

Assignment: Practicum Essay Abstract
Course: HUMA 5015 Practicum
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Title: Grounded in the Present, Pointing Towards the Future

Abstract: Changing the world means acting in the world – the world as it is, not as we might like it to be. It therefore requires a keen responsiveness to the present if it is to succeed. At the same time, changing the world means allowing our activities to be organized in part through a responsiveness to something else, to that which we desire that is not-yet – that is, it means relating somehow to the future as well as to the present. Not only does that sound like rather a challenging tension to navigate, it is also not entirely clear what “relating to the future” actually means for action in the present. In many social movement contexts, the operating assumption is that pointing towards the future can only happen through explicit vision combined with deliberate action. My recent experience working with a local food co-operative was an example where this seemingly essential combination did *not* hold – the food co-op pointed towards a transformed future yet was not attached to any kind of vision or intent for social change. Based on this experience, in the essay I break down the movement-based assumption into its component parts, and use those to explore how a number of different kinds of practices in the present – conceptual, oppositional, prefigurative, and potentiating – can be understood as pointing towards transformed futures. In the course of discussing these kinds of practices, the paper arrives at a picture of social change that is not a smooth, linear narrative, but something much more fragmented and untidy. It concludes with some general and tentative suggestions about what these explorations imply for working towards more just and liberatory futures as we remain firmly grounded in the present.