Envisioning Real Utopias: alternatives within and beyond capitalism

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FOUNDATIONAL EMPIRICAL CLAIM:
Many forms of human suffering and many deficits in human flourishing are the result of existing institutions and social structures.

FOUNDATIONAL EMANCIPATORY THESIS:
Transforming those institutions and structures has the potential to substantially reduce human suffering and expand the possibilities for human flourishing.
Four tasks of an emancipatory social science

1. Moral Foundations
2. Diagnosis & Critique
3. Alternatives
4. Transformation
Moral Foundations: three principles

Equality: In a socially just society all persons would have broadly equal access to the material and social means necessary to live a flourishing life.

Democracy: In a fully democratic society, all people would have broadly equal access to the necessary means to participate meaningfully in decisions about things which affect their lives.

Sustainability: Future generations should have access to the social and material means to live flourishing lives at least at the same level as the present generation.
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Diagnosis & Critique

Equality:
Capitalism inherently generates levels of inequality in income and wealth that systematically violate social justice.

Democracy:
Capitalism generates severe deficits in realizing democratic values by excluding crucial decisions from public deliberation, allowing private wealth to affect access to political power, and allowing workplace dictatorships.

Sustainability:
Capitalism inherently threatens the quality of the environment for future generations because of imperatives for consumerism and endless growth.
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What is a “Real Utopia”? 

**Utopia:** Alternatives to dominant institutions that embody our deepest aspirations for a just and humane world.

**Real:** Alternatives to dominant institutions that are attentive to problems of unintended consequences, self-destructive dynamics, and difficult dilemmas of normative trade-offs.
Two ways of trying to make the world a better place:

(1) **Ameliorative reforms**: Look at existing institutions, identify their flaws and propose improvements.

(2) **Real utopias**: Envision the contours of an alternative social world that embodies emancipatory ideals and then look for social innovations we can create in the world as it is that move us towards that destination.
Some Examples of Real Utopias

1. Participatory budgeting
2. Wikipedia
3. Solidarity finance
4. Public libraries
5. The Quebec social economy council
6. Urban agriculture and community land trusts
7. The Mondragon worker cooperative
8. Internet-based gift-economy in music
9. Policy juries and “randomocracy”
10. Unconditional basic income
A framework for exploring real utopias in & beyond capitalism:

*Taking the “social” in socialism seriously*
Three kinds of power deployed in economic systems

1. Economic power: power based on the control of economic resources.
2. State power: power based on the control of rule making and rule enforcing over territory.
3. Social power: power based on capacity to mobilize voluntary cooperation and collective action.
POWER WITHIN ECONOMIC STRUCTURES:
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POWER WITHIN ECONOMIC STRUCTURES: CAPITALISM, STATISM AND SOCIALISM

**Capitalism**: an economic structure within which economic activity is controlled through the exercise of economic power.

**Statism**: an economic structure within which economic activity is controlled through the exercise of state power.

**Socialism**: an economic structure within which economic activity is controlled through the exercise of “social power” -- power based on capacity to mobilize voluntary cooperation and collective action.
The idea of HYBRIDS:

All real economic systems are complex combinations of capitalism, statism, and socialism. We call an economy “capitalist” when capitalism is dominant. The possibility of socialism, therefore, revolves around the problem of enlarging and deepening the socialist component of the hybrid and weakening the capitalist component. I refer to this as the problem of building configurations of social empowerment.
Three types of power:

- Social Power
- State Power
- Economic Power

Interaction of forms of power:

= direction of power constraints

Strength and autonomy of power:

= primary

= secondary
Conventional democracy: Social power dominates state power

Corporate control of political parties: Economic power dominates social power
Illustration of Power Configurations

Corporate control of state power via funding of political parties

Social control of economic power via state regulation of capital
Economic Power

Social Power

Economic activity: investment, and production and distribution of goods & services

State Power
CONFIGURATIONS OF CAPITALIST EMPOWERMENT

Economic Power

Social Power

State Power

Economic activity: investment, and production and distribution of goods & services
ECONOMIC POWER

CONFIGURATIONS OF SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Social Power

Economic Power

Economic activity: investment, and production and distribution of goods & services

State Power
Two central problems of emancipatory social transformation

1. Institutional designs that reduce capitalist empowerment and increase social empowerment

2. Strategies of transformation
I. STATIST SOCIALISM
A CONFIGURATION OF STATIST EMPOWERMENT

Economic Power

Social Power

Economic activity

State Power

AUTHORITARIAN STATISM
II. SOCIAL DEMOCRACY I: SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC STATIST REGULATION

CONFIGURATIONS OF SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Economic Power

Social Power

Economic activity

State Power
A CONFIGURATION OF CAPITALIST EMPOWERMENT

Economic Power

Economic activity

Social Power

State Power

CAPITALIST STATIST REGULATION
III. SOCIAL DEMOCRACY II: ASSOCIATIONAL DEMOCRACY

ECONOMIC POWER

SOCIAL POWER

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

STATE POWER
IV. SOCIAL ECONOMY I: SOCIAL CAPITALISM

CONFIGURATIONS OF SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

- Economic Power
- Economic activity
- Social Power
- State Power
A CONFIGURATION OF CAPITALIST EMPOWERMENT

Social Power

CORPORATE CAPITALIST SELF-REGULATION

Economic Power

Economic activity

State Power
V. SOCIAL ECONOMY II: CORE SOCIAL ECONOMY
VI. SOCIAL ECONOMY III: COOPERATIVE MARKET ECONOMY

CONFIGURATIONS OF SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

- Economic Power
- Social Power
- Economic activity
- State Power
Economic Power

State Power

VII. PARTICIPATORY SOCIALISM

Social Power

Economic activity

State Power
CONFIGURATIONS OF SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Economic Power

Social Power

Economic activity

State Power

Socialist configurations
Social Democracy configurations
Social Economy configurations
Strategic logics of Transformation

1. **Ruptural** (radical break in institutions): Revolutionary socialist tradition

2. **Interstitial** (build new institutions in the cracks of the system): Anarchist tradition

3. **Symbiotic** (use existing institutions to solve problems in ways that transform institutions): Social democratic tradition
A Strategic Vision for the 21st Century

1. **Ruptural strategies** directed at capitalism as a system are implausible, but ruptures in specific institutions may be needed to open up possibilities for symbiotic transformations.

2. **Symbiotic strategies** are needed to expand the space for interstitial transformations.

3. **Interstitial** strategies create building blocks of emancipatory alternatives.
CONCLUSIONS

1. Transcending capitalism: centrality of democratization
2. Institutional pluralism and heterogeneity: multiple configurations of social empowerment
3. There are no guarantees: socialism is a terrain for working for equality, democracy and sustainability, not a guarantee for realizing those ideals.
4. Strategic indeterminacy: there is no one way
5. Opacity of the future limits of possibility: We cannot know in advance how far we can go in this trajectory of social empowerment.
REAL UTOPIA PROPOSAL SESSIONS AT THE 2012 ASA MEETINGS

1. Unconditional Basic Income. Philippe Van Parijs
2. A Democratic Media System. Bob McChesny
3. The Public University as a Real Utopia. Michael Burawoy
5. Philanthropy and Real Utopia. Rob Reich
6. Parecon (Participatory Economics). Michael Albert
7. Democratizing Finance. Fred Block
8. Reviving Democratic Citizenship. Bruce Ackerman
10. Reimagining the Corporation. Jerry Davis
11. Designs and Dilemmas of Participatory Budgeting. Gianpaolo Baiocci
13. A World beyond Gender. Judith Lorber and Barbara Risman
14. Real Utopian Foodshed Governance. Harriet Friedman
15. From a Transparent State to a Transparent Society. Archon Fung
16. Productive Democracy. Joel Rogers
17. Democratic-Egalitarian Education. (1) M. Fielding & Peter Moss. (2) Harry Brighouse
18. Postfossil Conversion and Free Public Transport. Mario Candeias
19. Mutual Aid in Networked Societies. Yochai Benkler
21. Lesson from the Kibbutz. Uriel Leviatan
PLUS

50 Real Utopia Thematic panels on:

Anti-Consumerism; Carework; Mondragon; Art; Global Warming; the Family; Sexuality; Religion; Childhood; Sustainable Cities; Fair Trade; Prisons; Intentional Communities; Democratizing Global Governance; A Borderless World; the Welfare State; Communities for the Elderly; Alternative Currencies; the Social/Solidarity Economy; Islamic Utopias; Creating Real Utopias for Persons with Disabilities; Architecture; and more……
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Suggested hashtag for Twitter users: #lseutopias