Reclaiming Public Infrastructure: Public Power New York and the Struggle for Energy Democracy

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Abstract

This thesis explores how privatised public services and infrastructures can be reclaimed as part of a democratic transformation of the local state. The increasing privatisation of essential services and infrastructures has led to concerns about the erosion of democratic control and accountability, creating a need to understand how these can be re-embedded within democratic, public frameworks. Using the Public Power New York (PPNY) coalition's campaign to pass the Build Public Renewables Act (BPRA) as a case study, this research investigates how a social movement can actively constitute and advance a project for energy justice and democracy. In this, demonstrating the potential for grassroots movements to catalyse broader political projects and foster democratic transformation of local governance structures.

By integrating diverse theoretical perspectives and empirical findings, this research offers a comprehensive analysis of how social movements can reclaim infrastructure and broaden political imaginaries toward more just and democratic futures. A novel theoretical framework integrates a range of concepts, following Cindi Katz's emphasis on minor theory to introduce queer theory as an interlocutor to Nancy Fraser's dimensions of justice.

The thesis reveals anti-democratic tendencies inherent in the technocratic and often hidden spaces of neoliberal governance. Furthermore, it demonstrates how energy infrastructure can broaden political imaginaries and foster different types of engagement with the local state. The research underscores the importance of understanding social movements as messy, evolving entities that continuously transform and are transformed by their engagement with the state, positioning queerness as an affective solidarity essential to sustaining social movements.

Empirically, the thesis contributes to literature on urban social movements and the local state, providing original insights into the dynamics of social movement organising in struggles for energy democracy. Methodologically, it highlights the adaptive nature of research design in response to external challenges, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, and the resultant deeper understanding of social movement dynamics through qualitative research conducted in virtual spaces.

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Author’s declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

BPRA	The Build Public Renewables Act
CCA	Community choice aggregation
CLCPA	The Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act
DPS	Department of Public Service
DSA	The Democratic Socialists of America
IBEW	International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers
IOU	Investor-Owned Utility
NYC-ESWG	New York City Ecosocialist Working Group
NYPA	New York Power Authority
NYS	New York State
NYUDA	The New York Utility Democracy Act
PPNY	Public Power New York
PSC	Public Service Commission
SIO	Socialists in Office slate
IRA	Inflation Reduction Act

1.Introduction

In September 2022 I was walking the High Line, the quasi-public park on an abandoned railway line on the west side of Manhattan. It was a glorious day: 28 degrees, with a cool breeze keeping the humidity at bay, the sounds of the street drifting up from below. There was a temporary exhibition installed along the one and a half mile-long structure called *The Practice of Democracy.* The exhibition invited people to think about "*the ways democracy shows up in our everyday lives, neighborhoods, and worlds"*. A little further down my stroll, another sign read "*beyond governmental systems, monumental symbols, and ideas about justice, democracy is a practice"*.

Thinking about the practice of democracy is exactly what I'd been doing in the months of fieldwork which were culminating in this autumn trip, though the spaces of these democratic encounters were nothing like the sanitised space of the High Line, itself a monument to the neoliberalisation of public space with its market-oriented sustainability and "designer ecology" described as "little more than an aesthetic veneer for underlying processes of neoliberal urbanization, gentrification, and lavish consumerism" (Lang and Rothenberg, 2017: 1746).

I'd spent three months in New York in the spring of 2022, joining the Public Power New York (PPNY) coalition in its campaign to pass the Build Public Renewables Act (BPRA) and elect a slate of Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) endorsed candidates to the New York State (NYS) Senate and Assembly. I'd door-knocked through the Hudson Valley, where lawn signs alternated between 'Black Lives Matter' and 'Blue Lives Matter'; canvassed areas of New York City, where residents of skyscrapers in downtown Manhattan had called security when we were unexpectedly at their door, and where people in Brooklyn had cheered when we said we were there on behalf of the DSA endorsed candidate; around Long Island, where confused residents initially presumed that we were trying to sell them something. At times it had poured with rain or had been so hot that we'd paused to get ice cream. One canvas ended with a pizza party in a volunteer's garden in upstate New York, after another we arrived back to a candidate's office in downtown Manhattan and pitched in to help hang their new banner, while passers-

by on the street stopped to give advice, or to lend a pair of ladders. Throughout it all, enacting a *practice of democracy*, in all its affective, embodied, often frustrating and often joyful forms.

Focusing on PPNY, a grassroots coalition of 22 organisations, as a social movement organising for energy justice and democracy, this thesis explores how privatised public services and infrastructures can be reclaimed as part of a democratic transformation of the local state. PPNY are organising to democratise the energy system in NYS and can be understood within the wider context of global remunicipalisation.

Remunicipalisation is the trend emerging since the early 2000s of formerly privatised goods and services being brought back into public or collective ownership at the local level, occurring across a range of scales from cities and rural communities to "sub-national regions" (Cumbers and Becker, 2018: 503). This thesis was funded by the European Research Council, as part of the ongoing, six-year 'Global Remunicipalisation and the Post-Neoliberal Turn' research project.

The global trend of remunicipalisation, when seen within wider processes of de-privatisation, has been categorised as a "societal push back" to the decades of privatisation and marketisation that have typified neoliberal capitalism (Weber et al., 2019: 3), and heralded by many as a key part of the fightback against decades of "roll-out" neoliberalism (Peck & Tickell, 2002). Kishimoto et al. (2017: 22) have claimed remunicipalisation provides us with "a strategic window to bring about positive change in our communities… the growing collective power of these different groups [in reclaiming] democratic public services puts resilient and thriving communities back on the horizon". Chapter 2 will include a fuller discussion of the fluid and evolving character of neoliberalism, which for now should be understood as a diverse set of political-economic principles and practices through which market-like forms of governance and control have been extended across all spheres of social life (Harvey, 2007; Ward and Swyngedouw, 2018).

The Transnational Institute estimates that there are more than 250 cases of remunicipalisation in the USA, covering a range of sectors including

telecommunications, social and care services, and utility infrastructure such as water and energy (Kishimoto et al., 2019). Though the proliferation of rural internet co-operatives has been documented by organisations such as The Democracy Collaborative as examples of 21st Century democratic public ownership models (Alperovitz and Hanna, 2015), it is within the energy sector that my research interest lies.

A movement for 'Public Power' has emerged in the local energy sector in the USA, spearheaded by the DSA and championed by a range of activist and citizens groups, calling for the remunicipalisation of the energy grid in cities such as Chicago, Illinois, and Ann Arbor, Michigan, and states including New York and Maine. Central to all these campaigns are narratives of justice which can be seen to encompass a variety of struggles: from demands related to decarbonisation and a Green New Deal, to racial inequalities, housing (in)security, and debates around democratic public ownership. Such demands have crystallised in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, in which it is estimated that a national moratorium on utility shutoffs – whereby utilities are prohibited from terminating service to customers, regardless of late or non-payment of bills – between March and November 2020, would have seen Covid-19 infection rates be reduced by 8.7%, and deaths by almost 15% (Jowers et al, 2021).

PPNY is advancing an understanding of energy democracy which involves two demands: to democratise the energy system by opening it up to participation; and, to break with the established corporate entanglements of fossil-fuel capitalism (Staeheli, 2010; Becker and Naumann, 2017). With this understanding of energy democracy, as well as the host of other radical demands, the movement for public power is also advancing a more transformative vision of remunicipalisation. Miller (2006: 243) uses a case study from a campaign in Calgary, Canada to prevent a utility from being privatised to demonstrate how activists "utilized the market logic of neoliberalism to defeat a major neoliberal policy initiative", while acknowledging that this remained similar to a consumer purchase, in that "the campaign was a one-time act, catalyzing no legacy of ongoing resistance" (Ibid).

Throughout this thesis I will demonstrate that PPNY are attempting to build a durable political project rooted in ongoing organising. In this way, its efforts to

reimagine ownership and governance beyond the specific instance of remunicipalisation itself advance the struggle for energy democracy.

By linking everyday concerns such as high utility prices, utility debt, and poor service provision with the specific logics of the neoliberal system and the existential threat of climate catastrophe, PPNY can be understood to be invoking a radical politics of environmental justice in its attempts to democratise the energy grid. In this way, it can be understood as following Swyngedouw (2014) and others (Becker and Naumann, 2017; Lefebvre, 2009; Purcell, 2008; Dikeç, 2005) who understand democratisation as a political act which creates an opening for alternative forms of social relations to emerge. Democratisation in this way "stages and defines equality, exposes a wrong, and aspires to a transformation" (Swyngedouw, 2014: 170).

Understanding democratisation as a political act which creates an opening for alternative forms of social relations is a key concept for this thesis, as it was within a particular moment of opening that I undertook my research. The BPRA did not pass until 2023 – when I was in the final year of my PhD, which I began in January 2020. As such, I witnessed many changes in campaign strategy and closely observed as PPNY responded to and manoeuvred around various setbacks and obstacles. The evolving nature of the campaign gave me a similarly processual understanding when it came to my conceptual framework. I began to think about the creation of alternative social relations as an act of queering (McCann and Monaghan, 2019: 3), and the opening that I was witnessing as a burgeoning becoming (Katz 1996; 2017), a glimpse of an alternative future existing in the present (Muñoz, 2019): a collective and redistributive way of understanding public infrastructure and democratic politics, in, against and beyond (Arpini et al., 2021; Hasler et al., 2020; Angel and Loftus, 2019; Routledge et al., 2018; Angel, 2017; Cumbers, 2015; Jessop, 2007; Holloway, 2005) the privatised and individualistic structures of the now.

This chapter will begin by introducing the PPNY campaign, briefly describing the contextual background to the BPRA. I will then introduce my research aims and questions, before detailing the conceptual and empirical contributions of the thesis. Finally, I will outline the subsequent chapters of the thesis.

1.1 Public Power New York

Before setting out my research contributions and introducing the structure of this thesis, this section provides a brief overview of the PPNY campaign timeline. When I analyse the campaign in Chapters 5 and 6, I will demonstrate how many elements of its strategy overlapped and will emphasise that it continued over numerous legislative cycles. I will not do a linear reading of the campaign as part of this analysis, so Appendix 1 provides an overview of the BPRA's legislative timeline. Below, I detail the beginning of the PPNY campaign, to lay an important foundation for the rest of the thesis.

There are four key moments which can be briefly described as the contextual background of PPNY and will be explored in this section. These are:

1. New York City blackouts in the summer of 2019, and the signing of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) into law in the same year;
2. Con Edison (Con Ed) rate case proceedings, which began in 2019 and lasted until 2023;
3. The Covid-19 pandemic; and
4. A Democrat supermajority in the NYS Senate and Assembly, as well as 2022 being an election year in the state.

PPNY is a grassroots, state-wide coalition of 22 economic and environmental-justice organisations, established with the aim of passing two pieces of legislation through the NYS Legislature: The BPRA and the New York Utility Democracy Act (NYUDA). Together, these bills would transform the entire energy system in NYS, from generation through transmission and distribution infrastructure, creating a "100% renewable, democratically controlled, publicly owned energy system" (Public Power, 2021). However, this thesis only focuses on the BPRA – this was the active campaign during my fieldwork, and the NYUDA no longer appears as part of PPNYs campaign. As NYUDA forms no part of the campaign, it will not be explored in depth. However, it would have initiated the process for transitioning all of NYS's distribution utilities into public ownership; enabled the state to acquire all assets of all energy and gas utilities across the state either through purchase or eminent

domain; established a timeline for scaling down all gas infrastructure, while scaling up renewable infrastructure; initiated the creation of new utility territories based on principles of environmental justice, equity, and energy democracy; created democratically elected utility boards to oversee the operations of the distribution utilities; and created an observatory oversight body of advocates and experts to provide oversight to the democratically elected boards (Public Power, 2021).

1.1.1 The Build Public Renewables Act (BPRA)

The New York Power Authority (NYPA) is the largest state public power utility in the US, established by President Roosevelt when he was the Governor of New York as a precursor to the sweeping reforms and public works packages of the New Deal. However, despite in theory having publicly owned generation, using this to stimulate the energy transition has hitherto been restricted, with the private sector favoured in the transition. NYPA has been unable to build or own new utility-scale renewable generation projects, as it has been limited by the state of New York to owning just six renewable projects of 25 megawatts or more (Dawson, 2022). The BPRA was thus created with the intention of unleashing the power of NYPA in service of the energy transition. While the version of the BPRA which eventually passed in 2023 will be discussed in the conclusion of this thesis, during my time in the field, PPNY were organising for a BPRA which mandated a suite of decarbonisation and democratisation measures. These are summarised in Figure 1.

The BPRA in Figure 1 also includes prevailing wage and Project Labour Agreements (PLA), which are standards set for public sector construction work in the US. PPNY's engagement with labour was complicated, and while the labour language in the bill was described as "*exceptional*" (Observation 26) by the Chair of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers' (IBEW) Utility Labour Council, trade unions were generally not supportive of the BPRA. While some unions' memorandums of opposition were eventually withdrawn, they remained neutral rather than supportive. The unions which did support the BPRA represent over one million workers, however these were largely from healthcare and teaching unions, including 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers, NYS United Teachers, United University Professions, the Professional Staff Congress at the City University of New York, and United Auto Workers Region 9A (TUED, 2023; Public Power, 2021).

PPNY's labour strategy could certainly be analysed through the same lens of messy co-learning that I will utilise for other elements of the project in Chapters 5 and 6. However, PPNY's engagement with labour will not be analysed in this thesis. Rather than engaging deeply with the technical aspects of the BPRA itself, I focus on how the coalition built an alternative imaginary and way of engaging with,

against and beyond the state. This is key for my research aim, which is concerned with how a social movement advances a democratic transformation of the local state which challenges established neoliberal norms. However, in the conclusion chapter, I will detail how the labour unions' positions on public power is an avenue for future research.

The primary focus of this research is on grassroots activists and organisers, focusing on activists involved with PPNY, including DSA volunteers, organisers, and elected representatives, and representatives from organisations within the PPNY coalition. In Chapter 3, I will detail the relationship participants had to the campaign in greater detail, however, I want to focus momentarily on the activists conducting canvassing efforts across NYS. In the vignette that opens this thesis, I describe the experiences of canvassing in the Hudson Valley, New York City and Long Island, and throughout this thesis I will explore how canvasses were utilised by PPNY activists to mobilise communities in urban and suburban areas of the state. I joined activists on many of these canvasses. The people attending these events as canvassers across the state reflected a racially diverse, but disproportionately white, activist base, made up of mainly young people of all genders. Many of the activists were university educated, with some still in higher education at master's or PhD level. Employment varied, as well as academic researchers and progressive think tank staffers, there were small dairy farmers, unemployed people, and a host of other freelances and service industry workers.

The people being canvassed varied greatly depending on location. In New York City, canvassing efforts in Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn often targeted working-class, immigrant, and racially minoritised communities. In comparison, the Hudson Valley and Long Island involved a broader mix of homeowners and middle- to upper-middle-class residents. Table 1 utilises census demographic data to highlight the cross-class and interracial differences across the state, with rates of homeownership far higher outside of the city, and racial diversity much lower. Aside from the counties canvassed in Long Island, where just 6.2% of people were living below the poverty line, poverty rates across the other three boroughs were relatively similar.

The demographics of canvassers and those being canvassed varied the most in NYC, where canvassers were predominantly white in what were majority Black or more mixed neighbourhoods. In multi-lingual neighbourhoods, there were often Spanish and Chinese speakers joining on canvasses, and multiple translations of campaign materials were created. In later chapters I will analyse in more detail some of the experiences of door-knocking, but for now it is important to note that while the demographics of canvassers and those canvassed varied, it very rarely shifted the tenor of campaign conversations. In Long Island, there were perhaps greater appeals around affordability and customer service experience, but all canvasses that I participated in made similar appeals around climate and economic justice.

Table 1: Demographic data of Senate and Assembly Districts canvassed

	Brooklyn (US Census Bureau, 2023a)	Lower Manhattan (US Census Bureau, 2023b)	Long Island (US Census Bureau, 2023c)	Hudson Valley (US Census Bureau, 2023d)
Poverty (persons below the poverty line)	12.5%	20.5%	6.2%	15.1%
Race and Ethnicity	50% Black 24% White 12% Hispanic 8% Asian	35% White 33% Asian 19% Hispanic 8% Black	58% White 21% Hispanic 9% Black 8% Asian	76% White 10% Hispanic 5% Black 2% Asian
Homeownership (ownership of occupied units)	40%	18%	81%	69%

Figure 1: The BPRA in 2021

- "NYPA is enabled to own and build new renewable generation, storage, and transmission.
- NYPA will provide 100% renewable energy directly to all state and municipal leased and owned properties and transportation by 2025. It will phase out its existing non-renewable generation as quickly as possible.
- After meeting the state and municipal leased and owned properties and transportation, NYPA is enabled to sell 100% renewable energy directly to customers through usage of any utility's transmission or distribution infrastructure.
    - All for-profit supply side ESCOs [Energy Service Companies] will be banned.
    - CCAs [Community Choice Aggregation] and community energy projects will continue to exist and are encouraged.
    - Excess renewable energy NYPA produces will be sold directly to end-use consumers who will be automatically enrolled in this program on an opt-out basis. This enrollment will prioritize low-income households first. NYPA's generation rate will be the same as lower than their current utility's rate.
- All NYPA projects will pay prevailing wage and will be subject to project labor agreements.
    - A hiring hall will be created within NYPA for hiring and re-training existing utility and fossil fuel workers for jobs in renewable energy development or maintenance.

(Continued overleaf)

Figure 1: The BPRA in 2021

- NYPA is forbidden from ever shutting off a residential customer's service for non-payment and from charging punitive late fees. Coordinating with ORES [Office of Renewable Energy Siting], NYPA is allowed to make the first offer to build or buy any new or existing renewable energy project. If NYPA chooses to match the price, it will then own that project.
    - Goes for any new renewable energy facility, project, or any utility scale renewable energy created by a new facility or project excluding community energy projects.
- The bill will be revenue neutral for the State and may be financed through a combination of bond issuances and progressive generation rates.
- NYSERDA [New York State Energy Research and Development Authority] Community Energy Hubs will be formed to foster public engagement on climate and resiliency plans, renewable energy siting, utility proceedings, research, green jobs and training opportunities, etc.
- Within 2 years of passage, NYPA must release a 10-year climate and resiliency plan outlining what renewable projects it plans to build and how it plans to comply with the CLCPA.
    - There will be annual public hearings on this plan, and all reports and data will be made public." (Public Power, 2021)

1.1.2 The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)

Nine of the member organisations of PPNY are local DSA chapters, and the Ecosocialist Working Group of the New York City chapter of DSA (NYC-ESWG) were organising around public ownership of energy infrastructure at the city level prior to forming the state-wide PPNY coalition. As such, DSA cannot be separated from PPNY. DSA is the largest socialist organisation in the US, with chapters in every state and in the District of Columbia (DSA, 2023).

Prior to 2016, DSA was a marginal caucus in the Democratic Party. Formed in 1982, the organisation sustained itself at around 6,000 members for thirty years (New Left Review, 2019: 118). Between 2016 and 2019, the organisation increased tenfold, with 60,000 members by 2019 – most of whom joined in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, Bernie Sanders' Presidential campaign, and the subsequent election of Donald Trump as President (Ibid). The organisation has since grown by a further 30,000, perhaps demonstrative of the lasting impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, with many volunteers I spoke with joining the organisation after losing their jobs in the first wave of the pandemic shutdowns. At its peak in 2021, DSA had 95,000 members, as of 2023 that figure stands at 78,000 (DSA, 2023; Hernandez and Huang, 2023: 19).

Though DSA run electoral campaigns, they are not a political party, and as such use tactics beyond the electoral – including direct action – to advocate for reforms. DSA endorse candidates at the municipal, state, and national level. For example, Astoria in Queens, New York is represented at all levels by DSA-endorsed elected officials: Council Member Tiffany Cabán; Assembly Member Zohran K. Mamdani; State Senator Kristen Gonzalez; and Congress Member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

1.1.3 Contextual background: 2019 to 2022

> "*2018, we had blackouts. 2019, we had blackouts. 2020, we had blackouts. 2021, will have blackouts.*" (Interview 02)

1.1.3.1 The Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA)

In 2019, the CLCPA was signed into NYS law. Regarded as "the most ambitious and comprehensive climate and clean energy legislation" in the United States (New York State, 2022), the CLCPA establishes targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the electric sector and across the economy: 40% less than 1990 levels by 2030, and no less than 85% by 2050. The CLCPA also requires the state to get 70% of its electricity from renewable energy by 2030, with 100% clean electricity by 2040. To do this, the CLCPA sets targets for the scaling up of clean energy, including the development of 6,000 megawatts of distributed solar and a reduction

of 185 trillion BTU[1] through energy efficiency measures by the end of 2025 (SUNY, 2022) and the installation of 9 gigawatts of offshore wind capacity by 2035 (Vangala and Aweh, 2020).

The CLCPA also includes a number of environmental justice components, including the requirement that at least 35-40% of the benefits of the Act be directed to historically disadvantaged communities (Morris, 2019), and the creation of a Climate Justice Working Group to provide strategic advice to key stakeholders. This 40% requirement has since been scaled up to the federal level, through President Joe Biden's Justice40 initiative, which mandates that 40% of the overall benefits of federal investment into a range of climate mitigation, clean energy, clean transit and water and wastewater infrastructure developments must go to communities which "are marginalized, underserved, and overburdened by pollution" (The White House, 2022). The CLCPA will be analysed in more detail, including how it intersects with rate making procedures, in Chapter 4.

1.1.3.2 2019 heatwave and blackouts

On July 13th 2019, at least 73,000 customers lost power in Manhattan because of a flawed connection at an electrical substation owned and maintained by Con Edison, the investor-owned utility (IOU) who operate across the five boroughs of New York City and the neighbouring Westchester County (Scutti, 2019). Eight days later, more than 50,000 customers in Brooklyn and Queens faced a second power outage, due to high energy usage during a (then) record breaking heatwave (Calma, 2019). In this second blackout, Con Ed reduced voltage across Brooklyn and Queens by 8% to protect its equipment, and asked residents not to use their air conditioning units unless for health and medical reasons (Ibid). Later that evening, Con Ed shut off the power for neighbourhoods in these boroughs to prevent a wider blackout (Ibid). Some of these disproportionately poorer neighbourhoods, such as Canarsie and Flatlands, rank 4 out of 5 on the heat vulnerability index (Ibid). In response, the NYS Legislature held hearings "to examine the reliability of utility electric power systems, and explore ways of

[1] British thermal units, the amount of heat required to raise the temperature of one pound of water by one degree Fahrenheit (SUNY, 2022).

ensuring that such power systems maintain reliability into the future" (New York State Assembly, 2019), NYC-ESWG testified in favour of a publicly owned alternative at this hearing.

NYC-ESWG also testified at the Con Ed rate case in the same year. Rate cases are one of the main instruments of regulation of IOUs, and while they will be examined in more detail in Chapter 4, it was the participation in these technocratic, often hidden, spaces of power, and seeing the regulatory system vote through rate increases regardless of the quality of service provision, that spurred NYC-ESWG to imagine a publicly-owned system for the state of New York.

1.1.3.3 Covid-19

The imagining of a public alternative saw the creation of three bills in 2019 in the NYS Senate and Assembly, which would have amended the public authorities' law to require NYPA to provide renewable power to all state-owned and municipal properties[2]. Then came the Covid-19 pandemic. DSA stopped campaigning for their bills, organising instead for a utility debt moratorium and a hiatus on utility service terminations throughout the pandemic. For context, electric and gas utilities in New York State had issued 5.4 million shutoff notices between May 2019 and April 2020 (Castillo-Kesper, 2020), and as mentioned previously, access to utilities was a lifesaving issue during the pandemic. A moratorium was signed into law in June 2020 by the then Governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo, which prevented utilities from terminating service to residential customers, and enabled customers to enter into deferred payment agreements for the duration of the pandemic (Ibid). The moratorium was due to expire in March 2021, but was extended until December 2021 (Food and Water Watch, 2021).

It was during this time that the state-wide coalition was formed, with the BPRA and NYUDA being drafted *"to achieve public ownership of energy from generation*

[2] Municipalising New York City's electric grid is a policy recommendation from the New York City Office of the Public Advocate (Public Advocate, 2020). However, that remains a research report. While some cities and areas across New York, such as Rochester and Long Island, are pursuing remunicipalisation, New York City is not. The focus of PPNY has always been state-wide, and that remains the focus of this thesis.

through transmission… and viewing generation and transmission as a first step to getting towards public owned distribution as well" (Interview 02). The process of drafting the bills that PPNY organised around will be detailed in Chapter 5, as the collaborative and deliberative process by which the BPRA was drafted and amended is an important facet of the democratisation I argue PPNY are enacting in the present.

1.1.3.4 Democratic supermajority and 2022 elections

Finally, 2022 was an election year in NYS. This meant that DSA's electoral strategy – of running DSA-endorsed representatives to challenge incumbent Democratic politicians – could be utilised as part of the campaign around PPNY and the BPRA. The Democratic Party has controlled the NYS Assembly for almost 50 years, the position of Governor for nearly 16, and in 2018 took control of the Senate (Ferré-Sadurní, 2022). Prior to the 2022 election, Democrats held 42 of the 63 Senate seats (Republicans held 20 and one seat was vacant) and 107 of the 150 Assembly seats (with Republicans holding the remaining 43). This equates to a 'supermajority', whereby two-thirds of each chamber of the NYS Legislature are held by Democrats, tipping the balance of power in their favour, and providing legislators with the ability to override any vetoes from the Governor (Fink, 2022). However, despite controlling the legislature, and being in a budget surplus of billions year-on-year, a familiar pattern of austerity measures had been passed at both city and state level (Nations, 2021; Aldag et al., 2019). As far back as 2016, NYS has been found to be following a path of "unforced austerity", with the state's self-imposed 2% spending cap much less than its tax receipts, which were forecast to grow by more than 4.5% (Fiscal Policy Institute, 2016). Further, in the wake of the CLCPA, New York went three years without passing any major pieces of climate legislation.

DSA-endorsed candidates seek to challenge this status quo in their primary races against established, incumbent Democrats. Primaries are the process by which the candidate who will stand for election is selected. In a state like New York, these primaries are crucial: whoever gets the Democrat nomination is likely to win the election, given the vast swathes of Democratic support in the state. As such, the primary races can be hotly contested. I will draw on data gathered across the

primary period of 2022 across Chapters 5 and 6, but as I will explain in Chapter 6, electoral strategy is a complicated matter. Some partners in PPNY do not favour electoralism, and in challenging incumbent Democrats, DSA elected officials are then pitted against the powerful Democratic leadership in the NYS Legislature.

With this brief history, I want to demonstrate the context from which PPNY emerged. Poor service provision is regularly pointed to in the literature as a reason for the remunicipalisation of privatised services and infrastructures, with the political effects of these service failures noted (Cumbers and Paul, 2021: 200). In the case of New York, we can see this poor service provision, demonstrated through year after year of grid failures across the state during critical moments of severe weather – which themselves are becoming more frequent due to climate change.

Here, we see a threefold crisis. This is a crisis of infrastructure, after decades of underinvestment in favour of shareholder dividends (Lazonick and Shin, 2020), with the regulatory system around the IOU model captured by the industry it is meant to be regulating. It is also a crisis of democracy, with a political system with limited means of participation and a Democratic elite upholding the status quo. All of this is, of course, overshadowed by the climate crisis, which also makes plain insufficiencies within the existing political-economic system. While legislation like the CLCPA is a crucial first step, it is stymied by a political economic system that favours the private sector in the decarbonisation effort and transition to renewables.

The present intersecting economic-political-climate moment is beginning to be understood as a conjuncture (Webber, 2023; Sultana, 2021; Highmore, 2020; Green, 2020): It is the climate crisis that makes clear the collapsing set of political-economic structures and systems of the present. The Covid-19 pandemic is an important element of this climate-conjuncture. Not only is climate change predicted to make global pandemics increasingly frequent (Sultana, 2021: 1721; Forster et al., 2020; Watts et al., 2021), but national responses to the economic crisis caused by Covid-19 lockdowns often exacerbated environmental exploitation and inequality (Webber, 2023: 14).

Stuart Hall understands a conjuncture as a moment of both danger and opportunity, given that the nature of how a crisis will be resolved is not guaranteed (Bennet, 2016; Hall and Massey, 2010). It is within this uncertain moment of resolve that PPNY can be understood as a conjunctural response, and it is because of the unique moment of conjuncture that PPNY is a useful case study through which to explore my research questions.

1.2 Research aims and questions

The overall aim of the research is to explore how a project for energy justice and democracy is actively constituted and advanced by a social movement. In this, there are two concurrent strands. The first – the "*what?*" – will theorise the project for energy justice and democracy, to develop an understanding of what this political alternative is. The second strand – the *"how?"* – seeks to understand how this alternative can be cultivated through political action to reclaim infrastructure as part of a democratic transformation of the local state that challenges established neoliberal norms.

This aim is addressed through the following research questions:

1) How do neoliberal governance structures and technocratic mechanisms inhibit democratic participation and perpetuate anti-democratic tendencies?
2) How can building a social movement around energy infrastructure broaden political imaginaries?
3) What wider potential do these campaigns offer for an alternative, progressive political project?

RQ1 is addressed Chapter 4, where I analyse the political economy of NYS's existing energy system. RQ2 and RQ3 are addressed in Chapters 5 and 6, where I describe and analyse the campaign around the BPRA and how this piece of legislation can be understood as a vehicle for a wider democratic vision.

To answer these questions, I utilised a qualitative research design, combining semi-structured interviews with participant observation both online and in-

person. I took an iterative approach to the research design and subsequent data analysis, which reflected the contextual challenges of the pandemic; the changing nature of the PPNY campaign; and the decision to incorporate queer theory into my conceptual framework after engaging with the social movement politics on the ground.

The climate crisis is the foremost challenge of our time (OHCHR, 2022), with transitioning away from fossil fuels and decarbonising the economy one of the most complex challenges in history (Huber, 2022: 234). The electricity sector is the "linchpin" of any decarbonisation strategy, and electricity is becoming regarded as a strategic sector for building broader working-class solidarity (Huber, 2022: 233). This thesis, which engages with social movement organising towards a publicly owned, renewables-powered energy system, is therefore both timely and significant. My research adds to existing literature by answering critical questions regarding climate policy and neoliberal governance: the BPRA is a successful piece of climate legislation, and understanding how a grassroots coalition built such a success is an important contribution to existing literature, policymakers and climate activists. Similarly, my work engages with energy justice and energy democracy literatures which examine public alternatives (Rivera and Bozuwa, 2021; Angel and Loftus, 2019; Angel, 2017; Jenkins et al., 2016).

1.3 Thesis contributions

My thesis makes original conceptual and empirical contributions. In my conceptual framework, I integrate a variety of concepts from political economy, geography, and queer theory to develop a novel set of arguments around energy democracy and social movement organising. The key concepts I integrate are Nancy Fraser's recognition and redistribution, Cindi Katz's minor theory, and José Esteban Muñoz's queer futurity. Minor theory here works as a bridge between Fraser's political economy and Muñoz's queer theory: Just as Katz (1996: 489) "squeezes [the minor theory of] feminism through the pores of [major theory] Marxism", I am squeezing queer theory through Fraser's productively porous economic thinking. Linking the political, geographic, and queer in this way helps to theorise an evolving social movement, which is necessarily grounded in specific political spaces and encompasses a variety of embodied and sensuous practices.

While queer theory has made important contributions to a range of disciplines, including management and organisation studies (Vitry, 2021), and development studies and urban planning (Castán Broto, 2021), a persistent key critique is that it “resists practical application” (Urban Institute, 2021). Thus, in moving beyond an explicit look at the bodies and lives of queer people and using queer theory to think about social worlds beyond the sexual or normative (Lesutis, 2023), I am not only contributing to a gap in the literature but also offering new insights and evidence regarding the usefulness of queer theory, serving to extend its applicability.

I also contribute to conceptual understandings of neoliberalism. I advance an understanding of neoliberalisation which emphasises the processual nature of market-oriented restructuring, and the grounded ways in which these are enacted through variegated, locally embedded strategies – including crises (Brenner, 2004 in Ward and Swyngedouw, 2018: 1079). Understanding processes of neoliberalisation also makes clear the incoherence and incompleteness of neoliberalism, demonstrating that its trajectory is non-linear; a problematising of temporality with productive similarities to queer theory. The processual nature of neoliberalisation is important for my work, which understands social movement organising as similarly processual. By 'process' and 'processual,' I refer to the dynamic, ongoing, and context-specific nature of neoliberalisation, which is not a static or uniform phenomenon but one that continuously evolves and adapts through various local strategies (Ibid).

Taken together, each of these conceptual contributions provide an original conceptual foundation for empirical investigation. It was through an iterative process that my empirical material informed my conceptual framework, and my empirical contributions serve to enhance the explanatory power and practical relevance of my conceptual contributions. Positioning the ways in which social movements engage with the state as being in perpetual motion – transforming the state while similarly being transformed – is minor theory in action, a continuous transformation or becoming.

My methodological approach is a further contribution. My methodology changed as a response to Covid-19 lockdown restrictions and in making this clear I

demonstrate how decisions can evolve through the research process, which in turn lead to a more nuanced understanding of social movement dynamics. I offer novel contributions about conducting qualitative research online, creating shared spaces of meaning with participants in Zoom rooms during the pandemic.

That I refined my conceptual framework after empirical engagement provides fresh insights to theories of social movement organising and energy democracy, as it revealed a greater array of interests at play than a stricter adherence to an original conceptual framework could have allowed for. Identifying the queerer aspects of PPNY's campaign to pass the BPRA revealed a previously under researched aspect of DSA specifically and left social movements in general.

1.4 Chapter outline

Following this introduction, the rest of the thesis will be structured as follows.

Chapter 2 will detail the conceptual framework underpinning the research. This chapter begins with a literature review on neoliberalism, the dominant mode of political-economic governance globally and in the US over the past 40 years, drawing attention to its anti-democratic tendencies and how these are enacted through technocratic ways. I focus on neoliberalism as neoliberal*isation*; a processual and continual project of restructuring, which is enacted through various locally embedded strategies (Brenner, 2004 in Ward and Swyngedouw, 2018: 1079). Process is important for my work, which is concerned with the processes of building a social movement that challenges these dominant logics. This perspective also highlights the fluid and contested terrain of neoliberalism, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how social movements can effectively challenge and disrupt these logics. Then, I outline the conceptualisation of energy democracy and justice that my project seeks to understand, thinking with Nancy Fraser's (2019; 2008) conceptions of recognitional and redistributive justice, and how these specifically relate to environmental justice. These sections of my conceptual framework address the first strand of my research; the *"what?"* of the justice-oriented democratisation project, to develop an understanding of what the current political economic context is, and what the alternative is.

The second half of my conceptual framework will think explicitly about the 'how' of organising, and in doing so will engage with praxis. To do this, I utilise a minor theory – queer theory – to describe how I understand prefigurative social movements. Here, I build on Cindi Katz's (1996, 2017) work on minor theory, a framework which challenges dominant theories and disciplines and emphasises the perspectives of marginalised and oppressed groups. With minor theory, Katz critiques dominant theories' focus on political, economic and social structures that exclude those on the margins. Minor theory brings a more expansive and multifaceted understanding of social realities, and of the spaces and places of the existing political economic system. Whereas Katz takes a more distinctly feminist perspective, I demonstrate how queer theories of time and desire can offer useful frames for practically enacting the conceptualisations of justice underpinning prefigurative social movements. Here, I argue that queerness can be understood as an affective solidarity (Hemmings, 2012; Negrín da Silva, 2018), or a sustaining force for prefigurative social movement organising.

Chapter 3 details the methodological approach taken, setting out the underpinning research philosophy and explaining how this is best reflected through my qualitative approach which combined semi-structured qualitative interviews with more ethnographic observations. I explain how my practice of research led to a recalibration of my conceptual framework, specifically relating to my decision to utilise queer theory after engaging with the social movement politics in the field. This chapter will also detail the changes to my methodology which occurred due to the Covid-19 pandemic, specifically online methods and the experience of researching through Zoom. Finally, I detail the data analysis methods I employed.

In Chapter 4, I analyse the political economy of NYS's energy system. The material provided in this chapter will serve as a contextual backdrop to the subsequent chapters. I give a historic perspective of the evolution of the regulatory system and the IOU model in the United States, before addressing the current context within New York, directly focusing on the regulatory arm of the state, in particular the Public Service Commission (PSC) and the role of rate-making procedures in upholding the profit-motive of IOUs. By focusing on these spaces as examples of technocratic, neoliberal governance, I relate the contradictions of the current system to my conceptual framework which argues that this type of governance is

fundamentally anti-democratic, due to the technocratic ways in which politics is 'done.'

Chapter 5 details the campaign to pass the BPRA. I analyse the organising strategy and methods which PPNY (and DSA more broadly) have been implementing in the mass movement to pass the BPRA. Within this, I focus on the agonistic and confrontational outside strategy of protests, the savvy insider lobbying, and DSA's electoral strategy. In each of these distinct but overlapping areas, I demonstrate how PPNY are working in and against the state. I argue that the mundane everyday organising around the BPRA has been a messy process, but it is within this messiness that a more prefigurative impulse resides – utilising data to demonstrate how the legislation can be understood as the vehicle for a broader democratic vision, thus going beyond the state in its present form.

Chapter 6 focuses on the outer edges of this messiness, turning to look at where messy experimentation bleeds into disarray. To do this I begin with the internal organising of the PPNY coalition, analysing how consensus was reached and decisions were made, especially focusing on where tensions arose in this process. In this section, I also highlight how momentum was maintained through each moment of failure throughout the years-long campaign to pass the BPRA. Finally, I interrogate the limits of engaging with electoral politics for prefigurative ends. This was a key tension for many participants, and I analyse different elements of this tension. I also address the limits of confrontation, expanding here to look at DSA.

Chapter 7, the concluding chapter, synthesises the main research findings and summarises how the research questions have been answered. I reflect upon my theoretical and empirical contributions, demonstrating how the findings of the thesis relate to broader debates about neoliberalism, social movement organising, energy justice and democracy, and queer theory. I also provide some reflections on the implications this research may have for policymaking surrounding democratic public ownership and for critical research on and with left movements.

Overall, this thesis follows a radical piece of climate legislation from its inception to its passage. It theorises how social movements work in, against and beyond the

state to build towards a collective, more redistributive futurity while addressing the governance processes and material barriers to change that are present in the everyday. In the processual and evolving nature of the Public Power campaign, we can see an actually existing alternative to the technocratic and anti-democratic tendencies of neoliberalisation.

2. Conceptualising a movement for energy justice

Energy provision is inherently political (Becker and Naumann, 2017) with scholarship examining how fossil fuels have shaped the objectives of democratic politics, and how the control of energy flows can open up, or close down, democratic possibilities (Mitchell, 2009: 399). A range of justice and democracy focused literatures also articulate democratisation – especially in political domains which have been systematically narrowed through techno-managerial governance (Swyngedouw, 2018), such as the energy system – as a process that can create an opening for alternative forms of social relations to emerge.

Energy is also intimately tied to everyday life (Angel, 2019; Walker and Shove, 2014; Chester, 2014). It is the way we power our homes, cook our food, move around our neighbourhoods and cities, and, increasingly, engage with communities near and far via the internet. By conceptualising energy as life-sustaining in this way, it can be figured as a foundational element of social reproduction, which offers a further useful frame for my project.

Informed by these two dimensions of energy – political and everyday – this chapter will detail the conceptual framework underpinning the thesis as a whole. The aim of my research is to explore how a project for energy justice and democracy is actively constituted and advanced by a social movement. In this, there are two clauses: what is the political alternative and how is it articulated? As such, in this chapter I will develop an understanding of what this political alternative is, before investigating how this alternative can be cultivated through reclaiming infrastructure as part of a democratic transformation of the local state which challenges established neoliberal norms.

In this chapter I will argue that the political alternative I am developing is one of redistributive justice, grounded in a collective futurity. The chapter has four sections. In Section 2.1, I will briefly define messiness. This is a key concept in my thesis, and I will explain why I am using this framing over other ways of conceptualising complexity. Section 2.2 will establish the existing political-

economic context of neoliberalism, conceptualising how it relates to this research. It is worth briefly noting that when considering remunicipalisation within the broader context of privatisation, the history of privatisation in the USA is different than in other places across Europe and Latin America where remunicipalisation has also emerged (Arpini et al., 2023). In the late 1970s, before the neoliberal project began under Reagan, only 2% of employees in the United States worked in state-owned enterprises. In other developed market economies, it was almost 7% (Goodman and Loveman, 1991). Thus, while in other countries, the state-ownership of utilities and basic industries made them ripe targets for privatisation, most of these industries were already privately owned in the US.

Developing an understanding of neoliberalism is important for this work, because the neoliberalisation of the energy sector has had negative impacts on the environment and societal wellbeing, as well as on the stability of financial markets and economic growth (Chester, 2013; Chester and McMaster, 2023).

I will address my first research question, which asks how neoliberal governance structures and technocratic mechanisms inhibit democratic participation and perpetuate anti-democratic tendencies, by problematising neoliberalism for its lack of democratic content, instead emphasising how it is enacted through technocratic and managerial forms of governance. By technocratic, I am referring to governance decisions which are based on the technical or specialised knowledge of professionals. While technocratic governance decisions are often portrayed as being outside of political ideology, untarnished by public opinion, I will demonstrate in this chapter how these decisions are often informed by a neoliberal 'common sense' around the role of the state and the role of the market. I will specifically focus on technocratic environmentalism, which sees concerns around the climate and environment reduced to administrative problems (Accetti, 2021) offering only policy-oriented and technological solutions doing little to address the root cause of many of these problems, namely the extractive capitalist economic system.

In Section 2.3 I will introduce the theoretical foundations of the alternative project, which I will argue contrasts with neoliberal governance in how it centres participation and a deepening of democratic engagement, and in its

conceptualisation of justice. To do this, I will utilise Nancy Fraser's (1997, 2003) work on justice as the foundational building blocks for my own analysis. Here, I will introduce Fraser's conceptions of the dimensions of justice, which are redistribution, recognition, and representation. After this, I will detail how recognitional justice can be seen to have replaced more redistributive mechanisms of justice, while at the same time losing its transformative potential (Fraser, 2019).

I will then utilise environmental justice literature to develop an understanding of the energy justice that is central to my work. This relates to my second research question, around how building a social movement around energy infrastructure can broaden political imaginaries. I will continue with Fraser, who has called for a "counter-hegemonic bloc that is trans-environmental and anti-capitalist" (Fraser, 2021: 127), to articulate a specific set of justice claims that are intertwined with an explicit rejection of the privatisation and marketisation of public infrastructure which I will argue has constituted neoliberalisation. This is a form of energy justice that locates the neoliberalisation of energy infrastructure as central to environmental degradation and social injustices. It is inherently redistributive, seeking to democratise the energy system while also mitigating climate crisis through moving away from fossil-fuel usage, to address social and economic inequalities.

For Fraser (2003: 74), transformative strategies of justice work to address inequalities by restructuring the underlying systems which gave rise to them, and in the fourth and final section I will demonstrate how redistributive justice can be cultivated through political action to reclaim infrastructure as part of a democratic transformation of the local state. I will do this from a minor perspective, working with minor theory – an approach developed by Cindi Katz (1996, 2017) which emphasises marginalised experiences in its exploration of power and resistance. Katz's work on minor theory is useful across multiple levels of my work. Prefigurative social movements interacting with the state can be understood as articulating a minor praxis: a way of engaging with the state which simultaneously transforms the state and the social movement, while also not aiming for mastery. By working in, against and beyond the state (Arpini et al., 2021; Hasler et al., 2020; Angel and Loftus, 2019; Routledge et al., 2018; Angel,

2017; Cumbers, 2015; Jessop, 2007; Holloway, 2005) on its own terms, and a social movement's own terms, we can begin to move towards a collective futurity through the institutions of the present.

In Section 2.4, I will argue that this "moving towards" is enabled through an affective mode of queerness. This addresses my third and final research question, which asks what wider potential these campaigns offer for an alternative, progressive political project. Here, I am using queer as a verb to focus on 'queering' as a form of doing which can "challenge and resist expectations or norms" (McCann and Monaghan, 2019: 3). José Esteban Muñoz (2009: 1) argues that potentiality is a central facet of queerness, which is "not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future". This future-oriented becoming is central to Katz's minor theory and my own work concerning a prefigurative project of democratisation. I will argue that queerness not only shapes the ability to see the "possibility for another world" (Ibid), but also enables the audacious optimism and messiness necessary to get there. It is the affective strength of a queer solidarity that enables both the vision of redistributive futurity as well as sustaining the mode of solidarity that is needed to continue beyond failures, past neoliberal technocracy, and through coalitional differences. This is a futurity which is grounded and cognisant of obstacles (Muñoz, 2009: 207).

2.1 Messiness

With the two clauses of my research aim (what is the alternative? and how is it articulated?), I am attempting to link the theoretical and methodological. This linking of theory and praxis was informed by everyday interactions during the PPNY campaign, and it was through these interactions that I started to consider notions of mess in the first place.

Messiness is a key concept throughout my thesis, and I am specifically using this framing due to what it suggests about chaos, incoherence, and unpredictability. I differentiate this from complexity, for example, which could similarly be used to study the multiple interactions within a system through which emergent properties can arise. I am referring here to the messiness of movements

themselves, as well as the chaos inherent in the breakdown of systems – such as in the climate-conjuncture.

Conceptualisations of mess and messiness have frequently been studied in literature with a methodological focus (Meer and Müller, 2021, Gill et al., 2012, Askins and Pain, 2011, Law, 2004). Here, scholars have thought about the "messy work" of collaborative research (Meer and Müller, 2021: 3). Throughout Chapter 3 I will detail the messy process of researching PPNY, and of conducting PhD fieldwork during the Covid-19 pandemic. Another body of literature addresses multi-level governance, positioned "between the two poles of 'ordered' and 'messy'" (Smith, 2007). This is particularly present in literature on climate governance (Bulkeley et al., 2015) and renewable energy (Smith, 2007). Here, the transition from policy ambitions, (such as the CLCPA's emissions reductions mandates), to implementation is frequently described as messy (Marin et al., 2020: 1).

I am less interested in creating a binary between 'ordered' and 'messy' poles, and as such my own usage of the term is more pliable. Instead, I will focus on moments where social movements can disrupt established processes or relationships inside the state, while at the same time, unforeseen events, confrontation, and unstructured communication can inhibit a social movement's progress.

Castán Broto (2020: 249) argues that while Foucauldian theories of governmentality are often associated with order, messiness is in fact central to governance. She links three elements of mess as a starting point for the development of a conceptual framework capable of reflecting the messiness of governance (Ibid: 249, 252). These are pertinent for my own work, and are:

- Messiness in postcolonial and environmental justice theory
- Messiness in methods – especially participatory ones inspired by feminist ideas of situated knowledges; and
- Messiness in the relations between the body, society and emotions which characterise everyday interactions.

These three elements are pertinent because they link theory with methodology and centre relational interaction. Throughout this thesis, I will articulate that working in and through the spaces of the state has been a messy, embodied project, and it is only through this that the spaces within the existing system can be re-worked: in the political imaginary that surrounds privatised services, but also in the literal spaces of the state and infrastructures that social movements are working within, against and beyond.

2.2 Neoliberalism

In this section I will define neoliberalism as it relates to my research. I will focus specifically on the introduction of market values in the public service arena, utilising the frame of neoliberalisation (Peck and Tickell, 2002, 2007) to emphasize the processual and dynamic nature of this transformation. As mentioned, by focusing on the 'processual' nature of neoliberalisation, I am drawing attention to the dynamic, evolving, and context-specific nature of neoliberalism, which is not static but constantly adapting through variegated local strategies (Brenner et al., 2010; Miller, 2006).

By market values, I mean the fostering of a certain set of values that privilege commodification, measurement, sales and price-setting (Fraser, 2014a). This is a Polanyian perspective which draws attention to the tensions that emerge when fundamental aspects of life are subjected to market dynamics – what Polanyi terms the 'fictitious commodities' of land, labour and money (Polanyi, 1944). Fraser (2014) productively builds on Polanyi's conception of these commodities to demonstrate the three-dimensional nature of current crises, which she describes as being ecological, financialised and directly tied to social reproduction. This is important for my own work, as energy can be understood along the same three lines.

Examining the specific impact that the introduction of market values has had on the public sphere is helpful for understanding neoliberalisation as a de-democratisation project (Kiely, 2016). This is important for my research, to address my first research question and to establish the context from which a political alternative emerges. In this, the methods in which neoliberals have

attempted to de-democratise the liberal democratic political order (Kiely, 2016) are important. While some scholars (such as Hall, 2011 and Bruff, 2014) point to more overtly authoritarian methods, more important for my work are the ways in which technocratic measures have been central to the undermining of democracy by reconstructing governance in line with market principles (Kiely, 2016: 725).

Neoliberalism can be understood as an incredibly diverse phenomenon, elaborated through a range of political-economic principles and practices which evolve depending on geographic location and political circumstance (Mirowski, 2019: 5). Commonly understood as encapsulating a suite of policies surrounding privatisation, financialisation and deregulation, scholars such as Harvey (2007) describe the epistemological dimensions of neoliberalism as dedicated to the extension of market-like forms of governance and control across all spheres of social life, as a way to restore elite power from the late 1970s onwards. Focusing specifically on the public sector, Jessop (2019: 344) explains how the introduction of market proxies which favour "efficient, effective, and economical delivery of public services" via choice and competition undermine non-market values and logics such as fairness, equality, and transparency.

The introduction of these market values into the public service arena have shaped not only how public services are delivered, but also the "parameters of what can currently be known" (Mirowski, 2019: 4) in the public service landscape. In this, specific understandings about public service, which have become common sense in the US, have ramifications on service delivery. Though expanded upon in more detail in Chapter 4, which untangles the modern US regulatory state, this common sense is based on understandings of private investment, the free market and the need for competition in the build out of the infrastructure required for the energy transition. Here, I am following scholars such as Hall and O'Shea (2013: 8) who problematise the easily available knowledge and "everyday thinking" of common sense. Drawing on the work of Gramsci, they argue that while common sense does have a "logic" and a history, it is "disjointed and episodic", "continually transforming itself" even while drawing on past traditions and ideas (Ibid: 9).

This definition of common sense can be read as extremely similar to the definitions of neoliberalism which describe it as mutating, shape shifting, and contradictory.

Mirowski (2013: 68-83) describes the contradictory nature of neoliberalism as struggling against a brace of inherent “double truths”, and the majority of understandings of the so-called “free” market acknowledge the sheer amount of governmental intervention via new modes of regulation and governance that are required in order to maintain it. Indeed, it has been argued that “it is only rhetorically [that] neoliberalism means “less state”” (Peck and Tickell, 2007: 33).

2.2.1 Neoliberalisation

As mentioned, a useful way of conceptualising how neoliberalism developed and sustained itself is the frame of neoliberalisation (Peck and Tickell, 2002, 2007). Neoliberalisation emphasises the “uneven, multiscalar, mutable but ecologically dominant nature” (Ward and Swyngedouw, 2018: 1079) of neoliberalism. The processual nature of neoliberalisation is important for my work for three reasons. Firstly, as a way to understand how the ideology has sustained itself through and beyond crises arguably of its own making, such as the 2008 financial crisis (Mirowski, 2013). Secondly, understanding that the restructuring programme of neoliberalism is not complete, nor coherent (Peck and Theodore, 2012), demonstrates how the trajectory of neoliberalism has been one that cannot be understood through a linear temporality; something that queer theory problematises, which will be unpacked in Section 2.4 of this chapter. Finally, understanding how neoliberalism has evolved through processes of neoliberalisation is useful due to the ways in which this process has encroached upon ever more facets of collective life, transferring these sectors and industries to privatised, corporate control – and thus removing them from the democratically accountable public sphere (Duggan, 2012). Emphasising process in this way is pertinent for my work, which is concerned with the processes of building a social movement that challenges these dominant logics.

Neoliberalisation emphasises the processes of market-oriented restructuring and the grounded ways in which these are enacted through variegated, locally embedded strategies (Brenner, 2004 in Ward and Swyngedouw, 2018; Miller, 2006). The redistributive nature of this transformation is important for my work. Relating to RQ1, the regressive nature of this redistribution (Ibid, 1079), in which public wealth is transferred into private ownership, exacerbates inequalities and inhibits

democratic engagement. Understanding how regressive redistribution was enabled through the active involvement of the state (Ibid) is important for investigating how a more redistributive futurity is being constituted and advanced, explored later in this chapter. In Chapter 4, I will examine in more detail how the regressive redistribution of neoliberalisation manifest in the US and will explicitly position energy as central in the processes of neoliberalisation in the country.

Peck and Tickell (2007: 27-29) posit that the range of governmental strategies adopted from the 1970s culminated not in the "the roll back [of] the state in general but [the] roll back (and [restructuring of]) a particular kind of state". The crisis of 'stagflation' – inflation and a simultaneous increase in unemployment – which was impacting Keynesian welfare states and social democracies provided the moment for the political-economic philosophy of neoliberalism, which had previously been the focus of a fringe thought collective (Mirowski, 2013), to be implemented in policy terms in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Davies and Gane, 2021: 5). Here, specific policies were pursued by governments seeking to break with the post-war social compromises to modify the balance of power in favour of capital (Jessop, 2019: 344), and there was a "rolling back" of many of the policies associated with welfare states (Peck, 2010).

From the 1990s onwards, new institutions and policy instruments were then 'rolled out' through successive re-regulations which privileged privatisation and marketisation. Privatisation and marketisation is when state-owned industries or organisations are sold to the private sector, or the legal environments in which they operate are restructured so that state enterprises become operated as market-oriented firms. These processes of market-oriented restructuring are enacted through locally embedded strategies such as public-private partnerships, fiscal incentives and subsides, and speculative investments, to name a brief few (Clement and Kanai, 2015: 371; Miller, 2006).

Mayer (2006: 91) highlights how the roll-out stage of neoliberalisation has extended beyond re-regulation, arguing that a number of supporting strategies have been introduced that function to displace urban crises. Revitalisation and regeneration strategies have quashed "the 'neighbo[u]rhood rebellions' of blighted areas", with grassroots activists working in economic development and

as community managers (Ibid, 90). In the roll-out stage of neoliberalisation, initiatives aimed at addressing social exclusion have interwoven different parts of the local state which had previously been separated, with social, political and even ecological criteria have been included in "efforts to promote economic competitiveness", in this way redefining the "social infrastructures, political culture, and ecological foundations of the city", transforming them, wherever possible, into economic assets (Ibid, 91). This is important for my analysis for two reasons. Firstly, drawing attention to the ways in which neoliberalisation co-opts political culture highlights how any understanding of its processes must look beyond the economic, a point that I will expand upon in more detail in Section 2.2, when I discuss Nancy Fraser's conceptualisation of the dimensions of justice. Secondly, Mayer demonstrates how roll-out neoliberalism neutered earlier forms of grassroots activism by incorporating their concerns around exclusion and injustice in ways which are not just compatible with financialisation and marketisation, but in fact work to expand these into further areas of public life. In Section X, I will explore in more detail the role of social movements in contesting neoliberalism, but for now this intervention provides an important foundation for my own project, which is concerned with how grassroots social movements engage with and against the neoliberal state towards transformational change and how organising around the ownership of energy infrastructure is central to this movement.

One way in which roll-out processes have progressed into further areas of collective life is in environmental policy. Here, the privatisation of energy and water infrastructures, carbon offsetting schemes, liberalisation of agricultural trading and quota systems in things like fisheries can all be seen as examples (Pellizzoni, 2011: 795). The privileging of quantifiable targets by public sector bodies can also been seen in the moves towards net-zero, with local authorities, states, countries, and even fossil fuel companies pledging a certain percentage number of reductions in carbon emissions by arbitrary deadlines. Shell, the multinational oil and gas company, has the target of becoming "a net-zero emissions energy business by 2050" (Shell, 2023), and in NYS, the CLCPA requires a reduction of economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions of 40% by 2030 (New York State, 2022). How the neoliberal regulatory state renders these targets merely

recognitional will be analysed in Chapter 4. For now, it is sufficient to note how these processes of neoliberalisation refine and secure the existing neoliberal order, extracting power and wealth from the state to the private sector (Brenner & Theodore, 2002).

The final phase of neoliberalisation to be briefly addressed is the post-financial crisis period. This era highlights the disciplinary function of neoliberalisation and exemplifies how neoliberalism adapts and sustains itself beyond crisis. To understand the retrenchment of the austerity period for my own work, the concept of austerity urbanism is particularly relevant. This body of literature emphasises the particular impact that the post-2008 period of restructuring had on the local state and public service provision (Peck, 2012). In rolling back an already reduced public sphere, post-2008 restructuring occurred within an already neoliberalised context (Ibid).

In the United States, the post-financial crisis period was not named austerity as it was in the United Kingdom and Eurozone, however the same pressures on local governments and states to cut back on expenditure were seen (Peck, 2012; Hinkley, 2017). This had a significant impact on the agency and capacities of local governments, constraining their ability to go beyond a disciplinary neoliberal framing. Here, discipline is literal and metaphorical. Rules and regulations are literally imposed, often maintained through repressive methods. These serve to then shape social, economic and political imaginaries metaphorically. Hinkley (2017) demonstrates how in the post-2008 period, urban crises in the US have been increasingly attributed to irresponsible public budgeting, unsustainable municipal debt, and pension burdens. From this narrative, the necessity is then put on local governments to make 'tough decisions' and adapt governance to a "new economic reality" (Ibid, 2017: 2124). In this, policy decisions are depoliticised and presented as the only viable alternative, while at the same time cuts to local governments' capacity means they are less able to withstand future economic downturns, further threatening public services.

The disciplinary functions of this period of neoliberalisation are most visible by looking at where privatisation and cuts were most concentrated. Many of the policies of privatisation and cuts to public services emerged first among

governments that were “larger, professionalised and more unionised” and as such can be understood as part of a deliberate strategy to “rein in” organised workers (Lobao and Adua, 2011: 433). Similarly, the policies enacted during this period of restructuring can be understood as punishments on governments – especially in cities, places where political targets such as “the ‘undeserving poor’, minorities and marginalised populations” reside (Peck, 2012: 629; Mayer, 2006: 94) – for “over-reaching” in their provision of social protections (Lobao and Adua, 2011: 433).

In this period of restructuring, the institutional capacity of the local state was eroded and, in more extreme examples, declared bankrupt (Tabb, 2014). One notable case of this is Detroit, which was once the fourth largest and one of the wealthiest cities in the United States, yet experienced the largest municipal bankruptcy in US history in 2013-14 after seventeen months of ‘emergency management’ (Peck and Whiteside, 2016: 235).

2.2.2 Neoliberalisation and the undermining of democracy

In the last section, I demonstrated how neoliberalism should be understood as a processual phenomenon, with different phases evolving to further erode the capacities of the state, promoting the interests of particular groups over others. In this section, I will show how these processes undermine democracy. I will begin by explaining how neoliberalism’s negative conception of freedom informs understandings of state action, before demonstrating the contradictions present in neoliberal notions of a small state. To do this, I will explain how state expenditure has not in fact reduced but rather shifted to different areas – specifically areas which maintain control through repressive means. In this, I will articulate how authoritarianism has increased through the austerity period, focusing on police expenditure in NYC during this period. Then, I will illuminate how the state has also intervened through technocratic means to undemocratically embed and institutionalise neoliberal values. Here, I will draw on an example from the Spanish municipalist platform Ahora Madrid.

For the original thinkers of neoliberalism, the state’s role is only to prevent coercion (O’Flynn, 2009a; Peters, 2023; Vallier, 2022). This is based on a negative

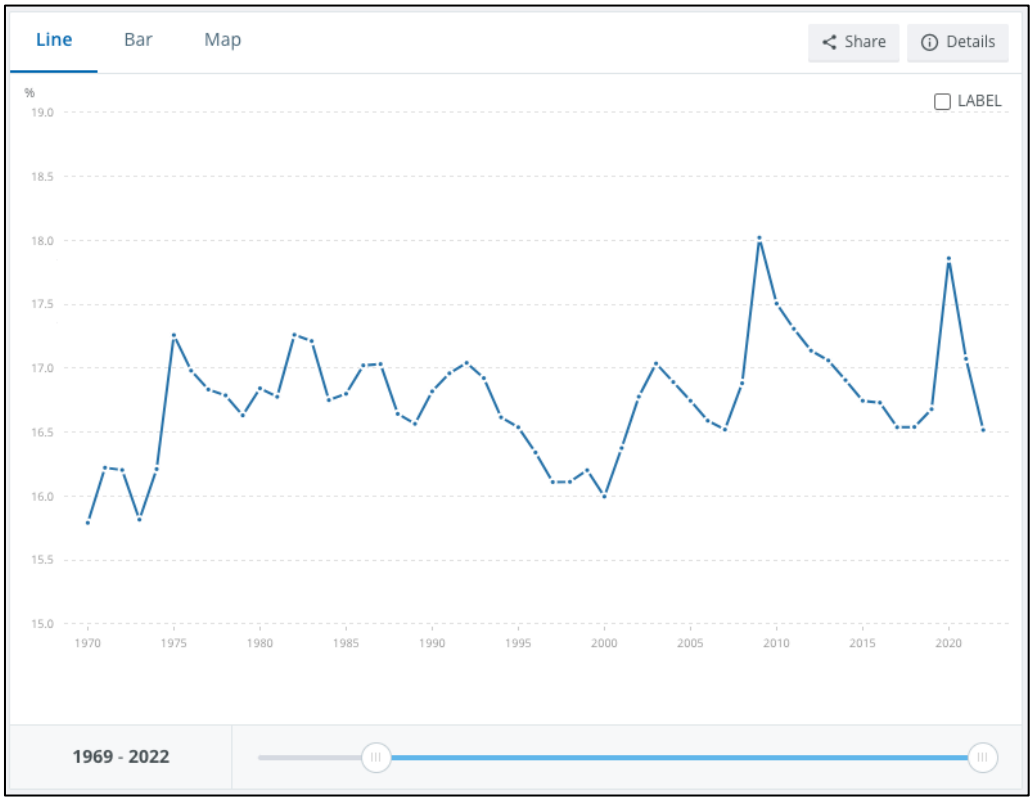
conceptualisation of freedom, which focuses on freedom from constraints, rather than a positive pursuit of common goals (Kiely, 2018: 2). Fundamental to this negative conception is the notion that while poverty is an unfortunate outcome of market forces, there is not collective responsibility to ameliorate the problem (Ibid: 3). This conception works alongside the austerity outlined in the section above, in which those associated with or dependent upon the state became a targeted constituency of neoliberal restructuring (Hall, 2011: 712, 719), to demonstrate how the dismantling of the state can impact upon local democratic structures (Ibid: 712). Not only are measures imposed by external actors, limiting the scope of elected governments to make economic policy decisions (which will be discussed momentarily), but deepening inequality can have negative impacts on social cohesion and inter-group trust (Buchroth and Hetherington, 2018).

In constructing inequalities as acceptable, while also promoting a discourse of austerity in which public goods become scarcer, the perceived rights of dominant groups can be voiced in ways which give right-wing extremism a direct route into mainstream political discourse (Buchroth and Hetherington, 2018). Tulumello (2018: 173) argues that, in contexts which can be characterised by long-term austerity rule, rather than simply understanding austerity as a set of policies enacted in the pursuit of neoliberal political goals, it should be understood as restructuring the concept of public policy in general. In this, public policy "fades out" (Ibid) and is replaced by a mixture of both state intervention and disengagement – the state intervenes more in some areas, such as policing, while retrenchment occurs elsewhere, such as social welfare. This is especially notable in places where neoliberalisation intersects with racial and class tensions, which can categorise many US cities.

This combination of state intervention and disengagement points to another of neoliberalism's contradictions: that it favours a small state. The periods of regulation and deregulation which I have outlined in my discussion of neoliberalisation cannot be understood as binary opposites, but rather a capture which favours a weak state and a strong government (Bresser-Pereira, 2008). Indeed, while the proportion of government expenditure has fluctuated over the neoliberal period, it has not declined. The graph below demonstrates how world expenditure has generally only fluctuated about half a percentage point, only

peaking beyond that with the financial crisis and the pandemic. This is despite privatisation initiatives which saw over $185 billion worth of state enterprises sold by the end of the 1980s, with a further $25 billion sold off in 1990 alone (Goodman and Loveman, 1991).

Figure 2: General government final consumption expenditure (% of GDP)
Taken from:
https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.CON.GOVT.ZS?end=2022&name_desc=false&start=1969&type=points&view=chart



In the post-2008 period, the privatisation of public infrastructure has continued. This selling-off, combined with under-investment in infrastructures that remain in public control, has led to maintenance backlogs which are now "intergenerational in scope" (Peck, 2012: 645). The private sector is also able to profit of these backlogs, both through public-private partnerships and further privatisation (Ibid). The sale of Chicago's parking meter system to a Morgan Stanley led consortium for 75 years saw the city lose an estimated $12 billion in meter revenues, while at the same time the city was trying to mobilise a $7 billion public-private partnership for infrastructure development (Ibid, 646). This is an example of the asset

stripping (Harvey, 2007) that has taken place under neoliberalisation, which has only intensified post-2008 (Christophers, 2023), with public wealth now traded for private profit.

That expenditure has remained relatively stable even while public goods and services have been cut means that the structure of this expenditure has changed. Stuart Hall (Hall et al., 1978) wrote about Thatcher's support for strong policing measures to maintain control and suppress social unrest and opposition to her policies. The same can be seen when looking at government spend in the US. New York City's Police Department (NYPD) is the largest in the country, with police spending per capita increasing by over 21% in the period between 2000 – 2017 (Miller, 2020).

The NYPD's multi-billion-dollar budget[3] includes $133 million on the Strategic Response Group (SRG) (a more than tenfold increase from the SRG's original $13 million budget), a special operations group who respond to "citywide mobilisations and civil disorders" (NYPD, 2024), and which the American Civil Liberties Union has called to be disbanded, due to its consistent threatening, attacking, and arresting of protestors (NYCLU, 2024).

The NYPD is also a deeply unaccountable public body. In 2022, the Police Commissioner Keechant Sewell rejected or changed more than half of all disciplinary recommendations made by the Civilian Complaint Review Board, the independent panel which examines police misconduct, announcing that the NYPD would impose 'less discipline' on officers found to have committed misconduct (Cramer, 2023; Sisitzky and McCormack, 2024). Perhaps unsurprisingly, complaints of police abuse have increased 51% since then, with more complaints filed by New Yorkers in 2023 than any time in the previous decade (Sisitzky and McCormack, 2024).

[3] Equating to a spend of $29 million a day, not including the nearly $100 million spent on the overtime budget (Lieberman, 2023). In 2023, the Mayor of New York, former police officer, Eric Adams awarded a new contract to the city's largest police union, seeing $5.5 billion in raises, and an increase in the overtime rate by more than 50% to $93.75 an hour (Su, 2023).

These colossal sums have been diverted to the NYPD at the expense of almost all other public services in the city. Almost all city agencies have faced budget cuts: The Department of Education faced cuts of more than $370 million (Su, 2023); and libraries in the city will see cuts of over $14 million between 2022 – 2025, meaning that all public libraries are now closed on Sundays in the city (Kang, 2022; CBS New York, 2023). Mayor Adams justified these cuts as being 'fiscally responsible' despite the Independent Budget Office projecting a $4.9 billion surplus for the city in 2023 (Su, 2023).

The violent policing of protests and limited accountability of the police as a public body are themselves antidemocratic (and indeed the policing of protests will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 5). Beyond that, in pursuing an austerity agenda for some public agencies but not all, even while in a budget surplus, the contradictory nature of neoliberal ideology is clear. Here, some of the state is shrunk, with education a key target[4], while at the same time the state increases its reach into other areas, such as policing, stoking fear and distrust as a way to increase expenditure on defence and security at home and abroad (Mirowski, 2013; Wrenn, 2014).

The ideological construct that says strong law and order should tackle crime as a social problem, rather than other perspectives which would argue that alleviating poverty and creating a flourishing society would address root causes of crime in the first place, is not the sole preserve of neoliberalism. However, it is a significant aspect of its framework and reflects a broader ideological commitment to maintaining order through coercive means rather than addressing underlying social issues through redistributive policies.

Beyond these, Bruff (2014) focuses on neoliberal governance as a mechanism of authoritarianism. He argues that rather than resistance and dissent being neutralised through concessions from dominant social groups to more subordinate

[4] The privatisation of public education was a racist segregationist response to Brown v. Board of Education, which desegregated US schools. School vouchers were created which put schools in the marketplace, enabling them to exclude students at will. This has continued through the years including through the growth of charter schools in the US, which remain highly segregated (Cohen and Mikaelian, 2021).

ones (in ways which do not threaten the dominant group's hegemony), what we now see are subordinate social groups being marginalised "through the constitutionally and legally engineered self-disempowerment of nominally democratic institutions, governments, and parliaments" (Bruff, 2014: 116). Far from only acting to prevent coercion, the state has actually intervened dramatically to ensure the continuation of neoliberal governance and the deep embedding and institutionalising of neoliberal values. An example of this is the case of Ahora Madrid, the citizen platform formed to stand for the 2015 municipal elections in Madrid. During this time, a number of similar citizen platforms responding directly to the financial crisis were elected in Spain, with Barcelona en Comú widely regarded as a success story of radical municipalism.

However, despite electoral success, the transformative potential of Ahora Madrid was restricted by economic and legal-administrative limitations (Janoschka and Mota, 2020) imposed by the national state. After Ahora Madrid gained power, the national state directly intervened to constrain the scope of transformative change in the city (Janoschka and Mota, 2020). The 2013 'Rationalisation and Sustainability of Local Administrations' Act in Spain allows central government to strictly monitor local budgets and severe sanctions can be enforced for non-compliance with set targets. In 2017, after two years of Ahora Madrid failing to meet targets set by the national state, which included spending cuts of €564 million, the finance minister Cristóbal Montoro announced that all of Madrid's transactions would be supervised on a weekly basis by Spanish finance ministry officials (Costantini, 2017). This was the first time such an action had happened since the reestablishment of democracy in Spain after the fascist period (Ibid).

Financial control was centralised and scaled up, while the costs and risks of fiscal adjustment were devolved to the local level (Ibid: 8), a common pattern of the logics of austerity urbanism, and roll-out neoliberalisation before the austerity period (Miller, 2006: 224). This meant that Ahora Madrid was restricted from expanding investment in urban infrastructure or implementing policies to reverse austerity. Further, nationally imposed restrictions on the replacement of public sector employees meant that the municipal workforce could not be expanded, and thus the remunicipalisation of larger services was rendered "de facto impossible" (Ibid).

This is an example of the state actually expanding its reach into further areas of social life to "stabilise the contradictions and dislocations emanating from socioeconomic restructuring without granting material concessions to subordinate social groups" (Bruff, 2014: 119, Poulantzas, 1978: 210-214). This case study is far from an isolated experience, and it is this type of active and expansive de-democratisation of institutions that I regard as central to the anti-democratic nature of neoliberalism advanced through technocratic forms of governance.

2.2.3 Neoliberal technocracy

In the previous section I have demonstrated the authoritarian tendencies of neoliberal governments, with reference to US police budgets and Ahora Madrid. By looking at these seemingly mundane governance decisions around city budgets, we can find the anti-democratic or de-democratising elements of neoliberalisation in the everyday. That many of these instances of de-democratisation can be understood as technocratic is important for my research (Kiely, 2016). As mentioned, I understand technocracy to be governance decisions which are portrayed as outside of political ideology, due to being based on 'independent' technical or specialised expert knowledge. In this section I will demonstrate how rendering governance as neutral 'practice' has allowed neoliberal logics of a strong government and a weak state to become hegemonic (Leitner et al, 2007: 1-2).

Hayek lamented that his own generation "talks and thinks too much of democracy and too little of the values which it serves" (Hayek 1991:52–57). By this he meant that democratic norms should be limited to efficiency in the operation of the competitive market economy (O'Flynn, 2009b: 118). The market is considered the pinnacle of democratic expression in as far as it enables citizen-consumers to make free and nuanced choices better than representative democracy, in which voters have to vote for a 'bundle' of goods, despite their potential distaste for some policies.

Some of the key elements of this technocracy include the creation of new agencies and institutions such as auditors and regulators to ensure that privatised or outsourced public services are being delivered efficiently (Davies, 2016: 8).

Independent central banks are a key example of these new bodies. Emerging as a policy response after the crisis of inflation of the 1970s (the roll-back period of neoliberalisation), central bank independence is now "a globally accepted truth of economics" (Wachtel and Blejer, 2020: 1). From a neoliberal perspective, it is the supposed lack of political interests which gives independent central banks their authority (Davies, 2016: 9). However, placing interest rates 'outside' of the realm of the political – and instead in a world of managers and independent experts – means that the economic 'rules of the game' are sealed from democratic process and political influence (Ibid, Streeck, 2014). In the years since the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, independent central banks' ability to maintain low inflation has been called into question, with the UK House of Lords launching an inquiry in March 2023 to assess how well the Bank of England's 'operational independence' has worked. This is the first inquiry of its kind in the 25 years since the Bank of England was granted independence in 1998 (Garriga, 2023).

Beyond the quasi-independent bodies established to regulate privatised or outsourced public services and sectors, reform which has taken place within the public sector are also technocratic. New Public Management brought a range of reforms to the public sector, which included bringing corporate management techniques from the private sector into the public realm (Hyndman and Lapsley, 2016). This includes a prioritisation of financial control and budget restraint due to an emphasis on 'value for money', performance-measuring and results-oriented benchmarking due to a focus on 'efficiency', and 'customer service'. These reforms have manifest in ways which re-cast people accessing public services as consumers, rather than citizens. However, in Chapter 4 I will demonstrate how in the US the notion of the 'citizen-consumer' is an apt way to understand the relationship between the public sector and citizen populations, which pre-dates the neoliberal period.

What distinguishes neoliberal technocracy from other technocratic forms is the way in which it has imposed a specific view of the role of the market and the role of the state in the democratic process. These market logics have permeated society, insulating economic decisions from the realm of the political, and the economy from democratic politics (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2020: 45). In the US, many of these logics were pervasive prior to the 1970s, however they can be seen to

have intensified in the neoliberal period through deeply technocratic means. Pinkerton and Davis (2015: 305) demonstrate how a 1971 memorandum written by a corporate lawyer named Lewis Powell roused an assemblage of pro-business interests by detailing how to "re-structure American politics, the judiciary, the media, universities, and the overall framing of public discussion to create a more business-friendly policy environment". Rather than a dramatic coup, a major way these forces assembled was through the establishment of think tanks, such as the Manhattan Institute and Citizens for a Sound Economy, and through lobbying. Large business registered lobbyists rose from just 175 in 1971 to 2,500 in 1982, and around 12,000 by 2015 (Ibid).

The imposition of a specific conception of the market is particularly visible when looking at environmental action, a useful arena to interrogate for my own work which is directly concerned with an explicitly ecosocialist response to the climate crisis. Literature demonstrates how environmental discourse has been depoliticised, with climate change reduced to a problem best addressed by techno-managerial solutions (Accetti, 2021; Swyngedouw, 2010). This is partly because consensus around climate change is sustained by scientific discourse which relegates environmental issues as "matters of fact" beyond dispute (Swyngedouw, 2010: 215-217). This removes climate action from meaningful political debate, rendering scientific expertise as the only 'proper' foundation for policy prescriptions, due to science being the only way to validate or disprove facts about emissions or global heating. By externalising environmental issues in this way, they become objective realities – with a similarly objective set of solutions best left in the hands of experts (Swyngedouw, 2010: 222 in Accetti, 2021: 53). This serves to close down debate around ideological differences in responding to the climate crisis. A collective, homogenous humanity is positioned as under the same threat from the looming spectre of climate change, which serves to void social difference and disguise conflict of interests (Swyngedouw, 2010: 223-225 in Accetti, 2021: 54).

In doing so, technocratic environmentalism undermines a central dimension of the political realm: conflict and disagreement (Accetti, 2021: 54). Conflict is crucial for my work, and in Chapter 5 I will explicate the confrontational methods that PPNY employed in their campaign, analysing how these can be understood through

the lens of agonism (Mouffe, 2005), which emphasises the importance of engaging with political conflict in a democratic society and for projects concerned with negotiating power differences.

In highlighting the importance of debate around environmental action, I am not referring to the populist right's disavowal of climate change, with which Accetti's (2021) work on environmental technocracy is concerned. Instead, I am concerned with how technocratic views around climate change have served to render the market as the only possible solution for, rather than a cause of, climate collapse. I have already mentioned how net-zero targets are one example of environmental action being neoliberalised, but Robson (2023) takes this further. He argues that the environmental movement has been captured by corporate interests through technocratic mechanisms, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which "effectively act as a cover for the top-down, corporate takeover of the world's resources under the banner of climate alarmism and increased influence in setting the energy policies of nation states (through, e.g. highly questionable 'Net-Zero' interventions)" (Ibid, 6). Robson argues that the Earth Summit in 1992, which was the precursor of the establishment of the SDG's, was a moment in which environmental goals became intrinsically linked to development, serving to 'green' development, while "free trade, multinational corporations, militarism – some of the biggest contributors to today's crisis – were deliberately left off the agenda" (Chatterjee and Finger, 1994: in Robson, 2023: 108). This, Robson argues (Ibid), was a clear "expression of the priorities of an emerging global management elite".

We can see the culmination of this moment by looking at recent UN Climate Change Conferences. At COP26 in 2021, more than 100 delegates were from the International Emissions Trading Association, who promote market-based climate solutions (Adams and Stevens, 2021). These solutions include technological responses such as carbon offsets, 90% of which have been recently shown to be "worthless" (Greenfield, 2023). Further, the president of COP28 in 2023 was Sultan al-Jaber; the chair of Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (Adnoc), which pumped 2.7 million barrels of oil a day in 2021 and is aiming to double that output by 2027 (BBC, 2023).

Of course, many new social movements galvanising around the climate crisis possess highly specialised knowledges of their own and can be seen to appeal to science in their calls for collective political action. However, for radical movements seeking a different engagement with the state, I will argue that this expertise does not lead to technocratic calls to keep politics out of environmentalism, but instead seeks to politicise existing environmental action in ways which bring a broader critique of neoliberal capitalism into the frame, while bringing different forms of grassroots knowledge to the table. This will be explored in Chapter 5.

In rendering policy choices, such as ones around environmental action, as outside of the realm of democratic debate, technocratic forms of governance disavow the notion of a pluralistic view of the political. Work has focused on how technocratic governance sees politics as an instrument (Crouch, 2004; Mehmood and Cousins, 2022), or as an impartial process in which solutions are sought objectively (Marquardt and Lederer, 2022: 4).

Scholars such as Mouffe (2005) have outlined how these instrumental political understandings are reliant on faux consensus, and in work addressing newer institutional governance forms, Swyngedouw (2018) adds an interesting slant to considerations of technocratic neoliberalism. Over recent years, there has been a proliferation of more horizontal forms of governance, which include private market actors and civil society groups in the governance mechanisms of the traditional state. These mechanisms offer the promise “of greater participation in policy deliberation and grassroots empowerment” (Swyngedouw, 2018: 3). However, Swyngedouw argues that these arrangements take place in an “institutional void” in which there are no clear rules of engagement, and where the terms of participation can vary significantly. Mayer (2006: 92) also contends that the roll-out phase of neoliberalisation has also seen “many of the participatory demands of the early urban movements apparently… fulfilled”. This understanding is fundamental for my own work. As will be outlined in the later empirical chapters, during my fieldwork I came across numerous examples of these horizontal governance forms which included largely symbolic mechanisms of participation. These included utility rate case proceedings and a Special Hearing

on the BPRA which was held in August 2022 after the bill failed to pass the NYS Assembly.

2.3 Justice

As demonstrated in Section 2.2.2, the negative conception of liberty in neoliberal thought, which focuses on freedom from constraints rather than an active pursuit of common goals, means that questions of justice do not have to be centred in decision making since injustices are perceived as the unfortunate outcome of the market. Market values have increasingly become embedded in public service provision, enabled through a technocratic arm of governance in which market values are reified over other values such as fairness, equality, and transparency.

Notions of justice are central to my work regarding political alternatives. In this section I will begin with a discussion of how Nancy Fraser's challenge to Marxist and feminist theories is significant for my own work. I will then introduce Fraser's dimensions of justice by exploring how these dimensions address gaps in existing critical political economy work on neoliberalism. I will then focus on the nuances of neoliberal recognition (what Fraser (2019: 18) terms the differences between 'progressive' and 'reactionary' neoliberalism) as important for the research context of New York State. I will synthesise this with environmental justice literatures to articulate a conception of energy justice that centres the neoliberalisation of energy infrastructure in environmental degradation and social injustices. This conception is a fundamental aspect of what the political alternative I am articulating through this thesis is, and as such relates to my second research question concerning building a social movement around energy infrastructure.

Fraser (2003) examines justice through the interconnected dimensions of redistribution, recognition, and representation. These should be understood as mutually reinforcing, with a comprehensive approach to justice requiring all three dimensions. Table 2 below provides an overview.

Table 2: Dimensions of justice

Dimension	Type of justice	Details
Redistribution	Economic justice	Concerned with not only the equitable distribution of wealth and resources, but the structural and systemic barriers that perpetuate inequalities. This includes reorganising the division of labour.
Recognition	Cultural justice	Focused on the recognition of difference and emphasises the need to acknowledge differing identities and experiences of various societal groups.
Representation	Political justice	Centred around fair and inclusive participation in decision-making processes. In this, democratic structures that enable a plurality of voices to be heard are important.

By moving beyond economic determinism and bringing in social and cultural elements of injustice, Fraser's understanding of the dimensions of justice addresses gaps in existing critical political economy work on neoliberalism in ways which are helpful for my own work due to the significant challenges to both Marxism and feminism that she raises. In Section 2.2, I provided a definition of neoliberalism and neoliberalisation as primarily as a restructuring political-economic project focused on the rolling back of welfare states and the expansion of marketisation and financialisation into ever more aspects of the public realm and social life.

Throughout Fraser's career she has maintained and developed a critique of mainstream critical political economy that argues it underestimates the role of identity-based struggles. Despite arguing that a solely economic analysis misses how neoliberalism restructures social hierarchies beyond class, Fraser nevertheless takes seriously the issues of financialisation and marketisation that characterise the class project of neoliberalism. For example, in Justice Interruptus (1997), she argues that the "resurgent economic liberalism" of the post-1989 'postsocialist' period resulted in "increasingly marketizing social relations, [the]

eroding [of] social protections, and [the] worsening… life-chances of billions" (Ibid, 3). In an article written two decades later, Fraser (2017: 34) has maintained this critique, arguing that the financialisation of the economy "poses formidable structural obstacles… [to the] spearhead[ing of] a counter-hegemony".

Fraser's analysis of financialisation in this way presents a more nuanced approach that is apt for my own work. Not only does she argue that the financialisation of the economy has simplified circuits of accumulation by removing the dependency on human labour (Ibid, 33), but she contends that it has served to also obfuscate "the class division between labor [sp] and capital", with the more salient divide now being "between the thinning ranks of the stably employed, on the one hand, and the swelling precariat on the other" (Ibid, 34). This has made it so that "organized labor [sp] does not speak for society as such" and "cannot supply the backbone for a [Polanyian] double movement in the twenty-first century" (Ibid).

Fraser (2017: 34) argues that looking beyond unions can help advance the project of the left in ways which are helpful for my argument, and does so in ways which bring in broader issues of recognition and representation. This raises a significant challenge to the dominant Marxism of the late 1990s and early 2000s. David Harvey (1997, 2000, 2003), for example, criticised the fragmentation of identity-based resistance movements, arguing that "class-based material interests are the only legitimate basis for a unified politics of resistance and that failure to pursue a common class politics represents, essentially, a form of false consciousness" (Miller, 2006: 232). Fears of class fragmentation seeing recognitional issues eclipse more redistributive focal points persist, with Cedric Johnson (2017; 2023) arguing that "the hegemony of identitarianism" has created confusion in political life in which social identity is equated with political interests, distorting alliance building around shared values over identity, warping left struggle, and contributing to a degraded public sphere.

However, in moving beyond economic determinism, Fraser turns to the spheres of social reproduction, arguing that struggles in this terrain serve "as a major site of opposition to neo-liberalism". By moving the conversation around alternatives to neoliberalism from financialised class relations as the only site of political struggle, she positions fights for recognition as central bases for mobilisation, and

doing so contributes to a significant gap in existing critical political economy work on neoliberalism. This is also important for my analysis. By being deeply involved in fights over housing, utility shutoffs, fossil fuel infrastructure, and the democratisation of energy, PPNY and DSA are directly engaging with infrastructures rooted in the daily reproduction of life, particularly for those made vulnerable by intersecting structures of race, class and gender. Building on Fraser's turn towards social reproduction as a vital terrain of anti-neoliberal resistance, I contend that organising for public power and energy justice is not ancillary to class struggle but a reconfiguration of *where* and *how* that struggle takes place. In the context of a warming planet crumbling public infrastructure becomes a key site of political antagonism.

This broader conception of justice and political subjectivity enables a more expansive understanding of who comprises the left and what kind of demands are possible. Rather than relying on the vision of a stable, industrial working class as the sole agent of change, Fraser's work legitimises the role of those organising from positions of instability, including precarious workers, queer tenants, and racialised communities who I will demonstrate throughout this thesis are often at the forefront of climate and energy injustices', and should therefore be central to its struggles. Fraser's arguments around organised labour also remain controversial claims for a left critical political economist to make, and contemporary US Marxists such as Huber (20022) would likely disagree. In Chapter 5, I will deepen this critique with my own empirical analysis, but for now it's worth understanding Huber's reassertion of the centrality of class for any left project. Huber (2022) argues that the working class – and specifically electric utility workers – are still positioned to lead a class-based movement, particularly in a just transition toward climate justice. Indeed, Huber (2022: 31) and other contemporary Marxists (e.g., Fong and Naschek, 2021) are critical of the role of the precariat in the left and the climate movement, arguing that while many "downwardly mobile" college-educated millennials are facing proletarianization, it is precisely because of the fact that the US left is increasingly dominated by the educated middle class, NGOs and other elites (including academics and researchers with PhDs and other further degrees) instead of unions, that ambitions have been tamed and the wider influence has been limited.

This is important for my own theoretical and empirical framing, due to the ways in which it offers a framework for understanding how the DSA and PPNY operate as political actors beyond the bounds of traditional class formations. Fraser's insistence on the salience of identity-based struggles and fights over the terrain of social reproduction helps me to situate DSA and PPNY not only as socialist formations, but as such formations that are increasingly queer, multiracial and composed of the very same downwardly mobile millennials often dismissed by some contemporary Marxists.

By highlighting how neoliberalism has restructured class such that precarity, rather than industrial trade unionism, is the dominant experience of exploitation and insecurity for large segments of the left (and non-political publics), Fraser's analysis opens up a space to take the DSA seriously as an organised expression of the precariat. This is not a deviation from class, but a more nuanced understanding of class in its contemporary form.

2.3.1 Recognitional justice and progressive neoliberalism

The concept of recognition is important for my analysis, and I want to focus on how recognitional politics have evolved over the last three decades. Fraser (2000) argues that struggles for the recognition of difference in the mid to late twentieth century held emancipatory potential because of how they brought "a richer, lateral dimension to battles over the redistribution of wealth and power". Indeed, many of the liberatory social movements of the 1960s and 1970s pursued the recognition of difference, while also directly addressing economic inequalities. The Black Panther Party's 'Ten Point Program' demanded "full employment… land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace" (National Archives, 2024). In 1972, the Ten Point Program was updated to include "people's community control of modern technology" (People's Forum, 2018) – a demand which resonates with the public power movement pushing for the democratisation of energy systems today. Similarly, the Third World Gay Revolution's '16 Point Program', created in 1970, advocated for "a revolutionary socialist society" and demanded "free utilities [as part of] … a society where the needs of the people come first" (sevier and Stamas, 2023: 15).

However, as neoliberalisation progressed through the beginning of the twenty-first century, the ideology successfully adapted to the challenges presented by some of these liberatory social movements by adopting markers of meritocratic recognition, such as ‘diversity’ and ‘women’s empowerment’, in ways which remain entirely compatible with the marketisation and privatisation of the economy (Fraser, 2019: 13). With this critique, Fraser raises an important challenge to the feminist theories that inform her work. By focusing on the “disturbing convergence” (Fraser, 2009) of some of second-wave feminism’s ideals with neoliberal capitalism, Fraser argues that feminism’s critique of the patriarchal state, for example the notion of a ‘family wage’ earned by a male breadwinner, was appropriated to legitimise welfare reforms, flexible labour markets, and even the dismantling of some social protections. This was done under the banner of individual autonomy, choice and self-empowerment. In this, rather than challenging capitalist exploitation, feminism’s claims of recognition were recast in ways which supported a new regime of accumulation, thus reinforcing the very system it sought to resist.

While I am arguing that neoliberalism has neutered the transformative potential of recognitional politics, it is important to note that neoliberalism remains a broad-church ideology. Fraser (2019) argues that in the United States, the major differences between the Republican and Democratic political parties can only be seen as recognitional. Both support financialisation, and one can only “choose between multiculturalism and ethnonationalism” (Fraser, 2019: 18).

These nuances are pertinent for the research context of NYS. New York has been a ‘blue’ state since the Great Depression and has voted Democrat in the last nine elections – with six of those by a 20% margin (270towin, 2021). In Chapter 1, I highlighted how Democrats currently hold the first supermajority in more than 170 years with 107 of the 150 NYS Assembly members, and 43 of the 63 Senators (Ibid). Many of these Democrats are aligned to progressive values of recognition. Not only did the state legalise abortion three years before the Supreme Court decided Roe v. Wade in 1973, but when this decision was overturned in 2022, lawmakers convened a special session to enshrine access to abortion and contraception in the

State Constitution and passed a series of bills protecting those seeking and providing abortion (Zraick and Meko, 2022). At the same time, the values of redistribution do not align. Abortion rights activists criticised the 2024 NYS budget for leaving gaps in Medicaid coverage around reproductive care (Lisa, 2024). The state reimburses health care providers for Medicaid patients, but the NYS budget included no funding to cover the estimated necessary $550 reimbursement rate per medical abortion. This could make low-income communities' access to abortion more difficult, at a time when maternity wards and so-called 'safety net hospitals' (hospitals that are legally obligated to provide healthcare regardless of their ability to pay, or if they are covered by insurance) are closing (Lisa, 2024).

This can be understood through the lens of progressive neoliberalism. While NYS Democrat politics are concerned with the promotion of diversity and recognition at a cultural level, they are less concerned with addressing fundamental inequalities of wealth and resources, which are produced by structural inequalities, and as such do not challenge elite power structures or the logics of financial capital. Thus, while moves may be made around cultural justice, economic justice is not addressed. This relates back to Table 2, in which I outlined the three dimensions of justice, and highlights again that any approach to justice that ignores one of these dimensions leads to incomplete and inadequate responses to social injustices.

Responding to various forms of social injustice therefore must involve integrating recognition-based claims with redistributive politics, rather than allowing recognition to be watered down through neoliberalisation (Fraser, 2019). Bringing together Fraser's dimensions of justice enables and necessitates a deeply democratic engagement. It demonstrates how a focus on justice could change not only what sorts of decisions are made, but also *how* they are decided and *by whom*. What emerges from this resonates with what thinkers on economic democracy call for: participation in decision making expanded into all areas of social and economic life, with "social and ecological justice, human needs and aspirations at its heart" (Cumbers et al., 2020: 679). Here, representational politics can be reframed and expanded in more democratic ways, by extending democratic decision making into other economic structures and institutional forms.

Later chapters will demonstrate how PPNY are attempting to enact a more redistributive form of justice, not only through the changes to the governance structure of NYPA which would be implemented by the BPRA, but also through their engagement with democratic channels of the state, and through their day-to-day organising.

2.3.2 Environmental and energy justice

In recent work, Fraser (2021, 2022) has called for climate politics to be renewed as part of an "anti-capitalist hegemonic bloc" in which environmentalism is one part of a wider mass of social struggles (Fraser, 2021: 97, 109). This is because of the ways in which environmental degradation can be read along the same lines as "other forms of dysfunction-cum-domination inherent in capitalist society" (Ibid, 122). Central to this thesis is an articulation of energy justice that links the neoliberalisation of energy infrastructure with environmental degradation and social injustices. Linking climate and ecological change to other injustices reflects an environmental justice perspective, itself a framework for organising and scholarship that can be traced back to the Civil Rights Movement and other struggles by Black communities in the US to link environmental injustices with racism (Bullard, 1990 in Partridge, 2022: 3; Pulido, 2017).

Fraser's trans-environmentalism is underpinned by a "re-situat[ing]" (Fraser and Llaguno, 2022) of Marx's account of the 'hidden abode' of production (Fraser, 2014b) through an exploration of the "background conditions" (Fraser, 2014b) which inform this. These background conditions are "nature, the political order, and social reproductive and dependent labo[u]r" (Fraser and Llaguno, 2022). By shifting foucs to these 'background' elements, Fraser highlights how capitalism depends on unpaid care work, the exploitation of nature, and political institutions, even though it often treats them as external or separate. This "expanded view" of capitalism (Ibid) connects the economic system to its social, political, and ecological foundations, and positions all of them as essential to how capitalism functions – and how it breaks down.This expanded framing of capitalism as an institutionalised social order (Fraser, 2014b) that offloads costs onto nature, care, and marginalised populations resonates directly with environmental justice scholarship. This is pertinent for my own analysis because it demonstrates how

energy infrastructure is a key site through which ecological degradation, racialised harm, and political exclusion are both produced and resisted.

Questions of environmental justice have surrounded contemporary energy problems for some time now, ranging from debates around fuel poverty and other energy vulnerabilities, to energy policy, production, and consumption. In light of the climate crisis, calls have also been made for collaborative efforts to foster fairer social, economic, and environmental outcomes in the control, access and use of energy resources (Bond, 2012).

Critical environmental justice is rooted in a critique of dominant power structures and economic systems, much of which dedicates itself to revealing racial injustices and indigenous dispossession (Pulido, 2016, 2017; Pellow and Brulle, 2005; McKane et al., 2024). For example, literature has demonstrated how eighteenth-century plantations can be understood as one of the first significant energy transitions, given how the transportation of enslaved people across an ocean to work on plantations illuminated energy "for the first time as a commodity and as a flow" (Hughes, 2017: 30). Here, energy was the physical labour of enslaved people, as well as the systems of dominance that were created to ensure a steady flow of labour into the plantation and economic goods out of it.

This type of historically situated critique serves an interesting temporal function in my work. Temporality will be discussed in more detail in section 2.4.2's discussion of queer time, however in linking environmental degradation with historic and existing oppressions, dominations, and dispossessions (Fraser, 2021: 123), the past and the future are linked with the present. Indigenous dispossession and genocide were foundational to the creation of the United States; this continues into the present day and is revealed when looking at the energy system and campaigns for environmental justice. For example, the Nuclear Waste Policy Act (1982) targeted Native American reservations as storage sites for nuclear waste, partly because tribal sovereignty means environmental regulations do not apply (Manjeshwar, 2022). The place designated as the US's principal repository of nuclear waste – the Yucca Mountain Nuclear Waste Repository – is on Western Shoshone land in Nevada, yet the Western Shoshone were "never consulted, asked for consent, or acknowledged as the original owners" in the 20-year and $4 billion

research project to identify this land as a major repository (Manjeshwar, 2022; Washington State Office of the Attorney General, 2012). As yet, the site remains unrealised, due to decades of litigation from Native activists and the state of Nevada.

Further, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has approved an open-pit lithium ore mine in northern Nevada (Nairn, 2022). Lithium is a key resource in the energy transition due to its use in commodities like electric car batteries. However, the proposed location of this ore mine is a sacred site for the Fort McDermitt Paiute, Shoshone, and the Burns Paiute tribes, and is an important area for medicinal plants and golden eagles (Ibid). Litigation is now underway against the BLM for approving permits without consulting the tribes, but the multiple attempts to halt construction have failed (Ibid). In both of these examples we can see a demonstration of political injustice, as tribes were not included in decision making processes.

Highlighting the temporal features of these injustices is important for my work, given my concern with a future-oriented alternative. By understanding environmental injustice as linked with historic violence and the creation of lasting systems of domination, the scope of environmental action's focus is widened.

Indeed, just as social movements fighting for the recognition of difference in the last century were also focused on questions of economic justice, so too was the environmental movement. Blühdorn (2013: 18-19) argues that the environmental justice movement of the 1970s and 1980s challenged the dominant industrial model and advocated "very different economic structures, social relations, forms of politics, [and] attitudes towards nature". However, 'environmental justice' is now utilised as a phrase throughout all levels of US government, in ways which are rendered recognitional. Despite nearly 40 years of activism leading to the inclusion of environmental justice components in legislation such as the CLCPA and Biden's Justice40 initiative discussed in Chapter 1, Pulido et al (2016: 12) demonstrate that poor communities and communities of colour remain "overexposed to environmental harms" and the "environmental quality of vulnerable populations" has not improved.

As such, social movements attempting to move to renewable forms of energy while directly linking this move with the logics of privatisation and marketisation inherent to neoliberalism can be understood as articulating a wider project of system transformation: one which is presently grounded in the direct concerns of people's everyday lives, aware of historic injustices, and seeking to move beyond these in their enactment of a future vision. In their conceptual review of energy justice, Jenkins et al (2016) posit three key tenets of energy justice that are similar to Fraser's conceptions. These are distributional justice, which relates to where energy injustices emerge, including through the location of production facilities such as power stations, and the burden of rising energy prices; recognition-based justice relates which points to sections of society that are ignored or misrepresented; and procedural justice which concerns the ways in which decision-makers have sought to engage with communities. Jenkins et al (2016) explicitly focus on three mechanisms of inclusion: achieving just outcomes through local knowledge mobilization, greater information disclosure, and better institutional representation.

2.4 In talking about representation in institutions as a key tenet of procedural justice, they argue that "ensuring better representation in such institutions offers a more proactive approach to achieving justice, rather than depending upon the response of affected communities to injustice" (Ibid: 179). They draw on data surrounding diversity in energy companies, including gender and minority representation in the oil and gas industry. Representation in the fossil fuel industry and its corporate boardrooms can be understood as part of Fraser's 'progressive' neoliberal project, which is outlined above. Oil and gas companies are still part of an extractive industry based on profit accumulation and environmental degradation, and regardless of the numbers of minority populations working for them, they continue to perpetuate disproportionate harm on minority communities.Minor theory and queer theory

So far in this chapter I have outlined my conceptualisation of neoliberalism, namely that it is a processual and continual project of restructuring, which is enacted through various locally embedded strategies which are both authoritarian and technocratic in form, serving a similar de-democratising function (Brenner, 2004 in Ward and Swyngedouw, 2018: 1079).

Then, I outlined the conceptualisation of energy democracy and justice that my project proposes. Articulating these concepts relates to the first strand of my analysis, concerning the construction of political alternatives. If this can be understood as the 'what' of the project, then the second strand of my analysis, an empirically grounded critical exploration of the way in which this alternative

is actively constituted and advanced by a social movement, can be understood as the ‘how’.

In thinking this ‘how’ of social movements, I contend that energy politics should be understood at the local scale, for two reasons. Firstly, environmental and energy justice literatures draw attention to the spatial unevenness of energy governance and experiences of environmental harms. Not only are energy infrastructures are locally sited, but the regulatory systems and political institutions that govern them vary at the local and regional scale.

This makes energy politics distinct from many other policy domains that are more centralised or abstracted. Decisions around rate-setting, infrastructure siting, and service provision are often made by state or municipal bodies, producing highly localised experiences of energy injustice. In later empirical chapters I will demonstrate how NYS’ IOU model, rate-setting procedures, and the structure of the Public Service Commission are not just generic features of the energy system, but are specific, localised expressions of technocratic governance that shape who pays more, who gets shut off, and, crucially, who has the power to intervene. In this, arguing that understanding the ways in which energy is politically and materially grounded in place demonstrates struggles for energy democracy must emerge through, and respond to, localised forms of governance.

Secondly, analysing energy as inherently localised makes it more material than grander understandings of the transnational flows of fossil capitalism. In this way, energy’s integral role in the sphere of social reproduction is revealed, and its position as a 'background condition’ of neoliberal expropriation and environmental degradation is also made clear (Fraser, 2014). In this way, I am conceptualising energy politics from a minor position, foregrounding the everyday and often overlooked ways in which people live with, contest, and reimagine energy systems.

By thinking about the ways in which energy politics emerge through place-based everyday practices, I am drawing attention to the affective and relational practices of social movements. Throughout this thesis, I focus on the small-scale and messier aspects of PPNY’s campaign to pass the BPRA, arguing that this is work

of building otherwise within the constraints of the present, and as such is where the prefigurative impulse lies. Analysing energy politics from the minor therefore allows a focus on the texture of grassroots struggle and the fragmented, iterative processes by which more just energy futures are made. Indeed, queer theory is pertinent for articulating this minor position due to the ways in which it offers a vocabulary for thinking with fragmentation, failure and mess as ways to understand affective and grounded modes of becoming.

By 'prefigurative' social movements, I am drawing on the work of many scholars (including Yates, 2020, Cooper, 2017, Maeckelbergh, 2016) who position prefigurative politics as politics that are "forward looking, yet resolutely present" (Brissette, 2016: 116). These aim to reconfigure the social relations and structures of the present in the pursuit of an alternative vision of a collective life (Ibid). In this, the means should justify the ends, by embodying in the present moment the type of society one envisions for the future. Prefigurative politics are embodied, experimental and experiential (Maeckelbergh, 2016: 123). This can be understood as related to minor theory and queer theory – all emphasise embodied standpoints, and all are about transformation, looking towards an elsewhere.

Prefiguration can be understood as a queer concept, with queer theory and activism developing in relation to "a broader range of inspirations from the radical left, feminist and (specifically in the US context) the civil rights movement" (Brown, 2015: 77). As I have mentioned previously, the 1970s gay liberation movements had an explicitly anti-capitalist critique, and Brown (Ibid) demonstrates how North American queer activism from the early 2000s developed linkages with the emergent alter-globalisation 'movement of movements' as well as early anti-gentrification alliances (Brown, 2015: 78; Shepard and Hayduk, 2002) in such a way that saw anti-authoritarian and anarchist practices inform the development of queer activist praxis. Similarly, Shepard and Hayduk (2002: 1) emphasise that ACT UP's – the grassroots group established in New York City in 1987 that was dedicated to political action to end the AIDS pandemic – first action was on Wall Street, against "business, big business, business as usual!!!!" (Brown, 2015: 75).

In work exploring queer festivals in Europe, Eleftheriadis (2015: 653) argues that queer identities are produced in a wider political context of which "sexual identifications are just a part of the broader identity building of queerness". Eleftheriadis argues that queer festivals, with their horizontal organisational practices and anti-authoritarian politics, decentre sexuality as the primary category of queerness, and instead practice an "idea of queer… not [as] a self-contained category" but "as another form of identity, a political one".

2.4.1 This matters for my work because of the ways in which I decided to incorporate queer theory. Namely, after interacting with queer participants in the field. The empirical argument I develop later in this thesis argues that for the members of the PPNY coalition, their queer identities were inherently political ones, despite DSA and PPNY not being explicitly queer organisations or demands. Understanding identity in this way is itself prefigurative, and in Section 2.4.2 I will draw on Muñoz's notion of queer futurity to further my analysis by arguing that queer theory reveals the affective, relational, and speculative dimensions of prefiguration. In doing so, I develop Fraser's dimensions of justice by analysing how prefigurative energy politics – which are redistributive in scope – emerge from the grounded and embodied – and recognitional – positions of the people involved in the movement. Minor theory

Engaging explicitly with the *'how'* of organising leads to considerations of praxis, the process by which a theory is implemented in a practical way (Wainwright, 2022). The policies of neoliberalisation outlined in Section 2.2 can be understood as the praxis of neoliberalism. Section 2.3 is an articulation of the theory underpinning prefigurative, justice-oriented social movements, and in this section, I will demonstrate how queer theories of time and desire can offer useful frames for practically enacting this: time is related to the future-orientation of

the social movement, and the desiring of something else is central to the construction of political alternatives. Here, I will argue that queerness can be understood as an affective solidarity, or a sustaining force for prefigurative social movement organising.

I am utilising queer theory for a number of reasons, not least my own standpoint and positionality, which will be detailed in Chapter 3. Queer theory, specifically the work of José Esteban Muñoz (2009, 2019), thinks about the notion of becoming and its future oriented slant. This is important for research concerned with prefiguration – itself a becoming, always on the horizon. In relating queer theory to democratic public ownership and theories of redistributive justice, Cindi Katz's (1996, 2017) work on minor theory is helpful. Writing about the relationship between Marxism (a major theory) and feminism (a minor theory), Katz theorises a way of approaching knowledge production (Hughes et al., 2022: 2) that emphasises transformation and becoming. In the "relentlessly transformative" (Katz, 1996: 489) nature of minor theory, we can find a useful position from which to think about the temporally and spatially variegated ways in which the processes of neoliberalisation manifest.

Katz (1996: 490) stresses that a minor theory "is not about mastery", but instead "its intent is to mark and produce alternative subjectivities, spatialities and temporalities" (Ibid). Minor theory "begins by expressing itself and doesn't conceptualize until afterward" (Gunning, 1991: 5, in Katz 2017: 596). Expressing itself first and conceptualising after could be a way to understand how a prefigurative social movement advances an ongoing campaign. For prefigurative social movements, engaging with the state is a messy, embodied project, which I will argue is not only *not* aiming for mastery, but moving towards a world beyond the concept of 'mastering'. Here, I want to think about how social movements engage with the state on its own terms, as well as their own terms: a moving towards a redistributive futurity through the institutions of the present in which both the state and the social movement is transformed.

2.4.2 Katz argues that “all those who enter a becoming are positioned somewhere, and… this positioning affects where they go and how they get there” (Katz, 1996: 495). This is linked to both elements of my research aim (the what and the how). Here, the justice-orientation that I have articulated can be understood as where the prefigurative social movement I am critically engaging with is positioned. It is this standpoint that informs how a social movement advances towards where they want to go. But this is also informed by the concurrent positions (both ideological and practical) of the institutions of the state. The becoming of minor theory points towards the spaces within the existing system which can be reworked. Not only the literal spaces of the state, but also the political imaginary that surrounds privatised services. Queer theory

In analysing these messy, embodied spaces of becoming, queer theory is useful. My decision to incorporate a queer perspective came after interactions with other queer people involved in the PPNY campaign, and can be understood as the minor theory of this thesis, through which I am interrogating social movement activity to reclaim neoliberalised state infrastructures.

Originating from feminist theory and often found in the critical and literary theory traditions, queer theory has much to offer a range of subjects including law (Sciullo, 2018) management and organisation studies (Vitry, 2021) geography (Lesutis, 2023), entrepreneurship (Chin, 2021), development studies and urban planning (Castán Broto, 2021). Queer theory can resist easy definition, with Donald Hall (2003: 5) arguing that “there is no ‘queer theory’ in the singular, only many different voices and sometimes overlapping, sometimes divergent perspectives that can be loosely called ‘queer theories.’” In her advancement of queer phenomenology, Sarah Ahmed (2006) argues that queerness as a sexual and political orientation offers an important obliqueness and disorientation to our

understandings of the world. It is this obliqueness and disorientation that I'm most interested in, here using queer as a verb, focusing on 'queering' as a form of doing which can "challenge and resist expectations or norms" (McCann and Monaghan, 2019: 3).

In this, I am broadening my focus from an explicit look at the lives and bodies of those who identify as a minority sexuality or gender to explore the ways which a queerer understanding can "problematize, rupture and reconfigure the field of norms" (Rumens, 2017: 1) that structure our social lives. I am tackling a gap in the literature that is only just being addressed, in which the epistemological expansiveness of queer theory as both an intellectual and political endeavour is beginning to be utilised beyond the sexual and the normative (Lesutis, 2023). Indeed, Lesutis (2023: 393) argues that his paper, which makes the case for the "extensive theoretical, methodological and empirical applicability of queering" in relation to critical infrastructure studies "is the first such attempt" of its kind.

As mentioned, deciding to incorporate queer theory came after interactions in the field. A crucial element of these interactions is that they were demonstrative of the type of emancipatory recognitional politics, still tied to redistributive justice, outlined in section 2.3. In Chapter 3, I will describe in more detail the ways in which participants related their queer identity directly to their anti-capitalist or socialist politics. For now, it is crucial to understand this as part of my wider conceptual framework, given that I adapted my framework in light of experiences in the field. By acknowledging the specific identity-informed standpoints of people involved in prefigurative social movements, in ways which do not centre these identities, queerness becomes minor in a broader project towards ecosocialism.

Lesutis (2023: 396) uses queer theory to analyse an example of a mega-infrastructure project in coastal Kenya, utilising queerness for its "(un)knowingly ambiguous potential", emphasising the "open mesh of possibilities" (Sedgwick, 1993: 8) that queerness presents that can be applied to topics beyond the sexual. This oblique reconfiguration of normative understandings is especially useful in regard to the energy transition, as not only could a queerer look problematise the use of fossil fuels, but also the political economy which says that energy should be privately owned and governed in technocratic ways. In this, there is broader

scope for alternative models of ownership and distribution of energy resources that place justice principles at the heart of generation, transmission, and distribution, rather than the profit motive. Queer theory can also help illuminate the open network of possibilities in any conjunctural moment of prefigurative organising, by being attendant to understandings which position queerness itself as a becoming (Muñoz, 2009, 2019).

Queer theory offers further useful interventions to understandings of climate change and accompanying action to mitigate its worst effects. Though there is a myriad of queer work on climate change (e.g., Seymour, 2018; Tipton, 2020), for my own project, two concepts are particularly pertinent, those of time and desire (Urban Institute, 2021). These concepts are prevalent throughout queer theorising and are useful groundings for why I am utilising queer theory in my work over other critical approaches. Similarly, time and desire can both be understood through a lens of becoming – both are states of anticipation – which productively links them back to minor theory.

2.4.2.1 Queer Time

Queer theorists have grappled with the dominant narratives of climate action that assert that we must act now for the sake of our children and grandchildren. These narratives are based on a future-orientated political imagination of reproduction. Queer thinkers have critiqued how these narratives are rooted in heteronormative understandings of biological offspring, serving to render those outside of reproductive discourse both "voiceless and futureless" (Edelman, 2004 in Tipton, 2020: 470) while also rejecting the lived realities of millions of people who are experiencing the brutal effects of climate change in the present (Seymour, 2013). These critiques of reproductive futurity are known as queer negativity (Bliss, 2015), and it is from this negative ethic that some queer theorists, such as Edelman (2004), propose a wholesale rejection of the future that is signified with 'The Child'.

This rejection of the future has been much maligned by a range of 'queer of colour' critics, such as Muñoz, who argues that many (non-white, -western, -affluent etc) children in the present moment are rendered similarly futureless

(Muñoz, 2009: 22, 95). This more pluralistic and intersectional understanding is useful for my own project, which examines how linking everyday concerns such as high utility prices, utility debt, and poor service provision with the specific logics of the neoliberal system and the existential threat of climate catastrophe can be understood as part of a radical politics of environmental justice.

However, beyond simply drawing attention to the fact that there are many people in the present moment bearing the brunt of climate inequalities, the critique of the antirelational turn that characterises the queer negativity of theorists like Edelman (2004) offers a further useful frame for my project. In Cruising Utopia (2009, 2019), Muñoz considers Marxist utopian philosopher Ernst Bloch's (1995, in Muñoz 2019) concepts of the 'no-longer-conscious' and the 'not-yet-here', utilising them in service of his own queer futurity. In this, he articulates a "hermeneutic of hope": a critical methodology "best described as a backwards glance that enacts a future vision" (Muñoz, 2019: 4). Through a compelling and emotive journey through various aesthetic works and performances, Muñoz (2019: 11) illuminates the potentiality of the future in an argument that pitches it as "queerness's domain".

What is particularly compelling about Muñoz's futurity in regard to my own work is that his belief in utopian thinking does not come as a naïve pursuit, nor as a turning away from the present. For Muñoz, the present must be known in order to create the types of futures that we deserve. Being presently grounded in this way is important for Muñoz in as far as it is a differentiator between concrete and abstract hope. Building again on Bloch's conceptions of abstract and concrete utopias, Muñoz (2019: 3) argues that abstract utopias and hope falter because they "are untethered from any historical consciousness" whereas concrete utopias "are relational to historically situated struggles, a collectivity that is actualized or potential", and are "the hopes of a collective, an emergent group". In this way, hope is an affective structure and a methodology, with more expansive temporal understandings of the past, present and future. This temporal understanding is one in which collectivity and hope is kept central – an understanding that is particularly relevant for my own work on how social movements articulate and advance their own justice-oriented democratisation projects. Hope is also a beneficial affective structure through which to imagine

an alternative to neoliberalism, given that fear is used so affectively by neoliberalism (Mirowski, 2013; Wrenn, 2014).

Another useful understanding of time which queer theory offers for my work is the notion of 'chrononormativities' (Freeman, 2010 in Urban Institute, 2021), which problematise the assumptions about time that are embedded into how life is structured. In Chapter 5, I will demonstrate how the project being advanced by PPNY can be understood as a rejection of the chrononormativities of the legislative process. The notion of chrononormativities holds that our lives are punctuated by the cyclical temporalities of the home, with all the labour of care that this brings, and at the same time, we are enlisted in the labour system which comes with its own set of capitalist temporalities (Urban Institute, 2021). Thinking temporally in this way is pertinent for considering how prefigurative social movements engage with the state and the energy system. Politicians think in terms of 4- or 5-year terms, and short-term wins that keep time with election cycles are favoured over longer term, slower scale change. Building and sustaining collective solidarities and coalitions within and against the cycles of legislative sessions therefore requires a shift in temporality. Whyte's (2017a, in Urban Institute, 2021) notion of "kinship time" is useful here, in as far as it posits a way of understanding time as something which we do together through "caring collective solidarity events" (Ibid). Prefigurative social movements, with their presently grounded but future-oriented concerns and praxis, can be understood as doing time together in this way – working through many small, everyday events of collective solidarity towards bigger, structural changes. Affective, embodied moments of encounter are therefore central for prefigurative social movements sustaining themselves beyond the strict temporalities of the state. This will be analysed empirically in Chapter 6. Whyte is an Indigenous environmental justice scholar, and in building on his work (from Vanesa Castán Broto's lecture) draws attention to some of the parallels between other literatures concerned with environmental futures. While I am particularly moved by Muñoz's queer futurity, with its imagining of a collective, affective horizon of possibility, this thinking resonates with other non-linear temporal approaches. Indigenous scholars such as Whyte (2017a, 2017b) engage in thinking about environmental justice that disrupts settler-colonial and capitalist narratives of progress. Whyte (2017b: 154) argues Indigenous approaches

for addressing climate change "arise from how our ways of imagining the future guide our present actions", arguing that:

> "Indigenous climate change studies perform futurities that Indigenous persons can build on in generations to come. That is, our actions today are cyclical performances; they are guided by our reflection on our ancestors' perspectives and on our desire to be good ancestors ourselves to future generations." (Whyte, 2017b: 160).

This resonates deeply with Muñoz's futurity, itself a backwards glance for a future vision. Other scholars have also highlighted the importance of Indigenous energy and environmental justice perspectives (e.g., Sovacool et al., 2023; Bacchiocchi et al., 2022; McGregor, 2020). For example, Awâsis (2020: 831) argues for a decolonisation of time in pipeline reviews, given that many Indigenous nations "embrace multiple temporalities [and] ways of knowing… [that are] land-based and embodied in individuals, families, [and] communities". In this, Indigenous temporalities are "enmeshed with the land" and are "a set of relationships of things to each other" (Deloria 2001: 23)" (Ibid).

These perspectives sit in productive parallel with queer theory's commitment to open-ended becoming and non-normative temporalities, and my own positioning of queerness as an affective solidarity. While emerging from different political and epistemological contexts, both frameworks challenge linear, technocratic accounts of environmental change, and both insist on the importance of re-worlding practices rooted in collective care, resistance, and survival.

2.4.2.2 Queer Desire

The second concept from queer theory that I am using is that of desire. The feeling and act of wanting, both libidinally and otherwise, has been a motivating force for many queer theorists (Halberstam, 2020; Edelman, 1995, 2004; Muñoz, 2009, 2019; Bersani, 2009). For my own purposes, queer theories of desire are useful not only for what they "teach us about how desire gets formed, mediated, mitigated and adulterated, and how it can change its own conditions and expand beyond its originary constraints" (Gerdes, 2019: 233), but also because "a queer

desire is, at its roots, a way of wanting something that's not available" (Ibid), a wanting of something else (Ibid, 234). Muñoz (2009: 1) argues that queerness itself is "a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present". It is through desire that other potentialities can be brought into the realm of what is possible, in this way helping us to imagine alternative futures (Gerdes, 2019: 234 in Alden et al., 2019: 8). The wanting of something else is central to the construction of political alternatives, and desire can be understood as structuring social movements, too. As I will explain in the next chapter, my axiology can be explained in part through a banner used at Manchester Momentum events with the slogan "*it doesn't have to be like this*", a phrase imbued with its own desire for otherwise, beyond the stale electoral politics of the present.

Queer theories of desire are useful for my analysis of climate organising. Castán Broto (Urban Institute, 2021) discusses how Berlant's (2011) notion of 'cruel optimism' can be seen to inform a range of literature and activism surrounding environmentalism in which humanity's "unbridled desires" for endless consumption are positioned as the cause of many environmental issues. Here, shame is used as a self-regulatory feeling in which action is reduced to individual consumption choices (Urban Institute, 2021). To critique this, Broto draws on Seymour (2018) to ask what it would mean to "leave behind" these feelings of shame and turn towards more seductive and enticing feelings of fun (Ibid). While she acknowledges that not everything can be fun, she argues that there is space for playfulness that can emerge at "the intersection of messy interactions between strategy, knowledge and bodies" (ibid).

For my own work, this leaving behind of shame also necessitates a leaving behind of individualistic approaches to climate action. Individual consumption choices can be understood through the lens of recognitional politics, wherein making the 'right' ethical choices becomes a consumerist project of identity building (Youde, 2009; Micheletti, 2003). However, the environmental justice I outlined previously is one in which individual consumption choices are less important than collective action to democratise the institutions of the state. In this, Fraser's three dimensions of justice are visible: recognition, in the form of acknowledging how environmental justice impacts upon differently situated groups; redistribution, in

terms of harnessing the power of the state in the renewable transition, diluting the profit motive and attempting to ensure benefits of the transition are widely distributed; and finally, representation, by increasing participatory forms of democratic engagement in the institutions of the state, not only legislative chambers but public bodies such as NYPA.

In Chapter 5, I will utilise empirical examples relating specifically to the case study informing this research, analysing how PPNY used playful motifs throughout the different elements of their campaign – from songs played at campaign updates (which were often queer-coded choices), to potentially incendiary materials used to spread their message, and spaces curated around campaign events which enabled more playful and open interactions between volunteers. Thinking more broadly, the notions of desire and fun can be useful for prefigurative social movements in sustaining themselves beyond the strict temporalities of the state, as discussed above. Here, the collective and embodied moments of encounter are seductive experiences (Urban Institute, 2021) that are central to the building of political collectives capable of enduring through failures and defeats. This is particularly important to my own research project: PPNY introduced the first iteration of the BPRA in 2019, and my research experience covered more than one legislative session and numerous defeats for the campaign.

Sustaining beyond these failures requires a concrete, or educated hope (Muñoz, 2019: 207). This is a hope which is "grounded and consequential, a mode of hoping that is cognizant of exactly what obstacles present themselves". In describing queerness as a "doing for and toward the future" and stressing that "we need to participate in more concrete hope", Muñoz describes a hope which is participatory (Ibid, 207). Prefigurative social movements, like the one I will detail through this thesis, are participating in the concrete hope of eco-socialism. If playfulness and desire in the enacting of this hope is both collective and participatory, then it is not simply a retreat into mere hedonism, but rather a collective wanting of and doing towards something else.

I want to briefly draw on an example from my fieldwork to illustrate how playful experiences are seductive in building and sustaining political collectives, although deeper empirical analysis will take place in Chapters 5 and 6. The quote below is

from an elected member of the NYS Legislature. This person is not DSA-endorsed but was a key pillar of support for the BPRA through the numerous milestones of the various legislative sessions.

> *"Most people, from most backgrounds, I think... have very pedestrian wants and needs, you know? They want to have decent safe housing, they want to have good schools, good job opportunities. They do want clean water and clean air. And I think we've got them on this one.* ***But they don't want to think about politics or government as much as you would maybe have to think about politics or government if you took the DSA, or other similar groups, all of their ideas to their logical conclusion.****"* (Interview 18)

It is the last sentence of this quote that is the most pertinent here. This politician is saying that most people do not feel the desire to participate in the ways that more participatory forms of democracy would enable or necessitate. This is arguably quite a pessimistic view of democratic engagement for an elected member of a democracy to hold that raises questions not only around how this politician knows people do not want to participate, but also whether it is just the *existing* forms of electoral politics that people do not want to participate in. In Chapter 4, I will draw on empirical evidence from public hearings from a rate case proceeding which complicates the claim that most people "*don't want to think about politics and government*". However, there is another reason to follow its claims through here.

If the justice-oriented project of energy democracy is collective and participatory, but people do not want to participate, then thinking about how to engage them in this project will be vital. This does not have to be through fearmongering about apocalyptic futures, though fear is its own affective anticipatory structure just as hope is (Muñoz, 2019: 3), but could be done through more joyful and indeed playful call to arms. These can energise political movements, and playful ways of finding pleasure in social movement engagement can "perhaps generate new desires for different collective futures" (Urban Institute, 2021).

2.4.3 Theorising neoliberalism with queer theory

Queer theory is helpful for theorising neoliberalism by problematising the short-term instrumentalism of technocratic neoliberalism, as well as the individualised forms of civic responsibility. By foregrounding relationality, desire, and temporal dissonance, queer theory troubles the normative timelines of political engagement and insists on the importance of affective, collective modes of becoming that do not always align with the logic of measurable outcomes.

Taken together, queer theory and Fraser's dimensions of justice offer a comprehensive approach for analysing prefigurative social movements. Fraser expands a critical political economy critique of neoliberalism away from the purely economic to assess the recognitional and representational injustices of the neoliberal social order. Queer theory, specifically Muñoz's queer futurity, helps illuminate the affective and speculative dimensions of prefigurative political action.

However, it is important to note that these frameworks do not fit together seamlessly. Fraser's dimensions of justice is grounded in a critical political economy tradition that seeks structural transformation through institutional mechanisms of redistribution, recognition, and representation. Queer theory, on the other hand, is often more post-structuralist in its rejection and refusal of categories of recognition and representation. However, this creates a productive friction. By putting Fraser and Muñoz in conversation, I centre both the material and affective aspects of justice, and the importance of hope and desire in building otherwise, within and against dominant institutions. In this, resisting neat theoretical resolution in ways similar to how prefigurative movements resist neat political outcomes. This also highlights the importance of theorising neoliberalism from a queer theory perspective – something which has been repeatedly called for in queer theory, with limited uptake. Brown (2015: 83-84) argued that queer's radical potential as both a theory and a political identity needed to be revived in the wake of austerity-era neoliberalism, describing "experiments with queer autonomy… [as offering] offered promising alternatives to neoliberal social relations". However, these "collective experimental impulses" were also in retreat, "just when they are needed most" (Ibid), with alternatives to "regimes

of the normal" in queer culture largely about "the accumulation of subcultural capital" (Ibid). This can be read through Fraser's dimensions of justice. Here, Brown is arguing that the affective and embodied political critique that queer forms of social relations offer have become recognitional, serving only identitarian functions, rather than challenging neoliberalism in the post-financial crisis period.

For Brown (Ibid), reviving queer's radical potential necessitated the development of new alliances with those who "are denigrated and marginalized in the reconfigured… politics of austerity period neoliberalism". Even earlier, at the turn of the 21st Century, Highleyman (2002: 110) questioned whether "a movement focused on gay and lesbian identity [could] expand to encompass a full range of progressive causes", arguing that "queer radicals… face a dilemma [between steering] the mainstream GLBT movement in a more progressive direction, or work[ing] with other progressive activists in groups that are not queer-identified".

By continuing this nascent line of questioning, I contend that queer theory offers a helpful lens for analysing social movements contesting neoliberalism. Not only does queer theory critique neoliberalism's exclusions, but it also offers alternative ways of inhabiting the present and imagining the future that escape its dominant rationalities.

2.5 Social movements contesting neoliberalism

In this chapter, I have outlined my conceptualisation of neoliberalisation, introduced definitions of justice, focusing specifically on Nancy's Fraser's dimensions of justice and environmental and energy justice, and developed an understanding of queer theory as a minor theory through which to consider the prefigurative potential of movements contesting neoliberalism and the local state.

I argue that queer theory, as a minor theory approach, offers helpful tools for understanding the affective, partial and processual dimensions of social movement organising. In this section, I will ground these insights within the wider tradition of social movement scholarship. Scholars have long theorised the tensions that emerge when movements engage with the state, and have analysed how political openings under neoliberalism are simultaneously sites of opportunity

and constraint. Building on this literature, I argue that contemporary social movements approaching the state with redistributive and recognitional justice demands embrace institutional tactics without entirely foreclosing the radical potential of becoming otherwise. In this way, legislative action emerges not as a straightforward path to transformation, but a messy, contingent and iterative process of world-making under conditions of constraint.

With this argument, I am building on a rich history of social movement scholarship. Mayer (2006: 90) for example, argues the restructuring strategies of neoliberalism have "transformed not only the forms and spaces of urban governance but also social movement terrains", with many of the strategies used by social movements of the New Left from the 1960s rendered obsolete by these policies and their consequences. She contends that neoliberalism has "created a more hostile environmental for progressive urban movements" (Ibid, 91), meaning that they have had to regroup around their priorities and rethink their tactics.

In describing the ways in which both social movements and the state have been transformed by successive periods of neoliberal restructuring, Mayer's intervention is helpful for my analysis. I contend that it is by engaging with the state in minor ways, both on its own terms and on new terms set by social movements themselves, that the inner workings of neoliberal governance can be exposed and challenged. Throughout this thesis, I will demonstrate how PPNY and DSA have taken their challenge *to* the state, utilising the contradictions of neoliberal governance as part of their oppositional strategy. As such, my work builds on Mayer's foundation, and in many ways, the social movement I am analysing as a case study represent a real-life example of the type of regrouping and rethinking that she calls for.

However, Mayer (2006: 105) also highlights where the demands of social movements have been co-opted by urban policymakers and subsumed into strategies of urban competition (see also Peck's (2016) intervention around the entrepreneurial city). The emergence in the US of new types of advocacy groups that engage with grassroots leaders in the development and implementation of policy (Ibid, 104) can be understood along the same lines of the NGOification (Fong and Naschek, 2021) of the left that has occurred with the decline of trade

unionism, which I introduced in Section 2.3, and will analyse in more detail in Chapter 5. This is an important friction, both between the demands of redistribution and recognition, and in terms of the limits of engaging legislatively with the state. For Mayer (2006: 106), these pitfalls can be addressed by social movements that demand "simultaneously, the democratization of international institutions and the defense of public services and infrastructures in the cities".

By positioning PPNY and DSA as examples of social movements that have regrouped in their response to neoliberalisation, I demonstrate how the energy system and local state is a crucial site of struggle against neoliberal restructuring in this moment of climate conjuncture. Fossil fuels are both materially and symbolically at the centre of the crisis, not only driving ecological collapse but enriching private actors through the ongoing privatisation of public infrastructure. Energy struggles thus highlight two key fronts of neoliberal governance: the hollowing out of democratic control and the concentration of economic power. By fighting for remunicipalisation and for reinvestment in public ownership movements like PPNY are not merely contesting a policy domain but confronting the structural foundations of neoliberalism itself. Legislative activism in this sector becomes a vehicle for exposing and unsettling the contradictions of neoliberal governance, while also prefiguring a different kind of state, one oriented toward collective survival. As such, energy is not simply one issue among many; it is the crux of the struggle, and a key site where social movement praxis, critical political economy, and minor theory converge.

Miller (2006: 224) positions the local state as a key site of political contestation by arguing for renewed "attention to the micropolitcs" of neoliberal governance in ways that also work well with my theoretical framework of minor politics. Miller (2006: 233) argues that neoliberal processes of "privatization, commodification, bureaucratization" should be understood as assaults that erode "communal ways of life… [and] collective self-determination". From this perspective, he builds on Habermas to argue that movements with the potential to resist these processes emerge along the "seams between the system and the lifeworld" (Habermas, 1987: 392 in Miller, 2006: 232). This conceptualisation of struggle at the interface of system and lifeworld resonates with my own theoretical emphasis on the

everyday, relational, and affective dimensions of governance, as well as to the minor, situated, and processual character of political transformation.

Campaigns for energy democracy can be understood as emerging directly from this seam between the system and the lifeworld. In this way redistributive justice can be understood as both an iterative and potentially radical project, not solely in the scale of demands, but in how those demands are made, who makes them, and the political alternatives they cultivate. Here, it is not just about the outcome of particular reforms, but also a cultivation of the capacity to reimagine and reorganise energy systems around principles of democratic control and communal self-determination.

Another way in which my theoretical framework can be understood in relation to existing literature on social movements is through my emphasis on the relational aspects of activism, which play out in specific ways when thinking about local energy struggles. Dierwechter and Miller (2024) argue that shifting focus from 'cities' to wider processes of urbanisation can help to reveal not only processes of inclusion and exclusion, but also more easily "trace how specific flows become momentarily fixed in urban places". This is what a local focus on energy politics also reveals, and in contesting these global flows of financialised infrastructures through an engagement with the grounded and localised spaces of utility governance, social movements can be seen to be intervening in the processes through which energy systems are spatially and politically constituted. These interventions are not confined to local boundaries, but rather operate through what Leitner et al. (2008) call the "politics of scale," where activists engage at the local scale as a strategic site of contestation shaped by and shaping wider relations. This relational and multi-scalar view of local activism aligns with my theoretical framework, which foregrounds the minor, situated practices through which broader political-economic transformations are both challenged and reimagined.

In thinking about the local as a strategic scale, new municipalist research is pertinent, and will be explored in more detail in the following subsection. Before moving to that, however, I want to briefly engage with the work of della Porter. While della Porter offers much for my theoretical framework, including a synthesis

of recognitional and redistributive demands and an understanding of how social movements are constrained and enabled by an engagement with the state (della Porter and Diani, 2006, 2020; Fox Piven and Cloward, 1997), it is her thinking around the post-austerity period of crisis that I particularly want to focus on.

della Porter (2015: 3) argues that the post-austerity period of crisis is a "crisis of political responsibility… [and] a deterioration of democratic institutions". Tracing movements across Europe and the Middle East, Della Porter demonstrates how movements have condemned the corruption of the political class. This critique provides a useful entry point for analysing political practices that seek to re-politicise the ostensibly neutral terrain of technocratic neoliberal governance. This crisis of political responsibility is a structural diagnosis of contemporary neoliberal governance, and is particularly apparent in climate politics. By continuing to frame climate action in ways consistent with market logics, individual responsibility, and incremental reform, neoliberal climate governance effectively abdicates the political responsibility required to confront climate breakdown. Deferring meaningful transformation in favour of technocratic fixes and depoliticised targets reinforces the very conditions that have produced the crisis, deepening the democratic deficit and leaving little space for collective, justice-oriented responses to climate change.

In Chapter 5, I will analyse an example of this in more detail by exploring the antagonistic tactics of the PPNY campaign in their attempts to re-politicise campaign donations received by NYS politicians. These agonistic contestations resonate with the wider logic of post-austerity mobilisation by rejecting the constraints of technocratic governance, and insisting upon the re-politicisation of institutions that have been democratically reduced.

2.5.1 New municipalism

In the empirical chapters of this thesis, I position DSA and PPNY as a municipalist movement. This is a key contribution, as municipalist literatures and the social movements themselves, do not conceptualise themselves in this way. By introducing the municipalist literature here, I will demonstrate the ways in which there are useful theoretical overlaps.

As a concept and a body of literature, new municipalism emerged from movements organising against austerity policies in the wake of the 2007-2009 global financial crisis (Arpini et al, 2023: 2291), with a wave of 'citizen platforms' swept Europe and Latin America from 2014, engaging with a range of democratic experimentation, from citizens platforms and other direct forms of democratic engagement. In Section 2.2.2, I introduced one example of a new municipalist platform that came to power in this period, Ahora Madrid, describing how the transformative potential was restricted through the imposition of the national state (Janoschka and Mota, 2020). Shaped by anarchist, eco-socialist and feminist principles (Thompson, 2021), municipalist thinkers argue that current power structures can only be "reconfigured" through "everyday practices" (Roth and Shea Baird: 2017).

These movements took the municipal level as a "strategic entry point" (Russell, 2019: 991) for leftist challenge to and struggle with neoliberal austerity politics, with the municipal scale and the everyday understood as generative sites of prefigurative potential (Arpini et al., 2023; Russell, 2019). Roth et al (2023) define new municipalism as having four key elements: the democratisation of political decision-making, ecological transformation, economic reorganisation, and the feminisation of politics.

The feminisation of politics (FOP) of new municipalism represents an attempt to move beyond formations of power that are distributed and maintained by competition, confrontation and domination (Roth and Shea Baird, 2017b; Roth et al., 2023). Instead, power is understood as a necessarily collective venture – "not a zero-sum game but a generative force for world-building and cooperation" (Roth et al., 2023: 2023). This, new municipalists argue, is cultivated via ethics of trust and care and horizontal, face-to-face interactions structured by honesty and cooperation, and a willingness to change (Ibid, Roth et al., 2020; Roth and Shea Baird, 2017b).

A FOP approach to doing politics also necessitates a commitment "to the idea that ways of doing determines outcomes, and that focusing on them has the greater transformative potential over the longer term" (Roth and Shea Baird, 2017a). As such, a FOP approach also encourages a different policy temporality that is not

driven by political crisis or electoral cycles (Ibid). This reflects a political sensibility deeply aligned with both minor and queer theory. By foregrounding trust, care, and relationality over competition or confrontation, new municipalism enacts a minor politics that resists dominant logics of mastery and instead values process, emergence, and horizonal organising. Its reworking of political temporality, attempting to eschew crisis and electoral cycles in favour of longer-term, iterative transformation, also resonates with queer theory's rejection of normative timelines and Muñoz's embrace of the "not yet." This understanding is crucial for my own theoretical framework, which suggests that *how* we do politics matters as much as *what* we aim to achieve, and that new democratic worlds are built not through conquest, but through affective, collective, and ongoing becoming.

In focusing not only on passing progressive policies (Russell, 2019), new municipalism encourages a breaking-open of concentrations of power through directly democratic means (Bianchi, 2023: 2117). However, much of the research that focuses on the Spanish new municipalist platform (Spain was where new municipalism had the most success, with Barcelona en Comu often regarded as the poster child of the movement) highlights the issues these platforms ran into when attempting to implement radical changes in complex and entrenches local administrations (Blanco, 2015). Not only did many local states remained dominated by the same neoliberal "managerial structures and… organisational culture" (Blanco, et al. 2020: 30), but activists more familiar with organising against the state found themselves administratively inexperienced once they got 'inside' (Ibid, 2020, Bua and Davies, 2023: 2057). Tensions between administrations and social movements also rose when municipalist platforms continued to use contentious forms of protest and disruption in advocating for change (Martínez and Wissink, 2022: 673, Bua and Davies, 2023: 2057). In later empirical chapters I will demonstrate how these tensions were also apparent in PPNY and DSA, but these frictions are central to my theoretical framework.

A key contention of my work is that, rather than necessarily being a dilution of radical politics, legislative activism can in fact serve as a site where minor political forms towards an otherwise are meaningfully practiced. This builds on my conceptualisation of redistributive justice not as a singular end-goal but as an

ongoing negotiation embedded in messy, collective practice. Legislative activism offers a space for prefigurative politics to unfold, not because the state is inherently just, or inherently totalising, but because activists bring alternative political temporalities, ethics, and solidarities into the state form. What is at stake, then, is not only the success or failure of a bill, but the reworking of democratic practice itself: from a bounded event to a relational and continuous process of becoming. This reframing foregrounds how minor and feminist theories of politics can open space for slow, collective transformation even – and perhaps especially – under conditions of neoliberal constraint.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have detailed the conceptual framework which I will utilise throughout this thesis. Beginning with a discussion of neoliberalisation, I have emphasised the processual and contradictory nature of neoliberalism. I have addressed the political, social, and environmental dimensions of energy justice and democracy, building on Nancy Fraser's interconnected dimensions of justice to provide a comprehensive foundation for the rest of this piece of work. I introduced the concept of minor theory in this chapter, and throughout the rest of this thesis I will focus on minor theory as an approach for analysing the messy realities of engaging with the state in the construction of a political alternative.

Energy infrastructure can be figured as the focal point for enacting this minor praxis for a number of ways. If the climate crisis can be understood as a binding temporality, happening both now and yet still to come, then enabling the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy can be understood as a concrete utopia: getting us from the now into the not-yet (Muñoz, 2009; Bloch, 1986).

Energy infrastructure is not only the literal concrete that will take us into the not-yet but is also the messy space of social reproduction in which crises are both seen and felt. Action to democratically reclaim such infrastructures is thus messy and embodied, seeking a recognition of difference alongside a rejection of the neoliberalised state in the creation of an alternative way of knowing and doing.

Finally, I situate this thesis at the local scale because it is precisely at this level that the contradictions of energy politics are most acutely felt. The local is not only where energy infrastructures are built, maintained, and resisted, but also where these infrastructures and the systems that govern them are materially entangled with everyday life, and thus can be resisted. In Chapter 4, I will demonstrate that energy governance is fragmented and uneven in the US, with state and municipal authorities often holding disproportionate power over the pace and shape of the energy transition. Thus, the local emerges as a vital site for experimenting with democratic alternatives, with movements like PPNY able to push for redistributive and recognitional justice through legislative and grassroots strategies. Framed through minor theory, the local becomes a space of partial, situated transformation, where political change is enacted not through sweeping national reform, but through the grounded, relational work of building different futures from within the infrastructures of the present. In the next chapter, I will detail my methodological approach, which itself was a messy and embodied experience.

3. Methodology

In the previous chapters, I have introduced the social movement that this piece of work will analyse and the conceptual framework through which I will analyse it. Throughout the thesis I will argue that social movements engagement with, against and beyond the institutions of the state is a lively and evolving process, through which we can see a burgeoning, actually existing alternative to neoliberalism. The practice of research can be understood as similarly lively and evolving, and throughout this chapter, I will expand upon the messy journey of doing research (Law, 2004) with and about an evolving social movement and burgeoning democratic experiment.

I am interested in understanding why the public ownership of energy infrastructure has emerged as a central locus for movements organising for a democratic transformation of the local state. As noted in Chapter 1, the Transnational Institute suggests that there have been over 250 examples of remunicipalisation in the US, including 11 in energy, 75 in water, 4 prisons, and over 100 internet services established (Public Futures, 2024). But US scholarship on remunicipalisation takes a cautious approach (Warner, 2008; Warner and Clifton 2014; Warner and Aldag, 2019; Clifton et al, 2019), often using large scale quantitative analyses to warn against the 'overhyping' of remunicipalisation as both empirical trend and progressive political project (Cumbers and Paul, 2020: 7).

For scholars in this literature, remunicipalisation is seen as a Polanyian 'pendulum swing' from contracting out to insourcing. In a recent text, Warner and Aldag (2019: 10) argue that remunicipalisation can be understood as "pragmatic market management", going as far as to conclude that "political interests *do not* have an effect on re-municipalization" [emphasis my own]. These conclusions are drawn from surveys of local government officials, from whom the authors do not detect high levels of political support for remunicipalisation. As Cumbers and Paul (2020: 8) explain, low levels of political support from local government officials are perhaps unsurprising, given that these officials are supposed to be politically neutral. That this body of literature does not engage with the "broader canvas of

municipal politics" (Cumbers and Paul, 2020: 8) which surround remunicipalisation in the US, means that it confuses the "commercially driven ethos still common internally in many public authorities… with the broader politics of remunicipalisation" (Ibid).

While it is within this so-called 'broader canvas' of municipal politics that my own research interest lies, paying attention to more cautious assessments of the remunicipalisation trend is important. Many successful examples of remunicipalisation in the US have cited the poor quality and high cost of private service provision as the motivating factors in the decisions and campaigns for remunicipalisation, rather than more explicit and radically democratic demands (Public Futures, 2024). Yet DSA chapters across the country have a host of these radical demands, from 'cancelling rent' and abolishing the police, to pushing to pass the PRO Act – which would amend labour laws to give workers more power to organise (Rosenberg, 2020) – through the US Senate. As such, I am interested in exploring why the democratic ownership of energy infrastructure has emerged in tandem to these campaigns when in some of the literature in the US and in practice it has seemingly tended to align with so-called 'pragmatic' market management and consumer choice demands.

The rest of this chapter will be structured as follows. In Section 3.1 I will restate my research questions, before articulating my philosophical framing in Section 3.2, demonstrating why my ontological, epistemological, and axiological underpinnings lead me to ask these types of questions. In Section 3.3, I will detail the methods that I utilised to answer my research questions, namely semi-structured interviews and participant observation. In this section I will explicate the position I occupied in the research process, which was neither that of an insider or outsider. In Section 3.4 I will detail the analytical approach taken. Finally, I will discuss the ethical considerations I undertook throughout the research process, focusing on the importance of maintaining high ethical standards in research conducted in solidarity (Ross et al., 2022).

3.1 Research questions

The overall aim of my research is to explore how a project for energy justice and democracy is actively constituted and advanced by a social movement. This requires both conceptualising what the political alternative is, and how this is cultivated through political action to reclaim infrastructure as part of a democratic transformation of the local state which challenges established neoliberal norms.

This aim is addressed through the following research questions:

1. How do neoliberal governance structures and technocratic mechanisms inhibit democratic participation and perpetuate anti-democratic tendencies?
2. How can building a social movement around energy infrastructure broaden political imaginaries?
3. What wider potential do these campaigns offer for an alternative, progressive political project?

To investigate these research questions and the alternative project they address, I first had to pay attention to the conjunctural, by situating the emergence of democratic alternatives within the context of neoliberalisation – which in the post-2008 period can be read as a series of conjunctural crises, with the Covid-19 pandemic as the latest one. While I introduced how PPNY can be understood as a conjunctural response in Chapter 1, it is also though a conjunctural perspective that I arrive at my research philosophy: critical realism.

The meta-theory of critical realism will be examined in the next section, in which I will introduce my personal ontological, epistemological, and axiological commitments and demonstrate how these shape the type of research that I want to undertake. Here, I will also discuss how being a queer researcher impacts upon my ways of knowing and thinking about the world, and how the interlocution of queer theory can be understood under the umbrella of critical realism.

3.2 Philosophical framing

In this section, I will detail the foundations of my own critical realist philosophical framing. The overall aim of this thesis is to explore how a project for energy justice and democracy is actively constituted and advanced by a social movement. In this, I am concerned with both *what* the project is, and *how* it is being advanced. Settling upon this aim was informed by a multitude of conscious and unconscious assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), the theory of knowledge and how to enquire into the nature of reality (epistemology), and the extent to which personal values should influence the research process (axiology) (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021: 71; Saunders et al., 2019: 130). These philosophical framings lead to certain choices in not just the design of research, but the very nature of what is regarded as research worthy.

My own philosophical framing can most satisfyingly be described as critical, queer, and social-justice-oriented. In this, I have a relativist ontology, a critical epistemology, and a radical and engaged axiology (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). While this can fit under the umbrella of critical realism, arriving at this label brought its own set of messy problems to deal with, not least because of queerness' rupturing interlocution. The abductive process through which I came to incorporate queer theory into my conceptual framework will be detailed later in this chapter, in Section 3.4, however it is worth first engaging in some "theoretical manoeuvring" (Rooke, 2010: 35) up front, to consider how queer theory – which has typically "oriented itself against ontological projects" (Rutzou, 2018: 141) – can be understood with critical realism, with its decidedly more realist ontological foundations.

Critical realism actually enables a "deepening of ontology" (Bhaskar, 2010: 13) which serves to "expand the range of categories" in the open system of social phenomena (Ibid). This can be understood in a queer way, especially if we consider queer theory as similarly realist. This is a controversial claim. However, Rutzou (2018: 142) argues that:

> "Queer theory presupposes a complex form of realism based in an account of open systems and conjunctural causation that recognizes ontology

> operates at the intersection of social forms, relations, knowledge, discourse, bodies, and culture and presupposes an outside that lacks a coherent reality upon which discourse can seize."

This is an understanding of both critical realism and queer theory that I find incredibly workable, in that both allow for a fragmentary and expansive range of categories in the social world, while maintaining a somewhat realist outlook on what these categories evolve into in durable ways. This avoids both overly realist accounts, and postmodernism's "dangerous, and potentially disabling" (Parker, 1995: 553) rejection of truth and progress.

Indeed, the theoretical manoeuvring undertaken around my ontology and epistemology is apt for studying a social movement concerned with environmental justice, given that Popke (2016: 3) argues that scholarship on climate change should emphasize ontological and epistemological diversity to "account for the realities of climate change". In encouraging us to question the ways in which knowledge is developed and used (Bhaskar and Parker, 2010: vii), critical realism serves a similarly useful function for my research, which is fundamentally concerned with how neoliberalisation has utilised expert and technocratic knowledge to uphold the marketisation and privatisation of the public sphere.

Further, in advocating a stratified ontology, comprised of the domains of the empirical, actual and the real, critical realism can be understood as embracing evolution in social science research (Bhaskar, 1978: 13). In this, the dynamic nature of knowledge and reality is emphasized, and it is acknowledged that the underlying structures and mechanisms of reality may change over time and are influenced by processes of emergence and transformation (Buch-Hansen and Nesterova, 2021; Kempton, 2022; Mingers and Standing, 2017). This can also be understood epistemologically, through a recognition that knowledge itself is not static, but develops through a dialectical interaction with reality (Bhaskar, 1993; Fletcher, 2016; Seal, 2016). In this, the knowledge creation of research is done through the same processes of becoming that are being empirically studied, rather than standing at a remove from them (Novy, 2009).

Ultimately, the most pertinent element of my philosophical underpinnings is the desire for change and possibility. These notions are at the forefront of my ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions, and the importance of research in challenging current conditions, rather than simply observing, is, for me, fundamental. By enabling a transformative praxis and recognising the emergent and evolutionary nature of reality (Bhaskar, 2010) critical realism is a useful frame through which to address research questions which are concerned with the emergent phenomena involved in developing a political alternative.

3.2.1 Ontology

I am a queer woman, and the ways in which this shapes how I move through, and think about, the world cannot be overstated. In this, I follow Ahmed's (2006) advancement of queer phenomenology, in which she posits that how one is oriented shapes how they exist in the world. This can be understood as a relativist position in which it is acknowledged that there are many truths and facts depending on the viewpoint of the observer (Easterby-Smith, 2021: 100). While this makes sense to me, squaring the more poststructuralist and postmodernist elements of queer theory with my research is difficult. I find the fragmentary nature of postmodernism frustrating and disagree with the claims that there is no truth, and that reality is created by people through language and discourse (Cunliffe, 2001). Instead of this focus on language and discourse, I believe that social reality does solidify into durable sets of institutions, structures, practices, and social relations. It is from this perspective that I am aligned with critical realism's realist ontology, which understands that social conditions such as class, gender or race have real consequences, regardless of whether these consequences are observed (Easterby-Smith, 2021: 89).

The way that critical realism's stratified ontology incorporates relativist elements, including the recognition that "social life is both generated by the actions of individuals and has an external impact on them" (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000, in Easterby-Smith, 2021: 89), is useful for my research. In critical realist research, the domains of the real, actual and the empirical can be utilised by researchers to "go beyond empirically-observed events to determine the causal mechanisms in the real domain that result in those events" (Raduescu and Vessey, 2009: 1).

For my own research project, this focus on causal mechanisms is helpful for trying to think though what causal mechanisms and processes are happening in social movements attempting to democratise the local state.

3.2.2 Epistemology

A critical research epistemology is similar to interpretivist epistemologies, in that both view the role of the researcher as standing in "subject-subject relation" (Myers, 2020: 45) to their field of study (what Giddens (1976: 146) dubs the "double hermeneutic"). The double hermeneutic is the understanding that researchers are always interpreting social situations and phenomena just as much as the participants of their research. However, where a critical research epistemology differs from an interpretivist one is in the *purpose* of research. The former posits that the main purpose of research is that of "social critique" (Myers, 2020: 50). Where an interpretivist researcher might seek to simply describe current beliefs and knowledge, a critical research epistemology seeks to "challenge those prevailing beliefs, values and assumptions that might be taken for granted by the subjects themselves" (Myers, 2020: 51).

By seeking to challenge existing beliefs, critical researchers are motivated by an explicit sense of ethics (Ibid). Though the ethical bases that motivate my own work will be explicated when discussing my axiology, for now they can be understood as aligning with those of key critical theorists such as Nancy Fraser, whose work on redistribution and recognition is foundational for my own conceptual framework. Fraser (1989: 113) defines critical theory as the "self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age". Critical realism draws from critical theory, seeking to enable a transformative praxis through its focus on the causal, based on the assumption that a greater awareness of these causes can provide potential emancipation (Easterby-Smith, 2021: 90).

Critical realism is a meta-theory, and as such acts more as a "general orientation to research practice" rather than proscribing concepts or methods for empirical research (Edwards et al, 2014: 13). However, the open systems described above, combined with the focus on transformative practice means that "useful [critical realist] research is necessarily rich, 'thick', and explanatory" (Ibid, 5). While

critical realist research is deeply conceptual, it is also iterative – moving between conception and application, testing ideas and concepts against what is found and observed in empirical research (Ibid, 13). In Section 3.3 I will detail the methods that I have chosen to answer my research questions, which enabled me to get the exact type of thick data necessary. Further, while I entered the field with an idea of concepts I wanted to explore, these were honed through iterative experiences and interactions with participants, including but not limited to the decision to incorporate queer theory. This will be examined in Section 3.4.

3.2.3 Axiology

As explained in the introduction to this chapter, I am interested in the broader canvas of politics which surround democratisation efforts in the US. This means that the actual technical process of passing the BPRA (or similar democratisation efforts in other parts of the country) is as important to me as the potentialities that are cultivated in campaigns seeking a democratic transformation of the local state. Emphasising this point again here is important, as it hints towards the philosophical assumptions that underpin my research.

I am motivated to not only do research, but to do this type of research, because of my ethical values and beliefs. The real root of my ethical values and beliefs can be surmised in shorthand with the slogan used on banners at many Manchester Momentum[5] events: "*There's more to life than this*" (Redmond and Rose, 2019). This belief shapes me, and in so far as it tallies with the notion of a 'flourishing life' (Wright, 2019, though these ideas go all the way back to Aristotle and the Ancient Greeks), can also be seen to shape the justice-oriented focus of my research questions.

Understanding my ethical values and beliefs also makes clear why I would be more interested in these types of campaigns and the extent to which they are

[5] Manchester Momentum were a grassroots social movement supportive of the Labour Party who abandoned standard left organising methods in favour of disco nights, football games and hikes up Kinder Scout, and emerged as "the most powerful mobiliser of activists in the North West" during the 2019 General Election, regularly seeing upwards of 200 canvassers at rainy November door knocking sessions in swing seats around the North West (Ibid).

constitutive of an alternative, progressive political project. By figuring energy infrastructure as a site of social justice struggle, campaigners are highlighting that there is more to life than the privatisation and neoliberalisation of the local state, and the environmental degradation and social inequality that this has wrought.

The role of ethical values in research is a distinctly axiological concern, and in centring my own values in this way, I take an engaged and radical axiological standpoint. The research questions and methods of researchers with a radical axiology are driven by explicit ethics and values (Porter, 2012). As demonstrated, my values form the basis of my philosophy and drive my interest in my research topic. An engaged axiology encourages researchers to get close to the phenomena they are studying, rather than remaining independent or detached (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018: 79). How I managed to get close, despite the impact of the pandemic related travel restrictions, will be detailed in Section 3.3.

Finally, a radical axiology aims for change. Burrell and Morgan (1979: 17) argue that such an axiology (or in their terms, "a sociology of radical change") is "often visionary and Utopian, in that it looks towards potentiality as much as actuality; it is concerned with what is possible rather than what is; with alternatives rather than with acceptance of the status quo". This perspective clearly relates to my research project. As demonstrated throughout, the notion of the possible is central to the theoretical foundations of my research project, which is interested in understanding the potentialities that building a social movement around energy infrastructure can hold for broadening political imaginaries.

Utopian elements can also be seen in the axiology of critical realism. Roy Bhaskar, who first developed critical realism in the 1970s and 1980s, describes an emancipatory axiology, or an 'axiology of freedom' through his work on concrete utopianism (Hartwig, 2007: 116). For Bhaskar (1993: 395), concrete utopianism "consists in the exercise of constructing models of alternative ways of living… counterbalancing actualism and informing hope". This understanding clearly reflects my own – indeed, it is the same concrete utopianism that Muñoz (2009: 3) draws on with his queer futurity – and as such critical realism can be seen to support a radical and engaged axiology. Though the concrete hope of queer futurity will be analysed in more detail in Chapter 6, we can here see how concrete

utopianism can be related to critical realism's conjunctural causal mechanisms (Raduescu and Vessey, 2009).

3.3 Methods

Given my philosophical framing and research questions, the methodological approach most suitable is a qualitative one, as it is through qualitative methods that rich, thick data is generated. In this section, I will first briefly reflect upon the experience of beginning fieldwork during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the difficulties this posed in locating the field. Then I will detail the methods used, namely semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Finally, I will reflect upon my position as a researcher occupying a 'third-space' in the research process, between insider and outsider.

3.3.1 Locating the field

As mentioned, the process of research was an abductive one in which my research practice led me to recalibrate some of my conceptual engagements. The practice of qualitative research is shaped "through the interactions between the researcher and the researched" (Bengry, 2018: 99), with close involvement with participants regarded as favourable for generating a "genuine understanding of the world from their perspective" (Bell et al, 2018: 377). Considering this, the impact of the pandemic cannot be overstated.

My experience of fieldwork and relationship to the field changed dramatically in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. From March 2020, isolation measures to contain the spread of the virus unsurprisingly impacted upon how research could be conducted. Sarah Zuckerman Daly (Krause et al, 2021: 267) argues that "mucking around in the field sparks inductive theories that reflect realities on the ground" and beginning my PhD in January 2020, I had anticipated a fair amount of 'mucking around' via a year-long ethnographic study into a site of remunicipalisation in the United States. However, much of my academic life was spent at the small desk in the bedroom of my shared, rented tenement flat in Glasgow's Southside, with my field site behind a closed border, five time zones away. The restrictions on entering the US from the UK were lifted in November

2021, meaning I eventually spent three months in New York between March and May 2022, and a further two weeks in September of the same year.

The opportunities for close involvement changed dramatically, and methodological considerations around the type of research I wanted to conduct, the methods most appropriate to do so, and my positionality as a researcher were all impacted by the pandemic and lockdown restrictions. In this, I occupied a 'third space' in the research process, between insider and outsider (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009: 60), which will be reflected upon throughout this section, alongside considerations of the different experiences of conducting research online and offline.

3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews comprised the bulk of the data I collected. In total, I conducted 33 semi-structured interviews, with 30 unique participants and 3 key informants with whom I spoke more than once. Table 3 provides an overview of the unique participants – to ensure anonymity the numbers do not align with the assigned numbers used to identify quotes through the rest of the thesis. All the interviews were one-on-one, apart from an interview with the Office of the New York City Public Advocate, where I spoke with two members of staff simultaneously. The interviews were conducted over a long period of time, from May 2021 to October 2022. However, the majority of interviews (21) took place between March and June 2022, when I was in New York, or just after I had left.

Table 3: Participants interviewed

Relationship to campaign		Organisation and role where applicable	Location
PPNY Coalition	1	Alliance for a Green Economy (AGREE) – Deputy Policy Director	Central NY
	2	Capital District DSA – Chapter Co-Chair	Capital region
	3	Energy Democracy Alliance – PPNY coordinator	State-wide
	4	Long Island Progressive Coalition (LIPC)	Long Island
	5	Metro Justice – Organising Director	Western NY
	6	Nassau County DSA – ESWG Chair and BPRA canvasser	Long Island
PPNY Coalition (cont.)	7	NYC-DSA	NYC
	8	NYC-DSA – PPNY coordinator	NYC
	9	NYC-DSA – Legislative committee	NYC
	10	We Act for Environmental Justice	NYC
	11	We Act for Environmental Justice – Energy Justice Policy Manager	NYC
	12	Sane Energy Project – No North Brooklyn Pipeline Coalition	NYC
	13	Mid-Hudson Valley DSA (MHV-DSA) - MHV-DSA Engagement Coordinator and PPNY Legislative Co-Chair	Hudson Valley
	14	Syracuse DSA – PPNY legislative committee	Central NY
NYS Legislators and candidates	15	Assembly candidate – Green New York slate, won election	NYC
	16	Assembly candidate – Green New York slate, did not win	Hudson Valley
	17	NYS Assembly Member– Socialists in Office (SIO) slate	NYC
	18	NYS Assembly Member	NYC
	19	NYS Senator – SIO slate	NYC
	20	MHV-DSA canvasser – Field lead	Hudson Valley
	21	MHV-DSA canvasser	Hudson Valley
	22	MHV-DSA canvasser	Hudson Valley

DSA canvas volunteers	23	MHV-DSA canvasser	Hudson Valley
	24	NYC-DSA canvasser – Shift lead	NYC
	25	NYC-DSA canvasser – 'Canvassing for Climate' session lead	NYC
Expert witnesses	26	City University of New York Professor	Long Island
	27	Office of the Public Advocate	NYC
	28	Office of the Public Advocate	NYC
	29	The Democracy Collaborative	Nationwide
	30	The Democracy Collaborative	Nationwide

I took an active listening role in each semi-structured interview, and as much as possible went into each one with an open mind or fresh perspective. I asked all participants to tell me about the history of the PPNY campaign and their involvement with the coalition. This led to a richly detailed account of the campaign from several different perspectives: from those who wrote the BPRA legislation, to others who arrived at the campaign from other activist groups, and even people who had only been assigned as their organisation's PPNY coalition representative in recent months. This meant that I heard information I was very familiar with on multiple occasions. However, I chose to remain open to this to allow participants to construct their own meanings, and to ensure that I was not influencing interviews too much.

I conducted interviews over Zoom and in-person, with some interviews in New York even conducted online. I think this was due in part to the impact of the pandemic: people had become used to conducting business online, with the use of online software becoming far more commonplace post-2020. Some people were still minimising social interaction, while other participants chose Zoom interviews to fit me into their schedules. For example, I spoke with one participant on Zoom on a Saturday morning, despite having spent the previous three days with them canvassing around the Hudson Valley.

Zoom was incredibly helpful in some respects. I was able to audio-record via Zoom's software, downloading the audio files immediately after the interview. On

a less practical note, the medium of Zoom also helped facilitate the rapid acceptance I experienced during the first stages of my fieldwork. Writing about her own experience of pandemic impacted fieldwork, Howlett (2021: 8) describes how online interactions enabled "a more symmetrical relationship" with participants. The Zoom 'room' became a "socially meaningful space… that was neither our present locations, nor a common physical setting" (ibid: 7). Building a shared location together in this way helped build rapport with my own participants, with *"where are you right now?"* and *"what time is it over there?"* frequently asked of, and by, me. These seemingly mundane questions established an intimacy and relationality that perhaps would not have happened so quickly if I had met people in offline settings, outside of the rooms in which they are most comfortable. Indeed, conducting these interviews from my own bedroom and speaking to people in their own bedrooms or living spaces could have enhanced the language and understanding we share, by allowing a glimpse into one another's intimate lives. In interviews, I saw people's bookshelves and posters, and they saw my own. I found out one participant likes the same musician as me, I described to another what Glasgow is like.

This "co-location" was also likely enhanced by the dreadful novelty of the pandemic itself. All those who participated in my research were navigating the same changes as I was – working from home, in cramped, shared, expensive accommodation largely not suitable for spending such long amounts of time in. The PPNY coalition had to learn on their feet in the shift to online activism and organising at the same time that groups I was involved in, such as the Scottish tenant and community union, Living Rent, and political education organisation Glasgow Transformed were confronting the same issues in Scotland. As such, participants were perhaps sympathetic to me, and our shared experiences expanded to the shared experience of the pandemic. The space of the pandemic itself can thus be understood as a new socially meaningful space insofar as it is neither a familiar location, nor a common physical setting shared between anyone.

3.3.3 Participant observation

I also conducted 26 observations, 13 online and 13 as an active participant in NYS. Table 4 provides an overview of every event, including whether it was online or not. The numbers in this table do align with the excerpts from these observations which will be used throughout the rest of the thesis. This is because no identifying information has been used in either the table or in any quotations or descriptions taken from these observations.

Table 4: Observations

	Date	Event	Online
01	April 5th 21	NYC-DSA Public Power Launch	X
02	May 13th 21	Public Power Campaign Update	X
03	June 14th 21	Public Power Re-Cap	X
04	July 10th 21	Strategy Summer Camp	X
05	July 20th 21	What Happened in Albany?	X
06	March 4th 22	Green New York DSA call	X
07	March 19th 22	Queens, NYC canvas	
08	March 20th 22	Mid-Hudson Valley canvas	
09	March 24th 22	Lower Manhattan, NYC canvas	
10	March 28th 22	Mid-Hudson Valley candidate call	X
11	March 29th 22	Rate Case Press Conference	
12	March 31st 22	Rate Case Public Testimony	X
13	April 2nd 22	Long Island BPRA canvas	
14	April 6th 22	Mid-Hudson Valley canvas	
15	April 7th 22	Mid-Hudson Valley canvas	
16	April 8th 22	Mid-Hudson Valley canvas	

17	April 30th 22	Lower Manhattan, NYC canvas	
18	May 1st 22	Brooklyn, NYC canvas	
19	May 7th 22	Lower Manhattan, NYC canvas	
20	May 16th 22	Brooklyn, NYC canvas	
21	May 21st 22	Long Island BPRA canvas	
22	May 24th 22	NYC DSA ESWG meeting	X
23	May 18th 22	Onboarding committee meeting	X
24	May 18th 22	EDA Town hall	X
25	June 7th 22	DSA SIO wrap up	X
26	July 28th 22	BPRA Public Hearing	X

As mentioned, my fieldwork was conducted over a long period of time in which the campaign strategy of PPNY shifted dramatically. In 2021, when I was still in the UK, but the worst of the pandemic restrictions on social gatherings were over, there were multiple rallies in support of BPRA around NYC. However, when I was in New York the following year, the strategy was more focused on building pressure and lobbying inside the state. Instead, 2022 was an election year, and the BPRA was a key election pledge of DSA candidates seeking election around the state as part of the 'Green New York' slate (which will be discussed in Chapter 5). As such, most of my active participant observation in New York was on canvasses for these candidates. I also attended multiple BPRA-specific canvasses in Long Island, where the local DSA chapters were asking residents to call a specific senator who PPNY were trying to convince to co-sponsor the BPRA.

Conducting observations online was a strange experience, and one in which I felt how far I was from my field site. This was clear in July 2021, when I attended a two-day 'Strategy Summer Camp' held by the NYC-ESWG. This was a hybrid event, with around 35 people in a conference room in Manhattan, a further 6 people Zooming in from other parts of the state, and me in my living room in Glasgow. During the structured sessions, being online did not feel disadvantageous. The

Zoom screen was projected onto a large wall in the conference room, and contributions were managed by the facilitator through a ‘stack’ system whereby everyone with something to say put their hand up or wrote ‘stack’ in the Zoom chat. Similarly, when smaller groups broke off to discuss specific elements of the Public Power campaign, those of us on Zoom were passed around on laptops so that we could still participate.

However, when the group broke for lunch, it became apparent that there were incidental interactions that I was missing out on. As the group in the room discussed what to order for lunch, social groups and hierarchies became clearer. Some attendees had been at the same party the night before, and others were organising a trip to the public swimming pool in Astoria. Deeper discussions about some of the action points covered in the strategy sessions were being had while people left to get coffee, and as they milled in and out of the reach of the computer’s microphone, I began to feel less like an observer and more like I was eavesdropping on private conversations. If I had been in the room, I would have been able to join these conversations and introduce myself and my connection to the coalition.

Indeed, this sense of eavesdropping led me to think about covertness in research. During online observations, my position as a researcher shifted. In many of these observations, there were dozens of people on a Zoom call, and my presence was just one square on a screen of many. I was almost entirely anonymous. Though I do not think any of my participant observations involved covert research as deception (Spicker, 2011), given the large numbers of attendees on Zoom calls, my role as a researcher was not disclosed. I did not conceal the fact that I was researching events, and was open with coalition members, but the scale of some of these online meetings meant an inevitable degree of covertness or anonymity (McCurdy and Uldam, 2013). This anonymity was amplified by the disembodied nature of the Zoom window (Howlett, 2021). When my camera was off, as it often was on public calls taking place late at night in Glasgow, it was just my name on a black screen. Depending on how many people were also on the calls, my laptop screen appeared in a mosaic of names. While it is likely that there would be some in-person events where my status as a researcher would not be disclosed to every attendee – such as large-scale rallies and direct actions – the act of observing an

online meeting, then logging off to an empty room alone, emphasized the “subtle voyeurism inherent in the technology” of Zoom (Neideck et al, 2021: 53). Though this can enable intimacy when used “two-ways, for gazing and witnessing simultaneously” (ibid), when I was not being ‘witnessed’, and people who I was ‘gazing on’ were perhaps unaware, the voyeurism was enhanced.

At the same time, participating in canvasses as a research method brought its own challenges and emotions. On a very practical level, it was difficult to make notes while walking around different constituencies around the state. MiniVAN, the canvassing app with household data on it, was complicated, and the amount of information required after each successful contact was time consuming.

As much as possible, I used these canvasses in a strategic way. I often asked to pair up with a member of the PPNY coalition, or the candidate themselves. However, even making use of this was difficult due to the sheer amount of information I would be told. As we would walk for four hours around various neighbourhoods, we would discuss in detail what was happening with the BPRA inside the legislature that week or the strategic intricacies of DSA’s electoral strategy or NYS politics. All of this was incredibly interesting and useful data, which was hard to capture in note form on top of the act of canvassing.

Similarly, while I would always go out on a canvas in a pair, to hear how DSA activists articulated public power on the doorstep, after a certain point, my ‘buddy’ would usually suggest splitting up to cover more of the ground (or ‘turf’) that we had been assigned. This was of course understandable, but it was at this point that I ended my observation: after this, it was just me on the doorstep advocating for the BPRA. As such, I felt that this was not useable data. To address this recurring issue, I began to use canvasses as an opportunity to build rapport and engage key informants – especially those running for office, with extreme demands on their time – to interview later.

3.3.4 The ‘third space’ of research

In considering the closeness involved with qualitative research, the membership role of researchers has frequently been discussed through literature focusing on

the roles of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ researchers (Kanuha, 2000; Asselin, 2003; Adler and Adler, 1987). However, literature has moved beyond binary understandings of either ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ (Gair, 2012; Gold, 1958; Mercer, 2007).

Dwyer and Buckle’s (2009: 60) concept of ‘insider-outsider researcher’ is persuasive for my own experience of fieldwork. With this, the hyphen between the two positions represents “a third space… of paradox, ambiguity, and ambivalence, as well as conjunction and disjunction”. This third space is not only useful from a queer perspective, which similarly encourages a move beyond binary understandings, but is reflexively useful when I consider the positions I have occupied during my fieldwork.

In many ways, I can understand my position in the fieldwork process as that of an insider researcher. Most of my participants have ‘looked like’ me; white, young, queer, living in cities, socialist. There is a shared language and understanding between us, borne from similar experiences of campaigning. I am interested in the PPNY campaign not just from an academic perspective, but out of a genuine support for its goals, stemming from the axiological value system in which I am inextricably intertwined.

I also experienced the rapid acceptance that Dwyer and Buckle (2009) argue is common for insider researchers. In some ways, this surprised me. Before beginning my fieldwork, I had spent some time talking with peers about the boundaries of academic research, what I was ‘allowed’ to offer the coalition in exchange for their time and access. I expected it to be difficult to get in touch with participants, wondered how I could convince them to speak to me from abroad while they ran an active and ambitious campaign. *“If I was there, I could just join DSA and go to their meetings,”* I said to a friend during one socially distanced walk in early 2021. This expectation of difficulty likely came from my own experiences of organising in the UK left; some imposter syndrome; and maybe a lingering uncertainty about the ‘value’ of academia. However, after one conversation with my first participant, I realised that these expectations were wrong. After outlining my research, my interest in Public Power, and my background as a researcher, my first interviewee – who became a key informant – was generous with his time, and after we spoke less than a handful of times, he introduced me to further

interviewees with the email subject heading "Connecting Comrades". This happened with other participants too, who sent emails vouching for me to people they thought I should speak with. During this time, I was invited to join NYC-ESWG's Slack and added to their Policy and Research sub-channels, where I was asked to do some short summaries of other re-municipalisation campaigns from around the world using information from the Public Futures database.

However, despite the rapid acceptance outlined above and my ideological alignment with the activists involved in the PPNY coalition, I also occupy the position of outsider researcher. This is largely due to what Mercer (2007) describes as the structural dimension of my position as a researcher (that I was born and raised in Britain) rather than the identity-related dimensions (that I am ideologically aligned with my participants, or that many of my participants were queer). I am not from the United States[6], and thus I am immediately outside of a deeper shared understanding that would come from a North American researcher conducting this project. Being an outsider here may have enabled me to bring perspectives together into a coherent narrative, in a way that would not have been possible if I had my own insider-relationship to the campaign from its inception. In having to ask follow-up questions about 'Americanisms' I was less familiar with I was able to uncover rich and interesting data. For example, after one participant made a passing reference to the phrase *"the scariest words you can hear are 'I'm from the government, and I'm here to help'"*, we went on to have a conversation about broader perceptions of the Green New Deal and public ownership in the United States, perspectives I may not have uncovered if that phrase was more familiar to me.

[6] It is worth acknowledging that the United States has been the global hegemon for my entire life. I was born in 1994, and grew up in Tony Blair's Britain, with its "special relationship" with Clinton and Bush's US. The imperial hegemony of the US has been maintained with the help of the "most dynamic, high-end 'symbolic'… sectors of the U.S. economy" (Fraser, 2017) such as Hollywood and Silicon Valley, and I am extremely familiar with the popular culture of the USA. This means that I am more familiar with the USA than other countries, however I remain outside of a deeper understanding borne from being raised and socialised in American society. Similarly, the deep awareness I have of American culture and society is a mythical one, "not without roots in reality, but with facts fudged to create narratives that best match dominating agenda" (Yaquinto, 2019: 2). Indeed, when I finally reached the US, I described the experience to friends back home as like the 'uncanny valley' – almost familiar, yet deeply different.

My position as an outsider researcher can also be understood extremely literally and became more apparent as lockdown restrictions eased on both sides of the Atlantic but the border remained closed. During this time, I became increasingly aware of the distance between myself and my field site, as explicated in the previous section on online participant observation.

Once I arrived in New York, my position within the third space of research persisted. Sometimes, I felt that I was on the outside looking in. At a press conference I attended in early March (which will be summarised in Chapter 4), I saw a lot of people I had already interviewed from Glasgow. They were happy to see me and were glad that I'd finally made it to New York. At one point, there was a photo opportunity in which everybody held up posters and signs. I chose not to participate in this crowd shot, because at this time I was trying to interview people outside of the PPNY coalition, including unions and senators occupying key positions who were opposed to the bill, and was unsure if my presence in the photo would potentially jeopardise these interviews. Other ethical decisions relating to the third space of research will be detailed in Section 3.5.

3.4 Analytical approach

In this section I will outline the approach I took to analysing my data. I will demonstrate how my abductive process of research led me to decide to incorporate queer theory to my analysis, explaining how this theory building can be understood through the lens of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2020) and aligns with my critical realist philosophical framing. I will detail my data analysis approach, explaining how I took some emerging themes into the coding cycle, while others emerged from it. I will also explain how I utilised analytic memos in theory building.

As mentioned, the process of doing research was an abductive one, in which my experience in the field caused me to incorporate queer theory into my conceptual framework. Abductive analysis is an approach which is oriented towards theory construction, based on an "inferential creative process of producing new hypotheses and theories based on surprising research evidence" (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012: 170). It is related to critical realism in that it also focuses on causal

mechanisms and emergent properties. This form of analysis is concerned with how emergent phenomena are "related to other observations either in the sense that there is a cause and effect hidden from view… or in the sense of creating new general descriptions" (Ibid, 171).

This is what happened in the field, where the queerness of the movement provided surprising research evidence that I then interrogated to understand its relation to the construction of a political alternative. Indeed, my decision to incorporate queer theory based on empirical interactions addresses a critique of queer theory that it "can resist practical application" (Urban Institute, 2021).

As I began my research, some of the people I interviewed via Zoom before getting to New York introduced themselves with non-binary pronouns, others mentioned their same-sex partners. However, it was not until one participant spoke to me about her experience organising with the men in PPNY that I first saw a queer-er element to the movement. This participant, an older LGBTQ+ woman, said:

> *"Honestly, I have never worked with – outside of LGBT struggles – a more lovely group of men. I mean, these guys are so incredibly sweet and respectful. It just is mind blowing, not at all the left of my youth… I mean, I really think, you know, sexism is a poison in organising and people don't really see it, they don't recognize its toxicity, and then you end up with a bunch of jerks running everything. And for some reason this crew includes both strong women and good men, and everything in between."* (Interview 05)

The way that this participant spoke about gender (including the '*everything in between*' the binary of men and women) within the organising of PPNY was not something I had fully considered before. This interview was an incredibly affective experience for me, and I logged off the Zoom chat feeling excited.

After this, I began to delve into queer theory, eventually stumbling on Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* (2009, 2019). Reading this book was similarly affective: my copy is adorned with exclamation points and love hearts in the margins. I attended a Zoom event hosted by DSA called '*What Happened in Albany?*' which focused on

why BPRA had not passed during the 2021 session, in which many of Muñoz's concepts seemed to be on display. While the analytical detail of this Zoom and how it related to the concept of queer futurity will be discussed in Chapter 6, detailing the process I undertook in incorporating queer theory demonstrates the extent to which it emerged from my experience in the field. I stumbled upon something I was not expecting to find, researched theory relating to it, built my own conceptual framework from this, and then tested the framework through deeper engagement in the field.

A crucial element of many of the interactions that led me to incorporate queer theory is that they were not solely focused on identity, but were demonstrative of the type of emancipatory recognitional politics, tied to redistributive justice, that I outlined in Chapter 2. Indeed, many of the people I interviewed expressed how their engagement with PPNY and DSA was refreshing in that it was "*the queerest space [they had] been in where queerness does not come up as a conversation topic*" (Interview 29). Every time I spoke about queerness with participants, they would relate their queer identity directly back to their anti-capitalist or socialist politics:

> *"One thing about being queer… is that there is a sense of alienation. It's already there. And then you add the alienation from what capitalist society brings. And it just is a strong motivator to just get out there."* (Interview 08)

> *"I do think that certainly my own experience of having a choice as a very young person of thinking 'Okay, well my society's messaging about me is correct and I am, you know, worthless. Or they're wrong about an incredibly big and important part of human existence.' And once you internalise that knowledge, that can be training wheels for thinking 'Huh, maybe our culture is wrong about many things.'"* (Interview 29)

> *"Black folks, Indigenous folks, people of colour, disabled folks, queer folks know struggle and they are more likely to experience many kinds of harm. Like, in terms of energy justice, trans and LGBTQ folks are more likely to be homeless and not have energy access, right? More likely to face work*

force discrimination, or maybe not have as high paid jobs, and therefore have a higher energy burden. So, it's like, when you are vulnerable to this, there's something at stake for you. And I think that does drive people." (Interview 14)

Constructivist grounded theory encourages "researchers to concentrate on what is happening in the research field, acknowledge that they are part of it, remain flexible, [and] follow empirical events" (Charmaz, 2020). While I did not follow the strict schema of grounded theory, Charmaz's approach to an empirically based and justice-oriented way of building theory resonates. I entered the field with a set of concepts that I was seeking to explore – features of what I had been tentatively calling a 'radical democratic citizenship', which included understandings about neoliberalism, democracy, freedom and the political. However, after initial interviews, my thinking changed. I was still interested in a construction of a political alternative to neoliberalism, but it was not one as strictly defined as my own conception, which I had arrived at through extensive engagement with literature.

This process can also be understood through the critical realist framing, which encourages researchers to stay attuned to the fact that existing theories may not accurately reflect reality, and deeper empirical analysis is necessary to help build a deeper explanation of emergent phenomena (Fletcher, 2017: 184; Bhaskar, 1979). My critical realist framing is also highly compatible with a grounded theory approach, due to the way in which they both emphasise the interconnected nature of practice and theory, and because both are attuned to practical transformation and goals (Oliver, 2012; Redman-MacLaren and Mills, 2015).

3.4.1 Data analysis

Data analysis was an iterative process that started long before I formally began coding. Rather than a clear boundary between 'leaving the field' and 'starting analysis', I was continually reflecting on my findings and thinking about how to proceed. Moving between levels and processes in this way, and thereby identifying emergent properties of a burgeoning social movement, relates to critical realism. As discussed, critical realism acknowledges that reality is not solely determined

by observable phenomena but also includes underlying structures and mechanisms that may give rise to emergent phenomena. The open approach I took to data analysis aligns with a recognition that, given their nascent nature, emergent phenomena may not be immediately apparent. As such, a flexible approach between the different stages of research allowed for the discovery of deeper patterns and relationships that constituted the social movement dynamics.

All interviews were recorded using Zoom, and then I uploaded the audio files to Otter.ai, a speech-to-text transcription service that uses artificial intelligence. Otter.ai was able to provide a first draft of transcription, which I then listened back to and edited myself to ensure accuracy. This re-reading and re-listening also enabled me to engage with the transcripts more deeply, which meant I had a better understanding of the data and therefore could conduct more rigorous analysis. I successfully applied for fieldwork funding from the Adam Smith Business School, which I used to pay for a professional transcription service for some of my interviews. However, I ensured accuracy in these by reading through them and going back to the audio file for any sections that had been mistranslated, and to again ensure deep familiarity with each transcript. After data collection, interviews were anonymised and assigned a number.

I kept research notes and reflections on interviews and after observations and events, which enabled me to refine my theoretical concepts through engaging with the dynamics of the movement while in the field. As such, I had developed an initial set of overarching themes before formally starting analysis. These included the roughly titled ‘Alternative Political Project’ and ‘Queer’ themes. However, despite having a sense of what was interesting to me about the data I had collected, I still followed advice from Esposito and Evans-Winters (2021) to remain flexible and open to unexpected themes emerging from the data.

As such, other themes emerged through coding. For these, I made judgements about relevancy to my research questions and conceptual framework, rather than strictly counting prevalence of code appearances. I coded each transcript initially through open, intuitive coding, using a combination of in vivo codes – which use participants’ own words – and descriptive codes. An example of an in vivo code that I retained from the first read through of an Otter.ai transcript immediately

after an interview, all the way through to my thesis, is the code that forms a subsection in Chapter 5, '*D-I-Y everything*' (Interview 06).

In the coding process I used a combination of manually coding interview data using print outs of each interview and the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews I conducted, the interview transcripts were often lengthy, sometimes page-long paragraphs of text, where participants touched on many separate and intersecting issues in response to questions. I would read the transcript and then break these longer text blocks apart into smaller paragraphs which focused on a single idea.

I found the manual approach of analysing interviews on Microsoft Word documents better suited the flexible approach to my analysis, and mainly utilised NVivo as a codebook and hub for analytic memos (discussed below). I found using NVivo in this way helped maintain consistency and rigour. I was able to identify where codes overlapped or were repetitive, and it was through this that I was able to identify deeper connections and cross-reference themes that then became the overarching narrative of this thesis.

Once the interviews were coded, I went beyond surface-level identification to analyse how different themes interacted. For example, I noticed that codes related to 'neoliberalism' and 'transformational change' were linked by participants' critiques of the existing system and their proposed alternative visions. Through constant reflection and comparison, I analysed how these individual themes related to my broader theoretical framework of recognitional and redistributive justice. This process enabled me to identify recurring patterns in participants' narratives, which were key to answering my research questions about the transformative potential of grassroots movements.

I took a less structured approach to coding observation notes than I did the semi-structured interviews. I categorised all field notes and other materials, such as including screenshots from Zoom, campaign materials, and photographs of field sites, as 'offline' or 'online'. I read through each piece of data and associated reflexive notes written shortly after each observation, but rather than coding each line from this data, I linked important moments and overarching themes to the

narrative and argument that was emerging, utilising these as descriptive vignettes.

As I will make clear in Chapter 5, many of the areas of the campaign overlapped: the confrontational outside strategy blends into electoralism, which is itself involved with organising on the inside of the NYS Legislature. Similarly, I found that many excerpts could be coded under numerous codes. As such, analytic memos were helpful in reflecting on emerging themes and keeping track of the common codes that were reappearing. These memos helped me make the work of my thesis "concrete and manageable – and exciting" (Charmaz, 2006: 72), and it was through this process that I was able to create the overarching narrative that will be developed through Chapters 4, 5 and 6. An example of an analytic memo from an in vivo code is included in Appendix 2.

In generating theory from analytic memos, I employed a process of abduction. In critical realist research, abduction seeks to move beyond thick description of empirical occurrences (Fletcher, 2017: 188) to theorise about the underlying causal mechanisms or structures that may be responsible for them. This is a key part of theory building, as it enables the development of theories that go beyond surface-level observations through the re-describing of empirical data using theoretical concepts (Ibid).

3.5 I also utilise secondary data materials n later chapters of my thesis, including policy, legislation and media. For example, in Chapter 4, I analyse language used in the mission statement of the New York State Department of Public Service that states its mission is to "stimulate effective competitive markets" (New York State, 2022b). I contrast this with the CLCPA legislation and other materials submitted by IOUs in a rate case. By tracing policy discourses through secondary data materials in this way, I was able to demonstrate the context that PPNY were operating in and provide further evidence of what I argue are the deficiencies in neoliberal modes of governance. The secondary materials I identified were always related to codes and themes that emerged from primary data analysis, serving to deepen my analysis and strengthen my contribution by supporting the linkages made from the data between participants' critiques of the existing system and their proposed alternative vision. Ethics

In this section I will discuss the ethical considerations in doing engaged, qualitative research. I will elaborate on how I navigated consent when canvassing and examine the reflexive practices I employed throughout my time in the field. I will focus on how these reflexive exercises were pertinent for maintaining high ethical standards while conducting research in solidarity with the movement I was studying.

Ethical approval was granted by the University of Glasgow's College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, and is included in Appendix 3. No sensitive or vulnerable groups were used in the research, and I explained the purpose of the research and why I was collecting data in a comprehensive and accurate manner. I received written and verbal consent, and informed all participants that they could withdraw from the study after the interview had concluded if they wished. All interviews were anonymised, and this was articulated to participants at the start of interviews. Anonymisation was important, in order for members of the coalition and others to speak freely – indeed, on more than one occasion I was asked by participants when my research would be published and to confirm that it would be anonymous before they answered a question. Though I did record all of my interviews, this was also optional for participants.

At observations of canvasses, I made clear my role as researcher to everyone present. I used the notes app on my phone to make observation notes, and then followed up with a reflective diary entry after the observation wherever possible. Ethical decisions about the third space of research were also pertinent during and after canvas observations. I participated in canvasses – knocking on doors around the state, speaking to people about various candidates and the BPRA. After these canvasses the group of volunteers would go for drinks in a bar in the Lower East Side, or to someone's house in a town in the Hudson Valley for pizza. In these moments, the third space felt extremely apparent: I was certainly an insider, socialising with the group, but I had to make conscious decisions about when the observation was 'over.' In moments of socialising, it did not feel appropriate to be gathering data – despite everyone at these events knowing that I was researching PPNY and being excited to talk to me about my PhD. It was also at these times that my reflexive practice became messy: if I prioritised joining the socialising, sometimes the reflective diary entries would not be completed until a long time after the observation had ended, which undoubtedly impacted the detail I was able to include.

Ultimately, I think this was still a worthwhile compromise. The moments of post-canvass socialising were not only an enjoyable space of decompression, but the rapport building and opportunities to ask specific people for follow up interviews were vital. At one post-canvas social, I was able to speak directly to the DSA

candidate running for office and ask to join him on a door-knock the next day. At another, I was invited to spend a day with a videographer who was scheduled to join an Assembly Member around Queens filming him speaking to residents about the BPRA. Unfortunately, this was cancelled and re-scheduled for after I left New York – an example of the messy realities of researching an active movement.

3.5.1 Between reflexivity and researching in solidarity

Reflexive practices which enabled me to "strategically consider, examine, and address the role of the researcher" (Ravitch and Carl, 2021: 107) were useful ethically and personally. These included keeping a research diary, which Browne (2013: 420) describes as "a cathartic tool" which can be used not only to reflect upon what is emerging, but also "to record fears and shortcomings". As well as useful for generating abductive analysis, I found "psycho-emotional support" (Borg, 2001) through these diaries too, especially when in New York alone. The experience of being 'in the field' as a lone researcher was a much more emotional one than I anticipated. Beyond emotive experiences in which people shared moving testimonies, the exhaustion of research – especially research which involves walking around on canvasses for hours, and then spending time reflexively thinking about how what I experienced relates to my conceptual framework – was enhanced by my unfamiliarity with NYC. Rather than going 'home' from 'the field' at the end of the day, to my flat and my friends, I was returning to an Airbnb room in a city where I only knew a handful of people.

Browne, (2013: 423) argues that the research diary can substitute "for the role of a sympathetic fellow PhD student to whom we turn and rely on for reassurance and support". While this is certainly true, another way I was able to do this was through voice notes. In this, I was able to still rely on my sympathetic peers. After an exhausting canvas, in which I witnessed an uncomfortable interaction between someone in my small group and a member of staff in a high-rise apartment complex, I sent a voice note about my feelings around the experience to a friend back in Glasgow as I walked to the subway on my way home. These voice notes sometimes served me better than a written research diary, due to the immediacy in which they could be conducted – talking emotively while walking – and then

listened back to in a way which “can provide an additional means of self-expression” while “demanding self-reappraisal” (Mazanderani, 2017: 81).

The reason I want to talk about the reflexive exercises I undertook while physically in the field is to introduce another discussion relating to positionality. Rather than solely list my identity markers as an acknowledgement of positionality (Gill, 1998), I want to further think about what it means to research in solidarity (Routledge and Driscoll Derickson, 2015; Ross et al., 2022). Torre et al. (2017: 504) define solidarity as “working the hyphens within and between us” and in this way can be seen to relate to the third space I occupied in the research process. Other research expands on the concept, with Ross et al (2022: 7) arguing that solidarity is “built on shared commitments to transformation”. In this, solidarity can rework “the spatialities of research and knowledge production” (Gagliano, 2021: 2). This clearly relates to my critical realist research philosophy, and conducting research in solidarity with the activists I spent time within the field was an important personal goal. In thinking about the role of positionality, reflexivity, and solidarity in research, I am also strategically considering the role of myself as researcher and the power I hold in the production of knowledge (Driscoll Derickson and Routledge, 2015: 6; Ravitch and Carl, 2021: 107, in Ross et al, 2022: 7). Research in solidarity is therefore less concerned with more positivistic notions of maintaining a critical distance to reduce bias, and as such it becomes especially paramount to maintain high ethical standards to ensure validity and accurately represent the data collected.

3.6 Conclusions

Researching an active social movement was a messy and evolving process, much like the social movement itself. Staying open and flexible, with a focus on empirical evidence supported by theory generation which acknowledges other causal mechanisms, is important in research practice and social movement praxis aiming towards a transformation.

In this chapter I have explained the philosophical framework which underpin my research aims and questions. I have articulated how my ontological, epistemological and axiological underpinnings led me to research a project for

energy justice and democracy, and why qualitative methods are the most appropriate for answering my research questions. While it is worth nothing that there may be other appropriate ways of understanding PPNY, throughout this chapter I have detailed why critical realism, as an evolutionary theory concerned with identifying causal mechanisms toward transformation, is a coherent metatheory.

In the following chapters, I will analyse my empirical findings. Beginning with Chapter 4, where I will look at the evolution of the regulatory system and the IOU model in the US historically,, I will then focus on the regulatory arm of the modern state, analysing the Public Service Commission (PSC) and the role of rate-making procedures in upholding the profit-motive of IOUs as way to introduce the technocratic and anti-democratic nature of existing governance.

4. Recognitional governance and performative participation

It's an early morning in late March, so cold that a fountain in NYC's City Hall Park has entirely frozen over, mid-stream. Still, a small crowd has gathered: representatives from the Office of the Public Advocate, staffers of local elected officials, members of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), and a range of economic and environmental justice organisations and consumer advocacy groups. People hold posters that read "NO CON ED RACIST FRACKED RENT HIKE", "NEW YORKERS WANT RENEWABLE PUBLIC POWER NOW!" and "NO CON ED PROFITEERING ON A HUMAN NEED."

We're all here on this frosty morning for a press conference regarding the Con Edison rate case proceeding. Con Edison (short for Consolidated Edison Incorporated) is one of the largest investor-owned utilities in the US, with over $62 billion in assets, which operates as a regulated monopoly in New York City, one of seven such utilities across the state. In January 2022, it submitted a request to the Public Service Commission (PSC) requesting an increase of its delivery revenues by 17.6% for electricity and 28.1% for natural gas (Con Edison, 2022: 4). In 2020, the PSC granted Con Ed a 25% rise in gas rates over three years, and a 13.5% rise in electric rates (Spectrum News Staff, 2020), despite the utility generating $13 billion in net income for its shareholders in 2019. The press conference is to publicise upcoming public hearings, part of the rate case proceeding, in which members of the public and other parties can share feedback to the PSC on why they think the proposed rate increases should be rejected or accepted.

At the press conference, advocates argue that the double-digit rate hike *"must be challenged"* as *"over 400,000 Con Edison customers are already in utility debt averaging over $2,000"* (Observation 11). They stress that the almost $1 billion a year that Con Ed wants to spend extending the life of its fracked gas delivery system *"is climate denialism"*. A City Council Member from Harlem testifies that *"utility debt is crushing New York families"*. Advocates urge the PSC to *"stand up to Con Ed and say no rate hikes for fossil fuels"* and to instead *"come up with a*

plan that aligns with our climate goals and reduces rates for struggling New Yorkers". Between each speaker the small AARP crowd gathered behind the speakers boo and hiss, chanting the refrains *"That ain't what? That ain't right!"* and *"People, not profit!"*

And yet, not a single member of the press was at this press conference.

A few days later, I log on to an online portal. There have been six Public Statement Hearing sessions in total, at 1pm and 5pm across three days. All have been conducted online, and we don't see anyone's faces. There's a presentation on the screen with helpline information for anyone calling in about an issue they may be having with a specific bill.

At the start, an Administrative Law Judge explains the proceeding, outlining Con Edison's requested rate increase, and stating that "*the purpose of the hearing is to provide you with an opportunity to tell the Commission your thoughts on [the] rate proposal",* with all the statements made *"becoming part of the case record*".

The Hearings are emotional experiences: people from across NYC and Westchester County describe *"suffering to levels that you have no idea"* (Observation 12). A nurse calls in on her shift break, explaining that her Con Ed bill sometimes makes her chose between feeding her child or keeping them warm. One man talks of how he *"grow[s] sad"* looking at his grandchildren, thinking *"about the climate catastrophe that we're living through*".

Overall, people are confused and angry. Throughout the testimony, people call in to ask, *"How could I possibly owe so much?"* They state that the PSC *"Need to put a stop to this right now"* as the current situation, and a proposed increase, *"is not justice, it's not justice in anyway"*. People say that their dizzyingly high bills are "*crazy*", *"beyond egregious"* and *"should be illegal"*. Multiple people question the monopoly model and demand that the PSC do something:

> *"It's kind of ridiculous, they're basically just getting to do whatever they want because they have a monopoly and it's really something that our representatives, anyone who is listening, really needs to step up and just tell them, 'No, you can't do this.'"*

Others speak of the poor service provision across the city: "*Every summer, we have blackouts and brownouts. All the time, there's all kinds of this-and-that outages. It is insane. Nobody is holding them accountable. Nobody is doing anything.*"

Many people thank the PSC for the opportunity to give their testimony. People thank other callers for their testimony. One woman describes how she "*initially signed up for this meeting [to] come here and let you guys know that I can't even afford to live in the Bronx. That my electric bill, it's literally worth more than my home. But upon listening to the other speakers, it sounds to me like Con Edison is asking that I pay 30% more to pretty much kill myself. They are charging me more money, so that they can make a profit on building new infrastructures that they know are going to screw us all, like literally set the world on fire.*"

Of the 19 people who testify at one hearing, all ask that the PSC outright reject the rate hike.

This vignette sets the scene for what will follow through the rest of the chapter. Most of the advocacy groups present at the press conference were members of the PPNY coalition, and public ownership of power was frequently presented as the alternative solution to the prevailing system, both at the press conference and at the public testimony hearings.

In Chapter 2, my theoretical framework introduced the conceptualisation of justice that I will be using to interrogate my empirical material and outlined how the more subtle anti-democratic tendencies of neoliberalism are revealed through an engagement with the technocratic levers of the local state. The vignette above can be read as constitutive of both components. The linkages that advocates made between the profit motive of investor-owned utilities (IOUs), climate change, and racial and economic injustice display a clear environmental justice lens. Further, the parts of the state involved – the PSC and IOU rate case proceedings – are deeply technocratic spaces. It is precisely these spaces of technocratic functioning that will be examined in this chapter, with an interrogation of how they can be seen to

be merely performing the functions of democratic oversight they are meant to be providing.

In 2023, the PSC approved a rate increase for Con Edison of 14.7% over three years for electricity and 21.7% over three years for gas (Finley, 2023). This is by no means an anomaly. Over the last five years, the PSC has approved every rate increase requested, albeit at lower amounts than those initially proposed by the IOU. It is also worth noting that members of the public being opposed to their rates increasing is likely unsurprising – with it similarly unlikely that someone would call in to agree with a proposed rate hike. However, I have included this material to demonstrate the expectations the public have of the PSC when they are participating in governance processes. Later in this chapter I will argue these spaces of participation are merely performances of democracy.

The material provided in this chapter will serve as a contextual backdrop to the subsequent chapters. I will begin in Section 4.1 by examining how neoliberalism manifests in the US, explicitly focusing on energy as central to processes of neoliberalisation. This is important to understanding at the outset of this chapter, due to the ways in which many of vested corporate interests and individualism I argue are symptomatic of neoliberalisation predate the phenomenon in the US.

In Section 4.2, I will focus on public service in New York, examining the state's PSC and focusing directly on the utility rate making process. I will begin with an exploration of the notion of 'citizen-consumer', before turning toward the spaces of state governance of IOUs to demonstrate how the regulated monopoly model can be understood to have fallen victim to regulatory capture (Brown, 2016; Payne, 2017; Flores-Espino et al, 2016). In this, demonstrating how the profit motive inherent to IOUs, which are primarily based on return on investments in physical infrastructure, is antithetical to New York State's own mandated energy targets, enshrined in the CLCPA.

In Section 4.3 I will build on the conceptualisation of neoliberalisation established in Chapter 2, which positions the technocratic features of neoliberal governance as central in understanding its anti-democratic tendencies, by focusing on how this is the regulatory system functioning as it is supposed to, before turning to

look at how participation in this system is rendered toothless, devoid of any real democratic power in Section 4.4. Throughout these three sections, I will relate the contradictions of the current system to my conceptual framework which argues that this type of governance is fundamentally anti-democratic, due to the technocratic ways in which politics is 'done' (Davies, 2016; Streeck, 2014; Accetti, 2021; Swyngedouw, 2010).

4.1 Powering neoliberalisation in the US

I have previously mentioned that the US differed from other countries at the beginning of the neoliberal period, given that relatively few of its industries were state-owned and thus privatisation was qualitatively different (Goodman and Loveman, 1991). Throughout this chapter I will demonstrate how vested corporate interests have been at the heart of US capitalism from an early stage, predating neoliberal reforms. However, neoliberalisation intensified many already existing individualist and corporate dynamics in the US.

This is particularly visible in the energy sector, which has been articulated by a range of scholars as central in the neoliberalisation of the US. For example, the oil embargo in 1973-74 is positioned as a pivotal moment in US political-economic history that enabled an ascending 'New Right' in the country to point to the limits of government power in order to revive 'the market' as a tool of governance that profoundly limited democratic decision making (Wellum, 2023: 13, Mitchell, 2011). Huber (2013: 100) demonstrates how "'Big Oil,' 'Big Government,' and 'Big OPEC'" were utilised in popular discourse as demonstrative of unfair political influence over the free market, which was in turn positioned as the ultimate arbiter of fairness – an example of "free and fair competition where the life chances of all individuals [were] negotiated through an even playing field" (Ibid).

Throughout this chapter I will draw on examples from the post-war period to demonstrate how mass consumption, enabled through the creation of the suburbs, is a central aspect of US civic identity. Huber (2013) goes further, to argue that it was easy and cheap access to fossil fuels, specifically oil, that enabled this mass consumption in the first place – and the high standards of living some Americans first experienced in the post-war period. Between 1950 and 1980, workings

peoples' share of total wealth in the US was higher than at any other period, with less than 35% of all US income taken by the richest 10% of the population (Pinkerton and Davis, 2015: 304).

The proportion of wealth held by the richest 10% of the population skyrocketed to 50% by 2007, with 25% taken by the richest 1% (Ibid). Similarly, average hourly earnings of production workers in the US have become a gradually smaller share of GDP since 1970, despite having tracked GDP between 1950 – 1970 (Ibid). Indeed, this rapid transfer of wealth beginning in the 1970s and 1980s has been understood as a direct response to progressive policies and active trade unions, "and to working people's increased share of total wealth during the period" (Ibid; see also Harvey, 2007; Madland, 2021, Reich, 2010). Scholarship has demonstrated how fossil fuels were foundational to this 'great exception' in US economic history, while acknowledging that the energy crisis mainly threatened the lifestyles of middle-class white Americans (Wellum, 2023: 8).

The crisis that followed created the conditions for a market epistemology to flourish (Ibid) – by the end of the 1970s, an oil futures market was being established on the New York Mercantile Exchange, creating "economic value out of speculation about future oil prices in a volatile world" (Ibid, 80). One of Ronald Reagan's first acts as President of the US was to decontrol the price of oil, declaring that free markets were the only way to *'Secur[e] America's Energy Future'* (The title of his energy policy document), being as they "were 'a continuing plebiscite" conducted by 'the American people themselves' that offered the flexibility to respond rationally and efficiently to changing conditions" (Ibid, 136).

I am drawing attention to the specific role of the energy crisis in the US in the processual evolution of neoliberalisation, in order to demonstrate the specific trajectory that neoliberalism took in a country already so heavily individualised and influenced by corporate interests, which the rest of this chapter will reflect upon. Thinking about the specific role that fossil fuels have played in the creation of the modern US political culture is also crucial for my project, in which I am concerned with how a social movement creates an alternative political imaginary around renewable energy.

4.1.1 New York's energy transition

Throughout this thesis so far, I have taken a nationwide look at the energy sector in the US, however, there are dramatic differences state-by-state. Nebraska, for example, is the only state in the US that has 100% publicly owned power, made up of over 150 community-owned utilities, as well as municipal utilities, electric cooperatives and public power districts (Nebraska Power Association, 2022).

The CLCPA, NYS' landmark piece of climate legislation that I introduced in Chapter 1 has seen New York take a leading role in the energy transition in relation to the national context, with "one of the most ambitious renewable energy visions of any state" (LEAN, 2024a). Indeed, there is already a wealth of municipal ownership of energy in NYS, with local governance and public control over electric infrastructure already playing a central role in the state's energy mix.

NYS is one of only ten states with community choice aggregation (CCA) enabling legislation (O'Shaughnessy et al., 2019; LEAN, 2024b). CCAs enable local governments to pool their electricity load and purchase or generate energy in a shared model on behalf of those within their service territory (LEAN, 2024b). In NYS, there are 158 CCA communities, and despite only covering 5% of the state's population, CCA's account for more than 30% of the renewable energy voluntarily purchased in the state, with 75% of energy used by NY CCAs renewable (LEAN, 2024a).

NYS is also the leading community solar market in the US, with nearly a third of the 6.2 GW of community solar capacity in the US located in NYS (NYSERDA, 2024). The state also has the 'Inclusive Community Solar Adder' that provides additional incentives to developers to encourage them to invest in community solar projects in disadvantaged communities who may not otherwise be able to access the benefits of distributed renewables (Ibid). A similar tax incentive was introduced in Biden's Inflation Reduction Act, demonstrating how NYS has again been leading the nation in the energy transition, just as the previously mentioned federal adoption of the Justice40 initiative.

Thus, in relation to the national context, NYS can be seen as a leader in the US energy transition. That it is a vibrant ecosystem of municipal and publicly owned energy provision that is central to New York's transition to renewables also demonstrates the vital role that municipal ownership of infrastructure has in accelerating the transition and highlights how municipalist models could serve as a blueprint for a more democratic and socially just energy transition. When local decision making, control, and community benefits are prioritised in the energy transition, there is higher renewable energy adoption, with the benefits of the transition more widely distributed within communities. The BPRA, however, is a statewide piece of legislation, and throughout this thesis I will demonstrate how PPNY attempted an engagement with the state and the energy system that sought a deeper challenge to its neoliberal underpinnings. In this, not adjusting the existing system through mechanisms like CCAs and distributed solar, but seeking to transform the very fabric of the state and its approach to energy governance. PPNY's engagement reflects a broader attempt to confront and dismantle the market-driven logics that structure the state's energy system, aiming for a more radical reconfiguration of public power and democratic control. As such, through the rest of this chapter I will demonstrate how market logics are pervasive in NYS, functioning in ways that uphold the rights of IOUs over consumers, and even undermining the CLCPA.

4.2 Public Service in New York

In this section, I will examine NYS's PSC, focusing directly on the utility ratemaking process. I will interrogate the notion of 'consumer' before addressing utility regulation. I will demonstrate how IOUs and the PSC have responded to the CLCPA, New York's landmark piece of climate legislation, since it came into effect for rate cases in 2021. I will argue that these responses are a form of greenwashing, in which 'greener' language is used while the existing system of fossil capitalism is not just maintained but expanded. Then, I will illustrate how this can happen because of regulatory capture of the PSC and the Department of Public Service (DPS), before finally demonstrating how regulation enshrines a 'perverse incentive' to continue building fossil fuel infrastructure.

The DPS is the staff arm of the PSC. According to its website, its primary mission is:

> *"…To ensure affordable, safe, secure, and reliable access to electric, gas, steam, telecommunications, and water services for New York State's residential and business consumers, at just and reasonable rates, while protecting the natural environment. The Department also seeks to stimulate effective competitive markets for clean, renewable, and distributed energy resources that benefit New York consumers, as well as product and service innovations."* (New York State, 2022b)

By focusing directly on the utility ratemaking process, I will interrogate some of the claims made in this mission statement while also highlighting how the DPS and PSC can be understood to have fallen victim to regulatory capture.

4.2.1 Citizen-Consumers

Looking at this mission statement through the perspective introduced in my theoretical framework reveals an immediate tension. The object of the statement is the 'consumer' and the role of the DPS in the renewables transition is to "stimulate effective competitive markets". These framings indicate a clear ideological position in which the logics of marketisation are clear. This framing resonates with Fraser's (2019) conceptualisation of 'progressive' neoliberalism, where recognition becomes detached from redistribution, resulting in depoliticised, technocratic approaches to justice. In this instance, the language of justice is utilised – "just and reasonable rates" – in ways which remain entirely compatible with the marketisation of the local state – "stimulate effective competitive markets".

Much has been written on the semantic differences between 'consumers' and 'citizens' (Coskuner-Balli, 2020; Cohen, 2003; Clarke et al., 2007; Smart, 2010; Chomsky, 1998; Fairfield, 2010), that largely figures citizens as civically engaged actors with political and public interests, as opposed to consumers, who are understood to be disengaged from political participation and mainly concerned with private or material desires (Coskuner-Balli, 2020: 328).

For a country like the US, the notion of 'citizen-consumer' (which predates neoliberalism) is apt. Firstly, because of the ways in which corporations themselves have been granted the same rights as people in the US. The Supreme Court has ruled that corporations represent "associations of citizens" and bear the rights of "the humans who own and control" them (Pollman, 2021: 221). In 1886, the Supreme Court first ruled that the 14th Amendment applied to corporations, in a ruling of Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad Company which blocked the County collecting tax from some of the Railroad's land (Oyez, 2024), ruling that Southern Pacific could not be "deprive[d]… of life, liberty, or property" (Pollman, 2021: 220). In the hundred years that followed, corporations were granted most of the Bill of Rights, culminating in 1986 when corporations' 1st Amendment right to free speech was enshrined. In PG&E v. Public Utilities Commission, the Californian IOUs' right to send newsletters that included political editorials, described by Grossman (2001: 1) as "corporate lies", with customer bills was upheld by the courts (Burke, 1988).

In each of these examples, courts ruled in favour of corporations, granting them personhood and enshrining their rights alongside citizens', demonstrating that vested corporate interests have captured state institutions at the heart of US capitalism from an early stage. The examples above can be contrasted with instances where citizens have brought cases against utility corporations around service terminations and disconnections, arguing that these constitute a violation of their 14th amendment rights. In numerous instances, such as Jackson v. Metropolitan Edison Co, courts ruled that service disconnection is a private act to which the 14th Amendment does not apply (Fitzpatrick, 1975: 624-625). This decision repudiates the concept that privately owned, public utilities are state actors (Ibid, 625).

These examples demonstrate not only the power that IOUs have in the US, but also the way in which the political and legal structures of governance frequently rule in favour of corporations over individuals. This demonstrates a specific set of ideals which take greater precedence than ones focused on economic and political justice. In the case above, service disconnection is ruled a private act, rendering the person whose service is disconnected as merely a consumer of a service-

product, rather than a citizen with any enshrined right to essential services such as electricity and water.

The citizen-consumer label also reveals the permeable relationship between the political and the economic (Cohen, 2004). This is important for my work, in which I am interested in questions relating to how political alternatives, based on collective and redistributive economic justice are created. Indeed, thinking from a minor perspective reveals more about this permeable relationship. As I outlined in Chapter 2, critiquing neoliberalism from a queer theory perspective enables a problematising of the instrumentalism and individualism of technocratic neoliberalism. Rending citizens as consumers reduces the role of the state in the provision of public services to a depoliticised one, despite the deeply political nature of this, as I have just outlined.

The ways in which the citizen-consumer emerged through the creation of the suburbs is important to understand here, as in the next chapter I will analyse the suburban doorstep as an important moment of encounter for an alternative project of ecosocialism. Post-World War Two, mass consumption was encouraged in the US as part of the creation of a peace time economy (Ibid). In this, the public were encouraged by "business leaders, labor unions, government agencies, the mass media, advertisers, and many other purveyors of the new postwar order" to purchase consumer goods as a way to be a good citizen (Ibid: 236).

New house construction was central to this. A quarter of all homes built in the US by 1960 had been built in the 1950s, and by 1960 62% of American's owned their homes, up from 44% in 1940 (Ibid, 237). Expanding home ownership, an increasingly productive economy, and mass purchasing power of consumer goods were figured as markers of social progress towards equality, without any need for the redistribution of existing wealth (Ibid, 237). Of course, the reality of the suburbanisation of the US did not see an expansion of democracy, but instead both revealed inequalities while embedding them further.

A variety of theoretical and empirical work has traced the way in which the development of the suburbs "were deeply bound up in processes of racialization" that saw the white middle-class created through and dependent upon racialised

exclusion (Derickson, 2017: 232), continuing through to present dynamics of gentrification (Rucks-Ahidiana, 2022). Indeed, the creation of suburbs saw 'white flight' from cities, and white supremacy was baked into the foundation of the post-war economy by white communities working to restrict Black access to real estate, at least partially spurred on by racist fears about property values (Cohen, 2004; Inwood, 2015). Gioielli (2020: 213) demonstrates the climate impacts of this, arguing that car-led, sprawling suburbs grew due to white communities becoming hostile to public infrastructure which could reduce carbon intensity, such as public housing and transport, because of racist fears over crime, poverty and 'the social disorder' of cities.

Fear of cities' social disorder and the privileging of the homeowning family is questioned by queer theory, which particularly problematises the 'naturalisation' (Muñoz, 2019: 21) of gay people into this political economic unit. Marriage equality and increased social acceptance has enabled increasing numbers of same sex couples access to "a suburban family life that is almost boringly normal" (Ghaziani, 2010: 65). This 'homonormativity' does not contest dominant institutions, but upholds them, thus suggesting that the way to become a 'good citizen' is to become depoliticised and is secured through domesticity and consumption (Duggan, 2003: 50).

In signalling how consumption, and thus the consumer, was figured as a virtuous civic ideal, I am demonstrating who is left out of these conceptions. The ramifications of this were discussed in my conceptual framework, in which I described austerity urbanism as deliberately targeting cities, where the so-called 'undeserving poor', minorities and marginalised populations live (Peck, 2012: 629; Mayer, 2006: 94). If the good citizen is actually a homeowning consumer, concerned only with private acts of consumption even when interacting with public services, then in recognising consumers, the nature of how the state should interact with issues of redistribution (and how people should interact with the state) is also set. In many ways, this reduces the role of the state to simply 'stimulating effective competitive markets', rather than providing goods and services itself. As one participant explained:

> *"This is a country where there's this thing, 'the scariest words you can hear are, I'm from the government and I'm here to help'. And the idea that government cannot manage things is deeply embedded. And it's because government has just been gutted here."* (Interview 05)

In Chapters 5 and 6, I will analyse how PPNY are attempting to build a different form of citizen-state relationship, moving away from a consumer relationship to one of more active, civic participation. But for now, it is important to understand how these logics permeate the state at all levels, interacting with bureaucrats and civil servants performing the everyday tasks of government, and informing how foundational infrastructures of the economy are managed and regulated.

4.2.2 Regulation

Regulation is the task of the PSC, who preside over decisions impacting electric, gas, steam, water, and telecommunications utilities. Regulation includes setting the rates that utilities can charge customers, ensuring that utilities provide adequate service – and investigating and taking appropriate action when they do not, – deciding where major gas and electric facilities are sited, and ensuring the safety of natural gas and liquid petroleum pipelines (New York State, 2022b). There are seven Public Service Commissioners, all of whom are appointed by the NYS Governor, are confirmed by the NYS Senate, and serve six-year terms. In this section I will demonstrate how the appointment system for Commissioners perpetuates injustices, examining issues relating to institutional representation and political cronyism.

In Chapter 2, I explained how a key tenet in the environmental justice literature relates to procedural justice, or the ways in which decision-makers engage with communities (Jenkins et al., 2016). One factor of procedural justice relates to institutional representation. Institutional representation is understood as beneficial for achieving justice, because the people who are impacted by an issue are the ones in positions to make policy decisions around it (Ibid, 179). This is more proactive than simply relying on testimony and consultation responses from communities affected by injustice (Ibid, 179). Representation is another one of Fraser's dimensions of justice, relating to political justice and decision-making

structures which enable a plurality of voices to be heard. Thus, limited institutional representation means that there cannot be a comprehensive approach to justice through the regulatory governance of IOUs.

Indeed, ensuring equitable and representational governance in energy regulation is particularly vital, given who is most affected by the decisions made in regulatory spaces. The NAACP (2022) define a number of key groups who are disproportionately impacted by decisions relating to energy. Across the board, low-income communities are more likely to have to spend a higher proportion of their monthly incomes on energy. Women are particularly impacted by this, as not only are they disproportionately lower income, but are also vulnerable to toxins that affect reproductive systems (NAACP, 2022). Black Americans pay the highest proportion of their incomes on energy, spending upwards of three times more than white households, partly due to poorer and older housing construction (Golden, 2020).

Further, many Black and Indigenous communities live near polluting fossil fuel plants, with an estimated 68% of Black Americans living within 30 miles of a coal fired power plant (NAACP, 2022). Black and Hispanic households are also disproportionately affected by utility shut-off policies – as in the so-called 'Texas Freeze' in the spring of 2021, in which these communities were the first to face power outages and some of the last to have their power reconnected (Dobbins and Tabuchi, 2021). The image in Figure 3 viscerally highlights this. The area in darkness is East Austin, the city's historically Black and Hispanic neighbourhood. The highway running through the centre of the image, dividing the two halves of the city, follows the exact same line as Jim Crow era zoning laws (Tretter, 2012).

Figure 3: Blackout in Austin, Texas 2021

Taken from: https://twitter.com/TerriG_KVUE/status/1361505736749166594

The demographic composition of PSC's across the United States exacerbates these problems because of the fact that they are not made up of affected populations. Commissioners are predominantly white, male and 'mid to high wealth' individuals (Nagra et al., 2022: 399). Some states, such as Mississippi, which is 48% African American, have never had a single Black Commissioner. Even in states where Commissioners are elected, similar problems persist. Georgia's PSC is currently facing a federal lawsuit due to how the at-large election system discriminates against Black Americans, including through staggered terms, a majority-vote requirement, and unusually large voting districts (Dunlap, 2020). Georgia has only had one Black commissioner in its over 100-year history, despite 33% of the state identifying as Black or African American in the 2020 census (America Counts Staff, 2021).

In fact, of the 197 commissioners across the US, 162 (82%) are White, 21 (11%) are Black, 6 (3%) are Hispanic/Latino, 6 (3%) are Asian, and just two (1%) are Native American/American Indian (Patterson and Hua, 2022: 13). This does not reflect the makeup of the US as a whole, where according to the 2021 census, 19% of the population identifies as Hispanic/Latino, 14% identify as Black, and 6% identify as Asian (Ibid). Nearly half of states have PSCs with no commissioners of colour, and

New York is one of just eight states who have more than one non-white commissioner (Ibid).

In the case of Public Service Commissioners, not only is institutional representation lacking, but even the relatively few commissioners who are not white men can be problematised for their role in the elite capture (Táíwò, 2022) of PSCs. Elites here are defined as relational and contingent upon context: small groups of people who "have power over a larger group of which they are part, usually without direct responsibility to that larger group, and often without their knowledge or consent" (Ibid, 22) For Táíwò (Ibid), elite capture occurs when well positioned or resourced people highjack and distort public resources in their own interests, which align with dominant power structures rather than liberatory efforts (Ibid, 10). Here, 'identity politics' are problematised, with class considerations recentred in movements articulating a recognition of difference.

The definition of elite capture quoted above translates easily to PSCs: Commissioners are not responsible to the broader population of voters, not only because the public are figured as consumers who engage in private acts of consumption in their dealings with IOUs, but also because in a state such as NYS they are unelected, instead being appointed by the Governor. Commissioners make decisions which have major ramifications on people's lives, and yet the vast majority of the public is unaware of their role or ways to engage in regulatory processes. In Section 4.2.4, I will further demonstrate the elite capture of PSCs by discussing how the 'revolving door' of regulatory capture complicates commissioner demographics further, again reducing even limited institutional representation to recognitional.

As mentioned, one reason PSCs can be understood through the lens of elite capture is because Commissioners in NYS are appointed directly by the Governor. This impacts the PSC's democratic functioning, and can be understood as antidemocratic due to the level of concentrated influence over technocratic domains holding a significant amount of political power.

All current commissioners, bar the Chair, were appointed by former Governor Andrew Cuomo – who resigned in 2021 after the New York Attorney General found

he had sexually harassed at least eleven women (Reuters, 2021). Multiple participants referred to the legacy of the Cuomo administration as one of political overreach and cronyism. He was described as *"vindictive"* and *"very good at hoarding and holding on to power"* (Interview 02). Others described how robust democratic mechanisms would be crucial in the expansion of NYPA through BPRA, due to Cuomo's tendency to work *"behind the scenes pulling a few strings"* (Interview 06), *"interven[ing]… behind everyone's back"* (Interview 10) against the perceived public interest.

As well as Public Service Commissioners being appointed by the Governor, so too are the Trustees of NYPA (who then appoint NYPA's President and CEO, who is then confirmed by the Senate). Some participants described NYPA as "*a fiefdom of the Governor, which is what it was for many years under Andrew Cuomo"* (Interview 29), with many appointments regarded as *"Cuomo loyalists"* (Interview 09).

Commissioners serve terms which are longer than that of the Governor and are significantly less accountable to the public. Two of the existing commissioners were appointed by Governor Cuomo just weeks before his resignation. One of these Commissioners had previously been Governor Cuomo's senior advisor and Director of Policy (New York State, 2021a). The other had been Cuomo's Deputy Chief of Staff when Cuomo was Attorney General[7], before becoming the 'Director of Chamber Operations' when Cuomo became Governor (New York State, 2021b). Both of these commissioners refused to step down from their appointments in the wake of the Cuomo scandal, despite being requested to do so by the new Governor Kathy Hochul (McCarthy, 2021).

4.2.3 Greenwashing the CLCPA

Before his resignation, Governor Cuomo signed a landmark piece of climate legislation into being, though participants described how he had personally "*watered it down"* (Interview 02). In Chapter 1, I described the mandates of the

[7] That the Governor of New York had previously been the state's Attorney General, was the son of a previous New York Governor, and was at the time married to a Kennedy, is a level of political concentration that would go far beyond the scope of this thesis to unpick.

CLCPA, and in this section I will illustrate how it intersects with rate case proceedings. By doing this, I will demonstrate how IOUs can be understood to be 'greenwashing' (Bowen, 2014) their infrastructure investments while actually continuing to build new fossil fuel infrastructures. I will argue that this is an example of how neoliberal governance and the privileging of the market in the delivery of public services is serving to undermine action on climate change, with technocratic spaces of the state central to this undermining.

Utility ratemaking proceedings have been described as "the new battleground" in the transition to clean energy (Payne, 2018: 75), largely because of how the paradigm guiding rate cases is inconsistent with many progressive climate goals (Murphy, 2021). When considering how both the DPS and IOUs have responded to the CLCPA, this is clear. The CLCPA only came into effect for rate cases at the end of 2021, after the PSC came to a decision on a National Grid rate case which had been ongoing since before the CLCPA was passed. With this decision, the PSC ruled that CLCPA requirements apply to all future rate cases (Public Service Commission, 2022: 27).

In Chapter 1, I explained how the inception of PPNY can be understood as a conjunctural response to the events of 2019 into 2020, drawing on Stuart Hall's understanding of a conjuncture as a moment of both danger and opportunity, given that the nature of how a crisis will be resolved is not guaranteed (Bennet, 2016; Hall and Massey, 2010). Often, the ideological – e.g., the dominant neoliberal order – is separated from the economic, so that the root cause of crises is left unscathed, even as individual moments of crisis are resolved. This separation of the ideological can be witnessed through the IOU response to climate policies such as the CLCPA.

On January 28th, 2022, Con Edison filed a letter to begin rate case proceedings for new electric and gas rates from January 2023. The letter begins:

> *"New York State is leading the way to a clean energy future. By taking bold action through the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act ("CLCPA") to reduce emissions and support disadvantaged communities, the State is building a sustainable energy future for all New Yorkers.*

> *Con Edison shares the State's vision and is committed to making it a reality. To do that, we are proposing new electric and gas rate plans for January 2023 that will help fund investments to bring large-scale clean energy resources to our customers, reduce emissions, and facilitate increased electrification."* (Con Edison, 2022: 1)

The letter continues with the proposed rate increase: around $1.2 billion more in electric revenue (an overall customer bill increase of 11.2%, with 17.6% increases in delivery charges), and around $500 million more in gas revenue (an overall bill increase of 18.2%, with a 28.1% increase in delivery charges) (Con Edison, 2022: 4). The projects publicised as examples of what this rate increase is to fund include 200 MW of new solar generation, the addition of around 20,000 new electric vehicle chargers by 2025, and investments in the electric system "to prepare for extreme heat from climate change and increased demand from electrification" (Con Edison, 2022: 1-2).

This focus on the CLCPA and renewable energy projects should be understood as an example of greenwashing – spin designed to portray Con Ed (and other IOUs) as an invested partner in the clean energy transition. InfluenceMap, a climate lobbying watchdog, found that the largest oil companies have spent $1 billion to rebrand themselves as 'green' since the Paris Agreement was signed in 2015, while continuing to undermine rules and regulations like the CLCPA at all levels of government (Aronoff, 2021: 28). Analysis by the Energy and Policy Institute found that many of the largest utilities in the United States are planning on slowing down their decarbonisation efforts between 2017 – 2030 (compared to 2005 – 2017), despite this being a crucial decade for action to prevent the worst effects of global warming (Pomerantz, 2019). At the centre of this slowdown are investments into natural gas (Ibid). The invasion of Ukraine has had impacts on global energy supplies and moves towards decarbonisation, with increased national focus on energy security leading to a reduction in multilateral cooperation on climate action (Brown et al, 2023: 21).

Looking deeper into Con Edison's rate increase request reveals a different picture to the one painted in the opening to their letter. The money requested also includes $70.4 million for a Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) facility in Astoria, Queens,

$220 million to expand a fracked gas pipeline from the Bronx to Westchester, $73 million dollars to expand another transmission line in Queens, and a further $11 million dollars for a fracked gas gate station near Peekskill (Sane Energy, 2022: 10-11). LNG, a fossil fuel with a climate footprint more extensive than coal, is highly controversial in New York. In 1973, an LNG storage tank exploded on Staten Island, killing 43 workers (Nagra et al., 2022: 368). In response, NYS introduced a moratorium on new LNG facilities and transporting LNG by truck is now prohibited in New York City (Ibid).

However, these measures are ignored by IOUs – as demonstrated through the investment to extend the life of the LNG facility in Astoria. Similarly, the 2021 National Grid rate case – the first to be conducted under the CLCPA ruling – included plans to install an LNG trucking station to transport the gas by truck to a facility in Greenpoint, Brooklyn (which is prohibited) as well as an expansion of the existing LNG facility by increasing the number of vaporisers from six to eight (Ibid). This is a clear disregard from IOUs for the goals of the CLCPA, which is upheld by the regulatory arm of the state, supposedly designed to protect from such gross abuses of power: while the PSC refused funding for the last phase of a gas pipeline in North Brooklyn, the LNG trucking station and the vaporiser increaser were approved. Instead, the Commission "directed the utility to discontinue natural gas marketing efforts and promotional programs" (Department of Public Service, 2022: 27).

Furthermore, while the ruling of National Grid's 2021 rate case now means that the CLCPA will apply to all cases going forward, this was not a forgone conclusion. One person I interviewed, who works for an environmental justice organisation which was a formal party to the rate case, expressed deep frustration with the process, explaining:

> *"…Within the National Grid rate case the Department of Public Service, which is the staff under the Public Service Commission, the lawyers, and all the people who are actually involved in the rate case, they argued right up until the very last minute that the CLCPA didn't even apply to rate cases. You know, that our law doesn't apply to literally how billions of dollars are spent? [Laughter]... Like every pipeline being built in our*

streets… the state argued to a certain extent that the law didn't apply to that." (Interview 28)

My theoretical framework reveals how it is in the technocratic spaces of the regulatory state (Keily, 2016; Leitner et al, 2007; Davies, 2016) that decisions which would have significant political ramifications can be made by unelected technocrats i.e., *"the staff under the Public Service Commission, the lawyers, and all the people who are actually involved in the rate case"*. In this example, the goals of the CLCPA – a landmark piece of legislation which was implemented because of the organising of New York Renews, a coalition of 300 environmental, justice, faith, labour, and community groups, and supported by elected representatives including both Governor's Cuomo and Hochul – would have been thwarted due to a space of supposed regulation which is almost entirely outside of the democratic sphere.

In Chapter 2, I outlined Fraser's 'progressive neoliberalism' to explain how progressive identity politics are now recognised within the same financialised and marketized system of neoliberalism, seeing a co-optation of their more radical elements and ignoring the redistributive aspects that are more disruptive to the status quo of neoliberal forms of governance. In this chapter, I am expanding Fraser's concept of recognition from a recognition of difference, to an understanding of political acts themselves as recognitional. The CLCPA is undermined by IOUs and state regulation, and thus is reduced to recognition. The recognition that climate change is happening, recognising that environmental injustice is occurring, but again situating the recognition of this within an ideological framework of redistribution that defaults to marketized solutions; the processes that have caused the issues in the first place. This means that even heavily polluting IOUs are able to pay lip service to the progressive targets, while acting against them. At the same time, the *political* status quo – the Democratic Party and its Leadership – can point to the passage of the CLCPA as a momentous occasion which demonstrates a commitment to addressing climate catastrophe, without then ensuring the necessary steps are made to reach the mandated targets.

Superficial governance that does not follow through in challenging underlying structures of power means that there is *"no path towards"* (Interview 02) the mandates of the CLCPA, just percentages attached to dates in the future. The results of this are clear: While the CLCPA mandates that the state gets 70% of its electricity from renewable energy by 2030, with 100% clean electricity by 2040, current figures are far from this. Hydroelectric power accounts for 22% of the state's total net generation (EIA, 2022), mainly from the NYPA-owned Robert Moses Niagara hydroelectric power plant (Ibid). Wind and solar, the expansion of which has been left to private corporations and "*green capital that's really just speculative and… is backed by Goldman Sachs*" (Interview 31), is stalled at a combined total of 6% (Ibid).

Outcomes like this, which seem inconsistent with CLCPA mandates while continuing to perpetuate environmental injustices in the pursuit of profit can only occur because the fossil fuel industry are regarded as a good-faith partner, rather than an industry which should be restrained (Aronoff, 2021: 27). Multiple participants pointed to the differences between the publicly owned provision of renewables and the privately supplied as a prime example of why the renewables transition should not be left to the market.

4.2.4 Regulatory capture

So far in this chapter I have outlined a myriad of ways in which the regulation of the utilities sector can be understood to work in favour of IOUs rather than the public. Now, I will look directly at the issue of regulatory capture. Regulatory capture occurs when "organized interest groups successfully act to vindicate their goals through government policy at the expense of the public interest" (Livermore and Revesz, in Payne, 2018: 79). Over the last five years, there have been thirteen major rate case proceedings in NYS across gas, electricity, and water utilities. In every one of these, the PSC has approved a rate increase (Department of Public

Service, 2018-2023). However, the final amounts approved have ranged from 14% to 92% lower than originally requested by the utility[8].

This may seem to paint a picture of a successfully regulated industry: A utility requests a rate increase, the PSC hears evidence from all affected parties, and makes a decision in line with the public interest – in which the rate increase granted is much lower. However, scholars characterise this process as a game, in which each powerful party – utilities, regulatory commissions, and public staff – comes away a winner, insofar as they can suitably say that their own objectives have been met (Payne, 2018: 76). The utilities get a profit increase, while Public Service Commissioners and DPS staff can say that they have acted in the public interest (Payne, 2018: 86). In this, customers are the least represented group, and come away as the only 'losers.'

One reason often cited in the literature for this game is the so-called 'revolving door' (Salant, 1992; Zheng, 2015) through which people leave government positions to work in the private sector and vice versa. This has become more common through neoliberalisation and is present in the regulatory sector too. Mary Jo White, a litigator from a law firm which defended Wall Street banks and executives, became the chairwoman of the Securities and Exchange Commission under President Obama in the wake of the financial crisis in 2013 (Zheng, 2015: 1266). The chairwoman she was replacing, Mary Schapiro, left to become a consultant at the Promontory Financial Group, a consulting firm at which almost a third of its senior executives have come from government agencies tasked with supervising the financial industry (Ibid).

Here, regulators are often perceived as acting in favour of the industry, so as to secure employment in the industry down the line (Nagra et al, 2002: 398). In New York, two commissioners were previously employed by a utility company, with the

[8] In 2020, two NYS IOUs had their previously granted rate increases delayed due to Covid-19. National Grid, which had been approved an electric delivery rate increase of $89.6 million and a gas delivery rate increase of $21.5 million, delayed the increases from 1st April to 1st July (Public Service Commission, 2021: 39). New York American Water similarly delayed its rate increase of $4.3 million for Service Area 1 customers and $3.1 million for its Service Area 2 customers until 1st September 2020 (Ibid: 38).

rest previously holding government positions (Ibid). The newly appointed Chair of the PSC (the first appointment made by Governor Kathy Hochul which could indicate a change in direction for New York's regulatory governance) is the only member of the PSC with any background in environmental justice, having previously chaired the Board of Directors for WE ACT for Environmental Justice, an organisation that is also a member of the PPNY coalition (New York State, 2021).

However, the concept of regulatory capture is more nuanced than individual commissioners simply working in self-interested ways. Some literature suggests that the revolving door actually does not lead to capture in the ways previously presumed (Zheng, 2015: 1268). Instead, the reason that regulation so often seems to act against the public interest in the utilities sector specifically is because the legal standard which guides PSCs is oriented towards the investor. In this, the investor is regarded as the central figure through which the fairness of rates is determined (Fendell, 1982: 823).

The Supreme Court ruled that a utility rate which does not yield a "just and reasonable" profit for an IOU is an "unconstitutional taking of property without due process in violation of the Fifth Amendment" (Ibid). This is similar to the Supreme Court rulings cited earlier in this chapter, in which corporations are granted more rights as citizens than members of the public sometimes are.

This ruling was first upheld in 1923, when a water utility in West Virginia brought a case against a PSC (Bluefield Water Works & Improvement Co. v. Public Service Commission) in which the Court asserted the IOU's right to yield a return on the value of property (Ibid, 379). Twenty years later, this ruling was expanded upon in a verdict which decided that an IOU's return on equity (ROE), "the profit or net income expressed as a percentage of the investment" (Nagra et al., 2022: 363), needs to be sufficient enough "to assure confidence in the financial integrity of the enterprise, so as to maintain its credit and to attract capital" (Ibid, 379-380). Here, the investors' interests take precedence over the consumers', and the entire process of ratemaking is primarily about satisfying profit-motivated shareholders (ibid, 823).

4.2.5 Rate case proceedings and the perverse incentive

The ratemaking process has also been criticized for enshrining a "perverse incentive" (Nagra et al., 2022) in the operating procedures of IOUs, and in this section I will discuss the environmental justice ramifications of this. The existing model of regulation allows IOUs to make a profit through their capital expenses: IOUs are able to recover not only their investment in infrastructure, but also a ROE through increases to customer rates (Ibid, 363). With this, IOUs are discouraged from initiatives that could meet energy needs in ways other than capital expenditure: the incentive to build is enshrined in the regulatory process which ties higher profit to more expensive infrastructure costs (Ibid). The capital expenditure for the electric and gas industry nearly doubled between 2006-2015, from $52 billion to $99 billion, increasing overall customer electricity bills by 22% (Deloitte, 2016: 15-16). The perverse incentive also means that utilities are not encouraged to request low increases, because the game of regulation will always grant them an increase. At the same time, their increases are not ring-fenced and can be immediately appropriated as shareholder dividends, not for investments into infrastructure.

Other literature investigating this perverse incentive also demonstrates how utilities often perform unnecessary capital work in order to earn a return, instead of cheaper and simpler operations and maintenance work, which does not earn a return on investment (Mapes et al., 2021: 346). This has clear environmental justice ramifications. The city-wide blackout described in Chapter 1 which saw at least 73,000 households lose power in Manhattan, and then a further 50,000 customers lose power in Brooklyn just eight days later, was because of a faulty connection and other circuit failures across electrical substations owned and operated by Con Ed (Calma, 2019). This was despite the PSC "*rubber stamp[ing*]" (Interview 02) an electricity revenue increase for the utility of $113.3 million dollars that very same year – the first of a three-year rate hike (Public Service Commission, 2020).

The areas of Brooklyn that were most impacted, which had their power cut by Con Ed in a move to prevent a wider blackout, included Canarsie and Flatlands (Calma, 2019). These neighbourhoods have a ranking of 4 out of 5 for heat vulnerability on

the New York City government's own heat vulnerability index – making them incredibly vulnerable to heat-related deaths (NYC Gov, 2022). They are also historically and predominately Black neighbourhoods. In fact, the metrics which inform the heat vulnerability index include 'Black population' due to the extent to which these communities are most excluded from heat resources (Ibid). The other metrices that inform this index are surface temperatures, number of green spaces, poverty, and air conditioning access (NYC Gov, 2022). The final of these metrics providing a further irony: before shutting off power, Con Ed requested customers in Canarsie and Flatlands limit the use of air conditioning (Calma, 2019).

That Black population alone can be used as a data point that demonstrates a neighbourhood's heat vulnerability is demonstrative of the depth to which racial injustice is experienced as environmental injustice. This again demonstrates the elite capture of IOU regulation in NYS. Despite the NYS PSC being one of the most diverse in the country, with the Chair himself being Black, Commissioners are consistently more accountable to IOUs rather than citizens impacted by poor service provision.

4.3 Regulation doing its job

What I have been attempting to demonstrate throughout this chapter is that injustices are embedded into the existing energy system through the regulatory state. From the 19th century until today, courts have upheld the rights and priorities of investors over those of the public. In this section, I will first engage a backwards glance for a future vision (Muñoz, 2019: 4) to demonstrate how, from its very inception, regulation was introduced to prevent more progressive – and at times explicitly socialist – possibilities. In this, I will look back to the Gilded Age, when the system of regulation was introduced, to demonstrate how energy infrastructure has always been at the centre of the development of US capital, even before the neoliberal period. Then, I will examine why the history of IOU regulation demonstrates that the decisions made by PSCs which benefit IOUs over the citizen-consumer are an example of regulation 'doing its job', functioning as it was intended.

A growing movement for public control of utilities emerged during the period of the Gilded Age (between 1870 and the turn of the century) in response to the brutal period of regulation-by-competition, which saw utility firms engage in tactics such as “cutting wires, arson, armed assaults and the demolition of competitors’ equipment”, outside of the more traditional price wars (McGuire, 1989: 186). IOUs which had gone out of business also left abandoned buildings and crumbling towers in their wake.

These conditions drove demands for the creation of municipally owned utilities, free from the profit motive. Of the 816 municipally owned and not-for-profit utilities that existed in 1902, 126 had formerly been IOUs (Ibid, 186). By 1912 the Socialist Party leader Eugene Debs would receive around 6% of the popular vote in the presidential election on a platform that called for widescale public ownership (Hanna, 2018: 22). However, it was the municipal level which represented a greater threat to the interests of IOUs. Instead of regulating industry, the so-called ‘Sewer Socialists’, Socialist Party mayors of industrial cities like Milwaukee, sought instead to replace IOUs (and other industries of everyday life, such as water and sanitation systems), with municipally owned power systems (Wisconsin Historical Society, 2022).

In New York State, newspaper magnate William Hearst created the Municipal Ownership League – a third party chiefly concerned with the municipal ownership of utilities (Wesser, 2009: 77-78). By 1905, the League had grown to a membership of 100,000, and elected five Assembly Members to office, with others losing by narrow margins likely due to electoral fraud (Ibid, 78). Hearst was an anti-corruption campaigner who advocated for a host of social reforms, and Wesser (Ibid, 76) notes that his “vulgar, sensational journalism… provided a breath of fresh air for the many who found the conventional politician and the middle-class to be virtually stale”. In the following chapter I will describe the confrontational outside strategy of PPNY, which in its explicit problematisation of campaign financing represents a refusal to conform to conventional Democratic norms in ways which could be deemed similarly vulgar by establishment politicians.

In response to this growing movement, it was IOUs themselves who fought to become regulated monopolies. Samuel Insull, the head of the Chicago Edison

Company (which today is ComEd, the largest utility in Illinois with revenues totalling more than $7 billion), advocated for government regulation as a centre ground between municipal socialism and regulation by competition, invoking "the specter of municipalization" to garner support from other IOUs and private companies seeking self-preservation (Bradley, 1996: 62; Rivera and Bozuwa, 2021: 9).

That movements have coalesced around the de-privatisation of IOUs in both the original Gilded Age and the so-called New Gilded Age of the present (Giroux, 2008; McAlevey, 2018) demonstrates not only the centrality of energy infrastructure in the processual evolution of capital, even prior to the neoliberal period, but also that there has been an ever present pushback to market fundamentalism in the US. This is important for my research which is focused on how alternative political possibilities are created through social movement mobilisation around the very infrastructure with which these spaces of regulation and the IOU model are directly concerned.

However, what brought me to focus specifically on regulation was a common theme that emerged through interviews, based on an in vivo code: "*doing your job"*. This was a code that was frequently invoked by multiple participants, and can be summed up through the below quote, from a participant who described her experience questioning IOUs and the DPS on the climate science and data they were using to define their emissions, at an evidentiary hearing which was part of a National Grid rate case:

> *"I've been to court cases before where people I know got arrested for stopping pipelines and stuff, so I've seen how the lawyer thing works where you build up to your question and your point. And so I did a pretty good job for somebody who is not a lawyer! And both the city and the state lawyers came up to me afterwards and were like, 'Good job', and it was a little bit of that like, 'Good job, little lady' kind of pat on the back, but I was just like, 'I just did your job'"* (Interview 28)

Just as I previously argued that it was the staff of the public sector who were arguing against the goals of the CLCPA applying to rate cases, in this instance it

was the lawyers working for the state that were accused of not '*doing their jobs*' well enough in terms of protecting the public against economic and environmental injustices of IOUs.

Multiple participants spoke of wanting elected representatives to 'do their job' and pass the BPRA through the various committee stages, or to vote in ways which align more to their constituents' interests than the interests of IOU and shareholder power. Similarly, at the Public Hearings for the Con Ed rate case, many members of the public implored the PSC and DPS to do what they were 'supposed' to do and hold Con Ed to account by refusing to grant a rate increase.

Some participants acknowledged that the injustices of the existing energy system are not *"just a happenstance of the economic setup"* but rather are *"baked into the foundation of how it works"* (Interview 33). With this, the perverse incentive that structures how IOUs operate, as well as the system of legality and regulation that is supposed to constrain these utilities, but in fact supports them, was regarded by multiple participants as *"an agreement that you just can't fully comprehend"* (Interview 33). Indeed, it was becoming party to a rate case in 2019 which caused the NYC-ESWG to decide to begin to campaign for a public power alternative in the first place.

But, as this chapter has repeatedly demonstrated, the representatives of the state and the PSC *are* doing their job when they make decisions that benefit IOUs. In fact, many decisions made by staff for the DPS, which are rendered technical, objective, and impartial, can be seen to have deeply unjust ramifications – ramifications that are lost when considering such decisions from a purely neoliberal perspective. Another example of this came from a participant who told me about providing expert testimony regarding the siting of a gas plant in a working-class, majority Black community. In response to testimony outlining the environmental injustice of this siting decision, the representatives of the state responded: *"the location is the location"* (Interview 28). In many ways, this is an entirely acceptable neoliberal response. If a technocratic, market-led process identifies a location for a polluting fossil fuel plant, likely by a cost-benefit analysis process, no injustice has been enacted because nobody has been coerced to live near it. Proponents would likely argue that people could move if they were

unhappy living near such a plant, and an ideology in which a negative conception of freedom and liberty does not include considerations of social injustice does not need to consider the environmental impacts of siting decisions. Those are best understood, from this perspective, as decisions removed from political deliberation. Again, this is the system doing its job.

4.4 Performative participation

Understanding how the regulatory system works as intended brings us to the final section of this chapter, which directly addresses how the recognition-based elements of the neoliberal regulatory state renders participation a prosaic process, with little real democratic power.

The administrative design of rate case proceedings is a tightly controlled process, and the multiple participants interviewed who had participated in rate cases found them incredibly frustrating. Rate case proceedings are lengthy and laborious and can last years. One representative from an environmental justice organisation described how, even with *"pro-bono representation from a major green company"* they were *"engaged in a really energy, labour, time intensive process for 11 months that most organisations couldn't even begin to work on"* (Interview 14).

That these systems are difficult even for organisations directly engaging with questions of economic and environmental justice, suggests that for the average member of the public, the process would be prohibitive. Indeed, literature has begun to understand the rate case process specifically as an example of procedural injustice, insofar as affected communities are deprived of meaningful participation (Nagra et al., 2022: 382). In the energy literature, procedural justice consists of four major elements: "(1) access to information; (2) access to and meaningful participation in decision-making; (3) lack of bias on the part of decision-makers; and (4) access to legal processes for achieving redress" (Sovacool and Dworkin, 2015: 436-437).

Here, I want to focus specifically on the second element: access to and meaningful participation in decision-making. The literature defines mechanisms which prevent meaningful participation as "including insufficient public notice

requirements, the power of utility companies to set the rate case agenda, steep information asymmetry between the parties, communities' lack of resources and technical expertise", as well as the already discussed issues involving regulatory capture (Nagra et al., 2022: 382).

An example of this procedural injustice can be seen in the March 2022 public hearings described in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter, which were held at 1pm and 5pm. Interviewees critical of this described it as prohibitive and inaccessible; these are times where people will be at work, or providing childcare, or commuting, and as such are not able to take time away to call into the platform which hosts the public hearing.

This lack of meaningful participation should be understood as a deliberate function of neoliberal governance. Over recent years, there has been a proliferation of more horizontal forms of governance, which include private market actors and civil society groups in the governance mechanisms of the traditional state, often in ways which appear to meet the participatory demands of earlier social movements, despite how eroded those movements' – and indeed the local governance structures of which they are integrated into - political influence and mobilising capacity may be (Mayer, 2006: 92).

These mechanisms offer the promise "of greater participation in policy deliberation and grassroots empowerment" (Swyngedouw, 2018: 3). However, Swyngedouw argues that these arrangements take place in an "institutional void" in which there are no clear rules of engagement, and where the terms of participation can vary significantly.

Indeed, the utility rate case proceeding can be understood as an example of this. In the settings of the public hearings, grassroots organisers and members of the public, civil society groups and private market actors were invited to give comments and share testimony. They were invited to participate in the functioning of the governance of the energy system of New York State. However, the bodies of the state were not obligated to include any of these testimonies in their final decision making. This was stressed at the start of the public hearing by the commissioners present and the Administrative Law Judge presiding over the

hearing: members of the public were informed that the statements "*you make today will become part of the case record*" and would be "*considered by the members of the Commission*" (Public Hearing, 31st March). In this way, no legal or regulatory weight is given to the statements, beyond being 'considered'. There is no guarantee that they will be agreed with, or inform a decision.

Here, while there are channels for participation, the outcomes of this participation are ultimately framed by parameters which have already been set. These parameters, especially in the NYS energy system, are underpinned entirely by the logics of neoliberalism: the administrative design of rate case proceedings, for example, is a tightly controlled process in which the "financial viability of investor-owned utilities" is prioritised over the "rights and needs of ratepayers" (Nagra et al., 2022: 382). This can be understood as anti-democratic because the outcome of such proceedings is almost entirely pre-determined: the PSC will likely always grant the IOU a rate increase, albeit a compromise from what they originally requested. Therefore, the participation and testimony of individuals and groups is a prosaic performance, with very little real democratic power. To take this further, this could be seen as having a deeper anti-democratic effect: If citizens engage in good faith with a difficult, unfamiliar, and time-consuming process, and then continue to see their utility bills rise, they could become disillusioned with further engagement with the local state.

4.5 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have demonstrated that not only is the existing energy system unjust, but rather from its very inception, the model of regulated monopolies was established to prevent more progressive possibilities. This historical context reveals how technocratic arms of the state were designed to uphold of the capitalist project of the twentieth century, a dynamic that has persisted into the neoliberal period. The recognition-based politics of so-called progressive neoliberalism have seen a proliferation of more participatory forms of governance – such as public hearings in rate case proceedings. Action needed to tackle climate catastrophe has also been acknowledged, couched in language which seems to recognise environmental injustice perpetrated against low-income

communities of colour. However, these are all enacted in ways which see such recognition reduced to lip service.

I contribute to broader theoretical and political debates about the limitations of neoliberal participatory governance and the need for deeper democratic reforms. I expand Nancy Fraser's concepts of 'recognition' and 'progressive neoliberalism' to demonstrate how socially liberal forms of neoliberalism in the US render much political action as merely recognitional. In this, demonstrating how the lack of democratic channels of accountability and transparency, as well as the complicated, time-consuming, and undefined methods for participation, enshrine a system in which investors are centred as the protagonists in decisions related to fairness.

In the following chapter I will discuss PPNY's campaign to pass the BPRA. I will analyse PPNY's messy and embodied experiences of engaging with the state, demonstrating how these experiences are central to the development of political alternatives, which themselves point towards more expansive citizen-state relationships than that of the consumer-citizen.

5. Towards a redistributive futurity

Chapter 4 dealt with the technocratic spaces of regulation, demonstrating how they can be seen to be merely performing the functions of democratic oversight that they are meant to be providing. Unelected and largely unaccountable officials work behind the scenes and are shaped by a neoliberal mentality which sees to it that the interests of IOUs are privileged over user groups, who are figured purely as consumers. The system of regulation that exists still today began in direct response to the proliferation of municipal socialism (Bradley, 1996: 62; Rivera and Bozuwa, 2021: 9). Throughout the twentieth century, courts upheld the rights and priorities of investors over those of the public, and today we can see the same private and corporate interests upheld over a broader set of public interests. Going further, I have also demonstrated how the spaces of participation which exist in these regulatory processes can be understood to be merely a performance of democracy and can even be understood as an example of procedural injustice (Nagra at al., 2022).

In this chapter, I want to investigate what an incipient alternative to this system may look like. The values and perspectives which frame this alternative can be understood as broadly justice-oriented, and specifically emerging from the environmental justice standpoint which I outlined in Chapter 2. Understanding this environmental (in)justice from a redistributive perspective, we can begin to relate these instances of injustice specifically to the functioning of the economic system.

By doing this, making space for the other key perspective which frames the conception of environmental justice I am developing, which relates specifically to public ownership. Social movements such as PPNY are grounding their projects in an explicit rejection of the privatisation and marketisation of public infrastructure which has constituted neoliberalisation. As such, they can be understood as articulating a redistributive justice that represents a widening of political imaginaries from narrow neoliberal governmentalities to a broader ecosocialist vision of democratic public ownership. Arguably, this is also a technocratic project – in the New York case of this thesis, the BPRA is a piece of legislation directly concerned with the functioning of a state organisation, NYPA, and the campaign

to pass it has necessarily been one that directly engages with the bureaucratic functioning of the NYS Legislature. However, this can also be understood as a redistributive technocracy, concerned with addressing fundamental structural inequalities.

My research is not only concerned with what the alternative vision is, but also how a social movement actively constitutes and advances towards it, including through the creation of an alternative technocracy that must grapple with the same institutional spaces of the state. As such, this chapter will focus on the campaign to pass the BPRA. Analysing the work of organising, I will argue that the attempt to pass the BPRA has been a messy process, but that it is within this messiness itself that the potential for a democratic alternative can be productively constructed. I will argue that it is within the mundane everyday of organising (Roth and Shae Baird, 2017) that a prefigurative impulse resides, contending that the legislation of the BPRA can be understood as a vehicle for a broader democratic vision.

Understanding this so-called messiness is important, and through this chapter I will unpick what I mean by this. In many ways, the campaign to pass the BPRA could also be described as agile or changing – an evolving experiment. However, I am drawn to its specifically messy aspects for three reasons. Firstly, because it is through the messier elements that the hidden channels of power within the NYS Legislature (referred to throughout as Albany) have been deliberately revealed and strategically utilised by PPNY. Secondly, it is through the messier and more creative elements of PPNY's campaign that we can begin to see its queerer impulses – which were not an explicit part of the campaign, but became more visible to me through prolonged interaction. Finally, it is through understanding the messier moments of the campaign that we can also understand the strategic mistakes or missteps which also occurred, which will be detailed in Chapter 6.

In this chapter I will argue that queerness functions as an affective solidarity in the burgeoning PPNY movement, which is itself articulating a minor praxis: a way of engaging with the state which transforms both the state and the PPNY Coalition, while also not aiming for mastery. In this, PPNY are engaging with the state on both *its* own terms, and *their* own terms: moving towards a collective futurity

through the institutions of the present. It is though this minor praxis that the spaces within the existing system can be reworked; both in the literal spaces of the state which PPNY are working within, against and beyond and also in the political imaginary that surrounds privatised services.

The campaign to pass BPRA changed throughout my time in the field, which was also a dynamic and changing experience as detailed in Chapter 3 (insofar as the pandemic impacted my fieldwork experience, causing the majority of interviews to be conducted online). As such, exploring the campaign is somewhat difficult to do chronologically. Therefore, I have decided to separate the campaign into distinct but overlapping areas. Section 5.2 will look at the 'outside' strategy of the PPNY campaign, meaning the traditional modes of organising, such as rallies and direct actions. Here, I will analyse the more confrontational aspects of PPNY's campaign. This is an important element to consider, as the more confrontational elements could arguably be regarded as risky in a campaign to pass a piece of legislation, which depends upon support in the legislature (something that will be discussed in Chapter 6).

However, I will argue that the confrontational nature of PPNY has been strategically utilised and is an important element of a democratic vision in which the notion of the political is understood as both pluralistic and potentially antagonistic (Mouffe, 2005; Parker and Parker, 2017). Section 5.3 analyses the inside strategy of the campaign, which includes PPNY's drafting of the BPRA, and how the coalition worked inside the Legislature when progressing the bill. I will interrogate the expert knowledge held by various members of the coalition, as the professionalisation of the climate movement is a matter of frequent debate. Section 5.4 will broaden the scope from PPNY specifically to the electoral strategy of DSA. I will analyse how DSA have used electoral campaigning to drum up public support for BPRA, while also articulating a different political-economic vision than the existing IOU model. This section will also investigate how elected DSA Senators and Assembly Members can be understood to be creating a project of co-governance, due to the ways in which they are working in and against the state.

5.1 Outside strategy

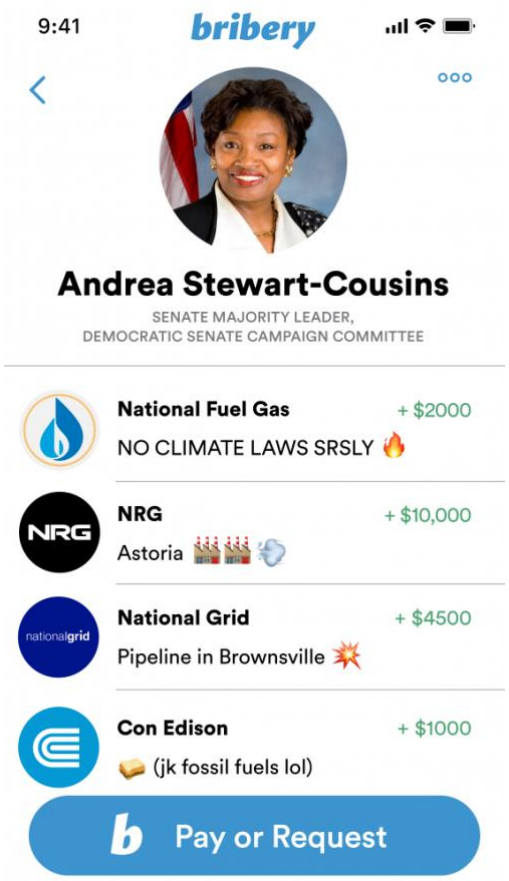
Analysing social movement organising requires an engagement with strategy, and throughout my engagement with the PPNY Coalition, various members used the same language of 'inside' and 'outside' strategy to describe the methods of organising around BPRA. Outside referred to the work that took place in public: rallies, direct actions, and emergency phonebanks on key days of legislative action. Throughout this section I will focus on one specific aspect of the outside strategy: the confrontational nature of many of these actions. To begin, I will utilise images used by PPNY at rallies and online, discussing the ways in which they re-politicised aspects of politics which have been removed from public debate, such as campaign donations. Then, I will demonstrate how PPNY and DSA elected representatives blended strategies, engaging with the state in professional ways as well as through direct actions which at times led to arrests.

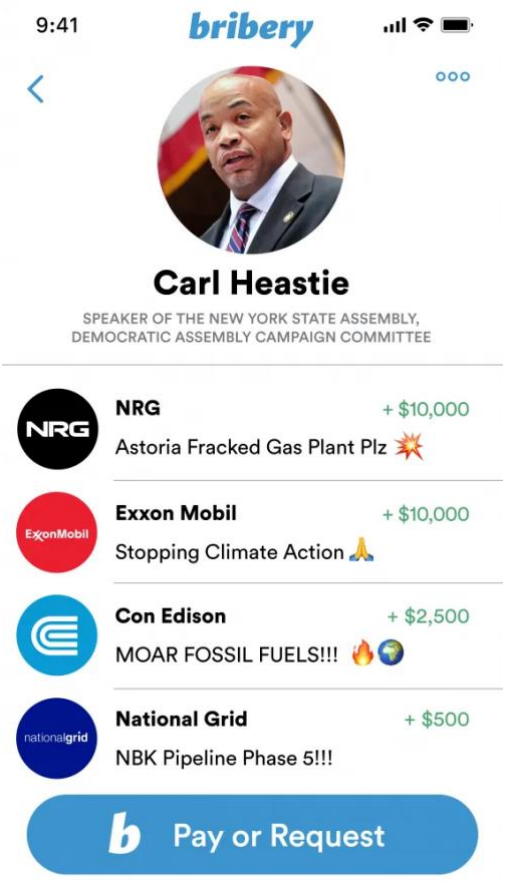
The images in Figure 4 mimic the app interface for Venmo, a mobile payment service used in the US for splitting personal transactions. The people on the cards are senior members of the Democratic leadership in NYS, including the Senate Majority Leader, Speaker of the Assembly, and Chairs of key committees which the BPRA needed to pass through before coming to a vote, including the Energy and Telecommunications Committee and the Corporations Committee. The cards display the donations from IOUs and lobby groups which each of these politicians have received and are an easily digestible display of potentially complicated data analysis. The information was collated by the NYC-ESWG using data from the National Institute of Money in Politics, and these images were taken to various different in-person rallies, as well as being posted online on social media networks like Twitter and Instagram. On the NYC-ESWG webpage about these cards, they are described as showing how IOUs and fossil fuel lobbyists have "invested" in NYS Democratic Party leadership (NYC-DSA ESWG, 2021).

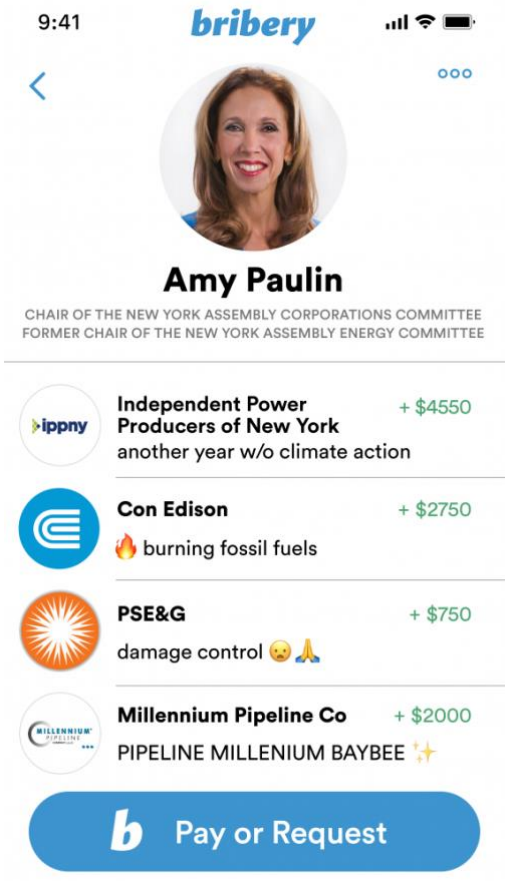
Figure 5 shows a photo from a rally held in summer 2022, after the BPRA had failed to pass for a third time and PPNY were trying to push for a special session to be held for a vote specifically on the bill. One of the 'Bribery' cards can be seen held up in the crowd, next to a sign mimicking the Con Ed logo saying, 'Conned by Carl.' Carl Heastie, the Speaker of the NYS Assembly, did not table a vote for the

BPRA in the last days of the 2022 legislative session, and became the target of much of PPNY's ire. Other politicians to be directly addressed by PPNY included Governor Hochul, who was accused of letting New York 'Burn' when the 2022 budget did not include funding for the BPRA. The imagery for this can be seen in Figure 6. Again, these images were used across social media and at direct action events – including a 'Build or Burn' rally in January 2022, where some activists were arrested for blocking traffic. I want to focus specifically on these images because of their clearly confrontational nature. New York State politicians are called out by name repeatedly by PPNY, and while the 'Bribery' cards may be described as *"kinda tongue in cheek"* (Interview 08) by members of PPNY, the evocative language is undeniably confrontational. However, the use of this imagery can be understood as more than just a provocative attack. For scholars such as Mouffe (2013) and Honig (1993: 532), antagonistic and 'contestatory' practices can "challenge existing distributions of power" by interrupting "the routine, predictability, and repetition" on which dominant power depends.

Figure 4: ‘Bribery’ Venmo Cards







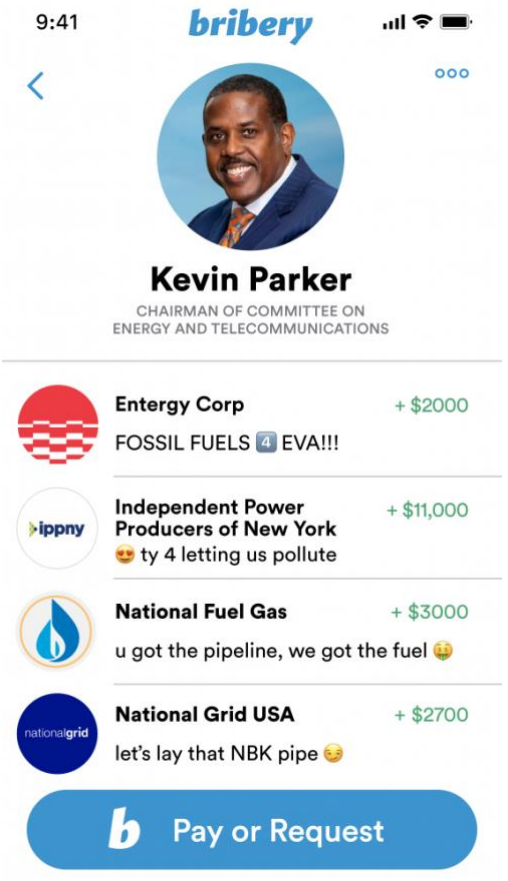


Figure 5: Rally for Emergency Climate Session, July 2022

Figure 6: Governor Hochul, Build or Burn

The ‘Bribery’ cards were regularly referenced in interviews by participants who found them to be an *“incredible”* way to show *“the corruption of these key legislators who are in the pockets of the utilities”* (Interview 05). While the language of ‘Bribery’ and ‘*corruption*’ and accusations that legislators are ‘*in the pockets of*’ IOUs is certainly provocative, it is by making visible the campaign donations from IOUs and other fossil fuel corporations that PPNY are disrupting the normalised and naturalised flow of NYS politics. They are politicising something which under standard neoliberal norms is an acceptable part of the political sphere: campaign donations are an entirely legal and commonplace part of the US political system. As such, politicising these donations mobilises a critique that goes further than confrontation for confrontation’s sake. The system is challenged to defend itself on its own terms (Parker and Parker, 2017: 1376). As one member of PPNY, when asked about the use of these ‘Bribery’ cards, said:

> *“We were telling the truth in everything that we said. They really did take that money. So, if you're embarrassed about it, maybe you shouldn't be taking fossil fuel money. I do think that that approach, you know, it pisses people off, but it gets their attention. And it demonstrates that you're willing to follow up.”* (Interview 29)

This can also be understood as a direct challenge to the crisis of political responsibility that della Porter (2015) argues social movements are confronting in the post-austerity period. Positioning this confrontational challenge within the framework of recognition and redistribution, making visible the sway IOUs and fossil fuel corporations hold over key spaces of democratic decision-making also has important ramifications. Indeed, while these campaign donations are entirely legal, IOUs are perhaps not above extra-legal methods of persuasion too. One participant, an Assembly Member in North Brooklyn, told me how National Grid had acted like “*mafiosos*” after he had led attempts to stop a natural gas pipeline that ran under New York harbour: *“They started shutting off people's gas in Brooklyn, and in my district… And they were coercing us saying, ‘Look, you support the pipeline, then we can turn the gas on tomorrow.’ And, you know, they pretended they were being mafiosos by saying, ‘No, no, because we're worried about future demand, we now have to start rationing today’, which was total bullshit.”* (Interview 18)

By confrontationally revealing what politicians have accepted in campaign funding from IOUs and fossil fuel corporations in confrontational ways, PPNY are forcing politicians to go beyond recognition-based politicking alone. Fraser argues that the decoupling of recognition-based 'identity-politics' from class politics is "a constitutive feature of the 'postsocialist' condition" (Fraser, 1997: 279) and has also focused on how so-called 'progressive' neoliberals (Fraser, 2019) have co-opted identity-based politics in ways which are synonymous with marketisation, financialisation and commodification. This is compelling and can be developed in a productive way for analysing climate politics and governance.

Just as in the previous chapter I argued that the CLCPA has been rendered recognitional by the regulatory state and system of technocratic neoliberal governance, by looking at the donations received by fossil fuel corporations to key lawmakers, we can understand how neoliberal action around the climate crisis is largely recognitional.

For example, the State Senator who sits as the Chair of the Energy Committee – an important procedural milestone that legislation like the BPRA has to pass through on its way to a vote in the chambers of the Senate and Assembly – was endorsed by the New York League of Conservation Voters in the 2022 Primary race, in part because "he authored the Climate and Community Investment Act and the Build Public Renewables Act" (NYLCV, 2022). But, this Senator is featured on the 'Bribery' cards displayed in Figure 4 and has received thousands of dollars of fossil fuel money. As one member of the PPNY Coalition told me:

> *"He has taken more fossil fuel money than anyone else. He will sponsor these bills, and then just let them die. He did that with the Build Public Renewables Act, he did that with the Climate and Community Investment Act, he consistently does that with climate legislation, he is very content to just, you know, sponsor legislation and not whip up people to pass it."* (Interview 08)

With this, the sponsoring of key pieces of climate legislation can be understood as entirely recognitional due to the ways in which sponsorship is utilised during election time when seeking endorsements, despite little efforts to champion the

legislation when the Legislature is in session. Or, indeed, the sponsoring and then stymying of climate legislation could be understood as more insidious, as PPNY and the NYC-ESWG imply with their repeated use of '*bribery*' and language of '*corruption*'. Similarly, accepting fossil fuel donations renders climate legislation similarly recognitional. Industry makes campaign donations to ensure sympathetic policy and legislation (Smith, 2015: 1), and legislation like the BPRA, which goes against the logics of the market and the interests of IOUs clearly run counter to this. In Chapter 2 I demonstrated how the neoliberal period saw an intensification of the corporate dominance of the US, including through the establishment of think-tanks and boom in business lobbying. The same intensification occurred around campaign contributions when, in 1976, limits on corporate donations were removed which in turn enabled corporations to dominate elections (Pinkerton and Davis, 2015: 305; Madland, 2021).

As such, this superficial form of representational politics is part of the same technocratic and anti-democratic project I investigated in the previous chapter and is an acknowledged and acceptable part of neoliberal governance – fuelling not only alienation and dissatisfaction with liberal democratic politics but also to the rise of far-right populism (Brown, 2003, 2019; MacLean, 2017). In politicising these donations, PPNY are bringing the corporate influence on democratic (and *D*emocratic) politics under scrutiny. The confrontational and playful ways in which PPNY are bringing transparency to these usually hidden power brokerages is a deliberately affective technique in as far as it signals a blatant rejection of the established party machinery.

As well as being confrontational, the Bribery cards are also a playful form of displaying information. While the next chapter will explore affective linkages of a queer solidarity in more detail, a queer impulse can be seen to reside in the playful elements of the campaign, and as such queer theory can be productively employed to analyse these moments. The everyday ephemera of the Venmo card is utilised featuring mischievous captions such as "😍 ty for letting us pollute" and "u got the pipeline, we got the fuel 🤑" which use text speak abbreviations (ty for thank you, etc) and emojis to display complex information. Queer theorists have begun to ask what focusing on enticement and fun could bring to discourses surrounding environmental action (Seymour, 2018 in Urban Institute, 2021), and the playful

ways in which PPNY make clear the extent of corporate influence on political processes are a strong example. By displaying the campaign donations in a playful way, PPNY are ensuring that the information serves to energise the movement around the BPRA, rather than demoralise it (Urban Institute, 2021). Rather than succumbing to a sense of powerlessness when faced with the inner workings of power, these approaches instead function in ways which make precisely these inner workings visible and known – and thus, able to be undone.

That these confrontational 'outside' aspects are combined with savvy insider manoeuvring and agile coalition dynamics is where a prefigurative potential resides: PPNY are not only rejecting established norms, but proposing an alternative to the present, *and* a roadmap for getting there.

5.1.1 Agonism and arrest: blending strategies

One example of how PPNY's combination of strategies is constitutive of a more prefigurative alternative comes from looking at the direct actions where the imagery discussed above were used. As mentioned, at the 'Build or Burn' rally in January 2022, activists were arrested for blocking traffic. This was not the first time that activists campaigning with PPNY were arrested. In June 2021, activists chained themselves together to block Broadway in NYC, as part of a series of direct actions around the city and in Albany. The pipes and chains fastening activists together were cut with a metal saw by the NYPD, who then arrested the protestors.

More than one participant had experience of arrests at other protests – *"I've been to court cases before where people I know got arrested for stopping pipelines and stuff"* (Interview 28) – and violent policing tactics are a common feature of anti-extraction and environmental justice movements across the US. For example, the private military contractor TigerSwan employed "war-on-terror tactics" against the Indigenous-led movement to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline (#NoDAPL) on Standing Rock Lakota territory (Seraphin, 2023: 272) and Georgia State Patrol troopers shot Manuel 'Tortuguita' Terá fifty-seven times, killing them, at a raid on a #StopCopCity encampment attempting to block the destruction of 381 acres of

Atlanta's Weelanuee Forest[9] in order to construct a police military training facility (Lennard, 2023).

What I want to focus on about the arrests at direct actions are the ways in which this confrontational outside strategy is used in tandem with other elements in the PPNY. I contend that understanding where the strategies intersect invokes a different type of social movement and state engagement. In this, the 'outside' strategy cannot be understood as separate from the inside strategy, electoral strategy, or internal coalition organising. This can be demonstrated through the quotation below:

> *"Last summer… we all got arrested for doing a direct action specifically for this bill, to pass it. It wouldn't pass… And now we're literally primarying Kevin Parker, who's the lead co-sponsor of this bill at the Senate level. So, I think now they can't ignore us the way they used to."* (Interview 25)

The participant who explained this to me, who had been arrested in 2021, was one of the 'Green New York' slate (analysed in Section 5.4) of candidates seeking election in 2022. This quote, in the context of the direct actions that the participant had been involved in, demonstrates the blurred boundaries between the different elements of PPNY's campaign: a confrontational outside strategy, combined with an electoral strategy in which key actors are directly challenged through Democratic primaries, with the candidates standing for election usually coming from DSA membership. This is similarly combined with an inside strategy in which lobbying was done inside Albany (discussed in Section 5.3.2), with the knowledge gained about the bureaucratic functioning of the state then shared outwards (discussed in Section 5.4.3).

The blending of strategy used by PPNY differs from other environmental justice movements. Literature explores how environmental justice movements are beginning to engage with the state in professionalised ways, such as through

[9] The violent repression of climate movements in the shoring up of 'petro-hegemony' (LeQuesne, 2019) has overt links with the settler colonial histories of the United States. In the examples above, Standing Rock is the territory of the Lakota and Dakota nations, and the Weelanuee Forest was forcibly taken from Muscogee Creek Nation tribes with the Indian Removal Act of 1830 (Belgard, 2023).

electoral politics and through participation in public hearings, in order to try and secure wins at a larger scale (Perkins, 2022). However, this is often due to frustration with how more confrontational forms of activism were only creating localised and disconnected successes (Perkins, 2022; Harrison, 2022). This is not necessarily the case with PPNY: rather than moving from confrontational to professional, they are maintaining both. Indeed, professionalism – or assimilation – is not the goal, and at every stage confrontation has been maintained. In this way, PPNY are working both in and against the state in a way which can be understood as the enactment of a prefigurative praxis (Arpini et al., 2021; Routledge et al., 2018; Angel, 2017; Cumbers, 2015; Jessop, 2007; Holloway, 2005).

This can be understood as prefigurative due to the ways in which this blending of strategy can be read as an embodying of PPNY's values, demonstrating a commitment to radical transformation through a pragmatic leveraging of existing structures to achieve their desired outcomes. This is a dual approach that enables PPNY to enact the principles of economic and environmental justice which frame their broader political vision of a redistributive futurity in their immediate actions with the existing political system.

5.2 Inside Strategy

The previous section focused on how PPNY have utilised agonistic and confrontational methods in their outside strategy, in order to disrupt the normalised and naturalised flow of NYS politics. However, as mentioned, they have blended this with inside-the-state organising. This includes the actual passage of the BPRA, and the associated lobbying to accomplish this. This section will investigate these inside strategies, focusing on the BPRA bill itself and the processual experience of learning what happens in Albany. By analysing how PPNY have been negotiating with and against these spaces of the local state, a similar messy prefiguration can be observed.

5.2.1 D-I-Y everything

The inside strategy of PPNY demonstrates that the project is one of co-learning. From the very inception of the campaign, PPNY have co-produced the knowledge they have needed, with participants explaining how they *"had to D-I-Y everything, which was challenging"* (Interview 06), and various member organisations bringing different capacities, knowledge, and skills (Crossan et al., 2016). Perhaps the best example of this messy co-production is in the drafting of the BPRA legislation itself. Multiple participants detailed to me the process of drafting the two pieces of legislation which made up the PPNY platform, which from the beginning has been a participatory and democratic exercise. Multiple participants described the *"really robust"* (Interview 14) democratic mechanisms built into the bill's writing and editing, with *"the writing of the bill itself"* described as *"one of the most extraordinarily rigorous democratic processes I've been a part of"* (Interview 29). Indeed, the rigor of the process meant that this participant *"wanted to claw my eyes out at many moments during that process – but that's a sign that you're doing something that is genuinely democratic [laughs]"* (Interview 29).

This process was democratic because of how participatory it was. In many ways, the participatory elements were incredibly ordinary, with *"a lot of is as simple as, for major decisions, having just a simple majority vote. But with an attempt to build consensus as much as possible"* (Interview 29). Similarly, the initial draft of the bill by the NYC-ESWG was created after the group *"basically just had a little roundtable and discussed what our vision for an ideal utility would be"* (Interview 06) before researching *"governance models, pricing structures, labor provisions. A lot of things we did not necessarily have expertise on before. So, we had a dedicated research team for just looking at what other utilities had done to draft that first draft of the bill"* (Interview 06).

The bill edit process was enabled through mundane and ordinary means of collaboration and communication. The coalition's steering group members used a shared online document to enable edits to the bill to be done collaboratively, with line edits done through comments on the document. As one participant explains:

> *"We went through, we all put yes, no or maybe. The ones that had the majority maybe's we went back to. Or even if they had any maybe's, we went back, we heard people's pros and cons. We weighed them. We all voted. We announced with like two weeks' notice when we were going to vote on them, you know? Encouraged people to be there that day so that they could have their voice heard, or put it in the doc beforehand."* (Interview 14)

Other online channels, such as the instant messaging services Slack and Signal, were used for speedy decisions and for keeping in touch – helpful for a coalition made up of volunteers and organisations with other demands on their time, located around the state. I have described these participatory functions as ordinary due to the accessibility and ease of the programmes used: collaborating on an online document is common practice for many organisations. Using simple online tools to communicate, combined with collaboration and a democratic "*one vote per org"* (Interview 14) means of deciding what edits were accepted to the bill language is a simple process – but a simplicity that engenders a more deliberative doing of democracy.

Indeed, this collaborative exercise was further enabled through the different kinds of expertise coalition members brought. One participant explained how an ethic from the Energy Democracy Alliance in which *"the people most affected by a specific provision should have extra weight in the decision making there"* (Interview 29) was utilised by PPNY in the drafting of the BPRA through various members of the coalition guiding specific elements of the work. WE ACT For Environmental Justice, an environmental justice organisation working with frontline communities in Harlem, were *"informing and guiding"* the *"language that affects front line communities"* (Interview 29). Similarly, given the "*very wacky, regulatory relationship"* Long Island has to the rest of the state, it was the "*Long Island partners*" who were "*writing and agreeing to the elements of the bill that would affect Long Island in particular"* (Interview 29).

The process I have been outlining is a collaborative one, in which each member of the PPNY coalition brings a different type of expertise – be that working with labour unions, lobbying, policy work, or experience in co-ordinating coalitions, as

just a few examples. An emphasis on information parity becomes one important democratic element of this collaboration. What this meant in practice was ensuring that short, understandable summaries of information were freely available for all members of the coalition, because *"not everybody's going to attend every meeting"* (Interview 29). This participant, who was the coordinator of the coalition, explained that:

> *"Real democracy requires parity of information… You need to have clarity on the question you're asking. And clarity on what it is exactly that that decision would affect… It's a subtle thing but I do think that ensuring that context and information is shared by everyone [is important]. You don't have democracy in practice unless you have that."* (Interview 29)

The emphasis on information parity and its relationship to democracy constitute a central element of the type of democratic alternative that I contend PPNY are advancing, and one which is directly oppositional to the type of neoliberal governance outlined in the previous chapter. As argued in Chapter 4, procedural injustice occurs when there is "steep information asymmetry [and] lack of resources and technical expertise" (Nagra et al., 2022: 382), as well lack of access to "meaningful participation in decision-making… [and] bias on the part of decision makers" (Sovacool and Dworkin, 2015: 436-437). The simple actions of providing "*two sentence summar[ies] of the background info*" (Interview 29) or *"announc[ing] with two weeks' notice when we were going to vote on [amendments to the bill]"* (Interview 14), and ensuring those unable to attend can share their thoughts in a shared document asynchronously to the meeting, are examples of PPNY centring informational parity and ensuring meaningful participation in decision making – a direct form of procedural justice.

Thus, the "*democracy in practice*" of PPNY is a deeply deliberative process in which consensus is reached through an active sharing of expertise and information, rather than the faux consensus (Mouffe, 2013) which exists under neoliberal technocracy.

Indeed, the *"D-I-Y everything"* nature of the PPNY campaign can be understood through a queer lens. Eleftheriadis (2015: 663) argues that queer events which

construct queerness as a political identity in which sexuality is decentred, "build upon… DIY practice as a significant characteristic of their own approach to community- and therefore identity building". D-I-Y principles have been associated with autonomous and anarchist political movements, including squatting, and punk subcultures of the 1980s that rejected major music labels in favour of self-distribution (Eleftheriadis, 2015; Nicholas, 2007; Poldervaart, 2001). Eleftheriadis (2015: 664) argues that D-I-Y narratives encourage an 'active uptake' that is indispensable in the construction of counterpublics (Warner, 2002) and anti-identitarian identity.

Eleftheriadis (2015: 644) analyses the D-I-Y ethos of queer festivals in order to connect them with self-organising autonomous left social movements, such as the alter-globalisation movements. In this, articulating an understanding of queerness as "a constellation built around a network of affective and political socialization ties [that enables a] shap[ing of] collective identity and rethink[ing of] political engagement" (Ibid, 665). Here, I am utilising the same understanding in a minor way, to link back the D-I-Y ethos of PPNY with a broader understanding of queer identity. In this, the 'D-I-Y everything' nature of PPNY is not only about self-organisation, but also about reconfiguring relationships of power and reshaping the political imaginary necessary for redistributive futures. In this way, Eleftheriadis' articulation of queerness as a network of affective and political socialisation ties resonates with the justice-orientation of prefigurative movements, offering a way to theorise how alternative subjectivities and spatialities emerge through organising practices that are both materially grounded and future-oriented.

Understanding this deliberative and collective project through the frame of redistributive futurity is also pertinent. Here, the redistribution is not one of tangible, material resources, but of knowledge. It is a participatory decision-making process in which consensus is sought, but through a collective building of information, rather than a power negotiation. Later, in Section 5.4.3, I will demonstrate the ways in which the information that PPNY were learning about the inside workings of Albany was shared outwards, beyond the internal coalition members.

5.2.2 Coalitional expertise

What the previous discussion also demonstrates is that PPNY it is a coalition with high levels of expertise. Not only are the organisational partners able to bring specific and grounded knowledge from their own worlds, but even the members of the NYC-ESWG are well-connected individuals. In fact, the "*little roundtable"* where the vision for an ideal utility saw the initial drafting of the BPRA was followed by:

> *"A lot of meetings with people who had already had public utilities. For example, we met with the former [Deputy] Mayor of Paris, I believe, Anne Le Strat, who worked on the Paris Water Observatory, because they have a really good governance structure that we wanted to model ours after."* (Interview 06).

That PPNY are able to plug into the global network surrounding remunicipalisation is demonstrative of impressive and strategically useful political links. It is also interesting that PPNY were able to tap into the global municipalist networks, given that they are not an explicitly municipalist movement (Arpini et al, 2021: 35). However, despite the "diversity of political, social and economic contexts" (Russell, 2019: 911) making generalisations impossible, in engaging with existing networks of expertise and knowledge, PPNY could be understood to be engaging with the same "informal process of collaborative 'theory building'" that Russell (2019: 911) argues is definitive of the new municipalist movement, which will be analysed in more detail in Section 5.3.

Beyond the former Deputy Mayor of Paris, PPNY were also able to work with climate experts who were *"able to get a white paper written… on what the impacts of our bill would be, and how many jobs that would create"* (Interview 06). These links are enabled by the types of organisations that are involved in the coalition, as well as the types of careers in which DSA members of the coalition are employed. Some participants involved with the NYC-ESWG work for international progressive non-profits, while another works as a lobbyist, meaning that a high level of expertise is brought to the table.

These high levels of expertise making up the coalition could be potentially controversial, with recent work taking aim at the professional class of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which make up much of the climate movement (Huber, 2022; Huber and Stafford, 2022; Fong and Naschek, 2021). That the left has become increasingly made up of educated middle classes and the elite, and NGOs have expanded into the space once occupied by unions (Fong and Nascheck, 2021) is positioned as a central reason for both the limited influence of the left in the US in recent decades, and the taming of ambitions and the gradual acquiesce to liberal political forms (Ibid). DSA are frequently invoked in these discussions, given its membership base consisting of "'downwardly mobile' college-educated workers facing proletarianization" (Huber, 2022: 31).

The climate movement has been similarly afflicted by this NGOism (Fong and Naschek, 2021), with Huber (2022: 31-24) arguing that the climate movement is made up of either credentialed, professional "'smart policy'-oriented technocrats, or 'anti-system radicals'" including DSA and a host of "radical academics, journalists [and] NGO activists" (Ibid, 32). For Huber, these radicals "rarely pinpoint the class that owns, controls, and profits from global fossil capital" in their advocacy for degrowth and localism (Ibid, 32-34). Even where such movements do identify the public ownership of electricity as central to the climate struggle, there is a tendency to ignore "trade unions as an already existing and organized base of social power" (Ibid, 47).

Huber (Ibid) posits that this tendency is because of climate movements' disconnection from the working class. This is arguably a simplistic binary that ignores the aforementioned proletarianization of downwardly-mobile workers, who are increasingly in precarious forms of employment and housing. However, PPNY is made up of a number of green NGOs, including those in receipt of hefty philanthropic donations – WE ACT for Environmental Justice have received $6 million from the Bezos Earth Fund, as Huber and Stafford (2022) point out. However, I think PPNY differ from the dichotomy that Huber proposes in important ways, not least in how their local work differs from the small-scale acts that seem to inform Huber's understanding of the degrowth movement.

However, rather than focusing on this, I want to instead make a case for the type of capabilities that PPNY are wielding, as I think it is unfair to dismiss the work of the coalition because of its success in tapping expertise. In this way, I am also building on Miller (2006: 245) who argues that "the nature of alternatives to neoliberalism must be determined by resistance movements themselves as they work to construct new forms and spaces of democratic governance". In underscoring the need to understand how movements define themselves and develop their strategies and capacities, this quote helps to understand PPNY's expertise as not inherently elite, but rather a grounded reflection of the terrain in which they are operating. Strategic decisions about expertise and organisational forms must be evaluated in context, especially given the hostile terrain and reduced public sphere that movements now operate in (Mayer, 2006)As mentioned, a member of the NYC-ESWG works as a lobbyist and could therefore provide helpful expertise when the coalition were figuring out how to move the BRPA through the various chambers of power inside the NYS Legislature:

> *"Sometimes I was offering people advice and I had to say, 'This is just my experience, this is just what I had noticed. This is not necessarily true, take it with a grain of salt.' And it was scary. I remember, I had an early conversation with someone where I tried to explain my understanding and background. And I saw the strategy that was developed after a meeting, and it looked a lot like what I had said [laughs]. And I was a little worried, I was like, 'I know some stuff, but I might be wrong' or, you know 'My knowledge is experiential, it's not always correct.'"* (Interview 07)

A similarly collaborative exercise as the one depicted in Section 5.3.1 is reflected in this quote, which describes the creation of an inside strategy for getting the BPRA through Albany. The participant is repeatedly emphasising that his "*knowledge is experiential*" (Interview 07), and it is this emphasis that I want to focus on. Here, we can see an example of minor theory in practice: rather than aiming for mastery (Katz, 1996: 490), the participant is emphasising that they do not know everything about the process. That the strategy was then drafted based on this potentially limited understanding is further indication of the messy '*D-I-Y everything'* nature of the campaign (Crossan et al., 2016).

The participant in the quote above went on to describe further help the NYC-ESWG got from DSA-endorsed NYS Senators and Assembly Members, who could provide "*a lot of great knowledge, not just about process, but also about who talks to who, who's close to who, what does it mean when someone says this? Are they being honest with you? Are they implying something that you don't know?*" (Interview 07).

The emphasis on experiential knowledge was central for this participant, mainly because of their conceptualisation of power in the legislature:

> *"A lot of experience in this legislative work is anecdotal. So, it'll be, 'I did this before, and this is my experience.' And sometimes it's different from other people's experiences. The legislature, intentionally, is difficult to understand so that leadership maintains power. Because, in this case, knowledge really is power. Understanding how things work and why they work that way can help you pass a bill or block it. And leadership, intentionally, obscures these things and makes them difficult to understand because they don't want other people accessing power. So, we had instances where a lot of people were saying, not contradictory, but different take aways, from their experiences. And we had to blend those together."* (Interview 07)

Understanding the expertise in the PPNY coalition as experiential and contingent upon collaboration is crucial for considering the type of redistributive futurity that the project they are building points towards. It can also be understood as part of the creation of an alternative technocracy by a coalition seeking to *D-I-Y everything*, as discussed in Section 5.3.1. Rather than focusing solely on the expert knowledge that coalition volunteers and their allies in Albany can bring, the more relational and everyday realities of power inside the NYS Legislature are similarly emphasised as crucial knowledge: *"Who talks to who? Who's close to who?"* (Interview 07).

Again, this is minor theory in practice. In her work on relational urbanism and minor theory, Cristina Temenos (2017: 580) argues for conceptualisations of power which understand that it is both produced *by* and a product *of* social relations and

interactions. In this, we can avoid falling into the trap of binary thinking which figures power as either/or (e.g., centralised or decentralised) (Allen, 2004 in Temenos, 2017: 580). In this case, a more nuanced understanding of expertise – as anecdotal, relational, and contingent upon collaboration – goes some way in countering the critiques of credentialed, professional knowledge in left climate movements because it demonstrates that highly developed policy knowledge is just one of the types of knowledge that prefigurative climate movements need.

By attempting to disrupt the intentional obscuring of how power functions, PPNY are seeking a different type of engagement with the state, one that does not fit snugly into the either/or of "anti-system radical" versus policy-oriented technocrat (Huber, 2022). It is an engagement with the state that can be understood as engaging with the state in a minor way: a becoming. In disrupting the often-hidden ways in which power functions, the inside organising of PPNY reveals that there are actually multiple trajectories that exist within what may seem like rigid state forms (Temenos, 2017: 580). In this, they demonstrate that the trajectories for social movements attempting to grapple with the state are persistently "in the process of being made" (Massey, 2005: 9 in Temenos, 2017: 580).

Similarly, that PPNY developed their strategy based on the knowledge that was available to them and the moment that they were in – one in which there is not an organised leftist union tradition yet, but simply a looming climate catastrophe and a political system of government generally opposed to public intervention – can be understood through another of Katz's (1996) tenets of minor theory, that of "renegade cartographies", in which politics are mapped "from within situated positions that are also able to be collectively read and taken up" (Temenos, 2017: 579). In orienting its practices towards "the emergent and the prospective (what has not-yet become)" (Anderson, 2017: 594), PPNY are building out a more redistributive future from the present, contesting and transforming power where it is held in favour of more democratic public alternatives.

5.3 Electoral Strategy

So far, this chapter has discussed elements of PPNY's outside campaign, namely its agonistic and confrontational tactics, and its inside campaign, specifically focusing on how the BPRA was drafted, and how the coalition built expertise to lobby for the bill inside the NYS Legislature. Now, I want to turn to another key element of the campaign, which is the electoral strategy of DSA. By running candidates from the movement, DSA and PPNY are attempting to tackle the existing political system head-on, going beyond simply protesting a lack of action, to move from the outside to the inside of the very structures that they are challenging.

It is in NYS where DSA have had their greatest electoral successes. As of January 2023, New York had eight DSA-endorsed representatives in the NYS Legislature (out of a total of two hundred and thirteen): more than any other state, and more than New York has had in over a century (Featherstone, 2023). Some of these have been in office since 2018, while the most recent were elected in the 2022 mid-term elections. The primaries of the 2022 elections, in which the candidate who will appear on the ballot is selected through a vote, occurred during my time in New York conducting fieldwork, and comprised a major element of my data collection. The elections and primaries were utilised as a key battleground in the campaign around BPRA and public power. In 2022, a slate of candidates were endorsed by DSA under the umbrella of 'Green New York.' Five candidates for the Assembly were endorsed, based across NYC and the Hudson Valley, as were two NYC-based State Senators.

Prior to this moment, the campaign to pass the BPRA had been reliant upon more outside forms of organising, as I demonstrated in Section 5.2, as well as through attempts to lobby non-DSA representatives inside the Legislature. However, attempts to mobilise representatives in favour of the BPRA did not always go to plan. As one person mentioned in a strategy debrief in the summer of 2021: "*Coming to a lobbying meeting and realising your elected don't give a shit about you is a very radicalising experience*" (Observation 04). At another event which was recapping the PPNY campaign to the wider DSA audience in the summer of 2021, the participant who works as a lobbyist was providing an overview of the

difficulties getting the BPRA through Albany – due in part to a lack of enough strong champions inside the Legislature, as well as the control that Democratic leadership have over the legislative priorities, and thus what gets passed and what doesn't. Another member wrote in the Zoom chat (in all capital letters):

"THAT'S THAT ZERO SUM ALBANY ENERGY WE WERE TALKING ABOUT

ONLY ONE BILL, ONLY ONE THING CAN BE A THING" (Observation 03)

The feeling that elected representatives "*don't give a shit about you*" combined with an understanding of the legislature as *"zero sum"* can both be understood as indicators as to why an organisation like DSA would pursue its own electoral strategy. Recent work argues that the major political parties in the US should be understood as "sites of class struggle" (Hilton, 2018: 125) due to how, rather than emerging from civil society, they are actually "akin to organs of the state itself… more similar to 'public utilities' than civil society organizations". (Hilton, 2018: 124). Indeed, the US is the only advanced capitalist democracy in which a labour-based political party was never established (Ibid: 99), and the two-party system in the US has only been strengthened by regulation which has legislated fairly high thresholds for third parties seeking ballot access (Ibid, 99). For Hilton (Ibid, 125), the left's response "must be to invent extra-party organizations that compensate for this deficiency, which develop people's potential to think, strategize, and act collectively, and can engage strategically and effectively inside the Democratic Party".

What Hilton calls for here is reflected in the actually-existing electoral strategy of DSA. While there were groups within PPNY who had differing perspectives on the usefulness of electoral strategy, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6, for now there are three interesting facets of the electoral strategy that are useful to discuss, due to how they demonstrate the broader redistributive futurity that social movements such as PPNY are pointing towards. The first two of these pertain to the development of "people's potential to think, strategize, and act collectively" (Ibid, 125) through the use of elections and canvassing as a means to control climate messaging, with the politics of the encounter examined as a way to comprehend the construction of political alternatives. The third relates to

engaging "strategically and effectively inside the Democratic Party" (Ibid, 125). To investigate this, I will examine the relationship DSA-elected officials have with the NYS Legislature and the organisation of DSA. This, I will argue, should be understood as a project of 'co-governance', in which the DSA Assembly Members and State Senators are continually working within, against and beyond the confines of the Democratic Party and state politics.

5.3.1 Controlling the message

"How do you do climate organising in a socialist way?" (Observation 03). This was a question facing NYC DSA in 2019. The NYC chapter and Albany chapter of DSA had since 2017 been members of New York Renews – a coalition of over 370 unions, environmental justice organisations and community groups formed in 2015 (Schaeffer, 2017), which was the driving force behind the CLCPA. The years since the election of Trump had been meaningful to the organisation. In 2018, the New York left began to be "*taken more seriously*" (Observation 03) after the elections of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez at the national level and Julia Salazar to the State Senate. By 2019, the NYC Council had passed its own version of a Green New Deal with a bundle of ten bills under the banner of the Climate Mobilization Act (Enking, 2019). This was followed at the state level with the landmark CLCPA. While being a member of NY Renews had been useful for making *"connections in the NY climate movement [while] also figure[ing] out [their] thinking"* (Observation 03), the organisation was also realising "*that it was not enough to be part of coalitions [they] did not control*" (Observation 03). The bills that were created by PPNY were an answer to the question of doing climate organising in a socialist way; the BPRA and NYUDA would position "*capitalism as the root cause of the climate crisis*" (Observation 03), utilising decarbonisation to get public control of the grid while highlighting worker control of the economy.

As previously mentioned, the campaign to pass the BPRA took multiple legislative sessions: at the end of the 2021 session, the BPRA had passed the Senate but not the Assembly. At a wrap-up call in June 2021, members were beginning to vocalise the need for an electoral strategy to bolster the efforts to pass the BPRA. "*Climate needs to be part of our electoral project, we need to run our own candidates from the movement*" (Observation 03). At this call, participants were asked to

share a moment of the campaign they were most proud of. People mentioned "*changing the conversation around environmentalism in New York*", "*raising so many people's consciousness around public power, including my own*" and "*shift[ing] the Overton window big time!*" While these quotations are indicative of the types of message-controlling that PPNY were seeking through the creation of its own pieces of legislation, other comments – including one from a person who said their "*favorite thing about this session is, we have learned enough to tear it all down going forward and build the future we need*" – point towards how the campaign evolved in the 2022 session.

This process can be understood as relational and evolving. Throughout the campaign, the PPNY Coalition and the DSA chapters which made it up were consistently figuring out the whereabouts of power (Allen, 2004). Joining the NY Renews Coalition, drafting the bills, and then deciding to run their own climate candidates, was a processual development in which the *doing* provided the coalition with the experience and knowledge needed to recalibrate strategy in the periods between legislative sessions. In experimenting from session to session – starting outside and then building an electoral strategy in which the issue of public power was central – we can see the evolving experiment of a prefigurative project in action. Indeed, the *between* is an important space for social movements to reside in – not only as minor position between expertise and inexperience, the state and social movements, inside and outside, but as a temporality which expands the remit of what state action is possible. The time between the 2021 and 2022 legislative sessions was a time of learning and recalibration for PPNY: of celebration of previous successes and planning to "*tear it down going forward*".

In March 2022 the Green New York slate was launched online via Zoom call. One-hundred people attended this call, which was aimed at DSA members and supporters. At the launch, all candidates seeking election introduced themselves, with many of them doing so through a distinct frame of environmental justice. Candidates from the Hudson Valley spoke about Black and brown low-income communities "*carrying the weight of things which other communities would rally against*", while emphasising that "*working-class labour is at the centre of our world, and deserve all its fruits*" (Observation 06). Consumer demands were linked with climate concerns by those seeking election and the hosts of the call,

who stated that *"it's not just our pockets that pay the price"* of rate-hikes that pay for the building of gas infrastructure. By differentiating the burden of environmental justice communities, the candidates from the Green New York slate can be understood to be invoking a recognition of difference (Fraser, 2000; 2004).

Fraser argues that "progressive neoliberalism" ignores many of the redistributive aspects of addressing inequality which would be more disruptive to the status quo. In positioning the messaging of the Green New York slate as an alternative politics of recognition, I am not arguing that candidates were paying lip service to notions of environmental and economic justice. Rather, they are building a new framework of messaging around these injustices, and articulating a vision in which injustices are addressed through redistributive forms that directly challenge neoliberalised political economy. This is a politics of recognition which overtly challenges the progressive neoliberalism of the NYS Democratic Party, which alienates and marginalises the concerns of working class and low-income New Yorkers who bear the majority of environmental justice burdens. As such, creating an alternative politics of recognition is an important aspect of the redistributive futurity that is being built by PPNY, and we can again see here an empirical example which aligns with Fraser's (2021) calls for anti-capitalist climate organising that transcends environmentalism.

5.3.2 Canvassing and the importance of the encounter

> *"I've been loosely involved with things like rate cases in the past. And I think that they're almost traps at this point. It's just so hard to build transformative change in those rooms. They're so filtered, who can reach them? I think that's something where DSA's electoral strategy has shown itself to be more powerful, because you can reach just a much broader base that way. You're playing in your own terrain, rather than in the rooms that they've created."* (Interview 31)

Throughout this thesis, I have discussed procedural justice, one of the core tenets of energy justice, which includes the ways in which decision-makers engage with communities (Jenkins et al, 2016). The mechanisms of inclusion through which just outcomes are achieved include local knowledge mobilization, greater

information disclosure, and better institutional representation. In Chapter 4, I discussed how rate cases can be understood as procedurally unjust, due to how affected communities are deprived of meaningful participation (Nagra et al., 2022: 382).

The quote above provides a useful overview for this section, in which I will analyse another key element of the electoral strategy utilised by DSA to build a base around the BPRA and public power. In the quote, the participant is talking about how electoral strategy can reach "*a much broader base*" of people than those present in the tightly controlled rooms created by the state which were discussed in Chapter 4, as well those outside the activist bubble, parties who are equally crucial to engage. One of the principal ways this happens is through canvassing – whereby volunteers go door-to-door to campaign in Senate or Assembly election races, and for petitioning around the BPRA itself. In this, activists are harnessing the power of the *encounter*. This is both an encounter between those who knock on the door and those that answer, as well as between the activists on the canvasses. Indeed, it was through my own encounters with PPNY and DSA on canvasses that I developed a rich sense of the campaign, the people involved with it, and, arguably, the scale of the challenge. It was through encountering the campaign around the BPRA on its own terms that I developed my thinking around the prefigurative and collaborative democratic experiment. As such, the two spaces of encounter – between activists, and between activists and those canvassed – should be understood as central.

The encounter figures centrally into literature focused on diversity, difference and prejudice (Wilson, 2017: 451). While the encounter is often defined in an oppositional way, the coming-together of people in an encounter is also a key feature (Merrifield, 2012: 270). This is where the encounter holds political potential – because of the possibilities that are opened when people come together. As such, encounters should be understood as inherently public and relational and, crucially, fleeting or temporary, bringing a surprise or rupture (Merrifield 2013; Wilson, 2017).

5.3.2.1 Suburban encountering

To explicate the potentiality of the encounters that DSA volunteers have with the people they canvass, I want to focus on the canvassing I did outside NYC. In the Hudson Valley, I attended canvasses for a DSA climate organiser running to unseat a 29-year incumbent Assembly Member. In Long Island, the canvasses were specifically related to the passage of the BPRA; I joined a small group across a number of weekends to ask people to take online action and send an email petition to their State Senator. Appendix 4 provides an overview of MiniVAN, the canvassing app.

Much of the literature on the politics of the encounter positions it as a specifically urban phenomenon (Wilson, 2017; Merrifield, 2013; Massey, 2005), with "the encounter" considered the "signature event in city life" (Shapiro, 2010: 1, in Wilson, 2017: 453). Analyses of urban encounters focus on the anonymity of urban life, and the "serendipity" of the chance encounter (Wilson, 2017: 453-454). However, in positioning canvassing as an enactment of the encounter, the doorstep of suburban homes is perhaps more interesting as a kind of border space. If suburbs are undertheorized sites of political struggle, with suburban political issues often assumed to be conservative (Carpio et al., 2011), the act of canvassing in them can be read as a moment of rupture. Indeed, the likelihood of a chance encounter in the suburbs is lesser. Even in more densely populated areas while on canvasses during fieldwork, I found the architectural landscape of the suburbs to be one of isolation. Houses were detached, driveways were lengthy and spacious. Pavements were few, as were people outside. In observation notes from a canvas in the Hudson Valley, where the sun went down as we were finishing the 'turf' – the concentrated area, usually a few streets in a larger neighbourhood, where the MiniVAN app generates a list of named contacts – I was struck by how dark the neighbourhood fell, noting, "*the only light came from people's houses or from huge car headlights*" (Observation 16).

Wilson (2017: 456) states that "a lot of work on the encounter takes places at the border… where limits are marked and lines are drawn". Bringing the language of environmental justice and eco-socialism (even implicitly, through an explicit rejection of the privatisation of energy infrastructure) to the border of the

doorstep, is thus a "momentary destabilisation" (Ibid). This is a destabilisation between the private and the public in more ways than one: in terms of both public power over private ownership, and the private home and the civic, public outside.

It is worth bearing in mind here that the encounter between canvasser and suburban resident is not inherently a chance encounter – the canvasser is a representative of an organisation or a cause, and as such has a responsibility to accurately represent these dimensions. But the notion of a civic, public outside is important to consider in regard to the encounters had at suburban canvasses. Eliasoph (2009: 230) argues that apathy is a common feature of life in the US, with politics largely evaporated from the public sphere, and 'public' contexts marked "precisely [by] the fact that the talk there is so narrow, not at all public-minded". While this reference is somewhat dated, especially given the post-Occupy, -Bernie, -Trump, -Black Lives Matter, -Covid context in which my research was conducted, there are now far more factors keeping suburban dwellers isolated. Ours is now an era of telecommuting, virtual classrooms and even online grocery shopping. Many of the people who were canvassed reflected a similar depoliticization. After one such canvass, on a rainy evening in Woodstock, the person I had been buddied up with remarked that everyone she had spoken to was "*a disaffected liberal just nodding at [her]*" (Observation 15). My own notes reflected this: "*People are broadly pro-public power and anti-Central Hudson, but do they care enough to actually vote on June 28th?*" (Observation 15).

However, it is precisely because of this sense of atomised disaffection that I believe the suburban canvasses have much to offer. In bringing an alternative politics to the doorstep, a public space of encounter was made[10]. This follows Merrifield (2013: 73) who argues that:

"…Spaces are made public by people encountering one another in them. We can rename them spaces of encounter, spaces in which social absence and social presence attain a visible structuration and political coherence… The relationship

[10] The same can be said for the urban doorstep, but the very nature of suburban living encloses people into more atomised lives – demonstrated with the privileging of the car over public transport, itself rooted in racialisation as demonstrated in Chapter 4.

can only ever be reciprocal, a dialectic of inside and outside, of here and there, of absence and presence."

This reciprocal relationship can also be understood as a becoming: a moment of surprise which creates the possibility for an opening (Merrifield, 2013; Wilson, 2017). It is important to note here that I am not able to measure what these doorstep encounters do. Once a door is closed, the volunteer logs data on MiniVAN: enthusiastic supporters can be followed up with, invited to join the campaign, while vehement opposition can be noted so other volunteers don't visit the house again. However, the vast majority of people fall somewhere in the middle. As one participant on a canvass in Long Island remarked:

> *"I come out canvassing and a lot of people don't want to answer doors, but in three hours you might have ten conversations. They might not then do what you've asked! But you've planted the seed which then might sprout down the line."* (Observation 21).

This seed represents the prefigurative becoming of the PPNY social movement, and of the encounter, each of which are about possibilities which "have neither definitive beginnings nor ends" (Merrifield, 2013: 63). The unknowing-ness of these encounters is also inherently messy, experimental. It is not even as simple as pointing to where candidates won their elections as proof of successful encounters – there were multiple candidates each with dozens of volunteers, and not all of them won. Indeed, in a district in NYC, for a candidate who did not win, a participant told me about a style of relational organising they had been testing out in the late stages of the campaign.

> *"We would pair canvassers to identify specific organic leaders in the community. And then rather than just doing blanket canvasses of neighbourhoods, we would focus on relationship-building with organic leaders, in churches, schools, community groups, things like that. And they would do weekly check-ins, to try and build deeper relationships that wouldn't disappear after the election is over. So rather than just giving people a bunch of Get Out the Vote texts and calls, building deeper relationships. It was an experiment; it was only in the waning weeks of the*

campaign. But it seemed remarkably successful. And I think it's something we'll pursue in future campaigns because it builds. It becomes more organising rather than just mobilising." (Interview 31)

In this late-stage experiment, for a losing campaign, we can see the kernel at the core of the encounter, and of all prefigurative experimentation – that it comes "without guarantees; potential outcomes can never be foreseen in advance" (Merrifield, 2013: 64). It is only through a willingness to repeatedly come together that the potential for political alternatives can be created. This is not a teleological process that can be measured with certainty, but rather a process of continual shifting and changing, in which the only thing that remains the same is that people are willing to encounter one another.

5.3.2.2 Encountering each other

The other space of encounter that occurred as part of the electoral strategy surrounding the BPRA was between activists on canvasses. Often, canvasses were spaces of learning, of emotion, and of friendship. The relational and emotional links between people play a crucial role in the wider democratic project. Rather than simply electing representatives who will pass progressive policy once in office, the affective solidarity that is built at canvasses and other campaign events serves a more prefigurative function. It is the space where alternative ways of being with one another are developed, and where ideas which constitute a more redistributive futurity are not only honed but held in community.

In work looking at the Occupy protests as moments of encounter, Andy Merrifield (2013: 73) argues that the groups of people who were encountering each other at Zuccotti Park were expressing their "political ambitions before the means to realize them [had] been created or invented". The canvass is not a novel political space in the same way that the makeshift libraries, canteens and meeting spaces of the parks and plazas of the Occupy protests were. However, in creating a space for unrealised political imaginaries to be voiced and shared, the canvass format became a space of empathetic acknowledgement of the validity of these unrealised futures.

One set of canvasses I attended, for a candidate running in Lower Manhattan, had found an effective way of addressing the difficulties of the experience. At the start of each session, the people attending – generally around 15-20 – would gather and introduce themselves. People would share their name, pronouns, and why they were there. The quote below is a snapshot of the types of reasons given, and it reflects the common theme for many attendees: wanting to participate in the building of a transformative political project.

> *"It's bigger than us individually. It's nice that I love [the candidate] and that I can talk about getting my friend elected and passing this transformative legislation. But it's also building a movement bigger than that."* (Observation 19)

After introductions, there would be a short training session. This included strategies to get into buildings, good talking points, and what the 'ask' of contacts was. Many of the canvasses were specifically climate focused, run by the NYC-ESWG, and came with specific canvassing for climate trainings:

> *"We talk about things like how to use clues at doors, you know, if there are stickers on the door, or there are kids' shoes outside of the door. Is the plaster falling out of the ceiling? Does the elevator not work? How to use those things, to anticipate the best questions to ask people… All these things give you clues in terms of what your opening angle can be, so that someone stays with you. And you can hook them. What we teach people is that there are all these kind of elegant ways you can tie climate to whatever you've already talked about. A lot of people talk about trash in the street, right? Like, you ask them what their big issue is, and they're like, 'Oh, I'm so sick of all the trash on the street.' And you can talk about that. And you can empathise with them and talk about how that's a problem. And then very easily be like, you know, 'And this relates to another issue that [the candidate] is really passionate about, and that's climate change. Because these emissions that these companies are spewing into the air, it's kind of like trash in the air, right?' You can kind of make these connections in, like, relatively elegant ways."* (Interview 24)

Rather than being purely informational, the trainings were emotive and relational. Canvasses can be draining, both physically and emotionally, which I have reflected on in my methodology. Though the people targeted were registered Democrats who had recently voted, not every reception at the door was a warm one. People can be unfriendly, rude, and somewhat nervous as to why you are at their door and how you know their name. Similarly, sometimes no one answers the door. This leads to a particular type of exhaustion, a feeling of time wasted. The energy you've mustered to knock on the door of hundreds of strangers, ready to talk and listen to them dissipates slowly into a tense adrenaline that's hard to shake. At one training session ahead of a canvass, the candidate running reminded everyone in attendance, *"If you can't get into a building don't be disheartened. If you get yelled at, or chased out, don't worry. We all come back here and eat our feelings and remember why we're all here in the first place"* (Observation 17).

At the end of the sessions there would be a group debrief and people would share stories of difficult encounters, reflecting on how tough the experience had been on them. Others would share funny anecdotes of sneaking into buildings with doormen, making it past front desks without being questioned. At one debrief a canvassing pair told a story about a woman they'd spoken to who was enthusiastic about the campaign, saying:

> *"It just warmed your heart a little bit! It was awesome, especially being the first door we hit after getting brutally kicked out of building after building. It felt good."* (Observation 17)

What I want to demonstrate across these three examples from the start and end of canvasses in Lower Manhattan is that these are spaces filled with care, and that making them spaces of care is another way to build the deeper affective bonds of prefiguration (hooks, 1999; Bhardwaj, 2024; Martins, 2022; Magnelli, 2022). When talking about the ways in which people involved in the Occupy protests were encountering each other, expressing as-yet unrealised political ambitions, Merrifield (2013: 73) positions such an expression as "a hitherto unknown and unacknowledged mode of solidarity latent within everyday life, a new form of empathetic human relationship—of *common notions* based on *adequate ideas*" (Ibid – emphasis in original text). This empathetic human relationship is what I felt

at the canvasses. People were supportive of one another, and there was repeated emphasis on the canvass itself being a minor part of the wider push towards ecosocialism. The quotation from the volunteer about *"building a movement bigger than"* simply electing a candidate, and indeed the candidate himself talking about remembering *"why we're all here in the first place"* are two examples of this.

These empathetic encounters serve a bigger function than welcoming new faces and encouraging people to canvas again, and instead are a way of enacting the different type of politics that PPNY and DSA are building towards in the present day. Drawing on Deleuze (1990), Merrifield (2013: 73) argues that adequate ideas are "necessarily joyful, necessarily active" expressive of affections that overcome "sadness and passivity". At one canvass, an attendee gave their reason for being there:

> *"I think about all the time in my life I've felt like I don't know how to get involved, and even feeling like a better world is not possible. But coming here and being with like-minded people makes me feel like it is."* (Observation 19)

Here, we can see someone overcoming the sadness and passivity of the current moment, with the relational and affective solidarity of the canvass therefore able to be regarded as the 'adequate idea', building towards a 'common notion' of redistributive futurity. Indeed, that joy is a central element of the creation of adequate ideas is also why the canvasses, and post-canvass socials, can be understood as central to the building of an affective solidarity.

Though the use of joyful expression (and specifically queer-coded joy) will be analysed more deeply in Chapter 6, investigating the usefulness of joy in the building of an affective solidarity for a prefigurative social movement is pertinent here, due to the ways in which active, expressive joy can "lead us closer to the ability to activate our own power" (Merrifield, 2013: 73). The canvass became a space where people's individual power could be activated, and I witnessed as people went from first-time volunteers to shift leaders running canvasses themselves. In one interview with someone who had gone from never canvassing

before to running their own session, they explained to me that the more long-standing organisers within the campaign:

> *"… don't make you feel alienated for your lack of knowledge. If that's something you want to learn about, then there's always gonna be someone to talk to you about that. I mean, I came in aligned politically because for me socialism is what makes the most moral sense. But my lack of theoretical knowledge hasn't hindered me. It hasn't hindered me to getting to where I was, or making me feel like I couldn't give more, or that it my time was less valuable. And now tomorrow, I have my first team lead. So like, if you're here, they recognise that you're willing to give your time and be part of the movement and the campaign, then you have a seat at the table."* (Interview 26)

Chapter 6 will address what it means for the movement surrounding PPNY to be made up of so many people new to the ideas of socialism. However, I want to focus on it here for another reason. As outlined in Chapter 2, though the project that I am theorising is one of redistributive futurity, this is a futurity that is grounded in the current moment. While having relative newcomers leading sessions could be understood as messy, potentially troublesome, I think it is this throwing together of volunteer capacity that makes the movement so dynamic and agile.

Adequate ideas are "notions we understand as agreeing with our body and our mind" and as such "there is a necessary complementarity between bodily feeling and conceptual understanding" (Merrifield, 2013: 74). This is reflected in the ways in which the participant in the above quotation talks about their moral alignment with socialism, and indeed through many of the empathetic and joyful sharings from canvasses. Ensuring the literal sustainability of the movement around PPNY that DSA means giving fresh faces leadership experience. This is also demonstrative of the type of expressive, affective solidarity that serves a more prefigurative sustaining function.

5.3.3 Co-governing

While the primary races of various candidates offered an opportunity to speak about the BPRA on the doorsteps – and candidates and elected representatives themselves acknowledged that their reasoning for running was to help pass progressive policy such as the BPRA – the role of DSA elected representatives once in office goes beyond the scope of the BPRA and the campaign to pass it. I contend that the legislation of the BPRA can be understood as a vehicle for a broader democratic vision, and the Socialists in Office (SIO) slate represent another important aspect of that. DSA elected representatives in the New York State Legislature can be read as taking a minor position, and demonstrating a novel engagement that can be understood as *co-governing*.

5.3.3.1 Co-governing between elected representatives

One example of this is in the relationships that the elected representatives have with each other. Just as the candidates running for election ran as the Green New York slate, once elected, they work together as the SIO slate. One participant has been a member of the Legislature since 2018 and described how the SIO "*deliberately operate differently*" in a way which "*is totally contrary to the individualist way of operating and individualist culture that exists in Albany*" (Interview 30). The participant described a "*collective decision-making process*" that the SIO undertake around decision-making, voting and public action. To do this, she explained:

> *"We have established somewhat formal ways and habits of communicating and working together. We meet every week, throughout the year, not only during the legislative session, but throughout the time that we're not in Albany. We have retreats outside of the legislative session, to plan for the upcoming session. We're really just more deliberate in the way that we work together. It seems simple, but this isn't the way the Democratic Party operates. That's certainly true, it just doesn't function the way that you would expect a party to."* (Interview 30).

In understanding the collective decision-making process that the SIO undertake together as co-governance, the strictly demarcated spaces of power that constitute the local state are opened up. Though DSA do not conceptualise themselves as municipalist, I think much of the co-governance can be understood through a municipalist framing. As a body of literature, new municipalism is similarly praxis-oriented, emerging from the democratic experimentation of the wave of 'citizen platforms' which swept Europe and Latin America from 2014. In taking the municipal level as a "strategic entry point" (Russell, 2019: 991) for leftist challenge to and struggle with neoliberal austerity politics, the new municipalist movement can be understood as seeking to go beyond the mere implementation of progressive policies, towards a breaking-open of power concentration through directly democratic means (Bianchi, 2023: 2117).

Shaped by anarchist, eco-socialist and feminist principles (Thompson, 2021), municipalist thinkers argue that current power structures can only be "reconfigured" through "everyday practices" (Roth and Shea Baird: 2017). This is the minor theory of the SIO slate, who are engaging in methods which *"seem simple"* in the everyday – meeting to collaborate and make collective decisions – to challenge the highly individualised nature of being a legislator in NYS. In creating small spaces such as these, the SIO slate can be understood to be working within and beyond the existing structures of the state.

This is not only about holding a shared political agenda, although that agenda is surely distinct from more establishment Democratic politics, but also about a very different way of doing the job of a legislator. In the previous chapter, I explored how the notion of "*doing your job*" was a common complaint raised by members of the PPNY coalition in regard to regulation and the politics of NYS. This was a similarly common refrain when participants spoke to me about the legislative timeframe. The NYS Legislature is in session from January to June each year, and multiple participants voiced frustration that it is only in these months that representatives 'do their job'.

That the SIO slate operate outside of these time frames – *"not only during the legislative session, but throughout the time that we're not in Albany. We have retreats outside of the legislative session, to plan for the upcoming session"* –

represents a rejection of the chrononormativities (Freeman, 2010 in Urban Institute, 2021) inherent in the legislative process itself, which I introduced in my conceptual framework in Chapter 2. As mentioned in Chapter 2, challenging the temporalities of the state is important for prefigurative projects, especially ones which necessarily engage with the short-term cycles of legislative politics. That the SIO work to sustain their bonds of collaboration outside of those short cycles is indicative of an attempt to shift beyond short-term wins within the neoliberal state system, looking instead to further political horizons and towards a type of politics that is collaborative and deliberative.

5.3.3.2 Creating 'power-with' through co-governance

This deliberative and collaborative politics is extended beyond the SIO slate, and outside of the legislature itself, leading to the second aspect of the co-governing relationship that the SIO slate and DSA are attempting to create: one which is accountable to the movement from which the candidates emerged. This can again be understood through a radical municipalist framing, which seeks to shift the distribution of power "from a top-down 'power-over' to a bottom-up 'power-with' model" (Roth et al.,2020 in Roth et al., 2023: 2013).

The power-with model of co-governance that DSA elected representatives have with the movement goes deeper than just relying on the movement for endorsements and election volunteers. Elected representatives maintain a deep coordination with the movement through local events like chapter book clubs, while also much larger town-hall style events where "*everyday people and certainly socialists who we're accountable to"* are brought "*into the legislative process*" (Interview 30). In these events, the SIO "*share information with members of the organisation*" about the workings of power, while also "*receiving feedback and ideas from membership*" (Interview 30).

In sharing information with the members of the organisation, the SIO slate sought to make visible norms and knowledges that are usually hidden from public awareness. This unlocking of hidden knowledge was often done through very simple methods, such as teaching about the role of central staff (a bureaucratic arm of the NYS Legislature which will be discussed in Chapter 6) or the bill edit

process; how discussions with Democratic leadership or labour unions were progressing; or examples from constituents who had approached their representative from the SIO with a local issue, and had worked together to join up with resources in the legislature to pass a bill to rectify it.

> *"Professionals own the knowledge, grassroots organisers do the work. It is about getting those that do the work to have the knowledge."* (Observation 05)

With the quotation above, from a town-hall-style event after the BPRA failed to pass in 2021, I want to demonstrate how these events are directly challenging neoliberal technocracy, in the same simple ways that were discussed in Section 5.3.1. In changing who 'owns' knowledge about how power functions inside of the state, the difficulties faced around how power functions within the NYS Legislature (which will be expanded upon in the next chapter) were utilised as a "*medium to democratise information about how Albany works*" (Observation 25) to "*inspire people to believe that Albany can work for them*" (Observation 05).

At another SIO call, one of the SIO slate said, *"[We are] rejecting the notion that elected officials are the ones who pass the bills and working-class constituents are passive and not engaged. [We are] helping people to self-organise so that we can govern together*" (Observation 05). When this is contrasted with the quotation from Chapter 2, from a non-DSA elected representative, who described "*most people from most backgrounds*" as not wanting "*to think about politics or government as much as… DSA*" (Interview 18), there is also a clear rejection of recognitional governance.

Through this we can see the prefigurative aspects of the movement around PPNY. Elected representatives are seeking to figure out the mechanisms of power in order to pass legislation such as the BPRA, while consistently maintaining an engagement with the social movement that exists outside of the legislature. Here, elected representatives are maintaining an oppositional relationship to the

mechanisms and norms of neoliberal state power. While both of the elected representatives I interviewed acknowledged that doing co-governance in this way was "*very exhausting*" (Interview 33) due to the amount of time and effort it took to be in coordination with a movement, they also reflected that it is the "*necessary aspect of this politics*" (Interview 33).

> *"This is why we went to Albany. It is not to become a part of that world…. it is to bring that world closer to ours"* (Interview 33)

In seeking to "*bring that world closer to ours*", the SIO slate are doing the work of prefiguration by seeking to move against and beyond the existing confines of the formal institution in a minor way in order to transform them. This is the foundation of a redistributive futurity. A movement endorses and elects representatives, who then work to pass progressive policy, while also working in seemingly simple ways to unlock usually hidden knowledge about that system to spread it outwards, while maintaining reciprocal links with the movement which underpins their electoral success.

5.3.3.3 Co-governance and affective solidarities

Maintaining these links goes beyond pure political strategy, to a more affective solidarity which in turn serves a sustaining role. Working in ways which are "*totally contrary*" (Interview 30) to existing norms has meant that many "*DSA politicians are not making friends [laughs]… legislators are uniquely hostile to them"* (Interview 07). This was mentioned by the Assembly Member I interviewed:

> *"Albany is not just a politically lonely place, it is also a physically very lonely place where you go to this state capitol, and you are surrounded by a system that is not welcoming to you. And nor should it be, because we are not there to become a part of that system."* (Interview 33)

Consider that excerpt in relation to the description of the town halls:

> *"And in these Zoom calls, in these moments where you get to speak to hundreds of members, you really do get to feel that warm embrace of a*

mass movement organisation, which gives you the energy required to keep moving." (Interview 33)

Emotive language including feelings of love – "*we need to carry that love for our comrades in everything we do*" (Interview 25) – was used by multiple participants who were DSA candidates or elected representatives. In the previous excerpts, the language evocative of "*politically lonely*" and *"physically very lonely"* feelings is countered by that of a "*warm embrace"*.

I am drawing attention to these emotional moments because they are an important aspect of the affective solidarity that is being built around PPNY, and such bonds of affection are a sustaining force for prefigurative social movements. While the redistributive project being built by PPNY and DSA is future-oriented, as all prefigurative movements are, it is also grounded in a very real present. While all of the elected members have worked in collaboration with non-DSA Democrats (itself a minor becoming in which the representatives are transformed through the institution they are transforming), being in opposition to established norms and processes positions them on the margins of, or outside of, even their own political party. This is a lonely position to hold, even with an eye on future political horizons. As such, maintaining relationships with an organisation aligned with that political horizon is likely an important sustaining and affective force.

5.3.3.4 Moving towards co-governance

A final important feature to consider about the co-governing of DSA elected representatives is that this strategy and way of governing is also new, and still an active and emerging experiment. Two examples from interviews demonstrate this, both in regard to the co-governing between members of the SIO slate, and through the power-with style of co-governance that seeks to bring everyday people into the legislative process.

When talking about the SIO slate, an Assembly Member told me:

> *"All of this is very much a work in progress, in the sense that we created the committee after we got elected. It was not a condition that we would join prior to our being elected. So now one of the changes is that when*

we're recruiting candidates now, they know full well where they're headed. But we're still trying to articulate exactly some of the more specific nuances of the committee as we move toward this idea of coordinated action." (Interview 33)

The language of *"move towards"* is again demonstrative of the minor ways in which PPNY and DSA more broadly are building a redistributive futurity. When considering the creation of the SIO committee against the previous descriptions of Albany as a lonely place, we can understand its creation as an actually existing example of affective solidarity. The SIO slate created a committee after a number of them were in office, and now new representatives running on a DSA-endorsement know that they will be entering a collaborative space. In creating a space within an existing system that was often unfriendly and oppositional, the SIO slate goes some way to ensuring that the project that DSA-endorsed elected representatives are trying to build towards is sustainable. It not only sustains elected representatives through periods of loneliness, but also sustains the project regardless of who actually makes up the SIO slate. This is a minor praxis: squeezing a collaborative way of being through the pores of established legislative norms and processes.

This is a continually evolving experiment seeking to discover the most effective methods of co-governance. The Senator I interviewed had critiques of the town halls that have been discussed in this section, explaining how she felt that the open public forums "*don't really feel adequate*" for communicating with DSA membership "*in a more comprehensive, ongoing way*", acknowledging that creating the perfect forum to do so "*takes time"* (Interview 30). I contend that the utterances of the Senator above are constitutive of a different type of politics than the recognitional form reliant upon faux consensus (Fraser, 2003, 2019; Mouffe, 2005, 2015) with arbitrary methods of participation, that I have detailed in the previous chapter. Rather than the town halls becoming performative spaces of participation, in similar ways to the rate case proceedings of the previous chapter, the Senator is reflecting upon the need to continue refining efforts to engage with the ongoing needs and concerns of the community, rather than merely creating the appearance of participatory inclusion and consensus.

This approach reflects a more substantive and authentic form of engagement, aiming for meaningful participation rather than superficial consensus. Municipalist literature is useful in understanding this shift, with "prefigurative experimentation alongside institutional innovation" positioned at "the core of radical municipalist strategy" (Roth et al., 2023: 2013; Russell and Milburn, 2018).

It is through experimentation and institutional innovation that radical municipalism attempts to "transform citizen subjectivities and ideological 'common sense'" (Ibid). The transformation of citizen subjectivities is precisely what the co-governance project I have outlined in this section is attempting. In attempting to co-govern, elected representatives are dependent upon a more politicised, participatory, and engaged base of citizens. This requires a transformation of subjectivities which are used to more prosaic engagements with the structures of democracy, mainly through voting for a representative. This will be its own evolving and changing experiment: while town halls have worked fairly well so far, there will come a point where this type of participation is no longer useful, due to shifting organisation and movement dynamics, and the ways in which the SIO slate engage will necessarily shift again.

5.4 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have analysed the campaign to pass BPRA by examining the various strategies and methods that have been used by activists. These include a confrontational outside strategy, a relational understanding of inside power and expertise, and an electoral strategy which creates a terrain for an alternative message to be spread more widely. Through this analysis, I have demonstrated that the project being built by PPNY is one of experimentation, iteration and prefiguration, engaging with broader debates on political strategy and the nature of social movements.

As articulated in my methodology, the role of the critical realist researcher comes with an understanding that all knowledge creation is partial and incomplete, given the stratified nature of reality. Consequently, throughout this chapter I have generated knowledge in a minor key, presenting only glimpses of the prefigurative becoming witnessed in my engagement with PPNY and DSA. This approach aligns

with theoretical perspectives on encounter and becoming, which teach us that prefiguration offers only glimpses of the future we aim to create.

PPNY changed strategy as they glimpsed success in one experimentation, and the process to pass the BPRA cannot be read in a teleological or chronological way. In the moment, this experimentation is felt as messy, changeable. Yet, when we enact the backwards glance (Muñoz 2009) of queer futurity, we can perhaps see the emerging of a lasting political project and imaginary. This perspective situates the PPNY campaign within broader theoretical debates on queer temporality and political experimentation, highlighting how these concepts inform and shape the understanding of contemporary social movements.

By examining the PPNY campaign's multifaceted strategies, I engage with broader theoretical and political discussions about the nature of power, resistance, and prefigurative politics. The coalition's approach, characterised by its willingness to experiment and iterate, contributes to ongoing debates about how social movements can challenge and reconfigure existing power structures. This analysis underscores the importance of embracing complexity and fluidity in political strategy, aligning with theoretical critiques of rigid, linear approaches to political change. Thus, I contribute to a deeper understanding of how social movements navigate and transform the political landscape, emphasising the importance of embracing uncertainty and fluidity in the pursuit of radical change.

The next chapter will further explore the concept of messiness by examining some of the strategic mistakes or missteps which occurred throughout the campaign. Mistakes, tensions and missteps are just as crucial to understand when building towards an alternative futurity. I will interrogate the internal dynamics of the PPNY coalition, including the tensions and disagreements which occurred over strategy and direction, unpacking why these disagreements occurred and how they were resolved.

6. Messiness' limits and queer horizons

Throughout this thesis I have advanced an understanding of the campaign to pass BPRA as processual, expressing itself first and seeking conceptualisation afterward (Gunning, 1991: 5, in Katz, 2017: 596). Though stressing that this has been a messy experiment, so far much of the experimentation has led to relatively successful outcomes. The form of the thesis encourages a linear laying out of data, which can lead to a prosaic reading of what is really a far more synergistic process: PPNY's outside strategy of protests and arrests doesn't work in passing BPRA, so the campaign switches to a savvy and highly expert inside strategy. When this doesn't work, DSA run their own candidates to challenge Democratic senators holding key committee chairs. Each time, an experimentation is a step in the right direction, and these many steps ultimately lead to the passage of the BPRA in 2023.

However, what this reading leaves out is where mistakes happen. At every stage briefly mentioned above, there were failures. Though the inside strategy saw a relational form of expertise being built, and the canvass was where activists built an affective solidarity based on joyful expressions of adequate ideas, there were still tensions and disagreements. These moments at the outer edges of experimentation, where messiness bleeds into disarray, are just as important to consider as the ones that lead to success. This is not only because of minor theory's insistence against mastery, but also because it was through missteps that certain workings of power were revealed. In this, where things failed or went wrong pointed towards an alternative way of doing.

Understanding mistakes is useful for other campaigns elsewhere, but beyond that, it is necessary to develop a picture of the campaign that includes moments that do not necessarily fit into a grand narrative of success. This aligns with Muñoz's concept of queer futurity. In being cognisant of obstacles that exist in the present moment, the future-oriented narrative which surrounds much climate action is problematised. By demonstrating that "there is not a grand story" (Urban Institute, 2021) to the organising of PPNY, but rather the possibility of multiple outcomes existing at once, I am working against notions of "monumental time"

(Ibid) which privilege heroic moments as the only markers of historical significance. This engages a queer temporality, and a queering of political action which encourages us to recognise our roles in the making of such futures, while also learning from the mistakes of the present.

This chapter will begin by examining the internal organising of the PPNY Coalition, investigating how consensus was reached and decisions were made, especially focusing on where tensions arose in this process. In Section 6.3, I will analyse how momentum was maintained through each moment of failure throughout the years-long campaign to pass the BPRA. This, I will argue, was done through specific markers and modes directly related to queerness. In Section 6.4, I will examine the limits of confrontation for prefigurative movements seeking an engagement with the state. In this, I will address where confrontational calls made by the wider DSA movement online inhibited the progress of the BPRA, as well as the ways in which confrontation can be understood in productive tension against the technocratic functioning of the local state, in the form of central staff and the committee process. Finally, in Section 6.5, I will analyse the electoral strategy. This was a key tension for some participants, and I will unpack the limits of engaging with electoral politics as a prefigurative movement. This is an important place to end my analysis, before concluding in the next chapter with some brief thoughts about the challenges of implementation and an assessment of the version of the BPRA that passed in 2023 compared with the version outlined at the beginning of this thesis.

6.1 Internal organising

In Chapter 5, I analysed the outside, inside, and electoral strategies of the campaign surrounding the BPRA. One notable area which was not discussed however, was the internal organising of the PPNY coalition and the NYC-DSA ESWG. Understanding how the PPNY coalition was built and maintained through moments of dissensus and campaign failures is important for my work, given my concern with how everyday affective moments of organising build toward a more collective and redistributive futurity.

In my conceptual framework in Chapter 2, I introduced "kinship time" (Whyte, 2017a in Urban Institute 2021) as a concept from queer theory which is helpful for analysing how solidarities in coalitions can be built and sustained beyond short-term cycles of legislative sessions. Kinship time advances an understanding of time as something that is done in collaboration, through "caring collective solidarity events" (Ibid). This way of *doing* time together is important for prefigurative social movements like PPNY. Through many small, everyday events, an affective solidarity is built between activists, grounding them in the present while maintaining an orientation towards the future, enabling the building towards structural change. These moments of kinship time are particularly useful for prefigurative social movements seeking to sustain themselves beyond not only coalitional differences and campaign failures, but also the strict temporalities of the state, referring here to the different legislative sessions in which the BPRA was active.

6.1.1 Kinship during disagreement

The kinship of the coalition is something that was made frequently apparent. The PPNY coalition was repeatedly described as different from other coalitions that the members had been part of.

> *"It really is an incredible space for organising, for community, a place to recharge. At the beginning of all of our meetings we have a check in question, it's like name, pronouns, organisation, are you okay? And if not, how can we help?... And that little thing is so much. You actually start to learn about people's lives. People will say, 'I'm really anxious today.' 'I had a loss in the family,' 'I'm struggling. I feel really overwhelmed. I'm burned out.' I remember I said something about being stressed one time. Someone really put in the chat, 'Is there any way we can help?' I was like, 'Mm, I don't think so, but thank you for asking.' I've never been in a professional environment with that level of community."* (Interview 14)

These feelings of community which permeated the coalition are an important part of the affective solidarity that I contend was built across the timespan of the campaign for the BPRA. This is significant for building a political alternative that

goes beyond a piece of legislation. The affective solidarities that were built between members of the PPNY coalition were also important in ensuring cohesion through moments of disagreement about strategy. The partners of the PPNY coalition all bring different expertise, and with that, different focus points.

> *"That's always the difficulty of needing to build mass movements or mass coalitions to win big fights, is that organisations are going to have differences in theories of change. But we need to figure out how to work together. Now, I still think regardless of whatever your organisational beliefs are, the coalition needs to have an agreed upon stance and clear theory of change. And I think that's been difficult to truly land on."* (Interview 22)

In organising in a minor way through the institutions of the present, I have described the project being built by PPNY as expressing itself first and seeking conceptualisation after (Gunning, 1991: 5, in Katz, 2017: 596). While on the one hand, this meant that the coalition was able to change strategy and adapt both to obstacles and new learning, on the other, messier elements are revealed.

> *"There's a lot of good faith and open ears and friendliness and coolness. I think the problem is that… there is a very, very big disconnect between the conversations that happen and the agreements that are reached, and then translating that into practice. I've honestly felt a little burned out, and a little frustrated, feeling like the conversations are happening, the trainings are happening, but then what that actually looks like in practice is inconsistent and contradictory… You can agree on something and then it doesn't get used, or you figure out a strategy, and for some reason, two weeks later, we're revisiting what our strategy is. So, there's a lot of rehashing, a lot of deviating from agreed upon things."* (Interview 22)

One reason that the participant above gave for the "*inconsistent and contradictory*" practice of the PPNY coalition is that a lot of the people involved were relatively new to organising. "*There's a lot of green organisers, you know? A lot of new organisers*" (Interview 22). Another participant described the coalition as "*amateurs*" (Interview 18), an idea that will be unpacked later in this chapter. Indeed, in my own observation notes I was frequently struck by how new a lot of

the people on canvasses were to socialist ideas and organising, writing at one time "*everyone is such a newbie*" (Observation 13), after multiple people I met told me that they joined DSA either after Bernie Sanders' campaign or during the pandemic.

Compared with the image of PPNY created in the previous chapter, of a coalition with very high levels of expertise, these levels of inexperience may seem counterintuitive. However, in bringing to light where different levels of experience caused tension in the internal organising of the coalition, we can again see messy solidarities being built through a continual process of doing-together, and also a deep democratic impulse at work. Central to Mouffe's (2013) concept of agonism is an embracing of the inevitability of conflict in politics. In this, she encourages an embracing of the inherent conflicts and tensions within society as a means of fostering genuine democratic engagement (Mouffe, 2013). Clashes of interests and perspectives are not only to be expected but are necessary for a truly democratic society.

Indeed, despite expressing frustration with the messiness in developing a strategy, the participant from the interview quoted above frequently referred to the people involved with the PPNY coalition as their "*comrades*". In this, there is a difference between internal tensions and disagreements within the PPNY coalition and the confrontational methods that they wielded against political opponents. The ability to maintain kinship through moments of frustration is an important part of the prefigurative potential of the coalition. It is through the encounter of continuing to organise together through these moments that there lies a deeply democratic impulse. By prefiguring on a micro-level, the agonistic, deliberative and democratic society that they want to see on a macro-level, PPNY exemplify transformation through doing (Reinecke, 2018: 1300).

Reinecke (2018: 1302) argues that the experimentation and transformation of prefigurative politics represent a break with 'Old Left' theories of change (Boggs, 1977; Franks, 2003; Maeckelbergh, 2011) which have tended to assume a linear path towards predetermined goals. But "future society cannot be theorized upfront" (Reinecke, 2018: 1302) and as such, the goal of prefigurative politics is to try out new political arrangements to see if they work (Maeckelbergh, 2011:

313 in Reinecke, 2018: 1302) through open-ended processes of doing and learning (Ibid). Though the messiness of the coalition was at times frustrating for some participants, the relative inexperience which led to these messier moments are also where a a prefigurative becoming can be glimpsed.

6.2 Celebrating failure

In Chapter 3, I outlined how an abductive research process led me to incorporate queer theory into my conceptual framework, focusing on a particularly affective encounter during an initial research interview. Another moment where I began to expand my thinking around the campaign to pass the BPRA came at the end of the 2021 legislative session. Many of the participants I had interviewed had been working on the bill for multiple years at that point and were confident that the BPRA would pass. Yet, the session closed without a vote on the bill in the Senate or Assembly, and it became the first time that the BPRA failed during my time conducting fieldwork.

At a campaign wrap-up call in June 2021, however, the mood was ebullient. As I logged onto the Zoom, that summer's hit pop song – 'Good 4 U' by Olivia Rodrigo – blasted through my laptop speakers. People were asked to introduce themselves in the chat box with their name, pronouns, neighbourhood, and one moment of the campaign they were most proud of. In my own observation notes, I wrote *"It feels very celebratory! Joyful and excited"* (Observation 03). The same thing occurred in June 2022, at an event for DSA members which served a similar post-mortem function when, at the end of the 2022 session, the BPRA passed the Senate but was not brought to the Assembly floor for a vote (which will be discussed in Section 6.5). On this Zoom, a song called "Sweat" by the transgender music producer SOPHIE was used at the beginning of the call, "*because we made Albany sweat, and because it's going to be the hottest summer on record*" (Observation 25).

In Chapter 5, I demonstrated how queer theorists have sought to bring enticement and fun to environmental action, and how this was visible in the playful outside campaign of PPNY. However, in the instance described above, the use of pop music to create a celebratory atmosphere differs from the playful moments observed in

the outside strategy. The wrap up calls in June 2021 and 2022 were after moments of failure, but instead focused on celebrating success. This is not only sustaining for the social movement, but I contend, deeply queer.

'Queer joy' has become its own theoretical concept, with work expounding the pedagogical uses of queer joy (Iacovelli, 2022), how queer joy can counter anti-Black repression (Mitchell, 2022) and how it is an important aspect of queer digital world-making (Copeland, 2023). While this work is generative and offers pertinent conceptual and analytical insights, much of it deals explicitly with the lives, bodies and experiences of LGBTQIA+ people. Again, what I think is so interesting about the queerer aspects of the PPNY campaign is how these aspects move beyond the recognitional, transcending individual identities and instead using the modes and markers of queerness towards more collective ends.

By analysing how PPNY utilised pop music to foster feelings of celebration and joy in the face of failure, I am taking seriously popular culture as worthy of interrogation, working to unveil the messy realities of creating a political alternative. Similarly, dedicating analysis to the failures of PPNY is a way to overcome a binary of success or failure, challenging defeatist discourse which can surround prefigurative movements (Reinecke, 2018: 1300), because it acknowledges that messiness and failure is part of the prefiguration itself. For Muñoz (2009: 7), the "forward-dawning futurity" of utopian feeling is directly linked to the quotidian glamour of the ornamental, of pop, which can provide an important reprieve from "the darkness of the lived instant" (Bloch, 1998: 340 in Muñoz, 2009: 5). This is the methodology of hope for Muñoz (2009: 5), and in my work, which is concerned with how a social movement organises toward a redistributive futurity, I am similarly engaging with method. At two moments of failure, a year apart from each other, the creation of an anticipatory and celebratory atmosphere played an important organising function, fending off burnout and disappointment in a group of people who must maintain momentum for at least another year.

Throughout this chapter, I aim to illustrate that at each of the moments of campaign success, there were failures and missteps, each of which were as integral to the building of a political alternative as the achievements of the PPNY

campaign. In this, I am demonstrating that "possibility and disappointment often live side by side" (Halberstam, 2011: 105). This is common across prefigurative projects, and is an integral part of the becoming of a collective futurity. In the previous chapter, I discussed the encounter of the Occupy movement, and later in this chapter I will highlight the difficulties faced by new municipalist movements when they entered the institutions they were seeking to democratise – such as in the case of Ahora Madrid in Chapter 2. Across these movements and many others, left organising seemingly loses or is defeated, or ultimately fails "to escape the entrenched nature of inequality" (Reinecke, 2018: 1301). These "*absolutely devastating*" (Interview 06) moments can cause hope to falter (Muñoz, 2009: 207). Thus, maintaining an affective solidarity rooted in hopefulness serves a deeper affective function, which recognises that all is not lost within the moment of encounter between activists (Merrifield, 2013). This is the becoming of a redistributive futurity, not an acquiescence to the present through banal optimism, but a collective struggle towards actualised hopes (Muñoz, 2009: 3).

In this, positioning failure not as a dead end but as opportunity (Halberstam, 2011: 96) serves a clarifying function. Failure brings attention to the urgency and darkness of the present moment (Ibid, 103), with ineffective neoliberal governance in the face of climate catastrophe, while also ensuring that the hopeful moves towards something otherwise remain grounded and cognisant of obstacles (Muńoz, 2009: 1).

6.3 Confrontation's limits

In Chapter 5, I investigated the usefulness of agonistic forms of confrontation, which express dissent while mobilising an alternative (Tambakaki, 2014: 1). PPNY mobilised this form of confrontation through the 'Bribery' Venmo cards which were used at protests and online, directly politicising campaign donations and naming the Democratic representatives who had accepted such donations. I also analysed how PPNY and DSA-endorsed elected representatives then work within the structures of the state which these agonistic methods are confronting, thus necessitating some level of consensus. In this, PPNY can be understood to be taking a strategic approach to the different sites at which politics are conducted (Dryzek, 2005: 221), going beyond pure antagonism towards a more deliberative

style of democracy which seeks to process antagonistic issues through active engagement in the public sphere (Ibid). However, while confrontation is useful in an agonistic sense, there are potentially limits to confrontation for social movements attempting to build and wield strategic power. It is, as a participant noted, important that the Bribery cards were "*telling the truth*" (Interview 29). But beyond that, it is also crucial that confrontation does not hinder strategy in the long term.

A key element of DSA strategy is electoral politics, and in Chapter 5 I demonstrated how the State Senate and Assembly elections in 2022 were utilised as part of the campaign around PPNY. Central to the electoral strategy of DSA is the primarying of incumbent Democrats with 'insurgent' candidates from the movement. This can be understood agonistically: an explicit expression of dissent through the mobilisation of a clear alternative in the form of a challenger to often long-serving Democratic politicians. While the electoral working groups of DSA chapters certainly purposefully strategize around which incumbent politicians to challenge, the notion of 'primarying' elected representatives has become well known throughout the membership of DSA. As such, the call to 'primary' various representatives is frequently made, especially online on social media and in the chat box of Zoom calls.

However, this is where some messier elements have come into play.

> *"One way you get the power is you make good on your threats. So, one thing, everybody's tweeting [Speaker of the New York State Assembly,] Carl Heastie, 'We're gonna primary you Carl.' Nobody's gonna primary Carl Heastie, let's be honest about that. That's not an immediate term thing that any one of these people making these threats can actually deliver on. And so, when you make those kinds of threats, it just cheapens anything else you're saying."* (Interview 33)

While the participant in the quote above, a New York State Assembly Member, is expressing frustration that online threats devalue the wider goals that the movement can deliver, in the expanded quotation, he also brings attention to how they can cause problems in the day-to-day manoeuvrings of the NYS Legislature,

too, describing to me a conversation with the Speaker in the closing weeks of the 2022 legislative session, in which the BPRA did not pass:

> *"There are oftentimes where P and C [Program and Council – a bureaucratic function of NYS Legislature] will call every single member to just get a gauge of 'where are you on this bill?' And I was saying, 'Please do this on this bill. I'm not telling you that you need to tell people to vote for this, which I know you can do. I know you can put a bill on the floor, and everyone will vote for it anyway, because it's your leadership. I'm saying just get a gauge. Just get a gauge. Just get the calls going.' And he refused to do that. And I think part of the reason he refused to do that was because, you know, there's a sense of 'Why am I going to do a favour for a coalition that is just absolutely lambasting me at every single opportunity?' A lot of politics ends up becoming personal in that way where people can respond to political priorities in a personal way, because a lot of the way that those priorities are advocated for are personally attacking, you know, might be seen in that way. But I think the issue at hand here with the climate crisis, is we can't afford to let things happen organically. We have to take an active role in it. So that was a real back and forth with the speaker. And, he didn't bring the bill to the vote."* (Interview 33)

This is a significant quotation for several reasons, not least for how it draws attention to the consolidated power of Democratic leadership in the NYS Legislature, and the recognitional nature of this type of politics, which was discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 regarding the CLCPA. Throughout my time in the field, the power of Democratic leadership was emphasised to me by the vast majority of participants. Leadership includes the governor, the speaker of the Assembly, and the majority leaders of the Senate and the Assembly, and Chairs of relevant committees, such as the Assembly Committee on Corporations, Authorities and Commissions and the Committee on Energy and Telecommunications. Across the multiple legislative sessions in which efforts were made to pass the BPRA, there were multiple times where crucial decisions came down to a single person, be it the leader of a specific committee, or in the case above, the speaker of the Assembly.

There are two specific elements from this extended quotation that I want to unpack. Firstly, it is an example of some elements of the confrontational outside strategy having a directly negative impact on the BPRA: *"I think part of the reason he refused to do that was because, you know, there's a sense of 'Why am I going to do a favour for a coalition that is just absolutely lambasting me at every single opportunity?'"* Secondly, in discussing the role of the *"P and C"* in the processes around passing legislation, the participant draws attention to the role of central staff; a bureaucratic arm of the NYS legislative body that fulfil administrative and support functions.

6.3.1 Against the state, against the movement?

In Chapter 5, I discussed the project of co-governance that DSA are building as one which expresses itself first and conceptualises itself later (Katz, 2017: 596). Following on from that understanding, the example above of DSA members calling for primaries should be understood as part of the same processual becoming. Here, we can understand where some of the elements of a becoming blur into messiness, rather than simply into complexity.

Social media is a useful tool for social movements, given that social media networks are spaces (albeit private, corporate, and heavily surveilled ones) in which alternative perspectives to dominant news media can be communicated (Barnes, 2020). Digital forms of communication can also widen activists' access to information (Barnes, 2020; Downing et al., 2001). Barnes (2020) discusses DSA's particular use of social media, exploring how points of reference are created by people involved or aligned with the movement, which can enhance both cohesion and fragmentation. Indeed, while use of social media is not a key area of focus for this thesis, various social media networks (including Instagram, Twitter/X and Facebook) were utilised to spread information about the BPRA throughout the campaign. By specifically analysing the calls online to 'primary' serving representatives, the role of social media is problematised.

The NYC-DSA chapter's X (formerly known as Twitter) account has 49,300 followers, with the NYC-ESWG account having 8,933 and, for comparison, the Mid-Hudson Valley-DSA chapter has 2,192. The national DSA account has 355,000

followers. Not all these followers will be dues-paying members of the organisation, and many other accounts exist online which share socialist principles and values yet are not related to DSA at all, including many hundreds of individual accounts of people who may only be tangentially involved with DSA.

While calls to 'primary' various NYS legislators occurred in the chat box of many Zoom rooms I was a participant in, I am deliberately emphasizing the nebulous nature of online social media spaces due to how what happens in these spaces impacts upon DSA as a movement and DSA-aligned PPNY advocates inside the NYS Legislature. In the quotation on page 211, the participant talks about how online threats against people in the NYS Legislature made the passage of the BPRA more difficult, while also '*cheapening*' the broader goals of the movement. As such, we can understand the online calls as demonstrative of the messiness of the project in as far as confrontational methods on the outside made it harder for those on the inside to do the strategic organising necessary to affect progressive change.

However, this messiness cannot be dismissed. It is through the ways in which Democratic leadership perceived and reacted to the antagonism that we can glimpse how the movement around the BPRA was conceptualised by those *not aligned* to it, who were instead more firmly enmeshed with the structures and processes of the neoliberal political-economic system. The quotations above demonstrate that these individuals, who may or may not be rank-and-file dues paying members of DSA, are considered as much as part of the movement to pass the BPRA as DSA-endorsed elected representatives. This lends weight to data from Chapter 5, in which participants discussed how *"DSA politicians are not making friends"* (Interview 07).

While in some ways this perception could be justification for dismissing DSA and the movement around BPRA, I think it points towards a potentially far more productive way of leveraging power in the future, especially when considering the actual events that followed the Speaker of the NYS Assembly not bringing the BPRA to a vote.

At the end of the 2022 session, the BPRA passed the NYS Senate, and when it failed in the Assembly, the Speaker responded to public pressure with an unusual public

explanation after the end of the legislative session. The Speaker declared that "we agree with the goals of the Build Public Renewables Act. The final version of the bill — amended two days prior to the scheduled close of our legislative session — had support in our conference, but not enough to move forward at this point"[11] (Fink, 2022). The Assembly then convened a similarly atypical public hearing in July 2023, to "get more input on the bill and determine its feasibility" (Ibid).

If a prefigurative becoming involves expression first, and conceptualisation later, then the caustic calls from individuals online should be understood as serving an expressive function (Reinecke, 2018). In work discussing the rise of "horizontal, leaderless and prefigurative movements", Reinecke (2018: 1300) argues that a central element of prefigurative politics is the collapsing of the distinction between tactics that are expressive of a movement's aims, and those that are 'instrumental' to mobilisation (Ibid, 1302). Reinecke argues that the expressive tactics of prefigurative movements are different from other forms of 'contentious politics' (McAdam et al., 2001, in Reinecke, 2018: 1301), which seek to make institutional change through the production of theoretical accounts that justify possible solutions (Greenwood et al., 2002: 60, in Reinecke, 2018: 1301). In this, the expression is an aim in itself, rather than having a necessarily useful purpose. Indeed, this aligns with the municipalist literature from the previous chapter, which argues that the goal of the new municipalist movement is not simply passing progressive policy, but changing the way in which politics is done (Russell, 2019).

The expressive tactics of prefigurative social movements also illuminates the messy confrontation coming from individuals affiliated with DSA online. The demands to 'primary' can be understood as the expressive demands of the organisation. A demand with an expressive function of dissent. Understanding the expressive function of these calls means they become less about the actual possibility of whether the Speaker can be 'primaried' right now, but more an acknowledgement that the strategy of primarying has been a successful one of an emerging and evolving movement. In this, the antagonism can be understood as

[11] This statement aligns with what Participant 33 described, regarding dialogue with the Speaker over whether the BPRA had enough support or not.

impulsive, certainly, but also as a more intuitive understanding of the wider prefigurative potential of the movement around the BPRA, beyond the passage of the bill itself and instead as a rejection of the existing political-economic system. In this, the inability to actually successfully 'primary' the Speaker, and indeed the failure of the BPRA to pass into law in its first two legislative sessions, are in fact somewhat secondary to the broader building of a movement. From this perspective, messiness is not self-defeating, but is an important component of prefiguration.

6.3.2 Central staff

Another element of the extended quotation that I want to discuss is the role of central staff, the bureaucracy within the Assembly that operates under the leadership of the Speaker. Central staff are a bureaucratic arm of the NYS legislative body that fulfil administrative and support functions. They operate under the direction of Leadership, and therefore do not necessarily support a particular ideology. However, as I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, neoliberal ideologies of market values and consumer relationships have been embedded in the functioning of the US state. Therefore, the type of expert knowledge that is mobilised by central staff aligns with this.

Although unelected, central staff perform many important roles within the NYS Legislature. They "*can put something on conference, which is when all of them get together and discuss in the Democratic Conference what bills move, where things get passed, or where things get voted on. They can pull something from conference. They control the whole legislature*" (Interview 07). Multiple participants explained to me that central staff hold *"a lot of procedural power, and they use it often"* (Interview 07).

> *"You can even get committee chairs on board, but their agendas for their committees are influenced by things like central staff."* (Interview 28)

Central staff are an example of technocracy in action. Certainly, central staff play an important role in the legislature, providing specialised knowledges and expertise to legislators in the drafting of bills and analysis of policy proposals.

However, as examined in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, it is through these same technocratic functions and specific types of expert knowledges that neoliberalisation has been continually embedded and re-embedded. Expert knowledges which privilege market principles and logics will necessarily construct governance decisions along these lines (Kiely, 2016: 725). Indeed, an example of this was given by a participant:

> *"One of the other things that I heard over the course of this this period where I was like cornering people as they went to the bathroom, trying to talk to the Speaker, every single possible thing, was, 'We haven't conferenced it yet. Some massive bill, we haven't conferenced it yet.' Which there's some reason to that point. We conference a lot of bigger bills. But I knew at the same time as I was pushing for this bill, the Governor had introduced legislation at the last minute, a multi-billion-dollar subsidy for chip manufacturing companies. Multibillion dollars. We hadn't conferenced it. What central staff did was to call in legislators and groups basically in thirds of the conference or fourths of the conference, so it was fractions at a time, to be briefed on it. And that was it… We had not conferenced it. We did not conference it, but it was a last minute, it was in the final days, and so to tick that box, we were given an oral explanation as to 'Here's what's happening, here's what's going on.' And it just spoke to me that, you know, Albany they call it like steering an ocean liner, but at the drop of a hat they can make it a speedboat if they want to."* (Interview 33)

The participant described this as *"an example of how power can create process"* (Interview 33). Here, the Governor's bill was conferenced in an unusual fashion, while the BPRA was not. Not only is this an example of the recognitional, individualistic leadership power that is wielded in the NYS Legislature, where the will of one elected representative supersedes a grassroots coalition and social movement, but it is an example of market logics superseding public ones. The piece of legislation discussed in this excerpt is the Green CHIPS legislation, which includes up to $10 billion in economic incentives – including tax credits for CHIPS projects that "result in at least $15 of private investment for every $1 of state investments" – to "kick-start economic growth" and attract semiconductor chip

manufacturers to the state (New York State, 2022c). The ‘Green’ part of this legislation is “an approved clean energy plan that mitigates the project's GHG emissions and other environmental impacts” (Ibid).

However, outside central staff’s role in subverting standard governance processes for market-oriented pieces of legislation, I want to discuss how the PPNY coalition related to this technocratic arm of the NYS Legislature.

> *“Two years ago, I didn't even know central staff existed, either. It's like, ‘Oh, there's actually this group that is completely non-elected, that edits bills, and are the people who have the main levels of power.’”* (Interview 28)

> *“This whole thing, honestly, has been one of the most educational experiences of my life in terms of how things really work. You ask, I'd say, 100 people on the street if they know what central staff is or does, and they'd say no. And it's crazy because they hold so much power. And, you know, the sort of Schoolhouse Rock version of how a bill becomes a law is like propaganda that has nothing to do with reality, is what we discovered.”* (Interview 29)

In these two quotations, the participants, both members of the PPNY coalition who work for state- and local-level non-profits in New York, describe learning about central staff and becoming familiar with how a piece of legislation is passed through the NYS Legislature. Their lack of familiarity with the role of central staff points to another messy reality of the PPNY campaign: that most of the learning around how to create and pass a piece of legislation happened *during* the campaign to pass the BPRA. Indeed, this has already been discussed in Chapter 5, in which I articulated the project of PPNY as one of co-learning.

For all the successes of this co-learning, however, we can also see where the fledging coalition’s inexperience was more visible. While central staff are an example of technocracy in practice, these types of state machinery are part of the layers of bureaucracy that constitute the everyday functioning of government. The reality of power and governance is something that any project seeking to

engage with the state must grapple with, beyond establishing and maintaining a network of volunteers and activists building pressure outside the state. That the members of the PPNY coalition in the quotation above had not heard of central staff before is an example of their inexperience.

Another participant I interviewed, a member of the NYS Assembly who was a lead sponsor and key advocate for the BPRA, but not DSA-endorsed or affiliated, highlighted this:

> *"My job is to convince leadership and the powers that be that the concept holds water. That it's a good idea, we should do it. Let's do it. And then we can get lawyers and experts and other people to figure out the terms of the agreement. What I think lots of people, and I say this in a nice way, that people who are amateurs at politics, is they think that there's a magic potion sometimes, that, 'If I come up with the right phrase, and the right words, and the period is in the right place, well, then I can't be wrong. And so, I proved the math problem. And I proved it right. And ergo, you have to vote yes on it because I showed it.' It's just not how it works… There's a lot more people involved, and a lot more people in the shadows don't get to be the front men or women who actually make this. My job is… to convince them of the concept."* (Interview 18)

Positioning the PPNY coalition as *"people who are amateurs at politics"* provides an interesting counterbalance to the conceptualisation in Chapter 5 of the coalition as one with very high levels of expertise. The knowledge brought to the coalition by different partners, including some lobbying experience, may be expert, but activist knowledges which may have a developed conceptualisation of how power functions, still can have limited understandings of the everyday manoeuvrings of power in the institutions of the neoliberal state.

6.3.3 Prefiguring a new regime

Central staff are an arm of government that is deeply embedded in the technocratic and bureaucratic functioning of governance, and as such it is unsurprising that people who had never before organised inside the state to such

a degree would not be familiar with them. However, I am drawing attention to this inexperience because of the ways in which I think this messy figuring-out and mistake-making represent an important prefiguration of its own. It is by examining how social movements have grappled with the internal mechanisms of the state, that crucial tensions between prefigurative movements and the state are revealed. This can be understood through the lens of urban regime theory (Stone, 1993, Bua and Davies, 2023). To detail this another example can be used from the same interview as the excerpt above, in which the participant was expressing frustration with the frequent amendments that were made to the BPRA by the coalition:

> *"One of the things that I would notice about the bill if I was looking at it and trying to figure out what's going on, I would notice that the bill has been amended many times. And I would go, 'Why do you keep amending the bill? Were you amending it based on notes from the other side or from leadership?' And we weren't. We were amending it to make it more perfect… And I think that was a real miscalculation… because of course, the real amendments will come when the other side will sit down at the table."* (Interview 18)

Here, the unfamiliarity with central staff and the miscalculation of the frequent amendments to the bill can be understood as resulting from the same messy inexperience with the internal mechanisms of the state. In the excerpt on the previous page, the participant is talking about all the "*people in the shadows*", "*lawyers and experts and other people*" who will "*figure out the terms of the agreement*" in regard to legislation once it has been passed. This is referenced again in the quotation above, with "*the real amendments*" which will come from notes from "*the other side*" and "*leadership*", again when the bill is at a later stage in its procession through the NYS Legislature. These are technocrats like central staff, who will provide technical expertise and know how in the implementation of the BPRA.

Indeed, in the public statement (previously referenced on page 212) made by the Speaker of the Assembly after he did not bring the BPRA to a vote, he mentioned that the BPRA was "amended two days prior to the scheduled close of our

legislative session" (Fink, 2022). That the PPNY coalition were frequently amending the BPRA themselves can be understood as a strategic misstep which could have been a reason as to why the bill failed to pass at the end of the 2022 legislative session. Here, though the members of PPNY were amending the bill "*to make it more perfect*", these very amendments were referenced by an established (and establishment) Democratic politician as a reason for it not being brought to a vote.

As mentioned, prefigurative projects engaging with the state must contend with the everyday reality of power and governance. However, it is in moving from outside the state to the inside that many prefigurative, horizontal movements concerned with deepening democracy have faltered. Research focusing on the Spanish new municipalist platforms that swept the country from 2015 has highlighted the difficulty that these platforms had in implementing radical changes in complex local administrations (Blanco, 2015) which remained dominated by the same "managerial structures and… organisational culture" as previous governments (Blanco, et al. 2020: 30). Activists more familiar with outside and against-the-state strategies of organising were administratively inexperienced when they became politicians on the inside of the state (Ibid, 2020, Bua and Davies, 2023: 2057). Tensions between administrations and social movements also rose when municipalist platforms continued to use contentious forms of protest and disruption in advocating for change (Martínez and Wissink, 2022: 673, Bua and Davies, 2023: 2057) – similar again to the unformulated calls to primary some representatives discussed in Section 6.5.1, which can be seen to have impeded the progression of the BPRA.

Thus, some argue that the new municipalist movement failed to consolidate new urban regimes necessary to deliver their radical agendas (Bua and Davies, 2023: 2055). This is known as 'regime incumbency', which is the extent to which a coalition establishes the governing capacity required to fulfil its aspirations (Stone, 1993 in Bua and Davies, 2023: 2055). Central to urban regime theory is the understanding that urban governance is not just about formal institutions of the state, but also informal networks of interest groups and business elites throughout the economy and civil society (Stone, 1993). These informal coalitions, or "regimes," collaborate in ensuring that policy is shaped in their interests, ensuring

stability in the status quo through the prioritisation of growth and market-oriented policy decisions. In the Spanish new municipalist example, a "triple alliance" of financiers, real estate developers and politicians established prior to the 2015 municipalist wave – all of which were "grounded in the extraction of surplus through municipal land reclassifications" (Naredo and Motinel, 2011 in Bua and Davies, 2023: 2057) – obstructed radical municipalist reforms through the "use of discourses around competition and free enterprise" which had been adopted by urban administrators (Blanca and Ganuza, 2018 in Bua and Davies, 2023: 2057).

A similar regime consisting of Democratic leadership, governmental technocrats and corporate energy interests came together to try to block the BPRA on numerous occasions. Firstly, there was an attempt to make the BPRA a study bill. Study bills are pieces of legislation that are introduced for the purpose of further research. They do not necessarily result in direct legislative action or changes to the law and are often used to explore complex issues. Regarding the BPRA being passed as a study bill, a NYS Assembly member said:

> *"A study bill for this, I feel like is bullshit… the industry, all the people who are against it, will just come up with lots and lots of ways to say, 'This is the worst idea ever.' … People will say, 'Well, look, you did the study, and the study came back with all this bad stuff.' And so, the legislature does that all the time to pretend that we're doing something, which is really frustrating"* (Interview 18).

Further, there were repeated instances where the BPRA was almost prevented from getting out of committee stage.

> *"There's a big question about what we would call a procedural move, called 99-ing the bill, which would be forcing a vote inside the committee where the bill is located. Because we have a majority of the members on the committee now. Leadership does not support the bill currently, and usually, when a member [tries to force a vote on a bill which the leader of a committee does not support], leadership tries to kill the bill. They start calling members, 'Vote no, take your name off of it.' There are lots of actors who don't want to see this bill passed, right? The big utility companies, and the big private*

energy generators, they don't want to see this bill passed, because they're afraid that the state is going to be a big actor who's going to throw its weight around, as they should be. But last time I checked, for big existential issues, we don't go and say, 'Well, some random venture capitalist who's made some millions of dollars investing in solar and wind farms around America should dictate whether or not we go and do this.'" (Interview 18)

The committee being discussed above was the Assembly Committee on Corporations, Authorities and Commissions, which typically handles legislation and issues pertaining to various types of corporations, including businesses, non-profit organisations, and other corporate entities operating within the state. This committee plays a crucial role in shaping policy and regulation related to corporate governance, as well as providing oversight and analysis, with the aim of promoting transparency, accountability, and effective governance in these sectors (Ballotpedia, 2024). In NYS, there is no deadline for committee action (which is the same for around half of the US' legislative chambers), which means that bills can languish in committee indefinitely, unless its sponsor explicitly requests action on it (Creelan and Moulton, 2004: 14). This means that legislators can "introduce bills on behalf of groups and constituents, even though they believe these measures are short on merit and should not move" (Ibid). Further, this means that bill sponsors can "publicly request a vote on specific bills they have introduced, while privately imploring committee members to sit on the same bills" (Ibid). Indeed, I demonstrated an example of this in Chapter 4, when I discussed how a lead sponsor of the BPRA, who was also the Chair of the Committee on Energy and Telecommunications was using his sponsorship of the BPRA on the campaign trail in order to get an endorsement from a local conservation group, even while the bill remained stationary in his committee.

Committees are also how Leadership further consolidate power. The Speaker and Majority Leader are able to fully control which bills are voted on in committee because they appoint committee chairs, who are the people who decide which bills make it to the committee's agenda for consideration or a vote (Creelan and Moulton, 2004: 15). "99-ing" occurs when members of a committee file a "Form 99" to request that the chair place the bill on the agenda within the legislative session (Ibid, 66). This is what happened with the BPRA, with the only member of

the committee who did not vote in favour of the bill being the committee chair. The following year, 99-ing was “significantly curtailed” by leadership, who changed the rules to make it very difficult to 99 bills (Karolidis and Karcich, 2023).

While it is too soon to assess PPNY based on its consolidation of regime incumbency around the BPRA and broader democratic vision of DSA, the regime incumbency of neoliberal technocracy is helpful for considering the messy spaces and processes through which social movements can contest and undermine it. While it may have been through confrontational methods that PPNY potentially obstructed the smooth passage of the BPRA, it was also through direct confrontation with the more procedural parts of the legislative process that the coalition were able to outmanoeuvre the established neoliberal regime of business interests and establishment Democratic politicians.

Throughout this section, I have analysed social movements engaging with the state must contend with everyday workings of power, negotiating with and challenging these in different instances. For prefigurative movements seeking a transformative becoming, via the state, these moments underscore the ambivalent terrain on which they operate. As my analysis throughout has shown, working in, against, and beyond the state entails navigating a space that is at once a site of constraint and of potential transformation. Becoming via the state recognises that social movements do not simply seek to seize state power, nor wholly reject it, but rather engage in iterative practices that rework the state’s forms and functions in ways that open up new democratic possibilities. This process is necessarily uneven and incomplete, echoing queer and minor theoretical commitments to non-linear, non-teleological change. The state is not a stable object to be reformed once and for all, but a shifting field that movements shape and are shaped by.

This understanding has important implications for how we conceptualise democracy. When democracy is reframed not as a finished structure or set of institutions, but as a process of becoming, it becomes less about reaching consensus or institutional design, and more about ongoing, embodied struggle. It emphasises experimentation, relationality, and partial victories over final outcomes. This open-endedness is generative, allowing movements to adapt when

necessary and also sustain themselves, but it also brings limitations, including exhaustion, fragmentation, and the risk of co-optation. Through all the moments of missteps that I have discussed in this section, we can also see glimpses of a coalition wielding significant power of its own. Creeland and Moulton (2004: 66) argue that in practice, members' power in forcing a committee to report on a bill through "99-ing" can be "effectively eviscerate[ed]" by the chair, who can simply force the sponsor to remove the request. This did not happen with the BPRA. Further, while the Speaker made a public statement blaming late-stage amendments and lack of support for not passing the BPRA, a public hearing was convened for the BPRA which also circumvented the pressure coming from the neoliberal regime to pass the bill as a study bill.

6.4 The limits of electoralism

Throughout this chapter, I have examined moments where the PPNY campaign failed, or their tactics caused issues in the actual progression of the BPRA. In the previous section, I discussed how a confrontational outside strategy hindered some inside manoeuvring, while at the same time acknowledging that it was through remaining confrontational in some of the more technocratic areas of the legislative process that the BPRA was able to make it through the committee stage. In this final section, I will remain inside of the state, scrutinising the limits of engaging with electoral politics for progressive ends.

This was a key area of contention in the coalition. Being largely DSA led, who are themselves an organisation highly focused on electoral politics, it is not surprising that the coalition utilised the 2022 primary elections as an important battleground for the BPRA. However, some partners in the coalition have avowedly anti-electoral organisational histories.

> *"I have very, very deep strategic disagreements with electoral strategies and thinking we need to primary new people. One, because throughout decades, I have yet to see that yield real victories. And if they do, it's like having some of the right people in office was helpful but didn't have a chance of moving anything until there was a mass movement on the outside. And time and resources are a zero-sum game. I think there's been*

an immensely disproportionate focus on primarying and electoralism as an answer." (Interview 22)

The concerns expressed in this excerpt, from a member of the PPNY coalition who works for a progressive non-profit focused on social and economic justice, are valid, and interesting to think about in regard to the previous section. While the inside strategy saw the BPRA make it out of the committee stage, it was public pressure that caused the Speaker to have to justify his decision not to table a vote in the Assembly, and it was the same public pressure that saw an attempt to rectify this through a public hearing. This is the within- and against-the-state (Arpini et al., 2021; Routledge et al., 2018; Angel, 2017; Cumbers, 2015; Jessop, 2007; Holloway, 2005) that I have been conceptualising, whereby norms are revealed and overcome by a messy blending of strategy.

However, the concerns of this quotation are valid ones, and an excerpt from another interview provides something of an interesting endorsement of those fears: A member of the NYS Legislature, who is not DSA-endorsed, said that *"Institutions have a way of changing people more than people changing institutions"* (Interview 18).

This is precisely the fear held by many organisers when it comes to engaging with electoral politics. I have conceptualised PPNY as working in, against and beyond the state throughout the campaign to pass the BPRA, but some work rejects the state as an arena for pursuing social and economic justice. This is because "as a form of social relations, it is part of the social synthesis that we are rejecting: the state is part of the cohesive suction of capital" (Holloway, 2010: 63). Holloway (2002: 22) argues that a mistake of social movements has been their underestimation of "the degree of integration of the state into the network of capitalist social relations", meaning that rather than the state being shaped by social movement struggle, it is more likely to temper ideals as social movements become shaped by the state (Arpini et al., 2021).

It is certainly true that the electoral strategy of DSA formed a key pillar of the PPNY campaign, and that the benefits of this were potentially slim. Of the seven people running for office who comprised the Green New York slate, only two were

elected. Other participants acknowledged that there was "*no way to characterise this past year as anything but a failure"* (Interview 31).

However, I think that within the messiness of the PPNY campaign, we do not necessarily see a full neutering at the hands of the state. Indeed, characterising the state as totalising in this way closes down areas of potentiality where experimentation can 'crack' the assemblage of social relations that constitutes the state (Holloway, 2010). With the passage of the BPRA, PPNY were attempting to (and did successfully) unlock the potential of a public utility that was severely underutilised due to the neoliberal logics of the state. This can be understood as a "symbiotic strategy", which Erik Olin Wright (2010) argues is a strategy for social transformation that, through collaboration with the state, extends and deepens institutional forms through policy interventions (Routledge et al., 2018: 80).

The limits of electoralism also goes back to my theoretical framework, as by revealing the ways in which expansive political imaginaries of prefigurative organising are constrained by institutional engagement marks a key site of tension between Fraser's invocation of redistributive justice and queer theory's emphasis on the affective, and indeed the ungovernable. In the context of PPNY, these tensions are not abstract but material: the coalition engaged in legislative activism, seeking to pass a bill within the constraints of the neoliberal state, while simultaneously working to cultivate a broader political imaginary that exceeds what the bill alone can achieve.

Legislative activism here becomes complex and slippery terrain. The discomfort many organisers felt toward electoral politics, with all its compromises, gatekeeping, and alignment with existing power points to the ways in which legislative action for more transformative ends can risk being co-opted into the very logics of technocratic governance and progressive neoliberalism that Fraser critiques – where recognition is glorified without meaningful steps towards redistribution, and where representation in existing state institutions becomes an end in itself.

However, I would argue that PPNY's legislative strategy is not purely reformist. In being driven by a messy, affective and collective political desire, it can be seen

to align with Katz's notion of minor theory as a refusal of mastery, and Muñoz's vision of queerness as a horizon. In this, the BRPRA itself becomes a site of struggle not only over energy policy, but over the terms of political engagement and transformation. In this, attempting to redefine the rules of democratic engagement.

PPNY troubles neat binaries between radical and reformist politics. It demonstrates that efforts towards redistributive justice is not always revolutionary in form, but can have more transformative potential, especially when enacted through collective and iterative modes of organising. In seeking to legislate change while refusing to let legislation define the limits of what is politically possible, PPNY can be understood as enacting a minor politics where what is at stake is not only the question of whether the state can be transformed, but whether engaging with the state can sustain alternative imaginaries. Across this thesis I have highlighted the processual nature of neoliberalisation and social movement organising, and understanding the state as processual enables a recognition that it can be constantly remade in ways which change the balance of power between institutions (Routledge et al., 2018: 79). Engaging with the electoral cycle is one way that this balance of power can shift, while empowering institutions such as the New York Power Authority is another. Throughout it all, reflection and recalibration can see areas of strategy be abandoned, or new experiments tried out.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have detailed the moments of coalitional tension, failure, strategy disagreements, and missteps, all of which can be understood as integral to the messy and evolving process of navigating and transforming state structures. This analysis engages with broader theoretical and political debates about the nature of social movements and state interaction.

By examining how the PPNY coalition sustained momentum between legislative cycles and overcame past failures, I demonstrate the role of queerness as an affective solidarity within the movement. This solidarity, characterized by playful modes and markers of queerness, provides a necessary reprieve from present

challenges, essential for prefigurative social movements negotiating state engagement. Beyond maintaining a joyful movement, these affective solidarities facilitate the navigation of strategic tensions, embodying "kinship time" and “caring collective solidarity events” (Whyte, 2017a in Urban Institute 2021), central to the prefigurative becoming I theorise.

By highlighting the campaign's stumbles in passing the BPRA, I adopt a minor key approach, rejecting grand narratives of political action in favour of an understanding that the pliable nature of power is revealed through messy actions and interactions. This perspective aligns with theoretical critiques of traditional political action, emphasising the fluidity and complexity of power dynamics.

Moments of friction in the campaign to pass the BPRA are not merely interpersonal, they reveal the tensions at the heart of state engagement. That the neoliberal state is capable of integrating social movements’ demands (as I articulated in Chapter 2), demonstrates the deeper theoretical tensions between redistribution and recognition. My integration of queer theory with Fraser’s dimensions of justice sits in generative tension in this chapter. Rather than seeking to resolve this tension, I have remained in step with the ways in which the movement inhabits it. This is a minor theory approach, refusing a narrative of linear progress with defined ends in favour of an account that a transformed relationship with the state is an ongoing project towards a prefigurative horizon, not a fixed destination. In this, the campaign to pass the BPRA is not a culmination (besides, it would be premature to judge how well PPNY and DSA have consolidated a new regime within NYS) but a becoming. In this, it is a slow, uneven and deeply localised and relational articulation of ecosocialist possibility.

PPNY’s tensions with electoralism and coalition governance demonstrate that becoming via the state is a messy process that demands both radical imagination and strategic pragmatism. Yet, it is precisely within this messiness that a more transformative democratic politics might emerge.

Throughout the thesis, I have illustrated that for a dynamic and evolving movement aiming to create a political alternative to the neoliberal regime of corporate ownership and deeper commodification of public life, it is not about a

binary choice between messy or straightforward, inside or outside, success or failure. Rather, it is a repertoire of political strategies that when taken together, build towards a more deliberative radical democratic politics that seeks to displace technocratic and elite neoliberal business as usual spaces. This analysis engages with broader theoretical debates on radical democracy and political strategy.

Understanding the everyday workings of power and governance is crucial for any coalition seeking to democratise political and economic state institutions. For a project where “means and ends are prefiguratively intertwined” (Thompson, 2021), embracing messy, collaborative, and sometimes confrontational experimentation is vital for subverting technocratic managerialism and anti-democratic decision-making processes (Ibid). This approach contributes to ongoing political debates on the nature of prefigurative politics and democratic experimentation.

7. Conclusion

In July 2022, a public hearing on the role of state authorities in renewable energy development was held, to examine the role that NYPA should play "in facilitating the development of renewable energy to meet the goals of the CLCPA" (Public Hearing Announcement, 2022). I have mentioned this hearing in Chapter 6: it was the result of public pressure on the Speaker of the Assembly after the BPRA did not pass at the end of the 2022 legislative session. At this mammoth ten-hour hearing, eight panels of stakeholders provided testimony around the BPRA, and Assembly Members were able to ask questions. The panels included unions, such as the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, representatives from the PSC and other state bodies, lawyers, academics, representatives from the solar industry, environmental justice organisations and climate activists, including many involved with PPNY, and DSA themselves.

Justin Driscoll, who was at the time the Interim President and Chief Operating Officer of NYPA (the previous President left NYPA for a job in the private sector) testified against the BPRA, stating that the bill's mandates "*are unworkable*" and that NYPA would "*not have a cost advantage in developing renewable generation*" (Observation 26). Within minutes, PPNY began circulating a new demand: to 'Dump Driscoll.' Over the following months, this demand turned into a campaign attempting to prevent the Senate from confirming Driscoll as NYPA President. Campaign donations Driscoll had made to climate-denying Republicans were made public, as were discounts awarded by NYPA to clients of his former lobbying firm (Public Power New York, 2023a). A report brought to light claims of systemic racial discrimination against Black NYPA employees under Driscoll's time as Executive Vice President, and he was accused of actively fighting to dismiss these claims (Public Power New York, 2023b).

The Senate decided against bringing Driscoll's nomination to a vote at the end of the 2023 legislative session, due to the nomination lacking enough support to be confirmed. However, Driscoll was appointed President of NYPA in October 2023. As no vote was held for more than 60 days, a little-known provision in the Public Authorities Law meant confirmation could be automatically conferred (French et

al., 2023). The result of this quiet approval drew accusations against Governor Hochul of reaching “a new low in… showing how power-hungry and sneaky she wants to be in this position” (Mid Hudson News, 2023).

I am deliberately drawing attention to this moment in my concluding chapter for two reasons. Firstly, because it is yet another example of technocracy undermining democracy; market values being held by public servants; and the revolving door between public agencies and the private sector. The second reason is to demonstrate that the social movement analysed as a case study in this thesis has not ended and cannot be neatly summarised. My time in the field ended before the public hearing, and before the BPRA was passed in the 2023 budget. As I was back in Glasgow analysing data and beginning to sketch out the contours of this thesis, I watched as the movement continued to shift and evolve. Still now, PPNY continue to adapt to ever new political terrain.

I am highlighting this because my work focuses on the processual and messy nature of social movements engaging with the institutions of the local state. I have already mentioned that it was through pressure built by PPNY that the public hearing was held, and it was through a confrontational and messy campaign against Driscoll as Interim President of NYPA that the Senate came to the decision not to vote on his confirmation. Ultimately, the ‘Dump Driscoll’ campaign failed, but succeeded in politicising an aspect of NYS politics and governance that generally is hidden.

In this final chapter, I will begin by returning to the aims of this thesis and my research questions to address how I have answered them. I will elaborate on the contributions of the thesis before advocating for three brief policy recommendations. After this, I will introduce areas for future research. I will briefly compare the BPRA which passed in 2023 with the one outlined in Chapter 1 to question whether the campaign should be understood as a success, or as demonstrative proof of the limits of engaging with the state.

7.1 Thesis aims

The overall aim of the research was to explore how a project for energy justice and democracy is actively constituted and advanced by a social movement. In this, there were two elements. I developed an understanding of what the alternative project for energy justice and democracy was. Then, I demonstrated how this political alternative was cultivated through political action to reclaim infrastructure as part of a democratic transformation of the local state which challenges established neoliberal norms.

I addressed the aim through the following research questions:

I. How do neoliberal governance structures and technocratic mechanisms inhibit democratic participation and perpetuate anti-democratic tendencies?
II. How can building a social movement around energy infrastructure broaden political imaginaries?
III. What wider potential do these campaigns offer for an alternative, progressive political project?

RQ1 was answered in Chapter 4. In this chapter, I demonstrated how neoliberal governance structures and technocratic mechanisms inhibit democratic participation and perpetuate anti-democratic tendencies through an introduction of the current energy context in NYS. I first examined the public service landscape in NYS, discussing how the notion of citizen-consumer has been embedded in the US, and how this informs the role of the market in the delivery of public goods.

The first way I demonstrated how neoliberal governance structures and technocratic mechanisms perpetuate anti-democratic tendencies was through a discussion of how corporations have frequently had more legal rights than the public, demonstrating how the profit-motive inherent to IOUs has been sustained by state institutions seemingly tasked with regulating these corporations. I discussed how this works antithetically to the state's own energy targets mandated in the CLCPA, rendering them recognitional. In this, I expanded Fraser's concept of recognition away from political recognition of difference, to think

about how political acts can be rendered recognitional due to neoliberal governance structures removing them from the realm of the political through technocratic mechanisms.

I expanded my discussion of regulatory capture to demonstrate how the modern system of regulation emerged as a way to prevent more progressive possibilities. In this, I demonstrated how the injustices present within the energy system are part of it 'doing its job.'

The second way I demonstrated the anti-democratic tendencies of neoliberal governance was by examining the procedural injustice of the rate case process. In this, democratic participation is inhibited to such an extent that it is rendered performative due to being framed by parameters which have already been set. This perpetuates anti-democratic tendencies by rendering the participation and testimony of individuals and groups a prosaic performance, with very little real democratic power.

RQ2 relates to the first clause of my research aim, around what the project for energy justice and democracy is. I first addressed this in Chapter 2, by developing a conceptual framework through which I articulated an energy justice which is primarily concerned with a rejection of the neoliberalisation of the energy system and the local state. Building a social movement around energy infrastructure can broaden political imaginaries because energy infrastructure is tied directly to the everyday, through bills and provision of services, while also being related to more existential questions of climate change – through fossil fuel infrastructure – as well as a broader critique of the existing economic system, problematising private ownership and IOU profit in a tangible way.

I detailed how queer theory can help us understand how queerness functions as an affective solidarity, sustaining social movements beyond everyday interactions with the local state towards a more collective futurity. In this, I demonstrated how such a lens can re-politicise recognitional politics, seeing them once more connected to a politics of redistribution which is fundamentally concerned with addressing inequalities. The collective futurity engendered by the affective solidarity of queerness can be understood as the broadening of political

imaginaries, towards a more just future but necessarily linked to present everyday injustices through the literal infrastructure of the energy system and local state.

I continued addressing RQ2 in Chapter 4, demonstrating the centrality of the energy system for revealing present injustices. I detailed how the siting of fossil fuel infrastructure is generally in working class communities of colour, who bear the burden of environmental injustices. Similarly, I highlighted how these communities have a higher energy burden from their monthly bills, as well as being the communities who are most impacted by service terminations and blackouts.

In Chapters 5 and 6, I answered the second clause of my research aim, regarding how a political alternative is cultivated through political action. I analysed how a social movement grounded its project in an explicit rejection of the privatisation and marketisation of public infrastructure which has constituted neoliberalisation. In this, I demonstrated how PPNY articulated a widened political imaginary, away from narrow neoliberal governmentalities to a broader ecosocialist vision of democratic public ownership.

In Chapter 5, I analysed the campaign to pass the BPRA, looking at the outside, inside and electoral strategy of the PPNY Coalition. In demonstrating how PPNY used a confrontational outside strategy in conjunction with an inside strategy that relied on a relational deployment of expert knowledge, I demonstrated how the movement can be understood as an alternative, progressive political project. By positioning the electoral strategy of DSA as central to PPNY's campaign, I demonstrated how engaging with electoral politics can create a terrain for an alternative message to be spread more widely. By utilising the public ownership of energy infrastructure as a talking point when canvassing, I analysed how DSA and PPNY deliberately utilised energy infrastructure to broaden political imaginaries.

Examining the electoral strategy of DSA in relation to PPNY, I addressed RQ3 by expanding beyond the scope of energy infrastructure to demonstrate how the social movement is fostering a different type of engagement with the local state. By detailing how DSA elected representatives are 'co-governing', I demonstrated

that they are working within and against the state, prefiguring a move beyond current structures towards a more progressive political project.

I continued to investigate the wider potential these types of campaigns offer for an alternative, progressive political project in Chapter 6. To do this, I analysed the messier elements of the campaign to pass the BPRA, focusing explicitly on moments of tension and disagreement, as well as mistakes and missteps the campaign took. Understanding how queerness functioned to sustain the campaign through electoral sessions and beyond failures was important in this chapter, to demonstrate the use of affective solidarities in the messy becoming of a political alternative.

This thesis has shown that by understanding democracy as a process of becoming rather than a fixed institutional endpoint, we are able to rethink the relationship between social movements and the state. Rather than treating the state as a singular object to be captured or rejected, throughout this thesis I have demonstrated how movements can engage with state institutions in ways that are partial and contingent on local and temporal specificities. It is in these ways that a transformative opening can be glimpsed. Through legislative campaigns, canvassing, and coalition-building, activists are not only demanding democratic reform: they are enacting a different mode of democratic life, grounded in prefiguration, contradiction, and collective experimentation.

This open-ended, processual view of democracy aligns with minor theory's refusal of mastery and queer theory's embrace of non-linear temporalities. It also foregrounds the limitations of a democratic politics rooted solely in institutional recognition or electoral success. When democracy is practiced as a becoming, it necessarily includes breakdowns, tensions, and incomplete transformations. This is not a weakness, rather it is where possibility resides. By tracing how PPNY works in, against, and beyond the state, this thesis contributes to a broader understanding of how democratic futures are not only imagined but materially and affectively assembled in the present.

By focusing on the mistakes and failures of the PPNY campaign, I demonstrated the importance of learning about the everyday workings of power and governance

for social movements seeking to democratise the political and economic institutions of the state. In this, I highlighted the collection of political strategies which subvert technocratic managerial, anti-democratic and recognitional decision-making processes. By understanding that messy collaboration and experimentation is central for prefigurative movements, I articulated how a burgeoning movement is building towards a more deliberative radical democratic politics that seeks to displace technocratic and elite neoliberal business as usual spaces.

7.2 Thesis contributions

This thesis presents a number of conceptual and empirical findings that contribute to broader theoretical debates. I will outline four here, which relate to my conceptualisation of neoliberalisation and expansion of Fraser's concept of recognition; my empirical work on left social movements which demonstrates the messiness inherent to prefiguration; my grounding of Katz' and Fraser's theoretical work in rich and thick empirics; and finally my integration of theoretical concepts, through which I was able to analyse the affective bonds of a queer solidarity that were present in PPNY, that offers much for queer theory and theories of social movement organising.

This thesis has framed the DSA and PPNY as illustrative of a regrouping and rethinking of social movement praxis in the wake of decades of neoliberal restructuring. Rather than viewing legislative activism as a capitulation to state power or a dilution of radical ambition, I have argued that movements like PPNY engage the state on both its own terms and newly forged ones. This is a politics not of mastery, but of becoming.

By bringing Fraser's redistributive justice into conversation with queer theory and social movement scholarship, I have shown how campaigns for public energy infrastructure can function as a wedge: exposing the contradictions of technocratic governance, while cultivating collective imaginaries that stretch beyond the horizon of the neoliberal present. In this conjuncture of climate crisis, democratic erosion, and infrastructural precarity, the energy system becomes a

critical terrain through which movements simultaneously contest and reimagine governance itself.

Building on insights from social movement scholarship, I have demonstrated that neoliberal governance is not monolithic but riddled with seams, spaces between system and lifeworld (Habermas, 1987 in Miller, 2006), through which radical politics might emerge. PPNY's efforts to politicise campaign finance, confront investor-owned utilities, and embed redistributive aims in legislative text reflect a form of world-making that is messy, relational, and processual. These movements neither wholly reject nor wholly assimilate into the state form, but instead blur the inside–outside binary, opening the state to minor, affective, and collective ways of doing politics.

I have argued that how we do political action is as critical as what we aim to achieve. Legislative struggle is not the end point, but a site where the otherwise is rehearsed. Even when constrained or co-opted, these efforts leave behind traces of practices, relationships, and reoriented imaginaries that sustain the longer arc of transformation.

In foregrounding minor politics in the reclamation of infrastructures, this thesis contributes not just to the theorisation of remunicipalisation or energy democracy, but to a broader understanding of how collective action endures even under conditions of constraint. The PPNY campaign, with all its tensions and contradictions, reveals the prefigurative power of social movements to not only demand a different world, but to begin building it from the here and now.

My first contribution is in my conceptualisation of neoliberalisation, in which I focuse on the technocratic and hidden spaces of state power in my assessment of the anti-democratic tendencies of how the credo is enacted in policy terms. I demonstrate the specific context of neoliberalisation in the US as being intimately tied to fossil fuels, which were a foundational aspect for the post-war boom in mass consumption as a civic ideal, and which also enabled the market epistemology of neoliberalism in the 1970s and 80s after the oil crisis. This is an important contribution, addressing my first research question, and I provide a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of neoliberalism and neoliberalisation

that does not render it totalising, but rather a changing and evolving phenomenon. My specific contribution in this regard is an expansion of Nancy Fraser's concept of 'recognition' – which emphasises the need to acknowledge differing identities and experiences of various societal groups – to an understanding which includes political acts themselves. I build on Fraser's (2019) recent conceptualisation of 'progressive neoliberalism', to demonstrate how the socially liberal forms of neoliberalism in the US render much political action recognitional. Climate policy can be sponsored by politicians who use it on the campaign trail while impeding its progress inside legislatures, and Democratic majorities can point to 'landmark' pieces of legislation, such as the CLCPA, even while the regulatory state undermines such legislation through rulings that maintain the centrality of the profit-motive for IOUs, itself dependent upon building more fossil fuel infrastructure.

My second contribution is empirical. I provide a granular analysis of a grassroots social movement operating in prefigurative ways in, against, and beyond the state. Through thick description, I examine how PPNY and DSA have engaged with the NYS Democratic Party, elucidating how these movements develop people's potential to think, strategize, and act collectively (Hilton, 2018) within, against and beyond, the framework of the US Democratic Party. By closely analysing the social movement's campaign strategies, I have identified moments where the NYS Democratic Party machinery was both successfully and unsuccessfully challenged by PPNY in its efforts to pass the BPRA. This examination reveals the technocratic and hidden workings of neoliberal state power, providing empirical evidence of how this power manifests undemocratically.

Furthermore, through semi-structured interviews and more ethnographic participant observation, I have demonstrated that the potential for collective strategizing and action is cultivated through every day, embodied interactions between activists, and between movements and the state. This approach offers a richer, more nuanced understanding of social movement organising. By focusing on the ordinary and mundane aspects of organising rather than grand narratives or heroic moments, I illustrate how these can build toward a prefigurative politics that is relational and deliberatively democratic. This theoretical contribution

underscores the importance of the messy, day-to-day interactions in creating prefigurative futures.

These messy interactions underscore my third contribution, in which I ground Cindi Katz's minor theory in the practical, everyday experiences of social movement organising. By doing so, I offer a tangible application of Katz's theoretical framework, demonstrating how minor theory operates in the lived realities of activists and their day-to-day interactions. This grounding provides a nuanced understanding of how minor, often overlooked, actions contribute to broader social change, emphasising the significance of the mundane and the incremental in the fabric of social movements.

In addition to grounding Katz's minor theory, I provide an empirical foundation for Nancy Fraser's dimensions of justice. Through detailed analysis of social movement practices, I illustrate how these dimensions are navigated and negotiated in real-world contexts. Furthermore, I engage with Fraser's (2021) recent work advocating for a 'trans-environmental' anti-capitalist bloc, showing how these theoretical concepts are not only relevant but practically enacted within contemporary social movements. By integrating Katz's minor theory and Fraser's dimensions of justice into an empirical study of social movement organising, I bridge theoretical concepts with practical action. This contribution highlights the critical interplay between theory and practice, demonstrating how theoretical insights can inform and be informed by the empirical realities of grassroots activism. This provides a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which social movements challenge existing power structures and work toward prefigurative change.

A final contribution relates to my integration of concepts, especially the production friction between Fraser's dimensions of justice and the minoritarian, affective modes of organising that queer theory makes visible. In this, I address a critique of queer theory that it "resists practical application" (Urban Institute, 2021) while also furthering Fraser's dimensions of justice. Queer theory does not slot easily into Fraser's schema; nor should it. Rather, its emphasis on futurity, failure, and becoming, reminds us that political transformation cannot be fully contained by institutional logics. Understanding social movements from this

perspective helps illuminate how prefigurative potential is not just found in policy successes, but through experimental, affective, and unfinished practices of being otherwise, together.

In this, the contribution surrounds my positioning of queerness as an affective solidarity central in the construction of an alternative politics. This positioning contributes to debates around coalition building by demonstrating how affective bonds help organisers maintain kinship through moments of frustration – which is vital for prefigurative organising, which must sustain itself beyond failure and setbacks.

I contend that it is precisely in this 'sustaining itself' through affective bonds that there lies a deeply democratic impulse, with PPNY exemplifying the transformation through doing (Reinecke, 2018: 1300) that is central to prefigurative politics, by prefiguring on a micro-level, the agonistic, deliberative and democratic society that they want to see on a macro-level. Queer theory strengthens theorising around prefigurative politics, with its own focus on open-ended processes of doing and learning, for and toward the future (Muñoz, 2009, 2019).

7.3 Policy recommendations

Having synthesised how the main findings of my research address my research questions, and detailing my major empirical and theoretical contributions, I will now detail policy recommendations that emerge from my findings. Despite a major focus of my thesis being future-oriented, away from the existing confines of the local state, there are four policy implications that can be taken from this research.

1) Be realistic, demand the impossible

Queer futurity encourages a look beyond the confines of the present, and the crisis of the climate-conjuncture brings with it a reminder of the necessity of an alternative political economic system. There is a need for bold policy, and for movements who are building pressure on the state for such policy to be realistic, in demanding the impossible (Polychroniou, 2018). Many radical demands have

become possible in the post-2020 period. Police abolition and anti-carceral politics became mainstream for a brief moment after the murder of George Floyd, when a majority of Minneapolis city council members voted to dismantle the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) (Chua, 2020: S-127). While the associated ballot measure to dismantle the MPD lost by around 12% in 2021 (Londoño, 2023), that even momentarily this was a possibility demonstrates just how far the terrain has shifted.

The same now must happen with climate policy. Throughout this thesis I have demonstrated how climate legislation is systematically undermined by neoliberal technocracy and market values. As such, the major policy takeaway is that policy such as the BPRA, that enables the state to directly intervene in the generation and distribution of renewable energy, should be replicated. Across the world, remunicipalisation is demonstrating the power of the local state in tackling the climate crisis and challenging advice from transnational institutions such as the OECD and IMF which continue to support market-based solutions in public service provision (Cumbers et al., 2022: 2). By bringing sectors into public ownership, commercial criteria and shareholder profit can be replaced with environmental justice values and other social concerns (Ibid).

2) Make use of the Inflation Reduction Act

There is ripe opportunity for the public sector in energy provision in the US. Green industrial policy has been central to President Joe Biden's agenda, with the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) passed in 2022 the biggest piece of climate legislation enacted in US history (Bigger et al., 2022: 1). While the IRA is a far cry from a Green New Deal and has been criticised for failing to plan a phase-out of fossil fuels (Ibid, 3), it nevertheless includes a number of key provisions that a range of stakeholders (social movements, non-profits, and engaged elected officials at the municipal and state levels) should take advantage of.

Indeed, provisions included in the IRA which extended clean energy tax credits and offered a direct pay option, had a direct impact on the passage of the BPRA, as NYPA was enabled take advantage of tax credits that had previously been reserved for private developers (Bigger et al., 2022: 2). That other movements

could take advantage of these provisions demonstrates that even within the constraints of centrist and top-down infrastructure spending, there remains scope to exert significant agency at the local level. Social movements and other actors in local state spaces can leverage these federal policies to construct public and community-based energy alternatives, demonstrating that transformative change can emerge from within more limited policy frameworks.

3) Deepen democracy through participation

The final policy recommendation relates to deepening channels of participation, to address the procedural injustice of the energy system. The rate case proceedings are undemocratic and outdated. IOUs should not be able to extend the life of fossil fuel infrastructure into perpetuity, and rate case proceedings must begin to reflect this reality. This recommendation follows the lead that has been set by other work, which has discussed how the regulatory frameworks around environmental decision-making are inadequate at promoting environmental justice outcomes, and community-led processes should be adopted as a corrective (Johnson, 2019).

4) Harness local movements and variegated strategies

The PPNY campaign demonstrated the power of social movements, culminating in a significant piece of climate legislation being passed into law in the state. At the local level, there are many levers that movements can utilise to similarly effect change. These include local referenda and ballot initiatives, which in states including Maine, Colorado and California have seen measures put on the ballot to municipalise IOUs and invest in green energy. The processual and variegated nature of neoliberalisation can be challenged in similarly processual and variegated ways, through messy experimentation and bold optimism.

7.4 Opportunities for future research

The experience of my PhD was one which shifted unexpectedly on more than one occasion. A global pandemic derailed much of my first two years. I did not enter the PhD expecting to engage with queer theory in my thesis. There were times

when the BPRA seemed destined to fail, trapped in legislative committees of which I had little access to. At the same time, I could not have predicted the BPRA becoming headline news (e.g., Uteuova, 2023; Wang, 2023; Dawson, 2023) as "the boldest challenge yet to the fossil fuel industry" (Featherstone, 2023) when I began my efforts to identify campaigns for public ownership at the local level. All of this to say that at many points the research I have undertaken over the last four years could have been markedly different, and as such there are many opportunities for future research.

In this thesis I have begun to make a connection between queer theory and Fraser's notions of (in)justice, and in future work I would like to further explore how these theoretical areas resonate and complement one another. Beyond this, I will briefly detail three major avenues.

1) Public power in the climate-conjuncture

While this thesis has focused on a case study of PPNY, there are numerous movements for public power proliferating around the US. In October 2023, Lead Locally organised a convening for groups organising to transform the energy system in their communities. Over seventy groups from across the US attended, each engaging with an area of the energy grid, from generation to transmission and distribution. Fraser (2021: 127) argues that there is a need for a trans-environmental bloc, and this burgeoning moment of locally situated public power groups represents that. Further research could therefore engage with how these movements are learning from one another, sharing practice and strategies, at this critical moment in the climate-conjuncture.

Research could also investigate opportunities outside of the energy sector. Remunicipalisation is proliferating in the provision of internet services in the US (Alperovitz and Hanna, 2015), and in some cases, water infrastructure has been contracted back in house by the local public sector, after being asset stripped by private equity firms (Ulmer and Gerlak, 2019; Hanna and McDonald, 2021). In California and New York, coalitions are developing public banks to better serve community needs. Analysing the tensions and dynamics present in these cases represents another way of understanding where and how processes of

neoliberalisation are being undermined, as well as how social movements are constituting alternatives. Further research could analyse how social movements are driving moves towards remunicipalisation and local public ownership in relation to literature focusing on US remunicipalisation as non-political and the result purely of public sector concerns with cost and delivery (Warner, 2023).

2) Labour unions in public power

A major area for further research relates to the labour movement and public power. This is an area that I did not explore in depth in this thesis, which is a limitation of the work. However, it is an area that will be crucial to understood as the US' public power movement continues to grow. Labour unions such as the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers were generally opposed to the BPRA, and in other public power campaigns across the US union opposition often presents a stumbling block. The reasons for this vary, but a major one relates to the Taylor Law, which is the piece of legislation that governs public sector unions, and crucially, does not give them the right to strike. Research seeking to understand how movements (especially explicitly ecosocialist ones) are engaging and negotiating with labour unions would address a gap. Similarly, understanding union opposition to the renewables transition and public ownership will be crucial for any research or policy concerned with a just transition.

3) The radical municipalism of DSA

Finally, DSA are a significantly under researched organisation. They are the largest socialist organisation in the US, achieving significant wins at all scales of government. This thesis has focused specifically on DSA chapters in NYS, and within that just each chapter's ESWG. However, DSA's reach goes far beyond the local energy sector. Critically engaging with the political project DSA are mobilising presents a fruitful future avenue for research – including its confrontational and fragmented online presence.

Similarly, positioning DSA as a municipalist project would benefit municipalist practice and theory – key municipalist scholars have declared the strategy to be "in crisis" (Roth et al., 2023). Similarly, a common critique of municipalist

literature is that it overly focused on European experiences (Arpini et al., 2022). DSA do not appear in the wider literature around radical municipalism. However, many of their successes are at the local level, and as I have demonstrated through this thesis, their way of engaging with the state can be understood through a municipalist frame.

7.5 Failing forwards?

At the beginning of this thesis, I outlined what the BPRA looked like throughout my time in the field. This is what activists were campaigning for, and what informed the interviews and observations I conducted with the PPNY Coalition and others affiliated to the BPRA. Throughout this thesis, I have discussed how the bill failed on more than one occasion, eventually passing in Governor Kathy Hochul's 2023 Budget. However, the BPRA that passed in 2023 was different than the one on which this thesis is based. I do not intend to do a strict comparison here, as it is beyond the scope of the thesis, however, it is important to reflect upon the more significant of these changes, due to what they reveal about the workings of neoliberal power in the face of an agile social movement during the climate-crisis.

Crucially, many of the BPRA's labour mandates were dropped, including the provision that any renewable project built by NYPA would be considered 'public work' (Stafford, 2023). This would have ensured project labour agreements (PLAs), which are pre-hire collective bargaining agreements that cover terms and conditions for work on government construction (Stafford, 2023; Madland, 2021) and supported apprenticeships (Stafford, 2023). Similarly, nearly all democratisation elements were dropped from the bill. Decisions around phasing out polluting fossil fuel sources, and judgements as to the state's progress on meeting the CLCPA's renewable energy targets (a decisive marker for if NYPA can intervene), will be left to the DPS, PSC, NYSERDA and the Office of Renewable Energy Siting (NYS Executive Budget, 2024: 290).

The Governor's version of the BPRA expands the role of the state in the development of renewable energy. It is without a doubt the result of the years' long efforts by the PPNY Coalition to politicise NYPA and problematise the role of the market in the renewables transition and the energy system more broadly.

However, in dropping some union standards and all democratisation standards, an interesting picture is revealed about what the neoliberal state can afford to adopt and what it will out-manoeuvre as it adapts to new challenges. Similarly, the PPNY Coalition have moved away from what was the second of their two bills – the NY Utility Democracy Act – which would have directly challenged IOUs in a way that the BPRA did not. This was a similar assessment of power and compromise.

I am deliberately drawing attention at the very close of this thesis to whether the passage of the BPRA was a success, or if it was instead demonstrative proof of the limits of engaging with the neoliberal state for transformative politics, for two reasons. Firstly, to again demonstrate that the PPNY movement is far from over. But secondly, to demonstrate the messy, evolving and processual nature of prefigurative social movements.

Throughout this thesis, I have demonstrated how PPNY's campaign to pass the BPRA unfolded as a series of messy, embodied and affective engagements with, against and beyond the state. From the drafting of the BPRA itself and insider lobbying, to door-knocking around NYS, to disruptive moments of protest and confrontational and agonistic challenges to 'business-as-usual' political practices, PPNY took incremental steps toward a more democratic energy system.

These steps required constant adaptation, compromise, and negotiation, and demonstrate how prefigurative politics are reliant upon everyday collective acts. By focusing on the messier and affective moments of encounter between social movements and the state, I argue that the struggle towards redistributive justice should be understood as an ongoing praxis of becoming, rather than a single moment of rupture or a definite demand.

While passing legislation and attempting to work within the state is not revolutionary in form, I contend that in content, a radical impulse can be glimpsed in movements attempting a democratic transformation of the energy system and local state. By demanding a break from energy as a commodified form, and elite, technocratic forms of governance, PPNY's campaign to pass the BPRA sought to redefine the purpose of energy by problematising its ownership. By seeking to reclaim public infrastructure by positioning the IOU model, and the associated

infrastructures of the local state that uphold this model, as central to their critique, movements for the remunicipalisation of energy can be seen as transformational, especially within the context of a neoliberalised public sphere where the very idea of the 'public' has been eroded. Attempts to re-embed energy systems and infrastructures within democratic, non-market logics challenge core tenets of neoliberalisation, such as privatisation and marketisation, austerity and technocracy. As such, movements organising with this vision of redistributive justice, through messy and minor manoeuvres, are radical in orientation, if not always in tactic. This understanding challenges linear definitions of radicalism and instead values processual, collective, and affective forms of disruption.

However, by engaging with the state, the transformational impulse is constrained. The neoliberal common sense that is present in hostile regulatory and political structures is deeply embedded, and the question remains as to whether movements can transform the state without being absorbed or neutered by it. This thesis demonstrates that redistributive justice can function as a wedge, opening up spaces for alternative logics to take root within institutions. However, without sustained pressure, successful coalitions (including with labour unions) and creative and future-oriented politics, such reforms risk reproducing neoliberalism – which is itself messy and contradictory enough to absorb critique as part of its ever-changing adaptation (as e.g., Mayer (2006) and Fraser (2019) have so successfully demonstrated).

Arguably, in the present moment of the climate conjuncture the future itself is at stake. The climate crisis demands swift and bold action to mitigate the worst of its impacts, and movements are organising to ensure that such mitigating action is taken in ways which move towards new political-economic structures of social relations. These relations are always a becoming, an aim, rather than a strict destination. Here, the not-yet of a collective futurity goes beyond passing legislation, towards a re-orientation of ways of being which reshape our relationships to one another and to the local state. Movements organising in a minor way, within, against and beyond the state, matter because they keep the horizon open, with the affective solidarities that are forged in the process as crucial as the tangible outcomes achieved. In this, even small redistributive gains can carry prefigurative potential, if they are oriented toward justice.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: PPNY legislative session timeline

2021/22 NYS Legislative Session

- January 2021: The BPRA is introduced into the NYS Legislature
- April 2021: The statewide PPNY campaign and the BPRA is launched on Zoom
- June 2021: The NYS legislative session ends with the BPRA still in the committee stage of the legislative process

2022/23 NYS Legislative Session

- March 2022: Green New York slate of DSA-endorsed candidates is launched for the NYS elections
- April 2022: The BPRA moves out of the Assembly Committee on Corporations, Authorities and Commissions
- June 2022: The BPRA is voted on in the NYS Senate and gains enough votes to pass
    - However, the BPRA is not scheduled for a vote in the NYS Assembly. At this point, PPNY start organising to pressure Assembly Speaker to convene a 'special climate session' to pass the bill.
- July 2022: Public Hearing on the Role of State Authorities in Renewable Energy Development is called to determine the 'feasibility' of the BPRA

2023/24 NYS Legislative Session

- February 2023: The BPRA passes the NYS Senate
- May 2023: The NYS Legislature approves a budget that includes most of the provisions of the BPRA and enables NYPA to build, own and operate renewable energy projects.

Appendix 2: Analytic memo

"The legislation is the vehicle"

With this I am thinking specifically about [redacted] use of 'vehicle' as part of the messy/prefigurative work of the Public Power Coalition, which is somewhat municipalist in a sense (drawing from the work on the joint paper for the ESA conference where we compared the municipalism's of NY, Argentina and Germany). The most municipalist thing about PP/DSA is in how they understand their electoral strategy as part of a co-governance project, in which they are attempting to make power emerge outside of traditional institutions and in working class communities.

In municipalist thinking, the point is not to simply implement progressive policy, but to crack the state in a way in which power is opened out. This is what I think [redacted] is getting at here: so the goal isn't just to pass BPRA and then sit back, but to use BPRA as part of building a mass movement (and of course use this mass movement to pass BPRA) in which the energy system is democratised.

As such, understanding BRPRA as a vehicle could be an important code going forward, or form part of a theme in my second empirical chapter. In this, they are thinking about 'the doing' of democracy which relates to my conceptual framework.

Other In Vivo Codes which relate to this:

1. How we change our law
2. Build the massive movement
3. Not only win
4. Base building
5. Community building
6. How they start getting involved in the community
7. Fighting for Public Power and how that's eventually gonna be implemented
8. Filter down to the local level
9. Long term we're really trying to educate people to understand the utility system
10. Get people more involved that way
11. Building a base that is big enough to threaten the powers that be
12. The community has never been a part of that
13. it's all about passing the knowledge
14. having more and more people who actually have that power
15. base building and power, is going to be really necessary.
16. we want this as localised as possible
17. need those kind of structures of organising
18. reach out to bring the community in

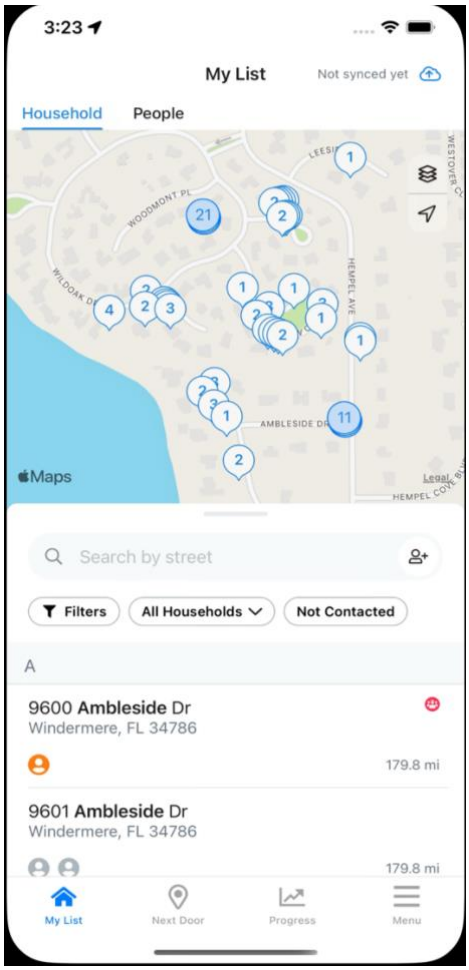
Appendix 3: Ethical Approval

Appendix 3 removed due to confidentiality issues

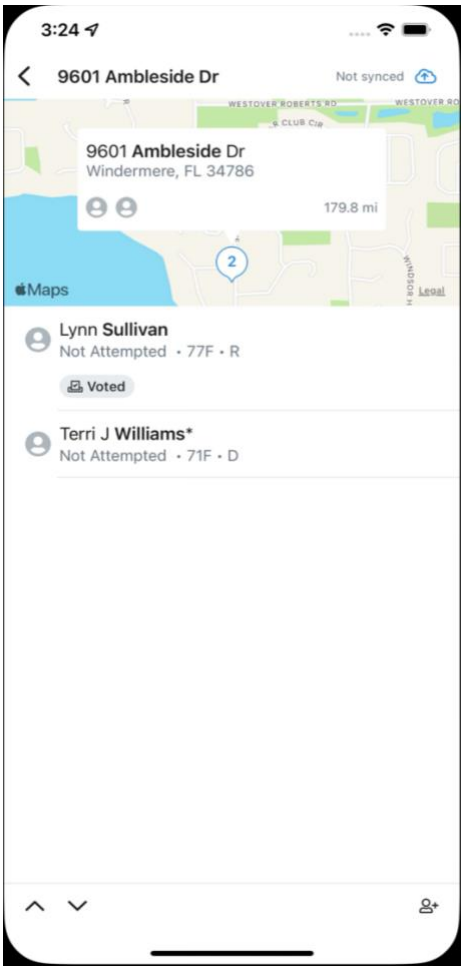
Appendix 4: MiniVAN

The images below are demonstrative of how MiniVan functions but are not from the canvasses I attended, due to the personal information such as addresses and voting history on each screen.

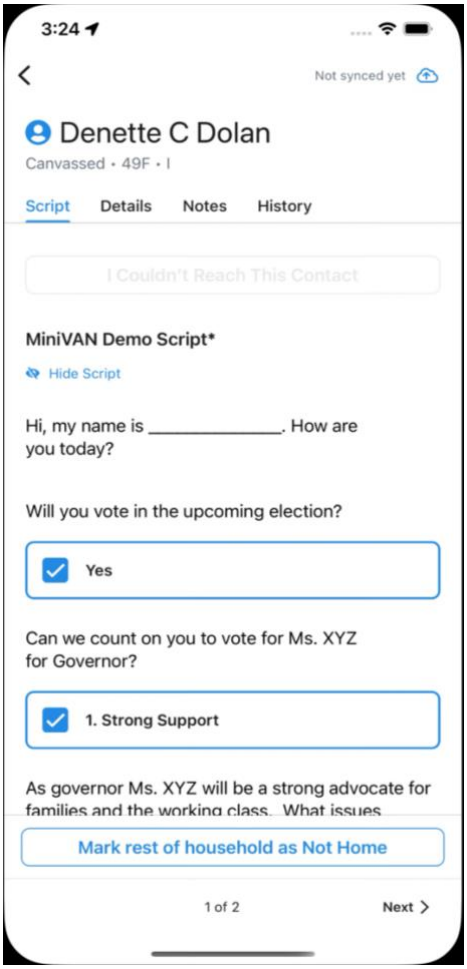
Canvassers are given a list number, which is connected to a map of contacts. This is the 'turf' to be canvassed.



After tapping a house on the map, the people to be canvassed are displayed with their age, sex, and voter registration.



The script is displayed, and support options range from ‘strong oppose’ through ‘lean oppose’, ‘neutral/unsure’ and the same o to strong support. Various customisable options can be added at this stage. Many DSA scripts included information about specific issues, such as the BPRA, and asks of the resident which went beyond voting, such as volunteering to canvas.



The different options available for successful and unsuccessful contacts.