

# PERSPECTIVES ON ANARCHIST THEORY

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FALL 2012

*This issue is dedicated to the inspiring memory of Dara Greenwald and Joel Olson.*

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# INTRODUCTION

THE PERSPECTIVES  
EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE

**T**o care is to give a shit.  
*To care is to feel involved,  
 affected, implicated, invested in  
 what happens.*

The theme of our last issue, which came out in September of 2011, was, serendipitously, “Building a Movement.” It went on the shelves just a week before Occupy Wall Street helped to ignite the country and the world around the possibilities for mass social mobilization. The timeliness felt born of a collective unconscious urge: after years of relative quiet, of wondering whence our urge to rise, we found ourselves in the midst of the one of the largest social movements in our lifetime. It was a galvanizing, exhilarating, frustrating, and complicated time for many of us. As we began to take stock after the tumult and excitement of last fall and winter, we realized that many of us were suffering from traumas or uncertainties stemming from experiences we’d had through Occupy and affiliated activities: burnout, stress, strain on relationships, self-criticisms, physical and mental wellness, community tensions—all of these things came to the forefront as the excitement began to wear off and we had the time and space to examine our successes and mistakes. With this in mind, we decided that the next issue should be organized around the theme of “Care” with the intention not only of rooting our work in love, but also of promoting the kind

of longevity and commitment that our work demands, collectively.

*To take care of something is to be responsible for it.*

When we talk about care in the context of anarchist organizing practices, including both responsible self-care and mutual care for one another, what we are ultimately talking about is seeking an integrated balance between individual and collective, ecological and social, mind and body. These principles are then echoed in the structures we seek to build, the meals that we share, the stories we tell, and the relationships and networks we form. When we are tired or afraid, when we feel despair or exhaustion or apathy, we often find that we have moved away from these principles, or have forgotten their importance. Both the integration and the balance are fundamental concepts, touchstones to which we can return time and again as we find our way together through moments of collision and action, through stagnation and rebuilding and learning.

By focusing on care, we are also pointing directly to the fact that we do this work out of love. Our aspiration to form a new and better world together is a creative impulse, one that comes from a desire to defend what we care about, as well as to develop a culture and practices that reflect our love for freedom, for equality, for transformation, and for each other.

Care takes many forms in society and so also provides numerous potential sites for resistance and intervention. Whether a society’s resources should be marshaled toward the collective wellbeing of its members—health, housing, food, education—or toward militarization and profit accumulation, is a no-brainer. What mode of organization should administer such priorities—a

state, or a decentralized grassroots network of medical and agricultural cooperatives, collectives for production and distribution of desired goods, and so forth—is an important question. In this issue of Perspectives, we want to explore antiauthoritarian ways of addressing these questions of care, from the intimate to the systemic.

*To care for something, some place, or someone, is to protect, cultivate, nurture, and sustain life, helping it to grow healthy and strong and to reach its potential.*

Our physical bodies have often been sites of contention in politics, and so are an immediate and universal locus for our care and attention. This manifests in many forms, from health care and medicine to gender and sexuality, self-esteem, mental health, reproduction, identity, and race.

Health care has been a major topic of public conversation in the United States over the past few months and years, largely due to its controversial role in current national politics. Obviously we have no interest in becoming enmeshed in partisan legislative debates, and it would be paradoxical for us to demand state-based health services. But we are concerned with the issues at the heart of this debate, which have to do with the fundamental values of the society we live in. It has been said that one can judge a society by how it treats its weakest members, and on this score the US does not look very good at all.

We object to the expropriation of this basic right to good health into a commodity that allows pharmaceutical and insurance corporations to extract surplus from our very bodies. Illness should not be a source of profit, nor denying someone the means to get well. We also object to a concept of physical and particularly psychological

health that indicates homogenization as “normalization” to “appropriate” gender and affect, facilitating contentment with unacceptable circumstances. We object to reproductive control by state or religious bodies, particularly pernicious in race and class terms.

In the context of racialized historical trauma, perpetuated through continuing structural violence, mutual care is an active process of rebuilding and survival; here healing becomes a component of resistance.

*To take care, or to be careful, is to pay attention, to be alert, to be mindful, to use caution, to act with full awareness of surroundings and consequences.*

Our community bodies are sites of resistance, as well. Caring for one another, developing networks on foundations of sound trust and mutual respect, as well as on shared understanding of basic security practices, is a way we keep ourselves and each other safe. By recognizing that ours is a common cause, not an individual pursuit, we see that it is both in our own best interest and that of our work to treat the risks and struggles of others as our own. This is the fundamental value of solidarity: it is only through our commitment to and concern for one another that we are strong.

People are currently resisting a series of FBI raids and Grand Jury subpoenas in the Pacific Northwest. This is a concerted attack by the state upon the anarchist and larger antiauthoritarian movement, which comes on the heels of the FBI entrapment of a group of people in Cleveland on May Day, and in Chicago during resistance to the NATO summit later that same month. Like has been done with the Muslim community since 9/11, anarchists are now being targeted, demonized, and

sent to jail on trumped up charges based upon the actions of informants and the fabrications of the state.

What the state seeks to achieve is tearing apart the very fabric of our lives that makes it possible for us to come together and collectively act to change the world. Where we have strong bonds based in common politics and shared life experiences, the state wants to instill suspicion and paranoia. Where we have friendship and a sense of camaraderie, the state wants to foster distrust and uncertainty. The state does not want us speaking our minds, organizing demonstrations and direct actions, raising the social costs through militancy and fighting back. They fear a social movement that is unafraid. They want us to cower in fear for who will be next: “Will they come for me?” Fuck that! People have rallied around the comrades subjected to raids and subpoenas, and if anything, this attack is uniting folks across previously minor differences over tactics or strategy; it has united a large group with a variety of political tendencies, including a solidarity statement signed by over 350 organizations.<sup>1</sup> We care about what happens to each of us.

The larger Occupy movement, which began only a year ago in New York City, has demonstrated that a large group of people care about what is happening in this country, and are ready to act. It is one of the largest, most popular social movements we have seen in our lifetime. Anarchists have played key roles in the success of this movement, and the current attacks are an attempt to sever us from a larger population that is rising up. Anarchist ideas are more widespread today than at any other time since the movements’ heyday. This has been recognized by the state. It is time for us to go farther, to further develop

anarchism as the new common sense.

We do this because we give a shit. We are invested in what happens—in our relationships, our communities, our environment, and our world(s). To take care of something is to be responsible for it; we are all responsible for the lives we live—not only our own, but those we touch, those we work with, those we rely upon, those we affect, human and otherwise. By embracing the notion of care and its implications of integrated balance, solidarity, and mindful activity, we can collectively advance contemporary anarchism into its fullest strength and potential.

## NOTES

- 1 <http://nopoliticalrepression.wordpress.com/>.



# HOME IS WHERE OUR HEARTS ARE

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HEIDI WHIPPLE,  
TARAN CONNELLY,  
AND KARI KOCH,  
MEMBERS OF THE  
PORTLAND LIBERATION  
ORGANIZING COUNCIL  
INFORMATION WARFARE  
CLUSTER

« Annette Steele, 79-years-old, great-grandmother of fifty, announcing that her family will not be evicted from their generational home in NE Portland, July 27, 2012. Photo: Pete Shaw.

# W

hen we engage  
in revolutionary  
work, we're act-

ing from a deep place of caring: caring for ourselves, for our fellow humans, for the planet—sometimes all of these, sometimes just one. At times, we forget to care for ourselves and at others we are only motivated by the pain we carry. Whatever the mix, the righteous anger that fuels so much of our work would not exist unless something we cared about was threatened. The desire to confront our oppressors and the desire to protect ourselves and that which we love are interwoven.

On the morning of May 1st, 2012, organized community members and allies marched together to move a local woman, Alicia Jackson, back into her NE Portland home after she had been evicted in the Fall of 2011. In doing so, a deliberate statement was made that people are willing to take great risks to care for those in their communities by claiming power to liberate spaces. The action was intentionally built on the idea that militancy and care for members of our community are deeply intertwined, and that the community members facing the harshest brunt of force from systemic oppression are working-class people of color. An opening was created by the Occupy related social movements of Fall 2011 that made May Day a ripe moment for

communities to organize, rise up, and defend themselves.

The morning of May 1st was chilly, but blessedly free of the late spring rains that are so typical in Portland, Oregon. In the brisk air, a crowd of several hundred gathered for a rally and march at Woodlawn Park, drawn in by the thorough community organizing and tantalizing street art that had appeared all over town for weeks. The wide expanse of grass was dotted with signs and banners reading “Our World is Here” and “Take Back the Land.” A few blocks away, flying squads, similar to affinity groups, were donning protective gear and readying reinforced banners in preparation for potential police aggression that might interfere with the day’s events. Known for using ‘sturdy banners’ to move crowds forward despite police lines, these flying squads gained their reputation for skillful, disciplined maneuvering during large actions such as the anti-police brutality march in Nov 2011 and the Shut Down the Corporations march on Feb 29, 2012. These squadrons were developed explicitly as a vital and necessary component of a successful space reclamation, acknowledging that deep care for the impacted community meant intentional preparation for confrontation. While the home liberation was intended to be a militant action, it was also organized to be a welcoming space for the community. As such, the flying squads, the first people one would see approaching the action, specifically did not “bloc up,” meaning no masks, no goggles, faces showing with the hope that an exposed smile would go along way towards building a welcoming action.

This action was organized by three groups, primarily: the Portland

Liberation Organizing Council, We Are Oregon, and the Black Working Group of NE Portland. PLOC<sup>1</sup> formed in early 2012 as a network of radical groups in Portland. We Are Oregon is an SEIU-backed and staffed community organizing and direct action group. The Black Working Group (BWG) was formed in the Fall of 2011 by and for the Black community as a community resource defense group, with a focus on housing and the foreclosure crisis.

Months of preparation and coalition organizing led up to this day of action that took place in Woodlawn—a NE Portland neighborhood currently undergoing a rapid process of gentrification. Lobo Negro, an anti-gentrification activist with the Blazing Arrow Organization in NE Portland explains, “Northeast is often called ‘the soul of Portland’ because of its historically black neighborhoods, but gentrification, the replacement of locals by wealthier residents through bank investment and uncontrolled development, has changed that. In response, a growing number of people in NE are waging a public fight to keep their homes, rather than be relocated by the banks.”<sup>2</sup> Alicia Jackson is a Black veteran and long-time resident of the neighborhood who had been threatened out of her house by Wells Fargo in the fall of 2011. The bank sold her mortgage to a developer who wasted no time in throwing up a new condo unit on Jackson’s property, exhibiting classic methods used by business and housing owners to drive up property values, push working poor families out of their communities, and advance gentrification. The focus of the May Day action became supporting Jackson in reclaiming her home by demonstrating the strength and resolve of the people of Portland to take back



land and other resources from the unaccountable economic system, specifically the banking and mortgage industries.

Inspired by brief speeches offered by the day's hosts, Alice Paul of PLOC and Ahjamu Umi of the BWG, the crowd in Woodlawn Park surged onto Dekum St., banners and signs held high. A diverse collection of neighborhood locals, supporters, organizers, union members, families, and students, they took the street with confidence and enthusiasm shouting out chants, talking, and laughing. Barring a half-hearted and unsuccessful effort made to keep the march on the sidewalks of the neighborhood, the police primarily trailed behind the crowd. As the march approached its destination, the flying squadrons emerged from a rally point to lead a diversionary march through a circuitous route that rejoined the mass of the march in front of Alicia's house. When the march stopped in front of the destination home, the squads took positions at both ends of the block, creating a police-free zone.

Inside this protected block, all eyes were on Jackson as she walked up onto her porch and declared, "This isn't just about me, this is for all of us!" Friends, a local minister, and other homeowners undergoing foreclosure joined her on the porch and made brief statements of support. Amid wild cheers of enthusiasm, Jackson cut the broad yellow ribbon that had been strung across the door, and displayed the key that someone had handed her.

The crowd collectively held its breath as Jackson tried the lock—jiggling, shaking, and coaxing the key to no avail. Finally, the key was tried in the side door and it unlocked immediately, ushering Alicia inside amidst the crowd's raucous chant of "Welcome

Home! Welcome Home!" The beaming grin on Jackson's face as she stood in her doorway told the whole story.

As the success of entering set in, the gathered folks sprung into action as PLOC's Logistics Team arrived with trucks full of Alicia's furniture and gardening materials. Music rang out as people jumped into cleaning the house and weeding the yard. Farmers helped create vegetable beds in the back yard where formerly only debris and brambles existed, and long tables of food were set up to serve the whole crowd lunch. Someone announced from the porch that the realtor had taken the house off the market that very afternoon, and the mood became joyous and playful. A huge bag of nerf balls was produced and a friendly game of dodge ball ensued; members of flying squadrons took breaks from their positions to throw the balls back and forth with children. Crowd members enthusiastically sawed the arms off of the "For Sale" sign in the front yard and people from different class, race and cultural backgrounds engaged in a traditional May Pole dance—strangers and comrades singing, dancing and interweaving in a physical metaphor of intercultural cooperation.

It was a successful day in a number of ways, with the following being some of the most prominent factors:

- It is a rare occurrence to take those in power by surprise, to knock them off their guard. This clear positive action was one of those instances where the police, the mayor, and the mainstream media all seemed tongue-tied by the actions of the people. This home liberation was the first of its kind in Oregon, a new direction for the movement, and a new attitude in the streets. This was an actual reclamation

of resources, not merely a symbolic action.

- The flying squadron units present that day had earned a reputation for effectively defending popular mobilizations against police action, and organizers had been vocal about the claimed right to defend this particular action.

- This was an actual community-led event, not an activist spectacle. The PLOC Community Organizing team - lead by the Black Working Group of NE Portland and non-profit We Are Oregon—had been canvassing the neighborhood and meeting with community leaders for months in the lead up to the action, which lead to many visible displays of support (like “Don’t Move Out” lawn signs) in the neighborhood.

- The action successfully created a choice for the mayor—either to support this homeowner by restraining the police force, or to attack Alicia Jackson in the name of banks and developers.

- The event was strategically timed to maximize impact. May Day in Portland is a historically exciting celebration of communities asserting themselves in the face of dominating systems of oppression. In its months-long outreach and invitation to the action, PLOC highlighted this legacy and the day’s role in the ‘Spring Offensive’ being rolled out by the national Take Back the Land Movement and revitalized energy from Occupy Portland. Additionally, Portland hosted five other events around town, some of which incurred a very high police presence. PLOC predicted accurately that police resources would be spread thin and not directed at Jackson’s re-entry.

Three months later, Alicia is still in her home, and the

community continues to support her through round-the-clock house sitting and rapid response maintenance. Others see this example and have begun to resist eviction. On July 27th, 2012, Annette Steele, a 79-year-old grandmother and her family announced that they will not move out of their home, despite being served a formal eviction notice by the Sheriff; they will stay and fight for their home along side their neighbors. On August 5th, the community again rallied on Alicia Jackson’s block to celebrate the 3 months of the successful liberation of her home, and to collectively liberate the empty duplex built on her land for use as a community center. Community members planned to use the reclaimed duplex, which is currently the subject of a legal dispute, as a base of organizing for people of color in the neighborhood against gentrification and police violence.

“Housing must be defended to end violence in working-class communities. Stable housing creates an environment for community self-reliance and healthy relationships. Without secure housing, families are displaced and communities are fragmented,” said Negro.

“Gentrification breaks the tie between generations, and forces communities to depend more heavily on outsiders such as the police to solve conflicts. Defending homes and stopping eviction protects the community’s safety.” The night of the community center liberation, the police forced their way into the building, arresting one person, and effectively shutting down the center for the time being. The action of the police demonstrate that they act on the will of banks, financiers, and developers, rather than in support of the community. When the police arrived and forced their way into the duplex, a network

of community support was activated and within the hour approximately 100 people came out to the homes to offer defense, witness, and assistance to the people living in those homes showing that together we are un-evictable. Actions against foreclosure and for collective control of land and resources continue in Portland with momentum and pressure mounting each day.

Ultimately, home defense results from the recognition that the economic and legal systems are used to take advantage of and manipulate working people for the gain of banks and financial institutions. This recognition, that there is no justice in the system, builds belief and power in the principle that the only thing we can count on to meet our needs are our communities, neighbors, natural and created families. Alicia, Annette and all the other faces of this struggle make it clear that any one of us survives only with the care, compassion, and commitment of our community.

## NOTES

- 1 Pronounced "P-lock."
- 2 "Northeast Residents Reclaim Duplex, Fight Gentrification," PLOC, accessed August 5, 2012, <http://www.liberatepdx.org/?p=439>.

≈ Duplex on Alicia Jackson's land that was illegally stolen by Wells Fargo and built on by developers, August 5th, 2012. Photo: Pete Shaw.





LEARN!!

LIBERATION

FREE SCHOOL

LEARNING CENTRE

519

ALL  
AGES

Welcome  
649

NEIGHBORHOOD  
RUN

EDUCATION  
IS A  
RIGHT

PEOPLES  
★  
HEALTH

PEOPLES HEALTH

# ALTERNATIVES TO EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES (EMS)

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THE ROSEHIP MEDIC  
COLLECTIVE

« *Free!* (detail)  
Josh MacPhee  
2009

WHY "ALTERNATIVES  
TO EMS"?

As communities across the US deal with the ongoing realities of police violence, discussions and projects have emerged to work towards accountable, non-oppressive, and community driven alternatives to police forces. This work has connections with progressive, transformative and revolutionary social justice projects such as those for prison abolition and support for houseless communities. As we see it, this flurry of activity around policing is one of many interconnected struggles and aspirations. So while we dream of and start to build alternatives to institutions like the police, we cannot stop there.

As EMTs, first responders, street medics, and other care providers, we believe that efforts to create radical alternatives also need to include emergency medicine and wellness care. If we are serious about seeking ways to reform or abolish institutions for law enforcement and incarceration, we must also critically address the broader realm of state and corporate administered health and safety. At the intersection of healthcare and emergency management, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) are frequently left treating those least served by other medical institutions—while further enforcing gender, race, class, political, and physical/mental ability

categories on people experiencing emergencies and chronic illness.

Ultimately, we hope to broaden discussions of community alternatives to systems of domination to include health, wellness, and safety and to provide a starting place for developing real communities of care.

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF EMS

Emergency Medical Services are systems intended to provide prehospital care and transport for injured and ill patients. While many traditions of healing exist and deal with the incidence of traumatic injury and illness, we focus here on those which produced EMS systems in the United States, most of Europe, and other areas affected by US and European imperialism. While the need for such systems today may seem obvious, less than fifty years ago pre-hospital medicine in the United States was almost exclusively the domain of soldiers and undertakers (and hearses, the convenient predecessors to today's ambulances). Examining the rapid rise of contemporary EMS in the United States and much of the global North is useful in explaining both its functions and place within institutions of medicine and emergency response (police, fire, disaster management).

The role of battlefield medics is one of the earliest and longest documented roots of this kind of care, with several independent lineages from before the European Middle Ages up through today. In Europe, Napoleon Bonaparte's chief surgeon designed a "flying ambulance" (carriage) system of medics that would treat and then gather up injured soldiers. Similar principles were implemented for cholera epidemics in Great Britain and eventually spread throughout Europe and to the

United States. Several late 19th Century physicians, disturbed by the lack of care on increasingly bloody battlefields, advocated for protection of captured and wounded soldiers, non-combatants, and medical providers. These efforts led to the Geneva Convention and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Society.

Radicals in pre-revolutionary Russia also recognized the need for support infrastructure, with vast numbers of political dissidents imprisoned by the tsarist government. In the early 1900s, the social democratic-influenced Red Cross and the Anarchist Red Cross (later "Anarchist Black Cross," to avoid confusion) formed to provide food and medical care to political prisoners and revolutionaries.<sup>1</sup> After the Bolshevik Revolution, the Anarchist Black Cross (ABC) spread across Europe and the United States, largely due to heavy repression and forced emigration of anarchists from the Soviet Union. Although ABC (and the prisoners they supported) eventually vanished from the USSR, chapters in Spain, Italy, the United States, and Germany continued supporting (and sometimes evacuating) radicals.

Through the course of the World Wars, increasingly brutal weapons demanded greater sophistication in equipment and training, including integration of automobiles, dispatch systems, and ride along doctors. Having in the last decade of the 19th century revised their scientific approach and created a professional certification system, the allopathic or Western doctors of most hospitals and universities systematically invalidated other traditions of medicine, including 'heroic' (e.g. leeching), homeopathy, eclecticism (Western botanical medicine), and



indigenous and folk traditions worldwide. Combined with its battlefield roots, this meant that the new civilian EMS model was firmly grounded in both military and allopathic approaches as it slowly began making appearances in larger cities. In 1950s Chicago, Drs. Farrington and Banks formally introduced military medicine into civilian EMS training with a trauma (injury) program for the city's fire department—a prototype for the first Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs).

In the late 1950s and '60s, early EMS systems grew more widespread but remained unstandardized, developing along distinct paths according to circumstance and need. In some urban centers, a handful of fire departments and urgent care hospitals began trial "paramedic" programs, which went beyond basic care and transport to include administration of medications and specialized care for severe injury and illness.

Meanwhile, amid the Cold War's entrenched conflicts in Korea and Vietnam, resources and training allocated to US military medics continued to increase, with more advanced protocols and equipment coming into wider use, including tiered medical response, advanced techniques (e.g. intravenous therapy and minor surgery), and helicopter ambulances. So successful were these improvements (and so poor their domestic analogs) that in 1966, the National Science Foundation report, *Accidental Death and Disability: the Neglected Disease of Modern Society*, found that patient outcomes were generally better among brutally-injured soldiers abroad than among civilians caught in car crashes, heart attacks, and everyday injuries and illnesses—primarily due to lack of

education, research, training, funding, and organization for emergency medical infrastructure.<sup>2</sup> The study offered 24 ambitious recommendations for EMS as they exist today, including: *prevention* (including education and safety standards), *tiered and integrated trauma systems* (first aid, ambulance services, emergency departments, rehabilitation), *disaster response*, and ongoing *research* into injury mechanisms and care. A seven year flurry of federal laws and acts established nationwide EMS training standards with increased scope, automobile safety standards, and millions of dollars for training, facilities and research. However, left to state governments, implementation and development of EMS systems remained uneven and slow, in part due to a general lack of awareness and demand. Today, many EMS workers remember the '70s TV series *Emergency!* as key to the popularization of paramedic programs. While producers portrayed LA County firefighter/paramedics with period-era exoticism and melodrama, they also went to great lengths making the show authentic, sending actors through paramedic training and consulting frequently with a local fire chief. The show's influence was so great that some paramedic programs used the TV show for training purposes.

In most areas, however, EMS programs remained scarce and insufficient. Even in served areas, help was often delayed or absent, depending on how quickly (if at all) responders were notified or available. In recognition of a need for greater community involvement, multiple states (starting with California in 1959) began passing Good Samaritan laws, intended to discourage spurious lawsuits and encourage voluntary service. Offering protections to lay

responders, these laws continue today to recognize a significant “gray area” in which many alternative EMS structures operate—more or less independently from the medical establishment.

One outgrowth of volunteer medicine developed in response to new kinds of injuries occurring in remote and challenging environments of North America and Europe, where recently protected wilderness spaces drew thousands of outdoor enthusiasts. In the early 1960s, educational materials for outdoor activities began recommending advanced techniques and administration of controlled medications—outside the scope and training of most urban EMS. The concept of “second aid”—provided by ski patrols and recreationists with or without independent medical training—was intended as a sort of place-holder for both urban EMS and early advanced care at hospitals. Beyond the reach of conventional medical systems and standards, wilderness medicine has since become a medical field in its own right, expanding with outdoor leadership roles (guides, Search and Rescue, etc.) to gain semi-professional status. As it remains legally unregulated, wilderness medicine continues to offer a flexible set of protocols with comparatively short medical training for situations where other EMS systems are impractical or unavailable. This has made it a favored choice among many radicals, community medics, and disaster responders.

Also during the '60s, members of oppressed and social justice communities combined the military practice of partisan care with the flexibility of Good Samaritan laws to provide for their own popular struggles. Formed to challenge white-supremacist exclusion of African Americans from access to

healthcare, medical education, and jobs in Mississippi, the Medical Committee for Civil Rights (MCCR) in its beginning lobbied and picketed against the American Medical Association and other segregated medical institutions. Yet starting with the March on Washington (1963) and Mississippi Freedom Summer (1964), members of the MCCR and the nation-wide Medical Committee for Human Rights (MCHR—composed of doctors, nurses, med students, and others) began filling more specialized roles, offering emergency and ongoing care to demonstrators, arrestees, and activists in what came to be called the Medical Presence Project (MPP). Many of these volunteers, though licensed in other states, chose to provide care illegally or under auspices of Good Samaritan law—at times literally under fire from police, KKK members, and others. Along with the care MPP activists offered, Civil Rights organizers also found that it encouraged greater participation and feelings of safety in their struggles. After Mississippi Summer, MCHR's work expanded to include public education, supply acquisition, community clinic development, documentation, advocacy, sanitation work, and more. MPP-style street/activist medicine also continued to play a part in further civil rights marches and demonstrations.

From equal rights agitation in the South, focus on alternative infrastructure spread to other human rights, student, self-defense, and liberatory movements, often engaging both licensed professionals and community-trained members of various movements. Throughout the '60s and '70s, medics played roles in demonstrations and power-building activities of the Black Panthers, American Indian Movement



(AIM), Young Lords Party, Vietnam Veterans Against the War, and in student protests, to name a few. Many of these movements, as well as early Street Medics, considered self-defense critical and cross-trained in martial arts.

The roles of medics and clinicians in caring for and sustaining these movements has in turn proceeded to inspire the street or action medics of '80s, '90s, and 2000s.

### EMMA GOLDMAN YOUTH AND HOMELESS OUTREACH PROGRAM (EGYHOP)

“EGYHOP’s mission is dedicated to bringing direct service items and resources to the homeless and low-income populations living on the streets or who self-identify as part of the street population.”<sup>3</sup>

Every evening in Olympia, Washington, EGYHOP volunteers go out on bikes with trailers to do exactly this. An ad-hoc group of volunteers and coordinators ensures that medical and hygienic supplies are available for nightly runs. Beyond simply distributing resources, EGYHOP volunteers are intent on being “a friendly and familiar face to talk with” for people who are often treated in dehumanizing ways by police and service providers. Volunteers see EGYHOP as a form of mutual aid, rather than charity. This is reflected in EGYHOP’s non-uniformed and relatively informal approach, and in the way volunteers cultivate relationships with people on the streets. EGYHOP volunteers consciously avoid judgmental or patronizing attitudes, and don’t have a religious agenda. They don’t see themselves as “experts” or as in a place to tell others how to live.

Though it is a relatively autonomous project, EGYHOP works with

and relies on other Olympia-based groups. Local shelter Bread and Roses, for example, provides storage space for supplies. EGYHOP also refers people to crisis hotlines and other services, including the Olympia Free Herbal Clinic, which also supplies EGYHOP with herbs. When absolutely necessary (as in a medical emergency), EGYHOP volunteers will call EMS and offer to advocate for patients, if possible.

EGYHOP volunteers emphasize the benefits of the trust they have built with the community. Making runs regularly means some folks on the street will “have their back” when needed, and volunteers in turn may try to help negotiate situations with EMS and copwatch<sup>4</sup> police stops. In addition to mutual safety, community ties improve services: folks acquainted with EGYHOP know when and where to find it. This trust is also important within EGYHOP teams. Volunteers going on runs need to know they can trust each other to communicate well and prioritize their own needs as they arise.

### STREET MEDICS

Street medics—also known as “action” or “activist medics”—are first aid responders, healthcare workers, and other wellness enthusiasts who volunteer to provide care at political events like marches, demonstrations, sit-ins, and occupations. Medics usually work either on foot with kits or in temporary clinics.

Street medicking emerged in its current form during the US movements of the 1960s and '70s. Since then, medics have supported a wide array of political, social, and environmental movements around the world.

As volunteers, street medics are not formally integrated into EMS

systems (though familiarity with their services is sometimes essential) which can be a valuable quality when urgent medical care is required at sites of political conflict. When police or military decide to use violent crowd control tactics, ambulances and other resources may not be allowed to enter what authorities declare an “unsecured scene.” (Remember, calling 911 activates medical services *and* police!) Even when available in the middle of a protest, treatment and/or transport by EMS professionals may give authorities greater ability to identify, detain, or arrest protesters. In contrast, street medics usually share sympathies with participants and may work directly with organizers and other infrastructure. This often gives street medics greater access and motivation to help in situations where EMS workers are unavailable, uncomfortable, or unwanted.

Shared anti-oppression and other principles also may make street medics and clinicians the preferred choices for those who feel alienated or endangered by corporate/state-controlled medicine. Street medics also generally share a strong emphasis on consent, mutual aid, patient-oriented care, confidentiality, and non-cooperation with police.

In the US, street medics often identify themselves with red duct tape crosses on clothes and packs. Usually working in buddy pairs, medics sometimes coordinate as teams for larger events and clinic spaces. A generally accepted minimum level of training to work as a street medic consists of 20 hours of basic first aid, particulars of medicking at political events, and how to deal with police weapons and tactics. However, many street medics also have other kinds of formalized training—as EMTs, nurses, Wilderness

First Responders, herbalists, acupuncturist and others. Street medic groups, independent medics, and similar or allied providers exist all over North America and many parts of the globe—adapting their training and practices to local needs.<sup>5</sup>

### COMMON GROUND HEALTH CLINIC

“The Common Ground Health Clinic started on September 9, 2005 just days after hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast. Due to the humanitarian disaster and apparent lack of governmental response, two community activists, Sharon Johnson and Malik Rahim, put out a call for healthcare workers to help meet the overwhelming need. The clinic started as a first aid station with the arrival of street medics best known through the anti-globalization movement. The clinic was originally set up in a mosque, with space being generously donated by the Masjid Bilal. Nurses, physicians, herbalists, acupuncturists, EMTs, social workers, and community activists came from around the world to volunteer at Common Ground Health Clinic. To date, the clinic has recorded over 60,000 patient visits- all at no charge to the patient.”<sup>6</sup>

In addition to receiving patients at the clinic, the Common Ground healthcare workers acted as mobile first responders to emergencies in the weeks and months after the hurricane. As Noah and Grace share with us in their interviews, the community also possessed a large and informal preexisting network (unaffiliated with the clinic), which allowed individuals to rely on one another for early response to crises, as well as limited treatment and transportation in the event of non-life-threatening emergencies.

With an explicitly radical and anti-oppression approach, Common Ground Health Clinic is an important example of many individual providers coming together from separate communities to work with local activists on an organized level. They also provide important lessons about working alongside existing (though severely diminished) state and for-profit emergency services as both a viable alternative and a provider of complementary care (including prevention).

### CRISIS ASSISTANCE HELPING OUT ON THE STREETS (CAHOOTS)

Founded by self-described hippies in the '70s, White Bird Clinic and CAHOOTS approach their work in Eugene, Oregon with a critical lens toward community care and police. They recognize that they have a unique position to take calls that would otherwise go to the police or EMS, and find that they have an opportunity to provide better care to people in crisis. CAHOOTS takes many of the police's "psych" calls, which are often public intoxication involving marginalized people, but can be any situation where a person is causing a "disturbance" and hasn't committed a crime.

CAHOOTS website:  
 "CAHOOTS is a mobile crisis intervention team integrated into the City of Eugene's Public Safety system. Free response is available for a broad range of non-criminal crises including intoxication, disorientation, substance abuse and mental illness problems, dispute resolution and street facilitation. The CAHOOTS van can be dispatched through the City's 911 department. Transport to treatment is also provided. The service is confidential and voluntary."<sup>7</sup>

### INDIVIDUALS/UNAFFILIATED NETWORKS

"One small and simple alternative [to EMS] from just a few weeks back was simple neighborliness in the bayou country of South Louisiana." —Grace

With or without certification, one of the more common current alternatives to EMS is the individual who, for any of a number of reasons, gets called when emergencies occur. These people often respond alone or as informal crews and provide whatever care and transportation they feel they can offer.

From earaches to stab wounds, we interviewed these first responders across the country with a wide range of training, including Wilderness First Responders, EMTs, herbalists, nurses, and those trained in post-disaster situations. Many of them expressed feelings that these networks could be formalized, but that their strength comes largely from calling on friends and community members as individuals and not as part of a larger organization. This sometimes means performing services without legal certification. However, offering care to patients who are legally or financially unable to access formal healthcare can be considered "harm reduction." Ultimately, community ties frequently allow enough trust between providers and patients to let them operate outside formal medical systems.

### HATZALAH AND FAITH-BASED EMS

Between autonomous and state or corporate-run EMS, there exist a number of faith-based volunteer associations which provide emergency medical services to meet the needs of their communities.

Hatzalah (Hebrew for "rescue") is an international Jewish EMS organization formed in the 1960s,

when members of a large, religious and Yiddish-speaking community in Williamsburg, Brooklyn recognized a need for faster and more culturally sensitive response to medical and traumatic emergencies in their community. At the time Hatzalah volunteers came from the same linguistic, cultural, and religious communities as their patients, and therefore were able not only to care for their neighbors but also negotiate religious laws and customs that sometimes posed barriers to accessing appropriate care.

Hatzalah is the world's largest volunteer ambulance service, with chapters in the US, Mexico, Canada, England, Belgium, Russia, Israel, and occupied Palestine. Organizing at the neighborhood level has meant that chapters differ according to scale, resources, and need. In the US, most responders are trained to EMT-Basic standards or higher, carry extensive "jump kits" in personal vehicles, and respond to emergencies in pairs based on availability and proximity. Many chapters operate ambulances as a second-tier response and routinely transfer patients as an independent auxiliary. With a large number of volunteers over geographically concentrated areas, some Hatzalah chapters boast uniquely rapid response times of as little as one to one and a half minutes, averaging two to four minutes in New York City (according to a 1992 *US News and World Report*) as compared to the 911 dispatch median of nine minutes.<sup>8</sup>

Anecdotally, in some areas Hatzalah responders are frequently called for non-medical emergencies as well—including domestic and community conflicts, "keep[ing] conflict resolution and other issues within the community—and out of the legal

system."<sup>9</sup> Although Hatzalah services are paid for and dispatched separately from 911 emergency response, they are free and available to everyone within their districts. Many chapters also provide community classes in first aid and safety, and have mutual aid relationships with regional EMS systems for larger emergencies.

The Sovereign Order of Malta and its British equivalent Order of St John are other examples of medical and service-oriented religious entities, which date from the Middle Ages and today offer popular education and humanitarian aid missions to Catholic and Protestant communities, in similar ways as the Red Cross, Red Crescent, and other national aid organizations.

## EMS V. THE COMMUNITY

*"Get up, get, get, get down, 911 is a joke in your town."*—Public Enemy

Police, fire, and medical services work together to respond to emergencies. For many communities that are impacted by police violence, EMS workers are less accessible to patients because the threat of violence and arrest shows up right along with (if not before) the medical help. The emergencies that EMS responds to are often in the neighborhoods most impacted by racism, poverty, crime, police surveillance, and most under-served by public institutions. In our discussions on work safety with EMTs and paramedics from around the country, most reported experiencing threatening situations on a regular basis. Even EMS workers who are police abolitionists spoke to feeling a reliance on the police for safety. Community healthcare, self-defense, and justice are clearly and inextricably linked.

How do we as a community make sure that people who need life-saving care get the care they need in a way that respects their identity, safety and desire to avoid arrest, detention or deportation? How can we make sure *those providing* that care feel safe enough to do their job every day without burning out? It's a long term project, but it starts with trying to understand how we got here and where exactly "here" is.

J, an EMT from the Pacific Northwest talks about his relationship to the police:

"I'm not gonna go into a party where there was a fight, which happened, where there's like 60 people hanging out drinking booze and I know there's potential for violence there and who's got my back? Somebody needs to have it and that's why I like firefighters, that's why I like the police to show up."

J's fears are pretty reasonable; an article in the *Emergency Medicine Journal* found that "International studies have shown that some 60% of paramedics have experienced physical violence [from patients] in the workplace."<sup>10</sup>

## SECONDARY TRAUMA

In addition to risk of violence from patients or bystanders, EMS workers are exposed to human pain and suffering daily. Many suffer from secondary trauma, including post-traumatic stress conditions and depression resulting from continued exposure to the cruelest and saddest sides of our world.

The high prevalence of secondary trauma and its related problems among healthcare workers points to a systematic lack of access to care and support

for those doing healthcare work. How can our visions for a liberatory approach to emergency medicine incorporate not just physical safety for providers, but also emotional well-being?

## CAHOOTS, A NON-OPPOSITIONAL APPROACH

G and H, EMTs who work with CAHOOTS, explain that because CAHOOTS began with a partnership with the Eugene police department, the police view CAHOOTS as a resource: "The police call us all the time for intoxicated subjects where there's no crime, ...[such as] someone who's intoxicated and stumbling down the street we can send them to a sobering station to sleep if off, no tickets, no fines, they're just safe and can sleep it off and walk away."

Although CAHOOTS operates through police dispatch, and they rely on the police for backup involving threats of violence, "in the vast majority of cases," they said, "we're out there without the police. It makes an enormous difference as to how we're perceived in this community."

We asked CAHOOTS about conflict with the police. They told us they and the people they serve actually have more problems with firefighters and EMTs. This story illustrates how the problems are larger than the police. David explains that in Eugene a 911 call often brings firefighters who are also paramedics, and that CAHOOTS often has conflicts with those firefighters who are often not very compassionate or people-oriented. He gives this example of:

"[a call] that I was on a number of years ago: [there was] a man who was middle aged, had an IQ of about 70,

had schizophrenia and a long term alcohol problem, had been homeless for many years, and didn't get along well with the police. The man got into a mental health oriented residential program, not totally sober but doing very well. [...]

So one day on the weekend they hadn't seen him for a day or so. There was only one staff so she went and knocked on his door and he was there but he was behaving strangely. She was not somebody with graduate degrees but [she had] a lot of experience working with these communities. He had been drinking, but this wasn't behavior due to alcohol, not strange behavior due to schizophrenia—she didn't know what it was so she called 911.

The 911 system caught the flags from the old days when he was a multiple officer response, so they sent multiple officers who barged into his apartment, took control of his kitchen cutlery, got into an oppositional attitude, and brought in fire and EMS. The multiple paramedics on the scene looked at him and decided he was a “drunken Indian” and called CAHOOTS to take him to detox. The young woman who was the staff was not listened to, her impression that this was a change of behavior not explained by alcohol or schizophrenia is information neither police nor paramedics took seriously. She was just shoved off to the side.

When we pulled up I could see various health staff up there. I caught up with a paramedic and asked her what was going on. What was this changed behavior? I'm not even an EMT and I sat down to look at the guy; he was partially dressed and with the kind of difficulty he was having getting his clothes on, it rang a bell—I'd seen this before. Buttoning, zipping, etc.—you can do all that while listening to the radio, talking to your partner, drinking coffee. He could still

do that, but he had to think about it. And sitting down talking to him, his pupils were uneven, his grip was weak. Theoretically I should've called EMS and had them come back to do it but we just unloaded the trunk and sat him down with triage.”

It is little surprise that race and class are very good indicators for the quality of care a person is likely to get from First Responders. A serious injury or acute illness masked by drunkenness is potentially lethal for anyone, but the fact that the man was Native, had a criminal record, and a long history of homelessness and alcoholism directly impacted the quality of care he received.

#### “WE OPERATE IN THE GRAY” —G

Most healthcare workers receive some self-defense and crisis resolution training, but functional alternatives to EMS have to address the question of safety in crisis situations. Our discussion about danger and safety with CAHOOTS' EMTs reveals a different approach than traditional EMS. G said:

“The team has the decision, if anyone threatens us we consider that a danger, but that's kind of gray. We operate in the gray. Everybody has their limits that they're comfortable with... If someone shows me a weapon and says, 'I'm going to stab you with this knife,' I'm gonna leave. But if someone's just loosely threatening it and their body language isn't showing that they mean it, and they nonchalantly say, 'get out of here or I'm going to stab you,' I'm like, well, do you really mean that... If there's immediate danger that we can't get away or if the person is in danger themselves, like laying in the road and then threatening us with a weapon so we can't get to them then we would request

the police department to come help us with this situation, get the weapon away from the person.”

CAHOOTS has a strong preference for hiring EMTs and crisis counselors with strong de-escalation abilities, from word choice to vocal inflection and body language. The result of this practice is a team of responders who are more confident in their ability to operate without the police, and are good at keeping each other safe. CAHOOTS also cross-trains their EMTs and crisis workers, so that EMTs who originally had little interest in being crisis workers end up seeing how those skills are vital for good medical work.

CAHOOTS demonstrates that it is possible to respond to mental health and medical crisis in a way that is more sensitive to people's needs than traditional EMS and police. They show that there is no substitute for good training and a true desire to meet people where they are at. They recognize that their success is influenced by the kind of community they serve; they described Eugene's population as significantly less intense than that in Portland or other larger cities, so much so that CAHOOTS' model of working with police might not work as well in communities with more users of multiple drugs and violent crime. J said:

Something I don't think radical people think about a lot is that there are violent, mean, scary people out there... and there's a way to protect people responding to that scene so that you don't get jumped by the drug addicts in the corner for your [ambulance's] drug box, or you're not responding to a [domestic] violence call and the boyfriend comes walking in with a baseball bat, so that

there are people [the police] there to respond to that.”

We want a world without police, but if we're going to ask the people doing emergency medical service work to do their jobs without the police, we are going to need to participate in creative solutions and be there to back them up.

## OUR THOUGHTS

### HORIZONTAL INFRASTRUCTURE/ TIERED SYSTEM

J: “So, about this title, ‘Alternatives to EMS,’ there won't ever be an alternative to EMS because when you're sick and you're actively dying, that's what you need. You need an ambulance and fire truck whether or not [...] culturally, you are in line with those folk.”

Regardless of how organized our networks become, J is correct: we cannot replace the current structure of EMS without the kind of funding that comes from the state. Our reliance on cars, laws designed to protect profit instead of human lives, and mass-production of toxic goods present us with dangers that necessitate heavy rescue equipment and hazmat teams. Without fundamental changes to our society, any alternatives to EMS will be incomplete, unable to adequately respond to all the dangers of our world. But as a part of a larger movement, with a functional “vertical infrastructure” of radical alternatives, we can (and do) provide alternatives to certain parts of the tiered system and can increase our ability to provide more urgent forms of care as we gain skill and structure.

Horizontal infrastructure bridges gaps between existing medical services and those that don't yet exist. It focuses



on the ignored spaces instead of contesting ground.

Vertical infrastructure means working with other groups to connect different services. It links ideas like alternatives to the police, reformative/transformative justice, and environmental activism with healthcare.

The idea that there is already a range of services available. For example, someone with good access to healthcare might follow a path like this:

0. Get primary and preventative care.
1. Buy an over-the-counter product.
2. Call and ask a nurse/doctor questions through their providers office or HMO.
3. Make an appointment with a doctor within a few days.
4. Go to urgent care that same day.
5. Go to the Emergency Department of their preferred hospital in a car or taxi.
6. Call 911 and go to their insurance's preferred hospital in an ambulance.
7. Call 911 and go to the nearest hospital with the service they need in an ambulance.

Each of these steps represents an increased level of urgency in their condition. Deciding which of these steps is needed can be a highly subjective process, and training can help make the "best" call by recognizing red flags. Often those without concern for legal, social and/or financial repercussions receive the care they need with the least amount of delay.

For someone without affordable or accessible healthcare, this process becomes increasingly expensive. However, many people without health insurance lack the ability to call a nurse/doctor advice line, make an appointment with a doctor, or access an urgent care clinic, which forces them to skip

directly to the Emergency Department. Additionally, those lacking primary and preventative care are more likely to experience urgent and emergent situations that could have been avoided with earlier access to treatment.

The best alternative to EMS wouldn't just be "our own" ambulance service; it would be care that prevents a life-threatening emergency. This would be care that prevents an infection, monitors high blood pressure and diabetes, and provides education so that emerging conditions are recognized while they can be handled in a way that is empowering, instead of the often-traumatic experience of receiving emergency care. This would also include responding to people where they are, and having a transportation option when further care was needed.

Noah from Common Ground Health Clinic: "We pop up everywhere and sometimes we are able to make things easier for some people, and as institutions like the Common Ground Health Clinic gained more ground and capacity . . . people came and talked to us and we continued to try and radicalize people about how they view the medical system... how it should be working instead of how it does work."

Noah discussed community alternatives in the form of helping people make decisions about when to enter the medical system, preventing chronic conditions from becoming emergencies (especially after Katrina when people were off their medications), and helping make connections between medical providers and people who can not or will not formally enter the medical system. None of this replaced ambulances, but bought time when ambulances weren't available and at times prevented the need for them. They provided services



using a model similar to an urgent care clinic with a mobile component, dispatching medics on bicycles and on foot to neighborhoods and community gatherings in the weeks following the floods and breakdown of state services.

Grace: “On the other hand, I personally remember the first auto accident I witnessed after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. Common Ground Health Clinic received the call as the 911 system was not operating, and several of us responded on bicycles. There was MOI for c-spine injury<sup>11</sup> and, while we had a backboard, we did not have a transport vehicle. We acted as on-site first responders while frantically working our contacts, trying to reach the personal cell phones of on-duty paramedics or dispatchers. When a rescue squad finally responded, we got each responder’s cell phone number as well as multiple contacts within dispatch. When you really need EMS, you really need EMS!”

### PATIENT ORIENTED CARE

For us, “patient-oriented care” means attempting to address the real issues that affect our patients and community members, in ways that are humanizing and thus effective. We believe in “radical” care in the sense of getting to the root of things, and treating the symptoms as well as the cause of the problem: an asthma inhaler, for example, does nothing to reduce the neighborhood air pollution that triggers attacks in the first place. Causes for medical issues are many, and are often interrelated in complex ways. The inequitable biases of society, healthcare institutions, and individual care workers always somehow come to bear on a patient in ways specific to their own particular, intersecting social statuses (physical/mental health and ability,

class, race, gender, etc.). We therefore cannot effectively give care without insights into both the personal and social issues at hand.

Practicing patient-oriented care can be quite difficult. As the stories of J, CAHOOTS, and others illustrate, caregivers are often forced to make tradeoffs and compromises. This means that well-intentioned care workers may treat people in ways that are less than ideal but seem to be the best possible for the situation. The reasons for these compromises are also complex and not easily resolved. Such complexities can result from the very real concern that the care worker needs to ensure their own safety while providing patient care, which often means involving police and others who may not help or may actively exacerbate the situation. Another reason is the perceived split between medical and emotional care. EMS (and first responders especially) are often more focused on fixing the immediate symptoms of trauma and illness than on mental health and how it relates to other bodily issues. Finally, good patient-oriented care takes time and sustained relationships, which care workers in general and EMS in particular are not designed to do, especially given the market-style setup of healthcare.

Here are a few ways that people we talked to address some of these tensions in their work:

*Encouraging Self-Care:* As a paramedic, J is more interested in solving the problems presented by symptoms (stopping dying) and logistics (transport) than with EMTs/caregivers being friendly and supportive. But he also doesn’t want people to go to the Emergency Room if that is not what they really need, and finds that there is too much emphasis

on immediate transport. He argues that EMS needs more discretion legally and in their protocol to not transport, and should instead give people the tools and knowledge to fix and monitor the small stuff. J says: "It's a sticky situation because you're going to get into an idea where a provider has security to deny service to somebody and that's going to fall back to racism, sexism, homophobia and all that stupid shit, but it would be nice to see that kind of responsibility given to folks, that way it would lessen the strain on the system."

*Knowing the Back Story:* CAHOOTS does "mobile crisis intervention," and has medical and psycho-social care delineated. They are proud that many of their staff are cross-trained in both. They have roots in "rock medicine," and grew out of the community following bands like the Grateful Dead, so they are familiar with the interrelated medical and psychedelia-related aspects of that environment. In their regular care work, knowing patient history is critical. They emphasize how they spend lots of time (~ 1 hour) per call to really be present with people and provide the best care possible.

*Establishing Trust:* Emma Goldman Youth and Homeless Outreach Program (EGYHOP) relies heavily on trust between buddies (teams on the nightly run) and with the community they work with. This is built over time, personally, with people deciding they can rely on each other. For CAHOOTS, there is a high degree of confidentiality built into their processes, "Having a counselor come to your door is better than a police officer,"— or fire/EMS—"they're not very people oriented, not very compassionate."

## VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Disaster threatens not only bodies, buildings, and property but also the status quo. Disaster recovery is not just a rescue of the needy but also a scramble for power and legitimacy, one that the status quo usually—but not always—wins."  
—Rebecca Solnit, *Uses of a Disaster*

### *Education as a Part of Prevention:*

Some of the most exciting work of creating communities of care today involves support for people experiencing chronic conditions, and for good reason. The long-term healing process requires a massive amount of practical and emotional support. But while we resist the glorification of crisis response and heroics in the face of danger, let's challenge ourselves to be better prepared for acute conditions, to intervene in escalating crises, and to be ready with infrastructure capable of supplementing or replacing current emergency systems.

In moments of crisis, natural disasters, and medical emergencies, conditions change dramatically and the immediate response can have lasting effects on the recovery process. After Katrina, the failure of the government on many levels to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable in the community caused immeasurable suffering, but also created space for collaboration and alternative options, such as the Common Ground Health Clinic, which sprang up in response to those unmet needs.

We all deserve the best care, and if we are to provide emergency services to each other it has to be done within our scope. But each effort to provide a more intensive level of care expands our abilities. Knowledge sharing, training, and accountability have to be central to

every attempt to create new services or replace existing ones.

*Care for the Healers in Your Community:*

There are radical doctors, nurses, paramedics, and other types of emergency medical providers working in and around the radical community. Some of them are activists doing other types of organizing work, some of them focus their work on medical activism, some of them are incredibly burnt out. When space is made for us to be honest about our work, the stories start to flow and the damage that our work does to us becomes apparent. Working for pay or volunteering inside our broken medical system is often the only way to increase the skill level of an individual, and thus the community, but that work can take an immense physical and physiological toll. The statistics for drug use, back injury, and mental health crisis are depressing. The danger of physical assault from patients is real. High stress and dangerous situations are a bonding experience for those involved, and can make it hard for those involved in medicine to get help from friends outside of medicine. If the only support after these experiences comes from supervisors and co-workers inside a broken and oppressive system, it becomes easier to identify within this system than outside it. If we don't have a process for supporting the emergency health care workers in our community, we will lose many of them.

*Retain Healers in the Community:* There is a massive push right now to enter more young people into nursing and medical school, and many people from the resistance movement are signing up. It's critical that we as a community seize this opportunity to maintain ties with

these individuals and support them as they go through a difficult educational experience. We cannot provide certain types of care without the knowledge and resources that these future nurses, doctors, paramedics and physician's assistants will have. Working with a broader community base that includes people who are already practitioners is important as their experiences and collective knowledge are invaluable, but watching radicals become isolated in their studies without the support of the community they're studying to serve is discouraging and leads to burn out. We need to make an investment, a radical scholarship of sorts, to ensure that those drawn towards healing professions have the support they need if we expect them to leave those programs ready for the hard work of creating, expanding and maintaining community alternatives for the long haul.

*Baby Steps and Adding Medical Services to Already Existing Crisis Response*

*Infrastructure:* Without massive funding and an influx of dedicated, highly trained service providers committed to full time work we are a long way from providing urgent care transport to definitive care, much less the emergency medical procedures currently provided by the state and for profit ambulance services. But there are crisis lines, walk-in clinics and informal networks that can be drawn on when dealing with minor emergencies and interpersonal conflict. There are communities of friends and collectives that have already developed the trust needed to rely on each other in times of urgent need. Finding already existing organizations and services ready to add a medical component to their care will allow greater focus on care and provide greater

access to a broader number of people.

Finally, here is a short and sweet list of some concrete ideas we have for the future:

*Advice Lines/Dial a Medic:* A number to call to discuss and plan support for non-life-threatening medical conditions. These already exist but could be focused on specific communities or set up as an additional resource attached to a crisis line or community clinic.

*Medical Advocates:* Available by dispatch. Trained to give emotional support at urgent care or Emergency Departments, document the actions of pre-hospital and hospital providers, coordinate the first stages of homecare after discharge, and provide transport. This is especially important for communities at risk of medical discrimination or who are legally vulnerable.

*Non-ambulance Home Care and Transport:* Dispatched with medical kits, food, and a functional vehicle. Able to provide first aid and transportation to definitive care for non-life-threatening medical conditions, transportation back from definitive treatment, and limited home care. Or show up, help assess that transport isn't needed, make a pot of tea, assist in coordinating the care needed, make some soup, and check in the next day to see if the patient needs further care.

## WE ALL GET SICK AND HURT

This essay is an attempt to raise awareness around the many ways that communities can grow towards better self-sufficiency and self-care, but there are countless more we haven't explored here. The most powerful resource we

have is our capacity to build trust and resilience together, to take risks and tap into creative solutions to the crises that surround us.

What alternatives to the EMS system can you envision? This project is an ongoing dialogue, and you can share your stories and ideas, find out about street medic trainings, or help build radical networks of care with us at: [rosehipmedics@gmail.com](mailto:rosehipmedics@gmail.com) A slightly longer version of this essay is also available as a pamphlet. You can visit our website at: [www.rosehipmedics.org](http://www.rosehipmedics.org).

*The Rosehip Medic Collective is a group of volunteer, primarily queer-identified Street Medics and healthcare activists based in Portland, Oregon. They provide first aid and emergency care at protests, direct actions, encampments, and other sites of resistance and struggle. They have also trained hundreds of other street medics and put on community wellness trainings for activists from houseless, queer, forest defense, student, economic justice, and other communities. They believe in democratizing healthcare knowledge and skills, in reducing dependence on corporate medicine, and that strong networks of support and care are essential to building sustainable, long-term movements for all liberatory struggles.*

Funding from the Institute for Anarchist Studies allowed Rosehips to travel for interviews around the Northwest and to Ohio, for the Mutual Aid Street Medics-sponsored Street Medic Conference in the Summer of 2010.

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## NOTES

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- 2 *Accidental Death and Disability: The Neglected Disease of Modern Society*, Institute of Medicine, NSF (1966), p12.
- 3 See: <http://www.oly-wa.us/freestore/EGYHOP.php>.
- 4 Non-interfering observation and documentation of police interactions. See: <http://rosecitycopwatch.org>.
- 5 See: [http://medic.wikia.com/wiki/Street\\_med](http://medic.wikia.com/wiki/Street_med).
- 6 See: <http://www.commongroundclinic.org/>.
- 7 See: <http://whitebirdclinic.org/cahoots.html>.
- 8 Hatzalah: "2-tiered system"; [hatzalah.org/twotiered.php](http://hatzalah.org/twotiered.php).
- 9 Anonymous interview.
- 10 Boyle, June 2007.
- 11 Possible injury to spine; can result in paralysis or death.

# PEER SUPPORT AND MENTAL HEALTH

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JULIA SMEDLEY

In these days of austerity, the subject of care in our communities falls upon us common folks to work out for ourselves. I focus on peer support because it is free and does not require paid professionals, because its methods are more consistent with the politics and ethics of anarchism, and because I believe it is the most effective form of care currently available for folks with mental health issues. During this economic downturn and the austerity measures that are being imposed on populations all over the world, one of the groups of people hit the hardest are those that are commonly labeled “mentally ill” or suffering from serious emotional difficulties. In Chicago, six out of twelve public mental health clinics were shut down in the Spring of 2012.<sup>1</sup> Huge protests led by patients were held in May of 2012. With a Republican governor in place, Illinois residents lost \$1.6 billion in Medicaid. There has been a move toward privatization in mental health care in the US in general, which leaves out the poor and/or uninsured. During this time, there has been a marked increase in the kind of “self-medication” that comes through drug and alcohol use, as prescription medications and therapists are being taken away from this vulnerable population.<sup>2</sup>

In the U.K. and other parts of Europe, suicide rates are on the rise.<sup>3</sup> In Greece, “...funding for

community-based mental health programs has been cut in half since the [economic] crisis started in 2007.”<sup>4</sup> These programs were implemented to help people become more independent: Menelaos Theodoroukakis, head of Greece’s mental health professionals association, said “There is still funding for psychiatric hospitals, but funding for programs to deinstitutionalize psychiatric patients has dried up... If this continues, we’ll be obliged to move some people back into hospitals.”<sup>5</sup> Hospitals typically over-medicate patients and offer no other form of “treatment.” In the US, at least, it is not unusual to emerge from a hospitalization prescribed eight or nine different medications, feeling perpetually sleepy and zombie-like. Hospitals also typically turn away all but the most urgent problems, such as suicide attempts or other severely self-destructive behavior. If one does not have insurance or has not paid previous bills from the hospital, one might be told that there are “no beds,” which usually means they will have you wait until one opens in the emergency area. But when one is being turned away, they are simply told “there are no beds available; we can’t help you.” The outcome of these changes has become evident: it has “spurred an increase in social and mental health problems—with a visible increase in homelessness, street prostitution and drug use.”<sup>6</sup>

The hierarchical relations between patients and doctors, when “care” is available, sets up an environment where the patient is tightly controlled. They are usually forcibly medicated, which often makes them sedate and compliant. In capitalist societies, but especially in the United States with its corrupt healthcare system, doctors are funded by pharmaceutical corporations, which

makes this form of control even more insidious. Consumers are promised miraculous recoveries by corporations that spend massive amounts of money on happy-ever-after ads in magazines and on television. “The pharmaceutical industry spends over fifteen billion dollars annually on advertising, and roughly a quarter of their profits come from the sale of psychiatric medications, more than any other disease or ailment.”<sup>7</sup> The side-effects of these medications are rarely considered, and have been the subject of much criticism from advocacy groups such as Mindfreedom.org or Robert Whitaker’s madinamerica.org. Both of these websites give ample documentation of the degenerative effects of these medications on the brain and body, and the unheard of suicides and other social ills related to their use. In spite of reams of scientific and other research to back up these concerns, medication is still the primary form of psychiatric “treatment” or “care” in the United States, with little research being done as to the effectiveness of other forms of care such as therapy, alternative medical approaches such as acupuncture or herbs, and the form of care most commonly embraced by radical mental health and peer advocates: peer support.

### MY OWN JOURNEY

In 2003, I went through a long period of insomnia during which I gradually become psychotic for the first time in my life. I began to hear a voice, which I understood at the time as a former romantic partner communicating with me telepathically. Because I had never in my life experienced this kind of thing, I was very confident that I understood what was happening to me, and I believed that the information I was receiving was very important and

absolutely true. I remember going to a close friend's house to let him know that Saddam Hussein was seriously considering sending nuclear bombs to the US. Only his roommate was home, and I will always remember the look of concern and disbelief on her face as she drove me home and I enlightened her with all of my newly discovered revelations. Everyone wanted to know who I was talking to and what he was saying. I was so surprised when my good friend did not share my smug confidence that I was becoming "enlightened" somehow. To keep me safe and to decide what to do, he and his friend had me stay all night in his spare bedroom. When I emerged the next morning, I had experienced the entirety of earth's evolution, through to the present day. It turns out that the dolphins had many supernatural powers, and were in control of the Screen Actors Guild, among other things.

Eventually, my friends whose help I had enlisted felt they had no choice but to have me "court-committed" to a hospital, because every time I went into one I would stay just 2-3 days and then convince the doctors I was absolutely fine and they would release me. I would totally lose track of where I was when I would go out of my apartment in Portland, and I would spend money I did not have on cabs to take me home again. These friends and the county workers in my hearing decided I was a danger to myself and sentenced me to a maximum of six months in an inpatient hospital. I ended up staying for 3 ½ weeks, leaving there addicted to three different kind of antipsychotics, two mood-stabilizers, and various secondary medications prescribed for the side-effects of the other meds. For the next year, my head felt like it was

full of molasses and I gained a considerable amount of weight and lost a lot of my hair. My family told me during the holidays that my face was like a "mask"—expressionless and emotionless. The Depakote I was taking left me with a totally flat affect: I could not feel happy or sad. I could not feel anything. And my memory was so bad that my family changed the rules of games that we played during the holidays so that I could play without being embarrassed. I was miserable and often expressed to my partner at the time that I felt "forsaken" and that I wanted to die. Without his love, support, and encouragement at that time, I think there is a very strong likelihood that I would have committed suicide.

## ISOLATION

The stigma and difficulties faced by people struggling with mental health problems can easily lead to isolation, and certainly did in my case. I was so embarrassed by my weight gain, hair loss, and loss of intellectual abilities and memory that I lost touch with all of my former friends from before the psychotic episode. I lost my self-esteem and my confidence, and became very dependent upon my partner. It was not a healthy relationship, and he decided to move away to New Orleans eventually, leaving me to find other sources of support. My therapist at a local mental health clinic introduced me to someone he had worked with, whose life was going well without medications. She was organizing a group of people with mental health issues to work on a Theater of the Oppressed<sup>8</sup> production, and invited me to be a part of it. This was an empowering process where the people involved could tell their stories through writing and starring in their own



interactive forum theater plays. I met a number of people whom I could relate to and who were very empathetic and supportive of the problems I continued to have with the voice I still heard and which did not seem to respond at all to the plethora of anti-psychotic medications I had been prescribed by this point. We did not necessarily agree on many things, such as the DSM diagnosis we may have been given, the role of medications in our lives, or the helpfulness of mainstream psychiatry, but we nonetheless worked together and supported each other and gained much-needed self-esteem and a sense of community through our Theater of the Oppressed work.

Around 2006, something happened that would pull me out of my isolation more fully and eventually return me to a life I felt was worth living again. I was given the URL to a website called "The Icarus Project." The Icarus Project website introduced me to an online community of mental diversity, where people shared their stories of their experiences and tools they used to cope and function with difficulties they had. Some mentioned their experiences of coming off psychiatric medications, and gave advice about the safest way to do this. As Sascha, one of the founders of the Icarus Project, says: "In the end, what it comes down to for me is that I desperately feel the need to connect with other folks like myself so I can validate my experiences and not feel so damn alone in the world, so I can pass along the lessons I've learned to help make it easier for other people like myself."<sup>9</sup> Through the website, I learned of a local Icarus Project Support Group.

When I began attending the support group, I was amazed to find that these were not only people with mental

health issues and diagnosis similar to my own, they were often also people who knew a lot about radical politics and who were currently activists or had been at one point. Icarus is in part based on the principles of radical mental health, which notes that in a society such as our own, "'Mental Illness' is used as a convenient label for behavior that disrupts the social order."<sup>10</sup> For example, "Oppositional Defiant Disorder" is a new "disorder" according to the American Psychiatric Association's DSM. I felt an immediate affinity for the Icarus group, since I had identified as an anarchist since 1993, and had been a part of an anarchist collective (AWOL) that had been a very important part of my life in Minneapolis. I had also been a part of the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation, and had worked on the production committee for the *Love and Rage* newspaper in New York City. I had enjoyed very much being an activist and working with other anarchists and anti-authoritarians, and felt like part of a community of radicals at that time that gave me a sense of purpose in my life as well as hope for making the world a better place. So meeting these people at the Icarus Project support group gave me hope again for having these kinds of bonds with people with whom I shared so much in common on so many levels.

The Icarus model of peer support is based on the notion of a "Wounded Healer," who has stories to tell and skills to share that helps them to be empathetic and supportive of other people in the group: "It is us, not the psychiatrists and professionals, who have the knowledge and ability to connect and communicate with each other through our pain."<sup>11</sup> I found myself feeling much less alone in this setting

where I could hear about the incredible experiences others had, as well as talk about my own situation. Icarus put out a publication called "Friends Make the Best Medicine" to help people establish local support groups of their own. In line with anarchist values, they suggested that these groups be based on the concept of mutual aid. "Mutual aid means we listen to and support each other as a community of equals, without paid professionals or staff to define who we are or get in our way. Each of us is an expert in our own experience."<sup>12</sup> By joining together as individuals and a community, we hoped to overcome our sense of alienation from the dominant culture.

Icarus Support Groups embrace the values of inclusiveness and self-determination. Diverse perspectives and life-choices are respected and honored according to the principles of harm reduction and self-determination.<sup>13</sup> Bonds are formed between members that create supportive relationships and connections that can help in a crisis and keep one from being placed in a locked facility and forcibly medicated, or put under the legal "Guardianship" of some other adult, such as a parent, who gains unbelievable rights of control over virtually every aspect of the lives of those who are sentenced with guardianships. Through this model of local autonomous support groups, Icarus hopes to develop a grassroots mental health network for as many communities as possible, helping to contribute to communities of care. This network would gather people "locally for listening, dialogue, mutual aid, activism, access to alternatives and any creative ventures they can dream up."<sup>14</sup>

## PEER SUPPORT IN A RADICAL POLITICAL COMMUNITY

Most people in the radical political communities I have lived within make great efforts to take stigma and discrimination out of their relations to oppressed groups. This has been true in my experiences within the radical subculture in Portland, Oregon. I have been fortunate enough to work in a collective and to be a part of another organization whose members have gone out of their way to support me when I have serious difficulties with the voice I hear. I have been given the freedom to take time off to deal with these problems, and I have felt supported in other ways. The bookstore/infoshop where I am a collective-member has allowed and encouraged me to work with other Icarus folks to try to get a new Icarus Project Support Group off of the ground that met at the store for a period of time until there were not enough people attending to support it anymore (the other one disbanded in 2008). We have also held Radical Mental Health Open Mics there which were a great success in giving people a supportive audience to hear and validate them.

I have a close friend from way back in the AWOL days in Minneapolis who is now a licensed acupuncturist and Chinese herbalist, and he provides important care for me with his exceptional knowledge of these forms of treatment. There is also a household in NE Portland that has opened their home to me at times when I had not been sleeping and was having frightening difficulties with the voice I hear. It is an activist, collective household and it is filled with loving and empathetic people who seem intuitively to know what to do in a crisis situation. I feel that I am very

supported by these people because they have been there for me when things were very difficult and I was struggling just to survive. It was Ibrahim Mubarak of the group Right2Survive<sup>15</sup> (of which I was also a member), who welcomed me into the house initially almost two years ago. But all of the people who live there have been important sources of support at different times, and have almost felt like family to me when I was having a very hard time. I feel very lucky to have the support that I do within this community.

Ideally, peer support helps one build confidence and self-esteem, by feeling supported by a community of individuals who are empathetic and can often offer help or helpful advice. It is the opportunity to value and express oneself, as I have been able to do through Theater of the Oppressed work, support groups, and Open Mics. All of these activities gave me the ability to creatively write about my experiences and to share them with supportive others, in a way that challenges me and makes me feel good about my contribution to others' understanding of these kinds of experiences. When I think back to some of the scary experiences I have had, it feels so affirming to know there is a community of peers and equals who want to know about this and to be supportive. It is so important to have a supportive community around, as one traverses the difficulties inherent in trying to survive amidst the ruins of capitalism, and all that this entails.

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*a member of the "ground-zero" houseless advocacy organization Right2Survive.*

## NOTES

- 1 "The Real News" progressvideo.tv, May 30, 2012.
- 2 *ibid.*
- 3 [http://www.unitetheunion.org/sectors/health\\_sector/latest\\_news-1/latest\\_news/austerity\\_measures\\_\\_may\\_increa.aspx](http://www.unitetheunion.org/sectors/health_sector/latest_news-1/latest_news/austerity_measures__may_increa.aspx).
- 4 "Greece: crisis hurting mental health services," *Deseret News*, September 23, 2011.
- 5 *ibid.*
- 6 *ibid.*
- 7 *Navigating the Space Between Brilliance and Madness: A Reader and Roadmap of Bipolar Worlds*, assembled by The Icarus Project. Timothy Kelly, "Who is Telling Your Doctor What to Think?"
- 8 *Theatre of the Oppressed* (London: Pluto Press, 1979) Arguably Augusto Boal's most academically influential work.
- 9 *Navigating the Space...*, p14. "The Bipolar World" by Sascha Altman Dubrul.
- 10 *Navigating the Space...*, p17.
- 11 "Friends Make the Best Medicine," assembled by the Icarus Project. p5.
- 12 *ibid.*, p18.
- 13 *ibid.*, p21.
- 14 *ibid.*, p29.
- 15 "Right2Survive" is a ground-zero, grassroots homeless advocacy group made up of houseless and formerly houseless folks, and their supporters.





# CLASS AND HEALTH: COMMUNITY ACUPUNCTURE

PAUL MESSERSMITH-  
GLAVIN

« Acupuncture at the TCM  
Hospital in Chengdu, China, 2008.  
Photo: Paul Messersmith-Glavin.

**T**he Community  
Acupuncture movement  
began ten years ago and  
now includes a couple hundred  
clinics across the US. Community  
Acupuncture seeks to address class  
inequalities in health care by making  
acupuncture available to working class  
and poor people who cannot otherwise  
afford health care. Clinics typically  
charge a sliding scale of between \$15  
and \$35 for a treatment, the equivalent  
of a co-pay if one is fortunate enough  
to have health insurance.

Clinical studies have shown  
acupuncture to be effective in treating  
a wide variety of health issues, from  
chronic allergies, to stress and anxiety,  
to back and neck pain to name a few.  
It can address both chronic nagging  
problems and acute conditions. It's  
effective in resolving any problem short  
of broken bones or cancer, and in those  
cases it serves as an excellent comple-  
ment to Western medicine.

In China, acupuncture and herbs  
are established parts of the health care  
system, with entire hospitals dedicated  
to these practices. Those suffering from  
cancer, for instance, will receive both  
chemotherapy and herbal IVs to help  
offset the negative effects of chemo and  
assist the patient's immune system.

China has socialized medicine,  
so an acupuncture treatment costs the  
equivalent of a couple of dollars. This  
is in stark contrast with the \$65-125

price tag some “boutique” acupuncturists charge in the US, a cost that is well beyond the means of most working class or poor people. Somehow when acupuncture started developing in the US in the 1970s, it adopted a model of massage therapy, done in a private room, at a high cost. This is not how acupuncture is generally practiced in China.

To be effective, one must receive acupuncture regularly, especially when confronting an acute health problem. In China, a patient is given a treatment plan at their first visit, which is a prescription for how often they should come back in order to resolve their problem. At a typical acupuncture clinic in the US, to receive the number of treatments to be effective, the cost would be very high. For instance, if one is suffering from a cold or severe back pain, a practitioner of Chinese medicine might want a patient to come back for treatments four times in the next week. The practitioner might prescribe herbs and massage in addition to acupuncture. At boutique rates, this could cost several hundred dollars. But at a Community Acupuncture clinic, the cost would be a small fraction of this. This type of regular treatment is what is really going to be most effective in helping the patient recover.

## THE ORIGINS OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE (TCM)

The use of acupuncture and herbs goes back thousands of years in China. It developed through trial and error, with theories being tested in practice, and what works being incorporated into the canon. In addition to the use of needles, herbs can address a wide variety of problems and are the second pillar of medicine in China, alongside

other modalities, such as massage (*tui na*), cupping, gua sha (a friction technique using the back of a spoon that helps bring blood and qi to the surface of the skin, relieving stagnation), seven star needling (in which the skin is peppered with shallow, rapid pin pricks, also used to relieve stagnation), and other approaches.

The practice of medicine in China was for generations closely associated with the philosophy of Daoism (Taoism). But that changed starting with the Chinese Revolution, particularly during the Cultural Revolution, which included savage attacks on Daoist monasteries and temples, and a widespread suppression of both Buddhism and Daoism. While attacking these Chinese traditions, at the same time, Mao saw the shortage of Western trained doctors and the existence of an indigenous form of medicine in acupuncture. Mao decided to promote acupuncture and herbs, but stripped the practice of its philosophical bearings. Consistent with his materialist interpretation of Marx and his favoring of practice, Mao applied scientific rationalism in codifying those aspects of Chinese medicine that conform to a Western scientific sensibility. He called this new system “Traditional Chinese Medicine,” or TCM, although this is ironic as it is actually more modern than traditional. It is TCM that has been exported to the West, and it is what is taught in the vast majority of Chinese Medicine schools throughout the US. To practice acupuncture in the US, one must pass a comprehensive licensing exam that tests one’s mastery of the theories and practices of TCM.

## THE ROOTS OF COMMUNITY ACUPUNCTURE

Community Acupuncture has its roots in the social movements of the 1960s and 70s, particularly that of the Black and Chicano Power struggles. Several Black Panthers studied Chinese medicine, and there were several delegations of Panthers to China, where, among other things, they observed the practice of medicine and studied acupuncture. Panthers came back to the States and made offering free medical care to the Black community more of a cornerstone of Black Panther activity, including the establishment of People's Free Medical Clinics by local chapters. In 1972, Point 6 of the Black Panther Party's Ten Point Program was modified to include their commitment to health politics and a demand for healthcare access "which not only treat our illnesses, most of which have come about as a result of our oppression, but which will also develop preventative medical programs to guarantee our future survival."<sup>1</sup>

In 1970, the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords took over Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx in response to inadequate medical care offered to the community. One concrete result of the Panthers and Young Lords Lincoln Hospital takeover was the institutionalization there of an acupuncture detox center. This center became the model for others around the country. This was one of the earliest developments of acupuncture in the US, running parallel to its development as a more exclusive health practice. Whereas detox acupuncture served a mostly lumpen population, houseless folks or the marginally employed struggling with drug and alcohol addiction, the other form of acupuncture was developing as

a kind of "boutique acupuncture," and was available only to those who could afford it.

## DETOX ACUPUNCTURE

Detoxing off of heroin, alcohol, or other substances involves a comprehensive approach, including using a set of acupuncture points located on the ears called the 5 Needle Protocol, or 5NP. This is the procedure used in street level detox programs throughout the US, and it is what was demanded by the Panthers and the Young Lords be instituted at Lincoln Hospital. Patients receiving 5NP are treated in a group setting, often taking out their own needles when they feel they are done. Detox centers are frequently funded by grant money or government subsidies, and offer acupuncture at little or no cost. These types of programs are becoming rarer these days, with increasing austerity being imposed on the population, resulting in social spending cuts.

It was this acupuncture detox treatment model which inspired the development of group treatments, which in turn was institutionalized in Community Acupuncture. Group treatments allow acupuncturists to treat more people, thus allowing for charging a lower fee. People come in for a treatment, sit in a folding chair or recliner, or lie on a table, and are attended by one of the acupuncturists on duty. Patients are together in a large communal space, rather than isolated in individual treatment rooms. An acupuncturist can treat up to six patients per hour this way.

Up until recently, the majority of acupuncturists in the West have marketed acupuncture as a mysterious and somehow magical experience, meant to be elevated into a sacred, special time



which will cost you some serious money to enjoy. They appealed to Americans' individualism and sense of entitlement by making the experience something which lasts an hour in a private room, with its exclusivity indicated by its cost. In part this reality is driven by the harsh debt most students of Chinese medicine incur just to get through the three or four years of a Master's Program which is required to practice Chinese medicine in the US. To support themselves, and perhaps their families, while paying back tens of thousands of dollars in outstanding loans often necessitates charging high fees and also prevents acupuncturists from serving underserved and marginal populations who can't pay for their services.

During the year I spent in Chengdu, China, I had the opportunity to observe how acupuncture is practiced in a major TCM Hospital, and it looks nothing like what goes on in the US. The Chinese acupuncture clinics I saw were like a New York subway, with dozens of people in a room, sitting in wicker chairs, getting their needles. People socialize, or sit quietly. Acupuncturists busily move about the room, taking pulses, looking at tongues, making diagnoses, developing treatment plans, and inserting needles. It is busy and hectic, and often loud and profoundly matter of fact. It is no big deal. It is medicine. It is healthcare. It is getting better. It is not a private experience done to soothing music in a dimly lit room at the cost of a nice meal out.

## WORKING CLASS COUNTER-INSTITUTIONS

It is essential that, as we build alternative health institutions, we make sure they are democratic expressions

of our values, otherwise all the talk of "the People" becomes more of a marketing tactic than a genuine expression of a viable alternative. The movements of the 1960s and 70s, resulting in actions such as the takeover of Lincoln Hospital and the Panthers' People's Free Medical Health Clinics, were all about empowering everyday people. Both those being served, and those doing the serving, need to feel respected and empowered for the Community Acupuncture movement to reach its full potential. What we do is important, but how we do it is as important. It is essential that as Community Acupuncture clinics serve poor and working class people, that they also treat the people that work there with respect and dignity.<sup>2</sup>

Recently a national organization for promoting Community Acupuncture was formed out of the older Community Acupuncture Network, called the People's Organization for Community Acupuncture (POCA).<sup>3</sup> Hopefully the hundreds of clinics that are part of POCA will ensure democratic workplaces, with empowered acupuncturists and other clinic workers like receptionists.

## CARING FOR OUR HEALTH

The Community Acupuncture movement has the potential to address class inequalities in health care in the United States. By providing low-cost health care, people who would not otherwise be able to get care can. Also, by emphasizing preventative care, many health problems can be avoided. With an affordable sliding scale, people can get the kind of care they need, as often as they need it.

With the spread of Community Acupuncture clinics across the country,



people will have real possibilities to take care of themselves. In addition, Community Acupuncture clinics, at their best, offer a sense of community. Many of them have community bulletin boards where upcoming events and other low-cost services are announced. They provide a place where people care about you, helping overcome the alienation of modern life. And they can assist you in living life in a meaningful, healthy fashion. When you are run down from work, or burnt out on organizing, a Community Acupuncture clinic can help you restore yourself. They can assist us in the long struggle to fundamentally remake society, while modeling the type of socially just institutions that will be necessary to overcome the degradation of a capitalist economy, which cares more about short-term profit than the health and vitality of us all. By creating democratic workplaces, they are overcoming the alienation inherent in traditional boss-worker places of employment while extending good health to a broad crosssection of the community.

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## NOTES

- 1 *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and The Fight Against Medical Discrimination*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 73.
- 2 One of the flagship clinics of the Community Acupuncture movement has a reputation for mistreating the acupuncturists that work there and utilizing authoritarian and arbitrary rule. The local Industrial Workers of the World

(IWW) chapter has been involved in supporting unjustly fired workers, pointing out the serious nature of these concerns.

- 3 <http://www.pocacoop.com>.



# TO CARE IS TO STRUGGLE

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KEVIN VAN METER



ften lost in the slogans, chants, and feverish excitement of a street action, or the ideological and sematic battles waged by radicals, is the richness of human relations. It is the ‘in between’ of these relations—expressed, in part, as care—that reproduces both the social order and revolutionary movements.<sup>1</sup> For our purposes here, we are interested in the acts and activity that care is associated with, as in care-work, which is imposed by capital, and care-giving, hence as an activity of the commons.<sup>2</sup>

This question of care can never be answered in the abstract, but only in the context of our lives, our stories, and the challenges that such lives and stories bring to bear. Different minds and bodies react differently to crisis, trauma, and the common shocks of life; they are acted upon, imposed upon and produced differently as they fit into different relations of power—as gendered, racialized, sexualized, et al bodies; particular minds and bodies have different productive desires, resist differently, and produce new worlds together differently. Here the intent is to interpret care-work and care-giving broadly. Then focus on creating movements that address these experiences and realities generally and the need for creating practical and political initiatives that struggle against current conditions and limitations and toward new, liberatory paradigms of care.<sup>3</sup>

## WHO DOES THE WORK OF CARE?

In the opening salvo of the *Wages for Housework* movement Italian feminist Mariarosa Dalla Costa stated,

For we have worked enough. We have chopped billions of tons of cotton, washed billions of dishes, scrubbed billions of floors, typed billions of words, wired billions of radio sets, washed billions of nappies, by hand and in machines. Every time they have 'let us in' to some traditionally male enclave, it was to find for us a new level of exploitation. [...] The challenge to the women's movement is to find modes of struggle, which, while they liberate women from the home, at the same time avoid on the one hand a double slavery and on the other prevent another degree of capitalist control and regimentation.<sup>4</sup>

The exploitation Dalla Costa and *Wages for Housework* sought to indict was not simply "the woman question" or the wages due from housework, but the entire apparatus of social reproduction, and the particular importance of the reproduction of labor power to capitalism. The reproduction of labor power is a particular force required for capitalism to function—that is the workers' capacity to work—and serves as one of the two base commodities, the other being hydrocarbons, that make capitalist accumulation possible. The challenge to the feminist movement, and in turn all revolutionary movements, is the abolition of care-work as the reproduction of labor power as well as to transform the gendered and racialized nature of social reproduction as care-giving.

## WHO DOES THE WORK OF CARE?

According to a 2011 white paper from the Organization for Economic

Cooperation and Development, titled "Cooking, Caring and Volunteering: Unpaid Work Around the World", women in the United States continue to perform twice the housework of men.<sup>5</sup> The total work time (waged plus unwaged time) in the United States is dismal when compared to other developed countries, and globally women spend much of their 'free time' doing housework, caring for household members, and shopping for the household. The gender imbalance is not improved upon when employment (waged work) and marital status are considered. Though the report does not consider racial and class differences within the United States or OECD countries, the amount of unpaid work heaped upon queer and gender-variant peoples, working-class women, immigrant women, and women of color is remarkably higher.<sup>6</sup>

This is compounded by the "double slavery" Dalla Costa speaks too. The New York City based Domestic Workers United released a report in 2006 titled "Home Is Where the Work Is: Inside New York's Domestic Work Industry," describing the horrendous conditions of the city's 200,000 (by official statistics, it's estimated to be closer to 600,000).<sup>7</sup> Some of the highlights include: 26% of the women surveyed make below a living-wage (\$13.47), 67% didn't receive overtime pay, 33% have faced verbal or physical abuse at work, ("One-third of workers who face abuse identify race and immigration status as factors for their employers' actions"). 59% of the domestic workers surveyed are the sole earner for their family, 93% are women of color and three-fourths are undocumented. These are workers specifically excluded from the right to organize by the National Labor Relations Act,

which recent organizing has sought to challenge. In addition to the low-waged work performed for employers, these women have a second shift of unpaid work at home.

Part of the imposition of housework is the imposition of heterosexuality and the control over sexuality and gender identity. While the literature on the subject is still developing, lesbian relationships have the clearest equality of housework among any partnership; though the study of trans-people are currently inconclusive.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, "Trans/gender-non-conforming and queer people [...] are born into webs of surveillance" and are hence often regulated to work in the "informal economy" and have higher rates of homelessness than their heterosexual and gender-conforming counterparts.<sup>9</sup> This is a complementary process to the disciplinary mechanism that incarcerates unemployed waged workers. The Wages Due Collective, as a lesbian auxiliary to Wages for Housework, saw the control of sex as an issue of workers' control, theorizing that the imposition of heterosexuality and the nuclear family was the imposition of unwaged work.<sup>10</sup> To the Wages Due critique we want to add the importance of gender self-determination and suggest that under a patriarchal society that only males identifying with their gender expression and heterosexuality can possibly escape unpaid reproductive labor; the class component of this escape will be explored later.

Looking specifically at capital's response to struggles over waged and unwaged work, neoliberal capitalism has increasing creating forms of work that are precarious, affective, and emotional; the result is the biopoliticization of work. This along with the increasingly

immaterial nature of production and shifting migration patterns, are part of "new mechanisms of exploitation and capitalist control."<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that affective and emotional work is being imposed upon all genders, and that cis-males are increasingly being incorporated into child and elder-care on both the waged and unwaged spectrums.<sup>12</sup> As the Team Colors Collective, of which I am part, stated, in a time of economic crisis, "the state de-funds social services [and] pushes the 'work' of caring for children, the elderly and everyone in between onto those who are already performing such work without a wage."<sup>13</sup> Herein capitalism is simultaneously imposing new forms of wage work while the state seeks to externalize waged forms of social reproduction (welfare payments, social security benefits, nursing home residents) on to unwaged workers. In determining who does the work of care it is important that we include waged and unwaged workers, even when these are embodied in the same individual. Our next task is exploring the difference between care-work and care-giving, and how we abolish the former while delinking the latter from capital, the state, race, gender and other impositions.

### CARE-WORK AND CARE-GIVING

Under capitalism care-work, both waged and unwaged, is the vessel for the production of labor power—of producing workers and workers ability to work. Additionally, the reproduction of labor power is part of the social reproduction of capitalist society; of which hydrocarbons, knowledge, educational systems, and systems of policing are other key components. The question of social reproduction is far too broad for our purposes here, but it is important to

consider the reproduction of gender, race, and class relations and how they manifest in care-giving as a set of activities of the commons. In organizing resistance against capital and the state it behooves us to note how elements of care-work can find their way into this activity, as the following story illustrates.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, two colleagues and I traveled from New York to New Orleans with the intent of documenting organizing work being done at the Common Ground Relief in the Algiers neighborhood.<sup>14</sup> This anarchist-led effort was the first to respond to the state's neglect and direct violence, organizing under the slogan "solidarity not charity;" and utilized "existing relationships and political organizing experience" from within the counter-globalization movement to fuel its projects.<sup>15</sup> While Common Ground Relief sought to address gender issues within the organization, these efforts only began six months into its existence when there were already hundreds participating in efforts in New Orleans. The volunteers were housed in a set of collectively run houses and we were able to observe the organizing work and housework first hand. It was clear from our arrival that female volunteers and collective members were performing all of the housework. On the morning following a celebration, the male members of the collective house we visited slept or groggily drank coffee but didn't attend to the general disarray of the house while female collective members cleaned. When this was raised in the course of the discussions we conducted, collective members seemed surprised. It was clear that the gender dynamics of housework preformed in some of these collective houses was not on the political agenda of the collective members we

spoke too. Admittedly, we interviewed a small sampling of total collective members and visited during the holidays when many long-term volunteers were traveling outside of New Orleans. But the gendered nature of care-work can easily find its way into care-giving and radical organizing, as the feminist movement has well documented.

## AREAS FOR INTERVENTION

In seeking to intervene in and abolish care-work, as we develop systems of care-giving, it is necessary to draw a clear line between care-work that is imposed and care-giving strategies which we incorporate into our own communities. Radical movements need to struggle with both these areas; the former without the latter becomes an attack with no defense, while the latter becomes a symptom of a drop out culture without the former.

As a young organizer seeking employment in the nonprofit sector during the late 1990s I interviewed with the now-defunct Left Democratic community organization Association of Community Organizers for Reform Now, known by its acronym ACORN. Following a formal, sit-down interview I was taken into the 'field' by the lead Long Island regional organizer. The issue of the day was desperately needed childcare in a poor and working-class neighborhood of African-Americans, El Salvadorians and immigrants from other South American countries. We knocked on doors with pre-printed flyers, canned speeches, and requests for money in the form of membership dues. After we spoke to a number of women a pattern emerged. The ACORN organizer repeatedly asked "don't you need childcare" and was surprised by the answer "we already have childcare."

One woman explained in detail how she shares childcare with other women in the building and in the neighborhood, by taking in children on her day off and then sending her children to other households when she is at waged work. Rather than seeing this as a foundation from which to organize, the ACORN organizer couldn't see this activity as important. Illustrated here is the fundamental difference between demanding childcare from the state; and organizing childcare cooperatives, from the existing relations on the ground, and then demanding the state pay for it.

Radicals, as well as the "loyal opposition" of the Left, are often blind to the organizational forms that exist in other communities. But by organizing around care-work and care-giving, radical movements have the opportunity to connect to a myriad of different struggles and build a multitude of relationships with those outside of our immediate circles. Often our strategies limit us to organizing with self-identified radicals or being blind to how those from different communities, with different sets of experiences, organize their everyday lives and struggles. Here it is important to ground these discussions in the context and content of our everyday lives, and question and concretize how this functions. Since questions of care and struggle need to be grounded in our own experiences, below is an account of my own.

#### **INTERMEZZO: A SHORT ACCOUNT OF A PERSONAL STORY**

As it would have it, I came to realize the importance of care and support to radical movements quite late in my tenure as a radical and organizer. After a decade of running a social center,

participating in anarchist collectives and the counter-globalization movement, employment in the nonprofit and service sectors, it wasn't until a tragic event that I began to explore these issues. The reason for this is obvious to me. I came from a community that was predominately in their early 20s, white, middle and working-class, suburban, cis-gendered, able-bodied and largely without major physical and mental illness. Of course this is an anomaly, and often those suffering from mental illness in particular did so in silence and sought support within close friendship circles.

In the early spring of 2007 one of our core group had a chronic condition that began to worsen. Jodi Tilton was not simply a political comrade but my partner and constant companion. Her Crohn's/colitis caused periodic, painful inflammation of the intestines which would often result in hospitalization. During treatment, she would rely heavily on her close friends to get her to and from the doctor, bring in groceries, and simply lie beside her and comfort her. This task increasingly fell upon me and another close friend, and at times, others within our core group. But as her condition worsened and continued unabated, many comrades pulled away entirely to attend concerts, demonstrations, open bars, and political events.

As a result of her treatment Jodi suffered a massive seizure; and as I held her hand, she passed into the unknown. Her treatment had caused demyelization of the brain and the brain began to bleed out; the seizure being the outward expression of the brain's attempt to stem the damage. I held her hand for five hours until they put her into emergency surgery and a medically induced coma. By morning we knew



that she would never awaken and six days later her life support would be terminated. Even with the outpouring of supportive friends and family around her, I feel into a psychogenic paralysis as I walked down “the corridor of lost steps” toward her hospital room.<sup>16</sup> While collective gatherings and projects of mourning followed, I was consumed by immeasurable grief and I couldn’t function. As with Jodi, those around me slowly peeled away once the formal grieving process had ended and then asked, ‘when I was going to return’ to activist work.

By no means are my experiences unique, as often during public discussions of these issues there is a chorus of voices sharing their own disappointments in regards to how they have been treated by fellow radicals. Capital and the state imposed upon every node in my above account; I cared for Jodi after a full day of waged work, in essence working a double shift. And she was not able to take time from work to recover, less she lose her health insurance. The process of terminating her life support, took six days though the medical panel ruled nearly immediately after her seizure that there was no hope of recovery. And the grieving process was supposed to conclude within the formal process (wake, funeral, memorial), so that I would return to productive, paid employment and activist work. These are the limits of our activity and power. Additionally, even with a decade of radical experience and a highly evolved core group, we did not collectivize and organize this activity.<sup>17</sup> In particular spaces such as these, care-work becomes care-giving when it is politicized.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE ACTIVE?

Just following the pinnacle of the counter-globalization movement, left-radical publication *Clamor Magazine* led with the article “What It Means to Be Active: Reflections on Progressive Activism.”<sup>18</sup> The article was a survey of reflections on the current state of the movement. Two particularly stand out, and one is useful for our purposes. Patrick Reinsborough, then of the Rainforest Action Network, stated, “Most people that are involved in resistance are involved in resistance due to survival. Their community is under attack [...] As opposed to a lot of white activists [...] who are choosing their issues.”<sup>19</sup> Oddly, none of those surveyed challenge the framework of activism and the self-referential title of activist, though Reinsborough’s comes closest.

As long as being active is synonymous with activism and the figure of the activist, there are those who will not become active. Gilles Deleuze commented on this subject, “[t]he question of the revolution’s future is a bad one, because, as long as it is posed, there are going to be those who will not become revolutionaries.”<sup>20</sup> For the question for care, we are concerned with how the definition of being active limits the participation of individuals who cannot partake in demonstrations because of PTSD, cannot sit through long meetings due to chronic pain, are physically ill and regularly miss events, and other similar experiences. This is certainly not to discount the use of direct actions by those in the disability rights, deaf autonomy, and neighboring movements, but rather to call attention to a structural problem within radical movements that emphasizes the involvement of able-bodied and able-minded

individuals that can escape the imposition of care-work. Additionally, by incorporating care-giving strategies and challenging “what it means to be active” we strengthen our movements vis-a-vis capital and the state.

Silvia Federici, in her “Precarious Labor: A Feminist View Point,” argues,

We go to demonstrations, we build events, and this becomes the peak of our struggle. The analysis of how we reproduce these movements, how we reproduce ourselves, is not at the center of movement organizing. It has to be. We need to go to back to the historical tradition of working class organizing ‘mutual aid’ and rethink that experience, not necessarily because we want to reproduce it, but to draw inspiration from it for the present.

We need to build a movement that puts on its agenda its own reproduction. The anti-capitalist struggle has to create forms of support and has to have the ability to collectively build forms of reproduction.<sup>21</sup>

As suggested by Federici’s comment, the shift is toward new forms of radical movements that are expressed in two complementary ideas: self-reproducing movements, which center their own reproduction, and movements of self-reproduction, that coordinate and amplify care-giving initiatives to challenge the limits imposed by capital and the state. There is a rich history of such organizing from which to draw upon. This will be considered alongside necessary and active solidarity with those struggling within and refusing care-work.

Finally, and importantly, such initiatives are bulwarks against repression,<sup>22</sup> ground our revolutionary politics in our everyday lives and

communities, and begin to create “grassroots community self-management” from which uprisings and insurrections can be launched.<sup>23</sup>

## HISTORICAL EXAMPLES

There is a rich history of such initiatives in anarchist and radical movements, too many examples in the United States alone to list here. Emma Goldman was arrested twice simply for distributing information about birth control; anarchist schools, cooperatives, and ethnic organizations provided direct services and bases of support; and the Industrial Workers of the World organized brigades to feed and clothe striking workers.<sup>24</sup> This history extends into the cycle of struggle that began in the late 1950s and ended as the 1970s concluded. The three that we will explore—Jane abortion services; Black Panther “survival pending revolution” programs, specifically health clinics; and ACT-UP’s combination of direct action and knowledge production—are well traveled territory, hence I will utilize the examples to illustrate particular points for current organizing.

The Abortion Counseling Service of The Chicago Women’s Liberation Union, known as “Jane” from the alias collective members would use, worked clandestinely in Chicago from 1968 until abortion was legalized in 1973.<sup>25</sup> The organization developed out of an initial referral services for women seeking abortions during a time when only wealthy women could access the procedure. From this beginning “Jane” provided counseling, abortion services through a third party, and eventually learned to performed the procedure themselves. This illegal direct action taken on behalf of women was seen as part of an act of self-determination.

During the same time period as Jane, the Black Panther Party were running "Survival Pending Revolution" programs that included free breakfast and educational programs for children, health clinics, sickle-cell anemia testing, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, and the provision of transportation so that family members could visit incarcerated inmates.<sup>26</sup> In April of 1970 citing the historical and continuing inaccessibility of basic healthcare among the Black population, "Bobby Seale issued an organizationwide directive that all Party chapters [needed to] establish local, free healthcare facilities. Called the People's Free Medical Clinics, the resulting clinics became the infrastructure for the Party's health programs."<sup>27</sup> An important aspect of the work was education about the deprofessionalization of healthcare, and in turn, the empowerment and involvement of the community the clinics were based in.<sup>28</sup> These efforts directly addressed needs in the communities of which they were situated, and confronted the lack of access to health care with initiatives based in self-determination while developing the knowledge and self-reliance of those who participated.

A decade after Jane and the Panthers, and addressing a new health crisis, the AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power (ACT-UP) utilized direct action and similar tactics to their forbearers to address the state's inaction on the AIDS crisis. ACT-UP responded with anger and militant direct action with demonstrations at Wall Street against the high price of AZT, at the time the most expensive drug in history, and shutting down the offices of the Federal Drug Administration for unnecessarily delaying AIDS drugs.<sup>29</sup> ACT-UP's Treatment and Data committee served

as the knowledge production arm of the collective and in short order the committee members were among leading experts on AIDS in the US. ACT-UP reports were read into the congressional record and the FDA used ACT-UP treatment proposals and language.<sup>30</sup> With their technical expertise and the force of direct action, the collective not only shifted the climate around AIDS but also made a fundamental impact on AIDS treatment and research. In addition to these activities, ACT-UP provided education about AIDS transmission and safe sex, and sponsored daily meetings for people with AIDS. Those facing a deadly epidemic self-organized an entire ecology of initiatives and developed expertise in the subject matter they were organizing around.

To these we can add the National Welfare Rights Organization<sup>31</sup> of the 1970s, which utilized direct action and radical direct service models toward a "movement of the unemployed," the Gray Panthers,<sup>32</sup> which organized aging Americans intergenerationally during the same period, and countless others. Each of these projects bridged the seemingly impossible direct service/direct action divide that infects current movements. Jane, the Panther clinics, and ACT-UP were based in the needs and sought to further the self-determination of the communities of which they were part; and were "a result of their own internal dynamics."<sup>33</sup> The direct provision of desperately needed services can build self-reliance in the engaged population while connecting individuals to neighboring issues and initiatives. In areas where the state has historically neglected, failed, and ignored the needs of the population *the question of survival is in fact pending the question of revolution*. Herein these initiatives

utilized a coupling of direct services and direct action; rather than the former, which easily falls into relationships of dependency, or the latter, that is often disconnected from working-class communities and the needs within them.

In a time of economic crisis, with the state's slashing of needs based services, there are numerous experiences and realities to organize around, as listed at the outset. Furthermore, it is important to note that models from another time, place, context, and involving a different population cannot be simply imported into another. Rather these examples provide insight and principles toward our own current organizing and the direct service initiatives that will emerge will find their own way forward.

### CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLES

Beyond the Domestic Workers United and Wages for Housework illustrations earlier, there are numerous instances of organizing around care-work from the Women's Strike for Peace in 1961, when 'housewives and mothers' struck against nuclear weapons testing and the escalating war in Vietnam, to the continuing struggle for parental leave. In recent years, Domestic Workers United has won a "domestic workers bill of rights" in New York and is fighting for passage elsewhere; these bills address the right to organize and basic control over wages and hours. A national campaign seeks to connect care-workers with families and persons needing care.<sup>34</sup> The intersection between these campaigns and unions has been tenuous. As Hospital unions have seen work being outsourced to low paying homecare workers, these unions have engaged with the campaigns of domestic workers and the AFL-CIO launched an organizing initiative addressing

domestic work. But in California the United Healthcare Workers is struggling against a takeover by Service Employees International Union.<sup>35</sup> Radicals and others are correct to be suspicious of business union interests, but solidarity with those struggling within care-work needs to be an active and continuous component of our work. Additionally, radicals themselves have been organizing care-workers. In Portland, Oregon the Industrial Workers of the World have an ongoing campaign to organized workers at area social service agencies, including homeless shelters and the Portland Women's Crisis Line.<sup>36</sup> Lastly, sex worker organizing has taken the form of bad date lines, a now out of print but important nationally distributed magazine, unionized and cooperatively run strip clubs, and sex worker rights and harm reduction projects.

These struggles against the imposition of care-work bring forth difficult questions. The Madrid-based Precarias a la Deriva (active in the mid-2000's, loosely translating as "precarious women workers adrift") proposed a "caring strike." Hence, what would a care-work strike look like and how do we strike against the imposition of care-work without striking against those we are caring for? This is not just a question for theoretical inquiry; it requires an organized response within our movements. Some of these responses are taking interesting and initial forms.

Over the last decade there has been a remarkable increase in zines and personal accounts from radicals who have experienced mental and physical health issues, chronic pain, grief, intimate violence, and burnout. In the introduction to *SICK*, an edited zine collection on illness, stated that the publication "developed out of personal

frustration during [cancer diagnosis and reoccurrence] over the lack of discussions about and understanding of illness within radical/left/DIY communities as well as the lack of resources within these communities for those dealing with illness.”<sup>37</sup> This is seconded by another zine published during the same period, the author reflects, “within the cultures of resistance that I’ve participated in—largely explicitly anti-capitalist and DIY oriented—issues of illness and support over the long-term are not at the core of political practice; [...] many anti-capitalists and DIY participants evade the subjects of illness and support work.”<sup>38</sup> Such statements could be quoted endlessly, but such an emergence of zines suggests that these issues are not being addressed in other ways and will shortly find their ways into book collections and organizational forms.

Numerous initiatives have begun to organize in proactive ways around care-giving. For instance there has been a proliferation of projects around intimate violence and sexual assault in radical communities. Drawing on the concept of transformative justice—meaning not simply punishing the perpetrator or restoring the situations to its pre-violence conditions, but rather transforming the perpetrator, survivor, and conditions of oppression that lead to the violence in the first place—projects such as Philly Stands Up in Philadelphia, Support New York and Audre Lode Project / Safe Outside the System Collective in New York City, Crying Out Loud in Seattle, have formed. While working within the confines of radical communities, and often a small corner of them, these initiatives address the difficult question of harm and intimate violence that radicals perpetrate amongst themselves.

Such projects function as a stabilizer in a community when harm has been committed against each other and increasingly are attempting to create a culture of consent, though this latter aspect needs additional energy. At their best, these seek to heal the radical community, not just those directly involved.

These current projects addressing intimate violence draw on a more established set of organizations and intertwine with a larger network of transformative justice. Generation Five, INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, and Critical Resistance seek to utilize anti-violence and harm reduction strategies in the task of revolutionary transformation. Here care-giving finds its expression in creating relationships and ways of being outside of the imposition and violence of the state and the punitive justice system. In a similar fashion, radical queer organizing has also sought to address the surveillance of queer youth of color. Most recently, New York City police department has attempted to clear queer youth and youth of color from public spaces, with the organizing of FIERCE challenging and mitigating the harm caused by this attack.

As with queer youth, people with mental illness have been challenging their marginalization. While predominately focused on those identifying with the set of experiences and realities that has been pathologized as bipolar disorder, The Icarus Project states, “We can organize events filled with inspiration and creativity, plan actions that demand change, educate our allies, share skills and resources, and help each other feel less alone. It is up to us to define what we experience in words that make sense, and to create support that meets our needs.”<sup>39</sup> This work is

an extension of previous organizations such as Mind Freedom International and the psychiatric survivors movement, and can certainly be replicated to address those with different realities and experiences of mental unrest. In a similar fashion but drawing from a different tradition, the Operation Recovery project of the Iraq Veterans Against the War, this is attempting to prevent traumatized active duty military personnel from being re-deployed.

Two additional efforts that have initially developed within radical communities and are in the process of expanding beyond its initial stages are the Rock Dove Collective of New York and the Rosehip Medic Collective of Portland, Oregon. Rock Dove humbly began as a referral service for activists to access low-cost healthcare, but has recently partnered with a workers' cooperative and people of color led community organizations to set up clinic hours and provide referrals to these groups' members.<sup>40</sup> As street medics, the Rosehip Medic Collective started with the purpose of coordinating medic efforts at protests and training medics to serve in these roles. With the cycle of protest in the Pacific Northwest declining before the resurgence of the Occupy Movement, Rosehips delved into community health in the form of trainings, education, and the production of zines containing information on treating "common maladies."<sup>41</sup> Additionally, Rosehip's has published a pamphlet titled "Alternatives to Emergency Medical Services" which proposes that activists, radicals, street medics, and supportive medical personnel begin to create bottom-tier systems of health-care (first aid, preventative care), thus preventing more complicated and costly medical issues from developing.<sup>42</sup> Here

such projects that find their origins within the self-imposed limitations of the radical community can expand their base and connect with neighboring communities and struggles.

Of course we are simply meandering through the field of contemporary examples. When considering organizations outside of the purview of radical movements, systems of care, support, and survival increase considerably, Rebecca Solnit has commented: "You can think of the current social order as something akin to [an] artificial light: another kind of power that fails in a disaster. In its place appears a reversion to improvised, collaborative, cooperative, and local society."<sup>43</sup> These attributes are found in the everyday resistances and forms of mutual aid of working-class and poor communities, communities of color, indigenous societies, and other communities of resistance within the US. Taking into consideration this fact, as well as historical and current examples, movements have experiences to draw from and a seemingly fertile environment in which to organize. Before concluding, and abstracting toward a more theoretical examination of self-reproducing movements and movements of self-reproduction, it is worth describing some problems found within current movement discourse and organizing.

## MOVEMENT PROBLEMS

Just as we cannot "occupy everything," we cannot care for everyone. I suggest this not because every institution, site of production, and public space cannot be occupied or that everyone should not be provided care. But because this is not a practical approach to the situation we find ourselves in.

Practical movements require a density of relationships, communicative mechanisms, organs for coordination and decision-making, efforts around education and self-reflection, and forms of organization appropriate for their particular tasks. Hence movements need to act strategically, deploying energy wisely, acting to immediate conditions while looking toward long-term development. The tactics chosen for occupations and care-giving need to be reflected in these larger strategies for revolutionary change and upheaval, but there are a number of ways that movements set their own limits on these possibilities.

Too often radical movements are based simply on a subcultural or ideological affiliation, and emphasize changing the consciousness of the population rather than how they function and what they accomplish in peoples everyday lives. Strategic thinking should not conclude in one correct strategy or line, but rather the creation of “a world in which many worlds fit,” to paraphrase the Zapatistas. Of the larger set of struggles taking place in society, there is a smaller subset that are taken up by radical movements and then a smaller set of radical movements that self-identify with various anarchist or activist currents. There is an error among activists to see this pyramid as inverted and the critiques that follow are part of how this infects the larger constellation of radical movements.

A particular attribute of current activism and radicalism is its subcultural nature, meaning that it defines itself in opposition to the dominant culture and this identification is at the heart of its activity and self-understanding. While subcultures can be utilized as bases for further organizing, they are often self-referential and currently it

appears that the subcultural nature of radical movements have imposed their own limitations on radical activity by excluding the general population as a site of intervention.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, the activist subculture is predicated on the escape from the restraints of the family, housework, and reproductive labor. When being active, as discussed previously, is limited to those who are able-bodied, able-minded, and able to avoid the imposition of care-work, what results is a particularly white, middle-class and young movement. This is connected to larger issues addressed herein, and stated perfectly during the debates of a decade ago: “Defining ourselves as activists means defining our actions as the ones which will bring about social change, thus disregarding the activity of thousands upon thousands of other non-activists. Activism is based on this misconception that it is only activists who do social change—whereas of course class struggle is happening all the time.”<sup>45</sup>

With the lack of attention given to care within radical communities, dialogs have been emerging to address this, but often they replicate the problematic formulations already contained within these movements. As with the concept that ‘only activists create change’ or are at the forefront of change, ties to the idea that simply activities of care need to be added to our current movements. This movement-plus-care scenario ignores the fact that care and support are already taking place in society. Seeing care as a separate activity to be performed in movements, outside of the function of everyday life, increases the distance between radical movements and the populations they purport to be bringing into a revolutionary



moment. Moreover, the idea of self-care is similarly blind to class position and the reality that everyone needs care. Self-care is a misnomer, as care is a collaborative activity, a commoning. Activists who suggest the need for self-care ignore the fact that the struggles they partake in are of their own choosing. Those who are incarcerated, working-class and poor, without access to healthcare, who are ravaged by waged and unwaged work, or are struggling around mere survival do not have the option to 'take time away' from their struggles. Activist self-care is part of the white, middle-class dynamic of current radical movements and such self-identified activists would be better off creating systems of care that other populations could intersect with.

Most recently, the gulf between the experiences of self-identified activists and those experiencing poverty and homelessness found its expression in the Occupy Movement. Referring to the Occupy Wall Street encampment, the New York City based *Indypendent* ran a full-page article in November 2011 stating, "Every utopia has extreme behavior that is a symptom of its values.... Into Liberty Park have come homeless street youth, drug addicts and alcoholics." The author equates homelessness with "extreme behavior" and discusses "drug addicts" and "alcoholics" in a negative light. This was replicated in Portland, Oregon where the Occupiers attempted to remove homeless people from the site of the occupation, which lead to splits in the organizing body. Similar sentiments were expressed across the country, where activists voiced disdain for people who brought difficult realities to the occupations and were angered on how 'such problems' were drawing energy away from the movement.

Any movement, especially one that purports to be based on the eradication of poverty, which argues that those suffering from conditions related to poverty, homelessness, addiction, and mental illness are somehow preventing the movement from being effective, is a movement that should pass into the dustbin of history quickly. This discourse within Occupy has been fought vigorously by other radicals within and outside of the movement, most notably those engaged in eviction defense, housing occupations, and direct solidarity with movements of the poor. It is toward new forms of radical movements that our attention must turn, as we seek to challenge movement problems and find new ways forward, together.

## TOWARD SELF-REPRODUCTION

Struggles against the imposition of care-work and the creation of care-giving projects lead us to a twofold movement-building strategy: movements of self-reproduction and self-reproducing movements. Specifically, movements of self-reproduction attempt to link struggles around care-work with care-giving initiatives, and become basis of survival pending revolution. Such an approach broadens organizing and can take the form of furthering existing projects, creating density of relationships around an initiative, the development of community dialogs and community mandates, and creating a culture of solidarity and nodes of communication. A movement-building strategy will require both the amplification of current struggles as well as the creation of new organizational forms addressing how a movement reproduces itself; thus will include care-giving projects as well as related means of survival: housing, transportation,

food, and education. Approaches that are utilized among radicals currently to decrease housing and food costs, so time usually dominated by waged work can be used for organizing and other activities, can be amplified to a movement-wide strategy. Collective houses, food buying clubs, community gardens, various cooperatives, resource and income sharing, neighbor care-giving strategies become weaponized when taken from their current subcultural and friendship-networks and are applied as an approach to organizing and movement-building. Contained within this strategy is that idea that movements organize toward reaching the limit of their own self-activity. Zines can be written, dialogs held, transformative justice programs created, referral systems set up—but the impositions of capital and the state on this activity and in our everyday lives must be challenged and overthrown. Self-reproduction is part of the strategy of revolutionary change that will take movements from our current level of to a higher level of political composition, hence inter and intra-movement relationships become more dense, initiatives are replicated and amplified, divisions within the working-class are overcome, and our strength vis-a-vis capital and the state is enhanced. Here we care and we struggle forward, together.

### TO CARE AND TO STRUGGLE

Our task is to care together as we struggle together. By pushing forth the complexity of experience and realities that arise in caring for those who are mentally and physically ill, traumatized, dying, survivors of intimate violence and incarceration, addicted, suffering from chronic pain, struggling against

the imposition of binary gender, and working in the care and medical industries our movements deepen our relationships with one another and construct new fronts for revolutionary struggle. It is these everyday realities that need to be considered on the long arc of sustained organizing and revolutionary change.

Let us conclude as we have begun, by reflecting on the relationships that populate and construct our lives. As there are too many voices to be heard, too many bodies and minds that can give and need to receive care, too many struggles, and too many worlds just starting to emerge.

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### NOTES

- 1 Rather than using the more common "caretaking," throughout "To Care is to Struggle" I use "care-giving" with specific intent of relating this form of care to that of gift exchange. This is preferable to caretaking, which refers to a relationship of dependency and debt. See: David Graeber. *Debt: The First*

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# THERE IS NO GOOD FAITH: THE GREEN ECONOMY, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND REIMAGINING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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KARI KOCH

« Street theater at the People's Summit, Brazil, 2012. Photo: Kari Koch.

**T**he greater good—sacrificing for the benefit of the whole—can be found either on the micro level, neighborhood by neighborhood where people look each other in the eye and have relationships that bind them together, or on the meta level, internationally where the path toward global ruin can be clearly seen and resources are amassed to address the needs of everyone. It could have been that civil society believed that the greater good was being pursued, and felt hopeful about humanity's path, when the United Nations met in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil twenty years ago to discuss and adopt sustainable development policies as the world was developing into mass globalization. That conference, named the 'Earth Summit,' probably seemed like the best place to lay the groundwork for a future that mitigated the growing power of international corporations and prioritized a collective approach to economic development and caring for our resources. Or perhaps it was as clear then as it is now that, while the UN makes forward thinking resolutions about rights and dignity, in the end their best work is non-binding and the UN's primary muscle reinforces global systems of capital that directly contradict their many various declarations of rights.

Now, twenty years later at Rio+20, intended to continue the work of the Earth Summit, corporate development and capitalist growth have an even

firmer grip on the international process and actively thwart any movement to compassionately, logically, or holistically care for the needs of people in our communities or the ecosystem at large.

As is evidenced by the ever growing crisis and deepening economic caverns between the owners and the workers, capitalism is on the decline, though it is by no means dead. It is wiggling its way into a new phase—the Green Economy. This was the primary focus at the Rio+20 conference and the primary focus of dissent at the People's Summit, a conference of popular movements that ran parallel to the official UN negotiations in Brazil.

The Green Economy is a slightly revised version of capitalism based on the fundamental belief that corporations and the market are the best stewards of the natural environment where everything on Earth can be bought, sold, and traded on the Green Exchange, called *La Bolsa Verde*. The classic tenets of capitalism still exist where corporations reap short-term profits and build their 'industry' around speculation, and governments buffer corporations from financial risk, and control the local community. We still see this relationship play out in the US from the financial collapse of 2007.

This green-washing of capitalism is not going to solve the global climate crisis, protect our communities from harm, or manage our common resources. Most importantly though, Rio+20 has made it clear that a Green Economy is not a transitional demand toward systemic environmental change. Capitalists in power have taken the term Green Economy and pursued it under the same banner that they pursue something called sustained growth, which means infinite growth in a finite world.

The two phrases in the UN document coming out of Rio+20 are used interchangeably. I've often heard it argued, by environmentalists and labor unions, that the Green Economy is better than nothing and that it is a step toward actual sustainable economies. This is a lie: nothing that reinforces the notion that all things in the world deserve a price tag and can best be protected by corporate interests could possibly lead us to real solutions. The Green Economy will continue to cause pain, destruction, and brutality just as every incarnation of capitalism has done.

In Rio, at the People's Summit, the overall analysis was that capitalism and the false solutions that it generates, like the Green Economy, will cause more problems than they will solve and that the people in charge of the economic systems at present are only concerned with quick profit making and maintaining power. The US and its corporate allies scheme on how to avoid all commitment to regulation on industry and undermine any agreements that put primary responsibility for global climate change on the world's longtime biggest polluters. Meanwhile, China, Brazil and other economies verging on the First World focus on fighting against any regulation that prevents them from using the same destructive mechanisms for development that propelled the US and Europe to their current stronghold positions; meaning coal, deforestation, oppression of indigenous populations and workers more generally. Developing nations, those with no voice in global policy making outside of the UN and barely a whisper inside the cavernous monument that houses the UN Summit, are fighting to keep their countries both literally and figuratively above water. There is a bloc of nation

states with modest economies that fight for some forms of justice inside the UN—Venezuela, Bolivia, some of the northern European nations. Even then though, they are still conducting power plays for their own advantage. In the case of Venezuela, their Green Economy is actually a petrol economy; in the case of Bolivia, they are building superhighways through communities for the transport of goods; and in the case of various European nations the Green Economy is based in market-mechanisms such as carbon off-sets that simply move pollution around for a price instead of reducing it.

“The efforts of governments are concentrated not on defending the living Earth from destruction, but on defending the machine that is destroying it. Whenever consumer capitalism becomes snarled up by its own contradictions, governments scramble to mend the machine, to ensure—though it consumes the conditions that sustain our lives—that it runs faster than ever before,” writes George Monbiot of the *Guardian*. Whatever hope was sustained by the possibilities that could emerge from an international effort, has officially evaporated into thin air.

In the end, the UN process is ill-equipped to deal with development or climate change because the nations of the UN, and their corporate sponsors, are primarily concerned with petty politicking, power plays, and ultimately profit-making. It's not a place to come to the table with global common interests—such as maintaining the ability of this planet to host human life—and to deal with issues that require sacrifice. The UN summits instead act as a place to come to the table to demand sacrifices of others for the benefit of the global 1% while

playing real-life political strategy games at the expense of the rest of the people and the Earth itself.

The UN and its constituent groupings will not bring about any serious movement towards true sustainability or toward addressing climate change until there is a strong enough global movement to force them to do so. In previous global convergences the way we demonstrated that power (or lack thereof) was through mobilizations and disruptions of the UN space. This time things felt different. Certainly, there were marches, rallies, and disruptions, but the primary focus of the People's Summit was on building. The eight days of the Summit were spent in workshops, plenaries, discussion forums, strategy meetings, assemblies, and relationship building. The global networks linked together to initiate conversations about international targets and campaigns that could unite our local struggles. The event planners prioritized space for a real solidarity economy to exist within the Summit. Organized social movements hosted multi-day plenaries where people could demonstrate, discuss, and dissect solutions that spanned from the very specific to the global.

It feels like a bit of a relief to not go begging at the door of national leaders and corporations. We can only be ignored beating at the doors of the elite for so long without losing all hope. Refocusing on areas where we actually have agency and can care for our communities is a welcome direction. This is a critical, and difficult transition for the global movement. This realization emerged throughout the Summit, particularly in the Solutions Plenaries, where local organizers put forward and debated tangible solutions to the Green

Economy and all that it encompasses. The vast majority of people focused still on the problems their communities face and the struggles in which they are engaged. As people who have rarely or never held traditional power, or felt the capacity to make fundamental change, adjusting to a mindset of being powerful enough to create solutions is a challenge. This is why we must practice. We need to spend time experimenting with solutions, trying out decision making models, claiming power in our own lives, and building relationships that can help navigate this global fight.

This is a critical moment for global and local movements to strike, when the system is weak, bloated, and failing to meet the people's needs. In order for our attack to be effective we have to be ready to respond with some ideas and directions for what we do want, how we want to be structured, and what sort of economy will work. This is the direction that I saw at the People's Summit, a clear move to the offensive.

A key lesson from the Summit is that no one person or community has the answer; and looking for some person who's solo action or idea will move us towards victory is naïve.

The systems highlighted at the People's Summit were about rerouting our decision making, action, and economies so that they are based in the collective, and are unique to our local communities. Whether that is getting rid of corporate structures and needless bosses to implement worker collectives, dismantling traditional notions of private property to institute collective management and community control based on those that work the land, or overcoming patriarchy to develop societies of gender equity and respect, these are the dual power systems that peoples

of the world brought to the Summit.

Additionally, while we can develop models to share around the globe, only our communities truly know what's best for the people, economy, and environment in that place. People's movements coming out of the Summit are working to develop networks and solutions that are interconnected globally, whether that is through open-source technology, collective targets, or shared analysis. In the US and other 'developed' nations our task is double, because while building the power of social movements is critical, it's also true that our government is one of the primary proponents of the Green Economy and uses its economic and military might to support the suppression of popular movements around the world. Organizers in the US have a responsibility to address this repression and imperialism that inhibits revolutionary people's movements and just economies. The Summit reinforced this foundation of local struggle based in internationalism, or conversely international movement building grounded in local community organizing. These are not brand new concepts, but the conversation about how to implement these concepts felt newly energized and liberated from the constraints of simply protesting.

The UN Summits are not a place for the people of the world to get together to decide how to preserve our collective resources and advance our well-being. The governments of the world cannot be trusted to take on this task, and corporations are actively working to exploit our communities at each opportunity. That leaves the people, social movements, our networks, organizations and relationships to navigate the way forward. The

People's Summit in Rio was one step, the next is an international gathering in Bangkok hosted by Focus on the Global South in September, 2012 completely removed from any UN process and entirely focused on the question of how to align local movements for maximum international effect. So here we are, strengthening our relationships to each other and to the natural world, all the while, crafting plans, and taking action to make those ideas a reality.

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» March and street art at the Autodromo favela community that is being displaced by the 2016 Olympics, Brazil, 2012. Photo: Kari Koch.



# WITHOUT DELUSION: RETHINKING BOTH SELF AND DETERMINATION

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JOSHUA STEPHENS

*"Your emotions are nothing but politics. So, get control."*

—Embrace

I grew up in the shadow of the US military establishment overseas, bound to its limitations and odiousness by a language barrier I made considerable, but ultimately insufficient, efforts to erode. Prior to my dropping out, my secondary education unfolded on the same naval air station in the Mediterranean from which we very recently bombed Libya, and from which we began launching sorties into Iraq early in 1991, just after I'd turned thirteen. That proximity to the rationalization of mass slaughter, the rabid nationalism, and the self-righteous jingoism exhibited by virtually every English-speaking person within five hundred miles left me scouring every possible resource for *any* means of refusal. No one would be surprised to learn that libraries on US military installations are somewhere shy of being wellsprings of critique (of any variety). They do, however, more than adequately service the place of modern Christianity in the quasi-fascist microculture of the military community. So, while I didn't have much access to Marx or Chomsky as a teenager, I enjoyed incidental access to all of the non-Christian traditions covered in religious encyclopedias.

And as the one (rather curiously) non-theistic tradition therein, the *dhamma*, or what Western orientalists referred to as Buddhism, caught my eye. More still, its brand of blunt candor struck a stark contrast with the cynical, Machiavellian hypocrisy of the adults



in my midst. The teachings never really occurred to me as some individualized escape from anything; they were always, for me, something I took up as an explicit fuck-you—a refusal to be compelled by the expectations of a culture I found repugnant. To the extent that life in such an isolated microcosm amounted to living in a certain state of exception from more conventional rhythms (and in this case, involved a far more material relationship with large-scale violence), the equation was far less complex than anything I experience presently. The manner in which I set about bluntly and clumsily applying the *dhamma* to my life at age fifteen was well-suited to its terrain. The two danced beautifully, like nails on a blackboard. In every way, that arch-rivalry was my gateway to a radical politics.

#### A VIGNETTE

While the *dhamma* was certainly a critical impetus for my diving head-first into grassroots movements upon my return to the US in 1995, it wasn't until eight years later, during my first visit to Palestine that it really hit me just *how* practically political it was. At a demonstration in the West Bank city of Qalqilyeh, events unfolded such that I found myself --along with a handful of other folks--standing between Israeli soldiers armed with rifles, and a crew of fourteen to fifteen-year-old Palestinian kids throwing rocks. I probably don't need to point out that, in such moments, it's quite intuitive and simple to slip into a singular focus on some particular emergency or objective. One gives very little thought to consequences when dialed in on anything seemingly (or objectively) vital. At a certain point, that obliviousness dissolved for me, and it became rather immediately apparent

that I was physically in harm's way, probably more so than I'd ever been in my life.

So, naturally, I began conducting something of an inventory of my options in the moment. On one hand, it was definitely not in my power to talk or coerce Israeli twenty-somethings into putting their assault rifles away. On the other, even if I could have convinced those kids to hit pause on the rock-volley (for the record, *I could not*), the moment for which I'd shown up that day was *not my struggle*; it was not for me to dictate the terms on which that unfolded. Frankly, my passport had been issued by a government that devotes entirely too much time, money, and energy to dictating the terms of people's lives, the world over; continuing that tradition was a non-starter. At a very instinctual level, this left me with the option of removing myself from the situation (something community elders had actually recommended), which likely meant removing a not inconsiderable check against people firing live ammunition at teenagers.

*What to do... what to do?*

Over the course of probably just a few seconds, I concluded (rather awkwardly) that all options for preserving my physical integrity in that moment were mutually unacceptable. There was a bit of panic, a bit of second-guessing and self-censure . . . and then it hit me:

Where, exactly, did I get the idea that the world owed me comfort, freedom from fear, or even safety? While we (rightly) endeavor to keep them to a minimum, dissatisfaction, stress, and suffering are inevitable conditions of being human. It was as true in what my immediate situation was conveying as

it has been every time I've found myself foiled by a tourist oblivious to the international etiquette of standing to the right on metro escalators. The distinction between the two was ultimately only a matter of degrees.

Worse still, I already knew this, though perhaps I'd failed to understand it with much depth. The first teaching the Buddha ever gave began by driving this point home:

Birth is stressful, aging is stressful, death is stressful; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair are stressful; association with the unbeloved is stressful, separation from the loved is stressful, not getting what is wanted is stressful. In short, the five clinging-aggregates are stressful.<sup>1</sup>

This teaching gets translated and interpreted in often confusing ways. It is the first of what are known as the Four Noble Truths, the truth of what the Buddha called *dukkha*—a sort of umbrella term inclusive of suffering, pain, stress, dissatisfaction, disappointment, anxiety, and so on. The Four Noble Truths being the most well-known of the Buddha's teachings, and *dukkha* being most commonly translated simply as suffering, there's a widespread misunderstanding that the Buddha suggested that life *is* suffering. What he was illustrating was not *dukkha* as something ubiquitous and all-pervading, but rather something inevitable. It is a recurring character in life's drama that cannot be written out of the script. With or without our permission, the bodies in which we live are born, will age and increasingly fail us, and die. We understand these as uncontroversial facts of life, and we understand with a comparable lack of controversy that these events entail some degree of stress, disappointment,

anxiety, pain, and so on. There's nothing terribly novel going on in this teaching. However it has been dressed up and exoticized, it remains an observation of something utterly mundane.

What it meant at that second in Qalqilyeh was that, imperfect as that moment might have been, it wasn't personal or unique; distress and suffering are things that happen in this life, as a matter of course. An aversive attempt to expel or escape my feelings of fear, uncertainty, and even helplessness as somehow unacceptable very likely could have undermined the focus of what I was there to do. Potentially, it could have meant injuries or even a loss of life. What was happening was happening, indifferent to my thoughts or emotions. Allowing myself to be conducted by the latter meant neglecting any skillful response to what was physically and tangibly unfolding in the former.

## BENDING TO THE MATERIAL

There's an arguable lack of sentimentality to this view which, on the surface, can seem very cold, even fatalistic. And certainly, the *dhamma* has its critics on this very point. I'd like to suggest this is a symptom of compartmentalizing its particular aspects and interrogating them in isolation. While the Buddha preoccupied himself unwaveringly with a singular project of eradication, that eradication was threefold, targeting greed, hatred, and delusion. Conventional representations of the *dhamma* tend to focus on the first two, resulting in caricatures of renunciation and a sort of quiet passivity or resignation. The matter of delusion, oddly, is neglected with curious consistency.

And yet, delusion is arguably the most intractable of the three, and

weaves through virtually every aspect of our lives, coloring our experience invisibly. It is so pervasive and multiplicitous, in fact, that it drives the only two other ontological claims the Buddha made, alongside that of *dukkha*: what he called *anicca* and *anatta*—impermanence, and a lack of stable essence. In his estimation, all things are impermanent, are without any discernible or stable essence, and entail some degree of stress or disappointment. Delusion animates our relationship with all three of these factors of existence (as the Buddha referred to them), but there is value to applying a finer lens to the teachings of *anicca*<sup>2</sup> and *anatta*<sup>3</sup> when thinking these through politically.

*Anicca*, or impermanence, is self-evident. All things end. Our tacit (if begrudging) intellectual acceptance of the fact is as pervasive in its universality as our stubborn denial of it is in literature, art, music, and OK Cupid. It nonetheless holds a liberatory gem: *dukkha* is impermanent, as well. It's here that the cold, unsentimental tag dissolves; the task is not to dismiss or suppress what we experience in life, but to recognize that nothing --whether we've judged it pleasant or unpleasant--stays. Whatever we experience, it will change.

*Anatta*, often translated as "not-self," is something arguably more complex, but corresponds both with impermanence and elements of Critical Theory that have woven into anarchist thought in recent decades. Its relationship with impermanence is, again, somewhat self-evident. If we accept that all things are impermanent, changing, in a constant state of unfolding or becoming, they are fundamentally incompatible with claims of stability or fixed, discernible identity. The concept

maps nicely onto queer and trans liberation discourse, in that it amounts to an affirmation of performativity—both in how we perform ourselves, and how we perform identity onto others (gendering, racializing, colonizing, etc).

At its core, however, *anatta* proposes a far more radical un-grounding, offering an account of the inevitability of *dukkha*, through what the Buddha described as the distinction and dissonance between name and form; what modern linguists have described as sign/signified. At its simplest, the word "tree" and the leafy object outside my window are different things. The object exists, regardless of whether language exists to describe it. To invert this a bit, I might invoke the Swedish term *fika*, which describes the act of conversing and communing over non-alcoholic drinks like coffee or tea. To be sure, these assembled elements occur in a discreet, organized way --even outside of Sweden—but no single English term exists to represent that arrangement (despite that it is arguably *precisely* what Starbucks has managed to brand and sell, at great profit).

What linguists, and an array of cultural actors from novelists to philosophers to standup comics, have illustrated and played with rather brilliantly herein is the distance and dissonance between the world and representation. What the Buddha suggested was that there was something of an ethics to be gleaned from it. If we understand that the language we use to represent the world (to ourselves, even) exists --always—at some distance from its object, and in some degree of disagreement with it, we take on a certain humility and acceptance that our representations are always and ever in some way flawed, imprecise, and *imperfect*.

Further, to the extent that our use of language in representing experience yields to us a rather complete control of description and narrative, the world beyond us is indifferent, and under no obligation to honor it. We are not in charge, and we are subject to whatever contingencies occur in the world.

Arguably, *dukkha* can be mapped in the interstice between the world and our representation of it. Delusion is the denial, or perhaps simple forgetting, that any such interstice exists.

## NEW MAPS

Attempts at charting various intersections of anarchism and practices derived from the teachings and life of the Buddha have been made sporadically for some time. Alan Watts comes to mind for most, followed perhaps by John Cage, various environmental activists, and even Peter Marshall's brief treatment in *Demanding the Impossible*. That said, very little of this has involved much detail and there has been a tendency to approach the latter piece of that equation more cursorily, still—and almost exclusively from the Zen tradition. Much of this has toggled between art and a corresponding aesthetics of living, and an attempt at reading the Buddha's teachings as a sort of revolutionary blueprint.

Consequently, to the extent that any of us can attest to being aware that a conversation or understanding of this intersection exists, our description thereof would likely prove rather reductive. In any such exercise, there's an understandable impulse to quantify the objects of analysis in discreet ways, usually to the effect of reducing dissonance or rough edges to a bare minimum. After all, if the objective is to explore where these things intersect,

we have to first ensure that they *do*, in fact, intersect. What we wind up with is an often dubious survey of the literature of the anarchist tradition, shoehorned into an even more dubious summation of what the Buddha taught—both spheres thoroughly abstracted from any lived reality. This last piece ought to throw up all sorts of red flags, as both of these traditions were elaborated from a deeply visceral, lived experience, in direct confrontation with very material, institutionalized modes of social organization. To strip them of this vital context is to discredit whatever we do with them thereafter.

There's a necessity, I think, to chart an entirely *different* intersection; one anchored to the embodied experiences of both being human (in all the gritty, messy complexity that inheres), and being humans engaged in collective struggle. Herein, anarchism as a literary or political tradition becomes less meaningful than an ethical orientation in opposition to relations of domination, from which we stage myriad interventions—personal, collective, and otherwise. Similarly, the *dhamma* is perhaps best understood here as a technology of the self in service of that orientation, as opposed to a moral or ontological framework for prefiguring social organization. What this mode of analysis allows us to explore is a detailed terrain of antiauthoritarian subjectivity, to which collective liberation cannot be reduced, but by which we might begin to think of it being *constituted* in, at least, partial ways.

Charting this intersection, it feels most appropriate to discuss it politically and technically, rather than spiritually. I actually dislike the term spiritual, for a number of reasons—not least of which is that it evokes something beyond the

material, beyond what we can observe in our own experience. There's a Voltaire quote that goes something like, "If I can make you believe absurdities, I can make you commit atrocities." Something about that feels profoundly correct, to me. Generally, I find such opacity is productive of all sorts of unsavory political outcomes, but it also happens that (contrary to popular mythology) the Buddha rejected it, as well.<sup>4</sup> So, the vocabulary of the "spiritual" is one with which I'm perfectly happy to dispense.

Tackling it from a material angle, I find Foucault's work enormously useful. This is especially true with regard to the lectures he gave at the Collège de France, many of which are now available in English. What Foucault does in some of these is document an exercise of power he called *governmentality*—which is distinct from the sovereign and disciplinary forms of power for which he's more widely known, in that it is exercised over populations, rather than individuals, through what is common to them. It's useful here to maybe think of the conducting of an orchestra, or the captaining of a ship. It involves the use of existing materials, forces, tendencies and so on as levers with which to *modulate* rather than exact specific outcomes. Here, we encounter Foucault's notion of bio-politics; arguably the most abused term in contemporary radical left discourse. It refers to a politics Foucault observes in things like immunization campaigns, pre-natal care campaigns—things that we don't necessarily experience as political, but are common to us as a population because we're exposed to the same viruses, vulnerabilities, resources and so on, all of which provide a vector for the intervention of power. What matters

here is not the particular disciplines in which this appears or sees application, but the *depoliticization* of power, and the ways we're acted on and conducted by any number of social forces, in ways we don't think of as political, and which we may not even notice.<sup>5</sup>

## EVERYTHING IS DANGEROUS

The depoliticization of power can be observed pretty much anywhere, with varying degrees of intensity. Once again, a particularly illustrative site, in my view, is the operation of language in constituting social understanding. Using the work of developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky, cognitive psychologist Charles Fernyhough has argued that language is a necessary condition for what we understand to be the act or process of *thought*.<sup>6</sup> He goes so far as to make the rather radical claim that, prior to the acquisition of language, children do not *think*. Not in the ways we conventionally understand, anyway.<sup>7</sup>

For a time, the going consensus in linguistics was that the primary function of language was *communicative*, meaning that it served primarily to convey novel information. For instance: I'm writing this on an iPad. Prior to my saying that, you didn't know it. My saying so *communicated* that. The problem discovered with this thesis is it's at odds both with how we use language, and how we acquire it, to begin with.

According to Vygotsky, we acquire language (and in turn, cognition) through mimicry, repeating what we hear others say, and eventually making it our own. If we're repeating something, it's because we already know it. So, we're not communicating anything novel. Further, the vast majority of our use of language is in what Vygotsky called "self-talk," or what we

understand as our inner monologue. It's physically impossible for any of us to tell ourselves something we don't already know. What we're actually doing is *re-presenting* information, in new ways. But it's information we already had, whether it was communicated to us from elsewhere, or acquired through sensory inputs.

What that re-presentation amounts to is the telling of stories. We're telling *ourselves* stories about our own experience; about what we hear, what we see, what we smell, what we feel. We're basically coloring in an outline, and applying a narrative re-presentation to something that, prior, was simply sensory input. It had no story. Given Fernyhough's claim that language is a necessary condition for thought as we understand it, we have cause to reverse-engineer this thesis about the primary function of language, to tell us something about the mind itself. If cognitive processes like social understanding are contingent upon a particular operation, that operation's primary function or activity can be viewed (at very least) as a central feature of the mind itself. In other words, re-presentation is something our minds do *ad infinitum*, without much prodding. It's what the mind *does*, based on the installed operating system.

Given language's status as a system of constraints (grammatical and otherwise), it necessarily allows particular utterances, and disallows others. Moreover, it is a system of representation at a distance from the world we experience, varying degrees of dissonance animating the space between. Further, if Vygotsky was correct about how we acquire language, the very vocabulary from which we derive the mere ability to re-present even our own

sensory experience to ourselves *came from somewhere*.

In other words, what our minds do all on their own, cannot possibly be neutral. It relies on a complex of particular tools, and an array of operations that play out even beneath the level of the conscious. In his work on the unconscious mind, *Incognito*, David Eaglemen characterizes identifying ourselves with our conscious minds as something<sup>8</sup> like a stowaway congratulating him or herself for successfully guiding a ship to port. Without so much as a hint of what we identify as political, even the subtlest operations of the mind *came from somewhere*. By default, they are vulnerable to the intervention of power, in the form of discourse. Here, what is argued by many to be a core of the Buddha's teaching takes on radically political, and even destabilizing significance: "Nothing in this world should be clung to as I or mine."

On the surface, it all seems very technical and even clinical. But if we think about it in conjunction with something like race, a particular picture emerges; one that corresponds with both the science of race (that it's a biological fiction), and key features of contemporary critical race theory (that it's a lived social reality). We come right back to the Buddha's distinction between name and form. We are telling ourselves stories, and in turn constructing particular social realities for ourselves and each other that do enormous damage to our humanity, certainly to our capacities for reconstructive, revolutionary transformation. We do this day in, and day out. Over and over and over.

One needn't reach terribly far to understand this as political. And in fact,

our own emergent modes of organization suggest that, on some level, we do understand this politically. Whatever distance we have to travel on the matter, the fact that discourse, training, and practice exist and proliferate in opposition to racism and white supremacy suggests we understand the operation of these stories to be of profound political consequence. Further still, the practices we've elaborated in opposition to these stories reflect an insistence that struggle requires persistent, critical investigation of and deliberate intervention on this narrative re-presentation.

### HERE BE DRAGONS

This is, in fact, the core of meditation practice. This is precisely what the Buddha articulated when he instructed his attendant, "Whatever your conception of the truth, it is always other." Practice --particularly a critical relationship with delusion--is the act of humbly stepping back from that cognitive process of re-presenting experience, and observing what's *actually* happening, and the stories we've been told, have told, or are presently telling ourselves about experience. More importantly, it is the act of taking responsibility for whether we adopt particular stories and what ends they serve.

As I've said, we appear to have (at least partially) arrived at this understanding, particularly with regard to forms of oppression that correspond with identity. Therein, we've begun to acquire a certain dexterity with tools for observing and intervening against those specific and intense manifestations of delusion; those places where exercises of power speak through and act on us in increasingly apparent ways. But they are not the *only* manifestations, and oppression is not the sole terrain in which

we encounter delusion, aversion, and attachment.

To begin with, at birth, we inherit a vast evolutionary residue that drives our recording of experience, almost immediately. Our impulses toward survival and corresponding anxieties with regard to security, scarcity, and sociality are imprinted on us before we even have language with which to construct narrative memory. They conduct a vast neuro-chemical system that can, upon the appearance of particular (even everyday) stimuli, send *thousands* of chemicals coursing through us. There seems very good reason to consider that practices of race, gender, class, sexuality and so on are not merely discursive constructs that we adopt and perform, but externally-imposed regimes that *colonize* and animate these *pre-linguistic* anxieties, conducting us through intensely physical experiences.

This evolutionary residue is not going anywhere. We will manage its chemical oscillations the remainder of our lives, in ways not dissimilar to how someone in recovery manages the operation of addiction. Whatever discursive tools we develop for combating practices of domination and oppression, vital and absolutely necessary as those have been and will continue to be, they are necessarily limited in that they will reach as far as language gets us. Well beneath that, our impulse to control our experience will persist, with all its physical and chemical intensity, ever vulnerable to colonization by some *new* discourse, explanation, or regime of reactive practices.

Whether he knew it or not, Foucault was onto something when he argued in the preface to *Anti-Oedipus* that the task before us is the pursuit of "the slightest traces of fascism in the



body.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, to the extent that charting an intersection between the *dhamma* and anarchist aspirations even matters, it must propose an antiauthoritarian relationship with and intervention on the *self*, with self-formation as its political terrain. The project, as thinkers such as bell hooks have described it, is one of mental and psychological decolonization—not as a set of individualizing, navel-gazing tactics of escape, but as a direct confrontation with and refusal of being conducted; a militant, unvarnished candor and clarity about our limitations and vulnerabilities, and a determination to take that below the level of language, into *embodied practice*.

### PRESENT-TIME AWARENESS

With the emergence of contemporary global uprisings, and things like the Occupy movement, we have compelling reason to apply this lens to experiences we *don't* necessarily identify as political. We carry some obligation to take quite seriously that these movements tapped a vein. Many of us know that organizing driven by direct democracy and direct action was happening in the US for many years, going back to anti-nuclear organizing, right up through the 1999 uprising against the World Trade Organization in Seattle, and the alter-globalization rebellions in the years that followed. What's new is that the financial crisis laid the groundwork for a mass movement, with broad, heterogeneous participation. What happened in Seattle, for instance, was not spontaneous; it was conducted by people with some pre-existing intellectual or ideological buy-in. While there was a spectrum of political positions, participants shared some degree of analysis. They came into that moment owning the belief that neoliberal globalization

and its effects were intolerable. And to some extent, they had a degree of organizing acumen, and dexterity with the practices of direct democracy, direct action, and the organizational forms that made that moment so dynamic.

What's happening now is a confluence of movements comprised often spontaneously of people of extraordinarily disparate political maturity, education, organizing experience, and life experience. More than that, we find ourselves in organizing scenarios with people who are incredibly broken. This is often difficult, frustrating, and demanding in ways we may not have been prepared for. It perhaps even puts us face to face with the ways we are *all* walking wounded. At points, we may even find ourselves wanting to abandon these encounters, despite that our whole analysis turns on the claim that capitalism invariably produces broken people. We indict this system for producing these outcomes, and yet we often don't want to deal with them, and lack the tools for doing so.

That aversion is deeply political. If we're serious about remaining a mass movement, rather than retreating to our prior, more ideologically pure and in many ways impotent forms; if we want to continue with struggle that prefigures a world in which we want to live, we have a deeply political obligation to acquire tools that enable us to stay present in those moments that feel gritty, uncomfortable, complicated; moments driven by open questions. In the places where it feels like we need a solution or an answer in order to move forward, we need to stay present and acknowledge that however helpless we feel, those moments are often deeply productive, if only in forcing us to live without the mythology of control.

Further still, any reconstructive vision that proposes direct, unmediated political forms necessarily confers on us a responsibility for the selves we bring to that. German anarchist Gustav Landauer is frequently quoted suggesting that the state is a condition; one constituted by our practices. He argued we dismantle it to the extent that we contract new relationships and behave differently, going so far as to proclaim, "It is not enough for us to reject conditions and institutions; we have to reject ourselves."<sup>10</sup> We'd do well to dial in on the reference to behavior. It suggests a value to something beyond merely working a problem over intellectually, hoping to unlock it; it suggests physicality, the cultivation of muscle-memory, even the cultivation of new selves. Perhaps, as we care for and challenge each other, moving through this historical moment, we will begin to elaborate and cultivate in each other subjectivities sensitized to the operation of delusion, awake to "all varieties of fascism, from the enormous ones that surround and crush us to the petty ones that constitute the tyrannical bitterness of our everyday lives."<sup>11</sup>

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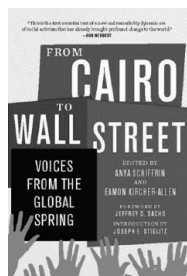
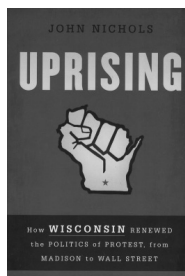
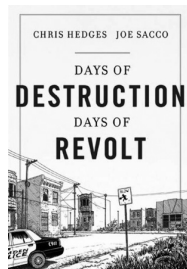
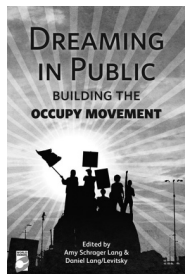
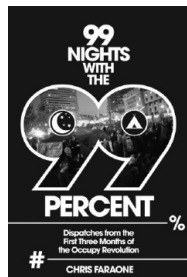
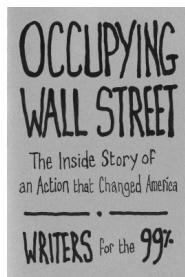
## NOTES

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- 8 David Eagleman, *Incognito: The Secret Lives of the Brain* (New York: Pantheon 2011), 4.
- 9 Michel Foucault, preface to *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1983), xii.
- 10 Gustav Landauer, *Revolution and Other Writings* (Oakland: PM Press 2012), 92.
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# REVIEW BOOKS ON OCCUPY'S ETERNAL NOW

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MAIA RAMNATH



*Occupying Wall Street: Writers for the 99%: The Inside Story of an Action that Changed America*, Writers for the 99% (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012)

*99 Nights with the 99 Per Cent: Dispatches From the First Three Months of the Occupy Revolution*, Chris Faraone (Write to Power, 2012)

*Dreaming in Public: Building the Occupy Movement*, Amy Schrager Lang and Daniel Lang/Levitsky (Oxford: New Internationalist Publications/Peoria: Versa, 2012)

*Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt*, Chris Hedges and Joe Sacco (New York: Nation Books, 2012)

*Uprising: How Wisconsin Renewed the Politics of Protest, from Madison to Wall Street*, John Nicholls (New York: Nation Books, 2012)

*From Cairo to Wall Street: Voices from the Global Spring*, Anya Schifferin and Eamon Kircher-Allen, eds. (New York: New Press, 2012)

The emergence of the Occupy Wall Street phenomenon in September 2011 unleashed a spate of publications by and about its participants. In fact, one of the movement's most notable features was the inseparability of its development from simultaneous auto-documentation and auto-critique. There wasn't a period of immersive action followed later by a period of reflection and analysis; in this case, as befits a population accustomed to living on twitter, Facebook and other social media to such a degree that consciousness itself seems indistinguishable from constant communication, its existence was not just mediated but produced by its discourse. The movement *was* the conversation, even while its anchoring physical presence was the key to its power and amplified reach. The so-called Arab Spring uprisings of the previous year too had utilized social media, pushing its frontiers of tactical effectiveness, but was this the advent of the true meta-movement?

When writer Tim Gee asked campers at various occupations what they thought important to mention, "The answer to this question was almost always the same: 'This is a space to discuss and to come up with our own solutions to the problems we face.'"<sup>1</sup> According to another writer/occupier, "it seems the central demand is to build and expand a conversation that is long overdue in this country, a conversation which doesn't

have simple cut and dry demands.” This suggests that the occupations’ real significance was in holding a space for people long excluded from participation in determining the terms of their own economic and political horizons of possibility. For a growing number, that experience created a profound opening.

Many others listened in: the “addictive” OWS livestream, “decenter[ing] the big event in favor of the casual banality of everyday life in a democratic public space,” was emblematic of a sense of an eternal present. Yet so instantaneous is the information cycle that the fastest fast-track into book publication seems too slow; from the time these books were written to the time people read and review them, everything has already changed and will keep changing.

For example *Occupying Wall Street: Writers for the 99%* began a mere month into the New York occupation as a proposal of the Education and Empowerment working group. According to the introduction, the group voted against it on the grounds that it was “premature” and risked presenting an “official statement” counter to the movement’s principles of plurality and openness. But a spin-off group went forward, conducting interviews from which to weave a “compilation of voices” that was not only an “inside story” of events but also an “analysis of OWS’s initial successes and failures,” and a “handbook for future occupations.” Short chapters cover preparations, establishment of presence, key escalations, and finally the encampment’s defense and eviction; plus thick descriptions of proliferating working groups at the 60 Wall Atrium and daily life in Zuccotti Park. Providing little critical analysis, it’s above all an eyewitness description that will be candy for future historians.

To its credit, though, this description does note the presence of critics and the content of their concerns, notably by people of color calling the general assembly process on racisms of commission and omission. And despite its detailed microfocus, the account nods to OWS’s place within a global movement.

Even more micro-focused is *99 Nights with the 99 Per Cent: Dispatches From the First Three Months of the Occupy Revolution* by self-embedded journalist Chris Faraone, based on his 24/7 immersion in the Boston occupation. This subjective patchwork of nightly notes on events, blog posts, pieces published (or censored) in the *Boston Phoenix*, and vivid nuggets of observation, bursts with energetic immediacy—which is where the question arises of the difference between swimming in the constant info-sea, and publishing a book. Is this like reading last month’s twitter feed? How fast does immediacy become irrelevance? Between instant communication—hey guys, this is what happened last night!—or the frisson of reliving your own exploits in media’s mirror—look ma, there’s me on TV!—and the future historian eager to conjure forth a time she could not experience herself, such documentation once in print often risks feeling dated, through no fault of the author’s.

But perhaps a larger time perspective is what’s most needed, and the book that seems best equipped for that is *Dreaming in Public: Building the Occupy Movement*, edited by Amy Schrager Lang and Daniel Lang/Levitsky. This rich assemblage engages deeply with two themes that are key ingredients of the moment’s unique brew: prefiguration of an alternate community based in mutual aid, and decolonization, which demands awareness of context. One implies a look

forward, one a look back, though both are enacted at the hinge of the present. Contributors ranging from the anonymous to the eminent cumulatively “help mark the way” to “carry forward what we learned there.” The articles, essays, blog posts, declarations, statements and critical interventions, organized thematically on topics like media, facilitation, libraries, safer spaces, people of color, arts and culture, sustainability, direct action, and town planning, are spiced with slogans culled from the encampments’ remarkable outpouring of personal expression. The editors draw critically nuanced material from multiple cities—notably Oakland, Los Angeles, and Detroit, among others—illuminating the particularities of each location’s history, demographics, needs and priorities, while also unpacking their relationship to the larger symbolic value of “Occupy Wall Street” as a metonym for everything wrong with banks, corporations, neoliberalism and high finance. Without shying away from internal conflicts and controversies, the documents “recount attempts on the part of individuals to explain what they, themselves, are doing in the movement” and “to address their own role in the development of a new politics” intending not to reform a discredited system but to brainstorm a different path.

## CARE

So what happened, when people first began to be infected by this most viral of memes? “The first move in most places was to reclaim a public space and establish a full-time presence there in an effort to make concrete the outrage, hopes, despair and dreams of those who answered the call.” Next, “Inside that space the protesters built a model for the communities they’d like to see,” by prioritizing the very functions

eviscerated from public life by austerity policies that discarded commonly distributed use values for highly concentrated exchange values.

Lang and Lang/Levitsky propose that “The effectiveness of this infrastructure at meeting the basic needs of participants [...]—food, clothing, medicine, human connection, intellectual and cultural excitement—has made it possible for the movement to devote its energy to stubborn problems that many political movements shelve,” including both internal tensions and external objectives. Corollary to this, they locate the successes of the movement in “the affective environment it has fostered;” here was an experimental manifestation of a society based on care and community rather than the isolated anomie of late capitalism. Sonny Singh: “Most of us can agree that OWS is not only about confronting big banks, corporations and the state, but also about creating alternatives to this oppressive system. How we in this movement interact with each other, hold ourselves and each other accountable, and sustain our community are questions just as important as what our message is and what our next direct action is.”

Furthermore, this foregrounding of collective care as a building block for political projects enables a recognition of feminism as central to radical anti-capitalism. For Larisa Mann, inspiration and interest lay less in the tactical action component than in that “[t]he occupations, by focusing on creating spaces for living and for having dialogue, highlight how little space we have in our lives for either of those things,” especially given the separation between public activity and the reproductive private sphere of “unglamorous[ly]” feminized “caregiving, organization, maintaining skills.” Therefore, “the most radical thing the

occupations have done is made visible a lot of that work, and made it accessible. They show it is possible for people to self-organize around things like food, medical care, childcare, a library, media centers, internet, etc.” Mastery of those anti-patriarchal skills of mutual aid and community self-reliance, by rendering people less “Dependent on the system, [...] make it easier to resist selling out or buying in.” Care is thus placed at the heart of the social transformations Occupy envisions, encoded into the practice of radical prefiguration.

Lang and Lang/Levitsky don't like this term, rejecting “the idea that the present can only be a foreshadowing of a future reality, not a reality itself. It assumes a fundamental separation between our present work and the world we hope to bring into being. We want to argue that what Occupy has accomplished is not the shadowing forth of a promised future, but rather the creation, on however small a scale, of a present reality. Not an act of prefiguration but an act of construction. That is to say, its energy [...] is devoted to building present alternatives to failed structures and policies. However utopian, Occupy does not proceed in accordance with an abstract blueprint for the future; on the contrary, its design emerges from daily process and practice.” I agree, except that what they say *is* my definition, beautifully stated, of a prefigurative practice. It may be *now*, but in order not to be ephemeral it also needs to last until the future becomes now: not predetermined but emergent.

## DECOLONIZATION

Removing spaces and means of living from the commodity circuit, and neutralizing unequal power relations, are both aspects of decolonization.

From the start of the occupations, some had contended that a more accurate, less loaded word than “occupy” was “liberate”: to reclaim commons, reverse expropriation, dismantle structures of exploitation and oppression. Another of the great strengths of this book is that it foregrounds that debate; it even embraces as standard practice the naming of the movement as Occupy/Decolonize, combining the brand-recognition and symbolic value of the former with the crucial critical intervention provided by the latter. In simplest terms this is a challenge for neophyte and veteran activists to acknowledge the real experiences of people subject to colonial/military occupation as being at the core of their stated task.

The call to decolonize carried the logic even further: after all, every occupation was on already occupied land. This challenge brought indigenous issues to the forefront, while also linking the symptoms of domestic economic collapse to the legacy of US imperialism, both territorial and economic. Toward an anticolonial analysis, Harsha Walia notes that the earliest vehicles of European colonization were “some of the first corporate entities established on the stock market...able to extract resources and amass massive profits as a direct result of the subjugation of local communities...In the midst of an economic crisis, corporations’ ability to accumulate wealth is dependent on discovering new frontiers from which to extract resources”—as true today as in the 17th century. In Denver, AIM proposed an Indigenous Platform stating that while “we welcome the awakening of those who are relatively new to our homeland,” after 519 years, to “a movement that is mindful of its place in the environment, that seeks economic



and social justice, that strives for an end to oppression in all its forms, that demands an adequate standard of food, employment, shelter and healthcare for all..." that movement should recall that "indigenous histories, political, cultural, environmental, medical, spiritual and economic traditions...can offer concrete models of alternatives to the current crises facing the United States."

The implications applied not just to external context but to the persistent oppressions implicit in OWS infrastructure. "There are problems at the camp," admits Jaime Omar Yassin. "There's misogyny, homophobia, racism, aggression. In short, everything that existed [there before] is still there today—it's not yet a utopia. But the difference is that now people have the opportunity to confront problems head on and innovate on ways to deal with them." Here is where the themes of decolonization and care intersect: in the aspiration toward restorative justice, processes of accountability, and instituting respect and inclusivity for women, queers and trans people, people of color, people with disabilities, and homeless occupiers. Just as the Occupy wave marked the entry into broader North American common sense of systemic crises long obvious to residents of the global South, the Occupy Boston Women's Caucus declared that "[d]ownwardly mobile middle-class white men are finally realizing what women and people of color have known for too long [ . . . ] Capitalism is destructive. Capitalism oppresses and exploits. If you're not talking about sexism and racism, you're not talking about economic justice." And Rinku Sen: "We need to interrogate not just the symptoms of inequality—the disproportionate loss of jobs, housing, healthcare and more—but, more fundamentally,

the systems of inequality, considering how and why corporations create and exploit hierarchies of race, gender and national status to enrich themselves and consolidate their power...If racial exclusion and inequity are at the root of the problem, then inclusion and equity must be built into the solution."

Regarding an expanded perspective, it also bears noting that what the editors of *Dreaming in Public* call the "radically new" aspects of the Occupy brand—its "broader rejection of older terms of political struggle," its emphasis on prefigurative manifestation through continual experimentation, its "ethic of participation [...]" and its remarkable inventiveness," its "[b]asis of affinity" located in a "shared form of struggle: participatory, leaderless, horizontally structured inclusive and demanding everything," and the creation of a semi-permanent autonomous zone (a SPAZ?)—all sound quite familiar to anarchists active over the last few decades, who in turn trace recent movement influences on analysis, processes and structures through women's and queer liberation movements, convergences around global justice conferences, eco-defense encampments, Food Not Bombs, and so forth. In short, implicitly anarchist tendencies suffused the movement even while overt anti-anarchist rhetoric poisoned some of the encampments.

This is why I have to say I'm sorry, Joe Sacco. I couldn't do it. Despite the beauty and power of your artwork I couldn't bring myself to buy your book, *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt*, because I was still too pissed at your co-author, Chris Hedges, for his role in the demonization of anarchists in OWS as a caricature of violent, nihilist insurrection by that notorious shadowy organization, "the" black bloc.

(Debating the meaning and justification of use of force is a big conversation for another day.) Nevertheless I want to mention the book as one of several that situate OWS in relation to its predecessors, valuably counteracting a little of the exceptionalism and inevitable New York-centrism that tend to creep into immediate accounts.

Its theme is the “commodification of the natural world and human life-worlds” and the destructive effects of the “ideology of unfettered capitalism” on communities and ecosystems. Sacco & Hedges focus on a few “sacrifice zones” or “areas in the country that have been offered up for exploitation in the name of profits, progress and technological advancement.” They identify the war on Native Americans as the “template” for this process, which was then enacted upon the Philippines, Cuba, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan as the US empire expanded, finally cannibalizing its own social fabric, from impoverished Appalachia to deindustrialized inner cities.

The silver lining is that the continuity of the process is matched by the continuity of resistance to the process. This historical narrative of destruction and revolt offers a stereoscopic view: Hedges supplies more of the background facts in textual passages and Sacco more of the emotional immediacy in the graphic spreads, though these do overlap. Sacco’s cinematic compositions with their strong lines and shadows evoke astonishing detail in both foreground (people in all their individual dignity and sorrow: exhausted migrant farmworkers sleeping on a bus, elders on the reservation at Pine Ridge) and background (the panoramic Great Plains of South Dakota, New Jersey’s postindustrial urban blight, the Dantean mines

of West Virginia). Sacco & Hedges add OWS as the capstone chapter rounding out a much longer saga of capitalist depredation and those who suffer from and fight against it. [Although I hate to say it, Wall Street Occupiers, and maybe this represents my own pet peeve... but I thought the spread illustrating the People’s Mic brought to mind a ravening zombie horde.]

Other such adjustments in perspective include John Nicholls’ *Uprising*, which details the long struggle in Madison last year wherein Wisconsinites besieged the capitol for weeks to fight for access to education and union bargaining rights, identifying it as a crucial inspiration and precursor for OWS; and *From Cairo to Wall Street: Voices from the Global Spring*, edited by Anya Schifferin and Eamon Kircher-Allen. Tracing a genealogy to the global justice movement wave of resistance to structural adjustment programs and free trade agreements over a decade before, Schifferin and Kircher-Allen locate the wave that rose to meet the most recent financial crises in the context of the much longer term structural problems of neoliberal globalization. Similarly, Nicholls sees uprisings not as isolated points but as arcs we can’t always see the beginning and end of.

When did this begin? When will it end? What was/is it? What did/will it do? What happens when its “space reclamation” becomes symbolic rather than material, “existing as an idea not a place”? We don’t know yet. So far, it appears that the meaning of this moment is most evident in its existential texture. Adding a sense of time, locating this present-tense autonomous zone in relation to both past and future through contextualization and prefiguration, allows for the interconnected work of care

and decolonization to take place, and renders it more likely to be effective in a lasting way. Lang and Lang/Levitsky assure us that “each of us is at the enter of an ongoing and, crucially, a collective history” and that whatever comes next, “we will build it together.”<sup>23</sup>

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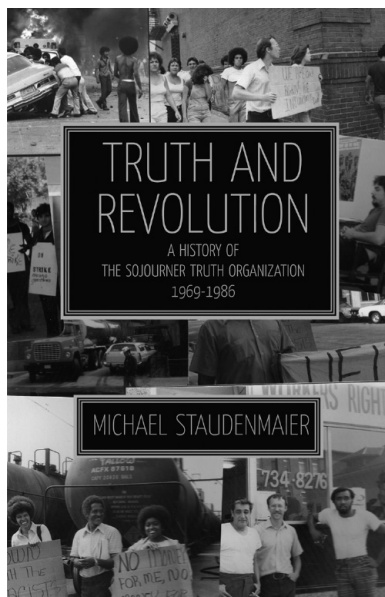
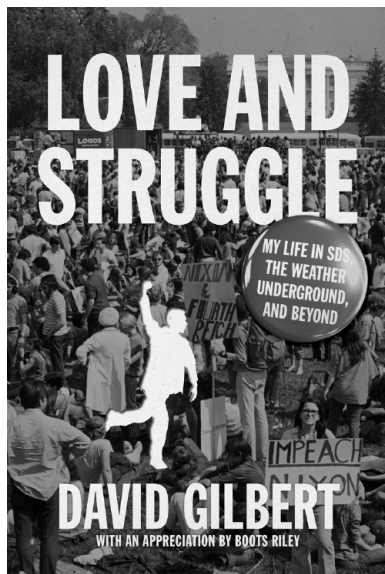
## NOTES

- 1 Tim Gee, “Occupy the North” in Lang and Lang/Levitsky, *Dreaming in Public* (Oxford: New Internationalist, 2012), 282.
- 2 Adrienne Maree Brown, “from liberty plaza: let it breathe” in Lang and Lang/Levitsky, 81.
- 3 Sara Marcus, “C-SPAN for Radicals” in Lang and Lang/Levitsky, 264-5.
- 4 Writers for the 99%, *Occupying Wall Street* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 2.
- 5 Lang and Lang/Levitsky, 16.
- 6 Lang and Lang/Levitsky, 16-17.
- 7 Lang and Lang/Levitsky, 16.
- 8 Sarah Jaffe, “Occupy Wall Street Prepares for Crackdown” in Lang and Lang/Levitsky, 254.
- 9 Lang and Lang/Levitsky, 22.
- 10 Lang and Lang/Levitsky, 125.
- 11 Sonny Singh, “Occupying Process, Processing Occupy: Spokes Council musings by one POC” in Lang and Lang/Levitsky, 123.
- 12 Larisa Mann, “On Occupy Wall Street” in Lang and Lang/Levitsky, 108-9.
- 13 Lang and Lang/Levitsky, 24-5.
- 14 Harsha Walia, “Letter to Occupy Together Movement” in Lang and Lang/Levitsky, 165.
- 15 American Indian Movement of Colorado “An Indigenous Platform Proposal for Occupy Denver” in Lang and Lang/Levitsky, 150.
- 16 Lang and Lang/Levitsky, 153.
- 17 Jaime Omar Yassin, “Occupy Oakland: Hugs are Also an Option” in Lang and Lang/Levitsky, 127.
- 18 See contributions by Manissa McCleave Maharawal, Emma Rosenthal and others.
- 19 Occupy Boston Women’s Caucus, “Statement” in Lang and Lang/Levitsky, 128.
- 20 Rinku Sen, “Forget ‘Diversity,’ It’s About Occupying Racial Inequity” in Lang and Lang/Levitsky, 148.
- 21 Lang and Lang/Levitsky, 17-21.
- 22 Chris Hedges and Joe Sacco, *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt* (New York: New Press, 2012), xi-xii.
- 23 Lang and Lang/Levitsky, 25

REVIEW  
LEGACIES OF  
LIBERATION:  
DAVID GILBERT'S  
*LOVE AND  
STRUGGLE*  
AND MICHAEL  
STAUDENMAIER'S  
*TRUTH AND  
REVOLUTION*

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GEOFF MC



*Love and Struggle: My Life in SDS, the Weather Underground, and Beyond*, David Gilbert (Oakland: PM Press, 2012)

, *Truth and Revolution: A History of the Sojourner Truth Organization, 1969-1986*, Michael Staudenmaier (Oakland: AK Press, 2012)

When I was a 17-year-old punk rocker

I wrote a high school paper on the history of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the major organizational manifestation of the white New Left of the 1960s. I argued something along the lines that early SDS's concept of "participatory democracy" had much in common with anarchist politics and that this liberatory potential was subverted by violent and authoritarian politics of Third World Marxists and Black Power advocates. I sent a copy of this naïve (and frankly racist) paper to a prisoner whose address I'd found in an anarchist newspaper. He wrote me back with an encouraging and comradely letter in which he appreciated the "insights" of my work, but urged me to recognize that the context of the Vietnamese revolution and the Black Liberation Movement were significant forces shaping the white Left. In many ways this letter was a significant moment in transforming my politics from a color-blind, anarcho-punk dogmatism to one that has increasingly prioritized the centrality of white supremacy and has engaged anti-imperialism and Marxism in the search for liberatory tools. My pen pal was David Gilbert, a former member of SDS and the Weather Underground, currently serving a life sentence for supporting the work of the Black Liberation Army (BLA).

As my politics continued to develop on this trajectory, I joined a political organization dedicated to building revolutionary working class power with a strategic focus on fighting white supremacy and white privilege. As I struggled to deepen these politics, I discovered that the organization was in many ways indebted, influenced, and descended from an earlier Marxist group. Many of the ideas we were developing around autonomous workers' struggle and white skin privilege were developed by the Sojourner Truth Organization. As I worked to develop my own politics around a number of issues and searched for practical and theoretical lessons and legacies of previous struggles, I kept finding the work of STO. As a result, I've spent a fair amount of time over the last decade poring through their pamphlets and journals and talking with ex-members, seeking to learn from and build on their groundbreaking political work on questions such as working class autonomy, trade unions, white privilege, Black nationalism, fascism and militancy.

Given my own personal political history, it is not surprising that I was thrilled to see the publication of David Gilbert's *Love and Struggle* and Michael Staudenmaier's *Truth and Revolution*. Finally, two of the political experiences, individual and organizational, that had most shaped my own thinking and practice were being given voice and shared with an emerging generation of revolutionaries.

On the heels of the Arab Spring, prison hunger strikes, the killing of Trayvon Martin and the Occupy movement, some people are newly understanding themselves as committed revolutionaries. People are asking questions beyond the march route for

the next demonstration. They are asking, what the nature of the period we live in is? What would a free society look like? How do we get there? What social forces are capable of overthrowing this (capitalist) system and replacing it? How does the fight against white supremacy relate to class struggle against capitalism? What is the role of violence and of illegality in social change? How do we balance study and action? What organizational forms make sense for serious revolutionaries to come together in and act? What levels of discipline are necessary?

These are genuinely difficult questions to which there are no obvious answers. All of our potential roads for developing revolutionary struggles and organizations involve real questions and costs. We are in a new and unique period, but it is important to look at other periods of upsurge and to study the efforts of conscious revolutionaries emerging from them. Generations before us have struggled with many of the questions we are grappling with today. While recognizing the fundamental differences of the social and economic context, revolutionaries today can only benefit by looking at the successes and failures of those who previously tried to walk a similar road.

Fortunately, David Gilbert and Michael Staudenmaier have contributed two powerful books that serve as tools in our attempt to draw useful lessons from the revolutionary struggles of the past. Gilbert's memoir and Staudenmaier's detailed organizational history both document some of the most advanced and exciting efforts to develop a revolutionary praxis opposing capitalism and white supremacy emerging from the mass movements of the 1960s and 70s. Both are intended not merely as nostalgia pieces but as

contributions to the creation and clarity of revolutionary work today.

Over the last decade a number of veterans of the Weather Underground Organization have written memoirs chronicling their experiences. Gilbert's *Love and Struggle* is among the most useful of these for revolutionaries seeking to discover the political lessons of that period. He is explicit in his intention that his memoir be a resource for radicals.

Gilbert tells his life story, beginning with his childhood in a middle class Jewish family in New England. He tells of the influence of his parents' moral stances and his sisters' proto-feminist consciousness. The struggle of Black people in the South against racist oppression was central to turning Gilbert into a supporter of the Civil Rights Movement. He was a well intentioned liberal Eagle Scout, eager to make the world a better place and support the progressive development of a fundamentally just US democracy.

Gilbert attended Columbia University during the 1960s. There, in line with his liberal anti-racist commitments, he began tutoring Black children in Harlem. He was an early opponent of the Vietnam war, joined Students for a Democratic Society, and became radicalized in the turbulent struggles of the 1960s, in which he played an important role. He powerfully describes the ways in which the leading role of Black, Vietnamese, and other Third World revolutionaries pushed him from liberalism to radical pacifism to revolutionary anti-imperialism committed to solidarity with the oppressed by any means necessary.

In 1969, SDS collapsed due to unresolvable political differences. The Progressive Labor Party faction

denounced all nationalism (including the Vietnamese Revolution and the Black Panther Party) and argued for an Old Left-style workplace-oriented "socialism" that largely saw race and gender as side issues. Gilbert joined the Revolutionary Youth Movement which supported the Black Liberation struggle for self determination and sought to fuse the emerging youth rebellion with revolutionary working class politics. Some of these young radicals, including Gilbert, formed the Weathermen.

For the next six years, Gilbert was underground as a member of Weather. He describes their early days and his experiences trying to build a fighting pole among working class youth through confrontational actions and community organizing. He recollects his harrying experience during Weather's infamous "Days of Rage" in Chicago 1969, aggressively street-fighting with the police. Following the Chicago action, Weather began living and acting clandestinely while carrying out politically targeted bombings. They also engaged in a great deal of political analysis which culminated in the collective writing and publication of *Prairie Fire: The Politics of Revolutionary Anti-Imperialism*. Following the Publication of *Prairie Fire* Gilbert argues that Weather increasingly abandoned its commitment to fighting white supremacy, opting instead to throw liberation struggles under the bus of "working class unity," to be lead by Weather (which was emerging from clandestinity).

Following a painful political split in the organization, Gilbert himself surfaced from the underground and tried to rebuild a life for himself in Denver. He got a job as a mover and reinvolved himself in aboveground political work. He describes apologizing for Weather's



political mistakes and finding a political home in the community provided by radical feminism and those allied with it. He also began to work with a revolutionary Chicano grouping that spoke to his more fundamental politics of fighting white supremacy. Ultimately his critique of white feminists' racial arrogance got him ostracized from his community and this painful experience contributed to his decision to go underground again.

Gilbert spends the last section of his book describing his time underground, working in solidarity with the BLA in New York. Neither accountable to nor supported by a political collective, he carried out logistical tasks to support this New Afrikan armed revolutionary grouping struggling to build the capacity to fight a peoples war for Black freedom. During this time he also partnered with Kathy Boudin and became a father, a moving experience which he describes in emotionally charged detail. Shortly after his son's birth, he was involved in a BLA robbery of an armored car, in which several security personnel were killed. Gilbert was captured on the scene, tortured, and jailed. He tried to support his captured comrades, who were driven to insanity and to snitching by racist torture. He managed to maintain his relationships with his family, and to build solidarity with BLA comrades. Ultimately he was tried and convicted of murder, and has spent the last several decades in prison engaged in AIDS education work and doing what he can to support revolutionary struggle.

David Gilbert's *Love and Struggle* is a powerful intervention in current movement discussions. However, at times his focus on particular themes that emerged in the period of the 1960s

leave a confusing chronology, skipping from the beginning of the Vietnam war to the foundation of Weather, then back again. Gilbert offers his own experience and history with a deep humility. While he certainly thinks his story is important he consistently analyzes his own errors and petty egoism. He manages to stand by the central political principles he has fought for, while being ruthlessly self critical. He pays particular attention to his own sexism and male chauvinism, honestly facing the ways that he hurt and exploited women comrades while claiming radical politics. He is particularly attentive to the ways in which individuals egos and personal insecurities play a destructive role in political struggle. He particularly looks at the way in which he made decisions about political intervention and armed struggle based on his personal need to prove his leadership and to prove what a committed and exceptional white revolutionary he was. His work stands as a reminder to developing revolutionaries that while we must confidently and militantly fight for our principles, we must also be humble, compassionate, and humane as we do so.

While Gilbert's memoir is a deeply personal account of an individual's attempt to engage revolutionary politics following the upsurge of the 1960s, Michael Staudenmaier's *Truth and Revolution* traces the development of an organization during the same period. While necessarily different in form and content from a deeply personal memoir, Staudenmaier's scholarship has many overlaps with the questions addressed in Gilbert's recollections.

Staudenmaier, an anarchist, traces both the intellectual and social history of the Sojourner Truth Organization (a small Marxist-Leninist organization)

from its emergence in the struggles of the late 1960s to its demise in the mid 1980s.

The Sojourner Truth Organization (STO) was founded by a cross section of revolutionary activists in the movements of the late sixties. Radicals coming from the Black Panther Party, the Young Lords, the Communist Party, and especially the anti-racist Marxist wing of Students for a Democratic society came together in a period of upsurge to build a communist organization seriously engaged in the work of fighting white supremacy and supporting working class revolution.

The organization initially prioritized workplace organizing. Influenced by the writings of Karl Marx and the experiences of the 1968 student-worker general strike in France and autonomous radical worker organizing in Italy, STO sought to build a revolutionary movement among workers at the point of production. Based on this analysis members of STO got jobs in factories and put forward the resources they had as tools to be used by workers in their struggles against the misery of wage labor.

Unlike many other communist and Marxist-Leninist groups active at the time, STO rejected participation in trade union struggles as the primary ground of working class struggle. Instead they sought to build independent radical organizations that could organize workers around concrete struggles but outside the capitalist framework to which trade unions are structurally limited.

STO was also known for its distinctive politics around "white skin privilege." Drawing heavily on the work of Black radical scholar W.E.B. Dubois, they argued that racial oppression was

at the center of capitalist rule in the United States and that the greatest obstacle to working class revolution was white supremacy and the racial privileges that it provided to white workers. As a result of this "separate deal" white workers were likely to see themselves as white, holding common interests with their rulers, rather than as workers, sharing common interests with the Black and Brown sectors of the class. Thus preferential treatment by police, in housing, in schools, and at the workplace were a "poison bait" that bound white workers to capitalist rule. Thus, STO (as a predominantly white organization) saw its role as supporting white workers in repudiating their racial privileges and joining the rest of the working class in anti-capitalist struggle already being waged by workers of color.

STO's project of building independent worker organizations largely did not take off, and as a result differing assessments for the reason for this failure split the organization. Some felt that the organization's autonomous and workerist orientation failed to deal with the centrality of trade unions in working class struggle and that the organization undervalued the Leninist project of building a communist party. Others felt that the organization did not respect working class self-activity enough and that building an organization separate from immediate working class struggle was elitist. In the aftermath of these struggles the organization was left with a handful of people.

Faced with this crisis STO decided to rebuild. Uniting with several revolutionary collectives throughout the Midwest, the organization assessed the struggles around it and decided that workers struggles were in a period of "lull." STO decided to step back from

its organizing in factories and instead prioritize theoretical development and solidarity with national liberation struggles.

STO's solidarity work was focused on supporting revolutionaries within the Puerto Rican independence movement. This movement was particularly strong in Chicago, STO's home base, which had a significant Puerto Rican population. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN) conducted a clandestine bombing campaign against US corporate and government institutions demanding freedom for Puerto Rican political prisoners and independence for the island. STO gravitated toward supporting the revolutionary Puerto Rican groups that supported the Underground, particularly the National Liberation Movement (MLN). Much of this solidarity work consisted of education, demonstrations, and legal support work due to the severe repression that Puerto Ricans were facing from the government.

STO also did solidarity work with Iranian revolutionaries working to overthrow the brutal, US-backed regime of the Shah. Members of STO worked to support exiled Iranian student leftists. Concretely this work was again largely a matter of education, demonstrations, and supporting Iranian comrades harassed by law enforcement or attacked by agents of the Shah's security apparatus within the United States.

This prioritization of solidarity with national liberation struggles was problematic in Staudenmaier's estimation. STO's autonomist orientation conflicted with the "Stalinism" of the Puerto Rican revolutionaries, and the organization was constantly in "crisis mode" responding to the latest attack

on the independence movement. Additionally, STO had a deep and complex analysis of working class self-activity and consciousness, but in the model of solidarity work it was engaging in, they were supporting "someone else's" struggle. Thus the MLN or other "Third World" (people of color) groups determined the political strategy, with STO following their lead. This proved deeply frustrating for STO as an independent and critical Marxist organization.

While the tensions with Puerto Rico solidarity work reflected questions of organizational line and style of work, the Iran solidarity work reflected deep political questions on a large scale. In 1979 the revolution that Iranian radicals had been working for happened. The Shah was overthrown by a mass movement fed up with US imperialism and its brutal client. However, while the revolutionary movement included a broad array of political forces, right wing theocrats quickly took power. Basing their rule on a reactionary interpretation of Islam they established an authoritarian patriarchal regime that went about imprisoning and massacring the leftists and communists who had helped bring them to power. These reactionary forces, dedicated enemies of United States imperialism, had demonstrated the possibility of a brutal right wing alternative to it.

In its final years STO attempted to relate to "new social movements" and inject its own militant and revolutionary politics within them. As it bumped up against the perceived limitations of anti-imperialist solidarity work, STO began to experiment with intervention within developing mass movement against nuclear power and US militarism. STO was attracted to and tried to broaden

the militant direct action orientation of this struggle. Of course they also tried to push an anti-white supremacist politics within the movement, building support for Black and Indigenous resistance to nuclear power. In building this militant orientation, STO increasingly began to prioritize “mass illegality” and collective violence, seeking to address the youthful rage of the emerging punk rock milieu and to break through the perceived reformist timidity of the ailing Left. This led to the organization of mass illegal direct actions within the anti-nuclear movement, and also increasingly violent rhetoric, targeting bosses, politicians, and the police.

In addition to its changing participation within mass movements, from workers to national liberation struggles to the new social movements, STO put a premium on theoretical development. STO was, remembers one former member, “an organization of revolutionaries who tried to think.”

STO developed the concept of dual consciousness. In contrast to some Marxist positions which believed that workers were deluded by “false consciousness” and needed to be implanted with socialist consciousness by a vanguard party, STO argued that working class consciousness is inherently contradictory. Workers hold an understanding of themselves as exploited and potentially powerful in remaking society, but also hold the ideas (racist, sexist, individualist, etc) of the society they live in. Thus the role of revolutionaries is not to bring consciousness to the class, but to discover and support the revolutionary ideas and experiences that are already there.

Based on this understanding of the contradictory nature of working class consciousness, STO rejected the

traditional Marxist understanding of fascism. In the midst of an upsurge of right wing and racist violence and activism in the late 1970s and 80s, STO engaged in anti-Klan and anti-fascist organizing. While most communists understood fascism as being “the open terrorist dictatorship of... finance capital,” STO developed an analysis that saw fascism as being autonomous from the state and capital. Instead of just being a tool of the ruling class, fascist political forces were in many ways genuinely anti-capitalist and anti-systemic, based in the reactionary consciousness of the exploited themselves.

STO prioritized truly developing its members as creative and critical theoreticians, rather than obedient soldiers who parroted a party line. To develop this intellectual capacity the organization prioritized collective study and was widely known for its culture of thinking and debate. One of its most well known innovations was the creation of its intensive course on the Marxist philosophy of dialectical materialism, titled “How to Think.” Instead of a traditional selection of introductory readings from Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao, STO’s course used a number of diverse and difficult readings ranging from Marx and Lenin to Hegel, WEB Dubois, CLR James, Lucacs, and Gramsci. Rather than teaching a set “Marxist-Leninist” dogma, STO sought to teach a Marxist method for analyzing a changing world. In rejecting the conception of themselves as a vanguard leading the class, STO also tried to build meaningful relationships with other revolutionary groups to develop a Left tendency capable of developing theoretical and strategic frameworks and common work, rather than a more traditional concept of Leninist party-building.

In the end, however, STO was unable to make itself a meaningful alternative to the right wing shift of the 1980s. Numerous political schisms within the organization and an increasing irrelevance of the national cadre organization framework led to the group's demise in 1986.

Staudenmaier's book is one of the most dense political histories I've ever encountered. It is extremely readable, while providing information on all manner of events, theory, and phenomenon that influenced STO. In the process of learning about a small and relatively obscure Marxist group, I learned a great deal about the preceding '60s radicalism, Dubois's analysis of Reconstruction, the Sino-Soviet split, the Puerto Rican independence movement, and the Iranian revolution, and much more. While he provides a broad understanding of the context, Staudenmaier also goes into great depths doing intensive textual analysis of the political line of the organization and its internal debates. By combining the use of internal and external documents with interviews with ex-members, he combines intellectual history, tracing theory and strategy. He also presents a rich social history that gives you a feel for what it was like to be a member of a Marxist organization, struggling to think and act as people committed to revolution. Staudenmaier's work will stand as an example for future historians of Left organizations.

Both Gilbert's memoir and Staudenmaier's history are exemplary models of radical literature dealing with the anti-imperialist and revolutionary politics of the 1970s and 80s. As a result there is of course a great deal of crossover between the experiences explored. Both Gilbert and STO emerged out of

the Revolutionary Youth Movement faction of Students for a Democratic Society. Gilbert worked with members of STO during his time in Denver and also was an ally to the Chicano/Puerto Rican National Liberation Movement. These areas of overlap are useful in comparing the experiences. For example while Staudenmaier suggests that the MLN's politics were "Stalinist," Gilbert remembers them as humane and solid comrades. And Gilbert's perception of STO cadre as sexist and domineering gives a useful on the ground view of the personal behavior of the organization Staudenmaier studies.

In addition to a number of areas of anecdotal crossover, there are a number of common themes in these works. Both Gilbert and STO understood the struggle against racial oppression and white privilege as central to revolutionary praxis in the US. Through his personal experience tutoring in Harlem, volunteering with the Congress of Racial Equality and following the leadership of the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army, as well as a great deal of study, Gilbert came to see white supremacy as a central barrier to the emergence of united revolutionary activity. Likewise, through these experiences he came to understand the self-activity of Black people, both political and cultural, as a powerful force capable of challenging official society and unleashing broad movements of resistance. He came to a particular analysis that understands Black people (and other people of color), as oppressed nations, colonized people with a right to determine their own destinies, independent of the United States. Thus, Gilbert understood his role as supporting the national liberation struggles of these peoples to free themselves by

any means. While very critical and sophisticated in his approach to this work, Gilbert always works within the framework of anti-imperialism and solidarity with oppressed peoples' right to self-determination.

STO shared much of this politics at various points in their existence. STO members and allies were largely responsible for coining the very term white privilege. Based on their experiences of the Black upsurge around them and the lessons they drew from US history, STO argued that the struggle against white privilege and for Black liberation were essential for the creation of a revolutionary working class. As they engaged in anti-imperialist solidarity work they developed a similar analysis of the national question to Gilbert's. However, while Gilbert was content to act as an ally to the oppressed, STO felt the need to prioritize their own critical and independent politics. At times it seems that Staudenmaier's treatment of anti-imperialist solidarity assumes that this framework was fundamentally flawed. Unfortunately this actually seems to prevent him from seriously engaging this politics if only to critique it. While it seems clear in hindsight that the national liberation struggles failed to create free societies, in the 70s and 80s they were leading masses of people in anti-systemic struggle. Staudenmaier can be faulted for not taking these politics more seriously. Despite the analytical limitations of both Gilbert and Staudenmaier, they both are clear on the need for a revolutionary critique of racial and national oppression and to break with colorblind views of class struggle that view workers as only white dudes in overalls.

While both STO and Gilbert placed a strategic centrality on

opposition to white supremacy, both also struggled with and against patriarchy and male supremacy. The relationship with feminism is a complex one since the movements of the time, including people of color liberation struggles, were often male dominated and deeply sexist. At the same time much of feminism was dominated by middle class white women and was racist and elitist. Gilbert wrestles deeply with the question of women's liberation, criticizing his own sexual exploitation of women, his political home in Denver's feminist community, and his exclusion from that community when he critiqued the racism of white feminists. While in some strategic sense secondary to his anti-racist politics, it is clear that Gilbert is deeply indebted to and influenced by feminist radicalism.

STO also struggled with questions around male supremacy. In their political interventions they organized for reproductive justice for Puerto Rican women, and ruthlessly critiqued the racism of some sections of the feminist movement. Staudenmaier also describes intense and painful internal debates around the role of women in the organization and sexist behavior of male comrades. Despite Staudenmaier's useful analysis of the women's liberation struggle, one gets the sense from his book that STO was a deeply male dominated organization that, while opposed to male chauvinist behavior, did not particularly look to feminist theory and struggle as a major source of its politics.

Another common theme in the two books is militancy. Gilbert expresses powerfully the experiences and analysis that led him from being a radical pacifist to a revolutionary engaged in armed struggle, and eventually serving

a life term for murder. He presses home the point that if the system is as terrible as our analysis suggest that we must be prepared to use all means at our disposal to overthrow it, particularly when our comrades across the world are waging war against the system. This is not mere rhetoric for Gilbert, as he vividly recalls physically fighting police in the streets, bombing government buildings, eluding FBI manhunts, and robbing armored cars. He reminds us both in theory and by example that we must prepare to build movements capable of waging a war for freedom, yet to do so without losing our humanity.

STO also prioritized militancy. From the very beginning they prioritized direct action by factory workers rather than mediated trade union reform struggles. In their support for the Puerto Rican and Iranian struggles they consistently supported those forces promoting or using armed struggle and political violence, rather than those forces who negotiated for concessions or even used purely peaceful mass action. In their interventions in the new social movements they prioritized an orientation of “mass illegality,” encouraging breaking with protest as usual and disrupting the military industrial complex and physically confronting fascists. In their appeals to punk rock youth they even encouraged violence against police and other authority figures. While much of the 80s communist Left was absorbed into the Democratic Party and trade union bureaucracies, STO’s commitment to breaking with official society and militant illegality made sure that they at least went out fighting.

Finally both Gilbert and STO took study and theory very seriously as a part of their political praxis. Throughout his memoir Gilbert not

only describes his organizing experiences, but prioritizes explaining complex ideas and theories in an accessible way. While he may be best known as a participant in armed struggle, he was always a movement theorist as well as activist. From developing analysis of late capitalism in SDS to setting up “cadre schools” to teach Marxism to the Weather Underground, he understood that a movement and its participants must be able to study and think. From prison he has written a number of important analysis on the AIDS epidemic, the white working class, and imperialism, along with countless book reviews. Throughout *Love and Struggle* he describes the books that influenced his own thinking and trajectory, encouraging us all to take them up and build our intellectual capacity.

STO was described as one ex-member as an organization that tried to think. It was an organization with innovative and brilliant theorists who developed powerful ideas around white supremacy, working class autonomy and the crisis of capitalism. While engaged in concrete struggles, members of STO were in constant dialogue with Marx, Lenin, Dubois, CLR James, Gramsci, and the Italian autonomist Marxists as well as the rest of the Left. STO was jokingly referred to as the “best debating club on the left.” In its commitment to building a thinking movement STO took important steps to deepen Marxist education in its dialectics classes that were far more sophisticated than similar study projects in other groups.

David Gilbert’s *Love and Struggle* and Michael Staudenmaier’s *Truth and Revolution* are powerful contributions to Left history and are full of lessons and ideas for developing revolutionaries today. While the world is very different

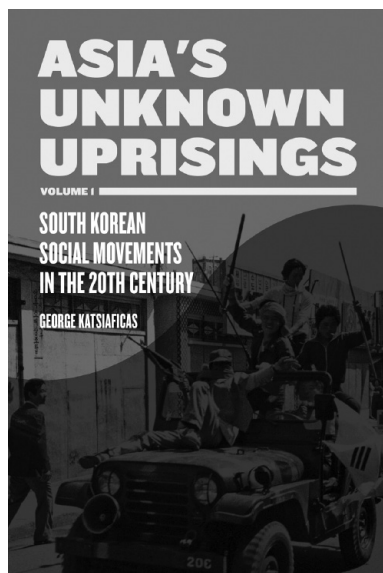
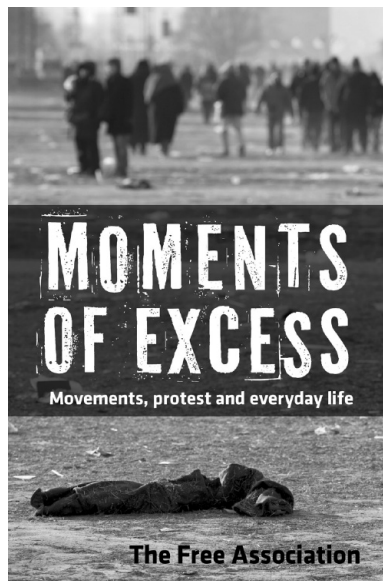


than it was in the 1970s we would do well to look to the experiences of those who in a period of upsurge sought to make revolution and build revolutionary organizations. The task remains to fight white supremacy and patriarchy and to build a bold fighting movement capable of serious theorizing and reflection. These two comrades books give us new tools to build with.

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REVIEW  
"NOT JUST  
WARMING  
OURSELVES  
WITH THEIR  
MEMORY"  
THE POWER  
OF SOCIAL  
MOVEMENTS

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STINA SODERLING



*Moments of Excess: Movements, Protest and Everyday Life*, The Free Association (Oakland: PM Press, 2011)

*Asia's Unknown Uprisings, Volume 1: South Korean Social Movements in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, George Katsiaficas (Oakland: PM Press, 2012)

Where do social movements come from? What spurs them into being? As Occupy and related movements have swept across the US, the most common answers to these questions have been “out of nowhere” and “seemingly nothing,” respectively. Like many activist-scholars, I have been dismayed by the lack of historicizing of the Occupy movement(s), a narrative that this uprising “just happened” because people were fed up. It is thus very exciting to see new works on social movement history, such as volume I of George Katsiaficas’ *Asia’s Unknown Uprisings* and the Free Association’s *Moments of Excess*. In this review, I read these two books as tools for locating the present moment. They remind us, for example, that occupations have been used in social protests for a long time and in varying geographic locations. And, as good social movement history should do, they remind us that resistance is possible.

George Katsiaficas has written a comprehensive history of Korean social movements of the last century, also providing a brief introduction to a longer history of Korea. His expansive investigation includes movements ranging from sweatshop worker organizing to the overthrowing of national leaders. This volume is the first of two; the next one will discuss the social movement history of several other Asian countries. Katsiaficas’ book centers on a series of

questions: "In my view, uprisings and insurgencies are not simply reactions but indications of people's aspirations, dreams, and imaginings of better lives. What are those dreams? Why do uprisings occur one day and not years before? Why do they arise simultaneously in place after place with startling rapidity? What are their outcomes?" As he points out, "the praxis of insurgencies contains a neglected theoretical value." Thus, the argument Katsiaficas is building has value beyond the context he is studying, while still being solidly grounded in a local context, one that the author understands well. Without universalizing, we can use the Korean social movement history Katsiaficas has written to think through questions of how movements start, and what results they have.

Katsiaficas especially points to the importance of the Gwangju People's Uprising, "the pivotal moment around which dictatorship was transformed into democracy in South Korea." In 1980, the southern city of Gwangju saw brutal and deadly clashes between civilians and the military government. The fierce fight of the civilians was one of the stepping stones for the 1980s' democratization movement in South Korea. While the most concrete result of the democratization movement was the presidential election held in 1987, Gwangju also showcases more libertarian and directly democratic tendencies. As Katsiaficas writes, "[f]or those whose dreams of freedom remain unfulfilled, Gwangju's history provides a glimpse of free societies of the future and inspiration to endure the long journey ahead." It was a movement based on self-governance and spontaneity, exactly the qualities that anarchists wish for in social movements. This was not just a demonstration against the dictatorship,

but also an example of a society built on mutual aid, with aspects such as communal kitchens. There were also general assemblies to run the uprising, which saw many of the same challenges and frustrations as those in the Occupy movement, when suddenly thousands of people had to figure out how to make decisions together. Using his concept of the eros effect, Katsiaficas describes the uprising as being "the erotic occupation of public space."

*Asia's Unknown Uprisings* not only makes a series of uprisings in Korea known to an English-speaking audience, but also challenges the notion of the West as the originary point of action and social thought. This is, as I see it, one of the book's most important contributions. Challenging Euro/American-centrism is not something new or unique to Katsiaficas' work, but it is a project that needs constant attention, and *Asia's Unknown Uprisings* is one valuable part of this project. One of the things Katsiaficas brings to the project of de-centering the West is a questioning of stereotypes about "the Orient" as a place of despotic rulers followed blindly by the people. Any simple binary between a hierarchical and tradition-bound East and a free and reasoning West is, of course, false. At the same time, Katsiaficas refuses a universalization of social movements, pointing out how existing social structures have influenced the structure of Korean people's movements. For example, in several of the uprisings Katsiaficas writes about, students have played an important role. This, he believes, is not incidental: "Confucian ethics accorded students great respect as well as a need among ordinary citizens to protect them." Further, *Asia's Unknown Uprisings* maintains that

political ideologies don't always emanate from the West. Katsiaficas mentions, for example, how Shin Chae-ho, an early-twentieth century Utopianist, saw his anarchism as bound up with shamanism. Together with Maia Ramnath's recent book on anarchistic thought and action in Indian history, *Decolonizing Anarchism*, George Katsiaficas' book is hopefully a sign of a new attempt to de-center the West in anarchist work.

The Free Association's *Moments of Excess* is smaller than Katsiaficas' book, both in size and in time covered: focusing on the "movement of movements," the text starts with the WTO protests in Seattle in 1999 and ends in 2010. The book is a collection of articles and essays, "initially written as interventions," many handed out as pamphlets at protests and other large gatherings. As the authors point out, the texts are written from the UK, with a decidedly European perspective. This perspective can be seen in the movements they write about, such as those against free trade and for a radical approach to climate change, and are inspired by "the anti-roads movement, the free-festival/free-party movement and the campaign against the [UK] government's Criminal Justice Bill." We can read *Moments of Excess* as the kind of praxis-based theory that Katsiaficas is calling for: the texts in the collection are based on the authors' activism, and many were written as tools for activists.

The term "moments of excess" refers to the authors' theory of how social movements function. Moments of excess are "intensive collective experiences" that can lead to large mobilizations of people, "a collective creativity that threatens to blow open the doors of their societies." We could read Occupy Wall Street as one such

moment, when people had intensive collective experiences, and found an identity in a social movement. Reading OWS through the Free Association's concept helps us think about the future, and not get stuck in lamenting the loss of occupations. As the FA writes, "[m]ovements move because they exceed the specific issues of their emergence," and they "create an excess, they are more than the sum of their parts." Where do we take the excess political energy that Occupy has spurred? The idea of moments of excess takes us away from movements as static entities—one movement can flow into the next, without that meaning that the original movement was lost. Thus, moving away from occupations into other struggles against capitalist inequalities does not mean that the occupations failed, but rather that the moment has shifted.

According to the Free Association, those participating in moments of excess are often unaware of the history they/we build on, yet "[d]uring bursts of revolutionary creativity we feel really connected to our antecedents, not just warming ourselves with their memory." But how can we feel connected to antecedents whose actions—or even existence—we know little to nothing about? What would it mean if Occupy activists in the US knew, in more than a superficial manner, about histories such as those told by George Katsiaficas and the Free Association? About the Black Panthers and the Arab Spring? Can a connection to past social movements really be just a feeling? This perspective strikes me as romanticized, not fully acknowledging the hard work—including self-education—that social change entails. Knowing about social movement history allows us to see which tactics have been used, as the Free Association's

own writings, as well as Katsiaficas' work, show. Both books reviewed here discuss direct action and prefigurative politics (or, as the Free Association puts it, "constitutive politics," which they describe as "[p]eople are beginning to work out what they want, what they are for, not just what they are against"). Knowing about past prefigurative struggles could, for example, help Occupy respond to the claim that the movement lacks demands. The Free Association writes about Reclaim the Streets that the movement's "events did not demand the closure of roads, they did close them. We were exercising power!" In this case, demands were not the point—instead, participants actually created the world they wanted.

While overall excellent and useful works, the two books reviewed do contain some oversights. Both texts describe social movements as class struggles, and while they acknowledge that the working/struggling class is not a unitary entity (for example, they emphasize the role of students in the struggles), they do not adequately tease out the differences within this enormous group. Any discussion of race and/or ethnicity is, for example, completely absent from both texts. Korea is a largely ethnically and racially homogeneous country, yet there are significant minority groups, and homogeneity in itself is worth exploring. In *Moments of Excess*, the whiteness of (parts of) the movement of movements—and of the Free Association—shines through in the absence of discussion of race and ethnicity. This is a significant oversight, considering that the issues the book discusses—globalization, climate change, the politics of labor—are significantly affected by racism and nationalism.

The Free Association also fails to address gender altogether. Katsiaficas does provide nods to gender, but this is done almost as an afterthought. Toward the end of several of the chapters, there are sections on women, describing their tasks in highly gendered ways. The roles of men in the struggles are presented as neutral, un-gendered. Rarely does he describe men as men, yet women are continually marked by their gender. As Katsiaficas points out, movements are in many senses "a mirror of the patriarchal division of labor of society at large." What would it mean to put women's role in social movements at the center of the history, not at the margins? What if the tasks women performed in the Gwangju uprising, such as "organiz[ing] blood drives, food preparation, gather[ing] and wash[ing] the bodies of the dead, tend[ing] to the wounded, and consol[ing] bereaved families" were understood as central rather than auxiliary? When he does mention women, Katsiaficas emphasizes the importance of their contributions; then why are these contributions not given greater space? Further, women are described in stereotypical ways, for example as "midwives of the *minjung* [people]." This language implies that women are helpers of the real revolutionaries [men]. I do not think that this is Katsiaficas' intent, yet it is something that needs to be looked at. The roles that Katsiaficas describes women as having in Korean movements, as revolutionary students and workers, hint at a much more central role. There is also women's autonomous organizing, which Katsiaficas describes as important yet only devotes two pages to. (This is followed by one page on the ecology movement, another aspect of Korean politics I would have loved to learn more about).

Together, these two books provide openings for historicizing the current climate of social uprisings. They speak to efforts to construct alternate communities, outside of the strict control of the state, of general strikes, mutual aid and job sharing, night schools for workers. They also talk about efforts to suppress social movements, including “requir[ing] hundreds of thousands of people to register with the police” and criminalizing certain organizations. These kinds of measures are mirrored in present-day United States, and we would do well to learn from how other people have addressed such challenges. They also show the perils of “success,” and the institutionalization and depoliticization that large-scale support can lead to.

Not only do the two texts provide history, but they also point to the role of the whole human being in social movements and uprising. The themes of excitement, love, and passion resonate throughout the texts. The movements that inspire the Free Association have an “emphasis on having a good time, on laughter, their quality of being not only against capital, but also of going beyond capital,” and they mention Reclaim the Streets as exemplary of this sensibility. They also show possibilities, such as people successfully fighting the police. Knowing histories such as that of the Gwangju uprising gives us back the invaluable knowledge that social movements do have power. People working together have achieved victories before, and can do so again.



REVIEW  
CARING TOO  
MUCH TO CARE  
ANY LONGER:  
RESPONDING TO  
NIHILISM

BRITT PARROT

THE  
BANALIZATION  
OF  
NIHILISM

TWENTIETH-CENTURY RESPONSES  
TO MEANINGLESSNESS

KAREN L. CARR

► SHANE WELLER

MODERNISM

AND  
NIHILISM

LAUGHING  
AT  
NOTHING

Humor as a Response to Nihilism

John Marmysz

*The Banalization of Nihilism: Twentieth Century Responses to Meaninglessness*, Karen L. Carr (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992)

*Laughing at Nothing: Humor as a Response to Nihilism*, John Marmysz (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003)

*Modernism and Nihilism*, Shane Weller (New York: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2011)



One of the most quoted scenes from the film *The Big Lebowski* is when Walter (John Goodman) tells The Dude (Jeff Bridges), “Nihilists! Fuck me. I mean, say what you like about the tenets of National Socialism, Dude, at least it’s an ethos.”

This same attitude is often held by cultural critics and political commentators from both the left and right who use the term nihilism to deride radical and revolutionary movements, assuming that such an identification discredits either the tactics or the strategies used by activists to work toward a better future. The critics and even some of the activists who view nihilism as purely negation are missing its potential for radical transformation.

Contrary to its popular depiction, nihilism has a deep history that extends to its political beginnings in Russia around 1860. According to historian Richard Stites, “There have been many attempts to define Russian nihilism, but I think Nikolai Strakhov came close to the truth when he said that ‘nihilism itself hardly exists, although there is no denying the fact that nihilists do.’” Nihilism was not so much a corpus of formal beliefs and programs (like populism, liberalism, Marxism) as it was

a cluster of attitudes and social values and a set of behavioral affects—manners, dress, friendship patterns. In short, *it was an ethos*.”<sup>1</sup>

The philosophical underpinnings of nihilism were most famously elaborated by Friedrich Nietzsche in the 1880s. In a fragment from his notebooks that was eventually included in the opening of the posthumously published *Will to Power*, Nietzsche peered into the future:

What I relate is the history of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming, what can no longer come differently: the advent of nihilism. This history can be related even now; for necessity itself is at work here. This future speaks even now in a hundred signs, this destiny announces itself everywhere; for this music of the future all ears are cocked even now. For some time now, our whole European culture has been moving as toward a catastrophe, with a tortured tension that is growing from decade to decade: restlessly, violently, headlong, like a river that wants to reach the end, that no longer reflects, that is afraid to reflect.<sup>2</sup>

Now that we are well into the second century of Nietzsche’s forecast, it seems the only shortcoming of his prediction is that the entire world is moving toward a catastrophe. And at the front of that movement toward a catastrophe is the United States, afraid to reflect upon its own role in bringing about this catastrophe.

One of the primary tenets of nihilism is that biological life has no purpose, goal, or inherent meaning, or, to put it simply, life is meaningless. While not a radical thought for most evolutionary biologists, this in itself serves as a locus for both confusion and hostility toward the idea of nihilism. To tell someone that life—all biological

life—is meaningless, often translates into “your life is meaningless,” which is not the same thing. It’s a difficult tenet for many to accept, especially in the US, where exceptionalism still prevails. We all build and destroy meanings throughout our lives, but taken together, they don’t add up to anything higher.

Three books released over the past three decades don’t back away from reflecting on the question of nihilism, each providing a response to this “growing tension.” These writers understand and respect the concept of nihilism and its potential for being a catalyst for creation or destruction. Each offers their own interpretation of nihilism gathered from a wide variety of sources, but all spend a considerable amount of words explaining Nietzsche’s conception of the issue.

In *The Banalization of Nihilism*, Karen Carr limits her study of nihilism to three authors: Nietzsche, Karl Barth, and Richard Rorty. She opens her book with a focus on religious nihilism and spends little time on the political and philosophical sides of nihilism. She feels that it would be misleading to view nihilism as a philosophical position, saying, “Nihilism is better described as an outlook or perspective that underlies the more reflective portions of a thinker’s overall view.”<sup>3</sup> Contrary to Walter, Carr also claims that nihilism is an ethos.

For Carr, nihilism is primarily a personal experience of the world or a person’s conception of their place in society. While she notes that “Nietzsche regarded nihilism as a potentially restorative and redemptive event, something not only useful, but necessary for the renewed experience of the world,”<sup>4</sup> she never pursues where that renewed experience could lead. By focusing on the individual’s realization and interpretation of

nihilism, Carr restricts herself further, which allows for a simpler option to resolve or overcome the “problem of nihilism” (her opening chapter title). By approaching nihilism as a problem, she fails to consider other avenues for the person who comes under its spell.

In the second chapter titled “Understanding Nihilism,” Carr identifies five separate aspects of nihilism: epistemological, the denial of absolute knowledge; alethiological, the idea that there exists no absolute truth; metaphysical, the denial of an independently existing reality outside of human thought; ethical, the idea that there are no absolute moral values; and existential, the idea referenced above that life has no inherent meaning or value.<sup>5</sup> Carr focuses mostly on epistemological, alethiological, and existential nihilism.

Carr explores the foundation of Nietzsche’s nihilism in chapter three, showing how nihilism can lead to two radically different paths. The trailhead for these paths originate with Nietzsche around his idea of nihilism as both disease and cure. Nietzsche felt that he had experienced the disease and lived through it. “For him, at least, the recognition that there is no undergirding meaning or truth to the universe, no divine purpose behind the world was ... (the great liberation) that brought out... (the innocence of becoming).”<sup>6</sup>

Thus for Nietzsche, the only way around nihilism was to become fully infected by it and struggle through the disease until one no longer felt the need to attach meaning and value to everything. Nihilism, as Carr explains, is not an end in itself; it is a means to a new understanding of life, even a religious life. “Far from indicating the demise of the religious life, nihilism could, Nietzsche thought, rejuvenate and

replenish it.”<sup>7</sup>

Carr’s summation of Nietzsche leads her to Karl Barth, a German theologian who became disillusioned with Protestant liberalism and his teachers for their support of the war policy of Wilhelm II. Like many people dealing with climate change today, Barth felt powerless during the years of the first world war, which had a great impact on his thinking.

The crisis that nihilism provoked for Barth became his inspiration. Carr depicts his transformation thus: “Barth epitomized in 1921 Nietzsche’s portrayal of the person who discovers that the true world which he or she had been promised, the God of the liberals, is but an illusion and a sham. All we have around us is a world of ‘formless and tumultuous chaos,’ no longer supported by the ground and foundation which gave it its meaning.”<sup>8</sup>

For the other path of nihilism, Carr looks to postmodernism, specifically in the thought of Richard Rorty and his anti-foundationalist critique of philosophy. She sums up his project to “recognize the provisional character of our belief systems in light of a trans-historical commitment to integrity, honesty, toleration.”<sup>9</sup> Carr briefly brings in Derrida to contrast against Rorty, but it fails to clarify why she uses Rorty as one of the three primary thinkers in a study of nihilism. Her primary explanation rests on the fact that “[d]espite their differences, both deconstruction and anti-foundationalism are frequently charged with nihilism.”<sup>10</sup>

In discussing Barth and Rorty, Carr explains how nihilism becomes “a weapon used to reveal how hollow are the pretensions of human beings to be able to find truth.”<sup>11</sup> Just as she starts to open her inquiry into nihilism as “a

weapon," she quickly tries to ground herself through a search for truth. It is on the issues of knowledge and truth where Carr gets mired. She summarizes the split between Barth and Rorty as the former rejecting knowledge but believing in truth with the latter rejecting truth but continuing to pursue the possibilities brought by knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

By the end, Carr admittedly leans toward Barth's interpretation, not willing to give up on the idea that there is a singular version of the truth for human beings to base their actions on. Without that, she fears, nihilism would become the norm. She thinks that the banalization of nihilism would result in a sort of end of history. In her words, "Nihilism, once complete, leaves us with nothing but the set of currently existing social practices and beliefs; in the absence of anything else, these practices and beliefs become, for all intents and purposes, absolute."<sup>13</sup> For Carr, nihilism needs to be brought back out from its postmodern banality so that it can be properly rejected or overcome through a regrounding upon truth.

In *Laughing at Nothing*, Marmysz takes the approach that nihilism is not something that needs to be overcome or rejected. He also begins with a religious take on nihilism, quoting Ecclesiastes 2:18, although he doesn't say which version he uses for the quotation, and I didn't find any online versions that matched his. There is, however, a much stronger verse at 2:21: "For a person may labor with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then they must leave all they own to another who has not toiled for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune."<sup>14</sup>

Marmysz covers more historical ground than Carr, going back to the distinction between German philosophical nihilism and Russian political

nihilism that marked the beginnings of the common use of the term. These philosophical and political notions of nihilism grant more specificity to the issue and allow for more possibilities of examination, rather than a focus on particular individual thinkers.

Also starting with an opening chapter titled "The Problem of Nihilism," Marmysz delves more into the popular usage of the term nihilism: "We must be careful to remember that the term nihilism is sometimes used as a label of derision, while at other times it has been self-consciously adopted as a title of honor. Critics who use the word nihilism as an insult are, in effect, saying that if they were in the shoes of those whom they call nihilists, they themselves would be dissatisfied and hopeless about their view of the world."<sup>15</sup>

Marmysz also goes deeper into the heart of what drives a person to nihilism. While despair plays a huge part in nihilistic thinking, it is only after one is able to conceive of a better world that one becomes distraught by the gap between what is and what could be. "In order to be a nihilist one must not only have a conception of the world, but also feel a sense of sorrowful dissatisfaction about the way the world is."<sup>16</sup> To care about a better future inherently includes the negation of one's present situation. How, or if, that translates into action becomes the primary crux for the nihilist.

Unlike Carr, Marmysz sees nihilism as an unattainable search for absolutes. In his own words:

Life presents obstacles and hurdles that must be faced and overcome if we are to accomplish anything. None of this is all that controversial or distressing. However, the world view presented by nihilists suggests something a bit more extreme than

this. It claims not only that life involves little failures and frustrations, but that life as a whole is one big failure and frustration. The things that we want the most, those things that give life its overall meaning and purpose, are forever out of reach. We may face certain hardships and overcome them during the course of our lives, but ultimately we will all die and be forgotten without ever realizing Being, Truth, or Goodness.<sup>17</sup>

While Carr felt that “post-nihilistic views affirm and value the world in which we live as it is, without recourse to some beyond, some ideal world to give it meaning and value,”<sup>18</sup> Marmysz sees the nihilist using the sense of an ideal world to drive their actions. As he puts it,

for the nihilist, it is because the highest perfections are out of reach, or lost, that they come to mind and are contemplated on account of their distance. In falling away from the ideal, the nihilist becomes aware of just how valuable it is. Nihilistic incongruity itself has value, then, both in its capacity to awaken the nihilist to the ideal and to form an admirational relationship between the nihilist and the ideal.<sup>19</sup>

While the first half of *Laughing at Nothing* engages a positive look at what Marmysz calls nihilist incongruity, the focus on humor in the second half of the book takes too long to tie back into his original line of thinking. He finally combines the two thoughts on page 147: “How is it that we withstand a world that, being in constant flux and change, offers us no ultimate delivery from suffering? This is a serious question, and it is in fact nihilistic to its core. ... While the realities of the world may never change, humor allows us the opportunity to shift our way of viewing them, and in so doing to transform all of our experiences, be they good or

evil, into constructive opportunities for affirmative enjoyment.”<sup>20</sup>

For Marmysz, humor allows us distance from the overcoming emotion of the nihilistic core of the modern condition of being. The incongruity of humor maps onto the incongruity of nihilism, creating a compatibility for people to use for action or for dealing with the despair they feel at the state of the world. The nihilist will never attain his or her ideal and shouldn't become frustrated by this failure but should “find value in the most profound failures of life insofar as these failures offer a point of contrast that reflects something of the absolute back toward the nihilist.”<sup>21</sup>

In the end, Marmysz has a better answer to the either/or path proposed by Carr. He states, “While despair and frustration are undeniable aspects associated with nihilistic phenomena, the nihilist need not ultimately surrender to these feelings. With humor, even the problem of nihilism may appear with its appropriate context as a painful yet ultimately valuable phenomenon in the history of our world.”<sup>22</sup>

In *Modernism and Nihilism*, Shane Weller explores how the history of the modern world is bound to the concept of nihilism. Unlike Carr and Marmysz, he starts with the French Revolution, specifically Anarcharis Cloots, who claimed, “The republic of the rights of man [*sic*] is strictly speaking neither theist nor atheist, but nihilist.”<sup>23</sup> Cloots was later executed on the guillotine by Robespierre for his beliefs.

For Weller, the French Revolution is the point where modernism and nihilism become intertwined partners in opposition. This idea is reflected best through Weller's initial examination of Nietzsche. Through the inherent opposition within nihilism emerges the active and the passive nihilist. Weller

explains, "Nietzsche always privileges active over passive nihilism, because he sees it as serving to clear the ground for the overcoming of nihilism through taking nihilism to its absolute limit."<sup>24</sup> Passive nihilism, on the other hand, is that of despair and inaction.

Weller spends more time on the aesthetic dimension and response to nihilism. His book, which is part of a series of *Modernism and ...* titles, is divided into three parts. Part one, "Philosophical Modernism and Nihilism" (and like the authors before him), goes into length on Nietzsche's legacy (his "long shadow"). Part two, "Aesthetic Modernism and Nihilism," delves into literature and artistic movements of the twentieth century. Part three, "Postmodernism and Nihilism," consists of short essays on a variety of thinkers, including Benjamin, Baudrillard, and Vattimo. Part three offers the most promise but seems quickly compiled and rather brief compared to the other two sections.

Similar to the present charges of nihilism against everything from marriage equality to the Occupy movement, Weller details the reaction to radical movements such as Dada and Surrealism during the first half of the twentieth century. He states, "With the popularization of the concept of nihilism in the early decades of the twentieth century through the publication of Nietzsche's *Will to Power*, the charge of nihilism came frequently to be directed at various forms of aesthetic modernism by commentators of all political persuasions, and this continued into the post-Second World War era."<sup>25</sup>

Weller claims that both the labeling of movements as nihilist and the reactions by these movements against such a label formed the bond between modernism and nihilism. This tension continues

to resonate among current political and philosophical debates, where any negation of an ideology becomes a nihilist stance. Contrary to Carr, Weller suggests that many postmodern thinkers, rather than accepting the label of nihilism and thus rendering it banal, attempted to counter such charges made against them. While few want to claim the label, everyone seems to fall under it.

This leads to Weller's suggestion that nihilism is inescapable. While discussing Baudrillard, he posits, "if there is no position outside nihilism from which it might be critiqued, and if one is not simply to submit to the prevailing nihilism of the transparent society...one has to turn nihilism back against itself."<sup>26</sup> This is reminiscent of the essay titled "Pessimism and Courage" in which Albert Camus stated, "We believe that the truth of this age can be found only by living through the drama of it to the very end. If the epoch has suffered from nihilism, we cannot remain ignorant of nihilism and still achieve the moral code we need."<sup>27</sup>

Rather than becoming a banal aspect of existence, as suggested by Carr, nihilism remains a constant reminder of the fragility of human existence, both as an individual within society and as a species on a planet. Instead of attempting to find ways to overcome or avoid nihilism, embracing it might be the only option to transform nihilism into action. It's almost as simple as a choice between embracing nothingness or becoming nothingness.

The looming spectre of climate change has, and will continue, to bring humanity face to face with its own annihilation. The values that industrialized, capitalist societies have placed the most importance upon have turned out to be detrimental to its continued existence. One only needs to turn to a source such as *The Economist* to experience the



underlying nihilism running through any of the current intelligent discourse about humanity's predicament:

Maybe a hundred years down the line, nobody will look back at climate change as the most important issue of the early 21st century, because the damage will have been done, and the idea that it might have been prevented will seem absurd. Maybe the idea that Mali and Burkina Faso were once inhabited countries rather than empty deserts will seem queer, and the immiseration of huge numbers of stateless refugees thronging against the borders of the rich northern countries will be taken for granted. The absence of the polar ice cap and the submersion of Venice will have been normalised; nobody will think of these as live issues, no one will spend their time reproaching their forefathers, there'll be no moral dimension at all. We will have wrecked the planet, but our great-grandchildren won't care much, because they'll have been born into a planet already wrecked.<sup>28</sup>

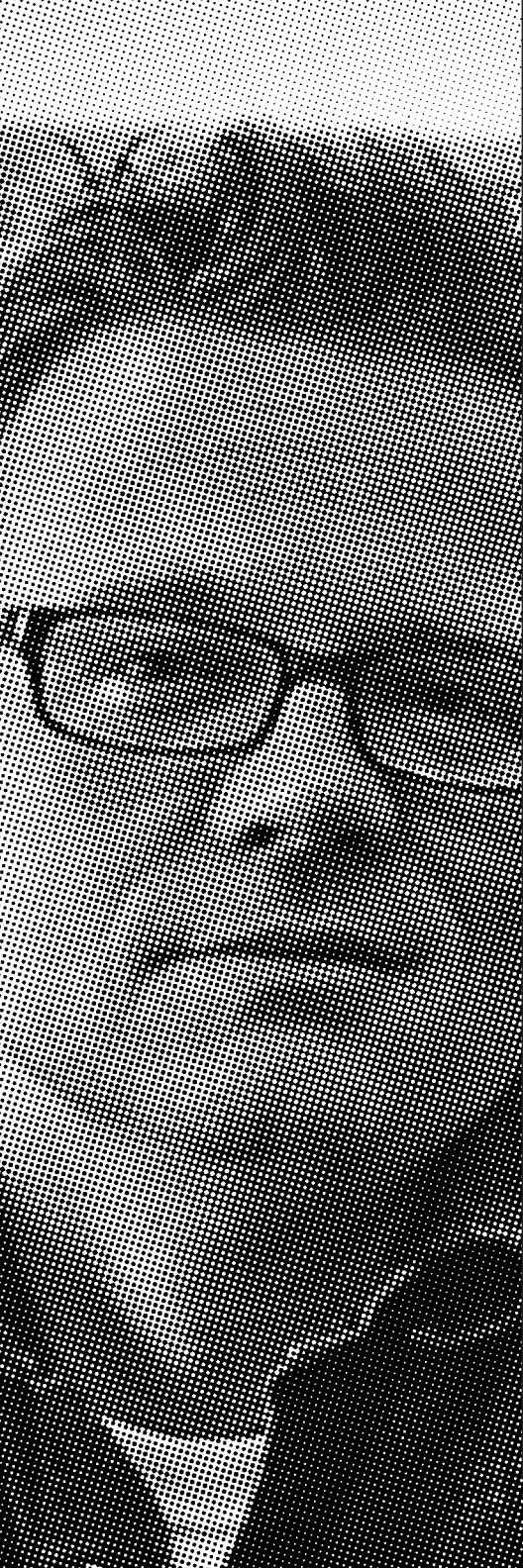
There will be no moral dimension at all because humanity will have ignored Camus and remained ignorant of nihilism, not only because of its banality but also, as Nietzsche wrote, because we are afraid to reflect upon it. The nihilism that runs through such discourse must be brought front and center for reflection, rather than being hidden from sight. Only when people accept that desires for a higher meaning or purpose create the conditions for our own destruction will they collectively be able to take action to undo the damage.

*Britt Parrott is a long-time activist who helped start the A-zone Infoshop in Chicago in the 1990s. A recent career as a government bureaucrat has sparked his interest in nihilism. He is also a member*

*of the Parasol Climate Collective and writes about climate change through the lens of film.*

## NOTES

- 1 Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978) p. 99-100 [emphasis mine].
- 2 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, archive.org, [http://archive.org/stream/TheWillToPower-Nietzsche/will\\_to\\_power-nietzsche\\_djvu.tx](http://archive.org/stream/TheWillToPower-Nietzsche/will_to_power-nietzsche_djvu.tx), accessed 7/14/12.
- 3 Karen L. Carr, *The Banalization of Nihilism: Twentieth Century Responses to Meaninglessness* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) p. 22.
- 4 *ibid.*, p. 48.
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- 7 *ibid.*, p. 50.
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- 10 *ibid.*, p. 105.
- 11 *ibid.*, p. 120.
- 12 *ibid.*, p. 129.
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- 14 Ecclesiastes 2:21, *Holy Bible*, New International Version, Biblegateway.com, <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ecclesiastes+2%3A18-26&version=NIV>, accessed 7/30/12.
- 15 John Marmysz, *Laughing at Nothing: Humor as a Response to Nihilism*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003) p. 72.
- 16 *ibid.*, p. 109.
- 17 Carr, p. 49.
- 18 Marmysz, p. 112.
- 19 *ibid.*, p. 147.
- 20 *ibid.*, p. 113.
- 21 *ibid.*, p. 161.
- 22 Shane Weller, *Modernism and Nihilism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) p. 17.
- 23 *ibid.*, p. 35.
- 24 *ibid.*, p. 91.
- 25 *ibid.*, p. 151-152.
- 26 Albert Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) p. 59.
- 27 M.S., "Durban and Everything that Matters," *The Economist*, December 12, 2011, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2011/12/climate-change?fsrc=scn/tw/te/bl/durbanandeverything>, accessed 7/20/12.



# REMEMBERING JOEL OLSON

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JOE LOWNDES

**W**e lost a great force in anarchist political action and thought in March of 2012 when Joel Olson passed away unexpectedly. Joel, who was 44, had already played a substantial role in anarchist and antiracist political struggles in North America, while intellectually he forged new ways of understanding the relationship of whiteness to liberal democracy, and the centrality of zealotry to the fulfillment of democratic ideals.

The difficulty in writing about Joel and his significance is that he was extraordinary in so many ways. He was at once a principled political activist, an effective movement builder, an independent thinker, a sharp polemicist, an inspiring teacher, a devoted partner, a doting father, and steadfast friend. How this left time for his other passions, beer and music, I'll never know.

I first met Joel in the early 1990s when he moved to Minneapolis in 1992 to begin a PhD program in political theory. Fresh from the Hippycore Krew in Arizona, Joel joined the *Profane Existence* collective, where along with reports and record reviews, he contributed a regular column, "Confessions of a Dead Hippie." He was also a welcome addition to the developing anarchist scene there. He was instrumental in establishing the Emma Center infoshop, Minneapolis Copwatch, and *The Blast!*, an incendiary, irreverent paper that took aim at

whiteness, patriarchy, class rule, and the police, among other things. Working closely with RABL (Revolutionary Anarchist Bowling League), AWOL (Anarchists With Out Lawyers, Anarchists Waltzing Over Lenin, Anarchists With Oblong Leaflets, etc.) and other groups in the formation of the Twin Cities Anarchist Federation.

My specific memories of Joel from that time evoke his different sides: skillfully facilitating difficult (and seemingly endless) political action meetings where anarchists, communists, and liberals had to find common ground. In drag, smooching a comrade at a lively, militant action in front of a church that was hosting Operation Rescue. Delivering a bundle of the latest issue of *The Blast!* to the food coop where I worked. Debating principles and strategy at a Love and Rage conference. Drinking, laughing, and listening to the Fugees at a house party.

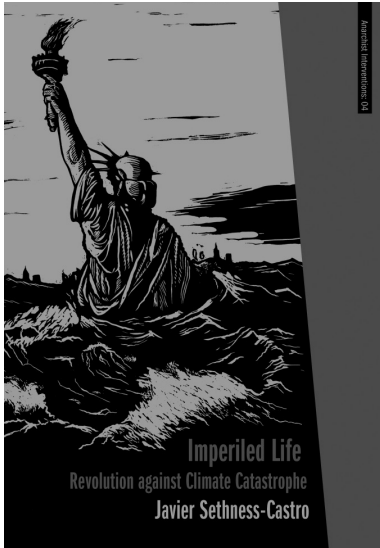
Joel and I stayed connected as he and I both became political science professors. In the meantime Joel continued to help build revolutionary political formations at the national level, including Bring the Ruckus; while working locally with undocumented workers in the Repeal Coalition to beat back the vicious nativist turn in Arizona politics. Having Joel as a friend and collaborator was invaluable. We regularly shared work for over a decade. Not only was I continually intellectually impacted by Joel, I was also influenced by his spirit of merciless critique. Whenever he sent me a draft article or chapter to read, he would say, "Destroy it. Rip it to shreds." Yet his own comments on my work were unfailingly generous—he continually helped me sharpen and focus my own ideas. Indeed contest, critique, and opposition were, for Joel, central to

healthy, democratic politics—a theme that he brilliantly explored in his work on zealotry in the last couple of years of his life.

The last time I saw Joel was last fall when he invited me to Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff to give a talk on the Tea Party movement and spend a little time with his family. Veteran agitator that he was, Joel made a provocative poster for the event, including the iconic Public Enemy silhouette in crosshairs. The morning of the talk, the chair of Joel's department came to his office to tell us that she had heard that the local Tea Party group was up in arms about the event. She was a bit anxious and wanted to talk about what kind of security measures needed to be taken. She asked, "What if they want to protest outside the hall?" "We should let 'em," Joel replied. "What if they want to come into the event with their signs?" she asked. "That's fine," Joel responded. "What if they heckle or shout down Professor Lowndes?" She asked finally. "No problem! Joe, how many people have we shouted down over the years?" Then he laughed, rubbing his hands together. "This is gonna be awesome!" As usual, he was right.

If you didn't know Joel it is hard to convey the combination of warmth, humility and humor that made Joel personally so appealing, just as it is hard to convey the combination of political tenacity, intellectual acuity, and courage of conviction that made him an invaluable enemy of white supremacy and American empire. His passing leaves a giant hole. It also leaves us an inspiration for how to live.

*Joe Lowndes teaches politics at the University of Oregon. He is a veteran of numerous ecological, antiracist, and anarchist organizations. He is the author of From the New Deal to the New Right: Race and the Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism.*



# IMPERILED LIFE: REVOLUTION AGAINST CLIMATE CATASTROPHE

JAVIER SETHNESS-  
CASTRO

AVAILABLE NOW at your local bookstore or infoshop or through AK Press (AKpress.org).

*Imperiled Life* is an attempt to theorize an exit from the potentially terminal consequences of capital-induced climate change. By means of an appraisal of the current state of the earth's climate and of possible futures by further climate destabilization, the book clearly states that dramatic revolutionary transformation must be had if humanity and life itself are to have a chance to flourish. Its alternative, that of an "ecological anarcho-communism," is set forth at the work's close.

Combining reportage from the 2010 Cancún climate negotiations with investigations into historical and contemporary anti-systemic thought and praxis, *Imperiled Life* seeks to promote critical thought toward the end of averting catastrophe.

*Imperiled Life* features a foreword by Paul Messersmith-Glavin of the IAS.

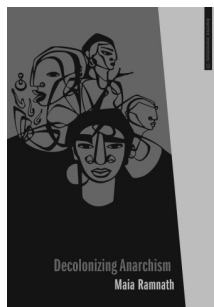
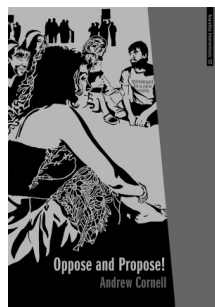
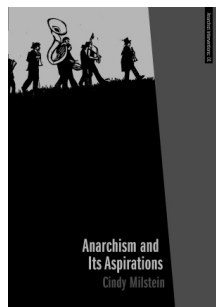
"The more people who read [*Imperiled Life*], the better humanity's chances will be."

—Kim Stanley Robinson, author  
*The Mars Trilogy*

"Sethness-Castro demands that we rethink our philosophies, reorganize our societies, and rework our economies if we are to escape a fate of being survived only by valleys of bones and mountains of garbage."

—Arun Gupta, cofounder of the  
*Occupied Wall Street Journal*

*Imperiled Life* is the fourth title in the Anarchist Interventions Series, co-published by the IAS with AK Press.



## ANARCHIST INTERVENTIONS

### IAS/AK PRESS BOOK SERIES

The IAS is pleased to announce the next two books in our Anarchist Interventions book series with AK Press.

**DUE OUT THIS WINTER, 2012**

*Anarchists Against the Wall: Direct Action and Solidarity with the Palestinian Popular Struggle*

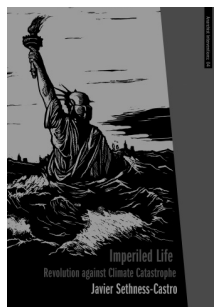
Edited by Uri Gordon and Ohal Grierzer

Foreword by Alfredo Bonanno

Training an antiauthoritarian lens on the history of South Asian struggles against colonialism and neocolonialism, *Decolonizing Anarchism* highlights lesser-known dissidents as well as neglected aspects of iconic figures. This reveals an alternate narrative of decolonization, in which achieving a nation-state

is not the horizon of freedom. Debates central to the anarchist tradition—on rationalism, industrial development, and modernity—also shaped the dynamics of South Asian anticolonial resistance, with the additional dilemma of whether these were to be seen as quintessentially alien. Without imposing the contextually specific language and history of Western anarchism, key principles nevertheless appear in different guises, with tendencies ranging from the progressive modernism of the antiauthoritarian Left to romantic antimodernism and insurrectionary nihilism. This facilitates not only a reinterpretation of the history of anticolonialism in India but also insight into the meaning of anarchism itself.

Anarchists and antiauthoritarians in colonized regions have been among the most progressive (though seldom dominant) elements in their own countries' anticolonial resistance movements from Mexico to China. "Western" anarchists have acted on their principles by standing in solidarity with national liberation struggles in places such as nineteenth-century Poland to twenty-first-century Palestine. While it's natural that there should be an affinity based on the principles of self-determination, autonomy, and self-governance (plus



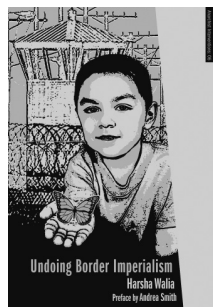
DUE OUT NEXT SPRING 2013

*Undoing Border Imperialism*

Harsha Walia

Preface by Andrea Smith

*Undoing Border Imperialism* combines academic discourse, lived experiences of displacement, and movement-based practices into an exciting new book. By reframing immigrant rights movements within a transnational systemic analysis of capitalism, labor exploitation, settler colonialism, state building, and racialized empire, it provides the alternative conceptual frameworks of border imperialism and decolonization to understand the freedom to stay, move, and return as essential for self-determination. Drawing on the author's experiences in No One Is Illegal and the recognition that social movements themselves produce critical theory, this work also offers relevant insights for all organizers on effective strategies to overcome the barriers and borders within movements in order to cultivate fierce, loving, and sustainable communities of resistance striving



toward liberation. Several of the chapters delve into the challenges of building broad-based alliances while maintaining radical political principles, fostering antioppression leadership while opposing hierarchies, and affecting tangible change while prefiguring transformation.

The author grounds this book in collective vision, from a roundtable on movement building with No One Is Illegal organizers to interspersed narratives from dozens of bold activists and writers of color from across North America. Contributors include Yogi Acharya, Carmen Aguirre, Tara Atluri, Annie Banks, Mel Bazil, Nazila Bettache, Adil Charkaoui, Yen Chu, Karen Cocq, Jessica Danforth, Ruby Smith Díaz, Nassim Elbardouh, Craig Fortier, Harjap Grewal, Mostafa Henaway, Freda Huson, Syed Khalid Hussan, Jane Kirby, Aylwin Lo, Karla Lottini, Alex Mah, Robyn Maynard, Graciela Flores Mendez, Cecily Nicholson, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Toghestiy, Sozan Savehilaghi, Mac Scott, Lily Shinde, and Rafeef Ziadah.

Both will be available from AK Press:  
[www.akpress.org](http://www.akpress.org)



# RECENT GRANTS

## WINTER 2012

We'd like to congratulate Michael Byrne, Pratyush Chandra, Claudia Villegas Delgado, China Martens, Will Munger, and Theresa Warburton on their 2012 IAS grant awards! For details on applying for a writing grant, see <http://www.anarchist-studies.org/> apply. Here's a glimpse of the six projects that we recently funded:

"Struggles Against Debt and Speculation in Ireland and the Spanish State" by Michael Byrne

This essay looks at government responses to the property crisis in Spain and Ireland, and the new movements that have emerged to challenge those responses. This essay tries to point toward a common horizon of European struggle against property speculation, debt, and financialization, and draw out what we can learn from each of these struggles.

Michael Byrne is a researcher and activist based in Dublin. His present focus is on activist research and direct action in the context of the Irish government's intervention in the financial and property crisis. Michael is also active in autonomous education, with a current focus on educational activities within the occupy and related movements.

"Neoliberal Industrialization in India and Workers Militancy Beyond Institutions" by Pratyush Chandra

The established legal trade unionism in India has not been able to represent the everyday struggle of the worker in the neoliberal phase of capitalism, which is increasingly raising the more fundamental issues concerning the very constitution of industrial polity and work. This project

attempts to understand and document some of these struggles waged in North India. It will critique how institutions that are thrown up in the process of workers' struggles become alienated and are transformed into agencies through which hegemonic structures are reproduced. It will detail how in the everydayness of struggle, workers try to counter these structures and develop ever-newer expressions of counterhegemony.

Pratyush Chandra is an activist based in Delhi, India, and is associated with the journal *Radical Notes*. He recently authored a booklet, *Capitalism, Labour, and Politics in Rural Indian* (2010), and edited a volume titled *Neoliberalism, Primitive Accumulation, and Politics in India* (2011). He is also a coeditor of *The Politics of Imperialism and Counterstrategies* (2004).

"That's How the Light Gets In': The Story of a Conspicuous Dialogue to Crack Capitalism in the Twenty-First Century" by Claudia Villegas Delgado

This project focuses a series of social mobilizations—consisting of assemblies, marches, and protests—launched particularly among Hispanic immigrants in New York City in the Fall of 2011, as they are indicative of an intended, coordinated immigrant response to the political momentum created by the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement. As history as shown, it is the very geography of domination that creates the historical conditions to unify social struggle, and today, right at the core of the geography of capitalism, a dialogue between Hispanic immigrants and the occupy movement has begun.

Claudia Villegas Delgado is a geographer doctoral scholar. Her research focuses on ethnic studies, social movements in Mexico and Latin America, Mexican immigration to the United States, and sociospatial inequality in contemporary cities. Currently she has been active in community-oriented media projects and grassroots organizations doing advocacy for the Latino/Mexican community and immigrant women in New York City. She also collaborates as the photography gallery director of Huellas Mexicanas ([www.huellas.org](http://www.huellas.org)).

huellasmexicanas.com), an independent Web-based media effort to document the social experience of Mexicans and Mexican Americans living in the United States.

“Radical Childcare: The Kidz City Model” by China Martens

Kidz City is a radical, anarcho-feminist child care collective that supports parents and children participation at social justice gatherings and events in Baltimore, Maryland. It started as youth programming and child care at the City from Below conference in 2009. After working together at many subsequent events—including bookfairs, community dinners, and most recently the Fair Development Conference, DIY Fest, and IWW Convention—the Kidz City collective developed a model for organizing collective support for caregivers and children. The time has come to gather the “Kidz City Model” in order to share it with others. This essay will answer activists’ questions about how Kidz City organizes, sets up child care space, recruits volunteers, and develops programming. Additionally, it will contain struggles and lessons learned as well as forms, checklists, and processes.

China Martens is the author of *The Future Generation: The Zine-Book for Subculture Parents, Kids, Friends, and Others* (Atomic Book Company, 2007), and the coeditor of *Don’t Leave Your Friends Behind: A Radical Parents’ Allies Handbook* (PM Press, 2012). China has had various essays printed in publications such as *Baltimore Independent Reader*, *HipMama*, *WIN Magazine*, and *Revolutionary Motherhood*. Since 2003, China has facilitated workshops to create support for parents and children in activist and radical communities. She is also a cofounder of Kidz City.

“Domestic Counterinsurgency in Salinas, CA” by Will Munger

Counterinsurgency is a theory and practice of state control that has undergone significant development as a result of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The city of Salinas, California, the Salinas Police

Department, and the Naval Postgraduate School began collaborating in 2009 to apply counterinsurgency against street gangs. The current operation in Salinas is one clear example of how the Long War (formerly the War on Terror) is coming back to affect life in the United States. Based on a critical analysis of recently declassified military research, it appears that the Salinas counterinsurgency program intends to reassert social and political control through techniques that build human and technological networks into the Latino population of East Salinas. These police networks are designed to generate a statist sensibility in the population as well as information flows about targetable social networks that enable gang formation.

Will Munger is an editor and contributor to the upcoming book *Life During Wartime* (AK Press, 2013).

“Anarchisms and US/Third World Feminisms” by Theresa Warburton

This essay is both an exercise in and exploration of alternative models of building solidarity in radical social and political movements. Despite many similarities between the methods, theories, and praxes of anarchisms of the past twenty years and US/third world feminisms, there has been little inquiry into the relationship between the two. In highlighting some prevalent affinities between these two bodies of thought and praxis, this essay will demonstrate the urgent necessity of considering how to build radical social and political movements that consider difference between peoples and communities to be essential rather than divisive.

Theresa Warburton is especially interested in contemporary anarchist theory, women of color feminisms, and speculative fiction as radical praxis. Theresa is committed to community organizing, and works mostly in the interests of prison abolition, student movements, reproductive justice, and urban farming. She believes strongly in the radical potential of the imagination, and is constantly trying to engage her own and others’ imaginations through all of the things she mentioned above.

# DONATE TO THE INSTITUTE FOR ANARCHIST STUDIES

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Eat one fewer vegan donut, drink one fewer beer a month, or both—and help fund anarchist written work!

Just think of all the little things you spend money on each month. Nice things—like a book, your friend's latest record, or the ingredients for a yummy dish to take to the community potluck—and annoying things, like bus fare or rent (which is actually a big thing!). Skip just one treat and set up a monthly donation to support the work of radical writers and translators around the world through the IAS and our grant-giving program. You'll also ensure that all the other crucial IAS projects are able to sustain themselves, from *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory* and the Anarchist Interventions book series, to our Mutual Aid Speakers List and Anarchist Theory Track, to Renewing the Anarchist Tradition conference, and more. With your help, we've been building a smarter anarchism since 1996.

Fortunately, we've now made it doubly easy to give up one soy latte each month and kick the money to the IAS instead. You can now set up a recurring donation via either Network for Good or PayPal, from anywhere and everywhere in the world, and for as little as \$1 to \$10 to \$100 per month (one-time and larger donations are equally

appreciated).

Do it today, by following this link: [www.anarchiststudies.org/support/donate](http://www.anarchiststudies.org/support/donate).

Of course, there are other ways to contribute financially to the IAS too. Throw a fund-raiser for us, help distribute *Perspectives* in your town, or the books in our new Anarchist Interventions series, and/or bring one of our Mutual Aid Speakers List folks to talk. Our Speakers List is available at [www.anarchiststudies.org/speakers](http://www.anarchiststudies.org/speakers), and features a bunch of new people this year.

The IAS also encourages anarchists and other like-minded radicals to give frequently to the many other wonderful projects trying to build a new world from below and yet in need of funds, from your local collective spaces to all our many innovative publishing, organizing, and agitating projects around the world. We're all in this together, from Cairo to Madison, from Japan to Libya, to our own corners of the globe.

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# CALL TO SUBMIT

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Our deadline for the next print issue is March 31, 2013. All submissions should have endnotes rather than footnotes, contain no page numbers, and conform to the Chicago Manual of Style. Please include your name and reliable contact information. Send your essays or questions to: [perspectives-magazine@googlegroups.com](mailto:perspectives-magazine@googlegroups.com). This is an open call, so all topics will be considered.



# INSTITUTE FOR ANARCHIST STUDIES

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**A**narchism emerged out of the socialist movement as a distinct politics in the nineteenth century. It asserted that it is necessary and possible to overthrow coercive and exploitative social relationships, and replace them with egalitarian, self-managed, and cooperative social forms. Anarchism thus gave new depth to the long struggle for freedom.

The primary concern of the classical anarchists was opposition to the state and capitalism. This was complemented by a politics of voluntarily association, mutual aid, and decentralization. Since the turn of the twentieth century and especially the 1960s, the anarchist critique has widened into a more generalized condemnation of domination and hierarchy. This has made it possible to understand and challenge a variety of social relationships—such as patriarchy, racism, and the devastation of nature, to mention a few—while confronting political and economic hierarchies. Given this, the ideal of a free society expanded to include sexual liberation, cultural diversity, and ecological harmony, as well

as directly democratic institutions.

Anarchism's great refusal of all forms of domination renders it historically flexible, politically comprehensive, and consistently critical—as evidenced by its resurgence in today's global anticapitalist movement. Still, anarchism has yet to acquire the rigor and complexity needed to comprehend and transform the present.

The Institute for Anarchist Studies (IAS), a nonprofit foundation established in 1996 to support the development of anarchism, is a grant-giving organization for radical writers and translators worldwide. To date, we have funded some eighty projects by authors from countries around the world, including Argentina, Lebanon, Canada, Chile, Ireland, Nigeria, Germany, South Africa, and the United States. We also publish the online and print journal *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory*, organize the annual Renewing the Anarchist Tradition conference, and offer the Mutual Aid Speakers List. The IAS is part of a larger movement to radically transform society as well. We are internally democratic and work in solidarity with people around the globe who share our values.