Reading Interrogations, Sociology 929. Real Utopias. Week 2. 9/11/2013

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1. Yotaro Natani

I would like to discuss what is meant by Levitas when she claims that utopia as method is not blueprinting, but is still nevertheless holistic. In the final chapter on the architectural mode, she repeats that this method is provisional, reflexive, and dialogic. I am inclined to think that because it is provisional and constantly critiqued/revised, thinking about utopia has to be partial and step-by-step. My understanding is that Erik Wright also agrees that future alternatives should not be blueprinted, which is why he conceives real utopias (through social empowerment) as a multidimensional, partial re-designing of institutions. Levitas criticizes Wright for lacking a holistic approach, claiming that real utopias only make sense if they are scaled up, and scaling up requires an imagined totality – but according to her, Wright avoids such holism due to his realism and scientism. So, I am not quite sure what is entailed by holism without blueprints. Levitas does mention that we need a vision of where we want to go and what routes are open (rather than mere proposals of damage repair that naturalize present structures). But Wright has his two equal access principles and a vast typology of social empowerment – what is so inadequate about this?

> [**EOW comment: I agree with your puzzle here about the meaning of "holism". I suppose the issue is that while I talk about social empowerment and a diverse set of institutional clusters in which we can better realize that principle, I do not talk very much about the interactions across these clusters, how they fit together dynamically to constitute an alternative *system*. My formal typology of seven pathways (or configurations as I now prefer to call them) of social empowerment does not accomplish this: I do not explore, for example, how participatory budgeting might interact with worker cooperatives. So, I think the issue here is that "holism" is invoking the idea that the "whole is greater than the sum of the parts" and my realism (Levitas argues) restricts me to exploring the parts serially.**]

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2. Madeleine Pape

Wright (2010) and Levitas (2013) approach the utopian method in quite different ways. Wright believes that emancipatory social science is at its most influential and effective when it engages in the 'fundamental redesign of different arenas of social institutions' rather than 'general, abstract, formulations of grand designs' (p.x). The role of social scientists in the realisation of utopias is to identify the institutional forms that can make it possible. For Wright, the greatest lessons are to be found in developing concrete proposals for specific ideas, such as unconditional basic income, or in learning from 'actually existing' utopias, such as participatory budgeting. Levitas, however, criticises this approach for restricting the possibility of a more holistic utopian vision, one that explores 'how different spheres interact at the institutional level' (p.144). In contrast with Wright, Levitas argues that a utopian method for social scientists 'is not and cannot be [about] a blueprint' (p.218). The 'architectural mode' of utopia as method is on the one hand about engaging one's imagination and daring to dream of a possible future,

and on the other hand an invitation for dialogue rather than a highly structured proposal. Levitas emphasises that the future cannot be bound by a blueprint, nor should it. Instead, Levitas focuses on sketching principles and institutional conditions.

Given Levitas' approach to understanding and applying the utopian method, what is the value of 'blueprints'? Do specific proposals of alternative institutional arrangements, such as those given in Wright's book, have a place within utopian thinking? Can the two perspectives be reconciled, or are they complementary rather than opposed?

> **[EOW comment: You raise issues similar to Yotaro's. Much rides here on exactly what is meant by "blueprint." The image is of a quite precisely laid out engineering design that gives you a direct recipe about how to build the alternative world. The parecon model gets close to that. But blueprint could mean something looser, seen more in the use of exemplars and broad templates rather than detailed formulas. Regardless, there is an issue of what is the relationship between the scientifically established knowledge about alternatives that we can generate through empirical investigation and theoretical modeling and the imaginative leaps that get formed in other ways.**

3. Michael Blix

In chapter six of Utopia as Method, Levitas details the post-modern and cultural "turn" of utopia in the 1960's-70's. With this, conceptions of utopia entailed a much greater degree of reflexivity, provisionality, and indeterminacy. In other words, Utopia transformed from an analytical task delineating institutional blueprints for a better future (i.e. Utopia as project), into a "hermeneutic method" which serves to interpret social (mis)representations and objects of desire (Utopia as process). One of the more salient arguments in this chapter to me was Zygmund Bauman's ideas regarding a shift in utopian thought under Liquid Modernity. He posits that under globalization the nation-state has lost its autonomy, which means that Utopia loses its place and cannot be thought of in terms of grand institutional projects. This is similar to arguments made by other theorists.

My questions: If Bauman is correct that utopia can no longer be tied to place under late (liquid) modernity, what are the implications for efforts to create meaningful, emancipatory institutional designs? How can we overcome globalization to create the conditions necessary for universal human flourishing? With that, is it even proper to strive for universal human flourishing, given that values and ethical practices are culturally produced?

> **[EOW: I thought Bauman's point was intriguing – about the deterritorialization of the idea of utopia and therefore it no longer as a "place" and cannot be thought of as a grand institutional project. I wonder if that idea hinges entirely on the idea that utopia must ultimately be a state project? That is, is it place that has disappeared or, rather, the capacity of states to have ambitious projects over territories? I'm not sure I agree with this even if it is really a claim about state capacities, but in any case I don't see why even if that is true why building new institutions that embody radically different principles of soial life become impossible even if globalization erodes territoriality.]**

4. Jake Carlson

By my reading, the discussion of transformation in Envisioning Real Utopias (ERU) seems to presuppose a singular capitalist society that can be transformed towards socialism. It seems to assume a singular state, economy, and civil society, as the contexts and objects of transformation. As I was thinking of this, I was imagining how the ruptural, interstitial, and symbiotic forms of transformation would play out here, in the heart of the empire, the US. I agree that ruptural transformation (whether the democratic version mostly described in the book, or a more common idea of typically violent revolution) is impossible to imagine successfully playing out here in the US at this moment.

Yet we live in a global capitalist economy, with transnational finance and governance institutions, and new internet-based social media that further blur the national lines presupposed in the theory based on the state, the economy, and civil society. How do we think about the theories in ERU in this context? How does resistance play out in this setting? In light of the futility of purely ruptural strategies in the US, could one imagine greater success with such strategies in the fringes of the empire, particularly in the Global South/Latin America? Could more revolutionary wins, lead to an erosion of the power of a transnational capitalist empire, to the point where ruptural strategies might become more realistic at the empire's heart? Does the ground gained (and lost) by resistance and revolutionary efforts in Brazil, Venezuela, Spain, Turkey, Egypt, etc. leave any source for optimism for challenging global capitalism? Would such an approach be considered interstitial, or do we need different analytical tools for this?

> [EOW comment: since the Russian Revolution, there has always been a current in the Marxist tradition that ruptures might be more possible in the fringes of global capitalism than in the center. What we observe is that seizing power in a ruptural manner has only occurred in places with weak states and relatively weak economies. What we have not observed is any sustained capacity to develop new institutions in an emancipatory direction. Still, there may be different kinds of transformative strategies that can take advantage of the weaker penetration or hegemony of capitalism in the periphery,]

5. Dmytro Khutkyy

From the very beginning the author claims that "the idea is to provide empirical and theoretical grounding for radical democratic egalitarian visions of an alternative social world" (Wright, 2010, p. 1). However, this statement poses a fundamental question: *how deeper equality can be made feasible in an alternative social world*?

It is an established macrosociological fact, that larger populations lead to bigger and more complex social structures with higher inequality (Lenski, 2005, p. 116). So how can we modify this regularity? Let us suppose we can implement this by introducing social policies favoring equality. Indeed, in industrial era ideologies have become the second factor (after technology) influencing differences between societies (Lenski, 2005, p. 122). Still, how is it possible to convince the elites and capital owners to pursue a different pattern of

redistribution? The author mentions class compromise (Wright, 2010, p. 289). Yet even not aiming at an eradicative change, how workers can persuade or force capitalists to share larger portions of surplus?

How can oppression be eliminated? Power and competition were pronounced for thousands of years, and now there are even more resources to control and more ways to influence and coerce. How can people in power be deterred from applying them? One might assume, by giving people means of resistance as well. So guns and blogs might become the people's SDI of the future.

Readers encounter a provocative assertion: "it is unjust that a person born in Guatemala has much less access to the material and social conditions for living a flourishing life than a person born in Canada" (Wright, 2010, p. 17). But what kind of global economy can create such opportunities? How people would agree to perform unpleasant or non-prestige jobs? Won't goods be of worse quality, as it was the case in USSR?

> [EOW comment: There are too many distinct questions here for a quick comment. Let me just say two things: I don't think it is an "established fact" that bigger populations mean more inequality. There are countless exceptions to this generalization. Bigger populations certainly allow for a more complex division of labor, but this does not inherently mean more material inequalities. Second, people agree to do unpleasant work all the time. The egalitarian issue is that these jobs should be well paid rather than badly paid – people should be compensated more for doing tedious and unpleasant work than interesting work. I don't see what that has to do with the poor quality of products in the USSR.]

6. Elsa Noterman

The relationship between 'making' and 'imagining' in the concept of utopia is an interesting one – it is a bit of a chicken or the egg scenario (which came first). While both books grapple with the making and imagining of alternative futures, there is some debate about which of these is ultimately privileged when examining utopias. Levitas critiques Real Utopias for privileging 'the doing' of utopias (and the related use of scientific knowledge) over the 'imagining' involved in alternative futures. However, it seems that the dichotomy between imagination and scientific knowledge, between imagining and empirics, is not a useful one in considering utopias – especially when considering utopia as prefigurative practice (in which the ends are the means). The reflexivity and progress (or process) identified in both the conceptions of 'real utopias' and 'utopia as method' suggest that utopia is "always suspended between the present and the future, always under revision" (Levitas 263). If the making of the present and imagining of the future are collapsed into one another within a utopian vision, are there other kinds of knowledge in addition to scientific knowledge that should be utilized in examining utopias? Can empirical analysis take into account imaginative visioning?

> [EOW comment: There is always space in science for imaginative leaps and conjectures. There are famous stories of scientists having fanciful visual dreams that trigger a solution to a knotty problem – I remember one story about a dream of a snake devouring itself that triggered some advance in chemistry (I don't remember the details alas). So imagination, dreams, poetry, taking a bath and watching the water rise, can yield "Eureka moments". The question is whether such epiphanies and

inspirations constitute a sufficient basis for action without the conjectures being further developed through more systematic analytical methods, or experiments, or other kinds of scientific research?]

7. Kerem Morgul

Erik O. Wright terms his endeavor "emancipatory social science." Yet, he also acknowledges a) that the limits of possibility in social life involves a subjective element, that is to say, what is possible is not fixed independently of our imaginations, and b) that the process of social change is too complex to be represented in the form of detailed maps of possible futures. What exactly, then, is the role of social scientific knowledge in devising utopian alternatives to the existing social order, beyond the diagnosis and critique of what exists? Can social scientific practice tell us, even tentatively, whether a specific institutional design is viable or achievable? How do we scientifically measure the viability and achievability of an alternative institution?

Wright is largely pessimistic about ruptural strategies to achieve a democratic egalitarian alternative to capitalism. He argues for a strategic pluralism in which a combination of interstitial and symbiotic strategies plays the primary role. However, he also recognizes in his discussion of economic systems as hybrids that in a capitalist society socialist and statist elements can survive so long as they do not systematically threaten capital accumulation. Any attempt to go beyond this functional limitation is likely to encounter powerful reaction from capitalist social forces. How is this hurdle to be overcome? How can really transformative socialist elements be put into practice within capitalism? Does not this imply that at a certain point in the course of transforming existing capitalism, directly confrontational strategies have to replace more indirect strategies like the interstitial ones and that even a revolutionary strategy might be needed?

In his typology of economic structures, Wright uses two measures: the basis of the form of ownership over means of production and the type of power that determines economic activities. Nevertheless, the following discussion privileges the latter measure over the former. To what extent is social control over economic activities possible in the absence of social ownership of means of production?

For Wright, socialism consists in the subordination of economic power to social power, i.e., the control of economic activities by voluntary associations in civil society. I find this somewhat vague given that civil society is itself an arena of power struggles. How can we ensure that social power over the economy results in equal access to the material and social means for human flourishing? How can we ensure that social deliberation and decision making over economic activities aim at the common good rather than the narrow interests of participating groups?

[EOW comment: There are too many quite distinct questions here rather than a single focus of interrogation (nine different question marks by my count). The central issue, I think, is the problem of transformation of capitalism given the power of capitalists to block transformations that "threaten" capitalism. A lot depends on exactly what one means by the idea of "threaten capital accumulation." Capitalists often engage in behavior which threatens accumulation, as in the crazy aversion of regulation

of financial practices that generate systemic risk. It is one thing to talk about strategies that pose an immediate and obvious challenge to the existence of capitalism – basically strategies that open the prospects of rupture – and policies which are simply suboptimal for accumulation. I think the system as a whole is very messy and that there are a variety of institutional configurations – different kinds of hybrids with different kinds of real utopian dimensions – in which capitalism could function adequately but not necessarily optimally. In a messy system alternatives can gain strength alongside a muddling-along capitalism. Capitalism itself is also heterogeneous and there may be sectors in which capitalists themselves may benefit from an increasing weight of non-capitalist/socialist elements in the economic "ecosystem". Much of this depends on how coherent you feel "the system" has to be

8. Laura Hanson Schlachter

How do you envision the role of markets in coordinating economic activity in a socialist alternative to capitalism?

Wright defines capitalism along two dimensions: class relations between capitalists and workers, and economic coordination through markets (2010, 34). Many real utopian proposals focus on transforming class relations from private to social ownership. Relatively few, however, embrace Marx's vision that socialism should transcend markets and coordinate economic activity through a central state apparatus. "To most contemporary critics of capitalism, comprehensive planning […] no longer seems a viable alternative" (192). One notable exception is Michael Albert, whose parecon model proposes doing away with markets completely and coordinating economic activity through a complex participatory planning process (256).

Wright's framing of the debate over market socialism versus parecon hinges on the role of markets in comprehensive system alternatives (246-65). What is your take on Albert's position on the intrinsic ills of markets (261)? What potential do you see for regulation to overcome market problems like hierarchy and mispricing (262)? Might there be other forms of economic coordination beyond markets and comprehensive [state or participatory] planning that we have yet to imagine?

Clarifying several issues about the nature of markets themselves would help me think through these types of questions. For instance, Wright defines the market as "a system of decentralized, voluntary exchanges involving prices that are responsive to supply and demand" (192). Yet the stylized 'invisible hand' seems itself utopian because in practice all capitalist systems are hybrids (35). Wright acknowledges thorny conceptual issues involved in identifying mechanisms of economic coordination (34), and I agree that dwelling on definitions can be counterproductive (118). Nevertheless, I wonder if analyzing markets in the spirit of Levitas's utopia as archeology might help us better understand where they fit into our vision of a good society (manuscript 275-306).

[EOW comments: We will get deeply into these issues in the week where we discuss parecon. My view is that systems of economic coordination need not be characterized as either market-coordinated or planned-coordinated (via participatory planning or bureaucratic planning). Rather there can be all sorts of combinations of market-relations and planning-coordination interpenetrating and coexisting. One can talk about the degree of market coordination and degree of democratic (or other) planning, and

this can vary across sectors. My claim, then, is that it should be a matter of experimentation precisely how these different coordination processes are articulated. There are trade-offs, and even if there are "ills" of markets, there may also be advantages in some contexts. I do see how to figure this out without learning-by-doing through experimentation.]

9. Samuel Need

Question 1:

In the discussion that I listened to this weekend (recorded from the first class) I was interested in the distinction you drew, between what you called "blueprint" utopia and "pragmatic" or "experimental" utopia (which you linked to Dewey and Habermas). The first of which is concerned with specifically predicting and designing the desirable future reality, and the second of which references something that is necessarily not finished, that remains open to experimentation and reform but is animated by a consistent commitment to certain values (like participatory democracy). This seems like a critical stance about the types of projects that are fit enough to survive in a world of heavily contingent events. A blueprint model is almost certainly weighed down and slowed by the huge number of contingencies it must "plan" for, in any proposal about the future. An experimental model is less slowed by this type of consideration. It does not have to plan for everything that might happen, because as a phenomenon it remains open to revision, rather than closed as a total, predictive vision of the future. At this point, I have a question. Let's say that we have a particular, pragmatic, utopian project, like a participatory budget committee. Will not this come under assault during the period of experimentation? We said above that such a committee is animated by particular ideas about freedom and how society should be organized. If this committee is also a location of experimentation, don't these normative ideas about freedom come under assault?

But to what extent can these experimental utopian projects remain both open to the contingencies of future events and yet unchanged by those contingencies on the level of value (like a particular definition of human flourishing)? Something that is open gains flexibility but is more likely to be co-opted by other interests than a totalizing vision, that is stubborn and slow (and thus unlikely to ever see the light of day) but is fundamentally closed off to this type of hybridization.

> **[EOW comment: Experimentation is especially critical in approaching the problem of building real utopias – how to construct them under the constraints and contingencies of the world as it is. Out experiments will come clearer models, more robust designs than would be possible in before-the-fact blueprints. The end result could well be very stable institutional arrangements which fulfill their purposes. Of course such projects are vulnerable to attack and erosion, to capture and destruction. And there can be no guarantees, and as I sometimes like to say, we can never relax....]**

Question 2:

What is the distinction between despair and disillusionment? Levitas thinks that individuals initially inclined to utopian thought are more likely to become extremely hostile to utopian

thought, once they have become disillusioned (I would agree with this and worry that I am on this slope). However, in class, you mentioned that this is in reference to the inability of utopian movements to execute on projects once in power (Soviet Union, Mao, etc.). You contrasted this with despair – something felt by individuals who are part of a process that remains true to its values but is defeated by an overwhelming oppositional force. You posited that, in comparison with disillusionment, this type of despair is less likely to specifically erode individual confidence in utopian projects.

I attended consensus-based Occupy Wall Street meetings in Chicago. In many ways, the meetings were more about exploring the capacity of individuals to have consensus-based meetings, and less about actually accomplishing a particular change. I felt this way because we frequently digressed into conversations about the process of meetings, and these took up more time than the actual content of the meeting, our plans for various types of protests. For me, it was problematic that this incongruity wasn't openly discussed – that there were multiple types of projects happening at the same time, some aimed at producing utopia as a part of the process of having a meeting, and others aimed towards larger structural change, and I did blame the leaders for not negotiating this. Occupy recruited a lot of people from different interest groups because it was intentionally vague in agenda, and could be attractive to individuals on the left interested in either strict personal freedom or larger, government-led, structural change. While this was a powerful recruiting call, during the actual experiment of the meetings, the difference between these two types of goals resulted essentially in divisive power struggles that were not reconciled. I know many people who left Occupy not because of their despair at the overwhelming force of the normative capitalist engine, but because of their disillusionment with the loose, experimental phase of Occupy itself (like a particular type of meeting). They weren't clear that they had signed on for this type of exploratory test.

> **[EOW comment: two quick points – (1) experimentation does not mean loose & vague. It just means adopting practices that enable one to learn from the process and revise one's understanding of what works best. Leadership can be critical in experiments, and good leadership requires skills (and maybe talents as well). A preoccupation with process in ways that pre-empts action is not inherent in experimentation. (2) I see disillusionment as especially a consequence of having been an uncritical "true believer", so that when things don't work out one doesn't have any intellectual resources to revise and bounce back. I'm not sure that the best contrast is with despair – I really meant to point out that being discouraged and even feeling that there is no hope because of the power of dominant forces need not erode ones values and ideals, whereas having absolute confidence in a set of beliefs that seem to be betrayed by the movement, is likely to create disillusion.]**

10. Emanuel Ubert

I would like to clarify (my understanding of) the theoretical importance of the difference between utopian blueprints and partial (real) utopian experiments to system-level transformative processes.

Levitas regards Erik's Real Utopian project ("examples of redesigned institutions") as "necessarily partial rather than systemic." Such an approach "rules out, in relation to the future, one of the great virtues of the utopian (and sociological) approach, namely the ability to explore how different spheres interact at the institutional level" (p. 256). Because scaling up of partial (real) utopias "means diversification, imagining a wider and more complex economy and society" (p. 259), "real utopias thus only inform alternative futures when imagined as part of a wider whole" (p. 260). I therefore interpret envisioning utopian totalities in her mind as being necessary for transformational purposes (utopian function of change). Only such systemic vision can sufficiently motivate transformative action and provide actors with practical guideposts to achieve transformative goals in situations in which the adherence to conventional practices has become too costly/ impractical.

Last Wednesday, Erik mentioned that real (partial) utopias can be abstractly conceptualized as (Deweyian) pragmatic experiments. I understand such pragmatic experiments to generally arise as creative responses to ruptures in the social reproduction of the institutional status quo. [Or alternatively, as result of deliberate institutional design, as e.g. in parts of the EU (Zeitlin, 2008)]. Let's bracket this here.] Such responses are creative precisely because they are not motivated and/ or strategically guided by pre-designed, alternative systemic visions but by partial, viable institutional possibilities. System-level (rather than partial) transformations are the essentially unintended consequence of pragmatic solutions to non-systemic problems in specific institutional realms.

Is this characterization of real utopias vs. utopian blueprints in the context of society-wide transformation accurate?

What exactly are the (incremental?) mechanisms that expand and scale up partial real utopias to the point that they result in system wide transformation? How do (class) interests figure into these mechanisms?

> [EOW comments: I wouldn't want to make a rigid contrast between partial, institution-specific real utopian pragmatic experiments which are deliberate innovations and system-level changes which are unintended by-products. Unconditional basic income is attractive to many people because of the belief that it will synergistically promote many other changes, open up all sorts of new possibilities, which would constitute system-wide transformations. UBI would constitute the macro-environment of other real utopia projects. The blueprint point is more about how fine-grained can one hope to be about the way an overall system will function with given novel properties. Engineering blueprints are meant to give you a viable system-as-a-whole, then only needs tinkering to run smoothly.]

11. Walker Kahn

What are the potential relationships between utopias and constructions of the security state? Is the security state inherently incongruent with utopia?

To what extent is the modern security state/panopticon fit the model of Utopia? The security state features an embedded utopia, a "desire for a better way of being or living": in this case, the Utopian impulse is projected as the effort to build a safer world. Or is the security state rather *dystopian* in that requires the conception of the world as "dark" and implies the need for a "totalizing system" to deal with this construction (Levitas 2012: 201)? Does it fail to be utopian only in practice, as any concept can be enacted poorly, or does it fail in theory as well?

The security state as currently imagined requires nearly unfettered state power. Does the dominance state power render utopia impossible, or is state coercion a possibly fertile ground for utopia? Or is the separation between utopia and dystopia highly unstable inherently?

Is the dominant role of state power inherent to security state (Wright 2013: 15)? If so, does the dominance of the state render utopia impossible, conceptually or otherwise?

> **[EOW comment: personal safety/security is certainly an important dimension of human flourishing, so it is a value that one should try to embody in institutions. This does not mean that all purported solutions embody emancipatory ideals. A police state is one way of creating bodily security, at least for those who are not targets of police repression. But it does not embody the specific values I identify with emancipation – equality, democracy, community. I don't think a panopticon is dystopian only because it is poorly implemented in practice; it is dystopian because it's very practices deeply contradict these values. Of course, if you endorse other values or simply reject democratic values, then the loss of freedom and autonomy in a security state is not a loss.]**

12. Taylor Laemmli

In the interest of resisting theories of social reproduction that see it as "comprehensive, effective, and fully coherent" (Wright 2010: 290), how does one begin to theorize and identify gaps in social reproduction at the level of subjectivities? While there are indeed gaps at the level of culture and ideology, how does one go about examining these systematically when the gaps may be momentary rather than static? For instance, one could imagine an individual noticing an inconsistency between notions of some widely held belief—"competitive individualism" (283), for example, and her real, current circumstances—for instance, she followed the ideological rules/norms of behavior corresponding to this belief by behaving in a competitive and aggressive manner at work, but her behavior was rejected and she does not climb the corporate ladder, is demoted, or loses her job. This could also be the case of her encountering competing ideological norms that are inconsistent with the norms of the, to her, subjectively dominant ideology. For example, her aggressive behavior, correct according to an individualistic ideology, is inconsistent with an ideology of gender that demands her passivity. Thus, she herself finds an ideological gap. However, this realization would not necessarily last,

in the sense of influencing or determining any consistent, subjective understanding or behavior. How does one capture and counter this momentary realization of an ideological or cultural gap? Is there a way a real utopia could systematically counter ideology in moments such as these? How could this countering of ideology and culture be imagined as an aspect of the goal of a real utopic organization and incorporated into practices of the organization?

> [EOW comments: Social movements and collective organization are crucial for making it possible for people to interpret the "gaps" that they experience ideologically in their lives, of the sort you describe. Sometimes people may spontaneously come to an understanding of the gap, but more often they are just confused and disoriented, or blame themselves for their failures. Real Utopian institutions that build practical alternative ways of people living can also be sites of "consciousness raising", not in the sense that they are sites of counter-hegemonic propaganda (although that may happen), but because they are sites for the production of new experiences and collective dialogue of interpretation.]

13. Jiaqui Li

You mention several times in your book, that the only way to process the transformation is via democracy. Your analyses are also about transformation in advance democratic-capitalist states. Do you imply that democracy is a pre-requisite for transformation? In some authoritarian capitalist countries, many left-wing (social democratic) revolutionaries/reformers are struggling for democracy and socialism at the same time. For instance, the Coalition of Socialist Forces, a coalition of five socialist and left-wing groups in Egypt after the 2011 Revolution. They stand for abolishing privatization and monopoly policies, and redirecting development plans to benefit "underserved social classes." But after the coup that happened in this July, based on your theory, their goals seem even harder to realize in the current Egyptian political system. I assume they will have to struggle for democracy again, but does this mean that they have to abandon the socialist characteristics of democracy that they are fighting for? How do these struggles (for socialism & democracy at the same time) fit into your transformation theory, or are they just impossible?

> [EOW comment: I am not sure that I fully understand your question. I am not saying that if you live in an authoritarian state and are part of a political project of social emancipation that you must first full democratize the society and then raise the issue of socialism. The two projects can be – must be – melded together. Socialism, after all, is a dimension of democracy – democracy extended to the economy. What I would say is that an authoritarian road to socialism is extremely unlikely: unless democratization is part of the political project, the trajectory towards socialism will end up somewhere else.]

14. Tatiana Alfonso

Levitas has a very interesting argument about the utopia as a standard to measure or evaluate our circumstances and actions; such standard has a transformative capacity of the existential experience and of the objective structures of the social world. The dynamic character between the existential experience and social structures is the element that seems to give track to social change; you change structures and institutions, people are gradually constructed within them having access to other types of experiences, developing alternative values and goals that could lead to achieve utopian values. While this is a very compelling idea of how to imagine social change both in terms of people and institutions, the issue of how to do that under the current circumstances is not clear at all. One example of how this could be clarified is the idea of human capacities. Levitas asserts that the notion of capacities differ from Sen's concept of capabilities because the value of the latter ones remain defined by the market and the idea of capacities should be freed from the obsession with marketable skills and reoriented to and useful human creativity. While her criticism of Sen might be relatively unfair, there is something puzzling about thinking and desiring only capacities that are free of the market if the market is still an existing mechanism for allocating resources. In other words, wouldn't we also desire the development of human capacities that are able to deal with an existing economic system that uses the market as a mechanism for redistribution of resources? If we don't envision human capacities that deal with the existing system, how would we be able to create gradual change and move toward the utopian vision of society? The answers to this question may have more general implications over how to advance toward the utopia in the architectural perspective.

> **[EOW comments: I agree that Sen's capabilities are not merely market-oriented, but rather the human capacities that enable people to flourish, which in a market society means that at least some of the capabilities have to enable people to function effectively in the world in which they live, which includes markets. Still, there is something in the substance of Levitas argument that capacities which simply equip you to function in the world as it is may not be sufficient to function well in projects of transformation. I think of this as more concerned with the general problem of subjectivity, ideology, beliefs, dispositions than "capabilities" in general: the forms of subjectivity that enable one to function effectively within the world as it is may disable one to participate in its transformation. And perhaps to some extent the reverse is also true: the kind of restless, dissatisfied subjectivity that fuels transformative innovation may make it harder to "fit in." This is connected to some of Therborn's ideas on subjectivity and its tensions.**

15. Alisa Pykett

"But knowledge here must be construed more deeply, as something that involves feelings and desires as well as cognitive statements. Utopia is not simply a thought experiment in the conventional sense, for it necessarily operates at the level of affect as well as intellect." (Levitas, p. 376)

In reflecting on Levitas' expansion on what constitutes knowledge, I wonder how the connotation of hope as naïve in scholarship has fostered criticism of utopian methods and the refusal to name work that actually makes claims of a good society as utopian. Can scholarship

be rigorous while standing on a premise of hope? If envisioning and implementing utopian structures requires hope at a certain level and, as Tillich (Levitas, p. 43) suggested, a willingness to commit to an uncertain and ambiguous alternative, how does the field attend to hope, the education of desire or Bloch's notion of educated hope among its scholars? How might the field's relationship with hope relate to Durkeim's division of labor theory (Levitas, p. 132) and the resulting contracted horizons envisioned by "specialized functionaries" instead of rounded persons?

> [EOW comment: Some strands of contemporary cognitive psychology have come to emphasize the critical role of emotions in thinking. Rationality functions quite different when it is "cold calculation" than when it gets its weights and drive from emotions. Hope and desire fit into this. I am not sure how best to think about the connections, but it does seem to me right that hope and desire are critical to sustaining the drive for transformation and real utopia. The problem is that hope and desire can also fuel wishful thinking which can be dangerous, can lead one into traps. So, clearly there needs to be mutual interplay between hope and (scientific) analysis. Perhaps one way of thinking about this would be to say that precisely because of the indeterminacy and contingencies of systems – which is something we can assert on scientific grounds – there are nearly always hidden possibilities for making life better. This provides a "rational" grounds for hope, and hope, in turns, provides the motivational grounds for seeking to discover/reveal those hidden possibilities. Maybe that is too pat.]