Defining the Present, Shaping the Future: The Administrative Second Coming of WOMP

by

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Richard¹s paper is quintessential Richard Falk: comprehensive, thoughtful, suggestive -maybe even bold. It has enough in it that a careful read by the participants ahead of time could yield substantial conversations about the theme of our gathering: "to WOMP or not to WOMP." I think, that some additional reflections on his part on what are the conditions under which "to WOMP" can happen or not happen (or in the alternative, what are the conditions under which "not to WOMP" can happen or cannot happen) would be useful to further focus the conversations, or generate more thought from others. I also think that the "elephant in the room" for our conversation is whether or not we need to (or can) engineer the "resurrection" of WOMP <as we once new it, or whether we need to let WOMP pass on, in order to make way for the fundamentally new and better. There is, after all, a huge difference between resurrection and resuscitation. And legacies do not always take the form of the familiar.

What would also be helpful, in my view, is a down-to-earth discussion of what the audiences or constituencies of WOMP (if there are any who remain) are looking for as they engage in their own work. I've always believed that WOMP's contribution to human discourse broadly and narrowly understood is at least three-fold: its specific "normative perspective" rooted in a global/cosmopolitan -and therefore diverse -understanding of "the political" (³global² comprehended in Nancy¹s term, ³mondialisation²); it¹s love affair with the ³future² (its meditations on space, time, and place), and its dialogical process (more ³moving through a logos² than a one-on-one conversation) that aspires to the hospitable. I also believe that the main significance of WOMP does not lie only in the visible leadership of those gathered here, but, perhaps more important, in the ways its values, methods, sensibilities, and commitments were accepted, adopted, modified by others who do not even recognize the origins of what they are practicing.

What needs to be thought through is whether it is desirable or even necessary to work for an administrative "second coming"<in forms directly recognizable or attributable to the old WOMPERS and to WOMPING; or whether, moving forward in the spirit of WOMP noted in the previous paragraph, means developing not only new and more relevant ways of defining both the present and the future but doing so in the light of what is administratively needed to transform the world. Can we now view or articulate WOMPING in terms of contributions toward competencies and skill sets <beyond information, knowledge and analysis, which WOMP quite compellingly provided in the past? Many of you, I am sure, have a legacy of influence in the many worlds that you traverse, but let me be brash and suggest that we are not the shapers of the
current world system or alternatives to it. If you will agree that this is even partly so, then, WOMPING needs to shape itself in terms of "companionship" competencies in the governance of the world.

I think of this in terms of competencies of being more robustly "political" ("all that we can and need to do together"). And if this is worth reflecting on, then, what kinds of competencies are needed to assist other more "powerful" political institutions (however "powerful institutions" are defined and in relation to "WOMP") and agencies in addressing issues which WOMPERS are not always a recognized part (no intentions of belittling the achievements of WOMPERS and their contributions to "the life of the mind" and the "life of the body"). More conventionally put, what are the elements of a transformative politics for those of us who are not kings or princes, or even king-makers, but rather, court philosophers—if not, as in my case, the court jester—or better still, the academic bureaucrats?

To put the matter organizationally, I believe it is not enough to focus our attention on WOMP's legacy of information, knowledge, and analysis. There is an over abundance of competencies—"even competition"—as well as complementarities, among WOMPERS in this area. What there is a serious lack of are the administrative competencies and infrastructures (or the political will) that are required to ensure that the WOMP "brand" of information, knowledge, and analysis can be effectively promoted. This, in my view, has been WOMP's perennial dilemma: the "transition strategy" organizationally and administratively understood. For the size of its administrative infrastructure, what WOMP qua WOMP has accomplished looks like a miracle; but, in my view, the future of the world cannot rely on miracles.