

# Rio+20 and the Green Economy: Technocrats, Meta-industrials, WSF and Occupy

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Whereas the official pitch for Rio Earth Summit 1992 was "our common future", the Rio+20 meeting in Brazil this June speaks to a negotiating text called *The Future We Want*.<sup>[1]</sup> The question of course, is who is this "we"?

## **Neoliberal class interest**

For the network Business Action for Sustainable Development, the "we" is the "private sector".

Multitudes around the world are part of the private sector, whether self-employed, entrepreneurs, farmers or small and medium sized as well as large multi-national enterprises. The private sector generates most of the goods and services that are utilised every day and therefore must be actively engaged to address the implementation gaps that have limited the achievements of sustainable development goals.<sup>[2]</sup>

It is true that the growth-driven private sector is responsible for the global ecological crisis, but it is not true that business delivers most people's needs. For one thing, the majority of world food growers are women in the global South. BASD's inflated claim subsumes and invisibilises several "othered" economic groupings. It is peasants, mothers, fishers and gatherers, outside of capital and labouring directly with natural cycles, who meet everyday life needs for the majority of people on earth.<sup>[3]</sup> Moreover, this "meta-industrial" class uses modes of provisioning and "indigenous technologies" that already integrate precaution and sustainability.<sup>[4]</sup> Theirs are actually real "green jobs".

Meta-industrial workers constitute the very broadest base of what the Occupy Movement names the international 99%. And around two thirds of meta-industrials are actually women, North and South, engaged in life-affirming reproductive labour. If they can achieve a hearing at Rio+20, then a momentous step for global democracy and sustainability will have been made. The significance of this is yet to be grasped by many on the Left. Nevertheless, in principle, the now decade old World Social Forum can serve as an instrument for drawing together worker's, women's, indigenous, and ecological voices.<sup>[5]</sup> People with meta-industrial skills and values are already active in the WSF - as

peasant food sovereignty and indigenous environment networks, as women anti-toxics campaigners and peace activists. And a meta-industrial consciousness is implicit in the critique of biocolonialism developed by the ETC (Erosion, Technology, Convergence) group. As the WSF looks towards Rio+20, its Thematic Social Forum is circulating a strong synthesis of shared concerns in 'Another Future is Possible: Come to Re-invent the World at Rio+20'.<sup>[6]</sup> Traditionally, each social movement has had its own objectives and discourse, which WSF activists struggle to balance. Now, the rise of Occupy and Indignados may mean a new round of Left self-examination.<sup>[7]</sup>

Meanwhile, the corporate message of BASD and others is a bid to promote the private sector as key sponsor and "ideas man" for reframing international governance institutions. The technique was pioneered by the Business Council for Sustainable Development in 1992 as it steered UNCED, the first Rio.<sup>[8]</sup> Today, Elliott Harris from the IMF, announces a GEI (Green Economy Initiative) built on "the strengths of the market-based economy" but supporting this with a more "coherent institutional framework".<sup>[9]</sup> No surprise that the peasant organisation Via Campesina, a leading strand of WSF and of the worldwide class of meta-industrial producers, reads the Rio+20 Green Economy as

... another phase of what we identify as "green structural adjustment programs" which seek to align and re-order the national markets and regulations to submit to the fast incoming "green capitalism".<sup>[10]</sup>

Technological innovation will be central to capital accumulation through this Green Economy. But ramping that up means ever more resource extraction, biodiversity loss, and energy pollution. In the words of ETC, advocates for people's science,

The big idea is to replace the extraction of petroleum with the exploitation of biomass (food and fibre crops, grasses, forest residues, plant oils, algae, etc.). Proponents envision a post-petroleum future where industrial production (of plastics, chemicals, fuels, drugs, energy, etc.) depends – not on fossil fuels – but on biological feedstocks transformed through high technology bioengineering platforms. Many of the world's largest corporations and most powerful governments are touting the use of new [but untested] technologies including genomics, nanotechnology and synthetic biology to transform biomass into high-value products.<sup>[11]</sup>

Clearly, the Green Economy is a circular and self-defeating strategy from an environmental perspective.

### **Manufacturing global governance**

The key substantive issues for Rio+20 are energy access and efficiency; food security and sustainable agriculture; green jobs and social inclusion; urbanisation; water management; chemical wastes; oceans; risk and disaster amelioration. The greening of the global capitalist system is deemed to be an "integration" of economics and ecology. At the same time, business and the UN argue that "innovative instruments" for financing this must be consistent with "the Doha Development Round of multilateral trade negotiations". The major big-picture initiatives towards this

contradictory hegemony are:

- Moves to transform UNEP into a World Environment Organization;
- Moves to assess the feasibility of Earth System Governance;
- Moves to explore a new Global Financial Architecture.

The World Bank, International Monetary Fund, the regional development banks, UNCTAD and the World Trade Organization will be asked to consider the ecosystemic implications of their decisions. And in so doing, these neoliberal agents of social dislocation and hardship will gain fresh political legitimation.

With guidance from UNEP, *The Future We Want*, an agenda also known as the Zero Draft, spells out the terms of reference and potential outcomes for Rio+20. It builds on earlier agreements such as Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Declaration, the Monterrey Consensus, Doha Round, Istanbul Programme for Least Developed Countries, and the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building. The Zero Draft also endorses the 1992 Rio principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" in redefining relations between the affluent global North and so called "developing" South. But while the need to remove poverty from the planet is right upfront in this negotiating text, other critical "p" words are missing. The first such word is "power" and the second is "profit".<sup>[12]</sup>

Rio+20 spins into view with networks, promo agencies, think tanks, websites, and conferences. The Canada based IISD (International Institute for Sustainable Development) offers itself as a comprehensive "knowledge management project" in preparation for the impending "innovation culture". Proposals are coming online from serious bodies like the New Economics Foundation and World Future Council. The feminist network Women in Europe for a Common Future is engaged; ministers from the Congo call for a new intergovernmental architecture; global policy meetings are conducted by facilitators with buzzy names like Bright Green Learning. In London, A Planet Under Pressure gathering is held under the auspices of the Royal Society. Described as giving scientific leadership for Rio+20, plenary positions go to the World Bank, a Shell Oil Company Vice President, and the UK's Chief Scientist. Attendance registration is set at GBP 400 per head.<sup>[13]</sup> Elsewhere, Lund University in Sweden, the Australian National University, and Tokyo's UN University are being funded to host conferences on Earth System Governance.

But thinking publics are paralysed in a maze of acronyms such as IEG (International Environmental Governance); 10YFP (10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production); CPR (Committee of Permanent Representatives); EMG (Environment Management Group); IPBES (Intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services); GLISPA (Global Islands Partnership); ISFD (Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development); SAICM (Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management); UNON (United Nations Office at Nairobi) and even COW (Committee of the Whole). Could human words be more mystifying and more disempowering?

If Rio+20 achieves nothing else, it will forge a new and homogenising discourse of international governance, a shared set of social and material expectations across nations, classes, and bodies. Yet market logic like "carbon trading", "geo-engineering", or "climate smart agriculture" cannot restore broken life-support-systems in nature. - The World Watch Institute calculates that 60% of nature's "services" have been destroyed by industrialisation since World War II.<sup>[14]</sup> The trouble is that economics describes an abstract idealised realm of human assumptions, whereas ecology

describes an actual living material realm. There is a profound cognitive disjunction between the two disciplinary lenses. International consensus on an incoherent totalisation like the Green Economy will do little for sustainability - or democracy.[15] Rather, what a Green Economy designed by free traders will do, is deepen the unequal exchange already existing between global North and South. In fact, this GEI is simply the next stage in the history of eurocentric colonisation.

### **Social, embodied, and ecological debt**

For the system of capital accumulation can only continue to function as long as it draws on a surplus provided by others. Thus, capitalism is built on a social debt to exploited workers; an embodied debt to unpaid women for their reproductive labour; and an ecological debt to peasants and indigenes for appropriating their land and livelihood.[16] So too, history has shown that this process of extraction from the living peripheries of capital relies on the development of a comprador class, groomed with incentives by the coloniser. This is the real meaning of "development" and such power relations are enacted today through the UN machine, through the business world, and through universities. High-level consultations for Rio+20 are currently taming a managerial class of scientists, academics, and bureaucrats. Usually, such intermediaries come from marginal populations or poorer regions, but not always. Neoliberalism reaches into unexpected quarters ... For this reason, the Occupy movement's call to the 99% is an inadequate analysis of class interests.

For example, women internationally are especially vulnerable to the privileges of comprador status as they strive to climb out of oppressive patriarchalisms, and to obtain better conditions for their communities. The World March of Women and other feminist groups thus face something of a political double-bind when responding to a Zero Draft that announces:

We call for removing barriers that have prevented women from being full participants in the economy and unlocking their potential as drivers of sustainable development, and agree to prioritize measures to promote gender equality in all spheres of our societies, including education, employment, ownership of resources, access to justice, political representation, institutional decision-making, care giving and household and community management.

This gender mainstreaming seems benign enough, yet the criterion for equality is "the masculine universal" - an idealised image of the emancipated woman as one who lives like a white, middle class, man. Women's material embodiment is neutralised - often with technological help. In this way, the unique skills and integrative insights that women learn from reproductive labours are diminished and "contained" as a valid source of alternative life-affirming values.

To illustrate this centripetal tendency: at the 56th session of the UNCSW (Commission on the Status of Women), UN Deputy-Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro endorsed the fact that rural women constitute a quarter of the world's population; grow the majority of the world's food; and perform most unpaid care work. There is no doubt that their situation merits political attention. But financing for water infrastructure and renewable energy, biodiversity protection, and climate change mitigation and adaptation, may well provide more benefits for donors than recipients. Likewise, UN-Women's Executive Director Michelle Bachelet pointed to barriers in women's empowerment and called for more gender sensitivity in national budgets and in business. To carry these things further, a high-level meeting is planned for June, hosted by Brazil.[17] However, like micro-credit schemes,

these newer measures will quietly recruit women as players in the capitalist system.

In the preparatory dialogues for Rio+20, "civil society" is used persuasively and often. Yet the term essentialises social differences and dissolves a myriad of grassroots struggles under the bland formula of citizenship and deliberative democracy. Worldwide, people see their national parliaments swept into the revolving door of suits - and find they have nowhere to go but the streets. This is why the World Social Forum formed following the Battle for Seattle. It is why the Occupy Movement for direct democracy broke out across a thousand plateaux following the second financial crash in 2011. And it is why, at Rio 2012 just like Rio 1992 before it, the People's Summit will be located for security reasons a good distance from official UN and government proceedings.[18]

### **The Great Chain of Being**

At the pinnacle of the Aristotelian hierarchy of Rio+20 stands conference Secretary General Sha Zukang, a Chinese career diplomat. He may be less hands-on than Maurice Strong, the Canadian businessman who brokered UNCED in 1992, but he is pushing a Sustainable Energy for All Initiative, as well as women's and indigenous rights.[19] It is envisaged that after Rio+20, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (SD) should be upgraded to Council status - CSD becoming SDC - and ECOSOC (United Nations Economic and Social Council) will have a strong coordination and outreach role. But for now, as per the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, UNEP remains the motor of Rio+20 under Executive Director Achim Steiner.

As UNEP's *One Planet* magazine explains, getting the Rio event up means orchestrating three kinds of humans - intergovernmental, governmental, and nongovernmental. In the governmental sector, state ministers or their stand-ins meet under the rubric of GCSS-12/GMEF - that is to say, the UNEP Governing Council / Global Ministerial Environment Forum (Special Session 12). These national representatives are deployed to spell out a mix of new Green Economy models "tailored to different local and national conditions"; at once "pro-growth" but based on a measurement of well being that goes beyond GDP. Governments are asked to configure the Millennium Development Goals into their policy with a view to realising these by 2015.[20] In undertaking this work, the UN requires that states listen to both intergovernmental and nongovernmental inputs. A rehearsal for Earth System Governance is underway.

The nongovernmental sector is marshalled under the UN acronym GMGSF-13, which stands for Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum, currently in its 13th Session. Here a designated space is made for Women's groups, Children and Youth, Indigenous Peoples, NGOs, Labour and Unions, Business and Industry, the Science and Technology community, and Local Authorities. There is also scope, possibly ad hoc, for regional opinion makers. But with no acknowledgement of the dynamics of "power" and "profit" as economic levers of capitalism, there is likely to be a good deal of sociological fudging in the Rio+20 consultations. Coordinators of the Stakeholders Forum, like Felix Dodds, will have to keep an eye on this, as WSF participants certainly will. Preliminary arrangements give a nod to "vulnerabilities" such as gender and ethnicity, but class analysis is absent. Instead, business delegates follow the UK's New Economics Foundation in talking about "joining the dots", enabling integration of "the three pillars" social, economic, and environmental. But a very skilled transdisciplinary analysis would be required to tease out the complexities and contradictions that inhere in such a crude functionalist agenda.[21]

UNEP believes that the views of Major Groups and Stakeholders will readily converge on the global Green Economy theme.[22] Meanwhile, the corporate sector is being urged by UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon to sign on to a Global Compact, circulating as kind of individualistic rights based credo of 10 principles. The ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation) agrees with the Green Economy approach and the idea of a new architecture of global governance. In addition, ITUC prioritises procedure - access, right principles, concrete targets, and accountability. Likewise, the ICS (International Council for Science) wants clear definitions and measurable implementation. But it needs to be emphasised that if the concerns of Major Groups get tied up with operational matters at Rio+20, then capitulation to the status quo will happen by default.

It seems relevant to the political identity and future direction of WSF and Occupy, that the only Major Groups reported by IISD as expressing material alternatives are people whose labour involves the hands-on reproduction of natural processes.

- Women want their unpaid domestic contribution valued;
- Indigenous peoples want secure land rights;
- Peasant farmers want attention to local food sovereignty.

To reiterate: it is these meta-industrial workers whose local economic provisioning and care giving already exemplifies commoning and sustainability. Inhabiting the domestic and geographic peripheries of capital, meta-industrial labour is largely ignored, even by many on the Left. Yet in an era of environmental crisis, the notion of a meta-industrial class is powerfully integrative. It broadens the classic socialist preoccupation with productivist industrial workers. It transcends the divisive idealism of "identity" politics like feminism or indigeneity. Meta-industrial labour is materially grounded in the reproduction of embodied and ecological processes. In maintaining the humanity-nature metabolism, this activity is trans-cultural and in principle ungendered. That said, for historical reasons, women around the world - right at the bottom of the Great Chain of Being - still undertake far more unvalued reproductive-metabolic-ecological labour than men do.

### **Meta-industrials v technocrats**

Meta-industrial labour already models the "green jobs" that the UN, private sector, and unions hope to "generate" out of thin air. Meta-industrial workers already meet human needs without destroying ecological cycles. Keynotes and committee chairs at Rio+20 should be drawn from this class. On the democratic count they are a global majority and on the sustainability count they are skilled managers of "nature's services". But where are these meta-industrials in the GEC (Green Economy Coalition) forming around UNEP? Led by Oliver Greenfield, GEC associates comprise Vitae Civilis, Consumers International, International Institute for Environment and Development, WWF, Biomimicry Institute, International Trade Union Confederation, the International Institute for Sustainable Development, International Union for the Conservation of Nature, Ecologic Institute, The Bellagio Forum for Sustainable Development, Aldersgate Group, Philips Global, Development Alternatives, the International Labour Organisation, SEED Initiative, World Business Council for Sustainable Development, Global Footprint Network, Ethical Markets Media, The Caribbean Natural Resources Institute, The Natural Step, and Eco Union. In truth, even if meta-industrials did score a seat at this table, they would soon be drowned out by technocratic dreamers.

The Green Economy Coalition describes its mission as a resilient economy within the limits of the planet, but from a meta-industrial perspective, the GEC program is a very eurocentric masculinist

developmentalist one. It is involved in research and product design, "partnerships for local entrepreneurship", grant giving, educational forums, and reporting. GEC entertains a mixed bag of themes - MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) - equity yet inclusive governance - competitiveness yet market reform - green jobs yet finance for technology - workplace standards yet best practice - and transitioning. There is some interest in an international environment court, although again, the question of global power relations under neoliberalism is not interrogated.

At the G20 meeting in Mexico late February 2012, President Felipe Calderon, intimated that funding technology transfer is a way for the global North to compensate climate change and the ecological debt of colonisation. But again, the environmental imposts of industrial technology are passed over in favour of "opportunities for growth":

... current high energy prices open policy space for economic incentives to renewables  
... investors are looking for alternatives given the low interest rates in developed countries, a factor that presents an opportunity for green economy projects.

The G20 communiqué rallied by asking the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank and the UN, to prepare a report

... inserting green growth and sustainable development policies into structural reform agendas, tailored to specific country conditions and level of development. [23]

The Green Economy is contradictory for two reasons. First, it is embedded in capitalism, a system whose *raison d'être* of profit depends on three levels of extraction or cost transfer. These economic externalities are experienced by others in the structural violences of social debt, embodied debt, and ecological debt. Second, the official Green Economy is embedded in industrialisation, and rhetorics of "dematerialisation" notwithstanding, even ecologically modernising digital production cannot avoid energy and resource draw downs. Each further advance in technology depends on a further cradle-to-grave cycle of extraction - transport - manufacture - transport - market - transport - consumption - transport - waste pit. In the human metabolism with nature, industrial technology never solves a problem, the best it can do is displace a problem. The displacement may be spatial - shifted on to the backs of less powerful sectors of society, or the displacement may be temporal - shifted on to the backs of future generations.

### **Epistemological violence**

As capitalism exhausts the planet's capacity to provide material throughput for industrial "value-adding", it is not just high tech "renewables", but global institutional architectures that are being devised to push against natural limits by enacting constitutional powers for Earth System Governance. Some 150 members of the official Rio+20 constituency - including Malaysia, Congo, and Peru - hope to see UNEP transform into a specialised agency with WTO like powers and capacity to simplify the 900 odd MEAs (Multilateral Environment Agreements). Other members favour social change strategies based on global treaties or regional conventions. As for *The Future We Want*, the Zero Draft confirms Rio+20 as a quintessential neoliberal arrangement - "voluntary commitments" to be recorded.

The Green Economy notion is a confused amalgam of imagined and material interactions between "financial capital, human capital, natural capital, and physical capital". By imputing "economic value"

to the life-giving capacities of "nature's services", metabolic flows must be reduced to imaginary tradeable units. This reductive fiction is an epistemological violence. In June 2012, young people, small farmers, workers, squatters, grandmothers, and indigenous gatherers are planning to converge on Rio+20 to oppose the deadly commodification of life. But environmentalists like the Global Footprint Network give up the game when they say that "billions of dollars of investment" will be necessary to make sustainability real. Again, Janez Potočnik, European Commissioner for Environment, invites funds from "non-traditional sources" to help "green" the global South. Edna Molewa, South Africa's Minister for Water and Environmental Affairs hopes "public-private partnerships" will multiply.

Middle class activists need to think carefully about their tactics. As the global private sector weakens governments, leading to cash starved public universities, academics are being co-opted with business donations for Centres of Excellence. The advocacy network, EJOLT (Environmental Justice Organizations, Liabilities and Trade) also walks a tight rope, sponsored as it is by EC research moneys under the 7th Framework Programme. EJOLT runs a website, data base, workshops, policy papers, and offers a utilitarian focus on best practice, life cycle analysis, and fair "distribution" of "development benefits".<sup>[24]</sup> But in terms of protecting cultural autonomy and global alternatives, its imperial structure may absorb grassroots energies, giving master governance institutions an opportunity to exercise "repressive tolerance".<sup>[25]</sup> On the US West Coast, wired-up activists are looking to social media for answers and find "a fast-mutating array of high-tech opportunities to create new solutions to social and economic problems".<sup>[26]</sup> But IT is part of the problem; a voracious energy user and virile polluter, not least to the bodies of Chinese and Mexican assembly line workers. Activists at WSF and Occupy need to examine cradle-to-grave accounts of the digital revolution.

Meanwhile, the corporate vision is thoroughly framed by the technological a priori:

Collaboration and collective action on innovation and technology development and their appropriate deployment via sustainable consumption and production (SCP) are at the heart of greening economies.<sup>[27]</sup>

Here, even Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) is scientised with an acronym - and it is telling in an era of "false needs" that consumption precedes production here. But "at the heart" of this hyper-industrial economy, who collaborates with whom? Capital accumulation in the great world cities has always relied on forcing food sufficient peoples off their land to become factory workers and consumers. And today, in order to keep the SCP model afloat in the global North, women remittance migrants from the global South are sent off across the world as cheap domestic labour and foreign exchange for home governments, while child caring grandmas, pick up the transferred cost of reproductive labour. In short: the "knowledge base" enthusiastically propagated by UNEP and IISD, and arguments for the global Green Economy, are seriously lacking - not just in ecological literacy, but in sociological literacy as well.

### **Everyday revolution**

In the 1970s, activists in the global North talked about "living simply so others may simply live". But this commitment was overtaken in the 80s and 90s by the rise of "professional environmentalism" championed by business through the UN sustainable development agenda. With the new

millennium, Latin American peoples are revitalising Left politics with earth centered Constitutions in Ecuador and Bolivia recognising Rights of Mother Nature. And a history-making 2010 Cochabamba Climate Summit, hosted by women and indigenes, advanced the principle of *sumak kawsay* or *buen vivir*.<sup>[28]</sup> The precise meaning of these words is unique to their Andean cultures of origin, but local versions of "living well" have been adopted by commoning activists around the world. Broadly speaking, wherever resources remain free of capitalist appropriation, "the dots" are actually still joined, and people - meta-industrial communities - enjoy autonomous ecologically sensitive provisioning. The classical hierarchy of Man over Nature, and the metabolic breakdown that results from it is unknown. At the margins of the capitalist patriarchal economy, the earth is valued for itself, not simply as a resource for human profit. And where economics is an embodied practice, people find identity and belonging in working together with nature. A call for this kind of deep green future commons is yet to find its way into the Zero Draft.

Meanwhile, the WSF Dialogue Platform meeting at Porto Alegre in January 2012 has issued a comprehensive working response to Rio+20 with 'Another Future is Possible: Come to Reinvent the World at Rio+20'. This pulls together a people's statement, North and South, infused with the vision of a "biocivilisation" evolving in reciprocity with nature.

---1 Ethical and Philosophical Foundations: Subjectivity, Domination, and Emancipation

--- Foundations for Biocivilization

--- Education in a World Crisis

--- Knowledge, Science, and Technology

--- 2 Human Rights, Peoples Territories, and Defense of Mother Earth

--- Right to Land and Territory

--- Territory and Native Peoples

--- Sustainable Cities

--- For the Right to Water as a Common Good

--- Health is a Universal Right, Not Source of Profit

--- 3 Production, Distribution, and Consumption: Access to Wealth, Common Goods, and Economies of Transition

--- Finance and a Fair and Sustainable Solidarity Economy

--- The Green Economy: A New Phase of Capitalist Expansion

--- Energy Transition is Urgent and Possible

--- 4 Political Subjects, Architecture of Power, and Democracy

--- The Commons: a Kaleidoscope of Social Practices for Another Possible World

--- Civil Society, Organizations and Social Movements

--- Governance and the Architecture of Power. <sup>[29]</sup>

Such a document backed up by the WSF Charter of Principles tackles the global hegemonic push for Earth System Governance head on. The Occupy movement also opposes any top-down form of globalisation directed by governments and institutions in the service of the market. In fact, the state, parties, vanguards, and vertical movement organisations are each problematic for the liberation of everyday life. The Occupy General Assembly honours horizontality, "autogestion" and

self-management. Likewise, WSF activists favour individual accountability and collective vision, shared power - and strategic use of privilege. In the words of Michigan based USSF (US Social Forum) committee members:

We have learned from past struggles that the leadership of our movement must come from those groups most oppressed by the system we're trying to change. We need to learn from low-income people and people of color, the folks at the bottom of "the 99%." These are the exploited, damaged, homeless, defeated people who need to lead our movement but who aren't able because of their conditions of oppression.[\[30\]](#)

Occupy has roots in the '70s anti-nuclear struggles, autonomous experiments, the global justice movement, and WSF itself.[\[31\]](#) Nevertheless, WSF organisers can improve their praxis by listening to Occupy. At Porto Alegre, for example, some complained that -

The NGOs and labor and government-run projects [staples of the World Social Forum] were all in the Legislative Assembly building, but the social movement folks ... were at the youth camp in an occupied building, Utopia E Luta ... They have a theater there, sewing machines and sewing classes and a hydroponics set-up on the roof.[\[32\]](#)

On the other hand, and without subsuming the spontaneity of Occupy under programmatic demands, an exploration of the WSF response to Rio+20 may give new activists a fuller sense of how their grievances interlock with complex international forces that are not easily undone. In the US, for example, unemployment is tied to offshore restructuring; the housing crisis to an unregulated world financial system; poor health services to military excess. And the taken for granted urban-industrial lifestyle is thoroughly dependent on the decimation of meta-industrial livelihoods elsewhere. Engagement with the international WSF process can broaden and deepen the self-understanding of Occupy in the global North. But the learning goes two ways. Occupy gives energy, inspiration, and direction to the WSF through its prefigurative commoning.

### **Watching over life**

Looking towards Rio, it is neither possible nor desirable for all in the movement of movements to fly to Brazil; besides, conferencing by the international economic elite and its technocrat managers contributes more than enough greenhouse gas. Consciousness raising can be done where people live and the proliferation of Indignado and Occupy sites in cities across the world is a boon to this deepening international political integration. The WSF text "Another Future is Possible" will inspire many thoughtful transformative strategies. Already there are proposals for a citizens audit of global debt, space for alternative currencies, minimum and maximum wage levels, bank socialisation, trade regulation, a financial transactions tax, and an end to land, water, and biodiversity piracy. More radical Occupy folk will see such campaigns as reformist or transitional gestures, but in terms of "learning to walk" they provide powerful educational tools. In addition, numerous round-the-world mobilisations are in the planning, with bank boycotts, direct action on Dirty Power, and simulated policy negotiations. The Rio+20 Green Economy will be targetted with international protests under the slogan: "Stop the Green Monster, the Future We Don't Want".

And a reading of the official Rio+20 Zero Draft suggests other life-affirming interventions, such as:

-- *Celebrating* the Rights of Mother Nature in the Decade of "Water for Life". Just as human bodies are joined to ecosystems, land is joined to water, and water to air. Through living plants, evapotranspiration cycles fertilise land and cool the atmosphere. This ecological rationality is lost with market oriented climate solutions like the CDM (Clean Development Mechanism) and REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation).

-- *Endorsing* the proposal for A High Commissioner for Future Generations and insisting s/he focus on a protective treaty covering the health and social costs of new technologies.

-- *Supporting* the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and matching it with a UN Declaration of the Rights of Peasants. Both should be cross-referenced to poverty, women, children, youth, land rights, livelihood, food sovereignty - that is, real "green jobs".

-- *Converting* UNEP's "mix of policy options" into a genuine exploration of non-violent decentralised alternative modes of provisioning: commoning and collective rights, cultural diversity, local autonomous gift economies from "simply living" in the global North to "buen vivir" in the South.

-- *Seeking* agreement that governments and multilateral agency decision-making and institutional modelling, uphold the distinctions between public versus private and science versus policy. The IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) is a good place to start applying this.

-- *Challenging* the rhetorical "integration of social, economic, and environmental pillars" by demonstrating how the very machinery of a capitalist economy, the dynamics of power and profit, is inherently incompatible with social justice and ecological sustainability.

-- *Demanding* satisfactory attendance in training courses on socio-ecological literacy as prerequisite to participation in Rio+20. Workshops will include exercises in political reflexivity to enable delegates from the global North to recognise colonisation in all its forms. Current training courses by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development are a travesty of education.

A focus on the Rio+20 agenda should help ground free wheeling "political subjectivities" in both WSF and Occupy. Certainly, it becomes more critical than ever to avoid internal movement conflicts - masculinist or ageist competitions in the guise of ideological or strategic purity have no place in the politics of life itself. The key is an open textured resistance with diversity of approaches and scales of action. Without unity of purpose, the professional managers of capital and their media will have a field day redefining political realities and forcing the Left into the divide and rule of wedge politics. The characterisation of WSF as "old movement vertical" and Occupy as "new movement horizontal" lends itself to this external manipulation.<sup>[33]</sup> Moreover, it is a facile dualism, since these dimensional abstractions can be found criss-crossing daily life in multiple ways. One activist even argues that

When the passion, fearlessness and vision of Occupy intersects with the resources and membership of community groups and unions, we'll find the sweet spot that makes it possible to force the richest to negotiate with the rest of us. It is where these two worlds meet - horizontal and vertical - united around common issues and enemies that we create

the potential to start winning together.[34]

Observing the interconnection between sustainability and peace, the WSF Thematic text speaks of opening up the Security Council to "new actors" - states, regional organizations, global networks - with a new balance of power based on bodies appropriate to watching over life, peoples, and planet. However, under existing geopolitical relations, this vision could be readily appropriated by established class interests as a step towards Earth System Governance. Perhaps the movements should simply Occupy Rio+20 and close it down? Yet this too, would play into the hands of corporations and governments like the US, which really want nothing to change. How do the movements deal with this tortuous ambiguity? My sense is that here the initiative falls back to Occupy as it grows regional awareness and support on home ground. Yet will grassroots activists - committed to an affective politics - be able to sustain this testing, often unglamorous nurture of the Mums and Dads? If yes, the dialectical interplay of WSF and Occupy will become a powerful historical force.

Communicating with the wider community remains a challenge. As Chico Whitaker points out, at present the movements barely add up to a global demographic of 1%. And whereas many people are struggling to survive, many are quite content with their commodity comforts.[35] Even at Cochabamba, the South's famous model of buen vivir got to be diluted by the soft sell of ecological modernisation and technology transfer.[36] Moreover, a political triangulation of WSF, and Occupy, and Rio+20, contesting the crimes of neoliberalism, faces an even bigger call. These Left activists must reconfigure not just human to human relations but humanity-nature relations as well. Remembering always, that what appears to be an economic bottom line is ultimately an ecological one, it is time for movements to defer to the meta-industrials.

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[18] The People's Summit for Social and Environmental Justice in Defence of the Commons will dual power the UN Rio+20, from 15-23 June 2012.

[19] Coincidentally, in recent years Maurice Strong has made his home in Peking.

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