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Towards a Futurology of the Present

Notes on Writing, Movement, and Time

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Has there ever been a revolution without its musicians, artists, and writers? Could we imagine the Zapatista movement, for example, without its poetry and lyricism? At this moment, I am writing from the specific location of the west coast of Australia, on land known to Aboriginal Australians as Beeliar Boodjar. Across the Indian Ocean, remarkable things are happening in North Africa. I listen on the internet to the songs of freedom being sung in Tahrir Square, as well as to the young hip-hop artists who provided the soundtrack to the revolution in Tunisia. But their YouTube videos are not the only things going viral. Significantly, their mutant desires, of which their music is an expression, are also beginning to ripple outwards. I feel it here at my kitchen table as I type, as viscerally as the caffeine flowing through my body. I also see it on the evening news in Spain and Greece. Perhaps the alterglobalisation movement never died, but was simply laying in wait. Perhaps we are only at the beginning. And perhaps there is little real difference in our movements between making music and making change; between the creation of art and the creation of new social relations through our activisms. Our common art is the crafting of new ways of being, of seeing, of valuing; in short, the cultivation of new forms of life, despite and beyond the deadening, ossified structures all around us.

What I would like to focus on most especially in this piece is the art of writing; more specifically, on the relationship between nonfiction writing and social movements. Movement produces writing which produces movement which produces writing, and so the loop turns; a constant feedback loop between action and reflection, experience and expression. To the relationship between writing and movement, I would like to introduce the added factor of time. Until very recently, radical writing practices have tended to operate in accordance with, and uncritically reproduce, some very particular ideas about time. One such idea is that it is compartmentalised into discrete units. Another is that it is linear and moves only in one direction. These understandings are part and parcel of Gottfried Hegel's dialectical logic,² which, via Karl Marx, has become the unthinking, taken-for-granted folk theory of generations of activists. They are also part of Enlightenment, or modernist, rationality more broadly – that particular way of knowing that has predominated across the world for the past few centuries. Linear, compartmentalised time has meant that we have come to see past, present, and future as three separate things – a division that lies at the root of the means-ends distinc-

¹ Janis Joplin, 'Ball and chain' in *Janis Joplin's Greatest Hits*, CBS Records, 1973.

² See Gottfried Hegel, *Phenomenology of spirit*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977 [1807].

tion in traditional leftist politics. It is only when present and future are treated as mutually exclusive entities that means and ends can be regarded likewise. Furthermore, for Hegel and Marx, one must always negate in order to create; that is, the present must firstly be negated before the future is ever able to come into being.³ Revolutionary politics is therefore conceived of in purely negative terms, and the job of building a new world deferred until after the revolution. Social movements become equivalent to war rather than creation. When the ends justify the means, the present effectively becomes sacrificed at the altar of The Future – and this for the sake of utopian designs fabricated in the minds of a self-appointed few.

The kind of temporal sensibility outlined above lies at the heart of the manifesto genre.⁴ It seems today, however, that people have grown tired of manifestos. The same is true for any such exhortation from above of what people should or should not be doing. My argument is that the present context of postmodernity⁵ de-

³ As the Hegelian philosopher Alexandre Kojève put it: 'Time in which the Future takes primacy can be realized, can exist, only provided that it negates or annihilates'. See Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the reading of Hegel*, Basic Books, New York, 1969, p. 136. Hegel's ideas on negation are drawn, in no small part, from physics: 'In modern physical science the opposition, first observed to exist in magnetism as polarity, has come to be regarded as a universal law pervading the whole of nature' (Hegel, *Phenomenology of spirit*, p. 223). Here he takes the positive-negative opposition found in electrical and magnetic phenomena and adapts it to social relations, elevating it as a mechanical law governing all of history.

⁴ See, for example, Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *The communist manifesto*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992 [1848]; Michael Albert, *Moving forward: Program for a participatory economy*, AK Press, San Francisco, 2000; and George Monbiot, *Manifesto for a new world order*, New Press, New York, 2004. The manifestos of the twentieth century avant-gardes (Futurist, Surrealist, Situationist, and so on) are perfectly exemplary too – with the exception, perhaps, of the *Dada manifesto* of 1918, which was more a parody of the manifesto form.

⁵ Postmodernity, our current global-historical context, is inseparable from those material processes associated with globalisation. The intensification of these processes began to be acutely felt from the early 1970s onwards, whereby the fates of once-disparate locales have become inextricably bound up with one another – not just through the expansion of capitalism, but also through mass migration, transnational activism, and the like. These trans-border ties, however, are but a subset of the wider phenomenon in the contemporary postmodern era of what we might call the *proliferation of transversalities*. Transversal, or cross-categorical, linkages now cut across all manner of previously compartmentalised territories of difference, whether these be nations, ethnicities, academic disciplines, or what have you. The modernist map of the world, in which both time and space were carved up into neat categories, often presumed natural and eternal, is now falling apart. Discrete insides and outsides simply no longer make sense in a world of interpenetrating networks. This means that the lodestars of the Enlightenment by which the Left historically navigated are now all being called into question. In their place, new *post-leftist* sensibilities are being forged, including, most significantly for the discussion here, novel formulations of time. This idea of the Post-Left will be the subject of an upcoming article. For more on the concept of transversality, meanwhile, see Félix Guattari, *Soft subversions: Texts and interviews 1977–1985*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2009.

transformation is not to be taken as mere metaphor, however. What he calls for is a merging of art with life, his contention being that global warming and the other great issues of our times cannot be adequately addressed 'without a mutation of mentality, without promoting a new art of living in society'.⁷¹ To the ends of forging a more habitable and convivial present, the cross-fertilisations between artistic and activist practices need to continue proliferating, and creativity in general must remain free to flourish. Just as the economic crisis in Argentina in 2001 was quickly and creatively responded to by way of a slew of liberatory initiatives at the grassroots (including the occupied factory movement discussed earlier), the same is now happening in response to the current economic crisis, albeit at a global scale. In these conditions, the futurology of the present is needed now more than ever. The question becomes whether to resign ourselves to the life-denying ossification of creativity under capitalism and the traditional Left alike, or, to liberate life wherever it is imprisoned and to participate passionately and deliberately in the production of the new.

we originally intended. It must furthermore be stressed that human subjectivity does not exist on some separate plane of reality as René Descartes presumed, but must rather be seen to be part of matter.

⁷¹ Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, p. 20.

becomes creativity per se, not the mere fulfilment of a telos. This is an idea I characterised earlier in terms of drawing, rather than merely colouring-in. The blank sketchbook knows no *a priori* designs; only the *a posteriori* marks that we leave behind as we move. In the realm of activism, this sensibility is embodied in the practice of prefigurative politics – a break not only from the cult of negation, but also from the idea that revolution has to mean fulfilling some programme handed down from on high. As Graeber writes, ‘we’re all already revolutionaries when we make something genuinely new’.⁶⁹ What this means for radical writing, meanwhile, is to do away with manifestos and instead tune our attention into the profound creativity everywhere in our midst. Unlike in the manifesto tradition, the futurology of the present does not prescribe a single monolithic future, but tries instead to articulate the many alternative futures continually emerging in the perpetual present. The goal of such an endeavour is to make visible the living, breathing alternatives all around us, while at the same time fomenting an immanent hope that can spread virally and be enacted in other places elsewhere.

To sacrifice today in the name of an illusory tomorrow is just not the point anymore. It is for this reason that I chose to open with those extraordinary words from Janis Joplin – *tomorrow never happens*. The point is to draw, not simply to colour-in or fulfill some pre-ordained utopian future. It is to continually re-invent reality from within reality, rather than from some external, transcendental standpoint such as that mystical realm where invisible hands and hidden gods reside. As an aside, it has occurred to me, as I sit here at my kitchen table punching out these final words, what a happy coincidence it is that the names Janis and Janus bear such a striking resemblance to one another. If I was a visual artist (not just a writer-cum-artist *manqué*), I would no doubt enjoy experimenting with ways to combine the two in some sort of installation – perhaps a stone bust of Janus, singing in the unmistakably raw and passionate voice of one of the legends of the hippie movement. But it matters not that I am no artist in any formal sense, since each of us are already *artists of the present* in our own ways. ‘One creates new modalities of subjectivity in the same way that an artist creates new forms from the palette’, writes Guattari.⁷⁰ The parallel he draws between art and social

⁶⁹ Graeber, ‘Hope in common’, p. 4.

⁷⁰ Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, p. 7. To interpret Guattari here as saying that the production of novelty is simply a straightforward matter of human intent and free will would be gravely mistaken. Becomings can only occur through ‘heterogenesis’ (pp. 33–57); that is, through a multiplicity of elements in symbiosis. In the case of multiplicities in which human beings play a part, subjectivity is certainly one ingredient in the mix, but it does not assume the role of primary causal determinant. There is always an unpredictability to heterogenesis and we often we end up with entirely different outcomes to what

mands of radical writers a fundamental rethinking of their (our) *modus operandi*. I will, in this article, present a critique not just of the manifesto, but also of the jeremiad – another one of the literary forms most commonly produced by radical writers. Where the manifesto is concerned with the future, the jeremiad centres on the present. The intention of the latter, however, is usually only to serve as a diagnostic description upon which a prescription must be founded; an ‘is’ that must be followed by an ‘ought’. In this way, we are hence led back into the domain of the manifesto. But what happens to radical writing once we reject those dichotomies upon which the jeremiad-manifesto distinction is predicated – namely, those of is-ought, means-ends, and present-future? What happens when the writer treats the present and future not as two separate things, but as conjoined in an indivisible flow within which means and ends are consonant? What I would like to propose, then, is a new writerly practice; one which I have chosen to call the *futurology of the present*.

Such a practice would involve an unearthing of the many living futures constantly coming into being in the present. Unlike the jeremiad, it does not solely describe *what is*, but also *what is becoming*. In other words, it entails not simply ‘a negation of what exists, but also an affirmation of what springs forth’.⁶ And it does not prescribe a single path forward, as with the manifesto, but tries instead to reveal the multifarious pathways fanning outwards from any given moment. It starts with the novel innovations and creative insurgencies happening everywhere in our midst, and from there works to build affinities between them. In this endeavour, I find inspiration in Rebecca Solnit’s assertion that ‘the revolution exists in little bits everywhere, but not much has been done to connect its dots. We need to say that there are alternatives being realized all around us and theorize the underlying ideals and possibilities’.⁷ This is, of course, an endeavour that necessarily requires a heightened sensitivity toward those ‘moments when things do not yet have a name’⁸; in short, toward *newness*. The new here is not meant to mean the same thing as ‘fashionable’, but rather refers to those becomings that are constitutive of alternative realities.⁹ This kind of sensibility has become especially important of late, given that ours is an era of accelerated social change, pregnant with germinal,

⁶ Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Labor of Dionysus: A critique of the state-form*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1994, p. 6.

⁷ Rebecca Solnit, 2009, ‘The revolution has already occurred’, *The Nation*, viewed 19 April 2009, p. 13.

⁸ Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson & Vassilis Tsianos, *Escape routes: Control and subversion in the 21st century*, Pluto Press, London, 2008, p. xiii.

⁹ Gilles Deleuze, ‘What is a dispositif?’, in T.J. Armstrong (ed), *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1992, p. 163.

as-yet-unnamed phenomena. One cannot continue imposing anachronistic grids upon our ever-complexifying present without exacting an extremely violent and myopic reductionism. Instead, as Félix Guattari writes, the upheavals that define our current conditions of existence call for a method attuned 'towards the future and the emergence of new social and aesthetic practices'.¹⁰ My proposal for a futurology of the present is one attempt to concretely think through what such a method might look like. I have certainly not been alone in these efforts. Besides Solnit, other fellow travellers include the members of Colectivo Situaciones whose practice of 'militant research' they characterise as the search for 'emerging traces of a new sociability'.¹¹ Consider too the mode of ethnographic practice proposed by the anarchist anthropologist, David Graeber. One role 'for a radical intellectual', he writes, might be 'to look at those who are creating viable alternatives, try to figure out what might be the larger implications of what they are (already) doing, and then offer those ideas back, not as prescriptions, but as contributions, possibilities – as gifts'.¹²

As has already been hinted at, the articulation of these ideas will necessarily require a confrontation with Hegelian dialectics and 'the damage it has caused, and continues to cause in political movements'.¹³ One of the principle reasons for this is that, to really understand the future appearing in the present, it is necessary to strip away the sedimented habits of thought under which becomings are subsumed or rendered invisible. As will be seen over the course of this essay, Hegel's method could be considered as precisely one of these habits (certainly, capitalism an issue here too, but I take it for granted that my readers are already convinced of this). My contention is that even those who do not consider themselves as having anything to do with Marx or Hegel still unwittingly reproduce many of their assumptions. Indeed, as far as traditional forms of radical politics are concerned, the Hegelian-Marxist dialectical schema has become the Sun around which all the other heavenly bodies orbit. For 150 years, we believed this Sun would give us clarity and deliver us from darkness to light. It turns out, however, that it has only served to obscure more than it has revealed. All those other stars, old and new, that have been shielded from view by the blinding, sun-soaked sky are today

¹⁰ Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An ethico-aesthetic paradigm*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1995, p. 12

¹¹ Colectivo Situaciones, 2003, 'On the researcher-militant', *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies*, viewed 28 January 2011, , p. 3.

¹² David Graeber, *Fragments of an anarchist anthropology*, Prickly Paradigm Press, Chicago, 2004, p. 12.

¹³ Maurizio Lazzarato, 'Multiplicity, totality, politics', *Parrhesia*, iss. 9, 2010, p. 24.

trinary. Jeremiad writers and documentary realists are amongst those who continue to enslave their creative sensibilities to the negative, their practice bound by an unthinking adherence to Hegelian folk theories. Their overarching imperative of needing to first negate the present means that they fail to appreciate the creativity happening all around them. Blinded by the Sun of Hegel, they lose sight all those other stars out there; those ideas, practices, and intimations of alternative futures continually coming into being in our midst. Once we are able to regain our vision, our actions in the present cease to be rendered simply as means to an end, but instead become 'means without end'⁶⁸ – a protean creativity and endless becoming that knows no discrete temporal stages, no telos, no hidden god. When means and ends become discordant, we forget that both are in fact immanent within the perpetual present. Creativity needs to be able to flourish, and to do so it must be liberated from negation. This is the place of means without end, of prefigurative politics, of the futurology of the present, and of all art that ceases to become abstracted from life and instead becomes life itself.

Having just discussed the possibility of creation beyond negation, I will now direct my critical gaze to *creation beyond teleology*. To free temporality from the telos of linear time is to do away with the idea that there is any kind of intrinsic point to history. Earlier, I recounted a Facebook debate I had with one particular Marxist who insisted that slavery was a necessary stage in human history. In this case, the African peoples brought to the Americas were quite literally the slaves of someone else's future. This trans-Atlantic trade in human lives, however, was a contingent and non-inevitable event, not a progression along a linear timeline toward some ultimate telos – no matter whether the telos of colonial masters or Marxist historiographers. For the prophets of the hidden god of History to naturalise the entire past as inevitable only makes them the strange bedfellows of the slave-masters. And their naturalisation of the future only makes all of us slaves, condemned to playing catch-up with their version of what the future should look like.

In this schema, there can never be anything new, since everything is already given *a priori*. The future is foreordained and simply awaits realisation. Only when we can unmoor ourselves from hidden gods, illusory tomorrows, and other such stultifying ideas, can we really embrace creativity and appreciate the production of novelty on its own terms. From the instant that the god of History is dethroned by Janus, infinite horizons fan out in all directions. And our creativity suddenly

⁶⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *Means without end: Notes on politics*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2000.

participant; an element amongst others, animated only by the winds of collective desire that fill her sails.

At this point, yet further unpacking of the concept of creativity will be required. Implicit in this article to date has been an idea of creativity defined in opposition to two separate, albeit related, aspects of Hegelian dialectics. The first is the primacy that Hegel accords to negation, which relates to the past-present-future trinary of compartmentalised time. The second, meanwhile, is Hegel's faith in an ultimate telos, inextricably related to the notion of linear time. I will discuss each of these in turn, zooming in first of all on *creation beyond negation*, before then turning my attention to *creation beyond teleology*.

It is only owing to the dialectical schema imported into radical politics by Marx that we have come to conceptualise movement practice as war rather than as creation. Had radical politics been based upon an alternative set of premises, the history of the recent past might have looked very different. From today's standpoint, Tristan Tzara's quip in the early twentieth century that 'dialectics kills'⁶⁴ seems strangely prescient of what was to ensue. 'It lives by producing corpses, which lie strewn across an empty field where the wind has ceased to blow', he continued.⁶⁵ Tzara was a key figure in the Dada movement, and what set the Dadaists apart from other avant-garde groups was precisely their staunch anti-Hegelianism. In fact, the *Dada Manifesto* of 1918 was not really a manifesto at all.⁶⁶ Instead, what Tzara produced was a parody of the very manifesto form, mocking his contemporaries for the Hegelian sense of historical self-importance which they accorded themselves.

Tzara's distaste for Hegel was likely to have been inherited from Nietzsche, a well-known influence on Dada. The idea that dialectics kills has echoes of Nietzsche all through it, perhaps no better illustrated than when he affirmed: 'We have art in order not to die of the truth'.⁶⁷ For Hegel, truth meant dialectics and the law of negation, to which Nietzsche counterposed an affirmative philosophy of creation. He upheld creativity and the artistic sensibility as alternatives to those modes of thought which attempt to reduce reality to a stable set of laws, axioms, and equations. For Marx and Hegel, creation is always suspended until after the moment of negation, but Nietzsche's radical contribution was to free creativity from the negative, while at the same time freeing temporality from the past-present-future

⁶⁴ Cited in Lee Scrivner, 'How to write an avant-garde manifesto (a manifesto)', *London Consortium*, viewed 9 July 2011, , p. 13.

⁶⁵ Cited in Scrivner, 'How to write an avant-garde manifesto (a manifesto)', p. 13.

⁶⁶ Tristan Tzara, 2006 [1918], 'Dada manifesto', *Wikisource*, viewed 4 July 2011, .

⁶⁷ Cited in Albert Camus, *The myth of Sisyphus*, Penguin Books, London, 2005 [1942], p. 90.

beginning to demand our attention and sparkle anew. This essay seeks to assist in this efflorescence, since, as Hardt suggests, we cannot hope to achieve any kind of liberation unless we first liberate ourselves from Hegel.¹⁴ One thing must be made clear, though, and that is that I confront Hegel's legacy not purely by way of negation, which would only mean a perverse reproduction of his dialectical straightjacket, but by proposing and affirming an escape route. My goal is a re-imagining of radical politics and a re-tooling of radical writerly practice.

Having thus far skimmed the surface of my argument, what I would like to do now is go deeper. I will start out by introducing the concept of the 'perpetual present' – the temporality within which the futurology of the present is situated. From this basis, I will proceed to elucidate the ways in which such a practice overcomes the limitations of previous modes of radical writing; namely, those premised on compartmentalised, linear time. In the second half of the article, I will link the futurology of the present to a politics of hope, before concluding with some thoughts on the nexus between activist and artistic practices – the very note on which I began.

The Perpetual Present

In today's social movements, there is an increasing call for a harmonisation between means and ends, now widely understood by way of the notion of 'prefigurative politics'.¹⁵ Such a sensibility cannot but imply a radically different, even 'amodern',¹⁶ temporal schema. Present and future cease to be treated as two distinct entities (the former but an instrument for the realisation of the latter), but instead become rendered as simply two linguistic signs referring to a common, indivisible flow. Such is also the case with the past. Drawing on Guattari, we could well say that both past and future inhere together in the 'perpetual present',¹⁷ an enduring liquid moment containing both memory and potentiality; traces of what has been, but also intimations of what could be, each indissolubly connected to

¹⁴ Michael Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze: An apprenticeship in philosophy*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993, pp. ix-xv.

¹⁵ See Uri Gordon, *Anarchy alive!: Anti-authoritarian politics from practice to theory*, Pluto Press, London, 2008; and Jeffrey S. Juris, *Networking futures: The movements against corporate globalization*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2008.

¹⁶ Bruno Latour, 'Postmodern? No, simply amodern!: Steps towards an anthropology of science', *Studies in the history and philosophy of science*, vol. 21, iss. 1, 1990, pp. 145–171.

¹⁷ Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, p. 92. Here, Guattari draws from the concept of 'duration' as found in Henri Bergson, *Creative evolution*, Dover Publications, Mineola, 1998 [1911].

the other. With this perspective in mind, there can no longer be said to be a revolutionary before, during, and after. Instead of activist strategy being determined by a stark delineation between discrete stages, means and ends become consonant within a permanent revolutionary process; a continual freeing up of life, desire and the imagination wherever they happen to be imprisoned. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri write: ‘We must think of [pre-revolutionary] resistance, [revolutionary] insurrection and [post-revolutionary] constituent power as an indivisible process, in which these three are melded into a full counter-power and ultimately a new, alternative formation of society’.¹⁸

It has occurred to me that the Roman god, Janus, could be taken as figurative of the perpetual present. He had one face looking forward towards the future and one face looking backward towards the past, and yet both belonged to a single head. The term ‘Janus-faced’ has, in modern times, become a synonym for ‘two-faced’ or ‘duplicitous’, carrying with it negative connotations, and yet, for the ancient Romans, Janus had an altogether different meaning. He was the god of thresholds; ‘an important Roman god who protected doorways and gateways’, primarily symbolising change and transition.¹⁹ The perpetual present is always a threshold between that which is ceasing to be and that which is coming into being; at once the repository of memories and the font of potentialities; a record of the past and a map to the future. Friedrich Nietzsche is of critical import here: ‘I am of today and of the has-been’, he writes, ‘but there is something in me that is of tomorrow and of the day-after-tomorrow and of the shall-be’.²⁰ This may well have been uttered by Janus himself.

A word on Michel Foucault is apposite here as well, particularly regarding his notion of the ‘history of the present’, which was how he described his genealogical method.²¹ Despite first appearances, the history and futurology of the present are not at all in conflict. Both, in fact, are immanent within the perpetual present. The multifarious routes by which the present is constructed are simultaneously one and the same with those processes by which alternative futures continually come into being. Hence, the history and futurology of the present are not unlike the two faces of Janus. One casts its gaze upstream towards the tributaries and the other

¹⁸ Cited in Gerald Raunig, *Art and revolution: Transversal activism in the long Twentieth Century*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2007, p. 47.

¹⁹ Scott Littleton, *Gods, goddesses, and mythology*, Vol. 6, Marshall Cavendish, Tarrytown, 2005, p. 770.

²⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, Penguin Books, London, 2003 [1885], p. 150.

²¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish*, Penguin, London, 1991 [1977], p. 31; Michel Foucault, ‘Nietzsche, genealogy, history’, in P. Rabinow (ed), *The Foucault reader*, Penguin Books, London, 1984, pp. 76–100.

is the relationships between them, and not the categorical divisions, which are of paramount importance here. To begin with, activist practice aligns with creativity in the first sense in that to forge new forms of life outside of prevailing apparatuses of domination is to allow ontological processes of creation to continue flourishing without blockage or curtailment. From the moment there is an imposition of relations of force, or a reduction of life to either state or market logics, there is creative subversion. ‘Life revolts against everything that confines it’,⁶⁰ as Sueli Rolnik felicitously puts it. The same could certainly be said of creativity in the artistic sense.

Activists and artists alike converge in the figure of the creator – that inventor of new values of the kind celebrated by Nietzsche⁶¹ as well as by autonomist theorists of ‘self-valorization’⁶² – in that they self-consciously endeavour to bring newness into the world. Each intervenes into the material-semiotic realm that we have become accustomed to calling ‘culture’ and there, works to shake up and reinvent conventional ways of seeing, thinking, feeling, valuing, doing. Hence, to revisit a point I made in the beginning of this article, perhaps there is little real difference between making art and making change. Perhaps the production of new forms of life by activists is itself an art – not art that simply represents life, but art that is utterly indistinguishable from it.⁶³ As such, the futurologist of the present does not simply observe and describe at a distance the alternative futures arising in social movements and countercultural milieux, but rather, participates politically in their production and propagation. In other words, to write of countercultural practice, broadly conceived, need not take the form of a detached reportage, but can alternately become a countercultural practice in its own right. Before there was ever such a thing as viral YouTube videos, there were contagions of revolutionary desire of the kind that spread with lightning speed in 1848, 1968, 1989–1991, and 1999–2001, not to mention the Arab Spring currently underway. The principle, though, is the same. One important role that the radical writer can play, as I have suggested, is to act as a relay through which such contagions can spread – not as a spokesperson or representative of a given initiative or movement, but as a

⁶⁰ Cited in Guattari & Rolnik, *Molecular revolution in Brazil*, p. 87.

⁶¹ Nietzsche, *Thus spoke Zarathustra*; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond good and evil*, Prometheus Books, Buffalo, 1989 [1886].

⁶² Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital politically*, Anti/Theses, Leeds, 2000 [1979], p. 18; Antonio Negri, *Books for burning: Between civil war and democracy in 1970s Italy*, Verso, London, 2005, pp. 198–207, 215–230.

⁶³ See John Jordan, ‘Deserting the culture bunker’, *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest*, iss. 3, viewed 10 July 2011, .

the contrary, these larval subjectivities turned out to be of paramount importance in my work, since it was at the micropolitical level of identity and desire that some of my most significant insights were gleaned. In addition, the concept of hope that I detailed earlier remained, at all times, extremely pertinent, since the novel imaginings, identities, values, practices, and experiments that I picked up on already point the way beyond the impasse within which many activists have floundered in recent decades. From the ruins of the traditional Left, a new radical politics for the twenty-first century is in the process of being born.

Although having presented a number of examples of the kinds of things that the futurology of the present concerns itself with, each in relation to the idea of immanent hope, I do wish to leave a degree of openness in my formulation so that readers can remain free to take up the practice and carry it in their own directions. Social movements, often the hotbeds of cultural innovation, have been my main focus in this article, but they certainly need not constitute the entirety of what the futurologist of the present looks at. Glimpses and intimations of other worlds in the making are indeed all around us. There is, in all spheres of life, an ‘unceasing creation’ and ‘uninterrupted upsurge of novelty’.⁵⁸ Anywhere where there is an autonomous cultural production taking place, outside of the habituated channels by which the status quo reproduces itself, is a potential site for the futurologist of the present to involve herself in and draw inspiration from. Wherever there is disobedience, insubordination, creative maladjustment, play, experimentation, or creation, no matter whether at the micro or macro scale, there is something happening which deserves our attention.

Revisiting the Art-Activism Nexus

Apart from hope, another point that has resurfaced throughout this article is the vital place of creativity. This idea, however, will now need to be unpacked and expanded upon. It turns out that the ways in which I have been using the terms ‘creation’ and ‘creativity’ have really been operating on three distinct levels. There is, first of all, the ontological creativity of the ‘chaosmos’⁵⁹ – a point alluded to upon my introduction of the concept of the perpetual present. Secondly, there is the creativity of activists and countercultural deviants. Thirdly, there is the creativity of artists and writers in their production and relaying of affect. Although each of these forms of creativity are able to be distinguished from one another, it

⁵⁸ Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, p. 29.

⁵⁹ Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A thousand plateaus*, Continuum, London, 2004 [1987], p. 7.

downstream towards the delta, but both belong to a common body bobbing upon a single river. While the history of the present challenges linear history and its obsession with the origin, the futurology of the present does likewise with respect to linear futurology and its drive toward the projected end-point of history, or telos. There is no Future with a capital ‘F’; only the delta, opening out onto the infinite expanse of the ocean.

At this point, it must also be made clear that the perpetual present has nothing at all to do with the kind of endless present postulated by neoliberal ideologues. Where the former is the font of infinite alternative futures, of a variable creativity that continually issues forth from the free play of difference, the latter is a present condemned to futurelessness, to an endless reproduction of the status quo. It was in this context that, in response to Margaret Thatcher’s infamous doctrine that ‘There is No Alternative’, the World Social Forum first proposed its counter-slogan of ‘Another World is Possible’. Alterglobalisation activists have since been vindicated in this idea, with the global financial crash of 2008 serving to irreparably discredit the neoliberal experiment. The state bail-out of banks to the tune of trillions revealed the neoliberal discourse (particularly its insistence on minimal state intervention in the economy) to have been fallacious all along. Capital needs the state and has always needed it, not least of all in its policing of unruly citizens. Neoliberalism was never really realised as a system, but functioned only as a legitimating discourse that, in practice, never aligned with what it professed in theory. Following these embarrassing revelations, global elites are increasingly eschewing the concept of neoliberalism, and find themselves conflicted about the way forward. As such, we have now entered into a brand new historical moment; one in which the futurology of the present arguably becomes more important than ever. With neoliberalism staggering along ‘zombie-like’ and ‘ideologically dead’,²² the space has now become wide open for the assertion and enactment of alternatives.

Tying together some of the points I have made thus far, the perpetual present is forever the site of ‘unconscious that protest’,²³ of insubordinate creativity and disobedient desire, of emergent values and practices that lead outwards onto alternative horizons, beyond the mirages conjured up by capitalism, the state, the traditional Left, and all similar such boring and life-denying institutions. It is the work of the futurologist of the present to tease these out from the tangle of everyday life, help increase their visibility, and thereby participate in their propagation.

²² Free Association, 2010, *How to generate a generation*, viewed 25 February 2011, , p. 1.

²³ Gilles Deleuze cited in Félix Guattari & Suely Rolnik, *Molecular revolution in Brazil*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2008 [1986], p. 19.

Below, I will seek to expand on these ideas and to further articulate their implications for radical scholarship and writing practices. In so doing, I will focus, first of all, on the challenges that the futurology of the present poses to compartmentalised time (and those modes of writing premised on such a temporality), before proceeding to do likewise with respect to linear time.

Beyond Compartmentalised Time

As touched upon earlier, my contention is that the past-present-future schema of time has been at the root of a profound disarticulation between means and ends in traditional revolutionary politics. Means and ends have only come to be regarded as mutually exclusive entities because present and future have been treated likewise. There has, as such, been a failure to recognise the necessary correspondence between the two; that is, between how we act in the present and the kind of world we wish to see in the future. It is for this reason that we have ended up with such abominations as the Leninist vanguard party, whereby dictatorial practices are supposed to somehow lead to a democratic society.²⁴

Owing to the fact that the idea of compartmentalised time has been little reflected upon in the past, radical nonfiction has tended to take three principle forms; namely, historical treatises, jeremiads, and manifestos, each mapping with its own discrete domain within the past-present-future trinary. The notion of the historical treatise needs little introduction, and the other two have already been briefly discussed. What I would like to do here, however, is to zoom in a little more closely on the jeremiad form. Diagnostic jeremiads like Marx's three-volume *Das Kapital*²⁵ are meant to function only as a set of 'is' claims upon which prescriptive 'oughts' can be based. Marx's jeremiad- and manifesto-style writings therefore go hand-in-hand. Had David Hume been alive in Marx's time, he no doubt would have critiqued Marx for assuming that it is even possible to make valid 'ought' statements on the basis of descriptive 'is' claims.²⁶ For Hume, all such prescriptions are dubious at best. And yet, the assumption that an 'is' must necessarily precede an ethical 'ought' is still rife amongst radical scholars. There is an un-

that point, become a global phenomenon. By that time, too, the national liberation movements that had won political independence had proven themselves utterly incapable of improving the lot of the populations they now presided over. One set of bureaucrats was simply replaced by another. The same old problems associated with statism persisted, and imperialist logics were indigenised and perpetuated in the form of exclusionary nationalisms.

In 1993, the CPP-NPA imploded, with two-thirds of its members choosing to defect *en masse*, rejecting not only its increasingly authoritarian leadership, but also Maoist ideology as a whole. Although many of the defectors still find themselves shackled by old habits, their response to the crisis of the Left, for the most part, is not the rectification and reconsolidation of old orthodoxies (as is the case with those who remained loyal to the Party), but an effort to invent new subjectivities more in consonance with the times. Indeed, in my ethnographic fieldwork in both the Philippines and Filipin@ diaspora, these two contrasting responses to the Crisis of the Left – rectification and reinvention – were what I found to constitute the most significant fault-line in Philippine radical politics today. The flipside to the Crisis of the Left, then, has been a vibrant regeneration of radical political culture. With the Marcos dictatorship gone and the Maoists a spent force, there occurred a veritable flowering of new ideas and practices throughout the 1990s, continuing through to the present day. The disintegration of the CPP-NPA in 1993 in fact coincided with the beginning of a boom period for the environmentalist, feminist, and anarchist movements in the Philippines. Today, the Philippine social movement landscape is home to a diverse array of nascent subjectivities, constitutive of efforts to re-found transformative politics on new grounds. During my fieldwork, I sought out those former CPP activists who had broken with Maoism; those who were rethinking all of the old certainties and endeavouring to enact new modes of activism in tune with contemporary realities. I also sought out the younger generation of Filipin@ activists in order to get a sense of both the continuities and discontinuities between their ideas and those of the older generation. In each of these cases, what I paid special attention to was the new; that is, to intimations of alternative futures arising in the present, which I took to be the same thing. These intimations included all manner of emergent, even insurgent, subjectivities – new political tendencies and ways of seeing, innovations in practices and methods, new modes of cultural identification, alternative values, and so on. It is important to point out, though, that these were most often elemental or larval in form – small becomings that did not necessarily add up to fully-baked ideas or practices, nor to formal theory that was written down or codified into political programmes. This did not mean, however, that they were any less significant. On

²⁴ See Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *What is to be done?*, Oxford University Press, Clarendon, 1963 [1902].

²⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, Penguin Books, London, 1986 [1867]; Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 2*, Penguin Books, London, 1985 [1885]; Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 3*, Penguin Books, London, 1981 [1894].

²⁶ See David Hume, *A treatise of human nature*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2007 [1740].

work is concerned with the fate of national liberation movements under conditions of globalisation, focussing, most importantly, on the tentative green shoots that are beginning to emerge from their ashes.⁵⁶ My primary case study is that of the Philippines, which, although having been granted formal independence from the United States (US) in 1946, is still considered by many Filipin@s⁵⁷ to be under the thumb of US imperialist control – and with good reason. As such, the Maoist insurgency against the US-backed Marcos dictatorship in the 1970s and early 1980s – led by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and their armed wing, the New People’s Army (NPA) – was imagined as a war of national liberation, in much the same vein as those which arose in Nicaragua and El Salvador during the same period. Despite having mobilised hundreds of thousands of people on countless fronts for almost two decades, the CPP-NPA was ironically absent in the developments which finally brought down the Marcos regime in February 1986. What toppled the dictator in the end was a military mutiny, accompanied by a popular though bloodless uprising. This dramatic turn of events became known as the People Power Revolution. In adherence with Maoist orthodoxy, the CPP-NPA’s focus was guerrilla war in the countryside, and yet the popular uprising that had swept Marcos from power had taken place in urban Manila. Long accustomed to proclaiming themselves as the vanguard of the movement, these developments came as a severe shock to many. The CPP-NPA’s absence in the midst of an insurrection meant that what replaced Marcos was not the long-prophesised communist seizure of state power, but the restoration, at least nominally, of liberal democracy. These events plunged the entire Philippine Left (in which the Maoist CPP had for so long been hegemonic) into a full-blown crisis. This was only further compounded by the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and Soviet Union in the years between 1989 and 1991, therefore dovetailing with the generalised Crisis of the Left that had, by

⁵⁶ The bulk of my research results are still in the process of being written up, although a few preliminary sketches have so far been published. See, for instance, Marco Cuevas-Hewitt, ‘Sketches of an archipelagic poetics of postcolonial belonging’, *Budhi: A Journal of Culture and Ideas*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2007, pp. 239–246; and Marco Cuevas-Hewitt, ‘The figure of the “Fil-Whatever”: Filipino American trans-Pacific social movements and the rise of radical cosmopolitanism’, *World Anthropologies Network E-Journal*, no. 5, 2010, pp. 97–127.

⁵⁷ I seek to neutralise gender here by synthesising both the feminine and masculine suffixes (‘-a’ and ‘-o’, respectively) into the new suffix of ‘-@’. The reason that I have chosen this form over the standard ‘Filipino’ is that I wish to avoid using a gender-specific descriptor to stand in for all Filipin@s. This is an unfortunate grammatical inheritance from Spanish colonialism, since pre-Hispanic indigenous languages in the Philippine archipelago were, by and large, gender-neutral. I might have chosen to use the alternative suffix of ‘-a/o’ but decided against it, not just because it reads somewhat clumsily, but more importantly because it perpetuates the rigid binary notion of gender by which genderqueer individuals are marginalised.

thinking assumption that a complete and ‘objective’ understanding of the present is a necessary prerequisite for effective political action.²⁷ Some jeremiad writers in fact become so consumed with this task, that they fail to even try to imagine alternative possible futures. What matters to them is to first negate the present; to limit themselves to *mere resistance*, in other words.

Hence, aside from those jeremiads which function within the is-ought framework, there are also those based on ‘is’ descriptions alone; pure lamentations of, or fulminations against, the present configuration of things.²⁸ For the most part, the intention of the lamentative jeremiad is to raise consciousness about this or that issue, such that the reader might somehow, magically, be spurred into action, as if a detailed knowledge of the evils of society was all that was required for this to happen. Precisely how to act on this knowledge is left up to the reader. Often, however, these works have the unintended and reverse effect of leaving the reader feeling overwhelmed and helpless, even despite their politicisation or conscientisation. The futurology of the present, in contrast, aims not to be merely descriptive or prescriptive, but rather, *demonstrative*. By this I mean that its concern is with fostering inspiration and hope through the demonstration of alternatives. So many contemporary writers and scholar-activists dedicate their lives, as Marx did, to writing about what is wrong with the world, but far fewer have cared to write about what people are already doing to change the world or to bring to light the many living, breathing examples all around us of how things can always be otherwise. Indeed, Harry Cleaver’s observation that Marx’s ‘historical analysis provided much more detail on capitalist domination than on working class subjectivity’²⁹ is an understatement to say the least. This is one reason that radicals so often end up with a perverse fascination for the ‘creativity’ and ‘dynamism’ of capitalism, thereby reifying that which they claim to oppose. One of the ironies here is that

²⁷ An analogy might help to illustrate the problematic I am dealing with here: Imagine that you are a houseguest at the home of a friend and you get up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom. The only problem is that there is an electrical storm outside and the power has failed. All is dark. Would it be necessary to have a complete map of the entire household in your mind in order to be able to reach the bathroom, or might it also be possible to feel your way there through the dark? The futurology of the present is not concerned with the map of the house; only with those feeling their way through the dark. Instances of the latter kind are what Maurice Merleau-Ponty has referred to as ‘absorbed coping’. See Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of perception*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2011, pp. 96–97.

²⁸ Examples include Jean Baudrillard, *The intelligence of evil or the lucidity pact*, Berg, Oxford, 2005; Paul Virilio 2005, *The information bomb*, Verso, London; and Annie Le Brun 2008, *The reality overload: The modern world’s assault on the imaginal realm*, Inner Traditions, Rochester.

²⁹ Harry Cleaver, 1992, ‘Kropotkin, self-valorization and the crisis of Marxism’, *Libcom*, viewed 9 March 2010, , p. 4.

capitalists do not create; they simply orchestrate and marshal the creativity of the commons for their own ends.³⁰

In contrast to the jeremiad, the futurology of the present starts not with capitalism (or any other kind of domination), but with the ideas and practices of those challenging it. That is not to say, however, that it fails to offer a critique of the various apparatuses of domination. On the contrary, it offers a critique of a radically different kind – one that operates via the presentation of alternatives, of ‘yeses’ that already carry within them a ‘no’. Every innovation, every ‘yes’, embodies a proposal for a different kind of world, but one that is defined, from the outset, against the world that it is leaving behind. The point is to commence with the affirmative, rather than defer it until after the negative. It is in this way that the futurology of the present becomes a project of fomenting hope. It destabilises the taken-for-grantedness of the present, albeit not in a way which disowns it, as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels do when they celebrate the communist movement as that ‘which abolishes the present state of things’.³¹ Disavowing oneself of the present in this manner could be seen to be part and parcel of the disastrous disconnect between means and ends, as discussed earlier. Unlike the jeremiad form, the futurology of the present centres not on the negation of the present-day so much as on its continual reinvention. It necessarily remains within the temporality of the perpetual present. It aligns itself, as such, with the radical challenge that Nietzsche poses to Hegelian thought. In Hegel, negation invariably precedes creation, but in the work of Nietzsche, we are presented with the alternative *possibility of creation itself as a means of negation*.³² One creates in order to negate, and not vice versa. In prefigurative politics, we prefigure the world we wish to create through our actions in the present, while simultaneously rendering redundant that which we leave behind. And in our futurologies of the living present, we offer an exposition of these other worlds already in construction without having to first negate. Such texts, furthermore, are themselves self-conscious creations. They are not just about the world, but are also *added* to it, thereby becoming a part of its workings. The creative act – whether on the streets or on the page – is already subversive.

³⁰ The commons could be considered as capitalism’s *constitutive outside*. It is the very lifeblood of capital and yet, even as it is harnessed, it must simultaneously be negated lest it threaten the calcified order necessary for capitalism’s own reproduction. The concept of the ‘constitutive outside’ has been drawn here from Judith Butler, *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of “sex”*, Routledge, New York, 1993, pp. 3, 8.

³¹ Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *The German ideology*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976 [1847], p. 57.

³² Nietzsche, *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. See also Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and philosophy*, Athlone Press, London, 1983 [1962].

society. This is another instance, like the RRFM, of creative subversion. In demonstrating real alternatives and emergent futures, *The Take* stands in stark contrast to the long tradition of documentary realism amongst radical filmmakers, the goal of which is simply to raise consciousness and bear witness to a given situation of injustice, in much the same vein as the jeremiad. In this style of documentary, the creative autonomy of people on the ground in responding to their situation is submerged or rendered irrelevant – perhaps because it is deemed *a priori* that local people are incapable of self-organisation and hence that solutions need to come from elsewhere and be imposed from the outside. It is the self-legitimizing discourse of vanguardists and professional revolutionaries. *The Take*, however, partakes of no such nonsense, nor does it limit itself to merely communicating information about what is wrong with the world. Rather, it offers an inspiring, concrete example of how the world can be, and already is becoming, otherwise. In conveying an immanent hope, it too is exemplary of that which I have been calling the futurology of the present.

Graeber’s *Direct Action* is also worth mentioning.⁵⁴ Graeber, who sometimes likes to refer to himself as a ‘professional optimist’, describes in his book the proposals for a new society embodied in the practices of North American activists in the alterglobalisation movement. His work takes the form of an ethnography, albeit one that centres not on some supposedly static culture (as with traditional ethnographies), but on *culture-in-motion*. It strikes me that ethnography in the latter mode seems particularly well-suited to the futurology of the present. This is because embodied participation in people’s social worlds arguably allows us to grasp newness in its very contexts of production and at the very moments of its inception. The ethnographer starts with small things in small places and, from there, learns to appreciate their wider significance and connect the dots between them. The small, therefore, is never to be confused with the insignificant or trifling, since, arguably, it is only ‘through attention to detail that we can find different kinds of collectivity in formation’.⁵⁵ Social theorists of the more conventional, desk-bound kind have typically overlooked the small details on the ground in favour of abstract theory, but in so doing, they have often also overlooked those formative processes by which newness enters the world.

Without wishing to indulge too much, my own research project at present is one which combines an ethnographic and futurological sensibility. In short, my

⁵⁴ David Graeber, *Direct action: An ethnography*, AK Press, Oakland, 2009.

⁵⁵ Penny Harvey & Soumya Venkatesan, ‘Faith, reason and the ethic of craftsmanship: Creating contingently stable worlds’, in M. Candea (ed), *The social after Gabriel Tarde: Debates and assessments*, Routledge, Abingdon, p. 130.

influence of the Zapatista movement or of the World Social Forum initiative originating from Brazil. A more recent example might be the affective vector that traversed the Mediterranean from Tahrir Square, Cairo, to Puerta del Sol Square, Madrid, from there emanating throughout the rest of Spain and beyond.

In each of the above cases, the role of the writer in acting as a relay for hope and inspiration cannot be discounted or underestimated. To foment affect in this way is especially revolutionary considering the ‘veritable obsession on the part of the rulers of the world with ensuring that social movements cannot be seen to grow, to flourish, to propose alternatives’.⁵¹ To actively help in circulating, amplifying and making visible the alternatives being realised all around us is to shatter any sense of inevitability. And by this, I am really referring to two things: firstly, to the inevitability of the present promoted by the political-economic elite, and secondly, to the inevitability of the future posited by the traditional Hegelian-Marxist Left. The former would say that there is no alternative to the present; the latter that there is no alternative to their prescribed future. The futurology of the present, in contrast, emphasises that there are *always* alternatives. It offers examples of creative subversion, while at the same time refusing to channel movement in a particular direction, as with the manifesto form. To participate in the cultivation and propagation of new liberatory potentials – the ‘production of production’,⁵² in short – is enough. What matters is that creativity, desire and the imagination remain free to flourish, rather than be shut down, domesticated, canalised, or stultified.

In addition to the aforementioned CrimethInc article, another work that I would consider as exemplary of the futurology of the present is *The Take*,⁵³ a documentary by Avi Lewis and Naomi Klein on the workers’ rebellion in Argentina that followed the financial meltdown of 2001. Here, I depart from my focus on writing for a moment, since the futurologist of the present need not necessarily be bound by the written word. *The Take’s* activist filmmakers aimed to mobilise their audience not solely by rousing in them an indignation against the local elites and International Monetary Fund, but more importantly by highlighting the real alternatives to capitalist social relations that Argentinian workers are already building in the present. Through their appropriation and collective self-management of abandoned factories, these workers are setting about the task of building a new and different kind of economy without having to first take state power. The bosses are not overthrown, but simply made redundant – completely surplus to the needs of

⁵¹ Graeber, ‘Hope in common’, p. 1.

⁵² Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, Penguin, New York, 2009 [1972], pp. 4–8.

⁵³ Avi Lewis & Naomi Klein, *The take*, Barna-Alper Productions, New York, 2004.

To practice creative subversion is not to overthrow, as with mere resistance, but to undercut and displace. Most importantly of all, it is to cultivate alternative futures in the living present and therefore to affirm life despite capitalism.

Beyond Linear Time

Aside from the compartmentalisation of time, we have also inherited from Hegel the idea that time moves in a straight line from an identifiable origin toward an ultimate end-point. Where the historical treatise usually draws a rigid straight line between the origin and the present, the manifesto does likewise between the present and the projected telos. The origin and the telos alike are both employed in the construction of linear timelines in which the progressions from past to present and from present to future are cast as somehow natural and inevitable. The way in which Marx adapted these ideas is by now the stuff of undergraduate textbooks: Guided by the invisible hand of History with a capital ‘H’, we pass through certain inevitable stages, one of which is our capitalist present, in order to eventually arrive at communism. Hence, even as Marxists angrily denounce capitalism, they ironically naturalise the social injustices that it produces as necessary by-products of the inexorable forward impetus of time. This became ludicrously apparent to me in a recent Facebook debate in which one Marxist tried to reason with me that ‘slavery was a necessary stage in human history’. The history and futurology of the present, as mentioned earlier, each seek to disrupt this kind of linearity in their own ways. The former cares not for the single origin, but for the multiple tributaries which have converged upon the present. The latter, meanwhile, concerns itself not with the single telos, but with the deltaic openings spilling out on to oceanic infinity. In each case, past, present and future – and the pathways between them – are denaturalised and rendered contingent. Here, I will focus most especially on the movement between present and future. Hence, while in the previous section, I sought primarily to problematise the jeremiad, I will now endeavour to do likewise with respect to the manifesto.

The manifesto could be thought of as akin to a children’s colouring book. When we are issued a colouring book with all of the designs already pre-determined, all that remains for us to do is to colour them in. Exactly such an idea was expressed by Marx himself when he wrote: ‘It is not enough that thought strive to actualize itself; actuality must itself strive toward thought’.³³ What he

³³ Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel’s philosophy of right*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982 [1844], p. 138.

meant by this was that the telos of history was already known in thought and all that was required was for reality to catch up; that is, for the proletariat to fulfill its historic mission. This is a temporality in which the future, paradoxically enough, actually precedes the present, since the telos is always given *a priori*. As the French-Russian Hegelian philosopher, Alexandre Kojève, puts it, ‘the historical movement arises from the Future and passes through the Past in order to realize itself in the Present’.³⁴ The present is thus held in tow by someone or other’s personal utopia, usually cast as universal. As such, it might well be argued that the manifesto form is inherently authoritarian. Martin Luther King had a dream, but so did Mao Tse-Tung. The difference in the latter case was that the dream had rigidified into a nightmarish Plan. The telos upon which such plans are predicated becomes a transcendental ideal; a mirage on the horizon dictating a single path we are to follow if ever we are to reach it. The question is: Who decides upon such ideals and who is enslaved by them? Do those enslaved by other people’s ideals not have dreams of their own? How might we avoid these dreams being steamrolled in the rationalist march of History?

The tyranny of linear time, according to Rosi Braidotti, is that it ‘functions like a black hole into which possible futures implode and disappear’.³⁵ To reject this conception of time is therefore to make ‘an ethical choice in favour of the richness of the possible’.³⁶ It means to move from the World Social Forum slogan of ‘Another World is Possible’ to the more open idea that *many worlds are possible*. In addition to the image of the delta invoked earlier, let us also consider Jorge Luis Borges’ evocation of the ‘garden of forking paths’; a garden in which ‘time forks perpetually toward innumerable futures’.³⁷ Change at any given point in time occurs through the aleatory and contingent actualisation of any one of these countless possible futures, not through any kind of rational progression. To proceed in this garden is not to progress, since the paths lead not so much forward, but *outward*. Contra Hegel and Marx, then, history does not consist of a series of logical stages, nor does it move in only one direction. There is only perpetual movement; a processual and protean creativity that wells unceasingly out of the perpetual present. The kind of writing appropriate to this movement is precisely that which I have been calling the futurology of the present. When revolution no longer has anything to do with linear timelines or the realisation of a pre-ordained

³⁴ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the reading of Hegel*, p. 136.

³⁵ Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On nomadic ethics*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2006, p. 167.

³⁶ Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, p. 29.

³⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, ‘The garden of forking paths’ in D. Yates & J. Irby (eds), *Labyrinths: Selected stories and other writings*, New Directions, New York, 1964, p. 28.

using the term here) is what makes the difference between empowerment and mere conscientisation. And the propagation of such hope, through the exposition of alternative futures already in construction, is one very important role that both radical educators and writers can play.

The futurology of the present, then, might fruitfully be characterised as a *practice of hope*. It is not simply about the transfer of knowledge, but more significantly of ‘affect’.⁴⁹ It is animated by revolutionary desire, while at the same time acting as a relay for this desire to spread. It does not speak *about* movements, but *with* them. It thinks with them, moves with them, and tries to inspire movement in turn. This is exactly what happened with a recent article by the North American-based CrimethInc Collective on the Really Really Free Market (RRFM)⁵⁰ – an anarchist initiative best described as a kind of celebratory potlatch in which nothing is bartered or sold and everything is free. The idea is that people bring food, clothes, books, art, music, skills, services, or whatever else to share, and the rest takes care of itself. This is a perfect example of prefigurative politics in that it embodies, in the here and now, what an alternative commons-based society would look like. There is no question of having to wait until after the revolution to begin building a new world. And it demonstrates that we do not have to choose between Josef Stalin and Milton Friedman, but rather, can opt for an alternative politics of liberating the commons from both the state *and* the market. Indeed, the RRFM (along with other such cooperativist initiatives) acquires a new poignancy in light of the Crash of 2008 – its very name being an irreverent poke at neoliberal free market ideology. Soon after the appearance of the CrimethInc article in print and online, RRFMs began popping up across North America, Australia, Indonesia, and elsewhere. The latest I have heard is that Philippine anarchists are now beginning to organise such events as well, of course adapting them to local conditions. As the idea parachutes into a new context, it immediately enters into a new set of relations and necessarily emerges transformed in the process. It is a becoming and not a matter of simple repetition (unless, however, we are talking about a McDonalds franchise). I should also add here that it is never a matter of initiatives flowing in a one-way direction from the ‘West’ to the ‘Rest’, since there is also considerable cultural traffic in the opposite direction. Consider, for instance, the sheer global

⁴⁹ My thinking on affect is primarily sourced from Brian Massumi, *Parables for the virtual: Movement, affect, sensation*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2002. In short, affect is the capacity to affect and be affected. It is not a personal feeling, but a pre-personal intensity that exists only in flows between people and things.

⁵⁰ CrimethInc., 2008, ‘The Really Really Free Market: Instituting the gift economy’, *CrimethInc. Ex-Workers’ Collective*, viewed 8 July 2011, .

against, but if our writing stops there and avoids giving due attention to what people are doing to undo the status quo, then there is the risk that we will only end up leaving our readers feeling disempowered – armed with knowledge, but starved of the hope necessary to act on this knowledge. An example drawn from personal experience – even despite it being in the context of teaching, rather than writing – will illustrate well the point I am attempting to make here.

A few years ago, I was helping to teach an undergraduate course entitled ‘Environmental Issues in Asia’ – one of my earliest experiences as a university educator. In the last class of the semester, I asked each student, as we went around the room, to share one thing that they would be taking away with them from the course. The response that most stood out to me was that of a young Asian Australian man, the gist being more or less as follows:

Well, I came into this really interested in the environment; interested in learning more about the issues and exploring how I could get involved to make a difference. But I’m left feeling really overwhelmed. The issues are just so big and the scale of the challenges so great that I’ve almost lost hope. We’re all doomed. Indeed, there seems these days to be more and more of an apocalyptic zeitgeist about the place, especially when it comes to the environment and issues around climate change. What I realised from this feedback was that, as educators, myself and my colleagues had given too little thought to mitigating against this kind of counter-productive, fatalistic resignation. The course content covered things like dam construction in China, the effects of glacier melt and rising sea levels in Bangladesh, deforestation and oil palm monocultures in Malaysian Borneo, and so on, but gave scant attention to what can be done about such issues (including what we in Australia can do, especially considering the record of some Australian companies in the Asia-Pacific region), or how indigenous peoples and others are already fighting back. On this last point, local peoples have rarely been treated as agents acting on the stage of world history, only as helpless victims. This, however, must change. I realised through this experience how mistaken I had been in thinking that it was enough to simply convey content about the issues, without also conveying hope – not a false hope premised on some transcendental future utopia, but an immanent hope, grounded in real-life, real-world futures already in construction in the present. I hence resolved from then on that, in both my teaching and writing, I would not limit myself to trying to conscientise people simply by pointing out what is wrong with the world. Equally important would be showing what can be done – indeed what already is being done – about injustices everywhere; that relations of force are never total or inevitable and that new worlds are always in construction. Hope (in the very specific sense in which I have been

telos, those self-proclaimed prophets of the hidden god of History cease to have any relevance. The futurology of the present, as such, could well represent a possible new form of non-vanguardist writerly practice. There are no experts or professional revolutionaries diagnosing the present or prescribing the future, as with the jeremiad and manifesto forms respectively. Rather, the writer takes her lead from the autonomous and creative participation of people in the making of their worlds, in social movements and countercultures of all kinds; ‘those crucibles of human sociability and creativity out of which the radically new emerges’.³⁸

Here, it will be worth lingering for a moment with the question of the new. In the introduction to this piece, I emphasised the point that the futurology of the present necessarily requires a special sensitivity toward newness. This stands in stark contrast to past modes of radical writing, which usually subordinated the new to the ostensibly eternal. In the linear temporal schema of the manifesto, there is no such thing as novelty, since the work of activists is not conceptualised as the creation of new forms of life so much as the gradual fulfilment of an essential humanness, or ‘species-being’.³⁹ This set of essences is deemed to have always been there, hidden beneath the veil of false consciousness.⁴⁰ It is the difference between drawing and simply colouring-in. My contention is that the production of novelty needs to be understood on its own terms. As Maurizio Lazzarato puts forth, ‘the conjunctions and disjunctions between things are each time contingent, specific and particular and do not refer back to an essence, substance or deep structure upon which they would be founded’.⁴¹ Once radical writing is able to successfully dissociate itself from any kind of hidden god or pre-ordained telos, it can become instead a valuable means with which to bring to light the open-ended and indeterministic ways that everyday actors at the grassroots creatively negotiate and construct their worlds. The value of this sensibility towards newness lies in the fact that it charges the imagination with an enriched sense of possibilities and demonstrates how the world is forever open to reinvention. This is an antidote, not just to the sense of historical duty preached by the vanguardists and manifesto

³⁸ Richard Day, *Gramsci is dead: Anarchist currents in the newest social movements*, Pluto Press, London, 2005, p. 183.

³⁹ Karl Marx, ‘Estranged labour’ in K. Marx, *Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1961 [1844], pp. 67–83.

⁴⁰ This is an idea expressed in Gottfried Hegel, ‘The doctrine of essence’ in W. Wallace (ed), *The logic of Hegel*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1892 [1817], pp. 207–286. ‘[T]hings really are not what they immediately show themselves... there is a permanent in things, and that permanent is in the first instance their Essence’ (pp. 208–209).

⁴¹ Lazzarato, ‘Multiplicity, totality, politics’, p. 24.

writers, but also to the pervasive sense of hopelessness peddled by those whose interests lie with the present configuration of things.

A Note on Hope

In the context of this discussion, hope is that intangible but very real feeling that our struggles remain worthwhile; that it is still worth resisting assimilation into the soul-crushing tedium of the system and persisting in our efforts to prefigure alternative futures. However, it is in the interests of the political and economic elite to maintain and reproduce the status quo from which they benefit – and a huge part of this is the effort to ‘destroy any sense of possible alternative futures’; to stamp out any initiatives which hint to how the world might be otherwise or at least ‘to ensure that no one knows about them’⁴² As such, the capitalists, politicians, police, media, and so on could even be said to constitute ‘a vast bureaucratic apparatus for the creation and maintenance of hopelessness’.⁴³ As Graeber succinctly puts it, ‘hopelessness isn’t natural. It needs to be produced’.⁴⁴

I would like to argue, though, that capitalism has not been alone in producing hopelessness.

Revolutionaries too have been just as culpable. From the perspective of the traditional Left, the story of the twentieth century is one of dashed hopes and unfulfilled dreams. It is not that the prophets of History overlooked the importance of hope to our movements, but rather that they propagated endless false hopes in a tomorrow which never comes. Reality was never really able to live up to their manifestos. The prophets will usually fault reality for failing to fulfill their version of utopia, but it is instead their utopia that must be faulted for failing to correspond to reality. It was situated in the distant future, completely cut off from the living present. It was thought, furthermore, that it could be achieved only by means of negation. In practice, negating the present also meant negating oneself. Sacrifice and discipline were what was commanded. Revolutionaries came to conceive of their practice as war, rather than creation, and their creative desires were endlessly deferred until after the revolution. The point I am getting at is that if people today are mired in cynicism and feel helpless to change the world, it is not only because the elites have perfected their bureaucratic apparatus for the production of

⁴² David Graeber, 2008, ‘Hope in common’, *The Anarchist Library*, viewed 1 July 2011, , pp. 1, 4.

⁴³ Graeber, ‘Hope in common’, p. 1.

⁴⁴ Graeber, ‘Hope in common’, p. 1.

hopelessness, but also because the traditional Left offers absolutely no alternative. Many people have grown wary of the vanguardists and self-appointed prophets, whose faith in the inevitability of historical progress now seems more misguided than ever, but at the same time have yet to be convinced that alternative revolutionary practices are viable, worthwhile, or even possible. The result is apathy, but an apathy that could very well be political⁴⁵ – a sensibility, perhaps, of profound antipathy towards the authoritarianism of both capitalism and the traditional Left, but one that lacks sufficient hope to be able to be enacted in alternatives.

Many writers who wish to avoid the authoritarianism of the manifesto tradition might very well feel that their solution is to offer simple critiques, sans prescriptions. I would like to argue here, however, that failing to offer any hope at all is no alternative to offering false hope. Even Foucault, whom earlier I identified as an ally, oftentimes falls into this trap. A detailed knowledge about the workings of various forms of power, most notably ‘discipline’,⁴⁶ can only take us so far. What then? What about counterpower? Foucault tends to give the impression that the reach of power is total. His concept of the ‘carceral continuum’⁴⁷ means that we are forever on the backfoot, only ever able to resist in a scattered and piecemeal way. But there are some profound ironies here. The first is that, despite Foucault’s philosophical emphasis on contingency, his writings often leave the reader (well, at least this reader) with the impression that relations of force are an inevitable aspect of social life. The second irony is as follows: Foucault knew as much as anyone that our discourses do not simply emerge from the world, but also serve to produce it. Therefore, if we do not allow enough discursive space in our work for resistance, subversion, and counterpower, we only end up reproducing the very conditions of our own incarceration. What is perhaps needed, then, is to make a subtle, yet profound inversion: that it is power on the backfoot, forever in an attempt to contain our uncontrollable vitality.⁴⁸ Where things do cohere together and take on the character of something resembling an insurmountable power structure, we would do well to remind ourselves that the longevity of such social formations is, historically-speaking, much more exceptional than the event of their break-up and dissolution – not vice versa. Certainly, it is of paramount importance to understand the world and the systems of oppression and exploitation that we are up

⁴⁵ This formulation of a ‘political apathy’ is indebted to the work of Feeltank Chicago. See Jerome Mast Grand, Amber Hasselbring & Corndog Brothers, 2008, ‘Renaming Bush Street’, *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest*, iss. 6, viewed 5 July 2011, .

⁴⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and punish*.

⁴⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and punish*, pp. 293–308.

⁴⁸ Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2000.