

WHAT IS DEMOCRACY TO YOU?

What is democracy to you?

...Democracy is always precarious, and must be fought for. – Doris Lessing

Since 2005, I have recorded over 300 video interviews with civilians on the streets of twelve cities in Latin America. The questions I asked, on individual perceptions of U.S. interventionism and foreign policy, democracy, leadership, and governance resulted in an extremely wide spectrum of opinion, which varies according to local situations and forms of government in each country. The resulting footage is the basis of "The Good Life," a multi-channel video installation and Internet archive.

For more detailed information please visit: www.carlosmotta.com/GoodLife.html

Democracy as a political concept– its perception, understanding, history, and its application to various socio-political fields – is an important undercurrent of "The Good Life." Focusing on public perceptions of democracy in Latin America, the work offers a panoply of opinions that attest to the profound divide between democratic theory and practice.

Through this poster publication, I attempt to further expand this discussion on democracy. To that end, I have invited three artists and a theoretician to respond to the question "What is democracy to you?" from their respective fields of research.

Ashley Hunt examines the role of the prison in the U.S. as "management of exclusion and insurrection" and thus questions its relation – as an institution – to democracy as a form of rule, and to the State as the infrastructure of rule. **Naeem Mohaiemen** gives a brief account of the recent political history of Bangladesh, demonstrating the country's serious disillusionment with democracy in the midst of a military government. **Oliver Ressler** offers transcription excerpts from his project "Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies," which suggest different democratic models, and the possibilities for their implementation. Finally, **Maria Mercedes Gómez** develops a thorough analysis of discrimination and exclusion based on sexual orientation, focusing on prejudice and violence within democratic societies.

I would like to thank the authors for their valuable texts, and curator **Stamatina Gregory** for her generosity and hard work organizing the exhibition "Carlos Motta: The Good Life" at **The Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA)**, Philadelphia, January 18 – March 30, 2008, which provides the context for this publication. (Edition of 2000. Illustration based on street graffiti encountered in Buenos Aires, Argentina) – Carlos Motta, January 2008



On Prejudice, Violence and Democracy

—By Maria Mercedes Gómez

Albert Memmi (1) wrote that difference is a value that we assign to real or imaginary characteristics in order to establish social hierarchies. Those who have the power to assign value commonly position themselves at the dominant end of this hierarchy, using their power for “scaling bodies” (2) and in the process, establishing the relational character of every identity. Differences have been historically established in various ways: through the reification of biological characteristics as in the case of race and gender; the stigmatization of particular cultural practices and expressions such as in the case of religion, ethnicity, and sexuality; or through the development of economic formations and class differentiation. Biological, cultural, and economic differences often overlap and reciprocally shape each other. One of the central challenges of contemporary democratic societies is how best to recognize and include such differences without reproducing hierarchies of inequality.

Dissenting Sexualities

Deconstruction and queer theories, as well as research on sexual behaviour, have shown that a binary categorization of differences is inadequate and insufficient to contain the fluidity of our desires and our identifications. It is not only that for some people biological sex, gender roles, sexual desire and practices do not correspond, but that they do not coincide for anyone. Our sexuality and our self is undetermined and contingent. But the perception of this generates extreme anxiety because it not only discloses the unsubstantiated condition of sexual binaries, but puts them at stake. It also puts at risk the privileges that derive from such binaries.

Many of us dwell in societies of “compulsory heterosexuality” (3) and act and live as if the binary construction of the world were natural and universal instead of contingent and socially constructed. Compulsory heterosexuality operates through political, sexual, social and economic practices that stigmatize and make targets of violence that which is perceived as feminine and sexualities, which do not conform to the heterosexual norm. Such a norm assumes male and female bodies invested with masculine and feminine roles, desiring the opposite sex and acting accordingly. Despite the cultural and legal reforms that dissenting sexualities have achieved in the past decades –especially gay men and lesbians and, to a lesser degree transgender people– they are still subject to second class citizenship and to extraordinary State and non-state violence in many societies.

People who embody difference are marked in two ways. The first way is premised on the assumption that one cannot become “the other” because the borders between the norm and those outside the norm are rigid. Race and gender, for instance, have been historically conceived in social, cultural and legal settings, as essential, visible, and largely immutable physical attributes (4). In contrast, the second way seeks to exteriorize difference when the “other” threatens to become one of “us” or part of the norm. Prejudice against dissenting sexualities is paradigmatic of border anxiety because unlike other seemingly essential, visible and immutable differences, sexual orientation has often been seen as invisible and mutable (5). In this case, the assumed permeability of the borders of difference –between the norm and deviance or dissent– is related to violence in a specific way.

A fundamental principle of democratic societies should be, as Nancy Fraser puts it, to achieve participatory parity for all their members in order to make collective decisions regarding the way they want to live their lives (6). Prejudices and the violent ways in which they manifest are central obstacles for the achievement of participatory parity. Many of the political, cultural and legal efforts to overcome prejudice focus on a notion of discrimination. I contend however, that explanations about different types of prejudices when collapsed into a single explanatory logic of discrimination are insufficient to elucidate the complexity of exclusionary practices.

Discrimination and Exclusion

The logic of discrimination seeks to maintain “the other” as inferior while the logic of exclusion seeks to liquidate or erase “the other” from the social world (7). These logics materialize in two uses of violence, which I call hierarchical and exclusionary. In the hierarchical use of violence, perpetrators maintain and enjoy difference as a mark of inferiority. In contrast, the exclusionary use of violence attempts to eliminate differences because they are understood to be incompatible with the perpetrator(s) world-view. In a compulsory heterosexual system of domination, non-heterosexual practices and identifications are a threat to the system. Keeping them as inferior is, in some cases, instrumen-

tal to heterosexual supremacy. But non-heterosexual identities are overall targets for exclusion although such exclusion takes place in different degrees for individuals perceived or defined as gay, lesbian, and transgender.

This means that remedies for violence based on social prejudice must include a profound transformation of the cultural practices which produce and reproduce such violence. Such a transformation requires a diagnosis of the different types of prejudice that pervade social interaction, as well as analytical clarity over the messages sent by, and the purposes behind, the violent embodiment of these prejudices. Hierarchical and exclusionary uses of violence are both expressive and terrorizing acts of power, but they are not equivalents. Intentions to keep “the other” inferior are expressed in different social contexts and political environments from those surrounding intentions to liquidate “the other.” Because of this, laws and policies, often designed and interpreted using discriminatory logic, cannot be the basket in which all hopes for social and cultural change are carried. Anti-discrimination laws and policies are important but insufficient to deal with the phenomenon of violence based on prejudice. They may even be detrimental if governments, activists and politicians assume they replace other social and cultural remedies or if they are taken to be the solution for repairing harms done by economic historical asymmetry and repetitive discourses of hate and stigma.

Democracy and Violence

What notion of democracy would better respond to the challenges of both hierarchical and exclusionary violence? Those who struggle for specific legal, social and political recognition of sexual difference and diversity gather around identity politics; those who argue that the affirmation of specific identities supports hierarchical binarism and naturalizes difference struggle to deconstruct fixed identities and to demonstrate the fluidity of identifications. The distinction between identity and identification comes mainly from the work of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, but has been reformulated in political terms by theorists such as Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe and Slavoj Žižek as well as by the work of Jacques Derrida. In spite of their important differences, these theorists agree that the notion of fixed identities is inadequate to represent the processes of subject formation, and translate such impossibility into the political. Subject formation is mobile and fluid. It emerges through a lack of “being” –or a constant emptiness which drives us to search for identifications with the illusion that we can diminish or fill such emptiness. Subjects are “greedy emptiness” (8) for recognition.

As with the subject, radical democracy requires the lack that permits desire. The saturation of such a lack in which antagonisms and contentions are possible, means violence. Political articulations around the relation friend/adversary, Mouffe suggests (9), constitute radical democracy and foreclose the totalitarian rhetoric of friend/enemy. In this sense, democracy is always in transition, agonistic, conscious of its contingency, always to come.

Foot Notes:

- (1) Memmi, A. 1971. *Dominated Men*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- (2) The expression is from Young, I.M. 1990. “The Scaling of Bodies and the Politics of Identity” in *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- (3) Rich, A. 1993. “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence.” Pp. 177-205 in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, edited by H. Abelove, M. Aina Barale, and M. Halperin. New York: Routledge.
- (4) For instance, Kenji Yoshino writes about the tensions between discrimination and assimilation in American anti-discrimination laws. Yoshino, K. 2002. “Covering” in *Yale Law Journal* V.III, Number 4, January. P. 771
- (5) Young, op cit., p.146.
- (6) Fraser, N. and A. Honneth. 2003. *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, New York: Verso.
- (7) Gómez M. M. 2005. “Usos jerárquicos y excluyentes de la violencia.” in *Mas Allá del Derecho. Género y Justicia en América Latina*, edited by C. Motta and L. Cabal. Siglo del Hombre Editores, CESO, Centro de Derechos Reproductivos: Bogotá.
- (8) Kojève, A. 1996. “Desire and Work in the Master and the Slave” in *Hegel’s Dialectic of Desire and Recognition*, edited by John O’Neil, Albany: State University of New York Press.
- (9) Mouffe, Ch. 1993. *The Return of the Political*. New York: Verso.

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Tricks of Logic and Constellations of Time

—By Ashley Hunt

What follows will be filled with tricks. Not to be tricky per se, nor excessively clever, but to think about tricks of thought, as they might lead us into traps, or as they might help us think our way out of them.

For example, I believe it is something of a trick that assumes the prison to be an institution “belonging to” democracy. It is not uncommon to come across this coupling, since we know prisons developed into their modern form in a time frame parallel to the emergence of modern democratic states. But the trick here lies in confusing democracy (a mode of rule and its contestation) for the state (institutions, documents and infrastructures of rule). States may conform to a liberal- or social-democratic model, or may be organized in a manner more or less conducive to supporting democracy, but a state cannot, in and of itself, be democracy, let alone desire it. The state institutes an ordering and distribution of power, structures of hierarchy and thresholds of inclusion and exclusion; whereas democracy is the pursuit to alter the fixity of that state of affairs. The prison is but one apparatus at the state’s disposal for maintaining and naturalizing that state of affairs, and thus contradicts the very logic of democratic progression — having more to do with managing the effects of failures and deficiencies of democracy and concealing its calculated subversion (1).

A trick in the other direction: Let’s say you go to prison. If this takes place within the United States, you will be banned from voting — unless you live in Maine or Vermont, the two states which do allow prisoners to vote. Once released from prison and designated an “ex-felon,” you will remain banned from voting while on probation or parole in at least 38 states, and in 13 of those states, you will be banned for the rest of your natural life (2).

Had your status as an ex-felon been assigned in Florida, then in the 2000 presidential election you would have experienced a confluence between political policy and political history. The state kept 600,000 ex-felons from participating in the election, along with another 200,000 who were held in prisons, the majority of whom, if allowed to vote, would most likely have voted for Al Gore and could have swung the election decisively (3).

As you experienced this intersection between political policy and a future to come, you would simultaneously have experienced a link with a past: with the period following the 1870 ratification of the 15th Amendment to the United States’ Constitution, which states, “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” Within years of this “democratization” of voting, 80% of U.S. states would have “felony” or “criminal disenfranchisement” laws passed — the very same which today ban over 5 million citizens from voting (4). These medieval laws were adopted, along with a variety of poll taxes, literacy tests (and unofficial, white-supremacist terrorism), specifically to keep newly enfranchised African Americans from exercising their right to vote.

In other words, following the extension of universal voting rights to all men (5) — which we can understand as a gesture to redistribute power by undoing a structure of exclusion — new laws were appropriated creatively to preserve the monopoly of political rule and economy that had already existed, accomplishing the exclusions necessary to this monopoly but by other logics. With the previous logic of exclusion having been biological, the same racial contents would now express themselves through selective logics of economic status, culture, lawfulness and danger (6).

Following this genealogy of your disenfranchisement further, jump 90 years into the future, where these newer strategies of exclusion would be significantly challenged by the Civil Rights Acts of 1960 and 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Despite their undoing of a century worth of new structures of exclusion, they reaffirmed your coming disenfranchisement by failing to address the key, post-Jim Crowe technology of racial control: criminalization.

This trick, criminalization, works well. It is one of the most effective for rulers to use in dividing ruled populations against one another so that they don’t unify against how or by whom they are being ruled. It is the most simple way to malign would-be “freedom-fighters” and to disrupt the continuities of trust that bind organization and activism. Whether that means turning people against one another in violence and competition over scarce resources, or conversely, leaving people with too much, atomized in comfort and full of fear towards others, it keeps the fight as one among individuals, preventing the formation of collective political identifications and analyses of power.

In the post-Civil Rights era, criminalization has become the container of legitimacy into which so many previous forms of racial control are concealed.

This can be seen in the 740% growth of the prison system since 1970 with a 75% majority of people of color, as the prison has all but replaced welfare state institutions in “managing” the devastation of Neo-Liberal economics upon working-class and poor communities. And in this time, just as this constellation of pasts converged in your individual disenfranchisement from the 2000 election, there are additional ways that imprisonment impacts democracy.

For instance, odds are that you would have come from a community in which many people go to prison (7), one plagued by a constant uprooting and relocation of bodies and minds. This disrupts the continuity of family life, economic cooperation, local political discourse, knowledge and identity, while undermining the trust among neighbors that would otherwise make a community potentially powerful. Furthermore, you become one vote removed from your district and one more body to be counted in the prison town during redistricting and gerrymandering battles (note that the communities where prisoners come from are typically counted as Democratic, whereas the communities where prisoners exist are typically counted as Republican (8)). More fundamental than elections however, the power to realize democracy depends upon the internal organization and strength of a community to force a redistribution of power. Mass imprisonment undermines this absolutely, and prisons help make such subversion possible.

But returning to the trick I offered — positioning you, the reader as the protagonist of a history — I suspect you may be tiring of this by now. It may seem to distract from the real meat of the essay or seem a manipulation, playing upon your emotions rather than your reason. It may have meant different things to different people though, specifically with regard to whether the reader her or himself has actually been to prison. This complicates the exercise, and in a sense, makes it less of an exercise. Instead, it asks the reader to reconsider the text according to whom its addressee is presumed to be, pointing not to a hypothetical subject but a real person who will indeed read this, who has in reality spent part of their life in one or more prisons.

We might realize that all along, our universal reader (which a text must always presume) had been someone insulated from the risks, dangers and violence of prison, to whom the prisoner is but a literary figure, a philosophical problem or a legal category, thereby placing the actual or former prisoner outside the address of the text, like an eavesdropper to a conversation that is about them but without them as a participant. Asking the reader who has been to prison to be the primary interpreter of these propositions changes the stakes of the text, asking those who have not been to imagine (to the extent possible) coming to these questions from a position of dissonance, rupture and urgency.

Then we are better positioned to realize that each of us is in turn produced by and implicated in these same histories. Then we might ask whether this disposition toward exclusion has in fact been a coincidence of history, or whether it is what composes our politics to begin with: the founding operation of a politics based upon exclusion, whose continuation and identity always requires the maintenance and securing of its thresholds. This is where the prison sits; it remains as it always has been, a key technology for the management of exclusion and insurrection; the brick and mortar analog of the army, police and law; the opposite of democracy.

Foot Notes:

(1) Here I am relying in part upon Jacques Rancière’s notion of democracy as argued in his “10 Theses on Politics”: “The ‘freedom’ of a people that constitutes the axiom of democracy has as its real content the rupture of the axioms of domination... Democracy is the institution of politics — the institution of both its subject and its mode of relating.”

(2) See <http://www.sentencingproject.org/RightToVote.aspx>

(3) See “Democratic Contraction: Political Consequences of Felon Disenfranchisement in the United States,” published in the *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 67, Dec., 2003.

(4) See “Losing the Vote: Felony Disenfranchisement Laws in the United States” (1998), report by The Sentencing Project and Human Rights Watch.

(5) Women were, with few exceptions, still banned from voting until 1920 and the 19th Amendment.

(6) For an excellent analysis of this history, see Clyde Woods, *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*.

(7) This can be seen in the work done by Laura Kurgan in the “Million Dollar Blocks” project, <http://www.100k.org/milliondollarblocks/million-dollar-blocks>

(8) See <http://www.prisonersofthecensus.org>

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Hoggole Singapore Hoibar Chai

—By Naeem Mohaiemen

The girl in the Raffles Hotel purred: bottled glitter and sexy danger. It was late. She was drunk. There had to be better ways to end up in a stranger's hotel room.

Everyone wants to go over the fence. The Bangladesh elite so fervently admires Singapore. The clean streets, the high-rises, the S-H-O-P-P-I-N-G. Tiny nation, largest government investment fund. Elections that return an absolute majority to the ruling party. No really, we ask, why can't that be us? The wistful examples: Jessore in Bangladesh had an airport before Singapore had an international airport, and now Singapore has the Airbus A380. Somewhere it went wrong for us.

Why can't we all be Singapore? Why can't I be you?

The answer always comes back to our obstinate love for elections. Our Bangla elders remind us that Singapore dispensed with democracy, and in exchange got efficiency, boomtown and profit. We "cling" to our cycles of election gridlock, parliament walkouts, strikes, riots, military coups, and finally democracy movements that overthrow the military. Then we get back to democracy/dysfunction.

Somebody said we need "a brand of democracy particularly suited to the genius of the Bengali people." Genius? Or does he mean we're children who haven't learnt to handle the vote? Perhaps he means we have too many choices and need a drastic reduction. The chatterati want a Bengali Lee Kuan Yew. But what if we hope for LKY and end up with Idi Amin dada? He promised to modernize as well. Digest the marrow and the bone.

Give some people democracy, and look what they do with it. This cannibal nation that ate its own "father." After splitting Pakistan in two and bringing Bangladesh to independence, Sheikh Mujib was machine-gunned four years later by his own men. Unable to imagine that the army would turn their guns on him, Mujib walked down the steps of his house and said "tora ki chas?" (What do you boys want?). He imagined it was 1971 again. That he would bravely march to jail and come back out the national hero. But it was '75, not '71. The bullet, not the ballot. The end of the grand experiment.

Bhodrolok is civilized or courteous man. The term seeps out of precious manners set in motion by the Hindu elite in the early twentieth century. As the Bangla Muslim elite came out of their larval stage, they took on the connotations of the bhodrolok. Or, how not to get your hands dirty in the messy business of life. A great retreat from politics by the Muslim bhodros. The spectacle of running a country was becoming too much for them. Independence war, failed reconstruction, cataclysmic famine, assassination, Maoist rebels, CIA station chiefs, coups and counter-coups.

Disgusted with politics, fearful for their purity, the bhodro retreated into seminars, dinner parties and op-eds, leaving politicking to others. As new groups infected politics, the intelligentsia formed alternate power silos. First the NGO revolution, until organizations like Grameen Bank, BRAC, Proshikha and GonoShastya functioned as parallel governments. Next, the Fourth Estate, as the satellite television age arrived. Linked and overlapping were the giant business houses, hydras reaching everywhere. A paradise that needed stability, not elections.

And now enter that concept— stability— that drains the blood from political life. The dream of Singapore. Hoggole Singapore hoibar chai. And now we see the bhodroloks return. Reborn into a new form we call shushil samaj – civil society. The word shu in front of a Bangla word gives it a nice sheen. Shumoti, sane thought, shubochon, well spoken, shubuddhi, good idea. My classmate rasps at me, "We call all of you kutil (twisted) samaj, not shushil samaj." Yes, he includes me. We benefit from the shushil money going into galleries, art journals and biennial trips...

In the sixth year of the new millennium, Bangladesh was in the grip of collective democratic hysteria. At stake were the coming elections. Neither side willing to trust a fair fight. Rigged voter lists and crooked judges. Debates and battles. Train tracks uprooted. Burning tires. Rubber bullets, tear gas, Molotov

cocktails, barbed wire. Trouble in mind, death in the air. In front of the stadium, the "Islamists" battle the "Progressives." One of the Islamists is beaten to death on live TV. Brain and blood on asphalt, horrified clucking in the blogosphere. Kids, did you think 1975 was any gentler? Video only killed the mystery.

On January 10th 2007, the United Nations announces that if the Bangladesh Army supervises elections in this chaos, they could endanger their UN peacekeeping role (Bangladesh is the largest supplier of troops to UN missions). This is serious business. On January 11th, the army steps in and installs a "Caretaker Government." 1/11. Our life rich with numerology. A World Bank alumni is appointed to head the caretakers.

A "war against corruption" is announced. Target: the political class. The raids begin, and there is no end to the looted riches being uncovered. Peacocks and pet crocodiles. BMWs, Hummers, Mercedes. One after another, all the big politicians are arrested on corruption charges. A minister is sentenced to five years for possession of foreign alcohol. A chill descends on the Dhaka party scene. Everyone starts flushing their stash down toilets, or better yet down their own gullets. Beer, vodka, gin. For the younger set, yabba is the party drug. A lethal amphetamine from Thailand, now locally manufactured. Mad Dog and Pink Pleasure. Honeyed brand names that drip off tongues. The big yabba dealer in town is busted. Surprise, he turns out to be a relative of one of the politicians. Another round of politicians to jail. I don't think anyone sheds a tear for these political godfathers. But we're jittery, because we wonder what will come when there are no more politicians. And why are the Islamists left alone? Something wicked this way comes.

Perhaps some are waiting for the "international community" to step in and "restore" democracy. That fabled Gandalf the good. But no one wants to disturb plans to install a Muslim-led UN peacekeeping force in post-America Iraq. With Pakistan out of the running, Bangladesh is the next candidate for the mission. So many players in this double-decker chess game. Only tunnel and tunnel, no visible light.

I'm not the last man in front of the Tiananmen tanks. I wish I could be that brave, but I'm not. But there are still protestors on the university campus. They haven't given in just yet. Their message is painted on the dormitory walls. If you're going to end politics, don't tell me it's for my own good. Kill me before you kill my time.

The caretakers assure us there will be elections in December 2008. The army is supervising voter list registration, with computer equipment that will create biometric national ID cards. At the registration center, my mother's fingerprints don't register on the scanner. "You're old," says the smooth faced man, "your fingerprints have rubbed away." I'm in the next room-- there are murmurs as people cut the line in front of us, breaking the orderliness. An old man dryly remarks, "There are no aliens from another planet, everyone comes from the same mother. Even if you beat it with a stick, the snake remains crooked."

Last man in front of the Tiananmen tanks-- I wish I could be that brave, but I'm not. But I keep thinking that planned history will not work. Bengalis still want a choice, rather than a lobotomy that births a nation of shoppers. We are not quite ready for our Singapore moment.

Naeem Mohaiemen is an artist who uses video+archive to explore historical markers, including national security panic and failed revolutions.

More info: www.shobak.org

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Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies

—By Oliver Ressler

The ongoing exhibition project "Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies" (2003 - 2007) by Oliver Ressler focuses on diverse concepts and models for alternative economies and societies, which all share a rejection of the capitalist system of rule. An interview was carried out for each of the 16 concepts, which are presented as 20 to 37 minutes long videos. Interview partners include economists, political scientists, authors, and historians. The following are three transcription excerpts of video interviews carried out for the project "Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies".

The Socialism of the 21st Century

Heinz Dieterich

Transcription excerpt of a video by O. Ressler, recorded in Rotenburg / Wümme, Germany, 26 min., 2007

The basic premise of my book is that you need to have certain objective conditions to have democracy; you cannot have democracy, just as a wish, and impose it on any objective world scenery or acting. First of all, there has to be a certain level of material well being, you need a certain quality of life. That implies that you can have a very extensive educational system, which is open and free for all, and then of course you must have the willingness in the people to have a democratic society instead of, let's say, a theocratic society. At the end, you need an economy that sets you free from unnecessary work so that you have time to participate in public affairs. I think these conditions have been reached today so that the authoritarian development of social democracy and historic socialism in eastern Europe was a phenomena much due to the circumstances of the World Wars, the Second World War and then of the Cold War, and that there's no need to have that once again. You cannot substitute democratic participation by the rule of surrogate force, the Communist Party in that case, neither, of course, of a capitalist elite, and, neither, of course, of a state bureaucracy. So, I think we've all learned from these things. The objective conditions are much more prone to a real participatory democracy. I think there's never been a better chance to have a real direct democracy than we do have today. [...]

I think it is a misunderstanding to think that participatory democracy will be that everybody decides any trivial subject. That was tried in the French Revolution and, of course, it leads to immediate breakdown of operational capacity of the state. First of all, it's impossible that everybody decides on everything. And, second, it's not necessary. The trivial things in a small village; they have to decide if they put lights in the streets or not, that doesn't mean a referendum, I guess. So you will have a mixture of direct democracy where you have electronic plebiscites and referenda and of representative democracy. And, the important thing is that you extend direct democracy to the economic, the political, the cultural and the military sphere. You cannot exclude any of these four basic social relations, which form our life. And, that of course, requires another objective condition. People must have free time to inform themselves what economists know, what political scientists know and so on. They need time to debate alternatives. So direct democracy today is possible because you have the technological basis, the Internet. You need the decision and information transmission in real time in gigantic geographical spaces. And, that we can do today. So for the first time since the Greeks, that it is really possible to have a direct democracy, where the will of the people decide the important issues.

—Heinz Dieterich, author of "Socialismo del Siglo XXI" (1996), professor of the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana in Mexico City.

Libertarian Municipalism

Chaia Heller

Transcription excerpt of a video by O. Ressler, recorded in Leverett, U.S.A., 32 min., 2005

Libertarian municipalism is the political branch of social ecology. [Murray] Bookchin really comes out of the Marxian tradition, believing that philosophy needs to be alive in the world, and needs to be in the service of human kind. Libertarian municipalism is basically a philosophy that says, that everyday people, citizens, cities and towns and villages across the world are rationally capable of governing themselves. And what he tries to do is balance principles of

autonomy and cooperation through the philosophy of libertarian municipalism, by saying what would happen if you had communities that had autonomy on a local level, but that that autonomy was always limited by and in dialogue with a larger collectivity, which would be the confederation. So there is a tension between the self-governing municipality, which would be a self-governing city, town or village, and the larger confederation, that the city or town or village is part of. The citizens are bound together by sharing a common constitution that is grounded on a set of ecological and social principles, and the confederation is bound together by that same exact constitution.

There is a tremendous concern among leftists about what is democracy, what ought it to look like, and what ought it to become. As a social ecologist, for me there is the sense that we have the potential to have a direct democracy; which means, that people in cities, towns and villages would gather as citizens in a local town meeting, which you could call a general assembly, or public assembly, or citizens assembly. It is that body that would be the driving force for policymaking in society in general.

Chaia Heller, activist and author of "Ecology of Everyday Life: Rethinking the Desire for Nature" (1999)

Anarchist Consensual Democracy

Ralf Burnicki

Transcription excerpt of a video by O. Ressler, recorded in Bielefeld, Germany, 29 min., 2005

Anarchy is so difficult for people to understand because many people can't imagine life without control, the organs of the state, control from above. They haven't learned to develop self-administered, organizational structures; they haven't learned to realize dominance-free decision-making, beginning with their private affairs. Therefore, a certain blind spot exists in today's so-called democracy: people are taught about human rights, Paragraph 1 of the (German) constitution, "The dignity of man is inviolable," espouses concepts that approximate or correspond to democracy. Yet the everyday application of what is required of democratic systems, namely, the population's actual self-determination, self-administration, and self-organization, is neglected.

If I want to describe the anarchist principle or model of consensus, perhaps it is helpful to first speak of this consensus model as a theory of independent decision-making or as a theory of direct democracy. The model refers to the intrinsic value of political decisions; that is, the way that a political decision is made is put at the center of focus. "Consensus" stems etymologically from the concept of "accordance," "agreement." Consensus, because it should be free of dominance and refers to an actual communication and decision-making process, is important in concrete decision-making. In a theory of direct democracy, concrete decision-making means, for example, that the agenda includes questions of how to produce something. For example: How can we build a center? How can we build a street? How can we build a collective? What should we do? Looking at representative democracy - a democratic form characterized by representative systems - it becomes clear that massive numbers of people who are directly affected by these systems are ignored.

Ralf Burnicki, author of "Anarchismus und Konsens" (2002)

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