

CRITIQUES OF THE MANIFESTO FOR A LEFT TURN

CRITIQUE OF THE GOTHAM PROGRAM

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(Thoughts on the 15th Street Manifesto Group's Manifesto for a Left Turn)

I shall continue to be an impossible person as long as those who are now possible remain possible.

—Bakunin

BE REALISTIC, DEMAND THE IMPOSSIBLE. —MAY '68 SLOGAN

Today, a true manifesto of radical politics must necessarily seem like a thoroughly impossible document, one that does indeed demand the impossible, and allows the impossible to make certain demands upon us. That is, as one reads it, one will be lured by the reality of the impossible and begin to be transformed into an impossible person. As many read it, they will begin to be transformed into the impossible community.

As the *Manifesto for a Left Turn* notes, we have passed through a period in which demands for the impossible have been heard less and less. We have lived through the era of “There is no alternative.” However, it is becoming increasingly clear that despite all attempts at repression and denial, we are in the midst of unprecedented historical crisis in which reality itself demands the impossible, whether one likes it or not. The *Manifesto* draws our attention to important aspects of this crisis.

Yet, though the crisis is unavoidable, the mechanisms of denial persist. For ordinary consciousness, the crisis presents the specter of traumatic impossibility. When we confront such impossibility, our very anxiety attests to its reality, but, far from demanding it, we force it back into the realm of the utterly unthinkable. The cost of such denial is that as this traumatic impossibility is repressed, so are all the possibilities that might prevent its emergence. In the end, the crucial question is whether we are capable of creating an alternative possibility, rather than merely falling victim to a repressed one.

So we might say that “a Specter is haunting the Left.” It is the Phantom of Possibility. It is the Ghost of a Chance.

The Chance is, of course, the chance that revolutionary, liberatory social transformation is still possible. This is the impossible possibility that the famous slogan asks us to demand. However, the problematic of “demanding” the necessary impossible has always been a bit misleading. The impossible that we have in mind is hardly lying around somewhere waiting to be

delivered to us on demand. (By whom--the State? the Party? History? Technology? Experts? God? UPS?) Rather, the realization of this impossible requires an Act. Or to put it another way, without the Act, everything becomes simply impossible.

The problem of the Act has become a major preoccupation in radical Left thought. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the true preoccupation has been the problem of the Non-Act. This agonizing problem is posed most strikingly by our collective failure to create a powerful movement to prevent global ecological catastrophe, even though we are in the midst of epochal climate change and the sixth great mass extinction in the history of life on earth, and even though the causes of the problem and the necessary preconditions for its solution are increasingly clear. Even the political ideologists who are most absurdly pessimistic about human nature proclaim that the first law of nature is self-preservation. Nevertheless, the mass of humanity manages to refrain from acting boldly in its own self-interest, and those who profess a disinterested regard for the good of humanity and a belief in the need for social change follow suit.

The *Manifesto* points out the ways in which the American Left in particular has shown itself to be incapable of such transformative actions. It states, for example, that "many Leftists and left-liberals ... were convinced they could eventually push the [Democratic Party] to more progressive positions on economic and foreign policy issues, so they shunned third party and radical alternatives, refusing to raise anti-capitalist demands." The question is how, after repeated failures, and even when that party continually moved in a direction precisely opposite to the direction of their "pushing," they could persevere in their illusions, and "push on." How could they see the same phenomenon repeated over and over and still act as if this repetition was not occurring? How could they see the social and ecological crisis continually intensifying and yet exert their concerted efforts supporting (critically, and with reservations, of course) an institution that plays a central and indispensable role in creating that very crisis?

The *Manifesto* offers a partial explanation in the fact that "many intellectuals and electoralists and some institutions such as Organized Labor, civil rights organizations and women's groups have been integrated into the party machinery and hold berths at the Democratic party's ostensible governing bodies." As true as this is, it explains the motivation of only a small segment of the Left as a whole. The minority who have become part of the party machinery have not really encountered mass resistance at the grass-

roots level to this co-optation of their movements, so more systemic forces that produce the Non-Act have to be delineated.

We can understand certain dimensions of the Non-Act if we shift our focus from the mechanism of denial to the Lacanian concept of fetishistic disavowal. In fetishistic disavowal, one has certain crucial knowledge but acts as if one lacks it. As Žižek has noted in his many examples of this mechanism, it is encapsulated in the phrase, “*Je sais bien, mais quand même,*” that is, “I know very well, but nevertheless.”

A generation ago, many on the Left thought that if only “the Movement” (the Great Floating Signifier) could get certain truths across to the people, then everything was bound to change. Both major parties are controlled by big business! The mass media are run by a few big corporations! Our tax money is used to support tyrants and oppress people around the world! Every year average working people produce more but their real wages decline! Etc. Etc. But now all this, and much more, is common knowledge. Unfortunately the prevailing attitude is: “I know I should be as mad as hell, and I know I shouldn’t take this anymore!” I know very well, but nevertheless. (And, of course, we find a fetishistic Left that succumbs to such disavowal and rallies under the banner of “*Vive le Quand-Même-isme!*”).

Part of the problem is the ease with which malaise can be co-opted when people are offered ineffectual substitute gestures. As was mentioned, the now-classic case is ecological crisis. Huge numbers of people now know that climate change is leading us toward global ecological catastrophe. Yet, their response remains on the gestural level of increasing their recycling, consuming more organic food, or buying “green” clothing and other eco-commodities. In other words, they act in ways that are most consistent with the prevailing institutional structure, the dominant consumptionist imaginary, the dominant economic ideology, and, most immediately, the dominant ethos—that is, they act in ways that are that are most continuous with the ways that they and everyone else are accustomed to acting. It’s an old story. As Brecht put it: “*Wir wären gut [grün, rot] anstatt so roh / Doch die Verhältnisse, sie sind nicht so!*”

The Left has largely lapsed into a mode of permanent protest. It has become obsessed with reactive negation almost to the exclusion of the creative negation of the negation. Consequently, there is a tendency to hope that if the evils that are the target of protest only get worse, it will shock the public into recognition. This is the trap of “So-bad-it’s-goodism.” In fact, the

Left has no monopoly on this perspective, which goes back deeply in the Judeo-Christian tradition: "O felix culpa!" Even the Fall from Paradise turned out to be a good thing! Modern philosophy has carried on the tradition, as when Hegel observes (as *we know very well*) that History is "the slaughter-bench at which the happiness of people, the wisdom of States, and the virtue of individuals have been victimized." But he contends that all these evils (*nevertheless*) must be accepted as "the means for realizing" the ultimate good, "the essential destiny" and "absolute aim" of World History. And Marx, in this case a faithful student of Hegel, pointed out (correctly) that history "progresses by its bad side."

In one sense, such philosophizing merely reinforces the folk psychology of civilization, which has always held that the infliction of punishment "teaches a lesson" to the victim. In addition, it expresses the deeply teleological, progressivist view of history that has been the dominant myth of modernity. The problem is that the "bad side" of history, while undoubtedly moving it along, often takes it in a *bad* direction and teaches the *wrong* lessons. It is not only the inadequate development of productive forces that brings back, as Marx ironically labeled it, "die ganze alte Scheiße." Not unless we are willing to admit that institutional structures, structures of the social imaginary, ideological structures, and even shared character structures are productive forces in a larger sense, since their inadequate development, or more accurately, their maldevelopment, also generate that Slime of History that mires us in domination.

Late capitalism hardly lacks contradictions, and it would not be surprising if the masses would decide to junk rampant neo-liberalism for the promise of job security, good housing, adequate medical care, and perhaps protection from the most conspicuous forms of poisoning their air, water and food supply. If a tough war on crime, rigid economic protectionism and a harsh crackdown on illegal immigrants were thrown in, they might clamor with even more enthusiasm for an interventionist State. The disquieting but inescapable conclusion is that the transformative contradictions might very well transform in a rightist, authoritarian, or even fascistic direction. Contradictions do not lead anywhere in particular when taken in abstraction from the institutional structure and political culture within which they emerge. When social contradictions are looked at with a degree of abstraction (as contradictions within an economic system, for example), left turns and right turns might seem equally plausible. When looked at concretely, in the context of the totality of social relations, they can be expected to lead in a direction determined largely by the prevailing institutional structure and the dominant political culture.

If one were to predict on this basis what kind of future world is most likely (barring our success in the project of discovering the secret of how to “turn” the direction of history), one might be forced to conclude that, sadly, it is a spectrum of possible eco-fascisms, ranging from the relatively friendly and constitutional to the relatively brutal and genocidal, as a desperate response to social and ecological crisis. A second possible scenario would result from a continuing failure to respond either desperately and brutally or wisely and humanely to these crises: global collapse, population crash and barbarism. A third possibility (the one we need to manifest for) is, of course, a “turning”—of the wheel of nature, of the wheel of the law, of the wheel of history.

If we hope to make this turning possible, we must pose the question of what conditions exist that could offer the basis for a liberatory response to contradictions, or, to put it another way, a response that would infuse brute contradictions with reason, passion and imagination, and transform *automatic contradiction into creative contradiction*. We must conclude that on this topic Hegel and Alcoholics Anonymous are right. Acts of will, good intentions, “oughts,” “shoulds” and “musts” are not enough. As the former puts it, we reach an impasse if we remain on the level of *Moralität*, of abstract moral ideals and moralistic encouragement. Morality attains its fulfillment in *Sittlichkeit*, in which the right and the good are given ethical substance through their embodiment in history and in social reality. When this occurs, “oughts” and other normative terms take on new life, as they serve as links between imagined social possibilities and concrete social forms in which those possibilities can be realized.

But the prior question remains of why movements for change have remained on the level of the gesture and the ought. In considering the problematic of developing transformative social praxis and understanding the barriers to such praxis the concept of overdetermination is illuminating. This theoretical concept was introduced by Freud and then developed by Althusser and other thinkers. Freud applied the term to the processes of condensation or displacement in the dreamwork. In the first case, the dream image represents many ideas in the unconscious. In the latter case, a seemingly unimportant image represents a reality that is highly invested with libidinal energy.

Overdetermination is often taken to mean multiple causation, perhaps taking the case of condensation as the paradigm, or following the apparent meaning of the word itself. However, multi-causality is only the most obvious dimension of the process, for there is always an implicit logic behind

the appearance of multiple, reinforcing causes. On a deeper level, overdetermination means structural or systemic determination. The power of the determination can only be understood by grasping how the multiple determinants are expressions of the structure of a whole (whether a highly integrated, stable whole, a whole riddled with contradictions and in a process of decomposition, or something between these extremes). Althusser applies such concepts to the analysis of society, but he focuses overwhelmingly on the moment of contradiction within the social structure. He directs his attention to the ways in which contradictions can “merge into a ruptural unity.”

An illuminating exercise would be to reexamine his paradigm case (the Russian Revolution), considering the ways in which the phenomena he examined exhibit moments of both rupture and non-rupture, including in the latter case pseudo-rupture, or the ideological illusion of rupture, in which elements of character-structure, social hierarchy, etc. are reproduced in a new guise. However, the question posed here is another one. It is the question of what we can discover about the overdetermination of action (or non-action) by the social system in its moments of non-contradiction, and how conscious social practice can effectively counter this determination and create new determinants in the relevant spheres.

There are (at least) four spheres that are essential to the analysis of how social reality is generated, how it is maintained, and how it might be transformed. These spheres are the social institutional structure, the social ideology, the social imaginary, and the social ethos. The complex dialectic between these four spheres and various dimensions of these spheres must be explored in specific detail to make sense out of the senseless folly of the Non-Act. Since there is a dialectical relationship between the spheres they should not be thought of as discrete realms. They are analytically distinguishable but at the same time dialectically identical with one another. The detailed analysis of this dialectic and the possibilities for transcending it cannot be undertaken here, but a brief sketch of the project might be helpful.

The present analysis is in a strange way prefigured by Pascal’s famous wager concerning the existence of God. The core of Pascal’s analysis focuses on how one is socialized into becoming a believer, while the present concern is how the individual is socialized into the dominant social system – and how one might be socialized out of it. In both cases the subject is conversion. The word “conversion” derives from the Latin *vertere*, to turn, and *com* or *con*, meaning completely. A conversion is a radical turn.

Pascal's wager is often dismissed with disdain, for after all, how could it possibly work? One is asked to balance the rewards in the afterlife (eternal bliss) that one might gain from belief if one is right, against the posthumous cost of believing (nothing happens) if one is wrong, and then to bet on belief. One can only conclude that it is quite implausible that this balancing act could ever lead to real conviction. This objection is obviously valid. However, it overlooks all that is brilliant in Pascal's analysis and in fact misrepresents his position by taking one point in abstraction.

In Pensée 245, Pascal says that "there are three sources of belief," which he specifies as "reason," "custom," and "inspiration." Each of his "sources" is paralleled by a sphere of determination in the present scheme of explanation. The role of Pascal's "reason," which offers arguments for the existence of God or for the value of belief, is performed here by *the social ideology*. The role of "custom," which for Pascal means religious rituals, is performed here by *the social ethos*, and the role of "inspiration," which refers to appeals to feelings and emotions, is performed in the present analysis by *the social imaginary*. The fourth sphere to be discussed here, *the social institutional structure*, also appears implicitly, since it was, of course, for Pascal the structure of the Church that is the framework for the ideology, the ethos and the imaginary, while here it is either the dominant social order or the socially and personally transformative community of liberation that challenges that order.

Pascal's analysis also parallels the present one in the very heavy emphasis he places on the power of ethos. In Pensée 233, he emphasizes the crucial role of habitual practice. He advises us as follows: "you would like to cure yourself of unbelief and ask the remedy for it. Learn of those who have been bound like you, and who now stake all their possessions. These are people who know the way which you would follow, and who are cured of an ill of which you would be cured. Follow the way by which they began; by acting as if they believed, taking the holy water, having masses said, etc. Even this will naturally make you believe, and deaden your acuteness."

Pascal's insight is that even if one does not believe, if one nevertheless *acts as if one believes* (that is, enters into the ethos of the believer), one will come to believe, or, to state it more critically, one will achieve a level of bad faith that is a reasonable facsimile of belief. In effect, "je ne sais pas, mais quand même." Two corollaries of this insight are important here. One is that even if *one believes*, if one in fact *acts as if one does not believe* (enters into the ethos of the non-believer), one will come not to believe, or, more precisely, one will achieve a level of bad faith that is a reasonable facsimile of non-belief.

Politically, this usually means a lapse into “liberal” or “progressive” politics, the politics of gestures and representation. Finally, if one *believes and acts as if one believes* (enters into the ethos of belief), then one can believe in good faith, accepting the practical consequences of and undertaking the project of one’s belief. Politically, this means that one becomes capable of the Act. (In honor of the philosopher, we might call it the “Pascalage à l’Acte.”) Pascal’s insight is that if you really want to be a *croquant*, then become a *pratiquant*. But there is a deeper implicit truth behind this. If you want to be a *pratiquant*, then become a *pratiquant!*

With this in mind, let us look briefly at the four spheres of social determination that have been mentioned. The first, the social institutional structure, is the most obvious determinant and constituent of social reality. It is the moment of externality, the material and substantial expression, of social reality. It is the sphere that is usually given the most attention in Left social critique. It includes the structure of capital and its various sectors, the state apparatus, and the technological system. It includes the formal structure of social practices, including institutional systems of domination and oppression based on sex, race, sexual orientation, culture, ethnicity, etc. Although it is the most conspicuous sphere and the one analyzed most extensively, there is still a need for a deeper and more complex dialectical investigation of the interrelationship between its constituent elements and its interaction with the other spheres of social determination. For example, there are important dialectical interactions between productionist and consumptionist institutions, and also between these institutions and both consumptionist and productionist forms of social ideology, forms of the social imaginary, and forms of practice (ethos).

The second sphere consists of the social ethos, habitus, or practice. In so far as it includes the content of social practice, it intersects with the institutional structure, but it constitutes part of the collective subjective dimension of the dominant system. Ethos encompasses the prevailing cultural climate of a community or society, its habits, its linguistic expression, its gestures, its rituals. Ethos is the sphere of certain satisfactions and gratifications that accompany practices, either within the confines of the system of domination or beyond it. Ethos is the sphere of social psychological reality. It can only be understood through a very specific analysis of everyday life and all the habits, practices, gestures, and rituals that it entails. This is the area that is neglected most in Left social analysis, but as the discussion of Pascal’s Wager indicates, it is perhaps the most crucial area for the establishment or transformation of patterns of behavior and forms of consciousness.

The third sphere is the social imaginary. This is the sphere of a society's or community's collective fantasy life. It includes socially conditioned self-images, commodity images, and images of the other. It includes the prevailing myths and paradigmatic narratives. In contemporary society, it is a sphere in which the elements of a productionist imaginary, a consumptionist imaginary, a patriarchal imaginary, a nationalist-statist imaginary, and a technological imaginary interact dialectically. It is related to certain preeminent institutions of the imaginary, such as advertising, marketing, mass media, the arts, and mass culture in general. It includes many of the phenomena that the Frankfurt School investigated as part of the culture industry and that Situationism uncovered in the society of the spectacle. The social imaginary includes, in Lacanian terms, both the symbolic and the imaginary (and might be reconceptualized as two spheres on this basis). The study of the social imaginary explores the social dimensions of desire, need and demand. The Lacanian Big Other exists within the social imaginary. Žižek has pointed out that there has been a historical shift in the primary superego injunction from "Thou Shalt Not!" to "Thou Shalt – Enjoy!" However, this shift has been far from complete, and superego mechanisms vary widely depending on one's location within the global capitalist system. In late capitalism, the Big Other has undergone its own identity crisis so that now takes the form of both the productionist/authoritarian Big Brother who makes infinite demands on us and the consumptionist/pseudo-libertarian Big Mother who offers infinite satisfactions. (The late capitalist imaginary can be summarized in one phrase: "The Big Tit backed up by The Big Stick.")

Finally, there is the sphere of social ideology. After the institutional structure, this is the sphere that has received the most attention from the Left. The sense of ideology here (abstracting it for analytical purposes from its embodiment in the other spheres) follows its traditional definition in critical theory. An ideology is a system of ideas that purports to be an objective depiction of reality but which in fact constitutes a systematic distortion of reality on behalf of some particularistic interest or system of power. To whatever degree it may contain certain elements of truth, it qualifies as ideology because it is also a systemic expression of false consciousness. The more specific sub-systems of ideology within the dominant system parallel the various realms of the social imaginary. Thus, there are economic, political, racial, sexual, nationalist-statist, technical-scientific, and other sub-systems of ideology that interact dialectically (often mutually reinforcing, but sometimes contradicting one another) within the larger ideological system. The quasi-hegemonic ideological sector is that of economic ideology, and there is a dialectic between the productionist and consumptionist dimen-

sions of this sector. Thus, the system of production is lauded for satisfying the needs of the consumer better than any other system; yet the ideology of self-satisfaction through commodity consumption (in addition to being internally self-contradictory) contradicts and in fact significantly erodes the contending productionist ideology, with its more traditionalist values of "the work ethic," "the productive citizen," "the job well-done," "pride in one's work," etc. Ideology is propagated especially through a range of ideological institutions, including discursive media, newspapers, magazines, news programs, talk radio, advertising, marketing, schools, churches, and conventional wisdom as expressed in public opinion.

There has been an increasing dominance of economism, and in particular of its consumptionist dimension, especially in the advanced industrial societies. This has been carried out through consumptionist institutions, the consumptionist imaginary, consumptionist ideology, and a consumptionist ethos. This is not to say that the productionist dimension of economism is not also crucial, as is nationalism/statism. Strongly productionist or disciplinary institutions such as the prison, the school, the office, the factory, and the military rely more heavily on productionist ideology, the productionist imaginary, and a productionist ethos for support and legitimacy. Yet there are always multiple interactions. Thus, schools and the military, for example, are legitimated not only by productionism but by the consumptionist image of personal success and upward mobility. Economic enterprises are legitimated not only by the various moments of economism, but also by nationalism/statism, through concepts such as the national interest and national power. It is important to understand the complex dialectic between these various moments if we are to comprehend the power of the system of domination to resist transformation. But though we need to understand all the moments in themselves, the relative significance of these moments must also be considered. Such a consideration will show, for example, that the consumptionist ethos, embedded in a consumptionist institutional structure, and reinforced by the consumptionist imaginary and ideology, is much more powerful than is usually recognized.

The point of such analysis is not merely to understand how these various spheres determine and reinforce the existing patterns of thought and action. It is also to understand what must be done if patterns of thought and action are to emerge that truly challenge and begin to overturn the system of social domination. It points to the conclusion that an effective movement for social transformation must consist of a growing community of people in the process of creating for themselves a different institutional

framework for their everyday lives, a different social ethos that emerges from the actual living of those lives, and a different social imaginary and social (counter-)ideology expressed in their ideas, ideals, aspirations, beliefs, desires, passions and fantasies.

We must ask what kind of program and transformative vision might appeal to those who believe in a world that is free, just, democratic, cooperative and ecological, and more importantly, which might actually lead to the creation of communities of liberation that break decisively with the dominant institutional structure, social imaginary, social ideology and social ethos. Such a transformative program would envision the creation of personal relationships and primary groups (families, affinity groups, base communities) in which caring, cooperation, freedom, justice and democracy are part of the practice of everyday life. It would foresee the creation of new liberatory communities, democratic eco-villages and towns, and democratically self-managed enterprises. And it would imagine the creation of democratic participatory media, arts, music, film and video. It would look forward to the creation of mutualistic associations to fulfill cooperatively our needs for child care, health care, education, celebration, expressions of social solidarity, spirituality, and experience of nature.

Many of these ideas were prefigured, for example, in Martin Buber's vision (following his mentor Gustav Landauer) of a socialism that was both libertarian and communitarian, and which was aimed at the creation of "an organic commonwealth" that would consist of "a community of communities." Buber proposed what he called a "Full Cooperative" that would combine cooperative living, production, and consumption. His ideas helped inspire the development of the early socialist kibbutzim. The experience of these communities demonstrates the enormous potential of the cooperative community, though it also shows how this potential can be undermined when the community fails to maintain its distinctive character through its ideology, imaginary, and ethos, and instead conforms increasingly to a larger society with conflicting values (such as capitalist economic values, group privilege, and colonialist oppression).

It is unfortunate that in the U.S., at least since the decline of the classical worker's movements, the right has been more skilled at creating and sustaining highly participatory (albeit rigid and hierarchical) institutions, while the Left has specialized in demonstrating, protesting, publishing in its print media, and hoping to have an effect on institutions that are simply not designed to respond to its demands. Accordingly, the best examples of

successful organization in (at least partial) opposition to the dominant American late capitalist consumptionist society come from the right. The rapid growth and internal strength of many right-wing movements can be attributed in large part to their success in grassroots organization, and in creating institutions and practices that fulfill primary social needs and address diverse aspects of the lives of their members. This is particularly true of the religious right, which includes in the U.S. tens of millions of active participants who find support for their beliefs and ideals in the everyday practice of their local church, which is in effect a highly participatory grassroots community.

Such a small primary community offers to its members a distinctive ethos, a form of life that synthesizes ideas, beliefs, images, symbols, rituals, practices, habits, and organizational forms. The members of the group find in the community a comprehensive social environment that structures much of their everyday lives. In the most developed of these communities it includes classes, study groups and other educational activities, a range of social groups based on age, sex, marital status, or interests, recreational activities, camps and retreats, counseling and consolation in times of difficulty, and beyond the local group, an extensive system of external ideological support, including magazines, books, tapes, and complete radio and television networks with diverse programming, all of which reinforce the values and practices of the primary group. To this must be added, of course, the core of more formalized ritualistic behavior that is central to religious practice.

The *Manifesto* points out a highly significant development when it notes that since they are “no longer rooted in neighborhoods, the [Left] social movements, in general, seem uninterested in mounting popular mobilizations against foreclosures and other evictions, repossessions and rent gouging, and lack a language with which to discuss the relation of rising food prices with the zooming prices of oil and speculation in commodities markets.” The words “no longer” are significant, since they impel us to think back to the time in which radical social movements in the United States were rooted in such communities—most notably during the heroic periods of the classical Workers’ Movement and the Civil Rights Movement. A social movement that aspires to fundamental social transformation must once again be rooted in primary and grassroots communities—in neighborhoods, in workplaces, in personal and family life, and in all of people’s everyday social interactions. It will be then able to mobilize the base because it will in a strong sense *have* a base.

Though primary or base community organization is almost entirely alien to the current mainstream American Left, on the global scale it has been important to major radical and revolutionary movements. One of the most instructive examples of the socially transformative small community is the history of the Christian base communities of Latin America that were inspired by Liberation Theology. These communities began to flourish in the 1960's and 70's and developed into an international movement of perhaps several hundred thousand groups (one study estimates that there were as many as 80,000 in Brazil alone in the mid-80's) and many millions of participants. Individual base communities range in size from a few dozen to over 100 members. Members meet frequently for religious celebrations, Bible study with an emphasis on the social justice message of the Hebrew prophets and the Gospels, and political activism centering on the ideas of social liberation and "the preferential option for the poor." These communities have had an enormous influence on social justice and revolutionary struggles in South and Central America and can certainly be given some credit for the fact that some variety of Left regime is now in power in almost every country in Latin America.

Another important historical example that is at least as instructive is the Gandhian Sarvodaya (Welfare of All) Movement in India, which inspired many millions and was a central force in overthrowing the British raj. The movement had certain shortcomings from which we can also learn, but its enormous accomplishments are instructive and inspiring. One of Gandhi's goals was that small groups of committed activists would form ashrams. In Sarvodaya's usage, the term "ashram" meant a political and spiritual base community in which the members lived communally. It was seen as a step toward the establishment of sarvodaya villages, in which the cooperative principles of the movement could be practiced in a more comprehensive manner. In addition, it was hoped that eventually every village in India would have a gram sevak, a well-trained and self-disciplined full-time Sarvodaya community organizer. The larger goal was a system of village swaraj, meaning democratic self-rule and economic self-management in the local community. Self-rule would be carried out through the gramsabha, or village assembly, and the panchayat, or five-person village council. The spinning wheel became the symbol of the Movement, in part for its functional role in decentralized, self-managed production, but also because spinning was seen as an edifying meditative activity, and a communal one that promotes solidarity. Kahdi, or homespun fabric, was also emblematic of the Movement, for it was seen as an expression of all of its aesthetic, ethical, political, economic, and spiritual values. The concept that is perhaps most

closely associated with the Gandhian Movement is Satyagraha, the Force of Truth. It expresses the idea that injustice and oppression can be most successfully overturned through the participatory political Act, through massive direct action or civil disobedience directed at the very structures of injustice. The movement also developed the idea of Bhoodan, or gift of land, in which land was donated for cooperative village farming projects. Though it never succeeded in making cooperative production the norm in Indian agriculture, five million acres of land were put into cooperative projects.

Many of the principles of the Gandhian Movement have been carried on by the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka. The movement interprets Sarvodaya as a “unity of awakening” on every level from the person and family, through the village to the larger society. Shramadana means a “gift of labor.” The Movement has created a “Five Stage Development Process.” It begins with the members of a village community perceiving a problem and then discussing it with Sarvodaya field workers. A Shramadana camp is then organized to plan the project and begin the village awakening process. Local groups, training programs, and planning meetings are then organized to prepare for the work. A formal Sarvodaya Shramadana Society is then formed to help finance the projects. Micro-credit programs are often established and the Movement has created several thousand village community banks and savings societies. Finally, the work is undertaken and completed, after which the participants reach out to other communities with similar needs to offer their labor, skills, experience, technical abilities, and material aid. Millions of Sri Lankans have participated in Sarvodaya projects over the past fifty years, and projects have been carried out in about half of the country’s 23,000 villages. It is perhaps the most important grassroots development movement in the world, though it remains almost unknown to the American Left.

It should be noted that both the base communities of Latin America, the Gandhian Movement, and the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement have been developments in the Global South. The American Left might be in a less spirited and directionless state if it were willing to find inspiration in movements and experiments that are outside the framework of Western modernity (or Western post-modernity for that matter). It is telling that the *Manifesto* can conclude that changes such as “the collapse of the Soviet Union” and the transformation of the other Leninist regimes “have all but removed the traditional sources of radical imagination from the political landscape.” However, if the “radical imagination” of the Left was reduced to getting its inspiration from Leninist bureaucratic state capitalist regimes,

then the problem was much deeper than collapse or mutation on the part of these regimes. The *Manifesto* contends that “despite all of its warts, the ideological anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism, the military power of the Soviet Union, and its promise of liberation filled the hearts of millions of oppressed people in the West as well as the global South with hope.” However, by the time of its demise the appeal of the USSR had dwindled all over the West, and many in the global South who strategically allied themselves to varying degrees with the Soviet Union in an era of Cold War polarization had no such illusions. They (“they” meaning especially the masses of people engaged in grassroots struggles) often had their own ideas of freedom, socialism, and self-determination and did not look to the USSR for the “promise of liberation.”

It is unfortunate that radicals in advanced capitalist societies have not in general looked to the global South (apart from tendencies strongly influenced by European political movements) for the reinvigoration of the radical imagination. The South has had and still has today an enormous amount to teach them, as shown by the movements just mentioned. There are many other examples, and, more importantly, a larger cultural context that generates them. As radical eco-feminists such as Vandana Shiva, Ariel Salleh and Maria Mies have pointed out, there are around the world age-old traditions of caring labor and mutual aid by women, peasants and indigenous peoples that challenge not only the economic, acquisitive values of capitalism, but the instrumentalist, dominating values that have plagued humanity since the origins of civilization in patriarchy and ancient despotism.

This is not to say that Western and specifically American radical and revolutionary traditions do not contain the resources for a new direction for the Left. Indeed, the *Manifesto* itself points out some of these possibilities. In particular, it mentions ideas concerning radical democratic politics, cooperative economics, cooperative housing, radical media, transformation of personal life, and a new relationship to nature. Some of these areas are discussed in concrete detail, while others are mentioned only briefly and need clarification and elaboration. We should look more carefully at some of these important themes.

The *Manifesto* expresses strong support for “radical democratic institutions... in communities.” It states, for example, that “the Right to the City would invest authority for issues regarding the allocation of space to community democratic decision-making.” This would indeed be a very important advance. And presumably, if this important authority could be democrati-

cally controlled by the local community, many other powers could also devolve to that grassroots level. However, the meaning of the “community” that has control is crucial. A deep and authentic commitment to radical participatory democracy would require placing decisions about space and many other key questions in the hands of institutions such as assemblies, councils and citizens’ committees, at the most basic levels, such as the neighborhood or town. In fact, some decisions could be even more decentralized if some responsibilities were allocated to (or perhaps better, appropriated by) assemblies and committees at the level of the block or section of the neighborhood. The degree to which abstract, formal democracy can be transformed into direct democracy will determine the degree to which a democratic ethos and a democratic practice can become integral to each citizen’s life activities.

Another point in the *Manifesto* that is relevant to democracy in the community is what it calls “fights for socialized medicine and for the expansion of mass public transportation.” Both of these demands, as stated, are typical elements of liberal and social democratic programs. So we might ask how medicine and transportation might not only be more socialized, but also how they might be transformed in a radically democratic and participatory manner. To what degree could there be a radical decentralization of preventive health care to the neighborhood level through situating health care workers and medical clinics in each neighborhood (though obviously some technologies will require central locations)? In addition to fulfilling the present need for *mass* transportation, we need to think about *demassifying* planning. To what degree can the siting and scale of housing, workplaces, shops, parks, recreational spaces, and civic centers be planned to minimize the need for individual or mass transportation and maximize the level of interaction and participation in the local neighborhood community? A crucial radical democratic project is to combat the New Urbanist co-optation of ideas of such as walkability, low energy consumption, social and ethnic diversity, and the rich intermixture in the neighborhood or town of homes, workplaces, shops, play areas, and arenas for cultural activities. We must show in practice how these goals can most authentically be realized, not through eco-apartheid, but rather in creative, humane, just, and democratic communities.

The nature of its housing is one of the key determinants of the nature of the community. The *Manifesto* takes a strong position in favor of “housing as a non-commodified public utility, that is, either publicly owned or organized as limited equity cooperatives (no tenant can sell her apartment privately, only back to the co-op).” This general goal is a highly desirable one and

such explicit support for socially-owned or cooperative housing is welcome. However, certain issues about how to achieve it need to be faced. Is this a proposal that even single-family homes be publicly or cooperatively owned? How would such a system be structured? What would be the advantage of public ownership as opposed to cooperative ownership? Participatory democratic decision-making is a central goal of the *Manifesto*, but would this not be achieved much more successfully through cooperative rather than “public” ownership, if the latter means state ownership? Would community land trusts fit into the picture of non-commodified housing? Under that structure, land is owned collectively, while a house or apartment is owned individually, but can only be sold to a new land trust member, and only for the equivalent of the original cost and improvements. Through such cooperative housing, speculation is eliminated and improvements to the community through the “collective force” of the citizens accrue to the community as a whole.

The *Manifesto* expresses a strong commitment to cooperative economics. It advocates “the founding of radical democratic institutions at the workplace,” efforts to “decommodify essential services” and “new forms of collective ownership and control over the natural and productive resources.” Such concepts could be developed into a wide-ranging program for a democratic system of production based on worker self-management. The U.S. has a rich history of radical labor movements (especially the IWW) that have fought for democratic control of the economy, in addition to valuable experience of self-managed worker cooperatives, from the important self-managed sector of the plywood industry from the 1930’s through the 1950’s, to the contemporary worker cooperative movement spearheaded by the U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives. Few people today in the U.S. have ever heard the case for self-managed production, but when it is presented it often finds a highly receptive audience.

There remain many questions that have to be faced in proposals for a self-managed economy. The Mondragon cooperatives in Spain, the largest system of worker cooperatives in the world (with over 100,000 workers, a cooperative bank, cooperative housing, a workers’ university with 4000 students, and a health care system) found that democratic decision-making becomes difficult if units grow to much more than 500 members. For this reason, efforts were made to create a federation in which the constituent cooperatives would not exceed this scale greatly (the average for individual cooperatives is now about 800). A challenge will be to create economic democracy in which cooperation can take place on a very large scale, in effect creating a larger federation of federations, while democratic control remains effec-

tively at the base. It must also be assured that there are no second-class workers and that all units and participants within the federation have a position of relative equality. Another challenge arises from the fact that even a large expansion of the cooperative, economically democratic sector would not in itself mean a thoroughgoing decommodification of economics, in so far as it would occur within a market system of exchange. For this reason, it is important to investigate alternative systems of exchange that could be put into effect on a much larger scale than the systems of labor exchange and local currencies that presently exist.

The *Manifesto* rightly points out the importance of immigrants to the economies of many of our communities, stresses the issue of immigrant rights, and notes that immigrants have made important contributions to revitalizing labor struggles in some areas. We might ask further whether some immigrant groups, which have much stronger communal ties and feelings of solidarity, and which are not as well integrated into the dominant consumptionist culture, might be capable of forms of cooperative and community-based organization that could be a model for other segment of the population. We might reflect on the fact perhaps one-third, if not more, of the population of El Salvador now lives in the U.S. There are other significant if less striking examples. Of course, the problem of illegality is an enormous one, and the right would react viciously to greater militancy on the part of any foreign-born workers. But then, class struggle has been called "struggle" for a reason. As "America" globalizes itself into the world, the world globalizes itself into "America" – whether "America" likes it or not. Perhaps "America" will be dragged kicking and screaming into the world, and the American Left along with it.

The *Manifesto* also confronts the key issue of media and communication (central to questions of the social imaginary and the social ideology) when it states that the Left has lacked "a truly national presence, a public press that regularly reports and comments on the economic, political, and cultural situations and a network of major educational institutions that constitute counter-hegemonies to the prevailing capitalist 'common sense.'" This is indeed an important part of the larger problem, which is the relative monopolization of the means of communication and the existence of a prevailing ideological and imaginary hegemony. One of the two practical proposals that is emphasized in bold type in the *Manifesto* is "starting a newsweekly in both hard copy and internet." In doing so, it points out one of the many crucial gaps in Left political culture in this country. If we consider the enormous contribution that has been made to the Left by one

radio and television news program, Democracy Now!, we can begin to imagine what a comprehensive system of radical Left media might accomplish.

However, we should keep in mind that as undeniably essential as the radical press may be, the existence of one or more national newspapers on the Left is not likely to be a major catalyst for social transformation. A number of countries have long had important Left dailies. France, for example, has had the Communist daily *L'Humanité* (founded in 1904), and *Libération* (founded in 1973), which was established as an extreme Left publication and was generally Left for much of its history, not to mention other important papers with more center-Left sympathies. It must be recognized that movement newspapers play a significant role in social movements and that they have contributed to the relatively greater importance and endurance of the European Left, as compared to its highly marginalized American counterpart. It must be realized, however, that newspapers are more an expression of the power and vitality of a social movement than they are the force that creates and develops the movement (or else Trotskyists and Maoists would be a hundred times stronger than they actually are, and Libé would have converted the bobotariat, rather than succumbing to it). Nevertheless, they are an important element of a larger system of communication that help generate an alternative social imaginary and alternative social counter-ideology, and not least of all, that help create an ethos of liberated communication that is part of the everyday lives of a growing community.

Above all, it is crucial to create media that flow out of and support transformations at the personal, small group and grassroots community levels. The electronic mass media are, much more than the print media, central to the shaping of consciousness today. But even beyond creating alternative mass print and electronic media, we need to think about a goal of creating democratic participatory media that are not merely marginal to people's lives. Can we see a flourishing of diverse media in the neighborhood? Can we create a movement for micropower radio that would demonstrate that every neighborhood can create a community radio station? Can we show the feasibility of a community video project in every neighborhood? Can we demonstrate the possibility of a community newspaper in every neighborhood?

The *Manifesto* confronts some of the most crucial questions concerning social transformation, those related to subjectivity and the personal dimension, when it asserts that radical democracy should be extended to "everyday social interactions, including the home, and that we should "rethink

personal relationships within the framework of class and innovative and creative psychic economies." However, this is one of the areas on which the text is most vague. For example, it is not made clear *how* class is to be used as a basis for this rethinking, why considerations other than class (gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.) do not demand such rethinking at least as exigently, or what the intriguing concept of "innovative and creative psychic economies" might imply.

The idea of radically democratizing the home calls for some discussion of how patriarchal values still intrude into family and personal life, how the society of mass consumption is revolutionizing these areas, how the insights of feminism and radical psychology and psychoanalysis are relevant to the project, and what democratized forms of personal and family life look like, at least in general terms. Under late capitalism, there has been a disintegration of the traditional productionist ego and a weakening of traditional forms of personal life. How, specifically, do these developments offer new opportunities for social creation and how do they create new obstacles to collective action?

Moreover, it is impossible to pose the issue of the transformation of personal life in a serious manner without considering how primary groups shape selfhood and personality. It is here that the potential of small groups such as affinity groups and base communities seems so obvious. Could we use our radical imagination to envision a political movement in which *every participant* is a member of a primary group or micro-community of a dozen or more members who are collectively at work on embodying in their personal and communal lives values of love and compassion, solidarity and mutual aid, peace and justice, freedom and creativity?

The *Manifesto* states wisely that we must "rethink the relationship between Nature and production." However, it says little about where this rethinking might lead us, or what other areas might have to be reconsidered if we take seriously our place in the natural world. Indeed, it is in general rather vague on questions of ecology and the natural world. From the formulation just cited, one would expect a discussion of the far-reaching implications of the fact that the system of production has led us into the sixth great mass extinction in the entire history of life on earth, and into catastrophically disruptive climate change. There is also a need for a consideration of why the society at large and the mainstream of the Left in particular have been unable, even when having some recognition of the gravity of the crisis, to act accordingly (lapsing once more into fetishistic disavowal). The develop-

ing ecological catastrophe should be looked upon as more than another argument that capitalism functions rather badly. Instead, it should be seen as the ultimate intrusion of the traumatic real, something like a collective death sentence for humanity and much of life on earth.

Consider an example that shows the irony of the inaction on the part of the Left. The Emirate of Abu Dhabi and private enterprise together are building a carbon-free, waste free city for 50,000 people in Abu Dhabi. The project, Masdar, is scheduled for completion within the next year. No doubt, the project will have many aspects worthy of the severest criticism. Indeed, its primary function will be to serve as greenwashing for those who play a crucial role in global ecological destruction (in 2006, the United Arab Emirates had the second-highest per capita level of CO₂ emissions in the world). Nevertheless, it poses the question of why some among the tens of millions of activists of the Left around the planet have not been able to come together somewhere to plan and create an eco-community that even remotely approaches such a scale, and that would be achieve not only ecological soundness but also social justice and radical democracy.

There is also a failure to consider the profound challenge that ecological crisis poses for all of our dominant institutions and ways of thinking and perceiving. We need to ask what a truly ecological culture and system of production might look like, with some degree of specificity. We might try to imagine how radically they might differ from the social world in which we live, which might be called the culture of extinction, the culture of extermination, or ecocidal culture. We might ask whether the prevailing system of high technology and industrial production can continue to exist in any form, and if it cannot, what kind of just and humane system could replace it. We might also ask what changes in culture, institutions, and personal relations might follow from the insights of ecofeminism concerning the connections between the quest to dominate nature and the system of patriarchy. We might ask how bioregional values and the idea of reinhabitation might fit into radical politics. We might ask how the radical imagination can be directed toward the question of what an ecological selfhood, a radically ecological politics, and a future culture of nature might look like. According to Thoreau's famous dictum, "in wildness is the preservation of the world." Is it possible that "in wildness is the preservation of the Left?" Or even beyond its preservation, its regeneration?

Another important subject addressed by the *Manifesto* is the future of the nation-state. It asks, "Will nation-states reassert their autonomy, or are new

political arrangements needed to insure a world of growing equality and democracy? If so, what would they look like, within the current system of global power? If not, what are the arguments, under present conditions, for the possibility of state autonomy." These are important questions, and given the de facto concentration of power in the nation-state system and the system of transnational capital we will have to judge in various cases whether a shift in the balance of power away from the nation-state or back toward it will be preferable (though it's not clear what "state autonomy" can mean in a global corporate capitalist society). However, both the nation-state and transnational bodies will reflect their positions within the larger global system of power.

In this connection, it must be noted that the *Manifesto* does not clearly face the problem of the centralized, hierarchical, bureaucratic state. Nor is the problematical nature of representation, the ideological foundation of that institution, confronted forthrightly. A manifesto for radical democracy should, one would think, consider the degree to which authentic democracy can exist at various scales, in both political and economic institutions, and the degree to which popular power is necessarily alienated in larger scale and centralized units of decision-making. It would seem that such considerations would lead to the conclusion that the "new political arrangements" that are needed are the ones that allow communities to re-appropriate the powers that are now alienated to corporations, to nation-states, and to a lesser degree, to trans-national political entities. In a sense, the challenge for radical democracy is to transform the base communities, the popular base, into the material base of social organization.

Many of the ideas expressed here have long been part of the anarchist tradition (in addition to being part of a larger libertarian socialist tradition) and that tradition still has much to offer to radical politics. It is rather disconcerting to read in the *Manifesto* that "even the anarchists have few ideas beyond protest and resistance." It is true that the general public, absorbing their political education from the corporate media, identifies anarchism with anarchist youth culture. As a result, it seems to be no more than a post-adolescent conspiracy with the single guiding principle that "you have to break a few windows to make an omelet." But there is more to it than this, and critical political thought needs to be a bit more perceptive.

In reality, there has existed in recent times a broad spectrum of anarchist ideas concerning social organization, even if we limit the list to those that are more detailed than those expressed in the *Manifesto* itself. Although

some of these ideas are deeply flawed, as a whole they constitute a theoretically rich and highly suggestive body of theory. Castoriadis's ideas of a self-managed economy were basically anarchist. Bookchin's libertarian municipalism and confederalism were elaborated within an anarchist theoretical framework. Fotopoloulos's "inclusive democracy" presents an anarchist economic and political model. Some anarchists have been inspired by Parecon or Participatory Economics, as developed by Albert and Hahnel. Many still adhere to and attempt to update anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary unionism. Many others carry on the tradition of cooperativism or mutualism. Karatani's associationism, as discussed in his book *Transcritique*, is a synthesis of Marxist theory and anarchist (mutualist) practice. Even the least systematic tendency within anarchism, the anarchist youth culture, while focusing on anti-capitalist and anti-corporate globalist struggles has developed ideas of affinity group organization, association for mutual aid, and networking that go significantly "beyond protest and resistance."

Furthermore, it is significant that the most provocative political document in recent times, *The Coming Insurrection*, emerged out of (as the French police phrased it) the "anarcho-autonomist" milieu. As Julien Coupat points out, one has not seen power so fearful of a book in a very long time. The work is noteworthy for confronting the modes of colonization of the subject, the need for effective and immediate radical transformation of everyday life, and the emancipatory dimensions of actual social struggles. It faces the impending catastrophe and the existing one, identifies the central place of the affinity group and base communities in a communal future, and reflects critically on the meaning of popular assemblies. While completely rejecting all illusions about the forms of bureaucratic and terroristic state capitalism that have masqueraded as "communism," it also helps divulge the well-kept secret that the senility and death-throes of various forms of statist despotism and (anti)social (un)democratic (non)reformism have masked the continual birth and rebirth of communist practice.

The work is not without serious limitations. Its greatest strength, its expression of radical opposition and marginality, is at the same time its greatest weakness. The modes of invisibility and social insurrection that it proposes are forms of both self-expression and self-limitation of social revolutionary power. It leaves underdeveloped the most crucial modes of radical transformation that are expressed through intensified social *visibility* and socially and ecologically regenerative action. But what is significant is not the work's limitation (limitations are easy to find everywhere) but the astounding fact that out of a moribund contemporary Left can come such energy,

creativity, and transformative vision. It is in fact evidence that there still is a Left left in the West, that there are still living seeds of liberation in the global rotten core.

And perhaps a few more words should be added about that notorious anarchist youth culture. Those who lived through the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina saw many hundreds of young anarchists (and perhaps even thousands from the larger anarchistic *mouvance*) come to New Orleans and the surrounding region to help desperately needy communities that their state and corporate masters abandoned cruelly and murderously. They came with ideas such as organization based on non-hierarchical solidarity, self-determination on the level of the local neighborhood community, and the creation of lasting grassroots cooperative institutions. Some of these young people were willing to devote months or even years of their lives—living in makeshift dormitories or tents, sometimes sleeping on floors, working long hours in unhealthy conditions, receiving no financial remuneration, using up their own savings, putting aside other plans for their lives—to put these ideas into practice. Some describe their experience, despite all the tragedy and frustration they endured, as the most fulfilling time of their lives. Yes, they also protested and sometimes got arrested, and they deserve recognition for their resistance. However, they deserve even more credit for the positive dimensions of both their vision and their action to save and restore communities.

In conclusion, the *Manifesto* is valuable for its analysis of the roots of the current social crisis. It shows that there are aspects (particularly economic ones) of this crisis that few have begun to comprehend adequately, and that need to be understood clearly. However, we know that awareness of crisis and even of its causes does not in itself lead to liberatory forms of social transformation. In a culture of denial and fetishistic disavowal such knowledge is fairly easily assimilated into the dominant system of thought and practice, and its existence can even function as a form of legitimation of that system and its illusions of freedom and openness to dissent. No manifesto can itself create all the conditions for social (or personal) transformation, and needless to say, neither can any critique of a manifesto do so. But if a text is to function as a manifesto of radical politics, a manifesto that proclaims the need for a radical turning, it will offer to the reader, or perhaps even impose on the reader, something that will remain with and, indeed, haunt that reader. It will inspire specific, immediate, transformational action, the beginning of such a turning. It would perhaps offer something like this injunction:

Create your own community of liberation. From this moment on, direct your most concerted efforts, your best work, and your greatest feats of imagination toward creating the impossible community, and do so first of all precisely where you are, with those around you.

Doing so would not mean, as some might hastily conclude, a fetishism of the local and mere particularity. It would mean, after fully recognizing and passing through whatever singularity, the creation of a community that expresses the universal particular. It would mean regenerating, in the creation of forms of life embodying communal individuality, the particular concrete universality on which the great commons, that larger concrete universality, can finally be founded.

The tradition of communism, in its most meaningful and historically-grounded sense (the most libertarian and participatory communism), is the tradition of the commons, the practice of humanity through ninety-nine percent of its history. It is also, as Peter Linebaugh shows so beautifully in the *The Magna Carta Manifesto*, a deeply-rooted tradition that lived on even in Europe into the medieval and modern periods and has only been suppressed in both the West and globally through the most concerted efforts of the centralist and imperialist nation-state, and the ruthlessly colonizing market economy. Communism, not as an ideology or abstract political program, but as communal practice, as the activity of “commoning,” may be the only possible transition to any liberatory form of socialism, at the same time that it already supersedes any future socialism that it may help create.

In our present predicament, we seem to be faced with a coming community that is capable of almost anything except coming, and a coming insurrection whose destructive powers are much more evident than are its creative ones. We must retrieve the history of commons, the commune, and communism, and resituate our creative communal practice within that history. In doing so, we will help destroy the identification of communism and the common with certain ideological constructs that have been used to legitimate forms of state capitalism, bureaucratic centralism, and political vanguardism that have inevitably worked to dissolve the authentic communal sphere. In doing so, we will give a definitive answer the paradoxical question:

Why is communism so good in practice, though it never seems to work in theory?

That answer lies in the creation of forms of life that challenge, materially and experientially, the dualistic split between critical theoretical reflection

and concrete communal practice. We might debate ad infinitum the question of whether another world is possible. However, we will only find a convincing answer by demonstrating that if something is actual, then it is undeniably possible. The answer lies in the creation of the impossible community.