Organizing Anarchy: the Politics and Praxis of the Vancouver Parecon Collective

by

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B.A, University of Victoria, 2003

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In the Department of Sociology

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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ABSTRACT

The participatory economics project (parecon) is Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel's vision for radically democratic workplaces and communities. This thesis examines the daily practices and ideology of the Vancouver Parecon Collective (VPC), one organization working to promote parecon as a viable socialist alternative. Arising from criticism of both the contradictions of the capitalist marketplace and the disparate power relationships within "communist" command economies, parecon is a powerful alternative to capitalist triumphalism. This thesis examines the efficacy of parecon as a prefigurative socialist vision and argues that parecon groups typified by the VPC need to combine Gramscian counter-hegemony and Richard Day's non-hegemonic approach to move from idealism and small-scale alternatives to large-scale and deeply transformative political economic change.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge everyone who helped or supported me throughout the process of writing and researching this thesis, particularly the members of the Vancouver Parecon Collective who made time out of their lives to tell me their stories, and Michael Albert for clarifying several issues over personal correspondence. I would like to thank my entire supervisory committee, especially my supervisor Bill Carroll and Martha McMahon for challenging me to write more clearly and succinctly in a more organized fashion. I would like to acknowledge Helga Hallgrimsdottir for accepting my thesis for one of her first committees, and Ian MacPherson for taking a break from retirement to participate in my defense. I also would like to thank my father, Peter Speers for working through one draft with me, and especially my wife Kirsten Larmon for her tireless effort editing each page, debating the contents and referring me to appropriate readings and resources when needed. This thesis could not have been accomplished without the help of all these people and many more, and I deeply appreciate their assistance, guidance and support. Nonetheless, all the errors and inaccuracies are my own.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Numerous sociological researchers have demonstrated that capitalism is no benign force; it is a system rife with systemic inequities, structural inefficiencies, and chronic over-consumption of environmental resources. One of the few defenses of capitalism since the fall of the Soviet Union is that there simply is no better alternative. Despite ardent criticism, few commentators have been able to offer a concrete vision for a more inclusive, egalitarian and democratic system. This thesis examines the revolutionary possibilities presented by the participatory economics (parecon) project—an alternative, radically democratic economic system proposed by Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel. Specifically, my research highlights the organization, ideology and daily activities of a prominent local parecon advocacy group, the Vancouver Parecon Collective (VPC). Throughout Vancouver, in Victoria, and internationally, the VPC are advocating for small, participatory structures in the form of radically democratic public planning and egalitarian, non-hierarchical collectives workplaces. The VPC perform this advocacy through informative talks, film screenings, online articles and outreach at numerous activist events. Although my main arguments and primary source interviews focus on the practices and experiences of VPC members, I also analyze parecon itself. I examine parecon with as much scrutiny as I explore the VPC precisely because parecon remains relatively unexplored in academic writing. Writing on parecon is different from writing on socialist or feminist movements, for example, because such movements have strong traditions in sociology and require little discussion to orient the reader towards their basic frameworks. Academic interest in parecon is relatively new, and thus I have used a substantial portion of

my thesis to explain the basic characteristics of parecon as a whole, and to contextualize the VPC movement. The VPC is an example of parecon in action and is just one group working to address the activist/academic "vision problem." According to Michael Albert, one of two originators of parecon, the "vision problem" is a common limitation of contemporary activists who share an inability to conceive of truly achievable democratic alternatives to capitalism and apply such concepts to their movements (Albert 2003). While they regularly challenge the injustices and inefficiencies of the current political-economic system, activists and academics rarely articulate a clear, contemporary vision of an alternative, and therefore cannot work towards fundamental change. Albert therefore advocates a "prefigurative" movement, a movement designed to fill the vision void by imagining a future while providing opportunities for small-scale change in the present.

Two central problems facing activists addressing the vision problem begin with *how* and *why*. In this thesis, I am more concerned with *how* this vision problem can be solved than *why* it came about. While I do examine the pervasiveness of the vision problem in this introduction, the emphasis in my thesis is not on *why* it exists so much as what activists and academics have done to try to overcome this problem. For the same reason, my analysis of the VPC emphasizes questions of theory and strategy more than why and how they came to exist in the first place. I reserve some discussion of origins in my analysis of interview transcripts, but my focus is on what the VPC is actually doing and how they mean to achieve success. The central problem the VPC faces is how to expand their vision to the population at large (this is their primary mandate as an advocacy group). The key to understanding the VPC is understanding parecon.

Parecon, a vision for a fully participatory economy would require that all affected members of society be provided the opportunity to directly participate in each aspect of

economic relations, from productive planning, to workplace organization, to numerous individual tasks. Parecon's participatory structures do away with the centralized hierarchy of previous socialist systems without sacrificing careful planning. The "vision" for a parecon is distinct from the practice of parecon workplaces and organizations, which are often termed "pareconish" or "pareconic" by advocates because they integrate aspects of the parecon vision without developing the full range of parecon systems. For example, a workplace that explicitly follows parecon's principles of non-hierarchical participation, or an organization that advocates parecon and operates non-hierarchically may be called "pareconic" or "pareconish," because they do not represent an entire integrated economy, rather are microcosms, small units working towards a larger parecon movement. The VPC is thus a "pareconic" organization, as are the connected parecon workplaces I discuss later in this thesis. Until an entire political economy is organized along participatory lines, there will be no "parecon" in the strictest sense, only pareconic workplaces, organizations and networks.

The emphasis of this thesis is not "why" pareconic movements exist, but what the VPC and other pareconic groups are doing on the ground to achieve change. Although growing, parecon has not yet achieved anywhere near the public awareness gained by other forms of socialism. I have found very few activist or academic books or articles that even mention parecon, and this suggests that more work is needed to expand parecon's social significance and impact. The question those advocating parecon must answer is what barriers they face and how such barriers can be overcome to create broader acceptance and recognition? Parecon texts have, after all, been in circulation for more than ten years. My primary question is not "why do we need a parecon?" (although I examine to what degree parecon works as a meaningful alternative to capitalism), but "what hasn't yet worked?" and "what can we do strategically to build an actual, working participatory alternative to capitalism?"

An issue central to parecon and prefigurative movement strategy in general is that of "hegemony," a concept used by Antonio Gramsci to explain dominance through a combination of means, including people's ideological attachment to the system and control over key institutions (Gramsci 1999). Hegemony is a key problem in academic writing that examines radical movements, and one that needs to be addressed in order for a movement to move forward and challenge centralized power structures. Capitalism maintains hegemony or "ideological dominance" largely because it is so seductive, and Gramsci argues that movements need to develop a "counter-hegemony," a network of movements devised to challenge existing hegemony and eventually dismantle the system and reclaim power (Gramsci 1999). Counter-hegemonic groups such as the radical and politically orientated Zapatistas, or the culturally orientated "culture jammers" fight political and ideological dominance directly through political and symbolic action. Richard Day, an anarchist-leaning scholar who discusses parecon in his book *Gramsci is Dead*, argues that counter-hegemony is not necessarily the perspective favoured by parecon activists. Day's argument is that the "newest social movements," recent movements including parecon and many anti-globalization organizations that reject centralized authority, are "non-hegemonic" in that they attempt not to supplant the capitalist state, but to render capitalist institutions moot by offering compelling working alternatives (Day 2004; Day 2005). While Day's argument tends to ignore problems that "compelling working alternatives" of the past (such as the 19th century Owenites, and the 21st century anti-globalization struggles) have confronted, his approach does describe many of the core tenets of the current parecon movement. I argue that the VPC fits primarily (though not exclusively) into this "non-hegemonic" or "newest social movement" perspective, but contrary to Day's argument, parecon is also capable of drawing from "counter-hegemonic" approaches designed to challenge the system directly. Parecon is a participatory and

democratic prefigurative movement and there is no single strategy that is more essential to parecon than any other. The best strategies for parecon activists to employ will draw from both "non" and "counter" hegemonic traditions.

In each chapter of this thesis I emphasize different aspects of the "non" and "counter" hegemonic approaches and how they have been applied. In my chapter on history, I argue that radically democratic, participatory systems have been relatively successful, with ancient Athenian society being the most pertinent western example. Modern anti-capitalist regimes such as the Soviet Union have failed to bring true equality because of a lack, rather than a surfeit of participatory democracy. In my chapter on theory, I argue that parecon's "newest social movements" strategy and ideology allows pareconic groups to draw aspects from both the "old-left" of Marxist worker movements and the identity based "new social movements," such as gay, environmental and ethnic rights groups. The barriers pareconic groups face are different from both the old-left and new social movements perspectives and thus from most of the movements of the past. Using various parecon "texts" (Dorothy Smith's term for socially coordinating artifacts such as books, articles, etc) as evidence, I continue this line of argument, demonstrating how parecon is different from other forms of socialism and providing examples of the kinds of organization favoured by parecon activists. Utilizing my own first-hand interviews of VPC members, I identify the activities that currently comprise the practice of parecon groups as well as the exact problems they have encountered at every level of their development. While I will be looking at many issues in order to explicate the different facets (methodology, history, theory, and practice) of my thesis, throughout my central argument is that because parecon is designed to be radically democratic and non-hierarchical, parecon is one valuable tool activists can use to "prefigure" or "model" an alternative to capitalism. As a result of focusing on non-hegemonic strategy, parecon faces numerous potential pitfalls and

needs new strategies drawn from "counter-hegemonic" approaches. However, while counter-hegemony is reliant on building an alternative ideology to compete for dominance with capitalism, parecon activists see no need to combine all anti-capitalist movements under their banner. The key problem facing parecon is how to expand their movement while retaining the aspects of "non-hegemonic" praxis that provide their uniquely diverse, radically democratic character.

This introduction aims to open the discussion of prefigurative change by asking questions. I start with the question of why I am interested in the VPC and more generally what interests me about parecon. Parecon offers a unique opportunity to built prefigurative movements that may inspire many reformist movements as well as help generate longer-term goals. I explore the "vision problem" and try to answer the question of how we came to such problems and what we have tried to do to overcome them. I raise the question of methodology, and briefly discuss what I believe to be appropriate methods for examining a democratic anti-hierarchical organization. Finally I answer some questions, ending this introduction with a basic chapter outline of exactly what I mean to examine in each piece of this thesis. While I do bring up many asssociated issues in the process, my main thesis throughout attempts to answer the problem of exactly how a radically transformative and democratic organization such as the VPC manages to operate and what new ways of operating they can draw from to achieve the change they advocate for. Each chapter explores to what degree parecon works as a prefigurative democratic vision and what problems the movement must address to succeed.

Exploring the "Vision Problem"

Parecon is a highly democratic version of socialism and faces tough critiques from numerous sources, including many on the left. While there is a growing list of social, ecological and

political problems that can be linked to systemic inbalances of capitalism, the left have grown skeptical of anyone attempting to construct an alternative. To paraphrase Michael Albert, while there has been a surfeit of analysis of the complexities of power and the problems of vanguard socialism, little progress has been made towards understanding vision, and the ideals that point towards something better (Albert 2006).

One of the main problems facing those who advocate alternatives is the totalitarian reputation of socialism and the negative image held of utopia. People who have heard my explanation of parecon generally like the idea, especially when compared to their own workplace, but often express the view that such "socialism" must be "impossible" or involve control over people's lives. The inevitability of inequality is expressed in the "Iron Law of Oligarchy," Social Darwinism, and in what Richard Day calls the "hegemony of hegemony" (Day 2004). Critics on the left who find inequalities and contradictions in the capitalist, patriarchal, and anthropocentric system tend to accept on some level that mass inequality is inevitable, or at the very least only possible to reduce through a revolutionary elite. Critics of parecon often argue that any alternative to capitalism would inevitably be as highly centralized and hierarchical as the state-socialist solutions that have come before it (Day 2004; Day 2005). It is hard to talk about alternatives to capitalism because most of us are so used to centralized political systems with concentrated economic power and mass production that we think that any alternatives will inevitably have the same kind of structure. We can think of a world in which individually owned automobiles run on biofuel, but we cannot think of a world in which each individual is encouraged and enabled to make active decisions about his or her productive and consumptive life.

For parecon, not just *what is done* will be different, but *how things are* done will change dramatically. The vision of a non-hierarchical, decentralized, radically democratic

economic system is a vast departure not just from capitalism, but from vanguard socialism and from the politics that traveled under the banner of "Communism" throughout the 20th century. Parecon is different from state-socialist solutions in that it envisages power as deliberately diffuse at every stage, with institutions put in place to avoid the possibility of concentration of power or influence. Parecon is a response to late capitalist "triumphalism" and Margaret Thatcher's much touted expression "There is No Alternative" (TINA) (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert 2003). As one of my interview subjects says:

> I got tired of just focusing on the negative and the problems: it didn't seem to be taking us anywhere, we needed a solution, a vision of where to go. You can banter all you want about something being a problem, but unless you see a solution or a way out, what's the point? (Appendix A, p. 167).

Without this vision, there is little momentum even towards smaller change, and political battles risk becoming episodic and reactive (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert 1990).

The feeling that there is no way out, and that elites will always rise to the top is at the core of the "vision problem" that Albert describes. At the same time as globalization expands the boundries and flaws of the international capitalist marketplace, social criticism of hierarchy, especially of hierarchy within vanguard movements aiming to replace capitalism, has grown (Albert 2003; Porta 2004; O'Brien and Szeman 2004; Wall 2005). The devolution of revolutions of Russia and China into totalitarianism, the growth of the public relations industry, Foucault's illumination of hidden power structures, and the broader poststructural linguistic turn in the social sciences were all late 20th century developments that served to deepen our understanding of hierarchical power. Few critics are now content to subscribe to a "master-narrative" advocating vanguard socialism and intellectualized utopianism. Feminists such as bell hooks and Donna Haraway have criticized the "detatched" social scientist:

typically male, employing the "god-trick" of omniscient object/subjectivity (hooks 1994; Haraway 1991).

While analysis reveals more problems in our ways of thinking about science, utopia and change, little progress has been made towards opportunities for lasting, transformative alternatives. Apart from certain strains of ecofeminism, Queer theory and post-Marxism, most commentators I have read focus on problems and interim reforms exclusively, to the detriment of radically-transformative or revolutionary change[1]. Commentators such as Howard Zinn, Michael Albert and others have argued that limiting our scope to the immediately achievable lowers the "baseline" of our success. Few in power are going to give activists more than they ask for, and by lowering our "baseline," we weaken our overall bargaining position with the state and corporations. While I am not very confident in the long-term success of reform movements (the rise of neoliberalism has shown how easy it is to reverse years of reformist struggle), I would argue that revolutionary activism supports reformist movements by providing a threat that makes reformist demands appear more reasonable. There are too many examples to explore in this brief discussion, but movements as diverse as the unionizing of the 1930's, women's movements throughout the 20th century, black civil rights in the US, and contemporary environmental movements, have benefited from the cooperation (or even competition) of radical and reformist wings. Parecon's prefigurative vision provides the opportunity to work towards broader, revolutionary change while achieving smaller reforms through participatory budgeting initiatives (for example, the democratic city budgets beginning in Porto Alegre, Brazil), and participatory workplaces. Parecon is an imagined non-

[1] See my section on the 'demise' of socialism sub-titled "New Social Movements and the Rise of Third Wave Internationalism" in Chapter 3.

hierarchical, participatory alternative that can be realistically achieved in part now and more fully in the future.

For parecon activists, one problem is that while parecon is an exciting idea, no organization, business or society functions as a parecon. Examples of parecon-like or "pareconish"communities, workplaces and social movement organizations merely aid the act of prefiguring a parecon and provide insight into strategies necessary for developing a parecon. In the following chapters I examine the process of prefiguring parecon, primarily through the lens of a single parecon advocacy group, the VPC. I explore parecon historically and trace the roots of radical democracy and counter-hegemonic, non-hierarchical movements. I also examine theories relevant to parecon—drawing from numerous social movement and socialist theories, I place parecon under the microscope and look at the principles that define parecon. I use this history, theory and my own interviews to examine the praxis of the VPC and see what parecon groups are doing on the ground, in the real day-to-day lived experience of parecon activists. I use all this data to describe the state of parecon today and investigate the specific barriers facing a parecon, as well as strategies that can and could be used to make the parecon vision a reality. While throughout I demonstrate parecon's potential as a prefigurative system, I remain critically aware of its flaws—not to destroy or discourage, but as a path to a stronger movement. I have demonstrated that there is a vision problem among activists and academics. My focus in this thesis is how parecon can bridge the vision gap.

Methods and Theories Used

Just as "how" parecon operates is as important as "why" it is needed, it is deeply important that my research methods are drawn from a critical and democratic position. As a democratic, participatory method, I have found the work of Dorothy Smith, specifically her "Institutional Ethnography" (or IE) approach, particularly useful. While I explore in detail the aspects of

my research that have been drawn from IE methods in my chapter on methodology, I will take some space to explain Smith's approach here.

While ethnographic researchers claim to collect data on a society or sub-culture without political "bias," IE researchers take up a political position and employ ethnographic techniques to uncover the "hidden" "relations of ruling" or ways in which people are coordinated/controlled through taken-for-granted systems of power (Smith 1999; Campbell and Gregor 2002; Smith 2003). People are not "dupes" in the power and control process, but actively engage with rules, regulations and bureaucracies in their every-day experience. IE is directed ethnographic research, an "investigation" to solve a specific "problematic" or key political question. Although Smith insists that information must be examined through theory in order to problematize or deeply question the experienced world, this theory must not be imposed from above via a rigid schema, but rather must arise from reflection upon the experiences of participants themselves (Smith 1999). IE encourages investigators to follow the lead of their informants in order to "map" social relations. Unlike the majority of IE studies, my study does not focus on the relations between entrenched institutions and these activists. Still, the power of capitalist institutions were at the core of my analysis of parecon's strategy, and I thus drew a great deal from the IE approach. My selection of parecon texts and the questions I asked were guided by the informants themselves, and the things I needed to understand from their own testimony, the aspects of their experience that the informants themselves seemed to take for granted. I entered without a pre-set script and attempted to investigate how the VPC was coordinated and what institutional barriers they faced. I did not write a strictly IE analysis, but IE framed each aspect of the research process.

I also used IE techniques to "read" parecon and address relevant theory. Often an IE "investigation" is supported by the analysis of "texts" that link together social processes

(Smith 1999). Smith defines texts as any kind of document which can be "activated" to facilitate social organization (Smith 1999). She writes: "the text is a material object that brings into actual contexts of reading a standardized form of words or images that can be and may be read/seen/heard in many other settings by many others at the same time or other times" (Smith 1999). For example, an organization may have a charter, mandate or set of rules defining conduct—these link local actions to the extra-local structure of the group itself. A government ministry has a mandate and numerous policy documents that define the activity of the government actors and those they interact with. Texts are integral to contemporary life, and they can enable both extra-local social control and extra-local resistance. Texts are standardized documents such as regulations or mandates that coordinate social activity. Smith argues that texts are "hidden" factors that help coordinate social interaction—without such texts, there would be no way to coordinate activities across distances in a uniform manner (Campbell and Gregor 2002). Parecon books and articles are uniform in that they emphasize the same core systems—without these "texts" there would be no way to coordinate parecon activism. Parecon activists enter into a tacit agreement over what the parecon texts mean, and can always look back to parecon documents to gauge their own level of participation. In my thesis I examine the various writings on parecon as texts that coordinate the VPC and parecon advocates in general.

Apart from Smith's IE perspective and parecon texts, I also draw on activist literature that discusses the "vision" problem and explicates radical, non-hierarchical democracy. In my theory chapter, for example, I examine key activist texts for analytic insights on parecon praxis of non-hegemonic and counter-hegemonic strategy. I also use historical analysis of some of the earliest articulations of democracy as well as more contemporary efforts such as the participatory budgeting being attempted now in South America. Historical analysis helps

address contemporary challenges facing parecon activists by illustrating where hierarchy and non-democratic systems have arisen and where movements to replace these have failed. Parecon emerges as a vision inspired by historical movements but with implications unique to the contemporary world.

Throughout, I employ the notions of counter-hegemony and non-hegemonic activism. In critical discourse, hegemony has become a complex term wrapped up in the sometimes apparently contradictory writings of the early 20th century Italian socialist Antonio Gramsci.[2] In short, hegemony is a unison of several kinds of power, potentially combining ideology, cooperation, coercion and/or dominance. Although hegemony is literally the dominance or political-rule of one group over another, Gramsci emphasizes that this dominance depends on cultural assimilation; the dominance over ideology and the way people experience and understand reality (Gramsci 1999). A progressive, "socialist" hegemony would be primarily not based on force but on ideological agreement engendered through political social movements. Counter-hegemony is a contemporary term to describe the counter-movements that change or challenge the dominant hegemony through acts of "powerful significance" (Carroll and Ratner 1996). Counter-hegemonic movements challenge ideological dominance with an alternate ideology. Counter-hegemony is an approach that can be employed by rights organizations and other "new social movements" that "retains the insights of historical materialism, avoids the pitfalls of radical pluralism." (Carroll and Ratner 1996). In other words, counter-hegemonic movements challenge existing hegemony proactively, employing Marxist analysis of the structural-economic factors of political change to stay politically

[2] Many theorists have examined the different and sometimes apparently contradictory meanings of "hegemony" in Gramsci's texts. For analysis of these differing meanings, please see Perry Anderson (1977), T.J Jackson Lears (1985), Hoare and Smith (in Gramsci 1999). Among the many meanings of hegemony, it is generally

salient and avoid becoming simply more groups lobbying for change (Hunt 1990; Carroll and Ratner 1994; Carroll and Ratner 1996). Counter-hegemonic movements such as Earth First! or the Zapatistas challenge the state and try to facilitate the building of political-cultural common ground among movements, transforming them from interest groups into a larger bloc working to affect deep political change. Counter-hegemonic movements are disruptive and mean to effect lasting transformation. Counter-hegemonic movements also build to capitalize on the historical inevitability[3] of a "hegemonic crisis" under which hegemony "breaks down" (Hunt 1990; Carroll and Ratner 1994).

Though counter-hegemony is a valuable contribution to social movement strategy, it does not specifically target hierarchy and is not intrinsically democratic. Counter-hegemony specifies how movements can work to challenge the state, but the counter-hegemonic approach does not explicitly reject the idea of a vanguard party. Just like the "old-left" movements, counter-hegemonic movements could develop deeply hierarchical and therefore corruptible leadership if they do not directly challenge hierarchy within their social movements, or work to recognize radical democracy as a core tenet of any radically transformative or revolutionary struggle[4]. It also may be that "hegemonic crisis" is not a historical inevitability, even when there are active counter-hegemonic movements. To complement counter-hegemony, I borrow the term "non-hegemonic" from Richard Day and

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agreed that hegemony suggests a "unison of economic and political aims" matched with ideological unity (Gramsci 1999).

[3] Gramsci argues that while crisis is inevitable under capitalism, it is not automatic and requires struggle, but that this struggle develops under particular social conditions that arise historically.

[4] In his *People's History of the United States* (1991), Howard Zinn does an admirable job showing how the principled but ultimately flawed early workers movements managed to be corrupted by otherwise well-meaning organizers who gained power within the capitalist state. Though by no means universal, the adage that "power corrupts" is a theme running throughout the history of radical struggle. Although Laclau and Mouffe (1985) make a solid argument for the necessity of combining democratic praxis with counter-hegemony, there is nothing intrinsic in the notion of a counter-hegemonic bloc that requires such a bloc to avoid all the corruptible hierarchies of the past.

various anarchist academics. Counter-hegemony directly challenges the state and corporate apparatus, while non-hegemonic movements attempt to bypass the state and corporations, creating alternatives that operate concurrently with capitalism and have the eventual goal of "rendering" capitalism "moot" (Day 2005). While I agree with Day's argument that non-hegemonic movements, such as Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting and various worker communes, are a valuable corrective to party-based movements, I also agree with Carroll's assessment that non-hegemony is problematic in that it discounts strategies that challenge state and corporate power structures directly (Carroll 2006). As I discuss in Chapter 4, in order to prevent the rise of an oligarchic leadership and render capitalism moot, both "counter" and "non" hegemonic approaches must actively work together. "Counter" and "non" hegemonic strategies may be combined to build a praxis that can challenge capitalist hegemony on two fronts.

Existing NGO's and traditional sources of state funding (such as lobbying) are of course out of reach for groups that actively seek to replace the political-economy altogether. Rather than focusing on how parecon activists can adjust their message or work to gain money and resources from existing NGO's and the state, parecon activists need to reach out to activist, academic, and in the case of parecon workplaces, consumer communities. Because they do not have many traditional avenues available to them, strategy is especially important to the parecon movement. It needs to be stressed from the outset that while I will be drawing from a variety of sources and writing on a subject with some general applicability to other movements, I can only directly apply my evidence to the Vancouver Parecon Collective and to some extent the Mondragon Coffeehouse and Bookstore (a parecon workplace one of my informants helps organize). This paper will thus attempt to explain the logic of parecon in order to illuminate how the VPC works, and how their radically democratic aims can be

expanded into an effective prefigurative project.

What Follows

Chapter One, this introduction, explored the "vision problem" and opened up many issues facing parecon as a radically democratic prefigurative vision and movement. The following chapters expand on the issues I have already raised. Throughout I focus on the "vision problem," identifying parecon as a radically democratic movement with roots in "counter" and "non" hegemony. I argue that the main barriers facing parecon are the capitalist market system coupled with a somewhat hazily defined strategy. I posit a strategy that draws from both academia and activist cultures, from history and from contemporary critical social movements.

Chapter Two introduces methodology. I first examine the distinction between "good" activist methodology and "good" academic methodology drawing on feminist/anarchist critiques and attempts to bridge them both. I explore how Dorothy Smith's Institutional Ethnography can be used to combine the critiques of activism and feminism. I follow with a discussion of the actual methods I used throughout my research. Through self-reflexive critique I reveal potential flaws in my own methodology and discuss how my methodology changed in reaction to the realities of the interview process. The methods I have employed are complementary and provide a valuable cross-section of data that reveals the workings of a parecon group and the coordination of the ruling powers from a variety of perspectives. My methodology is appropriate for challenging the foundation of centralized, hierarchical organization structures.

Chapter Three, "History of Parecon and the Possibilities of Change" explores historical examples that challenge historical determinism and reveal the processes that led to parecon. Throughout, I explore the particular historical conditions surrounding various movements and

argue for the efficacy of "non" and "counter" hegemonic strategy. I use relevant examples throughout history to trace the development and definition of radical democracy and show where parecon fits in. I follow by examining roots of the "vision problem" by exploring how anarcho-syndicalism/radical democracy has both worked and failed. I show how hierarchical tendencies within socialism have led to hierarchical states, and how hierarchical structures have been undermined. I end with a history of the parecon movement itself—a relatively brief experience, but with important lessons for organizations such as the VPC.

Chapter Four details how parecon can be understood in terms of both activist and sociological theories. I break my analysis into two main types of literatures; activist theory and experience including socialism and anarchism, and sociological analyses of "old-socialist" and "new social" movements. To connect with my overall argument, I focus on themes of centralization, hierarchy, and the invisible coordination of power. I draw on the writings of influential radicals, VPC members and parecon texts to demonstrate how socialist/activist trends apply to the parecon movement, critiquing myths of non-hierarchical socialism in order to better describe the core tenets of parecon. To show where parecon fits in sociological literature, I follow with a discussion of "old" and "new" social movement theory, drawing on Cohen, Day, Laclau and Mouffe. Throughout I make use of activist and sociological theories to link parecon, anarchism, and social movement theory into a "non" and "counter" hegemonic framework. I use the data drawn from activist and sociological theory to argue for the importance of parecon's role as a prefigurative movement able to challenge persistent myths and overcome theoretical barriers to change.

Chapter Five consists of an analysis of the texts that define and coordinate the VPC and an exploration of the logic that underlies their parecon project. Apart from defining parecon as extensively as I am able to, this chapter addresses criticisms and potential

weaknesses of the parecon project. I employ my interview transcripts to "map" the parecon texts as coordinating objects and their relationships to other texts that further delineate definitions and practices. Parecon texts are works in progress that have changed through their various iterations due to criticism and self-evaluation. As members of a prefigurative movement, parecon activists must draw from a multitude of strategies and build effective democratic praxis. I demonstrate how these techniques can be drawn from a close reading of parecon's core texts.

In chapter Six, having linked the history of democracy, anarchist theory, social movement theory and parecon, I attempt to put the VPC "under the microscope" and analyze the connections via information gleaned from my own interviews. In this chapter, I draw on my main sources of data: the interview transcripts and the texts that coordinate VPC members. The focal point of this chapter is my investigation of the VPC in which I explore barriers to change, the strategies they use to undo these barriers, and the practices that sustain parecon as oppositional culture. My focus is on the actual practices and activities that parecon activists are led to engage in as represented by the VPC. I break my interview findings into eight distinct themes, including an exploration of the origins of the VPC, their internal structure, their textual coordination, their recruitment and networking techniques, their main projects, their own placement within wider social movements (particularly anarchy) and their thoughts on future strategy.

In my conclusion, I reflect on issues of praxis, the problem of putting parecon ideals into practice. I discuss parecon's merits as a prefigurative radically democratic system and some of the challenges I have uncovered. I look at the VPC in terms of its practices and explore potential strategies to augment the work already being done by parecon proponents around the world. The non-hegemonic approach proposed by parecon proponents provides an

intriguing opportunity for approaching radical change in late capitalism but lacks a mechanism for challenging the state/corporate hegemony and therefore requires cooperation with counter-hegemonic praxis. As emphasized in much parecon literature, a variety of techniques are required in order to challenge the institutions of capitalism while avoiding the problems of centralized vanguard-party leadership. I expand on my discussion of praxis with some suggestions for future research. I emphasize that while parecon is a powerful tool for working towards change, it is not without its own external challenges and internal problems.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Parecon is an activist project emphasizing non-hierarchical, radically democratic structures. To effectively research parecon and empower those I was interviewing, I drew from non-hierarchical, democratic and participatory methods. This chapter explains my research methodology, including the selection and reading of key parecon texts, historical research, and interview methodology. I have tried to be as transparent as possible in describing my exact techniques and the theories underlying my choice of methodology. I start with a discussion of the importance of selecting just research methods, following with a discussion of the general weaknesses and strengths of my approach. I touch on the data collection methods I used, including historical analysis, textual analysis, logical examination, and IE interviews. I then discuss my recruitment method and include a self-reflexive critique of my intended method and the reality. I follow with my interview and question-making technique, which was a combination of pre-set questions and "in-depth" on-site question development, arguing that these are consistent both with an activist sensibility and with the Institutional Ethnographic approach (Esterberg 2002).

"Good" Theory, "Bad" Theory and the Feminist Intervention

As an activist, I am interested in research that can be analytical, self-reflexive and beneficial to radical social movements. Feminist researchers have been at the forefront of research that combines personal experience and critical social analysis and bolsters activism (Smith 1990; Smith 1999). "Bad theory kills" is an expression employed by some analysts to describe how certain theories cause harm by obscuring the processes of power. The search for "good" methods for feminists and activists has led to a partial bifurcation of academia and activism that creates problems for those sociologists who want to be "good" to both activism and

academia (Moss and McMahon 2000; Smith 2003; Miller 2003). In the activist context, "bad" methods reinforce or simply ignore existing power relations, disempower activists and their supporters, and/or cloud political issues unnecessarily. "Bad" methods come from a place of power and impose uncritical theoretical constraints—no matter what a person or text may be saying, it is slotted into an existing framework that does not challenge the status quo in any way (Smith 1999). Academically and intellectually speaking, "bad" methods tend to go in the opposite direction, interpreting all statements at face value, under-theorizing, not making the connections that take words from the level of rhetoric and personal experience towards clear and accurate analysis of society, history and politics. The difficulty for feminist and activist scholars is connecting the methods of academia with an activist ethos, combining "scientific" values of neutrality, logic and academic rigor with activist values of reciprocity, equity and empowerment (Esterberg 2002). As a result, "Good" methods are not entirely neutral but are open enough to follow the views and needs of participants rather than leading with value-laden assumptions. They are empowering, informed but not overwhelmed by theory; are politicized but scientifically sound; and they are created from a place of non-hierarchical cooperation. Oakley, Stacey, Cancain, Smith, Miller, and Campbell and Gregor are all feminist researchers who share these views and have advocated less abstracted, more participatory research (Oakley, Stacey and Cancain qtd in Esterberg 2002; Campbell and Gregor 2002; Smith 2003; Miller 2003). Drawing on Dorothy Smith, George Smith has argued that the "activist ethnographer's job" is to "determine how the ruling regime works" in everyday life and employ this information in the struggle to transform the regime's system of control (Smith 1990).

Of all the feminist approaches to engaged activist research, the one that has seemed the most complete to me is institutional ethnography (IE). While IE occasionally veers away from

more affirmative activism and is not always appropriate for examining political vision (IE's emphasis is on institutions, not activists, texts, not ideas), IE's methodology is comprehensively explained in Dorothy Smith's numerous works and is an excellent resource for criticism of systemic inequalities (Smith 1990; Smith 1999; Smith 2003). IE starts with a view popularized by C. Wright Mills that sociology can and should serve people, and that this service begins with treating people as subjects whose experiences are meaningful (Smith 1999; Campbell and Gregor 2002; Smith 2005). Smith calls this "sociology for people" and sometimes "sociology for women" from the "standpoint" or "lived experience" of women (Smith 1999; Smith 2005). As Smith puts it, "a sociology for people purposes to explore from experience but beyond it, beginning in the living as people can speak of it rather than in the pre-givens of theoretically designed discourse" (Smith 1999). The "standpoint of women" is a lived standpoint and not an abstract theoretical model, but it is a standpoint that extends to the oppressed, that begins from below, rather than descending from "above" subjects (Smith 1999; Campbell and Gregor 2002). While the standpoint of IE is of the oppressed, feminists writing from the standpoint of women do not represent all women or all oppressed people—IE researchers merely take *a* personal standpoint from the position of the oppressed, not the all-encompassing "universal" standpoint of the "victim" (Smith 1999; Smith 2003). To the extent that IE rejects hierarchies both of knowledge and of power, accepts the subjectivity of individuals, and focuses on subject's "embeddedness" in the relations of ruling, Smith's approach seemed not only appropriate for feminist research, but anarchist research as well. I, for example, am positioned as a white, heterosexual male, and my standpoint invites self-critique and an attempt to overcome my own unconscious racism, sexism, &c, &c. According to Munn-Giddings and Martin, self-critique and analysis of hidden sources of power are significant aspects of anarchism and anarchist research (Martin 1994; Munn-Giddings 2001).

In order to account for some of my advantages, it is important to develop egalitarian and non-hierarchical research and theory.

Although she rejects the term, Smith has been labeled an anarchist on more than one occasion (Smith, personal conversation, 2005). While this label may have been meant as a criticism of Smith, it seemed clear to me that Smith's emphasis on power relations suited my own anarchist leanings and could inform my methodology. I do not read all IE as automatically anarchist; rather, aspects of IE are useful for an anarchist position and can be extracted to develop a clear, anti-hierarchical radically democratic analysis. The "extraction" of aspects of IE requires a close, critical reading of Smith and others' material and an exploration of IE's underlying logic.

IE is not a methodology, but a "method of inquiry"; there is not just "'one way' to conduct an IE… rather there is an analytic project that can be realized in diverse ways" (Smith 1999; Devault and McCoy qtd in Campbell and Gregor 2002). IE studies are rarely extensively plotted out far in advance but rather take their cues from the research participants (Campbell and Gregor 2002; Smith 1999; Smith 2005). There are methods "appropriate" to IE, techniques such as "problematization," mapping, investigative interviews and others, but no single IE method (Smith 1999; Campbell and Gregor 2002). Instead, it is most important that IE research allow the researcher to see the techniques of social organization at work (Campbell and Gregor 2002). There is therefore leeway under IE to develop appropriate methods that can be incorporated into the IE project.

Additional Methodologies

Starting from an anarchist appraisal of the IE project, I needed to choose research methods that fit with both IE and my own needs as an anarchist–leaning social critic. As Sandra Mathison states in an online article:

> Anarchism is the rejection of all forms of domination. And so, an anarchist epistemology in evaluation is a rejection of domination of one method over any or all others; of any single ideology; of any single idea of progress; of scientific chauvinism; of the propriety of intellectuals; of evaluators over service recipients and providers (2005, p. 2).

I decided that in addition to non-hierarchical and cooperative interview techniques, I would need to establish context and a deeper critical investigation through historical examples, theory and logical analysis. Each aspect would be used to highlight my central argument once I had begun to find answers to my IE problematic. As the IE investigation would be the anchor for the rest of my thesis, I performed the majority of historical and textual analysis once I had already conducted two interviews and begun to develop a central argument.

Historical examples and texts were chosen in consultation with my interview participants and prompted from aspects of my investigation. Smith argues that it is important to unpack taken-for-granted jargon or terms in order to study the hidden forces of coordination and structures of power (Smith 1999). Further examination of terms and jargon also suited my anarchist needs, as many of these words needed more in-depth analysis to demonstrate how they fit with radical anarchism. I originally selected a vast range of historical texts to deal with each aspect of the parecon project and numerous arguments against parecon, though only a few have been represented in this thesis. I tried to narrow my examples down to those that both illuminated VPC processes and provided evidence relevant to the problems facing "non" and "counter" hegemony. In each instance I tried to read numerous accounts of the same historical events and in many cases, this approach helped complexify events I had originally misread.

Many of the texts on parecon I examined were chosen directly out of the information provided by the people I interviewed. Other texts more generally provided context to our discussions or further clarified parecon terms and arguments. Often IE analysis of texts is

critical, emphasizing their application for the coordination of actors across local and "extra-local," or "outside the local[1]" positions (Smith 1999; Campbell and Gregor 2002). While I have employed an IE approach, I am studying the effects of "ruling relations" on a group that does not have formal ties to a single institution[2]. Since there is no single text that ties the VPC to extra-local institutions, I employed a general analysis of institutions and the ruling relations, drawing on the more specific aspects of extra-local coordination touched on by my interview participants. It was clear that the ruling-relations had a profound, measurable effect on the VPC, but that these effects were not coordinated through one main text. Instead, I will focus my textual analysis on the many texts that co-ordinate parecon and specifically VPC activists locally and extra-locally. By employing an IE lens, I am able to illuminate the specific ways in which parecon texts and parecon activists are in direct conflict with the ruling relations. I am further able to analyze the ways in which their various choices are extra-locally coordinated and explore the political implications of terms parecon activists use to describe their daily activities. In the following chapters I expand on the textual issues relevant to IE as well as history and social movement theory.

Declaring a Focus and Setting a Frame

Having chosen parecon as a general subject of inquiry, I decided that interviewing individual parecon activists in order to study their concrete observable actions would be a way

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[1] Extra-local refers to areas that are not physically local but have some connection to localities (Smith 1999; Campbell and Gregor 2002). For example, Ottawa is extra-local to Victoria, in that it is a distance away but politically connected. There are many ways to see spaces as extra-localities, and Dorothy Smith generally uses the term when examining the connections between one physical location and a locus of power in another (Smith 1999; Smith 2003).

[2] The "ruling relations" is Dorothy Smith's concept for the ways in which dominant institutions and ideas interact with people's lives. These are "relations that rule, and people rule and are ruled through them," which "form a complex field of coordinating activities" (Smith 1999). Smith argues that such relations are necessary because the act of coordination is what centralizes power in a single set of rules. Without coordination through the ruling relations (also "relations of ruling"), laws, regulations and mandates would simply be unenforceable abstract codes. This makes ruling relations the core subject of inquiry of IE.

to ground my study in the actual day/night[3] experiences of parecon advocates, just as Smith recommends (Smith 1999; Campbell and Gregor 2002). I quickly discovered that there was an influential parecon group in Vancouver, just across the strait from where I live, and that they were quite active, having recently released a one year report on *Z* magazine's online site. My research topic would be the concrete everyday/everynight operations of the Vancouver parecon Collective with an emphasis on their activities and the barriers they met through the relations of ruling. My sources would be the VPC membership (whom I originally planned to bring together through a series of focus-group interviews and open discussions) and their texts, including all available works on parecon. Although I had a general topic, it had not yet been synthesized into a viable thesis, and I had not yet developed a problematic.

Within IE, a problematic is always part of the lived experiences of people's everyday lives (Smith 1999; Campbell and Gregor 2002). An IE study "explores, and explicates" a politically/sociologically salient problematic that is grounded in experiences of someone in the everyday world (Campbell and Gregor 2002). A problematic is a puzzle that needs to be solved (Smith 1999; Campbell and Gregor 2002; Smith 2005). It is important that IE researchers access "everyday/everynight" experiences so as to not focus on isolated events that do not have much bearing on the ruling relations as a whole (Smith 1999; Smith 2003). Further, it is important to be engaged, to understand what people face everyday/everynight in order to develop a problematic with some generalizablity (Smith 1999; Campbell and Gregor 2002).

My problematic evolved as I began my research. I started with the general puzzle of

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[3] The traditional distinction between day and night is gendered, day being associated with men's public work and night with the often discounted work of women, "private" work such as feeding the family, performing maintenance tasks, etc Smith's emphasis on day/night relations is meant to break down the dichotomy between the "working day" and the "night."

how parecon activists manage to move forward, being part of a movement that works in direct opposition to the political-economic system itself, essentially challenging the basis of the pluralist democracy their activism has to work within. Obviously progressive legislation, increased worker rights, or even power in an established party would not move the parecon movement very far, since parecon's ultimate goal is to replace the market economy altogether. As someone interested in hierarchical power, feminism and IE techniques, the question of how such systems could be challenged, how progress can be achieved was an important one.

At the core of IE's analysis of the relations of ruling are the institutions that are put in place to regulate these relations and help coordinate power. According to Smith, institutions are organizations or networks of organizations that "coordinate people's diversities of experience" into a "unified frame" (Smith 1999). An institution may not have a centralized office, but must keep track of regulations or rules in some kind of text or texts. For example the post-secondary school system in Canada is an institution guided by a precise national mandate and rules both explicit and implicit which are enacted by administrators at every level. Marriage is an institution with internationally recognized rights and responsibilities, regulated by governments at various levels with no centralized "marriage office." The global capitalist market operates as an institution to the extent that there are agreed upon laws for trade, currency exchanges and formal regulatory organizations that coordinate both trade and the lives of individual workers through established texts. Before entering my research I had assumed that many institutions would present barriers to parecon, including the property-ownership legal framework, the mass media, the school system operating to guard its borders, etc. etc. Banks would not give loans to risky socialist experiments, corporate tax structures would benefit competitive capitalist workplaces over small egalitarian systems, other institutions of trade would make the exchange of pareconic credits (as opposed to money)

virtually impossible, environmental and zoning policies would make the creation of full-scale parecon communities very difficult, and so on. Ideological hegemony, including the belief in the necessity of hegemony itself would create problems in parecon's recruitment process. People would not be able to trust egalitarianism when the institutions of education would have taught competitive capitalist ideals. In general, capitalist dominance over the coordination of institutions appears hegemonic, in the face of parecon activism, and thus it is important to investigate the exact experiences of parecon activists facing institutional barriers on a daily basis. As I explored further, I found that while hegemonic institutions did create barriers for parecon activists, most such barriers were indirect, framing the VPC's strategy. VPC activists learned to work *around* their barriers and thus were interested less in institutional problems than long-term strategic vision.

Although I was not examining a single institution such as the mass media or education system specifically, I worked to keep my methodology and subject of inquiry consistent with the IE approach by focusing on how the everyday lives these parecon activists were constrained by the relations of ruling. The focus of my problematic would be the effect of institutional control on a group and on explaining how such a group faced unique barriers. I used IE to frame each aspect of my investigation, from designing questions to examining texts, to mapping relations between the VPC and other organizations.

As I continued to learn about the strategic issues facing VPC members, my conceptual frame shifted. After my first interview, I learned that institutional barriers were more influential affecting the VPC's choice of tactics than they were determining the VPC's overall success. To avoid conflict with educational and financial institutions, VPC members decided to work towards advocacy rather than direct application of parecon principles in terms of a commune or co-op. My participants argued that the capitalist ideological hegemony, re-

enforced through the media and education system, significantly impacted how people understood the core principles of parecon. People saw democracy, efficiency and other concepts in terms of their dominant meaning under capitalism and had trouble understanding how parecon could be significantly different. Ideological hegemony "set the stage" for parecon advocates to pick less militant and highly discursive tactics or become part of capitalism as co-op owners. Institutions did not have to employ force or directly intervene because institutional barriers had framed the movement's choice of tactics from the outset. However, the limited spectrum of tactics left open to the VPC did not affect their long-term vision. As I will explore in my section on interview analysis (Chapter 6), parecon advocates have themselves struggled with the most effective form of activism to promote parecon. Although IE issues remained relevant throughout this process, I increasingly found that my IE focus not only left out important aspects beyond the institutional, but also relegated the inquiry to yet more criticism of capitalism rather than genuine exploration of parecon as a potential alternative or even solution. As Dorothy Smith points out in an essay on her research experience, it is important to not let theory lead an analysis of the actual living conditions (Smith 2003). While I continued to draw methodology from IE, I realized I was not strictly writing an IE thesis. Therefore, my problematic remained the same but my conceptual frame became imbued with concepts from social movement theory and issues of hegemony.

In my first interview, I noticed an emphasis on non-hierarchical organization and decentralized leadership. Although a single VPC member had been central in motivating the group, my first participant did not see this member as a "leader," as he did not take an active role directing activities, or even facilitating the formation of the group on his own. Leadership roles were rotational and the group emphasized participation in each aspect of planning by all members, including new "recruits." This non-hierarchical approach extends to the parecon

model itself, which emphasizes democratic participation and rotation of roles. In both the literature of parecon and the VPC practices described by my first interview participant, non-hierarchical democratic movement building is further extended into a broad strategy for challenging the capitalist market economy and pluralist "democracy." Rather than taking a vanguard-like strategy and leading participants towards a replacement of the state, parecon activists appear to be advocating parallel social systems and businesses, slowly building up alliances for the eventual "rendering moot" of corporate and capitalist state power. This "rendering moot" occurs when more people are using parallel social systems than are using their original capitalist counter-parts. Non-hegemonic growth depends on making parallel systems more attractive than capitalist systems by making them more free, more cooperative and less alienating. Non-hegemonic approaches are distinct from counter-hegemony which emphasizes direct challenges to the legitimacy and ideological dominance of the state. While a counter-hegemonic approach requires at least one "voice" to speak for the movement and at least one main strategy to achieve change, parecon's non-hegemonic approach is more rhizomatic and built on autonomous systems of mutual aid and cooperation. As I explore in analysis of these interviews and texts, this "non-hegemonic" strategy has merit, but needs to be bolstered by continual cooperation with counter-hegemonic techniques, strategies that challenge the ideological and physical formation of the ruling powers themselves. As I delved deeper into my IE investigation and theoretical readings, it became clear not only that issues of non-hegemonic and counter-hegemonic strategy were significant aspects of our conversations, but that these aspects connected quite directly to my IE problematic as a loop of causes and effects. While my participants certainly used more colloquial terms, I began to see "non" and "counter" hegemony as important elements of their taken-for-granted daily lives.

Techniques and Technology

The VPC was an obvious choice due to proximity and prominence in the parecon movement. Although I initially attempted to organize a focus group with VPC members, limited availability of members over the summer led me to set up an initial meeting with just one member. As per the IE guide by DeVault and McCoy, I used what knowledge I had to construct a set of potential questions, but deliberately did not bring these with me (DeVault and McCoy 2002). I would follow Creswell's suggestions in *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* and start with non-controversial introductory questions about participants' roles in the group, how long it had been around and what the history of the VPC was[4] (2003). I followed with more specific questions about the structural barriers to parecon activism and some questions challenging potential problems in the parecon program.

As Smith notes, IE is meant to be an "activity" rather than "an entity," so I did my best to stay informal and flexible (qtd in Campbell and Gregor 2002). DeVault and McCoy call the interview "talking to people" and stress that the interview "need not be standardized" (DeVault and McCoy 2003). Although I had several set subject areas, I did my best to let the conversation go where my informant was most interested, only refocusing when I needed to know more specific information or unpack a "discourse word," or word that is systematically used in place "what actually happens" (Campbell and Gregor 2002). I let my informant cover all sorts of ground as I was early in my investigation and didn't know exactly which would become the most important pieces of information for further investigation. I had first employed a standardized informed consent form which allowed me to record the conversation electronically—I used my video camera with the lens-cap on. Transcription against background noise turned out to be difficult and time-consuming, leading me to investigate

[4] I expand on my exact questions in chapter six, my chapter on transcript analysis.

other recording techniques for my next interview.

One thing I learned from my first interview is that the parecon advocates were very well versed in theory and impassioned in their desire to explain and expand parecon. The origin stories I received focused a great deal on their experience of discovering specific texts and noticing the disjuncture between Albert and Hahnel's system and their daily lives.

My first informant provided me with contact information for two others and I subsequently set up a second and third interview. For my second interview, I developed themes as well as a few more specific questions, allowing the interview to develop largely informally. I found that institutional issues definitely framed the VPC's strategy, but that such problems were not the focus of its members. Rather, they were preoccupied with questions of long-term strategy and vision and the operation of a parecon workplace itself. This second interview I attempted twice, first with a client-to-client protocol online discussion, or DCC CTCP chat, and secondly with a private chat room. The difference between the two methods is that the first initiates a connection between two computers with no possible third party intervention—only people that have been "let in" can communicate or read conversations. Through multiple time-outs and failures on both of our computers, we eventually agreed upon the slightly less secure but equally private "private chat channel" discussion over an online chat service called IRC (Internet Relay Chat). IRC is a way for people at disparate locations to chat through text, but unlike an internet chatroom, IRC communicators are more or less directly connected through the network and people can be kept out through by setting up a channel for private chat. Not only was our chat invisible to other IRC users, even if someone found us through some fluke, the room would be locked to them and we could kick them out if they got in. The only way someone could listen in is if an IRC administrator decided to, which would essentially be the same as someone bugging your phone during a phone

interview, and in the case of the massive IRC communication network, highly unlikely. I recorded our conversation using the "raw log" function of the chat program we used which records every communication between our computers during the chat process. In the future I would not recommend using the "raw log" as there is another function on most IRC programs just to record the conversation itself—the raw log ended up capturing large portions of code and was extremely difficult to edit. Because there was no limit of "tape," our conversation was also quite long and lead in many intriguing directions. I believe, however, that online chats such as IRC offer a useful alternative to face-to-face interviewing when the subjects are as techno-savvy as my informant was. If I had used the right recording method, I would have saved a great deal of time in transcription, and the peer-to-peer online chat system is very immediate with only a few moments pause or "lag" on either end of the communication. After transcribing this second interview and examining more closely the direction of my investigation, I sought out a third participant in order to adequately sample the "core" membership of the VPC, a membership which over the summer consisted of approximately five people with a larger online and internet forum presence.

My third informant/participant had been a founding member of the VPC and worked with Michael Albert on more than one occasion. We attempted to meet through similar peer-to-peer online discussion, but, due to busy schedules, decided to move ahead with an email interview in which I would ask all my questions at once and he would answer as thoughtfully as he could. I would have preferred a more direct conversation, or more time to produce follow-up questions, but time constraints made both options impossible. I was lucky that when I received my email reply, the questions had been thoroughly answered with almost encyclopedic detail. Although I will continue to keep this person's identity secret and his exact testimony confidential in order to stay in concert with the ethical commitments I

undertook with UVic's ethical review board, it became clear that this person was interested in publishing our interview and my name with it. Publishing my interview should not be a problem, but I will not reveal his actual name myself as I do not have this informant's permission and doing so would be of no benefit to my thesis. However, one side effect of the informant's desire to publish our conversation was that he took a long time responding to questions and answered them in a way that was consistent with a published interview, with responses carefully worded and written. The advantage of our email exchange was that I received quite detailed information, while the downside is that the information was prepared, edited and self-censured. The information this informant provided was consistent with what I had already been told, but in the future I believe I would use more direct interview methods, such as direct peer-to-peer chat or audio recording.

Overall, I interviewed three of between four and six core members of the VPC. Their testimony correlates well and each related similar stories. I used three different interview recording methods that allowed for three different kinds of responses. The first discussion was extremely informal and conversational, allowing for exploration. The second exploration was at a distance over computers, and thus less intimate than a one-on-one conversation but given that one-on-one interviews commonly occur in public spaces such as coffee shops or communal areas, our chat was far more private. While not as immediate as a conversation in front of a camera (due to slight lag), the online chat was much more immediate than email, which took several months to get back. In this case, the least intimate of the three (email) was the most detailed, while the online chat detailed the most amount of information (spread over a variety of subjects) and the face-to-face interview yielded the most personal information. All three have been transcribed and given pseudonyms for my analysis in chapter six.

As I conducted my interviews, I used the IE method of inquiry as a guide, but my

specific interests became more diverse, relying on the guidance of my informants. I began to focus more on the anarchist trends within the parecon movement and on parecon itself. Parecon became more interesting to me as did the question of an anarchist alternative to capitalism. It was still clear that institutional power framed the parecon movement (both as something to oppose and an imposition on achieving change), but other important issues arose. The second component of my research (which occurred simultaneously with the interview process) was study of theoretical literature and the texts of the parecon movement, the writings of parecon advocates.

Locally, interpersonal relationships and individual acts of power co-ordinate social systems—people affect each other in one-to-one relationships or small groups (Smith 1999; Smith 2005). Within these social contexts, codes of power, hierarchy, and behavior have already been set through extra-local means (Smith 1999; Campbell and Gregor 2002). In simple terms, since people enter into a situation with pre-determined set of behaviors, something must have determined these behaviors extra-locally or outside the particular social situation or context (Smith 1999). According to Dorothy Smith, texts (documents) are often the single concrete, measurable object that is enacted, coordinating extra-local relations (Smith 1999; Campbell and Gregor 2002). In simple terms, there is a law or a book or an article out there in the world which defines our roles before we enter a social relationship. Either a law which determines what we can and cannot do, or a policy document that determines how I interact with you, or a schema of workplace rules or contracts that places me hierarchically above you, or a revolutionary program we have both agreed to that determines what we are going to talk about and how we intend to reach our goals. Smith argues that texts are the fundamental coordinating object of contemporary institutions, and that texts also affect other spheres of life: our lives are "text-mediated" (Smith 1999). Smith chooses the term

"mediated" because texts do not "rule" us—people activate texts and with a different social context or under differing conditions, these same texts might not be enacted (Smith 1999). Texts can be ignored, resisted or only partially adhered to, but too much variance from the texts is likely to lead to some kind of penalty, whether social discomfort, job loss, or even arrest. Texts mediate social relations but it is conscious actors that enact them (Smith 1999; Smith 2005). Texts are not necessarily "negative"—one text may empower people (such as a report on the working conditions in a university department) while another may be used to disempower them (such as a letter dismissing and attacking the original report) (Smith 1999). It is my contention that parecon texts coordinate parecon activists extra-locally and determine what their intent is and how they will go about their activism. I originally searched for a group charter or statement of values/mandate and while such a mandate exists, the VPC members did not consult it as this mandate only reflected the textually-mediated relationships already enacted from the available writings on parecon.

As I continued my interviews, I asked what texts were central to the organization of the VPC. While each participant provided different answers, the core similarity is that each emphasized that a number of texts influenced their group and that members typically had read most if not all of the available documents on the parecon.org site. Since my investigation focused on parecon activists themselves and not any particular institution, I focused on how the parecon texts were formulated, how they would have influenced group strategy and organization, and how they had been affected by strains of the dominant discourse. I discuss my findings in my chapter on theory.

I collected the texts that I believed to be relevant and completed three diverse interviews. I coded my interviews by subject so I could easily observe areas of agreement and contention over the same issues and have pieced together a history of the VPC organization.

In later chapters I triangulate individual opinions with those of other members and texts to increase my observational accuracy and examine disconfirming evidence where appropriate. All of my interview informants made similar statements but had different emphases, differences I explicate in the following chapters. Before expanding on the interview data itself, I will present a history of parecon and democratic movements, both to begin my discussion of theoretical issues and implications and to establish the historical context of the VPC.

Chapter 3

A History of Parecon and the Possibilities of Change

Chapter Introduction

This chapter emphasizes two areas of historical research significant to my analysis of parecon, both of which are organized thematically rather than in a purely chronological order. First, I trace the history of the ideas that define parecon (including democracy, anti-hierarchy, workplace and consumer councils and non-vanguard movements); second I analyze a history of possibility, emphasizing the variety of conditions under which revolutionary change has been attempted and the myriad of non-capitalist economies that have functioned at various points in history. I emphasize that although the dominant narrative of human history is markedly authoritarian, there have always been alternatives and resistance to this dominant trend. Historical examples are presented that both help trace the development of parecon's core concepts and challenge overly deterministic views of history.

My Approach to History

I use this chapter both to document the development of parecon as an idea, and to challenge determinist histories that exclude the possibility of "counter" and "non" hegemonic alternatives. I draw on histories from the parecon literature itself and compare parecon writers' claims against my own historical research. If it is the case that we are now past the age of change and at the "end of history," (Fukyama 1992), entering into a didactic "clash of civilizations" (Huntington 1993) or even into a permanent post-socialism, then any movement advocating deeply transformative/revolutionary change would seem silly, outmoded and naive. If all alternative societies and communes must inevitably collapse, then a non-hegemonic approach would be equally meaningless. But history is a fluid process built on conflicting narratives and changing ground. There is no systematic way to prove that change

is impossible—in fact, radical change has taken place in a great variety of historical contexts. It is equally dogmatic to assert that revolutionary change is inevitable as it is to assert that revolutionary change is impossible.

Because parecon is embedded in a tradition of European scholarship, the bias of my history is towards "western" highly organized societies. This bias does not mean that only "western" highly organized societies are worthy of study—far from it. Highly organized mass societies capable of maintaining scrupulous records of sufficient quantity to satisfy historians have tended to be hierarchical, even patriarchal and militaristic, and thus potentially less inspiring examples for socialists than those for which there are fewer records (Barclay 1992; Muhlberger and Paine 1999; Stepaniants 2002). Discussion of Athenian democracy, early capitalism, state socialism, contemporary utopians and socialist governments are all necessary in order to understand parecon today and comprehend the process through which parecon's ideas have evolved.

Ancient Democracy and Radical Politics

A truism in historical writing is that the one constant of human experience is change, upheaval, conflict. Michael Albert begins the history of parecon with ancient Egypt when he states:

> I once heard about a strike, billed as the first, by Egyptian peasants against a Pharaoh who moved from requiring six days labor on the pyramid a week, to requiring seven days, and from providing food to providing nothing. I think parecon harks back all the way to that uprising (Albert "Parecon Today" 2006, p. 1).

Of course, Albert is being rhetorical, but his attention to the earliest points of the "western" historical traditional establishes a pattern examining the long history of revolutions and ends of civilizations. In another article on parecon, Albert and Hahnel note that even the Egyptian empire, which lasted thousands of years, eventually ceased to be a political or economic power

(Albert 2003). Throughout their writings, Albert and Hahnel use such historical examples as a counterpoint to capitalist triumphalism and to support prefigurative thought. In the Egyptian example, local resistance and external pressures, invasions, economic deals and unrest eventually led to the end of the "eternal" Egyptian period and the start of new empires (Newby 1980; Brown 1990). The constancy of change is an important concept in parecon literature as it allows for prefigurative visions to be more than "pie in the sky" dreaming, and allows parecon to be a realistic alternative to the "triumph" of capitalism.

One aspect of capitalist triumphalism that my informants thought was particularly problematic was the reification of democracy (Appendix A). In my interviews, all three parecon advocates noted that the idea of a radically democratic alternative to capitalism was a difficult concept for many interested in their project. People tend to conflate the radical democracy offered in parecon with capitalist representative democracy—a system critics of capitalism find highly problematic. Taking cues from my interviews and additional readings, I argue below that parecon's radical democracy is much more attuned to the original meaning of democracy than the capitalist form.

Although the concept of direct popular decision-making predates the term "democracy," the Athenian example is the most pertinent to parecon (Finley 1985; Muhlburger 1998; Muhlberger and Paine 1999; Albert 2001). Although the exact origins of the term are unknown, democracy was originally defined, broadly, as the "rule by" the "demos," or people (Finley 1985; Muhlberger and Paine 1999). In *Politics*, Aristotle states "the real difference between democracy and oligarchy is wealth. Wherever men rule by reason of their wealth, whether they be few or many, that is an oligarchy, and where the poor rule, that is a democracy" (Quoted in Finley 1985). Aristotle's definition of democracy differentiates the Athenian system from capitalist "representative" democracy, in which elite

"representatives" make the majority of decisions without direct popular vote.

Although it is not raised in the literature, a second major criticism of parecon could appeal to the "iron law of oligarchy," the argument than any democratic organization will eventually be overtaken by elites. Again, analysis of the Athenian system and many subsequent anti-authoritarian movements will help to challenge "iron law" arguments. As I argue below, recent scholarship suggests that the Athenian forum, though restrictive, was not dominated by heavily centralized elites.

While it usually excluded slaves and women (a significant reason to hold it as a highly democratic *example* but excise it as any kind of model of an egalitarian society), the closest articulation of democracy in the Athenian period was the "forum," a mass meeting of citizens that determined public policy (Ober 1996). In many ways, the forums have influenced many contemporary visions for radical democracy (particularly Fotopolous's Inclusive Democracy concept, which is explicitly modeled on the forum) and represented more direct democratic control than even the most ardent radical democratic activists call for today. In opposition to the "iron law of oligarchy," Ober (1996), Fotoupolos (2005) and others argue both that the Athenian forum was not primarily dominated by elites and that individual actors had significant influence over Athenian affairs in private and public spheres.

While decisions were relegated to male landowning citizens, these landowners were not necessarily rich: a household was the standard unit of citizenship, as it is today. Forum participation crossed all lines of wealth and tradition, often to the dismay of elite intellectuals and regents (Ober 1996; Fotopoulos 2005). It could be argued that since throughout most of the Athenian period slaves and women were systematically excluded, the sense of true "people powered" democracy was illusory; however, in practice, even slaves and women found ways to be represented (Todd 1990; Ober 1995). The Athenian land-owning class was

economically diverse, consisting of thousands of members. Furthermore, it is clear from archival data that the forum votes often went directly against the interests of local elites (Ober 1995). Slaves could eventually purchase their freedom and move into the landowning classes, and any male citizen could potentially be part of the mass forum meetings, while any woman could be involved in the interpretation and activation of the forum's decisions (Ober 1996). Philosophers often complained of the power wielded by women who influenced policy and decisions from a matriarchal position within the home and by other women in trade (Ober 1996; Kyrtatas 2002). Women and slaves dominated economic policy as they were the only Athenians allotted to actually carry out trade deals and transactions (Kyrtatas 2002).

The forum invited a diverse range of people into a single debate and gave them the power to actually set policy that would have immediate effects (Finley 1985; Todd 1990; Ober 1995; Fotopoulos 2005). Decisions ranged from dividing spoils of war, to setting trade levies, to building new temples and statues, and indeed to "all important business, including foreign policy and taxation" (Austin 1977; Ober 1996). On one occasion the forum attendees actually voted to dissolve the government (Ober 1996; Austin 1977). Meetings could accommodate as many as 8000 members, and relied on simple majority vote with an agenda determined by a smaller committee of 500 (Ober 1996). Citizens who arrived early enough were paid for their time and during meetings, after a proposal was read, anyone in attendance was encouraged to offer their advice (Ober 1996). Ober states that "frequently the actual decree had been proposed at the Assembly by a voluntary speaker" (Ober 1996). As stated in numerous texts, while philosophers played a key role in these debates, Greek historians now believe that the theory of "elite dominance" over the forum has been thoroughly debunked (Todd 1990; Fotopolous 2005).

The Athenian example lasted for more than 150 years, until Greece was conquered by

Macedonia in 338 BC (Austin 1977; Finley 1985; Todd 1990; Ober 1995; Kyrtatas 2002). Throughout this period, movements against concentration of power in the hands of the rich were common and often bitterly criticized by philosophers (Finley 1985; Ober 1995). The constraints of Athenian democracy were continually being challenged by competing aspects of society, and eventually, a combination of invasion and internal unrest led to factioning and internal instability. The forum was eventually relegated to a symbolic role under Macedonian rule (Austin 1977; Finley 1985; Todd 1990; Ober 1995). The Athenian example demonstrates that a working direct democracy was achieved under a relatively stable society without mass starvation or crippling poverty, or any centralized party apparatus (Austin 1977; Finley 1985; Todd 1990; Ober 1995; Kyrtatas 2002).

Utopian Socialism, the American Commune and Pareconic Practice

Parecon is foremost a radically democratic movement, but in early practice has largely manifested in small workplaces working "off the grid" from the standard capitalist marketplace. While history is rife with examples of alternative economic movements and societies that have collapsed, my research suggests that the pareconic business model is significantly different from previous utopian societies and communes. The growth and interconnection of parecon workplaces is so far the most touted strategy for building parecon. One significant danger facing these alternative businesses is that they will be swept-along with the capitalist market, making too many sacrifices in order to succeed economically.

Similar problems were encountered by early utopian socialist movements throughout Europe and in the US. Few of these Utopian movements lasted long, in part due to external pressures and in part due to internal instabilities (Manuel and Manuel 1966; Feuer 1966; Kenyon 1989). Robert Owen (1771-1858), for example, created a short-lived commune in New Haven based on principles of fair worker treatment and pay. Owen became famous for

his ethical treatment of workers, and he eventually created schools for workers' children, increased wages and provided and/or improved workers' housing (Manuel and Manuel 1966; Kumar 1990). Unlike the democratic, egalitarian principles of parecon, Owen's society ultimately depended on his goodwill rather than democratic relationships, and eventually failed when an associate stole the society's profits (Manuel and Manuel 1966; Kumar 1990; Holloway 1966). Although parecon businesses may rely on the input of resources from powerful individuals, the non-hierarchical decentralized nature of parecon seems to preclude imbuing a single person with as much power as Owen or his associates had. Owen's society did not last long in part because it relied on centralized control and placed faith in elite leadership—leaders who eventually scuttled the project and took the profits.

Not all such communes collapsed due to faith in an individual leader. Shortly after Owen's first attempt, Saint Simon and Fourier developed similarly egalitarian communes that challenged the growing power of capitalism. The Saint-Simonians, French followers of the wealthy Saint-Simon, formed a "family" of radical thinkers in the 1830's. The Saint-Simonians established a settlement near Paris but persecution by the French government eventually forced them into hiding (Manuel and Manuel 1966). Fourier, another French socialist, inspired a number of experimental communities in the 1850's and 1860's including *Le Reunion* and most notably the North American Phalanx and Brook Farm (Manuel and Manuel 1966; Guarneri 1991). Fourier's communities did not collapse due to the loss of Fourier or funding; instead, they lost "steam" after several failed projects. Brook Farm residents found their home "not conducive to creativity" and after a fire destroyed their attempt to build a utopian group-building, the Fourierian settlers disbanded (Holloway 1966; Guarneri 1991). Other communes rose and fell across the United States until at least 1914, but

few of these had a significant impact on contemporary socialism[1] (Fogarty 1990). Each commune either relied on an individual sponsor or patron to their eventual downfall, or lost momentum without a clear strategy to expand the movement and affect change. The evidence from these early communes suggests that, while building alternatives that do not attempt to supplant or directly challenge the hegemonic power of the state can be somewhat effective, in order to sustain a larger movement it may be necessary to form bonds of solidarity and networks of cooperation. As Manuel and Manuel argue, there are numerous examples of other utopian societies during the same period that collapsed because of their reliance on benevolent individuals and their inability to develop an effective strategy for growth (Manuel and Manuel 1966).

Marx once described the Paris commune of 1871 as the key model for a socialist revolution and naturally became critical after the commune's collapse. The commune has been embraced by anarchists as an early example that embraced non-hierarchical and democratic policies. French workers in particular had grown impatient with their lack of influence in the purportedly "people's" government and sought to create a government more suited to the republican claims of the time (Schulkind 1977; Tombs 1996; George 1998). Although well-known radicals were involved, no central-planning organization had set a program of action in advance (Schulkind 1971; Tombs 1996). There had been no concrete plan other than the survival of the republic without the control of Napoleon III or the Prussians (Schulkind 1971; George 1998). Although poorer workers did not directly advocate their own rule (many did not see their own class capable of stable representation), the "improvisational"

[1] Included in this period are many religious communes such as the Mennonites, Doukhobors, Amish and others. While these communes are interesting cases of alternative societies, I do not examine them in detail here as they have been more reliant on religious notions of utopia than on any particular political socialist or anarchist project. I am interested primarily in utopian societies that had a clear impact on democratic and socialist praxis.

approach to political process during the commune prevented any single intellectual or wealthy leader from taking control (Schulkind 1971; George 1998). Notably, the commune's decisions almost universally favored worker's cooperatives and excluded employers to the extent that contracts, pricing and wages were all to be set by collectives of workers and not by owners at all (Schulkind 1971). Places of power were all to be elected by the populace at large—a strong reaction to the centralization under previous governments (Greenberg 1969). However democratic, socialist and decentralized the commune may have been, it did not last long enough for the commune's agenda to be tested. Most historians argue that the commune's violent end was due neither to internal disputes nor poor organization; like Marx, historians blame the "scruples" of the communards who did not aggressively seek power in Versailles or effectively prepare battlements at home (Schulkind 1977; Tombs 1996; George 1998). It is also possible that the commune was doomed, situated in an already conquered city against a much more powerful invading force (Schulkind 1971). Nevertheless, the commune of 1871 has been an important influence on prefigurative radically transformative movements and represents an important example of a largely spontaneous and mostly leaderless movement. The Paris commune represents many of the strengths of spontaneous, relatively decentralized organization, including speed, direct democracy, and the value of improvisation. What they appear to have lacked was momentum, a drive to expand their successes and a large enough pool of popular support to challenge their opposition.

There are three core differences between the early utopians and the parecon movements. Firstly, most of the early utopian societies were dependent on a single individual or elite. None of the pareconic projects I have researched are reliant on Albert, Hahnel or any other individual and thus are not likely to fail should their single leader be captured, killed, or

corrupted. Secondly, early utopian movements were not effectively interconnected. Movements were not able to communicate quickly to facilitate their growth and cooperation. Pareconic businesses theoretically are meant to act as parts of nested federations and loosely networked local collectives able to work together on a number of fronts. Thirdly, most of these earlier utopian societies lacked a political movement capable of combating opposition and expanding their popular support. The Paris Commune is an especially salient example in which many plans were created but were not acted upon quickly enough through an aggressive popular groundswell. Parecon advocates argue that the transition to a parecon must draw on a growing popular movement and be built on cooperation among activists and federations. The danger still facing pareconic businesses, however, is the threat of collapse emerging from a variety of factors, including the state, market pressures and internal squabbles. Parecon activists need to draw from the lessons of utopian movements in order to face their own barriers.

Marx and the Rise of Communisms

One of the problems faced by my interview participants is that people attending their talks tend to confuse the systems of parecon with a command economy. The same problem is prevalent in the literature, in which economists argue that parecon would follow a similar path to that of "communist" command economies. Certainly parecon's development owes a great deal to the theories, interpretation and activation of the various texts of Marx. While Marx's writings have had an indelible effect on the politics of the 20th century, subsequent readings of Marxist communism have been central to the "vision problem" in activism that Albert and Hahnel claim to address (Albert and Hahnel 1991; Fried and Sanders 1993; Best 1995; Albert 2003). The impact of Marx on all contemporary forms of socialism is unmistakable—so much so that communism has become virtually synonymous with Marxism in the dominant

discourse (Fried and Sanders 1993; Best 1995). As I will demonstrate, while parecon has clearly been influenced by Marxism, parecon's anti-authoritarian praxis sets it apart in a number of significant ways.

The command economy form of "communism" (Marxist-Leninism, Trotskyism and Maoism) failed to deliver a truly egalitarian, democratic society. While they did manage to hold power for multiple decades, most (though not all) of the Marx-inspired states of the 20th century became regimes involved in the same trade war as capitalist countries. With the notable exception of Cuba, in the 1980's and 1990's, these regimes transitioned into capitalism due to pressures from capitalist countries, or otherwise collapsed (Brinton 1978; Fried and Sanders 1993; Lin 1997; George 1998). Numerous socialist and anarchist critics, including parecon advocates, have argued that these societies offer important illustrations of the strengths and weaknesses of centralized and "coordinator class" forms of alternatives to capitalism (Avrich 1967; Brinton 1978; Albert and Hahnel 1990). To argue that parties that emphasized hierarchy and elite rule either prove the "iron law" or disprove the idea of socialism is absurd. The hierarchical internal structure and ideologies of these movements were demonstrably clear early on. As I discuss in Chapter 4, anarchists as well as parecon writers have developed strategies to specifically avoid the authoritarian problems of the "communist" state movements.

Although there are many factors that led to Stalinism in Russia, socialists tend to debate a limited few, some arguing that it was inevitable, others that it was preventable. While I would avoid attempting to prove one position or the other in the limited frame of this thesis, there are aspects of the anarchist position that are relevant to parecon, specifically the problems of hierarchy and centralization. Anarchists argue that Lenin's vanguard politics were intrinsic rather than incidental to the development of the "totalitarian" form of state-

socialism (Avrich 1967; Miller 1976; Kenafick 1978). One example where the possibility of non-hierarchical democracy was thwarted by Bolshevik party policy stems from the early period of the revolution. Over a period of months, the revolutionary movement transitioned from a relatively open, spontaneous struggle to a single-party led socialist state. Throughout 1917 (both during the initial rebellions of February and July, and lead-up to the Bolshevik-led October revolution), a strong anti-authoritarian streak had been built into the anti-czarist movements in Russia, typified by the popular slogan "Hail anarchy! Make the parasites, rulers, and priests—deceivers all—tremble," and by sailors in the Kronstadt rebellion declaring "Where authority begins, the revolution ends!" (Avrich 1967). Workplaces began to be organized into independent "soviets," workplace councils often utilizing participatory and democratic non-hierarchical structures, much as parecon activists advocate (Avrich 1967; Freeze 1997; Fitzpatrick and Slezkine 2000). Soviets were initially quite experimental, working on a spectrum of egalitarian models and non-hierarchical organization that extended to militias, local councils and performance groups (Avrich 1967; Freeze 1997; Fitzpatrick and Slezkine 2000; Read 1996). These experimental groups led to alliances between anarchists and Bolsheviks that lasted until the first anti-anarchist purges instituted by Lenin in late 1917 (Avrich 1967; Freeze 1997; Fitzpatrick and Slezkine 2000; Read 1996).

It has been argued that while the early anti-authoritarian aspects of the October Revolution were important, anarchists lacked a realistic plan that could build anti-authoritarian sentiment against a well-organized, well-funded enemy. The historical record, however, suggests that anarchist writers had put considerable thought into the barriers faced. Bakunin and Kropotkin had both argued that the growth of an counter-revolutionary movement/army was likely and that an effective anarchist/socialist movement required a standing army or militia "for the purposes of self defense" (Kenafick 1948; Miller 1976; Bakunin 1994). There

is little evidence, however, that anarchists and other anti-authoritarian socialists were prepared for the resistance they would face from the Bolshevik party.

One would be hard pressed to argue either that there was no anti-authoritarian alternative expressed at the time or that the Bolsheviks needed to put down their anarchist supporters for the revolution to survive. Throughout the October revolution, numerous opportunities to support the anti-hierarchical groundswell building up within the soviets and throughout rebellions were thwarted by the ruling Bolsheviks (Brinton 1978; Read 1996; Fitzpatrick and Slezkine 2000). One movement crushed under Lenin's rule was the Makhnovists, a collective of anarchist-communist communes and worker cooperatives that many historians now recognize as having been viable alternatives to the state-centralized alternatives at the time (Arschinov 1974; Brinton 1978; Read 1996). Within the Leninist movement itself there was also the "worker's opposition" movement which challenged many Leninist perspectives on centralized leadership, but eventually capitulated to Lenin and the Bolshevik party leadership (Brinton 1978; Read 1996). I do not mean to suggest that the revolution faced no real threats or that ideology and party structure were the main forces that led to Stalin's "command economy"; nonetheless, there were anti-authoritarian alternatives that were put down by the Bolshevik party at the time (Avrich 1967; Fitzpatrick and Slezkine 2000). Although powerful imperialist forces helped push the Soviet states towards totalitarian defensive strategies, such strategies were not the only imaginable option. Today, parecon advocates need strategies that allow anti-authoritarian socialists and communists to work together and develop compromises that remain effective against powerful opposition.

War, Revolution and Power: Parecon as a Reaction to Struggles of Authority

Historically speaking, parecon is as much indebted to anti-authoritarian struggle as it is to Marxism and socialist economics. Although there are few extended historical studies in

parecon texts, the examples writers use tend to draw from significant moments of anti-authoritarian struggles that took place before, during, and after the rise of "Communism." Following the lead of my interview participants I looked up historical struggles to draw out useful insights for future strategy and better understand their testimony. Rather than attempt to exhaustively catalog all the formative events of the 20th century, I explore a handful of such events thematically, providing examples and explaining how each is significant to the history of parecon and radically democratic struggles. Each of these post-1917 "moments" is generally either used by parecon writers as an example of the dangers of hierarchical and authoritarian leadership in radical movements, or is an event I identified as an inspiration for anti-authoritarian democratic praxis. Throughout, I argue that, while they were historically less effective at achieving long-standing change, the non-authoritarian movements have been more inspiring for parecon writers and demonstrate possibilites for future strategy. Authority is not necessarily the key variable in any of these historical events, but it is the key variable relevant to parecon and a variable that can easily be overlooked.

There are three main levels of authority that had problematic impacts in the 20th century. At the state level, the rise of fascism in Spain, Italy and Germany illustrated the danger of the extreme concentration of power in one leader or small elite, while the purges in Maoist China and Stalinist Russia demonstrated the flaws of highly centralized, personality driven socialism. It is important to add that none of these hegemonic states came "innocently" to totalitarianism or centralized power—the leaders of the movements that created the USSR, Nazi Germany, Mao's socialist China, Italian and Spanish Fascism, all published works supporting concentration of power in the hands of a single person or party who would act as the "voice of the people" (Mussolini 1932; Hitler 1943; Avrich 1967; Mao 1969). The literature of fascism explicitly invoked the Nietzschean "superman" (however

inaccurately) while Chinese socialist propaganda established Mao as the symbolic representation of the entire revolution (Hitler 1943; Lansberger "The Mao Cult," No date).

Secondly, at the same time as these states were becoming authoritarian, social movements in the US and Europe were developing centralized, hierarchical structures. One example particularly pertinent to the question of parecon strategy is the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labour and and Congress of Industrial Organizations). The AFL-CIO moved from direct confrontation to legal rights battles early in the 20th century arguing that they had to centrally define their practices in order to fit with the bourgeois legal system (Fink 1987; Zinn 1999). In the 1930s, the AFL-CIO worked against the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) and centralized their leadership and decision-making, a choice that greatly constricted their movement repertoire and limited the independence of whole generations of workers (Zinn 1999). While submission to the legal system certainly aided unions and workers in their immediate goals, the centralized structures of the AFL-CIO and other US labour organizations led to large, highly entrenched bureaucracies, corruption, and long-term disjunctures between the needs of workers and the needs of centralized authorities (Lipset 1961; Fink 1987; Zinn 1999). Authority, especially that of white middle class activists, was one of the key factors that led to the development of "new" social movements and third wave feminism, reactions to the centralized authority of particular classes and ethnicities in unions and other social movements (Cohen 1985; Tong 1998; Zinn 1999).

The concentration of power within unions was itself a direct reaction to a third level of authoritarianism within workplaces. Between the late 1800's and early 21st century the growth of fordism, middle-management and the sweat-shop, combined with the increasingly concentrated power of corporations over the state, all heralded new levels of authoritarian power in workplaces, power that many critics have recognized as being detrimental to

democracy (Fink 1987; Staats 2004; Wall 2005). Whether or not the centralized power of corporations and the development of the managerial class in workplaces has significantly impacted democracy, the perception of these events clearly influenced the development of parecon (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert and Hahnel 1991; Albert 2003; Albert 2006).

Alongside the rise of authoritarianism around the world, decentralized alternatives developed that inspired anarchists and parecon advocates alike. Although less politically effective than authoritarian movements (there is a distinct lack of successful state-level versions of anti-authoritarian democracy, for example), the work of anti-authoritarian movements has been an inspiration to parecon activists. Moreover, these movements have provided opportunities for self-analysis and critique because they have largely failed to create lasting alternatives. Rather than assume that the failure of these movements is endemic to anti-authoritarian activism, parecon activists work from the assumption that change is possible, but that it is important to question tactics, movement structures, and ideologies in order to develop more successful alternatives (Albert and Hahnel 1990). In the 20th century, many movements of historical significance shared anti-authoritarian views and existed as largely leaderless collectives. The POUM Anarchists of Spain, for example, became famous for their struggle against the fascist army (Fremion 2002). George Orwell, who famously chronicled his exploits with the anarchist army noted the surprising effectiveness of POUM militias, despite their lack of hierarchical leadership and centralized command (Orwell 1952). Although crushed by a combination of Fascist forces and the Communist army, the Spanish Anarchists became important symbols to the anarchist movement and Michael Albert employs their example several times while responding to critics (Orwell 1952; Zinn 1999; Fremion 2002; Albert, "Albert Replies to Critics"). At the same time as the POUM was struggling in Spain and as most American unions were becoming more authoritarian and centralized (as

discussed briefly above), the IWW were still fighting for worker rights in a largely anti-authoritarian, non-hierarchical fashion in the US (Zinn 1999; Fremion 2002). The IWW broke staunchly from party politics, rejected the division of workers into craft and trade unions, allowed workers of any "race" into their organization, and fought against capitulation to the legal system (Fink 1987; Zinn 1999; Fremion 2002). Although other unions became more powerful, the IWW accomplished many decided victories for workers in their time and may still offer an alternative to the largely side-lined union movement today (Zinn 1999). Again, it is the perception and analysis of the IWW that has influenced parecon, rather than the degree to which they were successful at their aims. During the first half of the 20th century, anarchist movements also became prominent in many key historical struggles, including those in China, Cuba, Italy and Germany. While all these countries either became fascist or state socialist and most of the anarchist movements were repressed, their existence has been an important element in the development of anarchism (Abse 1982; Dirlik 1986; Dirlik 1989; Marrus 1995; Cannistraro 1996; Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert and Hahnel 1991)

I would argue that the main influence these struggles had on parecon's development is twofold. First, the destruction of social movements, distortion of socialism, and attacks on anarchism inspired activists to analyze authoritarianism and to come up with alternatives that avoided centralization of hierarchical power. Second, the denigration of socialism itself led commentators such as Michael Albert to argue in favor of a new conception of socialism with new terminology that sidestepped socialism's misconstrued image (Albert "Is Socialism Still on the Agenda?"). Indeed, recent history has shown a myriad of socialist visions and "pareconish" movements building particularly in Central and South America. Hope may lie in examining contemporary alternatives that show that people have learned from the "failures" of previous iterations of socialism.

New Social Movements and the "First" Internationalism

Between the 1960's and 2000, activists began to move away from highly centralized Leninist movements towards a myriad of cultural and identity-based causes (Cohen 1985). Some commentators argue that the 1990's and early 2000's saw the first reconciliation between workers, prefigurative activists and identity movements. Groups opposed to neo-liberal globalization organizations and agreements such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank brought together identity, rights, lifestyle and ethics groups with unions and socialist revolutionaries, without referent to a single ideology or leader (Graeber 2003; Day 2004; Wall 2005; Day 2005). Interconnection via the internet and coordination amongst nationalist, internationalist and peasant groups at single protest events (some of which have been called the largest protests in recorded history by international agencies according to Chomsky and Wall) have led some commentators to call this latest period the first "true" international—consisting of north, south, first and third worlds working together against a myriad of foes (Zinn 1999; Chomsky "Preparatory to Porto Alegre"; Graeber 2003; Day 2004; Clark 2004; Wall 2005; Day 2005; Dyer and Chomsky 2006). The diversity of these movements suggests that finding a single issue or program around which to develop a centralized movement would be extremely difficult and potentially harmful to the individual needs within. As Albert argues, however, there is no reason why disparate movements cannot develop solidarity around a larger vision—not as a leading force as in many vanguard Leninist movements but as one aspect of a larger economic, social *and* personal transformation through which independent movements can benefit one another (Albert 2003; Albert 2004). Broad forms of solidarity not employing an economic master-narrative but instead drawing from numerous frames have had a

significant impact on the development of new revolutionary projects (Froehling 1997; Schulz 1998; Bartley and O'Briain 2003; Wall 2005).

The last years of the 20th century and the first years of the 21st have presented new hopes for challenging capitalism in many areas of the world, notably South and Central America. Revolutionary organizations such as the Zapatistas have a less centralized, authoritarian structure than most 20th century revolutionary movements and have integrated internet media to build coalitions across nations (Froehling 1997; Schulz 1998; Wall 2005). Hugo Chavez's Venezuelan government has employed alternative media to debunk the right-wing counter-revolutionary movement and used cross-national networks to support burgeoning socialism across the Americas (Ellner 2001; Ellner 2002; Bartley and O'Briain 2003). The Bolivian Missions are often cited by supporters of Chavez as another decentralized and democratic aspect of the growing democratic revolution in the Americas. Although he has been accused of being expansionist and somewhat centralized, Chavez has allowed more free media and open elections than previous "socialist" leaders and at the very least represents a break from the neo-liberal turn in most of the rest of the world (Ellner 2001; Ellner 2002; Bartley and O'Briain 2003). Although new revolutionary groups employ wide networks, the World Social Forum and other globalized anti-capitalist pro-democratic events have strengthened ties between movements and provided forums for the discussion of vision (Chomsky "Preparatory to Porto Alegre"; Day 2005; Wall 2005). In Argentina, reclaimed workplaces have challenged the market capitalist state and attempts to repress democratic plant reclamation projects have largely failed (Lewis and Klein 2004; Morduchowicz 2004). The Argentine case is especially relevant because reclaimed factories have challenged hegemony indirectly through building non-hegemonic workplaces while simultaneously building national counter-hegemonic movements that challenge the legitimacy of state and

corporate power (Morduchowicz 2004). These factories are not parecon institutions per se, but are perhaps the strongest contemporary example of a self-managed factory movement that also challenges the legitimacy of the state and corporations. Each factory chooses its own structure, some being radically cooperative and participatory, some maintaining some management positions and other divisions of labour (Albert 2004; Lewis and Klein 2004; Morduchowicz 2004).

While Argentine factories have been reclaimed by workers, the economy as a whole remains capitalist and generally hostile to self-management (Albert 2004; Lewis and Klein 2004; Morduchowicz 2004). One area where more participatory decision making has taken centrality is Porto Alegre and the state of Rio Grande do Sul Brazil, where poor neighbourhoods have developed participatory budgets, determining social spending through collective agreement that require participation from most affected parties (Baiocchi 2003; Streck 2004; Munck 2004). Though the Brazil initiatives are striking and add valuable perspective to other participatory projects, they are currently only situated in a few isolated areas and have not been extended to national policy; in addition, participatory budgeting is generally restricted to money already allocated by the state, preempting full participation to the extent suggested by parecon proponents (Baiocchi 2003; Streck 2004; Munck 2004). Clearly there is room for a more complete vision that manages to tie self-managed workplaces to a decentralized, radically democratic state. The VPC, Hahnel, Albert and other parecon advocates' latest work is embedded in this context of new forms of socialism, international solidarity and growing alternatives to capitalism.

History of Parecon in Itself

There is little written on the actual history of parecon, because actual practicing parecon collectives are few and far between. Parecon history is little more than a history of

publications, with organizations such as the VPC, South-End Press and Winnepeg's Mondragon Coffee house being among the few functioning examples. Below I describe the history of parecon literature and outline some of the parecon organizations that have sprung up since Albert and Hahnel's first texts. My history is not comprehensive because there are few documents to draw on for such a history, and most would result in little more than a bibliographical timeline. I have tried, nonetheless, to capture most of parecon's key organizations and groups, including especially those that have influenced the VPC.

In an interview with Chris Spannos, Michael Albert describes how his and Robin Hahnel's parecon model developed, through their "reactions to various schools of anti-capitalist activism" and resulted in the first parecon book, *Looking Forward* (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert 2006). Though it is clear that discussions on parecon and anarchist economics had been going on for years before the 1990 publication, *Looking Forward* is the first major text that attempts to lay out the groundwork for a parecon movement. Following this initial philosophical text, Albert and Hahnel produced *The Political Economy of Parecon*, a more theoretical piece from an economist's perspective, and later published numerous articles and talks in a variety of media (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert and Hahnel 1991; Albert 2006). While full-fledged parecon would require social as well as economic institutions, followers of parecon have developed a number of parecon workplaces, parecon organizations and national movements.

It is difficult to develop an exact chronology of the development of parecon projects. South End Press, for example, has been printing since 1977, but has only become a parecon workplace relatively recently—I was not able to discover when, though certainly such a development would have happened after 1990 (South End Press "About Us"; Burrows 2003). Parecon workplaces that have sprung up since 1990 include the G7 Welcoming Committee, a

music distribution company; Tao, an internet communications company; the Black Star Co-op in Austin Texas; the Mondragon Coffee House and Bookstore in Winnipeg; *Z Magazine* itself; and several others I have heard about from friends and my interview informants since I began this project (ZWiki"Parecon Wiki"; G7Welcoming Committee, "FAQ"; South End Press, "About"; Burrows 2003).

Because one of my interview participants is also a member of the Mondragon Coffee House, I was able to examine the history of a "pareconic" workplace from a first-hand source. The Mondragon Coffee house began in 1996 as a participatory workplace that could contribute to a local parecon federation (Burrows 2003; Appendix A). While Mondragon's federation has grown over the last nine years and now includes much of the building in which it is housed, both the members cited above and the Mondragon worker I interviewed emphasized the many barriers faced by such pareconic businesses. These barriers include balancing financial survival and parecon principles with interpersonal issues that stem from working under capitalism (Burrows 2003; Appendix A). Mondragon has taken aspects from the parecon program but in order to remain in accordance with law and accepted accounting practices has only managed to adjust the typical workplace structure, not entirely replace it (Burrows 2003; Appendix A). Growth of Mondragon and other parecon workplaces has been slow but steady, with many businesses now operating profitably and expanding their level of workplace participation.

As pareconic workplaces have slowly grown in number, so have international parecon organizations. A full study of the history of these movements would require more interviews and primary source research than is possible within this one thesis, but there is basic information available on the web and in printed documents. The parecon.org site includes numerous writers on parecon and links to parecon organizations in other countries. Prominent

among the listed parecon groups is the Vancouver Parecon Collective, though there are also movements in Hannover, the Balkans, Argentina and Greece (ZWiki"Parecon Wiki"; Parecon.org, "index"). There are also parecon sites hosted in Turkey, Spain, Italy and Sweden, each site offering organizations and workplace information in that country's language. Even since the start of writing this thesis, new articles, events and movements have sprung up in various areas of the world, including new debates in Sweden, Germany and France and a reviltalized parecon organization in Chicago (ZWiki"Parecon Wiki"; Parecon.org, "index").

The future of parecon must build from problems of the past and must expand in new directions, employing strategy drawn from historical analysis and close self-critique. Growth of pareconic movements is steady, but slow, and it remains unclear exactly how these small groups will render capitalist institutions "moot." As I discuss in my next chapter, more work needs to be done to combine the activist and academic in a way that will help parecon supporters transcend the mistakes of the past and develop a system truly informed by the history of democracy, the possibilities of social change and both the flaws and strengths of previous socialist movements.

Chapter 4

Social Movements, Economics and Anarchism: Theoretical Issues

Introduction

This chapter aims to situate the VPC and parecon within a context of radical and academic literature. As I discuss below, parecon is a prefigurative, radically democratic movement, making it an amalgam of "old left" and "new social movement" trends. Although committed to economic equality, "old left" movements were not as radically democratic as parecon in either theory or movement structure. Old left movements such as early union and socialist party movements traditionally followed hierarchical leadership structures, like revolutionary vanguardism or democratic centralism. Also unlike many "old left" organizations, parecon does not argue that the economy is the key that will solve all other social problems. Parecon is an economic system that activists argue would make anti-racism, sexual and gender freedom and environmental health easier to achieve than under capitalism, but that would not solve such existing problems alone. Advocates tend to argue for solidarity with other movements specifically targeting race, the environment, orientation prejudice, etc. More than new social movements, parecon is counter-hegemonic. Parecon advocates are not content with changing social attitudes or achieving effective legislation and instead seek to radically transform and eventually replace the entire capitalist market system. Also unlike new social movements, parecon advocates challenge both the formation and very existence of the capitalist market and state. As I discuss below, parecon advocates are an amalgam of "non" and "counter" hegemonic movements, sharing aspects of anarchism and Richard Day's "newest social movements" rubric. My purpose in this chapter is not to explain parecon by locking it into a single overarching theory, but to use social movement and activist theories to help understand the challenges facing parecon and to devise strategy. Throughout I attempt to alleviate tension

between effective academic theorizing and the needs of activists.

Through my experience as a sociologist, how I use theory has become as important as what theories I use. An important theme throughout this thesis is the need for my research to benefit the parecon activist project without compromising my ability to be analytical or critical. Colin and Cox discuss the tension between effective academic theorizing and activist needs in their joint article "'What have the Romans ever done for us?' Academic and activist forms of movement theorizing." Colin and Cox note that social movement theorists benefit personally from social movement members, while not necessarily returning the favour with anything directly useful (2002). Dorothy Smith expands on this activist/academic tension, pointing out how she once tried to force her research into an "iron law of oligarchy" perspective and failed, recognizing the need to theorize from the lived-reality and not impose an unrealistic academic schema (Smith 1993; Smith 1999). bell hooks and Donna Haraway also argue that it is important that we ground our studies in our experiences rather than abstract theory, only utilizing theory when it helps explicate daily life (Haraway 1991; hooks 1994). In my experience as a student it has seemed apparent that theories that attempt to group specific cases into general rules are easy to challenge and find holes in, and much more difficult to defend. However, as Cox, Colin, Smith and others argue, theory can contribute to social movements when chosen and expressed carefully.

I argue that my use of theory must be self-reflexive and self-critical in order to aid the parecon movement. Just as in the case of my research methods, I have tried to select theories appropriate to an analysis of radical democracy and anti-hierarchical thought. To develop context I begin with what others have already said about parecon and related movements, not to slot parecon in to my own rigid structure, but to help understand the political context into which it is entered and to explain questions that have already arisen through my direct

experience and research. Throughout I situate theories within the actual lived experiences of the people I interviewed. I attempt not simply to categorize but to explicate and raise potential challenges.

Surveying the Territory: Parecon as an Activist Project

Apart from writings by parecon advocates themselves, there is not much activist literature directly discussing parecon in depth and it would be difficult to ascertain the general activist attitude to parecon without a more in-depth study. There are several debates posted on the parecon.org main site, including discussions with prominent Marxists, anarchists, primitivists and proponents of other anti-capitalist alternatives. While many of these debates are lengthy, few provide much clarity regarding parecon's place in activist movements[1]. Many commentators have compared parecon to their own chosen economic alternatives, but few of these proponents address the strengths and weaknesses of parecon in particular; instead they tend to emphasize aspects that they are interested in that Albert and Hahnel do not address to their satisfaction. Parecon's unique contribution is to the "vision problem," particularly among disenchanted socialists and anarchists.

Parecon proponents situate their project most often within either a socialist or an anarchist framework as a contribution to a larger anarchist/socialist activist project. Albert, Hahnel, Wetzel and Richard Day all describe parecon explicitly as a project with an anarchist agenda, an answer to some of the central problems facing anti-authoritarian socialists (Albert

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[1] While I found some of these debates useful in better understanding parecon and others interesting for other reasons, I decided not to discuss them at length here, because they did not focus on any of the issues that are at the core of this thesis. For those interested in exploring the debates on parecon in greater depth, I recommend browsing the parecon.org site, now nested in the Z Magazine site, at http://www.zmag.org/parecon/indexnew.htm/. There is also a lively debate between Albert and Inclusive Democracy proponent Takis Fotopoulos in *The Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, issue 3 (2005), followed by a rejoinder on the parecon.org site. All the debates I found ended up focusing more on issues of emphasis, including exclusion problems in the Athenian Forum, rather than fundamental differences between each system.

and Hahnel 1990; Wetzel 2004; Day 2005; Albert and Spannos 2006). Within activist literature, anarchism is the main label that has been applied to parecon and the connections between parecon and anarchism thus merit further discussion. Below I explore how parecon fits into a larger anarchist project and how this association both helps and hinders the parecon movement.

The anarchist leanings of parecon may come as a surprise to those who imagine an anarchist economic/social system to be absurd, contradictory or frighteningly dystopian. Anarchists are often misconstrued as either atheoretical socialists or amoral *laisser faire* capitalists, and both approaches seem contrary to the main sociological and socialist perspectives and to parecon as a whole. Parecon does not seem to be a system of anarchy, but rather, of carefully planned order. Reading the particulars of parecon also makes the connection to anarchism seem dubious, despite Albert and Hahnel's clear position as anarchist activists. Rather than an individualistic system without restrictions, parecon emphasizes social consciousness, collective decision making, and income distribution. It is my contention, however, that not only are such features copasetic to an anarchist framework, it is the anarchist character of parecon that makes Albert and Hahnel's vision particularly worthwhile to contemporary socialists, feminists, environmentalists and critical sociologists. In order to explicate and define parecon, I explore a number of popular myths about anarchism and connect these myths to existing academic theory. Especially useful to this thesis has been the "Anarchist FAQ," a popular document online and in multiple print forms, examined theoretically by Barker and Cox (2002). There are numerous myths about anarchism that include: anarchism is intrinsically violent, is simply the rejection of rules, opposes organization, is not a form of socialism, is congruent with "anarcho" capitalism and other forms of individual ownership, and focuses only on atomized individuals at the expense of

group co-operation.

Anarchy does not mean "system without rules" and is not synonymous with violence or nihilism. The term anarchy stems from the Greek, "an" (in opposition to) and "archos" (authority, bosses, chiefs). As David Weick puts it:

> Anarchism can be understood as the generic social and political idea that expresses negation of all power, sovereignty, domination, and hierarchical division, and a will to their dissolution. . . Anarchism is therefore more than anti-statism . . . [even if] government (the state) . . . is, appropriately, the central focus of anarchist critique (Weick qtd in Ehlich et al 1979, p. 139).

Anarchist is not an exclusive label—it is possible to be a feminist and an anarchist without necessarily always acting as an anarcho-feminist. It is possible to be a supporter of ecological and workplace reforms in some contexts and anarchist revolution in others.

While there are violent anarchists, such violence no more defines anarchism than violent socialists define socialism. The myth that anarchism is intrinsically violent is easily debunked when examined against the existing anarchist literature and practice. As Albert writes, violence is sometimes justified but is rarely an effective strategy. For Albert, the preferred parecon strategy depends on non-violent tactics (Albert 2003). The anarchist writers I have examined, including Enrico Malatesta, Starhawk, Kropotkin and others, explicitly call for non-violent strategies with a resort to violence only in cases of self-defense against violent adversaries. Ecofeminist and self-defined anarchist activist Starhawk notes "if breaking windows and fighting back when the cops attack is 'violence,' then give me a new word, a word a thousand times stronger, to use when the cops are beating non-resisting people into comas" (Starhawk 2004). As Emma Goldman argues, "it is a known fact known to almost everyone familiar with the Anarchist movement that a great number of [violent] acts, for which Anarchists had to suffer, either originated with the capitalist press or were instigated, if not directly perpetrated, by the police" (Goldman 1972). Although many anarchists make a

distinction between property and people and suggest that while violence against living things is wrong, violence against property is sometimes justified, Albert and other anarcho-socialists decry violence against property as an effective strategy. In a critique of the tactics used by some activists in the 1999 Seattle WTO protests, Michael Albert states: "changing society isn't a matter of breaking windows, it is a process of developing consciousness and vehicles of organization and movement, and of then applying these to win gains that benefit deserving constituencies and create conditions for still further victories, leading to permanent institutional change" (Albert 2000). Kropotkin, one of the premier Russian anarchists writes: "structure based on centuries of history cannot be destroyed with a few kilos of explosives" (Miller 1976). Respected anarchist Bakunin further states that "we wish not to kill persons, but to abolish status and its perquisites" because anarchism "does not mean the death of the individuals who make up the bourgeoisie, but the death of the bourgeoisie as a political and social entity economically distinct from the working class" (Bakunin 1994). There are many other writers who challenge the "violent anarchist" stereotype, both in action and in text, but the difficulty still remains to challenge these myths in the process of movement building. It is important that if parecon wishes to be associated with anarchist thought, parecon proponents be prepared to challenge myths through their own actions.

Anarchists are not traditionally opposed to organization. Errico Malatesta explains that the anti-organization myth stems from a historical confusion, stating that: "since it was thought that government was necessary and that without government there could only be disorder and confusion, it was natural and logical that anarchy, which means absence of government, should sound like absence of order" (Malatesta 2001). Parecon challenges the state and corporations, but not at the expense of organization per se. Albert himself makes this point many times in response to criticisms of parecon. In one heated debate, David

Schweickart argued that there is a contradiction in parecon's many levels of coordination and Albert's rejection of a "coordinator class" to which Albert replied "only an ignoramus would reject coordination or coordinating. I do have a problem, however, with economic institutions that monopolize empowering labor in the hands of few people who then rule all others" adding both that "in parecon people exercising their wills… authority, happens all the time" and that "the problem parecon seeks to overcome arises if one set of people are overwhelmingly empowered by their activity, and another set are overwhelmingly disempowered by theirs" (Albert 2006). One of my interview participants states: "where coordinators develop the characteristics of planners and managers and the rest of society develop the characteristics of apathy" (Appendix A). These statements are more or less the same arguments employed by the majority of influential anarchist writers. Malatesta writes: "far from creating authority, [democratic organization] is the only cure for it and the only means whereby each of us will get used to taking an active and conscious part in collective work, and cease being passive instruments in the hands of leaders" (Malatesta 1993). Carole Ehrlich points out that while anarchists "want to abolish hierarchical structure" they are "almost always stereotyped as wanting no structure at all" while instead, "organizations that would build in accountability, diffusion of power among the maximum number of persons, task rotation, skill-sharing" are a product of "good social anarchist principles of organization" ("Socialism, Anarchism and Feminism" 2000). In other words, anarchists reject hierarchy but not organization per se. The power of police, magistrates, government officials and bosses is problematic because it is undemocratic and corruptible and disempowers the majority both mentally and physically. In opposition, anarchists call for democratic and participatory systems of organization based on voluntary association and mutual aid. Again, parecon proposes a system which would fulfill the anarchist vision of cooperative, individualistic and voluntary organization.

Socialism is often seen as oppositional to anarchism due in part to the common conflation of socialism and Marxism, the two terms having originated in different periods of history. Infoshop.org's Anarchism FAQ argues that anarchism is a form of socialism in that all "legitimate" subsets of anarchism are opposed to capitalism and in favor of equality (Infoshop.org "A.1.4 Are anarchists socialists?" 2006). Bakunin and Proudhon, two formative anarchists both routinely declared themselves socialists "as long as Socialism was understood in its wide, generic, and true sense—as an effort to abolish the exploitation of Labour by Capital" (Proudhon 1903; Proudhon 1989; Bakunin 1994; Infoshop.org "A.1.4 Are anarchists socialists?" 2006). Because anarchists traditionally reject all forms of systemic hierarchy and centralized power, it is only logically consistent that they reject both the state and the corporate/capitalist structure. Corporations and the state traditionally rule from above, imposing restrictions on freedom through legislation, command structure, or market pressures. Despite clashes over issues of power, anarchists have historically made use of Marx and I would argue there is no direct contradiction between Marxism and anarchism, as long as such Marxists do not follow a vanguardist model. Socialism means to free workers from the capitalist appropriation of their surplus labour, but it is not simply wealth that socialists mean to share, but power. The wealth implied by labour relations only has meaning when translated into ownership of scarce goods (the power to own an item and prevent another person from having it), or power, prestige, and ownership of the means of production. Wealth has no meaning unless coins, stock options, and balance books translates into some form of power. By opposing hierarchical power, anarchists naturally also oppose inequality of wealth and work to either eliminate or render wealth differences meaningless. One of the more individualist anarchists, Joseph A. Labadie emphasizes the libratory aspects of socialism, stating:

> It is said that Anarchism is not socialism. This is a mistake. Anarchism is voluntary Socialism. There are two kinds of Socialism, archistic and anarchistic, authoritarian and libertarian, state and free… every proposition for social betterment is either to increase or decrease the powers of external wills and forces over the individual. As they increase they are archistic; as they decrease they are anarchistic (Labadie, "Anarchism: What It Is and What It Is Not," p. 1).

There is no writing that I have found among "accepted" anarchists that would contradict this interpretation of anarchism and socialism. While some anarchists have challenged specific aspects of Bolshevism or other socialist movements, it is not because anarchists are opposed to socialism, but because they oppose centralization of power and hierarchical command structures both within the movement and in society as a whole.

The only argument I have seen that could separate anarchy from socialism is the erroneous inclusion of "anarcho" capitalism and American libertarians with the anarchist movement. As parecon advocates reject authoritarian leadership and lack of direct participation in the economic system, so do anarchists consider capitalist relations a breach of individual rights. Since individual workers do not have choice to work as much as they see fit for the rewards they need, since owners and senior management rather than the workers themselves determine the work schedule and the daily activities for the employed, capitalism contravenes most of the basic principles of anarchism. There is no way to define anarchism without reference to the formative writers, all of whom criticize capitalism or similar "power-over" systems. Peter Kropotkin calls anarchism "the no-government system of socialism" (Kropotkin 1987). Malatesta states that anarchism is "the abolition of exploitation and oppression of man by man, that is the abolition of private property and government" (Malatesta 1974). The continuity between these two positions (anti-government and anti-capitalism) stems from the original definition of the term as presented by Kropotkin being "an" (against) and "archy" (authority) (Infoshop.org "A.1.1 What is Anarchism?" 2006).

As I have explained, anarchists are not against all forms of authority, such as public authority or authority over one's own body, but are opposed to *authorities*, people placed in power hierarchically above other people. It is therefore impossible to be an *an-archist* and support social hierarchy. This is why anarchists by-and-large reject "liberataian" capitalists as "legitimate" anarchists. Libertarian, "anarcho" capitalists support capitalism, a system defined by separation of capital and labour, disproportionately rewarded leaders and a larger mass of workers. Noted "anarcho" capitalists such as Murray Rothbard even support the state, arguing:

> If the State may be said to properly own its territory, then it is proper for it to make rules for everyone who presumes to live in that area. It can legitimately seize or control private property because there is no private property in its area, because it really owns the entire land surface. So long as the State permits its subjects to leave its territory, then, it can be said to act as does any other owner who sets down rules for people living on his property (Rothbard 1982, p. 170).

Right wing libertarians fall into the same category as "anarcho" capitalists as they believe that capitalists should be "free" to pursue their own wealth-accumulation, however illegitimately they obtained it, however many races, sexes, genders, or ethnic groups had to be displaced or exploited, and however many existing power structures and the state worked in their favor. David Boaz, Murray Rothbard and Milton Friedman are all among the most influential libertarians and argue in principle that no one should be free to harm others, but that capitalists should have free reign over their workers (Boaz 1995; Rothbard 1982; Friedman 1962). Contemporary anarchists are especially critical of libertarians and "anarcho" capitalists, as demonstrated here from noted anarcho-syndicalist Noam Chomsky:

> Anarcho-capitalism… is a doctrinal system which, if ever implemented, would lead to forms of tyranny and oppression that have few counterparts in human history…the idea of 'free contract' between the potentate and his starving subject is a sick joke (Chomsky 1996, p. 1).

While there are many variants of anarchism with varying degrees of connection to feminism,

Marxism, queer theory, post-modernism and other justice issues, anarchism cannot support the capitalist division of labour at any level. No amount of association with anarchists can change the fact that so-called "anarcho" capitalism and right-wing libertarian are antithetical to the very definition of anarchism.

How can parecon work with anarchy if anarchy rejects constraint on individual freedom? Parecon is, after all, a system with rules aimed to prevent individual wealth accumulation. Firstly, anarchists do not necessarily see a contradiction between individualist and collectivist impulses. Malatesta states that:

> The real being is man, the individual. Society or the collectivity - and the State or government which claims to represent it - if it is not a hollow abstraction, must be made up of individuals…Social action, therefore, is neither the negation nor the complement of individual initiatives, but is the resultant of initiatives…of all individuals who make up society . . . [T]he question is not really changing the relationship between society and the individual…it is a question of preventing some individuals from oppressing others (Malatesta 1993, p.36-37).

Emma Goldman adds that the "rugged individualism" under capitalism is "the social and economic laissez-faire: the exploitation of the masses…spiritual debasement and systematic indoctrination of the servile spirit" and that while people must be freed from the control of others, this has "nothing in common" with such rugged individualism (Goldman 1972). Goldman adds that social inequality is a great strain on freedom and only by achieving freedom from wage slavery and centralized control is true individualism possible (Goldman 1972). Another prominent writer, George Barrett, has stated that: "To get the full meaning out of life we must co-operate, and to co-operate we must make agreements with our fellow-men. But to suppose that such agreements mean a limitation of freedom is surely an absurdity; on the contrary, they are the exercise of our freedom" (Barrett "Objections to Anarchism" 1990). To reiterate, anarchists support individualism as a remedy to collective disenfranchisement and alienation but reject the capitalist notion of the "rugged" "atomic" individualism.

Anarchists believe that co-operation is not only desirable, but a necessary component of the expression of what they call "social freedom." Anarchists can reject the individualism/collectivism as binary oppositions, arguing that humans have a natural propensity to interact with groups as social animals and that true individualism accepts that people exist within a social context. Further, anarchist individualism depends on the acceptance of diversity and the collective energy of individuals working together without hierarchy or duress.

One central unanswered question facing anarchists has been how an anti-authoritarian movement and anti-authoritarian society could develop and "work." Obviously leadership is important to successful social movements and the drive to "take charge" is a significant force in "western" political economy. Parecon is therefore a meaningful answer to the "what do you want and how is it supposed to work" questions facing anarchists. As demonstrated below, the academic literature surrounding social movement mobilization and strategy not only helps answer the question of how parecon fits into social movement theory but how social movements in general can combat authoritarian tendencies and still achieve success.

Social Movement Theory, Anti-Authoritarian Movements, and Parecon Strategy

Parecon is a uniquely anarchist, prefigurative activist movement, but in practice faces many of the same barriers faced by any critical social movement. The study of social movement dynamics, growth, development and barriers is the purview of social movement theory. Social movement theory is a growing field in sociological inquiry that has only recently developed its own subset of terms and concepts. Authors as diverse as Charles Tilly, Chantal Mouffe, Alain Touraine and Richard Day all have attempted to explicate social movement politics, explain how movements develop, how they frame issues, how they grow and how they affect change. Social movement theory has tried to account for the differing forms of social movements

(particularly in the US) through the categories "old left" movements, reactionary movements, "new social movements" and "new new" or "newest social movements[2]." As I intend to demonstrate, numerous strains of social movement theory offer unique insight into the parecon movement, particularly new interpretations of the Gramscian hegemonic approach combined with "new new" and "newest" theories. I begin with a literature review of social movement approaches and their application to parecon and end with more questions facing prefigurative movements. Popular theories of social movement politics include Smelser's "value-added" strain theory, McCarthy and Zald's resource mobilization approach, Tilly's political process theory and Melucci and Cohen's new social movement perspectives.

Smelser's value-added theory contributes to Talcott Parson's structural functionalism, arguing that social movements are "semi-rational" and indicative of social dysfunction carried by social strain (Wasmuht 1984; Smelser 1972). Strain caused by social dysfunction builds up in the populace, causing movements to spring up to return society to full functionality. Movements follow six steps of articulation, starting with general structural conduciveness (the dysfunction arises but is not yet strong enough to ferment a movement) followed by generalized belief (beliefs challenging this dysfunction are generalized to a population or a group), structural strain (the dysfunction is recognized, leading to strain on individuals and the system), precipitating factors (some event or events occur that take structural strain to the extent that movements see the need to immediately mobilize), mobilization of participants (social movements that have connected their beliefs to the dysfuction react through political action), and finally mechanisms of social control address the social movement group and

[2] "New new" and "Newest social movements" are different terms offered by different authors for the same thing. Graeber's (2005) term "new new" and Day's term "newest" both describe recent anti-hierarchical and anarchist movements.

social strain (authorities either stop the movement, solve the social problem or allow the movement to continue) (Wasmuht 1984; Smelser 1972). According to Smelser, movements develop essentially as a result of some strain in the system that is either "fixed," ending the movement, or not fixed, allowing for the proliferation and growth of movements (Wasmuht 1984; Smelser 1972). While Smelser's "value added" theory has some explanatory potential when analyzing revolutionary situations, street protests, and many rights movements, he does not account for the long-term mobilizing of movements like parecon that are ongoing and do not rely on a particular structural precipitating cause (other than capitalism in general). Critics have additionally argued that Smelser unfairly pathologizes activists and categorizes at the expense of a deeper analysis (Wilkinson 1970). Value-added theory does suggest conditions under which parecon could grow, but neglects the role of long-term planning, strategy and changing protest repertoires as well as the effects of rapid social change (Wilkinson 1970; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Harper 1998).

Olson, McCarthy and Zald move deeper into the actual processes of social movements with their "resource mobilization" approach. Resource mobilization takes for granted that social movements arise in a democratic pluralist society and compete as interest groups (Kerbo 1982; McCarthy and Zald 1977). McCarthy and Zald emphasize five processes of mobilization: creating a potential base of support; forming recruitment networks; using framing techniques to arouse motivation for events; removing barriers to participation; and, once a movement is created, maintaining collective identity and nurturing "interpersonal relationships" (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Kerbo 1982). While resource mobilization provides a valuable framework for an analysis of the needs of social movements, they neglect the socio-political aspects approached by Smelser and others, as well as the differing needs of different social movement ideologies. Parecon, for example, could draw from the existing literature on

building a base of support, building networks, framing &c., but would face different barriers than other groups due to their counter/non-hegemonic position. While it is possible to gain support for feeding the homeless or catching dolphin-free tuna through standard channels, it is somewhat more difficult to gain support for replacing the political economic system from legislators, mass media, grant offices and other groups with a vested interest in keeping the capitalist market in place. Jean Cohen adds that the mobilization framework leaves "unanswered" the question of why solitary individuals join groups or form movements from the beginning (Cohen 1985).

Charles Tilly is often described as one of the founders of "political process theory," an approach to social movements that takes the basic resource mobilization framework and adds an analysis of political opportunity and structural constraints (Tilly 1978; Tilly 2004; Cohen 1985). Tilly expands the resource mobilization approach to analyze social movement repertoires, the "handbook" of tactics employed by particular social movements (Tilly 2004). Political process theory agrees with resource mobilization approaches' support for strong leadership and "sufficient resources," adding numerous structural concerns including "elite disunity," democratic pluralism, declines in the effectiveness of repression, greater access to institutional processes and support of opposition by elites (Tilly 1978; Tilly 2004). Tilly's approach is appealing as an attempt to bridge structural and micro-social issues under one framework, but problematic in that it offers no clear definition of social movements that applies evenly to local, national and international movements (Cohen 1985; Tilly 2004). Tilly, as with many of the analysts mentioned above, reifies democracy in the form the capitalist liberal (or neo-liberal) state, leading him to argue that only the spread of constitutionality and law will expand democracy (Tilly 2005). As I described in chapter 3, the meaning of democracy far predates the modern capitalist state. Since capitalist workplaces are

intrinsically undemocratic, due to the control of an unelected hierarchy, the spread of capitalism and of bourgeois law will never produce radical democracy. Social movement politics can go beyond existent modes of democracy and work to develop new forms—thus, the spread of democracy does not so much precipitate democratic movements as much as movements precipitate democracy. Jean Cohen also criticizes Tilly, arguing that social movement theories need to account for social movement culture and the formation of social movements through pre-existing sub-cultures (Cohen 1985). Activists do not necessarily develop identity "accidentally" but enter a movement with an established identity and a desire to legitimate this identity politically and socially (Cohen 1985).

The "new social movements" category is one that has been employed by many social movement theorists in the last thirty years. For Cohen, "new social movements" are identity movements that "abandon" the "productivist bias" of the "old left" in exchange for grass-roots political struggle within civil society (Cohen 1985; Day 2004). The "new" left struggle for democratization of contemporary structures and for the formation of "democratic associations that are loosely federated on national levels" (Cohen 1985). The new social movements are composed of the "middle classes" and some members of the "old bourgeoisie and are made up of "collective actors [who] consciously struggle over the power to socially construct new identities, to create democratic spaces for autonomous social action, and to reinterpret norms and reshape institutions" and "strive to create a group identity within a general social identity whose interpretation they contest" (Cohen 1985). In essence, Cohen argues that the "new social movements" have abandoned "old-socialist" emphasis on replacing society, in favour of a "self-limited" emphasis on "communication and collective identity" (Cohen 1985). Rather than advocating for redistributive struggles in the conventional political sphere, post-materialist values emphasize the quality of life rather than the quantity of goods (Habermas,

1987; Offe, 1985). In their defense of personal autonomy, they oppose state intervention in daily life to guarantee security and well-being (Porta and Dianni, 1999). Cohen presents both Habermas and Touraine as "identity-orientated" analysts who can be used to bridge findings from social movement organizations, from sociological analysis of tactics and from macro-social analysis with an understanding of "new social movements" (Cohen 1985).

Since the liberal-democratic worldview permeates all of the above theories, there is little room to seriously consider anti-authoritarian revolutionaries such as parecon advocates. All the above frameworks for social movements take the state as a given, placing activists in relation to the state and representing them as actors making claims with the government and corporations. Theorists tend not to view activists as people seeking entirely alternative networks outside, parallel to or in opposition to capitalism. As Cohen identifies, social movements self-limit their scope in order to work with the state rather than working towards its abrogation or replacement (Cohen 1985). Anarchists generally reject the state, regarding it as a politically and militarily enforced arbitrary entity and an instrument of class warfare. Parecon aims to replace the current state with a series of nested federations, networked across regions and legislated boundaries. None of the above social movement theories account for this possibility and none have a space for confronting an ideological, transformational movement that grows through ideological dissemination in a way distinct from that of old-left movements.

Richard Day's *Gramsci is Dead* is a polemical theoretical text that challenges previous social movement frameworks. Day specifically addresses some of the issues I felt were missing from previous social movement theories in explaining the development of parecon. Day argues that all heretofore social movement theorists have been co-opted into what he calls the "hegemony of hegemony"—the dominant belief that all political and economic systems

necessarily control social structures from the top down, and all movements to replace societies must themselves be prepared to exercise power through some centralized mechanism (however democratic this mechanism may be) (Day 2004; Day 2005). In order to take power from entrenched elites, those accepting a "hegemony of hegemony" would argue that socialists must themselves have some form of hierarchical structure and appointed leadership. Day argues that the "newest" social movements, such as those that organized the protests against the World Bank, IMF and WTO, are embracing a "non-hegemonic" (and thus non-hierarchical) "affinity-group" structure based on informal networks within groups and across cultural, political and state boundaries (Day 2004; Day 2005). Not only is the affinity-group structure one of the few organizational experiences I remember from participating in the 1999 anti-WTO protests in Seattle, it is a group structure that permeates literature on the new anti-capitalist activists (Sturgeon 1995; McDonald 2002; Graeber 2003; Clark 2004; Wall 2005; Day 2005).

The notion of a "leaderless cell" or affinity group is a sticking point for many activists and academics. Many typify the absence of clear leaders as inefficient, ill-conceived or idealistic. Porta, Gramsci, Voss and numerous others argue that leadership is important because it helps bring order and organization to otherwise disorganized individuals, as well as acting as a focal point for the media and potential recruits (Gramsci 1999; Porta and Diani 1996; Voss and Sherman 2000). I argue that while personal leaders are valuable, movements that rely too heavily on a leader at the expense of empowered group decision-making are too easily corruptible. The Owenites of my third chapter are a particularly salient example; their corrupted leaders fled and left their society to collapse. This pattern is a repeating theme of my history section and illustrates the value of participatory organization. Indeed, the idea that people form better decisions collectively is the very founding principle of democracy and

ultimately of socialism. Purkis, Mansbridge or Brafman and Beckstrom all argue that leaderless "cells" or those with highly democratic leaderships are more difficult to destroy and more empowering than those with a clear hierarchy and centralized decision making (Purkis in Barker, Colin and Lavalette 2001; Mansbridge 2003; Brafman and Beckstrom 2006). Counselman provides evidence that "leaderless" organizations can actually succeed for many years if the work of a leader is taken on by the group as a whole (Counselman 1991). Few, however, argue that there is no place at all for leaders—instead, critics argue that self-critical analysis needs to be done to diffuse concentration of power. Anarchists generally support active cycling of tasks and responsibilities to prevent groups from forming separations between leaders and the led. Morris and Staggenborg additionally argue that it is possible to democratize and diffuse leadership through active, self-critical attention while Foster, Hoggett, Heller, and Linhart argue that decentralizing or minimizing the direct control of leadership encourages individual empowerment among group members (Morris and Staggenborg 2004; Heller 2001; Hoggett and Foster 1999; Linhart 1993). As Albert and Hahnel argue in their defenses of parecon, decentralizing leadership and deliberately democratizing tasks also has the potential to help members develop leadership skills and build a knowledge base for future members (Albert and Hahnel 1991; Albert 2003; Albert 2005). Ultimately there is a place for strong, motivated leadership, but it must work alongside more directly democratic "affinity groups" and collective federations to affect change.

The term "new new" social movements and "new new left" is being employed to describe a form of activism that moves beyond questions of identity towards a new anti-capitalist revolutionary movement based on affinity between a variety of unique cultural, ethnic, social, sexual and gender groups and towards radical non-violent alternatives to the capitalist economy (Graeber 2003; Day 2004; Wall 2005; Day 2005). As one of these

movements, parecon represents a prefigurative system that offers a concrete opportunity to move beyond questions of identity towards a non-violent alternative to capitalism.

New new movements reject hegemony as a necessary condition for the replacement of capitalism. Day argues that these "newest" movements are non-hegemonic rather than counter-hegemonic, meaning that they seek social change through indirect conflict, by opening working alternatives that take the place of old institutions and eventually render capitalist institutions essentially moot (Day 2005). Non-hegemonic approaches avoid direct conflict with the state, and so far the main parecon organizations fit this model. However, as parecon grows, I argue that it will face more and more situations where conflict with the state and corporate structure are unavoidable. While Day is moving away from Gramscian approaches with his non-hegemonic model, Gramscian theories of political struggle, particularly his concept of counter-hegemony, provide useful additions to Day's "newest social movement" approach.

In order to contextualize Day's social movement approach, it is necessary to explicate Gramsci and his use of the concept of hegemony. Gramscian hegemony is a form of ideological and cultural dominance. Capitalism is successful because people are persuaded to accept it as the norm. Force is rarely needed precisely because capitalism is ideological dominant—capitalism becomes the taken-for-granted, unquestioned reality. People hold an ideological stake in capitalism and thus a consensus is built that, if not perfect, capitalism is "the best we've got" and potentially irreplaceable. Even if they disagree with capitalism, their will to resist is reduced simply because capitalist ideology permeates society. However, because capitalism is contradictory and inegalitarian, a "counter-hegemony" develops, a movement of people opposed to capitalist control. This counter-hegemony survives firstly because capitalism's non-violent hegemony provides space for such resistance, and because

counter-hegemonic movements continually work to find new members and challenge ideological dominance. This counter-hegemony can develop into a large-scale movement or "bloc," precisely because capitalism is so successful—a unified enemy makes it possible to develop a unified opposition. Hegemony weakens alternative means of accessing power (such as trade unions), which leads to the proliferation of movements focused on challenging political and social control, and provides these movements with a centralized focus. If capitalism was less concentrated and more rhizomatic, a counter-hegemonic resistance would have difficulty selecting a clear target. The growth of capitalist hegemony has led to many more identity movements fighting for recognition within the confines of the system (Carroll and Ratner 2001, Sonbanmatsu 2004, Kebede 2005). Gramscians argue that, while the many faults of capitalism create different kinds of resistance (environmental harm leads to environmental movements; patriarchal control leads to feminist movements; worker exploitation leads to workers' movements, etc), an analysis of hegemony allows activists to see how their struggles are connected. Gramscian theories thus provide the grounds for a "paradigmatic" critical approach, a way to unify disparate forms of political opposition (Carroll and Ratner 2001, Sonbanmatsu 2004, Kebede 2005).

In order to unify disparate social movements and build an effective counter-hegemonic resistance, activists must employ both "war of position" and "war of movement" approaches. A "war of position" is a kind of "war of attrition" in which movements chip away at the ideological dominance of capitalism from an entrenched position. A "war of position" is generally slow in pace and doesn't achieve much forward momentum, but is necessary in order to raise awareness and build up membership for the "war of movement." The dominant ideology is challenged through increasing influence of activists in the mass media, the education system, mass movement recruitment, etc., while solidarity is built between different

struggles. However, as a counter-hegemonic movement becomes more and more effective, the state and corporations become more aggressive, necessitating a "war of movement," to rally recruits and push for significant change. To put it simply, a "war of position" is the process of expanding the movement, building a popular ideological alternative and attracting members. The "war of movement" is the act of challenging the state and corporate structure with these new members, either through "acts of powerful significance" like protests and strikes, or widespread rebellion. In a hegemonic state, Gramsci argues that a "war of position" is needed to lay the counter-hegemonic groundwork for the "war of movement."

Through a Gramscian lens, parecon and other "newest" social movements would seem to be waging a "war of position," without a program that builds towards a "war of movement." Parecon activists, for example, are working to build a working alternative ideology and increase parecon's ranks in the form of pareconic workplaces. There are two core differences, however, between groups engaged in a "war of position" the non-hegemonic groups as described by Day, Wall and others. First, non-hegemonic groups are working to create solutions that are meaningful in the here-and-now. A very critical Gramscian response might argue that this is exactly the problem of the "war of position," however, for non-hegemonic organizations, there is little interest in being wrapped up into a larger battle per se. To suggest that these groups need to articulate their struggle as a war of position is to distort the self-stated aims, and to impose success or failure conditions that are not embraced by these groups themselves. Parecon activists do not see themselves as building for a final battle, but rather as creating a working alternative that transforms peoples' everyday lives today. Non-hegemonic activists hope to avoid or greatly reduce the need for a direct conflict with the state, minimizing the role of the Gramscian war of movement. Second, non-hegemonic activists have no interest in creating a single, unifying ideology. Unlike the "old left," which

traditionally strived to draw social movements (gender, sexuality, ecology) etc., under a single-issue banner, non-hegemonic groups want to maintain movement and tactical diversity. Parecon activists often state that they would like to see a broad-based movement to replace capitalism, but are not interested in building an ideology that is hegemonic, that encompasses all other movements. Gramscian dominance is problematic because it relies on an (albeit peaceful) consensus that may be impossible to achieve. While it is entirely possible for large portions of nations, whole societies and international coalitions to accept a parecon as the best form of economy, this still leaves many other issues to be handled in other ways. Gender, sexuality, environmental issues etc., require a diversity of approaches that may remain in opposition to one another. There may also be groups of people who agree to work under different prefigurative principles, such as Queer economics, deep ecology, or radical democracy as described by Takis Fotopoulos. While Gramscian hegemony is not a product of force, it still must rely on ideological *dominance*, not merely a general agreement over core ideals and principles (in the case of radically democratic diversity) but collective domination by one ideology. While socialist hegemony is supposed to be spread organically and democratically, ideological dominance can equally be spread (as it currently is under capitalism) through deceptive propaganda and centralization of media/power. Unlike counter-hegemony (which may value diversity), non-hegemony must be diverse by definition in order to avoid any one ideology becoming hegemonic. While this creates an apparent contradiction between "counter" and "non" hegemony, this contradiction is more an aspect of emphasis than it is of core disagreement. Parecon activists are working to make their vision widespread, but have no interest in bringing together all disparate forms of activism (gender, sexuality, environmental, and other progressive movements) under one banner. In fact, parecon advocates would be happy to work in parallel with other progressive systems. Allowing a

variety of people access to power through participatory governance is the backbone of parecon and the necessary diversity of non-hegemonic movements is considered its strength. Whether or not non-hegemonic movements can be effective without a strong "war of movement," these groups are not simply engaging in a "war of position" in the strictest Gramscian sense. Non-hegemonic movements thus attempt to bypass the problem of economic, political and social control by working for systems with built in barriers to centralized control. However, hegemonic and non-hegemonic socialist movements are not necessarily as diametrically opposed as Day and other commentators suggest.

Carroll and Ratner are two notable critics who challenge Day and others' attempts to work outside the Gramscian model of movements. As I argue below, the "newest" social movements perspective is effective in describing movements such as parecon, but it is not without its flaws. Day accurately identifies the "affinity group" structure shared by the new movements, parecon's focus on functioning alternatives, and newest movements' desire to supplant neo-liberalism with decentralized, highly democratic, and diverse alternatives. The major flaws of Day and others' approach are their inability to explain how non-hegemonic movements will effectively render capitalism moot, their unnecessary rejection of all counter-hegemonic approaches and the ambiguity of the terms "new new" and "newest."

In their non-hegemonic structure, Day argues that newest social movements take on an "affinity group" model as a structure that avoids the necessity of centralized leadership and places democratic control in the group as a whole (Sturgeon 1995; Graeber 2003; Day 2004; Day 2005; Wall 2005). As I will demonstrate in Chapter 6, the VPC does employ an affinity group structure. Affinity groups are a useful component of non-hegemonic organization, but these "newest" social movements recognize that "affinity" through developing identity is not enough—a more broad-based movement against neo-liberalism is required (Day 2005). A

second non-hegemonic element of the newest social movements is an attention to a disparate set of struggles including environmental, gender, sexuality, economic and political, all linked through opposition to neo-liberalism (Graeber 2003; Day 2005; Wall 2005). Again, Albert, Hahnel and several of my interview participants all emphasize the necessary connection between parecon and rights/recognition movements. Rather than a central leadership, the "new new left" embraces decentralized decision making with protests, workshops and talks being developed by a variety of groups and not by representative leaders (Graeber 2003; Wall 2005). A protest may be started by an anonymous blogger, or through an organization without a representative figure, or even through unofficial interpersonal networks (Graeber 2003; Wall 2005; Day 2005). The newest movements recognize that decentralization often leads to simply more complex, rhizomatic systems of control and so believe that decentalization is not enough (Day 2005). As Day argues, these newest groups are neither "reformist" nor "revolutionary" in the traditional hegemonic/counter-hegemonic sense, but rather strive to neutralize/block/resist and render both corporate and state power redundant (Day 2004; Day 2005).

There are flaws in Day and others' "newest social movements" framework that can be addressed through integration with other social movement theories and further analysis. Day's argument that non-hegemonic movements are not trying to replace capitalism all in one go does fit with Albert's position on gradual "non-reformist reforms," reforms that pave the way for participatory structures (Day 2005; Albert 2005). In making his argument, Day unnecessarily maligns counter-hegemony and revolutionary change altogether, disproportionately privileging non-capitalist alternatives at the expense of directly anti-capitalist or anti-state tactics (Caroll 2006). As Albert suggests in P*arecon: Life After Capitalism*, it may indeed be possible for parecon federations to proliferate through self-

perpetuating networks (parecon workplaces help set-up other parecon workplaces without the aid of other movements) and partially sidestep state/corporate barriers. However, as parecon organizations grow large enough to challenge the ruling powers, a counter-hegemonic "war of movement" will likely be needed to create space for more parecon (or other alternatives). Since parecon activists are not trying to unify all anti-capitalist activism under one banner, parecon will not take on the exact Gramscian specifications of a "war of position." Parecon is not trying to take over the state or create a socialist world government, but break the state down, making state borders less relevant and create a more diverse field of networked communities, perhaps some operating with different democratic systems. Nonetheless, by drawing on Gramscian strategies, parecon activists can advance both counter-hegemony as well as their non-hegemonic ideals. If parecon activists use pareconic workplaces to promote the real possibility of at least one meaningful alternative to capitalism, to connect activist struggles in different parts of the world, and to motivate parecon workers to support other social justice movements, parecon will weaken the taken-for-granted dominance of capitalism. By working towards the proliferation of parecon workplaces and fighting for participatory planning in communities, parecon activists will be creating non-hegemonic alternatives that undermine capitalist hegemony in indirect ways. Thus, by contributing to a "war of position" and non-hegemonic alternatives simultaneously, parecon will effectively bridge the gap between "non" and "counter" hegemony without sublimating their movement under the counter-hegemonic banner. Although he uses somewhat different terms, Carroll further argues that movements need to move from one unstable position to "walk on two legs" by connecting "non" and "counter" hegemonic movements into a single political approach (Carroll 2006). A "war of position" will not only bolster a wider anti-capitalist movement, but also will be needed to defend non-hegemonic alternatives from the inevitable capitalist backlash and work

towards lasting, widespread change. While diverse, using non-hegemonic means to build ideological resistance to capitalism will allow non-hegemonic movements to do as Carroll suggests and "walk on two legs," both creating diverse alternatives that are meaningful now, and working towards a counter-hegemonic movement for the future. A counter-hegemonic conflict with the capitalist hegemony will open up avenues for more non-hegemonic alternatives, since the barriers to such alternatives are intrinsic to capitalist ideological dominance. While the "newest" and "new new" social movement perspective seems to advocate strategies that minimize "war of movement" and emphasize the "rendering moot" of the ruling powers, a broader strategy must encompass both approaches in different political/social spheres.

Day's disinterest in demonstrating how "non" and "counter" hegemonic can work together is not the only flaw of the "newest social movement" perspective. *Prima facie*, the "newest" social movements and "new new left" labels are unnecessarily awkward. While Day makes a strong case for non-hegemonic movements, the entire usage of "new" and "newest" is temporally restrictive, especially in a world of rapid change. It could be argued that many of the utopian movements mentioned in my history chapter fit with the "new new" model. The Owenites in particular showed elements of the "new new" movements in their organization and non-combative political approach. The short-lived Paris Commune's inability to directly challenge the state and build a broader movement created the space for its own destruction. Alternative communities flourished in the first years of capitalism but most did not last long and those that did often changed their moral positions to work with the dominant economy[3] (Holloway 1966; Manuel and Manuel 1966; Bradeley and Gelb 1983). Parecon cannot follow

[3] In fact, there is a relatively vibrant subculture of utopian communities today (North America hosts over 700), few of the first non-religious based societies remain and fewer still are poised to threaten capitalist hegemony.

the same path of these earlier non-capitalist alternatives. As Albert and Hahnel argue, pareconish workplaces can work within capitalism and a parecon system could operate *alongside* a capitalist state, but full-fledged parecon (including fully developed worker and consumer councils that determine production and consumption) could not work in conjunction with capitalism or within a market capitalist state because the two are in clear contradiction (Albert and Hahnel 2001; Albert 2003).

As an activist interjection, the "newest" social movement concept is also problematic as it complicates the study of activism with another new schema, rather than contributing to an analysis of the key issues facing movements and the strategy that can be used to overcome them. Day's book also contains unnecessary generalization and swipes at academics and post-Marxists (Day 2005). Despite significant weaknesses, I believe the non-hegemonic movement framework offered by Day fits well with the actual practices of parecon and anarchism, and can be bolstered with a counter-hegemonic perspective. While Day seems to maintain that "non" and "counter" hegemonic approaches are in direct opposition, I suggest that they can complement each other. Non-hegemony fits with the current strategies of parecon well, but counter-hegemony will help parecon diversify, strengthening the movement.

In the next chapter I analyze the texts identified as influential by the VPC in order to expand my discussion of the parecon program and integrate analysis of parecon into a praxical approach inspired by the problems of anarchist and socialist history. Throughout this discussion I expand a definition of parecon and raise questions facing those critical of and copasetic to parecon. By exploring the specific arguments that define parecon, I hope to show how movements such as the VPC can work to combine "non" and "counter" hegemonic strategy.

Chapter 5

Parecon Texts Through a VPC Lens: A More Extensive Analysis

Introduction

This chapter examines how parecon was read, interpreted, and understood by VPC activists through an analysis of parecon texts and the interaction of these texts with related articles, books, and discussions. My purpose is both to identify what coordinated the efforts of VPC activists and explicate the exact meaning of parecon for the reader in the context of radical prefigurative politics. I start by listing some of the key texts VPC members cited in their interviews and continue with an exploration of the various core tenets and proposed institutions of parecon. After explaining each tenet or institution I discuss some of the critiques each face and how parecon authors have responded. In each case, Albert and other authors offer an in-depth response to their criticisms but in many cases they leave some of the precise details of how problems will be addressed unanswered. According to Albert and Hahnel, while they do want to produce as complete an impression of parecon as possible, too much specific instruction would be counter-productive. Any new society will face unique challenges and solutions to such challenges must arise organically out of the specific context. Albert and Hahnel try to leave room for parecon to develop in a participatory and democratic way, rather than dictating every rule as self-appointed rulers of the movement. By examining parecon in depth, my purpose is to show how seriously VPC members have examined their ideas, and to fully explicate parecon as a vision and a prefigurative movement. An in-depth look at the parecon system will help clarify strategy issues I explore in further chapters.

Texts Selected

There is no single text that unifies the VPC. Each member I interviewed emphasized different books and articles in the parecon pantheon, including "Michael Albert and Robin

Hahnel's joint efforts on *Looking Forward: Participatory Economics for the 21st Century*" (2001), "Michael Albert's dramatic 'debate' with… Zerzan," ("Albert/Zerzan: Primitivism." 2006) "a 'What is Anararchist Economics' lecture that [Michael Albert] gave" ("What Is Anarchist Economics" 2001) and "*Life After Capitalism*" (2003) or "essentially everything Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel had written on the subject" (Appendix A; http://boston.indymedia.org/newswire/display/4098). Each informant also stated that they had read most "if not all" of the online parecon writings, a collection which has now grown to be quite large: the online parecon site contains full-text of most of the available books, debates, articles and both talk transcripts and full-audio recordings (Appendix A). While varied, I found that these texts enriched rather than contradicted each other: while each member cited different sources, the overall message and prescriptions for organization were the same, allowing these texts to coordinate the movement. However, such texts are not "everything" to the coordination of the VPC, as Phil notes:

> values of parecon inform just about everything we do. We ask each other questions and we listen to each other at the talks we give and we read each others' essays, interviews and reviews and give each other feedback. I think this feature of our organizing is probably more important than any specific texts (Appendix A, p. 196).

In my research, I continually used my interview transcripts as a guide, tracing the origin of concepts and terminology and expanding into lengthier articles and books where necessary. Although Albert and Hahnel were the prime authors, I ended up following articles by Nikos Raptis, Tom Wetzel and some of the VPC members themselves. Due to time constraints, I did not comb through *all* such material, but did study each of the published books and combed through articles and debates from numerous authors in order to get a sense of the complexities and historical progression of the parecon program. For example, while I did examine the existing text of "What is Anarchist Economics," the original audio is now down, and some

material is missing from the Boston Indymedia site where it was originally hosted. While parecon has become more and more complex through response to various points of debate, the central tenets and ways in which proposed institutions are supposed to work are fairly simple to grasp. Having combed through many years of parecon writings, I would argue that, for those interested in prefigurative vision, even one book or one in-depth article should be sufficient, since most such texts merely re-enforce the same core points with some refinement and attempts to counter criticism.

The mandate text on the VPC's homepage was not considered a significant influence by any of the VPC's members, and yet offers a useful starting place to map out their movement. Clearly stated at the top of the page is that VPC is a group set-up to "advocate, research and implement parecon institutions, values and procedures" in the Vancouver area ("Introduction" http://vanparecon.resist.ca/, 2006). The definition of parecon as used in the VPC's online introduction can be found through links on other pages of the VPC "hub" including it's most prominent link, www.parecon.org, the centre-point of parecon on the web. In its most basic articulation, parecon is a model for a functioning "participatory" non-hierarchical classless society (Albert and Hahnel 1990). Under parecon, power is taken from coordinator and capitalist classes (managers, bureaucrats, land owners, CEOs) and divided up among workers and consumers (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert 2003; Albert 2005). This "take" need not be violent or sudden—the parecon movement could begin with small participatory workplaces building alliances and forming participatory federations, or it could involve large-scale ideological change and spontaneous bursts of direct action: there is no one single route to parecon and no need to resort to vanguard politics. There may be "experts" who push parecon forward, but these are not meant to be "leaders" as much as they are facilitators, working with community members, activists, and workers to demonstrate the

efficacy of alternatives. From the start, Albert, Hahnel and other writers have responded to criticism and occasionally updated or altered their arguments as a result of critique (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert and Hahnel 1991; Albert 2003; Appendix A). From the very beginning, parecon has been made up of four core principles: workplace and consumer councils/nested federations; balanced job complexes/job rotation; remuneration for effort and sacrifice; and participatory allocation (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert 2003; Wetzel 2004; Albert 2006). Each of parecon's four principles have been grouped slightly differently from iteration to iteration, but the names and their implication have remained more or less the same.

Councils

The main *social* structure I learned about from my informants is the council, both consumer and workplace. Workplace councils operate in any workplace, from a hospital to a warehouse, to an office, a school, a library, a factory, etc. Consumer councils consist of all people in a parecon outside of their position as workers. Councils are working groups that meet to make decisions—such groups may consist of all the people in a single workplace, in a region, in an industry, in an affected area, or even sub-committees entrusted to examine a specific issue or problem (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert and Hahnel 1991; Albert 2003). These councils may be "nested" so that a person may be in a small sub-committee and then report on behalf of that committee to the workplace council, which then reports to a regional council, etc (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert 2003). Workers may take part in many or few councils—the emphasis is in direct participation over abstract representation. Nonetheless, if a representative is merely providing a report on what has already been decided by a "lower-level" council, such representation would be acceptable—it is only when representatives hold special power to affect policy that they become problematic (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert and Hahnel 1991).

The term "consumer council" may raise some red flags for anti-consumerist activists, but Albert and Hahnel are not referring to consumers as an undifferentiated mass with rights or power to consume anything they like: parecon advocates begin with an admission that humans cannot avoid consuming things, from water to air to food, and that their actions as consumers are distinct from their actions as producers (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert and Hahnel 1991). Some people are affected by workplace decisions but are not workers, because of age, physical ability or any number of other issues. There will be consumption in any society, and councils allow this process to be participatory and collective without being dominated by a centralized authority. Consumer councils consist of the same people as worker councils as well as those who cannot work, and deliberately extend to as many affected parties as are realistically possible (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert 2004; Day 2005). The closest working example is the participatory budgeting initiative being championed in places like Porto Alegre. While limited due to budgetary constraints imposed regionally and nationally, the participatory budgeting of the city is a way to control allocation of resources socially, rather than through a centralized hierarchy (Chomsky "Preparatory to Porto Alegre"; Graeber 2003; Wall 2005). Under parecon, consumer councils help provide information on what communities and individuals need to be produced or provided, what local concerns need to be taken into account and what a community may have a surplus or other excess of. Parecon advocates argue that economic decisions should include all potentially affected parties to the degree to which they are affected: those living in an endangered wetlands should have say at the same table as workers who wish to extract resources there (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert 2003).

Councils may be organized in various democratic ways, from open voting to consensus model decision-making—as long as the members are collectively satisfied with the

organization and proceedings (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert 2003). As currently occurs in the Mondragon coffee house, an explicitly pareconic co-op in Winnepeg, workers can be regularly polled at meetings or over internet communication to discover how satisfied they are with the organization, what directions they think things ought to be moving in and how knowledgeable they feel they are about the council and parecon in general. Such polls can be public or anonymous depending on the wishes of collective workers through their council (Appendix A; Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert 2003). Workers determine how long they would like to work for an appropriate share of allocated rewards, what they wish to produce or what services they will provide, what methods they will employ, how sub-committees will be structured, etc. etc. (Albert 2003). While this may seem like a great deal of responsibility, Albert and Hahnel argue that it is not much more than many corporations and NGOs give to upper echelon managers already. Now, most such decisions are made in disempowering meetings that place all power in senior management, or behind closed doors of state and corporate institutions such as ministries of finance, corporate boardrooms and world trade organizations. Unlike most meetings workers attend today, council meetings (of both worker and consumer councils) would be included as part of the work-day and would be appropriately remunerated. Workers determine each aspect of their working experience, but they do not do so in a vacuum. Worker councils interact with consumer councils to allow for participatory planning and eschew the need for a centralized economic authority (Albert and Hahnel 1990).

Consumer councils are also designed to be "nested" from small neighbourhoods, large city areas, regions, even nations[1] (Albert and Hahnel 1990). Consumer councils inform

[1] Though the full implementation of the parecon model would allow for the elimination of meaningful national boundaries, in the short-term parecon would have to operate locally and regionally first, then within national boundaries, until such boundaries could be eliminated.

workplaces as to what the local/regional/national/international needs are, and allow for the collection of necessary data such as consumption projections, potential costs both environmentally and socially, and a variety of qualitative information from consumer satisfaction to social inclusion (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert 2003). The underlying principle of networked councils and federations is that "every actor should have a say in economic decisions in proportion as he or she is affected by them" (Albert 2006). All these councils make decisions and produce plans, but none of these plans take precedence over emergent conditions: council plans are participatory in that workers and consumers are encouraged to participate directly. Workers and consumers also implement the plans, determine their role, and adjust their actions as appropriate (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert 2003; Appendix A). Accountability can be built into any needed additional structures, including "accountability sessions" such as those used by the Mondragon Coffee House described in Chapter 6. Mondragon, like other parecon workplaces, makes use of extensive online and in-person meetings to determine future strategy, and of "accountability sessions" to track people's involvement and participation in projects, as well as to help keep sub-committees on task (Appendix A; Burrows 2003).

The main criticism of workplace and consumer councils is that they would be overly cumbersome. No one wants to be in meetings all day on half-a-dozen committees. Moreover, locking people into too many councils would be inefficient. Another criticism is that these councils are just further lines of bureaucracy obscuring economic relations. Many of Dorothy Smith's criticisms of capitalist patriarchy rely on the physical distance between steps in a bureaucracy (Smith 1999). Critics of parecon argue that the difference between parecon and command economy could become blurred as plans would dictate economic relations (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Hahnel 2000; Albert 2004). Albert and Hahnel deal with these challenges

head-on, first pointing to the massive number of committees and sub-groups already in place to deal with every aspect of capitalism, from monthly economic forecasting, to national policy, to inflation and monetary adjustment. There are hundreds or even thousands of organizations and corporations from the local to the international level that deal with comparable complexity—just in a comparatively undemocratic way (Albert and Hahnel 1990). By balancing job complexes (described in the section below), workplaces need not be overcome by meetings, rather making cooperative and informal planning sessions part of the normal workday. Albert and Hahnel argue that the majority of criticisms of "interminable meetings" are based on the experience of being part of highly alienating discussions where employees worry more about trying to agree with their boss than any gains in their participation in decision-making. Council meetings under parecon would represent real opportunities to advance policy and inspire action, since they have the concrete power to enact collective decisions (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert 2003). Albert also argues that the parecon federations would not be organized so that every single decision must make its way all the way up a "hierarchy." Instead, various federations may determine general programs based on reports from individual members describing their needs and their anticipated consumption for a period, and these may be used to guide the discussion at the workplace level (Albert 2003). Since people have a personal stake in the operation of the economy as members of worker and consumer councils, it is in their own best interest to make their workplace efficient and receptive to the needs of their community. There is no need to bring every decision to a higher level, since workplace decisions are not dictated hierarchically, but through self-managed groups and individual workers. Workplaces can handle the hiring and firing of members collectively (based on workplace needs or performance) and not rely on any wider council. Ideally, these workers participate both because they support their workplace (within

any democratic workplace model, workers would be free to change workplaces or careers at will without significant personal cost or risk) or because the structure of allocation and rewards (discussed below) favors participation (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert 2003; Wetzel 2004). It is important to recognize that different "levels" of communication do not necessarily imply increased bureaucracy—as Weber argues, bureaucracy is a hierarchical form of organization, not specifically democratic, inclusive or participatory (Weber 1994). The wider federations do not make the decisions, they merely collect information and make reccomendations based on consensus from other workplaces. They do not enforce such recomendations. All in all, Albert and Hahnel argue that the nested councils are simply more democratic and less bureaucratic than any of the systems that have operated under capitalism or the "Communist" command economies, stating

> While it might be that democratic decision-making requires somewhat more overall meeting time than autocratic decision-making, it should also be the case that a lot less time is required to enforce democratic decisions than autocratic ones. It should also be clear from our discussions of the daily circumstances and behavior in participatory workplaces that workplace meeting time is part of the normal parecon workday, not an incursion on people's leisure (Albert and Hahnel 1990, p. 255).

Apart from the mechanisms that have been put in place by parecon workplaces to build accountability and participation, daily workload is managed through "balanced job complexes" described below.

Job Complexes

The job complex system is designed to diversify people's skill-sets, provide variety and engender both transparency and accountability in decision-making processes. In simple terms, a job complex is like a network of jobs or tasks that each worker takes on. Parecon advocates argue that there are more and less desirable jobs or tasks and that these represent a spectrum of desirability (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Raptis 2003). Tasks may be more desirable

because they require less rote work, less repetition, less physical or mental strain than other jobs, or because they provide more information or responsibility, while undesirable tasks may be routine, monotonous, less respected, or more dangerous/stressful (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert and Hahnel 1991; Albert 2003). Although people will disagree over which tasks are better or worse, people generally agree today that there are certain jobs less desirable than others: dishwashing, for example, or clean-up. To create more equality and to reduce the opportunities for such differences to build into effective hierarchies, parecon advocates argue for more "balanced" "job complexes," collections of jobs emphasizing a variety of tasks for each individual worker (Albert 2003). Doctors may make a number of stressful decisions and require exacting training, but their position provides specialized knowledge and access to authority which ultimately leads to the inefficiencies and stratification associated with elite professions (Albert 2003; Albert 2004). Parecon advocates would argue that under a social situation in which all workers are given more-or-less equal rewards, very few people would choose to clean bedpans or dispose of medical waste all day. To avoid such inequalities and to diversify the available stores of knowledge of each worker, under parecon, workplaces would balance the types of work performed by each member: medical personnel would spend some time researching, some time cleaning, some time performing medical procedures (Albert 2003). Albert and Hahnel argue that education would be free and appropriately remunerated under parecon, as in any more just society, and this would allow for many more people to work in medicine, allowing for more doctors and fewer patients per doctor or nurse. While there may be some leeway given to specialists, there would be no pure "gruntwork," and all medical staff would have time allotted for a variety of tasks. In a factory, each worker would take some management tasks, some assembly-line work, and some clean-up. There would still be some workers who choose to take on more janitorial duties and some who would do more

administrative tasks, but these would depend on their personal interests and on the relative rewards they would like to receive. Unlike under capitalism where the worst work is generally rewarded the least, as I will explain in my section on remuneration, the hardest, least favorable work would receive more rewards (by small increments) than others (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert 2003). Further, the "balance" would not simply be some token interaction with cleaning or support staff:

> We do not mean that we have doctors who occasionally clean bed pans, nor secretaries who every so often attend a seminar. Parading through the ghetto does not yield scars and slinking through a country club does not confer status. Short-term stints in alternative circumstances—whether slumming or admiring—do not rectify long-term inequities in basic responsibilities. We do mean, instead, that everyone has a set of tasks that together compose his or her job such that the overall implications of that whole set of tasks are on average like the overall implications for empowerment of all other jobs. Further, for those doing only elite work in one workplace to do only rote work in another would not challenge the hierarchical organization of work in either one. We need to balance job complexes for desirability and empowerment in each and every workplace, as well as guarantee that workers have a combination of tasks that balance across workplaces. This and only this provides a division of labor that gives all workers an equal chance of participating in and benefiting from workplace decision-making. This and only this establishes a division of labor which does not produce a class division between permanent order-givers and order-takers (Albert 2003, p. 104).

Albert admits that some workplaces may simply have more or less hardship than others, and for that reason, workers would be provided the opportunity to spend some time in one workplace and some in another, in each case contributing as much as possible to a fulfilling and productive balance (Albert 2003). People living under capitalism today work two or three jobs and instead of being a necessity, this could be an opportunity to explore different groups of tasks. The advantage of this system is that it automatically precludes excessive specialization towards exclusive trades or professions, towards people primed for leadership and those not, towards "grunt" and "intellectual" workers, instead allowing everyone the opportunity to experience some variety, holding access to influential positions at each stage of their work.

There are many arguments against balanced job complexes, and the various writers at www.parecon.org handle many of these clearly and concisely, but there are other issues pertinent to this thesis. Firstly, there is the problem of judging the hardship or desirability of jobs. While statistics could be produced to determine which jobs are indeed more highly desired, there would be no accounting for individuals with greatly divergent experiences from the majority: there may be some people who just enjoy simple, intellectually unchallenging work, or visa versa. Some work may also be so valuable or specialized that it could not be equated to anything else, and might take a life-time of study to master—or simply be more efficient with a few people focused on the task over a limited period of time. As a juggler, for example, I discovered that professional circus performers often have to practice all day just about every day to progress and to develop the skills necessary for performance. As a backroom stock-worker in a warehouse store, I found coming in every day increased my ability to keep track of, and improve on, the many procedures. The most common example of the "specialist" problem is that of the surgeon, who may spend all her time studying a particular aspect of physiology and the science of curing a particular ailment. Albert and Hahnel argue that highly specialized workers are scarce under capitalism partially because many people lack access to the requisite education due to economic status or accessibility, and under parecon, skills-training and study would be appropriately remunerated as with any other kind of work (Albert 2003; Hahnel 1991). In a society with open access to training and democratic workplace-to-workplace mobility for workers the "expert" and "specialization" problems facing balanced job complexes become less pertinent as there would logically be a larger pool of "experts" to draw from (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert and Hahnel 1991). While some people would be so advanced in a particular field that taking them into another would be a waste, these are extreme cases that could be dealt with on an individual basis.

However, even if a more accessible education system allows for more specialists, most hospitals will still likely require a small staff of dedicated specialists for some operations and it may be inefficient to create a fully balanced job complex. While Albert argues that there are actually very few specialist positions that could not be given a balanced job complex, I still think there is more work to be done by parecon advocates to examine the specialist problem.

In addition to the specialist problem, some critics argue that balancing job complexes would be inefficient for many reasons, including redundant training, split resources, lack of interested people, and ignorance of the superior ability of some people to perform certain tasks (Hahnel 1991; Albert 2003). Albert and Hahnel reply on numerous fronts to each of these problems. In terms of judging hardship, Albert and Hahnel argue that they are interested in determining relative levels through workplace councils that will be designed democratically and non-hierarchically so that consensus between workers will determine a task's desirability, with room to accommodate special cases, just as there is now in many real-life organizations (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert 2003). One of my interview subjects challenges the idea that anyone would really want to do all the "shit jobs" all day anyway—most people he has met want at least some variety in their work as the same thing all day, be it intellectual or physical labor, tends to be exceptionally exhausting (Appendix A). Some people may also not be capable of a variety of tasks due to various disabilities or challenges, but this does not mean that an effort could not be made to enlist workers into as much variety of necessary tasks as is possible (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Hahnel 1991). Balanced job complexes not only eliminate many forms of elitism and inequality, they also help educate people into being able to participate in a number of fields. Under parecon especially, all people need experience in empowered positions so that they gain confidence in their ability to participate in decision making processes (Albert and Hahnel 1990). Albert and Hahnel argue that the freedom of

these complexes and their potential to enrich the workforce have direct benefits for efficiency and empowerment, which I have discussed above and are spelled out more formally in their more technical volume, *The Political Economy of Parecon*. However, balanced job complexes also reduce the opportunity for great inequalities of wealth through their interaction with the parecon system of remuneration.

Remuneration

Remuneration, or "payment" for effort and sacrifice is another aspect of parecon I initially found problematic but warmed to after interviewing my informants and reading the many debates, arguments and rebuttals on the parecon.org site (now moved to Zmag.org). Basically, parecon advocates choose the agreed-upon difficulty of a task and then rate this according to the abilities of the worker as a basis for payment in "pareconic credits" (Albert and Hahnel 1991; Albert 2003). While parecon would guarantee a basic level of subsistence aimed to meet the needs of all people, these "pareconic credits" would be added to people's basic subsistence and would be traded for a variety of "nonessential" or luxury goods and services. In other words, the council collectively decides what skills are required for a particular task and how much effort is required and then each worker is evaluated for the skills they have and the effort they will need to put out to complete the task. The more effort, the more pay, within the bounds of relatively egalitarian wages. Credits are then traded for goods in stores not based on competitive market value but on social/environmental/economic production cost. In opposition to capitalism, in which remuneration is based on either on this competitive market value or whatever the boss wants to pay, and command economies in which wages are set by the state bureaucracies, parecon advocates payment based on a collectively agreed upon level of "hardship." The more difficult people's work, the more they are rewarded. While it may seem problematic to separate allocation and need, Albert argues

that the two are entwined by the overall principles of parecon. It is simply the *mechanisms* of remuneration that are divorced from need; social welfare is designed to be built in at the base, through parecon's basic guaranteed income combined with an ethical parpolity, or participatory social system. Remuneration for effort and sacrifice merely diversifies *above and beyond* people's basic needs as a reward for work. Albert argues that systems of reward based on result rather than input are unfair. To Albert, it is unjust to reward "fantastic luck in being born genetically endowed with special talent" or born/placed into a social situation which provides one with greater access to education, training and inspiring familiar figures than the other (Albert 2003). If there is a just way to differentiate income—even at a relatively minute level—such distributive justice must be based on effort and sacrifice, in order to reward hard work and provide incentive outside of a marketplace for people to excel (Albert and Hahnel 1991; Albert 2003; Albert 2006). This fits with the testimony of one VPC member who criticized a co-op he had been working for because it failed to pay based on any agreement over which tasks were the most difficult. Hahnel clarifies the process in his most clear and detailed account in a response to parecon critics, stating:

> Consumption is according to effort. Effort is whatever the effort rating committee in one's workplace says it is. The procedures effort rating committees go through to come up with their ratings are up to them and the workers council of the particular work place. Self evaluation, peer evaluation, observation, measures of output, changes in output from previous periods, grievance procedures, or tossing coins! - all of that is up to each workers council to decide...Will they get it perfect? No. Will there be complaining? Yes. But they'll estimate effort as best they can and those who are sufficiently dissatisfied will go somewhere else where they're more appreciated (Hahnel, "Response to Criticisms of Parecon," 2006, p. 8-9)

Remuneration for effort and sacrifice is useful in framing parecon's job complex balancing, providing a reason to want to take on comparable jobs to other workers, and creating a structure through which hard work is promoted without resorting to markets, law enforcement, or rigid, centrally planned structures.

Just as with the first two aspects of parecon, the parecon remuneration system has faced numerous critiques. Many criticisms, such as those that equate the remuneration system with that of a command economy or that of capitalism, are routinely dismissed as they are easily disproven with reference to the actual literature (Albert and Hahnel 1991; Hahnel 1991; Albert 2003; Albert 2006). While remuneration is based on participation, such evaluation is not made by centralized party cadres as in a command economy, but by the workplace collectively. Unlike capitalism, remuneration is not highly competitive or based on market forces, but based on collective agreement over the desirability of certain work. At the Mondragon coffee house, for example, regular meetings help the workplace decide which tasks are more or less difficult and help re-balance workloads. There is simply nothing in the actual texts or practices of parecon to suggest that participatory allocation will be anything like that under a command economy or capitalism. It would additionally be difficult to exaggerate the difficulty of one's own job, since job complexes are balanced anyway, away from excessive wage differentiation. Those who claim the system wouldn't work due to competitive human nature are also referred to Albert and Hahnel's detailed political economic analysis in *The Political Economy of parecon*, or Albert's *Parecon: Life After Capitalism*, which does more justice to these claims than I could in the relatively short space of this paper. Their response basically narrows down to the argument that there is no evidence that "human nature" forces humans to be greedy, dishonest or unable to contribute to discussions or debate. Numerous social scientists have demonstrated the power of social norms, propaganda and institutional structures to affect people's actions (Albert 2003; Albert 2006, Habermas 1987; Weber 1994). Whether "human nature" is compassionate and cooperative as is evident in family and kinship structures, or whether it is competitive and violent, is still very much an open question and largely irrelevant to parecon (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert 2003).

Albert argues that if it is true that humans are competitive and violent, and it is also true (as we know) that societies operate with differing levels of violence and competition, then we would want a society that reduces the rewards for those who attempt to dominate others as to channel this energy in other ways: i.e., a parecon (Albert "Reply to Marko"). Considering the vast inequalities and emphasis on competition in capitalism, there is only one way to find out if humans have the capacity for greater cooperation and egalitarian relationships: experimentation (Albert 2003; Albert "Reply to Marko"). The one way to guarantee capitalism will continue to thrive is not to challenge it, not even to attempt to build working alternatives.

Some writers argue that emphasis on the "efficiency" of parecon's remuneration system risks missing opportunities for truly emancipatory alternatives—no one should feel they "have to" contribute to some abstract ideal just to make a living (Wetzel "Self-Emancipation"; Hahnel 1991). Parecon's remuneration system does not necessarily provide unconditionally for the desires of all people. Other writers point out there is no need to create an additional remuneration system as the entire system could be participatory or democratic: instead of some abstract, value-laden approach, remuneration could be determined by worker and consumer councils alone, even working in conjunction with broader federations (Wetzel "Self-Emancipation"; Albert 1990). There is no objective standard of "hard" and social preconceptions about the difficulty of some work over others could dominate the remuneration structure. Effort and sacrifice are also not necessarily commendable. By way of a *reductio*, destroying a forest could involve more effort than planting some trees, or a brilliant surgeon's work could be relatively effortless compared to that of a less efficient medical student, or the selfish pursuit of wealth could involve great hardship but little social value. In fact, *prima facie*, reward for effort and sacrifice might seem to reward inefficiency and redundant work.

Parecon advocates respond first by pointing out that workers do not determine their level of hardship in a void. Just as in any workplaces, workers can be hired or fired for reasons of performance. Unlike capitalism or a command economy, however, such decisions are collective rather than up to a centralized hierarchy. The same workers who exaggerate the difficulty of their own tasks would be selling-short their own community council, of which they are members. If a workplace were consistently exaggerating the difficulty of central tasks, regional councils would simply recommend that their job complexes be re-balanced or that they hire new workers, so as to make their work easier. Albert and others further argue that remuneration for luck, skill, or talent simply isn't just, while remuneration based on need disproportionately rewards those who can claim they need more—whether or not that claim is accurate (Albert and Hahnel 1991; Albert 2003; Wetzel "Self-Emancipation"). Obviously, someone with a serious physical impairment who wishes to work in a field where their impairment is a disability needs some sort of assistance, but within a complex society in which a variety of goods exist for entertainment and in which non-material goods such as vacations, spa treatments, and even additional training are to be distributed, determining who "needs" these things more would be an enormous challenge. It could be argued that the person who "needs" a vacation or a spa or some recreational toy most is the person who has worked the hardest, and that is the basis of parecon's remunerative justice. Albert argues that remuneration for contribution in the economy is additionally problematic even when considering the fact that these individuals endured long periods of training (Albert 2003). In our own society doctors, lawyers and sociology professors are (theoretically) paid more than construction workers, janitors and gas station attendants, theoretically because of all the elite skills they possess and long hours of training they put in. Under capitalism, it makes sense to disproportionately reward these people for their economic hardship, but under parecon or just

about any egalitarian economic system, where training or schooling would be itself remunerated (as it produces social "good" and requires effort), rewarding people after their schooling would be double remuneration above and beyond the advantage of gaining knowledge and becoming a more versatile person (Albert 2003). Albert (a professor himself) argues that, while schooling can be painful, it is largely the double stress of making money to pay for registration and performing all the necessary tasks that makes it difficult. Eliminating the former, education can actually be fun and is greatly preferable to all kinds of laborious jobs from mining to scrubbing toilets (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert 2003). Not only is rewarding luck, skill, training and natural ability unjust, a system of rewards emphasizing luck, natural ability or the heightened ability/opportunity to access training and gain skills (the joint conditions of so-called meritocracy) is *a priori* an ineffective incentive, since each exists prior to or apart from any system of reward and must therefore manifest and be "spent" before any remuneration process could take place (Albert 2003). In other words, people have talent *before* they are given the incentive to develop them. No one can improve their luck or natural ability, and while skills can be improved, under parecon, it is only at the point when these have already been developed that such 'incentive' would be given. Instead, Albert argues that hard work and sacrifice are very easy to measure, based on ratings determined by a workplace or other context, and would easily serve as motivation because their would be a direct ratio between their effort put in and rewards reaped (Albert and Hahnel 1991; Albert 2003). Tom Wetzel also argues that leaving rewards entirely up to democracy would be harmful, not because there is an internal flaw in democratic systems, but because it would be too difficult to account for individual or sub-cultural preferences in a mass assembly (Wetzel "Self-Emancipation"). Albert additionally states:

> Why, if we believe in equality, don't we give everybody one car, one tennis racquet,

> seven plums, thirteen books (one by Jacqueline Suzanne, one by Chomsky, etc.), and two green shirts? The answer, of course, is that being equally deserving does not mean that people have the same preferences. We want people to have the freedom to follow diverse preferences, but equality does imply that people shouldn't draw more from the public supply than anyone else (Albert 2003, p. 113).

Therefore, the parecon system of remuneration would bolster efficiency and social justice simultaneously against less "technical" systems that would end up being more unjust.

Allocation

Participatory allocation is one way that parecon bridges the individualism of anarchism with the co-operative distributive ethos of socialism. Basically, a rotating IFB or "Iteration Facilitation Board," operating as a fully participatory, democratic and qualitatively informed version of capitalism's central banks, government budget offices and treasuries, takes data from previous years (or newly collected data for the first IFB) and announces an "indicative" price for all goods and services (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert and Hahnel 1991; Albert 2003). IFBs may have a regular staff or rotating membership, but should act more as facilitators than active organizers. IFB reports are based on consumption from previous years, reports from consumer and worker councils and reports on social and environmental costs/conditions (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert and Hahnel 1991; Albert 2003; Albert 2006). Workplaces and federations submit proposals listing what output they mean to produce and what input they will need in terms of resources and allocations for workers (Albert 2003). These reports may be weekly, or monthy, or yearly, depending on the needs of the workplace and need not take any longer than a regular inventory or monthly report does today. After reading allocation reports from councils, IFBs submit an adjusted report based on perceived demand or supply, to which councils and workers reply with their own revised report. This process can be simplified and ideally requires only two iterations but is open to as many iterations as are required to reach a rough consensus (Albert and Hahnel 1991; Albert 2003).

Workers submit annual and semi-annual requests to their workplace which analyses them for submission to the IFB to reduce the chance of the necessity for serious revisions such as requests to increase or decrease their allocation requests/projected output (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert and Hahnel 1991; Albert 2003). These plans are not meant to be set in stone, but rather determine on average how much each worker will be able to consume and to determine their work hours (Albert 2003). Workers have input into the daily proceedures of their workplace and can easily make adjustments based on need, such as sick days, trips to be part of family events, unexpected allocation requirements, etc (Albert 2006; Hahnel "Response to Criticisms"). Workers make reports detailing their consumption over the year, selecting goods and services online without ever having to go out of their homes and these consumption reports are adjustable, more of a guide with buffers on either side than an absolute rule (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert 2003). Consumption requests may be made yearly like filing taxes under capitalism, or more regularly like shopping online. Robin Hahnel notes that although people are being asked to plan some time in advance,

> I shop for the week, and then end up going to the store every other day for more milk, or eggs, - or actually, cookies and ice cream that I tried to believe I was going to cut down on. I will be able to do just that in a participatory economy as well. The only difference is I will be asked to estimate my annual consumption of items in advance, and will receive a kind of pre-approval for that amount based on my effort rating. In the end I'll be "charged" for what I actually consumed during the year which will differ to some extent from what I asked for (Hahnel "Response to Criticisms of Parecon," 2006, p. 3-4).

Essentially, consumption for an entire year is approved in advance, but on a daily basis, people just exchange for what they need or want—there would be some leeway given for misjudged budgets. Although consumption approval would have an overall upward limit, the main purpose of the consumption report would not be individual regulation, but regional coordination of workplaces. People's consumption reports would help IFBs determine how

much of various things need to be produced, with small surpluses of goods maintained to account for changing consumption on a daily basis. Because parecon is not a consumer-market system, there would be little need to produce the dozens and dozens of different models for consumer products, allowing consumers easier choices and the opportunity to shop in one or two large warehouses rather than having to travel to the half-a-dozen they might otherwise have to under capitalism (Hahnel "Response to Criticisms"; Albert 2003). This would also eliminate the need for retail sales jobs almost altogether, opening up more workers for less alienating work. Community warehouses could be sparse like "big-box" stores under capitalism, or more lavish, large social meeting areas like a mall. In addition, some workplaces may have a front-end "store" although, because production would not be based on competition, these "stores" would likely have the same items available in the community warehouse. There might be 2 or 6 slice toasters, or vehicles with various designs, but there would be no need for 14 different companies all offering 6 slice toasters with different decals and low rates of durability and 8 companies all producing a nearly identical 4-door sedan (Albert and Hahnel 1990).

I have not found many specific criticisms of the parecon allocation system. Most socialist critics appear to be in general agreement with the approving of consumption based on social and ecological cost, as well as individual work and agree that there need not be competitive production of nearly identical goods. Non-socialists tend to ignore the allocation system's specifics as a whole and just criticize the entire system as another autocratic command economy. Under parecon, emphasis would be placed on quality goods, reducing the ecological strain of repetitive consumption, and goods would primarily be held in a central location, saving driving/walking/biking distance (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert and Hahnel "Descriptive Account"; Wetzel "Self-Emancipation"). Some people that my informants have

debated with have argued that the allocation system places too much power in society. The idea of making online consumption requests is also said to leave the alienating effects of contemporary technology unchallenged (Appendix A). Additionally, other critics have argued that planning shopping days, weeks or months in advance would be too difficult and complex, and submitting such reports could lead to artificial adjustments and self-censure of embarrassing purchases (Albert 2003; Hahnel "Response to Criticisms"). Albert and Hahnel call this latter issue the "busybody society" or the "kinky underwear problem" (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert 2003; Hahnel "Response to Criticisms"). Unfortunately, Hahnel makes little attempt to address the "kinky underwear problem" in his texts, stating only that his students have brought it up on numerous occasions and through discussion they believe they now have the problem "licked" (Hahnel "Response to Criticisms"). Elsewhere, Hahnel does reiterate that allocation requests are anonymous and confidential—the only information given to third parties are projections for specific industries and service agencies without information that would identify individual consumers (Hahnel "Response to Criticisms"). The internet also enables parecon "shopping" to be direct and relatively simple, without requiring approval for every request at every level of federation. Allocation requests are "pre-approved" and then subtracted from "banked" allocation amounts after transactions occur allowing for flexibility as described by Hahnel above. As far as the technology that simplifies such transactions, the VPC members I interviewed stated that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with technology in itself. Technology can be alienating under capitalism as it is used to accelerate and homogenize work as well as to eliminate jobs, but this is not how technology is meant to be used under the participatory allocation system (Appendix A). The fact that the internet allows free exchange and communication across space is a boon to parecon's broad ambitions, and makes it a potentially non-hierarchical tool to enable parecon participants and advocates.

However, as I will demonstrate in my brief analysis of the Mondragon Coffee house, there is more work needed to incorporate new technologies into parecon practice in a way that does not disproportionately advantage the techno-literate.

Strategy

While parecon is a detailed vision for a more participatory future, how we get there is less clearly defined. There are only two main parecon texts that address strategy to any significant degree, *Looking Forward* (1990) and *Realizing Hope* (2005). There is little detail in either of these volumes on how exactly to start a pareconic council, or how parecon in particular can seize on the struggle for worker-rights. The emphasis is placed on a general approach to building movements and what kinds of reforms will benefit parecon. Albert writes that there "is no roadmap" to parecon and that constructing a single strategy would be shortsighted (Albert and Hahnel 1990; Albert 2005). Primarily, parecon activists advocate the slow growth of parecon workplaces, "bootstrapping, via parecon, more parecon" (Appendix A). Successful parecon workplaces can pull smaller, less established workplaces and community councils up by their "bootstraps" and work on building stronger networks overall. Albert and Hahnel suggest that worker and consumer councils will be the "primary vehicles of the struggle for participatory aims" and that the first focus of parecon strategy is the formation of such councils (Albert and Hahnel 1990). Community parecon groups can work to create businesses and or the VPC initially considered, can work towards participatory city/regional budgeting. VPC members suggested to me that parecon would best grow through the slow build-up of parecon workplaces and networks, with no real need to rely on direct confrontation with the state or corporate powers. Apart from the formation of alternative workplaces, parecon supporters can work towards "non-reformist reforms," small political change that furthers a pareconic agenda (Albert 2005; Albert and Hahnel 1990). "Non-reformist reforms," are not

changes for the sake of improving conditions alone, but with a larger political agenda of building momentum towards a parecon movement. Such a program of "non-reformist reforms" very much echoes Gramsci's "war of position." While the goals are not identical (the growth of parecon in a limited locality not necessarily to be expanded into wider a counter-hegemonic bloc), the idea of building change with a wider political motive is one place where parecon strategy could be augmented with counter-hegemonic techniques. For example, Albert argues that pareconic councils can work in solidarity with other movements fighting for worker rights in order to simultaneously improve the power of workers and improve the possibilities for a parecon movement (Albert and Hahnel 1990). Reforms aimed to empower workers and increase democratic participation in the economy will provide the freedom required to work towards a parecon and help model the activities of a participatory society. However, there is little detail in any parecon text on how to build these movements for "non-reformist reform" and how to translate solidarity with worker struggles into advances in parecon without sublimating these advances under a unified parecon banner. Obviously, the fight for worker rights does not in itself advance parecon—worker struggles long predate the very idea of a parecon. There is little detail on how to advance from individual workplaces struggling to stay afloat towards a powerful network striving for change. Albert and Hahnel emphasize general guidelines for the movement more than a clear analysis of strategy.

Parecon's activist strategies are where the strengths and weaknesses of a non-hegemonic approach become most apparent. On the one hand, such a gradual build-up of parecon networks would be a highly participatory and democratic way to develop a movement, since everyone involved would be directly participating in the daily operations of pareconic workplaces. No one group would have the opportunity to become a revolutionary vanguard and dominate the movement. On the other hand, there is the danger that parecon

could grow too slowly, or not progress beyond small isolated workplaces and communities. Indeed, so far, parecon has left a negligible mark on public consciousness and in the activities of other social movements. As the catastrophic effects of the capitalist market economy accelerate (a growing gap between rich and poor, ecological disasters, concentration of political and productive power), parecon stagnates, growing only incrementally. While non-hegemonic practice is a useful way to avoid violent conflict with the state and sidestep endless battles with government legislators and corporations, under parecon's current strategy, there is no mechanism to expand parecon faster than it can be coopted or destroyed by capitalism. The inequalities of the Athenian forum, the short existence of the Owenites and destruction of the Paris commune discussed in Chapter Three, all demonstrate the dangers inherent in attempting to build an alternative without sufficient momentum or political vision. Furthermore, there is no ideological reason why the non-hegemonic approaches currently emphasized in parecon texts need be the only strategies parecon activists employ. As Albert argues that there are many "roads" to a parecon, there is no reason why a non-hegemonic approach cannot work alongside a more confrontational counter-hegemonic campaign to challenge capitalism on two fronts. The emphasis of parecon's revolutionary strategy is not on *right* or *wrong* ways to organize a movement but on democratic, non-hierarchical, and overall participatory practice.

Conclusion

To sum up, parecon is participatory in that people (in their roles as workers and their roles as consumers) have direct democratic control over almost every aspect of their workplace and jobs, and that these workers are encouraged to participate as part of—not above and beyond—their daily work-load. Project planning is participatory and democratic, engaging as many affected parties as possible in the process. Parecon is also participatory in

the sense that all people participate in as many aspects of their job as possible and have job complexes that are balanced from the least empowering to the most, allowing for a radical workplace equality. Remuneration is not entirely participatory in that workers do not determine the guiding principle, but is democratic in that worker councils determine the individual criteria for their workplace. Allocation is participatory and democratic in that all people have direct input in the kinds of goods and services they will have access to and what they will be pre-approved for. Individual consumers directly provide information that can be used to determine what and how much will be created. The movement to build a parecon is also meant to be participatory and to draw on diverse tactics.

Parecon texts define the perspective and coordinate the daily activities of the VPC and other parecon groups. More than simply being the *raison d'etre* of the VPC, these texts also organize the structure of the group, as the group attempts to reflect the principles of the parecon program in their structure. In the next chapter, a closer analysis of the VPC "under the microscope," I examine the effects the co-ordination of parecon texts have on the group and the influence of the relations of ruling on group activities. I discuss some problems of strategy and other problems of long-term vision within the context of a close examination of the daily practices of the collective.

Chapter 6

Analysis of Interview Transcripts

In this chapter I connect the history, theory and close reading of parecon texts I have examined so far to my interviews with VPC members. Having explored how activists have addressed the idea of non-hierarchical democracy in the past, what theories have been used to analyze this process, and how parecon has been designed to address our current "vision problem," I intend to explore exactly how VPC members have tried to actualize pareconic principles in their daily lives. I examine strategy as well as organization in order to analyze how parecon texts and non-hegemonic strategy coordinate the daily practices of VPC activists. This transcript analysis chapter is thus the centre-point or "anchor" of this thesis. Not only did these interviews frame my entire research process (I did research to address questions that became pertinent through the interview process), these interviews also answer key questions I have raised in previous chapters. The bulk of this chapter contains a detailed account of the words used by VPC activists to describe their actions and organization. Throughout I make two arguments: first, that the specific barriers facing the VPC are distinctive to anarchistic and alternative economic movements; and second, that these barriers demonstrate the importance of a combined "non" and "counter" hegemonic approach to move parecon forward on two fronts.

The three interviews I carried out organized each aspect of the research process. These interviews helped direct my additional reading and provided the most "new" material. I interviewed three VPC members whom I call Jack (interview 1), George (interview 2) and Phil (interview 3). Although I gained a great deal of information from each of these participants, I have tried to narrow down the essential information into seven subject areas that are especially significant to my thesis. Throughout, my emphasis is not on "why" there is a

vision problem, but "how" these parecon activists have attempted to address the problem, including the unique barriers they face as a prefigurative movement, and what may be missing from their existing strategy.

I asked my participants many questions to guide my further research. First, I asked which texts influenced their group and coordinated activities across contexts. Second, I asked each of the VPC members for some information on the history of their organization and their involvement in it. The VPC were approaching their fourth year, and this gave them each an opportunity to reflect back on where the group had started, and how these first months influenced the kinds of strategies they made use of. Two of the members were part of the initial founding group and one was involved early on afterwards. Third, I asked questions about how the group was organized and how decisions were made. This seemed important because of the decentralized, participatory, democratic nature of parecon and Albert's views on movement organization. Fourth, I asked questions about the recruitment and networking techniques employed by the VPC and the barriers those techniques faced. For a small group, the VPC needed to be able to connect and work with many other organizations. Fifth, I asked members to describe one or more activities the VPC carried out and to describe in detail how these events transpired. In addition to asking about VPC activities, George was able to provide information on a major parecon workplace initiative in Winnipeg. George was (and remains currently) a member of the Mondragon bookstore and coffee shop, a self-described parecon collective. Sixth, I asked VPC members to situate their movement in relation to other movements and use their own categorization to explore the social movement theory questions raised earlier, particularly my analysis of the work of Richard Day and "newest social movements." Seventh and finally, I sought group responses on future strategy and planned projects. I end with a summation of my findings and a discussion of what possibilities exist

for future studies.

Coordinating Texts

The texts I have already explored coordinate the VPC in a number of direct and indirect ways. As I argue below, elements of the VPC structure echo the parecon model's various systems and are congruent with its explicitly stated core values and beliefs. The extra-textual tradition of debate and critical self-examination is also reflected in the VPC's practice. Elements of coordination are especially prevalent in the structure of VPC advocacy activities. Several VPC members noted that various parecon texts were brought by group members to most events, some acting as reference materials for talks, others to field questions and address debate (Appendix A). *Looking Forward* by Michael Albert was one book that had been a "key text" for most of the group. More than simply acting as resources, parecon texts *defined* most VPC activities as there are no complete working examples of parecon on which to model their movement (Appendix A). On more than one occasion, George recalls that he brought "just about" everything Albert and Hahnel had written on parecon to an event in order to introduce more members to the group. Jack states that they were also trying to create participatory structures in the group based on those modeled in parecon texts. For example, a common practice in meetings was time spent to try and get everyone's confidence up, working to help everyone participate "because that's what we're advocating, participatory structures" (Appendix A). VPC meetings and advocacy activities are further text-mediated in that parecon texts define both how and what the VPC advocated. Phil states that the structure of meetings were consciously designed to provide communication and leadership skills that would benefit people in developing a parecon.

Texts also coordinate VPC members today, members who remain part of the group even though they work in different provinces and in different countries. While VPC members

are capable of memorizing the key elements of parecon for their daily interaction, the ultimate reference for these interactions is the various books and online articles on parecon. From the origins of their group, the VPC members entered textually-mediated relations but exerted personal agency, taking steps that were not specifically referenced in the parecon texts.

The Origins of the VPC

The next sections of this analysis move from how texts influenced the VPC to the actual daily practices of my interview participants. One of the first topic areas I explored with each member involved the history of the formation of their group and their interest in it. I examined the VPC's history in order to examine how the unique prefigurative focus of parecon influenced the formation of the group. I predicted that the intellectual nature of parecon would attract people interested in parecon's richness of ideas, as well as people who had struggled with hierarchical power structures at work. I was also interested in collecting the "story" of the VPC so as to better understand their process of developing strategy.

The VPC is now just over four years old and has grown from a small campus club to an international collective with members in multiple provinces and two countries. The membership is still small, but well connected, and growing. Like many such groups, the origins were complex and hard to synthesize into a single narrative. Each VPC member entered the group at a different point and contributed in a different way. One member, whom two of three participants cited and I call "Mike," could properly be said to be the first organizer of the collective, an individual interested in parecon who had been arranging talks on the subject at UBC. While Mike was the first member of the VPC, he did not originate the group or lead it in any substantive way and did not take on most of the leadership conditions discussed by social movement theorists (Aldon and Staggenborg 2004; Appendix A). Mike did not chair most of the meetings or hold the member list, or actively recruit. Officially

speaking, Phil was the second member who met Mike through links on Mike's personal webpage. As many theorists of new social movements, anti-globalization and newest social movements point out, the internet has become a powerful new recruitment/networking tool for activists, and is especially attractive to groups with generalizable goals (Snow et al 2004; Day 2005; Wall 2005). Phil and Mike discussed possible activities for the group and soon began speaking in classrooms with established presentations. Although future members did approach the VPC after many of these talks, neither of the other members I mentioned joined as a direct result of outreach. Jack had already been reading about parecon when he looked up the group online and found they were arranging a talk at SFU. Jack had already been "converted" before attending the talk, but joined shortly afterwords. George became connected to the group through his interest in open-source software, a software development system now popular in which contributors (often anonymous or under internet pseudonyms) contribute to the development of a new program that anyone can access and edit. Often open-source software leads to multiple commercial versions by different collaborators, but increasingly licenses expressly forbid for-profit versions or maintain that the source must always be open for anyone to work with. George was familiar with the parecon project but not versed in much of the literature until after becoming interested in the VPC. George discovered parecon while reading about free software and ended up calling Mike and suggesting that the collective should have some documents in an open-source format rather than in privately owned formats. Discussion led to George's involvement in the group and participation in an online discussion forum for local parecon and anarchist activists. All of these members were educated beyond the secondary level, and all mentioned difficulties working with workplace hierarchy. Throughout, other members joined, some continuing on, some quitting. Two of the members I interviewed had actually left the province but still considered themselves members.

The VPC emphasized parecon talks as their main strategy largely because that is how they first began and continued in part because of perceived institutional constraints on other projects. Each of the VPC members I interviewed stated that they had wanted to create a functioning participatory workplace or similar non-hegemonic alternative but been stymied by limits imposed by the economic/social system. Early on the members had discussed forming some kind of publishing house, distribution centre, radio station, or computer service company, but barriers to funding and the competitive market structure convinced many members that such a plan would not be effective, would be difficult to uphold and more challenging to make profitable. The barriers against the possibility of a parecon business led VPC members to focus on advocacy. George found that the advantage of creating an advocacy group was that unlike a business, "internal pressures [weren't] really huge because we [didn't] 'have' to do 'anything'" (his emphasis) and there were also "few external pressures." On the idea of creating an "ethical goods" distribution company, Jack states that "just trying to figure out, you know, where to get the funds from and trying to work within the larger capitalist structure, we found that it would probably be very difficult to do… I know other parecon structures are… staying above but they're—it's very hard to do within the larger structure." Phil states that

> We're constantly fighting against capitalism's institutional pressures which our resource problems, and the conditions it imposes, are rooted. We're all volunteering our time and energy to parecon organizing, we don't get paid and there's no material reward. The organizing is dispersed among what our own time and commitments to family, friends and personal interests allow us to do (Appendix A, p. 192).

Phil's experience partially fits with the resource mobilization perspective of new social movements literature, except that his goals are not related to participation with the state or the creation of a protest movement, but a much more "non-hegemonic" approach emphasizing parallel institutions and workplaces. Phil's non-hegemonic strategic approach, however, has a

counter-hegemonic goal: to change social structures by undermining the system's dominant claims to power (Appendix A). The barriers Phil identifies are specifically connected to the VPC's direct challenge to capitalism. On numerous occasions Phil says, "we want to fundamentally transform society's core defining institutions—that is the long-term goal" because "we're opposed to the system of capitalism—to private ownership of productive assets, corporate hierarchies, markets and remuneration for luck, bargaining power or brute force" and adds, "self-consciously, we have to choose our strategies based on the likely consequences of our choices and the potential for further strategic progress." George, who is now part of a parecon business in Winnipeg, adds that starting a parecon business is a "risky" idea that is not economically viable for someone with "job security" and that "market pressures force imbalance on to any possible arrangement before anything is even discussed" (Appendix A).

Whether or not these activists' views of the economic system are correct, their understanding of the system clearly framed the projects they chose to take on and they clearly found that parecon was in direct contradiction to the existing "core institutions," making anything other than advocacy very difficult to attain. Market capitalism is not by definition opposed to women's shelters[1] or against "community development," but is by definition anti-parecon. While discussing the difficulties of performing activism within our economic system, Jack states: "working part time, working jobs ourselves and then trying to do [a parecon project] on the part time and start[ing] that up seemed somewhat difficult" adding how important advocacy became: "unless somebody knows about an idea they can't really initiate it" (Appendix A). Clearly these activists recognize the political-economic structures of

the Canadian political economy (market capitalism) as barriers to certain kinds of activism and clearly these activists feel that such barriers influenced not just strategy but their concrete practices as a group. While they are striving towards non-hegemonic practice, their practice is more counter-hegemonic in that it undermines the ideological basis for capitalist hegemony by bringing up alternatives. This suggests that as a prefigurative group, the VPC is capable of drawing on both "non" and "counter" hegemonic traditions.

Organizing Anarchy: Internal Structure of the VPC

Just as the VPC's basic starting point was influenced by the constraints of the political economic system and their reaction to it, so too have been their day-to-day operations. Influenced by parecon texts, the VPC expressly rejects hierarchy (and by extension inequality and centralization) and embraces self-management. All three participants were aware of the institutional barriers to empowered thinking and collective action and knew that democratizing was an internal struggle against their own socialization. One member stated that "the upbringing of almost everyone, including those who turn to parecon, has been one of conditioning to approach things in a certain way… which is *not* one of egalitarian decision making or expected autonomy" (Appendix A, emphasis added). The VPC's members had to "self-consciously and patiently make efforts to balance [pre-existing] inequities, to counter capitalism's institutional pressures to carry out the heiarchical roles and relationships of coordinators and subordinates" and as a result structured the group as a "collective" that according to George is "fully non-hierarchical" (Appendix A). New members are briefed with a "quick and dirty" introduction to the way the group operates at the start of a meeting; an agenda, a facilitator and a minute taker are determined (positions rotate to avoid concentration

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[1] Although women's shelters and other charitable organizations are often gutted by local government, this is not because there is a direct contradiction between human welfare and capitalism, but because of neo-liberal ideology

in one person's hands) and the business of the day is decided, starting with immediate issues and working towards longer-term plans. This intentionally non-hierarchical arrangement is consistent with the view of anarchy I have explained and with Day's conception of non-hegemonic social movement organizations, as well as with the techniques that Aldon and Staggenborg argue groups need to employ in order to escape the so-called "iron law of oligarchy" (Day 2005; Aldon and Staggenborg 2004). According to Aldon and Staggenborg, avoiding centralized leadership requires continuous attention to the process of decision-making, as well as active articulation of cooperative, non-hierarchical principles. According to each of the members, meetings could cover just about any subject—while there was online discussion, nothing was withheld from meetings if it was at all relevant to the VPC. Decisions were very informal, sometimes consisting of voting and sometimes consisting of the consensus model, just as Albert suggests can be the case in a parecon (Albert 2006). While the basic anti-hierarchical model of the VPC was deliberately modeled after the parecon system and meant to be participatory (members who hadn't participated were directly encouraged to do so), Phil adds that other issues such as voting and decision models were never really firmly established but had not led to any great conflicts. Sometimes people did try to take leadership roles or did end up taking on the same responsibilities time and time again because they had particular expertise in that area and "had experience, education or work that sometimes enables better participation in the process of organizing for a parecon" (Appendix A). Despite mostly successful attempts to eliminate hierarchy and bolster participation, inequalities in skill and "activeness" were hard to avoid due to everyone in the VPC having been raised under capitalism and trained with differing skills (Appendix A). All three participants identified aspects that they or others excelled at and emphasized that there

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and reactionary belief-systems.

was continually an attempt to lower skill barriers between members and give everyone an opportunity to participate in each aspect. It could be argued, however, that the "intellectual" project of the VPC allowed for some concentration of power in the hands of more educated activists, and this could lead to a strategic problem for their non-hegemonic project. Future strategies by the VPC and parecon advocates in general may need to incorporate more ways to educate members and encourage participation, and create outreach among less-educated workers. It should be noted, however, that this may simply be a bias of my relatively small sample, as I sought key organizers who had been involved from the VPC's early days.

Recruitment and Networking

The texts and values employed by the VPC were also important to the arrangement of recruitment strategies. All three members noted that they did not want to "lead" a movement and become "cultlike" by going to events just to soak-up membership. The perspective of all three members was that they wanted people to join because of their interest in parecon, not because of any attempt to make the group bigger for its own sake. This may be problematic, however, as unconscious recruitment strategies could lead to an elite membership or vanguard structure, a form actively opposed by parecon advocates and anarchist-socialists in general. In order to be truly a popular movement and avoid vanguard-like structures, such a group must have members apart from "in-the-know" intellectuals. In their first three years, membership largely grew from people who had already become interested in parecon before coming to meetings or talks. Events such as their talks at SFU and UBC, appearances at activist events, and a screening of the documentary *The Corporation*, were particularly effective for recruitment purposes. While some members discovered the VPC through informal networks with other activist groups, these networks did lead to some internal struggles. Just gaining members through various networks turned out to be problematic, since many of these people

joined simply because parecon represented a progressive movement. Some of the groups the VPC networked with included the "anti-capitalist convergence" group, the Under the Volcano activism festival, UBC and SFU campus organizations, the Vancouver Cooperative Radio group, the Redeye Collective, Spartacus Books, "People's Co-op Book store and also a local cinematheque," ZNET (*Z magazine* online), the "Vancouver Anti-Capitalist Community Forum" and Global Justice TV (Appendix A). Several of these groups were personal networks, while others, such as Global Justice TV, took a direct interest in helping the VPC spread its message (in this case by providing air-time). It should be unnecessary to point out that since several of these groups are anarchist-leaning, and anti-capitalist, the connections with the VPC are to be expected and natural as opposed to networks with political parties and mainstream social issue movements. George describes the experience of having a political party member (a woman from the NDP) join without knowing very much about parecon and her being unwilling to take on the tasks other members shared as she "gave lip service to interest but really just wanted us as a springboard to prove she was "community oriented" (Appendix A). The experience of these members has been that knowledge about parecon and interest in seeing it grow was more important than simply being anti-capitalist or pro-alternatives. Networks were more effective when based not only on solidarity but on the anarchist notion of "mutual-aid," helping one another directly as opposed to merely showing symbolic support, as well as a genuine desire to achieve success:

> Members of our group have been and are teachers, social service workers, computer programmers, book store clerks, organic food delivery drivers, political party members, men, women, parents, anarchists, vegans, queers, anti-war organizers, media activists, etc. We contribute in a variety of ways to various organizations, institutions, groups and communities. It's more than networking because, just as many people have helped us, we're playing an active role, not only in upholding the commitments and responsibilities that we have among these various constituencies, but we're seeking their active success. Sure networking happens, but there are deeper relationships happening at the same time that I think are based on human solidarity and mutual aid

(Appendix A, p. 190).

Phil adds that while VPC's networking was valuable, there is still a great deal to do to spread parecon outside its relatively small sphere and reach out to GLBTQ communities, non-whites, poorer and less educated people, environmentalists and gender activists as he believes these groups would benefit from the parecon system just as parecon would benefit from more inclusiveness. Phil admits that most of the core VPC members are white, middle-class, heterosexual males and intimates that their "come to us, we won't come to you" recruitment strategy may be in part to blame. While there are problems in active recruiting when not paired with education, all three activists argued that more could be done to provide outreach to a greater variety of organizations and groups.

Parecon in Action: Organized Activities of the VPC and Mondragon

The VPC is unique among the social movement organizations that I have read about in numerous ways, several of which are connected to their social movement repertoire, or informal "handbook" of activist techniques. Unlike many anti-capitalist movements in the new or newest social movement category, street protest is not a significant part of the VPC approach. This finding is at odds with Day's argument that non-hegemonic movements (including parecon) use "direct action," a protest technique most commonly employed in street protest or other confrontation (Day 2005). The VPC has carried out film showings, talks, info-booths, video broadcasts and has launched both a website and an internet discussion forum. To analyze specific processes, I collected details on exactly how VPC actions were carried out and what barriers they encountered. Despite asking all three activists about these activities, I received very little detail. Two of the VPC activists mentioned their showing of *The Corporation* as an especially successful event. Jack discovered that there was actually a great deal of work to do for a number of people in order to put on such an event, the main barriers

being access to funding, advertising and time. In order to spread word of such an event, the VPC had to spend money to rent the space and put out an ad, as well as attain the equipment for the screening. Often such events find funding from local socially-conscious businesses, but this was more difficult for the VPC members because their cause was less "sexy" than fair-trade or the environment. As all three VPC members pointed out, even most co-ops are essentially just for-profit businesses with established management structures and were generally uninterested in helping a community parecon project, even though they supported reformist gender or environment causes (Appendix A). Parecon info-booths, another VPC project, basically began with discussion at a monthly meeting. The VPC paid for a booth at the 2004 Under the Volcano convergence and two members staffed the table.

At the Under the Volcano festival, as with their talks and film screening, explaining parecon and debating its merits with proponents of other systems was a central part of VPC activities. Although each participant emphasized that all members were encouraged to take an equal role, all also admitted that certain people often performed more of the talks, while other members performed other tasks such as web upkeep, arranging materials, providing tech-support and the like. Jack had the most to say about the actual process of giving a talk or answering questions and developed responses to numerous criticisms. Talks typically consisted of an initial speech about the merits of parecon and how it actually worked followed by questions and discussion from the audience. The main problem, especially at Under the Volcano was non-response. According to all three participants, most people were genuinely interested in the parecon program and many joined their email list, especially after their showing of *The Corporation*. The second most common problem was that discussions sometimes became derailed over what VPC members considered peripheral issues or extreme cases, including how consensus would work in an emergeny on an island or what parecon

would do with someone who wanted to "shovel shit" all day. While Jack believed he had developed answers to these debate issues, he also admitted that parecon was not meant to be a dogmatic or rigid system—they would do what worked, and what didn't they could jettison. A more common but less contentious barrier was one of language: another problem which VPC members recognize is reinforced by capitalist hegemony. People had developed certain expectations about what certain words meant through the dominant discourse (as Smith argues), definitions which interfered in their understanding of parecon. Some criticized use of the term "democracy" and because they viewed it as a corrupt system of concentrated power, not as a system of radical equality as conceived by the early Athenians. Others rejected notions of "efficiency" as being alienating, in Jack's mind confusing instrumental efficiency supported by capitalism and parecon efficiency, "getting our values done in a timely manner" (Appendix A). There was an "inbuilt barrier" in the language used itself, despite this language not being particularly esoteric (Appendix A). Jack felt that sometimes people had become "entrenched" in a view of certain terms through the dominant media and institutions. When people heard reified terms, they shut down and didn't even want to discuss further. Jack argues that the key to overcoming this barrier is simply more activism and more knowledge of parecon among the general public, academics included. People needed to be educated on the history of democracy and effiency and anti-hierarchy. One of the problems Jack also saw with these talks is simultaneously a feature he and other members were proud of: the parecon tradition of taking each criticism seriously and responding in a timely manner. Online, Michael Albert even goes so far as to respond to someone calling him a "fucking moron" "under a rock," and constructs a calm and carefully worded rebuttal. Jack states that often talks went overly long due to attention to small secondary issues that were not really essential to the central argument, and while he appreciated the VPC attention to detail, in the future he

might address such questions more quickly and ask if the critic could stay after the rest of the talk to discuss more thoroughly. As a prefigurative movement, parecon must overcome people's inability to concieve of a truly democratic future, overcome the linguistic and ideological roots of the "vison problem." Key, according to VPC members, is education combined with working examples.

One of the other ideological problems facing my interview participants is indicative enough of the entire movement to warrant some additional space here. In his discussion of the actual process of talks and open debate, Jack addressed the question of technology, which some critics seemed to reject outright, as "some groups…they'd think that technology is inherently bad, they wouldn't be able understand how under a parecon system the context is changed and only useful and socially beneficial technologies are utilized" (Appendix A). I found this particular comment revealing to me, as it seemed to assume that collective workplaces would automatically know which technologies would be useful and which not. First of all, I do understand that parecon advocates are not advocating the elimination of everything without direct utilitarian value: Albert takes pains to argue that art, "nature," nurturing and merely interesting science without practical application is valuable to society and any society should be able to place value on it (Albert and Hahnel 1999; Albert 2003; Albert 2005). However, parecon might still have a problem with workplaces that take risks on technology or that produce technology with unexpected negative results, even technology that is socially beneficial but ecologically harmful. While Albert and others do argue that ecological needs can be included in parecon calculations, the absence of ecology or kinship from a central spot in parecon's program is problematic. In talks and writings on parecon, as well as in concrete parecon operations, technology takes a central role in order to coordinate all kinds of processes. There is little consideration in any of documented sociological and

ecological harmful byproducts of silicone production, or the alienating effects of accelerating technology, or even the vast amounts of energy and harmful physical labour involved in the production of computer chips. The costs of computer parts could be included in consumer or workplace reports, but it would be difficult to balance the ecological costs with the considerable needs for electronic coordination within parecon.

One area where such technology has been problematic is in the actual processes of the Mondragon coffee house and bookstore, one of the projects influenced by the VPC. The Mondragon is just one of several significant parecon projects that VPC members have helped develop since leaving the Vancouver area (another is working directly with Michael Albert). Given the small size of the VPC, it is actually somewhat surprising the degree to which they have managed to participate in the parecon project in other countries. Although it began as a vegan co-op before George moved to the area, George has taken on a role helping maintain the coffeeshop and bookstore as an explicitly "pareconish" workplace. Mondragon is technically and legally defined as a co-op, although it is collectively operated and there is no set management structure. To be consistent with law, each member (all members are workers) has an equal share which is "essentially meaningless internally" where decisions are determined by a number of committees. Each member technically must be on at least one committee. Wages are equal and decisions are consensus-based, although consensus is not a necessary part of parecon. Due to institutional constraints, workers are paid on an equal hourly payscale rather than according to effort and are given money rather than "pareconish credits" or pre-approved allocation amounts. Mondragon belongs to a small federation of other parecon workplaces in their building and is connected to a network of parecon workplaces over the internet. The technological problem at Mondragon is one of coordination. Workers must access decisions and data via an internet forum that some are uncomfortable

accessing. George, a particularly techno-savvy parecon advocate, argues that it is necessary to become familiar with this technology if parecon is to work. He believes that the internet forum is a more effective means to disseminate information than email and is a place where debate can be more open, but this desire conflicts with the preference of some Mondragon workers. While George may be right in stating that more and more people are going to be comfortable with such forms of communication, that there is some room to improve on the technological issues, it is clear that the parecon approach to technology is problematic for some people and may require further exploration.

One important aspect of the Mondragon organization that deserves additional comment is the "personnel committee" (PComm) and regular "accountability sessions" (Appendix A). These two aspects have been added to Mondragon to deal with typical problems including the "boss" problem and the "employee" problem and represent how adjustable parecon can be in order to build truly participatory structures. George argues that workers have been brought up to take on particular roles in a workplace and parecon workplaces have to constantly work against these impulses. Workers can act like a "boss" by making unapproved purchases, making decisions for committees they are not part of, or simply taking on tasks they were not assigned to do. The "employee" problem is the reverse of the "boss" problem in which workers don't take initiative, don't participate in decisions or balk at their responsibilities, taking extra breaks, etc. The PComm and accountability sessions have been designed to deal with these and other problems. The PComm is a committee of four people and acts as a mediator for employees with grievances. PComm "bitch sessons," where workers complain about issues or other workers are "off the record," and allow workers some time to vent. Accountability sessions allow people to talk one on one to work out differences or address potential problems. Every few weeks groups of four or five fill out evaluation sheets that

include issues pertaining to "cafe tasks, bookstore tasks, committee work, collective process… everything that can be touched on including 'how well do you think this person knows parecon'" then they meet to discuss how their forms were filled out and what issues arose (Appendix A). In extreme situations, the group does have a dismissal system but "it's extremely hard to get going, and the infractions have to be pretty huge" (Appendix A). Mondragon tries to value accessibility (through lower prices) and ethical consumption/production (which leads to higher prices), but such values are difficult to attain under capitalism where "it's kind of a triangle... how can we be most affordable, most ethical, and yet still eat and not have to close our doors... in addition to squeezing parecon in there somewhere" (Appendix A). Again, this fits both with Richard Day's typification of the core values of non-hegemonic movements and Aldon and Staggenborg's analysis of anti-hierarchical movements. This is just one example of a parecon workplace, however, and is not necessarily indicative of others, or even parecon workplaces under a wider federation with the ability to link consumer and workplace planning.

Anarchy, Socialism and Parecon's Place in Social Movement Politics

Throughout this thesis I have tried to argue that parecon is distinctive from "new social movements" and is representative of the anarchist movement as well as a movement towards participatory democracy. I have argued that the barriers facing parecon are unique because of their non-hegemonic position and their opposition to both market capitalism and centrally planned "socialism." In order to gain some "on-the-ground" perceptions of parecon's place in social movement politics, I asked my participants to comment on what movements they believed parecon fit in and on whether or not it fits with worker rights, identity, anarchy, etc. George indicated in multiple places that parecon fit best with an anarchist perspective, but that parecon went beyond anarchy to define a specific structure as an alternative, exactly as I argue

in my chapter on theory. George also called parecon "the economic correlary [sic] of the free software movement… open information and non-hierarchical division of labour" (Appendix A). George adds that he feels parecon appealed to him because it was more logically consistent than Marxist communism, which he argues promotes a "state" and a "coordinator class" that could easily become a "vanguard" or another centralized hierarchy. He likes that while, "communism has a coordinator class and a vanguardist approach," "parecon is hierarchically flat and insists on participatory self-management" (Appendix A). The "hierarchically flat" aspect of parecon is just one aspect that differentiates it from traditional "old-left" versions of communism. Jack also states that parecon is distinct from Marxism and also cooperatives. Cooperatives usually have relatively traditional management structures and do not remunerate based on effort or necessarily have balanced job complexes. Jack describes parecon as a system through which "people… on the… everyday ground level of the production and consumption [are] deciding what they want, where to go, and coming to a decision in a democratic solidaristic way" (Appendix A). It was clear through our conversation and informal observation that he considered himself at least an ally to anarchists, but didn't want the group to come off as "angry" "anarchist punks" (Appendix A). Phil had the most lengthy answer, clearly rejecting a "worker rights," "identity" or "utopian" categorization of parecon. Phil argued that, while parecon and the VPC do support rights movements, are developing an identity, and are creating "pocket" societies under capitalism, their end goal is not simply more rights but a transformation of the economic system. To him, working for the recognition of an "anti-capitalist identity" "seems ridiculous" because the movement is about substantive change not looking or acting a certain way so that "any benefits of such a [anti-capitalist identity] movement would be petty." Phil adds that parecon is not utopian in the More and Morelley tradition, stating:

> Organizing and struggling to train frogs to play piano or birds to ride bikes is utopian, because birds and frogs will never have the same capacities as human beings. Organizing and struggling to balance work for both desirability and empowerment in the form of balanced job complexes, fighting for remuneration for effort and sacrifice, and fighting for more participation in the form of federated workers and consumers councils and decentralized participatory planning; fighting for more solidarity, self-management, equity and diversity is not utopian. It's realistic and honorable and quite frankly human survival might depend on it (Appendix A, p. 197).

Phil does suggest that parecon could be included in an overall socialist movement only if "socialism" is employed very broadly, stating:

> If you mean a form of democratic or participatory socialism with balanced job complexes, remuneration for effort and sacrifice and decentralized participatory planning… But… this answer relies in no way at all on the word 'socialism', but does demand that we be clear on what exact institutions we propose (Appendix A, p 198).

According to Phil, parecon is a reform movement but only as a matter of strategy—parecon could be a revolutionary movement in a different context or historical moment. Most clearly, Phil identifies parecon as an anarchist movement, once again adding the rider that unlike other forms of anarchism, "parecon goes much further in illuminating other areas economic life, like how to organize work" (Appendix A). In other words, as is consistent with the anarchist framework, the parecon movement rejects identity or worker rights/reforms as a basis for their movement, opting for the direct development and implementation of a non-hegemonic alternative that rejects all forms of hierarchy and centralized control. The VPC and Mandragon are clearly organized around non-hierarchical models consistent with anarchism and the newest social movement perspective. The VPC members situated their movement outside of identity politics or either traditional Marxist and Marxist-Leninist forms of socialism or any kind of rights movement. While employing some counter-hegemonic practice, their orientation is clearly towards future non-hegemonic projects. The VPC members clearly suggest parecon should support and create solidarity with other movements, but that it is a different kind of movement based on a prefigurative vision and not a single-

issue of state or corporate reform.

Getting There: Past, Present and Future Strategy of the VPC

Strategy is an important aspect of any social movement. Obviously, facing the institutional and linguistic barriers I have already described, the VPC has a considerable task ahead of itself. Though membership has fluctuated between school and summer months, it has rarely had more than ten or twenty members. As far as my interview subjects revealed, the VPC did not seem to have a very large base over the summer and many of its projects had to be sidelined due to funding and other emergent issues. Despite these setbacks, the VPC had grown as a network, and members have become active across the country and in the US. Members stay in contact through email and discussion forums, as well as communicate through online chat and contribute to parecon articles. Coordination between members has led to the VPC's involvement in Michael Albert's website, in the Mondragon Coffee House and in other parecon workplaces.

The Mondragon, itself connected to an online federation of parecon projects (a series of links and discussion articles from Znet's parecon secion), employs information from their VPC connections to help work with other parecon businesses in their building and provide data to those interested in creating new projects. New members have joined the VPC each fall, and while many become less formally connected over the summer, forum discussion is busier each year, with more workshops and discussions over the school semester. According to each of the members I interviewed, however, there is still a great deal to do. All three identified continued interest in forming or maintaining another parecon workplace as a working example to inspire others and "bootstrapping via parecon, more parecon" (Appendix A). One of the main goals of all three activists was increasing the network of parecon to other activist groups and helping those groups survive and grow. Phil in particular points to the

need to reach out to ethnic, sexual, economic, cultural and gender communities to demonstrate how parecon is useful for them and to include them in the discussion and debate. Jack suggested outreach in non-traditional ways, laughing that they could even do a parecon presentation in a mall or to progressive business owners. Jack believes that parecon co-ops have some place in the movement, being "a microcosm that we would need to expand… it's pseudo-parecon, it's the beginning stages of parecon, it's experiments in parecon it's not, it's not the full fledged allocation system," and that more parecon workplaces and community projects help build a "stronger base" for parecon activists to "bring about the larger system" (Appendix A). Jack's approach is thus non-hegemonic in that each workplace would not challenge capitalism directly but would stand on its own as a growing alternative. George, however, describes how counter-hegemonic tactics can bolster this non-hegemonic approach. He stresses that there needs to be more parecon workplaces, and agrees with both of the others that more advocacy is required, but that some direct confrontation of the socio-economic institutions is also required as part of a strategy of parecon "visibility, viability, and expansion" (Appendix A). Phil places more emphasis on the need to fight alongside other movements and to build networks, but agrees that forming smaller parecon "pockets" will benefit the movement and strengthen the opportunities for change. However, none of my three informants was very specific about exactly how this synthesis of alternatives and direct confrontation would best be achieved. George adds that parecon will face backlash as it becomes a threat, but that this will likely lead to self-defense rather than an all-out attack on the system itself. Surprisingly, he echoes almost the exact words of Richard Day when he states: "as in nature, old institutions won't necessarily die as a result of a "fight to the death". They'll simply be rendered moot" (Appendix A). In other words, the main strategies the VPC members I interviewed identified are: an expansion and deepening of solidarity with other

parecon groups and other movements; development of more parecon projects to build towards rendering capitalism "moot"; and continued advocacy through the VPC. While there is an interest in developing more confrontational tactics, their emphasis and experience is firmly situated in non-hegemonic praxis.

Summary of Transcript Analysis

The VPC is a text-and-institutionally-mediated organization within a larger parecon and anarchist/socialist movement. Members identified a variety of texts that not only affect the arguments employed by the VPC but define and structure their activities and their coordination. While specific acts of coordination do not rely on specific reference to actuated parecon texts, the existence of these texts and *ability* to reference them is essential to every VPC action. Texts are also used concretely to "spread the word" and as regular ways to deepen VPC members' understanding of parecon. The VPC itself operates in an anarchistic and pareconic mannor, relying on democratic forms of self-organization, open criticism, intellectual debate and highly praxical strategies. Members become knowledgeable about the concepts of parecon and then attempt to teach the specifics and activate texts directly through organization techniques and concrete alternatives. Parecon projects that have been considered and actual working alternatives, such as the Mondragon coffee house, face numerous barriers due to the specific "counter" and "non" hegemonic position of parecon, being situated in direct contradiction to capitalist forms of organization and structures of hierarchical control/centralized power. The organization and strategy of the VPC has been structured in response to numerous barriers. The VPC faces barriers based in reified language (democracy, technology, efficiency) distorted from original meanings, barriers based on access to funding (including a lack of funding both from the state and NGOs, specifically aimed at alternative economies), barriers based on the political-economic structure (access to points of entry, mass

media, the education system, etc), and barriers based on public knowledge of parecon (both as a movement in itself and as a non-Marxist form of socialism). Responses to the many barriers facing the VPC include non-hegemonic methods that emphasize parallel businesses and institutions, as well as internal approaches aimed at attracting and educating more members. There is little discussion of the value of counter-hegemonic approaches aimed at directly challenging the structures of power. There is much more work to be done among VPC members to work out how parecon's diverse and democratic non-hegemonic approach can draw from counter-hegemony and from tactics designed to challenge capitalism's ideological dominance head on.

The biggest problem facing VPC activists remains how to effectively work towards a parecon. While all the members I spoke with expressed interest in creating parecon workplaces as the best way to "bootstrap" more parecon and a way to build towards a more long-term counter-hegemonic movement, there seemed to be little discussion of how to best challenge the barriers discussed above. George saw parecon as the gradual development of federations, "weak and fragile, and partial, at first." He adds that

> "Direct Confrontation would, I think, be unwise without a rather large number of people to do it… it would just give pretext to get arrested… not very productive… revolution would imply that parecon already succeeded, so by the time a revolution **could** succeed [his emphasis]… it would already have succeeded" (Appendix A).

Phil calls creating a new business a "risky" maneuver, and as two VPC members mentioned, not necessarily realistic for each of them to pursue. Without further challenges to the highly entrenched power that created and reinforces many of the barriers above, it may be difficult to develop the resources necessarily to make more than a few isolated parecon workplaces possible. An informal network of workplaces would have to be enormous in order to have any significant impact on capitalism, and even then would have to break from the capitalist

monetary system on which it relies. Since the barriers against parecon mobilization are highly organized and powerful, even building a moderately strong parecon network would be fraught with pitfalls and considerable risk. While I believe the parecon program is workable and theoretically strong, their movement strategy generally remains under-explored. As I argue, the key to making parecon more effective may be to combine strategies aimed at tackling the ruling powers head-on, such as alternative media, government lobbying, street protest and other forms of direct resistance, combined with the non-hegemonic approaches involved in building networks, nested federations and effective examples of parecon in practice.

Chapter 7

Conclusion: Organizing Anarchy

Throughout this thesis I have tried to emphasize questions of *how* parecon's prefigurative ideals can move forward as opposed to *why* parecon exists. I am concerned with how democratic and participatory systems have been created in the past and how a parecon can be achieved in the future. I have looked at the texts that coordinate the VPC and how these documents connect disparate parecon activists. I have examined history and explored how radical democratic systems have succeeded in the past, and where such movements have failed. I explored theory and shown how parecon is distinct from previous social movements, as well as how parecon fits within a larger socialist/anarchist framework. I explicated parecon and demonstrated exactly how Albert and Hahnel's participatory society would operate. Finally, I delved into the structure and activities of the VPC and the Mondragon Coffee House to show how parecon works in the daily/nightly lives of parecon activists and the barriers these organizations face on a regular basis. In this conclusion I look not only at outstanding issues of strategy, of *how* parecon tactics can be expanded and improved, but also at what I learned about the process of research that may benefit future parecon analysts. I first examine my interview and research techniques, looking at things I did well as well as other things I could improve on. I also speculate on other areas of research that are needed in order to better understand parecon and prefigurative movements, returning to some as yet unanswered questions.

In the second half of this conclusion, I attempt to pull together all the data I have explored and make meaningful inferences about parecon and prefigurative movements in general. I examine the efficacy of the non-hegemonic model for the VPC and explore problems that such a model creates for parecon's growth and implementation. It is my

argument that while non-hegemony is an effective starting point, historical analysis and theory suggest that it is not a sufficient strategy for challenging the very foundations of market-capitalism. Non-hegemony must be bolstered by counter-hegemony, and I examine some of the specific ways parecon advocates can do so below. Throughout I try to focus on the particular ways activists and academics can end the "vision problem" and achieve more democratic, non-hierarchical and participatory societies.

Methodologies Re-Examined

This thesis has certainly taught me more about research methods than I ever expected. Although the methods I chose opened up a wealth of data on parecon practices, there is much I could have improved on. In reading the transcripts of my first interview, I realized that I did not always ask appropriate questions, but was sometimes leading, sometimes interrupting, once or twice asking double or triple-barreled questions. Those weaknesses combined with the technical problems in my second and third interviews make me want to refine my interview skills ever more. I would say that despite delays, I was lucky to have amiable interview subjects who were able to work out my pauses, ums and repetitions. I was simultaneously pleased that I was able to find out so much through the unscripted in-depth interview and that I was able to find information that was so essential out of a conversation that felt barely coherent at the time. I believe there is much more to explore in the field of online interviewing, chat rooms, discussion forums and DCC CTCP interviewing. I found that my direct internet chat interview had an immediacy combined with a richness of data that struck a fine balance between face-to-face and email interviews. As more people become accustomed to internet chat as a daily form of communication, DCC CTCP type interviews will become more and more useful. Unscripted interviews are difficult and truly depend on developing a rapport early on, if not beforehand.

I was lucky to be able to examine the VPC, a parecon advocacy group, as well as Mondragon Winnepeg, a parecon workplace in action. However, I believe there is a great deal more depth of analysis that could be made of practicing parecon workplaces and participatory communities such as Porto Alegre or Mondragon in Spain. My analysis of the Mondragon Coffee House was a secondary and unexpected addition to my thesis which I did not explore with as much depth as I would have liked. Future work may need to be done to examine how today's parecon workplaces in Chicago and Winnipeg operate and to track whether their networks grow as planned. Future work also needs to follow the media, recruitment, and advocacy tactics of the VPC and other parecon groups to see how and if they change in order to stretch out both "legs." Chapter Four opened up many questions about non-hegemonic and "newest social movement" strategy while Chapter Five opened up potential problems that parecon movements will have to address. More study of what other non-hegemonic groups are doing to advance their cause and what barriers they face will help build a stronger movement. Academics and activists may have to take more risks, employing ecological/social vision in their analysis in order to go from theoretical critique of capitalism to activist stances that support the growth of realistic alternatives to the capitalist market economy.

Organizing Anarchy: Concluding Remarks

The title "Organizing Anarchy" is not just a play on words: it is also a strategic choice that has guided the overall organization of this thesis. In one sense, parecon *is* organized anarchy, an economic system without command structures, without centralized authority in an attempt to build full participation of workers and consumers. Organizing anarchy is also the challenge facing parecon. Parecon activists aim not only to create an anarchist social structure, but one that combines the ideals of anarchy with the day-to-day needs of a functioning society, engendering mutual-aid, co-operation and autonomy. The parecon

movement requires active strategies that will make each aspect of organizing anarchy possible. Nonetheless, parecon seems to offer the most detailed answer to the main unanswered questions of anarchism.

Despite the exciting possibilities of the parecon movement, there remain a number of problems for non-hegemonic strategy, pareconic structures and anarchism. There also remain many intriguing questions for further research. Parecon's emphasis on 'non-hegemonic' strategies is problematic because it discounts the role of direct confrontation with capitalist hegemony and underestimates the ability of capitalism to undermine and co-opt alternative projects. The key problem, as I have stated, is for parecon to retain non-hegemonic diversity of ideas while still advancing towards a counter-hegemonic war of position. Not succumbing to market capitalist pressures would be difficult, requiring continual analysis of values, goals and theory, a process that George admits has not been happening at the Mondragon coffee-house. Without the support of more direct anti-capitalist strategies, developing a vast parecon network while working parallel to capitalism will be slow and difficult, if not impossible. Not only would running such parallel institutions be challenging (considering the institutional constraints on anything more developed than a "pareconish" workplace), the intellectual nature of parecon activism so far could easily lead to a vanguard-like structure. Future projects will need to challenge capitalist ideological dominance to pave the way for the proliferation and survival of parecon experiments.

Movements for a parecon not only face numerous structural barriers built into the structure of market capitalism, but an entire legacy of democratic and anti-authoritarian struggle. Reactions to socialism, utopianism and reified capitalist democracy are going to impact every level of parecon organizing. As my informants stated, the dominant discourse surrounding terms such as "democracy," "organization" and "technology" cause people to

"block" many of the ideas being presented to them. More people need to be made aware of the history of democracy and the myriad ways that participatory practices have succeeded or failed. Incorporating such histories into talks and lectures may be one way of educating interested individuals and breaking through people's preset "blocks." Academics who want to challenge the "vision problem" may have to take risks, engage in parecon and other alternative visions in a constructive way, incorporating more prefigurative thought into their curriculums.

Today, with the increasing reach of mass media, it may also be useful to reach out through pop-cultural means. Parecon activists can draw on counter-culture, alternative media, even pop-culture to spread counter-hegemonic prefigurative thought. Contemporary blogs, zines, and even relatively mainstream television like Comedy Central's *The Daily Show* are making politics edgy, entertaining, and popular. Reaching out to a variety of media will help parecon become "water cooler" talk for new workers. There are many ways the parecon movement can expand, and parecon activists would do well to "think outside the box" and work in a variety of ways. None of these alternative strategies will be effective, however, without a political movement to challenge capitalism on multiple fronts.

History demonstrates the numerous dangerous facing the VPC and the parecon movement in general as they continue to grow and build networks. Movements have failed or been "crushed" for numerous reasons, and it is difficult to pinpoint a single set of problems. Nonetheless, it is clearly important for movements to stay active and to adjust to emergent conditions. The first American utopian communities, the Paris Commune, and the various anti-authoritarian movements during the early to mid 1900's were all crushed in part because they were not prepared or able to react strongly enough against various counter-revolutionary forces. On the other hand, hierarchical, centrally organized movements have failed to create lasting democracy, often maintaining state-socialism through political, ideological, and

military dominance. Military coups have mostly failed to deliver equity and political participation, while elected government have tended to fluctuate between neo-liberal and conservative regimes or welfare state models, neither of which are sufficiently democratic to incorporate a system like parecon. Where participatory structures have been put in place, such as in Porto Alegre or areas of Argentina, they have often been limited by legal structures or the necessity for governments to trade with capitalist countries. The history of socialism does provide possible solutions, however. Those movements that have been the most successful have drawn on networks between radical and reformist forces. South American movements in particular have built international support through the internet and through solidarity demonstrations at the WTO, GATT meetings etc. It is important that parecon advocates build similar networks and connect to anti-capitalist movements around the world.

It is also important that anarchist and Marxist socialists work on developing more common ground. As demonstrated in my history chapter, many powerful socialist movements have worked to actively discredit and crush anti-authoritarian movements. It is important that anti-authoritarian movements build greater solidarity with Marxism and work to engender ever more democratic organization within the socialist groups. Parecon can work with a number of social and ecological-justice orientated groups to bring about change on multiple fronts, combining counter-hegemonic movements and non-hegemonic examples. While it may be true that a growing network can "bootstrap via parecon, more parecon," it is necessary to combine this strategy with a broader counter-hegemonic solidarity that challenges the state/corporate structures through direct action, educational, electoral, and legal means. Such movements pave the way for parecon workplaces to be more autonomous and allow the parecon movement to "walk on two legs" with other social and ecological justice movements. Based on the history I have examined, and the theory I have explored, it is difficult to see how

the slow rise of parecon could render capitalism "moot" on its own, just as it is difficult to imagine how a violent grasp for power could last in a North American context. Building support for non-hegemonic visions requires non-hierarchical counter-hegemonic measures. At the same time as parecon movements work to challenge ideological dominance, it is also important that they retain their non-hegemonic character and not succumb to a purely hegemonic view of social change. One of parecon's greatest strengths is its openness to work with other ideas and parecon activists' commitment to reciprocal relationships with other movements in a way that engenders diversity. To build parecon into an effective alternative to capitalism, activists will have to create working pareconic and pareconish examples, and connect Albert's "non-reformist reforms" to a wider political movement towards undermining capitalist hegemony. Legislative, mass media, direct action and discursive techniques will all be needed to achieve a lasting and meaningful parecon.

Although I learned a great deal about the particulars of the parecon project and gained respect for its thorough examination of the possibilities for an alternative economy, I also became familiar with some of parecon's problems. Parecon is primarily an economic movement, and despite statements to the contrary, there is a bias toward the economy built into it that could potentially neglect social and environmental concerns. While parecon authors specifically emphasize issues of social and ecological welfare, there is no simple way to include these within pareconic calculations. Parecon structures are designed to integrate with a just "parpolity," or policies based on participatory and egalitarian principles. However, it is unclear how the needs of those unable or those uninterested in work would be provided for under a system of remuneration for effort and sacrifice. While Albert and my interview subject Phil both emphasize the need for cooperation and mutual-aid between radically democratic projects, parecon does not clearly set out how animals and other non-human life

will be valued and how "home-life" can be conceptualized within the parecon framework. Nonetheless, Albert reminds his readers that parecon is not designed to organize every aspect of people's daily lives and that many issues of equality outside the workplace or community council should work with participatory polity (Albert 2003). There are many side-line debates within the online parecon network and these debates will continue to help parecon evolve. More projects similar to the Mondragon Coffee House will contribute to a growing list of mini-structures used to overcome various barriers within participatory organization. Additionally, future debate within the parecon movement will help develop a more effective par-polity. Albert's latest book, *Realizing Hope* makes some inroads towards addressing the lack of clear guidelines for par-polity, but there is still more work to do. Future research may look at exactly how to make parecon a more effective vehicle for a variety of justice issues, and how to "move" this vehicle into a powerful position as an alternative to capitalism.

Parecon is an admirable prefigurative project and my interactions with the VPC have been generally inspiring. While the VPC represents a new shift in anarchist economics and in radical social movements, many "old" questions of strategy and organization remain. A new emancipatory project would in my view need to advance the pre-figurative ideals of parecon through advocacy, education and non-hegemonic direct creation of alternatives while employing the best strategies of counter-hegemonic practice aimed to challenge the current formation of the ruling relations. While as Albert argues, there may be no "road map" towards parecon success, the movement will have the exciting task of drawing its own, piece by piece, striving towards the realization of their prefigurative program. Parecon is a radically democratic system based working alternatives for the here and now, with a vision for a better future. To achieve that future, activists must build serious and effective political challenges to the state and corporate structures, undermining the taken-for-granted realities of capitalism.

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APPENDIX A: Interview Transcripts

Interview 1:

Blake: So, basically I'm here to talk to you about the Vancouver Parecon collective and the Parecon movement in general. And, um, now, you've been in the group for how many years?
Jack: About, uh, a year and a half
Blake: A year and a half?
Jack: Yeah.
Blake: Okay. Now is there, first of all, is there any pseudonym you'd want to use or—it's just so no one knows any infor—
Jack: Just make one up.
Blake: Okay, great, so now, I, when you were involved in the organization, what really made you, inspired you get the group started what was gelling together that made people get it together .
Jack: [Mike] and um—
Blake: Don't worry, all the names will just (snap) disappear.
Jack: Okay um, well one of the mem—two of the members who initially started—I was getting into Parecon, just started reading a few books, and um, I noticed on uh a website there was a talk coming up on Parecon so I decided to attend it. It was at SFU Harbour Centre. Uh, I attended and two, two of the members uh, who later we created the group with later on, um were giving a presentation and uh, there were a few us that attended and after attending we decided we wanted to start something up, possibly a business, we didn't know quite what. And um, so, you know, eventually it came to be the Vancouver Parecon Collective, an advocacy group, it was basically the way we went.
Blake: Right
Jack: So, we, we did talk about start—trying to start a business, um, but uh, you know working part time, working jobs ourselves and then trying to do that on the part time and start that up seemed somewhat difficult we thought, and advocacy, unless somebody knows about an idea they can't really initiate it, so...
Blake: Right, so now, do you remember probably when you started off you started off writing, I assume you came up with like, some kind of, uh, like mandate or document, something like that, that came up with what you did—how did you come up with an agreement on what on what your group's kind of mandate was and then was there any kind of debate on what it should be or word—or wording issues? Anything else like that?
Jack: Well, basically, most of the principles of parecon are kind of already written out and laid out for us, so it wasn't too difficult to do that? Um, As far as meetings would go we would you know go, uh, we would uh, you know go around in a circle one at a time type of thing, we try and get everyone's confidence level up and try and get everybody participating as much as possible because that is what we were advocating, participatory structures. So if someone was particularly shy about something, we wouldn't necessarily force them into it, but we would try and coax them along a little and just get everyone's confidence level built up and able to participate. Cause, yeah—
Blake: So it's –you're trying to create a participatory structure—
Jack: Exactly
Blake: --In the group itself
Jack: Exactly. Within the—yeah.

Blake: So um, Now, uh do you have an actual written up—Uh, I think you do on the website but just to—for records, do you have an actual written up mandate and is it sort of what you still follow?
Jack: We have a brief, uh explanation at the top of the website about what we stand for as far as you know, solidarity between different activist groups, you know, anti-homosexuality, racism, you know, cap—we're against capitalism and centrally planned socialism. So, it's basically that's up there. As far as a written out, you know, charter or anything like that, no, we don't really.
Blake: Good. Good. And, um, were there any other groups that were involved in the original organization of the group, of your group, like was there, like any network, groups you networked with…
Jack: We did various networking. Um, one thing that we did involved going to an anti-capitalist convergence a quite a few times, networking with them. We attended the under the volcano table last year, tabled there. Put on the Corporation, uh, showing, you know, uh, just the general—gave talks at Universities… tried to get information about something that wasn't well known about out to the public, around, you know, around the Fraser Valley area.
Blake: Um, Gotta make sure—okay good. Got lots of time still…yeah. Good, okay. So, um, now when you were first getting started was there any kind of barriers or just ways you had to change your message, or anything else like that that just you didn't realize when you first started but just stuff that ended up getting in the way?
Jack: Yeah. Stuff that I realized that was causing a lot of, like during the talks and whatnot that was causing a lot of blockage. You get hanged up on some peripheral concept, or something say, say what if someone wants to work all day long shoveling shit, basically, right, um, you know. Something like that, why can't they just do that instead of working in a balanced job complex. We get stuck on that, or we get stuck up on black or white peripheral issues like the word efficiency will be used in our talks and people's notions of efficiency in a capitalist context, they get confused with efficiency under a Parecon context, whereas a Parecon one will be getting our values done in a timely manner, and not, you know, yeah, our values are far different than a cap-capitalist values, so they're to—two totally diffent things, but um, y—we kind of have to build the context of understanding when we go, when we give a talk or go into a concept because people's everyday notion is so entrenched, and, just getting through to people and find the best angles with that one example is something we really had to learn to do in order to get the message across...
Blake: So would you say there's like buil—sort of like built in barriers just to people's understanding of the terms?
Jack: Exactly. Exactly. You know, Parecon doesn't try to have lots of arcane terminology that no one can understand like traditional econ-economics, where its, its an eli—you know, pretty much an elitist field, when you look at it. Even the English language, uh in some respects, uh, phonetics and spelling is, its, its all just rule and whatnot to follow that don't make sense, they're just rules put in place so that specific groups can understand them and no one else can and because of this technical understanding they can use this "knowledge", uh as leverage against groups that are more ignorant of what's going on. So, uh… the question… is was the specific question…?
Blake: Oh, was just, just, uh, uh, what sort of, uh whether there was this kind of linguistic barriers and that were based right into the terms.
Jack: Yeah, uh, yeah, with the example of efficiency and another one would be, um, just

thinking about technology, even, with some groups, uh, they'd think that technology is inherently bad, they wouldn't be able understand how under a Parecon system the context is changed and only useful and socially beneficial technologies are utilized, so you know, terms of, maybe even money, um, money, money's labeled as evil, right? Under some people's eyes, whereas we would look at it as a credit system that is non-transferable, it—the labels that we would use, the terminology that we would use—people had a specific entrenched idea of what those meant, and under a Parecon context they mean something completely different, so yeah we have to be careful to make sure that we make that clear otherwise you get stopped and, people just put up a block and, the conversation's over and they're not supporting it.

Blake: Did you find ways to get around that? Like, did you find that people eventually got it?

Jack: You gotta just kind of… Yeah, you just got to kind of show that you're on their side, that you're concerned about the same things they are, but the labels aren't defined absolutely, it depends on the context. And I think a lot of what we're trained to do in the current society is notice absolute symmetry between things, versus the differences, and so when we see two objects in comparison we like to notice the similarity, but we don't' notice the differences of each object under its specific context. And to try and break people of that either/or logic that they've been trained to believe in under Capitalist systems. Because the either/or logic is what creates the quote unquote "efficiency," right? So it's either, "You're either with us or against us" it's very simple ideas that are bantered into people's minds over time. Parecon's a very grey matter, sys—you know, system and solution to problems, it's not a dogmatic ideology that you know, purports "this is the way its going to be" –it says, "Okay well, If this works then we'll use it, if we find a better way in the future we'll change it," right? But people like to have their believes is such structures. Parecon has guiding principles, but you know, if they're not useful, you know, we'll change them.
Blake: Yeah. Would you say that there is, it sounds—would you say though that there is sometimes value in the either/or structure, or is it always a problem?
Jack: Um, in, well, it depends. It depends—yeah sometimes there's value in the either/or structure, but it depends on the circumstance. So, if—I don't know, say, there's one situation that came up if we're on an island, right?
Blake: Yeah.
Jack: And we're going to have, you know consensus—you can't have a consensus decision if there's a volcano erupting and one person knows the safe way to go—are we going to let the other person go the way they want because they decide they want to go that way, or are we going to grab 'em knock'em over the head and drag them to safety, because we know that's the other way? Right? It's an either/or what are we gunna do kind of situation, right? So, that, that sort of situation under a Parecon system will come up. It may pose a problem, but, in the larger structure for most situations you won't have that. That's only for specific, you know, emergency situations. And even then, you know, in an emergency situation where you need an expert, you know, I don't know if I'm kind of digressing a little bit—
Blake: No, no, go ahead.
Jack: You have a specific expert to give you—they should at least give you reasons for it, and then another expert and then the other expert would give you the reasons and then be able to decide. Possibly in some situations if its extreme emergency situations, someone's dying, it's a lot different but 80% of the situations aren't going to be like that at least, right?
Blake: Okay. In a minute I'd like to ask you about a few more specific examples cause' cause

then we can get into how this actually works—
Jack: Okay
Blake: More, more concretely.
Jack: Okay
Blake: But, I would also like to go back for a second and, when you first started was there any kind of book or reading that you picked up about Parecon that that, uh, was one that got you interested in this group, other than—or perhaps just the talk—and then secondly is there any uh publications or books or particular readings that the group tends to draw from overall, or is it just the overall talks and writings on Parecon?
Jack: Well, what got me was the, the internet has allowed massive amounts of information to be available to people, and I found the online lectures of Michael Albert's that really appealed to me. You know, it wasn't uh, some type of economist who was, you know, high and mighty and above everyone else, it was really just a, a laid-back discussion. And getting down to the bottom of what all of these things really mean, right?
Blake: Yeah.
Jack: In the larger context of you know, inflation and um, stuff like that, right, so um, that, that really captured me and, is that is was a "What is Anarchist Economics" lecture that he gave, that's what pulled me in, and then, and then from there maybe I think it was a about a year later I picked up uh, "Life After Capitalism." You know I got tired of just focusing on the negative and the problems, it didn't seem to be taking us anywhere, we needed a solution, a vision of where to go. You can banter all you want about something being a problem, but unless you see a solution or a way out, what's the point, right?
Blake: Right.
Jack: So.
Blake: Okay, uh, now is there, now especially like when it comes to like writing the blurb at the top and stuff like that is there any particular text you were drawing from or is it just the same stuff you were talking about, uh, everyone has a different reading or—
Jack: I'm not sure who wrote the statement at the top.
Blake: Right.
Jack: I just found myself to agree with it, left it. But… okay.
Don't need to make things too complicated.
Jack: Yeah, yeah. Yeah
Blake: Okay good. So yeah, what I wanted to talk about is you mentioned some events earlier, there was some stuff you did some talks and this sort of thing,
Jack: Yup
Blake: and you came up against some barriers of language and things like that,
Jack: Yeah
Blake: I'd like to get into a little bit more about other kinds of barriers your ran into or other strategies you use, so I'd like to talk about I guess a few specific events you can remember and how they worked, what the process of getting the network together was, how that happened, you know the problems you encountered and stuff like that, so is there any particular—
Jack: Of getting the group together?
No, I'm thinking about more an event you did once you had gotten together.
Jack: Oh, okay, sure. Example, the, uh, Corporation that we put on. Um, planningwise we put a lot of effort into that. We spent quite a lot of money about $1000,
Blake: Wow
Jack: We rented out the Pacific CinamaTech, and, um, we that was last year in July, we

postered for weeks, all throughout Vancouver, we took out ads in the paper, well, not paid, just Georgia Strait, stuff like that, right? And, um, we held the event, it was the sunniest day of this—it was the hottest sunniest day of the summer. And about twenty people showed up—thing, considered a modest success, even though we were hit in the pocket pretty strongly, um, that was, that was a learning experience. Of just trying to put on an event and promote something. I'm not sure how it relates specifically to Parecon struggles and whatnot, considering since we are an advocacy group and not so much trying to create a workplace structure,
Blake: Right, right.
Jack: but then, maybe possibly as far as Parecon goes, you know, we, were trying to start up a distribution company, is what we were thinking of where we could have ethical goods. Um, then just trying to figure out, you know, where to get the funds from and trying to work within the larger capitalist structure, we found that it would probably be very difficult to do,
Blake: Right
Jack: um, and I know other Parecon structures are, are, staying above but they're – it's very hard to do within the larger structure? And we found that advocacy would probably be the easiest avenue, um 'cause the believes we have, and the ideas that we hold and concepts that know about really control and affect what we can actually do. Until we know about something we can't do it. So, we figure that if enough people know, then when we have enough majority and support, then we can, then it can come about a lot more easily, more readily.
Blake: Um, to, to, so two, things, one you you mentioned you this distribution
Jack: Yeah.
Blake: …company,

Jack: yeah

Blake: um you said that that, you didn't think it would work well—I'd like to find out more information specifically about, like how you found it wouldn't work, or if, or if it's just an understanding about capitalism, the led you to believe that.
Jack: Yeah
Blake: So specifics about that. And then I'd like to talk a little bit more about some of your advocacy work and how that worked. So first of all, um, trying to set up a distribution kind of company under Parecon rules. I can see why it would be difficult to do, but, what, what led you to sort of, what led you from thinking, okay we can try to do this to thinking, okay, we can't do this. What was some of the specific steps—things that happened.
Jack: Well, if you think you can or you can't, you're right. But you know, we could do it, but would be struggling along or would we be getting along very well. That was what – seeing how much struggle and how much effort we would have to put into it to get it up and running versus the costs and benefits of advocating for it instead, and seeing how much easier that would be to putting people on board. It's important to have examples to show that something can work, and there are those out there,
Blake: Yeah
Jack: With Mondragan coffee house/book store, South End Press, you know, there's a traveling company, the Blue Space I think it's called, um. Things like that, it can work, we know it can work. The thing is, is, that unless people know about it, yh. So, that's that's basically where we stood. We, we work full time jobs or part time jobs ourselves, right, and

it's – and getting enough money to start something up like that is—it's very taxing, so, what I've been thinking about recently is you know it might depend on the amount of resources, specifically, that the group has, like it might depend on, like if you went into food, there's not as much money, but maybe if you went into something in computers, computer repair, Parecon computer repair business, there's more money in it, we could use that money put it in the bank and then be able to support the cause more. You know, and hold our values. If there's pressure from the capitalist system outside, our resources are strained, then we're going to start we're going to start, uh seeing the negative things that capitalism, you know, promotes in people start to occur in us, and we don't want that to happen. But I'm starting to think, now, or, moreso in the last little while that if we get into something that has more resources available to us that we might be able to get something going far more easily. So, I'm I'm kind of looking more towards that in, in the future.
Blake: Right. What sort of ways did you try and gain—either find out more about the problems of gaining the resources or gaining resources. What methods have you tried to do or sort of like looked at in terms of the difficulties?
Jack: Getting support for um, different politicians on Vancouver city council, networking with um, other companies that are already in business, um, things like that we saw as options for helping us. But then, as far as the time it would take to do all that,
Blake: Right.
Jack: it was, you know, it's—whereas something maybe like a computer repair business is maybe very easy to do in a lot of cases. It might depend on the specific thi—like, like we talked about lots of ideas, like we did talk about maybe setting up an office somewhere, um, and supporting open source software and maybe setting up, like some sort of training, like computer training for different for different groups or whatnot and doing something socially beneficial. But at the same time working as a non-profit, you're not paying us an income, so that's something we would have to do on our own time, and there's not—time, there's just not a lot of it around.
Blake: So you so basically you've got the structural of that, that says basically you need money to buy food and all this stuff.
Jack: Yes exactly.
Blake: And you can't do everything while you're doing that at the same time, and so you've got to pick a struggle that you can do in your spare time
Jack: Yeah, yeah.
Blake: That, that may allow for more people and more resources.
Jack: Exactly, exactly, you've got it right there. Uh…
Blake: Okay, so now, you decided to work mostly on advocacy, um, so, and, and what events, say about raising awareness of Parecon specifically—can you think of just one or two that you did and describe what, what happened.
Jack: Uh, there was, uh—say the first event, when we realized that there was support for Parecon, uh, there was, we got—you know, usually, when we give a talk and once after it's a couple hour talk especially when we can really go into the details into it, people come out feeling, "Yeah, I never thought about that before," you know, doing it that way and, and, we see a lot of positive up-beat energy in people, and um –but the problem is getting the message out. If and—we just need to show people that there *is* a third option, another way of conducting human affairs, um, that's not trampling on one another, so… so, that's generally what happens at almost all of our talks that we give, at the end of the day, and there's the odd people who are very opposed, they have some kind of ideology that prevents them, there's a

block—whatever it be: they don't like technology or, uh—mo—usually that's the one. They don't like technology. They want to live in a primitivist society, with, you know, so… I don't think th—that's too much of a concern.
Blake: Okay, um, so, can like, you name a date and an event and how you set up for it?
Jack: Well, um, well we had uh, our Critical U, a workshop series, uh, one time it was in um… it was in… um… at it was in either February or March—it was March of two-thousand and—thousand and four,
Blake: Yeah.
Jack: and uh, it was, uh, part of a larger workshop series, we had a pretty good turn-out, we have pictures on our website of the event actually.
Blake: Okay.
Jack: And, uh, [Mike] and and um, another fellow from the group, um, they uh… did most of the talking, uh, whereas I and other members were in the discussion period teaching and whatnot, right. We try to participate as much as possible but still hold some high level of standards for the event, right, because we want to represent it well. And, so [Mike] would start off with the production, um, start out with the values of the talk and then [Dave] would do the, uh, allocation at the end, and you know, we'd have a sign-up sheet, fliers, books for purchase, um, and, and then a discussion period at the end, that's usually the format. And that talk went pretty well. We actually didn't get to finish because of that block someone had about shit shoveling, actually, so.
Blake: Well, what, what's, what sort of happened there? Cause you had—so, what, what happened?
Jack: I think that, uh, um, that, because people had to work in a balanced job complex where, you know they had some rote work to do and some work that was more uh, conceptual in nature, that what if someone just wanted to do the rote work all day long? And, who—our argument was that not too many people are going to want to shovel shit all day long, and uh, have you ever shoveled shit before, but it just—it turned into a whole diversion that we needed to bring back, we since learned from that that you can't go off on peripheral issues like that and get stuck, we have to build the larger picture before you can really analyze anything.
Blake: Right.
Jack: Because Parecon is a—what we learned is that any system, really, you can't just take one piece of it. It's a larger context and a larger system with many facets that interplay. Until you understand all of them, together and how it works cohesively, how one part props up another, and they interrelate, then you can't really get a good idea. If you get stuck on one of the concepts before you get the full picture.
Blake: Yeah.
Jack: So we learned that (laugh). And, um, and we actually make that as a statement before our talks, that we're not going to indict—you know, answer the questions as best as possible,
Blake: Yeah.
Jack: --but if we're going to show you how it interrelates somewhere later, we'll ask you just to hold off for the meantime till we get to there we're not just trying to divert away from it, we're not just trying to you know, ignore, you know, the claim or the question. It's just that in order to get such a large talk done we have to be able, such new concepts that people haven't heard before, we have to be able to move on.
Blake: Yeah. Yeah, just, just out of curiosity, did you end up coming up with a good answer to the shit-shoveling problem?
Jack: Um, let me think, only just now. Basically it seems pretty straightforward. Um, is that,

in order for people to participate in society and to have confidence and understand what's going on and in order for democracy to work, people have to be mentally prepared to participate in the decision making process—if they're—all they're doing is some rote task they're just not going to be able to do that. They're just not going to know what's going on. And that's the main argument. I don't think too many people are will have a problem with, with that. Uh, I mean if someone doesn't want to participate, fine, they don't want to participate, but I don't think that the large majority when they are given the choice of shoveling shit all day or working in a, you know nicer environment, you know, having the ability to creatively, uh, you know pursue their passions or whatnot are going to decide they want to do the former there, they're going to decide the latter, that's yeah.
Blake: In some ways, it's uh, a too intellectual a question. It doesn't really deal with concrete reality.
Jack: Yeah, yeah, it's just the side-side piece that you can't get diverted onto.
Blake: Yeah. Okay, so that's good. Now, now, um, um is the advocacy one of the main ways that you gained membership? Or… what are some of the other ways that you used to gain members.
Jack: We're didn't really—like we're not really like a cult or anything like that. We go out and get people signed up, like some of those other groups you see out on the street trying to sign members up. You know, we'd approach it more from the angle of if someone's really interested then they would come to us. And then, they come to a meeting, you know, they'd see how the dynamics worked, and if, if they wanted to join up great, well, we want supporters so they—that's how a few members joined up. Some people have come and gone, you know that people have lives to lead as well, right. So, basically, it wasn't, uh it wasn't really, like a big member drive, is was more of a really org—I guess an organic just, show up, come…
Blake: Yeah
Jack: type of spontaneous way of…
Blake: Yeah. Now, presumably though, people have to know about the group first, so where, so where would you say most of them came from? Because obviously they didn't necessarily know the group before they—they—but they must have known about it before they came to a meeting.
Jack: Yeah. So, one member who joined up who joined up for a while, for a few months found us on Znet. We had an article that we had all co-published up there. Um, about our experiences over the last year of everything that we had done, and he saw that up there and said, "Oh, they're in Vancouver and found out about us that way. Other people from um, just from festivals, and talks they would sign up to our mailing lists and come out repeatedly a couple of times to different talks, that's basically—through the internet, just through talks, normal networking.
Blake: Okay. Um, obviously the group fluctuates a lot, and you mentioned that people have previous commitments, they've got to do other things, etc.

Jack: Yeah.

Blake: Uh, would you say that you've noticed other reasons why you've noticed people quit, like have people become, uh, burned out or frustrated, or have people become just kind of moved on and done other things? What are some of the things you've noticed people that, that happens?
Jack: I would probably say more burnt out than anything. Um… it's a lot of work to—you

know, you have your, your full time job and then you have your other interests, and your other commitments— a lot of us are involved in other activist groups as well as Parecon. Um, so, it's just maybe a lot of burnout. Right now I think the group's taking a, a break. Moreso from our normal activities and in the fall probably we're going to start up again. You know, more strongly. And you just need that sometimes, just a break. Yeah
Blake: Is it any way, would you say it is any way connected to—university culture, you know like, I assume just because of fall I'm just guessing that people come back during school.

Jack: Yeah, yeah, and a lot of people are on vacation and a lot of the members are in the summer as well, so.

Blake: Okay. So… um, wh—one thing is, you've, you've gone and done talks I guess universities and stuff like that mostly, I assume—
Jack: Not mostly.
Blake: Oh.
Jack: Um…

Blake: Um. What are some of the places?

Jack: Like the Critical Views at the Britannia centre we've had a few talks there, uh, we come to, we did the, uh, we did the uh…like the, we attend anti-war demonstrations, hand out fliers, we put out the Shed Session video series at Britannia series, you know, it was a talk between and Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel,
Blake: Oh, neat.
Jack: --on video. Like, the Corporation thing we put on, and attending other festivals and uh… there's uh some things other members attended that I didn't that I can't really get into, but, you know, not just universities, a university environment, we try and keep it diverse.
Blake: Right. So, do you find that in order to get into, say, like I guess if you want to show the Corporation, like, in order to get into any of these venues, like, this event here, or, this, have you run into any sort of barriers to getting in other than just money for any of these events?
Jack: No.
Blake: Absolutely not?
Jack: No.
Blake: Okay.
Jack: No.
Blake: Um,
Jack: No problems, um, people I don't think have too many problems with what we support. Especially in the activist community. Um, I know [Mike] gave a talk, he's a teacher—he gave a talk to some other uhh, teachers one time where he got of, uh, negative reaction from, because, he was saying bas—it was basically "How dare you say that we should do some of the sharing, or our fair share of the shit work, right?" But myself I haven't experienced any— no, we mostly , mostly I think we've stuck to, uh, who supports us already, not really, it's not like we've gone into, I don't know, like some kind of business conference,
Blake: Right right right.
Jack: or anything like that. So…
Blake: So, it's mostly like events that are already interested in change.
Jack: Exactly, exactly.

Blake: So, um, would you say though, that, that, that, like, what would you say what are some of the –I guess they're obvious but it's nice to be able to hear, what are some of the reasons why you haven't tried to do, not maybe a business conference but to say maybe, keeps you doing more mainstream areas or more radical, like, is there any, what would you say is some of the barriers, you know, that change how you go about planning an event?
Jack: Oh, planning, um…
Blake: Is it mostly just your energies only go to certain areas?
Jack: Probably. I would say so. Um… It would probably be great if we would start maybe moving into forays where we are not as well known, or these types of ideas are not as well known and open up to the larger society instead of just more of a counterculture uh, aspect to it. Because that's where any change really is going to have to come from, is not from the people that are already converted, but from, from others in society, who just you know live in the suburbs and work the nine-to-five and have their family, right? We have to convince them that there's a better way and so probably in the future that's something we want to think about for sure.
Blake: Right. So, thinking about that, is there anything that, uh, that, that you'd like to um… how do I put this—have you talked about that, or, what's the most effective way, or have you thought about that at all, or have you even read anything about you know, about things like Parecon, how you can get to these other venues?
Jack: I honestly haven't really. Other than… other than… other than just trying not to come off as angry, you know, like Anarchist punks or something like that. Come off with, you know, present an image to people that they can identify with, build a rapport with them. Um ,you know, things like that would probably be useful, and those are things I have thought about. Because, I mean, a lot of, a lot of activist groups I feel, do it because they want something to belong to. Some idea, they're against something, and they want—I don't know, it's a whole psychological aspect to it. They, wheras with Par---what I want to see with Parecon is I want to see it spread, actually spread, and actually, have, like the people who eat McDonalds and go to the mall, actually like, be involved in it, like, I don't wanna isolate ourselves like other groups do from the larger society, change isn't going to come by doing that, and, yeah… so, definitely I know I know that with Parecon with other members those are things that we definitely think about whereas some groups might not, as far as actually acting on those things, I think we definitely should and probably will. Um, I don't know, maybe holding a talk in a mall. (laugh) Why not? Something like that. Those are things that yeah… to think about.
Blake: Okay, uh, I think we're getting pretty close to the end here, and we can, we will, there's just a few more kind of concepts I wanted to go over.
Jack: Yeah, okay.
Blake: But, are you getting tired or…
Jack: No, just maybe did you want to mesh out just some of the uh, concepts of Parecon per se, because I'm kind of just going into my kind of, my experiences with trying to promote something that's rather vague at this point.
Blake: Sure, part of the thing is that I have to do research into that as well.
Jack: Okay.
Blake: But, I, but what I'd like to do is maybe do a few of these questions, and then because hearing it from you is really important. So, um, uh I was just interested in, would you say things like the Mondragon coffee shop or bookstore—

Jack: Yeah, yep, yep

Blake: Or whatever and other things like that, do you think that that's an important aspect—I was just thinking weather that was an important aspect of getting the general public interested in this?
Jack: It's one important aspect but it's not the only one.
Blake: Right.
Jack: And whether it's the strongest one or not? I, I'd, I wouldn't say it's fair to say that even either. Um, I think it's a whole broad range of tactics that we need to, that we need to have. My feeling personally, is that advocacy and getting the knowledge out there seems like the most important at this time, because until people know about something they, they can't, can't even begin to pursue it.
Blake: Yeah.
Jack: So, that seems the most important to me.

Blake: Yeah. Yeah. Well, when I'm reading some articles it seems that, that, some people, sort of when they criticize Parecon they're criticizing other system entirely. And they just don't necessarily—

Jack: Yeah, yeah, or they haven't even read anything about it, usually, is the—they assume it's something like the—they assume it's just Communism or it's centrally planned socialism, they don't even listen, basically. I find that after we give a couple hour talk, most people come to a realiz—"Oh, okay, yeah that makes sense, that sounds logical."
Blake: So there's a real change in people.
Jack: Yeah, yeah, I think so, and that's why I'm so into it, because I think there's actual potential for this type of thing, versus whereas other types of things, are, are, are more, more antagonistic towards people's way of life and they're telling them they're wrong. Rather than showing them another way and saying, you know, things have changed in the past, why can't they change again, type thing.
Blake: Yeah. Would you say that like—I sometimes think that both, although it's also possibly problematic, um, there's still this aspect of sort of a myth about things like Communism and socialism, that people get hung up on.
Jack: Yeah. Well those are labels as well. The socialism label. Socialism means many different things to many different people. Um, if it means Lenin or Stalinism—to some people and others it means participatory structures. So it's just, it's—you have to take it on a case by case basis and not get hung up on one label as I said earlier. Yeah, uh yeah.
Blake: Okay, I think we're just about there. I just want to ask one more question I wanted to have—how has being involved in Parecon, how would you say it has effected your everyday life. Has, uh, I don't how, and I guess I mean in a number of different ways you see things,
Jack: Yeah.
Blake: How you—and then working in the group obviously is additional stress as well as stress relief, so I'm interested in those issues,
Jack: Yeah.
Blake: how has it affected you?
Jack: Well, recently I left the job that I was working in, technical support for an organic food company. Which I thought was more in-line, I told them about Parecon and the principles I supported, and I thought that they were more in-line with the Parecon system, and then,

getting my first pay cheque from them and not having my hours, like, correct, and then you know, being antagonistic towards me and then seeing how capitalism makes people who are, you know, supposedly even good people and support you know, progressive things, being kind of coerced from the larger system into these kind of Capitalist tactics of worker against owner. Having the Parecon context and seeing this, how this happens to people has given me some kind of perspective that I think others don't have, they might, they might have put up with that, whereas I challenge them, you know more so because of my knowledge of other ways of doing things and seeing larger structures, I don't I'm not as easily to put up with that kind of thing because of the ideas I hold.
Blake: And I would—would you say that maybe you have maybe have less of a personal "my boss is a jerk" sort of a response and more of a sort of how did the whole structure work—
Jack: Yeah. Yes. Exactly. Exactly right. I'm really conflicted about it. Um, because, with any job as well with any person, with any human being, because I know that put in a different situation, they probably wouldn't act that way, and it's the, and I don't want it, I don't want it to be, to be, you know, us against them, I want to work with them to try and find a solution, and that's what I'm actually, uh, tomorrow going to be doing. Um, so…
Blake: All right,
Jack: Yeah
Blake: uh,
Jack: Exactly what you said, yeah.
Blake: Okay, thanks. Um. Uh. I and, I think the last thing I want to say on that is just, uh, you talk about capitalism, now when you talk about capitalism are you talking about market, like the fact that that this group you're working for has to work within a market or are you talking more about that they have this structure of power, like who's on top, or is it a combination of those, what are we talking about?
Jack: I think that we're talking about the market system, um anything that's sustainable isn't valued as highly under a market system, externalities aren't accounted for. So, this is an organic food company, and they're promoting something that's somewhat better for the environment and whatnot, and um, there's not as much money as it apparently. Now, I'm conflicted as to whether its, it's an issue of not having enough money to stay afloat or if it's rapacious greed or something in between. I'm I'm rather conflicted, I haven't talked—to tell you the honest truth meshed that out yet, fleshed that out, so, um, but, but, but definitely the larger structure has an effect on people that they wouldn't have if put in another situation.
Blake: Right. Okay, that's good, so now, we've talked about Parecon fairly vaguely, and it would be really good to hear uh, an outlining, of what you uh you think Parecon means.
Jack: Yeah.
Blake: And any reference you can give to specific examples is perfect.
Jack: Okay. So, basically to start off Parecon is uh, it's a system of participatory—it's a participatory economy where each actor in the economy is given decision making influence to the degree that they're affected by the outcome. It has some guiding principles and values, um, of A) solidarity, B) diversity, C) equity, D), uh, um, participatory self-management and um, and uh, then it has um, and remuneration for effort and sacrifice, and certain other mechanisms to sort of obtain those values, remuneration for effort and sacrifice, balanced job complexes, worker's councils and consumer's councils and it's very much participatory structure instead of a centralized bureaucracy or coordinator class, like a traditional Marxist system would be, you know, of a centrally planning body, you know, allocating goods and services based on wha—where they think things should go, but instead people directly, you

know on the level everyday level, you know, on the everyday ground level of the production and consumption deciding what they want, where to go, and coming to a decision in a democratic solidaristic way. Um, and… generally, basically, that's the system and then specific examples of where that's happening… um, there's, in Brazil there's participatory in Porto Alegre Brazil there's the participatory budgeting that's being proposed. That's one other thing that we thought about doing as well, is proposing a participatory budgeting system for British Columbia, maybe even starting up a political party, though some other members disagreed that that might lead us to be what we advocate against, but, you know, um, um, so participatory budgeting or, or something like that is worker's coops and the Zapatistas they have a boot factory which we've linked to on our website where they make uh, in a worker's coop they make boots and then sell them, um, you know, across North America, um, um, and uh, and uh, and uh, use the money uh, to support their local economy, um, you know building solidarity across groups with this type of system is something… that's important.
Blake: Okay, one thing, one thing about that that I'd like to get into because sometimes it's difficult to suss out is, is what do you think is the biggest difference between say Parecon and just like, say, cooperative movements because a lot of cooperative movements exist, but they're not really, in my, from what I'm reading they're not really necessarily Parecon
Jack: Yeah.
Blake: And yet, and Parecon seems to be something new, whereas cooperatives and a lot of worker's movement that are some ways similar are not, so what are some of the big differences that makes this, okay, "this is a cooperative", "this is Parecon."
Jack: Right. A cooperative might have a managerial structure that's voted upon or a board of directors, wouldn't necessarily be payment for effort and sacrifice or balanced job complex. But, it would be a system without a boss, um, so it would be half-way there, but not, not the fully fledged system of Parecon. And within the capitalist system, perhaps it's what you have to do in order to stay afloat. Um, but, like that's why I think we focused on advocacy more because of that external pressure. Um, but, but, linking up and networking, working with coops is something that's a useful strategy, because they're more in line with the Parecon system than a corporation, so…
Blake: Um, also, did, would you say that—because you've talked about these projects that are sort of Parecon workplaces, but would you say that there's another step between a Parecon workplace and a Parecon sort of…?
Jack: System. Yes.
Blake: Because, it's –It seems that Perecon is a social system to a degree and not just a—
Jack: It's an economic system, social
Blake: Yeah, that's—so would you say that that that there is any really distinction between a Parecon workplace and Parecon, or is it just a microcosm that you would just expand?
Jack: It's a microcosm that we would need to expand. It's a microcosm under the Capitalist system. It's not full-fledged Parecon, it's it's it's pseudo-Parecon, it's the beginning stages of Parecon, it's experiments in Parecon it's not, it's not the full fledged allocation system, uh, because you know, you're dealing with markets around and around you, right, so, it's an internal microcosm with larger pressures, which makes it more difficult and more easily uh, able to be crushed, um, so, that's why building solidarity with coops and movements like that's important, and getting the ideas out there so that in the future we can have a stronger base in order which to rely upon and, and, bring about the larger system.
Blake: Okay, so, I guess, that seems to be really good. Is there anything else that you've talked about so far or that you haven't talked about, um, that you'd like to reiterate or cover

that you haven't. Anything else that you'd like to talk about?
Jack: Um, I can't really think of much.
Blake: Okay, I'll just do a quick run-down of what we've talked about. And then, if that's useful…
Jack: Sure, sure.
Blake: Basically, we've talked about why, why and how your group was formed, we talked about the mandate, and how it was written, we've talked about groups that you've networked with and if you could, we talked about some basic barriers you ran into in terms of ideology and things like that, um,
Jack: Yeah, yeah.
Blake: the texts that you use, some of the challenges you ran into, um, and how the memb—how the membership has been attracted, um, examples, of organizations, and we've talked about what Parecon is, future plans and strategies and stuff like that, is there any of those things that you'd like to expand on?
Jack: Um, I don't think so.
Okay, that's great. Thank you very much.
Jack: You're welcome.

Interview 2:

Blake: Just so you know, I'm recording a Raw Log from this point. So, sorry about all the technical stuff, looks like that took about an hour, are you still up for the discussion?
George: Yeah
George: I'm not sure what you mean by Raw Log
Blake: It's basically a recording of everything we're doing, so I can paste into a document.
George: as in Settings/Preferences/Chatting/Logging/Enable Logging ?
George: Oh… nevermind… I see it. Odd. I haven't see that before
Blake: It's the only way I know to record our discussion
George: so when it's on it makes a big copy/paste buffer?
George: Ah.
Blake: Yeah.
George: It doesn't support timestamping though, apparently… have you tried settings/preferences/chatting/logging/enable logging ?
Blake: I did that—timestamping isn't necessary for what I'm doing anyway. Just need the words.
George: k, well, whatever works for you, raw log is fine even though I wouldn't use it :)
Blake: BTW, I plan on using a fake name other than [text deleted], any preference? Don't worry about people you name then either, I'll change them, as well as specific businesses etc.
George: ok
Blake: So anyway, I guess you were part of the Parecon group that started in Vancouver, how did you end up being involved?
George: it's a rather ornate little story… I got laid off in Nanaimo shortly before the business I was working for shut the doors on its Nanaimo office entirely… went back to school, BCIT…
George: I was interested in Open Source /free software as a result of my work in Nanaimo…
George: which put me on to the track of other community oriented efforts and philosophies
George: in some little corner of my mind I knew that Noam Chomsky was a figure of some sort…

George: so I went to chapters… got "Understanding Power" by him…
George: read through it…
George: in one part he says "no no, don't be so quick to consider me a hero" (or something) "this is also because of people like Michael Albert, who do stuff like zmag."
George: so I googled and found the online site for zmag…
George: looked through pages there…
George: found parecon….
George: read up on it a bunch… liked it… googled again… found the vanpareconers
George: emailed [Mike] saying he should really consider having some document in an Open Format… I'm not sure exactly how things progressed from there to me actually being a collective member… strangely, the part before, I remember more clearly than the part after
Blake: So the Parecon group was around before you joined up then. Had it been around long?
George: a couple years I think.
Blake: Ah. So how long were you in the group?
George: Starting in 2002.
Blake: Do you still consider yourself a member? When abouts did you move away?
George: I'm technically still a member even though I'm not in Vancouver… George: I've been in Winnipeg since [earlier this year].
Blake: Ah, not long then, really. And since then you've been at Mondragon?
George: Yes
Blake: Cool. What first interested you specifically about Parecon? What made it different?
Blake: (different from other alternative ideas out there)
George: It was different because it seemed much like the economic corollary of the free software movement… open information and non-hierarchical division of labour. I've also read the communist manifesto, and its proposition, and it's hard for me to understand how people take it seriously.
Blake: In what way? What seemed especially different and harder to take serious than Parecon?
George: well, Marxist communism, from my reading of the manifesto, says "yes, a state is bad. But we need one for organizational purposes. But don't worry, it won't be around forever. When will it be dissolved? When the state decides it wants to dissolve" which is like saying, "rich people are bad, but they won't be rich forever. When will they be equal to you and me? When they decide it's appropriate."
George: Parecon by comparison doesn't create some unpleasant transitional edifice
Blake: So would you say this is also what seems problematic in examples of Marxist Communism? Or would it be mostly other factors?
George: by examples you mean
George: hmm…
George: my keyboard is being odd
George: by examples you mean Leninist and Stalinist implementations of it?

Blake: Sure, it depends on your interpretation, but that's more or less what I had in mind.
George: I would say that the purist, limitation on how far communism can go is something that the actual implementations of it never hit… they had other problems such as corruption and gulags and being run by an insane mass murderer with … syphillis I think…

George: not to mention that USSR was essentially third world as its starting point, rather than first world, so an apples to apples comparison showcasing what they failed to achieve isn't entirely rational
George: but running under the assumption that these practical issues didn't exist, there's still the silliness of the state deciding for itself when to go away
Blake: So your criticism was/is more of a theoretical one—the Communist manifesto still had these power issues to deal with, Parecon seemed more complete.
George: communism has a coordinator class and a vanguardist approach… parecon is hierarchically flat and insists on participatory self-management
Blake: So coming back to your involvement in the group (I usually call it the VPC), do you remember how you actually got in touch with the other members?
George: communism is a complete system… it's not a problem with it missing some specifications… I just don't like what it specifies :)
George: initially? I emailed [Mike] and asked him to convert a Microsoft Word document to an open format like Open Office…
George: or rather, I emailed the vpc email and he's the one that ended up reading it and responding to it
Blake: Interesting. I may ask you to talk more about the connection between software issues and Parecon in a bit, but for right now, I'm wondering, did you soon come to physical meetings with the group?
George: I think my first meeting wasn't too long after that… it was probably a couple weeks or a month or something just in figuring out whether my suggestion was amenable and when the next meeting was going to be
Blake: Oh and if you're ever in the middle of typing a response and you see another question, feel free to finish what you were typing—I don't want to cut you off, but it's hard to tell—as I'm sure you'd guess.
Blake: How was the VPC organized? Did it use a fairly non-hierarchical structure? How can you describe the meeting process?
George: it's fully non-hierarchical unless there's some hidden hierarchy I don't recognize…
George: meetings essentially consisted of following an agenda and voting on action items that needed to be addressed…. and assigning tasks to people to get stuff done….
George: to return to a prior question for a sec, I'm remembering now that my first meeting was actually just with [Mike], not the rest of the folks…
George: the meeting decisions process, as far as I know, is majority-based, but I don't remember us getting in to much conflict on decisions so it was somewhat moot anyway
Blake: Majority in terms of a voting process, or a concensus model, or did you not really have anything official?
George: majority in terms of a voting process
George: I met up with him in Parksville at a coffee shop… he was… visiting his dad I think… in Qualicum? Or somewhere in the area… he mentioned that there were various business-implementation ideas being bandied about and we talked a bit about some of them like the possibility of an IT collective (which, incidentally, is also being attempted in Winnipeg now)
George: would it be helpful for me to type "eol" or something when I'm at the end of a given ramble? :)
Blake: Don't worry about it. I just wait a few seconds :P. How many members would you say were involved at that time? Were there any groups you remember the VPC working with? Or people from those groups being involved in any significant way?

George: some people were involved in an electronic sense, but never came to the in person meetings (or at least not the ones I was at)… I ended up meeting [Mike], [4 other names].
George: so I guess the short answer to the number of people is 6
Blake: What was the size of the electronic contingent?
George: We discussed working with a group that was involved in lobbying for a Participatory Budgeting process… I don't remember their name though… [Mike] was the one who brought them up…
George: probably another two people
George: but we also had a relatively large following on our email list for announcements… but they were "listen only" folks rather than contributors.
Blake: Ah, so they didn't do much in terms of your actions, etc? What was your involvement like? Did you end up doing talks or anything else like that?
George: I went to "Under The Volcano" with them… the vanpar electronic discussion forums were set up by me and are hosted on my domain… I did research in to business implementation stuff like what costs would be involved in incorporating… I was going to do talks but I ended up here before it happened
George: in a sense, you could say I did talk-related stuff because I was part of presentation stuff done at "Under The Volcano"… but it was a booth rather than a specifically prepared talk
Blake: I've heard about your involvement in the Volcano and some of the business implementation stuff, but not as much the forums. I'd like to find out more about that, but first, what can you tell me about how the Under the Volcano thing was organized? What did the VPC have to do for it, and how did you present yourself?
George: Do you mean how we organized ourselves in preparation for it or how it was organized independently of us?
Blake: No, your involvement. I'm looking for details of how events are done, how you have to structure yourselves coming from a Parecon message.
George: we didn't actually have a lot of specifically rehearsed type of preparation… for the most part it was whoever could come showed up… with respect to what we did… we had our own little table… brought some of Michael Albert's and Robin Hahnel's books… brought a paper to write down people to add to our email list…
Blake: What steps were required for getting a booth? Was there any formal process?
George: If I recall, it was just an application and a rental fee or "strongly suggested donation" or some such…
George: I don't remember the exact amount… $25 maybe?
Blake: Also, what did you end up saying to people about what you did, and how did they generally respond? Was there any challenges there?
Blake: It seems like a big task explaining the difference between Parecon and other movements, in terms of its approach to technology and the differences with other socialist programs.
George: we had a wide variety of reactions, but people who bothered to do more than kind of pause and then keep walking nervously tended to have quite a favorable response… we spent more time talking about parecon than we did about our own collective I think
George: the biggest challenge would be people who were non-receptive… but there were enough people who were enthusiastic that it didn't matter much
Blake: These people were enthusiastic, but did they engage? Did they join the group? Or was that not a priority.

George: surprisingly, I don't remember anyone asking much about either technology or socialist comparisons… the closest was someone wondering how parecon related or didn't relate to the LET system
George: a lot of people joined the email list… we weren't really trying to sign new collective members up… that's something that we generally wait on, ie, people with initiative will attempt to join… if we instead try to convince people to join, it's just headaches
Blake: Ah. Did you experience any of these headaches? Any you can describe?
George: the closest such headache would be the NDP person I guess… who came to the meeting and gave lip service to interest but really just wanted us as a springboard to prove she was "community oriented"
Blake: Going back a bit, looking back a bit, what did you say/would you say now differentiates Parecon from LET?
George: with the disclaimer that I have at no time really researched it : from what I understand it's bartering/exchange rather than an organized system of remuneration for work. Which is to say, it does not appear to have any metric for considering work relevant…. only the products of that work (which would make it more like capitalism than parecon I guess). I'd probably be punched by some people for saying that :)
Blake: Well, it is a fair answer. I don't want to linger too long on this bit, because there's still some more to cover, but what texts would you have brought to the Under the Volcano event? Which ones were the most important to you when you joined.
Blake: read ? for . at the end there.
George: If I recall we brought essentially everything Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel had written on the subject up to that point, including some stuff that was … possibly decades old and sort of dusty…
George: The material I relied on, however, wasn't in print, but was the online stuff
George: I can link-hop faster than I can page-hop
George: and the online stuff had material that I don't think was in the books…
George: like Michael Albert's dramatic "debate" with… what's his name… Zerzan?
George: which consisted of Michael Albert specifically pointing out aspects of primitivism that he disagreed with and Zerzan responding with… well… name calling without substantiation, then Michael Albert saying "I thought this was a debate?" and Zerzan ignoring him…
Blake: What interested you about that particular debate? I know a lot of the Albert debates tend to devolve in that way (usually through no fault of Albert's).
George: to be honest, I pointed that one out for the sheer farcical entertainment value that it had for me… it made me laugh… it didn't really inform me in any objective fashion though. I'm actually surprised at how detailed and careful Michael Albert tends to be even when addressing people who… aren't.
George: I have had the same reaction with Albert, as well as Chomsky and some of the people they "debate" with. I guess I can say that one thing I did learn, objectively, beyond the mirth, is that some capitalist alternatives don't want to be questioned, or thought about critically, and therefore aren't really worth me delving in to too far
Blake: Is that part of the appeal of Parecon? It really comes off as being logical and not terribly emotional?
George: I'd say it was part of my appeal to me. When I first read about it I had instinctive skepticism (I still have some skepticism, I'm not utterly uncritical of it even now) but what I liked is that there was no attempt to hide ANY attempt at debunking it, even the silly ones…

any argument against it from various corners was there in plain site, thus allowing for the scientific requirement of falsifiability, ie, "feel free to prove this model ridiculous. We'll talk about it."
George: I don't get that feeling from most or any other proposed alternative, including Marxist communism
George: and if I remember, the Trotskyists call anyone, who questions them in any way, "petit bourgeois"
Blake: Yes. Okay. So you've got this very scientific, plotted out alternative, it seems to fit with a lot of people's values, but (correct me if I'm wrong) not a lot of direct confrontation of either ordinary people or opponents. Did you discuss much how to fight for something that is so diametrically opposed to the current system?
George: I think our non-pure-model discussions were essentially targeted to us starting a business for transitional purposes
George: which I was heavily interested in… that's where a lot of my VPC work went to…
Blake: Why would you say that goal changed? Or did it?
George: it didn't : that's why I'm at Mondragon now :) George: or you mean for the group as a whole? Time I'd say George: it's a huge effort… coordinating a new business George: and risky… and expensive George: everyone except me was employed and had pretty decent job security George: So there was little impetus to take up a pretty risky idea.
Blake: What about the social dimension of Parecon, things like community councils? Would that have been a deficit in the business idea, or would it have come?
George: consumer councils make sense in the context of a pareconic federation… not so much in the sense of a single parecon (or semi-parecon) business interoperating with a non-pareconic society… ie, a consumer council of capitalists really doesn't have the political right to control a parecon business, beyond choosing to show up and spend money or not
Blake: yes.
George: however, once enough isolated parecon businesses come in to existence, there exists the potential for them to federate with each other
George: that's when consumer council structures start to really make sense
Blake: Is that how you see a Parecon system coming about? The gradual development of federations?
George: so I would say, it will come, when the infrastructure for it allows it to make sense
George: yes… weak and fragile, and partial, at first, then stronger as greater business diversity exists
George: market pressures force imbalance on to any possible arrangement before anything is even discussed
Blake: Is there room for other strategies? Direct confrontation? Revolution? Community councils that are not linked to any particular business? Participatory budgeting? Are any of these particularly problematic?
George: when you say community councils do you mean consumers councils? When I think of a community council I think more along the lines of ParPolity rather than ParEcon
George: Direct Confrontation would, I think, be unwise without a rather large number of people to do it… it would just give pretext to get arrested… not very productive… revolution would imply that parecon already succeeded, so by the time a revolution COULD succeed… it would already have succeeded
George: participatory budgeting would certainly be a step in the right direction though

George: Michael Albert in a talk in … Australia I think… said that he feels that when 1/3 of people want parecon, 1/3 of people oppose it vigorously, and 1/3 of people are on their couches not caring, parecon wins. That would be the point where revolution would be the strategy
Blake: Okay, I'd like to talk more about the barriers to a Parecon workplace (and the opposite of barriers, whatever the word is), and especially your experience in Mondragon, but first, 2 questions, 1 how would you say we get to that 1/3, 1/3, 1/3, and 2--well, I'll wait on 2.
George: I'd say it's a multistep process… a very hard journey… the first step of which is to have a business that survives, and viably will continue surviving. Mondragon's been around since 1996, so it's past the "early business failure" risk…
George: businesses which survive should do outreach and support for other businesses to start, thus bootstrapping via parecon, more parecon
George: thus creating diversity : thus allowing federation : thus allowing greater strength to support further business ventures
George: not only businesses that haven't been done yet, but businesses that COULDN'T have been done yet
George: some businesses require more to keep going than others
George: like semiconductor fab plants, for a "way out there" example… multi-billion dollar investments… not something one little parecon business will be able to reach out in to… but a federation? Perhaps.
Blake: That's interesting and raises some interesting possibilities, but before we get to Mondragon and how it fits in, I want to go back (this is that question 2) and ask about your VPC work a little more. Can you describe the forums, how and what you did (without being too computer technical, more person and action technical)
Blake: I'd like to think about how it worked as a strategy, what it was being used for etc.
George: the forums are at sandbox.oracleatbelfry.com/forums/vanparForum, and are accessible and useable to whoever wants to chat about parecon. The system is phpBB, a Free Software forum development program written in Php. The intent is to use them to discuss anything and everything parecon related… and potentially plan stuff
George: actually, they could potentially be used for a lot more too… like real-time location based collaboration … but right now it's a pretty simple system.
Blake: Did it get used significantly? How is it being used now? Are there any particular rules or structures?
George: it currently has 7 posts spread over 3 topics, with the last post having been done in August… so it's uh… not quite as prolific as I'd planned
George: certainly not enough to consider rules and structure….
Blake: Any idea why?
Blake: why it's not as prolific as you planned, that it.
Blake: *is

George: well, the vpc to begin with is pretty small… and the subset of members that are technophiles is… essentially Bryan and I…. I don't think it's been formally announced on our email list either, so I don't know how many people even know it's there. Hmm. I'll need to nudge [Fred] about that now that I'd thought of it
George: The Mondragon forums that I set up are similarly plagued by a certain lack of activity, but I understand that better than I do the vpc forum quietness

Blake: Okay, so there's more work to do in the group itself on that. We're coming closer to the end now, only maybe a few more questions, but the big next one is about Mondragon. Can you describe how Mondragon works, what it is, and how it links to Parecon (as if I know only about Parecon and have never heard of the place).
George: Mondragon is a vegan restaurant and bookstore (formally called a "coffehouse and bookstore" I suppose) collectively operated… there are about 14 of us…
George: it's formally/legally a worker's co-op with share levels
George: the shares are all equal, and are essentially meaningless internally
George: the business is run by a series of committees. Each full member has to be (well, technically) on at least one committee…
George: it's parecon in the sense that there aren't differential wage scales, nor a "coordinator/manager" class…
George: the decision making process used at meetings is consensus-based, which the members believe is consistent with their anarchistic principles, but which technically isn't parecon…
George: also, having an hourly wage scale that's the same between workers is also not technically parecon…. and of course, we're paid in money instead of pareconic credits.
George: the closest thing that mondragon has to participating in a federation, so far, is that the other businesses in the same building (two of which are also parecon) get a discount
George: Mondragon tries to stay consistent with parecon's participatory self-management by making all information (with some exceptions) available to all members
Blake: Would you say there are many differences between Mondragon and other co-ops? The co-op movement hasn't really become a very political force but Parecon seems to be? What about Mondragon and workplaces in central america (I'm thinking here of Argentina)
George: Argentina, brazil, Mexico to some extent… Latin America generally seems to be making progress with it…
George: I'd say that other co-ops can still have managerial structures… which makes them less appealing to me
George: like, some businesses are employee-owned but a normal business in other respects. Still supervisors… still bosses… people who have different levels of share equity… different administrative responsibilities
George: being a co-op isn't enough to find balance and equity. It's just the first part of the equation
George: balance and equity aren't possible when ruled by shareholders who never even show up, and just watch their share price, certainly
Blake: What barriers does Mondragon face (apart from the normal business problems of any small business)--I'm thinking both internal and external? Are they similar to what the VPC faces?
George: no… the vpc has very few external pressures as far as I know, and internal pressures aren't really huge because we don't **have** to do *anything*… at Mondragon, we have both external and internal pressures based both on economic equity, and the need to survive…
George: so for instance, Mondragon has had discussions in the past about whether it makes sense to deal with a big corporation if it comes down to crunch time and our sustainability comes into question
George: the vpc doesn't face such things….

George: internal pressures at mondragon, very much along parecon lines, include stuff like people who go off on their own and represent the business without their approach being ratified (eg, being a boss)
Blake: Can you be any more specific—any specific things that have occured at Mondragon? Things you wanted to do or projects that had problems?
George: and at the other end, people kind of coasting and just getting through the day to their paycheck (being an employee)
George: the mondragon forums have had issues
George: it's actually been kind of funny, in a frustrating way
George: in meetings, on one or two occassions, people have asked for information.... I tell them "it's on the forums"
George: they say "ok, well can you email it too?"
George: I say "if you can check your email, you can check the forums. No."
George: It may be some level of technophobia I guess
George: but to innovate, as parecon requires to progress, people have to get passed that
Blake: So people acting as "boss" or "employee"—how can you describe this behaviour in concrete examples? Where do you think it comes from?
Blake: Oh and by the way, we're very nearly finished now, you've been very helpful.
George: an example of acting as just an employee : showing up late, taking more than your scheduled break, taking unscheduled additional breaks, and sort of "hanging out" even when you ARE working
George: buying stuff (ie $400 of stuff) when it's not your responsibility to do so, you aren't cleared to do so, you aren't on the COMMITTEE responsible for doing so, and you're interfering with what the money was intended for
Blake: Have those become serious problems? It seems in the latter that you're referring to a very specific event.
George: I think employee-ness and boss-ness come from the usual sources... lack of motivation and commitment creates the former, and vanguardism creates the latter
George: they're quite serious problems, the source of us continuously changing and updating our processes and policy to try to address them... the latter example I cited is only one selection from a cornucopia though
George: both extremes tear at solidarity and question the viability of the entire operation
Blake: Okay, I'd like to go back to that in a moment in terms of strategy questions, but first, one problem that I have been told happened at the VPC was people feeling uncomfortable about the level of cooperation involved at first—like not wanting to take part in debates, etc. It seems that Parecon invites quite direct involvement, little in terms of just following the leader, which some people find difficult to do. Would you agree?
George: certainly... the upbringing of almost everyone, including those who turn to parecon, has been one of conditioning to approach things in a certain way... which is not one of egalitarian decision making or expected autonomy
Blake: Are these personal problems or the result of social structures—are people being lazy or are they reacting to structures around them, or is it something else entirely?
Blake: I guess you mostly answered that now.
George: institutions shape the people that their policy touches—touches
George: and all of our dominant institutions are ones that favor obedience and consumerism over critical thinking and independent endeavors

Blake: So do Pareconists need to challenge those institutions apart from other strategies (like forming businesses), or is it the other strategies that challenge the institutions?
George: even institutions that talk about entrepeneurism want it to be done within the political constraints that surround us… not as world changers but just as new sources of tax dollars
George: If that makes sense
Blake: Okay, so how have you and how has Mondragon attempted to change people's
Blake: oops
Blake: ignore that
Blake: it's a prototype of my next question

George: institutions are created in service to the powers that be… power derives from a mandate (or complacency) from the masses, as well as access to resources. Both aspects can be addressed with visibility, viability, and expansion
George: new institutions will form as a direct result of pareconic expansion… they'll need to, to keep things coherent as the federation grows
Blake: So in other words, these islands, Mondragon and the groups you network with challenge the institutions which in turn challenge the ideology and the frame people are in.
George: as in nature, old institutions won't necessarily die as a result of a "fight to the death". They'll simply be rendered moot
George: we don't necessarily ever have to challenge them directly, although as Chomsky said they'll probably get quite aggressive once they think we ARE a threat.
George: at which point we'll be defending ourselves more than challenging anything in particular
Blake: Okay. Now, Mondragon still faces serious "boss," "employee" problems—how have you and your group attempted to deal with those problems—what are some of the strategies?
George: we have a personnel committee, and accountability sessions, as two strategies. The personnel committee is the lone example of what I alluded to earlier… of exceptions existing in what information is accessible. "bitch sessions" with PComm are NOT part of the general record… they can't be or people wouldn't feel comfortable talking at all…
George: accountability sessions allow people to directly talk to other people about what they feel has been done inappropriately, or also what's been done well…
George: there's also the good old fashioned approach of just going to the person you have issues with and telling them straight on. But that's hard for some people.
George: technically, if a problem is ongoing and never stops, we have a dismissal process, but it's extremely hard to get going, and the infractions have to be pretty huge
Blake: All right, in a moment I'm going to ask you if there's anything we've missed or you really want to add, but first, two more things, first, could you define "PComm," the "Personell Comittee" and "accountabilty sessions" in a bit more concrete terms? I know what happens now, but not how they actually occur. would you say there is a difference in how a Parecon advocacy group/Parecon workplace views value—and other organizations or businesses?
Blake: That was 2 questions, btw, my last 2 I think
George: the PComm is a committee of about 4 individuals and is intended to allow employees who have been unable to resolve conflict to have an intermediary/mediation source rather than just becoming frustrated and having tensions on a given issure forever…
George: accountability sessions occur every two weeks, generally with groups of 4 or 5, and have specific "evaluation sheets" that get filled out, which are discussed at the accountability meeting

George: the evaluation sheets relate to "cafe tasks, bookstore tasks, committee work, collective process… everything that can be touched on
George: including "how well do you think this person knows parecon""
George: which is another thing to mention : as a parecon business, we very rarely ever discuss the model, the underlying philosophy… so I almost always put a question mark in that slot
Blake: Great. What about value then—is there value apart from how much it sells for—is there any way that Pareconists see value in things differently say from Capitalists, or even quasi-capitalist co-ops?
George: for the other question…. there aren't any fully parecon workplaces yet do to the lack of a fully autonomous federation. The result is that a parecon advocacy group has purist model-based values where as a semi-parecon workplace is forced to compromise much more
George: at the moment Mondragon has to focus quite a bit on value, what things sell for… not entirely to try to extract profit either
Blake: any more you can say on that issue? It's a little vague, I admit.
George: we're also concerned about accessibility to our clientele (trying to be as accessible as we can be) and ethical food (fair trade, organic, vegan)… unfortunately the former pulls us to low prices and the latter to high prices, so it's a tug-of-war
George: it's kind of a triangle… how can we be most affordable, most ethical, and yet still eat and not have to close our doors… in addition to squeezing parecon in there somewhere
Blake: Okay, all that is great. You've been very informative. Really useful. Are there any questions you have of me or anything else you'd like to add before I log off?
George: so the process from here is that you assemble and edit the transcript and then email it my way?
Blake: Whatever you like. It will be some time before I finish editing it as I'm working a couple jobs and doing several bits at the same time. At the end I will have a paper of about 100 pages or so that you're free to have, as well as the transcripts of your interview. Basically anything you want that doesn't compromise anyone else's anonymity and confidentiality.
George: sure, it would be cool to see the final assemblage
Blake: Keep my email bspeers@uvic.ca, and ask any questions you have in the next while.
George: ok, cool
Blake: Good. I don't want to rush you though, is that good? Feel fulfilled?
Blake: You helped a lot.
George: heh
George: I have to head off to finish my laundry now… it feels like we covered a good amount of ground
Blake: All right, thanks muchly, I'm going to eat.
George: Bye!

Interview 3:

Blake: How do you remember the formation of the Vancouver Parecon Collective? What role did you play?
Phil: Well, our collective formed from happenstance at first then it quickly became a self-conscious effort to organize. I had been talking to many people for years about my interest in Parecon—activists, organizers and others—and one day when checking my email I came across a message from a guy named [Mike] who had a link to ZNet and his personal web site at the bottom of his message. For whatever reason, I clicked on his homepage link and

discovered that he had a very strong interest in Parecon, he had given a few talks at his university (UBC), had formed a reading group and had even developed a power point presentation for his talks. I immediately wrote [Mike] expressing my interest in parecon and we met for coffee to start brainstorming. Very soon afterwards [Mike] was approached to do a talk for students at Simon Fraser University (SFU). We quickly mobilized to re-write his power point, develop flyers, a web site and mailing lists.

That first talk we announced our collective. It was a really memorable night for me because it was dark and raining very heavily outside; there were other activist events happening all over town—I wasn't expecting very many people. We had a turn out of 12-15 people with very lively discussion. We had people sign up to our mailing list and take our flyers so felt very satisfied with the outcome of the evening.

After that there was the first screenings of the film "The Corporation", we set up a table in the theatre lobby to leaflet and sign people up to our mailing list. We did this for about four days. We wanted to provide people an alternative to corporate globalization, capitalism and corporate hierarchies. This event gave us access to literally thousands of people looking for an alternative. We were given this exposure on a silver platter and we took advantage of it. All this was a good foundation for our initial outreach, following events and publicity.

Personally, I think I played a very enthusiastic role as I'm generally a hopeful and optimistic person, since I think there's reason to be. I remain enthusiastic because there's a lot of potential for parecon advocacy and implementation. People have been coming 'out of the wood work' so to speak, and there's been great interest in parecon. But then again, why wouldn't there be?

Blake: What first got you "into" Parecon? What sparked your interest?

Phil: I remember first moving from California to Canada and working in my grandmother's embroidery factory. I was an embroidery machine operator for about six to seven years. As I got better at the job I had a little more spare time to read. At this point I'd been a regular user of ZNet and had a subscription to ZMagazine. I had always liked Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel's visionary thinking – they gave me hope. I found my introductory contact with the parecon model through Z inspiring, so I began to get Michael's and Robin's books. First "Looking Forward: Participatory Economics for the 21st Century", then "What is to be Un-Done", Michael's first book. After that I read "Un-Orthodox Marxism" and then the two volumes "Marxism and Socialist Theory" and "Socialism Today and Tomorrow", and many others. During this period I also picked up Stephen Shalom's "Socialist Visions", an excellent and still very valuable book. I did all this reading and studying in any spare time I had both off the job and while working at the factory and at other jobs. I'd read about balanced job complexes, self-management, solidarity, equity, diversity and remuneration for effort and sacrifice and I would feel miserable working in my repetitive, dull job, taking orders and constantly feeling tension around how best to manage my time at work. And then it struck me hard that, if I was feeling this way about my job, millions of other workers must also feel this way; successive generations have probably experienced the same thing spanning whole centuries. The vast majority of people, through their role as workers in the economic sphere of society, both in the past, present and in the foreseeable future, have been robbed of their ability to be fully human. We don't have decision making input in proportion to how we're affected, we don't have work place solidarity and there continues to be class rule of workers by the coordinator and capitalist classes who own and control the productive assets. Not just in the work place, but as consumers and citizens too, with warped preferences – our needs, desires and wants. Advertising conveys false information, the institutional roles of buyer and

seller in the market place pit people against one another and these same markets hide information about the social costs and consequences of our economic choices. Over all there is a bias towards production and consumption of private goods rather than public goods. Capitalism warps society and human development and has given most of us a bum deal.
In "The Political Economy of Participatory Economics", (Princeton University Press, 1991), Albert and Hahnel write "We seek an economy that distributes the duties and benefits of social labor fairly; that involves members in decision making in proportion to the degree they are affected by outcomes; that develops human potentials for creativity, cooperation, and empathy; and that utilizes human and natural resources efficiently in the world we really inhabit, an ecological world filled with complicated mixtures of public and private effects. In short, we want an equitable, efficient, economy that promotes self-management, solidarity, and variety under real world conditions."
This is what originally inspired me to commit to organizing for a participatory economy. But there were two other defining experiences down the road that also proved influential in my commitment. The first has to do with my experience at Simon Fraser University (SFU). I'm not a university student, but I've sat in on two whole semesters at SFU. One course on Marxist economics and before that another one on 'Comparative studies in alternatives to capitalism'. The professor for this last one was renowned Marxists economist Michael Lebowitz who's currently doing some interesting work down in Venezuela. For both of these courses I'd read all the material, wrote all the papers, went to all the tutorials and wrote the final exams. I went into this emersion of Marxism holding onto the parecon model and I came out of it unshaken and even more confident that parecon was the leading candidate for a future post-capitalist economy.
The other influential experience was my joining the Redeye Collective in 1999 to produce current affairs radio at Vancouver Coop Radio. I was a radio baby then and the veterans of the show had developed a very sophisticated collective model and corresponding procedures. I was able to contrast this with the work I was doing in the embroidery factory and get further insights into how my work place ideal of a balanced job complex would actually operate. Redeye has been the closest thing to my ideal ever since. But with the Vancouver Parecon Collective now organizing we're working towards placing our ideal into practice in a more specific way than I've ever experienced before.
For all these reasons I became interested and committed to parecon organizing and I think others should join the efforts too, because, well, I really don't see any other option, I mean if there are other options we should explore, debate, share and compare them. If they're better than what parecon offers, if they achieve more solidarity, self-management, equity, diversity and efficiency than parecon, then I'll point my efforts toward advocating that system. But so far, I've neither heard nor seen of any other such alternative economic model; parecon seems to be the cat's pajamas…
Blake: What other groups were you working with when you helped form/joined the Vancouver Parecon Collective (VPC)?
Phil: I was and still remain involved in a variety of different groups and communities. I've gotten together with many different folks at different times to organize anti-corporate globalization, alternative media, anti-capitalist and antiwar events. I've worked through Vancouver Cooperative Radio on various committees and continue to produce radio there with the Redeye Collective. I volunteered for Spartacus Books (not Spartacist ;) an anarchist book store, People's Coop Book store and also a local Cinematheque. I've spent the past couple years organizing with the Vancouver StopWar Coalition. My paid work as a social service

worker in Vancouver's down town east side has also put me in contact with many harm reduction and anti-poverty groups, etc.

Blake: What were some of the groups/organizations/institutions (including other activist groups, NGOs, specific media organizations, schools, political parties etc), that the VPC networked with?

Phil: We've networked with many groups. The folks in the 'Vancouver Anti-Capitalist Community Forum' was one such group. They've helped provide space for us to get the word out about parecon. We also tried to make some attempts to support and contribute to their work, but our efforts kind of puttered out for various reasons mostly having to do with our time and energy commitments. Global Justice TV helped us by broadcasting one of our presentations across the lower mainland three different times. That gave us access to an audience that we had never imagined we'd reach; they just video taped another one… Students at various universities helped out by providing a forum. Really, many, many people have contributed to our efforts to advocate parecon. Many people and groups either provided us space and resources, used their own medium to deliver our message or actually helped in our on the ground organizing efforts.

I do a little volunteering with ZNet so they have been very helpful and supportive of our efforts too. For that we're very grateful and continue to be. Michael and Robin have helped in numerous ways; just being around for us to ask them questions and bounce ideas off them has been an invaluable source of insight and guidance into our organizing.

But going beyond the dynamic of "networking" and looking more closely at group and institutional relationships, I think there's something a little deeper going on here. We've had a variety of people come, go and stay in the Vancouver Parecon Collective. Members of our group have been and are teachers, social service workers, computer programmers, book store clerks, organic food delivery drivers, political party members, men, women, parents, anarchists, vegans, queers, anti-war organizers, media activists, etc. We contribute in a variety of ways to various organizations, institutions, groups and communities. It's more than networking because, just as many people have helped us, we're playing an active role, not only in upholding the commitments and responsibilities that we have among these various constituencies, but we're seeking their active success. Sure networking happens, but there are deeper relationships happening at the same time that I think are based on human solidarity and mutual aid; a mutual interest and compassion for the wellbeing, sustainability and advancement of the organizations, institutions, communities and groups that we participate in. I think this has contributed to both the growth and effectiveness of the Vancouver Parecon Collective just as we, as a collective and as individuals, have contributed to the growth and effectiveness of other complimentary movements. It's this kind of accommodating and complimentary organizing that I think makes our organizing efforts sustainable and effective for the long-term and also contributes to the possibility of our movements achieving their goals for social change.

Blake: Once you were part of the group, did it manage to do what you hoped it would? Please expand by adding what barriers (if any) there ended up being between your vision for the group and what it did manage to accomplish.

Phil: After joining a group that advocates for a participatory economy, my hope was to advocate parecon effectively, support already existing parecon projects, contribute to starting new ones and help create and solidify relationships between them all. Beyond that I hoped that we can apply both reformist and revolutionary strategies to implement parecon in other ways.

Obviously, the long term goal is to implement as close to possible an approximation of the parecon model on an ever growing scale and size.

For me this begins by making parecon a visible alternative to capitalism that people can then choose from and join in the effort to organize, wherever they're located. I don't only mean among already existing activist circles, but also reaching out to the mainstream to ever enlarge the movement. I think we've been doing a great job at getting the word out. However, the fact remains that we're a grass roots group. We're not Fox or Time Warner and so we don't have the same resources at our command to touch people in the privacy of their living rooms or in their cars commuting to and from work to inspire organizing and dissent. We have to utilize the resources at our disposal and that means being creative, innovative and strategic with the minimal means that we have to over come barriers. I think we've been doing as best we can and we've being doing a great job so far, especially with the minimal means at our disposal. So, yes, we've been successful in achieving many of our goals and aims and in the context of our limited means, our success has been surprising, hopeful and inspiring. But we have larger goals and aims too, so there's still a long road to travel.

There are other issues though. We still remain a pre-dominantly white male group. This needs to change. We've had some women come and go and many say they were going to get involved but haven't yet. We also have lots of women and non-whites come to our presentations and workshops. But we still need more diversification to balance the gender and race participation in our group. I don't claim to fully understand our shortcoming in this area. But I do think this is partly due to the fact that women and non-whites don't have it as easy as we white guys do, meaning they have other responsibilities and commitments to their personal, family and community lives that take up their time and energy. We don't always have the same life commitments making it easier for us to commit to "extra-curricular activities" like organizing against capitalism, and on average there's probably less of a sacrifice from us in doing so. But that doesn't mean that we should stop doing what we're doing, it means that, in addition to organizing for a parecon, we have to address and do our part to help alleviate the conditions that make it harder for non-whites and women to participate. We need to make a difference in people's lives today and also develop hopeful strategy and vision seeking to transform the dominant culture, community and kinship institutions which create the conditions for sexism and racism. This is equally as important as organizing for a participatory economy and has to be done if we're to make long lasting progress.

However, another possible reason for our lack of progress on this front has to do with the fact that we haven't really made the effort to do any real outreach into specific communities beyond anti-capitalist or anti-corporate globalization activists. If we had a workshop series, flyers and other information addressing how a participatory economy would affect race and gender relations we may get the results that we've been lacking, but I'm not sure. I really don't know. I do know that discussion of this kind of organizing for us always comes down to time, energy and resources, not necessarily priority, because as mentioned above addressing race and gender is equally as important as economics.... The first step for us is finding people who share a common affinity for the parecon model and advocacy. We've done that and continue to do this kind of work. But can we grow beyond this basic level to begin outreach, education and advocacy into other communities i.e. the union and worker rights and working class movements, women, non-white and queer communities, etc.? You can see how groups as limited in resources as ours could easily overstretch ourselves to the point of complete dissipation, and this is a danger which I'll elaborate on below. So, in doing this kind of

organizing, in our current capacity, we have to be very strategic with our energies and resources.

Even if we were to extrapolate away the necessity of focusing on race and gender, the exact same issues arise when we discuss where to put our energies and resources when engaging in parecon specific organizing. There are still areas that we want to work on that we think are very important, but have been unable to make very much progress in. These areas are the creation of actual parecon projects and institutions to compliment our broader organizing, education and advocacy efforts. In addition, there are strategic matters at stake. We've had on the table for quite some time now the possibility of getting involved in Vancouver's municipal political process. There are some in the collective who would not commit their time and energy to this for concern that entering such a process may co-opt our principles and aspirations, along with many other good reasons. There are others who think it could be a catapult for organizing on a larger scale or to gain easy visibility for our ideas in mainstream media. Aside from the political debates we have about this, I think the issue deep down is that we don't currently have the resources to commit to the political process as a strategy for advocating parecon and at the same time stay engaged in the kind of organizing that we've been doing (or any other kind of organizing for that matter…) We simply don't have the resources. If we did have the resources we'd have conditions promoting the possibility of a diversity of strategy and tactics within our own collective efforts. Collective members who oppose participation in municipal politics could opt out without affecting others in the group who want to go forward with such a plan. Those in the collective who oppose participating in municipal politics could pursue other parecon advocacy routs so that our organizing would embody a diversity of complimentary strategies and tactics – this would be ideal. But, it's not what we're working with. Maybe some of our thinking is a little ambitious and perhaps some of our ideas represent shoes too big for us to fill. But I think we're very rooted in grass roots organizing and so all this is a healthy debate within our collective.

Beyond a healthy internal discussion and debate about strategy, tactics and outreach to women, non-whites and queer communities is a larger issue looming. We're constantly fighting against capitalisms institutional pressures which our resource problems, and the conditions it imposes, are rooted. We're all volunteering our time and energy to parecon organizing, we don't get paid and there's no material reward. The organizing is dispersed among what our own time and commitments to family, friends and personal interests allow us to do. Organizationally this means we take on personal sacrifices that may not be sustainable for our group in the long run. And even though we may try to share our work equitably, even though we know the importance of outreach to diver's communities, even though we want our organizing to embody a diversity of tactical and strategic approaches, some times our efforts scatter and even dissipate around certain projects and aspirations. In order for us to make our project sustainable, and not only sustainable, but to grow we need to be flexible, innovative and creative. Sometimes our efforts have been overwhelmed by the enormity of redirecting our energies. But other times, and I would say mostly, we are reaffirmed by the responses, outcomes and progress of our efforts. There always seems to be hopeful ways of moving forward with our parecon advocacy and it's promising.

But, finally, let me add one other brief and perhaps more humble explanation for any barriers and limitations to our organizing. We're still a very new group, just over two years old. We've just sprouted and have much potential to grow.

Blake: Many groups become big quickly while others stay with a small core and gain peripheral members. Which of these patterns would you say fits the VPC? Why would you say the VPC ended up with such a pattern?

Phil: I don't think that either of these characterizations or "patterns" fit us really. Over the past two years, we've had new members come and go regularly, some remain on the "periphery", but on average we've managed to attract 6-8 members who've stayed and continue to contribute and we continue to aim for more growth. But this does raise some issues about the challenges of movement building and some things to overcome.

Organizing for social change is a hard thing to measure and it's never quite clear just how or in what ways we're affecting people. Perhaps we could replicate the "Butterfly Effect", flapping our anti-capitalist wings in Vancouver to cause an economic justice and democracy storm in Washington or Wall St. Perhaps not, but hey you never know! More realistically and more self-consciously, we have to choose our strategies based on the likely consequences of our choices and the potential for further strategic progress. The size of a group may or may not play a part—one tiny mosquito can be a real pain in the ass if you're locked in the same room together overnight. That said, we want to attract as many people as possible to aspire towards helping implementing a participatory economy. Ultimately we need to think about how many people we'll need to win and how to arouse their participation; this could happen any number of ways. Perhaps our small collective can inspire others around the globe to take up organizing in their own locations. Maybe after a few years some of these groups could form an international organization advocating parecon. From there, things could blossom…

But beyond this issue of size, I think there are two additional issues related to your question and relevant to all Left organizing. The first issue is once people come to participate, how do we get them to stay? Michael Albert calls this the "Stickiness Problem". Albert says "…think of a person getting more and more involved with progressive ideas and activity. Does this person merge into a growing community of people who make him feel more secure and appreciated? Does she get a growing sense of personal worth and of contribution to something valuable? Does he enjoy a sense of accomplishment? Does she have her needs better met than before? Does his life get better? Does it seem that she is making a contribution to improving others lives, as well?"

That said, the second issue here is identified when you mention peripheral members and is related, I think, to the "stickiness problem". People go to the periphery for different reasons. These reasons may have to do with uncertainty or ambivalence of political commitment (in this case to parecon, or some other group, program or strategy), other reasons may have to do with personal life commitments (maybe a collective member just had a baby or something). The end result, regardless of the reason why people are on the periphery, is that they have one foot in political commitment and one foot out, and they can either be more or less in, or more or less out. The challenge for movements then is to, in various self-managing and solidaritous ways, be as open as possible to this transition from core participant, to peripheral participant, to exiting the group entirely, and finally to making their way back into the fold: we want conditions that cause people to stick to the movement for the long term, but also conditions that allow flexibility for changes in life circumstance or exploring political ambivalence.

So we want a movement that is self-managing where people can come and go as they need to, but one which offers solidarity and affects positive difference in their lives so they repeatedly come back, and hopefully stick, sustaining participation—as Che said "hasta la victoria siempre"—until the final victory.

Blake: My understanding is that the VPC did not have an aggressive recruitment program. Was there a particular ideological reason or event that lead to this plan?
Phil: There are many reasons why people may decide to begin advocating for a parecon. Inspiring attraction to the model or being recruited by a group are two different approaches for outreach. Personally, I hope that people join our efforts because they like the parecon vision and how it informs our organizing and activism today, not because we've told them that it does all these things and they commit even before they've come to their own conclusions about it. We want people to join our efforts for the intrinsic qualities of parecon i.e. balanced job, complexes, remuneration for effort and sacrifice and decentralized participatory planning. People need to believe in solidarity—caring about and expressing compassion for one another, in equity – classlessness not class rule, in self-management – decision making power in proportion to the degree one is affected, and in diversity—that we want divers living arrangements to choose from; people need to believe that these are all good things.
We work very hard to attract and arouse people, to do outreach. I mentioned earlier our efforts to "blitz" the opening week of the film "The Corporation". We've also held workshops and info sessions across Vancouver's poor, working and upper class neighborhoods. We write essays, conduct interviews, produce media, etc. We also hope to hold more culture and entertainment events in the future. Okay, yes, some of our efforts have been limited because our resources are limited. But we work very hard and consistently. "Recruitment" is a tricky concept. Our efforts to attract more people are not like military or sports recruitment where people are induced to sign up and commit through incentives such as travel, university, technical or trades training, which are not bad things to seek out in ones life. Even if we had all those resources at our disposal I wouldn't want anybody to join our efforts if it wasn't for how the parecon model inspires and informs us. I wouldn't want anybody to join up if they only wanted training, experience or education to get them into a better paying job. Our movements do need to be useful for people and especially in their daily lives. Unfortunately our movements do lack in this area. But I think it's best if people get on board with parecon organizing because they themselves come to terms with the insights and benefits of the model, not because they pay a membership fee and carry a card. If people like the events, workshops, essays, reviews and interviews we do, if they like the insights gained by a pareconish outlook, then, in addition to over coming the "stickiness problem", they'll join the organizing effort, because they want to, and that will provide the most long-term and sustainable commitment that we can hope for.
Blake: Please describe the group's structure. Are there leaders? How do meetings work? Do you use a simple majority vote or consensus? Are roles rotational or set?
Phil: We operate as a collective. We try to balance and share responsibilities as best we can. But we're all volunteers. People in the collective have friend, family, school and work commitments, as well as personal and social lives and commitments to other groups. Sustaining our efforts for successful long-term social change demands that we respect those commitments. Sometimes this means that some of us are busy, sometimes for extended periods of time, and others need to take a more active role doing more work than others. I wouldn't say that there's a leader or leaders. Our ability to collectively and equitably self-manage our own activities is born from the benefits or losses produced and reproduced through capitalisms class segregation. Some of us have had experience, education or work that sometimes enables better participation in the process of organizing for a parecon. We have to self-consciously and patiently make efforts to balance all these inequities, to counter capitalisms institutional pressures to carry out the heiarchical roles and relationships of

coordinators and subordinates. This means that we need to identify which tasks are empowering and which are disempowering and what the burdens and benefits of all tasks are, which we're patiently trying to do – it takes time.

For the actual nuts and bolts of our organizing, we have regular meetings once a month and rotate the responsibilities of "meeting chair/facilitator", minute taker, agenda preparation, etc. At these meetings we discuss and allocate tasks such as handling correspondence, writing essays, book reviews and conducting interviews, organizing info tables, speaking at forums, web design and maintenance, up keep, etc. If whatever we're working on, say talks or interviews for example, demand that we meet throughout the month, we meet as much as necessary.

As to our decision making procedures and practices, I think we operate informally on consensus a lot of the time. There are a couple of on going debates that may come to head in the future in which we may have to choose which decision making procedure to use. Do we use, consensus, one person one vote majority rule i.e. 50 + 1, or do we set the voting threshold higher say to %75 because the outcome of the vote is a key defining decision for our group? Is it possible that we won't all be affected the same way for these decisions and so give some in the collective more say than others? Really, in the past couple years, we've yet to dig our teeth into these process. We're a very young group and are still figuring out the best way to do these things and what works best for our specific group.

Blake: Please identify the main activities the VPC carried out and describe how you remember them being run. For example, if the VPC carried out talks on campus, you might identify how they were organized, how you managed to find space and attract people, what the format was, etc.

Phil: As mentioned briefly above, we organize talks, movie showings, write essays and book reviews, conduct radio and print interviews, maintenance our web site, correspond with many people, propos possible actions, etc. Whatever it is, we discuss it as part of our agenda at our regular monthly meeting. From there we assign roles to people or tasks to carry out. These may be anything from who brings the parecon literature and announcement sign up sheets for our info table, to who is going to take photos or record the audio or video for the event, or even who is actually going to give a presentation or do an interview. How people are allocated responsibilities may be decided in a variety of ways and for a variety of different reasons. These mostly have to do with availability of collective members, familiarity or relationships with the person or group we are working with, benefits or burdens of the different tasks and equitable distribution of them; skill or knowledge in a particular area; it may even be an opportunity to learn and educate members of the collective about things that we want to learn or know how to do. There are many layers to it and we do our best to explore them self-consciously in all our organizing.

Blake: What are some of the core texts, books, articles, etc that you feel the VPC drew from? What texts defined the group's structure itself? How did new members learn how the group was organized?

I'd have to say that Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel's joint efforts on "Looking Forward: Participatory Economics for the 21st Century" has been a key text that I think almost all of us, if not everyone, has read. Beyond that, I personally have read many of their books, if not all. But, I'm not sure what everyone else has read, or how important that is… I'm not sure what texts define the group's structure. Obviously the idea of balanced job complexes, remuneration for effort and sacrifice, federated worker and consumer councils and decentralized participatory planning, spelled out over and over again in the numerous books and essays on

parecon, inform our organizing. But, aside from defining features, I think the nuances are defined by our own personal experiences and skills we each bring to the group and these also inform how we organize ourselves too….
There's also a very strong educational component to our organizing. We all discuss parecon very clearly for the most part, and the institutional features and values of parecon inform just about everything we do. We ask each other questions and we listen to each other at the talks we give and we read each others essays, interviews and reviews and give each other feedback. I think this feature of our organizing is probably more important than any specific texts.
As for how new members learn about our organizational structure, well, at their first meeting we do a very quick and dirty orientation to our group, the kind of events and organizing we do, our main monthly meeting, our agenda, rotation of meeting facilitator, minute taking, etc. We're always open to doing things more efficiently or effectively so if anyone ever has better ideas on how to do things, than great. After that initial orientation we continue the processes outlined above and we move on from there…
Blake: What other movements would you see the Parecon movement fall into? Would you say that the Parecon movement is more focused on distribution of wealth or inequalities of power (assuming there is a difference between the two)?
Phil: We're an anti-capitalist group that advocates the replacement of capitalism by a participatory economy. There are both differences and similarities between wealth and power and parecon helps clarify this and seeks their Just distribution. But parecon is more than that too. We're opposed to the system of capitalism – to private ownership of productive assets, corporate hierarchies, markets and remuneration for luck, bargaining power or brute force. A participatory economic movement should have strategic aims seeking solidarity, self-management, equity and diversity with other economic actors as well as people and movements in all spheres of life. It's deeper than "falling into" other movements because economics actually overlaps into other spheres of life, just as other spheres of life overlap into economics – a society's different spheres can compliment, accommodate and "co-reproduce' each other. This means that in seeking social change in one sphere we need to also seek social change in all spheres.
Within the economy, we can identify with many groups who also advocate economic justice and democracy. This means we have affinities with many anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian groups, the anti-corporate globalization movement, the fair trade movement, unionism, the cooperative movement, workers rights and workers democracy movements, etc. The parecon vision is also about empowering consumer self-management through consumer councils and their federations. So we also identify with consumer rights advocates, buyers' cooperatives, ethical purchasing, labeling of GMO foods, organic food production and safe food practices, etc. Really I think anything or anybody affected by allocation of goods and services for either production or consumption should be able to find an affinity with the parecon model and likewise I think those who advocate for parecon should be able to cooperate with these diver's movements.
But since parecon is only a vision for one sphere of society—the economy, women, youth, people from the GLBTQ communities, non-whites and environmentalists should realize how parecon's institutional features may improve their lives. Also advocates of parecon can move forward by recognizing how a cultural vision, kinship vision, political vision and environmental vision can compliment and inform our efforts as well. This means that, again, that a parecon movement should have strategic aims seeking solidarity, self-management, equity and diversity with people and movements in all spheres of life and that the long-term

success of social change in any one of these spheres depends on the long term success of social change in all these spheres. People organizing with a parecon orientation will seek to create movements of solidarity that show compassion, concern and support for struggles against sexism, homo-phobia, racism and exploitation of workers and the environment. It will support internationalist struggles against war and corporate globalization and for national self-determination. A parecon movement is self-managing and participatory meaning it's opposed to class rule within our movements by vanguards, the coordinator class, or capitalists. We seek a balanced division of labor within our movement building where everyone has decision making input in proportion to how they're affected. A parecon based movement seeks equity. We want to lessen the gap between rich and poor. But we also want to recognize the efforts and sacrifices of our movement's participants, making activist efforts sustainable and rewarding, enabling long-term commitment and participation. And a parecon movement embraces diversity of sexualities, genders, races, religions and life styles. This should be the relationship between a parecon movement and other social movements.

Blake: Apart from being foremost part of the Parecon movement, would you say the VPC was more of an identity movement (IE, trying to assert a particular identity), a rights movement (IE, worker rights), a utopian movement (trying to create a pocket society more egalitarian than our own), a Socialist movement, an Anarchist movement or a reform movement? Please feel free to mix and match categories or come up with your own. Why that/those?

Phil: Fighting for an anti-capitalist identity seems ridiculous… What does an anti-capitalist identity look like? Do they look like Che, Mao, Lenin, Luxemburg, Goldman, Angela Davis or Bobby Seal? Do they look like the working class and what does the working class look like? Sure you can see people who've been affected by these influences, by the way they dress or talk or something. But no one wins any real serious gains in any such effort, conscious or not. What are the benefits of having an "anti-capitalist identity"? Such a person or group of people could never make millions of dollars or become powerful and influential decision makers. They may as well take off their mask and try to climb the corporate hierarchy or kick, scratch and punch their way towards joining the ranks of the capitalist elite, then try to be more effective at gaining wealth, power and privilege. That would seem a more effective use of their time and energy. Why would anybody or any group of people pretend to be anti-capitalist? Any benefits would be petty….

A rights movement? No, I would say that, although we may fight for reforms that advance various rights, say better working conditions, more spending on social welfare programs, etc, we aspire to be a revolutionary movement, not by rhetoric, but by seeking fundamental transformation of societies core defining institutions in all spheres of society: economic, political, cultural, and kinship. We want to replace them with something new and liberating, Parecon is our answer to how we would revolutionize the economic sphere.

Are we utopian? Organizing and struggling to train frogs to play piano or birds to ride bikes is utopian, because birds and frogs will never have the same capacities as human beings. Organizing and struggling to balance work for both desirability and empowerment in the form of balanced job complexes, fighting for remuneration for effort and sacrifice, and fighting for more participation in the form of federated workers and consumers councils and decentralized participatory planning; fighting for more solidarity, self-management, equity and diversity is not utopian. It's realistic and honorable and quite frankly human survival might depend on it. Not only that, it's our responsibility to try to change the world for the better since we're aware that there's a better way. You'd have to have good reason to not commit to organizing for a participatory economy. I've never heard one good reason as of yet. So, we have to start

somewhere, no matter how small our initial steps are – even if it's, as you call it, a " pocket society". No matter how small the initial experiments are, after refining and improving them, we should try to enlarge the scale and scope of our vision. This could be anything from a grass roots movement, a workplace or factory experiment, community, neighborhood, municipality, region, province or state, a whole country, or a whole world. We have to start somewhere; it's just a simple fact.

A socialist movement? Depends on what you mean by socialism. If you mean the traditional form of coordinator socialism that took place in the former Soviet Union or China, the answer is no. If you mean a form of democratic or participatory socialism with balanced job complexes, remuneration for effort and sacrifice and decentralized participatory planning, then the answer is yes. But notice that this answer relies in no way at all on the word "socialism", but does demand that we be clear on what exact institutions we propose when discussing vision.

An anarchist movement? I think parecon embodies many of the ideals of traditional anarchist thought and practice. But I also think parecon goes much further in illuminating other areas economic life, like how to organize work i.e. balanced job complexes, as well as being more clear on what self-management means: decision making input in proportion that one is affected.

A reform movement? Reforms are a strategic choice, and if we're serious about social change, a necessity. We can use them to struggle for short term goals, and they should be used along the way to improve people's lives today as well as to shape our skills and capacities for the new society, but they are not our final destination. As already mentioned above, we want to fundamentally transform society's core defining institutions – that is the long-term goal. So reforms should be used in ways that lead to ever more gains for our movements, that are hard to roll back, because if our social advances are threatened by elite interests, our movements will grow. These gains should lead to fundamental transformation of societies key defining institutions—victory.

Blake: Do you still consider yourself a member of the VPC? If so, why are you still a member?

Phil: I'm an active member. On the one hand I think we have a responsibility for taking on and embracing the task of organizing if we're aware that there's something better. On the other hand it's satisfying and rewarding to be part of a group, and possibly a growing movement, that advocates such a hopeful economic vision. That's why I continue to be an active member.

Blake: Where would you like to see the VPC go in the near future? How would you like to see it get there?

Phil: I'd like to see us create an institutional project that is a self-conscious experiment on the parecon model; perhaps a radio show or something, I can see that happening. But also, I'd like for us to be able to facilitate communication and coordination between the various parecon projects both in Canada and around the world. I'd also like to see an international organization that advocates parecon. Perhaps the VPC can play a role in getting that started… There are an infinite number of ways to achieve our goals. The first step is confirming that there's interest in any of these projects and that commitment to the effort is there.

Blake: Although I have a lot on Parecon already, what are a few of the main aspects that you think separate Parecon from other alternative systems? What are a few strengths and weaknesses (assuming you think it has one or the other)?

Phil: There are two issues here. One is about what properties and institutions make various 'alternative systems' different from one another. However this implies we already know which alternatives we are going to discuss and I'll choose a few below. The other issue is how to evaluate them. I also think there's an additional issue which I've mentioned above already in this interview, but I'll raise it again as a conclusion and that's about the point of evaluating these systems and what we do with the results of our comparisons.

Aside from Parecon, there's also Central Planning and Market Socialism, both are also called "Coordinatorism". I'll outline their features below but first I want to explain how to evaluate them.

For evaluation we look to see which system best fosters human potential, and I know this is kind of broad and general so let me explain. In an economy based on class segregation and class rule, corporate hierarchies, central planning or markets, human lives suffer pointlessly due to poverty, war, preventable illnesses, disease, authoritarianism, etc. In other words, we're losing valuable contributors to the richness and quality of human life; scientists, artists, lovers, mothers, fathers, children, musicians, writers, painters, physicists, poets, mechanics and more, are all left from fulfilling their human potential do to institutional arrangements that are poorly suited for human development. In both capitalist and coordinator economies the elite – the top few percentile of the world's populations operating in these economies—escape most of the human degradation suffered below. I would even argue that those on top are also warped, but in different ways, due to the institutions they function within. So, what we need to look for when evaluating various economic systems is an institutional arrangement that nourishes, compliments and accommodates human development and potential for all. By aiming for a truly classless society we can seek to explore, realize and fulfill the rich human potential that lies dormant in ourselves' and others. If the need to explore this human potential is ignored, despite a desire to do away with capitalism or coordinatorism, the institutional context which may provide the setting for this goal will be overlooked.

More specific criteria for evaluating various alterative economic systems are our values and principles. These values should positively compliment and accommodate the broad goal above of seeking the exploration, realization and fulfillment of human potential. The values we choose are solidarity, equity, self-management, diversity, and for economics we also add efficiency.

Solidarity means that we care about and express compassion for one another. Equity means that people are remunerated for effort and sacrifice. Self-management is decision making in proportion to the degree one is affected. Diversity means that we want a variety of life styles and living arrangements to choose from. Efficiency means that we don't waste the things we care about.

So the more solidarity an economy perpetuates, the better it is; the more equity an economy achieves, the better it is; the more self-management an economy fosters, the better it is; the more diversity an economy embodies the better is, the more efficiency an economy generates the better it is. And this is how we evaluate various economic systems.

Parecon eliminates private ownership or productive assets and replaces corporate divisions of labor with balanced job complexes. It replaces authoritarian decision making with self managed workers and consumers councils, remunerates work for effort and sacrifice and not

property, power, or output, and replaces markets (or central planning) with participatory planning.

Coordinator economies, i.e. centrally planned and market socialist, have public or state ownership of productive assets, corporate divisions of labor, authoritarian decision making, central planning, and either retains or replaces markets with central planning as the allocation mechanism. Key here is that coordinators are elevated to the level of primary economic decision makers and power holders.

Coordinators have authority and power over workers. On one hand, they do mostly empowering and conceptual work, accruing material benefits in accord with their elite position. On the other hand, workers below them do mostly rote and executionary work. This matters in so far as the kinds of work we do help shape and inform our skills for decision making and participation directly in our work places as well as in the institutions of society more broadly. The rise of a coordinator class, as central planners and managers, in coordinator economies sent those societies on trajectories over long periods of time, where people developed warped characteristics; where coordinators develop the characteristics of planners and managers and the rest of society develop the characteristics of apathy, combined greed and competition in cases of market socialism. Human and natural resources are sent on wasteful trajectories determined and assumed by a small elite of coordinators or the market blindness of buyers and sellers. These are irreconcilable flaws, not even weaknesses, in these alternative systems. Parecon offers a superior institutional arrangement creating conditions for classlessness, self-management, solidarity, diversity and efficiency. The issue left for us all to decide is what we do with the knowledge that there's a better way to live life. Do we live with that knowledge and not do anything about it, or are we inspired by the hope and potential a parecon vision offers and commit to organizing? We can all imagine the consequences of our choices and our choices are ours to decide.