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Alternativity as freedom: Exploring tactics of emergence in alternative forms of organizing

What does a sustainable pensions investment company, mindfulness meditation practitioners, and an independent political party have in common? This is not the opening line of some elaborate joke, but the starting point for our investigation into what conceptualizing *alternativity as freedom* might mean for organization and management studies. The existing literature on alternative organization tends to emphasize either the principles (Kanter, 1972; Rothschild-Whitt, 1979; Parker et al, 2014a) or the practices (Follett, 1918; Reinecke, 2018; Skoglund & Böhm, 2020) of alternative organizational forms. Although key to defining and delimiting alternative organizations, we argue that such principles and practices cannot account for the interrelations between 'the alternative' and 'the mainstream'; that is, they do not fully explain the relational character of alternative forms of organizing (Cheney, 2014). To centre attention on this crucial relationship, we suggest shifting the spotlight from principles and practices to process (Jensen, 2020; Just et al., 2021); more specifically, we consider alternative organization as an ongoing search for freedom from predominant socioeconomic orders.

Within organization and management studies, taking a process view serves to highlight the unfinished character of all organizing; its movement *toward* a pattern. As Hernes (2008: 128) puts it, 'this pattern is never fully achieved, but without the idea that some pattern will be achieved, nothing is likely to take place'. Alternative organizing might similarly be understood as the process of moving *away from* an existing pattern, from which freedom will never be fully achieved. However, and paraphrasing Hernes, without the idea that freedom from the pattern can be achieved, no alternative will ever emerge. Focusing on the tensions between patterned organization and uncharted freedom, our case studies of sustainable investment, mindfulness practices, and political organizing illuminate how

these tensions can become productive for alternative organizations as they seek to break free from patterns, yet tend to become patterned in the process. Beginning from this conceptualization of alternativity as freedom, we detail the emergent character of organizing that seeks to break free from rather than to achieve a pattern.

We embark on our exploration of alternativity as freedom by siding with Merleau-Ponty over Sartre, thereby assuming that freedom is never 'absolute' and always 'situated' – that is, limited by the context of its enactment (Webber, 2011). Although the term 'bounded freedom' may seem an oxymoron, as Malinowski (1947/2015: 25) makes plain, freedom can ultimately only be defined as 'the chains which suit you'. We acknowledge the premise that freedom is always limited, but disagree that freedom comes from accepting those limitations, instead conceptualizing it as the constant struggle to transcend existing boundaries. In the context of alternative organization, this leads us to ask: *How do alternative forms of organizing create conditions of possibility for freedom and what organizational tactics enable the emergence of alternativity as freedom?*

To establish the conceptual basis for exploring this question, we begin by reviewing existing literature on alternative organization. Drawing on the work of Gibson-Graham (2008), we identify and problematize the tendency within this literature to privilege specific principles or practices as inherently alternative, pointing to two major pitfalls in this respect. First, defining alternative organizations, whether according to their principles or practices, limits the scope of what can be considered alternative to preconceived ideals. Second, by conceptualizing 'the alternative' as a demarcated social domain, one overlooks its involvement with 'the non-alternative' and fails to appreciate how easily the former can turn into the latter (and vice versa). To remedy these shortcomings, we introduce the supplementary conceptualization of alternativity as freedom,

highlighting how this approach not only enables us to discover alternative forms of organizing in unexpected places but also more adequately conceptualizes alternative organization as resulting from the tensions between the making and breaking of organizational patterns.

Against this backdrop, we turn to the empirical study of our three disparate cases, identifying a common and well-known trajectory: rejecting the socioeconomic order typically sparks alternative organizing, but, if sufficiently successful, such organizing is often appropriated by the very order it rejects (see e.g., Selznick, 1949). We then explore how alternativity as freedom emerges from the tensions of this trajectory and identify the tactics of *endurance*, *germination,* and *reiteration* as specific forms of such emergence. Although each tactic is most clearly present in one of the respective cases, we argue that every case contains traces of all three, indicating that our list of tactics is neither exclusive nor exhaustive. Surely, endurance, germination, and reiteration are not the only tactics of emergence, but our study suggests that they are, indeed, central to the negotiation of tensions between rejection and appropriation, as they keep the liberating promise of the alternative open. Having identified these tactics and considered their interrelations and combined potential for constituting alternativity as freedom, we discuss the broader prospects that our study might hold for organizational theories and practices of freedom in the 21st century. Freedom, we maintain, never exists as a stable form, but only emerges in dynamic formations. Alternative organizations are precisely such formations, offering potential for freedom to emerge – as long as they themselves remain emergent.

Alternative organization between principles, practices, and freedom

Despite occasional claims to the contrary, the field of organization and management studies (OMS) has a long history of studying and conceptualizing 'the alternative' (Schreven et al., 2008), inspired by a broad range of empirical topics and theoretical traditions (see Parker et al., 2007; Artenzi, 2012;

Cheney and Munshi, 2017; Phillips and Jeanes, 2018). Indeed, the very inclination to ponder unconventional modes of organizing may be as old as OMS itself.

Early attempts to define alternatives are often associated with Follett's (1918) path-breaking work on 'group organization' as differing from hierarchical and bureaucratic organizational forms. The resulting understanding of alternative organizations as essentially anti-bureaucratic and non-hierarchical permeates early contributions to OMS (e.g., Selznick, 1949; White, 1969; Davis, 1977). A more recent source of inspiration is Rothschild-Whitt's (1979) work on 'collectivist organizations', united around certain normative principles rather than specific objectives and governed by these principles rather than by formal rules and regulations. Kanter (1972) offers a similar approach to the study of alternative organization in her historical account of 'utopian' communities that adhere to collectivist principles such as 'communion' and 'deindividuation'.

Although sharing a general conceptualization of alternative organization as anti-bureaucratic and non-hierarchical, these seminal studies diverge regarding their emphasis on either specific *practices* (e.g., group organization) or certain *principles* (e.g., communion) as key to establishing and preserving alternatives. In what follows, we show how this division between principles and practices remains central to contemporary research, but identify a third, still inchoate line of inquiry, which we label 'alternativity as freedom' in homage to its roots in theories of resistance and liberation (most notably, Foucault, 1997; Butler, 2004; Mathiesen, 1974). With our empirical work as a springboard, we then seek to contribute to the understanding of alternativity as freedom.

Alternativity as principle

One stream of contemporary research identifies 'the alternative' in terms of values such as justice and human dignity (Pal, 2016), post-capitalism (Daskalaki et al., 2019), and non-hierarchy (Land and King, 2014), or autonomy, solidarity, and responsibility (Parker et al., 2014a). Accordingly, alternative principles are defined as prerequisites for socioeconomic change to manifest in alternative organizational practices (Daskalaki et al., 2019).

Parker et al.'s (2014a) definition of alternative organization is a seminal point of reference for conceptualizations of alternativity as principle. Encouraging 'forms of organizing which respect personal autonomy, but within a framework of co-operation, and are attentive to the sorts of futures which they will produce' (Parker et al., 2014a: 623), this definition is inspired by anarchist thinking and sees organizing as a political objective in its own right. Alternative organizations that are guided by the principles of autonomy, solidarity, and responsibility embed a normative aim and seek to make the concomitant 'politics durable' (Parker et al., 2014b: 39).

These three principles, then, provide a clear political direction for the study of alternative organization and have inspired an array of studies of organizational forms that counteract capitalism (see e.g., Meyer and Hudson, 2017; Ossewaarde and Reijers, 2017; Webb and Cheney, 2014; Daskalaki et al., 2019). However, the very strength of conceptualizing alternativity as principle is also its weakness; when certain normative principles are defined *a priori* as alternative, the stipulated principles effectively delimit which organizations can be considered alternative. Hence, despite having many merits, this approach risks becoming tautological, as it only studies those organizations that are defined by the principles of alternativity and fails to consider unconventional initiatives that rely on other value rationalities than those identified in advance. Thus, this line of research represents what

Gibson-Graham (2008) call a 'binary' approach that only recognizes alternatives whose principles explicitly position them against capitalism.

Alternativity as practice

Another strand of contemporary research emphasizes alternative organizational *practices* such as horizontal decision-making (Daskalaki and Kokkinidis, 2017), open meetings (Bryer, 2020), and artistic self-expression (Reedy et al., 2016). For instance, Reinecke's (2018: 1305) study of 'prefiguration' in Occupy London is about 'practicing rather than preaching politics'. Similarly, Skoglund and Böhm (2020: 1274) highlight how the everyday actions of employees at a large energy company facilitate the 'instant creation of a "new world" at work and perhaps even beyond'.

Conceptualizing alternatives as practice, as in the above examples, accordingly 'makes visible how activism is becoming more dispersed and boundaryless in the current turbulent political landscape' (Skoglund and Böhm, 2020: 1273), thereby enabling researchers to discover alternatives that transgress organizational boundaries. This conceptualization also facilitates the development of analytical strategies that do not – by default – operate within an anti-/capitalism dichotomy.

Still, a focus on practices tends to imply a predetermined sense of normativity, as manifested in the blurring of analytical categories. For instance, the concept of prefiguration seems to denote a certain type of activist practice, but simultaneously functions as a normative standard for determining the inherent value of that practice (du Plessis and Husted, 2022; Parker, 2021). Further, while the alternativity-as-principle approach finds its main strength in its precision, this is the weakness of the practice approach. The implicit normativity of this seemingly open approach engenders ambivalence, thus obscuring what exactly makes a practice alternative rather than conventional. Consequently, as

Gibson-Graham (2008) point out, one can only assess the alternativity of a practice by considering its aims.

In sum, and following Gibson-Graham's conceptualization of diverse economies, we might say that alternativity as principle is too criticial of any practice that does not enact the stipulated principles, but that alternativity as practice in turn risks losing its critical orientation altogether. This begs the question, 'how do we disinvest in our paranoid practices of critique and mastery and undertake thinking that can energize and support "other economies"?' (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 618).

Alternativity as freedom

While alternativity is primarily studied and conceptualized in terms of principles and practices, a third and less advanced strand of research emphasizes *freedom* as the defining characteristic of alternativity. We find one indication of the potential of this approach in Jensen's (2020) discursive perspective on alternative organization, which he developed through a study of two homeless women's shelters that operate in similar institutional environments but employ different discursive strategies. One shelter sought to socially reintegrate the homeless by drawing on prevailing neoliberal and paternalistic discourses; the other drew on anarchist and feminist discourses to actively resist neoliberal hegemony. With this study, Jensen illustrates how alternative organizations can navigate competing 'discursive resources', thereby carving out spaces of freedom within the established order (Jensen, 2020: 18).

This approach sits uneasily with the canon of alternative organization because it avoids *a priori* assumptions about the inherent alternativity of certain principles or practices. Yet, we suggest, it offers a promising avenue for those wishing to heed Gibson-Graham's call for research that is

simultaneously critically directed and open-ended. The approach is conceptually rooted in a Foucaultian understanding of 'critique' as the question of 'how not to be governed like that, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures' (Foucault, 1997: 44). As Butler (2001) explains, this conceptualization of critique represents an act of liberation, thus linking freedom *from* a dominant order to the organization of alternatives. Within this body of research, alternativity is related to enacting the 'micro-politics of resistance' (Thomas and Davies, 2005), to countering dominant norms and institutions rather than advocating a particular set of political principles or promoting certain organizational practices. In this sense, alternativity is conceived negatively as a struggle *against* established 'positives' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 93).

Despite the strong emphasis on negation within this approach, the alternative must offer a replacement for that which it negates – or it would hardly be an alternative, as Gibson-Graham make clear. The instant an alternative is positively formulated, however, a fundamental dilemma arises, since currently subversive principles and practices may themselves become dominant over time. As Butler (2004: 115) notes:

> On the one hand, living without norms of recognition results in significant suffering and forms of disenfranchisement that confound the very distinctions among psychic, cultural, and material consequences. On the other hand, the demand to be recognized, which is a very powerful political demand, can lead to new and invidious forms of social hierarchy.

By formulating the dilemma in terms of 'the norms of recognition', Butler implicitly relates the expression of alternatives to the impossibility of absolute freedom. Indeed, not only is freedom limited, it is also limiting – what some experience as liberating will inevitably constrain others. This realization – that resistance may turn into power – implies that alternative organizations must

constantly reinvent themselves to remain alternative and thus keep offering potential freedom from (their own) domination.

Hence, the alternative must always be and necessarily remain unfinished, that is, 'messianic' in Derrida's sense of the ever-deferred, which is also already and with equal necessity *emergent*. In Derrida's (1994: 65) own words:

> the effectivity or actuality of the democratic promise, like that of the communist promise, will always keep within it, and it must do so, this absolutely undetermined messianic hope at its heart, this eschatological relation to the to-come of an event *and* of a singularity, of an alterity that cannot be anticipated.

Unlike democracy or communism, the promise of the alternative is directly eschatological in Derrida's sense: instead of containing an implicit hope of what is to come, the alternative is explicitly articulated as different from what is. As such, the alternative is 'the other' within any existing order; it appears in the cracks and crevices of that order, in the recesses that evade (discursive) regulation, and in places where, as Foucault (1990) might have it, liberties can be taken.

When conceptualized as freedom, alternativity is a process of perpetual becoming, because the act of finalizing a given alternative's principles and practices would establish a pattern only graspable as non-alternative. Mathiesen (1974: 13) highlights this unfinished nature of alternatives:

> I have gradually acquired the belief that the alternative lies in the unfinished, in the sketch, in what is not yet fully existing. […] It means that any attempt to change the existing order into something completely finished, a fully formed entity, is destined to fail: in the process of finishing lies a return to the by-gone.

As such, this perspective addresses the issues of the two established approaches, insisting on the critique of existing principles and practices while refusing to assume the alternativity of other principles or practices. Thus, this perspective allows one to look for alternativity more inductively and, perhaps surprisingly, discover organizational characteristics that – for the moment – serve liberating purposes. This enables a dynamic analysis that is less preconceived and more nuanced because it recognizes the intrinsic interrelations of the 'alternative' and the 'non-alternative'. It also acknowledges that the dilemma of alternative organization can never be resolved: whatever appears alternative today may become dominant tomorrow – meaning, the organization of alternativity as freedom is an ongoing and open-ended process.

As mentioned, this perspective remains marginal within OMS, since work on alternative organization generally define alternativity as principles and/or practices. Consequently, this article aims to develop and substantiate the approach to *alternativity as freedom*. We will return to this objective in the concluding discussion, but first turn to establishing our method of inquiry.

Methodological considerations

The empirical investigations conducted for this article are grounded in our common concern with whether and how alternative organizational forms offer freedom. Exploring this issue, we have entered disparate empirical contexts, thereby uncovering distinctly different trajectories and tactics. In what follows, we introduce our three empirical sites of investigation, present the methods of data collection, and detail the analytical process.

Case presentations

Since we do not limit our understanding of the alternative to a specific set of principles or practices, but rather see it as the eschatological impulse toward 'not being governed like that', we have selected disparate cases of diverse alternativities. As such, we have pursued empirical investigations into widely varying forms of alternative organizing, respectively representing the realm of the subject (mindfulness meditation), the economy (a sustainable pensions investment company), and politics (an independent political party). Despite their differences, these three distinct sites of alternative organizing share a messianic vision of freedom from the dominant order as well as an explicit ambition of remaining 'alternative' in the face of potential appropriation.

Mindfulness meditation within work organizations operates at the level of individual practices and cuts across organizational settings, offering employees release from the constraints of current norms. Defined as a cultivation of 'the awareness that arises from paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally' (Kabat-Zinn, 2017: 1127), mindfulness has gained considerable traction in recent years (Badham and King, 2019), making its way into organizations spanning from McKinsey to Black Lives Matter, and employee benefits increasingly include programmes like mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and Google's 'Search Inside Yourself'. On the one hand, mindfulness meditation presents itself as an alternative to dominant forms of subjectivity that underpin contemporary capitalism and its concomitant interpellations toward consumerism, individualism, etc. On the other hand, corporate managers have utilized mindfulness practices as tools for helping employees comply with dominant subjectivities, e.g., by coping with stress and enhancing job performance (Dane and Brummel, 2013). Hence, the mindfulness teachers interviewed for this study recognize the immediate risk of appropriation posed to the promise of individual freedom, as

mindfulness practices may serve various organizational goals and could easily come to uphold dominant socioeconomic structures (Islam et al., 2022).

SusPens (a pseudonym) is a fintech start-up that seeks to alter the market for pensions savings by creating more sustainable investment opportunities. SusPens was founded on the ambition of making capital work for sustainability and, more specifically, of moving investments away from polluting businesses and into green industries. Hence, we may define the company as an organizational alternative that aims at freeing pensions investments from current market logics and reemploying these investments for the greater common good (for other examples of the alternative organization of finance, see e.g., Parker and Parker, 2017; Giamporcaro and Gond, 2016). Initially, SusPens' founders wanted to form an independent pensions fund, but they soon found that the small start-up could not meet the institutional, economic, and legal requirements of this organizational form. Instead, the organization developed as partnership model, involving the creation of sustainable pensions investment portfolios for established pensions funds (and other investors). This, however, placed the founders in a dilemma: because the organization's products had to appear profitable to prospective investors, SusPens risked becoming subjected to, as opposed to free from, market logics.

Independents for Frome (IfF) is a political party that has gained absolute majority in the town council of Frome, UK, offering community members an alternative to politics as usual. Formed by a group of resourceful locals during a public meeting at a crowded pub in late 2010, IfF officially became a so-called 'minor party' a few months later, running in its first town elections in 2011. Winning 10 out of 17 seats in the local council, the party secured a solid majority only half a year after it was founded. By 2015, IfF claimed the remaining seven seats, thus establishing Britain's first all-out independent town council. The party successfully defended its absolute majority in 2019, despite none of the

original councillors of the 2011 administration remaining on the ballot. IfF aims to offer Frome's citizens freedom from traditional hierarchical structures and overly bureaucratic procedures. However, the incumbent IfF councillors have come to realize that the party's main objective of 'getting things done' may depend on formalization, which has compelled them to adopt a more mainstream organizational form. In this instance, then, freedom from the constraints of the established political system conflicts with the ability to achieve political results within the remit of that system (for analyses of similar political processes, see Husted and Plesner, 2017; Ringel, 2019).

In comparing the 'realms of alternativity' in which the three cases operate, we wish to explore how they offer alternatives to dominant norms of subjectivity (mindfulness teachers), to the greed of financial markets (SusPens), and to petrified bureaucracy (IfF). As such, all three cases understand themselves as alternatives to dominant orders and are driven by ideals of individual, economic, and political freedom, respectively.

Data collection

For each case, we conducted an ethnographic study, including interviews, observations, and documents (see Table 1 for an overview). In terms of observations, the first author followed SusPens for 8 months, from April 2018 to December 2018. Taking the role of participant-as-observer (Gold, 1957), this author partook in 31 organizational bi-weekly status meetings and workshops. The second author engaged with mindfulness by participating in an 8-week MBSR course, running from January to March 2020. The third author engaged with IfF during two field trips to Frome in 2019, attending council meetings, panel debates, and various social gatherings as an 'overt outsider' (McCurdy and Uldam, 2014).

This article is mainly based on our interviews, 57 in total, conducted across the three cases. During the SusPens fieldwork, the organization's two founders were interviewed several times and all full-time team members were interviewed once, resulting in 11 formal interviews. For the mindfulness case, 26 semi-structured online interviews were conducted with practitioners situated in the USA, the UK, Denmark, Israel, India, Germany, France, and Spain. About a third of the interviewees were employed as mindfulness teachers in corporate settings, a third worked at large meditation centres, and a third freelanced in various settings. Some were also involved in activist work. The IfF fieldwork included 17 onsite interviews and three online conversations;13 of the interviewees were councillors in the second administration (2015–2019), five were town hall staff, and two were external consultants associated with IfF.

Finally, of the documents collected in all three cases, a total of 81 were analysed for this article. SusPens' digital archive, including memos, funding applications, investor presentations, and working papers, gave us access to 54 documents. The mindfulness case included 12 documents, seven of which were texts on the MBSR-course reading list and five were suggested by the interviewed teachers. In the case of IfF, the analysis included 15 written accounts by former and current IfF councillors.

	Interviews	*Observations*	*Documents*
Mindfulness	26	8-week course	12
SusPens	11	27 status meetings, 4 seminars	54
Frome	20	9 full days	15

Table 1: Overview of data sources

Coding and analysis

The analysis focuses on the unfinished and unfinishable character of alternative organization, beginning from the observation that alternativity relies on an 'other' for its own articulation. The alternative is only alternative in relation to something (normative subjectivity, mainstream organization, dominant societal order) from which it must delineate itself (Cheney, 2014). Although establishing an alternative requires rejecting an existing pattern, the alternative immediately risks patterning, as currently dominant orders tend to appropriate alternatives, placing new principles and practices in the service of existing norms rather than causing their subversion. Capitalism, after all, has proven uniquely resilient, as it assimilates, even thrives on, critique (Chiapello, 2013).

De Certeau (1984) explains the societal trajectory of rejection and appropriation as a dynamic relationship between strategies and tactics. Here, de Certeau is inspired by Foucault's definition of strategies as the dual expression of power and resistance, with the latter being 'formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised' (Foucault, 1980: 182), and by his suggestion that historical trajectories might best be studied in terms of 'the intelligibility of struggles, of strategies and tactics' (Foucault, 1980: 114). De Certeau specifies the relationship between strategies as the exercise of power and tactics as countermoves, arguing that whereas strategies are spatial (stable and formalized), tactics are temporal (fleeting and improvised). He states:

> A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentary, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. […] a tactic depends on time – it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized "on the wing." Whatever it wins, it does not keep (de Certeau, 1984: xix).

Tactics, then, are multiple, impermanent, emergent.

Inspired by the proposition that alternativity might break free from strategic trajectories through tactics of emergence, we turned to the specific coding of our data. To this end, we accepted Ashcraft and Muhr's (2018: 219) invitation to promiscuous coding, a practice that 'may dwell upon and even savour certain pairings, but […] also recognizes that pairings are impermanent, satisfying (or not) for a particular time and purpose without progressing toward matrimonial commitment'. This approach, we believe, is particularly suited to our purpose, as it 'enacts strategic *in*essentialism, toying with many possible essences, shape-shifting, or refusing essence to see how it feels when the bottom drops out' (Ashcraft and Muhr, 2018: 219, emphasis in original). Hence, the practice of promiscuous coding has enabled us to explore the various ways in which desires for freedom might play out within and across our case organizations.

Promiscuous coding has also allowed us to work freely with each other's data, coding collaboratively for specific ways in which modes of engagement between 'the alternative' and 'the mainstream' manifest themselves in each of the three cases (see online-only appendix A for the data structures of each case). In the first round of coding, we inductively coded the data, looking for the various tactics the alternative organizations employed to break free from the current mainstream. In this process, we realized that all our cases had *rejected* the mainstream in a similar way, but also found that dominant forms of organizing strategically *appropriated* their tactics for freedom (see Figure 1).

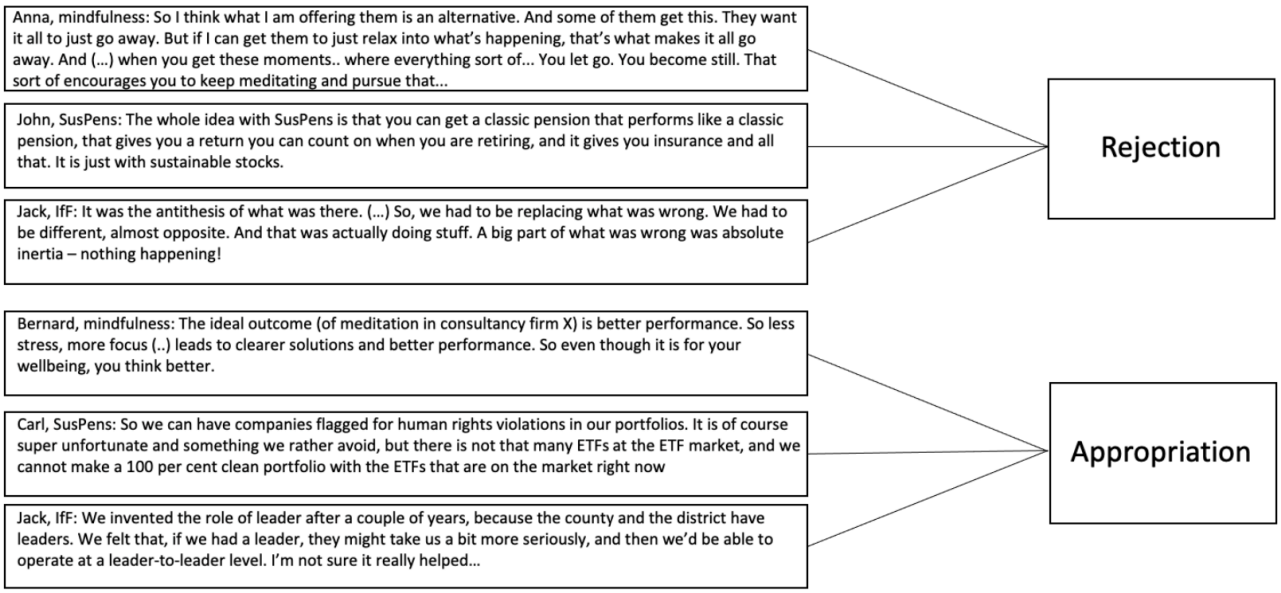

Figure 1: Data Structure: Trajectory of rejection-appropriation

This familiar story initially triggered a sense of hopelessness, but also prompted us to re-examine the data more closely and in different ways. In the second round of coding, we therefore searched for tactics that might emerge from the cracks in the trajectory, the spaces in-between rejection and appropriation, thus finding that our case organizations each favoured a specific tactic: *germination*, *endurance*, and *reiteration* (see Figure 2). Although eventually hooking each of our cases up with a particular version of alternativity as freedom, we do not necessarily believe that they are, metaphorically speaking, going steady. Continuing the promiscuous approach, a final round of coding involved looking for the tactics that we had paired with either case in the two others (see online-only appendix B for the alternative data structures of each tactic). Thus, what follows is our provisional analytical stabilization of what are *in*essentially 'open relationships', which will be 're-destabilized' in the discussion.

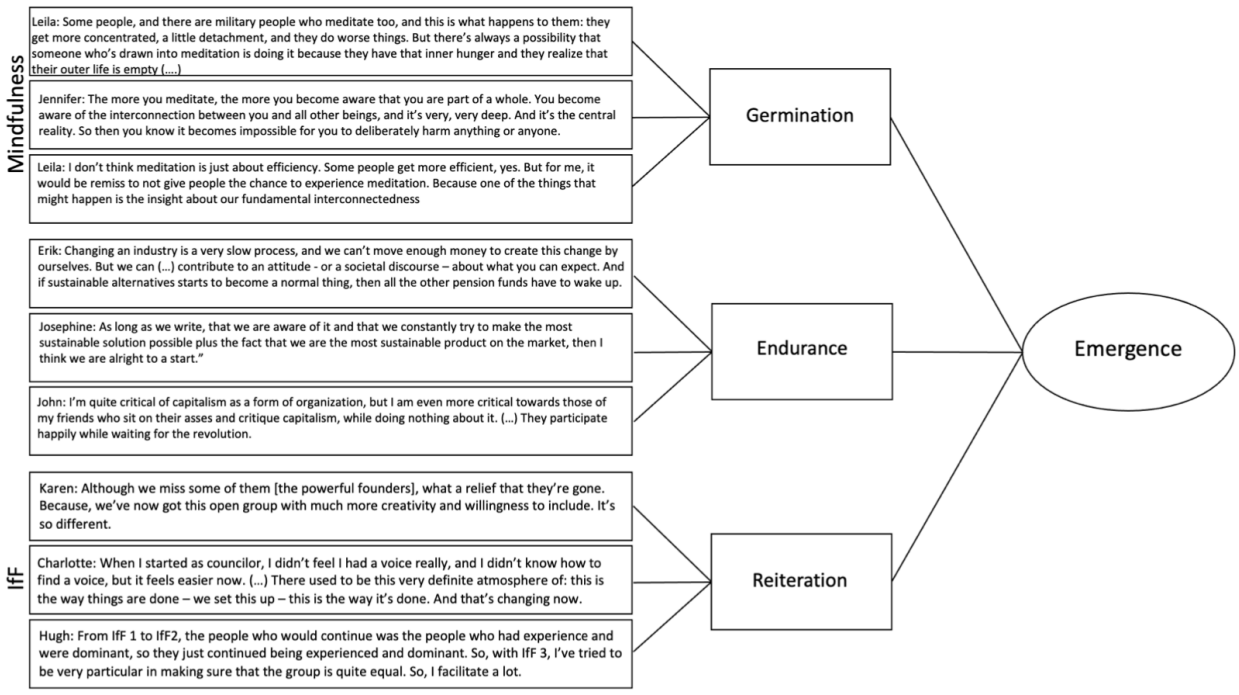

Figure 2: Data structure: Tactics of emergence

We organize the analysis in two main sections: The first briefly summarizes the interrelation between rejection and appropriation that is common to all three cases. The other details the different tactics of germination, endurance, and reiteration, each of which engenders a unique trajectory by keeping the space between rejection and appropriation open in different ways. However, as we will subsequently discuss, this distinction is largely an analytical abstraction; since tactics are defined by their very irregularity and opportunism, they remain ephemeral, dynamic, and reliant on strategies to emerge. Still, making a distinction between strategies and tactics and identifying each case's tactics is not just a structuring principle for the analysis, as the two rounds of analysis also highlight the very potentiality of alternativity as freedom. Freedom never *is* but becomes possible across the different trajectories of individual and collective efforts to make alternatives emerge.

Analysis: Trajectories of organized freedom

As the opposing forces of rejection and appropriation continuously pull at each other, new forms of freedom can potentially emerge from the cracks between them. In this section, we first consider the general trajectory of alternative organizing, which in all three cases involved an initial tactic of establishing the alternative through a *rejection* of the dominant order, followed by a strategic *appropriation* of the alternative. We intentionally smooth out this first round of analysis, building a common story in order to emphasize and detail the differing tactics of emergent freedom in the second round (see Gibson-Graham, 1996: 543).

From rejection to appropriation

Their many differences notwithstanding, all three cases follow the familiar trajectory of a rising and falling alternative that first asserts its freedom by tactically rejecting a dominant order whereupon this order reasserts itself by strategically appropriating the alternative.

Rejection

SusPens and IfF see themselves as alternatives to rather different orders – those of financial investment and of town governance, respectively – but the founders of these two organizations recount very similar origin stories. Both emerged as a tactical rejection of existing organizational principles and/or practices, with one rejecting dirty stocks and the other dirty politics. In SusPens, this rejection led to a fairly traditional product, albeit a clean one:

> The whole idea with SusPens is that you can get a classic pension that performs like a classic pension, that gives you a return you can count on when you're retiring, and it gives you insurance and all that. It's just with sustainable stocks. (John)

Thus, SusPens rejects unsustainable practices, insisting that the principles of profitability and sustainability are not necessarily contradictory. While this organization pursues freedom from the current order of the pensions industry, it still wants to remain in that industry, seeking to change it from within and ultimately make all pensions investments more sustainable.

IfF offers a somewhat more radical tactic for rejecting the principles *and* practices of political establishment, positioning itself as an 'anti-party party':

> There was no innovation, no change, and it was either right-wing or left-wing or somewhere in the middle, and that was what it was going to be. Just ridiculous. And nothing ever got done. That put me off. So, the IfF thing was: we're not doing any of that! (Mike)

More specifically, IfF rejects the traditional organizational template of party politics, which members and supporters of the new party associate with oligarchic decision-making, stultifying party discipline, and general indolence. IfF offers freedom in the sense of not being held back by ideological constraints and bureaucratic procedures, but instead being able to 'make things happen' (Sarah) and exercise meaningful choices that actually impact the lives of Frome's inhabitants.

Mindfulness meditation offers a similarly radical rejection of all the things that traditionally 'run your life' (Jonas) but begins with personal practices rather than organizational principles. As practitioners learn to 'let go of thoughts and emotions and observe them from an outside place' (MBSR field notes), they may become able to 'liberate the mind, and decolonize the spirit':

> they [the meditation students] start to see something that is other than what they understand life to be, based on what has [...] been conditioned from our political realm of our country, you know, nationalism, individualism, capitalism, conditioned within our own culture or conditioned as a gender or identification […] So, bringing them to […] a possibility of

> opening a door that might lead to endless possibilities of transformation is, to me, a good thing. (Marianne)

For many teachers, meditation thus implies a freedom from the conditioning of subjectivity imposed by dominant social structures, a rejection of – or 'decolonization' from – existing norms.

Appropriation

The practice of letting go can be strategically appropriated to maintain rather than reject dominant orders, as most of the interviewed meditation teachers are keenly aware:

> The military and police departments have used mindfulness practice essentially to create more efficient killers. And corporations have used mindfulness to create more efficient capitalists. And to me, the teachings of meditation and mindfulness were never about dealing with the stresses of our current society, so that we can kind of stay *in* the current society. And I think that's the danger that happens when you separate meditation and mindfulness practices from the ethical and spiritual teachings that they were always combined with. (Haru)

Several teachers refer to this sidestepping of ethics as 'spiritual by-passing', where meditation is appropriated for the purpose of avoiding confrontation with the structural causes of suffering and unresolved psychological issues: 'You just want to sit down and feel the bliss of certain states, and not address what is really happening' (Marianne). As one teacher suggested in discussing the omnipresence of mindfulness practices in Silicon Valley, 'if those employees are *really* meditating, they'll quit Google' (Jeff). With strategic appropriation, however, people risk meditating to become able to *stay in* rather than *opt out of* oppressive structures.

In the case of SusPens, the main risk is not strategic appropriation of its practices, but the balancing of principles of sustainable *and* profitable pensions, which immediately leads the organization toward compromise. Rather than attain a completely 'pure' investment portfolio, the company must settle for a 'pragmatic middle way', and including unsustainable stocks becomes acceptable in the name of profit: 'If we were to be that rigid […] we wouldn't have a product' (Carl). In SusPens, the logic of sustainability is at constant risk of succumbing to and being appropriated by the logic of the market, to the dismay of some employees:

> I was attracted to just that, like cool, here's a pension fund that does good on several parameters. But it's like it has become specialized in climate issues because they are quantifiable and measurable and easy to report on. The more parameters included, like human rights and women on boards, the harder it is to present an economically viable output. And it's not supposed to cost our clients anything to invest sustainably. That's our unique selling point. (Maria)

Although SusPens tactically rejected the logic of a trade-off between sustainability and profitability, the organization has arguably become strategically appropriated by it – and when a trade-off is accepted, profitability always seems to hold the winning hand (see also Just et al., 2021).

Whereas appropriation happens from within SusPens, the IfF councillors are faced with external constraints. First, town councils in the UK have little autonomy; they control parks, cemeteries, pavements, and a few other areas of public concern, but the primary local political authority resides with the district and county councils. Hence, town councils must lobby higher tiers of government to enhance their political clout. Second, conventionally structured district and county councils prefer to communicate with party 'leaders', a position that IfF had initially decided to abolish in a bid to make town government more horizontal and consensus-oriented. As one councillor explains:

> We invented the role of leader after a couple of years because the county and the district have leaders. We felt that, if we had a leader, they might take us a bit more seriously, and then we'd be able to operate at a leader-to-leader level. (Jack)

Thus, for IfF, obtaining broader impact required mainstreaming its organization. Here, strategic appropriation might initially function as a tactic for gaining influence. To appear legitimate to higher levels of government and, thereby, increase the chance of bringing real change to the local community, IfF decided to imitate a more traditional political party. However, becoming influential came at a cost:

> The more experienced and the more dominant got to run things, and quite a lot of people felt left behind. […] I think 'the blokes' were pretty powerful. […] A lot of women felt that they were being pushed aside and that their perspectives were being ignored. And I think they were right; it was true. (Hugh)

IfF may have adopted traditional organizational forms in order to realize its goals, but this adoption nevertheless compromised the organization's alternativity, which was based on a tactical rejection of bureaucracy and party discipline. In becoming appropriated by the political establishment, IfF risks losing its legitimacy as an alternative to that establishment.

Tactics of emergence: Endurance, germination, and reiteration

In the first round of analysis grassroots politics, sustainable finance, and mindfulness meditation have been established as alternative forms of organizing that tactically reject an established order – of oligarchic bureaucracy, profit-maximization, and unconscious living, respectively. However, each alternative, as we have seen, also immediately risks being strategically appropriated by or reproducing that which it set out to reject and overturn. In the case of SusPens, the dominant order was never thoroughly rejected, as the organization sought to change financialized capitalism from within, using

the profitability of sustainable investments as a tactical lever for broader change, but thereby also potentially placing sustainability in the service of profit. For IfF, strategic appropriation was initially a tactic to gain influence, as the organization realized it would have to look more traditional to become recognized in broader political contexts. Imitating a mainstream organization, however, risks becoming performative and thus bringing the organization ever closer to the forms it set out to reject. Finally, meditation practices are just that – practices – and practices can be appropriated for different purposes, including those of mainstream capitalist organizations and institutions of law and order, no matter how explicitly the interviewed mindfulness teachers reject such purposes.

In each case, the general trajectory from rejection to appropriation follows specific paths that enable different tactics of emergence, different ways of maintaining the potential for freedom that resides in the alternative. In the sustainable fin-tech start-up SusPens, freedom emerges in and through slow, piecemeal change: *endurance*. Mindfulness meditation develops a more uncontrollable tactic of sprouting freedom: g*ermination*. Finally, in IfF, freedom appears as continuous renewal through trial and error: *reiteration*. In what follows, we detail these tactics, beginning with the endurance of SusPens.

Endurance

While SusPens might be accused of having (re-)internalized the dominant market logic of profit maximization, its organizational ambition of sustainable investment has not been thwarted. Instead, the founders remain determined that their continued effort is worthwhile:

> I'm quite critical of capitalism as a form of organization, but I'm even more critical toward those of my friends who sit on their asses and critique capitalism while doing nothing about

> it. […] They still buy their groceries and don't care where their money is invested. They participate happily while waiting for the revolution. (John)

When the alternative is threatened with co-optation, it can either abandon or accept its new and somewhat corrupted version. SusPens has played at the fringes of capitalism from day one, which is why the organization consciously sacrifices the 'purity' of its alternative in order to continue pushing the financial sector in a more sustainable direction.

As such, SusPens is responding to a key dilemma for alternatives: be less alternative but more impactful or more alternative but less impactful. This dilemma becomes especially pertinent as SusPens keeps striving to make the pensions industry more sustainable from within – an organizational goal only achievable through being part of the industry:

> Changing an industry is a very slow process, and we can't move enough money to create this change by ourselves. But we can […] contribute to an attitude – or a societal discourse – about what you can expect. And if sustainable alternatives start to become a normal thing, then all the other pensions funds have to wake up. (John)

SusPens, then, handles the dilemma by accepting its status as a corrupted alternative: 'We're not perfect […] we're really not, as you can hear' (John). Nevertheless, the organization continues to push 'things and say, yes, the more impact-oriented the better' (Erik).

Instead of giving up or settling for a lesser version of itself, SusPens braces for the duration and 'constantly tries to make the most sustainable solution possible' (Carl). Accordingly, the organization keeps exploring possibilities for incorporating more sustainability factors into its investment portfolios, arguing that changing an industry is not 'a quick fix' or a revolution, but can only happen gradually, one portfolio at a time. Changing the industry is an inevitably slow and piecemeal process

of *endurance* that can easily (and sometimes justifiably) be written off as capitalist co-optation. Placing sustainability at the service of profitability, SusPens only goes as far as profit takes it. Nevertheless, it perseveres, maintaining its potential to break free of current norms of financialized capitalism through a tactic of incremental, but continuous steps.

Rather than abandoning its ideals of doing things differently, SusPens endures. By continuously engaging with the powers that be, it avoids simply succumbing to appropriation and finds freedom in the space between rejection and appropriation. This makes the tactic of endurance a *slow, piecemeal process of continuous engagement with the dominant order, a process of exploring possibilities for freedom in small, gradual steps*. Thus, appropriation need not necessarily be feared, as engaging with the dominant order can become a source of freedom. Moreover, as the next section will show, freedom may even grow from being appropriated. This happens through a process of inverse appropriation, or *germination,* that sublimates the opposing dynamics of rejection and appropriation.

Germination

In the case of mindfulness, strategic appropriation does not occlude the possibility of emergent alternatives. Many teachers describe alternativity as a potentially emerging 'something' that appears organically or *germinates.* As a practice, mindfulness may serve different purposes, but when appropriated to control minds rather than set them free, it can come to function as a 'Trojan Horse' (Farb, 2014), transforming organizations from the inside out and liberating employee subjectivities, despite managerial intentions:

> So, I feel like introducing mindfulness in corporate settings is basically a good idea. I think that if there's someone who's a little bit more open […], then maybe it could reach that person and they could be free in whatever way. That could mean staying in that job. It could

> mean changing the environment. It could mean leaving. [...] And maybe eventually it would more collectively create enough cognitive dissonance, enough friction with the pace, […] you know, that people might be able to have a wake-up moment. (Aina)

Hence, the introduction of mindfulness can always be tactically justified, as it can spur freedom from any form of domination. With meditators acting as 'secret agents' (Aina) of change, the seed of freedom can potentially germinate in the more subterranean registers of social life.

Crucially, as many teachers emphasize, freedom is always transitory, an 'ongoing […] purification process' (Catharina), because the tensions of rejection and appropriation constantly reinsert themselves: 'We have this reminder that, like, "whatever you think it is – it's something else." So, there's no end in sight' (Anna). Nonetheless, several teachers point to the unfolding potentiality of this dynamic – namely, the possibility that, once introduced, mindfulness may grow beyond the initial purpose of its introduction to install alternative visions:

> I think the more that people use mindfulness practice, even in the absence of ethics, the more we lay a stronger foundation for when political moments like Occupy, Standing Rock and Black Lives Matter begin to spark. So, people with a foundation in mindfulness are the ones who are pouring into political action. (Haru)

The tactic of germination, then, suggests that freedom may grow from the very tensions of rejection and appropriation.

Consequently, the presumably inevitable encounter with strategic appropriation need not discourage alternative movements (and critical scholars). Instead of being something to fear, these encounters might be viewed as important tactical opportunities that alternatives could benefit from learning to employ. As the example of mindfulness meditation shows, the process of appropriation can

potentially be reversed (see also Coles, 2016: 150). As such, we understand germination as a tactic for managing the tension between rejection and appropriation through a kind of inverse appropriation*, in which discursive catering to dominant norms enables freedom to sprout furtively in the visceral and non-discursive registers of life.*

Both the tactics of germination and endurance imply that freedom only exists in the ever-deferred form of an unfinished alternative. In the case of IfF, we turn to a situation where the alternative has become dominant and encounter a final tactic for evading appropriation by actively upholding the unfinished nature of alternativity – *reiteration.*

Reiteration

Having attained a full majority in the Frome town council in only four years' time, the founding IfF councillors decided not to run for a third term in the 2019 elections. Although each had their reasons for disengaging, most expressed a concern with the way they had come to operate the council. It had, they said, become less fun and more demanding than it used to be, and some (female) councillors felt subordinated or even excluded by the party's (un)official (male) leaders.

Although the two previous IfF councils had sponsored many important policy initiatives, the councillors' pursuit of external legitimacy had comprised the party's internal organizational setup. Most councillors felt this compromise called for a new version, or iteration, of IfF:

> It started out as something light-hearted: We could win here – the lunatics are taking over the asylum! And it's gotten more and more serious as time has gone on. And, also, perhaps a bit less exciting, less innovative. So, I'll be really pleased if these people [the new

> administration] can find some other way of refreshing it – and it won't be through the people who started it originally. (Simon)

In the absence of 'powerful founders' (Charlotte), the newly elected third administration set about the task of reinventing IfF, focusing on the need to address feelings of exclusion and marginalization. In the process, notions of collaboration and dialogue became important to the new group of IfF councillors. One female councillor described the development as follows:

> When I started as councillor [in 2015], I didn't feel I had a voice really, and I didn't know how to find a voice, but it feels easier now [in 2019]. […] And I think that's because there aren't these strong leaders anymore. When you start something like this, there are always these vanguard people who blaze the trail, and they definitely had that status. […] There used to be this very definite atmosphere of 'this is the way things are done – we set this up – this is the way it's done'. And that's changing now. (Karen)

What made IfF alternative in 2011 (being innovative, bold, and radical) had become problematic in 2015, and what may have seemed tedious and ineffective in 2015 (being inclusive, collaborative, and transparent) had become alternative in 2019.

Applying the tactic of reiteration does not resolve the tensions of rejection and appropriation; to the contrary, it actively harnesses these tensions as means of maintaining alternativity. As such, we understand the tactic of reiteration *as the continuous reinvention of principles and practices through an unending process of trial and error.* Thus, there is no telling what the next iteration of IfF might look like, except that it, too, will be unfinished. As a consultant working with the party noted: 'what's great is that the model constantly refreshes itself' (Hugh). Taking our cue from this insight, we now turn to the discussion of whether and how the three tactics of emergent freedom might 'refresh' each other as a means of upholding (as opposed to realizing) the potentiality of alternativity as freedom.

Concluding discussion: Upholding alternativity as freedom

While the tactic of reiteration employed by IfF is distinct from SusPens' endurance and the germination of mindfulness practitioners, all three tactics point to the potential of alternativity as freedom, understood as the continuous emergence of an always 'unfinished' project (Mathiesen, 1974). To maintain the potential to free individuals and collectives from the strictures of dominant norms, alternative organizations must constantly contemplate how to challenge dominant organizational principles and practices, even when this requires a reformulation of one's own organization.

The case of IfF throws the need to continuously reinvent the alternative project into relief, as this organization has effectively become hegemonic in its immediate context by winning all seats on the town council. To remain alternative, IfF must reformulate itself in opposition to the original setup of its own organization. However, all three cases point to the potential that resides in the space between rejection and appropriation: the tactics of emergence, as identified in each particular case, are all ways of keeping that space open, steering the alternative free of the closure involved in both rejecting the currently dominant order and being appropriated by it. Delving further into the process of emergence, we first discuss the empirical implications of the tactics, as analysed above, and then turn to the issue of how the empirical analysis contributes to the conceptualization of alternativity as freedom.

Empirical trajectories: Tactics of emergence

In the analysis, we have detailed the ways in which our three case organizations (1) establish an alternative space by breaking free form existing organizational patterns and *rejecting* currently dominant conditions of possibility, (2) risk *appropriation* by these very conditions of possibility when

seeking to substantiate the alternative, as such substantiation implies the (re-)turn to an organizational pattern, and (3) negotiate the tensions of rejection and appropriation by employing tactics of *emergence* that reside at the very nexus of making and breaking organizational patterns. This final step is what allows the three studied alternatives to emerge as freedom, understood in the Foucaultian sense of not being 'governed like that', regardless of whether the alternative applies to the individual subject (mindfulness), the economy (SusPens), or politics (IfF).

The identified tactics are distinct because of the unique contexts in which they are employed. As such, rather than being exclusive to each case, they indicate what became available to organizations and organizational members at specific times and in specific situations. As De Certeau (1984) explains, tactics are neither inherent to a particular actor nor readily available to everyone in a particular setting; rather, they are transient and somewhat accidental – or, at the very least, contingent. Tactics are *bricolages*, put together of what happened to be around. Yet having identified the three tactics, we seem to recognize them everywhere, not only in the case initially associated with them, but across the three cases – and in every new alternative organization we consider. In fact, in revisiting our cases from the current vantage point, we find that all three tactics are present to varying degrees in each case. Thus, the analysis that focused on establishing the distinct tactics might warrant a less orderly discussion; returning to the metaphor of promiscuity (Ashcraft & Muhr, 2018), it is time to consider the possibility of different couplings.

For instance, SusPens' primary tactic may be endurance, but in its continued engagement with the pensions system one could argue that the start-up is sowing seeds of change that might, in time, germinate from within the mainstream. SusPens establishes this potentiality by allowing dominant actors to appropriate its sustainable investment techniques, thus helping to recode the ethos currently

occupying pensions investment practices. This suggests a tactic of germination. Further, we might view the founders' decision to abandon their original business plan of establishing an independent pensions fund in favour of a more agile and, perhaps, appropriable setup as a tactical reiteration. When SusPens was unable to emerge as an alternative in one form, it simply sought another, reiterating the process of starting over as many times as it took to find a viable form, and even as this form is proving more susceptible to appropriation than might have been hoped, the organization endures. As it does, SusPens might inspire others to adopt a more sustainable approach to finance, thereby potentially fertilizing the tactic of germination by means of endurance.

Similar dynamics may be found in IfF, whose main tactic for ensuring freedom is currently reiteration. However, to get to where it is today, the organization has also deployed other tactics. For instance, the party has arguably worked as a 'Trojan Horse' within the system of local politics, and the work carried out by the IfF councillors has, in fact, germinated. Thus, numerous councils across the UK now engage in more independent and undisciplined types of political action (Macfadyen, 2019), a development that can be interpreted as 'the […] stirrings of a different state of things' (Jameson, 2009: 416). To get to this stage of internal reiteration and external germination, party members have applied the tactic of endurance in day-to-day encounters with the 'less exciting' aspects of local politics. Specifically, the adoption of a formalized leader position in order to appear legitimate to higher tiers of government can be seen as part of an endurance tactic that explores possibilities for gradual increases in freedom through continuous engagement with the powers that be. As such, the tactic of endurance may be a necessary condition for upholding any alternative as it struggles to establish itself and develop its agency, whereas reiteration might only become viable in situations of extreme success or absolute failure on the part of the alternative.

Correspondingly, germination might be the most forceful tactic for engendering change outside of the organization itself, as when mindfulness practitioners insert themselves in corporate settings – or, when SusPens offers its tools to other businesses and other local councils learn from IfF. In the case of mindfulness, for germination to succeed, endurance may be necessary, as the teachers continuously negotiate the conditions under which corporate mindfulness programmes may be carried out, thus gradually testing the limits of what can be taught (e.g., kindness, interconnectedness, non-striving, etc.) to employees in a given organizational context (see also Van Gordon and Shonin, 2020) – and constantly running the risk of being appropriated by that context. Further, the idea of mindfulness as 'an ongoing purification process' with 'no end in sight' suggests that reiteration is inherent to the practice itself. As one interviewee forcefully reminds us: 'whatever you think it is – it's something else'. In the case of mindfulness, then, germination is always already reiteration.

As such, the identified tactics form a non-exclusive list of resources for emergence that is potentially available to various degrees to any given actor at any given time. Further, the list is non-exhaustive, as new tactics may emerge when situational conditions of possibility change. Yet the above consideration of the interlinkages between the three tactics not only opens up established relationships but also suggests new stabilizations. Perhaps it is not entirely coincidental that we found these three tactics nor that we can (re-)identify them across the three cases? This might be the beginning of a new pattern, yet another dominant organizational form...

To continue the process of breaking free from such patterning, let us re-emphasize another and deeper partiality: the sense in which the alternative only maintains its potentiality for freedom by not fully realizing the potential. Re-invoking Derrida, the most interesting dimension of the identified tactics is how they defer realization of the alternative in each their way – and are able to thrive on this

deferral. In the above, we have discussed the empirical interconnections between the various tactics of emergence, each with its respective means of avoiding closure by thriving on the tensions between rejection and appropriation. This brings us to the issue of what such emergence adds to the conceptualization of alternativity as freedom.

Conceptualizing emergence: Alternativity as freedom

The three emergent tactics – endurance, germination, reiteration – offer pointers for conceptualizing alternativity as freedom precisely because they are neither exclusive nor exclusionary. Rather, they enter into frivolous relations with each other and invite an exploration of further forms of emergence. As such, they offer a springboard for reconceptualizing organized and organizing freedom in the 21st century. We launched this article by suggesting that alternatives only offer freedom from dominant structures as long as they remain unfinished, always deferred, in a perpetual process of becoming. The three tactics identified here are opportunities for such deferral, thereby indicating the evanescence of freedom. Freedom is suspended in mid-air, only existing as 'lines of flight' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), imagined projections of the course from here to there.

Although this may suggest a certain dialectic of freedom, with emergence being the synthesis of the thesis of rejection and the antithesis of appropriation, we prefer to highlight the ways in which 'our constitutive interdependency' defines 'social freedom' (Butler, 2020: 24). Freedom is never obtained; it is not a thing to be had, but an orientation toward self and others that, somewhat paradoxically, begins with the recognition that no one is never free. Far from cutting ties, freedom only arises in relation to others, in the alternatives that emerge when we repeat variations of currently dominant norms. As Butler (2020: 41) points out, 'the established discourse remains established only by being perpetually re-established, so it risks itself in the very repetition it requires'. Thus, alternativity as

freedom is always parasitical on dominant norms, which is to say it emerges through tactics of doing things differently whilst remaining recognizable within the given context. Freedom resides in the possibility to do otherwise – it will never be achieved and, hence, never disappear.

For alternative organizing, this implies a shift away from (the study of) alternative principles and practices and toward the process of negotiating the tensions of maintaining and breaking patterns. Understanding alternativity as freedom has two main implications. First, it rejects preconceived ideals of what an alternative is, thus allowing pockets of freedom to be discovered in unexpected places. In this way, diverse, though relatively conventional organizational forms – like sustainable investment companies, mindfulness training, and independent political parties – can be conceived as alternative organizations, not because of what they are, but what they aspire to be. Second, this open and inductive approach remains critically oriented, as actually existing alternatives are not the end of freedom – but can inspire the continued search for organizational forms that may further individual, economic, and political freedom. We have specifically contributed to the development of alternativity as freedom by identifying three tactics of emergence and suggesting how these – and other tactics – might appear where one least expects it. However, our main conceptual contribution is to imbue the approach with a decisive normativity. Following Gibson-Graham (1993), we might conceptualize the study of alternativity as freedom as a search for everyday revolutions – and for revolution every day.

For work organizations, this means alternatives are role models – not (only) because of their stipulated goals or proposed practices, but (also) because of their recognition that fulfilment is impossible, which, as Hernes (2008) points out, is a too often ignored condition of possibility for all organization. Only in working toward freedom (in whatever form) does the possibility of freedom arise. And only

in the aspiration to fulfil this possibility – in our work toward it – do we become (and continue becoming) free.

Hence, alternativity as freedom only exists in emergent tactics for maintaining an open space between the overturning of the current order (rejection) and the re-enrolment within that order (appropriation). As emergent forms, alternative organizations could assume the role of 'oracles':

> The existing order changes in structure *while* it enters its new form. This was the meaning of the oracles: they provided sketches, not answers, as entrances to the new. […] In the sketches of the oracles […] – in the very fact that only sketches are given – lie their alternatives (Mathiesen, 1974: 13).

The point is not that alternative organizations are perfect. To the contrary, they derive their value from the very imperfections, which makes them both aspirational and inspirational. What we propose, then, is that alternative organizations might serve as sources of inspiration for anyone aspiring to develop 'freer' and 'freeing' forms of organizing.

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