

a resulting intensification of crisis tendencies. As illustrated in Figure 9.5, as crises deepen, transition troughs become shallower because the counterfactual trajectory within capitalism becomes increasingly downward sloping. It may even become plausible, if crises take the form of a sharp and enduring collapse, that the socialist trajectory would be more like the "fantasy path" in Figure 9.2: material conditions immediately improve for most people relative to what they would have been in the absence of the rupture.

Third, actors may be motivated for a transition to socialism by values other than material interests, and it is not necessarily the case that with respect to these other values a sharp transition trough would exist. For example, it is certainly possible that with respect to the values of democratic participation and community solidarity the very process of rupture and transition enhances their realization. Thus, if these values constituted a robust and powerful source of motivation for people, then it is possible that support for the socialist project over the course of even a prolonged trough in material conditions could be sustained.

None of these responses are, I believe, convincing. It is possible that the disruption accompanying a rapid transformation of capitalist relations might be less than anticipated here, but historical experience of patterns of disinvestment in the face of even mild state-initiated threats to capital suggests that the disruption would more likely be quite severe. It is also possible that capitalism will enter into a long-term process of intensifying crisis and permanent decline that lowers the standard of living of most people, but in the absence of a compelling theory of the mechanisms that generate such intensification, this is a purely speculative argument. And while motivations other than material interests are profoundly important for the struggle for human emancipation, there is little historical evidence that over an extended period these motivations could neutralize the effects of a sharp economic decline accompanying a project of radical transformation of capitalism.

Large-scale ruptural strategies for constructing a democratic egalitarian socialism, therefore, seem implausible in the world in which we currently live, at least in the developed capitalist economies. If we wish to work for such a transformation, therefore, we need to think about some broadly different approaches to the problem. The question becomes: is it possible to expand the space for new forms of social empowerment within capitalism? What are the limits on this process?

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## INTERSTITIAL TRANSFORMATION

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If one believes that systemic ruptural strategies of emancipatory transformation are not plausible, at least under existing historical conditions, then the only real alternative is some sort of strategy that envisions transformation largely as a process of metamorphosis in which relatively small transformations cumulatively generate a qualitative shift in the dynamics and logic of a social system. This does not imply that transformation is a smooth, non-conflictual process that somehow transcends antagonistic interests. A democratic egalitarian project of social emancipation is a challenge to exploitation and domination, inequality and privilege, and thus emancipatory metamorphosis will entail power struggles and confrontations with dominant classes and elites. In practice, therefore, an emancipatory metamorphosis will require some of the strategic elements of the ruptural model: the history of the future—if it is to be a history of emancipatory social empowerment—will be a trajectory of victories and defeats, winners and losers, not simply of compromise and cooperation between differing interests and classes. The episodes of that trajectory will be marked by institutional innovations that will have to overcome opposition from those whose interests are threatened by democratic egalitarianism, and some of that opposition will be nasty, recalcitrant, and destructive. So, to invoke metamorphosis is not to abjure struggle, but to see the strategic goals and effects of struggle in a particular way: as the incremental modifications of the underlying structures of a social system and its mechanisms of social reproduction that cumulatively transform the system, rather than as a sharp discontinuity in the centers of power of the system as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This understanding of metamorphosis suggests that the stark contrast between "rupture" and "metamorphosis" is in some ways misleading since

Understood in this way, there are two broad approaches to the problem of transformation as metamorphosis: *interstitial transformation* and *symbiotic transformation*. These differ primarily in terms of their relationship to the state. Both envision a trajectory of change that progressively enlarges the social spaces of social empowerment, but interstitial strategies largely by-pass the state in pursuing this objective while symbiotic strategies try to systematically use the state to advance the process of emancipatory social empowerment. These need not constitute antagonistic strategies—in many circumstances they complement each other, and indeed may even require each other. Nevertheless, historically many supporters of interstitial strategies of transformation have been very wary of the state, and many advocates of more statist symbiotic strategies have been dismissive of interstitial approaches.

In the next chapter we will explore symbiotic transformations. Here we will examine the logic of interstitial strategies. We will begin by distinguishing between interstitial *strategies* and what might be called interstitial *processes*. This will be followed by a discussion of different types of interstitial strategies and a discussion of the underlying logic of the ways such strategies might contribute to broader emancipatory transformation. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the limits of interstitial strategies.

#### WHAT IS AN INTERSTITIAL STRATEGY?

The adjective “interstitial” is used in social theory to describe various kinds of processes that occur in the spaces and cracks within some dominant social structure of power.<sup>2</sup> One can speak of the interstices of an organization, of a society, or even of global capitalism. The underlying assumption is that the social unit in question can be understood as a system within which there is some kind of dominant power structure or dominant logic which

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emancipatory metamorphosis can itself be thought of as a trajectory of partial and limited social ruptures—institutional innovations—that cumulatively constitute a qualitative transformation. What is really at issue here is therefore the extent to which a large-scale comprehensive rupture with the fundamental structures of power in capitalism is possible.

<sup>2</sup> As a way of capturing the strategic logic being discussed here, the term “interstitial” was suggested to me by Marcia Kahn Wright.

organizes the system, but that the system is not so coherent and integrated that those dominant power relations govern all of the activities occurring within it. Even in so-called “totalitarian” systems in which centralized power penetrates quite deeply into all spheres of social life there are still spaces within which individuals act in relatively autonomous ways, rather than following the dictates of the logic of the system. This need not imply that such interstitial practices are subversive or that they necessarily corrode the logic of the system, but simply that they are not directly governed or controlled by the dominant power relations and principles of social organization.<sup>3</sup>

Interstitial processes often play a central role in large-scale patterns of social change. For example, capitalism is often described as having developed in the interstices of feudal society. Feudal societies were characterized by a dominant structure of class and power relations consisting of nobles of various ranks who controlled much of the land and the principal means of military violence. Peasants with different kinds of rights engaged in agricultural production and produced a surplus which was appropriated by the dominant feudal class through a variety of largely coercive mechanisms. Market relations developed in the cities, which were less fully integrated into feudal relations, and over time this created the context within which proto-capitalist relations and practices could emerge and eventually flourish. Whether one believes that the pivotal source of ultimate transformation of feudalism came from the dynamics of war-making and state-building, from contradictions in the process of feudal surplus extraction, from the corrosive effects of markets, from the eventual challenge of emerging capitalists, or some combination of these processes, the interstitial development of capitalism within feudal societies is an important part of the story.

While interstitial *processes* and *activities* clearly play a significant

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<sup>3</sup> One of the fundamental issues in social theory is the extent to which society can be viewed as a “system” and, if so, what kind of system. At one extreme is the view of society as a system in much the same way as an organism is a system with well articulated parts that fulfill interconnected functions. But societies can also be viewed as a system more like an ecology in nature: there are systematically interconnected causal relations among the component parts, and some of these may have the character of functional connections and feedback processes, but they are not governed by a coherent logic and there are no necessary functional relations that smoothly integrate the whole. Here I will be treating the systemness of social phenomena in this way, as a loosely coupled system.

role in social change, it is less obvious that there are compelling interstitial *strategies* for social transformation. The urban artisans and merchants in feudal society whose interstitial activities fostered new kinds of relations did not have a project of destroying feudal class relations and forging a new kind of society. They were simply engaged in profit-seeking activities, adapting to the opportunities and possibilities of the society in which they lived. The broader ramifications for long-term social change were basically unintended by-products of their activities, not a strategy as such. An interstitial strategy, in contrast, involves the deliberate development of interstitial activities for the purpose of fundamental transformation of the system as a whole.

There are certainly many interstitial activities in contemporary capitalist societies which are candidates for elements of an interstitial strategy of social emancipation: worker and consumer co-ops, battered women's shelters, workers factory councils, intentional communities and communes, community-based social economy services, civic environmental councils, community-controlled land trusts, cross-border equal-exchange trade organizations, and many others. All of these are consciously constructed forms of social organization that differ from the dominant structures of power and inequality. Some are part of grand visions for the reconstruction of society as a whole; others have more modest objectives of transforming specific domains of social life. Some are linked to systematic theories of social transformation; others are pragmatic responses to the exigencies of social problem-solving. What they have in common is the idea of building alternative institutions and deliberately fostering new forms of social relations that embody emancipatory ideals and that are created primarily through direct action of one sort or another rather than through the state.

This vision of interstitial transformation has a long and venerable place in anti-capitalist thinking, going back to the anarchist tradition in the nineteenth century and continuing in various anarchist and "autonomist" currents to the present.<sup>4</sup> While there is no

4 I will use the term "anarchism" to describe the theoretical foundations of interstitial strategies because anarchist writers have placed the greatest emphasis on such strategies. As is the case for many political labels, terms like "anarchism" become infused with different meaning depending upon the historical context in which the label becomes linked to concrete political movements. The classical anarchist vision of social emancipation revolves around the idea of a stateless society in which social cooperation is organized through voluntary activity within relatively small communities linked through some kind of voluntary federation.

inherent reason why strategies of interstitial transformation should be restricted to the specific anarchist vision of emancipatory alternatives, there is an obvious affinity between the anarchist vision of an ultimate destination without a coercive state and the idea of interstitial strategies that largely ignore the state. The preamble of the Constitution of the Industrial Workers of the World, the influential US anarcho-syndicalist movement of the early twentieth century, proclaimed: "By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old."<sup>5</sup> Half a century later, Colin Ward, the prominent British anarchist writer, described the central idea of an anarchist strategy thus:

Far from being a speculative vision of a future society . . . [anarchy] is a description of a mode of human organization, rooted in the experience of everyday life, which operates side by side with, and in spite of, the dominant authoritarian trends of our society . . . [T]he anarchist alternatives are already there, in the interstices of the dominant power structure. If you want to build a free society, the parts are all at hand.<sup>6</sup>

At times, however, anarchism became identified with particularly violent attacks on centers of authority and with visions of chaos rather than non-coercive community. The term "autonomist" became popular in some European political contexts in the second half of the twentieth century to identify movements that were part of the anarchist tradition, but which emphasized the voluntary, autonomous formation of egalitarian cooperation.

5 The literature of the IWW continually refers to new forms of worker organization as "embryonic" forms of the future society, suggesting again the idea that the future is built within the interstices of the present. For example, in a 1913 pamphlet titled "The Trial of a New Society" by Justuys Ebert (IWW: Chicago, 1913) the metaphor of embryonic development is used to characterize the process of transformation. The solidaristic organization of workers in the Lawrence, Massachusetts, textile strike of 1912, the pamphlet proclaims, was "The crude embryo—the rough outline of the future state, where industry and government shall be by, for, and of the workers direct." In the conclusion to the pamphlet the author asks: "The fact that a new economic power has arisen and is achieving new political and social triumphs within the old social order cannot be denied. But the question arises, can it endure? Will the embryo thus conceived develop until it overgrows and dominates all institutions in the interests of a new era?" In answering in the affirmative, the author draws on the history of the rise of the bourgeoisie which "developed their own institutions, their crafts, their trade, their guilds, their communes and confederations outside of and in opposition to the institutions peculiar to the original feudal constitution. They built the new society within the shell of the old; they evolved out of the old by means of new institutions in keeping with their new aspirations."

6 Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1973), p. 18, quoted in Stuart White, "Making Anarchism Respectable? The Social Philosophy of Colin Ward," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 12: 1 (2007), p. 15.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century when activists at the World Social Forum proclaim "another world is possible," much of what they have in mind are anarchist-inflected grass-roots initiatives to create worker and consumer cooperatives, fair trade networks, cross-border labor standards campaigns, and other institutions that directly embody the alternative world they desire in the here and now.

As already noted, many socialists, especially those enmeshed in the Marxist tradition, are quite skeptical of such projects. The argument goes something like this: While many of these efforts at building alternative institutions may embody desirable values and perhaps even prefigure emancipatory forms of social relations, they pose no serious challenge to existing relations of power and domination. Precisely because they are "interstitial" they can only occupy the spaces that are "allowed" by capitalism. They may even strengthen capitalism by siphoning off discontent and creating the illusion that if people are unhappy with the dominant institutions they can and should just go off and live their lives in alternative settings. Ultimately, therefore, interstitial projects amount to a retreat from the political struggle for radical social transformation, not a viable strategy for achieving it. At best they may make life a little better for some people in the world as it is; at worst they deflect energies from the real political challenge of changing the world for the better.

There are certainly instances in which this negative diagnosis seems plausible. The hippy communes of the 1960s may have been inspired by utopian longings and a belief that they were part of the "dawning of the Age of Aquarius," but in practice they functioned more as a flight from the realities of capitalist society than as nodes of radical transformation. Other examples, like organic grocery cooperatives, while not flights from capitalist society, nevertheless seem constrained to occupy small niches, often catering to relatively affluent people who can afford to "indulge" their preferences for a particular kind of "lifestyle." Organic grocery cooperatives may embody some progressive ideals, but they do not pose a threat to the system.

As a general indictment of interstitial strategies of transformation, these negative judgments are too harsh. They assume both that there is an alternative strategy which does pose a serious "threat to the system" and also that this alternative strategy is undermined

by the existence of interstitial efforts at social transformation. The fact is that in present historical conditions no strategy credibly poses a direct threat to the system in the sense that there are good grounds for believing that adopting it will generate effects in the near future that would really threaten capitalism. This is what it means to live in a hegemonic capitalist system: capitalism is sufficiently secure and flexible in its basic structures that there is no strategy possible that immediately threatens it. The strategic problem is to imagine things we can do now which have a reasonable chance of opening up possibilities under contingent conditions in the future. Interstitial strategies, of course, may ultimately be dead ends and be permanently contained within narrow limits, but it is also possible that under certain circumstances they may play a positive role in a long-term trajectory of emancipatory social transformation.

The question, then, is this: what is the underlying model of social transformation in which interstitial activities can be viewed as part of an overall strategy for emancipatory social empowerment? What is the implicit theory of the ways in which such activities can cumulatively transform the society as a whole? Writers in the anarchist tradition devote remarkably little attention to this problem. While anarchist writing criticizes existing structures of capitalist and statist power and defends a vision of a federated cooperative alternative without the coercive domination of the state, there is very little systematic elaboration of how to actually "build the new society within the shell of the old" and how this might lead to a systemic transformation.

#### HOW INTERSTITIAL STRATEGIES CAN CONTRIBUTE TO EMANCIPATORY SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Many of the specific examples used in chapter 7 to illustrate social empowerment and the economy were substantially the result of interstitial strategies. Wikipedia is the result of people building an alternative non-capitalist form of knowledge dissemination within the extraordinary space of interstitial activity called the internet. Many projects within the social economy are the result of interstitial strategies, even if, as in Quebec, some of them receive important subsidies from the state. Worker-owned cooperatives are the quintessential form

of interstitial organization at the center of classical anarchist strategies of interstitial transformation. To this list many other empirical examples could be added: a wide variety of internet-based strategies that subvert capitalist intellectual property rights (e.g., Napster, the music-sharing site); open-source software and technology projects; fair trade networks designed to link producer cooperatives in poor countries to consumers in rich countries; efforts to create global labor and environmental standards through various kinds of monitoring and certification projects. Within each of these interstitial activities, many of the actors involved see what they are doing as part of a strategy for broad social change, not simply as self-limiting activities motivated by lifestyle preferences or the desire to “do good works.” The question then is how these kinds of interstitial activities could have broad transformative, emancipatory effects for the society as a whole. What is the underlying logic through which they might cumulatively contribute to making another world possible?

There are two principal ways that interstitial strategies within capitalism potentially point the way beyond capitalism: first, by altering the conditions for eventual rupture, and second, by gradually expanding the effective scope and depth of their operations so that capitalist constraints cease to impose binding limits. I will refer to these as the *revolutionary anarchist* and *evolutionary anarchist* strategic visions, not because only anarchists hold these views, but because the broad idea of not using the state as an instrument of social emancipation is so closely linked to the anarchist tradition.

#### PAVING THE ROUTE TO RUPTURE

Many nineteenth-century anarchists shared with Marxist-inspired revolutionary socialists the belief that ultimately a revolutionary rupture with capitalism would be necessary. Where they differed sharply was in the belief of what sorts of transformations were needed within capitalism in order for a revolutionary rupture to plausibly usher in a genuinely emancipatory alternative. For Marx, and later for Lenin, the central task of struggles within capitalism was to forge the collective capacity of a politically unified working class needed to successfully seize state power as the necessary condition for overthrowing capitalism. The task of deep social reconstruction to create the environment for a

new way of life with new principles, new forms of social interaction and reciprocity, would largely have to wait until “after the revolution.”<sup>7</sup>

For revolutionary anarchists, on the other hand, significant progress in such reconstruction is not only possible within capitalism, but is a necessary condition for a sustainable emancipatory rupture with capitalism. In discussing Proudhon’s views on revolution, Martin Buber writes:

[Proudhon] divined the tragedy of revolutions and came to feel it more and more deeply in the course of disappointing experiences. Their tragedy is that as regards their *positive* goal they will always result in the exact opposite of what the most honest and passionate revolutionaries strive for, unless and until this [deep social reform] has so far taken shape *before* the revolution that the revolutionary act has only to wrest the space for it in which it can develop unimpeded.<sup>8</sup>

If we want a revolution to result in a deeply egalitarian, democratic, and participatory way of life, Buber writes,

the all-important fact is that, in the social as opposed to the political sphere, revolution is not so much a creative as a delivering force whose function is to set free and authenticate—i.e. that it can only perfect, set free, and lend the stamp of authority to something that has already been foreshadowed in the womb of the pre-revolutionary society; that, as regards social evolution, the hour of revolution is not an hour of begetting but an hour of birth—provided there was a begetting beforehand.<sup>9</sup>

A rupture with capitalism is thus necessary in this strategic vision, but it requires a deep process of interstitial transformation beforehand if it is to succeed.

7 Martin Buber, in his excellent study of anarchist thinking, *Paths in Utopia* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), argues that while Marx eventually came to acknowledge some virtues in the creation of cooperatives, he remained critical of views that saw this as a centerpiece of struggles within capitalism, feeling that it was an illusion that cooperatives could contribute much to remaking society so long as the bourgeoisie remained in power.

8 Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), p. 44.

9 Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, pp. 44–5. The metaphor of birth combines the idea of incremental metamorphosis with rupture: the moment of birth is a rupture with the past. There is a “before” and “after,” a discontinuity in the life course. But birth can only happen after a successful, incremental gestation in which future potentials are brought to the brink of full actualization, and after birth this incremental process continues through maturation.

There are, I think, four different arguments implicitly in play in this vision of pre-revolutionary (i.e. pre-ruptural) interstitial social transformation within capitalism. These arguments are represented in Figure 10.1, a modified version of the transition trough diagrams from the previous chapter.

First, supporters of the necessity of interstitial transformations within capitalism claim that such transformations can bring into capitalism some of the virtues of a society beyond capitalism. Thus the quality of life of ordinary people in capitalism is improved by such transformation. In phase I of Figure 10.1 interstitial transformations in capitalism are initiated and these generate an improvement of the quality of life for the average person relative to a capitalism without such transformations.<sup>10</sup>

Second, the revolutionary anarchist strategy affirms that at some point such interstitial social transformations within capitalism hit limits which impose binding constraints (phase II in the figure). Capitalism ultimately blocks the full realization of the potential of socially empowering interstitial transformations. A rupture with capitalism (phase III) becomes necessary to break through those limits if that potential is to advance further.

Third, if capitalism has already been significantly internally transformed through socially empowering interstitial transformations, the transition trough will be tolerably shallow and of relatively short duration (phase IV). Successful interstitial transformations within capitalism mean that economic life becomes less dependent upon capitalist firms and capitalist markets as capitalism continues. Workers' cooperatives and consumer cooperatives have developed widely and play a significant role in the economy; the social economy provides significant basic needs; collective associations engage in a wide variety of socially empowered forms of regulation; and perhaps power relations within capitalist firms have been significantly transformed as well. Taken together, these changes mean that the economic disruption of the break with capitalism will be less damaging than in the absence of such interstitial transformations. Furthermore, the pre-ruptural transformations are palpable demonstrations to workers and other potential beneficiaries of socialism that alternatives to capitalism

10 I am using the general expression "quality of life" here to indicate the all-things-considered well-being of people, without giving any particular weights to things like income, working conditions, quality of leisure, the nature of community, etc.

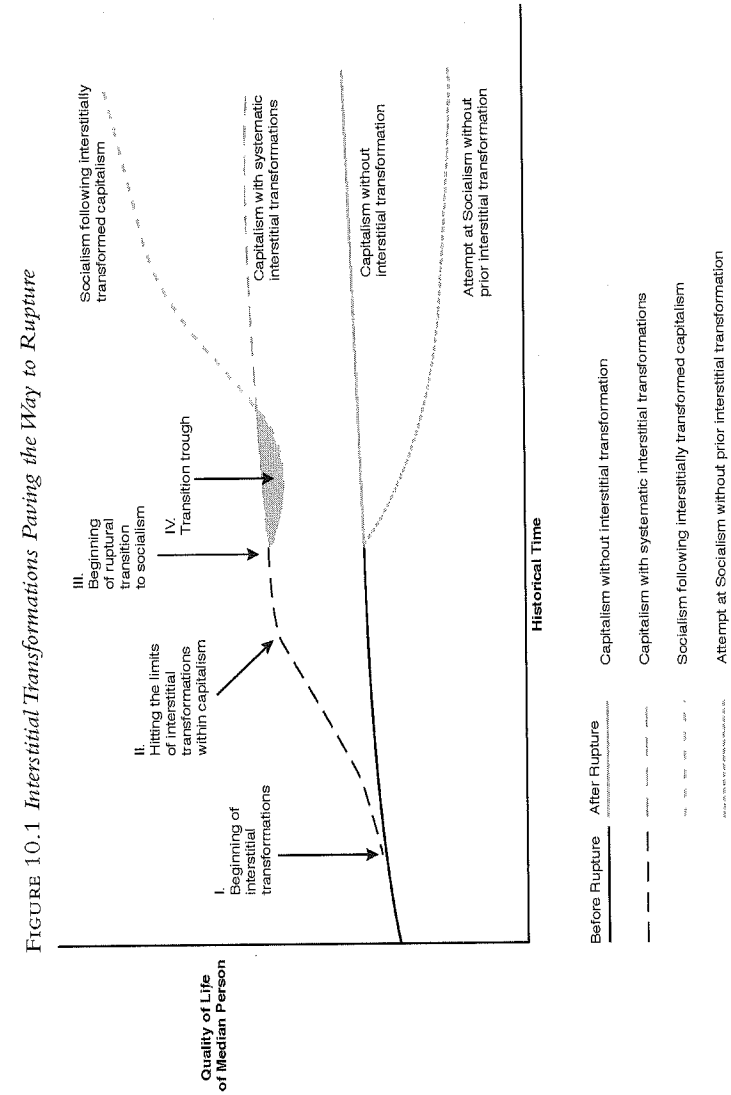


FIGURE 10.1 *Interstitial Transformations Paving the Way to Rupture*

in which the quality of life is better are viable. This contributes to forming the political will for a rupture once the untransgressable limits within capitalism are encountered.<sup>11</sup> The transition trough in figure 10.1 is thus much shallower than it would otherwise be.

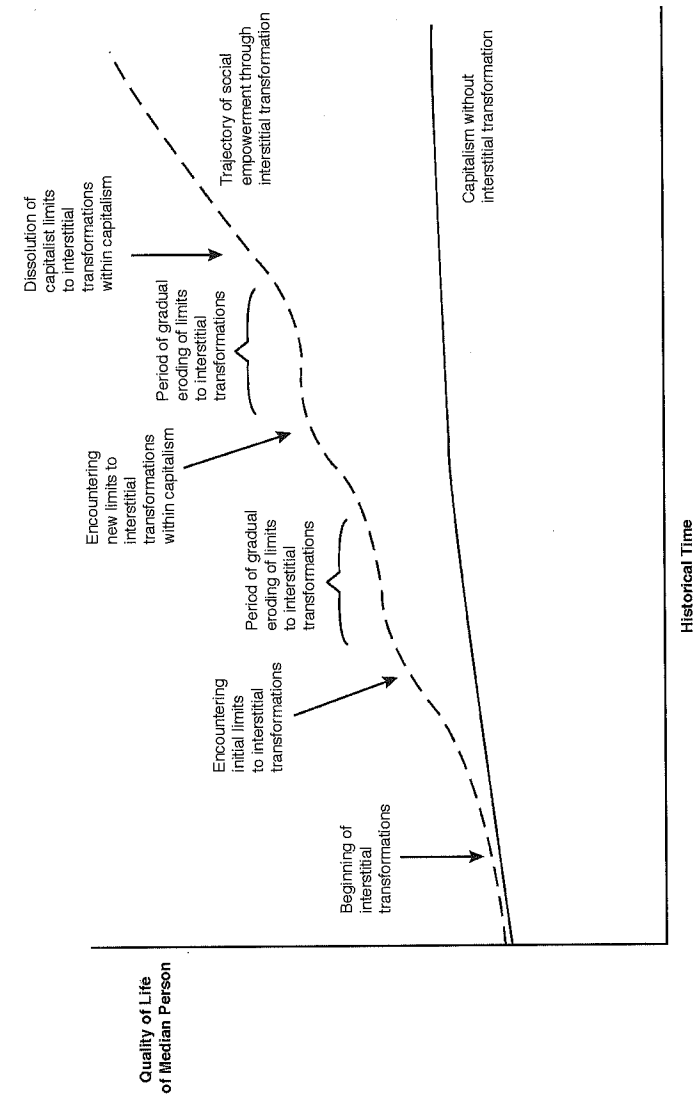
And finally, egalitarian, democratic social empowerment will be sustainable after a rupture only if significant socially empowering interstitial transformations had occurred before the rupture. In the absence of such prior social empowerment, the rupture with capitalism will unleash strong centralizing and authoritarian tendencies that are likely to lead to a consolidation of an oppressive form of statism. Even well-intentioned socialists will be forced by the contradictions they confront to build a different kind of society than the one they wanted. The result will be a decline in the quality of life for most people below the trajectory it would have had even under capitalism itself.

ERODING THE BINDING LIMITS OF CAPITALISM

The strategic scenario in Figure 10.1 assumes that capitalism ultimately imposes untransgressable limits on the possibilities of democratic egalitarian emancipatory transformations. The evolutionary anarchist scenario for social emancipation through interstitial transformation drops this assumption. The basic idea, as illustrated in a stylized way in Figure 10.2, is this: Capitalist structures and relations do impose limits on emancipatory social transformation through interstitial strategies, but those limits can themselves be eroded over time by appropriate interstitial strategies. The trajectory of change through interstitial strategy,

11 An alternative way of expressing these arguments is to use the language of Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci argued that in the West, with its strong civil society, socialist revolution required a prolonged "war of position" before a successful "war of maneuver" was possible. This means that the period before a rupture is a period of building an effective counter-hegemony. Gramsci's emphasis was on building political and ideological counter-hegemony. While he did not directly discuss the issue of interstitial transformations in the economy and civil society, they could be viewed as transforming key aspects of the "material bases of consent" necessary for such a counter-hegemonic movement to be credible and sustainable. For a discussion of Gramsci's ambiguous views on the possibilities of transforming civil society within capitalism in ways that would enhance social empowerment, see Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), section on "Gramsci and the Idea of Socialist Civil Society," pp. 142-59.

FIGURE 10.2 Interstitial Transformations Eroding Capitalism's Limits



therefore, will be marked by periods in which limits of possibility are encountered and transformation is severely impeded. In such periods new interstitial strategies must be devised which erode those limits. In different historical periods, therefore, different kinds of interstitial strategies may play the critical role in advancing the process of social empowerment. Strategies for building workers' cooperatives may be the most important in some periods, the extension of the social economy or the invention of new associational devices for controlling investments (e.g., union-controlled venture capital funds) in others. The important idea is that what appear to be "limits" are simply the effect of the power of specific institutional arrangements, and interstitial strategies have the capacity to create alternative institutions that weaken those limits. Whereas the revolutionary anarchist scenario argues that eventually hard limits are encountered that cannot themselves be transformed from within the system, in this more evolutionary model the existing constraints can be softened to the point that a more accelerated process of interstitial transformation can take place until it too encounters new limits. There will thus be a kind of cycle of extension of social empowerment and stagnation as successive limits are encountered and eroded. Eventually, if this process can be sustained, capitalism itself would be sufficiently modified and capitalist power sufficiently undermined that it no longer imposed distinctively capitalist limits on the deepening of social empowerment.<sup>12</sup> In effect, the system-hybridization process generated by interstitial strategies would have reached a tipping point in which the logic of the system as a whole had changed in ways that open up the possibilities for continued social empowerment.

Of course the trajectory in Figure 10.2 is highly simplified. Even optimistic visions of interstitial strategies understand that there can be reversals and the periods of thwarted advance of social empowerment could be quite extended. And there may be contingent historical circumstances in which interstitial strategies may no longer be possible—for example, in conditions of authoritarian statism where the political space for such strategies

12 Other kinds of structural limits might still exist—limits imposed by gender or global political divisions or some other kind of social relations—and this means that the cycle of encountering limits and devising new limit-eroding strategies would continue. But the specific limits to social empowerment imposed by capitalism would no longer impose binding constraints.

has been closed off. In such circumstances, ruptural strategies may be necessary, not so much to directly transform capitalism as to unbottle the interstitial processes blocked by authoritarian statism. The key idea, however, is that there is nothing inherent in the structures of capitalism as such which prevents interstitial strategies from having these transformative effects, and thus an interstitial trajectory towards social emancipation is possible within a world dominated by capitalism.<sup>13</sup>

#### INTERSTITIAL STRATEGIES AND THE STATE

It is possible to acknowledge that interstitial strategies of transformation can expand the scope of social empowerment and improve the quality of life of people without embracing these broad strategic visions. Interstitial strategies may create enlarged spaces for non-commodified, non-capitalist economic relations, but it seems unlikely that this could sufficiently insulate most people from dependency on the capitalist economy and sufficiently weaken the power of the capitalist class and the dependency of economic activity on capital accumulation to render the transition trough in the revolutionary scenario short and shallow. And while interstitial strategies may expand the scope of social empowerment, it is difficult to see how they could ever by themselves erode the basic structural power of capital sufficiently to dissolve the capitalist limits on emancipatory social change.

The basic problem of both scenarios concerns their stance towards the state. Those in the anarchist tradition of social emancipation understand that both civil society and the economy are only loosely integrated systems which allow considerable scope for direct action to forge new kinds of relations and practices. In contrast, they tend to view the state as a monolithic, integrated institution, without significant cracks and with only marginal potentials for emancipatory transformation. For revolutionary

13 This claim—that capitalism as such does not generate untransgressable limits of possibility—is sometimes couched in a language of "anti-essentialism." See, for example, J. K. Gibson-Graham (Julie Gibson and Katherine Graham), *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996). They argue that not only are economic systems always hybrids, but also that the capitalist dimension or component of the hybrid has no deep, unalterable "essence" which imposes rigid limits of possibility on the character of the hybrid as a whole.



anarchists, in fact, the state is precisely the institution which makes an ultimate rupture necessary: the coercive power of the state enforces the untransgressable limits on social empowerment. Without the state, the erosion of capitalist power through interstitial transformation could proceed in the manner described by evolutionary anarchists.

This is not a satisfactory understanding of the state in general or of the state in capitalist societies in particular. The state is no more a unitary, fully integrated structure of power than is the economy or civil society. And while the state may indeed be a "capitalist state" which plays a substantial role in reproducing capitalist relations, it is not *merely* a capitalist state embodying a pure functional logic for sustaining capitalism. The state contains a heterogeneous set of apparatuses, unevenly integrated into a loosely coupled ensemble, in which a variety of interests and ideologies interact. It is an arena of struggle in which contending forces in civil society meet. It is a site for class compromise as well as class domination. In short, the state must be understood not simply in terms of its relationship to social reproduction, but also in terms of the gaps and contradictions of social reproduction.

What this means is that struggles for emancipatory transformation should not simply ignore the state as envisioned by evolutionary interstitial strategies, nor can they realistically smash the state, as envisioned by ruptural strategies. Social emancipation must involve, in one way or another, engaging the state, using it to further the process of emancipatory social empowerment. This is the central idea of symbiotic transformation.

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## SYMBIOTIC TRANSFORMATION

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The basic idea of symbiotic transformation is that advances in bottom-up social empowerment within a capitalist society will be most stable and defensible when such social empowerment also helps solve certain real problems faced by capitalists and other elites. While there are historical moments in which it may be possible, through effective popular mobilization and solidarity, to deepen and extend forms of social empowerment even when this sharply threatens the interests of capitalists and other dominant elites, such gains will always be precarious and vulnerable to counterattack. Gains won in a period of heightened mobilization will therefore tend to be undone in periods where such mobilization declines. Forms of social empowerment are likely to be much more durable and to become more deeply institutionalized, and thus harder to reverse, when, in one way or another, they also serve some important interests of dominant groups, and solve real problems faced by the system as a whole. Joel Rogers and Wolfgang Streeck formulate this idea in terms of the general conditions for the robust success of the democratic left: "The democratic left makes progress under capitalism when it improves the material well-being of workers, solves a problem for capitalists that capitalists cannot solve for themselves, and in doing both wins sufficient political cachet to contest capitalist monopoly on articulating the 'general interest.'"<sup>1</sup>

Historically the most important examples of this mode of transformation were the relatively stable forms of "class compromise" between capital and labor mediated by the state in many

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1 Joel Rogers and Wolfgang Streeck, "Productive Solidarities: Economic Strategy and Left Politics," in David Miliband (ed.), *Reinventing the Left* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 130.