

TODAY, YESTERDAY & TOMORROW:
between rebellion
and coalition building

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Times change, and with them accounts of what is more likely to be seen as politically achievable, or perhaps ridiculous. There is near consensus that Britain at present is facing an ever-deepening recession, with economists such as Will Hutton disclosing that the UK is suffering the worst economic performance since the nineteenth century, while its recovery from the height of the banking crisis has been amongst the slowest in the world. Even the IMF warns that the extent of government's spending cuts and refusal to invest in the public sector is forestalling growth and risking permanent damage to the economy.¹ Moreover, there is widespread awareness of the distressing effects of public sector cuts on the most vulnerable people in the UK, with women hit hardest by job cuts in the welfare system, and half a million people marching against the cuts in March 2011.

Yet in the UK there is nowadays less political cohesion, hope, or anything like an agreed alternative vision between the different forms of resistance to this Tory-led coalition than there was when Margaret Thatcher was elected at the close of the 1970s. With the ethos of market forces so comprehensively triumphant over the last thirty years, fear eats the soul of the British left. Even the once widely approved word, 'socialism', to describe the goal of the radically egalitarian, democratic society many of us hoped to build back in the 1970s, has largely fallen into disuse. Back

then, it was the Women's Liberation Movement that exerted the strongest influence on my life, and feminism generally has ever since remained a part of every political move I make. Yet my feminism has never been separate from attempts to make sense of the broader political landscape. Thus, before turning back to that moment of *Beyond the Fragments*, in 1979, I want to survey aspects of the present conjuncture in more detail, to see its possible continuities and discontinuities with that earlier moment. Drawing especially upon the impact of feminism, the problem as we saw it back then was how to facilitate more dialogue and co-operation between the different organized left groups and diverse activist movements to build coalitions solid enough to confront the triumph of the right under Margaret Thatcher. In so many ways we seem back in that moment again, except that the obstacles we face have grown formidably.

'Man does not live by bread alone', the Sydney born anthropologist, Michael Taussig, reminds his listeners in London, January, 2012, speaking of Occupy Wall Street (OWS). Feminists always knew this. '*We want bread, but we want roses, too!*', was one of the classic banners we celebrated, thought to have been carried by the predominantly immigrant women on strike for three months for higher wages and decent working conditions after a threatened pay cut and line speed-up at the Lawrence Textile factory in Massachusetts a hundred years ago. It has been suggested that those banners were apocryphal, having originated in a poem written by James Oppenheim the previous year. Nevertheless they became enduringly associated with the mood of that strike and remained iconic in the reappearance of second-wave feminism, nearly sixty years later. Importantly, the strike, supported by the 'Wobblies' (the IWW or International Workers of the World) had ended with many of the workers' demands being met in March 1912.²

Another saying, often joyfully repeated and rephrased by second-wave feminists is wrongly attributed to the anarchist Emma Goldman: '*If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution*'. Again, the mythical phrase catches Goldman's

awareness of the importance of pleasure and beauty in politics, making visible an awareness of what is wanted, alongside anger against the causes of so much suffering. A tireless activist in the early twentieth century, Goldman soon added calls for birth control and women's emancipation to her public speeches in support of workers' and immigrant rights. It is easy to find the source of the historical misremembering of Goldman's words, expressed in her autobiography, *Living My Life* (1931), **in which she described** her fury when chastised by a comrade who declared her energetic dancing frivolous and harmful to 'the Cause': 'I did not believe that a Cause which stood for a beautiful ideal, for anarchism, for release and freedom from convention and prejudice, should demand the denial of life and joy ... I want freedom, the right to self-expression, everybody's right to beautiful, radiant things ... I would live it in spite of the whole world – prisons, persecution, everything. ... I would live my beautiful ideal'.³

The Art of Protest: Direct Action Today

Living life radiantly is the spirit some tried to capture when reporting from the front lines of the rebellion in Zuccotti Park, which kicked off 'Occupy Wall Street' (OWS) in New York in September 2011: 'To visit the park was like going to a street fair. There were so many smiling people, radiant with happiness, mixed with a few grim, concentrated ones,' Michael Taussig reported in his talk. Living in New York, Taussig was raising spirits in London the following year with accounts of his participation in noisy ebullient days, cold, wet nights, instant democratic networking, during the two months in which thousands of people took part in the occupation in Zuccotti Park. On his favourite terrain, telling stories linking aesthetics and politics, Taussig underlined the necessary ties between revolution, art and corporate capital. The 1 per cent still making obscene profits, that 1 per cent responsible for the entirely predictable economic crash of 2008, are right now busy buying at art fairs around the world. Indeed, as he explains, in financial crises, art is considered one of the safest investments,

and top galleries internationally report that their products are selling extraordinarily well: ‘As Stocks Fall/Art Surges’.

London art critic Thomas Keane agreed, noting similarly in October 2011: ‘While Greece careers towards bankruptcy, the UK is being predicted zero growth for next year, and the phrase “recession” overtakes “postmodernism” as a media buzz word, the artworld can now breathe a microcosmic sigh of relief.’²⁴ Art work also proliferated in Zuccotti Park, in the sometimes fabulous but fleeting images appearing daily, produced by the small tribe who saw themselves as speaking on behalf of the 99 per cent who, one way and another, were enduring the fall-out of financial crisis. The hundreds of women and men living in the park, black and white, young and old, included some who have lost jobs and homes, those hit hardest by the three decades of deregulated fiscal policies pandering to the always escalating greed of unchecked corporate capital: ‘Lost my job but found an occupation’, one sign declared. It was out of this art work that Taussig, taking notes, making drawings, constructed his talk, *I’m So Angry, I Made A Sign*: ‘This is not only a struggle about income disparity and corporate control of democracy. It is about corporate control of art, too, including the art of being alive.’²⁵ Reflecting upon the nature and impact of four years of anti-austerity street protests in Greece, the London-based Professor of Law Costas Douzinas similarly points to the cultivation in the squares of a new aesthetic politics, which called upon a lost sense of what should be valued as public expression and cherished as the common good: ‘The poems recited, the personal stories and historical references narrated transformed public speaking from instrumental and demagogic act into artistic performance making it deeply political.’²⁶

Some have questioned whether feminism is really a dynamic force in recent occupy movements, claiming that it is men’s voices that are most often heard in spaces of occupation. Indeed some women reported being harassed, or that microphones were grabbed from their hands.²⁷ This suggests, of course, the need for constant vigilance in direct action over the stubborn

persistence of old hierarchies, and sometimes the emergence of new ones. Nevertheless, the pioneering feminist activist from the late 1960s, Rosalyn Baxandall, who also regularly visited Zuccotti Park, expressed hope that a new movement was being born, one educating itself about the causes of the banking crisis. For while so many North Americans have lost almost everything, she noted – their homes, savings, health insurance and jobs – the salaries of bankers and managerial staff have continued to rise into the millions. Baxandall felt she saw in the park a renewal of her own old ideals: ‘The Occupiers have dreams and a vision, too: of a just, peaceful, diverse, democratic world, where democracy serves more than global capitalism and the greedy one percent.’⁸ In its opening weeks OWS not only managed to elicit a radical spirit cutting across generational and other divisions but, surprisingly, as British journalist Polly Toynbee celebrated, it quickly gained favourable support from 54 per cent of Americans aware of the protest, with strong endorsement from a quarter of the population, according to a poll in *Time* magazine.⁹

In sudden flurries of activity, there seems little doubt that grass-roots oppositional activity is now back on the political agenda. Rebellion, occupations, civil disobedience, all returned in force some years ago, as ever, in some of the most unexpected places. Some trace the beginning to the riots in the poor suburbs of Paris and other French cities in 2005 and 2007, mainly involving African and Arab youth in violent confrontations with the police. Many would point to the massive demonstration in Athens in 2008, but above all to the Arab Spring beginning December 2010, soon followed by massive gatherings of Portuguese and Spanish Indignados, more Greek street riots, the same year as Occupy movements appeared in New York, London, Sydney, and other cities around the world, late 2011. The most unexpected and immediately inspirational were the Arab insurrections, with the Tunisian uprising at the very close of 2010 followed a few months later by demonstrations of millions of Egyptians in Tahrir Square. The sudden coming

together of unemployed graduates, slum-dwellers, union activists, faith groups and feminists, were all at once projecting a host of new dissident voices around the world, many of them, there was no doubt about it this time, talented Arab women's voices, demanding true democracy and a fairer share of their country's resources, beyond any restrictions of gender, religion or class.¹⁰

Over 800 protesters were killed and tens of thousands injured in Egypt alone. Yet through demonstrations, marches and continuous acts of civil defiance, those first two Arab uprisings rather quickly overthrew their dictatorial, corrupt and self-serving rulers. What has followed in those two countries is more troubling, as economic disorder and political confusion remain, with conservative forces and new elites emerging, supported by the military. Nevertheless, the Egyptian writer, Ahdaf Soueif was still writing confidently a year later: 'The Egyptian uprising is like the Nile in flood. It cannot be kept back with barriers and uniforms.'¹¹ Threatening such optimism is a reality where a revolutionary multitude can for a while make an impact around the world and, at certain moments in history, overthrow a dictator, but they cannot by themselves install a progressive government without the most strenuous of coalition building to create or connect with a political party that might attempt to implement their demands. Such is not yet the case in Tunisia or Egypt although, as we shall see, there are more positive (as well as negative) developments in Greece.

Nevertheless, whatever the ongoing struggles in the Middle East, with complex and far bloodier uprisings in Syria and other regions, they unquestionably served as a further spur for the resurgence of protest movements in western democracies around the globe in the context of the continuing catastrophic effects of the financial crash of 2008. OWS was thus simply one of proliferating occupations of urban spaces in recent years, eager to reclaim the city, with excellent access to global resources for spreading the word that it is possible to imagine and practice ways of living differently: 'This is what democracy

looks like', the Marxist geographer, David Harvey, raced into print to declare.¹² No sooner was the occupation in Zuccotti Park violently ejected in October 2011, than people were setting up camp in many other cities around the world. In London, for instance, prevented from settling outside the London Stock Exchange (LSX), tents were pitched nearby, initially outside St Paul's cathedral. They remained for seven months before facing eviction, tents spreading like mushrooms into nearby Finsbury Square, and have been popping up here and there, if more sporadically, ever since.

The goals again were to expose corporate greed and social injustice, the lack of affordable housing in London, the influence of corporate lobbyists on government, as well as environmental pollution globally. Influentially, one of the most eloquent supporters of the occupiers in London was the Canon Chancellor of St Paul's, Giles Fraser, who resigned his post when the Church after some months had the squatters ejected from their forecourt. 'What would Jesus do?', the squatters penned provocatively, raising a tangle of theological issues regarding Christianity's founding Jewish rebel and prophet, who was no friend to money lenders and cared deeply about the poor, the sick, the shamed, discarded and destitute. After the eviction, Fraser became a media figure, writing on the significance of the occupation, sharing much of the occupiers' vision of the destructive values of contemporary global capitalism: 'Occupy's welcome and care for the vulnerable contrasted sharply with the indifference of a City that didn't seem to give two hoots ... The demand for social justice was being trumpeted slap bang in the boiler room of global capitalism.'¹³

'You can't kill an idea', was the viral message circulating globally at the height of the occupations, the idea being that there is something rotten in the state of corporate finance and global capitalism: 'We stand in solidarity with the global oppressed and we call for an end to the actions of our government and others in causing this oppression', Occupy London (OLX) declared.¹⁴ 'You can't kill the idea', the activists

hope, and their most sympathetic supporters with a voice in the media agree. This is because of the role of the world-wide web, and the instant communications that can keep protest alive. Such is the view of the British economic journalist Paul Mason, who believes the new global revolutions are now unstoppable because ‘the near collapse of free-market capitalism combined with the upswing of technological innovation’ has resulted in ‘a surge in desire for individual freedom and a change in human consciousness about what freedom means’.¹⁵ All that texting, twitter following, instant access for so many to the remarkable resources of internet knowledge and communication, he and others argue, can sustain protest as never before. The paradox Mason notes, like Marx before him, is that the technological advances of capitalism and the free market, which on the one hand has enabled the contracting out of labour in search of ever higher levels of exploitation, has on the other educated ordinary people in much of the world with the ‘skill ingenuity and intelligence to swap experiences beyond borders’. Yet he is also aware of the dangerous lack of connection between the protesters and any mainstream politics, noting that most of the people he interviewed were hostile to ‘the very idea of a unifying theory’, set of demands, or shared pathway.¹⁶ He simply hopes that the movements justified moral outrage at things as they are, with a tiny elite getting ever richer as billions globally get poorer, will somehow combine with their networking skills to help realize their vision of a fairer world, while believing that ‘the future hangs in the balance’.¹⁷

What should we make of this? There is a point to growing old: we have a past. So I can say at once that the imaginative excitement often unleashed in direct action against perceived injustice, actually being on the scene when you hope, rightly or wrongly, that this moment of collective resistance might leave its mark on history, often permanently changes consciousness. Contrary to clichéd opinion, most rebels, young or old, do not significantly shift their political outlook, though they may well become disillusioned. History matters, in discerning the impact

of battles of the past; yet, it will also always be contested. Memory matters too, though we recall selectively and must rely upon a shared language of recognition to facilitate our narratives of the past.

The early feminist commitment to sharing and learning from experience was critical for forming a sense of collective agency and purpose, though it would take a battering, some of it useful, when feminist theory began to embrace Continental philosophy.¹⁸ However, early on some feminists realized that the ways in which consensus is formed inevitably sidelines significant controversy in its desire to nurture and protect the ties that bind us.¹⁹ Today there are thriving intellectual debates about the connections and disjuncture between history and memory, and the possibilities and pitfalls of both. Surprisingly perhaps, as some historians have been noting lately, the recent past can be the hardest to know and understand, even when we have participated in some of its most memorable moments. Such indeed were the thoughts clearly articulated by the historian Tony Judd, shortly before he died in 2010: ‘The twentieth century is hardly behind us but already its quarrels and its achievements, its ideals and its fears are slipping into the obscurity of mis-memory.’²⁰ He provides many examples. Nevertheless, for all the growing sophistication of new technology, the instant messaging that does indeed make a difference, one thing ageing activists usually know, when faced with the political dilemma of keeping activism alive after initial exhilaration fades, is how hard that is. Sadly, ideas do fade, or the priority we once gave them, along with the fighting spirit of a movement, especially, perhaps, a movement as volatile, diffuse and vulnerable to attack as the Occupy movement, once the sanctioned forces of law and order move in against it.

Of course it is tiresome to hear, even to say, but to succeed Occupy has to manage to reach out not just in the heat of action, but to build coalitions that survive and manage to have impact upon groups that can affect government policies, once reality bites and fragmentation and exhaustion set in. With or

without jobs, a myriad of personal and shared responsibilities take their toll on rebellious spirits and dissident actions. Beyond spontaneous sites of struggle, the question shifts to whether or how ‘democracy in action’ can be preserved to form a coherent and intelligible opposition. If we actually believe in the possibility of a fairer distribution of the world’s resources, and less environmentally polluting uses of them, protest must be preserved and somehow, at least some of the time, made to cohere into something more enduring that can keep pushing for change, attempting to influence those who are in or might form a future government, or who are in some way closer to the levers of power.

Can it be done? The question is all too familiar. As I said, it was exactly the issue that motivated our writing *Beyond the Fragments*, facing the triumph of Thatcher in the UK, Reagan the following year, and wanting to forestall the installation of what would soon become the deregulated economic model known as neoliberalism that has brought us to the mess we are in today. At that time, we were writing from what we thought we had learned from over a decade of activism in different sectors of the then still flourishing radical left, with our own shared feminist, anti-capitalist, socialist perspectives. Today, that economic regime we opposed is itself in continuous crisis, evident in the threatened implosion of the Eurozone and the imposition of harsh anti-austerity measures visibly destroying the lives of many of those in greatest need, while also failing to generate what its own mantra of market expansion and ‘growth’ requires. This obviously makes it a good time to look back, critically, at the impact, legacy and, let me say right away, as I see it, the failure of so many of the ideas and aspirations that triggered our own largely thwarted attempt to move *Beyond the Fragments*.

Libertarianism writ large

However, I have passed through many lives, and all of them

feed into my troubled thoughts of the moment. Before I named myself a socialist, or a feminist, there was a time when a type of anarchism, 'living one's politics', refusing all contact with the political mainstream, was exactly where I positioned myself. Certainly, I and my companions always sided with the poorest and most rebellious, those on the fringes, most in danger of falling through any of the protective welfare nets capitalism might provide, but above all, we tried to live a politics of personal freedom and total disdain for any and all ruling elites. I am transported back to those days in the words and actions of the Occupy movement. As David Graeber, the American anthropologist now working in London points out, the consensus-based, direct democracy favoured by the Occupy movement adheres to anarchist principles, though it may not name them as such. It is not seeking to change the world through gaining state power or working through existing political or juridical institutions, but rather embracing forms of prefigurative politics, setting up its own alternative kitchens, libraries, clinics and networking centres, alongside other forms of mutual aid and self-organisation. From my visits to OLX these were often impressively efficient. This movement, with its self-organization and consensus, is thus busy doing what traditional anarchists have always tried to do, to begin building 'a new society in the shell of the old'.²¹

It was in that anarchist milieu of 'permanent protest', half a century ago, that I first encountered my long-term friend and former comrade, the young Mick Taussig. He was studying medicine at Sydney University, where I was studying psychology, and we both entered adulthood in the 1960s within the then still active, but soon ailing, sparks of Sydney libertarianism. It was a tiny movement that met regularly as the Libertarian Society, with ties to the broader social gathering (meeting in pubs or on the race-course) known as the Sydney Push. As I elaborated in *Making Trouble*, determined to remain on the fringes, never at the centre of institutional politics, we lived our lives visibly at odds with what we could then easily expose as the

hypocrisies, corruption and crippling authoritarianism inside all the institutions of state government, law enforcement, trade unions, church, or any other pillar of bourgeois life.

At different times, we would each face arrest or fines for our public stance of principled abstentionism: ‘Don’t Vote! Whoever you vote for a Politician gets in’, we plastered on public hoardings, our message illustrated with three little pigs, poker-faced, bowler-hatted, arms crossed.²² This was because voting is compulsory in Australia (at least, for those who were allowed to vote, which indigenous Australians in Queensland and Western Australia, for instance, were forbidden to do at the time). The small Libertarian Society sometimes united with the slightly broader Sydney left, briefly joining forces with the Communist Party, the tiny Trotskyist groups, or somewhat larger left Labour supporters and a few militant trade unionists in public protests. At first this involved supporting marches against Apartheid in South Africa or, later, taking to the streets to oppose the war in Vietnam. Later still, libertarians worked with militants in the Builders Workers Union of New South Wales, in support of occupations in old buildings in Kings Cross, Sydney, to prevent their demolition by new property developers determined to replace the beauty of old Sydney with their concrete tower blocks. However, with anarchists as our mentors, the point of our politics was not to capture the state or even to proselytise, but to remain beacons of freedom and alternative ways of living. We believed in ‘free love’, at a time when any signs of women’s sexuality outside marriage was still completely unacceptable, and a ‘fallen women’ – pregnant outside wedlock – would find it almost impossible to keep the child. We admired the ideas of the American ‘Wobblies’, founded by radical trade unionists in Chicago in June 1905 (which once had a branch on the docks in Sydney), fighting to end the rule of capitalism and wage labour via direct action and radical workplace democracy.²³

Thus, strangely, decades before its reappearance recently, Sydney Libertarianism (in line with much of the disenchanting politics of the post-war ‘Beat’ generation, strongest in the USA),

prefigured much of the political disdain and pessimism of today, rejecting any form of party politics. Proud of our lack of illusions and principled pessimism, we thrived then upon just that kind of sceptical pluralism that would be reborn decades later.²⁴ It is ~~just~~ this old permanently distrustful, pessimistic anarchism that I briefly embraced in my bohemian 'sixties that I see back in fashion, both in many involved in Occupy movements and in some fashionable academic circles relating to them. It is promoted, for instance, by the New York based, British philosopher, Simon Critchley, in his book *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*. His ethics of commitment celebrates 'the spectacular tactical politics of contemporary anarchism', one he sees as forging 'a new language of civil disobedience'.²⁵ This form of ethical commitment is presented as 'an anarchic meta-politics', significant in its 'continual questioning from below of any attempt to impose order from above ... Politics [here] is the manifestation of dissensus, the cultivation of an anarchic multiplicity that calls into question the authority and legitimacy of the state'.²⁶

The words are new, but the sentiment is familiar. The modern state, with its inevitable ties to corporate capital, cannot be overthrown. Given the triumph and power of global capitalism, the only role for the dissenter is to withdraw from direct engagement with the state, to create instead new spaces of resistance that remain in its cracks, or interstices, farthest from its control. Voices float back to me from almost fifty years ago (and no doubt from far longer, had I been around when the utopian socialist Robert Owen was founding his co-operative movement).²⁷ Thus today, at least in much of the direct action in the Anglo-American world, we are back in an anarchist moment, as leaderless protesters take to the streets, many of them understandably convinced that no electable government can be trusted to do more than continue injecting huge amounts of social wealth into rescuing the financial sector, with little concern for the dire economic and social costs resulting

from their finance-dominated austerity packages. Meanwhile, anarchy, of a far more destructive kind, also rules in the corporate world, with its equally passionate disdain for government and the state. Even after the global economic meltdown, the pursuit of profit within the corporations still rules supreme, with no fundamental state control over banking and financial markets.²⁸

Critchley is surely right to suggest that recent articulations of an anarchist ethics, celebrating open, pluralistic forms of dissent, have been inspiring much of the anti-war and anti-corporate globalization movements today. This draws him into skirmishes today, as it did us yesterday, with those working in social democratic or other political parties seeking government positions, as well as with those, such as his favourite sparring partner, the celebrity philosopher Slavoj Žižek, who believe in the need for a Revolutionary Party fighting for state power. Žižek is contemptuous of those, including Critchley, who accuse him of being stuck within the 'old paradigm', and who imagine that the task today 'is to resist state power by withdrawing from its terrain and creating new spaces outside its control'. In stark contrast, Žižek points with approval to Hugo Chávez, who did the opposite, 'ruthlessly using the Venezuelan state apparatuses to promote his goals', thereby managing to stand up to US-led corporate capital, and empower, even arm, those prepared to take to the streets to defend him, gathered from the grass roots slum committees.²⁹ This is exactly the sort of confrontation that *Beyond the Fragments* hoped, unsuccessfully at the time, to find a way to surmount. Today, I no longer think there is any way of surmounting the tension between those differing factions of the left, although I still believe, when and as the context allows, we must keep trying to find ways of promoting better dialogue between the two, when and where we see any opportunities for doing so.

Well before any such context appeared, back in Sydney in the early to mid-Sixties, the Libertarians were shrinking fast. The romantic few, mainly men who lived off gambling and casual jobs, refusing all compromise with the mainstream or

any centrally organized parties, were being overtaken by the less political, young and hedonistic counter-culture, whose views on world affairs were far more diffuse. Today, some of those surviving Libertarians remain my friends, a few still active as community figures in inner Sydney. Nevertheless, seeking neither to recruit nor convert they have left only a faint trace on history. The Push would be remembered as something like a small exotic tribe, notorious for its promiscuity, gambling and parties. One leading Libertarian, the late George Molnar, would later point out that we were merely creatures of our time. We were so totally opposed to the rigid post-war conservatism, the apparently seamless consensus of 1950s Australia (which continued into the 1960s), and also such a pathetic minority, that we made a virtue of the fact that there seemed no prospect of us ever influencing the course of events: 'We wove a fantasy ... to justify an impotent little group indulging their particular eccentricities ... [talking] about permanent protest, about the impossibility of change.'³⁰ Ironically, what we didn't realize was that change *was* in the air. We had talked of 'free love', and opposed all forms of censorship, knowing that Australia still enforced one of the most rigid censorship regimes in the Western world. But this was just moments before sexual liberation became the talk of the town, and the draconian censorship that had tried to protect us from any hint or whisper of explicit sexuality was about to be dismantled. As it turned out, the commoditisation of sex was more in keeping with new forms of market consumerism. This should have been my first lesson that change indeed is possible, but when it arrives it is never quite in the form you hoped, and so struggles must begin again. However, it would take some time for me to fully understand this.

I left Sydney for London in 1970, a single mother, aware that the freewheeling libertarianism I had known (so disdainful of secure jobs and settled life) had nothing helpful to say about motherhood and its dilemmas. In London in the 1970s, the political milieu was rather different, and certainly I needed new ideas to make sense of my position in it. Secretly, those of us most rebellious against institutional certainties, embedded hierarchies and established leaders (which surely must originate in all the unpredictable contingencies of personal history), are often eagerly looking for mentors. It's not easy thinking coherently against the grain, and politically impossible to act collectively for any length of time without guidance, solidarity and rootedness in some sort of comprehensible community, even when the traditions of that community are being reworked or invented day by day.

Fortunately, having just read and admired her writing, it wasn't long before I encountered Sheila Rowbotham who, along with many others, was quickly a key influence on my thoughts. Her writing played a crucial role in the leap in consciousness that helped to consolidate feminist communities in the early years of the women's movement in Britain. Yet Sheila was superficially one of the most unlikely of mentors. Tussling always with her own doubts and dilemmas, her dislike of being centre stage, of telling others what to do, she was always a reluctant organizer. Only in hindsight is it clear that it was precisely her attentiveness to the internal rifts and exclusions in some of the effervescent radicalism that flourished in late 1960s, in particular her dislike of the dogmatic certainties of the small Leninist 'parties' that sprung up in its wake, which inspired her imaginative attention to alternative aspirations. She embraced and circulated the thoughts of radical women that had been marginalized on the left, from Olive Schreiner, Alexandra Kollantai and Rosa Luxemburg, through Simone de Beauvoir to the militant working-class women she interviewed at the close of the 1960s. These voices she combined as best she could with her own reworking of the thoughts of Marx, Fanon, Reich,

Sartre and Gramsci, to formulate some basic understandings for a transformative women's liberation movement:

All revolutionary movements create their own ways of seeing. But this is the result of great labour. People who are without names, who do not know themselves, who have no culture, experience a kind of paralysis of consciousness. The first step is to connect and learn to trust one another.³¹

It seemed right to me. Coming from my background in the Libertarian Society, I easily found a political home in Islington, north London, in the 'non-aligned', intensely heterogeneous grass-roots community activism of the early 1970s, which had sprung up in most large cities in the wake of the political militancy of the late 1960s. At that time, this community politics was definitively part of the left, explicitly aligned with socialism and quickly a crucible for the diverse movement politics, especially women's liberation. It consisted of loose alliances between a myriad of local community resource centres, campaigning groups and radical trade unionists, all intermingled with the burgeoning women's, gay, Black and ethnic minority movements. However, political life now made sense, above all, because of the essential ingredient of women's liberation, a movement uniting me, this time, not just with a small tribe of determinedly rebellious outcasts, who were happy to remain that way (though we still had plenty of them in our midst in the Seventies), but also with women and men equally determined to see themselves as part of a mass movement, one capable of effecting change in state policies. In absolute numbers at that time, the non-aligned radical activists would almost certainly have outnumbered those in the biggest far left groups, although none of us were busy counting our 'recruits'. In this milieu, there was still for the most part a shared emphasis on autonomy, spontaneity, living in alternative ways in the present, now called 'prefigurative' politics, and above all exemplifying ways of working that were ideally open and devoid of formal

leadership structures. However, at least locally, we were always looking for alliances to foster any campaign of the moment. Sites of activity were often unpredictable, although back then, seemingly ubiquitous, as my own essay for *Beyond the Fragments* outlined.

Overall, for those around me, the Seventies was a time of constant excitement, rising hope and confidence. I spent much of my time engaged in or reporting on a diversity of struggles and campaigns, or (mostly) enjoying the festivals and alternative cultural life of the left. Feminism, in particular, had unleashed enormous creativity in women, poured into the formation of bands, such as Jam Today, theatre groups, including Cunning Stunts, the Monstrous Regiment, Gay Sweatshop, art-works of every stripe, including film, poetry, magazines, dance, and more. Yet, what is so surprising for me to register today is that most retrospective discussion of the Seventies presents it as a bleak and depressing decade, a time of growing tedium after the exhilaration of the Sixties. A description of decline, producing fears of crisis and decay, especially in the late Seventies is certainly the mood that the astute commentator Andy Beckett reports in his assessment, *When the Lights Went Out* (2009), which illustrates once more how differently we perceive and recall the very same eras in recent history.³²

It was hardly any sense of decline, but rather of a wave of huge optimism that was the most notable feature of the landscape I inhabited then, especially that energizing feminists throughout most of the 1970s. Indeed, feminism managed to reach out to embrace hundreds of thousands of other women, near and far. Moreover, many feminist struggles, especially those around recognition of the extent of violence against women, discrimination in the workplace, women's right to reproductive control, the need for nurseries, met with considerable success. Much of that success has lasted, despite having to fight over and over again to ensure its preservation – never more so than at this present moment of austerity cuts, known to be hitting women hardest, and threats to abortion clinics imported from

the American right!. Feminists throughout the decade also remained amongst the most committed political activists, often to our own surprise becoming increasingly competent and confident players in the public domain that would take us into the new and soon very different political landscape of the 1980s. From the margins, where some remained, to the centre, where more professional women ended up, feminist thought had begun shifting ways of seeing, influencing state policies, union practices and opening doors hitherto closed to women, while transforming cultural spaces generally.

Again as I described in *Making Trouble*, by the close of the 1970s, ideas had begun flowing across from the new social movements to more traditional forms of community politics, including local government, not infrequently resulting in meetings to promote more participatory democratic practices. Although often mutually mistrustful, this interaction left its mark on mainstream politics, broadening political agendas to include problems hitherto barely discernible, let alone thought addressable. It would also pave the way for many more militants, myself included, to make their way into the Labour Party, in what would be for us its glory days of radicalism in the early 1980s (for others, its wilder years of unelectability). In fact, we did get a few militant MPs elected, including Jeremy Corbyn in my borough of North Islington, who to this day remains one of the most left-wing and rebellious of Labour figures. He fiercely opposed the Iraq war and is still busily campaigning: whether nationally against the austerity and privatization practices of the Tory coalition; or internationally, against military aggression, or Israel's continued occupation of the West Bank and blockade of Gaza. It was the success rather than the failure of struggles at municipal levels across Britain, that led to Thatcher's targeted offensive against possible funding for more participatory democratic structures at local levels. New Labour did little to reverse this when in government.

Retrospectively, however, it has been clear for some time that part of the success of feminism related to broader economic

change. With government and market priorities allowing the decline of Britain's industrial base in favour of the expansion of the financial and service sector, women's position in society was shifting. However, feminists were not mere pawns of market forces, mostly remaining in critical dialogue with the broader left movement fighting for a more egalitarian and peaceful world. Even in the USA, where more conventionally liberal movements were far stronger than in Britain, one prominent wing of the movement was militantly leftist and radical. Meanwhile, given its influence and success, neither the mainstream nor the left could afford to ignore feminism.

Testifying to its deep and lasting impact globally, it was from 1977 that the UN General Assembly formally marked International Women's Day to support women's rights around the world, as Jocelyn Olcott highlights in an article on women's representation internationally.³³ Women's victories in the 1970s were also aided by the broader political moment, with Labour in government and in charge of many local councils. This facilitated our belief that self-organization and collective action could indeed begin to transform everything, from personal lives to workplace conditions, social policy and the law, while impacting on culture generally. It is of course this confidence that enabled us – three women – to think we might make an impact on the left's ways of organizing, promoting both alliance and autonomy, in forums that could encourage the creativity of all who became involved.

Yet, for all its successes, the close of the 1970s was already a confusing time for many feminists in Britain and elsewhere. Indeed, it was the very success of the movement that intensified the divisions within. It was this same success that led to us writing *Beyond the Fragments* during the run-up to the general election that would usher in the momentous upheavals of Margaret Thatcher's decade in power. We hoped that feminist ways of working, at their best, might help broaden and regenerate the left. This broad left would be stronger, we argued, if it were genuinely supportive of the multiplicity of

grass-roots struggles, instead of either disdaining or attempting to direct them. Conversely, those grassroots struggles would be stronger if they obtained genuine support from a broader left. For much the same reason, I had joined the small left group Big Flame, the previous year, since it was a national organization that stressed the need for some sort of central organization, while also supporting the autonomy of oppressed groups and espousing a politics that emphasized the interconnections between community and workplace struggles, seeing both as essentially anti-capitalist in their rejection of existing conditions in and outside the workplace. So, despite the sense of doom that many shared, 1979 was an exciting yet turbulent year for me and my political allies.

The interest triggered by the initial slim pamphlet *Beyond the Fragments* generated a noisy conference of almost three thousand people in Leeds the following year. As Sheila and Hilary say, over the years *Beyond the Fragments* has continued to influence feminist groups and trade union activists in India, Turkey and even the Brazilian Workers Party, to name a few. Indeed, even today, I found on the web a recent article by Pam Currie, a leading member of the Scottish Socialist Party, citing *Beyond the Fragments* for its emphasis on tackling sexism in political parties.³⁴ Looking back, I think we were right to suggest that many feminist priorities, such as stressing ties between the frustrations of personal life and the need for political change, or focusing on working locally, while supporting women's struggles globally, did play a significant role in the political achievements of the 1970s. As it turned out, however, with certain very significant exceptions, especially in the early 1980s, we were over-optimistic in imagining that people with similar but far from identical political goals and ways of organizing could work together and agree on common action.³⁵ The recurrent antagonism disrupting the final session of the conference underscored this. Some feminist groups and other individuals voiced their forceful opposition to our calls for greater ties with the organized left; members of left groups rejected the

importance we gave to direct action and autonomous ways of working over democratic centralism and ‘party’ building.

Defeats and Retrievals

What happened next? Or as many from left and right both like to ask, ‘who was to blame’ for the defeat of progressive forces by the close of the 1980s? No story is linear. With the right in power, not just in Britain, but in a Britain insistently welcoming the increasingly belligerent hegemony of the right in the USA, it was never going to be easy for the left to manage to shift the overall political direction and increasingly harder to agree on the best strategies for doing so.

Nevertheless, significant struggles were still being waged in the early 1980s, evident in the widespread support across the left for the twelve months miner’s strike against threatened pit closures, begun in March 1984. It was a battle determinedly instigated by Margaret Thatcher, with quite extraordinary levels of police mobilization and the orchestration of all possible media demonization of the miner’s leader, Arthur Scargill. The final defeat of the strike in March 1985 significantly weakened the British trade union movement, in which a once united NUM (National Union of Mineworkers) had operated as one of its strongest members.³⁶ Meanwhile, as Sheila and Hilary both illustrate, the years of Ken Livingstone’s GLC (Greater London Council) provided another broad-based, creative surge of resistance to Thatcher, often drawing directly on the ideas of *Beyond the Fragments*. Nevertheless, there is more to say than we expressed in that text about the difficulties of using feminist insights in the recurring challenge of uniting the radical left by building coalitions that genuinely make space for spontaneity and autonomy.

First of all, it now seems clear that the very real strengths of the outlook, ways of working and achievements of the women’s movement in the 1970s were tied in with inevitable limitations. The shared energy and close friendships built up in the small groups most feminists preferred, with their principled rejection of any structures of leadership, worked well for bringing

more people into politics. The informality fostered individual creativity and encouraged those shifts in identity and sense of agency that bring confidence to hitherto marginalized groups, enabling alliances (or confrontations) with others in the political arena. Yet, this same strong, ideally relaxed sense of collectivity and bonding could also leave some women feeling distanced from the effects of its more hidden premises, leaving them suspicious of the imagined joys of 'sisterhood'. Relatedly, the lack of prescribed structures of leadership in no way precludes certain controlling individuals, or simply the most charismatic, sharp, or ebullient of people, from becoming dominant figures, whether they wish to or not. Early on, this is exactly what Jo Freeman argued in her widely read, much anthologized essay, coining the now familiar phrase 'the tyranny of structurelessness' to describe her experience of the unwitting bullying and hidden mechanisms of control in the women's movement in the USA.³⁷

The dedication to ideals of equality, where everyone was encouraged to develop all possible skills, could obviously prove inefficient, while also evoking resentment against those seen as too authoritative, ambitious or successful. Again from the USA, the feminist psychoanalyst Muriel Dimen has suggested that the disavowal of envy and competitiveness between women made its inevitable concealed expression all the more embittered, seen in some forms of 'feminist rectitude'.³⁸ The resulting prescriptiveness created problems within movements apparently relying upon consensus, which usually entailed dismissing any views seen as inconsistent with the dominant one as inherently 'anti-feminist'. This is what triggered the fiercest conflicts over feminist sexual politics, pornography and images of power in erotic fantasy, especially as strands of radical feminism insisted that men's sexual violence against women (seen as instilled by pornography), should become the overriding concern of feminists everywhere from the close of the Seventies.³⁹ In the UK, the conflict came to a head in the very last annual women's liberation conference in Birmingham in 1978. It descended into chaos when women attempted to debate

the motion of a small but determined group of revolutionary feminists aiming to name men's sexual violence against women as *the* fundamental cause of women's oppression. The acrimony this generated brought to an end any further attempts to hold national conferences of the whole of the women's movement.⁴⁰ From the USA, Joan Nestle, among others, would describe similar debates over sexuality tearing feminism apart in her feminist milieu from the close of the 1970s.⁴¹

Bringing all the divisions between women around sexuality, race, class, heterosexism, into the open thus destroyed any notion of women's cosy unity. Race would soon prove an even more explosive issue than class and sexual orientation, whether in the USA or UK, for although both in theory and in practice poverty and racism were constant preoccupations of women's liberation, feminist groups remained overwhelmingly white and predominantly middle class. Thus, by the close of the Seventies division was more apparent than unity in many feminist gatherings, as newly empowered groups of women expressed their sense of marginalization within the movement itself. In Britain, the first Black women's conference was held in 1979, and here, as in the USA, the most painful clashes over race would occur in the second decade of resurgent feminism, with Black women challenging the priorities of white feminist analysis over the previous decade for privileging sexism over racism, and ignoring the particularities of ethnic difference. Thus, Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar argued in the early 1980s that 'the gains made by white women have been and still are at the expense of Black women'.⁴²

Nevertheless, whatever our distinct identities, what few of us could predict then was the extent of the subsequent selective incorporation or mainstreaming of key feminist demands by the state and corporate capital. Attending to some of women's struggles for equality while ignoring others, would launch one tier of professional women, including Amos herself, into positions of considerable power, authority and financial reward. (Valerie, now Baroness Amos, was the first Black woman to hold

cabinet office. She is currently UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator and a Labour Party life peer in the House of Lords). However, other women, especially ethnic minorities and poorer women everywhere, are still grappling with most of the old problems that women have always faced – juggling paid and unpaid labour in a landscape where violence against women, sexist and racist behaviour, though now officially condemned, remain deeply entrenched. Thus one partial success of feminism, allowing more women into ruling elites, could be aligned with the intensification of divisions between women in ways that were barely conceivable in the egalitarian politics we once fought for.

However, in my view it was not primarily conflictual internal dynamics that destroyed the early energies of grass-root movements, feminist or otherwise. Those who felt sidelined in the heyday of movement politics regrouped into new clusters in which they could work. It was rather the ruthless and unyielding forces soon confronting activists of any progressive stripe in Thatcher's Britain. The internal divisions within feminism were real enough at the close of the 1970s, accompanying the inevitability of hidden, and not so hidden, hierarchies and self-policing. But even as new groups kept appearing within feminist spaces, what was disappearing was any forward motion towards the more egalitarian or caring world we all apparently desired. The world was moving in the opposite direction.

As economic survival became more precarious for many, the social networks sustaining progressive thought and practice withered. The public mood shifted, gradually becoming more aligned with Thatcher's (and then her successor's) increasingly hegemonic anti-welfare, market-driven culture. The levels of political activity that grass roots struggle demands is harder to sustain in unfavourable conditions, and certainly the confidence needed for initiatives at left unity, such as that promoted by *Beyond the Fragments*, was difficult to achieve. There would nevertheless be many other attempts in the decades that followed to try again, never free from the difficulties faced by

that first conference in Leeds. Indeed, it is the same strategy that emerged at a global level at the close of the 1990s with the sudden upsurge of interest in the World Social Forums. Those working hard to create unity and pursue change through flexible consensus and networking, however, are still beset on all sides by voices from distinct far left groupings, re-emerging in their tiny splinters to dominate them. It leaves the rest of us ensnared, as ever, between fuzzy fragments and invasive vanguards.

In between, the politics of direct action continued in new sites, the most significant was at the women's peace camp at Greenham Common. This began in 1981 after a group, *Women for Life on Earth*, marched from Wales to the military airfield in Berkshire in protest at the decision of the British government to allow American cruise missiles to be based there. Lasting more than a decade, the camp attracted huge media attention, especially in its early years when tens of thousands of women took part in various days of action to blockade the base, holding hands around its fourteen-mile perimeter fence. During that time hundreds of women set up camp at different gates around the common, later speaking of their experience of the unique ties of affection and solidarity it created between the most heterogeneous of women.⁴³ The predominant, though far from exclusive, outlook of the women's peace movement saw women as more naturally peacemakers, men as the initiators of violence, whether at home or in military encounters. However, the fact that it was a female Prime Minister, and an exceptionally belligerent one, triumphantly waging war on the Falklands in 1982, provided an anomaly that was downplayed in this perspective.

Many others, including the significant minority in Big Flame that I supported, assessing our own weakness as an oppositional force capable of driving out the Thatcher government, joined the Labour Party in the early 1980s. This was a time when it seemed important to us tactically to consolidate a radical left within the Labour Party, reinforcing the mainstream opposition to Thatcher and her, almost literal, worship of the

market, accompanying her soon successful attempts to defeat and dismantle all the forums of resistance in which we had hitherto found spaces to work or build progressive alliances. The hegemony of the right seemed unstoppable, as Thatcher had systematically weakened the unions, local government, and any other regional bodies of resistance, most strikingly in her annihilation of the GLC in 1986. For a few years, my own branch in north London included an eclectic bunch of many of my old collaborators, who pursued much the same politics inside the Labour Party as we had outside it, busily putting forward motions for conferences that were usually defeated, but nevertheless often discussed. I don't regret those years in the Party, which I saw as equivalent to being a member of my trade union, though I drifted out by the close of the 1980s, along with many others who had joined, when our membership no longer seemed politically significant in making further changes in the Labour Party, which itself proved unable to defeat Thatcher.

The 1990s was thus largely a decade of gloom and mourning across a fragmented left and dwindling labour movement. There was, however, a sparkling resurgence of gay and lesbian activism in that decade, with the formation of Outrage in the UK in 1990, campaigning primarily on behalf of gay men and others who were, for a while, demonized in the press, and often neglected by the social services, as the first group facing the catastrophe of the spread of the HIV-AIDS virus within their ranks. Also around this time, another broad-based, multi-ethnic, but predominantly Black and Asian group, *Women Against Fundamentalism*, was formed to fight the resurgence of fundamentalism in their communities, after the fatwa against Salman Rushdie for insulting the prophet, Muhammad, in 1989, supported by the Iranian government and certain other Muslim groups around the world. Many former feminists also remained active in anti-war and justice movements, such as the Women in Black, formed in Israel in 1988 following the first Palestinian intifada, and soon spreading to become a world-wide network of women committed to peace with justice, while actively

opposed to war, militarism and all other forms of violence. In a sense, however, it was *back to the fragments* for most activists who remained politically engaged from the late-1980s, including myself. Tragically, however, it would be following the election of New Labour in 1997, and Tony Blair's soon evident respect for the rhetoric and policies of the Tory government, accompanying his affinity with the disastrous George W. Bush and eager subservience to US military aggression abroad, that finally sealed the disenchantment of much of what remained of the left and, for a while at least, any hope of forming coalitions that could make an impact on government policies.

Cherishing Autonomy; Building Alliance

So what has brought us to this new moment of significant resistance in the second decade of the 21st century? For any with eyes not glued shut, it is the obvious failure of the dream of the right. Through its own greed and mismanagement, the seemingly invincible grip of the various institutions of corporate capitalism on governments around the world instigated the biggest financial collapse since the 1930s, necessitating huge bailouts from those very governments who had in recent decades granted them so much freedom. Yet, following such spectacular refinancing of the banks, creating massive government debts and the implementation of severe cuts in welfare to lower them, there has been no fresh thinking at government level to counter the hegemony of free market ideology. The neoliberal faith in markets should have been completely discredited, but no attempt to reverse the abyss of social inequality they have produced has been implemented. Quite the reverse: financial institutions and heads of private companies continue to award themselves huge bonuses; the poorest and most needy are in danger of losing the scant social supports they could hitherto rely upon, with cuts directly targeting low income families, those on disability benefits, or receiving housing aid. The scandal of this situation is hard to hide when we read that in 2011, just as all these cuts had begun, the pay of directors at the FTSE 100 companies has risen by 49 per cent (to an average of

£2.7 million) in a single year, while the average employee's pay rose by 2.7 per cent. While workers in the bottom tenth of the pay scale received virtually no rise at all or were thrown out of work.⁴⁴

For decades we had been hearing that the distinctions between left and right are obsolete, whether coming from academics such as Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens, or from leading politicians, such as Tony Blair and Barack Obama. Of course, those two political leaders were swept into office on huge surges of hope and massive organizational work coming from, precisely, large segments of the left. It was a left so very determined to jettison what they correctly saw as the near seamless hegemony of the right, consolidated in Britain and the USA since that start of the 1980s. Never could this have been clearer than in the extraordinary mobilization supporting Obama in 2008, although there was briefly a similar mood of elation with the election of Tony Blair in 1997. The make-up and in particular the methods of the left may indeed have always been contested, however all its traditions and lineage point in one direction only, that of working for social change for greater equality, not just of opportunity but of actual outcome. The right, in contrast, has always accepted social hierarchy as inevitable, standing for strong national defence, traditional moral values and the protection of individual rights and property, especially via support for free markets and limited government regulation of the pursuit of profit. The left will doubtless always be divided, unsure how best to confront the monoliths of power it opposes and, for any number of reasons, will encompass competing interest groups within it. Nevertheless, whatever the inevitable divisions and blindness within the left itself, the notion that the two poles are not analytically separable is absurd. This is why people have taken to the streets, the squares, or in other ways begun to call once more for a new vision for the left.

Nowadays, when I turn back to that paradoxical moment, 1979, when we worked together on the pamphlet, *Beyond the Fragments*, I know I am returning to another world. It is strange

to revisit those times, when we were able to take so much for granted about commitments to equality, direct democracy and the need to develop and share the skills and imagination of everyone. At the community press that first printed *Beyond the Fragments*, people had begun working for nothing. Certainly, we expected no financial compensation for the labour we put into the alternative paper we produced, not even personal kudos, for names were rarely attached to articles. The bottom line was the prefigurative politics that expressed our belief in mutual aid and the sharing of talent and resources. This was the sort of society we wanted to create. Of course we joked about it. 'After the revolution' we can spend all our time in meetings, working for nothing, printing, collating, distributing materials, receiving naught but the political satisfaction of serving the community. I think our old goals are still worth fighting for, fighting over, though I have one or two final thoughts on how to do this.

Foremost, now as then we need to cherish any progressive oppositional spirit that is critical of the values and assumptions of unregulated market capitalism, undemocratic regimes and entrenched oppression. Today, for instance, it is the jailing of Pussy Riot in Russia and the brutality of rape cultures around the world that have been responsible for some of the most passionate gestures of protest and solidarity. Moreover, it is as evident now as it was forty years ago that people are drawn into collective resistance in a multitude of different, unpredictable ways. It is rarely established political parties, mainstream or radical, confident in their certainties of the best way forward, which brings new groups into politics. It is rather any number of shared personal issues and collective identifications in specific cultural contexts. I see this wherever I look. It was sharply evident lately, for instance, with the two election victories of the maverick (recently again somewhat discredited) politician George Galloway, after he was he was expelled from the Labour Party in October 2003 for his fierce opposition to the Iraq war. He went on to found the left-wing, anti-racist Respect Party in

times of heightened racism, directed especially against those seen as Muslims. Twice, Islamic communities rallied successfully to support him and overturn hitherto 'safe' Labour Party seats, first in Bethnal Green and Bow in 2005, then even more startlingly in Bradford West in 2012, with a 36 per cent swing from Labour, the third-largest in modern British political history.⁴⁵

I also know personally the significance of individual identifications quite outside party politics: as a young woman drawn to libertarianism when faced with the stifling conservatism and sexual hypocrisy of life in Australia in the early 1960s; as a single mother seduced by women's liberation in the 1970s; much later, as a person of Jewish descent, influenced by what soon became a movement of Jewish people opposed to the policies of the Israeli state, with its ruthless occupation of and expansion into the Palestinian West Bank and brutal blockade of Gaza. It is personal issues that bring people into politics, and it is a multitude of contingencies that then determine when, where and how people might go further, perhaps forming coalitions and alliances in pursuit of their goals.

Context is critical. At present, for instance, it is clear that in Greece it was four years of radical street protests, in the circumstance of extreme economic melt-down, that created the sudden impressive strength of Syriza – an acronym for the broad-based Coalition of the Radical left, led by Alexis Tsipras (originally from the youth wing of the Greek Communist Party). Syriza did extraordinarily well in the Greek elections of June 2012, receiving almost 27 per cent of the vote, less than 3 per cent behind the winning New Democracy party. As Costas Douzinas pointed out just before the election: 'The squares and mass disobedience were crucial in preparing the vote for the radical left. The unemployed and unemployable, men and women, Greeks and migrants, young and old, coming from different political ideologies and historical trajectories rose and learnt the importance of disobedience and insubordination.' As he sees it, there were three steps needed for these protests to become a serious political force. First, there was direct action,

in particular the significance of aesthetic politics (taking us back to my opening section), second, the development of direct democracy (taking us back to those movement priorities of the 1970s), and finally, and crucial for the formation and strength of Syriza, the building of a hegemonic left block capable of seeking state power: 'It found its parliamentary representation in the elections which rewarded those parties and groups and ideas which participated in the occupations from the start without attempting to dominate the multitude. The radical left won all the big cities where the occupations took place. ... Direct democracy acquired its parliamentary companion.'⁴⁶

Hilary also elaborates on the impressive success of Syriza in her essay here. However, there is the danger that these new hegemonies or large-scale left alliances that many of us on the left have always hoped to see are only occurring in exceptional circumstances. Greece at present is in just such a situation, facing catastrophic bankruptcy or brutal penalties imposed by the very institutions that were happy to make loans and encourage the expansion of debt only yesterday, before requesting its pound of flesh today. Nevertheless, it is an exception that may well become something of a rule, certainly at present in Southern Europe, as other nation states find themselves in similar situations. There is another danger here as well. Terrifyingly, the far right fascist party, Golden Dawn, also did unexpectedly well in the last Greek elections, produced by the very same set of circumstances mobilizing their supporters via traditionally nationalistic, patriarchal, racist and homophobic values. They too have continued to grow, despite and because of daily evidence of their violence against immigrants, ethnic minorities, women, gays and leftists.

More alarmingly, as the moving reports from Maria Margaronis illustrate, this openly fascist group is working with support from legitimate authorities, including the police and their own elected MPs: 'Golden Dawn is opening branches in towns all over Greece and regularly coming third in national opinion polls. Its black-shirted vigilantes have been beating up

immigrants for more than three years, unmolested by the police; lately they've taken to attacking Greeks they suspect of being gay or on the left. M's participation probably in the violence... It was just such situations of dire economic crisis that mobilized support for Hitler and other fascist leaders in the 1930s. On the one hand, the threat of fascism produced the sudden rise and significance of communist parties and other left formations and peace groups around the world. On the other hand, this did not prevent the devastating success of Hitler, Franco or Mussolini. Once we add in what we now know of the effects of climate change, and imminent water and food deprivation in swathes of the world, it is hard to know whether fear of our possible futures will strengthen or weaken the seeds of hope the left requires to nurture belief in its goals.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the changes I have witnessed, my thoughts today are not so far removed from my position over thirty years ago. If we hope to see a new and more vibrant left again, we need to support and try to connect both the multiplicity of expressions of direct action as well as any emerging, genuinely democratic and inclusive coalitions of resistance against contemporary corporate capital, and the environmental pollution that comes in its wake. We need today, as yesterday, direct action, movement politics and any coalition of resistance to seek diverse ways of influencing national government. The old familiar anti-statism of some of the left is far too closely attuned to the dominant refrains of neoliberalism, promising to 'get government off our backs'. In the UK, with our still unchanged electoral system, this means once more helping to strengthen left Labour (whether from inside or outside of the party). Or perhaps, as some of my erstwhile feminist and other left allies are doing, joining and trying to strengthen the left forces within the Green Party, working for a safer environment as well as a more egalitarian and peaceful world. Different strategies are possible and the most effective hard to gauge. Intellectual pessimism is surely inevitable, knowing the brutal forces protecting every pot of gold. However, even if we fail to win, we can perhaps agree

with John Berger when he says: ‘One protests because not to protest would be too humiliating, too diminishing, too deadly. One protests ... in order to *save the present moment*, whatever the future holds.’⁴⁸

Contrary to market idiocy that can only encourage us to consume more (preferably with tags on), being human depends on our acceptance by and concern with other people, not primarily the individual consumption or pursuit of profit that neoliberalism has made its mantra. Being human is also about savouring the time and place in which people leave their mark on us. For this reason I want to conclude with some recent thoughts of Stuart Hall, which I notice I echo, expressed in a talk at the celebration of his eightieth birthday. He was speaking of the continuities that have sustained him through time, and the political aspirations that have guided his life, which, even in these bleak times, suggest that change is always possible:

For someone who is committed to political and social change, I am astonished, looking back, to find how consistent I remain. I still believe that the poor should inherit the earth, that capitalism is a barbarous way of organizing social life, that despite all its political complexities social, sexual and racial justice is possible and worth fighting for. I think that while sometimes the situation looks extremely bleak – as it does at the moment - there are always what Raymond Williams calls ‘emergent forces and ideas’, which cannot be contained within the existing structure of settlements and compromises which constitute the dominant social order. Other wishes, desires, ideas and interests cannot be indefinitely contained. They will always break through in ways you cannot anticipate or predict.⁴⁹

His words speak directly to and for me, explaining why some of the dreams of old, looked at again, critically, just might be put to use to help us imagine futures better than the present.

Ageing, it is hard to retain the confidence of earlier youthful dreams of radical transformation. Apart from all the obstacles we have encountered, we usually become more aware of, and prepared to admit, just how much we fail to understand about

the complexities of power bearing down on any who challenge its manifest operations, not to mention its largely hidden ones. Entering the libertarian left in the 1960s and becoming a feminist in the 1970s, the better part of my life's ambition was trying to work for greater equality overall and increased democratic accountability, seeing feminism as a key player in the process. Today, I can see the significant changes that feminism helped to create, in making the world a less harsh, less confusing, more fulfilling place for many women, raising people's awareness of sexual oppression, domestic violence and the exclusion of women as significant players in cultural, political and economic life.

I also see what has worsened. At the bulky base of those old class, ethnic, and geographical hierarchies, both women and men have crashed down into a deepening chasm separating the rich from the poor. I can register as well the connection between what we have won, and what we have lost (as certain women and some ethnic minority members straddle the heights of power). This paradox only provides more reasons to think things anew, remaining in some sense true to those trampled hopes of yesterday, whatever the terrain. Returning more cautiously to where I began leaves me still welcoming the direct action of today, while also hoping as strongly as ever to see more consolidation of the diverse forms of resistance into some challenging left coalition – so long as that coalition, whatever its inevitable failings, tries to remain as open and democratic as possible.

Notes

- 1 Will Hutton, 'The worst post-war chancellor?' *The Guardian*, 25 July, 2012, p. 32; see also, Larry Elliott and Dan Atkinson, 'Little Britain: why the UK is no longer a superpower', 8 June 2012.
- 2 See Gerald Side and Gavin Smith, *Between History and Histories: The Making of Silences and Commemorations*, Toronto, Toronto University Press, 1997.
- 3 Emma Goldman, *Living my Life*, vol. 1 [1931], New York, Cosimo Classics, 2011, p.56.

- 4 Thomas Keane, 'Frieze Art Fair All's Well That Ends Well', *Artlist*, 27 OCT 2011, <http://www.artlyst.com/articles/frieze-art-fair-all-s-well-that-ends-well>
- 5 Michael Taussig, 'I'm So Angry, I Made A Sign', Goldsmith College, text of talk, delivered at Goldsmith College, 16/01/2012, sent as personal correspondence by the author.
- 6 Costas Douzinas, 'What did the squares vote for', *Greek Left Review*, May 15, 2012, accessed May 26, 2012, <http://greekleftreview.wordpress.com/2012/05/15/what-did-the-squares-vote-for/>
- 7 Feminist Peace Network, 'Empowering the Feminist Voice at Occupy – Confronting the Silencing of Mic Check and Other Misogynies', Nov 16, 2011, <http://www.feministpeacenet.org/2011/11/16/empowering-the-feminist-voice-at-occupy-confronting-the-silencing-of-mic-check-and-other-misogynies-in-the-occupy-movement/>
- 8 Rosalind Fraad Baxandall, 'The Populist Movement Reborn, At Last, In Occupy Wall Street', October 14, 2011, in *The Issue Magazine*, <http://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/cafe2/article/175>
- 9 Polly Toynbee, 'Here in the City protest has occupied the mainstream', *The Guardian*, 18 October, 2011, p.33.
- 10 Laura Gibbon, 'Translating Egypt's revolution: Images from Tahrir', *Open Democracy*, 9 March 2012, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/laura-gibbon/translating-egypts-revolution-images-from-tahrir>, accessed 1 August, 2012.
- 11 Ahdaf Soueif, 'Egypt's revolution has carved its path to parliament', *The Guardian*, Comment is Free, January 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/24/egypts-revolution-parliament-ahdaf-soueif>
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We can divide time into yesterday, today and tomorrow or past, present and future. The present is where we live now – the now zone of our lives. The now zone is the time to gather and set the building blocks of our future. A good and glorious future doesn't just come; it comes with executing a conscious plan. It demands maximizing our life one day at a time. What we do today will determine what we will become tomorrow. Today is the most important day of our lives so, we need to take it seriously. We must have a right attitude especially when it seems today is rough and tough. "Keep a good attitude and do the right thing even when it's hard. When you do that, you are passing the test. And God promises you your marked moments are on their way." Other articles where Between Yesterday and Tomorrow is discussed: Ute Lemper: "Waits and Nick Cave, and Between Yesterday and Tomorrow (2009), the first of Lemper's discs on which she was the sole composer." "Waits and Nick Cave, and Between Yesterday and Tomorrow (2009), the first of Lemper's discs on which she was the sole composer. Read More. Ute Lemper." From overcoming oppression, to breaking rules, to reimagining the world or waging a rebellion, these women of history have a story to tell. Lemper's mother was an opera singer, and she started her daughter on piano, voice, and ballet lessons at an early age. YESTERDAY 1 Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow My life now is not what I had in mind when I was growing up. But where I'm at right now doesn't disappoint me. I just turned thirty-one and I'm back in college trying to better myself. In this paper, I will briefly describe my past life experiences that have molded me into the person I am today and got me to the place where I'm at. I will also be sharing my current situations as well as my future goals and plans. I lived most my life in Jacksonville, Florida, though born in Orlando. My family moved to Jacksonville when my twin sister and I were going