Spirals of Perpetual Potential

How Empowerment Projects' Noble Missions Tangle in Everyday Interaction

NINA ELIASOPH

A newly prevalent kind of organization is spreading across the globe. It is supposed to, at once, both alleviate poverty and promote civic participation by involving disadvantaged people in solving problems rather than treating them only as victims. Beyond the goals of promoting civic engagement and helping the needy, these organizations' list of missions typically includes promoting transformation and innovation; appreciating grassroots, local, unique people and customs; and promoting sustainability. And above all, they have a mandate[1] to provide transparent accounts to funders and to do it all quickly.

I call these organizations *empowerment projects* and the language that they use to describe their work *empowerment talk.*[2] Scholars and practitioners have had high hopes for such projects, and, indeed, all of their goals are potentially laudable. But they are difficult to align with one another. All the multiple promises tangle with one another, but to keep everyday interaction possible, participants must find shared methods of smoothing out the tangles between each of the missions.

This chapter asks the following questions:[3] How, in one set of empowerment projects, did the goals of promoting civic participation and helping the needy come into tension with one another? How, in everyday interaction, did participants manage to make them harmonize? Empowerment projects are usually predicated on the existence of neediness and powerlessness. But the very instant that participants enter, participants are supposed to deny need's existence altogether, so that they can work together as civic equals. How, in everyday interaction, did participants manage to act as if they did not know about the very thing that brought their organization into existence to begin with?

Here, I will focus only on one of the most surprising, strange, but typical techniques for decoupling these two noble missions from one another—acting as if this inequality is already a thing of the past, as of the very moment that one begins to participate. This temporal leapfrog echoes the verb form called the "future perfect," the form of a verb used to describe an act in the future that will have already been finished: "I *will have* eaten lunch"; "We *will have achieved* equality," for example. In English, it takes the form "will or shall have" + "past participle." In these empowerment projects, this interactional sleight of hand did not usually solve the problem of inequality but only

projected it into a utopian future when it already *will have been* solved. One result in the cases portrayed here is that in everyday interaction, both helping the needy *and* civic participation usually fell by the wayside. The emotional and political toll of this sleight of hand was often high.

This chapter draws on a nearly five-year-long ethnographic study of a network of such organizations. First, it will show that volunteers implicitly knew just how important inequality was to the very existence of their empowerment projects. It next shows that participants shared routines that allowed them simultaneously to rely on unspoken knowledge of inequality in order to decipher each other's speech and action, and to ignore this same inequality while interacting. To resolve the tensions between the mantra's missions of "civic participation" and "helping the needy" in practice, participants often focused relentlessly on this hoped-for, abstract image of a bright future, while giving no attention to the past and little attention even to participants' current conditions.

Decoupling One Goal from Another in Everyday Interaction

By understanding how this one set of missions—between promoting civic participation and helping the needy—come into tension, and how participants manage to merge them, we can see *how*, in everyday interaction, key rationales for empowerment projects often snarl with one another.

As we have seen in many of this book's chapters, empowerment projects' missions add up to a veritable *mantra*, calling for engagement that is:

Civic: Open, egalitarian, voluntary, makes the volunteer into a responsible independent citizen

Appreciative of unique people, customs, and conditions: Comfortable, hands-on, community-based, natural-feeling, grassroots; not reliant on distant, abstract experts; not bureaucratic, not hierarchical

Transformative: Innovative, soul-changing, multicultural, aimed at getting you to "break out of your box" and to "stretch your comfort zone"

Sustainable, rather than dependent on outside funding

Helpful to the needy

And they have a mandate to do it all with speedy accountability, to please multiple, distant, hurried sponsors

In the empowerment projects I studied, each of these aims frequently came into conflict with the others. For example, being "transformative" often meant challenging, rather than simply "appreciating" and celebrating people's unique customs. Promoting "civic participation" meant, to some organizers, being open to all, but organizers of programs that were conducted in Spanish for recent immigrant youth wanted to give their kids a "safe space" after a long day immersed in a foreign culture and language. Those organizers did not want to encourage their kids to mingle with diverse others at

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that moment. The mandate for "speedy accountability" does not cause *all* of the con-flicts, but all the missions collide most pervasively, frequently, and forcefully when the mandate for "speedy accountability" was part of the collision.[4] Here, I focus on only the tension between promoting civic participation and helping the needy, and only on one method of reconciling them.

Many scholars have usefully pointed out that *no* organization simply lives up to its lofty, abstract promises, because the rules never completely match the unruly reality, so, to understand how people in an organization actually get things done, the researcher has to take their unspoken methods of "decoupling" into account.[5] Whether "loosely" or "tightly" coupled,[6] words never match actions.

As a backdrop to this chapter, I need to extend this argument, with two proposals. One is that an organization's missions might conflict with one another: An intensive care unit for babies evokes different kinds of responsibility from parents and doctors, for example, and the two approaches have to harmonize enough to come to agree-ments about treatment.[7] Second, we can expect that when people smooth out the ten-sions, in practice, they will develop everyday routines for doing so. It will be like other kinds of social order—relatively predictable and not simply random and ad hoc, but more patterned than scholars have usually understood. Participants have to master a *finite set of routine methods* for detaching and reattaching one mission from another, in everyday interaction. In my ethnographic research, I heard several such techniques.

The process of temporal leapfrog, of implicitly invoking the future perfect, was one particularly creative decoupling method. "Sustainable," "prevention," "at-risk youth": Many of the key terms that empowerment projects rely on are about a possibly risky, possibly wonderful future. Thus, Margaret Frye shows how young women in Malawi's NGO-sponsored education projects set their career sights high, sacrificing marriage and family for a while so that they can continue their educations.[8] The price of this relentless focus on a "bright future" will be worth it if the girl ends up with a steady job, but often, tragically, she ends up with neither marriage nor family nor job. The cases described in this chapter show face-to-face interaction that relies on this use of tem-poral leapfrog to reconcile divergent missions, but McQuarrie's chapter in this volume shows how whole cities build investment strategies that lean on a not-quite-yet existent, maybe-never-will-be-existent future. In them, the original question for many organiz-ers—whether a general redistribution of wealth might fix the problem—vanishes.

This routine method of decoupling one mission from another could be called *tem-poral leapfrog*, invoking the future perfect before anything has been perfected. It is one illustration of the broader argument: These empowerment projects had not only typical tensions, but also typical methods for reconciling them. It is in these every-day, minute encounters that organizations, and the selves that can populate them, are made.[9] Perhaps when people develop typical, routine ways of smoothing out typi-cal tensions, new organizational forms[10] start to solidify, thus making new kinds of "selves" possible.[11]

Rather than assuming that "civic participation" means what we like to imagine it meant two hundred years ago, when Alexis de Tocqueville described unpaid, self-organized local folks banding together to build roads and hospitals, we should learn

what "participation" means in this newly prevalent kind of organization.[12] Empowerment projects are different from the image we might have of purely voluntary associations, or activist groups, in which unpaid, self-organized people get together without any sponsors to whom they are accountable. Some empowerment projects are part of city government programs of the sort Baiocchi and Ganuza describe in this volume.[13] Some are nonprofit or for-profit organizations that provide their services to cities and corporations to conduct "deliberation" and "dialogue," as described in Lee's and Polletta's chapters. In impoverished nations, many empowerment projects are funded by international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), aimed at promoting development while also often aiming to promote women's rights, protect the environment, and do other things that westerners find worthy.[14] Many programs in the United States promise to empower youth, with varying degrees of success, depending on how they resolve the tensions between the various goals.[15] This is an admittedly far-flung set of cases, but they share many of the crisscrossed goals and tensions described here.

Empowerment projects do not work the same way everywhere, and some are more successful than others at resolving the tensions among all of these discordant missions, but they bear a family resemblance that can be seen when they try to put these mismatched missions into play.

Method and Field

To address these questions, this chapter describes three main kinds of activities that participants called "volunteering," found in these youth programs. All of the programs blended state, NGO, and corporate sponsorships:

>   *Adult volunteers* came to help in the afternoons, after school, with homework and other activities in free *community centers* that were, de facto, for low-income youth. Adults and university students came one or two hours per week, usually for less than a year. The two after-school programs described here are Community House, which met in a small building that also housed a food pantry and a couple of other social service agencies, and Casa Latina, which was an organization for mostly low-income, Spanish-speaking kids that sponsored a dozen after-school programs around town—the one Casa Latina program mentioned here met in an empty classroom for two hours an afternoon.
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>   Many *disadvantaged youth* from after-school programs continued, some evenings, to participate in *civic engagement projects*, in which youth from socially diverse backgrounds met to plan and carry out service projects. One was the Regional Youth Empowerment Project (Regional YEP), which met monthly as a group and had projects between the meetings. The other portrayed here was the long series of planning meetings for local events such as Martin Luther King Day and Youth Service Day. These met monthly for several months at a stretch and then more frequently as the event drew near.
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>   *Nondisadvantaged youth volunteers* who were not participants in the free after-school programs but came on their own, or in their parents' cars, were not con-

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sidered "disadvantaged." These teens came from leafy suburbs and often ex-
pressed worry or dismay about the possibility that other teens like them were
participating only for the purpose of adding lines on their curricula vitae for
future college admission.

Snowy Prairie is a city of about two hundred thousand in the Midwest, with a
majority white population and a relatively large middle class for an American city,
but an increasingly large nonwhite—mainly African American, Latino, and Southeast
Asian—population. It has good public schools, so unlike children in many U.S. cities,
in which parents who can afford it send their children to private schools, children of
all classes in Snowy Prairie mingle at school. It is, in some ways, a best-case scenario. If
attaining equality is so hard here, how much harder might it be in a city with a larger
gap between rich and poor? On the other hand, an intangible atmosphere of racial
distrust here felt palpable to me. There is no easy way to measure this atmosphere, but
at least two book-length studies corroborate my observation (to preserve my research
subjects' anonymity, I cannot reveal the books' titles).

I spent four and a half years attending these organizations, along with several oth-
ers like them, as well as many workshops and meetings for the adult leaders of these
programs. Working as a participant-observer meant helping with everything from
geometry homework to the Community House annual rummage sale, to entering
data about youth volunteering into a countywide database that kept track of where
and when kids volunteered, to deciphering federal grant forms, to volunteering along-
side kids and adults in various youth-led service projects, such as gathering food for
the homeless and decorating the Pediatric Hospital. I played soccer and capture the
flag; painted posters; went to dances, movies, county budget hearings, and Halloween,
Mardi Gras, and winter parties with volunteers, youth, and youth services adminis-
trators; and attended meetings, workshops and courses for adults who worked with
young people.[16]

At each step, then, even the first step of finding research sites, there was a back-
and-forth between data collection and analysis. Finding categories for comparison
was especially puzzling, because I had initially come armed with the standard defi-
nition of civic associations that are "not market, not state, and not family."[17] These
partly state-sponsored, partly nonprofit NGOs often engaged in money making, mak-
ing them seem "market"-like; some attained a level of familylike closeness over time
that exceeded that of many families and made them seem more like "family" than
"real" families; some called themselves volunteer organizations but got funding from
governmental and nongovernmental sources and often involved involuntary partici-
pation. In short, they could not easily be classified using normal sectoral divisions
between "voluntary associations," "state agencies," "nonprofits," or even "family." As
Martin points out in this volume, organizations across different sectors often imitate
one another.

My task became to figure out what happened when the crisscrossed "logics" of the
mantra were in play in these organizations that seemed to defy all established insti-
tutional boundaries.[18] Rather than starting with theoretical categories ("sectors," for

example), I had to start with the practical activity and work my way up, to see how everyday promises and practices over time settled into routine, repetitive patterns of everyday interaction. Through this "constant comparative approach," ethnographers gather data in the form of fieldnotes and then return to the site over and over, to keep checking, confirming, or rejecting their hypotheses, depending on whether and how the same interactions repeat in the same way each time we return to the field.[19]

Inequality: The Presupposition of Empowerment Projects

When You, the Needy Participant, Are Supposed to Help Yourself by Becoming a Volunteer, You Learn That You Are the Problem

A dreaded future of neediness looms over many of these projects: Many are called "prevention" programs for "at-risk" youth, two terms that directly invoke a bad but expectable future. These empowerment projects were supposed to help youth over-come their disadvantaged beginnings by helping them to become self-propelled civic actors. Many were also supposed to help socially diverse youth bridge their differ-ences. Much of their funding demanded that the projects address inequality. Behind the scenes, both in conversations among organizers and in conversations among youth participants, it was clear that members recognized this, but in conversations between youth and adults, or between disadvantaged youth and their college-bound peers, inequality could almost never be mentioned.

Nevertheless, youth participants often overhear the justifications for funding, and their taboo knowledge often reveals itself, in the form of mistakes, when they explic-itly refer to the inequality that is supposed to be unspoken. For example, at an out-door festival, a reporter approached a youth volunteer, hoping to give the boy a chance to display his generous volunteer spirit. The reporter asked the wispy black teenager, "Why are you here today?" The boy answered, "I'm involved instead of being out on the streets or instead of taking drugs or doing something illegal." His response was not quite a mistake. Others said they were volunteers so that they would not become obese, pregnant, dropouts, or drug dealers. Similarly, when another African American thirteen-year-old was asked to "speak from personal experience" about his own life in Snowy Prairie, he gave statistics about high school dropout rates among "African American males" in the city. Here is that impersonal future orientation in one of its many forms: Statistics predict grim fates for people like him, and he knows this, and he assumes, therefore, that his action today is aimed at preventing this predictable future. For disadvantaged youth, finding an implicit answer to the question, "Why am I in this group?" was easy. Statistics predict a miserable future for me: that I will do poorly in school and in life. *I am the problem.*[20]

Youth participants overheard the discussions about their neediness. In these pro-grams, poor and minority youth often said that their civic volunteer work was good because it kept them out of trouble. At most public events that their organizations

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attended—Juneteenth, Cinco de Mayo, Martin Luther King Day events, for example—other organizations came, with fold-up tables covered with pamphlets giving advice about preventing domestic violence, tobacco use, or AIDS; offering free home insulation; advocating good nutrition on a budget; telling people how to recognize the signs of one disease or another; and generally addressing problems that people in their disadvantaged position tend to suffer. These empowerment project–sponsored events were supposed to be festive, but self-help instructions for prevention and treatment of diabetes, high blood pressure, and other diseases, and variations on these themes, were always part of the festivities.

Altogether, disadvantaged participants were called on to enter the programs to solve problems, but they knew that they were, themselves, the main problem that they were supposed to solve. A recurrent type of error occurred when youth participants mixed up the mismatched missions, then, as the example of the boy who told the reporter that he was preventing himself from becoming a problem illustrates.

We can hear how entrenched this pattern was when we hear what happened when one unusually politically minded adult organizer tried to break it. She invited her group of middle-school-age kids to go to a demonstration in favor of environmental policies, and she asked them to help make a banner to promote bike riding. She gave them a list of ten incriminating "Facts about the Car" regarding air pollution, sprawl, labor exploitation, and car-oriented use of tax money (this, as well as the messages that the kids wrote on the banner, were in Spanish—the program was nearly entirely for Spanish-speaking immigrants). These kids were so accustomed to seeing themselves as the problem, rather than seeing social policies as the problem, they wrote, "Ride a bike to lose weight" and "Don't get drunk while riding a bike" and "Don't smoke while riding a bike." Even though the organizer had started with the ten facts about the car, the problem the kids assumed that they were being asked to solve was not air pollution or tax payer–funded subsidies for highways and fossil fuels rather than public transit. Rather, the kids assumed that they themselves, and their bad habits, were the problems that they needed to solve. This mistake makes sense; empowerment projects are supposed to help the needy, and empowerment projects' main way of doing so is to correct their bad habits and prevent them from suffering the predictable problems that statistics predict for people like them. Usually, though, experienced participants and organizers had unspoken, routine techniques for *invisibilizing* inequality, powerlessness, and need.

When Future Potential Participation Is More Important Than Helping the Needy: It's All about Democracy and Participation!

With all of their crisscrossed missions, empowerment projects have to make sure to include many local grassroots volunteers, even when the volunteers are ineffective or harmful. Consider the logic: An empowerment project is supposed to empower the volunteers. In funders' eyes, a program is good if it has grassroots support, and having high numbers of volunteers is good proof of this support. The inclusion and

empowerment of the volunteers have to be just as important as the concrete aid to the needy. The problem is that, sometimes, the organization cannot accomplish the goals of empowering the volunteers and helping the needy at once. Here, again, we see that there had to be a method of decoupling two of the missions from one another: civic participation for volunteers versus help for the needy. The temporal leapfrog was one such method.

For example, when youth volunteers gathered food for the needy, empowering the volunteers to become future leaders often mattered more than feeding the hungry today. Thus, organizers of the youth empowerment projects often complained that the head of the local food bank was "hard to work with," because she always insisted on the importance of food, and she had many requirements regarding the food that volunteers gathered, such as that the volunteers not gather more than she could distribute or store, that it be nonperishable, nutritious, and so on. In frustration, organizers would say that this food bank head never "got it" that the goals were "democracy" and "letting youth lead." She tried to control the flow and content of the food too much, rather than leaving it up to the youth volunteers to make decisions freely, on their own. After one meeting, for example, a county head of youth programming said, "*She's missing the point: It's all about leadership, and democracy.*" This volunteering was supposed to make the volunteer into a better citizen tomorrow, without necessarily providing what the needy person needed today.

Food presents an especially striking problem for this approach, because it is hard, but not impossible, to treat eating as something that can wait for the future potential to come to fruition. At Community House, in Snowy Prairie, a nutrition educational grant allowed a nutritionist to come once a week one summer to teach kids about good nutrition. But aside from the weekly lunch that this nutrition education grant provided, there was no nutritious food in the after-school programs for disadvantaged youth. Community House had only an expensive vending machine, and one of the after-school programs distributed fun-sized bags of chips and greasy cookies. So, instead of spending the money for decent food now, on an ongoing basis, for more than one meal a week, the project funded educational programs *about* decent food, aimed at an indeterminate brighter future, when the participants already will have had enough money to buy it. Here again, the future perfect is in play.

In an overview of projects that aim to empower people around the United States, Sirianni and Friedland describe many nutrition and health education programs in impoverished areas.[21] Many are one-day educational events, "visioning" workshops, and other inexpensive efforts aimed at getting poor people who lack insurance to help themselves, with no mention of any expensive aid. Similarly, Haney described a hilarious, tragic scene of empowerment in a women's prison: The women are given educational workshops in which they are told not to eat Ramen noodles, but to eat Luna Bars instead, as if the price difference would be irrelevant when they get out of prison.[22] More tragically, the women are exhorted to get educations and are forced to express feelings of hopefulness about their future educations, but they are given neither classes nor tutors to help them get to that desired future. Instead, they are told that they are making bad choices.

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"Choice" was a key term in this game of temporal leapfrog.[23] Empowerment proj-
ects often spent time teaching people to make good choices at some time in the future,
when they have the resources, without giving them the resources to make the choices
today. At one year's Martin Luther King Day event, a police chief, who grew up in
one of Chicago's worst slums, gave a sing-song speech about all the "good choices" he
made: avoiding bullies, going to a decent high school, avoiding gangs, getting a job. In
the question and answer period, when asked how he had made those choices, he tried
dodging the questions, saying with a chuckle that he had not told us about all the bad
choices he had made. As the questions continued, his sing-song tone vanished, and he
started angrily stabbing each word, saying, "I felt like I was *cheated* because not enough
volunteers stepped in, and that's why I volunteer now," but he never mentioned the
inegalitarian conditions that had made so many bad choices so easily available to him
on Chicago's Southside. Instead, he said, "I teach the community how to self-sustain
itself." His ability to leap out of his past came to seem unfathomable and magical.

Another key term for this temporal leapfrog was "leadership." Thus, when youth
participants at one evening meeting were asked to discuss when they *had become*
(notice the past perfect verbal construction—organizers' assumption being that if we
call them "leaders," they will grow into the part) leaders and to discuss what the quali-
ties of leaders are, most were baffled. Most youth participants said they were not lead-
ers. Some decided that leaders were usually "tall" and "handsome." Adult organizers'
faces and silences made it clear that these were incorrect answers.

Youth "leaders" often learned to act *as if* they were leading, when they were not yet
leading. This was often necessary, given the adults' constant need to apply for grants
during kids' summer vacations, *before* their youth programs started at the beginning
of the school year. Like many empowerment projects,[24] these often operated on short-
term "seed money," from multiple, distant hurried funders, so the organizations had to
keep reapplying for new grants for new, often unrelated projects. Every few months,
there had to be a different theme to the youth groups' projects, depending on whether
the adults had secured a grant from an organization that supported tobacco preven-
tion, the arts, health and nutrition, literacy, or stopping hunger and homelessness.

So the process of making the leaders lead in the direction of the funding required
a delicate dance on discordant future timelines. Adults, scouting out funding possi-
bilities, would select a theme—hunger, homelessness, literacy, arts—over the summer.
Then, when the school year started and youth volunteers started coming to meetings,
the adults would then subtly place the theme in youth volunteers' minds. And then the
youth volunteers would magically take on the project as if they had thought it up.

For example, a week of youth volunteer projects was timed for an especially impor-
tant moment in the county's budgeting cycle: early autumn. In a lunchtime meeting
in the summer, six administrators and adults who worked in youth programs said
that the point of the volunteering is "to showcase all the good work our kids [in local
youth programs] are doing." Examples that the participants in the meeting had so far
included were encouraging young people to conduct a food drive, a mitten drive, or a
toy drive or visiting a nursing home or homeless shelter. But remember: The kids had
not yet done any of this good work that was to be showcased yet!

Organizers had to negotiate a complex temporal map:

One youth worker: Let's not forget the county supervisors [*regional elected offi-cials, in charge of some of the purse strings for these programs*]. We should do something for them, let them know kids appreciate the money, and that they want them to "up" it next year. We could even go to a county board meeting—do they have one that week? We could give them a "thank you note"—a note of appreciation.

[*more discussion of possible activities for kids to do that week*]

Darrell [a minister of a fundamentalist black church's youth program that gets government money]: This week is to show that we're doing these things, that kids are not out on the street, or causing trouble, that we need more money. That's what we're ultimately doing this for. Maybe we could get police records on lower youth crime that week, because youth are busy doing community service.

[*later that meeting*]

Georgia [a magenta-haired youth worker, dressed in shredded black clothes and boots]: I'm wary of planning everything for people who are not at the table [*her teens who would not start coming to meetings until school reopened in September, and this meeting took place in the summertime*] because it's not realistic.

Another youth worker: When you plan like that and they weren't there, and then you say, "Oh, but it was such a good idea!" but it wasn't *their* idea.

Adult organizers had to plan activities long before the youth volunteers arrived, but they did not want to stifle youth volunteers' creativity, so they often told the youth groups, in words that varied slightly from one meeting to the next, that whatever project was under discussion, it was "open and undefined, up to you to decide 'whatever.'" The ideas for community service had to seem to spring from the young people's inspirations themselves. Organizers wanted to make youth feel responsible, autonomous, and competent, that is, civic. But the result had to be good publicity for the organizations and fit with whatever the grant was that year, and the organizers had to show that the public money was helping the needy, preventing the young people from committing all the future crimes that statistics predicted for adolescents like them.

Given what Georgia says about timing, it would be hard to make the youth participants into leaders in these conditions. However, by juggling the mismatched temporalities correctly, adults and youth volunteers managed to make them appear to proceed in the preferred order: At the summertime meeting, adults decided to focus on the issue of hunger (there was a grant for it). A month later, Rob, the Snowy Prairie youth agency director, brought up the topic in a meeting with teen volunteers and some other adult organizers, indirectly suggesting that the teens start a subgroup to work on the issue of hunger, but nobody took the bait. A few weeks later, in late autumn, a youth volunteer named Samia gave a presentation to the other youth volunteers about the project, saying that her subgroup had decided to organize a project to work on the issue of hunger. Samia had managed to play along with the idea that it

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was a youth-directed project. As we will see below, there was something else going on, beyond the deployment of temporal leapfrog, that made Samia's face grow to fit the mask: There was a long-term, close relationship with Emily, the paid leader of Samia's after-school program. Emily was encouraging and supporting her at *every* step, not just naming her "a leader."

Organizers often indeed said that even the longest journey starts with the first step. But since civic projects like the Regional YEP met once or twice a month for the school year, with "ice-breaker" exercises that were supposed to speed up the process a bit; participants rarely had time to take a second safe step. In groups with this combination of infrequent, optional meetings and vast inequality, efficient bonding was necessary, so most meetings started with these parlor games aimed at *tempting* members to interact. But participants rarely had time to take the second step, a second chance to bond. In addition, taking a second step may have been upsetting, if participants were pressured to reveal and discover just how vastly different their lives were.

So participants had to act *as if* there would be a second step, but not to expect it at all. Again, it is the future perfect, without the equipment needed to reach that bright future. They learned to make small talk with strangers—a skill not to be underestimated in a world that involves quick turnaround time and short-term employment. A common ice-breaker, for example, was a musical chairs–type game, which the Regional YEP played before many meetings:

Everyone stands in a circle, with one kid in the middle.

The kid in the middle calls out, "I am on a train, and I'm taking everyone who does *x* / has *x* characteristic / likes *x*!" and this kid runs to take someone's spot in the circle, as the kids who do *x* / have *x* / like *x* give up their spots in the circle. Whichever kid has not grabbed a spot goes to the middle, and the process starts over.

The point was just to have fun running around and learning a bit about each other. Participants always called out unthreatening, bland qualities: "everyone who is wearing blue jeans, come out," or "everyone who likes music, has been to California, has green eyes, has white shoes, is wearing underwear, is wearing short sleeves, has brown hair, has a ponytail, is wearing a jacket, likes basketball, likes ice cream." The qualities all had to be impersonal or visible matters of taste and not associated with any social divisions or troubles. "Is wearing jeans or sneakers or the color blue" were okay. In addition, "is blonde" was considered okay, because blondness was not considered divisive or controversial in this largely blonde city. "Has kinky black hair" or "knows a millionaire" or "gets straight A's" or "has a relative in jail" or "has traveled to Europe" or "has been to a welfare office" or "has ever gotten so drunk, they barfed" or "is gay" or "has parents who smoke dope" or "has been homeless" or "loves Jesus" were not okay. More precisely, no one ever tried ones like those. The closest anyone got to something personal or controversial was when one clumsy adult organizer, who dropped out after two meetings, said she would take on her train "anyone who farts in the bathtub." No one jumped onto her "train," and whenever I saw her after that, I imagined her bathtub farts. From this exercise, participants gained practice in mentioning inoffensive

characteristics about themselves and others. They were "bonding" by staying nicely impersonal. This was not what organizers had in mind by bonding.

Still, the very act of speaking itself in that kind of situation was, in organizers' eyes, a triumphant gesture toward a more perfect future, a sign that we have launched the process of "making contact and bonding." The content of the speech was irrelevant as long as it stayed nicely impersonal, even if participants expected never to meet again. Paid organizers themselves often were clearly triumphant when they managed to engage a kid in small talk, even if they never saw the kid again. Conversely, organizers often forbade kids from talking about more troubling matters with one another. In one conversation among middle schoolers in an after-school program, for example, the topics were the brother on parole, the suspended friend, and the uncle in jail, until the paid organizer broke in to say, "Come on, guys, let's talk about something a little more 'positive' now!" On this principle, she tried, another day, unsuccessfully, to start a conversation about 1960s music.

Here is the future perfect again: The very act of having achieved a conversation was what mattered to organizers, because it seemed to presage a better future. The future orientation of this kind of speech was especially apparent when adults volunteered with young children. In many volunteer activities, an adult volunteer could feel sudden momentary closeness to any random child at any time, as they bonded over shared shoe sizes or shared tastes in candy, all without needing to know the child's name. In a week of free summer activities at a park in a low-income neighborhood, I seemed, on the face of it, to do what organizers would have happily called "forging a bond" with a girl when we both laughed hard together about a battery-operated talking necklace. Another volunteer managed to give off the appearance of bonding with a child over a Happy Meals toy. To accomplish this instant bonding, we had to assume that we are all the same underneath and that we very quickly can get to that "underneath" place. That way, we can plug in and out quickly and effectively, without getting to know the other person over time. Socially diverse, unequal participants were supposed to bond *quickly*.

Learning to make small talk is an important skill, but here it also served as a promise that diverse participants might come to appreciate each other someday *if they had the time*. But the second step never came, in these empowerment projects' short-term horizons, so kids from different backgrounds would work side-by-side for a year or more without learning anything about each other's lives except that they liked pizza and wore blue jeans. When, for example, the adult organizers held parties for them, the two sets of kids would "clump," in different parts of the room or in different rooms altogether as organizers complained among each other, away from the kids. Each set of kids would also complain about the adults' efforts at promoting bonding—one clump of college-bound kids said, for example, that the adults' efforts would "never work." Relatively affluent kids never figured out, for example, why the immigrant girl from Community House lived with so many adults who were not her parents and why each time they called her shared home phone, a different adult answered. They had to treat their bonding activities as *potentially* leading to something more, though they had to expect that the potential future would never arrive.

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Two Harmful Uses of the Future Perfect: Promoting Plug-In Volunteering and Cutting Funds for Seriously Disabled People If They Do Not Become Active Volunteers

In the cases of the food pantry, the nutrition education projects, and the ice-breakers, participants were neither better nor worse off than they had been before people started being empowered. Sometimes, however, placing too much weight on participants' future potential for civic participation was a disaster. Here are two examples.

Adult volunteers came to help out in the after-school programs for disadvantaged youth, usually for an hour or two a week for a few months. They promised to become "beloved aunties" to the kids. But they did not know the kids, their homework, their teachers, their schools, or their families. They hoped to plug in and plug out quickly, like USB keys, so we call them "plug-in volunteers." They often ended up giving advice that contradicted the advice given the previous day, or hour even, by the previous volunteer. So, volunteer "homework helpers" on Wednesday often undid advice that the Tuesday's volunteer had given, who had, herself, contradicted Monday's volunteer's advice.

A typical day shows this: I was helping eleven-year-old Jeanette with a long-term homework assignment. It looked to me as if the previous day's volunteer had given her bad advice, to do the work in a way that did not respond to the teacher's assignment. So I undid the previous volunteer's advice and told Jeanette what I thought the assignment sheet really said she should do. Jeanette started working, but then I had to go make a phone call, and when I came back, another volunteer had taken my place, and I saw that he had already contradicted the advice I had given Jeanette fifteen minutes earlier. Jeanette was receiving a wealth of help, but in a mess of bits and pieces that did not add up to a coherent whole. Kids often complained to the paid organizers that the volunteers were unhelpful. In one meeting of a little middle-school governing body, populated by teens who were deemed "at risk," a girl said that she would rather wait until her mom got home from her second (minimum-wage) job than to try to get help from a volunteer who did not know her way of learning or her assignments. For these reasons, the three studious girls at Community House often hid in a private back room and shut the door, to get their homework done away from the chatty volunteers!

In one meeting, six recipients of an award for minority youth were supposed to stand in front of about thirty adult volunteers and potential volunteers. The volunteers kept asking how they could be helpful in one hour a week.

An adult volunteer: How does a mentor make a difference? How does a mentor make a personal connection? I meet with my middle school kid once a week. What can I do with my kid to make the homework meaningful when I meet with him next Wednesday?

First girl [echoing the statement I so often heard]: I know, just meeting once a week in the middle of the week is *not gonna be helpful.* I mean, I know if I have homework on Monday and Thursday, I'm gonna need help on it on Monday or Thursday. *Just once a week, that won't help.*

Another adult: It's about self-discipline. You can't always be there; he's gotta learn to organize himself so even when you're not there, he does what he needs to do.

First girl: So maybe you could meet with him on Monday and Thursday—because if he has homework on those days, that's when he's gonna need help.

Second girl: That's where motivation comes in. He needs to motivate himself.

Mentor: My schedule doesn't allow me to come in more than once a week.

Second girl: Maybe he should find a different tutor! [*everyone laughs nervously, a little shocked*]. No, not like that! Like [*people chime in, saying "in addition," "not instead of"*] an *additional* tutor.

Adult moderator: He needs to learn time management. We all do—need to plan, know what needs to be done when.

Eventually, in the future perfect, the boy will have learned how to manage his time, so the plug-in volunteers' work will be easy. But from the teens' perspective, it looked like volunteers thought they were helping them become self-sufficient by *not giving them the help they needed right now.*

These empowerment projects were designed to overcome inequality, and participants were supposed to learn about each other's lives, but with all the other missions in play, it was hard for anyone to take the time to understand inequality's effects on anyone's real life, much less figure out a way to prevent deprivation from harming these kids' futures or other young people's futures. The hurried volunteers and disadvantaged youth were supposed to encounter each other in the present, human to human, in the moment.

The plug-in volunteers were harmful, and yet these programs could not tell them to go home. For donors, these volunteers were symbols of a great potential, waiting to be unleashed, but before it was unleashed, valuing civic participation over the provision of needed aid not only did not alleviate suffering but also added to it. In one program, the teens who wanted to get their homework done hid in a basement to avoid the meddling plug-in volunteers.

In the next variation on the theme of harmful uses of the future perfect, we will see that even when the hope was undeniably unrealistic, participants had to act on the hope that needy people would eventually become self-sufficient and civically engaged, and that that would help them break out of a cycle of neediness. A large nonprofit umbrella agency, United Way, unveiled a new policy during the time of my fieldwork. Previously, it had distributed money to organizations that helped needy people, for things like food and home aid for the disabled. Now, it would give money only to organizations that could set their needy recipients on the road toward sustainability or at least toward "giving back to the community" through civic participation. These needy people, in other words, had to find ways to make their organizations lucrative or to make their participants contribute to society by becoming volunteers themselves. At the meeting announcing this change in plans, an organizer of a program for disabled senior citizens said that her organization would never become self-sustaining. Some of the seniors could not spoon food into their mouths independently. Some had dementia. The United Way head said she was sure there was *some* way that they could "give

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back to the community." Trying to finish a sentence saying that her disabled elderly people would never become self-sufficient, but just needed help now, the senior center organizer broke down, sobbing.[25]

The United Way's new formula was a very common form of empowerment project that I encountered while doing my fieldwork: "Asset-Based Community Development" (ABCD), which is based on the philosophy that all neighborhoods have "assets" on which local folks can draw and, by drawing on them, in turn, create a sense of wealth and of community, in a beneficial explosion of self-fulfilling prophesies. If local folks see themselves as civic problem solvers, rather than passive recipients of experts' aid, they will actually become more effective.[26] Whenever I participated in *any* meeting of an ABCD project, for example, I heard at least one local participant say that his or her particular poor neighborhood's assets include many loving grandmas, ready to help with gardening and babysitting. Yes, I thought, it would be very good to find ways for society to allow the grandmas to pass on their wisdom and know-how to the next generation. Feeling useful and needed is probably crucial for adults' psychological well-being,[27] and our society does not know how to use the genuine skills that we all share unless they can be packaged and sold for a profit. Still, I wondered if a place like Beverly Hills also had loving grandmas and whether they substituted for things that Beverly Hills residents might need—like dentists, surgeons; people to pay for the rent, electricity, and phone; pollution control experts, bus drivers, and earthquake safety engineers—or whether some public policies should change, to put less burden on those grandmas to provide for their communities' needs. I soon learned that organizers would have considered my puzzlement to be wrong in the first place: "Need" is almost a taboo word; rather, the word should be "choice." The idea with the grandmas was to provide a sense of hope, but not necessarily to address residents' main sources of deprivation. ABCD would leave that for another day, another discussion.

Tentative Solutions in Everyday Interaction

Some youth participants came to meeting after meeting not saying a word; for six months, or a year, or more, adult organizers waited patiently for them to become active participants. One boy, Raul, for example, came to the Regional YEP meetings and did nothing but make towers out of empty Doritos bags, and he shot Skittles at each other as if they were billiards. He spoke only once, when he mentioned visiting relatives in Mexico. Often, baffled organizers exclaimed to each other that they had no idea why kids like Raul kept coming to meetings and not saying a word for months at a time.

Some organizers stayed carefully tactful, saying to each other that asking directly would ruin the possible trust that the organizers hoped was developing. One proudly told me that she waited six months before one girl even said a single word to her—proudly because this organizer knew that her patience was starting to pay off. They were pleased that these Community House kids kept coming to meetings, because they assumed that it was preventing them from becoming a victim of domestic abuse, a drug abuser, or a criminal—for kids "like them," whom organizers (judging mainly

by visible race) guessed to be disadvantaged, the Regional YEP was an important prevention program. The idea was to whet their appetites for volunteering, as organizers often put it—to give them a taste for it, so that at some time in the future, they might get "hooked."

In three disadvantaged volunteers' cases, this process worked. These three girls began to speak up in meetings, even though, as one said, it made her feel "salty." These three attended Community House's after-school program and civic engagement programs for the entire four years I was there, and Emily, the paid organizer, was always there, too. She was their confidante and accompanied them shopping, and she knew their parents, teachers, schools, and boyfriend situations—she was like a mother to them. Emily's implicit anticipation of the girls' future success was accompanied by a real relationship with them in the present, so it was not just a temporal leapfrog; rather, Emily filled the gap between the present and the hoped-for future with an ongoing relationship.

Ironically, once these three disadvantaged girls developed into genuinely active volunteers, organizers had to start showcasing other, *more needy* youth. Otherwise, it would start to look as if the program had only helped one or two people, which was not enough. In a discussion between adult organizers about how to plan an event that would "showcase positive youth involvement," Emily offered her three most dedicated youth volunteers (plus another girl who ended up dropping out of the civic engagement projects), saying they could help. Rob, of the Snowy Prairie youth agency, glared at her, saying, "And maybe we can get some people beyond 'the usual suspects.'" Emily had hoped to develop the talents that these four brave, dedicated volunteers had begun to cultivate. These four teens were *no longer considered needy*. They were on the road to becoming genuinely civic actors. But in these programs, such competent youth volunteers had to keep getting dumped off the waterwheel so that new, fresh, needier volunteers could pour in the top. This echoed a larger theme: Everything had to be "seed money" for future, potential projects. Refining a project was always left for the indefinite future, with no support for the voyage to it (though in this case, Emily slyly devised another way of resolving the tension between helping the needy and promoting civic engagement: She coached one of her girls, Samia, so that Samia eventually did lead the meeting anyway, despite Rob's suggestion). Emily defied the usual approach; she assumed that after coaching Samia to take the first step, staying with her while she took a second, third and fourth would be necessary before she learned to walk.

Sometimes, focusing on the hoped-for future could help bring it into existence. In empowerment projects, participants might be able to lay the past aside and just work together, side-by-side, if organizers offered real help that allowed weaker participants to learn to speak and make decisions as equals, gropingly, over a long stretch of time. But this was not a simple assertion of the future perfect. It was a slow, ongoing walk toward an uncertain but hoped-for future. In contrast, the use of the future perfect was a way of obscuring problems by just making them seem as if saying is doing—as if all one had to do to make them disappear is act as if they had disappeared already. Poof.

The following final example will show how the image of the empowered volunteer can easily short-circuit the possibility of imagining that another solution to poverty

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is possible. Ignoring individuals' pasts and relentlessly focusing only on a hoped-for, potential future made it impossible to see that neediness is damaging and that the damage could easily have been avoided by social organization coming from the state, specifically. The only solution to poverty that appeared on the horizon is based on self-improvement, and in one very specific way, this solution worked, when scholarship funders believed that volunteering creates better future citizens. Knowing about this assumption, disadvantaged high school kids worked hard to focus on volunteer work, even if it cut into the time they spent doing homework.

Thus, when Samia, the disadvantaged girl we met earlier, became a very active volunteer, it was partly with the intention of being able to describe her selflessness when she applied for a scholarship for college. This volunteer work ended up making it possible for her to go to college, not necessarily because it "empowered" her to be a good citizen but because it earned her scholarship money to pay for some of the tuition.

Volunteers like Samia work for free, working on themselves, improving themselves, and ridding themselves of deficiencies so that they can become good-enough people to *deserve* an education. In most wealthy nations, tuition is free for all qualified students. Education in those nations is considered a "right." In the United States, it is not considered a right, and only people whose parents can afford the tuition, or people who are lucky enough to get scholarships, can go to college. But even in the United States, in the mid-20th century, lack of access to education was considered an unjust symptom of social inequality. The solution at that time was "social citizenship," to make the society more egalitarian by redistributing wealth or by giving people free or very low tuition, as the University of California did for most of the 20th century but no longer does.[28] Here, in an empowerment project, on the contrary, the inequality is not treated as an injustice. The problem is seen as emanating from the person, who needs to improve himself or herself in order to deserve access to the education that more privileged peers enjoy. So, in Samia's case, with constant attentive support, she got something she needed, but in a roundabout way, by shaping herself around an image of future good citizenship that would attract scholarships by the time she got to college. In this way, the prospect of "social citizenship" recedes into the very far distance.

Conclusion: Variations of Temporal Leapfrog with Varied Potentials for Ameliorating Inequality

Civic participation and helping the needy are two of the many tangled missions of empowerment projects. Participants have to find ways of meshing them, at least enough to keep interaction afloat. One method for converging civic participation and helping the needy was to pretend that we are already equals in this civic forum. This sometimes eventually worked, to make the not-yet-civic actor into one. More often, though, ignoring people's pasts and focusing on a hoped-for future made the mission of "helping the needy" difficult, because slicing off the person's unique past meant ignoring inequality and ignoring social conditions.

Of course, all organizations rely, in some ways, on gluing people's emotions and actions to hoped-for futures that may well not materialize[29]—that is what stock markets and crashes are about, and it is what happens when states invest in infrastructure that might never be used or might be used by an invading power. One might guess that there is usually more of a step-by-step path connecting the present to the hoped-for future than we see in empowerment projects; nevertheless, empowerment projects show, in a particularly clear way, a trend that one could study in many kinds of organizations. In this conclusion, I wish to sketch some possible ways that visions of a future shape an organization's present actions and present "structures of feeling," and I then tie that back to this volume by asking which kinds of paths toward the future might be most promising for addressing social inequality.

When Saying Is Doing:[30] Sometimes, "saying" simply *is* "doing." If I say, "I christen thee the *Queen Mary*," and I am the mayor whacking a champagne bottle against the side of the new ship, why, then, the ship *is* the *Queen Mary*. If I am a police officer and I say, "You are under arrest," then you *are* under arrest. If I am a priest and I now pronounce you married, then you are. These empowerment programs tried to work this way. But if I say I am going to be a beloved auntie but do not spend the time to become one, I will not become one; if I tell you how to eat healthy food but do not give you access to it, it will not magically be available. The problem is that if I am not a mayor, officer, or priest, all the whacking and the pronouncing in the world will not make it so. The mayor, officer, and priest occupy institutionalized positions that give them the power to make their words into realities.

Prospectancy: We saw another way that anticipating a hoped-for future can help make that future become real. A long-term caregiver like Emily can stand by patiently, for months or years, waiting for the truth to surface—waiting for the three youth volunteers to "realize," in both senses of the word, their capacity to be competent civic actors. With these three volunteers who started off silent and eventually became active, decision-making, speaking participants, focusing on a hoped-for future worked well, as long as it also included a real relationship over time, in a continuous present. "Prospectancy" is a good term for this feeling of hope that a caregiver exudes, when faced with all of the details of the life of this person who is not yet responsible as, not yet as self-sufficient as the caregiver.[31] With those three disadvantaged youth volunteers, a prospectant, attentive caregiver made very tiny, careful, happy self-fulfilling prophesies about their independence precisely at the very moment *before* the prophesies were *about to* come true. Good care makes itself as *invisible* as possible, to seem to be not a burden to the caregiver, making it seem that the person who is being cared for is just on the verge of being able to do it himself or herself.[32] Feeding toddlers, adults proclaim the yumminess of strained yams, thus helping to make it seem yummy; one toddler-sized step before keeling over is happily called "walking." Using this kind of predication can become a happy self-fulfilling prophecy at best or at least preserves the recipient's sense of dignity.

In contrast, in empowerment projects, this happy prophesizing is part of a whole organization's machinery, including hundreds of people who are rarely in intimate, one-on-one relationships with one another. The organizers *have to* assume that kids

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like Raul are steadily marching forward along the road to self-sufficiency. To be tact-ful, organizers have to assume this without necessarily knowing Raul personally. Empowerment projects' prospectancy is often done universally and relatively imper-sonally, on a group level, with members who have not developed a feel for one another over a long stretch of time. It is done in a big, public forum, in an organization that requires management and accounting, and multiple, crisscrossed public justifications, in the potentially harsh public spotlight, gazed on by many hurried, distant audiences. Youth participants often assume that they have indirectly been invited to proclaim their dependence and neediness publicly (and indeed, sometimes, this invitation was quite direct). Despite empowerment projects' promise to appreciate unique people, this hurried, public mass production of intimate care often becomes the opposite of prospectancy.

Symbolic Realism: For plug-in volunteering to work, participants had to have an-other approach to the future other than prospectancy. Religious language often works by invoking a hoped-for future as if it has already arrived: "Here, there is no rich or poor, master or slave, Jew or Greek: all are one in Christ Jesus." When plug-in volun-teers assumed that we are all interchangeable, that anyone could do what anyone else could do, as long as someone did it, intimacy had to become impersonal and universal, available equally to everyone quickly, no matter how far apart their starting points in everyday life are.

This hopeful universalism has sometimes inspired activists to press for social change. When shoeless, dishonored Christian slaves in the United States sang, "I got shoes, you got shoes, all of God's children got shoes! When I get to heaven, I'm gonna walk all over God's heaven! I got a crown, you got a crown! When I get to heaven, I'm gonna shine all over God's heaven!" it reminded them that, in a metaphorical sense, they *already had* what all humans have, despite their current barefoot and crownless circumstances. They recognized, however, that they did not have shoes or a crown at that moment. When religions speak like this, it is metaphorical, predictive language that Robert Bellah calls "symbolic realism."[33] It reminds us of something that we know is not realized in our current society but should be; it serves as a dream, a hope, that this submerged, veiled equality will someday *become* as real socially as we know—on another plane of reality—it is. In the case of the shoes and the crown, faith in the existence of another dimension of reality eventually became fuel for the civil rights movement. But just saying that you had shoes did not, by itself, give you shoes; politi-cal organizing helped. The organizing drew its energy partly from this projected future of greater equality, but there was nitty-gritty work to do as well, and organizers did not assume that the dream of perfect equality could become real on earth.

To make symbolism useful for activism, the trick is to *preserve the tension*[34] between the two planes of reality—to make plans in this world, instead of assuming that the future perfect will inevitably arrive. In contrast, adult organizers in Snowy Prairie tried to collapse them and make the transition from one to the other instantaneous. They hoped that focusing on the future would easily open up creativity and would allow people to stop dwelling on the past. But what looked to the organizers like an invitation to creativity sometimes felt, to the youth participants, like abdication. For example,

when youth participants asked how they should organize Martin Luther King Day, one of their first questions was always about what has been done in the past, how the holiday began, and what other people have done. A typical answer was "it's open and undefined, up to you to decide whatever," so youth participants frenetically guessed about the future, by overhearing, second-guessing, indirectly asking. By inviting young people to dream up ideas as if they "have a magic wand and anything is possible," organizers hoped to empower youth. This anti-hierarchical message was supposed to make youth see that society and material conditions were irrelevant. But youth participants second-guessed what is possible, without the benefit of a warm-bodied, familiar intermediary's step-by-step guidance. Often, they were armed with a magic wand but no loyal, familiar adult acting as a *realistic* guide. Prospectancy would involve the more experienced, able person invisibly guiding the less experienced or able one. Invoking symbolic realism to leaven action would include practical planning to get hats before we all get crowns. The problem in these empowerment projects was not the planning; instead, it was the attempt to make planning seem irrelevant.

Declaring an Inevitable Relation to a Hoped-for Future: Another way that anticipation of a future can direct personal and social change occurs when a seemingly *inevitable* future starts to drag everyday interaction forward too urgently, implacably and unequivocally toward an imagined utopia or an apocalypse. People in this situation do *not* preserve the tension between the wish and the reality; instead, they attempt to collapse them. Many times over the course of history, people have become convinced of the projected future's inevitable reality, leading to war, massacre, rebellion, suicide, or revolution.[35] This kind of prediction short-circuits debate. In contrast, we have to *proclaim*, "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal" because, as Hannah Arendt argues, simply asserting the seemingly self-evident truths would require relying on a ruler who could rule by decree. By prefacing these "truths" with "we hold," the founding fathers implicitly acknowledged that their nation would have to rely on agreements, hopes, and promises *between humans*—the provisional "prospectancy" that describes a hoped-for future as a belief, not yet a fact.[36]

Empowerment projects use hopeful speech of this last sort, in quotidian, everyday situations, not in distant documents like the Declaration of Independence. The problem is that empowerment projects assert a future without providing any means of getting there, but they are charged with the reliably long-term, daily work of taking care of people who depend on them now, today, not just in an inspiring dream world of the future. Nations are supposed to have long time horizons, and they operate partly based on shared, abstract aspirations, whereas empowerment projects are supposed to be temporary and help people immediately. In this context, speaking *as if* all people already are equal and already have shoes can obstruct their ability to get shoes today. Speaking this way does not help them plan just how they will overcome inequality. Instead, in the youth programs, this kind of speech tended to eviscerate the present.

Of course, for most political theory, democratic dialogue has, by definition, meant laying inequalities aside momentarily; the fiction of equality has been considered a necessary fiction that makes respectful dialogue possible. This volume shows how to ask such questions empirically. Our questions are how and when this fiction is useful,

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and when it should be pierced. When, in Walker's chapter in this volume, for example, corporations sponsor so-called activism that is aimed at making the company better able to make profits, citizens and legislators need to know how to ask questions about those activists' particular pasts and pathways to activism.

Without the enduring institutional power of the priest, police, or mayor, or the tender and intimately individual tact of the long-term relationship, or the shared universalism of some religions combined with realistic planning in the shorter term, the hopeful pronouncements easily become painful abstractions.[37] In these empowerment projects, there was rarely time to see the prophesies come to fruition, because the organizations had to keep inviting new members, inventing new projects, not getting "old and stale" and "entrenched" for a long-enough time to make all those potentials into realities. Participants were treated as perpetual future potentials: potential leaders, potential feeders of the hungry in the future, potential future risks, potential intimate acquaintances.

Partly, this temporal leapfrog was a result of the constant chase for money, and partly, it embodied a desire to keep moving forward into that glowing future. Everything had to be done quickly: before the "usual suspects" grew tiresome and started to make it seem as if the programs had helped too-few needy youth; before the grant period was over and the organization had to fill out another application for another short-term grant for seed money to accomplish an innovative project. Not all relationships can survive such speeding up, though, so it makes sense in these organizational conditions to treat relationships as perpetual future potentials. Youth participants were continually asked to put on public events that showed how much good their youth programs did, before the youth participants had a chance to see if the program really did do any good. Underprivileged participants had to put on these public presentations about "all the good things" that they *will have done*, instead of doing other activities that they themselves might have preferred, such as learning to fish, swim, do chemistry experiments, or play electric bass—learning anything that might take time or money other than how to do good PR for their programs. If they do learn anything, it must not take too long to learn, must be immediately "showcase-able," and is treated as a cure for their problems. In this way, the potential future starts to feel more real than the present.

NOTES

1. On the distinction between "mission" and "mandate," see Minkoff and Powell (2006). Here, the "missions" were "mandated" by funders, but organizers made it clear that the only demand that felt like a mandate imposed from the outside was the mandate for accountability.
2. Eliasoph (2011).
3. Katz (2001, 2002); Lichterman (2002).
4. Lee's, Walker's, and Meyer's contributions to this volume show some of the most terrifying ways that the need to please donors undermines the prospects both for civic participation and for helping the needy.

5. Meyer and Rowan (1977).
6. Hallett and Ventresca (2006a, 2006b).
7. Heimer and Staffan (1998); see also Binder (2007). A massive literature in management examines "hybrid" organizations that have mixed missions—for example, microcredit banks that sit halfway between the fields of social work and finance (Batillana and Dorado 2010).
8. Frye (2012).
9. Goffman (1959); Collins (2003).
10. Clemens (2006).
11. Swidler and Watkins (2008).
12. Smith (1997); Eliasoph (2009). Many aspects of these are not new, as Clemens and Guthrie (2011) clearly show, but my point is that they are newly prevalent.
13. Bacque and Sintomer (2001); Baiocchi (2005); Gret and Sintomer (2005); Berger (2008); Talpin (2011); Charles (2012).
14. Bob (2001); Swidler and Watkins (2008); Dale (2010).
15. Baizerman et al. (2008).
16. The book from which this chapter is drawn (Eliasoph 2011) follows this web of youth volunteers, adult volunteers, and paid adult organizers.
17. Wolfe (1989); Anheier (2007).
18. Thornton and Ocasio (1999).
19. Glaser and Strauss (1967); Ragin and Becker (1992).
20. How little has changed since W. E. B. Du Bois asked, referring to the experience of being black in the United States, "How does it feel to be a problem?" in 1898!
21. Sirianni and Friedland (2001).
22. Haney (2010).
23. See Cruikshank (1999) and Lee (this volume).
24. Swidler and Watkins (2008).
25. For a similar scenario, shutting out old people, see Sampson (1996) on building "civil society" in Albania.
26. Kretzman and McKnight (1993, 2005).
27. Erikson (1959).
28. Marshall (1950).
29. Tavory and Eliasoph (2013).
30. Austin (1965). His book's title in English is How to Do Things with Words, but in the French translation, it is Quand dire, c'est faire, which means "when saying is doing."
31. Gorney (1972).
32. Molinier (2005).
33. Bellah (1970).
34. Dumont (1986).
35. Hall (2009).
36. Arendt (1990).
37. As Vallas and coauthors show in this volume, abstract terms like "human rights" might help Americans' solidarity efforts toward workers in labor struggles in the global south. At a distance, it may well not matter if helpers understand the particulars of the lives of workers whom they want to help. But in everyday interaction, the particulars of each party's life do matter.

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