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to the special thematic section

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Special Thematic Section on "Rethinking Prefigurative Politics"

Rethinking Prefigurative Politics: Introduction to the Special Thematic Section

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Abstract

This special thematic section responds to the 21st century proliferation of social movements characterised by the slogans 'another world is possible' and 'be the change you want to see'. It explores prefigurative politics as a means of instantiating radical social change in a context of widening global inequalities, climate change, and the crises and recoveries of neoliberal global capitalism. 'Prefigurative politics' refers to a range of social experiments that both critique the status quo and offer alternatives by implementing radically democratic practices in pursuit of social justice. This collection of articles makes the case for psychologists to engage with prefigurative politics as sites of psychological and social change, in the dual interests of understanding the world and changing it. The articles bridge psychology and politics in three different ways. One group of articles brings a psychological lens to political phenomena, arguing that attention to the emotional, relational and intergroup dynamics of prefigurative politics is required to understand their trajectories, challenges, and impacts. A second group focuses a political lens on social settings traditionally framed as psychological sites of well-being, enabling an understanding of their political nature. The third group addresses the 'border tensions' of the psychological and the political, contextualising and historicising the instantiation of prefigurative ideals and addressing tensions that arise between utopian ideals and various internal and external constraints. This introduction to the special section explores the concept and contemporary debates concerning prefigurative politics, outlines the rationale for a psychological engagement with this phenomenon, and presents the articles in the special thematic section. The general, prefigurative, aim is to advance psychology's contribution to rethinking and remaking the world as it could be, not only documenting the world as it is.

Keywords: prefigurative politics, activism, political psychology, democracy, horizontalism, radicalism, social movements, resistance, political responsibility, global capitalism, crisis

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Since the emergence of the field of critical theory in the 1930s, politically committed scholars have struggled with the question of how to carry out empirical research while refusing collusion in the existing social order. In response to the rise of fascism in Europe, and drawing from anarchist traditions in the 1930s, pacifism in the 1940s, decol-

onisation, anti-colonialism and social revolutions in the 1960s and 1970s, through to the alter-globalisation movements of the 1980s and 1990s and the multi-faceted movements of today, activist researchers have engaged with social change in the spirit of their times while questioning oppressive orthodoxies. The problem of the ‘tyranny of the empirical’ — where researchers document existing phenomena and look for lawful patterns to explain them — continues to be taken up by critical theorists. Scholars drawing on post-modernist theories and discourse analytic approaches often address this problem by rejecting the procedural rules of the dominant paradigm. Psychology is now awash with studies that produce findings based on local narratives and habitats of meaning, rejecting the positivist scientific aim of identifying laws of human behaviour. But this turn to the local and to marginalized voices is not necessarily progressive in the sense of challenging the status quo. Indeed, as the papers in this special thematic section show, the relationship between local knowledge and broader systems or structures of domination is not at all straightforward.

As co-editors of this special thematic section, we came together in 2014 with the aim of working through questions at the borders of psychology, politics, and knowledge production. We brought our individual studies and perspectives to a series of conversations on field research. But we found common ground in struggling with how to carry out social change or participatory action projects in the context of the major crises associated with neoliberal economic policies overtaking whole communities throughout the globe. The dominance of market-driven models and the dismantling of the regulatory and social welfare functions of the state are central features of neoliberalism (Connell & Dados, 2014; Giroux, 2008). Resistances to the regime of neoliberalism have flourished across the globe as well. But the expansion of social change projects under a widening NGO framework, under the banners of anti-trafficking or women’s rights, for example, has been viewed by some as part of this same system of domination (Kurtiş & Adams, 2015). Many of these projects have been criticized as forms of rescue work where Western researchers bring their own agendas to ‘save the child’ or ‘save the women’, obscuring the complexity of these issues or how global economic forces contribute to the misery documented in these campaigns (Haaken, 2010). Activist NGOs confronting marginalisation and oppression in the global South and global North struggle to have their agendas recognised within global political systems characterised by individualisation, marketization, and the attendant fatalism and failures of political actors to take responsibility for suffering (Chachage & Mbilinyi, 2003; Cohen, 2000). Others grappling with this complexity have found it difficult to practice solidarity between global South and North amidst the extreme inequalities produced by the current economic order, or have struggled to realise political change within bureaucratized frameworks of action that expertly co-opt the issues and language of activism, anti-oppression and liberation (Cornish, Campbell, Shukla, & Banerji, 2012). How do we confront the capacity of advanced capitalism to incorporate critiques — resisting what Louis Althusser (1972) describes as the ideological process of introducing critique as ‘inoculation’ against fundamental challenges to the system — while still carrying out community-based research?

We seized on the concept of *prefigurative politics* as a conceptual touchstone — a way of taking up questions about radical social change — that also provided a big enough tent to hold debate and differences. The term emerged in the New Left of the 1960s and 1970s and represented a break from ‘Old Left’ practices of focusing on structural and economic determinants while failing to address how people in movements for social justice often relate to each other in oppressive ways. The term was embraced by feminism, anarchism and the New Left to bring into focus modes of practice that make it possible to envision a transformed society based on actual human capacities rather than abstract principles (Boggs, 1977). These movements were guided by the idea that radical social change requires creating and experimenting with the kinds of egalitarian practices, democratic spaces, and alternative modes of relating that anticipate a future society that cannot yet be fully realized (Breines, 1980, 1982).

In putting together this special section, we envisioned prefigurative politics as encompassing many social experiments that have the aim of fostering alternative and radically democratic practices. These groups are defined by their attempts to reconfigure social relationships based on critiques of the dominant structures associated with capitalism, patriarchy, and neo-colonialism, often by creating networks of non-commodified relations outside of monetary exchange. Many of these groups experiment with reshaping social relations on a deep level, interrogating the construction of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, class, nationality, family, ability, health and well-being. In doing so, they work to develop new forms of social engagement, prefiguring the democratic and egalitarian relations desired of a future, more just society, without waiting for large-scale structural change (Breines, 1982; Maeckelbergh, 2012). Such movements include intentional communities, workers' cooperatives, direct democracy initiatives, the alter-globalisation movement, Transition Towns, timebanks, eco-villages, citizens' municipal budgeting, the Occupy movement, community gardening, reclamation of urban spaces for social use, health co-operatives, participatory economics, permaculture, restorative justice, food sovereignty, and the open-source movement (Calhoun, 2013; Cornish, Montenegro, van Reisen, Zaka, & Sevitt, 2014; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Graeber, 2013a; Nettle, 2014; Springer, Ince, Pickerill, Brown, & Barker, 2012; Wright, 2010).

We take up a range of organizations, campaigns, and initiatives that have become part of a larger global justice movement based on inclusiveness and democratic principles. This definition separates these small-scale communities from conservative or reactionary groups that provide refuge to their followers. There are certainly many historical and contemporary cases of utopian communities where members share a vision of the world oriented toward preparing for a future apocalypse or return of a messiah. Interesting questions arise in evaluating the progressiveness of religious alternative communities or futuristic societies. Swatuk and Vale (2016, this issue) take up some of these questions in the context of transformational politics in Southern Africa. But we focus for the most part here on progressive communities that find affiliation in global justice movements seeking alternatives to the dominant economic, political and social system.

John Holloway (2010) uses the metaphor of 'cracks' in the system to represent both openings for resistance in contemporary capitalism and the vulnerabilities of the system itself. The metaphor serves as signifier of small spaces and everyday acts of resistance as well — the small cracks that cumulatively produce the crumbling of seemingly impenetrable edifices of power. The threat of these cracks in the system — the revolutionary potential of small-scale resistances — may be easily over-stated. But our interest is in moving between these micro-level local sites and the larger macro picture to see what we can learn about the configuration of practices and possibilities.

Psychology and Prefigurative Politics

Where are the links between psychology and prefigurative politics? Why might scholars of social and political psychology be interested in prefigurative politics? For any political or social psychology concerned with emancipatory social change, prefigurative politics offers a vital and interesting case, and as such, aspects of prefigurative politics have been considered within a range of psychological literatures, although with varying terminology. For traditions of social and political psychology concerned with social change, the study of prefigurative politics offers opportunities to examine the psychological dynamics behind small scale and large scale social change, and particularly the relation between the psychological and the societal, the micro and the macro, the global and the local (Campbell, 2014; Howarth et al., 2013). There is a strong tradition of psychological research on collective action

and protest (e.g. Campbell, Cornish, Gibbs, & Scott, 2010; Dixon, Levine, Reicher, & Durrheim, 2012; Haaken, Wallin-Ruschman, & Patange, 2012), which contributes to, and may benefit from, greater engagement with the protest dimension of prefigurative politics.

The study of prefigurative politics can also be appropriately situated within traditionally activist forms of social and political psychology, such as critical community psychology, liberation psychology or feminist psychology. These forms of psychology often strive to embody prefigurative ideals, that is, they strive to do psychology in ways that advance the critical, liberatory and feminist perspectives that they explore, often in a 'scholar-activist' role (Murray, 2012). For instance, within critical community psychology, Carolyn Kagan, Mark Burton, and colleagues have advanced a practice of *prefigurative action research* — where the conduct of research itself strives to instantiate the ideals of emancipatory social relations (Burton, 1983; Kagan & Burton, 2000; Kagan, Burton, Duckett, Lawthom, & Siddiquee, 2011). In a recent special thematic section, Adams, Dobles, Gómez, Kurtiş, and Molina (2015) bring together a set of papers focused on 'decolonizing psychological science' which critique the domination of the discipline of psychology by Euro-American authors and concepts, and which offer routes to decolonization.

In sum, prefigurative politics is not a topic to be addressed in a specialist branch of psychology, but one which is of relevance to a number of traditions, from quantitative studies of social and political change to more qualitative and participatory action models. For this special thematic section we welcomed manuscripts from a broad range of psychological and related perspectives that interrogate and illustrate in innovative ways the contributions and interactions between prefigurative politics and psychology.

Impetus for This Special Thematic Section

The recent proliferation of small-scale social movements in the global North and South provides the context and impetus for this special thematic section. These local initiatives developed in part as a direct response to the failed neoliberal economic politics and growing economic inequities of the last several decades. Many share affinities with earlier periods of resistance in anti-colonial struggles and the social movements of the 1960s onwards, from feminism, civil rights, environmentalism, indigenous people's rights, black/brown/red power to queer politics. While critical thinking has been central to traditions of prefigurative politics, the relationship between the emotional life of groups and their capacity to develop an analysis of their situation — one that is also responsive to changing circumstances — remains one of the more underdeveloped areas of critical social theory (Haaken, 2010; Haaken et al., 2012).

There are many lessons to be drawn from the revolutionary period of the 1960s and 1970s. The political projects of that era, from nationalist independence movements and guerrilla warfare to non-violent peace protests and myriad forms of class struggle, include heroic forms of resistance but also include bloody repression and marginalizing of dissent. Large-scale forms of struggle often meant silencing (sometimes jailing or imprisoning) some allies in the process of seizing state power. The question of how to move forward in a way that advances democratic ideals of participation remains as daunting as ever. This ethos of a prefigurative politics is in response to the tendency for many liberation movements to reproduce many of the oppressive practices of their enemies, often rationalizing violent suppression of dissent as a pragmatic response to the requirements of the period. At the same time, social movements that take seriously the aim of building an alternative to hierarchical and exploitive

systems must find means of coordinating their actions and resolving inter- and intra-group conflicts — some based on differences in power and privileges within their ranks.

Projects guided by the aim of social transformation provide important case examples for studying these dilemmas and how to work at the boundaries between small and large-scale group processes of change (Campbell, 2014; Cornish et al., 2014; Haaken, 2010; Holland & Correal, 2013). The papers in this special section attend specifically to the role of psychological dynamics in understanding the emergence, development, and sustaining of prefigurative projects. The authors also address the tension between psychological and political phenomena, recognizing that psychology, including critical social psychology, must go beyond the narrow boundaries of the academic or professional discipline (Campbell & Cornish, 2014). At the same time, activists must be able to carry some working model of psychological processes into their practices in order to change hearts and minds (Haaken, 2010, 2015).

In this set of papers, we bring a psychological lens to the study of prefigurative politics with the aim of generating greater interest among psychologist scholars in strategies and mechanisms of radical social change. As editors, some of us identify as socialists, anarchists, socialist feminists, or anti-colonialists, to greater or lesser degrees. But whatever our political affiliations or differences, we share a passion for research that contributes to social justice and reflective modes of practice. We resonate with the anthem of the global justice movement that 'Another world is possible' (see Cornish et al., 2014). As Naomi Klein (2014) argues in *This Changes Everything*, the world is changing, whether we want it to change or not. A question for us centres on how progressive scholars participate in bringing about a world that is habitable for most rather than for an elite few.

Our approach to prefigurative politics, psychology, and the issues raised in these papers developed through dialogue with the authors and with students and colleagues participating in various workshops during the course of the conception of the special section. As part of the process, authors submitted long abstracts in response to a call for papers and those that were accepted were invited to present a draft of their papers at a two-day conference at the London School of Economics and Political Science (where three of the editors are based) in March 2015. The conference was a place to work through lines of argument, offer critiques, and confer on manuscripts-in-progress. Full papers were then submitted and peer-reviewed before the editorial team selected the fourteen papers that appear in the special section. We hope that the result is something more than the sum of its parts in providing a collective perspective on the theme of prefigurative politics and psychology.

The contributions benefit from the perspectives of a range of sub-specialties in psychology and other fields, including sociology, social work, community studies, anthropology, education, communications and development. We are delighted to have a diversity of researchers working in a range of geographical contexts, including contributions from the UK, Australia, Turkey, Italy, South Africa, Greece, the US and Egypt. We also have authors at varying stages in their careers, from established professors to early career researchers and PhD students.

Our goal here is not to settle differences on what constitutes prefigurative politics. Indeed, the lively conference discussions revealed the widely divergent meanings of the term itself. Instead, we wanted to create space for open-ended inquiry, engaging with the complexity of the notion of prefigurative politics. Our aim is to promote a context-based, historically situated approach to scientific inquiry on projects guided by the idea that a better world is possible. The papers we have gathered here, which include empirical studies of projects around the globe and critical reflections on their processes, are guided by this ethos.

Although there are many overlapping themes, we have organized the papers into three overarching aims. *A first set of papers brings a psychological lens to political phenomena.* The authors start with the premise that radical social change requires a transformation in the desires and relational capacities of groups and individuals. There is often a gap between the egalitarian ideals of groups and their actual practices. In attending more carefully to psychological dynamics and the contradictions that arise between ideals and attempts to realize those ideals, we are better equipped to engage in prefigurative politics. *A second group of papers brings a political lens to settings that have been largely framed as psychological sites of well-being.* A robust literature has emerged on the mental health benefits of cooperatives, community gardens, and other local initiatives. But these projects and the literature arguing for the benefits of small-scale participatory programs often overlook critical questions that emerge on the political level. As conservative campaigns applaud 'localism' and calls for local control take on a nationalist tone, what distinguishes more progressive from conservative forms of local projects? Further, to what extent does the dominant system depend on small-scale 'alternatives' to maintain its legitimacy? This set of papers attempts to address these questions through studies of community-based projects that are widely regarded as helpful to people but may or may not be 'prefigurative' in their challenge to the status quo. *A third group of papers takes up 'border tensions' in working between the psychological and political dynamics of social movements.* Some authors work with the idea that the history of bringing psychology into politics has been a complex one, sometimes leading to the depoliticizing of social movements. For other authors, the border tensions centre on how boundaries are drawn between the personal and political, the private and the public. And for still others, the very definition of the prefigurative evokes psychological fantasies that produce inevitable collisions with reality.

Bringing the Psychological Into the Political

Although all of the papers in this special thematic section bring a psychological lens to political projects, a number of the papers focus specifically on a set of dilemmas that arise in bringing analyses of psychological processes into movement work. The authors in this group of papers describe projects where the political intervention serves as the basis of group identity, analysing dilemmas that arise in addressing emotional and relational aspects of group life.

[Awad \(2016, this section\)](#) considers the storytelling acts of individual participants in the Egyptian revolution, presenting a detailed account of personal psychological growth, which is demonstrated through a growing sense of personal agency. While the emancipatory promise of the revolution has not been fulfilled on a political level, Awad argues that there is a sustainable social impact through the psychological empowerment and personal growth experienced by participants. In the spirit of prefigurative politics, the author asks us to recognise the everyday transformations of individual, psychological change, and not only to focus on the spectacular failures of national and global power structures.

In their study of participation in an ecological social movement, the Transition Town Movement in Italy, [Biddau, Armenti, and Cottone \(2016, this section\)](#) investigate the psychosocial conditions for engagement in prefigurative politics, explaining how the meaning participants attribute to their affiliation with local groups encourages collective identification with a global ideological network. Participants' understandings or social representations of sustainability and how to achieve it both motivate and make sense of their own engagement in the movement, but also create a boundary discouraging engagement with formal politics. The authors identify a challenge for the participants as they seek to implement ecologically sustainable towns and national infrastructures. Members are motivated

to reach out and spread their message, but a deep distrust of formal politics, opposition to which is part of the very definition of members' identities, limits the potential for their wider, collective impact.

[Acar and Uluğ \(2016, this section\)](#) examine intergroup dynamics during the fifteen days in which protesters occupied Gezi Park in Istanbul, Turkey. The protests brought together very diverse groups of activists working together under conditions of extreme repression. They elaborate that the experiences at Gezi Park support the argument of [Dixon and colleagues \(2012\)](#) that collective action is a productive way not only of reducing intergroup prejudice but also of producing social change, both in terms of achieving the immediate demand that the Park should be protected and in building inter-group collaborations and coalitions after the protests. The authors focus on the process of prejudice reduction between subordinate groups representing diverse religious and ethnic minorities, feminists, LGBTI activists, the political Left, and nationalistic interest groups. In doing so, they demonstrate the positive impact of collaborative participation in collective action, on reducing prejudice, reaffirming the prejudice reduction model of collective action.

[Permut \(2016, this section\)](#) interviewed participants in the Occupy movement in the USA in her study of how participants developed identifications with the movement. She draws on the concept of 'psychological sense of community' to explore how occupiers generate a positive sense of community at a micro level within the Occupy movement. As [Cooper \(2014\)](#) argues, prefigurative political engagements, by instantiating an alternative order (e.g., inclusive participation in decision-making and care of fellow citizens), at the same time critique the existing order. Participants in Permut's study simultaneously praise and identify with the democratically inclusive and caring values that they associate with the Occupy movement, and criticise the electoral political system in the USA for being distant from the electorate and failing to care for its vulnerable citizens. The author highlights the value of such positive meaningful experience, potentially itself a valuable outcome of the protest.

[Moskovitz and Garcia-Lorenzo \(2016, this section\)](#) investigate a new social movement that has emerged *within* the organisational context of the UK National Health Service (NHS). Frontline healthcare providers, dissatisfied with the ways that the organisation of the health service limits their ability to offer good quality care, have generated a campaign that enables them to enact high-quality care, in spite of the challenging institutional environment. This movement has many of the features of prefigurative action, including horizontalism, acting according to deeply held values, distributed leadership, and developing a democratic ethos through its evolving process. Most importantly, the movement advances a vision of how participants would like healthcare to function on a broader scale. The initiatives show that prefigurative principles of 'being the change you want to see' may be taken up in diverse social settings, including within large-scale bureaucracies. Based on a series of interviews with staff members involved in the movement, the authors explain how NHS activists reinvigorate deeply held beliefs about the value and role of socialised medicine and of health workers through a process that increases collective efficacy and resistance to top-down, managerial mandates.

Bringing the Political Into the Psychological

The second approach authors have taken to rethinking prefigurative politics draws our attention to social spaces with which psychologists might be familiar but may not have conceptualised as political in the sense of carrying potential for broader forms of social change. These authors illuminate the transformative possibilities of such

spaces and highlight how the ethos of 'creating the future in the present' can be enacted in settings not ordinarily understood to be transformative.

[Guerlain and Campbell \(2016, this section\)](#) examine the activities and experiences of community gardeners in East London. While the gardeners conceptualise their activity as a positive means of connecting with others from a position of marginalisation, Guerlain and Campbell argue that this activity may be viewed as prefigurative. The gardeners do more than simply grow vegetables in their neighbourhoods; they create an alternative to the dominant economic and social order that marginalises them. Through gardening, community members address their personal challenges and scarcities in ways that help combat the multiple forms of deprivation that define their daily lives and, in the process, discover wider existential possibilities.

[Beckwith, Bliuc, and Best \(2016, this section\)](#) review the development of the Recovery Movement which is a loose network of groups organized by people managing mental health conditions or addiction who chart their own pathways to recovery, against the traditional pathologisation, medicalisation, and professional dominance of the addiction and mental health fields. The authors introduce examples from Wales, Scotland, Australia and the UK to rethink dominant medical models of healthcare around mental illness and addiction. Taking the Recovery Movement as an instance of prefigurative politics brings to this study a further set of questions concerning the relationship between practices of the Recovery Movement and the medical system and how to confront the absorption of 'alternatives' into the dominant system. The movement prefigures social change, the authors argue, as it enacts in the present a vision of a more democratic conception of health and well-being. In creating new forms of community through recovery groups, the movement challenges the dominant orthodox institutionalised healthcare service structure, provoking a rethinking of alternatives to the bio-medical model of addiction and mental illness.

[Nolas, Varvantakis, and Aruldoss \(2016, this section\)](#) investigate the notion of prefigurative politics in the context of childhood, showing how everyday spaces commonly considered outside the public sphere are marginalized in the social movement literature. In studying autobiographical narratives of children growing up in communist families in the USA, the authors draw out the meaningful political experiences of children both as political participants by default as well as strategic political activists. They also explore the narratives of children as students occupying schools in Greece in 1990/1991 to protest against proposed educational reforms, bringing into their analytical lens intergenerational issues in political identities.

Working With Border Tensions

A number of the papers look critically at some of the history of prefigurative politics and analyse border tensions that arise in working toward ideals for building a better society within the limits of the present. These papers address the tension between utopian tendencies in prefigurative politics and the barriers that emerge — some of which are produced by external factors beyond the group's control and some by internal factors.

In her review article, [Trott \(2016, this section\)](#) observes that prefigurative political activities have generated little interest in the literature on the psychology of social movements, which tends to focus on high-profile protests that engage explicitly with public policy or state power. To the extent that psychology concerns itself with theorising collective action, group processes and social change, there is much to be learnt in investigating groups oriented

toward radical forms of social transformation. These groups include large-scale social and political movements as well as smaller scale, less spectacular participatory democratic experiments. Trott argues that the literature on the psychology of social movements has a great deal to contribute to understandings of prefigurative politics, and that studying and engaging in prefigurative politics correspondingly has much to offer social psychology.

[Polletta and Hoban \(2016, this section\)](#) enlist a historical lens to analyze the concept of prefigurative politics. They focus on consensus-based decision making, taking up the varied purposes that activists have pursued in response to the wider social and political conditions of their eras. The authors contrast the understandings of radical pacifists in the 1940s, New Left activists in the 1960s, and contemporary Left activists. They argue that the enactment of radical democratic practices served to sustain stalwarts through repression in the 1940s and 1950s — times when radical pacifists were marginalised. Activists within the prefigurative movements of the 1960s, the authors argue, hoped to model new social values based on the principle that such practices of radical equality would be adopted as alternatives to capitalism. Contemporary activists, they suggest, focus particularly on unacknowledged privilege within progressive social movements. The authors draw out some of the key lessons of these three eras of radical experiments in alternatives.

[Lin, Pykett, Flanagan, and Chávez \(2016, this section\)](#) enlist a women-of-colour feminist theory and a reproductive justice framework in their paper on survival politics, illustrated by a case study of the We Are BRAVE programme in Oregon, USA. The programme encourages people of colour-led organisations and social justice activists to integrate reproductive justice into their work, including and far beyond a focus on abortion access. They describe and analyse three strategies: creation of radical ‘homeplaces’ as sites of connection and places to recognise and resist domination; ‘theory in the flesh’ which grounds politics in bodies, spaces, and shared experiences of both; and coalitions as subjectivities — ways of living and deepening intersectionality. Each strategy situates reproductive justice in and with other struggles, and emphasises the social and relational dimensions of prefigurative politics, drawing attention to the operation of stratifying forces of race, class and gender within movements that strive to be prefigurative.

[Wallin-Ruschman and Patka \(2016, this section\)](#) draw parallels between prefigurative politics and the ideology and practice of ‘safe spaces’ in a US college course on feminist consciousness and in a faith community’s ‘inclusive’ liturgy. They note similarities in the value placed on building community and enacting alternative futures with a trusted group of like-minded others. They draw out the tensions that arise in making the classroom ‘safe’ for persons experiencing diverse forms of marginalisation and in adapting worship services to include people with intellectual disabilities, and the tendency to over-emphasize community in the construction and practices of such literal and figurative spaces. They propose ‘critical collective spaces’ as alternatives that provide valuable community-building opportunities, accommodation to diversity and resistance to oppression in a prefigurative fashion.

Focussing on Southern Africa, [Swatuk and Vale \(2016, this section\)](#) examine prefigurative politics as an alternative to a strategic politics which engages with the state, addressing the classic critical debate of whether prefigurative experiments are powerful enough to mount a real challenge to the existing political order (e.g., [Campbell, 2014](#); [Farber, 2014](#)). While they are critical of the ways that the modernist state form has failed to bring the majority of Africans the most basic physical or economic security, they do not consider prefigurative politics to be a sufficiently powerful alternative. They argue that in the Southern African context, state power is continually reasserted, both by liberation movements which strive to achieve a better life by achieving a better state, and by mainstream politics which co-opts alternatives in the service of state power. The recent student movements in South Africa,

they suggest, may hold greater potential for change, as they combine their radical critiques with engagement in strategic politics.

On the other side of the psychology/politics divide, Power (2016, this section) argues that within the Transition movement to create climate-resilient futures for communities, insufficient attention has been given to 'Inner Transition', that is, the processes of egalitarian decision-making, interpersonal dynamics and leadership internal to a prefigurative political group. She highlights how a 'doing/thinking' binary was evident in the Transition initiatives she studied, so that participants de-valued critical reflection on their own processes, feeling that 'action' was more important. While Swatuk and Vale argue that the small-scale and localist nature of prefigurative experiments are not enough to change southern African politics, Power's article reminds us of Paulo Freire's (1970) insistence on the simultaneous necessity of both reflection and action for emancipatory social movements. As Power argues (and Swatuk and Vale also detail), without attention to the modes of organisation and leadership employed, movements too easily repeat the failures of the dominant systems they intended to critique.

Conclusions: Psychology for a Prefigurative Politics

Collectively, this set of articles makes the case for psychology to explore prefigurative political engagements as sites of psychological and social change. They show both how established psychological theories can offer useful perspectives on what is happening at the levels of self, identity, relationships, community and modes of solidarity, and how empirical engagement with prefigurative movements may produce new insights. Further, many of the papers extend psychological theories concerned with group processes, such as consensus, collaborative leadership, inclusion of diversity, and relations between individual, group and societal change (Acar & Uluğ, 2016, this section; Awad, 2016, this section; Biddau et al., 2016, this section; Polletta & Hoban, 2016, this section; Power, 2016, this section; Trott, 2016, this section). Other contributors question the social psychological dynamics of prefigurative spaces, exploring what constitutes a 'health-enabling space' (Guerlain & Campbell, 2016, this section), a 'critical collective space' (Wallin-Ruschman & Patka, 2016, this section), a space of alternative modes of relating and caring (Permut, 2016, this section), and the political nature of everyday spaces (Nolas et al., 2016, this section). And several papers foreground the political psychology of bodily health, through investigating the health-enabling potentials of the Recovery Movement (Beckwith et al., 2016, this section), the urgent politics of survival in a struggle for reproductive justice (Lin et al., 2016, this section), and the politicisation of healthcare providers around the ambition of offering care in the best sense of the term (Moskovitz & Garcia-Lorenzo, 2016, this section). In each of these ways, the articles offer to extend psychology in new directions.

But the articles do more than expand psychology into these critical areas of inquiry. They are provocative. They identify cracks that have been opened, in a National Health Service, a Recovery group, a community garden, a classroom, an urban park, and a variety of social movements. They encourage us to see emancipatory politics where we might not previously have seen them — in small personal changes, in the everyday, in childhood — and ask us to question how big a change has to be to be significant (Awad, 2016, this section; Guerlain & Campbell, 2016, this section; Nolas et al., 2016, this section). At the same time, they assert the necessity of critical analysis of the macropolitical movements of our time and contexts where states repeatedly fail to provide citizens with basic forms of human security (Swatuk & Vale, 2016, this section). In various ways, the papers problematize the assumption that utopian ideals and pragmatic realities are at odds, inviting us to observe their simultaneity.

Much like other either/or dichotomies, it is important to resist forced-choice alternatives that leave out the irreducible complexities and uncertainties attached to any broad-scale movement for social change.

We hope that as a whole, this special thematic section invites curiosity and engagement in the various alternatives to individualising, divisive, environmentally unsustainable and inequality-producing forms of social organization that characterize so much of neoliberal global capitalism. Psychology has been all too easily incorporated into oppressive systems, from individualising the determinants of mental health and social problems, to investigating how to maximise individuals' and groups' capacity to produce profit. We hope the collection of papers reminds readers to keep asking the existential question posed by David Graeber (2013b), paraphrasing Marx: "assuming that we do collectively make our world, that we collectively remake it daily, then why is it that we somehow end up creating a world that few of us particularly like, most find unjust, and over which no one feels they have any ultimate control?" (p. 222). This special section does not answer this question. But we do hope that the papers contribute to the search.

Ideals are vital to social movements even as they produce potential for repression in the name of carrying them out, and terrible disappointments when leaders or movements betray those ideals. The productive interplay of psychology and prefigurative politics adds valuable analytical dimensions to understanding the attractions, manifestations, achievements and disappointments of efforts to instantiate those ideals. We hope that this special section will stimulate further research, intensify lively debate, and encourage greater research participation in projects throughout the globe that challenge neoliberal capitalism and further global justice by embodying the ethos of democratic radical alternatives.

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