

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

Acting as If:
Prefigurative Politics in
Theory and Practice

23-24TH OCTOBER 2021

INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY, CZECH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES,
PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC (ONLINE IF NECESSARY)

Keynote speakers:

Davina Cooper, King's College London

Mathijs van de Sande, Radboud University Nijmegen

Paul Raekstad, University of Amsterdam

Recent years have seen increased scholarly attention to the concept of prefigurative politics – the idea that political practice in the present can and should implement, realise or embody elements of a desired future. Although this idea appears as a kind of activist common sense and has deep roots in anarchist and socialist politics, it is also open to diverse and sometimes conflicting interpretations. Recent work has traced some of its historical and conceptual roots, ranging from debates in theology to Council Communism, and also challenged some of its traditional framings and distinctions, for example its contrast with strategic or representative politics.

At the same time, critical work has focused on the temporal structure of prefigurative action: Activists are invited to behave 'as if' they live in an (often remote) alternative society in the full knowledge that they do not, to bridge the gap between an undesirable present and an imagined future without collapsing such a distinction entirely. Prefiguration is thus often associated with forms of utopianism, raising questions of how future visions and goals can be coherently incorporated into present action – questions made more acute by the commitment to experimentation shared by most advocates of prefiguration and by the need to reckon with climate catastrophe.

However, the 'as if' form of action associated with prefiguration need not be understood in only utopian terms – agents and institutions frequently act as if they have capacities or powers they do not (yet) have, or as if the meanings of concepts (the state, gender, authority) are otherwise, in order to help bring new meanings, powers and capacities into being. Paying attention to such 'everyday prefigurations' reveals affinities and tensions with notions of performativity, enactment, imagination, fiction and idealisation, opening paths for dialogue with diverse traditions in philosophy and social theory.

The goal of this conference is to bring together researchers and activists from different disciplines to develop discussion on the prefigurative and its associated themes. These could include, but are not limited to:

- Prefigurative politics and its supposed others (e.g. strategic politics, vanguardism, representation, parties and states).
- Studies of prefiguration in practice (including 'everyday' prefiguration).
- Historical traditions of prefiguration.
- Prefiguration and other forms of 'as if' action (e.g. performativity, play, proleptic instruction, enactment, fiction, idealisation).
- Prefigurative feminist and LGBT politics – prefiguring gender and sexuality.
- Utopias, Utopianism and anti-Utopianism.
- The temporal structure of prefiguration – linking present, past and future.
- Prefiguration and Political Theology (eschatology, messianism, apocalyptic time).
- Criticisms of prefigurative politics in both theory and practice.
- Prefiguration and digital technologies.
- Prefiguration and utopia in contexts of disasters, pandemics, and climate catastrophe (e.g. Salvage/Disaster Communism, Catastrophic Hope).

Abstracts of up to 300 words accompanied by short biographical details should be sent to pragueprefigurationconference@gmail.com by 31st May 2021. In the spirit of the theme, it is hoped that the conference will be shaped by its participants, and so proposals for specific thematic panels are welcome. Please sent enquiries or suggestions to Dan Swain: swaind@pef.czu.cz.

The conference will be organised according to all and any COVID-19 restrictions. It is hoped that it will be possible for the conference to take place in person in Prague, but should this become impossible it will take place online. If the conference takes place in person, a conference fee of approximately 30-40 Euros is anticipated, but this can be adjusted in case of need. Participants will be notified as soon as possible and in good time.

The conference is organised as part of the Czech Science Agency funded project 'Towards a New Ontology of Social Cohesion', realised at the Department of Contemporary Continental Philosophy at the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences.

