

INTRODUCTION

Theorizing from and Traveling toward a Radical Democratic Habitus

A catastrophe is under way. A hypermalignant form of capitalism is entangled with ecological collapse, unfathomable inequality, ruthless privatization of the commons, the dismantling of democracy, intensifying xenophobia, “new Jim Crow” racism, permanent war, and the destruction of higher education as a space for critical and creative inquiry. This malignancy often manifests remarkable capacities to outmaneuver even modest efforts to avert the worst, let alone more ambitious movements to generate powerful alternatives that lean in fundamentally better directions. Formal politics are confined to narrowing channels that keep shifting rightward, while a vast portion of what goes on even in the “critical” portions of the academy has become hyperprofessionalized in ways that often lack *both* transformative vision *and* serious contact with movements trying to make real change. Pragmatic sensibilities too often lose connection with the creative provocations, affective intensities, and expansive horizons of radical vision. Scholarly sensibilities increasingly focus on discursive industries of hermetic tertiary literature that shed less and less light on matters of increasing urgency. For a long time, powers that might resist neoliberalism and generate alternatives have grown less creative and less powerful, while vicious game-changing dynamics of rapacious powers are modulating and on the move. As hopeful movements around democratizing education, climate justice, racism, austerity, solidarity economics, migration, and broad-based community organizing are beginning to rumble, how might we regenerate more promising forms of academic work and politics?

This book is written in the midst of scholarly, pedagogical, and activist movements along various edges between scholarship and practice. My aim has been to inhabit these edges as ecotones—rich evolutionary zones of tension and pregnant commingling between different-yet-related ecological communities,

rather than locations where one is reduced to the myopic imperatives of the other. I have sought to provoke theoretical and scholarly shifts in the midst of the imaginative openings and the challenges of grassroots political life, and I have sought to inform the latter by means of ideas that have had freer range in spaces where the pressures of immediacy are not (yet) quite as severe. At every point in this uncertain yet exciting journey, I have tried to tune my ears and direct my gaze toward possibilities of creating transformative theories and practices for radical and ecological democracy. How might we generate new patterns and interactions, charged at the edges between myriad fields within the academy and the broader world of democratic practices that might gather and generate transformative powers of a visionary pragmatism?

This book is unusual, insofar as it is not merely *about* such edges between theory and practice, it is also written *from* some of those edges, and it is a call *for* reworking the scholarly habitus in ways that make such edgework an integral part of the ecology of endeavors necessary for visionary pragmatic thinking and acting. As such, I begin with some vignettes from my often-meandering journeys beyond certain ruts and walls of the academy. These travels have repeatedly provoked me to explore the practice of theory in relation to political pedagogies of receptive and catalytic movement in places typically avoided by scholars. I consider these journeys and explorations to be indispensable conditions of nearly everything else that follows.

The sky is gray, the falling rain is gray, and the pavement is gray. As I open the car door and thank my colleague for giving me a ride home on a day when my bike has failed me, he glances at the shabby houses along the street and says, "Rom, I could never live in a neighborhood like this—it is just too dreary and depressing."

It is the early 1990s, my political theory tenure clock at Duke University is ticking, and with my family I have moved here on the edge of this Durham ghetto out of a vague sense that this is where I should be thinking. This turns out to be easier said than done, as gunshots interrupt most nights and a gang of drug dealers moves into the house across the road.

One late afternoon, several feet from our front room, about a dozen guys with sticks and knives face off against about a dozen others similarly armed. Some have guns. The worst does not happen, but along the edge of the road is a child who is four or five. He has a stick, and during the entire event he is banging the hell out of a metal garbage can close to the scene. I sometimes say that my life moves to the beat of Martin Luther King Jr.'s voice as I heard it boom while riding

on my dad's shoulders before I could stand up for long. Yet the truth is that for more than two decades now, the main beat moving me is that stick on the can.

There is a widely shared sense among radical democrats of many stripes that what matters in politics, theory, and other kinds of scholarship is the journey—the performance and practice—far more than the destination. Yet the very ease with which we circulate this too-common wisdom risks turning it into a destination. As we settle into this sense that our vocation is an odyssey, we may obscure how difficult it is to move—the intellectual, experiential, and ethical energies, depths, and agonies that theoretical, scholarly, and political journeys require. Our sense of odyssey may conceal how narrow the horizons of our journeys have become, or our sense that we are moving may itself become a soporific that draws us unaware toward an unfortunate rest. The journey of which this book is a part is propelled by uneasiness about such possibilities. It is born of a sense that the hyperactivity and professionalization of much radical political theory and critical scholarship in many disciplines is becoming a vehicle for going nowhere, or at least that *I* was becoming stuck.

I move to the edge of the ghetto to mix in the neighborhood in whatever way differences of class and race might allow, and so to keep my fingers on the pulse of difficult life that, I was thinking, is what radical democratic theorists should be animated by, even when we are not thinking about it directly. Yet the first thing that the near riot and the stick on the can move me to do is to search for a home in a safer neighborhood. Just as we are about to sign a lease on a new place, a former student of the populist historian Larry Goodwyn who has recently started organizing in the neighborhood shows up at the front door, manages to claim a chair in our living room, and somehow convinces us to stay put, talk with the neighbors about the confluence of slumlords and drug dealers, and become politically active in the hood. Before I know it, I am spending a lot of time organizing in the living rooms of grandmothers one street over who sleep on the floor to avoid bullets that might come through the windows. I do a lot of listening. I am among a small group of people creeping into run-down vacant houses to record and report unenforced housing code violations, holding up large pictures of a slumlord's mansion in front of the shacks he owns, building a network of relational power to address problems in the neighborhood. We begin to organize against the slumlords and for affordable housing, a land trust, a community

center, a preschool for kids in the neighborhood, drug rehabilitation programs, a different kind of policing—but the issues matter less than the engagements. Without realizing it at first, and in ways I never anticipated, I am beginning to think in relation to how things unfold in the living rooms, the conversations and actions in the streets, the community center. I begin imagining the world through the anxious and excited movement of our bodies through smashed windows in and out of dilapidated houses. I am reading, teaching, and writing about Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Gadamer, Adorno, Kant, Wolin, Derrida, among many others, but I am increasingly reading them from the broken windows, the differences and dreams in the living rooms, the streets—reading more to the beat of that stick on the garbage can, and less to the textures of life in the library, the departmental and professional meetings, and the academic rituals of making it at an elite university (even as these continue to matter).

Across many disciplines, epic traveling has long been constitutive of theorists' imagination of our vocation, as the Greek etymological roots linking theorists, theory, traveling, and even the ships that carried such travelers suggest.¹ In more tacit ways, I think this undergirds many less theoretical scholars' sense of their work as well. We imagine ourselves struggling our scholarly ways out of and back into caves in which the rest of humanity remains stuck and bound to illusion. We journey in time—while others are merely swept along without reflection and agency—whether we spread our wings of comprehension as the sun sets on an age, or march knowingly in an avant-garde pushing history's revolutionary edge. Where others reside in and think from one position in a political order, we move, think, and forge vision from multiple perspectives afforded by travels across the rugged geography of high peaks and deep valleys of our polity. We move restlessly to and from the gatherings of the herd and our places of solitude, becoming, while others are stuck in reified misapprehensions of being. Though most are mired in tribalism and patriotism, we imagine ourselves soaring to heights from which we forge cosmopolitan perspectives in which humanity is one. Or we connect the heart of theory and other scholarship to arteries and capillaries through which we circulate across borders of polis, culture, nation, and religion to offer an essentially comparative wisdom. Or we forge political imagination, judgment, and action through world traveling, as we attentively visit—yet keep a certain distance from—various perspectives around the tables at which we gather in speech and deed.

I am inspired by several of these images of political theory, even as I am highly suspicious of others, and seek to resist the (sometimes absurd) hubristic pretensions that are associated with most of them. Yet I increasingly doubt that the aspirations guided by these metaphors hold up well in the ritualized movements of most professionalized theorists' daily lives. If fresh thinking and acting is so deeply linked with metaphors of movement, and if the first theorists actually were geographic travelers whose capacities to theorize were thought to be inseparable from the manifold experiences and perspectives associated with their journeys, might we not have reason to suspect that the kinds of movements we engage in day in and day out may indeed influence our capacities to think—and not necessarily for the better? My unease here concerns not only what I take to be an exaggerated sense of the mobility of our imagination in the absence of unwonted experience and corporeal movement, but even more so the extent to which the routinized movements of our daily lives powerfully guide and constrain our capacities for political imagination and vision. For a vocation so shaped by metaphors of movement, are we not remarkably inattentive to the actual movements that make up the quotidian life of most theorists (and scholars more generally) in the academy? If metaphors of sweeping, grand, and attentive movements often orient our aspirations, what happens to our vocation when our bodies circulate in deep, over-worn ruts of movement, avoidance, attention, and inattentiveness?²

We theorists and scholars of politics across many disciplines tend to be very busy people in perpetual motion. Many different drives and pressures propel our movement, ranging from intrinsic love of theoretical questions and scholarly work, to passionate concerns about politics, to a desire for scholarly expertise that may enhance our engagements as public intellectuals, to tenure pressures of elite universities, to massive teaching loads of contingent faculty who are simultaneously scrambling to publish their way out of these most precarious faculty positions in corporatized institutions, to love of academic camaraderie, to desires for—and fears of—the judgment of one's peers, to desires to move into administrative positions and try one's hand at shaping higher education, to earning salary increases associated with "highly meritorious" evaluations. Thus, we find ourselves moving among classrooms, to our offices, to faculty meetings, to libraries, to attend or give guest lectures, to professional conferences and corporate hotel rooms, to our middle-class homes and higher-end supermarkets in comfortable neighborhoods, to restaurants where we dine with people a lot like us, to long hours of sitting in our studies.

We have fantasies about the powers of our imaginations to embark on vast disembodied journeys with texts. Yet we are profoundly embodied beings so often swept up in frenetic motions myopically focused on the concerns of a professionalized environment—disengaged from and oblivious to most of the world around us, harboring ourselves within a small range of spaces, experiences, types of energy, modes of activity, cultural productions, ways of being and doing. Insofar as capacities for theory and scholarship are in any way linked to attentive travels beyond the familiar, it is tempting to say that the professionalized movements of academic governmentality may be among the most anti-theoretical and antischolarly conditions of impossibility imaginable for fresh thinking and political acting.³ Pierre Bourdieu formulated the idea of “habitus” to express the ways in which dispositions, perceptions, affect, expectations, thought, and bodily engagement in practices and institutions are closely articulated, correlated, and cogenerative of each other.⁴ Highly critical of theories of free subjectivity and intersubjectivity, he argued that the everyday practices of our habitus generate and are reproduced by a very structured and limited repertoire of improvisations. Our “flights” of imagination are mostly propelled by and adhere to the contours, requirements, and limits of this moving structure of behavior—including the necessary fantasy that we are free travelers.

The stick, the can, and the kid laid in a beat that made me feel increasingly uncomfortable with the rhythms, flows, interactions, productions, and limits of academic practice. They cast me forth along other paths. I found myself spending a lot of time organizing in the basements of black churches across uncanny lines of race, class, and religion, and walking attentively in unfamiliar parts of Durham, North Carolina, with many others, as we listened to stories of challenge and aspiration in an attempt to fashion a radically democratic epistemology, community, and form of power. As I taught and wrote, these experiences increasingly animated and infiltrated my work. Yet at the same time, even my most philosophical writings and conversations animated and infiltrated my organizing experiences and orientations. If I felt uncomfortable and claustrophobic in the midst of academic rituals and productions, these feelings developed less as negation and more as a growing taste for the generative-if-difficult intertwinements between these very different modes of being and reflection. For me, this intersection seemed to engender more receptive and expansive journeys—and these seemed to give birth not only to political possibilities that I found more hopeful but also to theory that seemed to move anew—to find many of its richest possibilities in these

movements. Some of my writing began to change, and many of my students began to move about and become involved in the community in new ways at the same time they became involved in radical democratic theorizing. Their flights of inquiry and imagination became more courageous and interesting—to themselves and to me. I developed an insatiable hunger to explore and experiment with these edges, to proliferate them in pursuit of a new educational culture and set of practices. I began to wonder if it might be possible to cocreate a radical democratic habitus that would become conducive to fresher, more potent thought and action in the face of the monumental crises of our times.

For Bourdieu, habitus is a principle of reproductive practice and improvisation whose tendencies are centripetal. Insofar as we are animated to venture beyond the limits of the order, it is due to crises, internal contradictions, cultural confrontations from without, and so forth. Yet a central question that animates this work is whether we might be able to generate practices that are, in a sense, more centrifugal in character. Might we fashion corporeal and theoretical practices that move attentively with the tensions, differences, strangeness, suffering, and suppressed yet very present possibilities of the world in ways that tap into and cultivate energies more conducive to what Foucault called a “limit ethos,” that questions the “necessities” that so often “go without saying because they come without saying”?⁵ Might we engender transformative conducts in which patient labors give form to our impatience for freedom and commonwealth? How might we cocreate a habitus of durable transformative patterns and interactions that I shall refer to as game-transformative practices?

Along with a few colleagues and a couple of organizers in the Southeast Industrial Areas Foundation organizing network, we began to experiment with one modest incarnation of this hopeful possibility. We gathered organizers, grassroots leaders, and scholars from across the southeastern United States for a couple days of intensive conversation a few times a year around issues and texts concerning race, democracy, religion and politics, immigration, unions and community organizing, and so forth. The idea was to generate a radically different kind of encounter that might throw all of us a bit off balance, toss us out of comfort zones, and stir up creative energies. On the one hand, folks who spent most of their time in scholarly settings would engage the narratives and living theory of folks who spent a lot of time in the trenches. On the other hand, folks in the trenches would have an

opportunity to pause, reflect, and discuss scholarship pertinent to their struggles with those who had the luxury to spend countless hours reading and writing.

We called this initiative the Third Reconstruction Institute. The idea was that the first Reconstruction was in the process of creating an enormously transformative and promising radical democratic movement when it was crushed in the nineteenth century. Almost a hundred years later, the organizing tradition of the civil rights movement of the 1960s arose to reinvent U.S. democracy in unprecedented ways but was driven back once again. Amid so much promise and retrenchment, it was long past time to strive to generate a third reconstruction. Inspired by how important the intersections between scholars and activists had been in the 1960s, we wanted our engagements to be like watering holes, wellsprings—whirlpools where we would all commingle and jostle each other out of our dogmatic slumbers. The Third Reconstruction Institute, in other words, would be an effort to cocreate an indispensable part of a radical democratic habitus.

Move each other we did. Most of us with our heavy foot in academia quickly came to realize that the organizers and grassroots leaders from across the Southeast not only brought textured and gritty narratives to the table but also brought a trove of reflection and theorizing. To be sure, this theory was often not of the scholarly kind, but rather was born of repeated reflection at the intersection of their own experiences, those of others in their communities, as well as those in communities across the Southeast and beyond. A number of academics felt rumblings of inspiration and no small uneasiness at how good some of those outside the academy were at our own game. Maybe they were more interesting than we were. A mutual appreciation and respect began to develop across these differences that was—as we had hoped—a source of revitalization and uneasy jostling. And different people had different experiences and reflections in the gatherings. Some of the newer and less formally educated leaders in the grassroots organizing network felt put off by abstract academic language and references. Others were comfortable with and hungry for the different lenses these afforded. Many of us from various backgrounds started to make new connections and ask new questions that seemed crucial to and engendered by this distinctive kind of conversation. Most of the academics in the midst felt an increasing sense of narrowness and staleness in the more conventional discussion practices to which we returned, and went back to seek ways to change things.

The Third Reconstruction Institute was a modest effort to form a game-transformative practice that might press and midwife new possibilities for

democratization and justice into being. I suspect that such practices have been integral to every genuinely transformative movement of theory and practice. The idea of changing the game in the struggle for a better world is not new, but rather is an enduring (if episodic) pulse in many traditions. Lao-tzu, Jeremiah, Jesus, Buddha, many Native American trickster figures, and numerous others can each be read to (pre)figure such possibilities.

In this light, I think it is useful to begin our inquiry by considering a biblical story that has repeatedly been a source of inspiration and guidance for transformative movements, in order to glean insights into how underdogs and social movements can alter the spacing, timing, and practices of encounter in ways that change the conventional contestation—or game—to enable victories deemed highly improbable.

When Goliath, a gigantic, highly skilled, and heavily armed (and armored) fighting champion, steps out of the Philistine camp to challenge any Israelite to battle him to determine which nation will become enslaved, Saul and all the others are terrified. They have good reason. Goliath stands just a few inches shy of ten feet tall; he wears a coat of armor that weighs 125 pounds; the iron tip of his spear alone weighs 15 pounds. For forty days, twice each day, Goliath stands forth and shouts his challenge, and each time the Israelites “all fled from him in great fear” (1 Samuel 17:24 [NIV]). The king of Israel has offered the man who can kill Goliath great wealth and his daughter in marriage, but it makes no difference. There is no earthly measure that can overcome the trembling terror and hopelessness each soldier feels in the depths of his being. Goliath is the best at this game, and no one can conceive of beating him.

Except David, a young shepherd with no military experience, who volunteers for the battle and insists on fighting in spite of Saul’s resistance and others who dismiss him. When he is given the go-ahead, a string of game-changing events is under way. At first, David attempts to play the anticipated game, steps up, and dons armor and sword. Yet he quickly realizes that this will lead to defeat and then proceeds to dramatically alter the expected engagement: swapping his coat of mail and blade for five smooth stones and a slingshot, he steps forth, proclaims his purpose, slings a stone, and knocks that giant dead—thus releasing Israel from threatened servitude.

Marshall Ganz, an unusual scholar who dropped out of Harvard to join the civil rights movement, has fashioned his five smooth stones from five decades of involvement in grassroots political organizing. He is fascinated by David’s “unusually unconstrained approach to learning” and wonders how David is “so strategically resourceful,” “unlike anyone else on the battlefield.”⁶

What sets him apart? David draws from an incomparable depth of enthusiastic commitment—he perceives what he is about to do as a divine calling. In response, he moves beyond his comfort zone, puts on armor, and picks up weapons. Yet their impossible weight and demands press his imagination toward “new pathways, often employing bricolage to combine familiar elements in new ways.”⁷ As an outsider to combat, he reimagines the battlefield. In a responsive interplay of body and mind, he refuses the compartmentalized assumptions of the embattled polity, removes armor from his body, rearticulates what to most are separate spheres of pertinent capacities, and draws on body practices and movements he developed as a shepherd charged with protecting flocks from predators. As Ganz mixes insights from this narrative with those he gleaned as a leader in the United Farm Workers movement, he suggests that responsive enthusiasm is key. To become powerful, a social movement must combine extraordinary commitment with the commingling of extraordinary differences in ways that repeatedly propel it beyond the comfort zones of settled practices and assumptions. For a time, he suggests, the United Farm Workers gathered laborers, priests, rabbis, students, civil rights workers, lawyers, consumers, and more into a dynamic mix that forged new political vision and potent strategies of engagement that overwhelmed corporate forces that had far greater conventional resources.

There appear to be elements of wisdom here that have broad significance. In Ivan Arreguin-Toft’s study of every war in the past two centuries in which strong combatants were at least ten times as powerful as their weaker counterparts, he finds that the underdogs win 29 percent of the time.⁸ Even more remarkably, he finds that when Davids acknowledge their disadvantage and invent an unconventional strategy, they win nearly two-thirds of the conflicts. In other words, when people acknowledge that they can’t win the traditional contests and pursue radical alternatives, they can change the game and win far more often than not. Observing that “Davids win all the time,” Malcolm Gladwell suggests that what distinguishes Davids is that they discern and enact radical modulations of the spaces, times, and modes of engagement that most others take to be sharply delineated and immutable.⁹ When Lawrence of Arabia led Bedouin fighters who were (in conventional military senses) poorly trained and poorly armed in their uprising against the occupying Ottoman army, their success was due to the fact that they refused to wage a concentrated assault on the heavily armed Turkish garrison at Medina. Instead, they spatially dispersed the conflict by repeatedly attacking telegraph and railroad lines in unexpected places across hundreds of miles of desert. To enact this strategy

they deployed cognitive, imaginative, and physical abilities they gleaned from traveling in other contexts. Hence they deployed their incomparable knowledge of the land and capacities to move across uncanny distances at high speeds on camels in order repeatedly to confuse the Turks' sense of timing.

Examining a totally different terrain of contest, Gladwell arrives at similar conclusions in the case of his twelve-year-old daughter's basketball team in Silicon Valley, coached by a man from Mumbai. A cricket and soccer player profoundly puzzled by why basketball teams would usually rapidly retreat to their end of the court when the other team would inbound the ball, the coach decided to deviate from the accepted common sense and play intense full-court press "every game, all the time." With this dramatic alteration (imaginatively drawn from cricket and soccer) of the space, timing, practices, and intensities of conventional basketball, his team of nerdy "little blond girls" totally confused the strategies of other teams, utterly broke their rhythm, and made it all the way to the national championships.

What the protagonists in each of these stories have in common is a profoundly mobile imagination that is intertwined with bodily movement: as they move into new engagements, they draw on movements from other spheres of activity, to move in new ways. In each case, where most people perceptually appropriate a given terrain of encounter through an unquestioned and rigid lens, these Davids sense and imaginatively enact tremendous potentials that transform the very character of the contest. They sense and enact the hope of the hopeless.

Of course, the conventional patterns—and patterns of being myopically conventional—have a remarkable capacity to reassert their dominance, as shepherd David becomes King David and then reassumes a too-common sense, lords his sovereign power in relation to Uriah, commands an abusive census, and so forth. Ganz tells a parallel story of the ascent and descent of Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers.¹⁰ Thus, what interests me in these narratives is not that they are compelling examples of "game changers"—a term that typically indicates little more than the reversal of probabilities and outcomes in a given game due to an unexpected strategy, tapping into unsuspected sources, a wild card, and so forth. Such readings confine the significance of the events within the teleological narratives provided by the basic games and who wins them. What interests me, rather, is to modulate the temporality of reading; to tarry with the zone in which the actors are imagining and doing a new thing; to take *this emergence itself* as the focus of what is significant; to explore how that newness happens; and, whirling with the vertiginous possibilities that

unfold then and there, to ask questions concerning how we might gather insights from the event of game changers in order to create game-transformative practices. I read the protagonists as prototheorists, intertwining travel and theory in ways that give birth to imaginative and incisive thought and action.

These events go to the far edge of what we typically mean by “game changer,” insofar as they do more than implement an exceedingly smart strategy. Rather, they profoundly deviate from and challenge conventions that are taken for granted by nearly all who play. Yet their transgression of these conventions lacks resilience and also leaves the more elemental basics of the game unquestioned. In what I am calling a game-transformative practice, both commonsense conventions *and* basic institutional rules and orientations are altered, *and* the energies, sensibilities, and modes of moving, imagining, thinking, and acting associated with such transformations become partially embodied in practices through which they acquire significant resilience and regenerative powers. Sometimes game-transformative practices alter things dramatically and quickly; sometimes their processes are more incremental. Usually game-transformative practices involve a complex interanimation of multiple processes across a broad spectrum of transformative tempos, spaces, modes, and intensities.

The game-transformative practices of a radical democratic habitus for theory and politics that I seek in what follows would engender persistent patterns, practices, dynamics, and sensibilities that tend to further nurture our receptive and cocreative powers in relation to differences and collective possibilities typically unacknowledged by the dominant rules and common sense of any given time. These dynamics would in turn tend to enhance our capacities for radical reformations that further enhance our powers for receptive creativity and complex commonwealth. Clearly there is something paradoxical here, insofar as such game-transformative practices would hinge upon a profoundly receptive democratic common sense that seeks to radically reform itself in order to intensify these very capacities. Yet I will try to show in the chapters to follow that this paradox is neither a contradiction nor impossible, but rather a tension that can be negotiated through the vitality of political theory, vibrant scholarship, and democratic life—particularly in relation to practices of resonance, circulating movement, autocatalytic system dynamics, and the alternating electrical currents of radical democracy.

As I moved to and fro between practices of grassroots organizing and political action, on the one hand, and those of academic life, on the other, two things

became particularly tiresome. There was a too-frequent tendency on the part of my scholar-colleagues to dismiss the pertinence for “genuine theory” of movement in the world of political engagement. Being politically active was a “nice” thing, and perhaps a good thing to do as a member of the polity. Yet too few took seriously the idea that it might be integral to revitalizing political theory and scholarship. At the same time, there were many who inhabited the world of grassroots politics in flat-footed ways who had very little patience for theory that could not prove its immediate “relevance” and “applicability.” In both cases, it was easy to understand a moment of truth in some of their dismissive postures: there were types of action that did little to stretch, inform, or inspire inquiry; and there were types of inquiry that were so hermetically sealed in arcane bureaucracies of secondary and tertiary commentary that their broader significance seemed a stretch. Yet more often than not, such dismissive insistence also seemed tightly intertwined with defensive dispositions to constrain or even eliminate unorthodox gestures and unfamiliar possibilities. One result of my fatigue in the face of such responses was the emergence of a predisposition of my own, namely, the sense that endeavors to proliferate movements beyond the stultifying habitus of academic scholarship and stagnant politics should proceed by way of multiplication and juxtaposition, rather than truncation, new uniformities, and separations. A radical democratic habitus for theory, scholarship, and politics would require a complex and dynamic ecology of practices, not a new monoculture.

Insofar as the emergence of the energies, imagination, and cognitive shifting of game-transformative practices is intertwined with bodily travels and attentions that move beyond our comfort zones, the vision of a radical democratic habitus—for theory, for politics—would not consist of a new discipline founded on newly discovered “right movements.” The (cl)aim should not even be that every theorist and scholar must be deeply engaged in *unwonted* movement of some sort, in order to theorize well. In myriad relationships, each of us may be fed variously by the energies, comparisons, collaborations, insights, and wonder of others who theorize attentively in relation to journeys in proximate or distant places tabooed, maligned, or ignored. Receptive physical journeys may stimulate imaginative journeys; imaginative journeys may dispose us toward more receptive physical journeys; and the imaginative journeys of some feed those of others. The generative movements to and fro among these different types of traveling theory are as important as the movements within any single mode. Journeys toward critique, insight, wonder, new modes of democratic

collaboration and struggle are many. Many are oblique. And movement in each typically requires movement in others. Yet anyone who is half honest knows how unimaginative we often are, even as it is easy to overestimate our capacities. This concern here isn't to form a new uniformity but to move beyond the stultifying limits of the uniformity that is so pervasive in the academy today in ways that enhance radical democratic imagination and practice.

We would be terribly ill-served by a new regime that has no taste for the delights and fruits of endless hours in libraries buried in difficult scholarly texts (which remain among my favorite things). Rather, we *also* need a collaborative effort that cares—and cares profoundly—for the *ecology* of bodily movements and political involvements of political theory, scholarship, and pedagogy as a whole. We need collaborative initiatives in which we ask questions about this ecology from vantage points that are almost entirely ignored in most places today. Are we cultivating among ourselves and in our relations with the broader world an ecology of practices that nurture radically democratic imagination capable of moving beyond the ruts and walls of a professionalized habitus that render us increasingly dull—sometimes even as we perform our most radical posturing? Are we engendering an ecology of practices for theorizing that is conducive to vital and capacious responses to questions of commonwealth, earth, difference, and democracy? Are the practices and discourses of political theory favorable to an expansive, powerful, and pluralizing democratic “we”—the “we” of theory, the “we” of broader commonwealth? Or are we performing a shrinking “we” that moves, sounds, and looks more inward and administrative in modality and tone?

To tend to the ecology of our practices would mean considering these questions as elemental to the development of theory and politics. We would do so in collective decisions regarding hiring, promotion, tenure, teaching, institutional support, refashioning campus spaces, rethinking who counts as credible collaborators in scholarly inquiry, rearticulating the textual genres we engage and create, curricular design, and so forth.¹¹ We would care for this diverse ecology as a condition of possibility for theory and scholarship that has some chance to contribute to intensifications of democracy that can journey beyond enclosures, insane inequalities, and ecological catastrophe to cocreate commonwealth.

Black clouds and strong storm bands moved off across the desert. In the distance ahead, golden setting sunlight cast beams in every direction from behind Northern

Arizona's San Francisco Peaks that rise above Flagstaff, creating a dark and mysterious silhouette towering many thousand feet above us. Along this last stretch of interstate I was teeming with a giddy mix of anticipation, hopes, and aspirations, as well as some uncertainties and doubts. This journey felt right to me, but it was haunted by months of questions from many friends, colleagues, and family members, for whom my move from a top theory program to a "second-tier" public university in a state with a far-right-wing legislature that regularly expressed animosity toward education was unintelligible. Each evening for the previous few days, the car raced toward sunsets, and in the mornings, the sun was rising in the east as we were driving away. The intersecting movements of car and sunlight seemed to mirror my difficulty responding to people's consternation.

Beginnings are easier to imagine in relation to where you've been and experienced other beginnings. But as you move toward a markedly different future in a place you don't know much about, when you try to express it—not only to those who aren't going and haven't been, but even to yourself—the words you toss toward whatever glimpses of miracle you may have seen seem to either fall into a darkening horizon or to turn "biblical" in a sense that only the worst artists can portray. And so, the better part of what I had to say floated in a future that was necessarily quite indeterminate, somewhat improbable, and that always sounded (to me) a lot more grandiose than what I actually felt and imagined. Still, this sunset over a land of new beginnings was as compelling as any I've seen.

Months before this trip, in a job interview at Northern Arizona University, I had boisterously declared that if they were to offer me the directorship for the Program for Community, Culture, and Environment, I would spend a lot of my time engaged in attentive traveling in the community, seeking receptive collaborations with people in the poorer neighborhoods around town, many of whom were undocumented immigrants and Native Americans—and I would try to take a lot of students with me to community centers, schools, churches, and organizing centers because I suspected these people and places might be integral to teaching and learning about community, culture, and environment. This could get uncomfortable for the university, I noted, but generating democratic political thought and action with a vast range of people that universities typically try to exploit or ignore was vital to why I was interested in the job. I loved many of my students, colleagues, and opportunities at Duke, and I loved the political engagements in Durham that were a vital part of my daily life, but I was drawn by possibilities to help create a very different set of practices for political and ecological thought and action. And I thought the openings for such institutional change in higher education might be greater at a university that had a more regional identity,

professed commitments, and set of relationships, as well as fewer pressures to be an academic in the narrower disciplinary sense of the term.

During the six years since I came to NAU, many of my skeptical friends' and colleagues' concerns have been borne out, and this has posed great challenges: Arizona shifted farther to the right, and the sharp economic downturn of 2008 happened just as I arrived. This intersection of politics and economics led to massive budget cuts, virulent legislative attacks on ethnic studies, bills to allow concealed handguns on campuses, an unrelenting assault on all things public, and the harshest anti-immigrant regime in the nation. This shock politics has contributed to a climate of widespread fear, anxiety, cynicism, and exhaustion, as the number of tenured faculty has taken a plunge, while the number of contingent faculty and the size of the student body have grown enormously. Most of the colleagues with whom I had anticipated long-term interesting relationships have left for other universities.

At the same time, however, the last six years have been absolutely exhilarating, as initially indeterminate aspirations developed more quickly and profoundly than I could have ever imagined and morphed into myriad forms in relationships with diverse communities. Many elements of a radical democratic and ecologically resilient habitus for thinking, teaching, learning, and acting are being created and woven together in a process that is dynamic, interdisciplinary, and supple. Each semester, many hundreds of students, faculty, and community partners are involved in action research teams that combine academic knowledge and democratic engagement with community partners on issues ranging from grassroots democracy and sustainability education in K–12 schools; to energy efficiency and renewable energy; to water conservation and rights; to alternative agriculture on campus, in community gardens, and in K–12 schools; to immigration; to public spaces; to indigenous environmental justice; to cooperative and sustainable economics; to climate change; to alternative health practices; to art and political action; to velocomposting; to queer politics; to animal oppression, and more. This is to say that hundreds of students and many faculty members find themselves moving between seminars and K–12 schools in diverse neighborhoods, community centers, social movement meetings, agricultural plots, city council meetings, congregations, neighborhoods many would otherwise likely never visit, occasional street protests, and so on. In close conjunction with action research teams and seminars, a host of other spaces and practices are emerging—from self-organizing residential learning communities, to a green café, to sustainable student-organized gardens, to poetry jams, to a solidarity economy center called Mercado de los Sueños. For all the challenges we face, there is a level of enthusiasm

for this work among students and faculty that is incomparable on campus: growing numbers of people are getting involved; modest yet significant resources are flowing our way; and promising forms of theory, scholarship, pedagogy, and political practice are pressing into being. Similar enthusiasms for this work are growing among members and groups in the wider community and to a lesser but significant degree among some in the university administration.

I am an avid cyclist, and I find myself cycling an hour or two each day back and forth across town (a person who has trouble being on time, I am always sprinting) to meetings where we are in dialogue, imagining, organizing, learning, thinking anew, frequently discovering “smooth stones” and different ways to use them. The habitus we are creating is coursing with movement—people walking attentively and listening to stories in unfamiliar neighborhoods, struggling to bridge histories of colonialism, hostility, and indifference through attentive conversations and collaborations for a complex, plural, and dynamic commonwealth. We are relearning how to regenerate ecological resilience through macro and micro political movements, and also by tending to the soil, plants, and creatures that live here—the way water moves across the land, how plants grow near the south faces of stones.

Why am I telling you all this? As I have said, this book is not simply about these things, this pedagogy, the specifics of this political work and action—it is also *from* this work and action. It is imagined, theorized, practiced, and written from this strange and evolving habitus, as well as the intersection of this habitus and the habitus that still prevails in most universities and conferences where I also regularly collaborate. Hence, when I am discussing mirror neurons, resonance, circulation, complex dynamic systems theory, democratic natality, hope, and social movements—even in the most philosophical moments, I am often thinking from this work and these intersections, informed and inspired by them in ways that offer something that I think is somewhat distinctive among scholars. I am also a strange radical evangelist *for* these types of habitus. I hope my account is interesting.

It is intentionally polyvocal, in the sense that it is written with more than one audience in mind. On the one hand, I continue to engage in the scholarly conversations and communities that have excited me for decades in spite of the detrimental limits discussed here. This book seeks to make a contribution there, even as no minor part of this contribution is to call the habitus of conventional academia and politics into question—to call many of those

who inhabit it to move and attend to the world differently. On the other hand, the book is also written *to* and *for* those engaged in or searching for alternative modes of theorizing, pedagogy, and political practice. It seeks to make a contribution concerning *a way* of pulling these endeavors into new relationships that may enable us to become more capable of initiating new and more hopeful paths before it is too late—or perhaps even after that. In this text I interweave these endeavors, but I also give each the space I think it needs in order to do its work and sing its own song.

I conceive of the work that follows as *visionary pragmatism*. One important way to think of visionary pragmatism is as an energetic refusal of how these two words have so often been opposed to each other, by people on more than one side of more than one antagonism. Visionary pragmatists seek the resonance *and* dissonance of this pairing, even as others generate contradictory frames to secure various borders of theory and politics.

Consider the terms. On the one hand, people invested in politics and theory that adheres to the textures, flows, and limits of the present often marshal pragmatism to dismiss far-ranging critique and alternative vision as impractical, irrelevant, and hence of no value to the world that matters. Unjust suffering is happening now, and we should attend to it in ways that have short- and medium-term impacts on the current order of things. We should work with the standard tools that are available, even as we make some adjustments. This kind of pragmatist often uses this argument to fence his or her work off from calls for more “transformative” theory and practice.¹² On the other hand, many who are invested in projects for radical critical thought and political action explicitly refuse the demand that theory (and political engagement) be oriented by ambitions that are practical and relevant according to the present horizons of time, spatiality, and meaning.¹³ Often the most important work we can do may be to question those horizons and seek possibilities—however indeterminate and distant—beyond their dead ends of violence, injustice, and ecocide. Such disruption, whether by means of theory or political practice, can be extremely important, long before an alternative horizon and political strategies have been articulated. “Pragmatism” here names a line to be criticized rather than crossed.

In refusing this binary, visionary pragmatism is *pragmatic* insofar as it relentlessly thinks, works, and acts on the limits of the present, drawing forth and engendering new resonances, receptivities, relationships, movements,

circulations, dynamics, practices, powers, institutions, strategies, shocks, and so forth, in an effort to contribute to desirable changes in our lived worlds. Yet it is *visionary* in the sense that it maintains an intransigent practice of peering underneath, above, around, through, and beyond the cracks in the destructive walls and mainstream ruts of this world. It lingers in eddies, catches cross-currents, and cultivates new flows that spill through these cracks and flood beyond the banks. It has an unquenchable appetite for visions that come from beyond hegemonic common sense or exceed it from within, and it devotes itself to looking for clues of these, listening to whispers near and far that articulate suggestive possibilities beyond the assumed boundaries, and seeking modes of political engagement that help inspire, energize, inform, and enact them. The ways that we think, work, and act are forever informed and inspired by visions—both immanent and transcendent—that again and again call us to “do a new thing” that nurtures democratic possibilities and ecological flourishing. And doing new things may nurture such visions.

Visionary pragmatism is oriented by a profound sense that the alternative resonances, flows, and system dynamics associated with the political work and action of a radical democratic habitus can be indispensable for opening our senses and enhancing our capacities for theorizing and scholarship. Moreover, I shall argue that when such work and action is done well, it can create self-regenerating dynamics that enliven rather than vitiate the richly emergent characteristics of game-transformative practices. For visionary pragmatists, then, vision and pragmatism must often be dynamically interwoven in order to avoid quickly taking reified forms that become increasingly functional for the dominant order. Visionary pragmatists recognize ways in which each side can also threaten and undermine the other, but we believe that it is necessary to take these risks because the binary alternatives (when they are pursued in ways that intensify homogeneous academic ecologies on either side) are almost always employed in ways that lead to theoretical and political dead ends.

When I say that this book is written from the radical democratic habitus we are generating, I mean that it is opened, oriented, energized, and informed by the mobile intersections of theory and practice that are pressed into being there, in ways that may be integral to radical democratic and ecologically resilient transformations. Insofar as we take seriously at least some of the ways in which theory and travel have been closely associated for eons, this claim should not be so preposterous as to be met with dismissal. What is involved is not a claim to epistemological privilege, but rather a theory of some of the conditions of movement and practice that are conducive to and generative

of alternative and promising insights. Like all insights, these need to be examined, explored, criticized, and extended from a variety of angles and in a variety of engagements. To make a claim for certain possibilities of insight that may occur in the movements of a radical democratic habitus is not to make pretenses to epistemological invulnerability, but just the opposite. Only by undergoing vulnerable encounters and criticism is there any hope of learning how we might live less poorly—or even well. Yet visionary pragmatists will insist that critical self-reflection upon the habitus in relationship to which one thinks, works, and acts becomes an integral part of the conversation, for in the absence of such reflection, our endeavors will be “precritical” in the worst possible manner. This insight is as old as traveling theory.

The chapters that follow offer a visionary pragmatic account of an emergent habitus of radical and ecological democracy. Both critical and generative, each chapter analyzes a dimension of power that is an elemental aspect of the contemporary catastrophe and explores emergent counterpractices and alternative practices in relation to it that are beginning to generate ethical-political powers that I take to be indispensable to promising movements for democracy, ecological resilience, and commonwealth. Of course, these different aspects of power are not isolated from each other but rather interconnected in amplifactory webs—in both their catastrophic and their more hopeful forms. My discussions in each chapter move back and forth between theory and scholarship drawn from many fields and from participant-observer accounts from the democracy and ecology movement in which I have been a leader during the past six years at Northern Arizona University and in Northern Arizona.

In chapter 1, “The Neuropolitical Habitus of Resonant Receptive Democracy,” I begin with a critical analysis of the contemporary right-wing resonance machine and turn to how we might theorize and practice a politics of radically receptive resonance that animates rather than euthanizes democratic relationships and power. I was drawn to this theme as I experienced and reflected upon face-to-face interactions both in political organizing contexts and in classrooms. Anyone who teaches young adults who have been subjected to overcrowded, underfunded, test-driven education is familiar with blank faces. The same could be said for the faces of many faculty members grown weary from shock doctrine attacks on higher education. Yet one of the most profound manifestations of radically democratic engaged pedagogies is the emergence of resonant faces: faces of university students lit up by attentive curiosity,

empathy, questions, unexpected possibilities, and enthusiasm in the midst of an encounter in a nearby impoverished neighborhood, and long after; faces of K–12 students as they begin to work in a grassroots action research team, learning concepts of democracy as they explore and enact them together; faces of parents and community members challenging an elected official or a police officer in a public meeting; faces of faculty working together on a new action research network, or faces of faculty seeing their college students' faces light up in relation to the faces of third graders and their parents practicing democracy; faces of people around a table of conversation on emerging collaborations and possibilities for cooperative economics—seized by mimetic energies of excitement they can barely contain, and sometimes can't; faces of students, faculty, and community members gathered around a table deeply engaging a text that is pertinent to this action.

Early in my work at NAU, I became fascinated with the interactions among excited faces because, when this work is going well, this buzz is more frequent and energetic than in most other kinds of pedagogical contexts. Often, this resonance is intertwined with the birth of public relationships, the conceptualization of new political strategies, and the imaginative articulations of emergent sensibilities and vision. My interest in the power of expressive faces was magnified as I myself frequently felt swept up and charged—theoretically and politically—when I encountered them. And so, a few passing comments on mirror neurons sent me into a rather extensive investigation of these one-fiftieth-of-a-second resonant mimetic relationships between faces and bodies that are integral to cognition and (inter)action, yet are rarely given serious attention in considerations of political life. At the intersection of moving encounters in our theory and practice, it was becoming clear that we were in the process of cocreating elements of an alternative to what William Connolly calls the “capitalist evangelical resonance machine.”¹⁴

When NAU students succeeded in getting the university to provide space and support for a sustainable café that would be a site for democratic engagement, we quickly approached Shonto Begay—a brilliant Navajo (Dine) artist whose work is expressive of many aspects of the ethos that animates engaged pedagogy—to see if he would be willing to work with students to do a large mural in the café. Through a process of extensive conversation and collaboration, an electrically beautiful painting now greets all who work and dine in this space. When Shonto and I were discussing the mural, he told me that he conceives of all his painting as a process of visual drumming—a tapping on the canvas (or wall) that resonates with the broader world to engender a visual

expression that at once embodies and enlivens the vibrant interconnections among things. In a most profound sense, then, the resonance of the mural both registers and contributes to the resonant interactions of people in the café. This chapter explores these resonant relationships at the heart of our work—from the cellular level, through bodies, assemblages of bodies, specific democratic practices, and (less extensively) a variety of communications media. Through a careful—if nonexpert—engagement with the neuroscience of mirror neurons, I begin to construct an argument for the possibility of a radical democratic habitus at the cellular level that can engender and support game-transformative practices, rather than practices that are merely reproductive, as Bourdieu would suggest. I argue that these processes and mimetic energies have the potential to dislodge and provide a radical democratic alternative to the dominant resonant machine.

Chapter 2, “From Mega-circulatory Power to Polyface Flows,” pursues themes of resonant *movement* that begin to emerge in chapter 1, in order to consider counterconducts and alternative conducts to the vast arteries and capillaries of circulatory power that are integral to contemporary forms of governmentality. The mirror neurons that undergird our capacities of perception, recognition, and comprehension develop in relation to the movements of our own bodies and those of others with whom we are engaged. This chapter tends more carefully not only to the character of these movements but also to the movements of our bodies in relation to the world of beings and things that is set into circulation (or already moving) all around us. The chapter begins with a discussion of Foucault’s interpretation of ways in which contemporary power operates through the proliferation, management, and juxtaposition of massive circulations, and develops these insights in the context of gargantuan flows of oil, corn, factory-farmed animals, water, people, finance, capital, political power, military, soil, and so forth. I understand the increasingly hybridized and fluid forms of political economy that Sheldon Wolin calls superpower and inverted totalitarianism as institutional articulations of this circulatory regime. In the context of a world and people increasingly being reengineered according to the imperatives of this malignant circulatory apparatus, this chapter examines a plethora of new—yet often unrecognized—social movements that are creating an assemblage of “new materialist” counterflows and alternative flows of things, beings, energy, people, capital, and radical democratic practices of moving democracy.¹⁵

I examine and theorize these new materialist social movements primarily through the lens of alternative agriculture and food politics (and to a lesser

extent, renewable energy) initiatives that are proliferating at impressive rates, developing a notion of “polyface” flows inspired by Emmanuel Levinas’s notion of the “face” and radical eco-farmer Joel Salatin’s practices of cultivating receptive flows on his Polyface Farm. In the form of thousands of farmers’ markets, community-supported agriculture (CSA) arrangements, grassroots community gardening initiatives, food policy councils, farm-to-school collaborations, fair trade practices—as well as inflections of each by environmental justice initiatives that address issues of class and race—alternative patterns of material flows and powers are emerging that increasingly contest the neoliberal regime of governmentality. In a project focused solely on circulatory politics, there would be space to develop similar accounts in relation to emergent flows of people and things in the realm of energy, water, soil, clothing, capital, finance, medicine, transportation, new monasticism, and so forth.

The ethics and politics of movement and new materialist flows are a vital element in our public work, political action, and theoretical reflection at NAU, and these surely inform the work that follows. Indeed, before I came to NAU, my political involvements with Durham CAN (Congregations, Associations, and Neighborhoods, an Industrial Areas Foundation affiliate)—particularly the ways in which receptive movement across the city was integral to the organizing process—played an indispensable role in theorizing “moving democracy,” which developed related insights.¹⁶ In our action research teams, we are continually imagining, theorizing, and enacting an alternative politics of circulation based on attentive movements. In our grassroots democracy education initiative, scores of students travel to schools in neighborhoods in Flagstaff, where they form relationships by listening attentively and coaching K–12 students to work together in ways that are similarly attentive. Meanwhile broader community organizing efforts with which we collaborate practice a similar politics of receptive relationship building across myriad differences of places, people, and so forth. In the campus, community, and school garden action teams, attentive and careful movement with plants, soil, compost, and water forms the heart of our work—as do experiments with establishing healthy symbiotic microflows and relationships among all these elements and among the diverse peoples involved in the gardens. Hence, quotidian experiences with people who are reflectively involved in such flows have played a vital role in giving birth to the theoretical work that follows.

This habitus of emerging flows (at NAU and in many other places as well) also importantly informs the writing that follows insofar as I write (partly) to those involved in these practices. Specifically, in this chapter I am concerned

to provide a narrative and theoretical understanding of this work and action that suggests an alternative to more territorial and nostalgic readings and self-interpretations. It is not uncommon in the literatures on environment and place to inflect this work toward *rooting*, reestablishing deep connections with localities, creating a relocalized dominion of land stewardship, and returning to a nostalgic sense of the simplicity of an earlier time. In contrast, it is crucial to supplement rooting narratives with narratives that accent *routing*—a political ecology of receptive and generous movements in the midst of a world teeming with human and nonhuman complexities, migrants, and differences.¹⁷ A new materialist politics of tending ought to be understood and practiced as deterritorializing, nurturing relationships across myriad scales and dimensions of being, becoming inventive and imaginative of complex dynamic practices, and cultivating hospitality as a central motif in our thought, work, and action. The theory of receptive circulation—or polyface flows—seeks to illuminate and intensify what I take to be most hopeful in new materialist movements, at a time when problems of ecological catastrophe and human dislocation are growing rapidly along with dangers of resurgent racism, xenophobia, and class-war-from-above politics.

While chapter 2 builds on chapter 1 by focusing on movement more than resonant receptivity—even as the two are utterly intertwined—its most distinctive contribution is to show how cocreating a radical and ecological democratic habitus greatly hinges upon how we both craft and tend to flows of beings and things around us, and how we let be vast portions of the circulations of air, water, soil, insects, flora, and fauna in ecological systems in which we are immersed. The question of how we move attentively (or not) in relation to the flows of beings and things we let be, and how we foster, interweave, and tend to flows of other beings and things we set in motion is integral to the kind of ethical-political powers we are able to bring forth in human and nonhuman communities.

If we accept that radical democratic and ecologically resilient pedagogies and politics are emerging that contest and venture alternatives to dominant forms of contemporary power, are there reasons to be hopeful that these still comparatively small movements might suggest possibilities with any significant chance of engendering systemic transformation? Given that such movements are often radically precarious and short-lived, is there reason to think that recent democratic initiatives might engender a degree of resilience? And if so, what sorts of insights and theoretical analyses might enhance these possibilities?

In chapter 3, “System Dynamics and a Radical Politics of Transformative Co-optation,” I argue that systems theory can make indispensable contributions to the potential and transformative power of radically democratic initiatives. It enables us to understand emergence, duration, resilience, and self-organizing transformation as immanent conditions of each other’s possibility and power, and it offers a compelling heuristic for theorizing and organizing.

While my interest in systems theory dates back to my undergraduate fascination with Gregory Bateson, Irvin Laszlo, Ludwig Bertalanffy, and myriad articulations in ecology, physics, chemistry, sociology, economics, and political theory, I leave most of that to the side in this chapter. For my ambition here has nothing to do with providing an extensive scholarly engagement with the terrain of systems thinking as such. Broad overviews of core ideas have been provided many times, including discussions of insights that have become widespread, as well as those that are the subject of intense contestation. In her classic work, *Thinking in Systems*, Donella Meadows focuses on introducing “core ideas” while leaving “the leading edge” for others to address.¹⁸ In contrast, in chapter 3, I focus my engagement on one “leading edge” of complex dynamical systems theory, namely, Stuart Kauffman’s theory of self-organization, and examine what it might offer to the theory and practice of organizing resilient forms of democratic emergence. I am particularly interested in Kauffman’s ideas on autocatalysis—or the ways in which processes generate conditions of their own reproduction and thereby acquire self-generative characteristics.

Ultimately, I think that Kauffman’s work in complex dynamic systems theory suggests ways of understanding and seeking to cocreate democratic transformation that make significant advances over much contemporary democratic theory and practice. Kauffman de-reifies systems so that they no longer appear a priori as closed totalities. Instead, they are complex assemblages of processes in relation to which it may be possible to generate emergent autocatalytic dynamics that tip systems toward alternative equilibriums, transformed patterns, and so forth. If systems are mutable in these ways, then antidemocratic systems of political economy ought to once again become a focus of our transformative energies, rather than forces we accept as immutable—attempting merely to hold them somewhat “accountable” from the terrain of “civil society.”

One of the most significant insights in this chapter concerns a theory and practice of *co-optative systems dynamics*. The idea here is that we can link certain aspects of radically democratic autocatalytic systems dynamics to particular dynamics of non- or antidemocratic systems in order to co-opt them in ways that intensify our own powers. As we connect with certain nondemocratic

system dynamics in order to advance autocatalytic features of our own, we can exponentially expand our capacities to resist and transform neoliberalism. Indeed, this co-optation has been one of the most important innovations—and an elemental condition—of the radical and ecological democracy movement at NAU and in Northern Arizona. If it were to spread to other institutions of higher education and regions, it would be nothing short of revolutionary.

Kauffman's work adds significant insight into how emergence and duration ought to be conceived as conditions of each other's possibility—rather than antitheses, as many strands of contemporary political analysis and theory would have it. In this way, his thinking further contributes to our effort to theorize the possibility of cultivating a radical democratic habitus. Moreover, if natality and persistence may be best understood as potentially cogenerative, then theoretical reflections concerning specific modes of organizing radical democracy can move beyond the antinomy in which organization is either ignored or gestural, on the one hand, or so foundational that the basic modes of organizing are themselves largely removed from democratic processes of contestation and emergence, on the other. My sense is that Kauffman's theory of modular "patchwork" learning processes provides a compelling heuristic for reflecting on democratic organizing in theory and practice.

As with the other chapters, my engagement with Kauffman stems from our efforts to create a radical democratic habitus. His theory of autocatalysis drew my attention in the way that it did precisely because I found myself involved in numerous initiatives in which we were attempting to catalyze democratic energies and dynamics that might become more self-sustaining and resilient. Kauffman provided a theoretical lens that both made sense of and has powerfully informed some of our efforts. At the same time, our efforts predisposed some of us to read his work on chemical reactions and biological dynamics in ways that developed radical democratic implications that move significantly beyond his own forays into politics and economics.

In the last chapter of this book, "Shock Democracy and Wormhole Hope in Catastrophic Times," I step back to reassess possibilities for political transformation in the context of neoliberal shock politics and the likelihood of climate catastrophe. I argue that Naomi Klein's work ought to become more salient in contemporary theories of power. In a grim supplement to the complex intertwinements and modulations of circulatory biopolitics, disciplinary power, and sovereignty, shock politics repeatedly sends devastating charges through political bodies. Contemporary power works by means of alternating currents: it sends shocking surges of power that tend to level old and new

resistances, followed by mega-circulations that proliferate capillary flows, microresonances, and autocatalytic dynamics in ways that reengineer people, things, urban spaces, and finance, followed again by additional shock surges that further decimate resistance and create conditions for renewed intensifications of governmentalized circulations, resonances, and so on.

If we return to the narrative of David and Goliath, in which David's performance intimates key themes that are characteristic of game-transformative practices, we might say that in contemporary times, Goliath has become a masterful David. Goliath has learned the arts of radical and relentless game transformation. In the form of global neoliberal capitalism, Goliath is no longer a dumb giant but a dynamic malignancy that has developed transformative powers of an alternating current that are nearly unfathomable. In this context, we must supplement the work we have done in earlier chapters. It is not enough to learn from David in our efforts to initiate the game-transformative practices of a radical democratic habitus. We must also learn from the Goliath who has learned from David, without becoming ourselves what is horrendous about Goliath.

I theorize this in terms of the need to carefully interweave the shocking politics of outrageous ephemeral protest performances—such as Occupy, the Battle of Seattle, the nationwide immigrant marches, 350.org rallies—with the quotidian politics and receptive flows of broad-based community organizing. While others have called for making such connections in order that the momentary characteristics of the former can be channeled into the more durable modalities of the latter, I accent another aspect of the relationship between these two political modalities. In my view, the most profound reason that the two modes must be intertwined in a complex and subtle strategy is that the political natality of each mode hinges on the political natality of the other. Hence the democratic political capacities of each are greatly hampered when disconnected from the other. Nevertheless, one of the most common moves in contemporary democratic theory is to “take sides”—affirming one modality over the other. This unwittingly unplugs the powers of each. What we can learn from the Goliath who has learned from David is that when dramatic surges are connected with micropolitical flows and resonances in the politics of alternating currents, each grows more powerful as it empowers the other. In the context of our discussion of movements for radical democracy and ecological resilience, this means that the politics of receptive resonance and attentive circulation can greatly enhance its autocatalytic system dynamics if it can connect the natalities of dramatic action with those of quotidian politics

of tending. This is, I think, indispensable for cultivating transformative power in our times.

Nevertheless, even if we make significant headway on this latter front in order to effectively counter shock politics, we will still face the overwhelming likelihood that climate change will radically erode the stability that has characterized the Holocene period during which human civilizations of the past ten thousand years have taken form. We will face a storm-shocked Eearth (to borrow Bill McKibben's term).¹⁹ My sense is that this will require that we develop capacities to modulate genres in order not to succumb to cycles of self-reinforcing despair. Visionary pragmatism orients us toward working with our chin up to build expansive imagination and a movement that enhances radical democratic power and ecological resilience. However much this work always faces setbacks and discontinuities, visionary pragmatism accents a kind of at least modestly hopeful politics in which prospects for imagining and building a movement with substantial continuity are not unreasonable. I take it that this genre is an indispensable aspect of radical democracy, even as long-term horizons, wild patience, and the unanticipatable must be a constitutive part of the strange perspective it offers.

Nevertheless, my guess is that though necessary, this will not be sufficient. Human beings will likely face a world in which storms, droughts, floods, fires, and so forth, will far more often destabilize much that we seek to build, and repeatedly create massive numbers of climate refugees—all of which will likely pose monumental challenges that not infrequently overwhelm our capacities to cope well and maintain desirable continuities. In the context of a storm-shocked Eearth, then, we will likely also require something like what I call “wormhole hope,” in order to cultivate passage across especially bleak periods to come. Wormhole hope is a faith that the better intensities of movements for democratic communities and ecological care can survive underground, across vast stretches of time and space where they appear to be absent, and re-surface with an uncanny power to establish resurgent relationships for democratic and ecological renewal across apparently impossible and discontinuous times and places. It is a faith that our best works will endure in this way, even if they “fail” according to more continuous coordinates of time and space, by which we must also continue to orient our endeavors. It is a faith in strange future possibilities that is born of histories in which we have seen retrospectively, time and again, how unfathomable—and unfathomably powerful—connections happen across vast expanses of time and space in which continuities (of democracy, freedom, equality, etc.) were not discernible. Such connections,

then, rapidly develop powers to disrupt and transform the continuities (of hierarchy, subjugation, inequality, ecocide, etc.) that we had come to think were immutable.

This happens; we know it does. It may seem bleak to raise the need for cultivating such faith in the context of a visionary pragmatic work. Yet I don't see it this way, partly because the darkness stems not from the theory but from the conditions in which we will likely find ourselves, and partly because visionary pragmatism will be neither visionary nor pragmatic if it fails to address a world in which continuities will more frequently be disrupted. When lines of vision, work, and action that we may presently take for granted are broken, we will need to cultivate ways of seeing, working, and acting that can harbor and unfold different kinds of power across especially dark times. This is to say that a visionary pragmatism that fails to address tragedy will almost certainly succumb to it, whereas one that cultivates wormhole hope may have significant resources for generating words and deeds that make indispensable contributions to maintaining Ralph Ellison's "raft of hope" when the seas become especially stormy and wash across much of the land—or when the waters depart.²⁰

Once we recognize the ways in which ricocheting trajectories often unexpectedly connect struggles across the most disparate times, territoriality comes undone insofar as these connections leap far beyond spatial borders in ways that are impossible to control. Consider how the theory and practice of non-violence leaps from Jesus in the Middle East, to Thoreau in New England, to Tolstoy in Russia, to Gandhi in India, to Martin Luther King Jr. and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee across the U.S. South, and beyond. These movements cannot be controlled by the master narratives of nation-state sovereignty. Like ecosystems whose flourishing depends on what Rebecca Solnit poetically refers to as "weightless seeds" that come from far away—literal seeds, and metaphoric ones like rain, water, birds, fish, insects, and migrating mammals—so too does the flourishing of human communities. In a world that will soon be populated by many hundreds of millions of climate refugees, nothing will be more important than deterritorializing radical and ecological democratic sensibilities and practices. To this end, I argue that the "hospitality for weightless seeds"—for all those tossed into motion by shock doctrine and a storm-shocked planet—is indispensable if we are to avoid absolute barbarism.

These reflections on wormhole hope and the hospitality for weightless seeds, too, emerged in the context of our efforts to create political and pedagogical transformation, examining questions of what and how we ought to "pass on" to younger generations, dwelling as we are in the U.S. Southwest, which by

all accounts is likely to become one of the epicenters of climate catastrophe—and is already the epicenter of migration from the south and neofascistic responses to it. What does it mean to learn and teach to live well—to speak, love, work, tend, and act politically in ways that cultivate relationships and a world we want to see, and help us survive the storm-shocked world we want not? Such questions come with nearly unbearable poignancy from younger people awakening both to theories and practices of radical hope and to a human and ecological catastrophe in their midst of proportions they had never dreamed. A broadening and deepening “we” is learning and struggling to respond. Much of what follows is emerging in this process.