

# *Heterarchic Organizational Logic and Social Movements*

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Rich Potter  
PhD Candidate  
Institute for Communications Research (ICR)  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC)  
rpotter2@illinois.edu

# *Hierarchy v Horizontality*

- For centuries – at least – social movements have sought alternatives to hierarchical, top-down organizational strategies.
- The Occupy movement has manifested this desire in its decentralized, horizontal organization and consensual decision-making procedures.
- While these strategies can increase a movement's agility and contribute to deeply felt senses of inclusion, empowerment, and liberation, they can also prolong decision-making, impede coordination, and contribute to activists' frustration.
- Social movements need not think about hierarchy as an either/or proposition, in strict opposition to absolute horizontality.
- My proposal is to think about structure in terms of heterarchy.

# *What is Heterarchy?*

- **A fundamental organizational principal of complex systems in which the basic components of a structure can be ranked or connected in multiple and fluid ways, allowing for a range of structure between horizontal, vertical, and networked forms.**
  - hierarchy - control from above, from higher/sacred authorities
  - heterarchy – control from above, below, and other levels
- **This is not actually a new concept. We already organize in terms of heterarchy, but we generally only recognize order as hierarchy.**
  - This is partly because the enlightenment (positivism) values efficiency and bureaucratic structure.
  - My goal is to attach a vocabulary and imagery to a concept that is already familiar.

# *What is Heterarchy? (cont)*

- To apply heterarchical logic, it's helpful to think in terms of *interpenetrated (i.e. overlapping) modularity*.
- **Why modular?**
  - This is how we envision *units of social organization*.
  - It helps us think in *scalable* terms.
- **Why interpenetrated?**
  - Not all individuals belong to one module.
  - Not all structures have neat rankings.
- **Why not think in terms of networks?**
  - Actually, we are, but networks tend to invoke connected *individuals*.
  - I want to emphasize connections between *modules/groups* that can be organized in levels.

# *Heterarchy and Hierarchy*

- **Hierarchy is actually just a specific sub-category of heterarchy and it may be useful in some contexts.**
- **Heterarchies are often composed of multiple intersecting, possibly partial-level hierarchies.**
- **Similarities:**
  - every level of complexity and organization has its peculiar properties and laws
  - higher levels associated with slower rates and time-constants, lower levels with faster rates and time-constants
  - no level is totally independent from its adjoining levels
- **Differences:**
  - hierarchy - complete inclusion; heterarchy - partial inclusion
  - heterarchy posits several-to-several interactions
  - heterarchic levels are affected by non-adjoining levels
  - heterarchy allows for more two-way information flow

# *Why Should We Think About Heterarchy?*

- **To understand how civil society functions (or *could* function).**
- **Civil society = organized, but not state or market**
  - Civil society in a representative democracy is supposed to guide the state.
  - But the market has had too much control.
  - Previous social movements tried to counter this with state control.
  - We might prefer to rely on civil society. (the socialist / anarchist split)
- **How do we make social power accountable to civil society?**
  - Meaning-making and decision-making spheres/modules.
  - Occupy, decision-making, and meaning-making:
    - affecting politics (mostly [external] meaning-making)
    - doing pre-figurative politics (internal decision-making)

# *Heterarchy and Occupy*

- **Applying heterarchy may help us participate more effectively in meaning- and decision-making.**
- **We can see ourselves and our organizations as participating in interpenetrated modules for meaning- and decision-making.**
- **Within Occupy:**
  - more dialogic meaning-making and more efficient decision-making - without hierarchy
  - maybe it means the GA is only for meaning making, or only for a specific kind of decision-making (i.e. the approval of established proposals)?
  - or that there is a coordinating GA with representatives from working groups?
  - maybe it means that working groups are more autonomous?
- **Beyond Occupy:**
  - what decision-making is Occupy most interested in influencing? taking part in? (transnational, national, regional, state, local)
  - can Occupy participate in those decision-making "modules"? expand it's presence in meaning-making "modules"?
  - does this help us to rethink community engagement?