(un)Conference; three provocations

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#changehow

Change:HOW? starts now. We've shared these essays to get you thinking and engaging with the themes of this year's conference. Whether you are coming are not please visit our website and let us know what you think and how you feel about them. And because all of us are smarter than any one of us, what experiences have you got to share and add?

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Jeremy Gilbert - How Does Change Happen and How Can We Make It?

Neal Lawson - Change:HOW?

On the 30th November 2013 over 500 people will gather in a warehouse come events space in East London to discuss how change happens. We want those 500 plus people to learn a lot and we expect them to be a lot. Compass is dramatically changing the way it works – trying to be 'the change we wish to see in the world'. We could only get 500 or so into the space but what we know about change is that it happens when the vast majority don't just want it but make it happen.

In this briefing Indra Adnan and Jeremy Gilbert give their take on change-how? It's for everyone coming to the event and more importantly for all those who can't – so we can all join the conversation about how to make change happen – because then it will happen.

It's clear the political system is no longer fit for purpose. The refrain 'they are all the same' or 'nothing ever changes' have become so

commonplace as to warrant only further weary resignation. Of course important differences exist, between Labour and the Tories in particular but they are not different enough. Austerity rules, banks are still too big to fail and global financial flows are in excess of where they were before they caused the crash of 2008. As a recent Observer editorial bemoaned "Why is politics proving unequal to the task of structural economic reform?" We watch the planet burn and the poor get poorer and yet our democratic system seems incapable of righting those fundamental wrongs.

It's not that a better world can't easily be conjured. Everyone wants a secure job, enough to live off but enough time with the people we love, some say over the big institutions that affect our lives, be it work, a good local school, hospital treatment with a smile and a planet that can breathe. In short, a world that gets gradually better, not a whole lot worse.

The desirable isn't that far fetched. It's not outrageous – just the expectation that we can live our short lives, in a world of abundance, as fully as possible. Yet what is modestly desirable feels less and less feasible. Impossible even. Politics, the means by which we make our collective destiny is palpably failing because it offers no way out of the mess we are in.

There are myriad reasons for this democratic malaise. Capital has gone global while democracy has remained resolutely local. The domination of a turbo-consumer culture, telling us unremittingly that a good life can be bought off the shelf. The decline of working class solidarity that denies an agent of change. It seems there really is no alternative.

So the question is how do we surmount these problems? Because it's imperative for the planet, the poor and for all of us that we do. How do we make the mildly desirable, to live together as human beings, feasible?

That is the question that will be discussing at a Compass conference and way beyond it – not the 'what' of change but the 'how'. We want a good society, one that is much more equal, sustainable and democratic, but how do we make it happen?

The heart of the debate has to focus around this simple but hugely revealing insight. In the 20th century the world developed from the top down, through command and control structures that gave orders, pulled levers and set targets. From Henry Ford, to total war mobilisation, from the NHS to Stalin's Soviet Union, taking with it every political party, the world was based on the concept of the vertical hierarchy. Just think factory.

The 21st century is taking a very different turn. Today the abiding organisational form is horizontal. Driven by the internet, and now social media, things happen through networks as power and decisions are dispersed. In this world change is complex and has to be negotiated not imposed. Consensus not conformity is the watchword. And crucially this horizontalism carries within it the seeds of a more equal future – as every voice must be heard and respected. Just think Facebook.

The urgent political test is how we balance the vertical and the horizontal. We still need political parties, after all, someone has to stand candidates and offer a coherent manifesto. But the limitations are palpable as people increasingly want to collectively create their

own world rather than fit anyone else's template. Labour in particular must jettison the belief that it alone can transform society. The forces ranged against it and the complexity of the world are now too great.

That is why Labour needs to work not just with progressives in other parties but the new horizontal forces be it Occupy, UK Uncut, 38 Degrees, Mumsnet, Transition Towns and myriad other flatter forms that are as energetic as they are engaging. But the problem of the horizontalists is their lack of ideological coherence, they are a sum less than their parts. They need a shared programme and a sympathetic government in office.

So the question is how far will progressive parties bend towards the horizontal - to open up and out? And how far are horizontal movements willing and able to join up – to become political? The answers will decide the fate of the 21st century.

The shift to a proportional voting system is a big factor that can facilitate future change. It looks as if there will be another hung parliament that nullifies the whole democratic charade as five years of government are thrashed out in secret in five days. Proportional representation recognises that the days of single party government are over and that the negotiation of a shared programme has to be conducted with the people before they vote – not after.

These are both dangerous but potentially liberating times. Change seems both far away but very close as people self-organise for a better world despite the political system, not because of it. If progressives who occupy vertical and horizontal structures can find common cause then there is hope once more. But only on the basis that change is not for others to do for us or too us – but by us, with us and for us. The tools

exist; the technology and an emerging collaborative culture. We just need the wit and the wisdom to know our strengths and our limitations and reconfigure our ideas and forces in ways that will make the desirable feasible once more.

Neal Lawson is Chair of Compass

Indra Adnan - In new New Times change happens while you are not looking

I was in the Bronx the night Obama was first elected and there was shock on peoples' faces. They had no doubt about his capabilities. But they were finding it hard to believe that the American people had chosen him. While it was Obama's personal win that would go down in history, it was the sea change in the American people that the people in the Bronx that night had not seen coming.

We had our own double take recently when Cameron recalled Parliament to try and secure a high profile, stage managed, media prepped agreement that Britain should go to war with Syria. Parliament, against expectations, voted No. Not only did the millions in 2003 who marched for peace in Iraq finally have their day but the world witnessed a global-scale shift of power when the dominoes toppled, Obama stepped aside and Putin ended up the hero of the hour, for promising to bring Assad and Syria's chemical weapons to account.

Was this Ed Miliband's triumph? If it was, he wasn't aware of it: the following days saw him defend himself falteringly against a media backlash. What had happened was that in the short gap between the parliamentary recall and the vote, millions of people increasingly disillusioned with the efficacy of war were being polled and signing petitions against military intervention. Not only the Labour Party but the Coalition too heard the clamour and responded in enough numbers to deny Cameron his Blair and Thatcher moment. Why did they listen rather than ignore the people as Blair was able to do? Because we are living in New Times.

Not the *old* New Times that responded strategically to the political redefinitions of Thatcherism by exploring the seductions of individualism, flexibility and choice which lead ultimately to the policy triangulations of New Labour. But its progeny, the *new* New Times [New Times 2.0?], arising in a post-Crash, ever-more-transnational, significantly flatter world – a "soft-powered" world that deploys the tools of engagement, connection and influence more than arms, money and clout.

No, that doesn't mean the leaders have become nicer or wiser, only that they have understood that there is a new relationship between voters and politicians – and among voters themselves - that they ignore at their peril. It is not a simple moment of populism – the same, for example, that tabloid newspapers claim to represent, where complex issues are reduced to simple headlines eliciting roars of approval or censure.

It's closer to a new network of intelligent output, arising from a myriad of sources, which as they respond to the actions of politicians shift the

debate altogether. Issues that were brought up in those few days around the Syria vote included the changing purpose of the armed forces, the revelations about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder amongst soldiers and the consequences, our changing understanding of the Arab uprisings, the unacceptable machinations of the military industrial complex, the difference between hard power and soft power and the shifting balance of influence across the globe.

Thumbs up to Putin for preferring jaw-jaw; thumbs down to Obama for using drones to avoid it. These are all factors relevant to any debate on military intervention that the online public is sharing and absorbing without prompting from their leaders. 'We' are ahead of 'them' and the pool of alternative knowledge and narratives is growing.

Far more people are joining the growing plethora of civil society institutions than political parties. The range is too extensive to describe easily, from old established aid charities which allow passive membership (Oxfam, Marie Curie) to activist sites that demand participation such as Peace Direct or Avaaz (twenty nine million and growing daily). Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Delicious – once caricatured as vehicles for narcissistic mumbling – are now just as easily cast as irrepressible, well-informed, imaginative vehicles of passion for justice and change.

This refutes entirely the idea of a passive, apathetic public. As the US strategic forecaster Jeremy Rifkin has recently described at length human beings are wired to be empathetic. Contrary to the neo-Darwinist prejudices of mainstream economics, humans are not hurtling towards atomisation but use every tool available to learn more about each other. Our expanding yet intimate media-verse amplifies these instincts for reading the resonance of others. In this environment, when

our leaders betray apathy to the plight of the majority – as a certain comedian recently suggested on Newsnight - they can no longer lead effectively. They are not on our wavelength.

The not that new horizontal

Core to this social development is the technology which enables horizontal, peer to peer relationships like never before. Social media allows even the shy to perform and respond to thousands of people as many times per hour as they please.

Politicians need not despair: they can take advantage of these new, multi-voiced conditions but they must understand the difference between hard and soft strategies for engaging with people. Networks cannot be forged on command. They arise spontaneously out of human social relationships, steadily maintained. In that sense, there is nothing 'new' about them. From parents' anti-natal groups to old Etonians, any collection of people with common interests forge networks that then help them to get their collective and individual needs met, whether formal or fun. What the internet has done is extend the reach and the range of ideas around which a network can form – a huge speeding up of connectivity which offers a variety of weak ties (Facebook 'friends' you've never met) and strong ties (communities of practice).

Some will say that your network of Twitter friends, followers and followed, bears little relation to a real time neighbourhood network: but for those who spend most of their day at work, or anyone seeking to grow their influence beyond their immediate home ground, Twitter is more tangible, more useful. If you have ever hash-tagged your hobby on Twitter and discovered there are thousands of people you never

met sharing your obsession, you might feel a closer sense of community there than in the Town Hall. These are the "new" New Times.

Cameron's Big Society project largely ignores these dynamics. Society is teeming with natural networks: in particular, those that have grown up around people in need. While researching a paper on community cohesion for The Barrow-Cadbury Trust ten years ago and again later, working for a group of senior Scottish social workers (ADSW), I was unfailingly moved by the way women in particular (not exclusively) were able to organise and help each other with little or no resources. Many of what start out as simple initiatives become full blown charities down the line and they succeed because they arise out of the community they serve. Taking money away from these networks of care and then handing it over to entrepreneurial young men (now termed "nexters" by the Big Society people) who have good ideas about how to help these same people, is folly. Any conception of the Good Society should think less about change and more about developing and enhancing what is already there – a modus operandi that Participle is championing with relational welfare and Movement for Change understands to the core.

From wellbeing to well becoming

What this newly enabled, burgeoning civil society reveals to us is the multi-dimensional, full bodied, emotional, multi-gendered and cultured beings that we are. More than that, we are active, global citizens, resourcing goods and supporting causes in places we rarely hear mentioned on TV. Witness the changing discourse: the RSA explores spirituality, Open Democracy hosts a Transformation stream, brain science and neurology are the new religion.

Our shared public identity is no longer as two-dimensional beings, focussed entirely on the material and active – what we can do in order to consume. We have revealed the other side of the coin: a fascination with our internal drives, both personal (in the form of inquiries into human capacity and social (in our explorations of culture and narratives). This is not narcissistic: it means we are thinking about human *being* as a factor of our agency, alongside human *doing*.

With depression now understood to be the second biggest cause of disability worldwide it's time to aim higher. Rather than stick within the government endorsed initiatives such as Action for Happiness, who imply that we can improve our wellbeing without capsizing the already imbalanced boat of "work-life", we might examine the thinking that got us into the mess in the first place. It is not enough for politics to conceive of people as simply needing a home, a job and a tax cut.

Joe Griffin and Ivan Tyrell are founders of the Human Givens School of psychotherapy, which synthesises and integrates many different approaches and methods in the mind sciences and therapies. They have demonstrated, over years of practice that human beings will be mentally healthy only when they get their physical *and emotional* needs met. We are quite well aware of physical needs - but consider the list of emotional needs below. Our inability to meet them explains much about our consumerist, celebrity-led, internet-addicted society:

attention (giving and receiving): a form of nutrition, the only way to download complex information
intimacy: being accepted exactly as we are
connection/relationship: both strong and weak ties are vehicles for development
community: a source of relationship and context for development

status: gives us a position within our social group
autonomy: having volition to make responsible choices
privacy: opportunity to reflect and consolidate experience
meaning and purpose: arising from being stretched in what we do and think
security: a safe environment which allows us to develop fully
sense of competence/achievement: allowing us to retain balance going forward

When any one of these is not met, we begin the journey to mental illness. Just as there are 'given' needs to assure the survival of humans, there are also 'given' capacities with which we can get these met:

- the ability to build rapport, empathise and connect
- emotion and instinct – our guidance system
- imagination – allowing us to focus away from emotion to be creative
- a conscious rational mind that can question
- the ability to 'know' – that is, understand the world consciously through patterns of data
- memory – allowing the accumulation of knowledge into understanding
- an observing self – the part which is self-conscious and objective
- a dreaming brain: dreams acting as a clearing house for emotional disturbance

We become incapable of self-maintenance when one of those capacities is damaged, or adopt a punishing life style, or live/work in a toxic environment – a context far too familiar in our modern world. How far is current political discourse from understanding even these basic

requirements? It's not enough for us to aim for well-being; to flourish we must achieve *well-becoming*, a state of constant self-renewal.

Sustainability +

It's hard to see how we can begin to create a society that allows these needs to be met without re-imagining the basics. To get on track, we need more time, space, autonomy, meaning – not easy to achieve within the current moral and political conception of hard working, obediently voting families. At the same time, help for those who have not had either their physical or emotional needs met for generations cannot be withheld if any of us want to see society grow and develop.

When Roberto Unger came to London recently, he thrilled his audience with visions of an education system which trains young people to use all their capacities – not just their ability to regurgitate facts. But human potential is poorly served by schools enslaved to a performance table, let alone by parents enslaved to their jobs: like flowers, children need space and time to blossom.

NEF's Anna Coote's 21 Hours is a brave and well thought-out attempt to begin to shift the balance from work to life, even crunching the numbers for those who believe it is economically unfeasible. Shorter working weeks, job shares, school hours, an increase in civic life, reclaiming care – it's all there. More time would give us the chance to regain consciousness, to become mindful of each other and the world we live in. Without these human resources coming on stream, society will struggle to develop - no matter how much the economy grows. Anyone who witnessed the LSE launch in 2010 saw both young and old whoop with excitement.

As much as I resist a computer analogy – we are not *like* machines after all – I've always been fascinated by the relationship between the hardware and the competing bits of software. No matter how good the hardware, the software can quickly disable it. If you drop Windows packages onto Apple basics, only bits of it will work – no matter how brilliant the designers.

Politicians, including Labour ones, tend to drop packages onto us – new models for education, care, spending, devised in isolation from the people who have to use them - expecting their theories of change to take. But after generations of unengaged, disconnected leadership, society itself has become dysfunctional, no longer supporting the people within it.

As Jon Cruddas avows, we must move beyond transactional politics - the pursuit of policies that link actions with outcomes in linear strategies. But how is Labour's preferred goal of transformation achieved? An early mentor of mine, peace academic Johan Galtung offers a clue when he makes his distinction between conflict resolution and conflict transformation.

The first is a zero sum game where the spoils are agreed and shared, usually unequally between the two parties, often sowing the seeds for future conflict. The second is an infinite game, where not only the two disputing parties are consulted for their grievances and goals, but everyone affected by their conflict is brought in too.

The multitude of perspectives, visions and capabilities, brought together into this transformational space, causes previously unimagined goals to arise. The leader's task is not to invent, but to integrate and synthesise - to recognise the commonalities, make them

visible and draw people towards a very different future than the one which either side envisaged while fighting.

What is radical about both Gandhi and Unger is their understanding of the relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm, in any system or environment. Just as society needs constant innovation to thrive, so individuals need constant development to play their part. Leaders are inspirational when they serve that dynamic; always ready to improve and serve, being the change they wish to see.

So before we clamour for a new blueprint, let's aim first to rediscover for ourselves how we can enhance "we, the people" – a people learning and evolving, who need to be engaged by a politics that understands human nature in a properly multidimensional way. That new combination of "the personal and the political" itself forms the basis of a Good Society and gives us a compass for the future.

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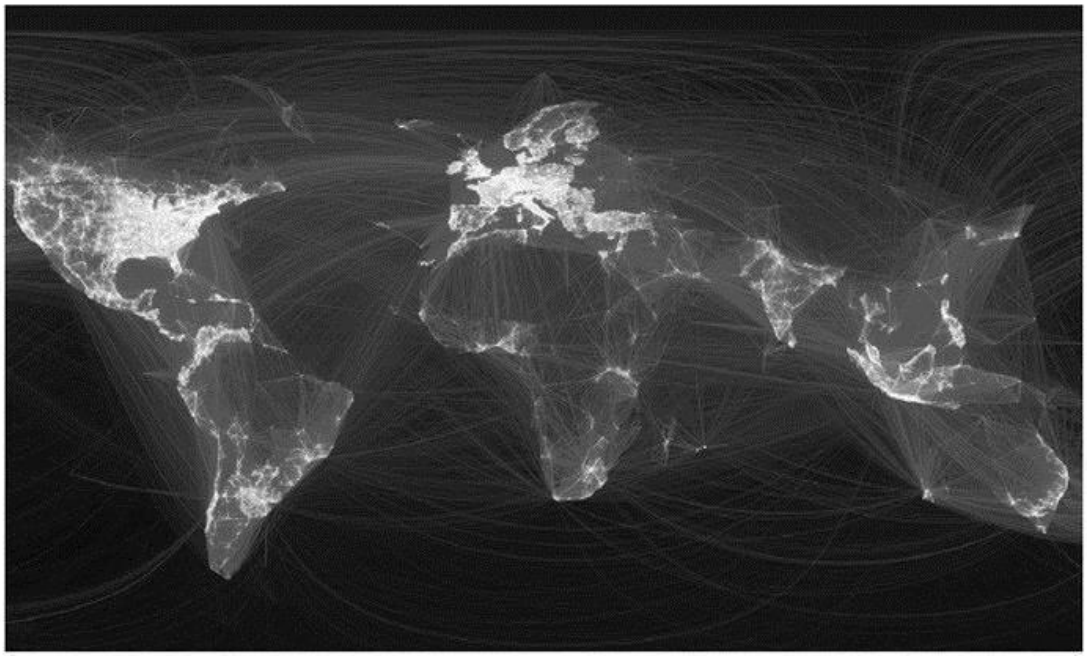
Jeremy Gilbert - How Does Change Happen and How Can We Make It?



The living map of human connections on Facebook

The Vertical and the Horizontal

Mainstream politics is bankrupt. Privatisation, weakened unions, deregulated labour markets, insane financial speculation, endless tax-breaks for the rich: we can all see where this has led. But how to respond? With disciplined organisation, a return to effective party politics, and a restoration of 'traditional' community values? Or with a rejection of a discredited political system, new forms of networked organisation and a break from all forms of hierarchy and institution? Supporters of the latter position often describe themselves as advocating 'horizontal' organisation over the 'vertical' methods of their more conventional opponents. Which way is the right one?

The answer is 'both'. Effective progressive politics always has at least two dimensions: a vertical *and* a horizontal. Effective change always needs to have an institutional dimension, consolidating gains, building

effective institutions. But to be real change at all, it must also possess an experimental dimension, working to break down concentrations of power wherever they arise, looking for new ways to maximise real freedom for all. Our enemies have always understood the multidimensional nature of power, and use every outlet and organisational strategy at their disposal to achieve their aims. We must do the same, building a movement which can encompass both the horizontal and the vertical dimensions of power and change.

We saw one version of the ongoing debate between 'vertical' and 'horizontal' politics played out in the public media over the past few weeks in the public spat between two TV comedians. Russell Brand's charismatic evocation of the possibility of radical change provoked elation and contempt in equal measure. Robert Webb, Labour Party member and Orwell enthusiast, insisted that any alternative to the received forms of liberal democracy necessarily leads to the Gulag. Webb was right that calls for total revolution and apparent appeals to charismatic authority should send a shudder down the spine of anyone who remembers the twentieth Century. But his position ignored Brand's basic argument. Brand didn't suggest that democracy as such - the rule of the people by the people - is a bad thing. Rather he claimed that the present form of liberal democracy does not actually offer the majority of citizens any kind of say in how their societies are run. In this he was demonstrably correct.

Neither of these positions is adequate on its own, but both offer insights which we can't do without. If Keir Hardie or Nye Bevan or the Pankhursts had remained as attached to existing institutional forms as Webb seems to be, or as indifferent to them as Brand claims to be, then we would never have had the Labour Party, women's suffrage or

the NHS. If we can't get beyond their dichotomy today, then democracy has no future and the planet will continue to burn.

Change and Stasis in the Twenty-First Century

But these observations alone are not enough to answer the most pressing question facing us today: how does change happen? This is a question which necessarily draws our attention to some paradoxes of the times that we have all lived through. Has everything changed? Or has nothing changed?

On the one hand, everyday life, work and culture are in many ways unrecognisable in a country like the UK from what they were even 20 years ago, never mind 30 or 40. In 1993, the World Wide Web was three years old. Mobile phones were still an expensive luxury. Public disquiet was being expressed about the declining performance of boys in relation to girls in the early years of secondary school, but few imagined that we could be entering a world in which that process would continue into late adolescence and young adulthood (the traditional point at which girls' attainment levels and ambitions were expected to collapse). The idea of a Conservative prime minister legislating for gay marriage would have seemed preposterous. The Labour Party was even still opposed to the privatisation of public services. Today there are more women than men entering the senior professions; and we all know the rest of the story.

The decline of the New Right in the 1990s, in both the US and the UK, initiated a new phase of neoliberal governance, characterised by a turn away from the social conservatism of Thatcher and Reagan and an embrace of that cosmopolitan liberalism which Blair and Clinton embodied.[i] This attitude still characterises the general mood of

contemporary mainstream culture, as the public reaction to the 2012 Olympics showed, despite noises from the Right about immigration. At the same time the general process of privatisation, labour market deregulation and growing inequality has continued unchecked, to the point where today it seems hard for many people to imagine any alternative.[ii] At the present time in the UK, the government is even desperately trying to stimulate consumer demand 90s-style, with yet another crudely-engineered asset bubble.[iii]

At the level of popular culture, the 'New Lad' backlash against popular feminism in the mid-1990s turned out not to be a flash in the pan, as many assumed it would be, but rather set the tone for a long period of retrenchment and reinforcement of gender stereotypes in public culture, updated for the age of hyper-consumerism and competitive individualism[iv] (rape joke t-shirts for the boys, *Sex In the City* box sets for the girls). This era may finally be coming to an end, challenged by a new wave of feminist consciousness, but it's too early to declare it over yet. One of our most important cultural critics, Simon Reynolds, spent the 1990s celebrating the extraordinary wave of intense innovation which characterised the electronic dance music coming from cities like London and Bristol. Today he bemoans the fact that nothing of real interest has happened to music culture since then.[v] Richard Osborne, like most of my undergraduate students, seems to agree with him.

The way to make sense of these apparent paradoxes is simply to ask ourselves who has actually benefitted most from the social, cultural, economic, technological and political changes and continuities of the past 20, or even 40 years. Just reflect on the following question for a moment. Of all the competing interests and demands which clashed during the social upheaval at the end of the 1960s, or even during the culture wars of the 1980s, which of them won? Who, 45 or 30 years

later, could be said to have actually got the world they wanted? It certainly wasn't the defenders of the post-war status quo, from the Left or the Right. In the Western economies outside Germany it has been not only the industrial unions, but also the manufacturers with whom they negotiated, once the presiding force of Western capitalism, who have lost enormous amounts of power and prestige.

Were the real winners then the partisans of the counterculture? Certainly the opponents of the 'permissive society' have comprehensively lost every battle they have fought in countries like the UK, and have lost significant ground everywhere except in enclaves of revanchist religious conservatism, even on the symbolic issue of drug prohibition. But the individualised world of postmodern consumer culture, in which sexuality is a prime commodity, looks nothing like the libidinal democracy dreamed of by the utopians of the 60s; or rather, it looks like a wholly distorted version of it, issuing not from Berkeley or Woodstock but from Silicon Valley and Madison Avenue.

And this should give us a clue as to how to answer the question. If there is one group who has clearly succeeded in actualising their vision of the ideal world, turning it into a concrete reality in which we must all now live, then it is an elite consisting of finance capitalists, technology entrepreneurs and the senior sections of the media and marketing industries. This is what changed significantly at the end of the 60s, when the uneasy post-war alliance between industrial capital, organised labour and broadly social-democratic governments broke down, unable to accommodate the accelerating demands of women, young people, non-white people and various minorities for autonomy and authority: a different configuration of interests was able to take their place as the leading force in society, never able to control its course entirely, but always capable of directing the general direction

of travel. The late 70s and 80s saw individuals such as Rupert Murdoch, Charles Saatchi, Richard Branson, Bill Gates and Steve Jobs emerging as the key exemplary figures representing a set of interests which has remained extraordinarily consistent throughout this period.

The most typical institutional forms which these interests take are not in fact the innovative firms fronted by these men. Rather, they are the investment banks, hedge funds and other financial institutions whose job it is to manage the flows of capital, investment and speculation which have made possible the global reach of those companies. The persistence and long-term success of these interests in creating exactly the world they wanted is what produces the strange sense that nothing has changed for a very long time. Technologies, cultural forms and social institutions come and go, but the interests they serve have remained exactly the same. This is why it should come as no surprise that the social makeup of the government, its preponderance of privately-educated millionaires embarrassing even the Eton-educated Prime Minister, feels like a throwback to the 1930s, never mind the 1990s. The new elite didn't take long to ensconce themselves in the traditional strongholds of the old establishment.

What this elite wants to happen is for people to buy as much stuff as possible, preferably on credit, and preferably with the people who made the stuff having been paid as little as possible for making it.[vi] That's the magic formula for maximising shareholder value and the overall value of investments. What that elite doesn't need, except under exceptional political circumstances, is old-fashioned ideas about communal identity, traditional culture, sexual morality or social justice - or new ideas about economic democracy, environmental protection or non-consumerist lifestyle - getting in the way of those goals being achieved as efficiently as possible. As such it will tend to promote a

culture which is libertarian and experimental, provided that demands for liberty and cultural experiment never take social forms which might disrupt the endless expansion of debt, consumption and profit. Where such threats are posed - by religious conservatives or political radicals - its response tends to be swift and brutal: the violent suppression of protest in the UK is only one recent example. The result is a set of social changes which further entrench this hegemonic set of interests by gradually altering the cultural terrain to their advantage.

The question for us today is: what are the mechanisms and techniques by which these changes are brought about? The answer is that they are a mixture of radically 'horizontal' and classically 'vertical' practices. On the one hand new ideas, new technologies and new organisational systems are spread through 'viral' processes of lateral communication, inventive replication and user-empowerment. Nobody was forced to move his or her life onto Facebook. On the other hand, Facebook is hardly a workers' co-operative. The concentration of capital and authority in the hands of a tiny elite remains an endemic feature of capitalism, just as it always has been. It's through the clever and ruthlessly self-interested deployment of both 'vertical' and 'horizontal' techniques that the elite which governs our lives maintains its hegemony. The question for us is: what can we do to achieve such successes in pursuit of our own goals?

How do we get what we want?

This is both a strategic and a programmatic question. Strategically it implies that we should be prepared to use the full range of resources and tactics at our disposal, from viral marketing to street protest to seeking parliamentary influence. Programmatically it implies the need for policies which have the potential effect of both breaking down

existing concentrations of power and re-constituting effective sources of legitimate authority on new, more democratic bases. In fact I think that the most radical policy programmes and analyses offered by Compass in recent years are of precisely this type. Neal Lawson's calls for the democratisation of public services - a radical alternative both to marketisation and to the patrician bureaucracies of the past - posits exactly such a possibility, as does the idea of 'co-production' as an organising paradigm for public-service delivery, which proposes that both users and providers of services should be regarded as the 'co-producers' of desirable outcomes, rather than sovereignty being accorded to just one partner in that relationship.

A crucial element of such radically democratic policies is this: they recognise that the transformatory processes which have disaggregated existing communities of interest are real and irreversible, and in response they propose to constitute new communities on a primarily horizontal basis, through egalitarian and co-operative relationships. For example, as society becomes more diverse, service users express increasingly complex and specific needs and expectations, rather than fitting into predictable categories; and this is not going to change. The solution to this is not to marketise public services or to impose more traditional models of authority on them, but to enable all participants in them to share in decision-making processes in a genuinely democratic way, enriching and energising the institution and its constituents in the process. That is what co-production means.

Such an approach also opens up political possibilities on a number of crucial fronts. Firstly, it makes possible a mainstream politicisation of the digital revolution and its consequences. Since the 1980s, outside of the hacker fringe, the anarchist-influenced protest milieu, and a few isolated web-publishing projects (e.g. open Democracy), the British

Left's attitude to these changes has been almost entirely reactive, assuming that the defeat of the industrial unions and the inevitable victory of neoliberalism were the only things that we could ever have expected from the computerisation of society. As I've suggested elsewhere, for the most part even the pioneering authors of the 'New Times' analysis of social and cultural change at the end of the 1980s seems to have found it hard to imagine the democratic possibilities that the world of the web would contain (with a couple of visionary exceptions).

But in a world where the global dominance of Microsoft Windows has been decisively displaced by the success of the free, open-source, collectively-maintained operating system Linux, it is patently obvious that capitalism as we have known it is not the only possibly beneficiary of this technological revolution. With encouragement from sympathetic governments, attuned to the potency of networks and the forms of horizontal creativity which they can engender, the enormous creative energy which gets expended every day on Facebook could arguably be enabled to develop a whole new paradigm for the management and democratisation of our polity and public sphere; or could at least be used finally to liberate the news media from corporate control. The complete lack of interest shown in such possibilities by the Labour leadership for decades is terrifying. But this is what a politics which was truly aware of the complex relationships between the horizontal and the vertical would require: a willingness to ask what real democracy might look like in the era of social media, and an acknowledgment that our democratic systems, inherited from the days when broadcast radio was new, are rusting and decrepit, in desperate need of an upgrade.[vii]

At the same time, any such approach must surely require an acute sensitivity to the politics of ecology, and to the urgency of the present environmental crisis. The relationships between the vertical, the horizontal, large-scale and the small-scale are crucial here. Only an environmentalism which has real popularity can withstand the ideological assault on it which consumer capitalism must make in order to survive. Such popularity can't be imposed from above; it can only emerge from a grassroots transformation of attitudes, expectations and desires. But the very thing that most inhibits any such transformation is the widespread sense that climate change is a problem that we can't solve even if we want to. This is because the very 'vertical' institutions of government and representative democracy have themselves become so ineffective and seem so illegitimate that it is impossible to imagine them becoming effective vehicles for action on the requisite scale. This is a good example of a situation in which the lack of effective institutions capable of wielding decisive power can actually inhibit mobility and change at even the most grassroots and 'horizontal' level. This is why the demand for radical democratic progress must be a crucial dimension of any ecological programme. The people who want to do the polluting already know how to make web 2.0 and the global financial markets work for them. Without political institutions capable of doing the same for us, any environmental objectives will remain just statements of good intent.

But conversely, the change in attitudes - the shift in the 'structure of feeling', as Raymond Williams would have called it - which a popular environmentalism would require could not be engendered solely by even a democratic and maximally 'horizontal' reconstitution of political institutions. Only a necessarily unstable process of experimentation at the level of everyday life, household organisation and the pursuit of pleasure could really make any such thing possible.

One of the most contentious but also the most widely resonant of Russell Brand's remarks - following his public altercations with Jeremy Paxman and Robert Webb - has been his evocation of a quasi-mystical dimension to his desire for self- transformation and social change, and his self-depreciating remarks about his interest in meditation and 'alternative' culture. Such attitudes have been anathema to almost all of the political Left for a very long time: at least since the punk reaction to the commercial co-optation of the counterculture and Jim Callaghan's rejection of the permissive society and the progressive education movement in the 1970s. But to continue reproducing this prejudice is to cut radicals and progressive off from an important part of our own cultural heritage.

The aspiration of the counterculture in its most positive manifestations was for a way of life answering to the needs for community, self-actualisation and freedom from the relentless demands of the commercial economy.[viii] In this it shared some concerns with conservative communitarianism. The difference was that it also gestured towards the possibility of meeting those needs in a way which was feminist as well as collectivist, liberatory as well as democratic, pleasurable as well as spiritual.[ix]

The historic allergy of the organised and moderate Left to the legacy of the counterculture, and above all to its spirit of utopian social experiment, must surely be overcome by any politics which aims to work with the grain of recent social, cultural and technological change rather than against it. So many of these changes are expressions of the demands for autonomy, for the right to experiment in our relationships and with our bodies which emerged in the 1960s. It's quite wrong to assume that those desires and demands are somehow confined to a metropolitan class of affluent professionals. They are not - rather they

are the very stuff of everyday life and popular culture for millions of working people, for whom the attractions of religion waned generations ago, but who still seek more out of life than work and shopping can give them, and who have no more desire to go back to the world of 1962 than anyone else does, except insofar as that world was still one in which the future looked brighter than the past.

Any politics which can hope to unite the 'horizontals' of the Occupy movement with the 'verticals' of traditional Left and centre-Left must therefore try to imagine itself on an expansive but inclusive cultural terrain. On such a terrain those who aspire to a radical reinvention of the family, the household and the self, as well as those who merely want to spend a bit more time with their kids and a bit less at work or online shopping, should all feel more-or-less at home. Above all, the shared mood on such a terrain must be forward-looking and optimistic. The Left has never succeeded at anything by clinging to the past.

What could enable such disparate, but mutually sympathetic, range of desires to be organised towards a common purpose? A single reasonable demand. What would that demand be? For a recognition of democratic principles as those which should inform our public life. We do not wish to see our lives governed by the logic of the market *or* by the hierarchies inherent in 'traditional' communities.

It sounds simple. It sounds obvious. But for the past 30 years the neoliberal elite has ensured that it is the principle not of democracy, but of commerce and profit-seeking which has governed ever-expanding areas of our social world. Today, across the globe, some of the loudest opposition to that project is to be heard from those who seem to wish to go back to the old days of patriarchal authority, when women and young people knew their place. The elite that governs us

already knows that this is a fantasy, and that the terrain we now fight on is not that of the 1930s or even of the 1990s. That's why they've been able to out manoeuvre us so successfully, so often, on both the horizontal and the vertical planes. But we don't have to keep letting them have everything they want: especially not now. As the neoliberal consensus fragments before our eye, and the sense that real change might be possible once again starts to circulate for the first time in a generation, we may have a historic opportunity. Let's show the world what democracy can do.

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[i] See http://jeremygilbertwriting.wordpress.com/2004/11/

[ii] See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJq8VImEBTc&feature=c4-overview&list=UUK8bnqASv4NQTSjGJh6awZw

[iii] http://www.theguardian.com/housing-network/poll/2013/mar/22/help-to-buy-budget-2013-poll

[iv] See Angela McRobbie (2008) *The Aftermath of Feminism*. London: Sage.

[v] Simon Reynolds (2011) *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past.* London: Faber & Faber.

[vi] Neal Lawson (2009) *All Consuming*. London: Penguin.

[vii] http://jeremygilbertwriting.wordpress.com/2009/12/30/postmodernity-and-the-crisis-of-democracy/

[viii] See Ellen Willis (2012) *No More Nice Girls: Countercultural Essays*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

[ix] See Soper, Ryle & Thomas (eds) (2008)*The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.