The Contradictions of Localism: An Interview with Greg Sharzer

Jordy Cummings

Jordy Cummings[1] (JC): Your book is called *No Local* and it is an immanent critique of inward looking reactions to neoliberal capitalism. One poignant episode you recount surrounds urban agriculture, and the idea that we've come to a really problematic situation when poor people are encouraged to grow their own food in addition to working their jobs and raising their kids. What is the political or strategic problem with localism? What are your thoughts, for example, on campaigns like "Occupy the Economy" and so forth?

Greg Sharzer[2] (GS): First I'd like to quickly define some terms. 'Local' is a space distinct from larger regional, national and international spaces. But it's also relational, a moment in the global capital circuit. It's amorphous, changing depending on what you're measuring: political, social, economic, and so on. 'Localism' is the fetishization of scale. It's assigning some positive benefit to a place precisely because it's small. It's impossible to be anti-local, unless you're against units of measurement. But I think it's a mistake to think that small is always beautiful. Localism assumes 1) local economies are fairer than global economies, 2) local spaces are autonomous from, and therefore more open to democratic control than larger spaces, and 3) the political project of revolutionary socialism is dead or, more accurately, never existed in the first place. I think these problems mean that localist schemes for change, such as

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community gardens, local currencies and transition towns become pieces of the broader capitalist economy, no matter how sincerely their participants may wish to change it.

Because of these problems, I think localism is a way to avoid, rather than confront capitalism. Most localist schemes assume from the outset that capitalism can't be changed wholesale, so it's better to make piecemeal reforms around the edges. Occupy The Economy says the capitalist system is the problem – not so controversial for left-localism – but goes further and says the heights of industry, the banks and industrial corporations – need to be taken over and run for the benefit of all of us. Therefore I wouldn't call Occupy localism. They're far more ambitious than a transition town and resemble the socialist industrial democracy schemes of 100 years ago.

But Occupy's problem is idealism. Their occupation will be accomplished by everyone showing up at corporate headquarters and discussing democracy. They even call for activists to set a date. After that, socialism (though they're careful to avoid that word) will be accomplished...through a constitutional amendment! Apparently capitalists and politicians have a long history of giving up their power voluntarily, and general strikes happen when everyone decides to walk off the job. This doesn't engage with the real history of the labour and socialist movements, which show that you need to win specific victories in different workplaces and community campaigns, while organizing political alternatives that fight to extend those victories.

If Occupy represents extra-local activism, I can see why some people feel localism is more realistic. But the kernel of truth in Occupy the Economy is that localist schemes don't challenge either state or capital effectively. We need to ground dreams of revolution in effective strategy, not only to figure out concretely how to build fighting social movements, but to convince those drawn to localist schemes that we can go beyond the local.

JC: Structurally speaking, it seems that localism involves some aspect of commodity fetishism, in particular in its co-optation of opposition within capitalist social property relations. Would you make a practical distinction between localist political activism, such as those involved in urban agriculture, food security and so on, and the more obvious examples of ethical consumerism, such as "fair trade", alternative currencies and the like.

GS: In *No Local*, I distinguish between pro- and anti-market localism. The latter is about making capitalism fair and ethical, which I don't believe is possible. I think those involved in urban agriculture and food security activism are often far more anti-market, seeing serious problems in how capitalism treats the food supply and looking for solutions. I think the former are simply wrong; I agree with much of the latter critique but I don't feel setting up alternatives economies are the best way to go.

Both strategies can naturalize capitalist social relations, separating economics from politics and believing that the latter can be 'fixed' without the former – or, as Marx accused Proudhon, taking the good from capitalism and dropping the bad. In that sense, both pro- and anti-market localism suffer from commodity fetishism, mistaking the world of things for the world of people. Pro-market localists believe capitalism can be fixed if things are distributed more ethically. Anti-market localists take existing production relations as fixed and seek change at the margins. I've always found this a little tragic, since localism is about bringing agency back to people. But as I point out in the book, I think part of what forms localism is pessimism that union and party organizing can restrict any of capital's rights.

And yet there are important differences between these approaches: people seeking anti-market localist alternatives want the same sort of fundamental change that socialists want. We just differ on how to achieve it. For me, this requires mass, democratic unionization, particularly among agricultural workers, regulation and controls on existing supply chains as steps towards nationalization, and of course, worker control over industry as a long-term goal. I think many anti-market localists would be open to those ideas.

JC: Can you get into the theoretical, or analytical problems with "localism" as part of a project towards eco-socialism or environmental justice. I know people, for example, in Vermont, who are not necessarily "politicized" aside from being "progressive" in the American sense, voting for Sanders, etc. – and they grow their own food and other supplies, raise their own animals. I remember mentioning your book to a friend down there and he said to me "Of course we're not changing the world, we're just trying to raise our families"...and pointing out that for every person who raises chickens, grows corn, that takes money out of the agri-business complex. When you were interviewed in "North Star", commenters pointed out the plethora of local co-operative businesses that are a significant part of the economy in the U.K. What is wrong with

these kinds of arguments, and what is the concrete role of these rural types? Can we find a balance between talking about the "idiocy of rural life" on one hand, and the romanticist and moralistic rusticism of some quarters on the other hand?

GS: To take your last question first, absolutely, industrialism vs. romanticism is unhelpful. However, I'd argue that's precisely what the utopian forbearers of localism did by mistaking capitalism, a system of extraction of surplus value from workers' labour, for its consequences in industrial society. Instead they looked back to a mythical time of petty commodity production. So we need to understand capitalism much more precisely, in order to figure out what to do about it.

So on economics….I've received many comments along the lines of, "You say that local alternatives are impossible, but here's an example of a project or genre of projects that has been viable for years." Invariably these are projects supported by the fierce determination of local activists, who have managed to carve out a space – say, for a cooperative or community garden – by mobilizing progressive local politicians, or conducting enough community mobilization that these projects get a level of stability. In which case, saying 'no' to the local is just contrarian, a denial of the facts.

People who want to make their lives better by growing their own food or meeting their neighbours should do so. Workers need to lower the cost of reproducing their labour power. And I appreciate the honesty of your friend, who knows he's not changing the world. It's when people start assigning undue political significance to localism that I think it should be questioned. It's not a question of whether cooperatives are possible – clearly they are – or whether they can make life better for some workers – clearly they can. The resilience and creativity of social enterprises are not in question: their capacity to serve as a base for anti-capitalist organizing is.

To maintain themselves, they have to make the same kind of compromises that a private firm makes, cutting back in times of recession, rationalizing production and so on. They may not be malign about it, they may spread the costs around more fairly rather than making swingeing cuts, but the discipline that all social enterprises face is imposed by the marketplace, not bad bosses. Politically, these schemes are contradictory: they provide a lesson in social production, and Marx saw them demonstrating "how a new mode of production naturally grows out of an old one." But he didn't see them as revolutionary agents; the funda-

mental antagonism between capital and labour still has to be addressed through political and economic action.

It's impossible to socialize capitalism without confronting the powers-that-be. Saying that workers could build alternatives to capitalism, without taking its vast productive capacity away from the capitalists, is like saying that capitalist power is voluntary. It implies people can choose how to participate in the global economy. But by definition, capitalism means workers are alienated from the means of production: the social wealth they produce is stolen from them, taken into private hands, and used against them. If it's not, if workers aren't coerced by enclosure, and the mass of dead labour set up to suck living labour from them, then we don't even have capitalism, just some form of expanded reproduction.

And then the political question…How do we organize this confrontation? We need to 1) identify the central relationship of coercion – workers are forced to sell their labour power to survive and 2) build people's confidence to resist and transform it. Instead of these, I see localists encouraging belief in the power of local schemes to outcompete capitalist enterprise and transform capitalist economies through the agglomerating power of a good example. This is not only challenged by the history of capital centralization and concentration, it opens the door to co-optation. Lately, the ruling class has become very good at localizing, because it's another way to devolve responsibility for cutbacks to local administrations, while imposing new forms of market discipline at the micro level. We don't need to stop making local change; we need to consider how local economic schemes fit into political strategy.

Everyone has the right to say, "The community garden or local currency I participate in has made me aware of how capitalism works and given me the courage to resist," and they're correct. Motivation, as I make clear in the book's introduction, is highly individual. However, Marxists believe that people's ideas change through struggle. It's only the experience of collective organizing and mass resistance that builds people's confidence to run society themselves. If we're going to run the factories and offices democratically, like Occupy the Economy wants, we need to fight to make them our own, not try and set up spaces away from them. And, because capitalism is a political as well as an economic system, we need to engage in all struggles – anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-nuclear, etc. – where capital is trying to make life worse. In other words, there is a choice: it's not 'you build your farm, I'll build my social movement', and let's meet in the pub afterwards.

This is not an abstract problem. For example, during the protests in Gezi Park in Istanbul, some protestors set up a community garden there. It would be sectarian foolishness not to celebrate the diversity of tactics that led to a garden being planted there. However, some questions remain. How did the gardening tactic resonate with people, particularly after the ferocity of state repression? Some organizers suggested that the garden was the work of 'middle class' activists who were swept aside when the mass of people came into struggle. Is this true, and if so, how did the activists use it to reach out to workers?

As I write, the protesters have just been cleared from Taksim Square in Istanbul after weeks of breathtaking occupation. I can guarantee the kind of political discussions that the movement began are breaking down mental blocks to socialism much faster than years of painstaking social enterprise-building.

JC: I'm wondering if you can mention aspects of localism that play a dialectical role, that is to say, both support and subvert capitalism?

GS: Yes. Every small project is a set of property relations partially removed from capitalism. Internally, it can refuse to replicate hierarchal work relations, and distribute goods via a direct exchange or scrip scheme. Yet, as I mentioned above, the scheme is embedded in a global market in the commodity labour power, which means it has to adapt to it by lowering wages, speeding up work or finding a client base willing to pay more for goods that other capitalists can produce more cheaply. I think non-capitalist schemes can also signal capital that a previously non-commodified space is now commodifiable, like the demonstrated link between artist squats and gentrification. So capitalist social relations get buttressed. I'm deliberately leaving out "the power of a good example" as an example of undermining capitalism, because I don't think it's at all clear that a good example works in the way proponents intend. When projects adapt or fail, they lend credence to the idea that there is no alternative.

JC: What about a set of social property relations that is neither capitalist nor socialist, in the schematic senses of a society of market compulsion on one hand, and of free-association and disalienated labour on the other?

GS: I don't think so, if we conceive of the world market in a Marxist sense as a system of global attempts to reduce the cost of socially necessary

abstract labour time (SNALT). The problem with localist, non-capitalist, Proudhonist, etc. schemes is they assume that they get to decide whether their project is capitalist or socialist. Capitalism doesn't allow that kind of autonomy: it operates outside the control of a multinational corporation or national market, let alone an individual firm. Socialist property relations are an oxymoron: appropriating the means of production means breaking the power of the state that enforces capitalist property rights. Before that, we can have varieties of capitalist power relations – for example, state capitalism, where property is monopolized by a ruling elite dedicated to forms of redistribution. But social property relations imply that the global market no longer coerces firms to achieve SNALT. I could see circumstances in which a redistributive state subsidises social enterprises which don't meet SNALT with revenues from other sources: for example, Venezuela using oil revenues to support reclaimed factories. But is it non-capitalist to use one segment of the circuit of capital to partially remove another segment? Can a change in the mode of production be made through appropriating rents? Maybe, although I don't see how this is sustainable in the long run. I think Manuel Laraburre's work on Venezuelan worker cooperatives is very useful for pointing out the strength and limitations of this strategy.

There's a temporal aspect to this: certainly, mass struggles throw up examples of workplaces and institutions freed from capitalist property relations. When workers seize a factory and it no longer produces for the world market, that can't be described as capitalist. But that's temporary: the struggle must continue to overthrow the state, or be thrown back so that seized enterprises still have to meet SNALT. A strike is not about creating social property relations, but about disrupting capitalist ones. If strikers generalize their action and begin to create forms of dual power, producing for distribution by local workers' councils, for example, that could be 'in between'. But it's in between precisely because it's not stable, and either capital or labour must win.

The question of struggle is what saves this discussion from dissolving into the semantics of how one defines capitalist property. If people are fighting capitalist social relations, new forms of production, distribution and association are born – not from the blueprints of participatory economics but from the practical questions involved in running liberated cities and countries. The point is that these relations are in motion, according to the rhythm of class struggle. You can't create non-capitalism away from the political question of movement-building. Those attempts to break out will be re-incorporated.

Finally, this relates to Marxism directly. Marx fought against mechanical materialism, which states that people are just products of history and structures. This missed people's active role in making history. Against the fatalism of some forms of political economy, localism has stressed agency, which is a good thing. But the problem is it's idealist agency: if we have the right ideas, we can reshape the world simply by demonstrating them. Socialists can't re-emphasise mechanical materialism as a response. Rather, we need historical materialism: an understanding of how people make history on the terrain provided for them.

Political economy is determinist in the sense that it sets the terrain upon which we act, one of the conditions Marx referred to when he said 'we act upon a world not of our own making'. The question is not one of rejecting determinism entirely; that way lies voluntarism and ultimately lifestylism. Rather, it is a question of figuring out how much determining power capital has; or, put another way, the relationship of political economy to the working class. The ruling class uses dead labour to control the living and so has tremendous power, but it's not total: capital still needs fresh living labour to mobilize the machines and create surplus value. This is the potential power of the working class: capital needs it. And it's why schemes for social change that ignore how to mobilize workers, setting examples for them instead, miss the fundamental antagonism at the heart of capitalism.

JC: I'm wondering how you would gauge the position of the petit-bourgeoisie. Is localism petty-bourgeois, and as well, can you tell me how you would define "petty bourgeois"? And on the terms of actually-existing petty bourgeois interests, does localism contradict their interests in the same sense as it does for the working class? If we accept that there is a petty-bourgeoisie, not in the Poulantzian "new middle class" sense, but in the sense of small entrepreneurs, shopkeepers, and indeed farmers, how is localism indeed damaging to their own interests? Or is there a "petty bourgeois at all"?

GS: In *No Local*, I use Erik Olin Wright's analysis to describe the petty bourgeois as a group trapped between workers and capital. This is wrong, because a middle layer is too vague a concept to be of any analytical, let along strategic use. Worse, if we introduce new classes with the same analytical weight as labour and capital, the labour-capital antagonism disappears, along with Marxism. This is one of the unhappy side-effects of the 'creative class' thesis, although even before that, there were decades of

'new middle class' theorizing: replace the relationship to the means of production with occupations, or even shopping habits, and the list of middle classes is endless. In 1995, after much of the new middle classes debate ended, Robert Weil came up with a useful characterization: the petty bourgeois is a class that acts as both capital and labour. Their highly specialized knowledge is their capital, which they control and use to appropriate surplus value – their own surplus value. But they don't produce or own enough to stop working and become a real capitalist.

This fits very well with the definition of localism as petty bourgeois. The tension that comes from embodying the capital-labour antagonism personally causes a desire for classlessness. In turn, this causes a desire for small: to return to a mythical artisanal economy where the world-historical pressures to accumulate and resist exploitation aren't arrayed against you inside your own head. I think it's impossible to understand localism without understanding it as an ideology, not just an economic philosophy, though of course this ideology has material roots.

It doesn't damage the petty bourgeois's own direct interests, because those interests are to avoid class conflict and escape the constant need to accumulate and alienate. But it damages those members of the working class who also want to escape (which is nearly everyone), and whose natural instinct towards class solidarity gets blunted in favour of small-scale communitarianism. A philosophy of solidarity and confrontation can also sweep up the petty bourgeois along with the working class – in any urban revolution, the small shopkeepers often side with the revolutionaries. Given the historical weakness of the left, that's been reversed: the working class is presented with the petty bourgeois point of view. It resonates because nothing else is on offer at the moment, and the hope of being petty bourgeois remains an elusive dream for workers, sustaining millions of people in their daily drudgery or unemployment with the false hope of freedom.

JC: Your make use of Marxist rent theory, it seems we are both big fans of the third volume of Capital. Can you give us an explanation of rent theory and how it connects to these issues? How is it useful to you? And how has it been used incorrectly? I've always thought how one conceives rent theory is informed by how one sees the origin of capitalism, am I right to see this?

GS: I claim no expertise on rent theory, but as Neil Smith once said to me, nobody who claims to get it actually does. It's one of the hardest

parts of Marx's theories, because it's not intuitive. Anyone who works 'gets' exploitation; but how is that connected to land?

I attempted to reintroduce rent because it seemed that Marxists stopped talking about it in the 1980s. Yet capitalist exploitation still has to take place somewhere. Rent is the theory of how social barriers to investment create temporary advantages for capitalists. These may appear as physical barriers, like a fertile or well-located plot of land. But if one capitalist owns a better piece of land than the other, the second one can apply enough capital to change her land until it's just as good.

The point is the barriers to capital flow are social, and the social barriers of ownership seemed to be just as important today – even more so, given the global push towards urbanisation. So I think it's impossible to understand how urban development happens without understanding rent, the extra money gained by landowners from situating production on their property, which other capitalists can't immediately recreate.

Another way of putting this is that land is not outside the capital circuit. And this is important for localism, because there's this idea that urban agriculture is somehow protected from capitalism by virtue of its small size. But urban farms have to compete with other capitals far more than rural capitals do: the competition for land use in cities is intense. If we can understand how rent is generated, we can understand how developers make space for urban gardens as a way to raise the value of their condominium towers, for example. We can also avoid the naive notion that poor, ex-industrial places like Detroit are outside of capital because of all their spare land. In line with radicals there, I'd argue it's precisely the new lands created by long-term economic crisis that makes a place like Detroit so useful to capital. There is no outside to capital: it keeps finding new ways to destroy 'inefficient' property or commons, like Detroit's bankruptcy.

This is not to say things like community gardens are impossible; of course there are many places where they're not only possible but approved by municipal administrations. But my point is that those places are shielded from rent pressures by particular circumstances. They're temporary, at least in the medium term (witness the pressures on the greenbelt in Seoul, for example), and can't be replicated everywhere. For example, Havana turned its spare land into farms because it had no property market. That's not going to work elsewhere on a grand scale.

JC: If local solutions are merely defensive at best, what should socialists be doing about the environmental crisis? One position holds that

a lot of eco-socialist discourse relies on what is called "catastrophism"; myself, I'm sympathetic to the position of Henwood, McNally and other contributors to that book[3]. On the other hand, there are those who accuse those who critique catastrophism of underrating the importance of the ecological dimension of our struggles, even to the point of denigrating their centrality? On both a strategic and theoretical level, where do you stand on this debate?

GS: Rather than saying all ecological struggles are local, I'd say they're spatial. They're always rooted somewhere, which allows people directly affected to shape them – recent activism against tar sands pipelines and fracking are great examples of this. However, eco-struggles are the best example of the limits of localism. On the one hand, capital always 'lands' somewhere, it's never dematerialized. When workers producing a key component of a car go on strike, they can bring the entire production process to a halt, even if the factories are widely scattered. When indigenous people blockade a single pumping station on a pipeline, they can stop the entire project – the company can't exactly build a new pipeline to go around them. The path-dependency of capital gives local direct actions tremendous disruptive power.

On the other hand, a pipeline isn't the result of a local business. Oil companies can bring a lot more pressure to bear on local campaigns precisely because they're extra-local, like when Enbridge Pipelines Inc. gave $44,000 to the police, at the same time as they need police to protect their property. Local actions need to be scaled up, so that capital can be fought on many fronts: financially, politically, direct action, and so on. I don't think this is controversial, but what I'm arguing is that the implicit, sometimes explicit, message of localism is: "stop there". If there is any confrontation, don't make it too big. Start locally to outcompete or detach from capital.

Put more abstractly, space is not a substitute for social relations. Starting small still poses the same questions of power that mass movements pose, and to challenge, restrict and defeat the extra-local powers trying to shape localities, we need to get big. The way not to do this is by terrifying people with catastrophe. The north pole officially became a lake a few days ago: there's plenty of reason to be afraid. But fear is a demotivator: making that fear existential – the entire basis of our civilisation is being undermined! – is a sure-fire way to get people to do nothing

3 Lilley, S., D. McNally, E. Yuen and J. Davis. (2012). *Catastrophism: The Apocalyptic Politics of Collapse and Rebirth*. Oakland: PM Press.

at all. It's remarkable that a movement based on strict adherence to local or micro-economies and politics – such as intentional communities and even some transition towns – relies on such sweeping generalisations about the state of the world and human nature.

In response to catastrophists, I guess I'd say: "OK, we agree that capitalism is destroying the planet. What's the best way to stop it?" Detaching and forming more egalitarian, green-friendly communities is premised on the old 'propaganda of the deed' – build it and they will come – model. But capitalism ensures most people are too busy or desperate trying to survive to drop it all and participate in these new models. At which point, catastrophists can go one of two ways: be absorbed with building a better life for themselves right now, or consider strategically how to gain allies. That means speaking to people where they are, about what they're concerned about. Leadership comes from supporting and empowering people to solve their actual problems, not telling them to abandon those problems and focus on planning for the end of the world – whether that end is posed as sweet revenge, our collective doom or a chance to build a new society.

The question of our ecological survival is political, not technical. That means reframing our struggles. Rather than saying, "Runaway global warming is going to drown all of us and lead to mass die-off of flora and fauna and us, so stop the pipeline", it means saying, "The poor safety record of pipeline companies mean that, when spills happen, toxic chemicals are going to destroy your homes, playgrounds and the health of your loved ones." Both are true: only one poses concrete political questions for those living near a pipeline.

JC: We've seen a general discrediting of the dominant forms of left organization – top-down vanguard parties; formless affinity groups; bureaucratic social democracy? What kind of organization do we need to be building on the Left in order to move beyond these concerns, and move beyond localism and towards class struggle? Barring full-scale international socialism, something on the distant horizon, what can be done on the level of national states? Of course there can be no "socialism in one country" or delinking, but isn't it incumbent upon us to suggest new kinds of organization without falling into a pattern of "stagism"?

GS: Part of localism's appeal is to stop fussing with theory and organizational models and just get on with doing what you can, right now. But this conceals a pessimism about the prospect for left victories. It takes collective struggle off the agenda and leaves capital free to impose

itself. This is a natural reaction to the constant assault of austerity, which have succeeded thanks to 30 years of neoliberal defeat for the workers' movement in the Global North. Without an organized left to get involved with, the appeal of DIY is much stronger: why bother with discussions about long-dead revolutions when you can rejuvenate a traffic island by planting vegetables on it? There's a parallel trend which crosses left and right, and that's to focus exclusively on the mechanisms of power – again, tempting now that we know the NSA is reading and watching everything. But these are not only hidden theories of powerlessness – a concession to the nihilism that capitalist triumphalism feeds on. They miss the exciting developments on the left.

For example, the recent and continuing crisis of the British SWP is a reference point for English-speaking leftists, at least, and I've been very impressed with the rethinking of the International Socialist Network and others. They've identified the centrality of anti-oppression politics, not just paying lip service to gender or race; the need for pluralism; and a sober assessment of the left's recent history, as starting points. And of course, there's been the recent mass explosions of struggle in Turkey, Brazil, Egypt and elsewhere. They raise incredibly exciting questions about strategy, dual power, and how to raise demands that can draw layers of people into sustained political campaigns. I think the job of socialists is to learn from and be inspired by these movements, and figure out how their lessons can be applied elsewhere. For the first time in many years, we see the prospect of mass resistances breaking out across the globe, due to highly specific local conditions on the one hand, and the overarching logic of capitalist austerity on the other. Suddenly the old question of: how do we organize this into something that can last, and that can make real gains? – makes sense again.

I read 'stagism' as an attempt to cut off a revolution's momentum, declare its limits to be national borders and impose a new elite to manage it all. All social movements have stages; but equally, they can leap through different scales and inspire other movements in remarkable ways, the Arab Spring being the most recent example. I think that's the best argument against stagism: showing concretely how learning from, and contributing to international movements can help change our own societies.

This is another word for a global network of socialist parties, which seems to be a tremendously unfashionable concept these days. But I don't see how we can get around it. Capital is internationalized, and although it's just as internally divided as ever, its various factions can

muster international resources – legal, financial, military – that a left party in one country can't fully counter. The working class still exists in ever more precarious, gendered, racialized forms, and yet with the vast potential for unity. The advanced sections of the working class still need political organization. Without extra-local political organization, capital can play these sections off against each other.

JC: What kind of struggles exist right now that link the local with the global? What are their limitations and what are their advantages? If we are to say of course "no local", how can we situate, in general, globality, without falling into the trap of Hardt and Negri?

GS: I would define a linking struggle not only in terms of scale, but also as one that reveals social relations. Again, the anti-tar sands movement is a good example of this: fight a pipeline and you end up fighting multiple levels of government, the police and multinational corporations. You confront the legacy of colonialism in Canada and the U.S. It's a truism to say that every local struggle contains the seeds of global ones – but the keyword there is 'struggle'. Raising chickens, growing your own vegetables, processing your own biofuel is not struggle. (Unless the land you're doing it on is wanted by a developer, in which case the non-capitalist alternative has to quickly learn how to confront capitalism.) A local struggle has to confront some aspect of capitalist power, and through that campaign raise the confidence of its participants to fight back, and provide a way to self-educate participants in the nuances of organizing.

Hardt and Negri's failure lies in ignoring the strategic questions that movement organizing has posed since the dawn of capitalism, in favour of a celebration of an amorphous global multitude. Years ago I saw Michael Hardt speaking on why we need a theory of love as the basis for a political movement – not in an ethical sense, he apparently meant it strategically. This convinced me that strategy matters, and that strategy, in turn, rests on an understanding of how capitalism must expand and go into crisis. Without a close engagement with that dynamic, and what actual people are doing about it – fighting police brutality, the high costs of living, dictatorships, and so on – we lose a sense of what the questions are and can follow generations of idealist utopians, trying to impose our own order on the world based on what's in our heads and hearts at the moment. I'd argue what these traditions share is a rejection of the relationship between deter-

ministic capital and working class agency. Without that fascinating, studiable and actable anchor, we can suggest any version of local or global we want.

This is the key advantage of a social movement that looks beyond the local to understand what it's fighting and who its allies are. It is firmly grounded in the real world, not in the world we'd prefer to live in right now. This is the opposite of closing off possibilities. The real world poses impossibly rich questions, both in analysis and action. For example, what sparked the deposing of Morsi in Egypt, and what should the role of the Left be in it? Various accounts have suggested it's a revolution, a counter-revolution, or both. 'What side are you on?' is still the most important question, and by questioning localism, I'd like to see people start asking themselves that again. Quickly followed by asking themselves what the sides look like, what motivates them, and how our side can win.