

This article was downloaded by: [79.167.75.180]

On: 24 November 2014, At: 06:07

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/csms20>

Rethinking Prefiguration: Alternatives, Micropolitics and Goals in Social Movements

Luke Yates^a

^a Department of Sociology, Sustainable Consumption Institute, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

Published online: 09 Jan 2014.



CrossMark

[Click for updates](#)

To cite this article: Luke Yates (2015) Rethinking Prefiguration: Alternatives, Micropolitics and Goals in Social Movements, *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest*, 14:1, 1-21, DOI: [10.1080/14742837.2013.870883](https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2013.870883)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2013.870883>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Versions of published Taylor & Francis and Routledge Open articles and Taylor & Francis and Routledge Open Select articles posted to institutional or subject repositories or any other third-party website are without warranty from Taylor & Francis of any kind, either expressed or implied, including, but not limited to, warranties of merchantability, fitness for a particular purpose, or non-infringement. Any opinions and views expressed in this article are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor & Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

It is essential that you check the license status of any given Open and Open Select article to confirm conditions of access and use.

Rethinking Prefiguration: Alternatives, Micropolitics and Goals in Social Movements

LUKE YATES

Department of Sociology, Sustainable Consumption Institute, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

ABSTRACT *Theories and concepts for understanding the political logic of social movements' everyday activities, particularly those which relate directly to political goals, have been increasingly important since the late 1970s. The notion of 'prefigurative politics' is becoming established in this debate and refers to scenarios where protesters express the political 'ends' of their actions through their 'means', or where they create experimental or 'alternative' social arrangements or institutions. Both meanings share the idea that prefiguration anticipates or partially actualises goals sought by movements. This article uses narratives and observations gathered in social movement 'free spaces', autonomous social centres in Barcelona, to evaluate, critique and rearticulate the concept. Participants' attention to the 'means' through which protest is carried out and emphasis on projects such as experimentation with alternative social and organisational forms suggest they engage in prefigurative politics. However, the article uses these examples to dispute the key ways through which prefiguration has been defined, arguing that it can better be deployed in referring to the relations, and tensions, between a set of political priorities. Understood as such, prefigurative politics combines five processes: collective experimentation, the imagining, production and circulation of political meanings, the creating of new and future-oriented social norms or 'conduct', their consolidation in movement infrastructure, and the diffusion and contamination of ideas, messages and goals to wider networks and constituencies.*

KEY WORDS: Prefiguration, everyday politics, social centres, practices, micropolitics, free spaces, Barcelona

Prefigurative politics and a constellation of associated terms including micropolitics and direct action have become important in accounts of political protest. The concept, which following other scholars is used here interchangeably with the simpler 'prefiguration', refers to the attempted construction of alternative or utopian social relations in the present, either in parallel with, or in the course of, adversarial social movement protest. It was coined by Carl Boggs (1977) as a political logic posing a 'direct attack on statist Marxism' and was subsequently established in describing tensions between 'community and organisation' in the United States' New Left (Breines, 1989; Epstein, 1991). It has played significant roles in discussions of contemporary movement activity, including the

Correspondence Address: Luke Yates, Department of Sociology, Sustainable Consumption Institute, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK. Email: luke.s.yates@manchester.ac.uk

© 2014 The Author(s). Published by Taylor & Francis.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The moral rights of the named author(s) have been asserted.

alter-globalisation movement (Maeckelbergh, 2011), environmental direct action (Szerszynski, 1999), the public space occupations of 2011 in Egypt, Greece, Spain, the USA and the UK (Juris, 2012; Razsa & Kurnik, 2012), various alternative modes of consumption or provisioning (Portwood-Stacer, 2012) and ‘free spaces’ (Futrell & Simi, 2004; Polletta, 1999). Conceptually, it appears embedded in the political orientation common to what have been called ‘new social movements’ and is directly implicated in wider paradigmatic debates in social movement studies about strategy and culture.

Despite its importance for the key problems of social movement studies, as well as in referencing important disagreements in activist debate, discussions about prefigurative politics make various diffuse claims and, accordingly, raise some difficult theoretical and empirical questions. Prefiguration forms part of a general understanding of politics as an instrument of social change. Yet it is often not clear if it is a tactic, orientation or way of doing protest, an alternative type of movement activity or a combination of these, and it is rarely apparent where distinctions with other types of political activity ought to be made.

These problems are the starting point for this article. To begin, I review the main ways in which prefiguration has been used, identifying two rough camps – those who take it broadly to mean the building of movement ‘alternatives’ or institutions and those who take it to be a way in which protest is performed – and two related sets of problems. Analysis is presented of social movement organising in Barcelona’s autonomous social centres, movement spaces used for radical political activism, communal living and the organisation of cultural and educational events. The understanding and practice of politics in these spaces, defined broadly as collective attempts to create social change, are the article’s empirical focus. Participants contest power on a series of different levels, ranging from the macro-political, as with adversarial protest forms which confront governments and institutions, to the ‘micropolitical’, the relations of power shaping interaction among individuals, collectives, movement networks and wider society. While it is often unclear how the macro- and micropolitical connect, this theoretical-strategic concern is explicitly shared by participants and compensated for by oscillating between, on the one hand, experimentation and the building of ‘alternative’ ways of living and relating, with attempts to consolidate and proliferate their outcomes on the other. Following this, I argue that prefigurative politics is best understood as the compound of five identifiable processes, combining experimentation, the circulation of political perspectives, the production of new norms and conduct, material consolidation, and diffusion.

Building Alternatives, Means–Ends Equivalence and the Future: Making Sense of Prefiguration and Its Claims

Although prefiguration is regularly described as a ‘new’ form of doing political action and is increasingly used for analysing contemporary movements, the term has been in use for several decades. It was first defined in a formal article by Boggs (1977) as ‘the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal’ (p. 100). In most accounts (with Futrell & Simi, 2004, a notable exception exploring ‘white power’ networks), prefigurative politics has since referred to a dynamic distinguishing left-wing political projects or protest styles apart from Trotskyism and Leninism, where an organisation or vanguard is considered necessary to bring about revolution ‘from the outside’, deferring communism for an unspecified period of readjustment. In contrast, and

often in implicitly critiquing the authoritarianism of past attempts at state socialism, prefiguration is said to create or ‘prefigure’ utopic alternatives, though on a limited scale, in the present. Prefigurative politics has thus, since Boggs, been aligned closely with anarchism, and notions of non-violent direct action (Epstein, 1991) that see authoritarianism and coercion as fundamentally unjustifiable.¹

One of the central modes of defining it, following from this, is that rather than ends justifying means, the means of prefigurative politics reflect, or are somehow equivalent to, the ends (see for example Calhoun, 1993, p. 404; Franks, 2003, p. 18; Maeckelbergh, 2009, pp. 81, 89; Rucht, 1988, p. 320). This idea casts political action as ‘prefigurative’ when it fulfils certain conditions in the way in which it is performed. The most typical example is the use of consensus or other ‘direct democratic’ mechanisms to promote egalitarian decision-making and the organisation of collective action among diverse groups (Maeckelbergh, 2009, 2011). As such, it is widely described as an essential component distinguishing direct action from other forms of protest: in direct action, writes Franks (2003), given that the ‘means’ in some way reflect the ‘ends’, prefigurative direct actions are a scaled-down, synecdochic expressions of social movement goals. An illustrative example of this usage is Graeber’s explanation of prefigurative politics in his article, ‘The New Anarchists’ about the alter-globalisation protests against the World Trade Organisation in Seattle:

When protesters in Seattle chanted ‘this is what democracy looks like’, they meant to be taken literally. In the best tradition of direct action, they not only confronted a certain form of power, exposing its mechanisms and attempting literally to stop it in its tracks: they did it in a way which demonstrated why the kind of social relations on which it is based were unnecessary. This is why all the condescending remarks about the movement being dominated by a bunch of dumb kids with no coherent ideology completely missed the mark. The diversity was a function of the decentralized form of organization, and this organization *was* the movement’s ideology. (2002, p. 84)

An apparently separate aspect of prefiguration, meanwhile, emphasised by authors such as Breines and Epstein, centres on the creating of movement ‘alternatives’. Breines and Epstein argued that the North American New Left was ‘new’ precisely in its ambitions to build ‘community’ – experimentation with social relations and the construction of counter-institutions and counter-power – in the course of their social movement organising. This perspective, in contrast to Boggs and Graeber, does not frame prefiguration as a politically inflected way of conducting protest. For Epstein and Breines, prefiguration tends to involve an alternative or additional set of *activities and/or goals* to political mobilisation.

The term prefigurative politics [...] may be recognized in counter institutions, demonstrations and the attempt to embody personal and anti-hierarchical values in politics. (Breines, 1989, p. 6)

What was new about the Clamshell and the Abalone [anti-nuclear movement campaigns] was that for each organization, at its moment of greatest mass participation, *the opportunity to act out a vision and to build community was at least as important as the immediate objective of stopping nuclear power.* (Epstein, 1991, p. 123, my emphasis)

For Breines and Epstein, prefiguration is doing extra activities or projects *alongside* adversarial protest, rather than a dynamic *underpinning* it. These former projects included, for Breines, counter-institutions, a ‘brotherly way of life’, a ‘transformation of relationships’ and the construction of ‘community’ (1989, pp. 6, 59, 47, 49). Breines emphasises the contrast by citing the Students for a Democratic Society national secretary Greg Calvert who advocates ‘dual power’, where practical projects complement confrontational protest ‘in order to catalyze [...] an organic process of building power from the bottom up’ (Calvert & Neiman, 1971, p. 158). The distinction between protest and practical projects in these accounts marked a symbolically important generational disjuncture between the identity of the ‘old left’ movements principally interested in strategic pursuit of political goals, and New Left groupings, who apparently pursued additional priorities and goals.² This emphasis on building alternatives, and the contrast between it and actual mobilisation or strategy remains an important mode in which prefiguration is used. Juris’ (2008) compelling study of alter-globalisation movements, for example, describes the ‘literal embodiment’ of alternative networks through ‘prefigured utopian alternatives’ (p. 131), elsewhere reflecting that ‘the critical question is whether activists can strike a balance between prefigurative politics and their more instrumental goals’ (p. 266).

Maeckelbergh (2009, 2011) has made important contributions to this debate. She argues that the common distinction between prefigurative politics and instrumental forms of social movement activity, as implied in Breines and Epstein, is misguided – prefiguration is strategic because ‘the creation of new political structures [is] intended to replace existing political structures’ (2011, p. 7). Her detailed account of decision-making in the alter-globalisation movement therefore allows that prefiguration may involve a process of creating alternatives, but outside of decision-making it is unclear how and when such alternatives relate to social movement goals.

Scholars continue to treat prefiguration principally as one of two dynamics, across a variety of contemporary movements. Prefiguration is either a way of doing mobilisation where the ‘means reflect the ends’, following Boggs and Graeber among others, or it involves an alternative or parallel project, following Epstein and Breines among others, although a crucial point of overlap exists across these features. They are linked by the notion of prolepsis evoked by the word itself: to prefigure is to anticipate or enact some feature of an ‘alternative world’ in the present, as though it has already been achieved. This third overarching feature has been applied to both aforementioned dynamics: to protest activities which are carried out prefiguratively, in which the protest movement, its organisation and practices are the goal, or to seemingly any other collective project which in some way ‘prefigures’ how it might normally be performed in the future. Although to characterise these in shorthand implies a certain simplification of complex positions, for ease of reference these three components or dynamics of prefiguration are henceforth referred to as ‘means–ends equivalence’, ‘building alternatives’ and ‘prolepsis’.

Each dynamic of prefiguration carries problems. First, the popular idea of ‘means–ends equivalence’ does not assist much in understanding political action or defining prefiguration. Beyond the classic example of participatory decision-making, where a more egalitarian future as a goal or ‘end’ may become in some way actualised through the process or ‘means’ of establishing consensus, it is not clear what processes and goals are being referred to. As noted by Maeckelbergh (2009), all movements have multiple goals and engage in a huge variety of practices, processes and ‘means’ – it follows that prefigurative action is distributed in a somewhat complex fashion across social movement

activity. Second, and relatedly, in accounts of ‘building alternatives’ there is rarely any distinction made between prefigurative activities and the collective identity processes of countercultures, subcultures or other forms of idealistic or utopian grouping. Where does the political begin and end in the case of building alternatives? Third, where futures are claimed to be prefigured through prolepsis, there has been little discussion of the extent to which such an idea is (culturally and strategically) important for movement participants, whether or on what terms such ‘futures’ represent overarching goals of some movements themselves or if prefiguration is simply an analytic concept describing what some movements do, unbeknownst to participants.

What follows seeks to address these theoretical problems and the deficit of empirical studies which explore the contested logic of prefiguration alongside strategy and protest politics. It draws on a recent four-year project exploring social movements and their practical projects, networks surrounding spaces known as ‘social centres’.

Fieldwork and Methods

Social centres can be classified as a type of ‘free space’ (Futrell & Simi, 2004; Polletta, 1999) or practical movement project organised by social and cultural movements. They offer organisational and cultural resources for movements, and participants attempt to engage with local communities via the organisation of political, educational and leisure activities. They may or may not be accompanied by a residential communal living project. The combining of political organising with counter-cultural activities including (sometimes) communal living differentiates social centres from other types of practical movement projects such as radical bookshops and communes.

Other writers have provided excellent case studies and discussions of social centres in a range of European contexts, particularly Italy, Spain and the UK (Chatterton, 2010; Martínez, 2002; Mudu, 2004; Ruggiero, 2000). These works generally contextualise social centres in histories of squatting, despite centres’ increasing use in, or participation from, other social movements. In Spain, and Catalonia in particular, social centres have evolved both more recently and more quickly than in other European countries with similarly developed social centre networks such as Italy and Holland (Martínez, 2002), due to the blanket repression of social movements during Franco’s dictatorship (1939–1975). Beginning in the early 1980s and responding to the marked institutionalisation and co-optation of new social movements into state organs and mainstream civil society organisations, early Spanish squats were identifying as political and counter-cultural spaces characterised principally by a politics of anti-fascism and autonomism (González, 2011; Martínez, 2002). Since the 1990s, squatting and social centres have increasingly been used by a broader set of social groups and movements in Catalonia (de Paula Fernández Gómez, 2010). Since this period, Catalan social centres are credited with politically socialising a generation of activists, operating organisational bases for a number of prominent counter-summits in the alter-globalisation movement and repopularising assembly structures, civil disobedience and direct action among actors across the political left (González, 2011; Herreros, 2004; Juris, 2008; Martínez, 2002). Social centres are also sites for projects of organising alternative leisure and education, and organising unorthodox forms of living arrangement. For this combination of activities, motives and political goals, they would appear ideal sites for investigation into prefigurative politics – visibly combining the organisation of practical projects with the hosting of specific movement campaigns.

The empirical project comprised two periods of participant observation, open-ended interviews and documentary analysis anchored around three social centres in Barcelona, Spain. Public events in these three centres were attended during a fieldwork period spanning November 2009 until June 2010, following a spell of reconnaissance when many more centres were visited. I also stayed as a visitor in one space, Can Tintorer,³ for the month of April 2010, participating in house and social centre activities. Most time was spent in organisational spaces such as assemblies and public events including workshops, seminars, campaigns, demonstrations and actions. Twenty-four audio-recorded open-ended interviews were also carried out to better understand the relation between political beliefs, daily activities and moments of mobilisation. These were fully transcribed and analysed alongside ethnographic observations to explore how individuals framed activities away from the collective.⁴ Materials were analysed manually as they were gathered, in an iterative process of analysing small sections of the data for emergent themes and codes, comparing to the whole and testing early hypotheses through discussions with participants and further observations, until a point of data saturation was reached.

Prefigurative Politics in Social Centres

The following three sections, corresponding roughly with the three case studies of the project, present examples from these data in an exploration of the multiple political understandings, priorities and goals articulated by participants during interviews and ethnography.

Identity Politics, Culture and Self-Actualisation

Localia was a squatted space, eight months old when fieldwork began, situated close to Barcelona's city centre. Workshops, events and discussions included Mexican dance, Argentine rock music and workshops on Zapatism, reflecting the large number of Latin American organisers and participants. Politically, Localia members planned and participated in campaigns and mobilisations including solidarity actions with Latin American movements, anti-racism and queer politics. Yet interviewees were insistent on the contingency of protest in its traditional formats. They described politics as the acting out of values and challenging of norms in everyday interactions and identities. Living together as a large group, evoking Breines' (1989) depiction of community-building, held a central role in their understandings of political engagement.

Localia participants seemed motivated most by what could loosely be termed a politics of identity, including questions of gender, sexuality, race and migration. In this sense, their actions resembled those of new social movements. The slogan from the women's movement, 'the personal is political', was quoted by interviewees and in several meetings. Movement activities such as marches and assemblies, however, were frequently described as insufficient responses to the political imperative of equality. As Cecilia argued during one meeting for a group aiming to start a new squat: 'It's one thing making lovely banners for big demonstrations, another thing to live what they say'. Processes of politicising everyday life were in tension with other modes of protest.

Various Localia interviewees described wanting to resolve such tensions through aligning their political protest and everyday life with their beliefs or values. The desire to be 'coherent' in this way helped explain many participants' political trajectories and their

understanding of what doing activism comprised. Gemma, a 20-year-old student from Andalucía, defined her political practice literally as ‘acting according to my beliefs – doing as I think’. Viviana, a street-seller from Chile and resident of Localia, reported the ubiquitous presence of diffuse ‘power relationships’ and ‘the political’ as that which had first initiated her into social movements. This perspective had motivated her participation in Localia:

I never participated in any social or political movement or anything, but always... well, always no, but since a long time ago I’ve been aware that the ‘apolitical’ doesn’t exist [...] So I was interested in implicating myself in a political movement that wasn’t partisan politics because no party political perspective interests me, but yes – to *do politics*. So carrying out [...] fighting for some concrete ideas, doing actions, doing activities, becoming coherent as well with discourse because this is also difficult. (Viviana, Localia)

Viviana’s narrative of becoming politically active rejects both party politics, which she sees as abstract and technocratic, and a politically radical rhetoric when it is not backed up with appropriate behaviour. Maria, a musician from Costa Rica and also a resident of the centre, described similar sentiments, also evoking a conception of power which is decentred and distributed:

I think we should be political and political [phrased in both masculine and feminine forms] always in our daily life, no? And, well, from our form of life of not consuming, or that we strengthen ourselves with who we relate to, what we talk about, what we have in our thoughts, in our hearts, what we want to do, how we *do* that because it isn’t just about saying what we want but also *doing* it. (Maria, Localia)

When quizzed for examples of what kinds of practices they were actually referring to, Maria, Viviana and other members cited squatting, ticket-dodging on the metro and the ‘skipping’ of waste food and objects as alternative means of shelter, travelling and consumption. There were also various group norms established and reproduced daily among those living in Localia, based on similar notions of power and on experimentation or the experimentation of other groups. These norms included the sharing of possessions such as tools and appliances, eating together, and establishing an informal timetable of communal leisure time in the social centre. The removal of doors separating different parts of the building reinforced a culture of sharing through the material structure of the centre itself.

Viviana and Maria’s narratives suggested that particular importance was placed on political self-actualisation, but the way this was actualised tended to be intensely sociable. These were not self-identity projects, as with Giddens’ (1991) ‘life politics’, but were about changing interactions and group living. Participants stressed their attempts to open up personal space and pool possessions to disrupt their ‘preconceptions’ about ‘internalised’ questions of, for instance, privacy, private property and individualism. Revealingly, Cecilia contrasted Localia and her vision of doing politics, with a more indulgent or escapist form of living:

I don't like the idea of isolating myself from the world and to have my life and community, and live fantastically ... without *carrying out ideas*, without confronting anything ... I think the idea of confrontation is really important, the idea of visualising the enemy, to say right, this is the enemy, and I'm going to go *this* way. I don't like the idea of being ... of saying 'Fine, all this is shit so I'm making my own little home, my little space, in another' ... I prefer this of ... well, we live in a community, we want to break with a lot of stuff to do with prejudices, preconceptions that we have all our lives that just come out, that are naturalized into us socially. We want to break with all that but at the same time confront the question of immigration, that's really important here in the neighbourhood, and questions of living space. (Cecilia, Localia)

For Cecilia, participating in Localia meant confrontation with ethical questions about prejudice and inequality. The distinction was not between community living and confrontational activism as described by Breines (1989), but between the cognitive comfort zone of individualism and escapism, and of contesting power in everyday life. Localia residents thus located politically productive activities as multiple and layered beyond the distinction between 'community' and 'organisation'. Political action was not simply a question of holding banners, but also implicated following their slogans; it was about challenging oneself and others rather than leading the idyllic communal life and involved the practice of, not just discussion about, radical political ideas; all alongside community campaigning.

The Practice of Micropolitics

FUGA, another centrally located social centre but in a rented space that had no communal living experience adjoining, was composed of activists with considerable experience from alter-globalisation protests and migrant advocacy. Most identified with a Marxist autonomist political positioning, which in practical terms united the group around a rough shared ideology, and some clear political goals around precarious workers such as immigrant street-sellers. Lacking a communal living project, FUGA put less emphasis than other centres on creating 'alternatives' to domestic practices, outside of attempts to fairly divide work and the centre's costs among participants. This section outlines how FUGA, like Localia, saw a much broader set of moments as politically significant than those involving mobilisation. This suggested a multiplication of goals (Maeckelbergh, 2011) and, accordingly, a multiplication of practices designed to address them all. Mateo, student and FUGA activist, explained:

We have been discussing what it means to think your politics in terms of the revolution of everyday life. What it means to inscribe radical practices not only in the production of public conversations, public statements, but also in the functioning and in the producing of this statement [...] That is where I think 'micropolitics' plays an important role [...] I think the space of the social networks of movements, of society itself, what are the political hierarchies, the relations of power, the fascisms, the process of social relations, *that* I am describing. That is the micropolitical level of the interventions. (Mateo, FUGA)

The social interactions underpinning FUGA's public campaigns and their preparation were described as 'micropolitics'.⁵ Making links, coalition-building and finding common ground with other groups or institutions were seen as necessary for achieving certain specific political goals, but they were also processes which contributed towards achieving wider goals of a better connected, informed and empowered social fabric. It meant that the form of politics under question took place not only during protest events, but also in a substantial variety of social environments FUGA members were involved in. These included leisure events, assemblies, meetings with other groups, campaign meetings, conversations with members of the neighbourhood and social institutions of various natures, and within the friendships of the group. Reflecting on and interfering with relations of power or hierarchy in any of these environments or scenarios was integral and essential to FUGA's political work. 'Doing politics' thus necessarily involved considering and better controlling the dynamics of political activities, but this also meant considering many practices beyond mobilisation as politically significant.

The open discussion on practice that micropolitics entailed was complemented by the group's overt focus on the production of movement knowledge, '*autoformación*' (self-training, self-education). *Autoformación* was most obviously manifested in FUGA's debates, discussions and occasional publications, which were public events and materials, and open to outsiders. This enabled the group and its partners, politically sympathetic social centres elsewhere in Spain, 'to think on a more strategic level [...] to generate discussions, seminars, courses, publications, articles, a space of radical thought within the left' (Ernesto, student and FUGA organiser). An adjacent focus was on the practical, local knowledge required to successfully plan campaigns and advocate on behalf of particular migrants or social groups. There were attempts to crystallise this knowledge where possible in publications or explicit discussions. In short, micropolitics was explicitly discussed in the course of practising *autoformación*, and understood as underpinning campaigns.

By emphasising micropolitics, FUGA members foregrounded social interactions. The focus on the 'producing' of 'horizontality' and 'finding the common', by which they meant promoting relationships among movements and civil society, was seen as necessary in order to mobilise sufficient numbers or support to achieve local political goals, while moving society towards overarching and abstract goals. Other groups and institutions were also seen as potential recipients or targets of the theoretical or practical movement perspectives developed by the group. This process of 'taking the debate to other porous spaces' (Jaume, postgraduate student, youth centre worker and organiser at FUGA) included my research project, seen as just one such space. The centre's social movement activism thus included a set of practices that needed to be simultaneously tackled in order to advance various overarching goals, but also simply to allow effective mobilisations: producing knowledge, discussion and capacity-building among as wide a section of society as possible. Micropolitics needed to be considered alongside these processes just as much as it did for moments of protest and actual contestation: it was a parallel, 'prefigurative' priority in the sense used by Boggs (1977), Graeber (2002) and others, but for a wider set of activities than these authors recognise. The tackling of these multiple priorities was, on the one hand, celebrated by FUGA participants as what made them distinctive as activists, but on the other hand there were also frustrations with the slow pace at which they organised protest, given the time and energy required for thinking through and reflecting on micropolitics.

Participants in Localia were less focused than FUGA on practices around knowledge production and coalition-building across groups and networking. Yet Localia's perspective, based around individuals, interactions and social norms, was that overarching societal goals could only be realised if individuals were able to change themselves, and that activists should demonstrate the political messages they promoted within their normal lives. In this respect, Localia's identity politics had a similar logic to the additional practices that FUGA's political networking encompassed. Localia residents described self-actualisation as a competing yet complementary practice with doing activism, while FUGA members were more focused on discourse and knowledge.

Communication, Performance and Group-Individual Dynamics

Can Tintorer, the third case study investigated, was a squatted social centre, composed mainly of environmentalists and anarchists, on the edge of Barcelona. Although the group had been heavily involved in anti-roads and food-related protests in the early years of the project, they now did less direct campaigning as a centre. However, most individuals continued to be part of movements individually, and the social centre project was adjudged, in various ways, to be contributing towards political goals in a variety of ways.

Can Tintorer members all mentioned the diminished campaigning carried out by the centre as a whole and by members individually, with varying degrees of anxiety. Members explained that the 'balance' between an emphasis on public and adversarial political action with the internal processes of the group such as communication and consensus were a source of substantial discussion and some dispute. However, Can Tintorer's attention to local education and outreach assuaged the anxiety some participants felt at how the centre had transformed from 'all-out activism' (Sergi, local school organiser) in the first years of the project to a situation where 'each person has found their place in the house and in Barcelona, and their role' (Kes, musician). The development of these roles had displaced what, in the case of Can Tintorer, were sustained campaigns around food and environmental issues. Participants were experienced in direct action, similar to that utilised in the British anti-roads and environmental movement, specialising in the 'manufactured vulnerability' (Doherty, 1999) of occupying and obstructing strategic sites such as bridges, buildings, roads and green space. Targets included companies testing genetically modified crops, oil and petrol subsidiaries based in the area, and the elite EU, World Bank and NATO meetings which sparked large counter-summits in the early 2000s (González, 2011; Herreros, 2004; Juris, 2008). Participants said this kind of action continued, but that it tended to be on a smaller scale, involved fewer centre members and was more based around the amplification of political messages using the media to such an extent that 'Sometimes it feels like we're just turning up, standing in front of something, getting out a banner, taking a photograph and leaving' (Roger, occasional plumber and centre resident).

While adversarial protest was less visible among the group than in previous years, this seemed compensated for with more diffuse forms of activity that related to less specific movement goals. Participants across a number of social centres described the permeation of protest from a side project or a particular sphere of life into their normal interactions. In this way, participants from Can Tintorer often talked about everyday life as having become practically indistinguishable from their political practice. As journalist and Can Tintorer resident Victor reported: 'For me, activism and my life are super-mixed-up, I

don't know where one starts and the other ends, but at the same time I try to not let activism take over my life totally'. Yet everyday activities were not seen as political ends in themselves, but as interim steps towards a variety of different goals.

Kes argued that a certain kind of communication and negotiation, enacted through fidelity to the practices of consensus decision-making, was a precondition for good decisions, sensible group norms, and thus the production of communal living. Evidence of this communication in the resolution of problems was regularly described as a source of a sense of efficacy and empowerment:

You might have a very clear idea of how you want something to go, but other people have got a very clear idea of the opposite direction. And it's bringing that together and coming to an agreement, between yourselves, and I find that process really exciting. (Kes, Can Tintorer)

Learning to communicate differently in order to make decisions and compromises maintained group morale, but was also a crucial ingredient of constructing the shared conduct and norms which underpinned communal living.

Much has been made of prefigurative social movements' experimentation (see for example Melucci's (1996) 'laboratories of experience'), yet this was just one part of a set of more sustained processes. New norms, informed by political framings around equality and community, had been established to guide practices such as domestic work, where members worked simultaneously in order to level the value of different tasks, rotated positions of responsibility and used a 'buddy' system to transfer specialised skills. Furthermore, just as Localia removed doors and shared possessions in order to materialise their commitment to community over individualism, Can Tintorer physically manifested – and tested – their environmentalist political frames through the organic cultivation of the majority of the group's fresh food and in unorthodox ways of heating water (home-made solar panelling), limiting electricity use (fuses and notices), recycling and construction.

Can Tintorer's experiments could have been described as 'proleptically' anticipating social alternatives, and most members were highly enthusiastic about experimentation. Yet enormous emphasis was put upon processes of how experiments practically produced wider change through their communication and demonstration. This paralleled FUGA's emphasis on making connections and 'taking the debate to other porous places'. The communication Kes described was vindicated strategically through its public visibility. Changing oneself, operating as a good example of group living, and modifications to politicise the material order in which one lived were thus seen as component parts of the performance of alternatives to outsiders:

I don't think it's reasonable to give up on society, I think you need to try and change it. But if you're just trying to change it without having changed yourselves and your own living circumstances then it's just a lot of rhetoric. But if people can see here we don't prize material possessions very highly, or cars, or any of the normal nonsense that people are obsessed by, but have a good life, they can see lots of happy people living a good life, then that's more convincing than any book or, you know, any political speech, really. You just come up here and go 'Fuck, that looks great, what are those people doing?' (Roger, Can Tintorer)

Can Tintorer participants, like those of Localia, saw a substantial set of activities in the collective production of ‘alternatives’ as politically significant. There was also substantial weight attached to the ways in which centre participants did political action, related to movements and other groupings, dynamics that some members of FUGA called ‘micropolitics’. The valuation of the project and the activities which produced it were continually linked by participants to the consolidation and spreading of related political perspectives, in a variety of processes which included but were not restricted to campaigning.

Balancing and Negotiating Multiple Targets and Goals

Participants in Barcelona’s social centres identified a set of additional considerations and targets to traditional social movement opponents and goals. These explained much of the variety of practices that were considered politically significant and were carried out across these spaces. While conflicts during political actions continued to cast local authorities and police as traditional political adversaries, these were often seen as proxies for the real problems movements sought to address. Thus, opponents and goals described by social centre participants and organisers varied enormously in their nature, encompassing their styles of organisation, government legislation, the public’s social practices, cultural beliefs and activists’ individual identities, requiring a similarly transversal approach to doing protest. Participants’ distinct ways of dividing space and domestic labour, providing and consuming food, and organising meetings and leisure activities – and the practices composing adversarial protest itself – were thus understood as practical attempts to contest the effects of micropolitical power relations, as well as helping build momentum for attaining specific movement goals. Prefiguration provides a potential language for interpreting the political logic connecting everyday processes taking place in Barcelona’s social centres – the prefiguration of ‘building alternatives’ – with those more closely related to decision-making and political actions.

Participants across different social centres took micropolitics, community-building, mutual learning and coherence between values and actions to all be significant politically – that is, related to the process of creating social change (with micropolitics understood broadly as a tool for change on a micro-social level, particularly in the power relations between individuals and groups). However, participants rarely expressed much confidence in having resolved the problems of how to address these challenges, or how much to prioritise them. For example, participants such as Kes, Sergi and Viviana disagreed on how micropolitics, alongside more substantive objectives of movement campaigns, should optimally be tackled. Many argued that engaging solely in this or that practice, or adherence to just one goal infringed micropolitical concerns, or might not produce any external macro-political or lasting impact. Reflecting this, participants frequently declared that none of the politicised activities that they took part in within the collectives or living spaces were ‘enough’, and always tempered their allegiance to one activity with others that *in combination* legitimised their actions as both strategically worthwhile and micropolitically sound.

Roger, for instance, was typical in arguing that only through the diffusing of the centre’s ideas, and the sharing of skills and procedures which allowed practices to be changed, was Can Tintorer’s communal living experience politically valuable or useful. FUGA participants oscillated between celebrating and expressing unease about the proportion of time they spent talking and reflecting on how to ‘do politics’, as opposed to the time spent

mobilising. In Localia there was a perceived danger of overemphasising at the expense of others any one project of individual self-realisation, the practice of communal living and its associated conflicts, or adversarial activism. In all centres, the simultaneous collective practice of different activities allowed each priority to insure the others against their political legitimacy. It is in this sense that the political action of participants in social centres could be understood as strategic (cf. Maeckelbergh, 2009, 2011). Participants framed moments of cultural expression, affinity, emotion and identification purely as elements of political strategy, an interpretation which should probably not be taken wholly literally.

Prefiguration is best understood and deployed as this necessarily plural configuration of practices. Multiple priorities were juggled in the course of daily life and social movement activities and were subject to negotiation through a political logic of hedging and widespread ambivalence about how best to produce social change. In participants' awareness and concern that (i) any 'alternative project' was not built for its own sake but was linked to wider ambitions of capacity-building; (ii) attention to *how* goals were to be achieved was necessary (as with the 'means–ends equivalence'); and (iii) with reference to wider or more distant future political goals ('prolepsis'), the three components of prefiguration enumerated above were linked through an articulated set of priorities that were in tension.

Refiguring Prefigurative Politics: The Construction and Diffusion of Ideas, Practices and Conduct

This conception of prefiguration retains its core components and clarifies how the traditional approaches to the concept can be seen as facets of the same process. Prefigurative politics in this account includes both 'building alternatives' and the preoccupation with how practices are performed, above called the 'means–ends equivalence'. It also incorporates the orientation towards the future that traditional models of prefiguration have proposed. The key clarification proposed is that prefiguration necessarily *combines* the experimental creating of 'alternatives' within *either* mobilisation-related or everyday activities, with attempts to ensure their future political relevance. This combination took place through a mixture of five interrelated social processes, whose identification allows for a more practical and specific evaluation of the political logic at play in processes of prefiguration.

First, *prefiguration involves experimentation*. Experimentation took place not just in everyday practices and projects, but also in those relating more directly to political mobilisation. Participants in social centres treated many activities as opportunities for experimental performances or, more precisely, possible new ways of carrying out practices in the future (displacing to some extent certain established or hegemonic forms of social activity). Social centre participants enthusiastically experimented with and openly reflected on their directly political practice (in the case of FUGA), as well as many of their normal social interactions and practices (in most other centres). These reflections or modified practices tended to be shared in assemblies and in informal conversation over mealtimes and other communal moments, as well as following demonstrations and actions. In changes to daily life, the limited size of the communal living projects helped incentivise and regularise this self-awareness and experimentation, as changes or 'improvements' often had a perceptible impact on participants' lives.

Second, and echoing work on social movements' interpretative and ideational processes (Gillan, 2008), *prefigurative groups host, develop and critique political perspectives, ideas and social movement frames*. In social centres, the organisation of seminars, debates, conferences and the production and provision of zines, pamphlets and alternative media encouraged participants to imagine, learn and play with ideological positions. It explains and informs the kind of everyday experimentation described above – experimentation was sometimes carried out for its own sake, but was generally represented as an attempt to reorganise or reimagine practices. FUGA was a particularly powerful group in its capacity to develop political and ideological frames or positions, reflected in their singular emphasis on '*Autoformación*', the organising of seminars and discussions for the self-education of the collective. These ideas and frames also circulated visibly and audibly in banners, slogans and other messages communicated in moments of adversarial protest.

Third, *prefiguration involves establishing new collective norms, which draw upon both experimental performances and political perspectives or ideas*. Collective codes of conduct in social centres, and the tactics of the movements they were involved in, were debated, discussed and decided (often via consensus and in assemblies) based on the above-mentioned experimental performances and political perspectives, building ideology, imagination and reflexivity into the daily practices of social centre participants. This entailed conflicting processes of crystallising new patterns of practice in group conduct and identity while, conversely, normalising and encouraging the breaking or reinterpretation of rules in order to develop and improve the nature of the 'experiment'. As a set of norms or directives, this was sometimes recognised as introducing a new level of governance, but one that in theory was more accountable to its constituency of social centre participants or the social movement network at large. Studies of social movements have often focused on experimentation and frames but often neglect their outcomes in new repertoires and routines outside of tactical preferences.

Fourth, *prefigurative politics usually involves intervention or consolidation in material environments or social orders* in attempts to decisively inscribe or consolidate these codes of conduct, their political messages and symbolism, and experimental origins. In social centres this ranged from the ways in which participants and speakers were seated in a debate, to how land was used or cultivated, and how physical infrastructures were altered. Can Tintorer's dry toilets were essential components for consolidating environmentally inflected hygiene and cultivation practices, for instance; while Localia's division of space, through minimising privacy, encouraged communal cooking and the sharing of possessions. Actions such as occupations, roadblocks and use of 'manufactured vulnerability' in protests were more temporary, but symbolically highly significant, interventions in the material environment (Bey, 1991). Consolidation tends to be limited, temporary, miniaturised or curtailed – the occasions when it is not are examples of prefigurative social movement success.

Fifth, the *demonstration and diffusion of practices, orders, devices and perspectives* allows prefigured 'alternatives' to persist beyond the present for groups and collectives. In social centres this took place through alternative media circulated by social centres; in the public character of the workshops, seminars and conferences which took place in their public spaces; and via informal events which allowed for performances of alternatives. Public protest events and demonstrations, although many involved a direct action element in literally impinging on targets and practices, were seen principally as acts communicating messages of dissent, collective force and the existence of political alternatives.

These five processes or dynamics are henceforth referred to as ‘experimentation’, ‘perspectives’, ‘conduct’, ‘consolidation’ and ‘diffusion’. They ought not to be understood as new concepts, not least because they draw upon a multitude of existing ideas from prior social movement literature, rather they are reference points to the empirical ingredients which might usefully be seen to compose prefiguration. Prefiguration as a compound of five processes retains much of the three dynamics identified in traditional discussions of the term and proposes mechanisms through which they coherently relate. It still refers to the future-oriented building of alternative practices, institutions or utopia (see for instance Breines, 1989; Epstein, 1991; Juris, 2008), or the way in which protest is performed (referred to above as the means–ends equivalence; see Boggs, 1977; Graeber, 2002) – the five processes of experimentation, perspectives, conduct, consolidation and diffusion are the same. Thus, prefiguration as conceived of here can be seen as taking place not only in more informal environments such as communal living environments, public social centres, *but also*, and with the same political logic, on the streets, in the context of planning and implementing protest actions.

Prefiguration as conceived of here is a temporally unfolding phenomenon composed of several processes, and across networks of people. Emphasis on experimentation and new conducts, which have been much emphasised by theoreticians of new social movements, anarchism and contemporary protest forms (see for instance Bey, 1991; Melucci, 1996), is what differentiates prefigurative politics from other political logics. Yet it is precisely the inclusion of political ‘perspectives’, and at least one of ‘consolidation’ and ‘diffusion’, which distinguishes prefiguration, as a political approach, from subcultural or counter-cultural projects lacking either a collective vision or preparedness to act in order to change wider society. Put differently, the combining of ‘experimentation’ with ‘perspectives’ in ‘new conduct’ is necessary for prefiguration, but not sufficient.

Prefigurative Politics: What Movement Participants Do and What They Want

The above approach retains the basic features from traditional discussions of prefiguration, but proposes an analytic frame which enables differentiation from non-prefigurative action and groups, and for unpicking how diverse groups do prefiguration. The newer approach has shown how ‘building alternatives’ and ‘prolepsis’ are part of prefiguration, and that the way in which collective practices are performed is politically important. However, this approach has up to this point sidestepped the popular idea of the ‘means–ends equivalence’, the claim that in prefiguration ‘means’ are conflated with, collapsed into, reflect or are the same thing as their ‘ends’ (the list includes, but is by no means limited to, texts as diverse as those by Calhoun, 1993; Franks, 2003; Maeckelbergh, 2009, 2011; Rucht, 1988). This final section directly considers the ‘means–ends equivalence’ and argues that despite raising the interesting question of the relationship of practices and goals in social movements, as a qualifier of prefiguration it is misleading.

The relationship of means and ends is a hypothesised homology between movement practices and movement goals and can best be unpacked in these terms. First, ‘means’ or ‘practices’ can be understood as the variety of short-term and mostly realisable activities that any movement group do together. They range in scale and in how directly they relate to mobilisation: they might include domestic practices such as domestic labour arrangements; they might also include more specialised tasks such as coalition-building, meetings, fundraising or maintaining movement infrastructure, and include mobilisation

activities such as participation in demonstrations and damage to movement targets. All practices are performed in certain ways, and the selection of practices and their performances is important for distinguishing movements and organisations from others. Second, all social movements also have ‘ends’, which are here referred to as ‘movement goals’, therein differentiating them from individual motives or personal ambitions. Importantly, movements rarely have one goal, but nearly always have several related shared goals, and these range in terms of scale, realisability, negotiability, the nature of the targets and the precision or completeness in which they are understood by participants. Peace movement organisations, for example, usually want to prevent an impending war, stop a current war or stop the production or retailing of weapons on a local or national scale, but likely shift their attention between scales and targets according to changing opportunity structures, while retaining certain persistent goals, such as wishes that armed conflict all over the world stop permanently. Most of the practices they do together are on some level attempts to attain one or more of these goals.

Some authors using the ‘means–ends equivalence’ idea make it clear which means resemble which ends; however, they almost never acknowledge the other ‘means’ and ‘ends’ at play. This limits the descriptive power of prefiguration in these terms and makes distinguishing prefiguration from other aspects of protest and everyday life a difficult interpretative task. No movement can relate *all* means and ends. Glass (2010, p. 205), for example, caustically observes that in prefigurative Zapatista solidarity spaces in Los Angeles, the painting of walls and the holding of meetings obviously did not mean that activists wanted all walls in the world to be painted or wanted to be able to constantly hold meetings. As a starting point for distinguishing prefigurative politics, the ‘means–ends equivalence’ recognises that practices are politically relevant for participants – an important step which permits the recognition of micropolitics in a multitude of daily practices – but does not draw clear boundaries for where politics starts and ends or how prefigurative movements can be compared or analysed together.

All three case studies discussed in this article were prefigurative in the traditional sense in that one or another practice evoked one or another of their goals. Yet the differences in what each centre did together politically can be better explained using the framework outlined above, alongside which a fuller discussion of the specifics of the practices performed and goals held is analytically valuable.

FUGA, then, had realisable, negotiable, targeted and precise movement goals, as well as some that were overarching and non-negotiable. More precisely, they wanted to stop new Catalan legislation against street-sellers which disproportionately targeted immigrant workers, prevent local transport price increases and introduce a ‘basic income’ for all irrespective of labour market participation, and some participants discussed wishing for a kind of non-centralised communism to replace welfare statism. In practice, they emphasised the principles of dialogue and horizontality in communicating with other groups, which probably were considered essential principles of any alternative future, yet the goals of creating functioning coalitions and mutually helpful relationships were often a higher priority – ends sometimes justified means. FUGA members saw their potential identification as a counter-cultural space to be problematic for communicating with other institutions and being perceived as legitimate and serious political actors – this meant that experimentation and new forms of conduct did not extend to invention in daily life practices but were mainly confined to mobilisation activities. Concentration on practices of *autoformación* and the promotion of discursive alternatives were adjudged to advance

their goals better than visible cultural experimentation. Means and ends were frequently in tension and – self-consciously – prioritised differently according to the circumstances.

Localia held less precise and explicit goals than FUGA, but had a more tangible relationship with how collective practices were performed. Identifiable goals included gender and racial equality, greater autonomy for populations in the Zapatista territories of Mexico, initiating an open and autonomous people's assembly for their local neighbourhood, and 'reclaiming' or somehow making local privatised space 'public' again. The sharing of space and possessions, and individuals' attempts to try to actualise their political values of tolerance and equality, did appear homologous with their goals. Like FUGA therefore, some means related to some ends, but their distribution of prefigurative politics was radically different. Using the framework proposed above, Localia were less active in producing political 'perspectives', but more active in trying to apply them to every aspect of their daily life through 'experimentation' and the instigation of new collective 'conduct'. Their attempts to engage with the neighbourhood through 'diffusion', and to 'consolidate' them in public space, were less explicitly considered than those of FUGA, and the political consideration of mobilisation activities was not so focused. However, their 'free shop', low-priced food events and refusal to collaborate with any institutions for fear of politically compromising themselves meant that some movement goals (those around equality and communality) were evoked in these means, while others (the longevity of the centre, the project and achieving of neighbourhood goals) were de-emphasised. Most members were more hopeful or idealistic that they could attain 'coherence' between what they believed politically and what they did, and as such they aspired to, but inevitably could not, realise an orthodox practice of prefiguration where all their practices literally reflected all their goals.

Can Tintorer, a mix of environmentalists and anarchists, held a visible range of goals including the protection of local parkland their space opened onto, the end of genetically engineered farming experiments on an international scale and the shift from industrial food production to smaller-scale and organic methods, and some participants held various types of anarchist or eco-utopian visions of the future. Aspects of their activities such as their organic food production and attempts at self-sufficiency evoked these goals (once again, some means related to some ends), but their emphasis on consensus in meetings, their free shop and their attempts to divide work fairly across the collective referred to other political aims which were not held explicitly as goals. Can Tintorer took 'experimentation' and new ways of doing daily activities, 'conduct', as central priorities like Localia, but used a more successful variety of methods for performing, sharing and 'diffusing' these experiences, skills and ideas with outsiders. While Localia were less experimental in their mobilisation and political planning, Can Tintorer continually tried to innovate in decision-making methods, while emphasising their ability to inspire other projects through simply demonstrating the project's transformation of the building and grounds into a semi-self-sufficient communal living example. Again, there were self-conscious compromises between goals – those that identified more readily as anarchists were concerned about the impression given of the prices charged for the organic food in social centre events, for example, but the practical goal of supporting the centre tended to trump these concerns.

In summary, when scholars say that means and ends are somehow equivalent, it indicates they think that there is emphasis on the micropolitics of how one or more collective practices are performed ('means') through some homology with one or more of

the movement's goals ('ends'). This relationship is only ever partial and specific, and the type of homology between practices and goals clearly varies and depends on the social grouping in question. The potential for opening up a more nuanced discussion of how political practices and goals relate and are configured in social movements has not yet been capitalised on. In addition, as a qualifier of prefiguration the 'means–ends equivalence' idea is simply not precise enough in any of its permutations. Interaction in any social group or network with shared goals, whether it be a cultural grouping, business or other organisation, is always likely to reflect some overarching ethical and political values to some degree, particularly if one is creative in identifying means and ends. In contrast, the model advocated above, where different practices and goals are negotiated through a configuration of five processes, better distinguishes prefiguration from other kinds of political and non-political actions, and is of much more use in describing and explaining differences among prefigurative groups. It is empirically more accurate, but conceptually also offers greater sensitivity to the everyday processes of social movements, particularly to the many significant practices and goals which do not straightforwardly relate.

Conclusion

Since the emergence of 'new social movements' and theoretical paradigms acknowledging shifts in targets, tactics and personnel, increasing attention has been placed on social movements' practical projects and the politics underpinning their action. Students of social movements have become increasingly interested in the concept of prefiguration, a term first substantially used in academic literature on the North American New Left. The term and its key ideas have been deployed for making sense of a variety of protest activities and for an array of political movements including environmental direct action, the alter-globalisation movement and recent occupations of public space such as 15-M and Occupy. However, the breadth and flexibility of prefiguration have produced a variety of usages and meanings which detract from its potential as a theoretical concept for understanding political action. This article argues that prefigurative politics should not be simply a denotative term for many movement activities, but a working analytic concept.

The notion of prefigurative politics has rested on the notion of participants 'act[ing] out a vision of a better world' (Epstein, 1991, p. 122), whether it is through creating alternatives or through the way in which protest is practised. Each of these components has been qualified, and the changes amount to three key differences: (i) 'building alternatives' should only be seen as prefiguration (and can only be distinguished from subcultural or counter-cultural activity) when combined and balanced with processes of consolidation and diffusion; (ii) rather than means equalling ends it is more simply that the (micro) politics of practices themselves are considered important in prefiguration; and (iii) rather than participants 'proleptically' imagining or actualising future goals in the present amounting to prefiguration alone, which in many circumstances may not be 'political' at all, this account argues that imagination, experimentation and trying to proliferate and perpetuate struggle are only *part of* prefiguring politically.

The empirical example of social centres in Barcelona has been used to construct and exemplify this approach to prefiguration. Social centre participants expressed ambivalence over how to make movement practices ideologically acceptable, and how to balance these activities with the consolidation and proliferating of alternative ideas and practices. This was driven by preoccupation with a range of usually practical social movement goals.

When discussing experimentation, references were made to better futures in which movement goals were achieved, but the orientation towards the future was usually not in utopian or ‘proleptic’ terms. When participants said that their actions or experiments were political ‘in themselves’ or that ‘living differently was political’ per se, they nearly always added disclaimers with a pragmatic sense of political impact: they were an ‘example’ to be seen and communicated; people wanted to ‘inspire’ change and diffuse perspectives. This qualification differentiates prefigurative groups from subcultural or counter-cultural groups, who normally do not try to consolidate, proliferate and diffuse their perspectives and collective conducts.

It also only partially supports Maeckelbergh’s (2011) claims that everyday prefigurative practices are strategic because ‘movement actors believe that the process they develop now is the one with which they will replace liberal representative democracy’ (pp. 8–9). Strategy did not lie simply in the pursuit of multiple goals or in particular overarching goals, but in the navigation and *hedging* of multiple political priorities: ‘experimentation’, the circulation of ‘perspectives’, the establishing of new ‘conduct’ and their use in ‘consolidation’ and ‘diffusion’. It is worth remembering that narratives from movement participants systematically downplay cultural and identification processes. This does not imply dishonesty or a sociological misunderstanding by activists, but denotes a significant discursive hierarchy whereby ‘political’ goals, understandings and practices are favoured.

The implications of this work are relevant for studies of social movement spaces, direct action, micropolitics and everyday practices in social movements. The ways in which political action is performed and everyday life in social movements is lived are highly significant not just because they shape how effective struggles for social change can be, but also because they help explain the formation and composition of movements, groupings and structures of solidarity themselves. Prefiguration involves combining the imaginative construction of ‘alternatives’, within either mobilisation-related or everyday activities, with some strategic attempt to ensure their future political relevance. The way in which these priorities are juggled can sensitise analysis to differences between prefigurative groupings, schisms within them, and ideological barriers between prefigurative groups and other movements. It is now widely documented that many movements and social groupings appear preoccupied with the politics of their practices in some respects, and clear that most engage in a whole range of ‘alternative’ practices which do not relate immediately to movement goals. More work is needed to understand how these processes take place and what their significance is for questions of social movement emergence, change and success.

Acknowledgements

Support from the ESRC (ES/I903445/1) and the Sustainable Consumption Institute is acknowledged. I thank Alan Warde, Dale Southerton, Kevin Gillan, Nick Crossley and Kevin Hetherington for insightful feedback and discussion around prior drafts, and two anonymous referees for their comments. Thanks most of all to the participants in the study. All errors are my own.

Notes

1. It is significant for the term’s genesis that Boggs (1977) explicitly contrasted the concerns of prefiguration with those of Leninism and statist Marxism. A passage from Gorz (1968) written almost 10 years prior to this poses prefiguration, drawing on the Proudhon or Leninist conception of ‘dual power’, as an interim achievement of

revolutionary strategy: 'It is impossible to demand immediate unification – by a line imposed from above – of all the various movements (of manual, technical, scientific, artistic, cultural and other workers, etc) as a precondition for the frontal conquest of the State. It is only possible to articulate their specific aspirations within the perspective of a common goal which contains them all and at the same time transcends them: the goal of a socialist society, itself pluralist and "articulated". This is the society which the revolutionary party must prefigure in its methods and action if it wishes to fulfill its proper function' (pp. 61–62). Although Boggs cites Gorz, the former's understanding of the concept dominates in subsequent work, which helps explain the prevalent assumption that prefiguration is inherent to anarchism, and vice versa.

2. Although there is plenty of evidence showing that practical movement projects and prefiguration are as old as the labour movement, argued most forcefully by Calhoun (1993).
3. Names of participants and social centres are anonymised and their details altered for reasons of ethics and confidentiality.
4. Twenty-one interviews were conducted in Spanish and three in English; all quotations are verbatim or my translations.
5. An initially sociological term coined by Burns (1961/1962) and developed by Deleuze and Guattari, authors important for FUGA's perspective, particularly through their influence on Hardt and Negri (2000).

References

- Bey, H. (1991). *The temporary autonomous zone, ontological anarchy, poetic terrorism: Anarchy and conspiracy*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia.
- Boggs, C. (1977). Marxism, prefigurative communism and the problem of workers' control. *Radical America*, 6(Winter), 99–122.
- Breines, W. (1989). *Community and organization in the New Left 1962-68: The great refusal*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Burns, T. (1961/1962). Micropolitics: Mechanisms of institutional change. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 6, 257–281.
- Calhoun, C. (1993). 'New social movements' of the early nineteenth century. *Social Science History*, 17, 385–427.
- Calvert, G., & Neiman, C. (1971). *A disrupted history: The new left and the new capitalism*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Chatterton, P. (2010). So what does it mean to be anti-capitalist? Conversations with activists from urban social centres. *Urban Studies*, 47, 1205–1224.
- de Paula Fernández Gómez, F. (2010). *Okupació a Catalunya, 1984–2009*. Barcelona: Anomia.
- Doherty, B. (1999). Paving the way: The rise of direct action against road-building and the changing character of British environmentalism. *Political Studies*, 47, 275–291.
- Epstein, B. (1991). *Political protest and cultural revolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Franks, B. (2003). The direct action ethic: From 59 upwards. *Anarchist Studies*, 11, 13–41.
- Futrell, R., & Simi, P. (2004). Free spaces: Collective identity, and the persistence of U.S. white power activism. *Social Problems*, 51, 16–42.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Gillan, K. (2008). Understanding meaning in movements: A hermeneutic approach to frames and ideologies. *Social Movement Studies*, 7, 247–263.
- Glass, P. (2010). Everyday routines in free spaces: Explaining the persistence of the Zapatistas in Los Angeles. *Mobilization*, 15, 199–216.
- González, R. (2011). *Xarxes crítiques i polítiques públiques: els impactes del moviment per l'okupació a Catalunya i Madrid (1984–2009)* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona. Retrieved from <http://www.tesisenred.net/bitstream/handle/10803/48643/rgg1de1.pdf?sequence=1>
- Gorz, A. (1968). The way forward. *New Left Review*, 1, 47–66.
- Graeber, D. (2002). A movement of movements: The new anarchists. *New Left Review*, 13, 61–73.
- Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2000). *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Herreros, T. (2004). Movimiento de las okupaciones y movimientos sociales: elementos de análisis para el caso de Cataluña. In Ramón Adell Argilés & M. Martínez (Eds.), *¿Dónde están las llaves? El movimiento okupa: prácticas y contextos sociales* (pp. 129–150). Barcelona: Catarata.
- Juris, J. S. (2008). *Networking futures: The movements against corporate globalisation*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Juris, J. S. (2012). Reflections on #occupy everywhere: Social media, public space, and emerging logics of aggregation. *American Ethnologist*, 39, 259–279.
- Maeckelbergh, M. (2009). *The will of the many: How the alterglobalisation movement is changing the face of democracy*. London: Pluto Press.
- Maeckelbergh, M. (2011). Doing is believing: Prefiguration as strategic practice in the alterglobalization movement. *Social Movement Studies*, 10(1), 1–20.
- Martínez, M. (2002). *Okupaciones de viviendas y centros sociales*. Barcelona: Virus.
- Melucci, A. (1996). *Challenging codes: Collective action in the information age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mudu, P. (2004). Resisting and challenging neoliberalism: The case of social centers. *Antipode*, 36, 917–941.
- Polletta, F. (1999). 'Free spaces' in collective action. *Theory and Society*, 28, 1–38.
- Portwood-Stacer, L. (2012). Anti-consumption as tactical resistance: Anarchists, subculture, and activist strategy. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 12, 87–105.
- Razsa, M., & Kurnik, A. (2012). The Occupy movement in Žižek's hometown: Direct democracy and a politics of becoming. *American Ethnologist*, 39, 238–258.
- Rucht, D. (1988). Themes, logics and arenas of social movements: A structural approach. In B. Klandermans, H. Kriesi, & S. Tarrow (Eds.), *From structure to action: Comparing social movement research across cultures* (pp. 305–328). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Ruggiero, V. (2000). New social movements and the 'centri sociali' in Milan. *The Sociological Review*, 48, 167–185.
- Szszynski, B. (1999). Performing politics: The dramatics of environmental protest. In Larry Ray & Andrew Sayer (Eds.), *Culture and economy: After the cultural turn* (pp. 211–228). London: Sage.

Luke Yates is Hallsworth Research Fellow in the Department of Sociology, University of Manchester, UK. His research interests revolve around social movements, everyday life, consumption and socio-cultural change.