive with the human capacities for freedom, agency, and resistance. They are reading Foucault in a foreign conceptual language, and they end up expressing an intellectualized version of the childish retort: "I know you are, but what am I?" Claiming that Foucault fails to offer an adequate account of an agency located outside of power relations it is like criticizing modern art for failing to paint believably realistic portraits. It entirely misses the point by passing judgments of worth according to a set of qualifications external to the thing judged. Yes, of course if you consider a Kandinsky or an O'Keefe painting against the terms by which a Rembrandt or a Michelangelo are judged, then there's no contest. That's my point: there no comparable contest between these two positions, they represent different perspectives, different orientations. What if the one does not invalidate the other? There's no reason why my appreciation of Rembrandt discredits any parallel appreciation of Kandinsky. Rather the contrary: my aesthetic life will be far richer for appreciating them both. What if the theoretical perspectives on power could also make room for multiple visions?

I want us to think of the agency and the structure perspectives in this way, to recognize the differences in value they each offer without reducing the one to the other. The notion that there is no power without resistance is a famously mis-interpreted point when its logic is treated only from either the agency or the structure perspective, when the special dynamics of the conduct

perspective are ignored. Elaborating on the terms of resistance and power in a very different frame of reference than he applied in the *History of Sexuality — Volume I*, but with the same conduct perspective logic, Foucault states again in *The Subject and Power* that there is “no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight. [...] It would not be possible for power relations to exist without points of insubordination which, by definition, are means of escape.”<sup>334</sup> Resistance is mounted not from “outside” the complex relations of these competing powers, but as another alternative and opposing collective action assemblage that must strive to over-power and out-maneuver its competitors. Any agent who wields the freedom to act as a conduit of power can mount resistance to others or to a dominant collective action system, but only to the extent that they can mount the power of an alternative collective action system. Resistance is “another power.” Which is also to say that power-to is always performed in contrast to the power-over that can support and/or resist it, and vice versa, power-over can only be performed upon agents with the power-to acquiesce and/or resist it. This is the condition of power-with as a concept of interactive magnetism: there are always *powers*. What is experienced as power-to for me is felt by my enemy as an imposition of power-over; what is my power is their resistance. And vice versa, the power-over imposed upon me is a successful exertion of power-to for my enemy; my resistance reacts to their power. It is essentially perspectival flip that requires us to uproot the fixation on any one point of reference. Whether I consider a certain relationship of power in terms of power-to or power-over can be switched, but what never changes is that the middle of that magnetic opposition is power-with, the means of communicative conduct.

The invertible magnetic relationship between power-to and power-over is central to the

conduct perspective's analytic and strategic capacity. For one, the abstractly utopian sentiments of anarchist radical democracy (as so loudly expressed in the discourses of consensus decision-making) cannot be maintained in the face of the conduct perspective. The concept of radical democracy has to adapt accordingly. Chantal Mouffe's concern with the idea of *agonistic democracy* is an important case of this adjustment. As she says, from a perspective that accepts the ubiquity of power as a process of division and coordination in all social relations,

the main question of democratic politics becomes then not how to eliminate power, but how to constitute forms of power which are compatible with democratic values. To acknowledge the existence of relations of power and the need to transform them, while renouncing the illusion that we could free ourselves completely from power — this is what is specific to the project that we have called 'radical and plural democracy.'<sup>335</sup>

The conduct perspective requires such conceptual reviews, treating power as constitutive of every type of organization and the modes of social conflict which they inevitably evoke as reversible relations of power-with must always be the focal point of analysis. This is especially true for the radical democratic politics of power-with where we aim to form relations of radical equality. Relations of radical equality are not going to be free from power, they are not neutral. They too will pose interactions of power-to and power-over through the magnetic connection of power-with. The task is not to compose a shiny happy bubble of pure power-to and power-with (that is only an illusion, a repression, which tends to mutate into new shadowy monsters of power-over). The task is to understand and balance a system of power-to/power-over as explicit relationships, determined *from the middle* by focusing on the modalities of power-with, the types of interaction, the structure of relations, the conduct of conducts that can provoke the most

egalitarian and interactive empowerments for all involved members of a specific collective action system.

We can also begin to look at power as a problem of the second point: power-with is the *medium* of power. To treat power-with as a medium is to assert that power is always a *communicative causation*; or, as I've introduced the idea already, the *communicative act of conduct*. Communication requires a *medium* of symbolic interaction. It is composed of information and messages rather than impacts and forces. Therefore, in opposition to the popular agency perspective which build a model of power from the basis of the *physical physical cause-ability of behaviours*, the conduct perspective has to see power as a *communicative cause-ability of actions*. As Terrence Ball puts it, "people do not ordinarily exercise power by bumping into other human beings but by communicating with them through a system of signs or gestures or words."<sup>336</sup> The mechanical philosophy of explaining power in reference to causal physical phenomena, with all its allusion to billiard balls and physical jostling, will not hold for the conduct perspective because power here has to be about influencing the actions of other actors, and the communicative cause-ability of power must be more strictly differentiated from the physical causation of force and violence. Beginning from power-with, we have to reframe the concepts of power-to and power-over as inherently delimited by the boundaries of social and communicative influence.

Power is a communicative process that impels agents to act in certain ways through the medium of socialized, symbolic, ritualistic, and routinized forms of coded activities — that is, through the scenarios of possible interaction that are established by a given social milieu. A key point of defining power's communicative medium resides in its responsibility to, but also

indeterminacy in relation to, the milieu in which it is expressed. A power relation is never *certain*, never totally defined by overbearing structural power-over, because the parties involved always have a capacity to change their relations and affect the milieu itself. Again, let's consider the classically anarchist problem of authority. Authority is founded on communicative consent; it always requires a willingness to act (however that willingness is generated, by coercion or conviction) upon its communicated dictates. Gene Sharp has identified this as a crucial component of direct action nonviolence: recognizing that "the key to habitual obedience is to reach the mind. Obedience will scarcely be habitual unless it is loyal, not forced. In essence, authority must be voluntarily accepted."<sup>337</sup> Obedience is always given, rather than taken. Obedience can, of course, be coerced into being given, but the point is that the power of authority is always a communicative relationship. Hannah Arendt delves into this point as an important hinge in her thought on power. Arendt observes that "when we say of somebody that he is 'in power' we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name. The moment the group, from which power originated (*potestas in populo*, without a people or group there is no power), disappears, 'his power' also vanishes."<sup>338</sup> Considering how we are defining authority as a consensual relation of communicative causation, Arendt's point makes perfect sense. To be "in power" is to have the authorized right to command others to act in the pursuit of some collectively-defined goal, a right which increases the commander's chance of finding submission to an order. But if the people who act subordinate to that position of authority do not recognize it as authoritative, then they are always able to remove their obedience. If they remove their obedience, then the heightened capacity for authority to cause the actions of its subordinates automatically disappears. Authority requires the willing response of the subordinate

to follow-through with the commander's command. Without that willingness, the power that it conducts will cease to function.

Because of the link between authority and violence, social theorists are often tempted to find the greatest magnitude of power in a positive correlation with the greatest coercive threat of violence. If power is strongest when forceful coercion is strongest, then certainly the threat of punishment tends to dramatically increase the capacity for power. Gerhard Lenski, for instance, wrote:

*The ability to take life is the most effective form of power.* In other words, more men will respond more readily to the threat of the use of force than to any other. In effect, it constitutes the final court of appeals in human affairs; there is no appeal from force in a given situation except the exercise of superior force. Hence force stands in the same relationship to other forms of power as trumps to other suits in the game of bridge, and those who can exercise the greatest force are like those who control trumps.<sup>339</sup>

If the chance of finding submission to an order reaches its greatest magnitude with the legitimate and plausible threat of violence, then wouldn't a gun to the head elicit the swiftest and surest obedience, exhibiting the clearest and strongest power? Should we conclude that violence is the utmost authority, that, as Mao's famous dictum proclaims, "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun?"<sup>340</sup> Hannah Arendt says no: "out of the barrel of a gun grows the most effective command, resulting in the most instant and perfect obedience. What never can grow out of it is power."<sup>341</sup>

Power cannot grow out of the barrel of a gun because it is a communicative practice of coordinated activity among agents, and as such exists only through communicative inter-action rather than through forceful violence. Another way to put this is to say that *violence is not an*

*inter-action*. It is a propulsion, a physical movement; it is a thing that happens to bodies, not to actions. To highlight this point, we can take a closer definitional look at the notion of power as *coercive influence*. In order for someone to be “coerced” into performing an action that they would not otherwise do, they have to understand and act upon a threat. Again, to repeat the point, a threat is necessarily a *communication*. Thus, an institution of power-over relies on the communicative causation which the threat of violence can compel, and not upon the actual force of violence to which the threat refers. So, for instance, if someone puts a gun to my head and tells me to fall in line, the event of power is in the coercive influence of the threat that compels me to willingly oblige as the gun-wielder commands. I may choose to be coerced and fall in line instead of provoking the potential violence that could issue from the gun. But, if I refuse to obey and I get shot, then that is no longer an act of power but simply an event of violence (at least for me it is, in that specific moment; often an actual act of threatened violence serves as a demonstration to others who perceive it because it continues to represent a threatening communication of power-over — “see, I’m serious: fall in line or this will happen to you!”).

Technically, power ends precisely where violence begins, even though there is a strong bond between the two in *communicated coercion*. In *The Subject and Power*, Michel Foucault explicitly draws the line of power at this limit of violence, specifying that

a relationship of violence acts upon a body or upon things; it forces, it bends, it breaks, it destroys, or it closes off all possibilities. Its opposite pole can only be passivity, and if it comes up against any resistance it has no other option but to try to break it down. A power relationship, on the other hand, can only be articulated on the basis of two elements that are indispensable if it is really to be a power

relationship: that ‘the other’ (the one over whom power is exercised) is recognized and maintained to the very end as a subject who acts.<sup>342</sup>

This concept of power as a management of possibilities represents the limit which is set between force/violence and power/conduct. In fact, it is the *threat* of force which is the trump suit in power relations, not force itself. Power is conducted action, not forced action (action upon action, not force upon behaviour). Nikolas Rose also usefully draws the distinction between power as domination and power as governance that relies on the concept that power is a *communicative causation*, such that governmental actions of *collective control* must be understood as conducting and guiding the inter-actions of its members, rather than forcing them into shape. As he says:

To dominate is to ignore or to attempt to crush the capacity for action of the dominated. But to govern is to recognize that capacity for action and to adjust oneself to it. To govern is to act upon action. [...] Hence, when it comes to governing human beings, to govern is to presuppose the freedom of the governed. To govern is not to crush their capacity to act, but to acknowledge it and utilize it for one’s own objectives.<sup>343</sup>

Power can never grow from violence because it is based on a mutual social contract of recognized legitimately accepted modes of inter-action: A influences B to perform a certain action performed *willingly in the context of a defined social relation of collective action (as conduct, involving inter-active communicative influences that compel people to coordinate their actions in accordance with each other’s powers)*.

“Power and violence, though they are distinct phenomena, usually appear together,”<sup>344</sup> says Arendt. They appear together as bonded by a dialectic opposition. They appear together at the limits of power, where power is most volatile and most tenuous and most dangerous. Violence

occurs upon a thing or body. The blow of violence renders upon a thing as forceful behaviour, having nothing to do with communication. On the other hand, power compels actions through communicated influence. The communicated threat of violence may indeed be a compelling way to induce conduct, but it cannot sustain a balanced system of collective control on its own. When actions work upon actions, it is by applying mechanisms of influential coercion (“that are, to varying degrees, strict”) which are responsible for controlling and structuring a field of possibilities for those actions, but without clenching so much that this field of possibility is suffocated. The mechanisms of coercion can be varyingly strict, but they cannot be *totally* strict. Niklas Luhmann calls upon a concept of power as contrasted to coercion in this sense when he comments that “the possible choices of a person being coerced are reduced to zero. In borderline cases coercion resorts to the use of physical violence and thereby to the substitution of one’s own action for the action of others one cannot bring about... for many cases we can even say that coercion has to be exercised where there is a lack of power.”<sup>345</sup> When the possible choices reach zero, then we have exited the domain of power altogether because there is no longer any opportunity for conduct by *inter-action*, the communicative influencing of another agents choices in a field of possibilities. Forceful impetus or violent compulsion will only drive *behaviours*. Thus, the means of conduct power are never totally reliant on direct force: that would register a phenomenon of direct violence that breaks, destroys, and closes off all possibilities by forcing behaviours, whereas the communicative influence of power has to direct and manage possibility, harness and organize activities. We see here how power acts upon the conduction of liberties, it is a “play of liberties.” *Power is a project of acts influencing upon acts,*

*a conduct of actions; whereas violence is a physics of force upon force, a causation of behaviours.*

And, finally, to think of my third point about conduct power: power-with as the *milieu* of power. This means that power analysis has to attend to the social spaces which power relations create by patterning collective systems of communicative conduct. A milieu of power-with is a condition of consistent rules and roles which define different collective action systems. This concept will lead us to the most distinct analytic invention of this project, the systems diagrams. The diagrams try to depict how we can model the relations of power-to and power-over as constituting the milieus of collective action systems. For now, a milieu has to be thought of as a key condition of how power exercises communicative causal social relationships that have the tendency to form enduring, regular, and rule-bound systems of conduct.

Language is perhaps one of the most abstract and broad-ranging terms upon which collective action systems can be distinguished as defining different power milieus. Only those creatures who communicate — however minimally — can inter-act through power-with, and so language comprehension determines an important limit to the milieu in which one agent may possibly have the power to communicatively influence the conduct of another, or in which agents may be reasonably expected to conform to the rules and roles of social structures. As Peter Winch said:

It does not make much sense to suppose that human beings might have been issuing commands and obeying them before they came to form the concept of command and obedience. For their performance of such acts is itself the chief manifestation of their possession of those concepts. An act of obedience itself contains, as an essential element, a recognition of what went before it as an order.<sup>346</sup>

Communicative understanding is the baseline condition upon which relations of power can occur, conducted by languages which include words, gestures, ideals, dreams, symbolisms, threats. Power occurs where an action effected through a communicative medium influences upon the present or future actions of another agent, and when these mediums of conduct start to settle into consistent circuits or conduits, they can then be identified as forming milieus, specific spaces in which a collective action *system* takes shape.

We can explore the implications of treating collective action systems as patterned configurations of conduct by continuing to think about authority. Take, for instance, Gerhard Lenski's basic definition of authority as "the enforceable right to command others," which he articulates in comparison to the concept of *influence* as "the ability to manipulate the social situation of others, or their perception of it, by the exercise of one's resources and rights, thereby increasing the pressures on others to act in accordance with one's own wishes."<sup>347</sup> Lenski is here following upon a definition presented by Max Weber's classic concept of *Herrschaft*, which called authority an increase in "the chance of finding submission to an *order*."<sup>348</sup> With this in mind, let's think about how the statement "Yes Sir" functions in relation to the structure of a military hierarchy. The statement "Yes Sir" is uttered by the inferior position, soldier *B*, as a sign of deference to a superior position, officer *A*. When *B* says "Yes Sir!" it is a sign of submission to *A*'s order, an expression of *B*'s compliance with *A*'s command and a routine acknowledgement of *A*'s authority. The statement "Yes Sir!" confirms an *authority relationship* that exists between the officer and the soldier according to the normally encoded collective controls of military behaviour. In this context, authority can still be described as a case of Dahl's power, where "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise

do.”<sup>349</sup> However, there is an important twist. In the case of authority, *B's social role predetermines that they should automatically complete this formula of power*. *B* will likely act according to the routine structure of their role, obeying *A's* directives without putting up any resistance or conflict, which would annul Dahl's formula, leaving us with a situation void of power. It is only by thinking of the power relationship as a structuring of agency that we can see this interaction as a normal medium of power for a bigger collective action system, the military.

The officer's authority is a relationship structured by the particular collective action system of the military which *heightens the standing probability* that the soldier will do as the officer commands *without resistance*. This analysis of authority considers it to be more of a structural condition of control which permeates and defines a specific social institution, rather than an individual power of causation belonging to the qualities of an active agent. The structural interpretation of authority treats it as a feature of defined, predetermined behaviours that preempt and exclude events of conflict or command between *A* and *B* by providing the social link through which *A* and *B* act as a common power — authority ties *A* and *B* together in *C*, a collective action system which has power-over the conduct of their related actions for the sake of producing power-to as an entire institution. It aims to assure that *A* will cause behaviours in *B* as a matter of regular, uneventful, non-conflictual compliance with the structural institutional rules, a structural power-over. In other words, the the *milieu* of communicative conduct that is instituted by “the military” connects *A* and *B* in a common collective action system.

Power occurs wherever the conduct of communicative influence connects power and resistance. This is a formulaic definition which certainly sets up a great variety of potential power constellations. It is not simply coercive and destructive, nor is it simply cooperative and

productive. Rather, power undergirds the possibility of communicative causation which can be coercive or cooperative in varying degrees, and is probably always some of both. To register the way that power-with is in the middle relation coded by various milieus of power-to and power-over relationships, we can highlight a key difference between Max Weber's and Hannah Arendt's concepts of power, as distinguished by Jürgen Habermas.

For Weber, the essence of power is found in the coercive capacity of one agent to cause actions in another, in the case of both *Macht* and *Herrschaft*. Habermas has stated that Weber, on the one hand, "defined power as the possibility of forcing one's own will, whatever it may be, on the conduct of others."<sup>350</sup> That is, Weber's notion of power as *capacity* comes back to the instrumental projects of agents acting in conflict with one another. Habermas continues, explaining Weber's view of power as "a teleological model of action in which an individual subject or a group has a set purpose and chooses the means suitable for realizing it."<sup>351</sup> Arendt, in contrast, proposes a model of power that is essentially a function of "the capacity to agree in uncoerced communication on some community action."<sup>352</sup> Habermas draws the difference between the two perspective along the battle lines of a conflictual/consensual duality: Weber "considers only agents who are oriented toward their own success and not toward agreement," whereas Arendt argues that power is not "the instrumentalization of another's will for one's own purpose but the formation of a common will in a communication aimed at agreement."<sup>353</sup> Weber and Arendt seem to be articulating distinct ideas about power, one based on conflict and the other based on consensus.

This dichotomy is in fact another common feature of meta-theorizations on power. Mark Haugaard, for instance, also argues against the terms of the traditional debate that "has taken on

the form of an insistence by some that power is primarily conflictual and others that it is mostly consensual.”<sup>354</sup> In the words of Thomas Wartenberg, the distinguishing mark between these two theoretical streams is that some accept “the idea that power is a constraint on the lives of human beings,” while “others move in a fundamentally different direction by seeking to develop a positive notion of power, one that does not see power as fundamentally oppressive.”<sup>355</sup> If we look at both views from the conduct perspective, however, it is quickly apparent that power can run across the spectrum from conflictual relations to consensual relations, because both versions depict individuals interacting in the context of collective action milieus. In this analytic context, both Weber and Arendt are right about power, they’re just focusing on different parts of the same phenomenon. It’s rather like the popular parable about several blind people who each touch a different part of an elephant to decide what it is: the one holding a leg says, it’s a tree; the one holding trunk says, it’s a snake; and the one holding a tusk says, it’s a spear. Weber and Arendt are talking about the same thing, they’re just at different ends of the elephant.

In Weber’s approach, power is expressed when agent A collects agent B’s will into their own, coercing or manipulating or demanding that B contributes to the collective action structure which works to A’s benefit, control, and purposes. This is a conflictual and coercive form of assembling collective action, but it is quite clearly still a form of collective action. B’s actions are assembled into the structure of A’s projects, by means of the interaction between A and B which coordinate B in accordance with projects that benefit A. That is, A conducts the conduct of B in such a way that B’s actions become a part of A’s conduct. In the form of A versus B, power is treated as a battle and contentious political struggle for hegemonic dominance. In this case one agent exerts power-to in order to change the conduct of another agent’s power-to (the medium of

communicative causation), under the auspices of a shared collective system that coordinates their mutual inter-action (the milieu of collective control), and the analytic categories of power-to and power-over are bonded in this manifestation of conflictual power by their antagonistic polarity (power-with is the middle is a dialectic relation between *my* power-to *my enemy's* power-over).

On the other hand, Arendt's version of power addresses that other end of the conflict-communion spectrum, treating power as collective action which arises from the purely consensual communicative interactions of humans agreeing to act in concert. In this case, power-to is *our* power and power-over is *the mutually accepted authority that our bond holds over us as our collective system*. For Arendt, power arises only in cases where humans create collective actions in agreement, the positive processes she defines as the essence of politics and action. Arendt is also clearly dealing with a concept of power that is oriented towards collective action, but in this case we are faced with a version of power that is ideally aimed at building a structure of egalitarian, communicative, non-dominating power. Here, the bond between power-to and power-over is synthetic: the power-to of each individual influences the conduct of the group (communicative causation, from the agency perspective) bound together under a common system of power-over (collective control, from the structure perspective) such that collective action systems emerge as a new source of power-to.

Conflict coordinates collective action systems by differentiation, consent coordinates them by assimilation. In either case, power arises as the active middle term of inter-active power-to/power-over conduct relations, as the coordinating medium of communicative alliances and associations or conflicts and competitions, that function to distinguish and assemble a collective action milieu.

### **(3.2) Diagrams for Mapping Power-To, Power-Over, and Power-With in Collective Action Systems**

The model of power I am proposing requires that we think of all agents and all social structure as invested manifestations of collective action systems. In order to depict this basic premise in a schematic (ultimately quite basic yet innovative) way, I will briefly outline a set of diagrams that depict how power-to and power-over can be dialectically linked according to the internal and external relations of collective action systems. By outlining these power systems diagrams as hinged on the categories of external relations and internal relations (which I have previously associated with the agent perspective and the structure perspective, respectively) we can redefine a connection between agency and structure as mutually coherent perspectives that together describe elements of collective action systems. I will then use the diagrams to depict the power of consensus decision-making in a new light.

This model of power draws inspiration from a systems theory paradigm which treats collectives as open functioning systems of interactive components, which themselves also derive from open-functioning systems. I am drawing from the way that Eva M. Knodt explains Niklas Luhmann's application of systems theory as a process that "simulates complexity in order to explain complexity, and it does so by creating a flexible network of selectively interrelated concepts that can be recombined in many different ways and thus be used to describe the most diverse social phenomena."<sup>356</sup> I aspire to that kind of plan: these power systems diagrams should empower some flexible and the interrelated concepts.

Earlier, in chapter 2, I introduced the agency and structure dichotomy via Torben Bech Dyrberg's explanation of external and internal relations. As he said, "the basic assumption of agency conceptions of power is that "the relation between agent and structure has to be external,"<sup>357</sup> whereas for a structural conception of power "the relation between subject position and structure must be internal."<sup>358</sup> The difference between the agency perspective and the structure perspective marks several distinctive shifts in the way that people go about articulating their own theories of power. While most theorists ultimately tend to side with one or the other (at least, in the end, as a matter of method), I think these differences in fact represent two side of the same coin. The agency and the structure perspective are dialectically mirrored versions of a common phenomenon, they are a parallax view of the same image. I am trying to bring this image into dual focus by understanding that power is a process of collective action, that it can never occur without both the scene of an inter-active influence among agents and a collective action system of structures that coordinate those inter-actions.

### **(3.2.1) External and Internal Relations of Collective Action Systems**

In the agency perspective power relations are built-up from the component parts of individual agents, promoting a theoretical architecture that works from the bottom-up, using the individual person as the *atomic agent* of power relations. The concept of an atom refers to the smallest possible piece of matter. Drawn from the ancient Greek philosopher Democritus' theory of a world built from arrangements of a single basic material building block, 18th century European science picked up on the idea that the physical world was made up of essential particles, and they called this idea an "atom." Literally, the Greek word "atom" means *in-divisible*. The atom is the

building block of all things because there is nothing smaller. The agency perspective treats the individual agent like the atom of power relations: the individual agent is considered the smallest in-dividual piece of the power puzzle, from which all further relations must be *built up*. Putting together atoms, we can build molecules; putting together molecules, we build complex physical structures. In the same way, the agency perspective puts together power as a story about how individual agencies combine and collide, arrange and oppose one another.

*Figure 1: Agency Perspective — External Inter-Actions of an Atomic Individual*

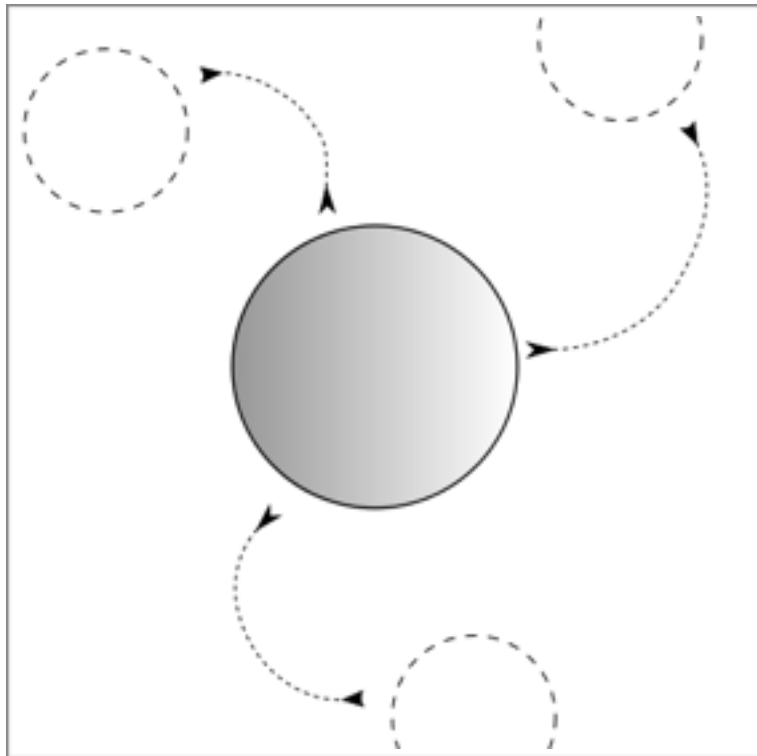


Figure 1 shows the simplest manifestation of power-to and power-over for the agency perspective. The atomic agent is represented by the shaded, solid-lined circle in the middle of the diagram. Agents are treated as predetermined atoms, and social power is a matter of assessing the way that those agents *inter-act* to influence one another to “do something they would not otherwise have done.” The question of how power affects the agent is a question of how it over-

powers other agents or is over-powered by other agents. In the diagram these relations of power are represented by the curved connecting lines that link the central agent with external agents represented by the dashed-line circles.

For the structure perspective we have to reverse those terms, taking power-over as the basic and original form of power from which the conditions of individual agency and power-to are then derived. In this approach, social power is built from the top-down, starting from the operations required for a *dividual totality* to control and maintain its own systemic parts. A dividual totality refers to a total limit within which elements may be divided, but outside of which nothing can be considered. The individual atom has no internal relations, only external relations. In direct contrast, the dividual totality has no external relations, only internal relations.

*Figure 2: Structure Perspective — Internal Inter-Actions of a Dividual Totality*

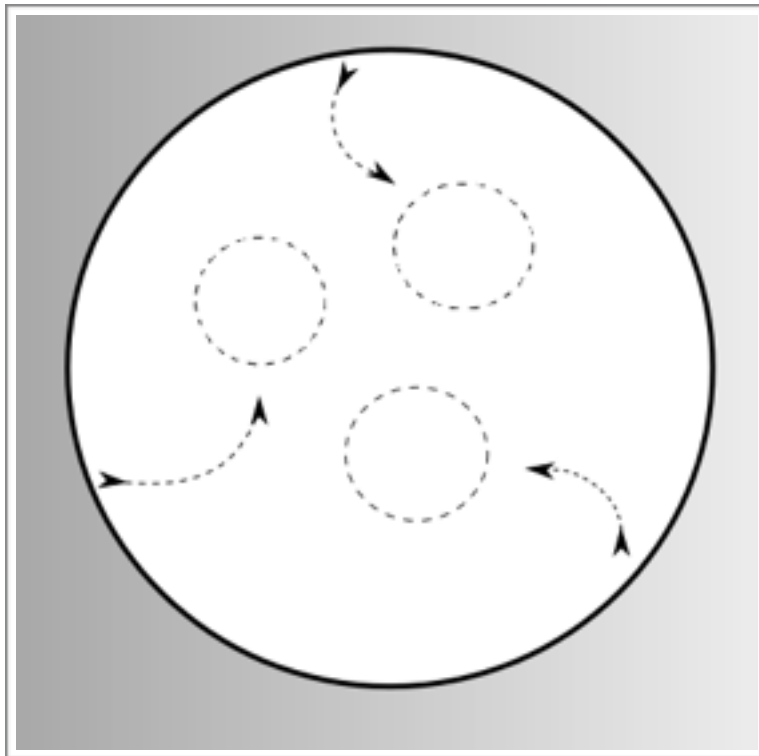


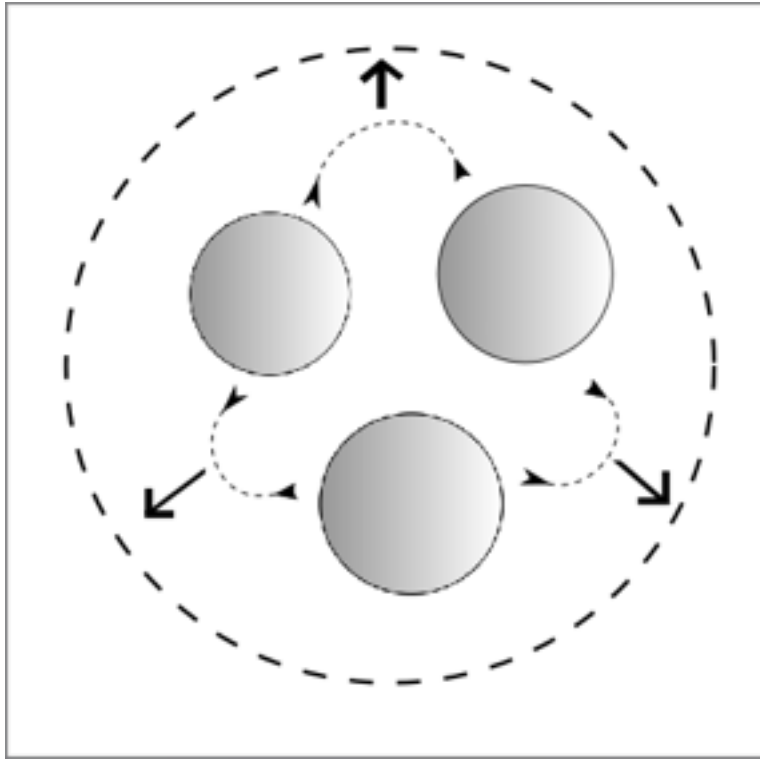
Figure 2 represents the origins of power-over and power-to according to the structure perspective. The structure perspective starts from a social totality that generates power-over as a means of creating and controlling agents as internal subjects of its own systemic organization. In the diagram above this is represented by a zone of *internal relations* which is delimited and contained by the solid-lined circle. The inward pointing dashed-lines represent the power-over that defines and controls internal subjects, who are represented by the dashed-line circles, to engage power-to in the roles and rules coded by the social totality.

To build a diagram that could represent the conduct perspective we will have to consider both of these models at once, superimposed upon each other, so that power has to be seen as conducting internal relations for a a collective agent who is also engaged in external relations. There is no such thing as an originally independent agent or an originally social totality. Every social agent is a system with internal relations of power in itself (as a unified totality having internal relations of power which constitute its own coherence) and an agent having external relation with other systems (as an atomic individual having external relations of power which articulate its interaction with other forces). Power, therefore, is a concept that depicts the dynamics of conduct that coordinate the inside and outside faces of a collective action system.

We can still consider power from both the agency and the structure perspective, depending on the question and the context. Gerhard Göhler aims for a similar outlook when he argues that “both power over and power to mean different things, depending on their potentiality or actuality and on whether their point of reference is inside the group (self-reference) or outside.”<sup>359</sup> If we think, first of all, from the agency perspective, then it makes sense to see collective action

systems as constructed by the interactive coordination of agents working together to build social power organizations.

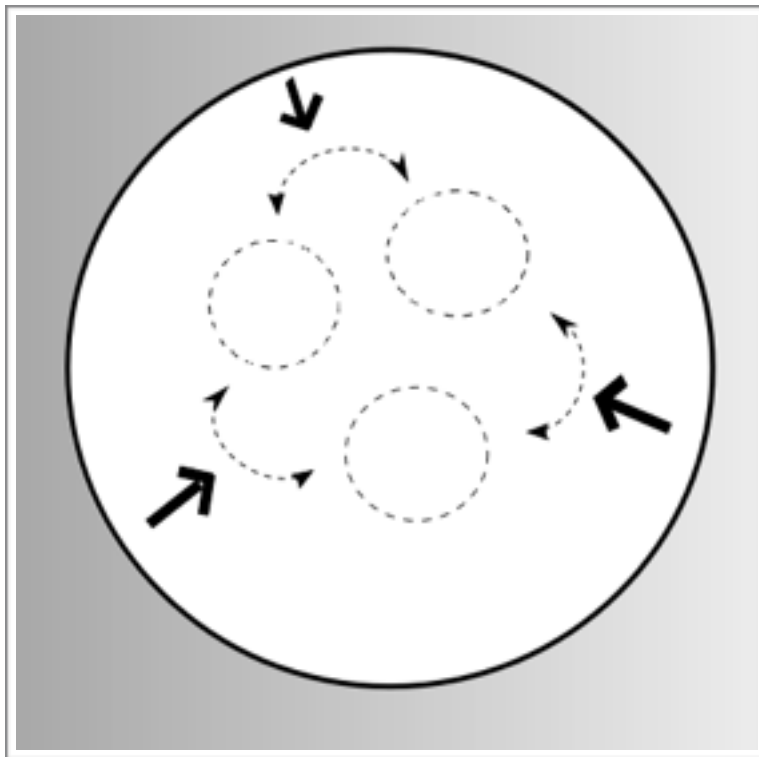
*Figure 3: Agency Perspective — Collective Action System Conducted by External Relations*



This diagram illustrates the basic form of an *agency perspective analysis of collective action*, coordinated from the bottom up by external relations among individual agents. The atomic individual agents, represented by the shaded circles, interact by influencing each other with their individual power-to, constructing relations of mutually binding power-over through the medium of power-with to compose conduct patterns of collective assemblage. Their interactions, represented by the curved dashed-lines, form relationships that constitute the conditions of the group's collective action, represented by the solid-lined arrows pointing out towards the larger dashed-line circle that encompasses them.

The structure perspective on power would build collective action systems the other way around: as a coordinated totality first, which then regulate the roles, rules, and routines of its internal mechanisms, designing its own individual particles in such a way that the social structures containing them are sustained and reproduced.

*Figure 4: Structure Perspective — Collective Action System Conducted by Internal Relations*



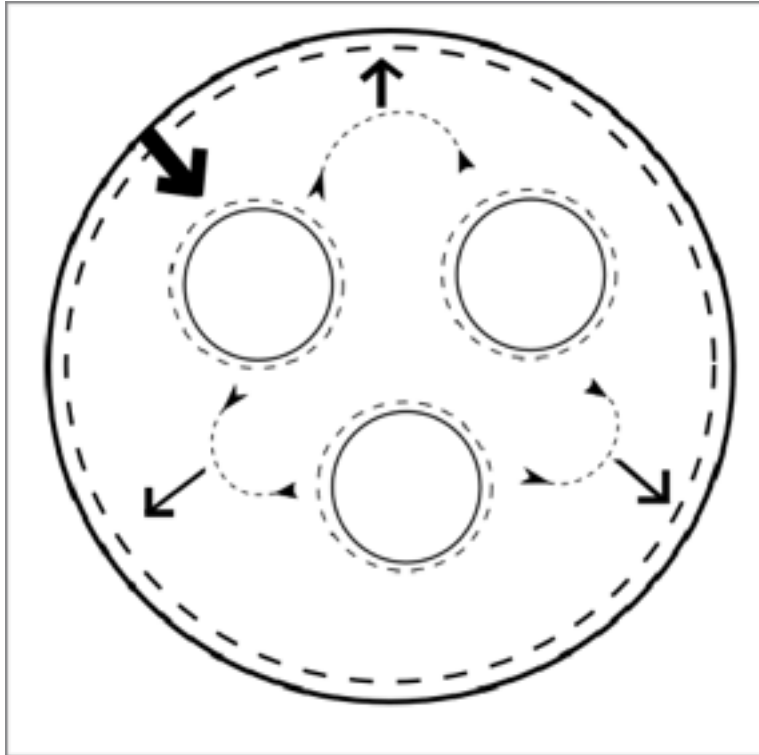
This diagram shows the *structure perspective analysis of collective action coordinated from the top-down by social control over the internal relations of subjects*. Power-over originates from the solid inward-pointing lines to conduct the internal activity of the dividual totality in question. In the diagram, the solid-lines coming inwards from the limit of the dividual totality first influence the curved dashed-lines connecting the internal subjects (who are represented by dashed-line circles). This is because the power-over of structural control works first of all on the roles, rules,

and relationships of the inter-actions, conditioning the internal subjects' power-to in relation to each other in ways that support the overall integrity of the collective action system.

Figures 3 and 4 represent the general image of how the agency and the structure perspectives understand collective action to be constructed as a process that works from the bottom-up or from the top-down. For the agency perspective, collective action systems are built from the bottom-up, so that each individual is gathered together in their external relations to combine into a greater assembly of collective power. For the structure perspective, the collective system works from the top-down to orient its internal subjects in sync with the greater assembly of collective power. For a conduct perspective, however, power has to be analyzed as travelling in both directions, such that we can account for the overlapping relations of external and an internal interactions.

Power works to coordinate the internal dynamics of a collective action system and its external relations with other systems in its environment. This means that the two perspectives must be conceived as co-ordinated, as forming a dynamics feedback system. Consider the agency perspective first.

Figure 5: Structured Agency — Interactive Power-To Conducting Collective Power-Over

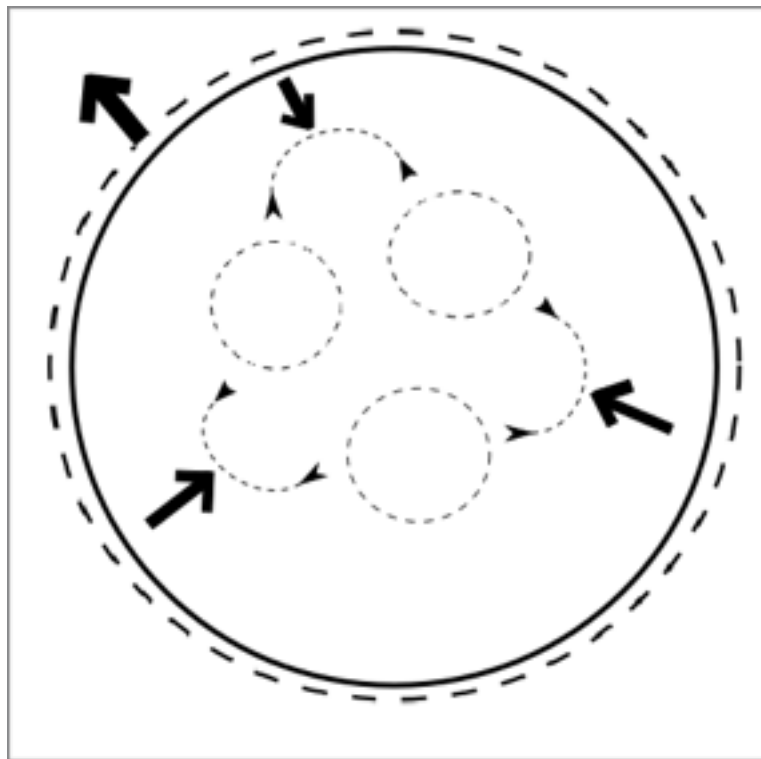


This diagram depicts a feedback loop of *structured agency*. If agents coordinate to create a collective action system (the dashed-outer circle), that system will solidify into structured expectations on its internal agents' further action patterns (the solid outer circle). The structured collective action system exerts pressure back upon the agents who create it (represented here by the inward-pointing large arrow), so that whenever agents create a common system of interactions the relations they have with each other become conducted through *structured terms of agency*. The agents who are parts of the collective whole cease to be predetermined and atomically simple (they lose their shaded solidity and are instead constituted by a dashed-line contingency conducted in relation to their interactive system). Agents who exist within collective action systems are always structurally constituted in ongoing relation to their systems. When a group of agents is assembled to create a collective system, then that system will inevitably have a

return impact on the nature of their interactions and the roles which they fulfill within their common activities. That is, the collective action system becomes a structural condition within which those agents continue to act. It is impossible to conceive of an agent who is not structured in some way by their participation in collective action systems.

From the other direction, it is similarly impossible to conceive of the structure perspective version of collective action as a one-way process. Whereas agents are always acting in collectively defined conditions of structured agency, the composition of collective systems also creates the inevitable condition of *agentic structures*.

*Figure 6: Agentic Structures — Interactive Power-Over Conducting Collective Power-To*



In this diagram the structure model of collective action internal control now includes a dashed outer circle and outward-pointing arrow, which represent that the structural whole can act as an agent with external relations of its own. The internal control and coordination of subjects is

conducted for the sake of rendering the structure as an agent in other external relations. There is no longer any shaded exterior zone because the structure's dividual totality no longer represents a strict limit to the analysis of internal relations. In any collective action system, insofar as internal relations are struted into conformity with the structural totality it is for the purpose of acting as an individual agent in power relations with other social forces, other collective action systems. The collective action system which is coordinated by controlling internal relations always does so because it is itself an agent in its own external relations; that is, structures are agents too.

As Niklas Luhmann says, modern systems theories have made important strides “to replace the traditional difference between *parts and wholes* with that between *system and environment*.”<sup>360</sup> Parts and wholes remain conceptually important to these theoretical approaches, but they cannot be taken as essentialized atoms or fundamentally presumed totalities. There are no abstract units of absolute reference. That is, there is no whole which is not also a part in other wholes, and there is no part which is not also a whole that contains other parts. The diagrammatic depictions of collective action systems' internal and external relations should banish any thought of treating power as a simple matter of parts and wholes, pure agents and pure structures. Thinking about systems and environments rather than parts and wholes helps to challenge the notion the everything fits neatly into a single functional system or that power must originate certainly from a fixed natural source. There are no atomic individuals and no dividual totalities. There are no agents and no structures; only structured agencies and agentic structures.

Power is in the conduct relations of social coordination and competition that *differentiate the systemic environments of collective action systems*. As Luhmann puts it, “a differentiated system is no longer simply composed of a certain number of parts and the relations among them; rather, it is composed of a relatively large number of operationally employable system/environment differences, which each, along different cutting lines, reconstruct the whole system as the unity of subsystem and environment.”<sup>361</sup> The power systems diagrams should work as a conceptual toolset that can help to classify the “cutting lines” that distinguish how a collective action system is composed of both internal relations with common systems and external relations in common environments. A power analysis based in this perspective must always ask a double set of questions: 1) the agency questions: how does a specific collective action system interact with the environment of external power relations in which it is situated? — where does it stand in conflict or cooperation of external relations with other systems that are beyond its own patterns of internal conduct? And 2) the structure questions: how does a specific collective action system coordinate the internal power relations of its own system? — where does it fit in relation to other systems with which it shares internal patterns of conduct? By treating every social agent as a collective structure and every social structure as a collective agent, these double questions must be asked for every question of power.

If we think of the problem as an abstract magnetic polarity, starting from the middle of a relation between power-to and power-over, power manifests most clearly on the edges of collective action systems, as the thin film of the diagrammed bubbles, as the dialectic limit that separates insides from outsides. Both sides of power are generated from the middle, through the *differance* that arises when power-to and power-over *associate to coordinate collective actions* or

*contrast to divide collective actions.* In the first case, power-to and power-over coordinate the power-to of agents according to system parameters of power-over, thus coordinating a system of conduct. In the second case, power-to and power-over magnetically oppose integration, and instead define the relationship of resistance between systems of conduct. “Power” in general is the praxis of alignment and opposition among systems which are acting prefiguratively and contentiously in their own environments.

The purpose of these initial diagrams is to provoke closer scrutiny concerning the relations which assemble collective action systems based on domination, and to analyze how those systems can be resisted by alternative relations that could subvert, overthrow, and reconstruct them. We can no longer divide power-to from power-over, but the point is not to lump it all together as a one big category of general influence. The concepts of power-to and power-over operate as analytic labels under which many different types of social organization can be clarified and differentiated. As Michel Foucault clarified with regard to his studies of sexuality, the conduct perspective does not deny that domination is a key function of power:

Of course, states of domination do indeed exist. In a great many cases power relations are fixed in such a way that they are perpetually asymmetrical and allow an extremely limited margin of freedom. To take what is undoubtedly a very simplified example, one cannot say that it was only men who wielded power in the conventional marital structure of the 18th and 19th centuries; women had quite a few options: they could deceive their husbands, pilfer money from them, refuse them sex. Yet they were still in a state of domination insofar as these options were ultimately only stratagems that never succeeded in reversing the situation.<sup>362</sup>

Authoritative command, institutional hierarchy, and dominant control are common and well-practiced human methods for empowering collective action systems, but they are not the only

options. As we already heard from Nikolas Rose, a broader definition that accords with the conduct perspective treats government as “all endeavours to shape, guide, direct the conduct of others.”<sup>363</sup> There is always a specific organization of power and a struggle among powers in any given collective action system, and it is the task of our analysis to illustrate and quest(ion) these arrangements.

In its most positive expressions, where we think of power as *our* power, collective action arises from the free association of individuals’ power-to in a project for collective power-to. But these systems, too, must be critically investigated for they are not free from the demands of power-over. Brian Fey marks this point as a key corrective to the regularly negative concept of social power-over which normally prevails in social and political thought.

For critical social science, power exists not only when a group is controlled but also when a group comes together, becomes energized, and organizes itself, thereby becoming able to achieve something for itself. Here the paradigm case is not one of command but one of enablement in which a disorganized and unfocused group acquires an identity and a resolve to act in light of its new-found sense of purpose.<sup>364</sup>

The power-over of collective control can refer to the positive constitution of a *collective power-to*. Collective power-to arises when a group composes a socially united body able to act in concert towards collective goals. Of course, even this sense of government is not a utopian green-light to think of power as “good when it’s government” and “bad when it’s domination.” Governments coordinate collective action structures which define the capabilities of agency in ways that are always complex, never simply good or bad. Power-over is never simply good or bad. It is a function of human collectivity that we shape our relationships of power-with and our

individual conduct of power-to in accordance with constraints, models, rule, roles, that define and direct both who we are as individuals and who we are as groups. Todd May reflects on this point in a pamphlet about *Power*, published as part of the Institute for Anarchist Studies' *Lexicon* series:

We might think of power, at least political power, as *the exercise of constraint on people's actions*. We should not confuse the term constraint with the word restraint. To constrain an action is to influence it to be a certain way. It is not necessarily to stop it from happening, although it could be that. It could also be a matter of making an action happen where it otherwise wouldn't, or of influencing an action in one direction or another.<sup>365</sup>

The anarchist uneasiness with “constraint” is a big part of what complicates our concern with accepting the notion of power-over as a more neutrally analytical concept. Do we reject *any and all* constraint, control, and power-over? There is an anti-organizationalist strand that is still alive and well in anarchist traditions, whose champions would argue that social order is inherently oppressive and constraining, to the extent that any organized activity should be avoided at all cost.<sup>366</sup> Those people are confusing “restraint” with “constraint,” where by constraint we mean not simply a controlling coercion, but the obligations and influences of a collective action relationship. When people act according to how they will affect the actions of others, then they are (at least minimally) “constrained” by the forces which those others exert upon their actions, and therefore, according to the generally formula of causal power, they are engaged in a form of power relation. As the title of an anarchist-feminist treatise from 1975 proclaims: “The question is not 'organisation or no organisation?' but 'what sort of organisation?' And the same goes for structure.”<sup>367</sup> This kind of constraint is, however, not the kind we would wish to exercise. We

have to be clearer about treating power-over as a neutral analytic concept that must always fit in a constellated association with certain forms of power-to and power-with. The tactical question is not “how to do we destroy power-over?”, but rather: *what modes of power-over should we conduct for dual power anarchist collective action systems in order to prefiguratively and contentiously destroy anarchist modes of power-over?*

From the conduct perspective, the operable question of power-over is always: *what kind of power-over and for whose benefit?* There are as many options as there are people to conduct them, but we can make categorical distinctions that can help to arm our analysis. Consensus decision-making is actually quite distinct, categorically speaking. The next section will use these new systems diagrams to clarify exactly how we may think of consensus process as capable of producing a specialty type of collective action system.

### **(3.2.2) Consensus Decision-Making and the Power of Anarchist Solidarity**

Beginning to think in this new mode now, treating the question of power as an analytical mapping of collective action system dynamics, we can return with a fresh perspective on how power is organized in the techniques of consensus decision-making. I propose that the consensus process is a tool specifically designed to generate a collective action system based on *emergent synthetic anarchist solidarity*. The idea of “emergent synthesis” is a key quality of the consensus process that orients it around generating collective solidarity through the process of deliberation. In the manuals, a successful consensus decision is defined according to two criteria: 1) the decision should be a good decision that effectively empowers the group to achieve its instrumental goals; and 2) the decision should be made in such a way that it empowers the group

to learn and grow as an egalitarian community. These two criteria match directly with the terms of anarchist dual power: 1) contentious politics of anarchist instrumental action in a hegemonic struggle to change society; and 2) the prefigurative politics of anarchist pedagogical development. They also match with the terms of external and internal power relations as depicted in my collective action power systems model. That is, the collective action system produced by consensus decision-making should: 1) empower the external power-to of the group as a collective actor in a wider environment of its hegemonic relations; and 2) empower an anarchist system of power-over that allows for egalitarian relations of power-with to conduct the group's overall coherence and communal system. The task of consensus decision-making is to empower the group's external contentious instrumental power-to through an internal system of power-over that nurtures prefigurative communal relations of power-with. The consensus process is special when it can successfully combine those goals.

First of all, let's delve into the way that the manuals depict the importance of *emergent synthesis*. For a consensus decision-making process to be considered successful, the final decision "should reflect the *integrated will of the whole group*."<sup>368</sup> That can only happen when, as the ActUp manual puts it, "coercion and trade-offs are replaced with creative alternatives, and compromise with synthesis."<sup>369</sup> Participants are supposed to work together against the normal behaviours of competitive power and command, for the sake of the group's best interests and for the general ideal of working with a more anti-authoritarian and nonviolent means for building cooperative capacity. Consensus process is oriented towards cooperative synthesis in contrast to the way that it views alternative decision-making as a process of competition, including democratic procedures. For instance, the ActUp manual says that any democratic voting

procedure is “a means by which we choose one alternative from several. Consensus, on the other hand, is a process of synthesizing many diverse elements together.”<sup>370</sup> The Formal Consensus manual makes the point that “the goal of consensus is not the selection of several options, but the development of one decision which is best for the whole group. It is synthesis and evolution, not competition and attrition.”<sup>371</sup>

The Vernal Project’s Notes on Consensus implores that consensus is a necessary procedure because it offers a process that does “not assume someone must win and someone must lose when discussion reaches a stalemate. There may be a totally new idea (a ‘third alternative’) that encompasses everyone’s views.”<sup>372</sup> Consensus is a process of finding that third alternative. Rather than choose between A or B, when the group is divided in its support for A and for B, consensus strives to generate a solution to the problem at hand that was not apparent before deliberation began by promoting an atmosphere and structure of debate which can work through conflicts of ideas and interests until another possibility opens up that will empower everyone together. This process requires that everyone accepts the premise that, as stated in the Formal Consensus guide, “there is no *right* decision, only the best one for the whole group.”<sup>373</sup> Likewise, the Livermore Direct Action Handbook explains that “consensus is a process in which no decision is finalized until everyone in the group feels comfortable with the decision and is able to implement it without resentment. Ideally, the consensus synthesizes the ideas of the entire group into one decision.”<sup>374</sup> So, as the *Rhizome* guide says, “this weaving together of the various threads into a proposal is sometimes referred to, in consensus jargon, as synthesis.”<sup>375</sup>

A successful consensus decision-making process aims to arrive at an *emergent synthesis decision*: the consensus decision should *emerge* from open and egalitarian debate, undertaken in

the spirit of cooperation and compromise, to find a *synthesis* of all views that can best serve to empower the group as a whole. In the discourses of consensus there are two main ways that a successful emergent synthetic decision is thought to impact the group, and they accord directly with the model of dual power as the internal/external relations of power engage by a collective action system. On the outside, in the external relations of the group as a united collective action system, the decision is successful when it empowers the group *instrumentally in contentious political struggles*. That is, when an emergent synthetic decision contributes to empowering the group's contentious political action it thereby increases the collective power-to which the group can exert in conflict with the external power-over it faces in its external hegemonic struggles. On the inside, through inter-active relations internal to the group's collective action system, the decision is successful when it empowers the group *autonomously in its prefigurative political organization*. An emergent synthetic decision contributes to empowering the prefigurative pedagogical praxis of forging radical democratic inter-actions within the group as a collective action system.

Tamra Gilbertson opens her short depiction of consensus method with the statement that reflects two sides of instrumental and pedagogical sides of "success" quite clearly: "consensus is the practice of oneness for those who are committed to that idea, or it is the search for the best possible solution for those who are more logic-based."<sup>376</sup> The twin terms of success for consensus decision-making process are equivalent to the twin terms of anarchist dual power: as *a power-to for the group's anarchist projects in externally contentious politics of collective action: and as a politics of anarchist power-with for the group's internally prefigurative inter-actions*.

The twin form of power-to externally and power-with internally must coincide with a specific type of power-over: how does consensus decision-making coordinate and collectivize its participants? What kind of power-over do people generate through its mechanisms? First, let's consider how a consensus decision is said to empower the group's externally instrumental contentious collective action. The two main points expressed by the manuals state that the consensus process can increase *group solidarity* and *strategic novelty* for a collective action system's instrumental power-to wage its externally contentious politics. A successful consensus synthesis instrumentally benefits the group because any decision made with full consent of all group members will enjoy more active commitment and contribution from the entire group's membership. It is also said that the consensus process can help to discover new ideas that no one in the group would have articulated on their own, because the discursive influence of searching for a "third way" forces people into a brainstorming process oriented towards what is best for the group. That is, consensus process can instrumentally empower the group's external contentious actions when it provokes novel thinking that can lead to new tactics and strategies.

These two points are generally stated as conventional wisdom in the consensus manuals. Often, they are noted in the same breath. Here's a few examples from the manuals to get the ring of it. Martha Kotusch Legacy Project: "The results are high quality decisions that last longer than decisions made by one party and are more easily implemented because all stakeholders agreed with them."<sup>377</sup> Centre for Conflict Resolution: "We are convinced that a group is most effective when all its members can participate fully in decision making and group activities. People support what they help to create."<sup>378</sup> Vernal Project: "everyone is involved in the final decision and understands it better, so everyone is *more likely to work to implement it*;"<sup>379</sup> Formal

Consensus: “If everyone participates in the decisionmaking, the decision does not need to be communicated and its implementation does not need to be forced upon the participants. The decision may take longer to make, but once it is made, implementation can happen in a timely manner.”<sup>380</sup> Dan Spalding: “And since everyone gets to contribute their ideas into the decision-making process, the decisions are not only the best possible ones - but also the ones people are most invested in. Since everyone feels ownership over the decisions, people are more likely to take on responsibility for projects.”<sup>381</sup>

These points articulate the most common perspective on how consensus process can contribute to the *instrumental power-to* of the group who employs it, enabling that collective action system to make good-quality and potentially novel decisions that enjoy the highest-level of support from participants. On the other hand, the consensus manuals also describe a successful process in terms of “internal” or “community-building” benefits. It is said then, as the ActUp manual states, that “through consensus, we are not only working to achieve better solutions, but also to promote the growth of community and trust.”<sup>382</sup> Consensus will serve to empower the prefigurative pedagogy of radical democracy by teaching people how to unite in egalitarian interaction, making difficult decisions together without resorting to coercion, conflict, or authority. From Peter Gelderloos’ consensus manual we hear the purposes of this *prefigurative political pedagogy* most clearly expressed: “An explicit consensus process serves as a crutch or bridge which intentionally reinforces the learning of consensus until a new, cooperative, anti-authoritarian society provides that reinforcement as a matter of course.”<sup>383</sup>

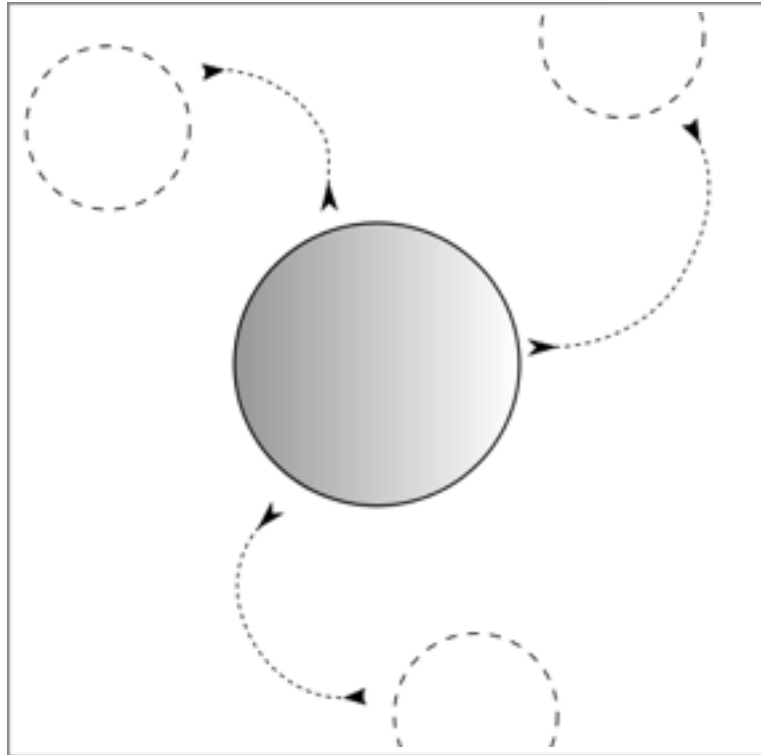
So the success of emergent synthetic decision is not only instrumentally useful for contributing to contentious political goals, but also pedagogically useful for contributing to

prefigurative political goals. This dual goal aligns with the anarchist project of dual power, which reminds us that these two goals must support and empower each other in order to generate the best of both: there is prefigurative power in contention and there is contentious power in prefiguration. In some very important respects, consensus reveals the way that the two terms of dual power are necessarily interactive. As Francesca Polletta argues, the idealism of radical democratic initiatives is not purely idealistic, but rather provokes some important instrumental benefits as well. She notes that even though activists often express their judgement of radical democracy in idealistic terms as a prefigurative practice, it is also true that “over and over again activists have been drawn to the *solidarity, innovatory, and developmental* benefits of participatory democracy — benefits that are a practical and political.”<sup>384</sup> The claim to dual power is also common to the discourses of consensus — it indicates an intention to span the two sides of being radical, to propose that there are two essentially intertwined goals that should be forefront in the process of decision-making: the prefiguration of egalitarian relationships internal to the group as well as the practical group activity of fighting for equality external. From *Rhizome*, we hear this dual power praxis expressed as the ultimate sign of a successful consensus decision-making process: “When it’s working well consensus delivers highest common denominator decisions — that is decisions based on the best of all the ideas discussed in a diverse groups. It addresses people’s concerns. And it reaffirms the sense of group and leaves people energised, creating a virtuous circle.”<sup>385</sup> *Good decisions* lead to good collective actions that can externally force political gains in social movement campaigns, while they simultaneously also engage people in the prefigurative politics of internally constituting good

egalitarian community relations. A successful consensus process generates a “virtuous circle” on the cycle of dual power.

In power theory, the terms of dual power success in a consensus decision represent the positive relationship between power-with and power-to in the politics of power-with. This relation has to move both ways across the boundary of the collective action system, from the individual members as atomic agents who inter-act within the system, to the totality of the group as a collective agent generated through those inter-actions. Looking out from the inside, an instrumentally effective good decision constitutes a directive for the group’s collective *power-to* in instrumental external actions. Looking in from the outside, the effective instrumental external actions binds the group together under common goals and struggles in such a way that their inter-actions are organized according to the consistency a structure and meaning system. As Alberto Melucci put it, the “collective action is not a unitary empirical phenomenon. Whatever unity exists should be considered the result and not the starting point, a fact to be explained rather than assumed.”<sup>386</sup> The decision-making process of consensus decision-making achieves its external terms of success when it unites the group into a collective action system based on full egalitarian solidarity of power-with, which acts as a binding obligation of power-over its members to render the collective action system into an emergent individual agent capable of external action power-to.

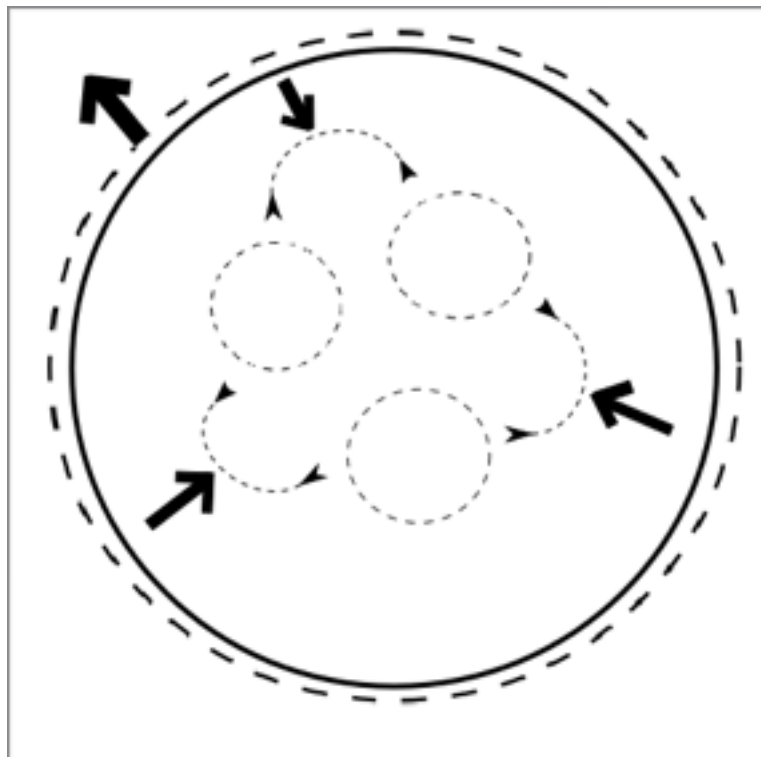
Figure 7: External Relations of Power-To — Instrumentally Contentious Collective Action



I bring up Figure 1 again in order to depict the *tactically contentious* viewpoint that is proper to the agency perspective. In order to depict the contentious action of a collective action system, we look to what it can do in its external relations. The consensus decision-making process is oriented towards this term of its success when it can design a group collective action system as a totalized unity for external action. Consensus does in fact aim to produce a type of solidarity in action which produces a fully united and undifferentiated collective actor. It is a solidarity machine built from members who are “all in,” so to speak. This can be described as a process that generates a certain form of intensely solid power-to for the collective action system composed by inter-actions of egalitarian power-with among its participants. In these terms, the ideally successful decision of consensus decision-making is to create a *solid* in-dividual agent that can act out a fully united power-to in its external contentious relations.

The same purpose is also reflected on the “inside” of the collective action system, in its internal inter-actions among the participants. As we hear again from the Occupy guide, “through consensus, we are not only working to achieve better solutions, but paving the way for an egalitarian model of community decision making.”<sup>387</sup> To bond the dual power relationship, the contentious collective cause-ability of external relations must be generated by the proper means of internal power-with relationships. The consensus decision achieves its internal terms of success when the collective action system allows for participants to develop the prefigurative skills necessary to treat each other according to relations of egalitarian power-over.

*Figure 8: Internal Relations of Power-Over — Communally Prefigurative Collective Interaction*



We find the internal side of the “successful decision” represented in this diagram, showing the usefulness of the structure perspective as a way to critically reflect on the *communal*

*prefiguration* of power-over. This diagram is a repetition of figure 6, showing the influence of structural organization on internal relations for the sake of collective empowerment to act as a collective action system in external relations. The dual power activity of prefigurative organization must manage to complete this power loop by methods of anarchist power-over.

Consensus decision-making can be depicted as a mechanism for generating an anarchist collective action system that must be analyzed by the dialectic relationship between: 1) its external relations where the group generates a good decision that will impel the collective agent to exert power-to in the externally contentious political actions necessary to achieve the goals anarchist radical democracy; and 2) its internal relations where the group generates that same good decision as a way to prefiguratively perform the means of egalitarian inter-actions of power-with necessary to achieve the goals of anarchist radical democracy. Consensus decision-making is special when it is able to bond those two sides in that mutually productive “success.” This promise and potential does not mean that it deserves a utopian trophy of uncritical worship. It does not mean that it is essentially better than any other alternative form of decision-making that tries to empower the politics of power-with. It does, however, mean that it should be recognized as very useful in some respects. So if we can understand better how consensus is unique and special, compared to all the other means of radical democracy and anarchist dual power, then we can learn to situate this tool and apply it more effectively.

### **(3.3) Authoritarian Versus Anarchist Modes of Collective Action Conduct**

The consensus process is a decision-making technique method of anarchist radical democracy that can help to generate *emergently synthetic anarchist collective action systems*. In the

following analyses I will elaborate on this special feature of consensus decision-making, trying to draw more detail into this idea by contrasting between an *authoritarian decision-making model of head-body organizational power relations* and an *anti-authoritarian decision-making model of power relations in a political body-without-a-head*.

Usually, the prevailing modes of organizational power operate by separating their decision-making faculties from their action-performing faculties — that is, by dividing the head of the organization from the body. The emergent synthetic solidarity of the consensus process represents a different collective practice, one which is in direct contrast to systems that operate by pre-formulated orders issued by a structurally regimented authority. Consensus decision-making tries to conduct a different type of organization than the usual head-body model does. It aims to create a political body-without-a-head. Consensus decision-making is specially adept at this task when it can create that particular type of *anarchist collective action system*, based on solidarity and equality. The advantages and disadvantages of this mode of political organization mark consensus decision-making's unique place as an organizational tool in the projects of anarchist radical democracy. In the following sections I will define this conceptual distinction with reference to the conduct perspective, continuing to explore how the concepts of power can be developed as an analytic tool for mapping the dynamics of collective action systems.

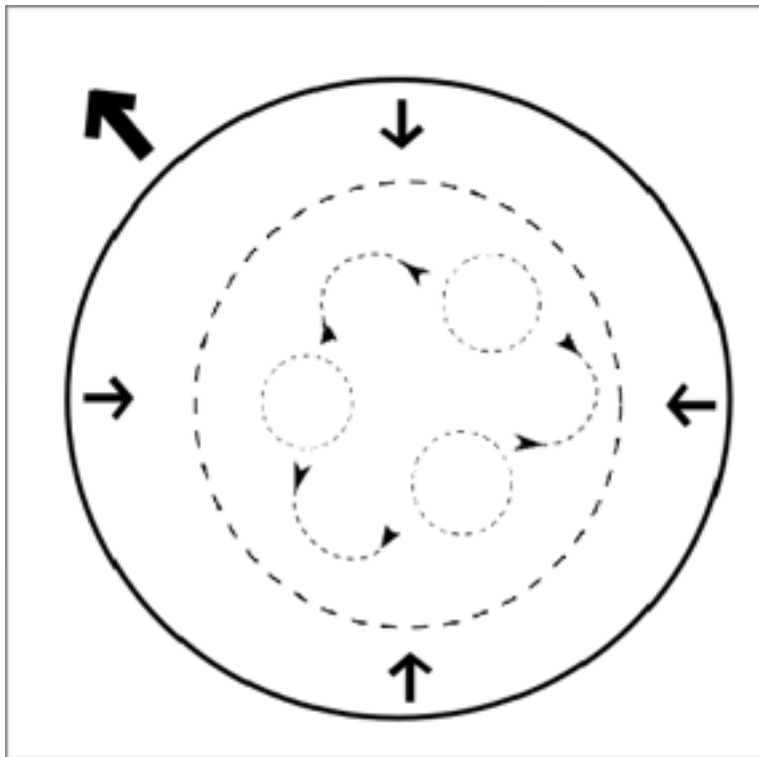
### **(3.3.1) The Authoritarian Head-Body Collective Action System**

The anarchist project is set out as an intense quest(ion) against forms of power represented broadly by the concept of *domination*. One of the key forms that domination takes, especially prominent in the traditions of anarchist analysis, is that of *authority*. Working from the starting

point of Max Weber's classic definition, I have already dealt with authority defined as "the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons."<sup>388</sup> We can also note a repetition of this meaning of authority in Weber's broad conceptual definition for the law: "Law exists when there is a probability that an order will be upheld by a specific staff of men who will use physical or psychical compulsion with the intention of obtaining conformity with the order, or of inflicting sanctions for infringement of it."<sup>389</sup> The law is the structural order in which authority can operate. Authority is present in an organizational setting wherever participants are held to obedience in the face of some decree, command, or rule. A collective action system can only regulate its power inter-actions according to the techniques of authority if there are distinctive positions within the system that situate those who command and those who obey. There has to be a position which decides actions and speaks orders, and another separate position that embodies actions and operates on orders based on the appropriate rules and sanctions that maintain those relationships.

The broad form of such command-obedience relationships engenders a model of social organization akin to the relationship between a *head that commands* and a *body that obeys*. The head-body model of authoritarian collective action systems can be portrayed in the following diagrammatic mode.

*Figure 9: The Authoritarian Head-Body Decision-Making Model*



The outer circle represents the head of the organization or institution, exerting top-down control on its internal mechanisms for the sake of its own power-to in external relations (represented by the outward pointing arrow). The inward pointing arrows represent the “decision” as a command that has the authority to direct the pre-determined obedient body parts, the internal subjects. The internal subjects are represented here as dashed-line circles, whose interactions are conditioned and contained within the larger dashed-line circle that constrains them to their proper internal roles. In this model a “decision” comes pre-concluded from the head, as a directive, which means in the collective actor there is a predetermined, authoritative, and legitimized difference between the function of deciding and the function of doing.

Now, there’s nothing inherently “evil” about this mode of organization. All collective action systems organize their internal inter-actions of power in order to compose and coordinate

external relations of power. The simple fact that collective action systems must organize a mode of collective control over their internal inter-actions is the basic concept of power-over, and this does not represent an inherently evil form of domination. However, the authoritarian model of head-body collective action system does represent a schematic depiction of a key tactic by which domination and authority can rule collective action system organizations. We have to be able to differentiate between this modality of the power-over function and other options that could be more empowering to anarchist radical democratic praxis.

Thomas Hobbes' depiction of "the Leviathan" articulated a quintessentially modern philosophical portrayal of this idea that collective unity in political organization requires an authoritative separation between a group's head and its body. For Hobbes, the *institutionalized position of legitimate authority* emerges in the State when individual agents mutually contract their right to wield power-over each other to their commonly collective action system — the collective agent of the Leviathan, who then holds a common power-over all of them. Hobbes believed that to unite a commonwealth of rabbling competitive powers requires subsuming them under only *one* position that is above *all* others. As he wrote, "the only way to erect such a common power [...] is to confer all their power and strength upon one man or assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills by plurality of voices unto one will."<sup>390</sup> The "one will" named by Hobbes is granted with the power to command all the subservient wills, and can be represented as a *political head* which rules over its various organizational bodies that *obey and serve*. There is a direct power inter-action that runs from command to obedience where Leviathan is personified as the head (the sovereign who holds all the subjects together) that exerts power as authority in whatever it commands the body to obey (the subjects who do as they are told

because they are held together). Leviathan holds authority because it represents collective action system as a whole which generates a new collective agency from the systematization of its interacting members.

In the authoritative model of decision-making there is a strict division between command and obedience, between the decider and the doer. An important facet which I highlight for my present purposes is that this division is *predetermined* by the structure of the organizational model in which a collective action is mobilized. So the head's decision-making process *generates a command*, and this command is supposed to be *performed, unquestionably, by an already pre-constituted and pre-possessed body*. The body *belongs* to the head, and it is unquestionably expected to obediently perform any and all commanded activities expressed by the head. Leviathan's subjects are certainly expected to be so accommodating, and the same formula resonates across a range of experiences. Psychologically, the head-body system invokes the notion of personal will and self-control, whereby our thoughts are supposed to be able to command the behaviours of our bodies. The "I" is generally conceived as a conscious and willful Head that has control over certain actions of "me," treated as my unconscious and subservient Body. The I-Head is personified, active, capable of causing actions; the me-body is objectified, passive, capable only of obeying directives. When I say "I" there is an immediate identification with an undivided conscious experience, thought, and the decisions "I" make. From this perspective I refer to "my" Body as a possession which is, ideally, supposed to be trained and controlled to do my bidding. "I" am Sovereign. My body is "my" subject.

This division is also basically analogous to the classic concept of power formulated by the relation between the agent of the law and the subject of the law. As Michel Foucault put it:

Confronted by a power that is law, the subject who is constituted as subject — who is ‘subjected’ — is he who obeys. To the formal homogeneity of power in these various instances corresponds the general form of submission in the one who is constrained by it — whether the individual in question is the subject opposite the monarch, the citizen opposite the state, the child opposite the parent, or the disciple opposite the master. A legislative power on one side, and an obedient subject on the other.<sup>391</sup>

The ideological terms of who gets to be on the legislative side and who gets to be on the obedient side of political decision-making is posed along the lines of an association of rationality with the legislative head and physicality with the obedient body. The slaves, the outsiders, the underlings, the women, the others are conceived as incapable of contributing to the processes of decision-making. The head is represented as motivated by higher purposes, aware of morality and logic, driven by spirit and activity. This is a naturalized sense of “mastery” which John Richardson identifies as integral to Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of power: “Mastery is bringing another will into a subordinate role within one’s own effort, thereby ‘incorporating’ the other as a sort of organ or tool.”<sup>392</sup> This sense of “mastery” is what we normally assume when considering the meaning of leaders as the decision-makers — as hierarchical bosses, patriarchal dictators, autocratic tyrants. “That commanding something which the people calls ‘spirit’ wants to be master within itself and around itself and to feel itself master: out of multiplicity it has the will to simplicity, a will which binds together and tames, which is impious and domineering.”<sup>393</sup>

On the other side, the body’s motivations are considered carnal and base, driven by instincts and passions, and they are therefore represented as *in need of being controlled*. Silvia Federici, a theorist and historian concerned with feminist and communist empowerment, points out that Hobbes’ and Descartes’ mechanical philosophy (these philosophers who have also offered so

much theoretical support to the notion that power-over is the inescapable root of government), aimed “to institute an ontological divide between a purely mental and a purely physical domain.”<sup>394</sup> The idea of the body in early modern thought was intentionally modelled in terms of mechanical causation — that is, according to the forces, and energies of power-to because the power-to of the head, the spirit, the rational capacity of the enlightened Man needed something to control: to have power-to meant, in obverse, to have the *power-to control*, to have *power-over*; that is, the new conception of the head-body relationship would lead to the construction of a “bourgeois psychology” which treats “all human faculties from the viewpoint of their potential for work and contribution to discipline.”<sup>395</sup> The power-to of understanding is simply to possess the power-over of knowing how the world functions. This is a power-over which comes along with the human capacity for logical deduction, pattern recognition, and practical action. But, there can always be too much of a good thing. Strung on a thin binary thread between power-to and power-over, the power of knowledge in modern society (this capitalist, heady, captivating head-rush) threatens to exploit and drain everything that comes to understand. In this mode, the practice of being-together in egalitarian arrangements of mutually beneficial influence (acting in respectful power-with among ourselves and with other creatures in this world) becomes unintelligible.

In the guise of “Mechanical Philosophy,” Federici writes,

we perceive a new bourgeois spirit that calculates, classifies, makes distinctions, and degrades the body only in order to rationalize its faculties, aiming not just at intensifying its subjection but at maximizing its social utility. Far from renouncing the body, mechanical theorists seek to conceptualize it in ways that make its operations intelligible and controllable.<sup>396</sup>

For the head, a “good body” trusts, accepts, obeys, performs what it is told, is spoken to but never speaks, faithfully executes the will of its beloved and wise head. For too long established patriarchal wisdom has assured everyone that women simply were not capable of making properly rational decisions necessary for governance. Their status as the more physical sex limited their ability to learn complex tasks of the Head. Woman-the-bodily is always to be commanded by man-the-heady.

In so many variations, the head-body system of collective action applies an *internal domination of collective control* in order to act as a united actor in external relations. The head has domain over the parts of its own body because those parts belong to it; literally, the subordinate positions are *in-corps-orated: made into a body*. The German sociologist Georg Simmel referred to a similar sense of incorporation and mastery to clarify a difference between internal domination and external conflict: “Certainly, the desire for domination is designed to break the *internal* resistance of the subjugated (whereas egoism usually aims only at the victory over his *external* resistance).”<sup>397</sup> When *internal* powers are in-corps-orated by domination, this is for the sake of the power-to of that incorporating agent, the greater power, the over-powering agent. Domination forms internally to a collective action system, as a mode of top-down organizational structure. Decisions at the top, performances at the bottom. However, since collective action systems have to be considered fractally, any internalizing domination project iOS performed for the sake of external relations. So the over-powering agent — the State, the Man, the Head, the Boss, the Sovereign, the Law, Society, the Cause, the Group, the Revolution, the Power — over-powers only in order to gain power-to in its own collective actions, in projects of it’s own egoically motivated victory over *external* resistances. Simmel’s distinction between

internal domination and external egoism perches on the edge of the collective action system, on the “skin” — so to speak — where the internal and the external is divided. The two practices may support and reflect one another in a common form of *conduct*, the power-with of that collective action agent spanning its internal and external inter-actions.

Leviathan’s sovereignty, the I’s body, the law’s subjects, the man’s woman: these all represent an internal system of collective control as a form of domination power-over. The head of the group is supposed to order the rest of the being around: the consciousness, the ego, the will, the law. The Sovereign tells *it’s* body what to do, the Boss tells *his* workers what to do, the Patriarch *has* his woman (etymologically, literally the word woman means *wife-of-man*), the I tells *it’s*-self what to do — because the Sovereign has that *right*, because the boss *owns* his workers, because I *have* my body. All of this exploited power-to of these bodies gets in-corps-orated by the power-over it, so that the energy of the individual components is transferred to the greater whole; all the power-tos internal to the system get controlled by the power-over of the system and re-applied to serve the purposes and power-to of the greater controlling actor.

As Judith Butler has said, “the cultural associations of mind with masculinity and body with femininity are well documented within the field of philosophy and feminism. As a result, any incritical reproduction of the mind/body distinction ought to be rethought for the implicit gender hierarchy that the distinction has conventionally produced, maintained, and rationalized.”<sup>398</sup> In an insatiable quest to control, consume, cause the structure of the world. In the drive to have power-over everything we humans act like we’re the psychopathic tyrannical head for all the earth. We are the victor, sovereign conqueror, controller, ruler, extractor, consumer: *Rex Homo Potens* — the lord of power-over everything! This kind of power manifests the extremes of

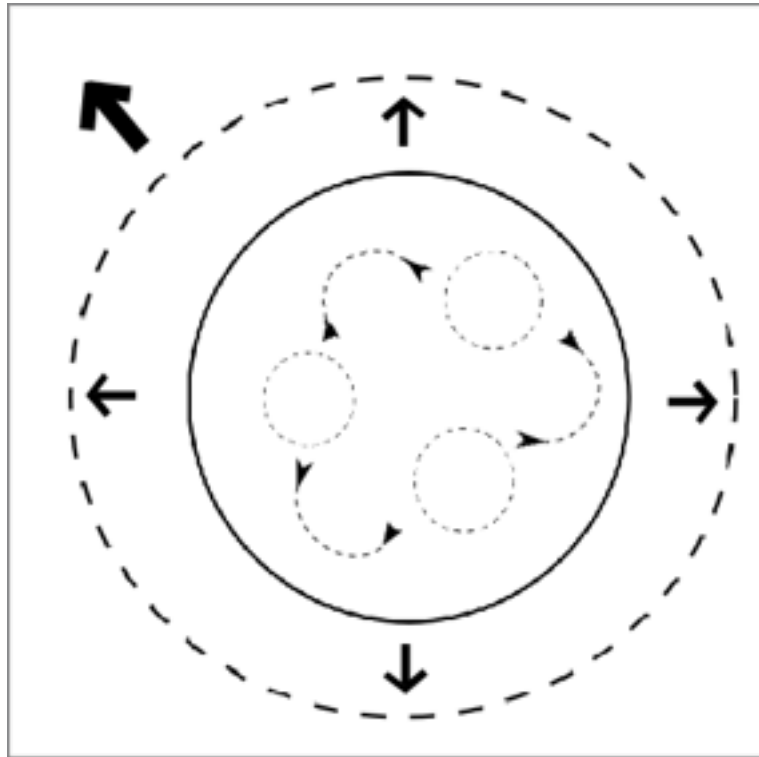
tyrannical, unquenchable power-over. This can't go on. *Off with His Head*.

### **(3.3.2) The Anarchist Body-Without-A-Head Collective Action System**

As Michel Foucault famously said: “in political thought and analysis, we still have not cut off the head of the King.”<sup>399</sup> This is a distinctly *archist* form of collective action organization: it treats some mode of institutional hierarchy as essential to the practice of government. It is this accepted “essence of government” that *anarchist* forms of collective action must strive to depose by finding alternative methods and systems that can structure collective action systems without recourse to command and obedience. It is not only difficult in the social organizational sphere, but has to be challenged up and down the fractal range of collective action systems from the psyche to the social.

Consensus is a political practice that tries to perform this anarchist feat. I am trying to understand how it works in the terms of political thought. I propose that we can fruitfully think of the consensus process as a political technique of creating collective action systems without-a-head.

*Figure 10: The Anarchist Body-Without-a-Head Decision-Making Model*



In this diagram, the inner dashed-line circles represent individual participants who are not pre-enclosed into an organismic-organizational structure. They inter-act to relate with each other in a manner that will compose the nature of their collective action system as a body-without-a-head through the relations of mutual conduct that they create by their assembly. The solid-lined circle represents their successful emergent synthetic consensus decision, which provokes a temporary and performative collective action system that can enact external power-to (represented by the large outward-pointing arrow).

Power, insofar as it is understood as always provoking the differentiation and assimilation of collective action systems in co-operative and conflictual relations, is always involved in defining the limits of organizational belonging. The model of the head-body authoritative collective action system, orchestrate power relations that separate positions of command and obedience and hence

rely on a distinction in decision-making power. It separates people: some people as deciders and others as merely doers, some people as commanders and some people as obeyers. The challenge of participatory radical democracy, however, as understood by the anarchist consensus traditions I am concerned with here, must include everyone in the decision-making process, therefore erasing the clean distinction between a head and a body. We must ask: if everyone decides on the commands, then who enacts them? What changes in the relation between command and obedience when radical democratic operation involves all people in its decision? For an anarchist project, the concept of the dichotomous power-to/power-over relation between head/body must be treated as an arch-enemy. From the anarchist perspective, “all of these forms of organization claim to *represent* the people in struggle, to act in their name. And what defines autonomous self-organization is precisely the rejection of all representation.”<sup>400</sup> Another such distinction can be drawn from the 1980s anarchist journal *No Picnic*, where this divide is framed as a contrast between *direct action* and *directed action*: “the self-direction stems from the decisions reached by the people/person involved in the action. It is only then that the action takes on the form of self-direction. [...] If people are merely following others or the ideas of others, the self-direction is negated. it becomes directed activity.”<sup>401</sup> In the authoritarian model, there will be an archic ruler — some head that is authorized to command the other parts of the body politic. In the properly democratic model, there is no such head — we find a body-without-a-head, or a body-as-a-head, because all the people who are involved in the decision of the action are also responsible for performing those actions. There is no separation between decider and doer. This is the essence of democracy’s radically anti-authoritarian model of collective control. I will now

explore how consensus decision-making should be considered as a distinct means of accomplishing this type of power system.

No matter whether the decision is made by a single tyrant, by a committee of elected representatives, or by a consensus assembly, to distinguish between a collective action based on authoritative arche versus a collective action based on autonomous arche we must still ask: does *the decision* assume the status of an authoritative command directing *the performance* of a body that is predisposed to serve? We still have to bring “the body” into a political theory of radical democracy, asking not only “who decides?” but also “who performs?” Even consensus processes have to take this critique (its own critique) more seriously, and make its own quest(ion)s *harder*: how do we make a political body without a head? What is that good for? What can it *do*?

During the 1960s and 70s, the French anthropologist Pierre Clastres studied American indigenous cultures, particularly in the Amazon, trying to understand how societies can function without recourse to institutions of state-centralization or strict relations of command-obedience. “Why are primitive societies stateless?”, he asked. How do societies work when they refuse to accept any difference between dominator and dominated, between head and body in a social organization? “In primitive society, there is no separate organ of power, because power is not separated from society; society, as a single totality, holds power in order to maintain its undivided being, to ward off the appearance in its breast of the inequality between masters and subjects, between chief and tribe.”<sup>402</sup> That is, Clastres’ notion of the primitive society is a group that has no institutional separation between head and body. Clastres observed that many so-called “primitive” societies build organizational structures that intentionally resist the centralization of command and power in any one place or person. He called these social scenarios a case of

“society against the state,” in an effort to emphasize that the stateless institutions were not simply a passive, underdeveloped, pre-mature form of social organization, as many Western anthropologists would have labelled them. Rather, societies that resist hierarchy must be understood as having a historical relationship with hierarchical possibilities which they have actively rejected, finding instead the means of conducting forms of power that could resist authoritarian collective action systems. The crux of Clastres’ thesis is set up, in a way, by the anthropological battle-line between a politics of power-with and politics of power-over. An anti-authoritarian system of power-with has to wage hegemonic struggle against the power-over of State-formation in order to make egalitarian social mechanisms of anarchist power.

So what are the mechanisms of stateless anti-authoritarian collectivity? In deliberative processes, of course, the question of *speech* is central. In authoritative state-rule systems, Clastres observes, “the exercise of power ensures the domination of speech: only the masters can speak.”<sup>403</sup> We might say: in authoritarian systems of power only the head speaks. It’s a talking head, so to speak. A talking head that spouts commands to a docile body which must never talk back. Feminist author Marilyn Frye has also said that “the powerful normally determine what is said and sayable,”<sup>404</sup> pointing to the fact that any utterance at all spoken from a subordinate position can be viewed as insubordination, resistance, or an act out of place that generates conflict (“a woman should be seen and not heard,” as they say). Accordingly, in the political deliberations of egalitarian power-with, speech must be made available to everyone. Everyone must speak in order for everyone to have mastery over their collective destiny. this is the status of political humans, humans who can conduct their collective action through communicative

causation: “‘men’, that is, beings engaging in a collective destiny through words,”<sup>405</sup> as Jacques Rancière would have it.

In the equality of speech, the meaning of “conflict” is transformed by the politically democratic register of debate. In the process of speaking and listening to others, conflict as disagreement is inevitable and indeed necessary. As the Formal Consensus guide puts it,

Consensus requires a different kind of attitude toward conflict and its resolution. Conflict is considered necessary, welcomed, and desirable, not something to be avoided, repressed, or feared. Its resolution is achieved through creativity and cooperation. The groups strives to create an environment in which disagreement can be expressed without fear and heard as a concern which, when resolved, will make the decision stronger.<sup>406</sup>

The Occupy Wall Street guide also marks the equalization of speech as a defining feature of its process: “there is no single leader or governing body of the General Assembly, everyone’s voice is equal. Anyone is free to propose an idea or express an opinion as part of the General Assembly.”<sup>407</sup> Everyone should speak and listen, everyone’s voice is respected and integrated in the process of finding a mutually acceptable solution that every participant can support freely with their words and their actions. In the ActUp guide, we hear that “the fundamental right of consensus is for all people to be able to express themselves in their own words and of their own will,” and that “the fundamental responsibility of consensus is to assure others of their right to speak and be heard.”<sup>408</sup> As opposed to an authoritative mode of power-over, where only the head speaks commands, in the anti-authoritarian mode of consensus many heads talk amongst each other. *The whole social body speaks.*

This is the very condition of *politics*, as Hannah Arendt defines it: the process of inter-active power influences people to conduct each other's lives in free and equal assemblage through speech. Arendt retraces the steps of political etymology to support her view, claiming that the Greek democratic principle of "*isonomia* does not mean what equality before the law means for us."<sup>409</sup> Today, living under the modern nation-state, we assume the meaning of *isonomia* — literally "equal-law" — in a terms of rules and regulations. It comes to represent our relation to the State that incorporates and controls us as obedient subjects, to the rules that bind us to authoritarian orders in home, school, work, government. And as such, we think about *isonomia* as a concept that relates to "equality under the law" to mean that each subject has the same status under the greater power-over to which we subject ourselves. But, Arendt reminds us of the original meaning:

*Isonomia* does not mean that all men are equal before the law, or that the law is the same for all, but merely that all have the same claim to political activity, and in the polis this activity primarily took the form of speaking with one another. *Isonomia* is therefore essentially the right to speak [...] To speak in the form of commanding and to hear in the form of obeying were not considered actual speech and hearing; they were not free because they were bound up with a process defined not by speaking but by doing and laboring.<sup>410</sup>

This is what consensus decision-making does: it creates an entire group as *a collective of radically equal speakers as isonomic inter-active agents*, by eliminating any organizational communication that functioned "to speak the form of commanding and to hear in the form of obeying;" that is, by refusing to conduct any power by means of an authoritative head and an obedient body. In the ideally successful consensus decision there is no separation between the people who decide and command the action and the people who obey and perform the action.

The political theorist A. P. D'Entreves has said that "liberty in the positive sense is in fact nothing else than self-government, autonomy. It cannot be realized except when the power which commands is the self-same power of him who obeys."<sup>411</sup> This is a classic representation of freedom in the Western political tradition, but it doesn't quite accomplish the sense of isonomia that Arendt explains, that purpose of consensus decision-making: the freedom of people in concerted relational conduct. This form of power-with cannot be modelled along the same axis as command and obedience. D'Entreves is positing autonomy as something like a closed-gap between head and body, between the means and ends of political organization. However, as Arendt urged us to recognize, there is something essentially different about speech conducted in its political sense which is not at all possible between the commanding-speaker and the obeying-hearer. Where no one is commanding and no one obeying, we have instead autonomy as a plural-political *inter-active* relationship of power-with as opposed to a singular-authoritarian *causal* relation of power-to commanding power-over.

In this sense, Arendt notes the conceptual mutation from *arche* (as leading or ruling) into *agere* (as combining and agreeing): the power relations that compose the collective action system change forces from command to agreement, and the concept of leadership begins to sound a lot more like a means of power-with than of power-over. It's a different kind of leadership, a collective relationship among mutual means, anarchist leadership that empowers an entire group's mutual organization of agreement in order to begin new capacities of collective action. The difference, says Arendt, is that we normally conceive of freedom, agency, the rights of the individual person. "According to our conceptual thought and its categories, freedom is equated with freedom of the will, and we understand freedom of the will to be a choice between givens,

or, to put it crudely, between good and evil.”<sup>412</sup> In that frame of reference, freedom is bound to the capacity for power-to, an agent’s individual and asocial ability to affect differences in the world and to resist the power-over of those who might impose difference upon them. But, if we consider freedom in the political sense that Arendt recalls as crucial to antiquity, we get a different picture. In that case we get an idea of freedom that can only be expressed among relations, as a capacity for *inter-action of conduct*, rather than the activity of a singular cause-ability, as the root of power-with not power-to. Then, she says, we can understand “politics” in the Greek sense of the word,

whereby freedom is understood negatively as not being ruled or ruling, and positively as a space which can be created only by men and in which each man moves among his peer. Without those who are my equals, there is no freedom, which is why the man who rules over others — and for that very reason is different from them on principle — is indeed a happier and more enviable man than those over whom he rules, but he is not one whit freer. He too moves in a sphere where there is no freedom whatsoever.<sup>413</sup>

Isonomia is a condition of political action, collective action, derived from the basic condition of power: power-with as the inter-actions that relate people together to form collective actions, and the collective action systems that relate back to control the way that people inter-act. The freedom of radical democracy, the freedom of a politics of power-with, has to come from this basis of power in the capacity for people to conduct their common conduct through isonomic inter-actions in deliberation.

For this radical idea of democracy it is necessary that a “we” *emerges from the process*, rather than as a label determined by prior organization. Democracy cannot be authorized, legislated, and controlled in advance by a preconditioned I-Head. It is authored, spoken, and performed at

the moment by a we-body. This is its autonomy. One commenter on the Occupy Wall Street movement's sense of consensus decision-making calls upon the idea of *Collective Thinking* to explain the meaning and purpose of consensus decision-making as a *constructive* process.

That is to say, two people with differing ideas work together to build something new. The onus is therefore not on my idea or yours; rather it is the notion that two ideas together will produce something new, something that neither of us had envisaged beforehand. This focus requires of us that we actively listen, rather than merely be preoccupied with preparing our response. Collective Thinking is born when we understand that all opinions, be these opinions our own or others, need to be considered when generating consensus and that an idea, once it has been constructed indirectly, can transform us.<sup>414</sup>

The process can transform “us” essentially because it can create an “us.” As Francesca Polletta has also said, “what distinguishes [radical democracy] from majoritarian voting in an adversary system is its emphasis on having participants make their own reasoning accessible and legitimate to each other. Solidarity is re-created through the *process* of decisionmaking, not its endpoint.”<sup>415</sup>

The head-body organization asserts authority to make a predetermined body do something; a body-without-a-head authors the body that will do something. This is its speciality in practice, and its uniqueness in theory. This quality of the body-without-a-head collective action system produces a phenomenon that is like a *performative* speech act. According to J.L. Austin's definition, “a performative” is a particular type of speech act where the utterance does not refer to any already existing thing. Rather, the act of speaking performs a thing into existence by its utterance. As Austin puts it, a performative speech act “indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action.”<sup>416</sup> A good example of a performative speech act in Austin's account is that statement “I name this ship...” By stating “I name this ship,” let's say “I name

this ship *Isobel*,” the speaker does not refer to something already existing in the world. Instead the speaker names the thing into existence by stating it as such. This ship’s name *becomes* “Isobel” by the performative power of my having named it so. This is a thoroughly social phenomenon that communicatively causes a name to enter into the circulation of speech; it only exists among people who speak and hear and know and influence one another. This is to say: the performative speech act can only be performed among the reflective recognition of people who share a mode of power relations. It is a phenomenon of power relations, through and through.

When the consensus process decrees that an action is to be performed it does so in a similar fashion as a performative act. Consensus *constitutes a collective actor and its action at the same time*: by speaking the consensus decision it also performatively names the collective body that will enact the decision. The decision creates its own doer. This strange situation can occur because the consensus decision does not simply issue a command which is then obeyed by an already existing organizational body. Instead, the consensus decision generates the collective actor who will perform the decided action: the actor and the act are determined whole, at the same time. Judith Butler influentially made a similar point about the constitution of gender as a performative act. Gender is never a predetermined or essential quality, she says, but is rather performed as a regenerative a code of behaviours that we categorize according to gendered expectations.

Gender proves to be performative — that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. The challenge for rethinking gender categories outside of the metaphysics of substance will have to consider the relevance of Nietzsche’s claim in *On the Genealogy of Morals* that ‘there is no ‘being’ behind

doing, effecting, becoming ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed — the deed is everything’.<sup>417</sup>

Herein lies the key distinction between the consensus process and other authoritative processes: the decision of a consensus process does not command an institutionally separate bodily organ that is prepared and ready to do as it is commanded; that is, in consensus *there is no being before the doing*. The decision of a consensus process does not bear upon any other part of a predetermined organization, it does not move from a head (whose responsibility is to decide and command) to a body (whose responsibility is to obey and perform); it is not an *authoritative* speech statement that commands a subject to enact its decree. It is, rather, an *authoring* speech statement that performatively creates the subject of its address as itself, simultaneously deciding upon a course of action and bringing into being the agent that will enact that course of action. It is a deed that constitutes the doer of the deed in a performative action. The actor and the action, the performer and the performance, are co-produced by a successful consensus decision-making event.

This is the momentary, intense, performative act of a collective action system that simultaneously creates its performer and its performance at once. It is a strange beast, distantly removed from the normal genus of the authoritarian head-body type of organizational structure, which so obviously and widely populates our normal social environments. This strange anarchist collective action system is as different from authoritarian collective action systems as an amoeba is from a complex multi-celled organism. The performative body-without-a-head can be further distinguished by association with what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have called a *Body without Organs* (BwO). The BwO is a concept that Deleuze and Guattari apply to illustrate

concepts related to the simple unity of desire intensities, as a way to contrast against the classical conception that all government requires the distinctions of head-body control so common to political theory. As they state, “the BwO is opposed not to the organs but to that organization of the organs called the organism.”<sup>418</sup> The BwO is opposed to organism systems that are organ-ized by the differentiation of their bodies into separate subsystems acting as functionaries for the whole system, each committed to performing certain acts under direction from the head-organ/central nervous system. The relationship between a head and its functionary organs is elucidated by the command-obedience power relation, requiring a complex authoritative process that requires internalization, in-corps-oration, organ-ization: the head *organ-izes* the body. On the flipside, the BwO is a fully simple or undifferentiated body. Nothing organ-izes anything else. This body has no internal organs to do its bidding; it is a body that exists only for the moment when it is activated-by and becomes-active-for a unique event, acting as a singular body without direction from the centralized authority of a head who calls all the shots. In a BwO, the sense of power of command-obedience head-body relationship fades away entirely and is replaced with a power that functions performatively and instantaneously, generating a body that cannot separate its deciding from its doing. A BwO is born like the performative speech act, in a moment of collective embodiment where “composer and composed have the same power.”<sup>419</sup>

Against the modes and logics which determine centred and authoritarian systems of organization, Deleuze and Guattari counterpose “acentered systems, finite networks of automata in which communication runs from any neighbour to any other, the stems or channels do not preexist, and all individuals are interchangeable, defined only by their state at a given moment — such that local operations are coordinated and the final, global result synchronized without a

central agency.”<sup>420</sup> With no rule, no organizational order, no authoritative structure of differentiated jobs, functions, and skills, the BwO is “simple” — which isn’t to say it is simplistic or easy, only that it is undifferentiated, smooth, momentous.

The consensus decision-making process generates this same mode of intense singularity when it performatively creates a collective action system through the emergent solidarity of anarchist unity. Within a fully realized consensus process there is no decision which makes a body do something, there is not even a body which predates the decision. The decision generates the body which can perform it. The total simplicity of the system’s ideal product is an undifferentiated political body. Because the collective agent conducted by means of consensus decision-making requires the active, explicit, and direct consent of every member in order to do anything at all, technically there is no consensus collective actor that outlives the action it was explicitly born to perform. People’s active, explicit, and direct consent can never be extended or presumed beyond the specific decision it was committed to endorse. There is no presumably primordial social contract or established hierarchical command structure that can instill duty beyond an immediate commitment to the specific decision at hand. That is what makes the demands of consensus decision-making so unique, and so extreme. It is a way of generating collective action systems as all or nothing, immediate or nonexistent. Because of the performative bond between the decision and the doer, each individual collective decision also creates an individual and specific collective action system. Each action has a life of its own.

Like a life, the collective actor of a BwO is composed only once: it is born, it acts, it influences the creation of other new lives, and it dies. The simplicity of the BwO means that it is performatively *transient*. Like a performative art that only happens in the moment and cannot be

fully preserved. It hasn't the organizational complexity required to coordinate and maintain large-scale projects or to structure hierarchical systems of power relations, to differentiate labour and arrange economic or ecologic networks. The body-without-organs is a temporary thing, inherently fleeting, because it has no unification, it has no controlled order. It never creates "unifications, never totalizations, but rather consistencies or consolidations."<sup>421</sup> Consensus, too, relies on the momentary, temporary, and specific synthetic emergence of its political bodies: a new decision will constitute a new body, and there can be no prearranged assumption about when, where, how, why, or who it will be. So too the collective actor devised from the consensus decision-making process composes a unique singular life — organizes, itself, acts, progenates, and dies. The consensus body-without-a-head thus "reveals itself for what it is: connections of desires, conjunctions of flows, continuums of intensities."<sup>422</sup>

This peculiar type of collective action system acts more like a swarm of locusts than like the body of Leviathan: a group composed of individual units that have no direct control over each other even while they act as a functional unity. The association sometimes made by Deleuze and Guattari between the BwO and "the swarm" is a pertinent analogy to consider the organizational form of a body composed from a transient and momentous assemblage of desires, flows, intensities: the BwO has certain modes in common with the collective bodies of insects, derived less from organization of command and obedience as from the mass association of a basic form of social cohesion, and connected less to the identifications of persons than to the intensities of activities. The "I" *possesses* its own, specifically constituted body. The I is mine. But "the BwO is never yours or mine. It is always *a* Body."<sup>423</sup> Leviathan is a personified ruler, a territorially situated commander. The locusts are a nomadic swarm that collectively attack, devour, and cross-

pollinate without fixing themselves to any authoritative persona. The Head-Body order controls and coordinates, unifies and totalizes. The organism that controls and commands the organs, the head that claims the body, the State that organizes the people: these follow the same patterns: they are a “phenomenon of accumulation, coagulation, and sedimentation that, in order to extract useful labor from the BwO, imposes upon it forms, functions, bonds, dominant and hierarchicized organizations, organized transcendencies.”<sup>424</sup>

Before moving on, let’s take just one more angle on this concept (the more angles we can use to observe an object, the more we can see that object in detail). We can also think of the consensus process as a special means of creating an *autonomous and autoergoic* collective action system. Max Weber’s most famous contribution to power theory is derived from his analysis of authority, categorizing the different forms of legitimacy that derive from charismatic, bureaucratic, or traditional leadership. But Weber also realized that any organizational analysis of social systems should understand how “power actually rests in the hands of those who, within the organization, handle the work *continuously*.”<sup>425</sup> In groups where power is supposed to be shared equally, this means that imbalances in work are just as problematic as imbalances of decision-making. Peter Gelderloos recalls, for instance, the experience of trying to run a Food Not Bombs chapter with not enough labour power (a problem many of us have experienced at one point or another, no doubt):

For most of its history Harrisonburg Food Not Bombs distributed work in such a way as to encourage burn-out among activists. For several months at a time, two or three activists would be responsible for nearly all the work each and every meal, including dumpstering the night before (I’ll refer to these people as “leaders”, though the only authority they had stemmed from the fact they did all the work).<sup>426</sup>

The *Seeds for Change* guide to consensus also notes the importance of this point, addressing that power can easily become centralized into certain positions and roles when the essential work involved in implementing collective action tasks is not evenly distributed.

Some people end up doing most of the work within a group, leading to more knowledge of the issues and more emotional investment. This means that they can find themselves speaking a lot in meetings and dominating the discussion whether they like it or not. One of the best ways to deal with this is for every member of the group to do a fair share of the work, rather than letting one or two people do it all. That way information, skills, and effort are more equally distributed. Taking on more tasks should also enable quieter people in the group to have more confidence to speak up.<sup>427</sup>

That is, balancing inequality in work is integral to balancing inequality in speech: when more people are involved in the daily work, more people can be informed and engaged enough to get involved in daily speech.

The bond between work and speech is important for anarchist collective action systems because the implementation of decisions in deeds represents a crucial aspect of the power dynamics that operate in any given collective action system: Who speaks? Who works? The question of equality is important not only as *auto-nomos* (the self-given laws generating rules, directives, and plans through an equality of decision-makers) but also and at the same time of *auto-ergon* (the self-given work needed to accomplish those rules, directives, and laws through an equality of labour performed by those same persons). The goal of a successful consensus process is to produce a decision-performance or head-body link that is coordinated *autonomously and autoergoically* so as to eradicate the organizational conduits of power-over. Autonomy may erase command among those who take their part in the process of decision-making, but it is quite

often then implemented upon others outside that inner circle of the organizational head. This is how the consensus manuals often portray official democracy as a mechanism that continues to serve as technique of power-over most people. To truly erase command would be simultaneously to erase obedience, so that the people who make decisions must apply those decisions themselves, and must be prepared not only to decree a collective action but also to become the collective actor who will perform it. This is precisely what consensus does. In this sense, consensus process represents an extreme allegiance to the principle of participatory democratic equality that rejects any *hierarchical organization that separates decisions and deciders from their performances and their performers*. Consensus decision-making is a mechanism for collective action systems that want to performatively bond decision-making power and work-producing power, linking conditions of autonomous and autoergoic collective action by requiring that a law or decision to be performed can only be decided if those who decide it are also the ones who will perform it.

The ideal process of a successful consensus decision-making event occurs when *collective autonomy decapitates command by the performative covalence of decision-and-action, articulating a collective action system that is unitary and two-dimensional, like a body-without-organs, the balanced and immanent activity of an autonomous and autoergoic collective action system*.

### **(3.4) Consensus Decision-Making as Anarchist Dual Power**

The archetypal contrasts between head-body and body-without-a-head modes of collective action power systems allow us to see the specificity of consensus decision-making as a tool for

generating emergently synthetic anarchist collective action systems. When consensus process creates a body-without-a-head collective action system, it makes a link between the internal bond of power-with among equally independent collected actors and the solidarity that they create for an external power-to action performed by their collective agency. But just as much as we can view power from the bottom-up, as a process of agents inter-acting to build a collective agency capable of contentious external relations, we must also always see the system from the top-down. From the top-down, the prefigurative structures of consensus process construct and educate the kinds of agents whom will inter-act within the bounds of a consensus-based collective action system, and in that sense the collective action system constructs and conducts the agencies of its members. The collective action system itself cannot command any internal relations because they are not distinguished from it in any way.

The process of consensus decision-making is a solidarity-making machine that creates emergent anarchist solidarities. There are modes in which this tool *can* enable a dual power capacity. But there are also ways that it can fail to achieve this mode of power, and instead reassert established collective action systems of power that may even directly oppose the projects of anarchist dual power. With the new concepts of power developed in this chapter, I think we can begin to reassess and clarify the potentials and problems inherent in the power relations which consensus decision-making makes possible.

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<sup>420</sup> Ibid., 17.

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<sup>427</sup> "Consensus Decision-Making," Seeds for Change, accessed September 29, 2013, <http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/consensus>. accessed September 29, 2013, <http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/consensus>.

## Chapter 4) *Analyzing* Consensus Decision-Making as Tool of Anarchist Radical Democratic Dual Power

In the previous chapter I developed the basis of a conduct perspective on power that uses the concepts of power-to, power-over, and power-with to describe the internal and external dynamics of collective action systems. I then began to apply this model to illustrate the special character of consensus decision-making as a tool for building a body-without-a-head anarchist collective action system. However, this special feature certainly does not mean that consensus decision-making is the one and only “most revolutionary” of all democratic processes. It most definitely does not mean that consensus enables a model of collective action that is free from any power inequalities. The power of consensus decision-making (like all powers) must be treated like the power of a tool: it is a practical mechanism that can serve different uses and different projects.

Consensus decision-making can be a powerful tool for projects of anarchist radical democratic dual power, *but*: the more powerful a tool, the more dangerous it can be. Like all tools, the consensus process can be used and abused across a range of circumstances and projects, and, like all tools, its value shifts depending on the situation in which it is employed. It is not so terrible as its detractors have worried and it is not so amazing as its proponents have promised. It certainly has a place in the toolbox of anarchist radical democratic power praxis, but we have to understand it more specifically and more pragmatically than we usually do. In this chapter I continue to apply the conduct perspective on power to analyze consensus decision-making in a different light, treating it not as an ideal or as an idol, not as a salvation or as a

damnation, but as a tool that we can learn how and when to use best by accepting and managing both its positive and negative potentials.

So, consensus is not a totally revolutionary mode of radical democracy, nor is it a process that does more harm than good, limiting the overall empowerment of radical democratic movements. This is the way the discourse about consensus is most often posed, however, ruled as it is by the way “those two guys” grandstand the issue as a choice between two monsters. But the conduct perspective on power should allow us to avoid choosing either side in that abstracted duel between internal prefigurative power and external contentious power. First, don’t fall for that first guy’s rosy burps: consensus decision-making is not the single way to perform perfectly egalitarian prefigurative relationships. And then, don’t bow to that other guy’s tough pomp: consensus decision-making can be more than a distracting circus for self-indulgent prefigurative poseurs. The first guy acts like easing the internal systems of power-over are enough to challenge dominant power systems in the world. The second guy acts like attacking power-over in wider social structures is enough to change the way we all interact. Dual power is the project of changing internal and external power relations in co-ordinated strategy. It only shows up when both guys are proven wrong at the same time.

Consensus can, in fact, be very useful tool for anarchist dual power, but we have to be able to figure out when it can help to accomplish dual power and when it may not. That’s what I’m trying to figure out. First, I will argue that consensus decision-making is useful as a *tool of anarchist democracy that creates emergent solidarity*. When it is used to create temporary, transient, and transformative moments of unitary group identity, the consensus process can birth new collective action systems that generate new powers and new movements. However, when consensus

process is used as a regularly instituted structure that supports established collective action systems, it ceases to work in that way. In fact, a very interesting total reversal occurs, and the consensus process can actually end up working as a *tool of anarchist domination that conserves established solidity* in an already instituted collective action system. In these cases, the consensus process stifles new beginnings, maintains conservative uniformity, and resists change. In the first use, the consensus process is an anarchist technique that can be used to birth emergent egalitarian collective action powers, and can function as a useful part of an anarchist radical democratic project. In the second use, it is an anarchist technique that can be used to conserve established inequalities in collective action power relations, and this function usually works against the anarchist radical democratic project. In one context, it's a potential anarchist power; in the other, it's a troubling anarchist problem.

As a way of elaborating on this split in consensus usages, I will introduce some concepts derived from an alternative tradition in political theory that sees "radical democracy" in a different light than the participatory democracy traditions of consensus decision-making. Dealing mainly with the thought of Miguel Abensour and Jacques Rancière, I will explore how radical democracy can be conceived as an insurgent disruption that works to fight established consensus in political institutions, disrupting the normalized authorities and rules of deliberative participation, intruding upon the inequalities of a regulated collective action system with the challenge of equality. The insurgent democracy perspective provides a new way to challenge the traditional ideals of participatory democracy in anarchist consensus decision-making. These theorists are in fact emphatically opposed to the ideal of "consensus" because they commonly treat it as the direct enemy of radical democracy. That is, a social and political consensus is

exactly what insurgent democracy is supposed to interrupt, unsettle, and overthrow. So how could a “consensus process” have any place in the theory of radical insurgent democracy? It is important, here, to remember that the consensus process is not an ideal that should settle power dynamics once and for all into utopian democratic perfection. It is a tool for mobilizing certain arrangement of power dynamics at a time and a place where it can be useful for practical democratic movement. A tool can be used for a variety of purposes, projects, and powers, and the power of consensus that generates the emergent anarchist solidarity of a body-without-a-head collective action system is different than the power it can deploy to support an established consensus on group uniformity. The critique of “consensus” that emerges from the insurgent democracy tradition applies explicitly to the abuses of its conservative mode, but in its creative mode the process can actually be implemented as a tool for insurgent democratic activity. Applying conceptualizations of insurgent democracy drawn from Abensour and Rancière, I will argue that the consensus decision-making process is a tool that can function on both sides of the divide between insurgent democracy and instituted inequality.

Ultimately, I argue that the consensus process provides a specifically useful *power of unity* to create new anarchist collective solidarity for initiatives of insurgent democratic dual power. The creative mode of consensus can empower a political subject that manifests outside-of or in-between normalized organizational institutions because it is concentrated in the performative lifespan of a temporary, autonomous, body-without-a-head collective action system. If, on the other hand, a collective action system tries to encode, established, or organize the consensus process as a permanent idolized method for conducting a more complex social order, then its function inverts and instead works as a *power of uniformity* to conserve the established solidity

of predetermined power systems. By analyzing the difference between those two uses of consensus process we can perhaps get better at applying the method more consistently for situations where it can truly enhance anarchist radical democratic dual power. The consensus process is only capable of generating anarchist dual power when it interrupts and challenges established systems of power, and we should strive to apply it more carefully for the moments and the jobs that apply to that project.

#### **(4.1) The Uses and Abuses of Consensus Decision-Making**

In chapter 3 I proposed that the consensus process can work to generate anarchist power when it produces a body-without-a-head, isonomic, performative, body-without-organs, temporary, autonomous/autoergoic, and synthetically emergent collective action system. That's what it is capable of creating, according to its ideal terms of success. But of course, everything doesn't always go according to ideals. Everything can break, and everything can be used poorly, inappropriately, or irresponsibly to produce results widely different from those it could produce when applied carefully and appropriately. Consensus has uses, and it has abuses. It works, and it breaks. As one internal letter circulated within the San Francisco Food Not Bombs chapter during the winter of 1996 puts it, sometimes you just have to admit it and scream out: "Help! We're fucked!" In that letter, the author named several problems they perceived to be prevalent in the Food Not Bombs use of consensus process: 1) "There is unacknowledged hierarchy within the group;" 2) "there is competition within the group;" 3) "people think individualistically, not in terms of what is best for the group;" 4) "we are unable to detach individuals from their ideas or proposals;" 5) "we give individual people insane amounts of responsibility;" 6) "we are

consistently late.”<sup>428</sup> All of these are significant problems related to anarchist decision-making practices, and each could be addressed in its own right. At present, I want to address how this type of controversy arises especially because we want the process to create ideally emergent anarchist solidarity, but when we impose that much pressure it then often ends up promoting almost the exact opposite type of organizational format, serving instead to resist change and settle established power relations, conserving or reinforcing an already established collective action system.

The consensus process has more than one application, it is a tool that can be used and abused to empower different functions and different forces in a collective action system. In this section, I elaborate on the dynamics which prevail in both modes of consensus decision-making: 1) as an anarchist tool for creating emergent solidarity and 2) as an anarchist tool for conserving established solidarity. It is important to recognize that in both of these functions, the consensus process facilitates a distinctively *anarchist* system of power relations — but calling it an “anarchist method” does not automatically mean that it is *all good*. There are good and bad uses for anarchist tools, just like there are for any other tool. I am trying to detail consensus process as a tool of *anarchist power-over*: a collective mode of government in which people assemble without recourse to the authority of a collective head. By distinguishing between the uses and abuses of the consensus process, we can begin to get a clearer idea of how to tactically apply it in strategically powerful moments.

#### **(4.1.1) The Power of Unity: Creating Emergent Solidarity**

In May of 1977, over 2000 protestors gathered under the banner of the Clamshell Alliance to

occupy the site of a proposed nuclear power plant at Seabrook, New Hampshire. 1400 protesters were arrested and jailed together in a makeshift prison at a nearby armories. While imprisoned, they were faced with making a collective decision: would they accept release on bail, or would they demand to be let out on their “Own Recognizance” (OR)? The protesters went right to work determining whether they could make a collective demand for OR. First, they broke into smaller affinity groups to find a consensus decision among groups of closer comrades and friends. For the environmental and anti-nuclear movement in which Clamshell was situated, activist George Franklin writes that “affinity groups are a base of support for activists — a small group to check in with, plan tactics, keep an eye out for each other — and perhaps share jail time. At some direct actions, organizers require that all participants be part of an AG. This is difficult in urban actions, where the situation is often more fluid.”<sup>429</sup> Once each affinity group had come to a consensual decision among themselves, they would then send a representative back to a larger meeting (a “spokescouncil”) to discuss the problem as an entire assembly. When each affinity group’s representative was asked who would accept bail, none rose. When asked who would demand OR, all rose. It was decided.

As Barbara Epstein reports, ““Once we got that done, we were united as a group,’ Meg Simonds said. ‘You need a unifying decision that you can make quickly and easily at the beginning.’ This demonstration of the capacity of the consensus process to affirm solidarity strengthened the protesters’ determination to insist on their right to use it.”<sup>430</sup> In this case the consensus process operated as a *solidarity amplifier or a group-belonging feedback machine*. It reinforced and augmented the strength of a collective action system with the greatest capacity for non-coercive voluntary solidarity, so that a group of actors can coalesce without any system of

authoritative command into a unique group-body that lived out its activity in the specific act for which it was gathered-together. This is the *power of unity* which is produced by consensus decision-making, and it can be a useful tool for dual power — both prefiguratively and contentiously empowering to the anarchist project. In order to find out where consensus decision-making has the most dual power potential, we have to think about how the instrumental power of creative solidarity and the communal power of creative belonging become mutually reinforcing. In the Clamshell jail solidarity, these two factors clearly coincided.

Consensus was successfully applied in the armories *not* as a way to make tough decisions, *not* to sort out complex strategic choices, *not* to define a movement — but to affirm and amplify a condition of solidarity which was already implicit in the communal conditions of the group which performed it. “In the armories, consensus process had worked well because everyone wanted it to work and because there was plenty of time to work out every question.”<sup>2431</sup> It is clear that in this case the conditions for solidarity were both culturally and circumstantially ripe. It makes sense that anyone who was already invested in the group’s collective action (by association with its cultural identity and its instrumental goals) stood for insisting on OR – what had they to lose? The only other option was to publicly remove themselves from the group’s solidarity association: to give up and accept bail would be to signal your surrender in front of the entire assembly, immediately initiating your expulsion from the group. Anyone who wanted to remain in solidarity, who wanted to continue acting collectively with the Clamshell project, would choose to affirm and strengthen that bond by consenting to the only option that built power from solidarity.

We can elucidate some of the specific power derived from this experience of communal

solidarity by reference to Emile Durkheim's classic ethnographic sociological investigations into the phenomena of *collective effervescence*. In his study of Australian Aboriginal peoples, Durkheim developed a sociological account of how ritual activities serve to confirm unity in a social group:

The very fact of concentration acts as an exceptionally powerful stimulant. When they are once come together, a sort of electricity is formed by their collecting which quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation. Every sentiment expressed finds a place without resistance in all minds, which are very open to outside impressions; each re-echoes the others and is re-echoed by the others. The initial impulse that proceeds, growing as it goes, as an avalanche grows in its advance. And as such active passions so free from all control could not fail to burst out, on every side one sees nothing but violent gestures, cries, veritable howls and deafening noises of all sort.<sup>432</sup>

The terms Durkheim establishes here can also categorize the factors of unity which arise in a successful consensus process: 1) "the very fact of concentration;" 2) "every sentiment expressed finds a place without resistance in all minds, which are very open to outside impressions;" 3) "each re-echoes the others and is re-echoed by the others." We've heard this kind of thing before! They are another version of how the conditions of equality are understood in consensus discourses as special because of its *process-oriented* creation of solidarity as a product of democratic interaction of power-with.

With sociologists Scott Hunt and Robert Benford, we can begin to conceptualize solidarity generally as "the ability of actors to recognize others, and to be recognized, as belonging to the same social unit."<sup>433</sup> Sociologist Herbert Blumer's concept of *esprit de corps* fits in nicely with my analogical choices here, representing solidarity as a process of belonging within a social

body, a *corps*. In Hunt and Benford's words, "*esprit de corps* suggests that solidarity has two major facets: a body of confederates that can be identified as a collectivity and a spirit that involves feelings of identification with that group."<sup>434</sup> The consensus process stands out among decision-making options because of its emphasis on developing the prefigurative, internal, communal dimensions of egalitarian group belonging, but ritual elaborations of communal identity are common to all collective action systems: *esprit de corps* is a function of power-over which consolidates and integrates members into the purposes and structures of the group system.

As social movements scholar William Gamson asserts, "any movement that seeks to sustain commitment over a period of time must make the construction of collective identity one of its most central tasks."<sup>435</sup> The consensus process is explicitly focused on the prefigurative tasks of producing egalitarian collective identity, more so than most other decision-making processes. This lean towards the prefigurative emphasis has often been a source of imbalance in the use of consensus, and can tip its capacity to generate dual power dangerously off kilter if people get too caught up in its charms. Nevertheless, that same focus on the prefigurative power of creating egalitarian and inclusive unity has pragmatic benefits too, especially when we consider how poorly our culture prepares us for egalitarian political deliberation. The act of getting together and working out ideas in explicit allegiance to radical democratic values can help to provoke our capacity to imagine and understand what it would take to build a more radically egalitarian society. As Chris Shilling and Philip Mellor put it, social reproduction relies heavily on sites of ritual experience where it is the "collective effervescence stimulated by assembled social groups that harness people's passions for the symbolic order of society."<sup>436</sup>

It is in this frame of mind that consensus decision-making has often been promoted as a radical counter-pedagogy, a way of relearning who we are and how we can work together, a way of recasting the symbolic order of our society in more radically democratic tones. Butler and Rothstein, for instance, depict consensus as creating a mode of solidarity that is not yet fully functional, because “in general, nonviolent conflict resolution does not exist in modern North American society. These skills must be developed in what is primarily a competitive environment. Only time will tell if, in fact, this model will flourish and prove itself effective and worthwhile.”<sup>437</sup> As Justin Elliot wrote concerning the Occupy movement’s capacity to affect contentious transformation in American society, “I don’t think it’s that realistic that we’re going to get fundamental change from the system that created this crisis by occupying plazas. I think the occupying creates a new way of relating for people that they can then take to other spheres of life and work.”<sup>438</sup> Speaking at Occupy Wall Street in the fall of 2011, Slavoj Žižek colours the same idea with a prescient joke that nicely highlights how prefigurative politics can help to challenge to our political imagination:

Let me tell you a wonderful, old joke from Communist times. A guy was sent from East Germany to work in Siberia. He knew his mail would be read by censors, so he told his friends: “Let’s establish a code. If a letter you get from me is written in blue ink, it is true what I say. If it is written in red ink, it is false.” After a month, his friends get the first letter. Everything is in blue. It says, this letter: “Everything is wonderful here. Stores are full of good food. Movie theatres show good films from the west. Apartments are large and luxurious. The only thing you cannot buy is red ink.” This is how we live. We have all the freedoms we want. But what we are missing is red ink: the language to articulate our non-freedom.<sup>439</sup>

Processes that emphasize the group belongingness and a collective effervescence of egalitarian equality serve as a way to begin articulating the revolutionary possibilities of radical democratic action. They help us believe in the potential of changing ourselves — inside and out, from the smallest interpersonal interaction to the grandest systemic organization — into more egalitarian, anarchist, communally responsible, and democratic people.

As I argued in the previous chapter, there is a key distinction between collective action systems that function by means of authoritarian heads commanding obedient bodies and those which orchestrate anarchist power-over of mutually inter-active bodies-without-heads. Now, group unity is a challenge common to any type of power organization. When an anarchist collective action system needs to reinforce its terms of group unity, it tends to rely *even more* heavily than more authoritarian systems on the informal effects of collective effervescence and communal belonging, simply because they cannot appeal to more direct and explicit coercive mechanisms. In absence of any recourse to institutional authority and the threat of punitive violence, anarchist collective action systems often try to strengthen group unity by intensifying the power of a *voluntary solidarity*. As Uri Gordon notes:

In groups and networks thoroughly predicated on voluntary association, compliance with collective decisions is also voluntary. Consensus is the only thing that makes sense when minorities are under no obligation or sanction to comply, because consensus increases the *likelihood* that a decision will be voluntarily carried out by those who made it.<sup>440</sup>

David Graeber has made the same basic point about the conditions of effective anarchic political organization:

The explanation I would propose is this: it is much easier, in a face-to-face community, to figure out what most members of that community want to do, than to figure out how to convince those who do not to go along with it. Consensus-decision making is typical of societies where there would be no way to compel a minority to agree with a majority decision – either because there is no state with a monopoly of coercive force, or because the state has nothing to do with local decision-making. If there is no way to compel those who find a majority decision distasteful to go along with it, then the last thing one would want to do is to hold a vote: a public contest which someone will be seen to lose. Voting would be the most likely means to guarantee humiliations, resentments, hatreds, in the end, destruction of communities.<sup>441</sup>

A consensus-oriented process is especially applicable in situations where the decision and its performance will require the utmost faith and full solidarity of its members, but where that solidarity cannot be controlled or coerced by any means and where the organization of the assembled actors cannot be presumed to extend beyond the immediate performative life of the specifically consented action. This is, again, the special power of consensus decision-making: it aims to garner the maximum *power of unity* for a collective action system built purely on *anarchist solidarity*.

The problems of harnessing the power of voluntary solidarity is a well-worn problem of anarchist small-group association. Solidarity is a special kind of power. As social theorist Alvin Goldman explains, “to the extent that members of a group have greater confidence in the reliability of their partners (and hence greater confidence in the efficacy of their own acts as part of a larger group) the group itself has more power, or is more likely to have at least *some* power w.r.t. a selected issue.”<sup>442</sup> Mancur Olson, an American economist and sociologist, has argued that small, voluntary, and open organizations would be likely to optimize a collectively egalitarian

distribution of “goods” simply because each person is only likely to contribute their own resources to the collective action if they also feel they will get a reasonable proportion of the rewards from the collective action. As a general economic imperative, then, small voluntary groups would be expected to tend towards radical democratic distribution of responsibility because

in any group in which participation is voluntary, the member or members whose shares of the marginal cost exceed their shares of the additional benefits will stop contributing to the achievement of the collective good *before* the group optimum has been reached. And there is no conceivable cost-sharing arrangement in which *some* member does not have a marginal cost greater than his share of the marginal benefit, except the one in which every member of the group shares marginal costs in exactly the same proportion in which he shares incremental benefits.<sup>443</sup>

However, as Olson also argues, the propensity towards egalitarian distribution of goods in voluntary association must rely heavily on integration within the group norms. When a group has enough socially contextual impetus to stick together, then they will tend to reassert the conditions of voluntary solidarity. But, as activist and scholar Steve D’Arcy has written:

A collective action problem exists whenever the action that would be most advantageous to a group of people, were they to cooperate with one another, is not advantageous to any of them individually in the absence of such cooperation. As a result, each of the individuals is in the position of being reluctant to “stick their necks out.” What is missing... is coordination. Each individual or isolated group needs to be able to trust all the others that, when one person or group sticks their neck out to fight, all the others will “have their back” and take up the fight. This is the missing ingredient. But how can we begin to address this 'atomization,' this sense that we all stand alone, wishing we could stand together?<sup>444</sup>

A 1985 anarchist pamphlet urging direct action against nuclear armament suggests that the consensus process is *most useful* precisely when facing this exact problem: because “the unity of purpose that arises from groups that use consensus is impossible to defeat,”<sup>445</sup> people can feel more confident that when they stick their own necks out that everyone else is going to be there too.

On the inside of a collective action system, solidarity structures a unity of internal relations that regulate common inter-actions and feelings of membership, powering the collective effervescence that builds bonds of affective association for egalitarian practices. On the outside, the collective action system that is united by those radically egalitarian internal relations of anarchist solidarity can also enhance the power-to of its external relations. The *power of unity* available through the consensus process can function upon these internal relation or to strengthen the external relations, or in very particular circumstances it can do both at once. If a group can use consensus decision-making to mobilize both the internal and external powers of unity in sync, then they will be able to wield the special capacity that consensus offers for anarchist radical democratic dual power.

#### **(4.1.2) The Power of Uniformity: Conserving Established Solidity**

The consensus process *can* create the power of anarchist solidarity by enabling, enhancing, and channelling a performatively assembled voluntary collective action system. It would be a grave mistake, however, to think that consensus that *automatically* generates a utopian equality that is somehow totally free of any power-over. If consensus decision-making is a solidarity-making machine for birthing performative, voluntary, and temporary anarchist collective action bodies,

then the emphasis on *birthing* should be a crucial condition. The progressive power of creating social solidarity can very easily transform into the conservative power of maintaining social solidarity sameness and certainty, depending on whether the “consensus” is *emergent* or *established*.

To understand how the power of consensus can exert conservative control over a collective action system, we have to take up a structure perspective on understanding *social power* as *religio*, or *relegere* (the root of our English word “religion”) which means *to bind together*. The social power of solidarity *binds together*. The consensus process evokes anarchist solidarity, the power of unity, which has certain kinds of power-over to conduct the actions of its participants. The peculiarity of this anarchist form of power-over is that it cannot resort to any explicit authority or domination in asserting and maintaining these systems of inter-active conduct, and instead must work with more informal and cultural means of socializing conduct. Rather than exerting the explicit power of an authority that must be directly obeyed, the power of solidarity which is so crucial to consensus process operates according to the more implicit structural power of norms, rules, and roles. Then the capacity to achieve consensus relies substantially on upholding traditions, beliefs, and customs that can perpetuate inequality and maintain subtly coercive systems of power that are rooted in subtle and subterranean *religio*.

The power of *religio* is not the same as a command or coercion that “says no,” it is an incitement to act in certain established manners, a reaffirmation of habits and codes that strike those who perform them as natural, normal, and right. Remember, as I first introduced the concept of solidarity in Benford and Snow’s definition, it means “the ability of actors to

recognize others, and to be recognized, as belonging to the same social unit.”<sup>446</sup> This is a productive, consensual power, wherein, as Michel Foucault famously put it,

what makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression.<sup>447</sup>

For Foucault, as for others who take the structure perspective seriously, power does not simply emanate as commands and coercions, coming explicitly from the most obvious sites of power-over. It circulates through the circuits of power-with, through the connections of social interactions, so that it enables conducts as much as it may also block them.

To study the great varieties of power-over which “say yes,” which guide and direct our own deepest conventions and common senses, we have to abandon the agency perspective's prejudice that all power-over is simply the same, and simply evil. It is crucial that we treat the bonds of *religio* as mechanisms of power-over, and equally crucial that we do not thereby normatively constrain them into representing something oppressive and dominating. There is a power-over of *religio* in every social formation, and especially in the most extraordinarily anarchist formations. Only by first accepting this basic point can we be capable of reflectively analyzing our own structures of group organization in meaningful ways.

So, I argued above that anarchist solidarity can promote a type of collective action system in which power-over is emergent and voluntary, birthing new systems of egalitarian collective action. This is a power of *religio*, but the process can also be used to promote more secretive, darker, forms of *religio* which are less desirable. From the agency perspective, the concept of

power is often used to identify who can be held accountable in an organization. As Steven Lukes puts it, “an attribution of power is at the same time an attribution of (partial or total) responsibility for certain consequences. The point, in other words, of locating power is to fix responsibility for consequences held to flow from the action, or inaction, of certain specifiable agents.”<sup>448</sup> When those agents who have the power-over in a situation are dubbed powerful, this designation allocates those agents as responsible for the consequences of the situation. As Lukes again says, “the powerful are those whom we judge or can hold to be responsible for significant outcomes.”<sup>449</sup> Peter Morriss also makes this association between power and responsibility clear when identifying the relationship as “essentially negative: you can deny all responsibility by demonstrating lack of power.”<sup>450</sup>

In this sense, asking “who’s powerful here?” is like asking “who’s responsible here?” SO who’s responsible in the situation of consensus decision-making? The answer from the manuals is unanimous: *everyone*. Everyone is equally responsible. This is a source of possible strength because it can create anarchist solidarity, but it is also a sign of possible danger because it can diffuse any specific responsibility for power. Marilyn Frye has said that “the powerful normally determine what is said and sayable.”<sup>451</sup> What happens when “everyone” determines what is sayable? In an ideally successful consensus decision, the the responsibility for the decision belongs to everyone. What happen when the process is not ideal? If it relies too heavily on what the group implicitly accepts as said and sayable?

The ideal of consensus aims to design a situation in which everyone can say what they want, but what is considered fundamentally sayable is nobody’s responsibility, and it therefore settles into the unspoken rules and norms determined by the group’s common sense consensus. This is a

way of talking about common sense, convention, socialization, normativity. The responsibility for these decisions belong to *nobody*. Within the mechanics of the consensus process *the block* represents a crucial point where responsibility for group power belongs to a structurally established normal nobody. The “block” is the clearest type of resistance possible in the formal process, and it does exactly what it says: it *blocks* the proposal (in the U.K. they tend to call it a *veto*). In the final phase, a proposed decision can be “called to consensus.” At this point any participant can decide that they do not accept the proposal as it stands, and if they are willing to assert the block then the decision fails consensus and the group must resume discussion, usually refocused on the conflicts which the blocker has posed.

The block represents the most concentrated formal means which consensus allows for a single individual to exert power upon the group’s collective actions. It is therefore also, as the Rhizome guide says, “the biggest obstacle groups face as they learn to use consensus well.”<sup>452</sup> The block allows any individual — regardless of authority, position, or privilege within the group — the *negative* capacity to unilaterally influence the group in *not* making a decision. Because of this crucial feature, as Ethan Mitchell reflects,

the notion of ‘voter power’ in a majoritarian democracy has little relevance to consensus. A voter in an idealized referendum or a town meeting has a relative power of  $1/n$ , where  $n$  is the size of the group. In an idealized consensus system, the voter has a power of  $1$  where vetoes are concerned, and a power of  $0$  where positive proposals are concerned.<sup>453</sup>

That is, in a consensus process the group has no formal power to command that a decision be accepted; no one can tell any one else what to do. There is instead a kind of *negative command*: the block is a command that says “no” to a decision; it tells everyone else what they cannot do as

a collective action. The individual power of *any one/anyone* is enhanced by the consensus process, but only in a negative mode of resistance to the collective power of *everyone/no-one*.

“Each individual having the right to veto any proposal at any stage? That’s a huge amount of power and a huge responsibility.”<sup>454</sup> As is clear from this mention in the Rhizome manual, the guides to consensus certainly understand that the block is a structured position of responsibility and individual power over the group. What happens if an individual abuses the power of the block? What recourse does the group have to reassert a collective authority over an individual who uses the block to monkey-wrench the entire process? As a counter-weight to the huge amount of power and responsibility invested in the block, the consensus process generally relies on the big social structural power of *religio* invested in normal practices, social precedents, and ethical standards to judge dissent. In principle, the consensus process considers a specific block to be valid and acceptable if it can be said to represent the interests of the group rather than the interests of the individual. From the Seeds for Change manual, for instance, we hear that “in some cases the rest of the group is unwilling to respect a block. This is a difficult situation. A group should respect a block, unless it stems from a fundamental disagreement with the aims of the group or is driven by abuse of power (although it isn’t always easy to tell if this is the case.)”<sup>455</sup> Fundamental values concerning the aims of the group are not always entirely explicit, and they often rely heavily on shared cultural understandings, shared experiences, and shared moralities: that is, it relies on the implicit social powers that bind the group together to determine deviance.

As the ActUp manual states, to block usually means “‘I cannot support this or allow the group to support this. It is immoral.’ If a final decision violates someone's fundamental moral values

they are obligated to block consensus.”<sup>456</sup> If a proposal is thought to conflict with “fundamental moral values” then participants have an “obligation” to block consensus. If a member does challenge the group with a block which cannot be adequately resolved, then the *final appeal* concerning whether or not to accept the block is made to “the group,” or “the group’s essential principles.”

If you find yourself faced with a veto that you suspect might not fit the group’s definition of an appropriate block, gently ask the blocker if they are able to articulate the reasons for their block in relation to group values and aims. If what you hear sounds personal, keep asking — ‘it’d help me to understand your objection if you could say a little more about how that relates to our collective vision for the group’?<sup>457</sup>

If “a concern must be based upon the principles of the group to justify a block to consensus,”<sup>529</sup> every block addresses both the proposed decision at hand as well as the very essence of the group’s collective identity. The Formal Consensus manual lays this down forcefully, construing the block as a key moment wherein “every objection or concern must first be presented before the group and is either resolved or validated:”

A valid objection is one in keeping with all previous decisions of the group and based upon the commonly-held principles or foundation adopted by the group. The objection must not only address the concerns of the individual, but it must also be in the best interest of the group as a whole. If the objection is not based upon the foundation, or is in contradiction with a prior decision, it is not valid for the group, and therefore, out of order.<sup>458</sup>

Whenever a group doubts a block’s validity, it is held against the judgement of traditional value, group moral code. This is a *trial*. And, as it is with trials in general, there is a double social function at stake: on the one hand, it is oriented towards achieving a resolution on the proposed

decision (a specific function); but on the other hand it also a mechanism for revisiting and reinforcing the normativity of the group's common sense, throwing light on differences and conflicts "in principle" which serve to reaffirm and delimit group's identity, belonging, acceptance, and membership. As Gianfranco Poggi says, "(and this is a view already presented by Durkheim) even punitive and cruel visitations of violence on errant members of society have largely symbolic significance; they reaffirm threatened values and, when they take particularly spectacular forms, allow the majority of members to renew their own sense of moral commitment."<sup>459</sup> Instead of attributing distinct positions of power to differentiated roles among its members, the consensus process relies on a most diffuse and indistinct form of social power derived from an *implicit consensus about common sense*. This anarchist mode of power-over may indeed grant authoritative violence to no-one, but it does so by appealing to normal values and group belonging that derive from the commonality of common sense, the sensibility of the common, the census of commonness. To highlight the deep connection consensus process has with this form of power (and because I like to be linguistically cheeky), I call this the power of *common sensus*.

Interestingly, this feature of the process seems to be largely accepted by the consensus tradition. It is common to hear, for instance, that the consensus process works best when used among those who already have common goals and common cultural expectations and values. As Randy Schutt remarks:

The consensus process also does not usually work well in groups where individuals hold conflicting basic values. Basic values are those deep beliefs that a person applies under all circumstances. These are often immutable to logical or emotional appeals and can therefore lead to insurmountable disagreements. All

non-basic values, by definition, can change. New information, persuasive arguments, or emotional appeals can sway people to change their perspectives.<sup>460</sup> If we accept that only “non-basic values” can change, isn’t that a process that sets up conservative protection for the group’s essential identity? Doesn’t that set of “immutable basic values” cover almost the entire essence of a collective identity and its goals, leaving only shallow matters of tactical and logistical concern open to discussion? It is a depressing tautology to suggest that a consensus is only possible among those who already agree. When a person’s block is judged according to the group’s normal principles of common sense, it suggests that consensus is only possible within a range of predetermined socially acceptable shared understanding about the aims and values of the group.

This is the mode of consensus found among a group of friends who have long since ceased explaining anything to one another because they all implicitly believe the same things. In Jane Mansbridge’s words, this sameness of common sense promotes “conformity and conflict avoidance, producing surface unanimity while masking a genuine opposition of interests.”<sup>461</sup> In league with the dynamics of privilege which I analyzed in chapter 2, the power of *common sensus* works to articulate a very conservative function of the consensus process which gains prominence exactly in those places where so many commentators suggest consensus “works best.” For instance, in an article concerned with the dangers of informal anarchist decision-making Kristian Williams recounts the story of Portland Cop Watch, a small, tightly knit, anarchist-oriented group with common political values and defined tactics operating by consensus decision-making which consistently failed to attain consensus decisions and unintentionally isolated newcomers in the process. Ultimately, Williams recalls, “disagreements

were settled largely by default. Changes were blocked by recalcitrant members; irresolvable questions became taboo; and, in the absence of true consensus, deference was given to precedent. Tellingly, these all amounted to the same thing: within the organization, the status quo prevailed.”<sup>462</sup> For Portland Cop Watch, consensus prevailed as the assumedly proper mode of inclusive and participatory decision-making, but actually functioned to include only those who were already well established in the group while excluding and delimiting outsiders from participating, consistently stifling new decisions and alienating new members precisely because of its reliance on *common sensus*.

This problem is structural, pertaining to a construction of consensus decision-making which digs itself into a hole of its own making whenever established consensus gets in too deep. As Zoe Mitchell has also argued, “when an oppositional discourse challenges the coercion implicit in consensus process, the only other option is to return to the status quo. Put simply, when conflict exists, consensus process does not allow a third way that could provide a method of shifting policy without manipulating some members of the polity.”<sup>463</sup> Ultimately, as Timothy Luchies has puts it,

in the service of efficiency, consensus places groups' guiding principles beyond the reach of politics as usual, and stipulates something very close to perfect agreement in order to revisit or amend them. This means that difficult negotiations relevant to anti-oppression can be sidelined in the interest of a groups' cohesion, its tactical orientation or for the sake of its ‘collective process’.<sup>464</sup>

If all you’ve got to build on is a repetitive referral to your own founding principles of unity or pre-specified collective goals, then whatever positions differ from those original purposes will continue to be excluded, no new ideas or radically challenging positions will be able to get heard

in a serious way, and the entire consensus process will gravitate towards its own centre of priorly established social solidity.

If consensus decision-making only works among those who already share common sense, is it really likely to empower new emergent decisions and collective action systems? Or, is it more likely to reaffirm already established ideas that happen to be the most commonly held or least controversial among an already prevailing set of social expectations? Organizational sociologists Michael D. Cohen, James G. March, and Johan P. Olsen have inspected this type of phenomenon in groups that prioritize decisions that reinforce their already-established range of routines and tactics. They call organizations that rely on this self-referential mode of decision-making (appropriately for my purposes) *organized anarchies*. In this kind of organizational forum decisions are made more as a function of expressing established identity than as a means to solve actual problems. A decision made by an “organized anarchy” is, according to these authors, “a collection of choices looking for problems, issues, and feelings looking for decision situations in which they might be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they might be the answer, and decision makers looking for work.”<sup>465</sup> This is what happens when the power of uniformity rules a collective action system, and this is the point at which we have to quest(ion) how the consensus process can function in ways that will give “organized anarchy” a bad name.

When a consensus process is used to reassert established group identity and self-assured group goals, then it can increasingly restrict the range of possible decisions, aims, tactics, ideas, and membership. In the worst possible cases, it can also sometimes even serve as a tool of domination in the hands of those who know how the system works and want to keep it working for the benefit of those who're already well-established within it. As Rob Sandelin, a community

activist and decision-making facilitator, has reflected: “this is where you need a process to either remove an individual, or move the process to something temporarily that can not be hijacked. There is a place where blocking on convictions is appropriate, there is also a place where blocking is used to hold a group hostage to a personal agenda.”<sup>466</sup>

It’s very interesting and very important that these functions of consensus process seem to be exactly opposite to the functions I discussed earlier. Here, on the flip side of its capacity to serve as a power of unity for creating collective action systems based on emergent solidarity, the consensus process generates a *power of uniformity for conserving the established solidity of collective action systems*. In both cases we are dealing with a definitely *anarchist* mode of generating collective action systems, good and bad. This is a simple point, but it flies against the established belief that anarchist collective action systems must be void of power-over, or that anarchist organizing strives simply to eradicate power in general. Both the unity of solidarity and the uniformity of solidity are potential powers of this particular anarchist tool, and they have to be engaged as inevitable facets of power which occur whenever humans act in collective conduct (which, I dare say, is always).

For the sake of *anarchist collective conduct*, as a specific ideal for finding the most egalitarian and empowering ways of conducting human interactions, we have to recognize a polar bond between the powers of unity and uniformity, between creative emergent solidarity and conservative established solidity: there is a dual edge to the power generated by consensus decision-making, it can cut both ways. In the next section I aim to examine how an anarchist project of radical democracy can enhance its power for creating emergent anarchist solidarity while resisting the abuses of conserving established anarchist solidity.

## (4.2) Dual Power Radical Democracy, Revisited

If we are going to use consensus for creating anarchist collective action system solidarity and avoid using it to conserve anarchist collective action system solidity, then we need to distinguish between how and when each function is likely to occur. This final section delves deeper into those distinctions by introducing an analysis of *insurgent democracy*. This title “insurgent democracy” names a grouping of thinkers who conceive of democracy as a politics of agonistic deliberative dissensus: an activity of disagreement, conflict, and political interruption that breaks established consensus in order to allow for insurgent new equality to erupt where it was formerly withheld. This insurgent democracy perspective presents a necessary challenge to the traditional discourse of consensus decision-making’s participatory radical democratic ideals. If democracy is actually generated by acts of insurgent dissensus that break up collective action systems based on political unity, then how could a formal consensus process which is premised on achieving unitary agreement truly be radically democratic?

Sorting out this question of how the theories of insurgent democracy relate to the practices of consensus decision-making, we shall be able to further elaborate on some useful differences between the opposed powers of consensus decision-making. Recognizing an important difference and relationship between *anarchist solidarity* and insurgent democracy, as opposed to *anarchist solidity* and insurgent democracy. Insurgent democracy is a movement (never an established order of things) that impacts upon established and solidified collective action systems. Therefore, it affects the two modes of consensus process very differently. Facing the consensus process’ *power to conserve the established solidity of anarchist collective action systems*, the movement

of radical insurgent democracy will be an antagonistic force that breaks that power of uniformity and reasserts new subjects into any established code of normal ruling *religio*. But the consensus process' *power to create an anarchist collective action system from emergent solidarity* can form a synergy with the movement of radical insurgent democracy which can propel revolutionary project of anarchist dual power. In other words, when it is used to conserve established solidity, the consensus process fails to coordinate dual power mobilization and instead reasserts preconditioned collective action systems, then it is the enemy of radical democracy. However, when it works to create emergent solidarity, when it is successful in creating a dynamic dual power collective action system, then it can be an agent of radical democracy. The trick is to tell them apart and know when each can be applied.

#### **(4.2.1) The Politics of Insurgent Democracy**

The concept of *insurgent democracy* depicts a social activity that interrupts any institutionally coded normalcy, prescribed order, or established consensus. The editors of the recent anthology *Thinking Radical Democracy* write of how this tradition stands in contrast to the classical and mainstream trend of political theory:

From Plato to Rawls, the outstanding representatives of Western political thought have clearly recognized that division is the essence of the sphere of politics: divisions continually re-emerge between different parts of society – between those who claim different titles to govern, between those with opposing visions for the community, between those who are members of society and those who are not. But with few exceptions – Machiavelli, in particular – the tradition's canonical thinkers have seen the indeterminacy resulting from these divisions as something to be overcome, not as

a condition to be affirmed. The realization of democracy, though, depends upon precisely this affirmation.<sup>467</sup>

Democracy is not an institution, not a system, not a method — it is a social movement of political insurgency that erupts wherever people introduce new equalities and new subjects into previously settled institutions, systems, and methods.

This idea of democracy depicts a principle of activism, a social movement that affirms resistance and introduces the demands of new equality into an already-given power system. It cannot be applied to accept or reproduce established power, a given state of order, a given law, a given authority. Even where a social order may call itself “democratic,” then insurgent democracy must be thought of as an act of introducing new terms of equality and new political subjects into the system called democracy. In the terms I have developed so far, this idea of insurgent democracy fits in as an attack on the powers of uniformity, the consensus of common sense, the conservative established solidity of a collective action system. The concept of “consensus” has been roundly criticized from the insurgent democracy perspective as a notion of established and institutionalized normalcy. In one sense, consensus is the arch enemy of radical democracy because it stands for the normal, routine, accepted form of government in which a collective action system goes about arranging its “common sense” status quo systems of power.

French theorist Jacques Rancière’s conceptual opposition between *politics* and *police* can serve well to elaborate on this contrast. First of all, he expresses that “politics is generally seen as the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution. I propose to give this system of distribution and legitimization another name. I

propose to call it *the police*.”<sup>468</sup> Any institutional coordination of managerial normativity is a matter of “the police,” whereas politics is an insurgent challenge to the police. In his *Ten Theses on Politics*, Rancière writes that the police is “not a social function, but a symbolic constitution of the social,”<sup>469</sup> which means that we should recognize the police as a certain mode of order which can arise in any and every social formation, not simply in our enemies’ outrightly egregious examples of tyranny and domination. The concept of the police represents any social coordination of the normal which settles habits and organizes the sensible and understandable arrangements of “groups tied to specific modes of doing, to places in which these occupations are exercised, and to modes of being corresponding to these occupations and these places.”<sup>470</sup>

Emphasizing also that the politics of democracy is not simply a designation of institutional systems or an idealized image of the will of “the people,” Rancière sees democracy rather as *an interruption of who counts as “the people.”* This requires that democratic politics be conceived as an intrusive interruption of the established consensual solidity of a collective action system: “whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place’s destination.”<sup>471</sup> It is the emergence *through disagreement* of how to name “the people.” It is the emergence of a political people who will infect the good name of the police people. Then, says Rancière, “politics exists when the natural order of domination is interrupted by the institution of a part of those who have no part.”<sup>472</sup> The part who have no part are those who previously did not count as “the people,” but who, through contentious interruption of the normal organization of the police system, have come to cause a break in the normal order and place that ranks and sorts people’s power.

Politics is the act of intruding upon the police. Upsetting a group’s established police orders to break its consensus on who it is and how it operates, democracy opens new subjects and actions

into the realms of political possibility. It is a process of interrupting the presumption and presence of the people's rules of belonging and equality with a challenge to the rules *of* belonging and equality. John Keane (albeit from a somewhat different perspective) also addresses this conceptual essence of democracy as a challenge *to* the principles of participatory democracy. Arguing that any democratic government (even those claiming radical participatory unity) must necessarily perform some kind of division between rulers and ruled, Keane says that understanding democracy simply as a "government of self-rule by the people" overlooks the point that

a 'people' cannot govern itself unless it relies upon institutions that in turn have the effect of sundering 'the people'. So despite the fact that they may try to imagine themselves to be standing shoulder to shoulder, seeing eye to eye, a body that calls itself 'the people' always finds in practice that it is a fictional entity made up of different individuals and groups interacting through institutions that materially shape not only how they make decisions and what they decide as a body, but also who they are as a 'people'.<sup>473</sup>

*Against* any officially organized institutional definition of "the people," the people who actually *do* democracy are those who are always left out of "the people," those who do not count in that count, who are unnamed in that name, and who are unheard in that speech. For Rancière, this is key: "the people always, in fact, take shape at the very point they are declared finished."<sup>474</sup>

With this new take on the meaning of radical democracy as an insurgent act of disrupting established order, we are presented with a challenge to the previously accepted definitions of consensus decision-making as a tool of radical democracy. There are certainly conditions in which the consensus process can stifle the possibility of politically insurgent dissensus — I have already identified this situation as specific to the powers of uniformity that conserve established

collective action system solidity. That one side of the dual function in consensus decision-making is basically a definition of *the police* in action. If a consensus is called and the people are named as a whole, united, and indivisible collective action system, then Rancière's vision of democracy begins as counterattack to that consensus. In direct opposition to the premise that radical democracy should aim to establish equality based on consensus and unity, Rancière calls on the concepts of *dissensus* and *dis-agreement* to describe democracy as an interruption that exposes structured inequalities of political power; as a crack in the stability of an enclosed discourse, it is the uncomfortable struggle between a fully integrated common sense and an exposed and scandalous uncommon sensation. Democracy is not consensus at all, it is the very opposite: it is the rupture of consensus, "the manifestation of dissensus as the presence of two worlds in one."<sup>475</sup>

*However*, by thinking about the consensus process as a tool of collective action systems, I have tried to unhinge it from representing fixated idealistic and theoretical oppositions of this kind. Consensus process may be used as a function of the police, indeed, but it is not bound to that function alone. The critical perspective of insurgent democracy is definitely opposed to the conservative functions of consensus, but not necessarily to its creative functions. In fact, I think that insurgent democracy and anarchist solidarity are potentially powerful allies *against* systems of conservative established solidity. The distinction in the consensus functions that generate either the power of unity or the power of uniformity has echoes in Miguel Abensour's conceptual contrast between the *all ones* and the *all One*. Recalling the political thought of Étienne de La Boétie, Abensour writes that

insurgent democracy means the community of ‘all ones’ (*tout uns*) — what it specifically terms friendship — against the ‘all One’ (*tout Un*); and more precisely, if we take in charge the dynamic dimension of the political, the resistance of *all ones* to the shift into *all One*, as if insurgency had among other functions the one of blocking, eradicating the ever menacing slippage of the community of *all ones* towards the unifying form of *all One*, denying the plurality, the ontological condition of plurality.<sup>476</sup>

The *all One* is a process of managing a collective action system that is established prior to any interactions that may take part within it. It is a singular order. The *all ones* is a collective plurality, always a dynamic relationship determined *through* the process of a collective action system of equals. It is not a single unity — not an *all One* — but a plural unity — composed of *all ones*. It is a plural assembly.

Abensour employs this conceptual opposition between the *all ones* and the *all One* as a way to define the principles of struggle between *democracy* and *the State*. For Abensour, the State is not simply a name for certain institutions of political governance, but a categorical form of human organization, a code for any collective action system which resorts to the rule of the *all One*. The State is a conceptual category that can “designate a social ensemble — of groups, relations, practices — which work towards the reproduction of a given historical community, in various fields: technical, scientific, industrial, cultural, ideological.”<sup>477</sup> Abensour is concerned with elaborating a politics whose primary aim is to struggle against any such social and political reproductions. In this way, Abensour’s sense of democracy is by definition against the State, an insurgent action rather than an instituted organization, but it must engage against an instituted organization in order to exist. *Democracy against the State* means that “the State is not the last

word of the political, its accomplishment. On the contrary, it is only a systematic and destructive form of the *all one* in the name of the One.”<sup>478</sup>

The tricky part about this conceptual array is that the *all ones* and the *all One* are not categorically distinct; they can transform and slip into one another, they are a dialectic conceptual polarity in human collective action system dynamics. As Abensour puts it, democratic “insurgency corresponds to the time of the caesura between two State forms; it is to recognize that the democracy which is inspired by it works to preserve this time of the caesura.”<sup>479</sup> This means that insurgent democracy is a transient and performative act which cannot establish itself as an ongoing and established system of power-over without transforming the character of its democratic insurgence into the State order of coordination and systemic maintenance.

Democracy has to work within a gap between State forms, which means that its very existence pertains to State forms. “Insurgent democracy installs itself paradoxically in a place which defies any installation, the very place of the caesura between two forms of state, one past, the other to come.”<sup>480</sup> As Abensour says, if democracy is to represent the all ones against the all One, it must be “redefined as the always possible emergence of human struggle.”<sup>481</sup> The act of democracy is a momentary, insurgent situation of disruption, rather than a lasting, organized institution.

Democracy, so often trivialized and domesticated in order to be better trained, is a particular form of political experience that gives itself political institutions, so that it may endure with efficiency. Yet it simultaneously never ceases to rise against the State, and in such a way that its effervescent opposition has less to do with negating the political realm than with embodying, in a most powerful and paradoxical fashion, an incessant ‘new disorder’ that reinvents the political realm beyond the State, and even against it.<sup>482</sup>

This is a vision of democracy as a struggle, not a state. It is an act of transforming the established systems which prevail, disrupting them when they rule and resisting their return to rule. In these senses, the concept of insurgent democracy accords amazingly well with the qualities we've already identified in the emergent consensus decision-making tool: it is a transient moment of irrupting equalization, staged as a moment of disorder that insurgently disrupts the institutionalization order of established consensus to reinvent the political conduct of power relations. The same polar dynamic which constitutes the relation between the democratic insurgency of the all ones and the institutional order of the all One should be recognized in the dual functions of consensus decision-making's capacity to empower creative emergent solidarity and conservative established solidity. As a tool of emergent solidarity, consensus is a mechanism for conditioning an assembly based on plurality. Through the consensus process a group of *all ones* can build the collective power determined only by their explicit and immediate interactions, autonomously generating a collective action system unprepared by any established system of coded order. In this role, the consensus process is a tool for radical democratic empowerment of a group composed of *all ones*. When it works to conserve established solidity, however, it empowers the very opposite — it serves the *all One* because it asserts predetermined regulations about who belongs, defines and protects a regime of what is sayable, and only counts those who are placed in their proper positions. On the one hand, the consensus process is a tool for empowering the political action of *all ones*; on the other, a tool for holding the *all One* power of the police.

I contend, therefore, that if consensus process is going to be a useful tool for insurgent democratic activism, then it should be applied only as a creative emergence that can provoke

collective action system power in a caesura between States, in the gaps between instituted functions of collective action systems, as a way to enable the power of dissensus through the collective action of *all ones* who manifest a wrong with their very emergence.

Consensus decision-making process illuminates the polar connection of the *all ones* and the *all One*, the thread that runs between politics and the police, the dual capacity for creative and conservative functions of anarchist power. The police and the *all One* will return on their own, so our task is to always invigorate the creative side of the consensus process. We have to figure out how to identify when and how the creative function of consensus decision-making can empower insurgent democratic politics of dual power, and how we can best recognize and resist its transformation into a function for State stability and police order. In the following sections I will focus on two important points that the insurgent democratic perspective can teach us about when and where consensus decision-making's capacity to create emergent solidarity can serve anarchist radical democratic dual power: 1) as an insurgent democratic action, the consensus process is useful for specific tasks that require new collective action systems to be created from disparate parts — it has to be treated as a specific tool for specific jobs; 2) as a caesura between State forms, the consensus process has to be accepted as a technique that has a limited time and place — it has to be a transient, performative, and unsettled activity. Together, these two points draw some new detail into the quest(ion) of *how* and *when* the consensus process can best serve as a dual power tool implemented to create new associations and to challenge collective action systems, rather than as a formal standing system that operates to control and manage ongoing collective action systems.

#### **(4.2.2) Anarchist Dual Power Praxis (Both Hands, Again)**

The autonomous solidarity of *all ones* is always cast in conflict with the autocratic solidity of the *all One*, in a dual sense: 1) it must act as an insurgent interruption of *all One*/the police this is established in prevailing social institutions; and 2) it must always reflect and resist its own transformation into another form of *all One*/the police. There is an external and an internal dimension to these struggles because the *all ones* and the *all One* are not separated by a stable categorical distinction, they are a conceptual pair that expresses dynamic polar tension. To accomplish the political task of that insurgency, the *all ones* have to assemble a dual power collective action system that can act both prefiguratively to minimize the reproduction of *all One* within its own internal organization and contentiously to externally fight and defeat the organization of the *all One* in its environment. This formula recalls, once again, the sense of anarchist dual power: to incite the insurgent democratic power of *all ones* that can contentiously fight the *all One* externally, associated with prefigurative methods of coordinating power among the *all ones* so that we do not reproduce the *all One* internally.

How can these insurgent democratic concepts be mapped to the systems diagrams of internal and external power relations? Insurgent democracy is a contentious politics of disrupting established institutions and regulated distinctions; it interrupts any settled rules that define inequalities in how people are able to participate in political collective action. The consensus process is one way of generating a collective action system capable of these activities when it is both without internal distinctions of rule and which can serve to help the struggle against external powers of rule. As long as it lives as a temporary and transient collective body, it will not organize any institutionalized established power structures. When consensus is successful at

generating dual power it is much more likely to hold these qualities as a new, undifferentiated, body-without-a-head collective action system in which there is no categorical division among those who participate. This is a type of collective action system that cannot be the object of democratic insurgent interruption because it has no standing order, there are no places, no counts, no differentiation among those who have power and those who are excluded. On the contrary, in fact, the successful consensus process can be understood as creating a *collective subject* that is especially capable of *enacting* democratic insurgency.

Now, such an alliance between the consensus process and insurgent democratic action is relevant only for those rare and fleeting cases where consensus achieves its ideal terms of success and acts to create an emergent collective action system based on anarchist solidarity (the transient, performative, autonomous and autoergoic body-without-a-head anarchist system). These moments of emergent solidarity are not meant to last, they are assembled only for specific and definite actions, after which they are supposed to disassemble. If the body-without-a-head becomes an instituted form of established functioning, it then transforms in function into the conservative rule of *all One*. When the consensus process is instituted as a system to rule over established and solid collective action systems, it then *must* become the object of insurgent democratic interruption; it must itself be broken open to reveal the hidden patterns of inequality which are solidified in its *common sensus* routines and relationships. There is a thin line between creative consensus of all ones and a conservative consensus of all One. In the remaining sections of this project I aim to detail some powers and problems of consensus decision-making where we should pay close attention to that line.

Here's a hypothesis: the use of consensus process for anarchist insurgent democratic action can only prevail where it is mobilized by dual power. One important sign that the consensus process is likely operating in its conservative mode rather than in its creative mode is when the process works only for one side of dual power. Considering *external relations of dual power*, anarchist solidarity can empower an externally contentious power-to for movements of insurgent democracy. Considering *internal relations of dual power*, the body-without-a-head mode of prefigurative anarchist solidarity coordinates a situation where — at least potentially — every participant can be counted, where every voice is politically integral to their collective action system. Of course, there are specific and delicate conditions in which this dual power must be situated. It won't work like this for every situation or at all times. In the history of consensus decision-making, the delicate dual power balance has often leaned towards emphasizing prefigurative harmony over contentious struggle. Too often the process has been used to organize and to justify idols of prefigurative unity, by which a group perceives itself to be righteously manifesting radical democratic equality in a way that actually only privileges its own established terms of solidity.

Even when a group does manage to perform a creatively emergent consensus, if it is not also engaged in any effective contentious political action then it will quickly settle into itself and fail to act as a tool for insurgent democracy. Insurgent democratic action requires contentious interruption, it cannot exist merely in the casual unity of solidified equalities. If the consensus process arranges a perfectly harmonious anarchist unity but for no actively contentious purpose, then that collective action system is only filling in a uniformity that was probably born too easy into predetermined positions. In those cases we should be wary that the process is liable to

reassert established consensus on privileged power rather than create emergent possibilities for radical insurgent democracy.

Anarchist solidarity and insurgent democracy can be allied, if employed carefully. How to be so careful? In the remaining sections of this chapter I will explore two key concepts which I believe to be necessary for the tactical deployment of consensus decision-making as an anarchist radical democratic dual power. These two points are simple enough in principle, although apparently difficult enough in practice to warrant more explication as principles.

1) *To every job a tool.*

We cannot ever allow a specific democratic tool like consensus decision-making to stand for the ideal of all democratic practice. The consensus process is a tool among many, and many tools will be required to coordinate the entire project of anarchist radical democracy.

2) *To every power a season.*

All tools have their tasks, and every job has its moment. Dual power is not a problem solved by any one resolution, it is a praxis which requires ongoing balance and adjustment, it is the homeostatic challenge of coordinating collective action empowerment. Consensus decision-making enables a specific mode of power to that project which will be useful at some times and not at other times.

### **(4.2.3) To Every Job a Tool**

Consensus process is not the salvation of radical democracy. It is a specialized tool for creating collective action systems based on emergent anarchist solidarity. In this capacity it has an indispensable place in the toolbox of an anarchist radical democratic project which, of course,

must also involve many other techniques and tactics. Wherever consensus is hailed with blind adulation, idolized as a universal democratic multi-tool, treated primarily as a technique that in itself leads to harmony and belonging, it is then likely to become mired in its conservative abuses. *When people use nothing but consensus, they end up with nothing but consensus.* “Nothing but consensus” is just pure sameness, the *all One*. It’s the conservative police. That guy who assures you “we’re all equal here” is content to live in a harmonized world of established consensus because his vision of equality does not include struggle. He wants peace without justice. He wants happy consensus over necessary conflict. He wants the police without politics.

If *equality* were as easy as *agreement*, if democracy were equivalent to unity and anarchism could truly eradicate power, then it should only take a properly articulated consensus process to make a world where “we’re all equal here.” Whenever one single system, theory, or process gets put up on such a tall pedestal, its *ideal possibilities* harden into *idolized assurances*. This has been a problem with the modern tradition of consensus ever since its growth-spurt in the 1960s. This is a common point among social movement historians. Social movements scholar Jean Cohen, for example, casts the difference between the “old” social movements and the “New Social Movements” (NSMs) upon an axis of “strategy versus identity” (that is, again: “those two guys”) claiming that the newer movements were focused on a self-reflexive process and self-referential campaigns that renounced the greater revolutionary tasks of the old movements. As she puts it, the NSMs express “a self-understanding that abandons revolutionary dreams in favour of the idea of structural reform, along with a defense of civil society that does not seek to abandon the autonomous functioning of political and economic systems - in a phrase, self-

limiting radicalism.”<sup>483</sup> That is, according to this tale, activists have increasingly turned towards problems of how to *be* radically democratic, rather than how to *fight for* radical democracy. The preoccupation with *being radical* certainly applies to the way that consensus decision-making has often been treated as a symbolic commitment to the anarchist ethics of power.

As Andrew Cornell argues, “consensus functions as a synecdoche—a part rhetorically standing in for a greater whole. In this case, the whole that consensus stands in for is a participatory, egalitarian, self-determining movement, on the one hand, and, on the other, a society with the same characteristics.”<sup>484</sup> The prefigurative idolization that has plagued consensus over the years is concocted from a potent brew of ethical commitments derived from anarchist, feminist, Quaker, Peacemaker, and Christian civil rights movements. By the time the consensus process became so popular in the antinuclear environmental movement of the late 1970s, the method was already treated *reverently*, as a process that held some possibility for the political salvation of a movement that held strong spiritual opposition to the general character of modern industrial society as a whole.<sup>485</sup> Many groups treated consensus not only as *a good* democratic decision-making method but as *the one and only truly democratic* decision-making method. Consensus became the way, the truth, and the light. As Francesca Polletta says, “for many, the commitment to consensus reflected a firm belief that there was one true way, God’s way, discoverable through joint contemplation.”<sup>486</sup> In a now oft-referenced piece emerging from the experience of antinuclear mobilization of consensus decision-making, Howard Ryan wrote that “groups making decisions by consensus tend to regard the process with a sort of spiritual reverence — I mean it is *worshipped*. The suggestion that even a straw vote be tried often brings reactions of hostility and moral indignation. The aura of morality discourages any objective

analysis of the effects of consensus.”<sup>487</sup> Years later in 2004, Andy Cornell asked why the alter-globalization movement seemed to be sputtering through a lack of mobilizational impetus:

Why? Because the real revolution was happening right there, on the dirty floor of a warehouse in Red Hook, Brooklyn, where 75 people, nine tenths of them white and economically comfortable, were having "democratic" conversations. The revolution was the process itself-- assuming that every nuance of consensus procedure was followed, the facilitator ran through the “stack” in the correct order, and each participant used the correct hand gesture to indicate that she wanted to make a “direct response.” It didn't matter what the outcome was, as long as we were "reinventing democracy" in the process.<sup>488</sup>

Today, when consensus is still called “the most revolutionary decision-making decision making process” it is coloured by the same type of spiritual sheen and miraculous promise for an ecstatic sense of community. The spiritualized valour and moral indignation that tends to pervade these traditions of radical democratic prefigurative politics can offer a certain kind of limited power: when a group of people is so passionate about the righteousness of their actions it helps to cement their courage and commitment to the cause. But there are also serious drawbacks: people start to presume and reinforce their positions as common sensical to the point that their commitment devolves into a head-in-the-sand inability to recognize when alternative processes and perspectives may be required to get anything new done.

Many scholars see the Clamshell Alliance as an exemplary case of this conglomeration of influences, a clear example of both the power and danger in treating consensus process so reverentially. As Barbara Epstein reports, “Clamshell was perceived as a dialectical response to the failures of the New Left. This is one of the reasons consensus decision making was such a sacred cow.”<sup>489</sup> First of all, in the Clamshell story we can observe how the procedure of

consensus came to be a synecdoche for the core values and ideals in radical democracy, equality, and nonviolence. From the very beginning, the Clamshell Alliance presented consensus as eminently *necessary* for achieving these essential cultural revolutionary aims: no “truly radical” organization would be possible that allowed for hierarchy, differences of power and control, or any internal structural privilege to decide on matters of collective affairs. In Epstein’s review of the Clamshell’s development from a small closely-knit group process to a mobilization network involving thousands of protesters, she expresses that

the almost ecstatic sense of community that Clamshell enjoyed in its first year or so led Clams to believe that internal harmony was the automatic result of consensus process and a philosophy of nonviolence. But in fact consensus probably worked best among people who were more or less like-minded, as the original group was, or in the special circumstances of incarceration in which power struggles were not at issue and there was both the time and the desire to work out differences.<sup>490</sup>

That “ecstatic sense of community” is a prime symptom of the collective effervescence that can help promote anarchist solidarity-building. Then, the process eases into delimiting boundaries of belonging, setting “the community” apart as an exclusive domain; literally *ec-statically* (*standing outside from the normal*) distinguished from others. When groups like Clamshell have over-emphasized the intensity and importance of prefigurative politics, they are much more likely to fall into favouring the conservative side of the consensus process. When a group has to stand aside from the rest of the world in order to achieve their radical democratic ideals, they will inevitably step out from the praxis of dual power.

In a society fragmented by the modern dismemberment of more traditionally organic associations, in a world where so many people are longing for belonging, it is tempting feel

emotional about the consensus process. It augments and emphasizes the presence of collective “being,” it builds the collective effervescence of belonging and harmony, it helps people build tightly-knit public-political groups in a society where those experiences are in short supply. However, this kind of heightened emotional charge tends to make people over-invested in the practice of deliberation itself, transforming a tool into an idol. To take a line from Zygmunt Bauman, when trying to compensate for a general lack of social unity many “groups are overloaded with expectations which are virtually impossible to meet, and which, once frustrated, lead to mutual recrimination.”<sup>491</sup> History certainly shows this trend in consensus practice. Initially, the Occupy movement’s focus on the prefigurative construction of an alternative political experience was potent in itself. The mainstream media was baffled, as CNN reporter Erin Burnett’s piece makes explicit with its title: “*Seriously?! What are they protesting?*”<sup>492</sup> For many Occupiers this kind of response from the mainstream was taken as a sure sign that they were doing something right simply by inhabiting a different kind of politics. However, as L. A. Kauffman, a sociologist and Occupy participant, worries: the movement may have ultimately ended up bending its power into an obsessive focus only on the internal-communal and prefigurative processing of insular solidity to the exclusion of any instrumental aims to increase their empowerment into a more powerful externally-acting social movement. Kauffman quotes Jonathan Smucker’s poignant recollection:

I began to wonder if the heightened sense of an integrated identity was “the utopia” that many of my fellow participants were seeking. What if the thing we were missing, the thing we were lacking — the thing we longed for most — was a sense of an integrated existence in a cohesive community, i.e., an *intact lifeworld*?

What if this longing was so potent that it could eclipse the drive to affect larger political outcomes?<sup>493</sup>

Participants in Occupy initially bonded by sharing a collective emotional anger about their place in the modern world, a feeling that they had previously found to be frustrated and unexpressed in public political spaces. This point was so prevalent in the Occupy movement that it fed the popularity of the slogan that “at Occupy, process is politics.”<sup>494</sup> The common social and political estrangement which Occupy strove to transform first served as a spark for the initial burst of movement passions. But, as Smucker asks, what if this longing were more potent than the drive to affect larger political outcomes? To the regret of many the task of creating “cohesive community” seemed to outweigh the task of creating a “larger political outcome” in the Occupy movement, once again splitting the capacities of that mobilization along a familiar fault line of prefigurative versus contentious politics. Those two guys, at it again.

The Occupy movement became infatuated with *being* radically democratic, and this was *initially* its primary strength: when it could put the consensus-based political process to use for creating emergent solidarity. But, as that identification with radical democracy slowly established as Occupy’s *only* strength the creative function of consensus process mutated into the conservative function. Occupy’s slow demise was attended to by that conservative power of consensus process that augments the power of uniformity to settle group decisions down to the lowest common denominator of a very broad *common sensus*, a broken-down consensus that eventually isn’t *for* anything but conserving consensus itself. Even the best prefigurative process easily wallows in the self-righteous conservations of established collective action power patterns when cut away from contentious activism.

When the presumption of an established anarchist cultural consensus reigns in activist organizations, “we ghettoize ourselves in our comfort zones, to a point that anyone that doesn’t fit the anarchist “description” feels as out of place as a fat woman in a fashion magazine.”<sup>495</sup> One anonymous author depicts this classic dual power disfunction sprouting at Occupy Los Angeles after only a few weeks, blossoming quickly in the fertile soils of presumed cultural *common sensus* and idolized political process. According to this participant, the choice between those who prioritized the prefigurative power of the process versus those who wanted to use the movement to build the power of contentious direct action sprang up almost immediately as the main dividing line of ideological difference that would ultimately spell out the demise of that camp’s effectiveness as a united collective action system. As this person recounts, the consensus process was almost immediately prioritized beyond any question, and when opponents fought back the whole mechanism ground to a halt:

We spent literally 5 hours, without exaggeration, and nothing was agreed on beyond where we would sleep. Since day 1 this model has been used to stifle and stop direct action and civil disobedience rather than to foster it, and when I have called for even non-violent autonomous actions the organizers (who are mostly new to activism) have gone out of their way to troll us and make us look divisive and out of touch with the movement.<sup>496</sup>

When consensus is lopsidedly applied for prefigurative politics, it lends it considerable powers to establishing the privileges of easy decisions and easy actions that promise revolutionary delivery in and of themselves. These are false promises, and the eventual fall from grace they provoke tends to hit pretty hard. As long as the value of consensus is essentially equated with the whole

symbolic pantheon — anti-authoritarian, non-violent, feminist, and anarchist principles — it will demand a lofty dose of idolized worship.

No worshipful initiate dares to treat their idol like a “mere tactic;” it’s a harsh demotion to get bumped down from a synecdoche for all democratic equality to just another tool in the toolbox. But this is what is necessary. So long as consensus continues to be treated as somehow equivalent to anarchist cultural principles of justice and equality, its practitioners risk losing the dual power edge that the tool may actually contribute to radical democratic mobilizations. As Andrew Cornell counsels:

to avoid some of the muddled strategic thinking that often accompanies an introduction to consensus, organizers must stop teaching consensus in a way that entrances activists into thinking that the quality of their intermovement conversations are alluring enough to revolutionize society by weight of example. Concretely, this means that they need to use and teach additional methods for making decisions in political work and help less-experienced activists determine when each are most useful.<sup>497</sup>

Mark Lance, writing about how too many groups tend to fetishize the consensus process, sums up this basic point clearly: “no procedure guarantees wise decision making, and a wide variety of procedures can be useful in arriving at wise decisions. So do not privilege one over another in the abstract.”<sup>498</sup> Many tools make a good toolbox. For idols, on the other hand, two’s a crowd.

Worshipping one idol is especially inimical to the pluralizing spirit of democracy. If power is always a feature of collective action systems (coordinating people into collective agents and against other collective agents, both internally and externally to their respective systems) then we cannot expect any system to deliver the pure utopia of equality, freedom, and release from power.

In fact, quite the opposite: to treat democracy as an idol is to begin sacrificing its power in actual practice.

To develop anarchist radical democratic methods of dual power requires that we think of our processes as tools — useful or useless depending on the task — not as idols to be worshipfully followed in every case. In fact, wherever consensus decision-making has worked best as a dual power tool people have tended to treat it as both a tactical and an ethical instrument, as the combined praxis of a tool that helps their contentious empowerment and their prefigurative power systems. For instance, as Polletta recounts, during the early stages of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's rising influence on civil right mobilization in the American South (SNCC) the methods of participatory democracy and consensus-orientation were treated explicitly as tactics of dual power. However, when the organizational composition of SNCC changed dramatically in 1964-65 there was an interesting reversal in the rhetoric associated with radical participatory democracy. SNCC's executive secretary at the time, James Forman, believed in the need for drastic organizational restructuring to build a more efficient and coordinated mass organization. SNCC needed to change if it wanted to compete in the big leagues, and for Forman this meant abandoning the decentralized participatory structures it had used so far, adopting instead more coordinated, centralized, and leader-oriented structures which could deliver effective large-scale mobilization. The resulting organizational conflicts within the organization then began crystallizing around a distinction between "freedom highs" and "hardliners"<sup>499</sup> (another version of "those two guys"): the one driving for loose structure, open organizational authority, and defending these choices with the appeal to high ideals; the other

going for stricter structure, controlled organizational authority, concerned with justifying the need for pragmatically immediate capacity.

However, Polletta argues that “in fact, the objections to Forman’s plan were initially made on practical grounds.”<sup>500</sup> Against Forman’s proposal for a more conventional bureaucratic structure, an alternative was suggested that would be based on a new structure of groups who would meet to coordinate and deal with localized problems. These, “loose structure proponents cited not the requirements of ideological consistency — of enacting participatory democracy in the here and now — but Mississippi field organizers’ need for organizational flexibility.”<sup>501</sup> It was a tactical problem, a problem of direction, an issue with the very heart of the organization: its goals, its dreams, its life choices. And it was problem that no one quite knew how to describe or solve. In the face of uncertainty, people resorted to the familiar lens of ethics versus tactics, prefiguration versus contention. Nevertheless, throughout these debates and difficulties SNCC members continued to discuss their organizational forms in terms that privileged strategic concerns.

After difficult internal processing in 1964 and 1965, SNCC abandoned the explicit commitment to participatory democracy and consensus-oriented procedure, approaching instead a supposedly more ‘radical’ ideal of building power for the movement by assuming a different sense of responsibility for leadership. Just as SNCC had been born in distinction against the authoritarianism in the more-established Southern Civil Rights organizations, in 1965 the move away from loose structure was cast largely in terms of distinguishing themselves from the influence of a “participatory democracy” that had now become largely associated with the white, Northern activists. In this, Polletta argues, we can see a reversal of the traditional sense that there is a clear divide along the lines of strategic capacity versus ethical commitment. “Decentralized

and informal structure here, as in other movements, had facilitated individual initiative and tactical innovation. The source of top-down structure's appeal was not its capacity to yield more efficient outcomes or its consistency with an existing ideology but its symbolic resonance."<sup>502</sup> It is only in the story's repetition, in its transformation into history, that the model of hardliners versus freedom highs has been drilled into memory as determining the shifts in SNCC organizational form. The problem of practical strategy versus utopian ethicality was actually itself part of the problem. That is, the division between prefigurative politics and contentious politics is itself a matter of ideological framing rather than a predetermined real choice.

To break free from the powerful trance created by the dichotomous ideological frame of prefigurative versus contentious politics, we have to recompose our attention on seeing practices, process, ideas, and actions as tools of praxis: more political *doing*, less political *being*. More flexible political action means less rigid political identification. When people get caught up in assuming that they are democratically equal simply due to the quality of their political ideals and structures it can assuage the democratic urge for actually practicing equality. Then people can proudly assuage themselves ("we're so very democratic that we don't even need to be working on that anymore!"), convinced that they are already doing all the egalitarian decision-making they need ("just keep it up and all will be well!"). The same kind of displacement goes on with regard to the struggles of feminism or anti-racism: assuming that feminism has won ("men and women are finally equal, we are all feminists!") or that racism is over ("we're all even now, hooray no more racism!") distracts from any further attention to advancing feminist or anti-racist action. It should never seem that easy; equality is never finished. Whenever it does seem that

easy, then some power of covert coercion is blinding people to the actual status quo inequalities in their collective relations.

That covert power that conserves established notions of standardized equality is more likely to work for a collective action system that privileges one or the other side of dual power. In this section so far I've been mainly considering the follies of a prefigurative idolization, because that is one of the most prevalent characteristics in the tradition of consensus decision-making. The same effect can be derived from idolizing contentious action as well. When a collective action system requires uniformity from its members in order to mount its collective power-to in external struggles, the conservative functions of consensus can help to coordinate and reinforce that uniformity. This is what political theorist Ronald Dworkin worried about when noting that solidarity is "a category that could be used by people with power to compel the allegiance of those without it."<sup>503</sup> The consensus function of assuring collective action solidity works in this way, disregarding the need for prefiguring an internal composition of democratically egalitarian power-over in favour of raising an externally powerful collective action to defeat contentious enemies and advance "the movement." On this point Jodi Dean's 1995 distinction between *conventional solidarity* and *reflective solidarity* proves illuminating as a way to consider, again from another angle, the difference between a creative anarchist solidarity and a conservative anarchist solidity. In the formation of conventional solidarities, Dean writes:

The expectations of members are given, whether rooted in traditional values or engendered by a situation which constructs various individuals as members of a group. Conventional solidarities, then, take their form from a shared adherence to common beliefs of goals which unite people in membership. These goals and beliefs serve as mediations surpassing the actual interconnections among members.

Yet as they serve to bind the group together, these mediations present themselves as delimiting the self understanding of the group. In other words, they provide limits beyond which one *as a member* cannot go.<sup>504</sup>

Solidarities based on exclusive belonging function by categorical exclusions; the group solidifies its own identity by being impermeable to influences and interaction, cut-off from the power circuits that flow beyond its boundaries. Reflective solidarity, on the other hand, does not centralize the interests of members in the same way. Reflective solidarity is a practice of reaching across the boundaries of identity and ideological interests in order to join groups in common actions derived from a reflective process of connecting synthetic collective action systems.

Although the point is commonly made that consensus works best among people who are more or less like-minded, the concept of reflective solidarity suggests that we would do better to apply it as a way to reflectively link minds rather than to consolidate like-mindedness, to discover common ground and create bonds of solidarity rather than to reaffirm common senses and conserve bonds of belonging. In Peter Gelderloos' words, "in working out these practical details we will start from our own experiences and we will develop our own strategies. But anarchy can only benefit from a diversity of experiences and strategies."<sup>505</sup> This has often been the task set for consensus process in situations where there is no prior group identification, as a means to assemble new collective identities by finding common ground among people who do not necessarily share an automatic cultural or tactical like-mindedness. For instance, as sociologist Donatella della Porta recounts, consensus was used to good effect in alter-globalization movement spaces to open new dialogues and spark new alliances:

The Foro Social de Palencia (2008) presents itself as a ‘permanent space for encounters, debates and support for collective action, where ‘decisions are made by consensus’. In fact, the pluralist nature of the forum is positively assessed in its definition as a ‘meeting place of different visions and positions with some common denominator, not an organization that has to reach a unique position.’<sup>506</sup>

In addition to its potential as a solidarity amplification tool (as demonstrated in the Clamshell armories case), this is another general scene where consensus can function usefully to create emergent solidarities that synthesizes “different visions and positions with some common denominator, not an organization that has to reach a unique position.” When used as a “meeting place” technique the consensus process can clear away any preconceived positions and roles which might have predetermined ranks and powers, allowing all people the chance to speak and be heard in open forum. It then facilitates the possibility for a new grouping of those people to emerge, and those effects will have a longterm and unforeseeable impact on all the social interactions in which those people will forever be involved. They can begin to form new bonds of power-with through their communicative association; they can begin to know and understand people they had never known or understood before; they can begin to invent new collective action systems and birth new movements.

Jacques Rancière also depicts a useful model of insurgent performative transience when he describes democracy as responsible for creating emergent *political subjectifications* where there were previously only pre-coded police identity-positions. “Politics is a matter of subjects, or, rather, modes of subjectification. By *subjectification* I mean the production through a series of actions of a body and a capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable within a given field of experience, whose identification is thus part of the reconfiguration of the field of

experience.”<sup>507</sup> Insurgent democracy occurs when a subjectification creates a previously unidentifiable political actor — a wholly new political body and a capacity. Rancière is describing the creation of a new political actor whose very existence depends on the dissensus it manifests when disrupting established codes of power. It exists because of the active and contentious difference it forces into an established social system by becoming a subject that previously had no set place in the institutional order of things. This political subjectification is born in contentious resistance to what Rancière call a “wrong” in the established system which is challenged: “the wrong it exposes cannot be regulated by way of some accord between the parties. It cannot be regulated since the subjects a political wrong sets in motion are not entities to whom such and such has happened by accident, but subjects whose very existence is the mode of manifestation of the wrong.”<sup>508</sup> The emergent collective body generated by the consensus process is this very same kind of subjectification: an agent that was previously nonexistent, brought into being as the power-to manifest a wrong in established codes of power-over.

Insurgent democracy has to be acted by an emergent subjectification, it has to be initiated by a collective action system of some kind, and the consensus decision-making process is an anarchist tool that can produce this subjectification in a particular formation of dual power. Of course, I do not want to suggest that consensus decision-making is the *only* means for manifesting the political subjectification of insurgent democracy, but it can be and has been used in precisely this capacity. Treating consensus process as a political principle of radical democracy tends to overload it with unattainable fantasy idols of who we *should be* because of it, to the point that there is sometimes no room left for the praxis of *doing* anything useful with it. Consensus *as a culture-principle-idol* can be a dangerous ideology that allows conventional solidarity to

conserve *common sensus* interests in a idolized system of established collective action system solidity. Consensus *as a process-tool-ideal* can be valuable for identifying common goals and coordinating them into the reflective solidarity of a synthetically emergent collective action system that can enact the political subjectification of insurgent democracy. The creative power of consensus can be allied with the project of insurgent democracy to find a path of dual power in fighting against established orders of inequality, but the conservative uses of consensus supplies power to established orders of inequality. It's a fine line between these two contradictory uses of the same tool, a line that we need to distinguish more pragmatically. To every job a tool.

#### **(4.2.4) To Every Power a Season**

The dual power tool of emergent consensus for insurgent democracy must be a *doing* rather than a *being*, an *unsettling action* rather than a *settled situation*. For the insurgent democracy perspective, for the practices of reflective solidarity, and for the creative consensus body-without-a-head mode of power — *equality has to be an activity of struggle, not a state of affairs*. This point introduces the idea that the consensus process is not only a specific type of tool with different uses, but that there are specific moment, places, and situations where those different uses of the tool are more applicable.

Sheldon Wolin, an influential American political theorist, urges us to understand democracy as more than a name for institutions and systems. In a vein similar to the insurgent democracy perspective, he too see democracy as something that has to happen “in-between” institutionalized systems and their established codes of order and procedure. He argues that

democracy needs to be reconceived as something other than a form of government: as a mode of being that is conditioned by bitter experience, doomed to succeed only temporarily, but is a recurrent possibility as long as the memory of the political survives. [...] Democracy is a political moment, perhaps *the* political moment, when the political is remembered and re-created. Democracy is a rebellious moment that may assume revolutionary, destructive proportions, or may not.<sup>509</sup>

For Wolin, “democracy thus seems destined to be a moment rather than a form. Throughout the history of political thought virtually all writers emphasize the unstable and temporary character of democracy.”<sup>510</sup> It is in this condition that democracy must be understood as “fugitive” — fleeting, rare, on the run, and rebellious, or, as Jacques Rancière says, “an always provisional accident within the history of forms of domination.”<sup>511</sup> Democracy manifests as the arch nemesis of any managerial, instituted, proceduralized organization, a phenomenon which arises as retaliation to accepted and normalized inequality. This is why, for instance, democratic theorist Nicholas Xenos also says that “the democratic moment must be a moment of transgression of boundaries and not a renewal of them,”<sup>512</sup> a point that again reiterates the difference between creative and conservative consensus: if consensus is to serve the democratic project, it must be a moment of transgression and not a renewal of them; it must be the moment of creating a new collective action system through emergent solidarity, and not the moment of conserving an old collective action system through established solidity.

The creatively emergent mode of the consensus process births a performative anarchist collective action system which exists *only* as this “fugitive moment,” through that “place of caesura” which Miguel Abensour names as the habitat of insurgent democracy. Emergent anarchist solidarity is not good at coding and organizing ongoing systems of complex human

government, it is supposed to generate a singular agency, a body-without-organs, whose entire existence is bound to the specific action which it is born to perform. If the characteristic of transient performativity is accepted and respected then the consensus decision-making process will never become a form, rather than a moment, never move from the place of caesura to a position within a State. It will disintegrate before it can transform from an assemblage of *all ones* into a system of *all One*. Democracy emerges in a place of caesura between States or as the creation of a caesura within a State; it is the interruption of subjects who present a wrong in the established order of the police; a momentous and transient occurrence that rends the coded order of collective action systems, breaks in between States, and interrupts any settled relations of power. The political action of subjectification isn't meant to last: it is the eruption of new power relations, the disorganization of modes of conduct which open collective action systems into their environments. The *all ones* are a temporary and momentous assemblage of a radically egalitarian collective action system that can bring a subjectification to bear on an established system of *all One*. To activate the truly special mode of emergent consensus, the doer is entirely in the doing.

In order to better situate consensus decision-making as a dual power tool, we can focus on how these transient performative moments arise. How can we recognize the time of consensus as a performative fugitive act, locating symptoms for when it is ready to sprout when it as run their course? In the 2011 assembly movements that shaped a wave of radical democratic protest across Europe and North America, consensus-based processes were originally used promisingly to create emergently synthetic collective associations. Initially, consensus-based assembly procedures served these movements well by providing the forum in which everyone could speak

and listen to each other in new ways, so that the process aiding a motley assemblage of different people to build themselves into the solidarity of an emerging collective subjectification. Michael Albert reports an example of this perspective from his experience at the European assemblies:

For example, Greek and Spanish activists said that at assemblies initially people spoke with incredible passion of their plights and desires. Their voices often broke. Their hands shook. Each time someone rose to speak, something real, passionate, and persistent happened. It was enchanting and exciting. People were learning not only new facts and interpretations - and, indeed, that kind of learning was relatively modest - they were also learning new confidence and new modes of engaging with others.<sup>513</sup>

The same tone set the early days of the Occupy movement, where there was a clear self-reflexive awareness that the general assemblies were really focused on creating new political spaces rather than accomplishing contentious political actions. As the Occupy movement made abundantly clear to a baffled mass media, they didn't *demand* anything in particular. Not anything "externally," anyway. They made no assertions or attacks on the authorities, but by occupying public space and making it a political space they created a new subjectification, creating democratic inter-action where there was none before.

However, even where the consensus process first proved to be invigorating and solidarity-producing, we also hear a common story about that spirited enthusiasm turning sour when the goals, activities, and organizational systems of the assemblies became more complex and diverse. Albert noticed this change in his report from Spain, recalling that

after days and then weeks, the flavor of the talks shifted. From being new folks speaking passionately and recounting their reasons for being present and their hopes for their future by delivering deeply felt and quite unique stories, the

speakers shifted toward being more seasoned or habituated folks, who lectured attendees with prepackaged views. The lines of speakers became overwhelmingly male. Their deliveries became overwhelmingly rehearsed. Listening to robotic repetition and frequent predictable and almost text-like ranting got boring and alienating. Sometimes it was even demeaning.<sup>514</sup>

At that point where the “flavor of the talks shifted” those assemblies might have benefited from being able to alter their procedures. If the flavour of a meal shifts for the worse, then you change the recipe. As Albert recounts, after providing the tools for an emergent original openness, the very same procedure increasingly served to solidify old privileges and consolidate established routines of power. Perhaps the original task of “learning new confidence and new modes of engaging with others” — which was so effectively articulated in the early days of open forum assemblies — had been completed? If the tool had done its job, how could we recognize when its moment had passed?

As I’ve already argued, the mode of political action where anarchist solidarity and insurgent democracy are allied *isn’t meant to last*. It serves best as a tool for new beginnings, rather than as a tool for orchestrating lasting institutions. It’s a seasonal tool. So there’s a trick we need to learn: how to smell the changing winds? Well, one way I think we can identify the shifting seasons of consensus decision-making is by looking at who speaks and who counts in the group. As soon as a *count of who belongs* begins to get established in a group, then we should watch out for a shift from the emergent to the established use of the consensus process. In Albert’s report, he signals to this kind of change. It’s a shift that happens when people stop telling each other about *their own* positions and instead begin to tell others what positions *they* should take. It’s a shift that happens when the signals and habits of the process begin to feel like in-group secrets,

when cultural lingo begins to baffle and alienate newcomers. It's a shift that happens when people get accustomed to counting on each other to the point that they discount any others.

In one of its more straightforward manifestations, the count of who belongs will begin to fall in line with the *privilege of in-groups*. When C. Wright Mills spoke of a "power elite" that silently ruled American society he was not concerned with a group that controls everything by means of tyrannical directive. For Mills, the power elite is coordinated by association and networks, it is a special "higher social circle" which determines membership by attributions of belongingness and prestige to grant privileged access to social, economic, and political resources. A power elite, wrote Mills, will "form a more or less compact social and psychological entity; they have become self-conscious members of a social class. People are either accepted into this social class or they are not, and there is a qualitative split, rather than merely a numerical scale, separating them from those who are not elite."<sup>515</sup>

Defining the power elite in this way, Mills wanted to identify how power is hoarded and circulated among associated members to differentiate inside from outside. These power elite circles define their terms of inclusion according to what they exclude, their self-definitions rely on other-exclusions. This sense of in-group/out-group dynamic of power elite control was often reported as a weak-point in the Occupy movement's application of consensus. We hear it loud and clear from this anonymous critic, writing with verve for Occupy's online forum discussion:

The thing they don't tell you about consensus, is that it only works if you're willing to exclude others from it. When faced with a block, it's common for people to use psychological manipulation, threats, invent process to deny that person a vote, or even pressure them to leave the group entirely. Oftentimes when such people don't get their way, they'll leave the group themselves. Consensus invites the most awful

type of conflict because there can be no agreeing to disagree. But at the same time consensus also quells the more constructive forms of dissent because most considerate and rational people aren't masochistic enough to welcome the hatred and backlash inherent in blocking a proposal.<sup>516</sup>

When everybody is a part of the in-group, then everybody will be more likely to be heard *and* have their say. But this is often because they're all saying fundamentally the same thing anyway, they are repeating an established *common sensus* on fundamental moral values to reaffirm their social circle's own biases and opinions. And, of course, everybody can't always be a part of the in-group. The in-group defines itself against those who are labelled outsiders and others, and the power of uniformity is often evoked unintentionally as a way to differentiate between those who belong and those who don't, those who can be a part of the power collective and those who will be separated from counting as "the people."

In anarchist situations, where there is no formally labelled and specific authority, the power of *religio* will have to increase its hold on matters of moral commitment, the socially constructed limits of an in-group's *common sensus* will have more power than usual to define the range of considerable decisions, moral commitments, and the range of possible punitive powers needed to dissuade dissenters. A well-cited example of this type of problem has been highlighted in Joreen's critique of her experience in American feminist cooperative movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Organizing based on in-group relationships was an explicit focus of early 1970s feminist movement that saw the opportunity to augment feminist power in the egalitarian, non-hierarchical, and anti-patriarchal relations of friendship or "sisterhood." In the process, they learned some lessons about power. In a widely influential essay from the early 1970s, Joreen

testified that the informal associations of social privilege can lead to a kind of “tyranny of structurelessness,” which presents a new set of dangers.

If the movement continues to deliberately not select who shall exercise power, it does not thereby abolish power. All it does is abrogate the right to demand that those who do exercise power and influence be responsible for it. If the movement continues to keep power as diffuse as possible because it knows it cannot demand responsibility from those who have it, it does not prevent any group or person from totally dominating.<sup>517</sup>

The tyranny of rule by formal authority is one kind of power, but the rules of in-group friendship circles and sisterhood dynamics conduct another. The more an organization “adheres to an ideology of ‘structurelessness’, the more vulnerable it is to being taken over by a group of political comrades.”<sup>518</sup> As feminist political theorist Anne Phillips has said, “the problem with power that is based on friendship networks is that it does not look like power, and is therefore rarely brought to account.”<sup>519</sup>

In consensus decision-making principles of open expression and free speech are crucial tenets. Take, as an example, this prefigurative plea for a cultural transformation of speech patterns from Seeds for Change manual: “Making decisions by consensus is based on openness — this means learning to openly express both our desires (what we’d like to see happening), and our needs (what we have to see happening order to support a decision).”<sup>520</sup> They want consensus process to help people develop a way of conversing that is different from the hard-edged, bargaining business of political argumentation towards a more open, dialogical form of conversation. Within consensus, there is a near-universal assertion that a proper process must assure everyone has the right to speak and that everyone is responsible for listening, such that all participants are granted

an equal opportunity to contribute to the decision-making process and everyone has an equal say in the final decision. This principle is always forefront in the manuals, as when the Occupy Wall Street General Assembly Guide states that “there is no single leader or governing body of the General Assembly — everyone’s voice is equal. Anyone is free to propose an idea or express an opinion as part of the General Assembly.”<sup>521</sup> Or, for another version, the Act-Up guide to consensus says that “the fundamental right of consensus is for all people to be able to express themselves in their own words and of their own will.”<sup>522</sup>

Consensus is primarily about talk: it is a power of building solidarity through speaking and listening. There is power in building new solidarities from hearing people talk out their convictions, and people change their minds by being forced to actually listen. Reflecting on the use of consensus at the Sleepless Goat Co-operative Cafe in Kingston Ontario, former co-op member P. Quick marks this point as the primary benefit of their process:

The main advantage of consensus decision-making as it plays out in the Goat, as opposed to say voting, is when there are concerns, you end up talking about them to the point where everyone understands clearly why we're making a decision that we're making. It can take a lot of time but you get into all kinds of different issues, and often someone will be against something at the beginning of a meeting that everyone else is keen on, and if that person sticks to their guns and articulates themselves, you'll have situations where everyone else will come over to their side, not because they're blocking a decision but because they're convinced. In another situation, you never would have listened to the details of that issue. Sometimes that can be really tedious, if you're talking about fucking peanut butter or whatever, but sometimes it ends up being really important and you're glad you took the time to talk about the issue, even if it seems small.<sup>523</sup>

On the other hand, the priority of talk also provokes this crucial weakness in the consensus process. All that emphasis on “self-expression” highlight a crucial aspect of cultural bias that emerges from the in-group’s ideal. As any observer of the differential effect of race, gender, class, age, or dis/ability (among other such distinctions of status and privilege) in decision-making scenarios will attest, the *formal structural* “right to speak and be heard” cannot force equality upon cultural habits of “value and support” which grant certain voices more or less impact according to the *informal affective* power relationships that constitute the reality of group dynamics. We must remember that procedurally assuring everyone is *able* to speak does not mean that everyone will actually speak or that anyone will actually listen. The structural rule of equal access to deliberative expression may indeed create a situation where all *can speak-up and be heard*, but it does not necessarily affect the underlying power relations, ethical orientations, and cultural habits which are so influential in determining who *has their say and is listened-to*.

Karl Deutsch once defined power as “the ability to afford not to learn.”<sup>524</sup> This point plays perfectly as a description of the informal in-group privilege which is heightened in anti-authoritarian systems like consensus decision-making, where friendship circles and insider status can dominate a collective action system simply by the force of familiarity and experience. The in-group is the in-group because it is *in the know*. Of course not everyone who participates in a consensus decision-making process (or who *could* participate but might choose not to) is familiar with the prevalent cultural background, and everyone won’t be equally prepared for its expected norms of proper dialogue. Kristin Becker, for instance, recounts the experience of marginalization from anarchist meetings in this way. “When their ignorance and refusal to listen and process what I say causes me to repeat myself (often over and over until I just quit), it is very

obvious that they do not want to hear and process what I am saying, and that they would rather that I not speak at all.”<sup>525</sup> If you don’t say something in a way that other people want to hear it, then sometimes they simply won’t hear it. Then, your potential influence on decision-making power is lost; in one ear and out the other. As Anne Phillips expresses, “decision-making based on meetings is almost invariably weighted toward those with the confidence to articulate their position.”<sup>526</sup> The models of speech and interaction which people assume to be proper for confident consensus decision-making skills are derived from the tangled threads of that largely white, middle-class, feminist, Christian and 60s counter-culture inflected context of the 1970s social movements that birthed them. Today, as is in evidence at Occupy, the practice reigns in a predominantly white, educated, progressive grassroots activist tradition which has its own cultural and technical expectations for proper speaking and listening habits. These cultural assumptions end up defining vague informal limits of in-group access to the power of speech, which is so crucial to the egalitarian success of the process.

The capacity for consensus to operate as an insurgent democratic tool depends on addressing these abstract and amorphous power differentiations, where some people fail to be counted and are excluded by so many means of silent elision. If people are silenced, uncounted, excluded, or subdued within a group, then those people have to wage insurgent democracy from the inside in order to break new subjectivations of equality onto the scene of their own collective action system. If it becomes too difficult for alternative voices to speak and be heard, then the possibility of emergent inter-actions falters. In order to challenge such effects of established power solidity, the power-less have to stand up and interrupt and the powerful have to shut up

and listen: a moment of interruptive manifestation from those who have been uncoun­ted and a moment of silent reflection from those who have coun­ted.

However, as a process of internal interruption, we have to be aware of how to best nurture the manifestation of insurgent democracy in a way that won't irrevocably split our movements. The question of insurgent democracy is not only a problem of contentious action — how to empower an interruption that can crack new space into external systems of domination. It is also a problem of prefigurative politics — how to construct collective action system dynamics that can nurture and conduct insurgent democratic capacities for self-reflexive openness to change within our own modes of politics. We can open ourselves to insurgent democratic progress by engaging actively in building reflexive solidarity, understanding and making connection between previously separated positions, connecting old identities to make new powers. Consensus can actually serve these tasks by providing a means of focusing on synthetic communication which can help people hear from others and recognize people *as* others, in ways that they may never have before. But this communication will only be democratically insurgent if those who are partaking in it are self-aware of the prejudices inherent in their own social power systems, and strive to reopen cracks in their own established collective solidity.

Maybe this suggests a lesson that should seem simpler than the ongoing debate between those two guys would have us believe. If we shut out the terms of their binary bickering, we can think more pragmatically about how tools like consensus decision-making are neither the idol of democratic perfection nor the devil of democratic destruction. Yes, consensus decision-making is often used as a means to focus on prefigurative preoccupations that build group identity, at the beginning of movements when spirits are high. But, no, this isn't *necessarily* a bad thing. There

is a time and place for prefigurative preoccupations. In the great array of tasks and programmes which feed the anarchist radical democratic project, mightn't there be room for *that moment*? If it is going to be deployed in alliance with insurgent democratic action, then consensus should be used for a transient, performative, fugitive moment. The Occupy movement intensely demonstrated the way an anarchist group can begin with radically open intentions for reflexive democratic solidarity, but then close itself off when the established solidity of in-group privilege tilts into an overemphasis on the powers of belonging and uniformity, wherein "maintaining that Occupy is leaderless only leaves its leaders invisible, unaccountable and no matter how well intended, free to push a course that will isolate the movement."<sup>527</sup> Creative opening can and should be leaderless, but consistent organizing requires some kind of collectively appropriate type of leadership system. Nathan Schneider, for instance, quotes antinuclear activist Bill Moyer's observation that "an 'anarchistic loose structure' such as Occupy Wall Street's general assembly can last in a movement for only about the first three months, while adrenaline is high."<sup>528</sup> After the initial rush of collective unity, "such a structure 'tends to cause excessive inefficiency, participant burnout, and group domination by the most domineering and oppressive participants.'"<sup>529</sup> A key to using this dangerous tool safely: always remember, this too shall pass.

The project for anarchist dual power requires both prefigurative and contentious political activities in balance, but "balance" doesn't mean that each side always keeps perfectly even on a steady-keel flat line. It's not like the balance of a tightrope walk, it's more like the balance of a homeostatic regulation: a systemic process of fluctuating activities that balance an overall system within optimum limits. A good homeostatic process is responsible for adjusting its power dynamics to fit the challenges of various circumstances and tasks; it doesn't keep everything in

locked equivalent ratio, it adjusts constantly to find the most powerful operating system for the given environmental conditions and the practical challenges at hand. There can be moments where we give one side of dual power precedent over the other, such that their forces are ultimately coordinated in an overall ongoing balancing act.

The needs of a group will change; the group itself will change. The procedures and tools of collective action should be adjusted to engage those changes, and although consensus may continue to serve well for some problems, its role in the overall praxis of deliberation must always be revisable. The prefigurative and the contentious powers of consensus decision-making can align in the task of creating anarchist collective solidarities, but once those solidarities have attained a more permanent organizational form, the anarchist radical democratic moment has passed. My point here is basically that by recognizing a difference between how consensus functions for creative emergence and for conservative establishment, we should emphasize that its special power works optimally for creating emergent political subjectivations that can act in the in-between places of a movement as transient, performative, role that has its season. Knowing when to quit with consensus is just as important as knowing when to start. If it gets too comfy and settled, it will transform into the conservative established function. We should not organize, manage, or govern longterm collective action systems by consensus alone, in the same way that insurgent democracy is not a practice that organizes, manages, or governs institutional democratic structures. There are other tasks and other tools for the complex array of power interactions required across the overall balancing act of radical democratic anarchist movements. Insurgent democratic anarchist solidarities may be one tool of dual power, and a special one that

fills in the gaps between institutionalized states, but we need many more to fill out the whole praxis of a homeostatic dual power balancing act. To every power a season.

### **(4.3) Empowering Anarchist Radical Democratic Dual Power**

It is foolish to glorify one tool to the point where it is expected to solve each and every problem, and it is just as foolish to demonize one tool so that it cannot help to solve anything. Powerful tools are also dangerous tools. As a chainsaw is both powerful and a dangerous, so too is consensus decision-making. We don't ban them outright because they could be used inappropriately. We teach people how to use them properly, safely, at the right moments and for the right jobs.

In this frame, we have to understand consensus *as a collective action power tool* insofar as it can empower *and* hinder the larger project of anarchist radical democratic dual power. Like any tool, its usefulness will always depend on *how and when* it is used. In this chapter I have inspected how and when consensus decision-making tends to be used across its two polar opposite functions: as a tool for creating emergent solidarity or as a tool for conserving established solidarity. For enhancing anarchist radical democratic dual power, we have to improve our ability to use it for creating emergent solidarities and decrease our reliance on using it to conserve established solidarities. To each job a tool and to each power a season. The dual power of emergent solidarity is a unique and special capacity in the consensus decision-making process that can be especially allied with insurgent democratic tasks: that's power we need to practice when we are learning how and when to use the consensus process.

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<sup>502</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>503</sup> Ronald Dworkin, "A Year Later, the Debate Goes On," in *The New York Times Book Review* (October 25, 1992): 39

<sup>504</sup> Jodi Dean, "Reflective Solidarity," *Constellations*, 2 (1995): 115.

<sup>505</sup> Peter Gelderloos, "Lines in the Sand - Part I: You Have to Do it My Way," The Anarchist Library, accessed February 22, 2013, <http://anarchalibrary.blogspot.ca/2010/10/lines-in-sand-part-i-you-have-to-do-it.html>

<sup>506</sup> Donatella della Porta, "Consensus in Movements," in *Democracy in Social Movements*, ed. Donatella della Porta (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 80.

<sup>507</sup> Rancière, *Dis-agreement*, 35.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>509</sup> Sheldon Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton, Princeton University Press: 1996), 43.

<sup>510</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>511</sup> Rancière, "Ten These on Politics," 35.

<sup>512</sup> Nicholas Xenos, "Momentary Democracy," in *Democracy and Vision: Sheldon Wolin and the Vicissitudes of the Political*, ed. Aryeh Botwinick & William E. Connolly (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 34.

<sup>513</sup> Michael Albert, "Occupy to Self-Manage," Autonomedia, accessed February 20, 2014, <http://interactivist.autonomedia.org/node/33609>

<sup>514</sup> Albert, "Occupy to Self-Manage," <http://interactivist.autonomedia.org/node/33609>

<sup>515</sup> C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, New ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 11.

<sup>516</sup> Anonymous, "Occupiers! Stop Using Consensus!" Occupy Wall Street, last modified February 14, 2013, accessed May 29, 2013, <http://occupywallst.org/forum/occupiers-stop-using-consensus/>

<sup>517</sup> Joreen, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," in *Radical Feminism*, ed. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle, 1973), 297.

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

<sup>519</sup> Anne Phillips, *Engendering Democracy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 134.

<sup>520</sup> "Consensus Decision-Making," Seeds for Change, <http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/consensus>.

<sup>521</sup> "General Assembly Guide," Occupy Wall Street, accessed February 16, 2014, <http://www.nycga.net/resources/general-assembly-guide/>

<sup>522</sup> "Consensus Decision Making," ActUp: AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, accessed June 13, 2013, <http://www.actupny.org/documents/CDdocuments/Consensus.html>

<sup>523</sup> Affinity Project, "Reflections on the Sleepless Goat Workers' Co-operative," Indymedia, last modified April 17, 2009, accessed September 20, 2012, <http://news.infoshop.org/article.php?story=20090417134547510>

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<sup>524</sup> K. W. Deutsch, *The Nerves of Government: Models of Political Communication and Control* (New York: Free Press, 1966), 111.

<sup>525</sup> Kristin Bricker, “You want to know why I don't go to your fucking meetings anymore?” Anarcha Library, accessed May 28, 2013, <http://anarchalibrary.blogspot.ca/2010/09/you-want-to-know-why-i-dont-go-to-your.html>

<sup>526</sup> Phillips, *Engendering Democracy*, 127.

<sup>527</sup> Mark Vorpahl, “The Struggle for Leadership Within “Leaderless” Occupy,” Indymedia DC, accessed April 30, 2013, <http://dc.indymedia.org/newswire/display/152745/index.php>

<sup>528</sup> Nathan Schneider, “Breaking up With Occupy,” *The Nation*, last modified September 11, 2013, accessed March 14, 2015, <http://www.thenation.com/article/176142/breaking-occupy?page=0,2>

<sup>529</sup> *Ibid.*

## 5) Conclusions

We can learn a lot about how to do radical democracy better if we can begin think more tactically about our power praxis. Francesca Polletta's optimism about the history and its potentials still encourages:

Today, activists are moving once again toward complex understandings of equality. But they are more alert to the inequalities that are built into conventional understandings of equal treatment, more sensitive to the liabilities of informality in relations among those unequal in status, and, at the same time, more attuned to the necessity of forging egalitarian relationships as well as rules. Therein lies great possibility.<sup>530</sup>

We have work to do, searching for ways to actualize this "great possibility." I hope that in this project I have contributed something to that possibility, something that can fertilize the many quest(ion)s of anarchist power.

### (5.1) Praxis: For the Anarchist Toolbox of Power

Treating the consensus process as a *tool* rather than as an *ideal* is a vitally important step towards using it better. The issue of consensus process is thus posed as a set of technical problems: How to refine it as a precision instrument, as a particular means? When and where is it a useful power? When and where is it a dangerous power? How does this tool fit in with all the others?

This last point is especially crucial. A good toolbox has many tools, each with its own jobs and seasons. In this project have tried to articulate a theory of power that supports this way of thinking technically about consensus decision-making as a power-tool for anarchist collective action systems that is specifically useful when creating emergent anarchist solidarity and

especially dangerous when conserving established anarchist solidity. In either use, it is still the same tool — a special anarchist mode of powering collective action systems. The “good” and the “bad” effects are particular to its applications. Using consensus as the one and only ideally utopian radical democratic process, as has been commonly the case over its modern history, is like making a really big hammer and then saying: because this is the most powerful hammer of all time, all construction projects shall henceforth use only this hammer. That hammer may indeed be very useful; it may even, in fact, be the very best hammer ever created. But it’s still *just* a big hammer. It’s definitely not the only tool we should ever use. Any complex revolutionary project built like that will be a rickety unstable mess. Consensus is not a utopian hammer. It is not the be-all and end-all of the whole revolutionary story, but it *can* be an important part of the revolutionary repertoire. We will need to continue to detail when, where, how, why, and for whom consensus is usefully applicable for generating emergent synthetic collective unity, and when and where it is abusefully applied to control and conserve collective uniformity.

Radical democracy is not the be-all and end-all of the revolutionary story. Anarchism is not. Insurgent democracy is not. But... they can all be gathered together to make a more powerful revolutionary toolbox. For the project of anarchist radical democratic dual power, consensus decision-making should be thought of in this way: as a unique tool of anarchist solidarity which should be brought out of the toolbox whenever groups need to institute an emergent autonomous solidarity for their collective action system and/or interrupt the regular course of their own collective action systems with the new influence of interruptive voices.

## **(5.2) Praxis: For the Anarchist Quest(ion) of Power**

In this dissertation, I have constructed a theory of power that analyzes the dynamic conduct of collective action systems according to the concepts of power-to, power-over, and power-with. This idea of power ceases to allow the concept to stand in for binary, dichotomous ideals of agency/structure, internal/external, and good/evil distinctions, and instead begins to pose the problems of power as an essential matter of the struggle to determine human collective self-constitution. By considering power as a function of *conduct of conduct, communicative causation, and collective control* the commonly used anarchist conceptual format of power-to, power-over, and power-with can be made more useful for describing various facets of collective action systems and their inter-actions. As long as we treat the idea of “power” as incompatibly split between agency and structure, between the external relations and the internal relations the dichotomy of power-to and power-over will require that the prefigurative work is done only upon “us” and the contentious fight is waged only upon “them.”

My basic point, the crux around which all the other supporting concepts are tightened, is that power *is* collective action. In one way or another, willingly or unwillingly, to the benefit of one or to the benefit of many, humans act collectively, taking part in common projects, altering each other’s future and present possible actions through ceaseless inter-action of allegiances and coalitions, struggles and confrontations. Power always has a dimension of coordination and alliance (producing anarchist collective action systems and modes of inter-action) and a dimension of resistance and struggle (fighting against anarchist collective action systems and modes of inter-action). The anarchist quest(ion)s of power are always both prefigurative and

contentious, always about how to make a network of interlocking dual powers, always about producing anarchist powers that can resist archist powers, even within their own articulations. In order to devise methods of empowering the anarchist project we have to be more aware of the difficulties and the challenges involved in the inseparable complex bonds by which power-to, power-over, and power-with can be used as an analytic complex to identify and map power relations in every dynamic of collective action system interactions.

This perspective on power requires that we cease to think of the anarchist project for radical democratic dual power as a quest(ion) of accepting or rejecting power in general. It's rather a question of determining *how* we organize our power, how we influence one another, trying to make the constraints we expect from each other as equal and as free as possible. Power is the social quest(ion), the quest(ion) of sociality: *how* can we coordinate power-to, power-over, and power-with in collective action systems that help us to conduct each other in mutually equal and communicatively responsive dynamics?

In a word, this is the anarchist quest(ion) of power: *how?* Like the project of radical democracy, it should always be a question invested in an ongoing quest. I hope that I have contributed some power to keep the anarchist quest(ion)s going on. Word out.

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<sup>530</sup> Francesca Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2002), 25.

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