van de Sande, Mathijs. "The prefigurative power of the common(s)." *Perspectives on Commoning: Autonomist Principles and Practices*. Ed. Guido Ruivenkamp and Andy Hilton. London: Zed Books Ltd, 2017. 25–64. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350221741.ch-001>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 09:59 UTC.

Copyright © Guido Ruivenkamp & Andy Hilton and Zed Books Editorial copyright © 2017. You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

Chapter 1

The prefigurative power of the common(s)

Mathijs van de Sande

Introduction

If we want to grasp how capitalist structures and relations are resisted from and by ‘the common’ and/or ‘commons’, we need to ascribe a certain power to it/them. This power, moreover, must be substantially and essentially different from capitalist forms of power. First and foremost, it needs a conceptualisation ‘from below’. The objective of this contribution is to provide such a conceptualisation, for which purpose three central concepts are employed: ‘prefiguration’, *‘potentia’* and ‘power-to’.

First, I define and conceptualise the notion of ‘prefiguration’. Prefiguration or ‘prefigurative politics’ is an experimental political practice in which the ends of one’s actions are mirrored in the means applied in their realisation. These ends are thereby conceived as inherent in the practice itself and their immediate realisation is aimed at. In other words, from a prefigurative perspective on political practices, the oppositional relations between means and ends and between a ‘future ideal’ and the ‘here and now’ are problematised. However, as I will argue, this concept of prefiguration needs further politicisation outside the context of contemporary anarchist theory. What is more, this concept could also be useful to our endeavour of conceptualising a power from below and offers us a valuable perspective on various conceptualisations of resistance as it occurs today.

Second, two closely related yet significantly different concepts of power from below are defined and compared. To begin with, I look at Antonio Negri's notion of '*potentia*' or 'constituent power'. Departing from the Spinozist opposition between *potentia* and *potestas*, Negri's conceptualisation of the former as a historical and non-dialectical understanding of power will be reconstructed. Then this concept is related to his contemporary work on 'the multitude', and finally reconceptualised as a prefigurative form of power. I describe *potentia*/constituent power as an active potential that creates an 'outside', but 'inside' the capitalist relations and structures it seeks to confront.

Next, I turn to John Holloway, another contemporary autonomist thinker, who is often related to and compared with Negri but who departs from a significantly different ontological background. His conceptualisation of power from below, which he terms as 'power-to', is also reconstructed. As opposed to 'power-over', power-to is presented as an alienated capacity, a potential that seeks actualisation but is limited by a power 'from above'. Holloway argues that power-to breaks through this alienated form of itself and thus creates spatial-temporal 'cracks' in the texture of capitalist relations and structures. Power-to is equally termed as a prefigurative power, which constructs a 'beyond' and sheds light on a future to come.

After that, Holloway's concept of power-to and Negri's *potentia* are juxtaposed, along the lines of the conceptualisation of prefiguration. In presenting both as prefigurative understandings of power, I investigate the consequences and implications these divergent conceptions have for our understanding of current forms of resistance against capitalist structures. Finally, these differences are further concretised through a comparison

between (Hardt and) Negri's concept of 'the common' and Holloway's reference to 'commons'. This also allows us to grasp the prefigurative characteristics of (the production of) the common and/or commons in its/their antagonist relationship to capitalist structures and relations.

Prefigurative politics: mirroring means and ends

Resistance to capital comes in many forms. Diverse and heterogeneous as they may be – from relatively spontaneous expressions of public space occupation and mass street protest to 'direct action' networks and 'civil society' projects seeking to implement alternative forms of cooperation and production – many of these resistances share, to a greater or lesser extent, a form of political action in which means and ends are not strictly divergent, but strongly reflected in each other. This conception of political action, which is commonly referred to as 'prefiguration', is a useful tool that enables us to make intelligible a broad diversity of contemporary political practices.

Prefiguration as a notion is applied in contemporary anarchist literature both as a descriptive term, by means of which the practices of (predominantly anarchist and/or alter-globalist) activist movements are portrayed, and as a normative concept, on the basis of which an ethico-political agenda is defined. Most commonly, these two applications of the term coexist or converge, even completely. The anarchist anthropologist David Graeber, in an interview on 'Occupy Wall Street', in which he took part, describes this 'prefigurative' movement in the following manner:

It's very similar to the globalization movement. You see the same criticisms in the press. It's a bunch of kids who don't know

economics and only know what they're against. But there's a reason for that. It's pre-figurative, so to speak. You're creating a vision of the sort of society you want to have in miniature. And it's a way of juxtaposing yourself against these powerful, undemocratic forces you're protesting. If you make demands, you're saying, in a way, that you're asking the people in power and the existing institutions to do something different. And one reason people have been hesitant to do that is they see these institutions as the problem. (Quoted in Klein, 2011)

Hence, 'prefiguration' first of all addresses a methodological problem. One wishes to alter certain political and/or economic structures, but at the same time one may regard the means most commonly applied for this purpose (e.g. the positions of power and the existing institutions) to be a part, or even the cause, of the very problems themselves. The possibility (or necessity) of changing the world by means of the state and other hierarchical structures has long been debated within radical political movements. Can radical change be realised directly, or should it be enforced by the use of (state) power, a seizure of which would precede this process of transformation? As the moral philosopher Benjamin Franks suggests, the latter view implies an instrumentalist approach to radical strategy, in which the means of emancipatory struggles are subordinated to their objectives. According to this consequentialist view of political practice, Franks argues,

The ultimate end, the seizure of state power or 'revolution', justifies particular types of political behaviour. Actions are judged by whether they assist or hinder the revolutionary goal. Likewise

the model for a centralised party structure is also advanced on the same consequentialist grounds. The end ... justifies the means, even if the methods are autocratic. (Franks, 2003: 23)

A prefigurative view of political practice leads to a critical reconceptualisation of the relationship between means and ends here. However, as much as it refuses to reduce the former to the latter, a prefigurative perspective equally rejects a one-sidedly means-oriented depiction of political struggle. According to Franks, a deontologist understanding of politics, in which the act is evaluated exclusively on the basis of one's means and intentions, 'maintains this problematic division between means and ends, only this time the emphasis is on the former' (Franks, 2003: 25, 114). In a prefigurative practice, however, political means and ends are considered to be mirrored. The means embody the objectives of a certain political practice, and its ends comply with the processes that lead to their realisation; or the ends comprise a realisation of the means. It is not merely or even primarily the consistency between means and ends that matters, but rather the way in which they mutually reflect each other in political practice. In other words, rather than a mere accordance between means and ends, in a prefigurative account of political action the relation between these two is itself problematised.

This prefigurative view of political struggle in practice has two further consequences. First, it means that both the means and the ends, in their mutual relatedness, are formulated, tested and evaluated throughout the political process. Prefiguration is a process rather than the implementation of a pre-set strategy (Maeckelbergh, 2009: 94). Second, and as a result, this process is inherently experimental and experiential – one continuously and

contemporaneously develops and redefines an image of both the objective of one's political actions and the means applied in these actions. This implies that prefigurative practices are characterised by a strong immediacy and sense of urgency. Prefigurative actors seem to experience the urge to live their social and political ideals in the 'here and now'. In his ethnography on 'Direct Action', for instance, Graeber (2009: 210, 527) describes the strategies applied by alter-globalist movements as the creation of a 'micro-utopia', or 'acting as if one is already free'. Similarly, the alter-globalist activist and anthropologist Marianne Maeckelbergh (2009: 67) states that 'practising prefiguration means removing the temporal distinction between the struggle in the present toward a goal in the future'. More than a mere strategy, in other words, prefiguration is most commonly considered as a way to reach beyond the experiential distinction between longer-term revolutionary goals and the urge to free ourselves in the present. Indeed, as Uri Gordon (2008: 39) states:

Anarchists often explain their actions and modes of organisation as intended not only to help bring about generalised social transformation, but also to liberate themselves to the greatest degree possible. On such a reading, the motivation for anarchists to engage in a prefigurative politics lies simply in their desire to inhabit liberated social relations.

Hence, although in a prefigurative practice one aims at long-distant, idealistic (or, sometimes, even 'utopian') political goals, these are fully oriented to the context of everyday life. Prefiguration, in other words, is the attempt to create the 'other world' we deem possible in the here and now. In that sense (and only in that

sense), no distinction can be drawn between a future ideal and its experimental – yet direct – realisation. Of course, prefiguration never fully embodies that which is prefigured, but nevertheless – as will become clear in my reading of Antonio Negri – as an ‘active potentiality’ it cannot, in fact, be understood outside the context of its practical realisation.

Toward a politicisation of prefiguration

The concept of ‘prefiguration’ or ‘prefigurative politics’ was initially derived from studies of the civil rights movements in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. Breines, 1982; Polletta, 2002). Today, however, it is most predominantly used in anarchist or autonomist theory – often (but not exclusively) in reference to political movements that consciously identify with these theoretical currents. Anti-fascist and squatters’ movements in Europe and the USA, the Zapatistas in southern Mexico, the Landless Farmers in Brazil and the alter-globalisation movement (which experienced a partial revival in the form of ‘Occupy’) have been extensively referred to as the most obvious examples of prefigurative practices (Franks, 2003, 2006; Gordon, 2008; Graeber, 2009; Maeckelbergh, 2009; Day, 2010). The political objectives of these movements – such as democracy, ‘horizontalism’ or equality – are realised prefiguratively, in the forms of their actions and organisational structures. There is a need, however, to further politicise this concept by extending it from this predominantly anarchist discourse to a broader description of current political movements and practices. Three considerations urge us to develop such a politicisation.

First of all, the recent global waves of political upheavals and revolts – the ‘Occupy’ movements in the US and Europe, the

square occupations by ‘Indignados’ in Spain and the massive protests in Greece, the ‘Arab Spring’ (e.g. the occupation of Tahrir Square; see van de Sande, 2013), the various mass occupations and street protests that may be economically grouped as occurring in ‘emerging markets’ (Brazil, Turkey, Bulgaria) – demand that we rethink our approach to political struggle and resistance in general. As critically engaged theorists, we should put more effort into providing the methodological and normative tools that will enable us to place ourselves in these movements’ positions, or rather that allow these movements to speak for themselves in critical political theory.

Second, although we routinely make sense of specific political practices by ascribing certain ‘outcomes’, ‘intentions’, ‘means’ and ‘ends’ to them, this assumes an abstraction that prevents us from doing justice to these practices from their own viewpoint. Understanding the internal dynamics and rationale of a particular practice of resistance, in other words, cannot take place from a generalising, retrospective point of view. Instead, we are in need of methodological approaches that help us to understand how means, ends, objectives and outcomes correlate and interplay with one another in political practice itself. The concept of ‘prefiguration’, I claim, gives rise to such an alternative approach, and therefore deserves a broader application. When taken out of its contemporary, predominantly anarchist context, ‘prefiguration’ may be a suitable tool by which to understand practices of politics and resistance more broadly.

Third, political struggle is necessarily first and foremost a struggle for, about or against power. Intuitively, a prefigurative understanding of power appears rather self-contradictory, as power is most commonly conceptualised precisely in terms of

a means–ends distinction. Most of the sources referred to above do, in fact, elaborate on the relationship between power and prefiguration, but only to problematise the internal power relations within a political movement or organisation. Instead, my objective here will be to develop applications of ‘prefiguration’ in an analysis of political power as such. The central question here is not merely how to deal with power prefiguratively, but rather how to formulate a conception of power that is prefigurative – to conceptualise, in other words, prefiguration as power.¹

Two concepts of power ‘from below’ spring to mind here: those of ‘*potentia*’ or ‘constituent power’ in the thought of (Michael Hardt and) Antonio Negri and of ‘power-to’ in the recent works of John Holloway. Although these conceptualisations appear rather similar, there is a subtle difference between them, and this has significant consequences for an understanding of prefigurative power. In the following sections, I first define ‘constituent power’ and ‘power-to’ in terms of prefiguration and then go on to apply these conceptualisations of prefigurative power in the context of ‘the common’ or processes of ‘commonisation’, thereby drawing a distinction between ‘commons’ and ‘the common’. This not only allows us to grasp the development of prefigurative power as a process, but also to differentiate between the perspectives on (the possibility of) resistance offered by power-to and *potentia* as different conceptions of prefigurative power.

Potentia/constituent power

In 1979 and 1980, while imprisoned for his involvement in a (legitimate) oppositional movement, Antonio Negri wrote an extensive study on the political and metaphysical works of the seventeenth century philosopher Baruch de Spinoza. Negri’s

study of Spinoza, *The Savage Anomaly*, revolves around the distinction between two conceptions of power that can be found in Spinoza's thinking: *potentia* and *potestas*:

Potentia as the dynamic and constitutive inherence of the single in the multiplicity, of mind in the body, of freedom in necessity – power against Power – where potestas is presented as the subordination of the multiplicity, of the mind, of freedom, and of potentia. (Negri, 1991: 190–91)

In Negri's reading of Spinoza's *Ethics*, this distinction between *potentia* and *potestas* is approached from the perspective of the former, and its constitutive characteristics are shown to form the core of a Spinozist understanding of power, which, as Negri states, 'can be defined in only one way: against Power'.² It would lead us too far to elaborate on the ontological differences between these two forms of power, but let us briefly stress one significant contrast between them in Spinoza, following Negri.

Negri's understanding of Spinoza's *potentia/potestas* distinction relies, among other things, on the 34th and 35th propositions from Book I of the *Ethics*, in which God's power (or rather 'Power') is discussed. According to Spinoza (1955: 74 [I.P34]), 'whatever we conceive to be in the power [*potestas*] of God, necessarily exists'. Power in this sense is the active capacity to create, a capacity from which its realisation necessarily follows. Whatever can be understood to be in God's power (*potestas*) is necessarily actualised. This conception of power is rather different from its counterpart, *potentia*. When referred to as '*potentia*', 'God's power', Spinoza (1955: 74 [I.P35]) argues, 'is identical with his essence'. Hence, in this formulation, '*potentia*' expresses the

identity between power and its essence: power is not equated with capacity here, but with essence itself; '*potentia*' is not actualised, but an inherent necessity. Thus, as Negri stresses, there is a subtle but nevertheless highly important difference between these conceptualisations of power: whereas in *potestas* that which is potential needs actualisation, in *potentia* the actuality is already enclosed; it is an active potentiality (Negri, 1991: 191–2). In Spinoza's political writings, this active potentiality is identified as the power of the multitude, a power 'from below'. *Potestas*, on the other hand, is the power of authorities, which comes from above and is imposed on this multitude (Negri, 2004).

The distinction between *potentia* and *potestas* is further developed from the perspective of the former and placed in a political-historical context by Negri in his *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*. Employing the terms 'constituent power' (*potentia*) versus 'constituted power' (*potestas*), Negri here depicts their relationship as a non-dialectical, historical antagonism. Again, 'constituent power' is conceptualised as the form of power that is intrinsically linked to democracy, whereas constituted power is its institutionalised counterpart; the repressive, inflexible and dense power that appears as soon as formal constitutions are formulated, when states and other authoritarian structures are formed. Constituent power, the power of the multitude, is the force that thrusts history, offensively aiming at the realisation of its potential. Rather than being dialectically related, constituent power and constituted power are just directly and antagonistically opposed, and cannot be synthesised or reconciled with each other.

Negri repeatedly refers to the unavoidable negativity inherent in constituent power, and defines its 'active elements' in terms of

‘resistance and desire’; but it is also productive, since it actively forms the alternative to that which it negates. Moreover, constituent power is the very process in which new relations are formed, Negri stresses, as it does not aim at its own institutionalisation, but, far from this, strives to ‘construct more being – ethical being, social being, community’ (Negri, 1999: 23). This ‘construction of being’, as Negri formulates it, is an open process rather than an end-oriented development. Hence, a central element that has been ascribed to a prefigurative conception of political struggle (above) can also be identified in Negri’s understanding of political power. The problematic distinction between means and ends that is questioned in a prefigurative practice is implicitly dealt with in Negri’s conception of ‘constituent power’, in which this distinction dissolves. What is left is an open power; the practice of struggle itself.

This is not to say that historical processes are considered to be fully contingent in Negri’s anti-dialectical analysis, or, rather, that a historical perspective is completely done away with in his thought. Rather, we see how ‘constituent power’ is introduced as a prefigurative interpretation of historical continuity. Negri’s analysis of political struggle is further developed throughout *Insurgencies*, which introduces an alternative, non-linear view on historical progress. The antagonistic relation between ‘constituent’ and ‘constituted power’ manifests itself in the revolutionary event, such as the American and French Revolutions, the 1905 and 1917 revolutions in Russia and the Paris Commune. These are the moments in which constituent power expresses itself in its confrontation with constituted power and liberates time and space to realise its radical alternative – if only for a short while. Once these moments or spaces have been institutionalised,

its processes moulded in a dense, systemic form, 'constituent power' has long been pushed back beneath the surface again. In fact, since 'constituent power' manifests itself as this democratic and political moment, in which existing relations of power and production are politicised, the point at which it is blocked (for example through institutionalisation) is where history comes to a standstill; the political is closed again. In fact, however, this blocking may also be seen in a wider context as interruption, a pause until the continuation of history. The process in which constituent power develops, Negri argues, shows two different historical continuities – the first of which is depicted as follows:

[W]hereas the American Revolution, by introducing an undefined constitutional dialectic of the singular and concrete rights of freedom, spreads the process of political emancipation, the French Revolution works this space in terms of equality and from the standpoint of the liberation of labor – thus posing the foundations of the Bolshevik effort to constitute the political arrangement of living labor. Therefore, this process has an initial continuity, that of an increasingly complex, complementary, and progressive plot: the rational expression of a dense project of the emancipation of social freedom and its realization in the political. (Negri, 1999: 304)

Constituent power is a 'plot' that develops over time: little by little, it gains terrain on constituted power, but this expansion is always, at least partly, repressed and forced back by the latter. This is the 'back-and-forth movement' that Hardt and Negri refer to in *Commonwealth*: the realisation of constituent power is a gradual process in struggle with constituted power, without

a synthetic conciliation between the two. Constituent power, so to speak, gradually ‘accumulates’ throughout history. The irruptions that this constituent power brings about, however, are prefigurations of its full potential. Therefore, within this ‘first trajectory’, Negri (1999: 304) argues, a second historical continuity is implied, which is ‘not a process of objective configuration, but of subjective action’. Here, constituent power is a prefigurative tendency, ‘continually reopened and redefined as absolute in its reopening’ (Negri, 1999: 305).

The constituent project is explicitly a creative project. Democracy as the ‘absolute form’ of government, as both Machiavelli and Spinoza define it, becomes an effectual possibility – that is, it transforms theoretical potentiality into a political project. The project is no longer that of making the political coincide with the social, but that of inserting the production of the political into the creation of the social. Democracy is the project of the multitude, a creative force, a living god. This is the second terrain of the historical continuity of the concept of constituent power. (Negri, 1999: 307)

In other words, the radical alternative that is unfolded by constituent power exists as a ‘second nature’, as a real, existing reversion of the status quo that is actualised in the constituent act. The ‘living God’ of democracy – the actual potentiality of the radical alternative – is the multitude’s expression that realises its potentiality, so to speak, in the shadow of political reality, in order to unfold itself in the ‘constitutive praxis’ that coincides with the moment of rupture. These ‘two terrains of historical continuity’ reappear as the ‘double temporality’ of ‘multitude’ in Negri’s

later writings in collaboration with Hardt. Here, the distinction between 'empire' and 'multitude' – again derived from Spinoza's thought – is centred on the basis of a new analysis of the current world order. Leaving behind the classical Marxist conception of class society, 'multitude' is presented as a more comprehensive conception of political subjectivity. Rather than a ruling class that exploits the working class, 'empire' represents a worldwide network that manages and controls global relations of production, power and exchange. 'Multitude', on the other hand, is the inherently productive, heterogeneous and multifaceted counter-structure of empire. Its historical role is the creation of a 'counter-empire', which exists autonomously of empire as 'an alternative political organization of global flows and exchanges' (Hardt & Negri, 2000: xv).

Multitude's objective is both to 'contest and subvert empire', and simultaneously (and in fact, as part of the same practice), to 'construct a real alternative' to it. Multitude therefore exists both as this autonomous alternative structure in opposition to empire and as the potential new order that will topple and replace the old. In other words, it is both history and future. Hence, in reference to the famous syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World, the 'counter-empire' of multitude is frequently referred to as a 'new society within the shell of the old' (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 207; 2009: 8). As Hardt and Negri argue, a distinction could therefore be made between an 'ontological' and a 'political' multitude, the former of which

is the multitude that, as Spinoza says, through reason and passions, in the complex interplay of historical forces, creates a freedom that he calls absolute: throughout history humans

have refused authority and command, expressed the irreducible difference of singularity, and sought freedom in innumerable revolts and revolutions. (Hardt & Negri, 2004: 221)

It will, however, 'require a political project' to bring this multitude into being, 'on the basis of these emerging conditions'. The former, in other words, is the multitude of the present, which is always 'already-there'; the latter, however, is its future, which is latent as potentiality, existing as a 'not-yet' (Hardt & Negri, 2004: 221–2). These 'two multitudes', however, mutually presuppose each other. After all, whereas the 'political project' of multitude can only be realised provided that this multitude is 'already latent and implicit in our social being', this potentiality fully depends for its existence on its immanent actualisation.

As we saw before in Negri's interpretation of *potentia*, therefore, there is a sense in which we cannot distinguish between potentiality and its actualisation: they have a logical equivalence in that they presuppose each other. Multitude, or – and one could argue that this is the same – the power of multitude, is prefigurative precisely because it cannot exist as a potentiality without actualisation. In other words, since multitude exists precisely as an active potentiality, it already exists simultaneously with the relations and structures it aims to alter, and thus prefigures its full potential in this actual existence. Prefiguration thus could be depicted as the 'unfolding' of a temporality that exists 'next to' the present. The 'here and now' aspect we earlier ascribed to our conception of prefiguration is particularly essential here. As Negri states in his writings on revolutionary times, the 'time of class struggle' cannot simply be defined as a 'negative time' that passes from one stage or status quo (in)to a future: 'It is also

prefigurative power. The future is, so to speak, enclosed in the practice of the 'now', in the imminence of *potentia* as a potential that is always actual. 'The time of class struggle', Negri therefore argues, 'in itself contains the future and it continually attempts to shape it' (Negri, 2005: 97; emphasis original).

Alongside this 'contemporaneity of the future and of the present', there is also a spatial element to prefigurative power. As Hardt and Negri repeatedly stress, Empire no longer has an 'outside' – in a territorial sense, as well as economically, politically and juridically. Strictly speaking, Empire has no spatial characteristics at all: it is rather an '*ou-topia*, or really a *non-place*' (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 190). Insofar as it is everywhere, Empire is nowhere, and as it cannot be pinned down to a specific territory or location: the inside–outside dialectic simply no longer works. In their preface to *Empire*, Hardt and Negri (2000: xv) therefore state that 'The struggles to contest and subvert Empire, as well as those to *construct a real alternative*, will thus take place *on the imperial terrain itself* – indeed, such new struggles have already begun to emerge' (emphasis added). Hence, a direct relationship is implied between the construction of an alternative and its foundation within the territory of Empire itself. Since we can neither properly speak of an 'outside' nor, therefore, of an 'inside', this resistance 'from inside', this realisation of a 'real alternative', entails the composition of a space rather than a mere occupation. Thus, in the very formation of opposition, constituent power effectively creates an 'outside' (that nevertheless is 'inside').

As Hardt and Negri (2000: 185) formulate it, the struggle against modern sovereignty and constituted power 'is situated *within* the historical evolution of the forms of power, *an inside that searches for an outside*'. Here, we can once more recognise

strongly prefigurative characteristics – again, defined in terms of a ‘here and now’, but this time with an emphasis on the ‘here’. This depiction of a process in which the active potentiality of an ‘outside’ is unfolded in the ‘inside’, I suggest, might be a fruitful way to grasp the prefigurative workings of constituent power. The realisation of the radical alternative in struggle, therefore, is not only a ‘prefiguration’, in the (temporal) sense that it realises a future order in the reality of the present, since it is also an ‘ex-figuration’ or ‘alter-figuration’, the experimental figuration of a ‘not-yet’ potentiality, a (spatial) externality that comes from (and remains) within.

Hence, we can conclude that what we refer to as ‘prefiguration’ in the context of (Hardt and) Negri’s thought is the historical process of development of *potentia* or constituent power, seen from a perspective in which the ‘historical continuities’ of this power – or the ‘double temporality of multitude’ – are understood to be convergent; ‘prefiguration’ is neither the mere implementation of a potency that exists as a ‘not-yet’, nor solely the accumulation of power as a ‘political project’, but the creation of an ‘outside’ which remains ‘inside’, in which the potentiality of multitude *exists as* its power. We will return to this conceptualisation of prefigurative power in the context of ‘the common’.

John Holloway – another political thinker often associated with autonomist Marxism, but whose work in several respects offers a substantial critique to that of Negri (and Hardt) establishes ‘power-to’ as an alternative conception to power ‘from below’, which in fact is more explicitly related to prefiguration. Although there are as many similarities as differences between Holloway’s thought and Hardt and Negri’s, we will concentrate on the latter here.

Power-to and power-over

Contrary to what might be inferred from the title of John Holloway's ([2002] 2010a) *Change the World without Taking Power*, the author does not entirely reject 'power' or its role in the revolutionary process. One of his central arguments, rather, is that a distinction should be made between what he refers to as 'power-to' and 'power-over':

Power, in the first place, is simply that: can-ness, capacity-to-do, the ability to do things. Doing implies power, power-to-do. In this sense we commonly use 'power' to refer to something good ... Whereas power-to is a uniting, a bringing together of my doing with the doing of others, the exercise of power-over is a separation. ... Power-over is the breaking of the social flow of doing. Those who exert power over the doing of others deny the subjectivity of those others, deny their part in the flow of doing, exclude them from history. (Holloway, 2010a: 28–9)

Holloway suggests, therefore, that the world can be changed without taking power-over. At first sight, it may be tempting to equate the distinction between power-to and power-over with (Hardt and) Negri's *potentia* vs. *potestas* (or constituent power vs. constituted power). Holloway (2010a: 169) indeed stresses that his position and Negri's bear strong resemblances, in particular with respect to the centrality of oppositional struggle in their thought, and their rejection of state power as a revolutionary means. There are some substantial differences, however. Clearly, *potentia* and power-to are both conceptualised as a power 'from below', formulated in terms of 'doing' rather than a static 'being', and therefore based on, as well as directed to, a political practice of resistance

that takes place in reality; it is in relation to the 'other' power, the power 'from above', that the difference between *potentia* and power-to becomes apparent. In Holloway's account, power-to and power-over are more closely related than Negri's terminology suggests. Therefore, Holloway (2010a: 36) states,

posing the distinctions in ... terms [of 'potentia' and 'potestas'] can be seen as pointing merely to a difference whereas what is at issue is an antagonism, or rather, an antagonist metamorphosis. Power-to exists as power-over, but the power-to is subjected to and in rebellion against power-over, and power-over is nothing but, and therefore absolutely dependent upon, the metamorphosis of power-to.

In other words, power-to and power-over are different sides of the same coin, rather than essentially different forms of power. Power-over is the alienated – or, to apply Holloway's terminology, 'fetishised' – form of power-to. As we have seen, Holloway defines power-to in terms of a capacity, an 'ability to-do'. Power-over in capitalist society, Holloway argues, exists as the breaking of this capacity, of the 'flow of doing', and the division between this 'doing' and the 'done'.³ Hence, the relation between these forms of power, which exists as a breaking or 'metamorphosis', is rather different from the antagonism between *potentia* and *potestas*. Indeed, Holloway (2010a: 41) argues,

the relation between constituent and constituted power remains an external one. Constitution (the transformation of constituent into constituted power) is seen as a reaction to the democratic constituent power of the multitude ... In the face of power-over

(constituted power) it tells us of the ubiquity and force of the absolute struggle of the multitude, but it tells us nothing of the crucial nexus of dependence of power-over (constituted power) upon power-to (constituent power). In this sense, for all the force and brilliance of his account, Negri remains at the level of radical-democratic theory.

Here we come to a central argument, in which Holloway clearly distances himself from what he refers to as the 'autonomist' current. Holloway praises the operaist Mario Tronti, not only for stressing the need to centralise struggle itself in our analysis of capitalist relations of power and production, but also, in Holloway's (2010a: 160) words, for 'seeing working-class struggle as determining capitalist development'. So far, as Tronti argues in his famous article 'Lenin in England',

[We] have worked with a concept that puts capitalist development first, and workers second. This is a mistake. And now we have to turn the problem on its head, reverse the polarity, and start again from the beginning: and the beginning is the class struggle of the working class. (Tronti, 1979: 1)

Departing from Tronti's argument, Holloway agrees that later, in its further development, autonomism may have been meritorious in insisting on 'seeing the movement of capitalist rule as being driven by the force of working class struggle'; even so, autonomists like Hardt and Negri only tend to understand capital as a 'function of the working class', rather than as its 'product' (Holloway, 2010a: 165). Hardt and Negri may question the theoretical separation between capital in its development and

class struggle as made in 'traditional' Marxism. Nevertheless, Holloway (2010b: 190) argues, in their thought, the 'categories themselves are never understood as conceptualizations of struggle, so that the externality remains'.⁴ In other words, capital, in Holloway's view, does not just develop autonomously in an attempt to defend itself against the constant pressure of the extending power of a working class, but fully comes forth from and is therefore (nothing but) an alienated form of this working class itself – rather than a 'function', which nevertheless remains external to it.⁵

A comparable shortcoming appears in Negri's distinction between *potentia* and *potestas*, Holloway argues, with the relation between the two treated as external to the conception of power itself. Negri's *potentia* and *potestas* are essentially different concepts of power and cannot be reduced to each other, while Holloway's power-to and power-over are intimately connected; whereas Negri ascribes a certain autonomy to *potentia* or constituent power, Holloway rejects its inherent 'positivity', and stresses that power-to can only be negatively related to its alienated form of power-over, which is actively resisted by the former. Power-to, therefore, is a frustrated or repressed (one could even say self-repressed) capacity. It is a potentiality that can only be actualised by overcoming its alienated form. Nevertheless, this 'can-ness', the 'unalienated doing', does in fact exist, 'as present antagonism to its denial, as present projection-beyond-its-denial-to-a-different world, as a presently not-yet' (Holloway, 2010a: 35).

Here we come to Holloway's conception of 'prefiguration'. Since power-to is a potentiality that is alienated *as and by* power-over, it can only be realised in a confrontation with the latter. In other words, the confrontation against power-over and the

development of potential, which is depicted by Holloway as 'the emancipation of power-to', are one and the same process. This process is what he, in turn, refers to as 'prefigurative':

The most liberating struggles, however, are surely those in which the two are consciously linked, as in those struggles which are consciously prefigurative, in which the struggle aims, in its form, not to reproduce the structures and practices of that which is struggled against, but rather to create the sort of social relations which are desired. (Holloway, 2010a: 153–4)

In *Crack Capitalism*, Holloway (2010b) concretises this depiction of a prefigurative struggle against capital. As its title suggests, the breaking of capitalism, and therefore the release, so to speak, of a power-to that is repressed behind it, requires a 'method of the crack': the continuous breaking open of already existing cracks in the plastering of capitalist order. The widening of these cracks is an 'opening of a world that presents itself as closed' (Holloway, 2010b: 9), which, in other words, existed already as a potentiality, but needs to be actualised. Throughout Holloway's writings, innumerable examples of these 'cracks' are given: from the more standard means in activist repertoires (squats, social centres, 'Temporary Autonomous Zones', demonstrations or 'reclaim the streets', raves, etc.), and the 'highlights' of historical revolutionary movements (the Paris Commune, liberated regions in Chiapas, the Argentinean revolts of December 2001, etc.) to the everyday (community gardens, alternative consumption patterns, the small acts of refusal in our everyday lives).

Thus, 'the crack' in fact is a spatio-temporal depiction of a prefigurative practice. According to Holloway, it should 'not be

seen as a means to an end', since 'there is always an insufficiency about it, an incompleteness, a restlessness'. In other words, the crack is not a means that has its ends external to it but rather something that internalises the end and aims at realising it there and then, if only in a limited time and/or space. 'Prefiguration', or the creation of 'cracks', in Holloway's account, is not the creation of a durable structure so much as a spatio-temporal experiment with its alternative. As Holloway (2010b: 35) argues, a 'crack is not a step on the path of Revolution, but it is an opening outwards'. These momentous disruptions have 'a validity of their own', when, so to speak, looked at from a non-linear perspective, and are 'independent of their long-term consequences'. This validity consists of the durable impression of a 'different world' in its unalienated form, which is unveiled for a moment in the prefigurative practices that fill the 'cracks' in capitalist order:

Like a flash of lightning, they illuminate a different world, a world created perhaps for a few short hours, but the impression which remains on our brain and in our senses is that of an image of the world we can (and did) create. The world that does not yet exist displays itself as a world that exists not-yet. (Holloway, 2010b: 30–31)

Hence, I conclude, 'prefiguration' in Holloway's account is the construction of a 'beyond'. It is an experimental practice, but one that sets an example, or empowers, and enables one to realise that a different world is possible – before this can-ness falls back into its alienated form as power-over. In the moment of prefiguration, power-to reaches beyond the order it wishes to negate.

Power-to and *potentia*: a comparison

Let us now compare Negri's conception of *potentia* or constituted power in relation to prefiguration, with the prefigurative account of Holloway's power-to as reconstructed. On Holloway's account, prefiguration is the act that projects 'beyond' itself, and sheds a light of and over the future; for Negri, on the other hand, it is rather the unfolding of this future 'inside' the present. The power that realises the beyond that is prefigured in Holloway's depiction is an alienated potentiality losing its alienated form. The prefiguration of power-to is its actualisation in time and space, its realisation in practice. In the case of *potentia*, on the other hand, we cannot speak in terms of actualisation, since, as we have seen before, in Negri's conceptualisation of *potentia* there is no difference between essence and existence, no theoretical account of power as a 'possibility'. Moreover, unlike power-to, *potentia* is not the unalienated form of its radical counterpart; rather than existing in the 'cracks' of capital, 'constituent power' leads a parallel life with respect to constituted Power' (Casaroni & Negri, 2008: 157). Thus, we can conclude that whereas for Negri prefiguration through *potentia* is the unfolding of an outside in the inside of political time and space, Holloway depicts prefiguration through power-to as an event of actualisation, a moment in which its radical potential is realised.

Both Negri and Holloway refer to the radical alternative as a 'not-yet', but whereas in Holloway's account this 'not-yet' is an alienated and repressed potentiality – the passive potentiality of the 'beyond' – for Negri this 'not-yet' is backed, so to speak, by an *autonomous* 'already-there' potential in a rather active form: the active potentiality of an 'outside' that is 'inside'. We could,

therefore, conclude that in Holloway, power exists *in* potentiality, whereas for Negri potentiality *is* power. In the former case, power as power-to becomes prefigurative in its realisation; in the latter, power as *potentia* is prefigurative – and for Negri it is the power as *potentia* that both accumulates and exists as practice in the present, whereas in Holloway's conception of power-to, power may become practice in (or after) its liberation.

Now, what consequences do this – rather theoretical – distinction between Negri's *potentia* and Holloway's power-to have for our conceptualisation of prefiguration in practice? In the following section, we will make one last theoretical step, applying the distinction developed above within the context of production of the common. The aim of this further elaboration will be to show how this theoretical distinction regarding prefigurative power between Negri and Holloway eventually leads to a significant divergence in their understanding of (the possibilities of) resistance against global capitalism.

Commons or the common?

Despite its central position in their more recent work, Hardt and Negri's exact definition of the common remains relatively vague, particularly concerning its relation to the 'commons' (plural). In the introduction to *Multitude*, it is suggested that the difference between the two is historical rather than semantic. Originally 'commons' refers to pre-capitalist, collectively used and/or (cultivated) natural resources, whereas the process of commonisation described by Hardt and Negri (2004: xv) is 'not a return to the past, but a new development' – besides, as they state without much further explanation, "the common" highlights the philosophical content of the term'. In a later article, however, Hardt

further defines this distinction in terms of ‘artificiality’. Apart from the natural resources traditionally referred to as ‘commons’, ‘the common’ more broadly also encompasses the (immaterial) fruits of biopolitical production:

On the one hand, the common names the earth and all the resources associated with it: the land, forests, water, air, minerals, and so forth. This is closely related to seventeenth-century English usage of ‘the commons’ (with an ‘s’). On the other hand, the common also refers ... to the results of human labor and creativity such as ideas, language, affects, and so forth. You might think of the former as the ‘natural’ common and the latter as the ‘artificial’ common, but really such divisions between natural and artificial quickly break down. (Hardt, 2010: 350)

Although leaving us empty-handed, Hardt’s formulation suggests that a distinction between commons and the common should be drawn on the basis of a paradigmatic difference in form of production. One of the central developments described by Hardt and Negri throughout their work comprehends the ‘immaterialisation’ of labour, or the ‘commonisation’ of production processes: ideas, networks, concepts and communication structures have gradually become the products of labour, whose centrality in contemporary economic production has converted the dominant relations of power and property, as well as the role and form of both productive and everyday (‘private’) life. Indeed, the definition of the common should (at least partly) be formulated in terms of these developments, rather than a natural–artificial distinction:

This notion of the common does not position humanity separate from nature, as either its exploiter or its custodian, but focuses rather on the practices of interaction, care, and cohabitation in a common world, promoting the beneficial and limiting the detrimental forms of the common. In the era of globalization, issues of the maintenance, production, and distribution of the common in both senses and in both ecological and socioeconomic frameworks becomes increasingly central. (Hardt & Negri, 2009: viii)

The question remains, however, of what would make a suitable criterion for such a distinction. Perhaps commons and the common could be distinguished on the basis of Donald Nonini's (2007: 7) 'natural and social commons' and 'intellectual and cultural commons', where the former are depletable and subtractive, and the latter are 'non-rival goods' that can be 'created and regenerated *only* through social exchange and sociability'. Applying these differences in a distinction between commons and the common leads us to define singular resources as commons, not taking 'artificiality' as a criterion but rather exhaustibility and numerical limitedness. The common, in its turn, comprehends commons as well as those resources that are characterised by the inclusion of production and consumption in a single social process. This implies – and here we finally get to the core of the distinction – that whereas the commons could be defined as a plurality of more or less distinctive recourses, practices and processes, the common is an indivisible whole of social relations, concepts and forms of life. Therefore, the best way to describe the relation between these two concepts is, perhaps, to depict commons as particulars of the common – which is precisely why Hardt and Negri decided not to use the former notion at all.⁶

It is striking that whereas Hardt and Negri refer exclusively to 'the common,' Holloway refers to 'commons.' Although this concept does not play a central role in his writings, Holloway does refer to commons as exemplifying cracks in capitalism, which is the point from which our comparison can depart:

The commons can be seen as the embryonic form of a new society ... These common areas, at least to the extent that there is genuine social control and not just state ownership, can be seen as so many cracks in the domination of capital, so many no-go areas where the writ of capital does not run, gashes in the weave of domination. Or rather: if capital is a movement of enclosing, the commons are a disjointed common-ing, a moving in the opposite direction, a refusing of enclosure, at least in particular areas. (Holloway, 2010b: 29–30)

Thus, in his reference to 'commons,' Holloway means to describe a broad plurality of practices that develop independently and 'outside' of capitalist structures and relations, to 'cut off an area and put up signs all around it saying, "Capital, keep out!"' (Holloway, 2010b: 28). The commons Holloway refers to are examples of such struggles in which 'the other-doing is very much to the fore' and hence struggles in which the creation of a radical alternative coincides with struggle against capital. In effect, we are back at the definition of prefiguration we started with: Holloway's commons are examples of prefigurative practices in which the distinction between means and ends are dissolved within a 'here and now' practice.

Holloway tends to view resistance as a multitude of everyday-life practices, some of which may not appear very radical at

first sight. 'Rebellion,' argues Holloway (2010b: 169), 'is always an option, but much more than that, it is an integral part of life'. This argument leads him to an extremely inclusive and simplifying conception of struggle, in which even the decision to read a book in the park (instead of going to work) may easily equal the armed struggle of a guerrilla fighter in the Mexican jungle: as far as Holloway (2010b: 4–5) is concerned, these are both examples of a real, existing resistance. Moreover, even though these examples are presented as forms of struggle that are connected, a strong ahistorical individualism lurks in Holloway's analysis. Of course, one can only appreciate the absence of a 'greater plan' – either historically or politically – in post-totalitarian radical theory. Holloway's prefigurative perspective is indeed valuable in this respect. However, when resistance is depicted as 'doing our own thing, as expressing ourselves' or 'creating small projects', as Holloway (2010b: 248) does, politics becomes limited to an unconnected whole of mere stances and attitudes. The question remains, however, of how these struggles are related to one another. For Holloway, we may find a solution here in the relations of affinity:

It may seem strange to place the car worker who goes to his allotment in the evening next to the young man who goes to the jungle to devote his life to organising armed struggle against capitalism. And yet there is a continuity. What both have in common is that they share in a movement of refusal-and-other-creation: they are rebels, not victims; subjects, not objects. In the case of the car worker, it is individual and just evenings and weekends; in the case of the young man in the jungle, it is a very perilous commitment to a life of rebellion. Very different and yet

with a line of affinity that it would be very wrong to overlook.
(Holloway, 2010b: 6)

However, apart from this vague appellation to a 'logic of affinity' (Day, 2005), Holloway hardly explains what the 'continuity' consists of. Actually, the relationship between different forms and practices of struggle and resistance only exists on a rather idealistic plane. In practice, as Holloway has argued in the preceding description of 'the commons', these singular, separable practices may relate to each other, or share strong similarities, but they do not converge into a broader whole – indeed, as he formulates it, they are only parts of 'a *disjointed common-ing* ... a refusing of enclosure, at least in particular areas' (Holloway, 2010b: 30; emphasis added).

Hardt and Negri struggle with the same problem. As Ernesto Laclau (2005: 241) has argued, what is lacking in their description of the struggle between empire and multitude is any account of political articulation between divergent forms and practices of resistance. Indeed, early on in *Empire*, Hardt and Negri (2004: 54) state that multitude's different struggles have become 'incommunicable'. They thereby not only fail to acknowledge that for the multitude to be politically successful, it needs its many different, globally spread struggles to correlate, but, and on the contrary, indicate that this is not possible, or at least has become so. However, as Andy Knott argues, Hardt and Negri gradually revoke this 'incommunicability thesis' throughout the *Empire* trilogy. Already in the latter part of *Empire*, and certainly in *Multitude*, they suggest that multitude's struggle against empire can only become political once such a communicability between different struggles and practices is constructed. And finally, in

Commonwealth, Knott (2011: 201–5) suggests, Hardt and Negri attempt to deal with this problem by presenting precisely the common as that (in) which these struggles share – and which, therefore, binds them together.

Thus, although both Holloway's and Hardt and Negri's understanding of political struggle depart from a broad diversity of practices and resistances – rather than a single, centralised and homogeneous political or historical project – the conceptualisations of commons and the common as explicated here reveal how their positions diverge in their understanding of resistance to capitalist structures/relations. Let us briefly elaborate on this point, by outlining this essential distinction in more detail.

The 'cracks' in the texture of capitalism that Holloway refers to function primarily to widen, expand and connect practices of resistance to capital's enclosure. These cracks, in other words, are openings within a texture that is not their own – they are disconnected practices of de-alienation on the surface of relations and structures that are antagonistically opposed to them, but which, at the same time, are their own alienated forms. In other words, 'cracks' – and therefore commons (among other forms of resistance) – are the voids in the texture of capital. They cannot be ascribed any positive autonomy, any externality to the very structures they aim to subvert and alter. Moreover, it remains unclear how Holloway understands these different commons to communicate and collaborate with each other – all these separate practices of resistance share is the texture in which they perform as cracks, and not the ways in which this 'cracking' takes place.

In Hardt and Negri, on the other hand, the common *is* the texture – or, better perhaps, the 'matter' – of multitude: the

development of multitude and the common are tightly interwoven. Therefore, rather than a mere whole of distinctive practices, the common is precisely that (in) which these many different practices share, in which they take place. The production of multitude is a process of the common, which is both a means of production and its product, the structure that results from it. In other words, 'the common is both precondition and result of the production of the multitude'; it is the material of an experimental prefigurative project, but simultaneously it is its own model (Hardt & Negri, 2004: 339, 349); and, most importantly, it is therefore autonomous from and external to the capitalist structures and relations which, in their turn, try to intervene, break into and gain control over the processes and practices of commonisation.

Hence, whereas Holloway's commons are the prefigurative moments within the structure of capital that reach 'beyond' it, Hardt and Negri's common forms – and consists of – its 'outside', the already-present future that is an active potentiality. The prefigured and prefigurative common, in other words, is more than the illuminated contours of a future alternative; it is its real existing form in the 'here and now'. The commons, so to speak, are the anticipating and voluntarist forms of a prefigured future, while the common, far from being an anticipation, is the actual condition for revolutionary change, not merely a perspective on the future, but rather this already-existing future itself. Notwithstanding their rejection of dialectics and teleology, Hardt and Negri ascribe a historical role to the common – a role it already fulfils, of course – in its 'growing separation from capitalist exploitation and command'. Again, in reference to the organisation and extension of the common, Hardt and Negri

(2009: 301) invoke the image of ‘a new society within the shell of the old’.

Conclusion: the prefigurative power of the common(s)

Four theoretical steps have been made here. First, I distilled a definition of ‘prefiguration’ from contemporary autonomist theory. ‘Prefiguration’ was defined as a practice in which ‘means and ends’ are considered to be mirrored in practice itself, and prefigurative practices were characterised by a strong orientation to the ‘here and now’, as they question the temporal distinction between a present struggle and the future goals it strives to realise. This concept of prefiguration was then applied to two understandings of power ‘from below’: first, Negri’s concept of *potentia* or constituent power and, second, Holloway’s notion of power-to. I reformulated and compared these concepts as divergent prefigurative understandings of power. In power-to, prefiguration is the realisation of a power that pre-existed in an alienated form, and which, in the act, shows its potential through actualisation. In the case of *potentia*, on the other hand, we can perceive a wholly different understanding of prefiguration as process, one in which the active potential is always ‘already-there’. Through its development over time, *potentia* increasingly exists as an alternative external to and autonomous from the structures it struggles against. In other words, whereas power-to is prefigurative in the sense that it experimentally shows the possibility of a radical alternative, *potentia* directly and sustainably forms – and therefore prefigures – this alternative in the here and now.

The final step related Hardt/Negri and Holloway’s divergence on the issues of power and prefiguration to a conceptual

distinction between commons and the common. Holloway conceptualises 'commons' as (just) unconnected – 'disjointed' – cracks in the surface of capitalism, thereby realising spatio-temporal breaks and ruptures in its functioning. Hardt and Negri, on the other hand, involve the common as a means to overcome this 'disjointedness' or 'incommunicability' between different struggles. Hence, the division between 'commons' in Holloway and 'the common' in Hardt and Negri develops along the same lines as that between 'power-to' and *potentia*. Whereas in Holloway, commons are the moments in which power-to actualises itself, in Hardt and Negri, the production of the common and the development of *potentia* are one and the same:

Accumulation of the common means not so much that we have more ideas, more images, more affects, and so forth but, more important, that our powers and senses increase: our powers to think, to feel, to see, to relate to one another, to love. In terms closer to those of economics, then, this growth involves both an increasing stock of the common accessible in society and also an increased productive capacity based on the common. (Hardt & Negri, 2009: 283)

This leads us to two different conclusions. First, in a political conceptualisation of prefiguration, what we need is a criterion that binds divergent forms of struggle and resistances together. This element is clearly missing both in the anarchist ethico-political formulation in terms of a means-and-ends distinction and in Holloway's perspective on power-to and its actualisation through the cracks in the structures of capitalism. This is just

what is provided by Hardt and Negri, expressed as the common that lays the relations between widely different struggles.

But in Hardt and Negri's perspective, a convincing explanation of *how* the already-there is actualised in a political struggle is lacking. It remains unclear, that is, how multitude's struggle against empire finds articulation in practice. Therefore, and this is our second conclusion, such a conceptualisation of the common as a plane of prefigurative processes – as that which binds together struggles and resistances against capitalism and thereby politicises them – demands a more elaborate formulation of the politico-historical role of the common, and a more detailed understanding of how this binding together, this taking part of different struggles in the common, takes place in practice. The concept of 'prefiguration', I argue, could fulfil a key role in this further conceptualisation, as it encompasses a practical approach to struggle and resistance, a conception of power 'from below', and an understanding of the common as that which both creates and simultaneously exists as the alternative to capitalist structures from within.

Notes

1 Maeckelbergh (2009: 115) in fact touches upon this problem in her definition of 'prefigurative power'.

2 In the foreword to his translation of *The Savage Anomaly*, Michael Hardt stresses that the Italian distinction between *potere* (*potestas*) and *potenza* (*potentia*) (in French: *pouvoir* and *puissance*; in German *Macht* and *Vermögen*) cannot be made in English. As a reference to *potestas* he therefore writes 'Power' with a capital 'P', whereas 'power' stands for *potential* (see Hardt, 1991: xi–xii).

3 This division is the transformation from an active doing to a passive, which is labour. For a more elaborate development of this position, see Holloway's (2010b) *Crack Capitalism*.

4 In fact, Negri suggests that this externality gradually follows from class struggle. In response to Holloway's argument that the operaist movement developed a 'functionalist' perspective of the relationship between class struggle and capital, Negri (2010) argues the following: 'With respect to this presumed functionalism, *operaismo* simply turns this picture upside down; the antagonistic pressure of the force of labor (exactly because dialectics was pushed aside) does not avoid but rather deepens the contradictions. This deepening of contradictions has two effects. The first is to accentuate the consistency of the subjects (i.e. labor force, proletariat, class, multitude) and to impress upon this subjective reality a continual process of metamorphosis, a dispositive of ontological transformation. Second, and consequently, there arises the effect of pushing the subject (labor force, proletariat, class, multitude) each time further outside of capital – exodus is precisely the result of this process. It is a process nonetheless, a struggle, not a utopia, an indefinite lineage, not one that has been concluded, real, not dreamed.' Hence, the 'positivity' or externality is never a given, but exactly the relation that comes forth from (or is constructed in) struggle itself.

5 Note that at the backdrop of these differences between Holloway's and Negri's analyses, one can perceive a significant contrast on a more ontological level: whereas Holloway thinks from a strongly Hegelian–Marxist (and, hence, dialectical) perspective, Negri departs from a Spinozist approach.

6 It needs to be stressed, however, that the term 'particulars' in this context is far from unproblematic. As Hardt and Negri argue in *Commonwealth*, 'The common cuts diagonally across the opposition between the universal and the particular. Normal usage of the terms "common sense" and "common knowledge" captures some of what we have in mind insofar as they extend beyond the limitations of the particular and grasp a certain social generality, but these terms generally view the common as something passive, already given in society. We concentrate instead, following Spinoza's conception of "common notions," on the production and productivity of the common through collective social practices' (Hardt & Negri, 2009: 120–21).

Hence, my depiction of ‘commons’ as the particulars of ‘the common’ depends heavily on quite what Hardt and Negri intend by ‘diagonally’.

References

- Breines, W. (1982). *Community and Organisation and the New Left 1962–1968, The Great Refusal*. South Hadley: J. F. Bergin/ New York: Praeger.
- Casaroni, C. and Negri, A. (2008). *In Praise of the Common: A Conversation of Philosophy and Politics*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.
- Day, R. (2005). *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*. London: Pluto Press.
- De Spinoza, B. (1955). ‘The Ethics’, in *On the Improvement of Understanding/The Ethics/Correspondence* (trans. R. Elwes). Mineola, NY: Dover.
- Franks, B. (2003). ‘The direct action ethic from 59 upwards’, *Anarchist Studies*, 11(1): 13–41.
- Franks, B. (2006). *Rebel Alliances, the Means and Ends of Contemporary British Anarchism*. Edinburgh: AK Press.
- Gordon, U. (2008). *Anarchy Alive! Anti-Authoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory*. London: Pluto Press.
- Graeber, D. (2009). *Direct Action, an Ethnography*. Edinburgh: AK Press.
- Hardt, M. (1991). ‘The anatomy of power’, in *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza’s Metaphysics and Politics* (trans. M. Hardt). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hardt, M. (2010). ‘The common in communism’, *Rethinking Marxism*, 22(3): 346–356.
- Hardt, M. and Negri, A. (2000). *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hardt, M. and Negri, A. (2004). *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. London/New York: Penguin.
- Hardt, M. and Negri, A. (2009). *Commonwealth*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.

- Holloway, J. ([2002] 2010a). *Change the World without Taking Power*. London: Pluto Press.
- Holloway, J. (2010b). *Crack Capitalism*. London: Pluto Press.
- Klein, E. (2011). 'You're creating a vision of the sort of society you want to have in miniature', *The Washington Post*. At <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/ezra-klein/>
- Knott, A. (2011). 'Multitude and hegemony' (PhD thesis). Brighton.
- Laclau, E. (2005). *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso.
- Maeckelbergh, M. (2009). *The Will of the Many, How the Alterglobalisation Movement is Changing the Face of Democracy*. London: Pluto Press.
- Negri, A. (1991). *The Savage Anomaly, the Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics* (trans. M. Hardt). Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.
- Negri, A. (1999). *Insurgencies, Constituent Power and the Modern State* (trans. M. Boscagli). Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.
- Negri, A. (2004). 'The Political Treatise, or, the foundation of modern democracy', in T. Murphy (Ed.), *Subversive Spinoza, (un) Contemporary Variations* (trans. T. Murphy, M. Hardt, T. Stolze and C. Wolfe). Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Negri, A. (2005). *Time for Revolution* (trans. M. Mandarini). London: Continuum.
- Negri, T. (2010). 'John Holloway's change the world without taking power'. At <http://antonionegriinenglish.wordpress.com/>
- Nonini, D. (2007). 'Introduction: the global idea of "the commons"', in D. Nonini (Ed.), *The Global Idea of "The Commons"*. New York/Oxford: Berghahn.
- Polletta, F. (2002). *Freedom is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Tronti, M. (1979). 'Lenin in England', in *Red Notes, Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis: Italian Marxist Texts of the Theory and Practice of a Class Movement: 1964–79*. London: CSE Books.
- Van de Sande, M. (2013). 'The prefigurative politics of Tahrir Square – an alternative perspective on the 2011 revolutions', *Res Publica*, 19(3): 223–239.