Power and Social Transformation

Week 5 - 9.26.2019

Opening Reflection

4:30-4:35

On the whiteboard

Complete the sentence:

POWER IS....

Orientations

4:35-5:45

- What is "power"? What work do (theories of) power do/not do?

- What might it mean to reimagine power and ourselves in relationship with one another for the purposes of social transformation?

- What praxes suit the reconfiguration/dissolution/prefiguration of power and society as we know (or don't yet, know) it?

What do (theories of) power do or do not do?

"All our categories of thought, all our assumptions about what is reality, or what is politics or economics or even where we live, are so permeated by power that just to say "no!" to power precipitates us into a vertiginous world in which there are no fixed reference points to hold on to other than the force of our own 'no!" Power and social theory exist in such symbiosis that power is the lens through which theory sees the world [...]. To try to theorize anti-power is to wander in a largely unexplored world. How can the world be changed without taking power? The answer is obvious: we do not know. That is why it is so important to work at the answer, practically and theoretically" (22).

What might it mean to reimagine power and ourselves in relationship with one another for the purposes of social transformation?

How is power built among those who are discursively and structurally produced as "powerless"?

Or exercised against powerful institutions and actors in the interest of development?

Primers

- Power.
- Prefiguration

Re/Imagining Power
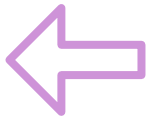
- Can Power from Below Change the World?
- Beyond Power?

Praxes

- Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements.
- Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds

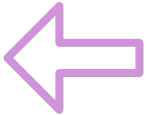# Transformative Movement Building

- Asian American Racial Justice Toolkit

- Breaking A Rainbow, Building a Nation

- Abolition and Reparations: Histories of Resistance, Transformative Justice and Accountability

- 'Be Water!': seven tactics that are winning Hong Kong's democracy revolution.

- "Puerto Rico: The Shift from Mass Protests to People's Assemblies.".

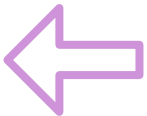- "Y'all Tryna Win or Nah?

Primers

- [Power.](#)

- [Prefiguration](#)

Matin Saar (2014) "Power"

"'The Weberian idea that power refers to an actor's capacity to influence or determine another actor's behavior or to carry out his or her will, even against the other's resistance, has been the core of the traditional concept of power, and it has been reformulated in many ways" (1098)
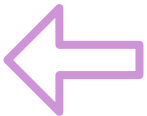
"Several theories of power have tried to [… focus] less on individual acts of power exercise between people and more on the very creation of social relationships or even social entities through power. […] This sets power in sharp contrast to domination and expresses the idea that power has to be created collectively and is not just there to be found. But it also shows that power is the very basis on which collective social action is possible and that it can never be full substituted by the rule of force or violence. Power, as it were, manifests itself as empowerment, as the bringing about of new forms of agency" (1100). KS
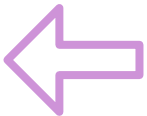
Christian Scholl (2016) "Prefiguration"

"The politicization of subjectivity and interpersonal relations has politicized integrity: people are now called upon to have their daily practice fully reflect their political values" (323).

"As Engler and Engler (2014a) put it, 'if the project building alternative community totally eclipses attempts to communicate with the wider public and win broad support, it risks becoming a very limiting type of self-isolation'" (324)
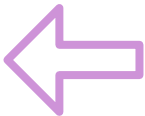
Re/Imagining Power

- [Can Power from Below Change the World?](#)

- [World without Taking Power](#)

Frances Fox Piven (2008) Can Power from Below Change the World?

"I propose that there is another kind of power [interdependent power] based not on resources, thing, or attributes, but rooted in the social and cooperative relations in which people are enmeshed by virtue of group life. Think of societies as composed of networks of cooperative relations, more or less institutionalized [...]. Social life is cooperative life, and in principle, all people who make contributions to these systems of cooperation have potential power over others who depend on them." (p. 5)
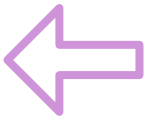
"The actualization of interdependent power typically requires that people break the rules that govern the institutions in which they participate, if only because those rules are designed to suppress interdependent power. People must also recognize that they have some power, that elites also depend on the masses. People have to organize, to contrive ways of acting in concert, at least insofar as concerted action is necessary to make their power effective" (8). KS
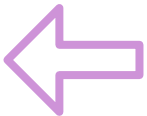
John Holloway (2002) "Beyond Power?"

"The notion of capturing positions of power, whether it be governmental power or more dispersed positions of power in society misses the point that the aim of the revolution is to dissolve relations of power, to create a society based on the mutual recognition of people's dignity. What has failed is the notion that revolution means capturing power in order to abolish power" (20)

"All our categories of thought, all our assumptions about what is reality, or what is politics or economics or even where we live, are so permeated by power that just to say "no!" to power precipitates us into a vertiginous world in which there are no fixed reference points to hold on to other than the force of our own 'no!' Power and social theory exist in such symbiosis that power is the lens through which theory sees the world [...]. To try to theorize anti-power is to wander in a largely unexplored world. How can the world be changed without taking power? The answer is obvious: we do not know. That is why it is so important to work at the answer, practically and theoretically" (22)

Praxes

- [Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements.](#)

- [Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds](#)

Charlene A. Carriuthers (2018) Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements.

"There are three collective commitments our movements must take up to regenerate: 1. Building many strong leaders, 2. Adopting healing justice as a core organizing value and practice, 3. Combating liberalism with principled struggle."

"Everyone invested in collective liberation must answer the following questions critical to determining the health and success of our movements: Who am I? Who are my people? What do we want? What are we building? Are we ready to win?"

"Principled struggle means that we talk with each other from a place that allows mutual dignity. Principled struggle means that our conclusions about people, events, and organizations are as sound as possible, grounded in observation, and recognizing that even then our assessment may not be valid."

adrienne maree brown (2017) Emergent Strategy

"Small is good, small is all.

Change is constant. (Be like water).

There is always time for the right work.

There is a conversation in the room that only these people at this moment can have. Find it.

Never a failure, always a lesson.

Trust the People. (if you trust the people, they become trustworth).

Move at the speed of trust. [...]

Less prep, more presence.

What you pay attention to grows" (41-42).

"Do you already know that your existence--who and how you are--is in and of itself a contribution to the people and place around you? Not after or because you do some particular thing, but simply the miracle of your life. And that the people around you, and the place(s), have contributions as well? Do you understand that your quality of life and your survival are tied to how authentic and generous the connections are between you and the people and place you live with and in?" (91)

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- "Y'all Tryna Win or Nah?

Asian American Racial Justice Toolkit

"In this volatile moment, racial justice advocates face an urgent mandate to inspire visions of a future America based on inclusion and interdependence, rather than on division and domination. This future requires building mass consciousness to see race not as the classification of human difference, but as a mythology created in service to broadly damaging systems of plunder and control. It requires engaging in rigorous political imagination and struggle to forge new ways of seeing our humanity in one another across race and national borders. Building this consciousness is as much a cultural project as it is a political one. As Brazilian educator Paulo Freire reminds us, "hope needs practice in order to become historical concreteness." (4) KS

Regotsofetse Chikane (2018) Breaking A Rainbow, Building a Nation

"Can coconuts be trusted with the revolution? Can they undergo a process of rejection that involves the removal of their complicity within a system that offers them opportunities for advancement, while simultaneously explicitly denouncing it, using the privileges the same system has vested in them?" (15) KS

"Coconuts and the black elite, like any other group within #MustFall movements, will try to steer the movement in a direction that favours them best. But unlike other groups who compete for the soul of the #MustFall movements, we hide in the tall grass, hoping that no one sees us, yet banking on the knowledge that enough people can sense our presence. We unconsciously influence #MustFall politics to protect our self interest under the impression that our acts are for the greater good. The presence of a bigger villain allows the gaze to turn away from us. We are asked questions we're never truly expected to answer and as a result, in the same way that we traverse our post-apartheid society, coconuts chart the landscape of #MustFall politics; cautious, conniving, curious and always cunning" (234). KS
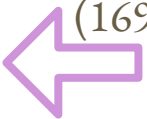
Patrisse Cullors (2019) "Abolition and Reparations: Histories of Resistance, Transformative Justice and Accountability."

"Abolition calls on us not only to destabilize, deconstruct, and demolish oppressive systems, institutions, and practices, but also to repair histories of harm across the board" (1686) KS

"Abolition must be a cultural intervention. It must produce a new way of being even in the most challenging and difficult moments. We have not collectively practiced abolition so it's hard for us to understand its significance. But, if we implement a new practice that is centered in care and dignity, we might find a practice that challenges our instinct to "cancel" each other. Abolition is about how we treat each other. It is about how we show up in relationships. Abolition is about how we respond to harm caused and how we respond when we cause harm. It is differentiating between large-scale systems that have been built to perpetuate our harm, and individual harm caused against one another. I don't believe abolition is about bullying, but I do believe abolition is about standing up for yourself. We need to be committed to building a culture that is rooted in care, dignity, and accountability" (1694)
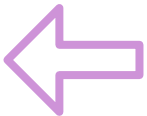
Antony Dapiran (2019) "'Be Water!': seven tactics that are winning Hong Kong's democracy revolution."

"Hong Kong's young protesters are eschewing the fixed, immobile occupation strategies of the past, in favour of a highly mobile, agile style of protest. A rally may turn into a march; a march may begin in one direction and abruptly change to another direction; the focus of a particular protest action may only emerge in the course of the march itself. [...] As Bruce Lee said, "Water can flow, or it can crash!""
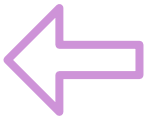
Jacqueline Villarrubia-Mendoza and Roberto Vélez-Vélez. (2019). "Puerto Rico: The Shift from Mass Protests to People's Assemblies.".

"It is too soon to know whether this newly acquired power will lead to a radical change in the political structure of the island and, if so, what type of change. What is certain is that the sense of empowerment produced by people's participation in the mass mobilizations has undoubtedly led to a political awakening. These assemblies suggest that people are beginning a process of appropriation and probing of participatory democracy and its vectors—that is, empowerment, self-management, and self-determination. The shift from street demonstrations to people's assemblies suggests "the proposal behind the protest," a principle that challenges those mobilized by grievances to construct their own solutions and present them as alternatives to the current state of affairs."

Youth United for Change (2019) "Y'all Tryna Win or Nah? Lessons on Organization Development and Youth Organizing on Shifting Terrain."

"Winning requires a collective commitment to complex authenticity, perpetual learning, and hard-nosed rigor. Winning requires an unrelenting, ruthless criticism of all of our assumptions about our world, our work, our people, and ourselves. Winning requires sharing uncomfortable truths about our practice and organizations, not to shame or ostracize one another, but to help all of us avoid repeating mistakes that inhibit our collective ability to achieve liberation. Finally, winning requires taking calculated risks based on material assessments and shedding obsolete organizing practices and tactics when they outlive their usefulness based on such assessments. If our sector begins to do such things at a mass scale in partnership with other key social movement sectors, we can potentially witness a progression of societal transformation we have not seen since the advent of Reconstruction" (5).

Working Group Time

6:00 - 7:00

- Finalize the order of working groups
- Syllabi and lesson planning
- Think through ideas you may have for how to organize your podcast episodes
- What support would you like to plan and create your webpages?
- Bios?