

**Saturday April 6th
2-4pm
146 Sydney Rd,
Coburg.**

**IRL library open
4-6pm**

**On the unceded
land of the
Wurundjeri
people of the
Kulin Nation.
Sovereignty
never ceded.**

IRL infoshop workshop series

**SOLIDARITY,
TRAUMA AND
INTERNAL LIMITS
TO STRUGGLE**

During the recent and ongoing violent occupation of Palestine many of us have been drawn to or engaged in various solidarity actions. We have been trying, failing, asking, examining and learning about what solidarity might mean. At the same time we are witnessing the violent deaths of so many.

Organising within and alongside the context of violence and trauma has raised tensions and exposed internal limits to struggle. Too often collectives and radical organisations have collapsed after grappling with these limits, oftentimes around interpersonal conflict and harm.

In this discussion, we want to explore these tensions and what a principled practice of addressing harm and conflict in struggle might look like within a shared politic and across difference.

We would like to offer these readings as a way to ground the conversation and encourage you to engage in them before the discussion.

M. E. O'BRIEN

Hello. Why don't you start off, Peter, and introduce yourself however you like.

PETER HARDIE

Yeah, so my name is Peter Hardie. Sixty-five-year-old veteran of a lot of movements. Been involved with socialist organizations from the time I got out of college in '77. And yeah, I've seen a few things along the way. I'm a father. I'm hoping to retire sometime soon. And, yeah, trying to sort out what it means to be an elder in this moment. That's what I will leave it at.

ME

So a lot of the interviews we're doing in *Pinko* are trying to think about some of the contradictions and complexities around ideas of accountability. To start off, what does that word, accountability, evoke for you?

PH

I guess two phases in my life: On the one hand, when I became a member of a socialist organization, there was a certain sense of accountability there that was more ideological, meaning more in the sense of adherence to some level of accountability to the people around political practice, around agreeing to a collective decision making process. At some point in the last, I don't know, ten or twenty years, I think it's changed to mean more of a personal level trying to think about myself as a cis-heterosexual man. The privileges entailed in that. And my commitment to grappling with those, if not overcoming them, to at least acknowledge that that was a force in my life, and then dealing with that. And I think that comes from two places. One, when I got to New York, in the 2000s, I was in much more contact with the queer liberation folks and with non-binary folks, and realized how much I didn't know about gender and patriarchy. And also as someone committed to social change, what it meant to be accountable to those forces and those movements and individuals around me. Not just acknowledging everybody has the right to do their own thing, but also defending and opposing discrimination and oppression based on patriarchy or heteropatriarchy.

So I think accountability has definitely changed. I came up in the movement and we were, I don't know, gay-tolerant, maybe, is the right word. I mean, we didn't really understand the gender binary, but we sort of opposed discrimination and oppression on general terms. But I think there's now a sense of needing a greater understanding and struggling for a principled understanding of the lived lives and lived expression and lived politics of people who may or may not be socialists, but are clearly not gender normative or gender normal.

ME

That's interesting, I hear you talk about two meanings of accountability: One, accountability to a group process of democratic centralism and accountability to politics to align a political vision that might be sort of easy to veer off from in the conditions of our lives. And then accountability as an ally in terms of thinking about your privileges and about the emergence of a movement that you might not know tons about. The way that we're approaching it is different than either of those. Mostly, it's thinking about accountability as the internal process of how movements deal with harm. So that might be in Maoist terms—criticism/self-criticism, combat liberalism, unity/struggle/unity—the history of ideas like that. And these days, accountability shows up a lot as a notion in transformative justice, people trying to do alternatives to police and prisons and what that means. But that you brought up these two other meanings, I think, is very interesting, and I'd encourage you to elaborate on them. You said a little bit about trying to think about queerness. Could you say a bit more about the first one? Thinking about accountability to line and to a group and to each other?

PH

So it's interesting you raise this sort of criticism/self-criticism, because I was on a call earlier today talking with younger comrades. Now, there's more attention paid in movement spaces to harm and blind spots, whether it's hetero blindspots or male or patriarchal blindspots. I noted that there's definitely a sense in spaces now that's different from spaces I came up in when I was in my twenties, which were much more sort of criticism/self-criticism as a vehicle for growth and personal change. The

reality that I recall—and it may have been just my experience—but the reality was that those spaces, those criticisms/self-criticism spaces were very male, cis-hetero dominated. I think to the extent that you had cultures and organizations that were fairly heterosexual, that allowed for the development of cultures that weren't necessarily as open. And on another level, the movement has shifted a little bit, in the sense that democratic centralism and dogmatism are less acceptable. In a good way, meaning the good elements of that. "Let's stick together and work together even if we disagree, and let's find truth where we can find it, whether it's in the writings of Marx or in the writings of Cabral or in the writings of the Combahee River Collective." Let's try to find a theory where we can find it.

So that's all good. But if I think of myself as a cis-hetero man, pronouns are a good example. I know I have to work to remind myself to identify my pronouns. And it's probably not even on this Zoom call, but I changed it for the previous call. Those are the kinds of things that, as a privileged man, I don't think about—the harm I'm doing when I'm mis-gendering people or when I'm not aware that there's all that privilege connected with who I am as a man. So, yeah, I think accountability looked a lot different maybe forty years ago than it does now and people hold each other to standards that are much less about politics and more about how we treat each other as human beings.

ME

That's very interesting. So tell me briefly about your political arc. You mentioned being in a socialist organization since you got out of college in '77. What's the general arc of the major movements you've been a part of?

PH

So I came out of college in the '70s and there was a sort of vibrant anti-colonial movement around the world; corresponding solidarity movements in the United States for struggles happening internationally, like in Angola and the anti-apartheid movement. Personally, I was involved in the politics of decolonizing education in the '70s, so struggling for African American studies, struggling for Chicano studies. I don't know that I was active in the women's studies movement, but I think

that it was concurrent with those things as well. When I got out of college, I went into the labor movement and was a factory worker for six or seven years. I got involved in the union where I was and the union's Civil Rights Committee.

But during that same period of time, there was an extensive network of what was called, at the time, the National Black United Front. Boston had a Black United Front; there were Black United Fronts in a number of the major cities. And for the most part they mirrored the Black Panthers, meaning they were trying to target police violence, segregation, and trying to develop a national agenda for Black liberation minded folks around the country. At the same time, I came out of college politicized on the level of class and socialism as well, so I don't know if I can name all the iterations of those organizations, but the Proletarian Unity League was where I found my socialist home. And then, I'd say I split my script, my allegiance to a variety of Black liberation organizations like the Black United Front, the African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC), and the various iterations of those organizations all the time. That may be as much as I can remember.

ME

Sure. And then continuing on, did you stay in the labor movements, the socialist organization, and Black organizing?

PH

Yes and no. I was in labor for about twelve or fourteen years after college, worked in a factory under one union and joined the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), working as a staff-person for public employees in Boston. Most of the national formation stuff and the Black liberation movement I was connected to ebbed and flowed like everything else. There was the National Black United Front. It was ALSC at a certain point. There was the Black Radical Congress. So we were traveling to Mississippi to work with anti-racist, active organizing in Mississippi. So yeah, I've stayed involved to this day. I still consider myself a socialist and I still consider myself a revolutionist and a Black liberationist as well. And those things have evolved.

You know, I think I would say I'm probably clearer about patriarchy now than I was for quite a number of those

years. And it goes back—we knew that some of the Black liberation movements of the '60s were very patriarchal and some homophobic, although not as much as people tend to think. But I think it's been a little bit of a journey for me as an older activist in my forties and fifties to start to think about the interconnection between patriarchy or heteropatriarchy, capital, and white supremacy. So my political growth has probably brought me to a sharper understanding of the relationship and the importance of centering all three and not just the class or the race struggle.

But, yeah, I've stayed involved. I'm working with Black Lives Matter activists in Louisville, Kentucky, a little bit here in D.C. I was overseas for a while, so my activism was muted in the sense that I was doing some work in South Africa related to labor there and just sort of mindful of the political growth of South Africa as a former apartheid state and colony and trying to understand the international economy and the impact on states like South Africa.

ME

So Pinko is interested in both formal and informal practices of dealing with internal harm and conflict and abuse in movements, and it would probably make sense to talk about the movements a little bit separately. It sounds like they have a little bit of separation in your life, even if they're in dialogue with each other. I mean, I know you most from your work in the legacy of the New Communist Movement. Do you have a sense of what you would like to talk about or what would be interesting to talk about, to start off, around both informal and formal ways of dealing with internal conflict and harm?

PH

So a couple of things come up. One is, we make a lot of assumptions in this work, and so if you leave aside the sort of New Communist Movement, even the sort of Black civil rights struggle, the Black Power movement—you have organizations like the Black Panthers that articulated, whether they were practicing or not, a certain understanding of the need for allyship and political alliance around the struggle against capital and empire. You had a little bit less of that, actually, in the civil rights movement. I'm not the best person to give an analysis

of that, but I think what that results internally is a whole lot of tension that doesn't get affirmed or actualized around male practices, around heterosexual practices in relationship to people. And so, while the Panthers may have espoused a certain level of early alliance with gay liberation forces back then, there certainly wasn't a lot of evidence of homosexual or queer Black folks engaged fully in the Black Panthers. So a lot of that harm gets hidden, you know; we don't know what it was because we don't know and nobody was interested in it. That's changed a good bit recently, and I'm trying to think about the interim period, but the rise of Black Lives Matter, for example, was the result of three queer women, and we're still grappling with that—meaning, I think a lot of men in movement spaces are working on it and in a lot of good ways, on our understanding of it, while in a lot of other spaces, they're not.

There's still a certain level of if not outright homophobia or misogyny, frankly, then a certain sense that people are not interested in talking about it. And so, as a result, you've had powerful voices of women and queer and trans women shaping the dialogue, forcing the movement to grapple with them as human beings and to grapple with the kinds of oppressions they faced as part and parcel, or at least connected to the struggle against white supremacy. Sometimes I chafe at that a little bit because, in some ways, in a lot of ways, I'm old school in terms of studying. But I think there is some new knowledge coming up that's not based in the literature of the revolutions or the literature of the New Communist Movement, but that is based in the real life experiences of people who decided that they are tired of oppression, and whether they have the same understanding that I do or not, want to do something about it. So, yeah, I would say those spaces have changed, the Black liberation spaces have changed for the good, but they're not there yet and we still have a lot of work to do now.

ME

In the queer spaces that I'm in, the queer and trans political spaces I mean, there are extremely sophisticated discussions about transformative justice and addressing harm and lots of other things. And frankly, I think they might have something to learn from criticism/self-criticism, combat liberalism, unity/struggle/unity—there are some old school principles that, one,

I think might have had more influence on the present moment than people realize and, two, might have moments in them of clarity and hopefulness that people could use. So part of what we wanted to do in these interviews is think about the two together, think about different currents of accountability and not just be, "Oh, this one's new and cool and made by queers and the other stuff is old school and boring and made by men." But to actually have a little bit more of a dialogue between them, more thinking about them alongside each other, or thinking about how they might have influenced each other in ways that people don't always talk about. So that's part of what I mean—I appreciate all the self-critical, self-reflective things you're saying about gender and patriarchy and sexuality. But I would also encourage you to actually share what worked and what didn't work and what you all were trying to do in these spaces, in Black liberation spaces, Communist movement spaces.

PH

That's a very good point. And I agree with you 100%. On some level there was a certain value system connected with criticism/self-criticism that maybe, though not always, engendered a certain amount of trust that these were the kinds of things you could talk about in self-criticism, and these were not. Parallel to that, I think there's just been a certain weakness in ideology and in ideological perspective around what we're trying to do. The immediate example that comes to mind is that it's a simple thing to organize and rant against oppression as a thing that's affecting me. Trans women, the murder of trans women, for example, has been in the news and there's a lot of discussion about that. But it's not really connected, in analysis, to some of the bigger things that we think are important. And so that's not unusual, I mean, the struggle around white supremacy in the Black community is often more about white bias and white prejudice and discrimination. And I can't get a house in this neighborhood or, you know, I want to start a business and not connected to real political analysis of where oppression comes from and how trans-oppression or queer oppression or patriarchy or white supremacy are connected to the capitalists, the global capitalist, neoliberal capitalism.

I feel like that's a weakness I do see in a lot of movement spaces... What's good is that there's a lot of attention on how we

behave with each other. And I think that's important and good, and to the extent that some of this is about building community that can move together, then you need to build community. You can't just move together. It doesn't just happen. On the other hand, where are we moving, what are we moving? I think that's the weakness there has been in political study. And I grapple with that because there's a certain amount of privilege connected to political study that is allowed to students and intellectuals of various sorts, and that doesn't always get pushed down into the streets.

On the other hand, if we're not clear about what we're fighting and we're not clear about the connections between the various struggles, then we're sort of floating around in this area of, "I don't want to be harmed," and we're calling people out for harming and we don't always—and this is my experience particularly in some Black movement spaces—we're not always clear about how we're trying to build and move the struggle. I think you're right, I mean, I'm not sure I have a coherent thought around this, but I do feel, to a great extent, an anticapitalist element is not being woven in where it needs to be woven in. I would say that that should be the legacy of the socialist movement: we should have done a better job. But I think some of it is also just that every generation creates its own terrain and struggle. We have an obligation to try to figure out how to help. I mean, the question of accountability is always a question of accountability for what? Are we all in the same struggle? By that, I mean that we are fundamentally, but some of us are less interested in the struggle against patriarchy, or only see the struggle against white supremacy, and don't see capitalism as a key target for liberation. And socialists ultimately have to hold each other and the movement's feet to the fire on all three. Accountability for upholding all three facets/fronts of struggle.

ME

Yeah, that really makes a lot of sense in that there's such intense arguments right now between, "Oh, this is bad cancel culture," or, "Oh, you're enabling abuse," that is all focused on behavior and not, "What are the political stakes of what we're fighting for and how does this help us get there or hinder us from getting there?" And that's to sort of draw back to your first point about

accountability to politics, to a political vision on some level, or to a critique of capitalism. Would you be up for talking a little bit about criticism/self-criticism and how it worked; what you saw and what worked and what didn't?

PH

Yeah. I think I did notice that, at least in the early days, women were more subject to criticism than men. And not really about the level of productivity or hours put in. More just about stuff, lack of understanding. I think some of that was student days, and so, you know, nobody's really doing anything or raising families or working a real job. And then once folks were in a factory or we were doing community organizing, I think the criticism did shift to more systemic stuff, i.e., not a criticism of you as an individual for x, y or x, but more, "How do we critique ourselves? How do we try to understand lessons from our work? What works, what doesn't work? What should we do tomorrow that we didn't do today or what shouldn't we do tomorrow that we did do today?" And so, I think it's a tool for growth and maybe accountability, in the sense of being true to the work and being honest about the work. Not just doing stuff because everybody else is doing it, but really trying to figure out if we're actually serving the people or just serving ourselves. That's the sort of blanket statement, and I think it may or may not be true in all instances.

I don't recall the last time a person was called on the carpet. I think we have been gentler with each other over the past few decades. And I think that is a result of, one, the struggle of people who aren't male and white against the behaviors of people who are male and white, and two, the communist movement, I think, has been committed to trying to grapple with some of that stuff, even if it's only words. But I think it's sunk in in some places. Right now I'm in a study group with some men in the Louisville, Kentucky, area to try to grapple with masculinity and what it means to be male in female-led, and women-led, queer women-led movements. Just trying to think through that, I mean, trying to figure out how to be disciplined, how to appreciate and acknowledge and follow the leadership of non-male non-men. And the counter-education that we have to do as men against all the sort of not only legit—when I say legit, actual political forces out there of male supremacy in our community, in the Black

community—but also against the invisible cultural pushes of men to be in control, to see only weakness in women, to “other” queer and trans men and women. It’s been an interesting experience. I mean, I think people are trying to do it and we’re sort of struggling through it.

But yeah, I do feel like there is value in criticism/self-criticism, to the extent that in the same way we think about oppression as systemic and not just about individual people, we’ve got to think about critique/self-critique as not just, Peter Hardie, what did you do right today and what did you do wrong today, but self-critique of ourselves as a revolutionary force, an actual force for actual change. What is required of us as a community/collective—was what *we* did the right thing to do? The wrong thing to do? How do we think about what we do tomorrow? More time on strategy, and less time on negotiating theory or ideology. A lot of movement spaces tend to get dominated by stuff that clearly tells you that people are really fighting the same thing and that, wow, maybe all those struggles are important and need to be dealt with. That we can’t keep people on the basis of just resolving your particular grievance with somebody else; that if we’re trying to build a movement, we’ve got to have some values that allow us to raise criticisms and expect that they’ll be dealt with, rather than raise criticisms as a way to point out all the problems of the world. I mean, I grapple with this a lot around the white socialist movement in relation to the Black liberation movement. And this constant sort of railing about white leftists and white anarchists in the white white white... and that, one, they’re not all white, and two, they’re not all... you know, the anarchists are not all white either. But it’s easy to sort of create the straw man, the straw person, and rail against the influence of so-called whites on movement spaces that are dominated by people of color, African Americans.

And my attitude is, if we’re clear about who we’re fighting, then we’re clear about the need for allies, and if we’re clear about the need for allies, then we’re clear about the need for discussion with those allies. It’s not just like we make demands of allies; we’re in a movement together and we have to sort of negotiate, navigate some collective space and roles and viewpoints and accept some things that we may or may not 100% agree with them on.

ME

Can you remember a specific example of criticism/self-criticism that stands out to you or that had an impact on you?

PH

The one that stands out was really a sort of attack on a particular woman. I don’t remember all the details, but it just sort of felt like ganging up. And again, this was sort of in the “criticism is personal” as opposed to “criticism as organizational” period. It was mean-spirited and it was really sort of... I’d love to be able to say I wasn’t a part of it, I don’t even remember whether I was or was not. I just remember talking to the woman afterwards and feeling like she was right; she felt hurt and betrayed and probably left the movement. Or at least left the organization. And I think that had a big impact on me in terms of, one, thinking about the relationship between theory and people’s lived experience, the understanding that theory was not enough to really make what happened happen. That her lived experience and her perspective was not even ignored, but just sort of suppressed and denied and that’s not... that’s a place of privilege to do that, to deny someone’s perspective, that’s a place of privilege and that I’m a very privileged man. I went to college and worked plenty of jobs. And, you know, I haven’t experienced the levels of insecurity or hatred or discrimination or violence that many people have. Criticism should be a shared vehicle as opposed to a weapon. So that’s what I remember. My memory is terrible actually. You’ve got more out of my memory than probably most people have.

ME

Any examples of it being used as a vehicle? Maybe from the later period, of people beginning to try to think about criticism in an organizational- or movement-wide way?

PH

I think there are quite a few... The organization has grappled with a lot of changes in policy and practice. Should people go south and work in the South, the development of chapters in places like San Diego and where our forces have been able to grow and where they haven’t been able to grow, and what is that a result of. There’s been good conversations about what we’ve

been able to do, and I feel like even the sort of criticism that's come up about where we are, or are not connected to Occupy, are we or are we not connected to Black Lives Matter. And should we be leading those things. Those are good conversations to have and they don't have clean answers. Putting all this together is going to be a matter of getting beyond organizational boundaries and really thinking about the big, broad, united front stuff that we've talked about and promoted as part of our political line. And then, it's testing it on a daily basis and trying to figure that out. We're better at that now than we were.

I think we're still figuring some other things out too. You know, how to move political education and spaces that are not our own. A good example was, this afternoon we had a study session with a bunch of young potential members. They had questions about any number of our stuff, and I think we tried to balance, on the one hand, how and why we got here with some sense that the perspectives of people who are critical or unsure, that those perspectives are real, too, and that we're unsure. A lot of us are unsure. We shape this theory and we shape our practice on a day-to-day basis. So what we wrote ten years ago, we're happy to repudiate. I think that's what legitimate criticism/self-criticism is, which is to say, we're learning and we need to think about learning. There's a dearth of learning in a lot of organizations. On the one hand, people are bemoaning the fact that we lose a strike or we lose an organizing campaign and we don't even make time to learn what happened? So I sort of feel that's important to me, that's the sort of kernel of criticism/self-criticism, which is, can we learn, what can we learn, and are we making that a regular practice?

ME

Are there other ways of dealing with internal harm in movements that you've witnessed or that have had an impact on you, formal or informal?

PH

Yeah. I think I've learned the most by actually listening to the voices of victims or survivors of patriarchy and heteropatriarchy. As you go back, you find the critiques of the civil rights movement, you find the critiques of the Black Panther movement. BLM right now is engaged in a serious

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internal reckoning. The movement is growing and I think most of that is the strengthening of the voices that have not been heard. Queer, trans women's voices that have just not been heard. And that's where we sort of gain some strength, both in practical organizing, but also in understanding what we're grappling with.

The last few years, I've been leaning more into patriarchy as the main danger, rather than capitalism as the main danger. And I don't have enough of a theoretical understanding to answer that question, but just because you start seeing the ravages of patriarchy, both globally as well as here in the United States, you can't help but wonder whether we're ever going to have a better world if we can't solve patriarchy. It flies under the radar of a lot of leftists because they think it's sort of related, or the domain of some other sort of groupings of women or queers or trans or whatever. Fifty percent of the world is non-male and non-white, probably more actually, non-male and non-white anyway, and they're developing their own sense of what's going on in the world, independent of socialist theory or anybody else's theory. We need to be in movement with those forces that maybe don't come out of our theoretical head of heritage. And yeah, it's going to be work. It will be fruitful. The answers lie there, they don't lie in our heads, and they definitely don't lie in the heads of men. They don't. They definitely don't lie there.

ME

This conversation is very theoretically and politically interesting. It feels a little abstract. A lot of what you've been talking about is your own learning and the collective learning of a lot of men around thinking about gender and sexuality. Can you think of something concrete from your experience, like where you've hurt somebody or seen a man hurt somebody and watched people deal with that, that you learned from at the time?

PH

What first comes to mind is dysmorphia. I'm still not sure I understand it. That's the wrong way to say, but I've struggled with that, because I've sort of felt, OK, if gender is a construct, then does it matter what your body looks like. But I've been around enough trans folks to start challenging my own thinking about that. So even if I don't understand it, I try to, and I also

acknowledge that it doesn't matter whether I understand it or not. It's an acknowledged experience of people that I know, and yeah, that's fine and good and so that's the first thing that came to my mind. I probably live in a little bit more of a bubble than most, and there hasn't been a lot of sort of active movement space in the last five or ten years that hasn't been dominated by women and or fems.

ME

I mean, I've seen four organizations torn apart in the last three years because of sexual assault. Destroyed. Just destroyed. They're gone. There were accusations, probably well-founded, around sexual assault. There was a discovery of a cover-up or whatnot. And the biggest anti-police brutality coalition of ultra leftists in New York was torn apart this summer. You know, one of the main ultra left magazines was closed around it. One of the biggest student-based socialist organizations in the United States was gone. The biggest British socialist organization, totally gone. I feel like this stuff is just happening right and left and people don't know what to do. I mean, the shutting down of an organization is sometimes what needs to happen. And those harms of sexual assault are things that have happened in every movement. People are trying to figure out how to deal with them. And it's a hell of a lot better than not dealing with them. There's something very unique and special about sexual assault, but it's also on a continuum of a lot of other things that happen in movements that people are trying to grapple with.

PH

Yeah. I mean, I know of many of those instances. I've read about them. I haven't been in close proximity with them. And it may be that some of those things happened in my organization and it's been hushed up, I don't know for a fact.

ME

Well, if it hasn't come up in your group, do you think there is a reason that you all have managed to avoid it? Is there a different culture around working with gender or working with interpersonal harm, where maybe it hasn't happened as much as it might have happened elsewhere?

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PH

It's a good question. I don't know. If I were to take a stab at it, I think most of the people who are sort of my age or who came in around the same time I did, everybody sort of coupled up. Probably not entirely true. I mean, I do remember some relationships that split up. I think we took the study of male supremacy fairly seriously. It was one of the first studies I remember in college. You know, it was sort of a combination of both. It wasn't quite as sophisticated as more recent stuff around patriarchy or heteropatriarchy, but it was pretty clear that socialists didn't behave in certain ways. Lefties are some of the most abusive and intolerable people in a lot of spaces here and elsewhere around the globe. Which, I don't know.... I don't assume that we're necessarily better, I just assume that we've been luckier. I'd have to think about that, I don't want to presume that somehow we've answered some questions that other people have struggled with. On the other hand, you're right. I mean, I don't think we've had that level of stuff...

ME

I remember when I helped write the gender unity document. And there was a line in there that states if it's suspected that there's a pretty reasonable likelihood that someone might have committed sexual assault, they'd be thrown out of the organization. I was worried that that would be super controversial. And there were other things that were controversial in the document. But on that point, everyone says, "We've thrown people out for less. Sure. Yeah, of course, we'd throw them out." And I say, "Oh, OK. Well, that's cool."

PH

Yeah, I mean, I think you're right, there is a little bit of a... We've managed to attract a broad spectrum of people to the organization, and I think some of that is just sort of the character and style and culture of our organization. I think we are open to criticism. I mean, I feel like we don't resist criticism. And it may not be that we understand or accept or follow through on it all the time, but I think people can raise criticisms and they get accepted as not counterrevolutionary, but they get accepted as, "OK, let's think about that" at least, or, "let's deal with it" at best. And I do feel like that's the culture of our organization. Some of

that is a culture of respect, meaning... maybe we're a little less hierarchical. I don't know, that's a good question. You're raising some good questions. I think there may be a level at which we're not as hierarchical as a lot of the other sort of socialist left organizations where, you know, they've got a chairman of a central committee. There may be something to that. And that may be related a little bit more to trying to be democratic and at the same time, I think we've moved away from centralism toward more democracy. That's reflected in our Congresses and in our chapters here in the area. That's a good point. Actually, I hadn't thought about that.

ME

I remember one serious conflict in one branch and the national, and pointing a couple of people to look into it, to sort of talk to everyone involved, and try to get an assessment of what was happening and try to figure out if it could be resolved and what that would take and if there was any serious, serious, destructive behavior on anyone's part. That's a formal process of dealing with harm and conflict. I feel like there are these threads, these ways of trying to deal with it, trying to address it that could lead to a sort of cover-up or something like that, but could also lead to something very positive. Most of the time, in the history of the organization that I saw, which is a very small window of time, just—what was it—five years or six years that I was there with you all, that people made a sincere effort to deal with conflicts that came up.

PH

This gets back to the question of who are the enemies of the people and who are friends of the people, and being clear about being able to distinguish that, just because someone might be completely fucked up it doesn't necessarily make them an enemy of the people, and balancing that with how much harm they are doing or can do or actually do? To protect other folks, I mean. Racists can be harmful, and people with racist views can be harmful, but they are not all enemies of the people. How do we manage differences, how do we grow a new society? We have to think beyond that. I mean, I think you're saying the same thing I'm thinking, which is, I think we have had an approach more along the lines of how do you reconcile differences among

the people? How do we call people into something, as opposed to just call them out and kick them out, or split? That doesn't serve anybody, and frankly, it's been the tool of government and covert agencies to disrupt movement building. That said, a lot of harm has been done inside movements, and it's a good thing that it's recognized, it's a good thing that people ensure the safety of all. Building and safeguarding community.

ME

And sometimes protecting and caring for people means making sure that folks do leave.

PH

Exactly, exactly. I think the Native Americans had a practice—they didn't have capital punishment—but for very, very, very serious crimes, they send people off into the wilderness and say, you know, you can come back in two years, but you can't be around here. And I think that's legitimate. To the extent that we've got to interrogate our own systems to make sure that they're not replicating some of the same harm in how we evaluate harm. But that's important to do as well, and in some ways why we need to have the folks—at the intersection of most stuff in the leadership of things and in the center of thinking about what harm is and what it means and how we should deal with it—the people who've been harmed repeatedly and the most. Yeah, I mean, some of this is we're trying to shovel sand off the beach in the face of the ocean. Some of us have the privilege of even thinking about it, and a lot of people, not us maybe, but a lot of people don't have that privilege and don't even have time to think about some of these things. And so we've got to get good at helping folks, say, when they're harmed and saying...

One of the things we were talking about today was just how do you start meetings. And I said that you used to start meetings by asking, how's everybody doing and who needs some help with anything? Every meeting, anywhere, everywhere with whoever—who needs help and what help can we give you and how can we help you? So that people understand that it's OK to ask for help and it's OK to say something's wrong. Because privileged people don't have as many things that are wrong or are harming them, and so it's easier to start a meeting with "let's

get down to business la-da-da.” Meanwhile, people are hurting and they don’t want to come back to the meeting because nothing offers them any solace or any help.

And that’s—I don’t know if it’s a lesson for the movement, but it’s certainly a lesson for me, which is that movements are not just about issues or ideas, they’re really about community and embracing people, embracing each other and learning how to embrace each other, because we don’t really know... we’ve been raised not to, we’ve been raised to be jerks and idiots and mean and hostile. Maybe not all necessarily just those things, but to compete. To defend. To not be vulnerable. We’ve been raised for all these things and I think our movements have to change to create something new. Maybe we haven’t even imagined it yet.

ME

I’ve noticed that you have avoided identifying your organization and we are somewhat interested in political lineages and political histories. There are different kinds of socialist organizations in the United States. Could you say a little bit more, in your own words, about your group? If you don’t want to identify it we certainly won’t. But to give some sense of kind of where it’s coming from?

PH

Yeah, sure. I have no problem with that. So some of it is just that we’ve changed our name a few times over time. But we’re now the Liberation Road Socialist Organization, formerly Freedom Road Socialist Organization (FRSO). Freedom Road comes out of a variety of trends out of the ’60s and ’70s. Proletarian Unity League is my earliest communist organization, in the late ’70s. Folks who have drifted in and out, we have absorbed other organizations, recruited all ages. We’re still standing, and many organizations have dissolved. I don’t think that’s any solace to anybody. But not so sadly, the fact that I think folks who are still committed to a radical change in this country are attracted to us, to Freedom Road and now Liberation Road. Our trend, I think what we used to fight with people about back in the late ’70s and early ’80s and that now has received a lot less resistance... We were part of a current of leftists that centered white supremacy and white privilege in the struggle for socialism.

The sort of righteousness and supremacy of national liberation movements—whether they were bourgeois-led or not—we felt like those struggles against white supremacy were important in the struggle against capital. And that socialists of all stripes needed to identify that and recognize and support that. A lot of other forces were much more class-oriented or didn’t want to see divisions in the class. So that’s a little bit of a trend that I come out of.

I feel we’ve learned a lot from liberation forces among women, among queer and trans folk, among African American nationalist organizations. We’ve seen the importance of working with those forces as part of the struggle and not from the perspective of “if it’s not the class struggle, then we don’t want it.” I think our organization has tried to see the multifaceted layers of good movement building. And yeah, I’ve been around too long, but I feel I’ve been in the right places. Not in the sense that I’ve chosen to be, but just that I’ve been in spaces where I could learn from folks not of our tendency, and that we as an organization have tried to learn from folks not of our particular tendency.

The other part of our line that I think is important is that a lot of other folks decided they should become a revolutionary party and struggle for power as a revolutionary party. We felt it was premature. A lot of work needs to be done to decide if you’re a revolutionary party and none of the organizations out there have. And at least half of them, if not three-quarters of them, are gone now. And, you know, we’re still in communication and dialogue with lots of them, including the Communist Party of the United States of America, because we see the value of forces meeting and discussing and talking. We’re going to have our differences, but the differences between one hundred people over there and a hundred people over there is meaningless in the context of the struggle against empire. And so it’s important that we start the dialogue. Where we can work together, we do. We’re in conversation right now with some of the Black nationalist forces around some work around police—white supremacists and the police and military. And, you know, that is good stuff. And we’ll take it wherever we can go and we’ll try to figure out the lessons from that.

So that’s the trend I come out of. Yeah, we’re a fairly multinational organization with lots of roots, drawing from

some of our alliances with and/or mergers with folks in the Chicano movement out in California, Arizona, the Midwest and Southwest area, a bunch of varied elements that are still around and kicking. We're getting younger. We have lots of young people coming in. And it's a growth process. I'm happy to be a part of it and still able to attend meetings and speak my mind. That's great.

ME

We've been talking for an hour and fifteen minutes and we certainly could keep talking. But I also want to respect your time and we could start winding down if you want. As well, although it's been a long time, I consider you a friend and a comrade. And if you want to have a conversation about dysphoria, we can do that.

PH

I would love to, actually. Yeah, I would love to.

Esteban Kelly

REVOLUTIONARY MOTIVES

Why do the dispossessed revolt? Or, more to the point, why don't they? There is no shortage of reasons; in every direction we look, the fully capitalist world presents itself as an immense accumulation of injury and outrage. And yet, on their own, these reasons rarely suffice as explanation. What is unbearable to one group of proletarians is bearable to another; what produces a rebellion on one occasion, or in one place, fails to elicit any response on another. We might be tempted to approach the problem from the other side and list all the reasons *not* to revolt, chief among them the enormous repressive power of the state. Most revolts end in failure, even if we define success in the most modest terms, and failure means, let's be clear, not only wasted effort but injury, death, imprisonment. Except in situations where survival is truly at stake, there is always good reason to keep one's head down, to stagger on under the nightmare weight of history. But fear explains both too much and too little, since many *do* revolt in situations when the odds are not particularly good and the risks great. At a first pass, we are confronted by an insufficient positive explanation (reasons for) and an insufficient negative one (reasons against). Moreover, as nearly all commentators have noticed, since the odds of success for a revolt are not determined by the force of the enemy alone but by the number of those who participate, there is something circular and self-fulfilling about whatever judgments participants make about the risks. Bad odds can be transformed into good ones if, by misapprehending the situation or ignoring the risks, some small group decides to go ahead anyway, creating felicitous conditions for everyone else. A leap into the void can make the ground appear, just as a refusal to leap can turn solid ground to thinnest air.

The self-fulfilling character of such judgment has led many pro-revolutionaries to conclude that the decisive element is the consciousness of would-be rebels, who must be educated or provided with the right leadership, in order to realise the reasonableness of revolt, the possibility of success given unitary action. This view, which I will call *voluntarist*, finds its most important articulation in the words of Karl Kautsky, as interpreted and popularised by V.I. Lenin in *What Is To*

Be Done? “Socialist consciousness”, writes Kautsky, “is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without and not something that arose within it spontaneously.”¹ For Lenin, this position necessitates the formation of cadres of “professional revolutionaries” who can provide intellectual leadership to the working class, lest their default to a spontaneous “trade-union consciousness” leave them incapable of effectively combating their domination by capital.² We might think of Lenin’s interpretation of the voluntarist thesis as *pastoral*, meaning it emphasises leadership. Other voluntarisms are *pedagogical*, identifying the education of the underclasses as the decisive element. Antonio Gramsci may be the clearest exemplar of this latter variant, but it should be noted that voluntarists are rarely pastoral or pedagogical completely. We can talk here only of tendencies.³ Lenin’s professional revolutionaries were to sell newspapers in order to develop close contact with the masses they might later mobilise, and Gramsci himself continuously describes education as a form of leadership.

Most voluntarists acknowledge that revolt does occur independently of pastoral or pedagogical intervention.⁴ A certain class of revolt — riot or strike — is more or less spontaneous, reflexive, and unexplainable except as the result of contingency, our pedagogues or would-be leaders might say. But more massive, durable, open-ended, and strategic revolt depends, in their estimation, on consciousness and leadership. The voluntarist account of spontaneous action must therefore be distinguished from what I call *fatalism*. For the fatalist, spontaneity goes all the way down, and there is no way to cheat the process through acts of will. Fatalists see revolt as unfolding from either inexorable objective mechanisms or, perhaps, the advent of an ineffable event. Why do people revolt? Let me tell you, say the pastors and the pedagogues. We just don’t know, say the fatalists.

1. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *Essential Works of Lenin* (Courier 2012), 82. There is some debate about the extent to which Lenin’s interpretation of Kautsky’s views is accurate.

2. *Ibid.*, 147–48.

3. In many essays from the mid-1920s onward, Gramsci emphasises the decisive role of intellectuals and of education in preparing the way for revolution. In short, and at the risk of vulgarising a complex and fragmentary body of work, Gramsci argues that there exists among the working class ‘organic intellectuals’ who, by virtue of their position in production, control the ‘ideas and aspirations of the class’. Organised into a class party, such intellectuals and the educative role they play will secure ‘hegemony’ for the working class — that is, ensure that working-class ideas are dominant in society. This ‘war of position’ is a necessary precursor to any ‘frontal attack’. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (International Publishers 1971), 3–13, 106–13, 257–63.

4. These views are not confined to Marxists or socialists. Anarchists are often prone to a pedagogical view of human

action, even if they are axiomatically opposed to a pastoral one. The popular eco-anarchist (or ‘green nihilist’) text, *Desert* (2011), rejects the possibility of revolution in its first pages by way of an off-hand anthropology. Revolution, in the views of the authors, can only be made by dedicated revolutionaries, anarchists, and this group will always be marginal: ‘Anarchists can be wonderful. We can have beauty, and self-possessed power and possibility in buckets. We cannot, however, remake the entire world; there are not enough of us, and never will be’. Considering very briefly the possibility that revolution may be made by people who are not already dedicated revolutionaries, they quote from a previous eco-anarchist text: ‘There is unfortunately little evidence from history that the working class — never mind anyone else — is intrinsically predisposed to libertarian or ecological revolution. Thousands of years of authoritarian socialisation favour the jackboot..’ They offer a negative version of the pedagogical thesis; education goes all the way down, producing perfectly compliant social subjects, and only a small number of freaks or deviants will ever break out of the straitjacket of ideology.

Declaring something unknowable is always a safe approach. But as I will argue below, political struggles often require people to make assumptions about the motivations of others; in revolutions, such assumptions can prove quite powerful. Indeed, as I show, the pedagogical and pastoral assumptions are at the heart of the processes that allow revolution to turn to counter-revolution. Those who say they don’t know now may find themselves, at a practical and intuitive level, relying upon common sense conceptions later on. Obviously, there is a great deal within history that is unknowable. We may never be able to say why, for instance, the murder by the police of a young unarmed man in one instance produces a riot, and in the other nothing more than a few small protests. But we may be able to say something about why the riot continues, dies down, or passes over into insurrection. To do so, we need a theory of revolutionary motives. The pedagogical and pastoral approaches fail because they confuse people’s motives with people’s beliefs. Motives, for the most part, and especially *revolutionary motives*, exist at a deeper level than the sort of consciousness or ideology that pedagogues and authorities can target: survival, desire for increased well-being, concern for the well-being of one’s familiars, hatred of oppressive heteronomy. These motives do not need to be taught, even if they are conditioned and transformed by social structure. Nor can they be untaught. For an ideology to succeed, it must work with and not against people’s underlying motivations.

motives described above—that is, concern for material well-being—though it should be noted that such concern extends to dependents, companions and intimates. Within Marxist and other left thought, interests name the deep though often unexplained forces that mobilise the underclasses. An interest, importantly, is something more than a reflexive action, something other than instinct or drive as such. We use the term to name internal forces that can be repressed or ignored, that appear as strong inclination or felt need, that motivate action but do not immediately produce it, and that therefore prompt deliberation or reflection.

Motive is perhaps similar to what Baruch Spinoza called *conatus*, or striving. “Each thing”, Spinoza writes famously, “as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being”.⁵

This being in which people strive to persevere is not identical for every person, and some aspects of it are quite clearly historically determined, unique to particular social relations and institutions, but every society or human community has as its given that it must allow people to survive, if not flourish, and the motives that correspond to these survival needs will form the basis for much (though certainly not all) of what people do: humans will strive to feed themselves, to find shelter from the elements, and to avoid pain and illness, to speak of three of the most basic material motives.

In capitalism, these basic motives fuel the fires of accumulation. The apparatus of the wage, for example, depends upon the motivated-yet-free action of proletarians who, dispossessed of the means of production, voluntarily sell their labour power in order to survive. Proletarians are not gripped by capital at a neuromuscular level, their bodies directly recruited to produce things of value. Domination and power is everywhere, and its history thousands of years deep, but people are almost never the simple objects or tools of others. Even those forms of domination which we imagine to operate almost entirely through force and to be more or less indifferent to the consent of the dominated presume some limited margin of freedom.⁶

Prisons are constructed and organised, for example, on the assumption that prisoners will try to escape, and even plantation slavery, which seems in some regards the infernal maximum of dehumanising and

5. Benedictus de Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, E. M. Curley, ed., (Princeton University Press 1994), 159.

6. For Foucault, power presupposes ‘a limited margin of freedom’. He writes: ‘Even when the power relation is

objectifying oppression, presupposed that slaves were free to refuse work, attempt to escape, revolt. Hence its recourse to violent punishment, at every turn, as necessary compulsion.

It should be made clear that a theory of revolutionary motives is not a theory of motives in general. People are no doubt driven by all manner of unique, perverse, and complex desires, understanding of which must be left to psychology if not psychoanalysis. Since we are talking of inclination rather than instinct, motive and interest are probabilistic concepts. Rather than seeking to explain every single thing that people do, interest is similar to the Marxian concept of *tendency*, asserting itself in the long-run and in the aggregate, despite and against deviations. A theory of revolutionary motives is concerned with proletarian interests that are basic, common, and elemental. Revolutions have a tendency to bring these elemental motives to the surface, because survival is so often at stake and because they aggregate many actors, thus putting into question what they may have in common as goals. Furthermore, because they involve the breakdown of existing institutions, people can no longer rely on habit or commonplace rubrics, and instead must elaborate, through deliberation and collective conversation, new ways of doing things based on shared motives.

The theory of revolutionary motives therefore emphasises the practical reasoning that inhabits the gap between compulsion and action. In revolutionary situations, proletarians reflect on what they are doing. They do not simply act instinctively. The concept of reason will no doubt sound the alarm for some readers, trained by various antihumanisms and structuralisms to see people as character-masks for impersonal forces. Many have critiqued the Marxian theory of interests as universalising a Western or post-Enlightenment philosophy of mind, and there is little doubt that certain presentations of it naturalise a limited and ultimately European psychology.⁷ But reason and “rationality” are not the same thing, and to suggest that people think about what they do is not the same thing as suggesting that

completely out of balance, when it can truly be claimed that one side has “total power” over the other, a power can be exercised over the other only insofar as the other still has the option of killing himself, of leaping out the window, or of killing the other person. This means that in power relations there is necessarily the possibility of resistance because if there were no possibility of resistance (of violent resistance, flight, deception, strategies capable of reversing the situation), there would be no power relations at all! Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954–1984* (Allen Lane 1997), 284, 292.

they are utility-maximising computers or vessels for transcendental faculties. Reason can be irrational by the lights of an Immanuel Kant or a Karl Popper, and when it comes to social practice, what matters is that it works, not that it's correct. In any case, capitalism is now a global phenomenon, and capitalism is, as indicated above, nothing if not a form of unfreedom that acts through reasoned choice, through a paper-thin freedom, constraining and limiting the autonomy of the exploited. Capitalism presupposes the theory of motives advanced here.

Where there is reasoning there are also ideas and though voluntarists over-emphasise the role of ideas, consciousness, and ideology, this is not to say that ideas are inconsequential, nor that there is no role whatsoever for a theory of ideology. Inasmuch as proletarians reflect on what they do, then ideas will play a role in the actions they take, since evaluating the consequences of one's actions depends upon ideas about how the world functions. This is also well described by Spinoza: "Both insofar as the mind has clear and distinct ideas, and insofar as it has confused ideas, it strives, for an indefinite duration, to persevere in its being and it is conscious of the striving it has".⁸ In other words, contrary to the assumptions of voluntarist theory, ideology is significant inasmuch as it conditions what people do, but it has little effect on the deeper underlying motives. The motives we are concerned with here are either givens of social reproduction or products of social structures that are unchangeable without a change of structure. They exist at a deeper level than the sort of consciousness or ideology which pedagogues and leaders aim to transform. You cannot unteach hunger.

Many will no doubt want to know why it matters that we know why people do these things. The answer is that, in any revolution, there is always the formation of a dedicated and organised mass whose motives are, in some regard, idiosyncratic, undertaken out of commitment

7. This is the view of many within the Subaltern Studies Group, in particular Dipesh Chakrabarty who, in *Rethinking Working-Class History* (Princeton University Press 1989), argues that Bengali workers' attachment to communal ties cannot be explained in terms of the ability of such ties to satisfy material needs, a Marxist mode of explanation which would project bourgeois rationality onto such workers. Rather, Bengali workers valued such cultural commitments for reasons internal to their culture. See Vivek Chibber for a strident and ultimately too narrow attempt to defend a universalist account of material interests against the Subaltern studies critique of Chakrabarty and others: *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (Verso 2013), 178–207. Chibber points out, importantly, that even arch-relativists like Chakrabarty rely on material interests as explanation in the final instance.

8. Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader*, 160.

to the cause of the revolution rather than personal well-being or the well-being of familiars. Many of the people who write and read texts such as this one, author included, will likely find themselves in this weird class of people, whose motives and desires are no doubt various and deserve study in their own right. This is a porous zone, into which and from which people pass in and out, and certainly not exclusive of other more basic motives. Some may engage in struggle for basic reasons and stay for other ones and, needless to say, such basic motives can reappear and trump all, such as when a person, threatened with ten years in prison, decides to inform on their comrades. Nor would we want to imply that whatever forms of altruism, libidinal passion, death drive or need for recognition motivates those who inhabit radical milieus do not exist among others as well. We talk here of distributions and primacies. But the historical evidence is clear that the vast majority of people participating in a revolution do so because of the deeper motives described above and in what follows — a desire for safety, for increased well-being, autonomy for themselves and their intimates — and will withdraw their support if they see nothing of the sort on the horizon. The problem is that the "organised minority" takes its own motives — and its capacity for sacrifice, discipline, self-abnegation — as evidence of the structure of motivation in general, and as such will frequently turn to pedagogical or pastoral supplement in order to compel the support of the larger revolutionary mass and install in them its own motives. As I argue in the pages that follow, this is bound to fail, and in fact sets in motion a number of counter-revolutionary processes.

We therefore need a better theory of revolutionary motives. For most of the 20th century, fatalism was supposed to provide that theory. Anton Pannekoek and Paul Mattick demonstrated how the organisations that resulted from voluntarist projects would, during non-revolutionary conjunctures, either be destroyed or integrated into capitalism.⁹ The emergence of any meaningful struggle would always seem "spontaneous" from the vantage of the pastors and the pedagogues. Since it emphasised the futility of the projects and interventions of the active minority, fatalism provided a counter to the voluntarists who

9. Both Mattick and Pannekoek owe a great deal to Rosa Luxemburg, whose account, in *The Mass Strike* and elsewhere, fuses the fatalist and voluntarist positions. Paul Mattick, 'Spontaneity and Organisation' in *Anti-Bolshevik Communism* (Merlin 1978), 117–38; Anton Pannekoek, 'Party and Class' (1936).

insisted on the crucial role of their own education or leadership. But this leaves open the question of what happens during revolutionary conjunctures. It is one thing to counsel non-intervention during quieter moments, but another thing altogether to do so during revolutionary ones, when not only the success of the revolution seems at stake, but when suffering and death are either present or imminent. As the pure distillates of the fatalist position, Monsieur Dupont, the uniplural authors of *Nihilist Communism*, recognise this problem and attempt to find something for the fatalist pro-revolutionary minority to do when it goes down. The answer: disable the voluntarists. In revolutionary conditions, the fatalist minority will be called upon to “actually go against most of the ‘revolutionary’ communist and anarchist milieu”.¹⁰ There is certainly some truth here, in that the attempt by some fraction of the revolution to seize power and begin to lead the revolution will need to be contested vigorously by a revolution within the revolution. But fatalists such as Monsieur Dupont are, in a sense, the weird twins of the voluntarists, relying on a view of the masses of ordinary proletarians as fragile, easily manipulated, diverted, or betrayed, even if capable of spontaneous revolt. Monsieur Dupont lack the courage of their convictions: if the working class is truly capable of organising itself and directing its own action on the basis of motives internal to it, then it is also capable of critically evaluating and rejecting the leadership or education offered. If one believes, as the theory of motives I will develop leads one to believe, that revolutions and the revolutions within revolutions and against counter-revolutions are produced by proletarians acting on the basis of motives internal to them, and by way of innate critical endowments, then intervention as such is no longer a problem. Indeed, one no longer needs to argue, futilely, that the dedicated minority sit on its hands; rather one can articulate the ways in which the kinds of things this minority does can either hinder or help the unfolding of the revolution. One can distinguish, ultimately, between two types of intervention: *vanguardist* and *adventurist*. The vanguardist seeks to control, lead, and shape proletarian action through pastoral and pedagogical intervention and, as such, sets in motion counter-revolution. The adventurist, however, engages in self-directed action that seeks to facilitate the conditions under which the vast majority of people will decide that going in the direction

10. Monsieur Dupont, *Nihilist Communism* (Arden 2009), 20.

of the revolution, of communism, means satisfying their materialist motivations. This may mean expropriating capitals and turning them over to people so that they can meet their needs, engaging in defence of the revolution from capitalist counter-attack, or subverting the attempt by revolutionary factions to establish leadership, or any number of other “communist measures”. The point is that the purely negative theorisation that the fatalists offer is inadequate; people will choose among positive actions, not among action or inaction. We can only evaluate positive actions on the basis of an adequate theory of motives.

The theory of motives matters, then, because it is the basis for action by those who have transcended, always partially and for the moment, materialist motives and begun to act on the basis of their commitment to the cause of reform, revolution, or struggle. Theory is always the product of history, of struggle as it is reflected on by those directly and distantly concerned. Abstracted from immediate struggles as it may be, this essay reflects the ongoing self-examination of the activist and radical milieu as it worries about its own existence and its relationship to the masses of proletarians who would be necessary for any revolution. If the pedagogues and authoritarians wildly overstate the importance of such activists, the fatalists wildly understate it. One attempts to arrogate to this group a power that it can never have, the other engages in perpetually abortive fantasies of the self-abolition of this group. Consider this essay an attempt to cut diagonally across both positions, neither arguing, fallaciously, for the utter insignificance of the active minority nor attributing to it some fictional burden of leadership.

The Materialist Conception of History

Before the interventions of Marx and Engels, nearly all radicals imagined communism or socialism as the conscious, ideologically-motivated undertaking of committed reformers and revolutionaries. The radical milieu into which the pair entered in the mid-1840s viewed the overcoming of capitalism as largely a moral and sometimes a religious project. The League of the Just, whose members joined with Marx and Engels to found the Communist League and commission the text that became the *Communist Manifesto*, had previously rallied around

the moral and religious perspectives of Wilhelm Weitling, who attempted to identify communism with the essence of Christianity.¹¹ But Weitling's eminence within the cluster of communist secret societies of the 1840s eventually weakened, partly as a result of contacts made with struggle-oriented and practical-minded English Chartists and partly due to the emergence of Marx and Engels' Communist Correspondence Committee. At the time, communism distinguished itself from "socialism" and its utopias primarily through an association with the legacy of the Jacobins and the various French insurrectionists who organised in secret during the 1830s and 1840s. Many communist groups had some degree of continuity with the followers of Gracchus Babeuf and his pre-empted uprising against the Thermidorian Directory, the goal of which was to radicalise the egalitarian revolutionary process instigated by the Jacobins and produce "community of goods and labour".¹² Babeuf and his co-conspirators held to both the pedagogical and the pastoral perspectives outlined above. Revolutionary overthrow of the Directory, they concluded, would have to grant power to a "provisional authority" that would rule until such time as the masses were capable of administering the community of goods themselves.¹³ The Babeuvians placed an enormous emphasis on "modifying the human heart by education". Part of the goal of their provisional authority would have been to allow time for the people to be educated in revolutionary "good manners" and disabused of egoism and avarice.¹⁴ Where education failed, punishment would have to suffice, and holding an anti-egalitarian opinion would be a sanctionable offence in the post-revolutionary world of the Babeuvians.¹⁵ Weitling was also both pedagogical and pastoral in his approach to the new world to be built, grounding communism in a reading of the Gospels, insisting on the need for a transitional dictatorship, and imagining a post-revolutionary world premised on "universal duty to work and consisting of a centralised economy".¹⁶

11. The best accounts are in Gareth Steadman Jones' introduction to the Penguin Edition of *The Communist Manifesto* (Penguin 2002), 39–50 and August Nimtz, *Marx and Engels: Their Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough* (SUNY Press 2000), 27–58.

12. Most of what we know about Gracchus Babeuf and his failed insurrection comes from the memoirs of fellow insurrectionary Philippe Buonarroti, *Buonarroti's History of Babeuf's Conspiracy for Equality* (H. Hetherington 1836), 153.

13. *Ibid.*, 101.

14. *Ibid.*, 166, 202–4.

15. *Ibid.*, 210.

16. Marx & Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 43.

This religious and moral inheritance continued to influence the Communist League, even after Weitling's departure, evidenced by the fact that the predecessor to the *Communist Manifesto* and the first programmatic statement of the League, Engels' "Draft of the Communist Confession of Faith", was modelled on a catechism. But despite this rhetorical form, by the time they entered the league, Marx and Engels had developed both independently and together a potent theory of political action that extended the "critique of religion" of the Young Hegelians and transformed it into a critique of idealist and moralist politics altogether. In *The German Ideology*, they assert bluntly that "it is not consciousness which determines life but life which determines consciousness", rejecting any account of revolution that begins with moral education or consciousness-raising.¹⁷ "Morality, religion, metaphysics" and other "phantoms formed in the brains of man" are "sublimates of their material life process", and therefore a politics that begins with these is doomed to failure, analogised, in their preface to the book, to the actions of "a valiant fellow [who] had the idea that men were drowned in water only because they possess the *idea of gravity*".¹⁸ Historical change occurs, not as the result of various forms of "self-consciousness" as their post-Hegelian antagonists had it, but from the antagonistic "interests" that attend the division of labour and the unequal portioning out of the products of labour. Communism is only possible on the basis of these interests, and specifically, the interest-motivated action of those whom the capitalist mode of production has rendered propertyless. In opposition to the moral communisms and egalitarian political projects of their peers and predecessors, Marx and Engels declare grandly that "Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things".¹⁹

In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels further ground this real movement in the class *interests* of the proletariat, interests determined by the development of "bourgeois society". I have so far avoided using the term "self-interest" (often taken as synonymous with interest as such) largely because I want it to be understood as a specific, atomised form that interest can take, one effected in particular

17. Marx, *The German Ideology* (MECW 5), 42.

18. *Ibid.*, 42, 30.

19. *Ibid.*, 57.

by the individualising, competitive relations of capitalist society. Intriguingly, Marx and Engels never speak, in the *Communist Manifesto*, of “self-interest” as a characteristic of proletarian activity. Rather, the term is reserved for the bourgeoisie, which has “pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his ‘natural superiors’ and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous ‘cash payment.’”²⁰

We might read these famous lines as implying that the rule of the bourgeoisie has meant the universalisation of self-interest among all members of bourgeois society, including proletarians, submerged equally in the “icy waters of egotistical calculation”, and indeed Marx and Engels later describe the proletariat during the early stages of capitalism as an “incoherent mass scattered over the whole country, and broken up by competition”. But the centrifugal forces of competition that divide the proletariat are counterbalanced by the centralising development of industry, which gathers the dispersed proletarians and forms them into “compact bodies.”²¹ As capitalism develops, “the various interests and conditions of life within the ranks of the proletariat are more and more equalised, in proportion as machinery obliterates all distinctions of labour.”²² In other words, for the proletariat, class interest and individual interest are increasingly identical:

The organisation of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between the workers themselves. But it ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier. It compels legislative recognition of the particular interests of the workers, by taking advantage of the divisions among the bourgeoisie itself.²³

The arc of history bends toward the unification of the interests of the working class, whereas divisions among the bourgeoisie are, it would seem, less easy to overcome. Marx and Engels invert the argument about and from self-interest that one finds in Adam Smith, in which the pursuit of self-interest by individual capitalists redounds to the benefit of all. For Smith, it is the capitalist class which finds

20. Marx & Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 222.

21. *Ibid.*, 229.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*, 230

self-interest and collective interest identical. But for Marx and Engels — and this is the basis of Marx’s many attempts to explain crisis and the crisis-generating aspects of capitalism — such self-interested action ultimately erodes the conditions of possibility for capitalists, “cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products.”²⁴ Here this self-undermining character of capitalism is largely about the political force of a proletarian class that capitalist development unifies but the same argument will later be used to explain how the falling rate of profit results from the profit-seeking behaviour of individual capitalists, to name just one example.

Grounded in a theory of interest-based action, the “materialist conception of history” of Marx and Engels shows little need for pedagogical or pastoral supplement. This is not to say that there is no place for organisation or the elaboration of ideas; rather, these are treated as expressions of class struggle. As they write, “The theoretical conclusions of the Communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be reformer. They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes.”²⁵

25. *Ibid.*, 234.

Paradoxes of Self-Interest

In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels assert that as the social division of labour develops, so too does an opposition between individual and collective interest. From here emerges their theory of the state, based in part on the earlier works of political philosophy written by Marx, such as “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right” and “On the Jewish Question”. The state, for Marx and Engels, is a usurpation of the common interest: under conditions of “contradiction between the particular and the common interests, the common interest assumes an independent form as the *state*, which is divorced from the real individual and collective interests, and at the same time as illusory community, always based, however, on the real ties existing in every family conglomeration and tribal conglomeration — such as flesh and blood, language, division of labour on a larger scale, and other interests.”²⁶ The state exists as a

26. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 52.

false representation of common interest because it allows for the universalisation of the particular interests of the ruling class. The proletariat, however, is unique among classes in that its particular interests really *are* universal, since there is no way for it to emancipate itself without abolishing classes and thereby itself. The reasons Marx and Engels advance for this special proletarian destiny are multiple: for one, as we've seen, historical experience has brought proletarians together in workplaces where the divisions between them are levelled (as deskilling progresses, so too is there a universalisation of experience, ability, and consequently interest). Marx also seems to suggest, in his early writings on right and the state, that proletarian struggles exhibit a "universal character" inasmuch as they focus on forms of "universal suffering" and needs shared by all humans (such as the need for food and shelter): the wrong that the proletariat suffers therefore is not "a particular wrong" but "wrong in general".²⁷

In other words, proletarian struggles are rooted in the basic and materialist motives described above. There is also, finally, a simple numerical argument: ruling classes are, by definition, minorities. As they write in the *Manifesto*, "All previous historical movements were movements of minorities or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority".²⁸ A revolution in the interest of the "immense majority" can institute a new class rule only by betraying its *raison d'être*; it must abolish classes.

Even though most Marxists will off-handedly speak of class interests, few have attempted to elaborate on or develop any theory of interests, instead turning to confused concepts such as "consciousness" or "ideology" or black boxing the subjects of class struggle altogether. Those who have attempted to develop the theory, such as the writers associated with Analytical Marxism have frequently come to conclusions rather markedly different than Marx and Engels, insisting that the division between individual and collective interest is far more tenacious than originally thought. While most of so-called Western Marxism pursued different themes, the writers willing to investigate the theory of interest were those who mostly rejected core tenets of Marx's thought (especially his value theory) and displayed some

27. Karl Marx, 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right' in *Early Writings* (1992), 256.

28. Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, 232.

sympathy for the methodologies if not the motives of neoclassical economics, game theory in particular.²⁹ The key text for left-wing and Marxist game theory is probably Mancur Olson's *The Logic of Collective Action*. Though Olson is by no means a Marxist, and in fact elaborates his theory as a critique of Marx's conclusions, the problems that he poses and the conclusions he reaches strongly influence later Marxist investigations of the problem of class interest. Arguing against thinkers such as C. Wright Mills who, noting the relative lack of class struggle around them, concluded that people must not be aware of or capable of acting on their class interests, Olson claims instead that Marx was right to conclude that people are motivated by their interests but wrong to think that this will lead to collective action. "Class oriented action will not occur", Olson writes bluntly, "if the individuals that make up a class act rationally".³⁰ This is because, for Olson, group interests and individual interests diverge in cases where the group is sufficiently large or heterogeneous. Unlike the results of most individual actions (seeking out a better job, for example), actions by groups in pursuit of class interests produce, in most cases, benefits that accrue to all members of the class, whether or not those members participate in group action (think, here, of a campaign to raise the minimum wage or reduce taxes). There is thus a free-rider problem in the case of such class benefits. If individuals truly are motivated by self-interest alone, then they will conclude that it is better for them simply to take whatever benefits accrue to them from the actions of others rather than to suffer the costs of action themselves. The larger the group, Olson argues, the more likely the individual will reason thus, since in the cases of large groups the added benefit of any individual contribution to the group effort is negligible. What does it matter if I, or any one person, goes to the protest, attends the meeting, donates to the strike fund? When the group actions involve thousands or tens of thousands of people, the answer is: very little. Olson defines the matter in mathematically precise terms: if individuals will only find it rational to contribute to group efforts where the benefits from their contribution are greater than their costs, then this means that individuals will

29. Though as we will see, this literature depends upon a number of false assumptions and needless methodological reductions, it deserves serious readers, not least of all for its willingness to investigate questions others had been scared away from by antihumanist dogmatism.

30. Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Harvard University Press 1971), 105.

participate only when the fraction of the group benefit they receive is larger than the ratio of their costs to total group benefits. As groups increase in size, such a criterion becomes much more difficult to meet, except in cases where very minimal costs produce very large benefits.³¹ Otherwise, the effects of any extra individual effort will be too small to encourage participation. Whereas Marx thought optimising behaviour on the part of capitalists would lead to suboptimal outcomes for the capitalist class, Olson extends such a view to *all classes*.

As a left-wing institutionalist who worked for a period in the Johnson administration, Olson was committed to finding a rational basis for such things as labour unions and the provision of public goods by a welfarist state. Olson's treatment of the problem of collective action leads him to conclude that large collectives as well as states need mechanisms to compel individuals to act in the collective interest, lest "suboptimal" conditions result. Since the dilemmas of collective action he describes will apply to large groups of capitalists as well as large groups of workers, he argues for the necessity of a state's right to tax (in order to pay for public goods that redound to the benefit of capitalists but which they would not individually pay for, as rational profit-maximisers) as well as the necessity of the closed shop, compulsory union dues, and legal enforcement of strikes, without which, in his argument, no large union can survive. Though he is a rationalist, and relies on a rather blunt, utilitarian view of human action, this leads him to declare the inevitability of the pastoral supplement if social reform is desired. (Indeed, he suggests that it is Trotsky and Lenin, rather than Marx, who correctly perceive the consequences of self-interested and rational action and develop a coherent theory therefrom).³² With Olson, we see an

uneasy alliance between the rationalist approach, on the one hand, and the authoritarian or pedagogical approach on the other; if one concludes that rational, self-interested actors can only produce suboptimal outcomes — as Marx concluded of the bourgeoisie but not the proletariat — then one might decide, despite the rationalist anthropology, that a moral, ideological or authoritarian supplement is still necessary for social change. Though Olson figures social change along left-liberal and reformist lines, rather than revolutionary ones, many Marxists who attempt to elaborate on the Marxian

31. *Ibid.*, 22–43.

32. *Ibid.*, 106.

theory of interests in the wake of Olson's intervention will derive rather similar conclusions.

While most of Olson's Marxist interlocutors hail from the "Analytic Marxist" camp, the most interesting response may be that of Claus Offe and Helmut Wiesenthal, who come to Olson from the Frankfurt School and Jurgen Habermas rather than John Nash and the RAND corporation. Olson actually offers two separate, though related, reasons why individual and collective interests diverge. Before a collective can even begin to act in an effective way, and before individuals can determine their level of participation, there must be an agreement about common objectives. Therefore, collective action involves fixed "costs of organisation" — investments of time and other resources — that must precede any action and any benefits.³³

These are separate from the costs of action itself, and as groups become more internally heterogeneous (something that is related to but not necessarily dependent on size) the costs of organisation will rise. This provides a second reason why many attempts at collective action fail, or never occur at all, and why the centralisation of power within collective institutions is necessary, since such institutions have the ability to unilaterally decide on goals and suspend interminable deliberations about what goals should be pursued.

In their text, "Two Logics of Collective Action", Offe and Wiesenthal expand on this second problem — the heterogeneity problem — and suggest that it is the real limit to proletarian action.³⁴ Olson does not differentiate between groups in terms of class, and his mathematical treatment of the "logic of collective action" provides as its fundamental model a scenario where individual capitalist firms, competing with each other and attempting to maximise profit, must decide whether to restrict output and therefore increase price or expand output and decrease price. Offe and Wiesenthal suggest that this model is inapposite to the situation workers face and that there is not a single logic of collective action, but rather two logics, a capitalist logic and a proletarian one. Whereas capitalists can translate all of their desires into money terms, needing nothing more than to find the optima of a production function, proletarian desires are heterogeneous (some workers prioritise better pay, others prioritise conditions, others still

33. *Ibid.*, 47.

34. Claus Offe and Helmut Wiesenthal, 'Two Logics of Collective Action: Theoretical Notes on Social Class and Organizational Form' in *Political Power and Social Theory* vol. 1 (JAI Press 1980), 67–115.

more flexible schedules, childcare, health insurance, pensions). Despite the insuperable nature of inter-capitalist competition, firms will find it easier to coordinate and decide on a unitary course of action through business associations because of their singleness of purpose: profit. Workers, on the other hand, will face very high costs of organisation. Though they acknowledge that the problem of size discussed by Olson affects proletarian organisations, such that union strength follows an “inverse U-curve”, reaching a maximum at a certain size and then falling after that, they also insist that proletarian and bourgeois organisations face entirely different dilemmas: because of the heterogeneity of individual interests, proletarian organisations must deal with problems that can’t be attributed to size alone. Regardless of their differences, Offe and Wiesenthal agree with Olson that effective proletarian class struggle cannot come about on the basis of interest-based action: “only to the extent that associations of the relatively powerless succeed in the formation of a collective identity, according to the standards of which these costs of organisation are subjectively deflated, can they hope to change the original power relation”.³⁵ Offe and Wiesenthal therefore add to Olson’s pastoral solution a pedagogical, subjectivising one: one must educate workers to understand the benefits of acting in the name of the collective good.

The structures of collective action described above are, as many will recognise, forms of the *prisoner’s dilemma*, which is in many regards the primary example for social science of a situation where rational, self-interested action produces outcomes that are inferior for everyone. To review: in the prisoner’s dilemma, two conspirators, arrested by the authorities, are offered their freedom if they agree to inform on their partner (to “defect”, in the language of the game). If one defects and the other cooperates, the defector will be set free and the cooperator will serve 5 years. If both defect, they will both serve 3 years. If both cooperate, they will serve 1 year. The best outcome, from the perspective of the *class of prisoners*, is mutual cooperation. The best outcome is not the rational outcome, however, if the prisoners individually evaluate their chances in the face of the likely actions of the other. Regardless of what the other does, their “best reply” as individuals is to defect, and thus mutual defection is an “equilibrium” point of the scenario. This is in some ways the model for the

profit-lowering effects of capitalist development Marx describes, the suboptimal outcomes of Olson’s unionists, and many other rational irrationalities besides. What the game presumes, however, is that there is no trust between the players, nor communication, nor any awareness of the history of play. It is a one-off event where both players are fully individuated within the solitary confinement of a depthless carceral reason. In scenarios where these relational and temporal assumptions are relaxed, the prisoner’s dilemma can become an *assurance game*—that is, a game where mutual cooperation is an equilibrium point. For Marx and for many Marxists, proletarian action was basically an assurance game, an iterative prisoner’s dilemma which, played enough times and under certain conditions, led to a cooperative equilibrium point. In other words, even if we assume entirely self-interested, rational proletarians, mutual cooperation will be the best result, given that they will find themselves within an environment and structure conducive to cooperation. Collective and individual interests merge.

However, as Olson and Offe and Wiesenthal demonstrate, when one moves from a bilateral to an n-sided situation, in which one confronts thousands or even millions of actors, assurance is a much more complicated matter. The effects of communication between the parties as well as the weight of history, in cases where past “play” is part of the information available to present players, creates essentially incalculable complexities. Here, organisations and political leaders (“political entrepreneurs” as they are called, chillingly, by some of Olson’s readers) leap into the breach, solving the communicative and deliberative problems of thousand-sided exchanges through unilateral action and centralised communication, transforming the prisoner’s dilemma environment through sanctions and threats of sanction that then make cooperation rational. Organisations then become second-order agents confronting second-order social dilemmas, their ability to act conditioned by the size of their membership but also its militancy. Offe and Wiesenthal draw rather gloomy conclusions from these second-order effects, showing how proletarian organisations are forced into contradictory behaviour as a result of the structures in which they find themselves: on the one hand, they must demonstrate their *potential* to harm the class of capitalists through the use of the strike weapon, which requires a highly active membership; on the other

hand, in order to wrest concessions from the capitalist class they must use the strike weapon sparingly, and this requires a disciplined membership, one willing to fall in line with leadership. But such discipline will ultimately produce disaffected and passive unionists, unable to mobilise for strike when necessary. Adam Przeworski, in his use of game theory to treat class organisations, confronts a similar dilemma by way of different premises. In the essays included in *Capitalism and Social Democracy*, one of the most thoroughgoing and explicit attempts to create a mathematically rigorous Marxian game theory, Przeworski argues that, if the goal of class organisations is to conquer electoral power (as was the case for social democracy) then they will need to maximise their membership in order to achieve this aim.³⁶ But in almost all countries, the proletarian vote was never large enough for proletarian parties to conquer electoral power on their own, unless they formed coalitions with other parties and other class fractions. Therefore, proletarian parties were forced to either forsake the conquest of electoral power or seek out participants from other classes, where pursuit of the latter would require weakening the class program of the party. But this weakening would, in turn, dissolve proletarian identification with the party, and undermine the basis of proletarian belonging as such, leading proletarians to seek out other parties who might represent their interests on the basis of other forms of identification: Catholicism, or whiteness, for example. The result was failure either way. Whereas Mancur Olson thought that organisational or institutional agency might emend the problems caused by individual rationality and choice, Offe and Wiesenthal and Przeworski insist that those problems make themselves felt as constraints upon the action of organisations as well. The pedagogical and authoritarian supplements might be necessary to see any results at all, but they are incapable of fully solving the problem. As we will see, it is in fact much worse than that, and these supplements not only fail but in fact exacerbate the problem.

36. Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (Cambridge University Press 1985), 99–128.

IS IT REASONABLE TO REVOLT?

Both Przeworski's *Capitalism and Social Democracy* and Offe and Wiesenthal's "Two Logics of Collective Action" are crucial sources for

the important essay on the workers' movement, "A History of Separation", written by the Endnotes collective and published in their fourth issue.³⁷ There, the authors tell the story of a workers' movement continuously hobbled by the opposition between individual and collective interests. For Endnotes the question of class identity revolves around the problem of interest. In their view, the formation of a working-class "identity" was a way for the workers' movement to bridge, however shakily, the gap between the serial and collective interests. This involved the sort of pedagogical and moral (as well as pastoral) solutions described above. Collective interest was, therefore, mostly a construct: "Insofar as they made sacrifices in the name of the labour movement, workers generally were not acting in their immediate interest. To say that they affirmed a shared identity is to say that the movement succeeded in convincing workers to suspend their interests as isolated sellers in a competitive labour market, and, instead to act out of a *commitment* to the collective project of the labour movement". This is because, contrary to the predictions of Marx and Engels described above, the deskilling dynamic of the factory system did not effectively level the differences between proletarian factions; fragmenting forces at work in labour markets, commodity markets, and neighbourhoods nullified whatever fragile unity might have emerged in the workplace, and even there difference among workers according to skill, race, and gender remained far more tenacious than expected. Whatever weak, ideological and tentative unity did exist had to be "cobbled together" out of local organisations, and enforced by disciplinary structures that definitionally excluded proletarians who did not conform to the working-class norms (because they were drunks, or black, or shirkers.)

Endnotes is clear that this identity wasn't unilaterally "imposed" by working-class leaders, as some readings of Olson and some variants of the pastoral solution might imagine:

To the extent that workers were willing to believe that having solidarity was morally necessary, they were able to realise — partially and fitfully — the slogan "an injury to one is an injury to all". The phrase never described a preexisting truth about the working class; it was, instead, an ethical injunction.

37. Endnotes, 'A History of Separation' *Endnotes 4* (2015).

But insofar as workers accepted this injunction, their interests as *individuals* began to change: those interests were simplified, narrowed or even wholly redefined, but also partially fulfilled. By this means, competition between workers was muted, but only for as long as the shared ethic and identity could be maintained.³⁸ 38. *Ibid.*, 100.

Not an imposition, then, but a process of re-education and belief in which many workers willingly participated, offering their sacrifice and commitment, the effect of which was to establish in some limited manner a real rather than merely ideological bridge between individual and collective interest. For many of the writers discussed above, transformation of desire through education or compulsion is nothing less than the very basis of any radical transformation of society, the *sine qua non* of both reform and (for those who think it possible), revolution. Offe and Wessenthal or Przeworski may, as Marxists, lament the untenability of Marx's view of proletarians interest, individual and collective at once, and only with a certain chagrin accept the conclusions they reach, that self-interested action by proletarians will scuttle any attempt at collective action, all things being equal, but they suggest that this is simply what we have to work with, and if we seek a different world then we must be clear about what such a search entails. There is no possibility of serial interests converging with collective interest except through the intervention of educators, leaders, or institutions.

Given their reliance on these sources, a reader may wonder whether or not Endnotes is also pessimistic in this way, and similarly resigned to the necessity of the pedagogical or pastoral approach. Those of us familiar with their work, and in particular with the positions taken in the two companion pieces to "A History of Separation" — "The Holding Pattern" and "Spontaneity, Mediation, Rupture" — will know that they are actually considerably more optimistic about self-organisation than the writers referenced above. Toward the end of "A History of Separation", they acknowledge a different perspective on the unfolding of individual and collective interest, describing how, in opposition to the forgeries and falsifications of the collective worker, there may emerge a "real unity of the class... forged in self-organised struggle, when workers overcome their atomisation by creatively

constructing a new basis for collective activity".³⁹ Elsewhere, Endnotes describes this self-organisation as a cooperative solution to the prisoner's dilemma scenarios described in Olson and elsewhere, writing that "the seemingly indissoluble problem of struggle is finally solved only by struggle itself. Computationally, this solution can be described as the possible result of an iterated prisoners' dilemma".⁴⁰ As long as capitalism persists, whatever unifications are produced as a result of struggles will be fragile, transitory. In a communist revolution, however, proletarians produce a "real unification" that is at the same time an abolition of their status as proletarians, since they must become "the beyond of this society by relating to one another, materially, outside of the terms of the class relation".⁴¹ One definition of a classless society is one in which there is no longer an opposition between individual and collective interest (which is not to imply that interests never come into conflict). One of the main motivations of this essay is to further theorise the passage from the situation described in most of "A History of Separation" to the one hinted at in "Spontaneity, Mediation, Rupture".

Part of our task must be to think through the many different forms in which class struggle appears. When applied to the entire class of proletarians, the Wobbly maxim "an injury to one is an injury to all" indeed must remain mere ethical attitude, a transformation of Kant's categorical imperative into the indicative mood, describing an idealised condition of maximum solidarity and universal experience. But the phrase also emerges, I think, as an extrapolation from struggles where the "one" and the "all" do converge, and where the strength and safety of numbers alone is enough to ensure collective action, independent of moral imperative. This convergence depends partly on the size of the group concerned: it occurs with struggles on the scale of the enterprise or neighbourhood, rather than industrial sector or province, because as Olson and others have demonstrated, at such scales the consequences of one's action or inaction are immediately apparent. There is, also, perhaps more importantly the question of the type of struggle under consideration. In many conditions, people are attacked as a group rather than as individuals. If an employer threatens uniform reduction in wages, workers will find it

39. *Ibid.*, 165.

40. Endnotes, 'Spontaneity, Mediation, Rupture' *Endnotes 3* (2010).

41. Endnotes, 'The Holding Pattern' *Endnotes 3* (2010).

advantageous to resist together, since they are strongest that way. In this case, interests converge because of the defensive nature of the struggle and the collectivising character of the attack. Even in conditions where the attack abstracts from the group as a whole, singling out particular individuals, responding en masse may be the best response. Workers may conclude it's in their advantage to oppose the layoff of five of their fellow workers if they think it possible that a subsequent round of layoffs will target them (this indirect self-interest, in which one recognises one's dependence on the well-being of the other, is often called "enlightened self-interest"). In such a case, injury to the other promises the threat of injury to the self, and thus the maxim holds true beyond whatever moral power it may have. In the context of the workers' movement more generally, collective action was not always and only a matter of sacrifice and commitment; in many cases, there were practical and material benefits to joining the union or class party. As Endnotes indicates, the moral redefinition of interests allowed for their "partial" fulfilment. The paradox of the prisoner's dilemma is that the "irrational", morality-based or fanatical actions of some can change the nature of the interaction such that, for subsequent participants, cooperation appears as a real solution, one that can be arrived at through self-interested calculation alone. For those first dozen or so people, organising the union or the political organisation might have been a matter of sacrifice and political passion entirely, with the risks outweighing whatever meagre benefits they would see, but once the organisation has been formed, joining it may be the most logical choice of all, a clear pathway to higher wages and better working conditions.

None of this contradicts the main point of Endnotes' history, which is that the trajectory of capitalist development did more to atomise and fragment proletarians than it did to unify them. As we have seen, though, this history and the problems it introduces continues to lead many to conclude that neither reform nor revolution can occur independent of pastoral and pedagogical supplement. If, by contrast, we imagine revolution as the unfolding of proletarian self-organisation, as a solution to the problem of collective action that emerges as a consequence of struggle itself, then it's necessary to specify as clearly as possible the determinants that lead to this overcoming or, alternately, to the opposition of serial and collective interest. Some

of these determinants have already been mentioned: the size of the collective involved and its homogeneity or heterogeneity; whether the struggle is defensive or offensive, concerned with survival or increased well-being; whether the threat is individualising or collectivising. Struggles have different temporalities, too: they can be immediate or open-ended; focused on short-term or long-term goals; they can feature smooth, gradual change or sudden discontinuities. The formal models discussed above all assume a type of class struggle mediated by national trade unions or class parties, and oriented toward gradual improvements in proletarian welfare through bilateral negotiations. But this is only one of the many forms proletarian struggle can take, and the dilemmas of collective action would appear very different if these authors had taken a riot, a prison revolt, or guerrilla warfare as their foundational example.

Formal, game-theoretic analysis gravitates toward the trade union model, in part, because it can be treated with the techniques of neoclassical economics. Many of the models of rational, interest-based action that are available essentially assume, by treating choices as *purchases*, that interest is more or less monetary and every need can be given a price, with costs and benefits evaluated in directly monetary terms. This is where, despite the restriction of their own models to the social democratic scenario, Offe and Wieselth offer an important criticism of the literature on the logic of collective action, arguing that such reductions conflate a proletarian logic of collective action with a bourgeois one. For capitalists, interest is more or less directly correlated with *interest rate*; capitalists seek to maximise returns on investment, and the interest rate measures the guarantees capitalists would need to decide to invest in a particular endeavor, given the risks. To be sure, inasmuch as proletarians are market-dependent, and some large portion (but not all) of their needs accessible only through money, they also participate in optimising logics. The organisation of capitalist society seeks to monetise and quantify proletarian interest as much as possible, and this is one way to understand what the wage is, a machine for disciplining and conditioning proletarian reason such that it remains congruent with the requirements of capitalist reproduction. The dispiriting conclusions of Mancur Olson and Adam Przeworski result, in part, from the narrow definition of interest with which they begin, and from their assumption

that the work of subsuming proletarian need under money has been completed.

A fine example of the limits that these assumptions introduce is Przeworski's attempt, with Michael Wallerstein, to model class struggle as a pair of simultaneous equations for labour and capital, where labour chooses the wage rate (by its degree of militancy) and capital determines the rate of investment (by virtue of its property rights).⁴²

Since the wage rate affects profit, and the degree of investment affects wages, each actor is forced to maximise an equation (for wages and consumable revenue, respectively) where they control one key variable and their antagonist controls the other. While workers in this scenario are naturally inclined to increase militancy as much as possible and therefore increase their consumption, doing so will provoke disinvestment, and thus, counter-productively, lower future wages. Capitalists, for their part, must reinvest a large enough share of their returns lest they provoke a degree of militancy which will lower the rate of profit. In such a scenario, the rational strategies that the actors will pursue depend not only upon the productivity of capital but also the degree of certainty that they hold about the future. If both sides are reasonably certain that the present balance of militancy and investment will hold far into the future, then the interdependence of the actors will have a moderating influence, introducing negative feedback that counteracts any increase in militancy or disinvestment. The main thrust of this argument is to show that workers will never choose to move in the direction of total expropriation and seizure of the whole sum of the social product, because any steps in that direction will produce capital flight that will immediately lower workers' future consumption. As a critique of socialisms that imagine a gradual process of socialisation mediated by trade unions and workers' parties, this scenario is absolutely correct, and grasps a key aspect of the problem for such attempts to maximise workers' welfare: their dependence upon a course of accumulation control over which lies entirely in the hands of capitalists. The social democratic project finds itself confronted with an uncrossable "valley of transition", in which deteriorating economic fundamentals make any passage toward eventual improvements impossible if undertaken

42. Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy*, 151–204; 'Workers' Welfare and the Socialization of Capital' in Michael Taylor, ed., *Rationality and Revolution: Studies in Marxism and Social Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 1988).

on a slow, step-by-step basis. As Offe and Wieselthaler themselves note, dependence upon the rate of investment will mean that workers' organisation must be as concerned about the health of capitalists as they must be about workers' welfare.

Przeworski and Wallerstein arrive at their conclusions in large part because of the narrowness of their assumptions, excluding all sorts of revolutionary projects and motivations that don't fit the neo-classical lineaments of their model. For instance, it is not at all clear that we can model the strategic choices of proletarians in terms of an attempt to maximise future value. Proletarian uncertainty is here defined explicitly as a "discount rate" — that is, an *interest rate*. Workers and capitalists discount (or devalue) future revenue relative to present revenue according to their sense of how likely present arrangements are to continue on the same footing. Not only does this form of reasoning assume the translatability of proletarian needs into money terms pure and simple, but it also requires a prospective, future-oriented, and mathematical rationality. To be sure, most people who live in capitalism understand that money which is not spent but invested grows in value, and capitalism offers the working class options for such investment in the form of pensions, real estate equity, mutual funds and the like, but Przeworski and Wallerstein are imagining a fairly elaborate mathematical reasoning, one based on an actor peering far into the future. Given the inherent complexity and difficulty of proletarian life, these do not seem reasonable assumptions about the strategies proletarians might pursue, even if we agreed to limit welfare to money alone. Notably, however, Przeworski and Wallerstein do not, however, imagine these strategies as pursued by *individual* proletarians but rather by class organisations: the examples the writers give are of compromises and strategies such as the Matignon agreement signed by Léon Blum's Popular Front government or the pegging of wages to prices by US trade unions and employers in the 1950s and 1960s. In such cases, one can expect highly future-oriented, mathematically sophisticated reasoning by strategic actors, but this is to assume class struggle will proceed along a technocratic path dominated by class institutions. The writers therefore exclude from consideration any instance where revolution unfolds as the result of the self-organised activity by proletarians who respond to local conditions and immediate objectives and take actions that

are, as often as not, opposed by the various class organisations that would represent them and their interests. Nearly all revolutions unfold, at least initially, in this way, as a fragmented field of actions both uncoordinated and contradictory. We see therefore how formal, mathematical representation, in theory, of class interests by writers like Przeworski and Wallerstein bears some relationship to the substitutionist representation of those interests in practice, by parties and trade unions. In both cases, the heterogeneity of proletarian need must be doused in the universal solvent of money, and where proletarian reason might lead to dangerous and unreasonable conclusions, such as increased militancy, a moderating form of highly prospective and formal rationality must be asserted. Przeworski and Wallerstein state their assumptions about the rational conclusions of proletarian actors as follows: “workers consent to the perpetuation of profit as an institution in exchange for the prospect of improving their material well-being in the future. In terms of such a compromise capitalists retain the capacity to withhold a part of the product because the profit they appropriate is expected by workers to be saved, invested, transformed into productive potential, and partly redistributed as gains to workers”.⁴³ The voice we hear in such a passage is clearly not the interests of workers as they are, as they might *present* themselves to us, but the interests of workers as ventriloquised, as *represented* by class organisations.

43. Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy*, 180.

BEYOND SELF-INTEREST

What, then, can we say about motives, self-interest, and rationality, if models such as these fail? Though not ultimately usable for the purposes of our investigation, recent work within game theory has attempted to use its techniques while abandoning some of its more untenable assumptions about human motivation. Samuel Bowles, for example, has attempted to develop game theoretic models independently of what he describes as the “Walrasian” paradigm, where “individuals choose actions based on the far-sighted evaluations of their consequences” in accord with “preferences that are self-regarding and exogenously determined”.⁴⁴ Bowles offers a much looser sense of motivated action and a very different kind of rationality than, for

instance, Przeworski.⁴⁵ In his models, “individuals intentionally pursue their objectives, but they do this more often by drawing on a limited repertoire of behavioural responses to past experience than by engaging in the cognitively demanding forward-looking optimising processes assumed by the Walrasian approach and by much of classical game theory”.⁴⁶ In other words, the version of game theory that Bowles employs— which he calls *evolutionary game theory*— “assumes that people act with limited information about the consequences of their actions, and that they update their beliefs by trial-and-error methods using local knowledge based on their own and others recent past experience”.⁴⁷ Rather than simply trying to find equilibrium states, and imagining that society conforms to the arrangements at such points, the evolutionary approach stresses the importance of the *order of play* and the temporal sequence leading to such equilibria. Bowles emphasises out-of-equilibrium dynamics and the importance of understanding the steps that lead to any stable point. History matters, in other words, not only as knowledge that actors draw upon in making their decisions (unlike the ahistorical, purely rational actions of the prisoners in a prisoner’s dilemma game) but also as structure, as the set of past outcomes that, in persisting, condition present action. Actions are “path-dependent”. Equilibria may exist but be “evolutionarily irrelevant”— that is, not attainable by any of the paths available to actors. The relevance of this line of thinking to an account of revolutionary transformation is clear. The old, Marxist critique of “utopian socialism” can be rewritten in evolutionary terms. That a utopia is imaginable, and that it would be a workable arrangement of human affairs means nothing if one cannot demonstrate how it might result from the conflicts and motivated actions in the here and now, from the “real movement” of history.

The evolutionary approach to game theory began with early attempts to explain the cooperative behaviour displayed by humans and animals. Since the time of Darwin, many biologists had assumed that cooperation observed in nature had to do with the perpetuation of the genetic material which coded for it.⁴⁸ Natural selection would cultivate

44. Samuel Bowles, *Microeconomics: Behavior, Institutions, and Evolution* (Princeton University Press 2004), 8.

45. We might call this reason, in the sense that involves if-then reasoning, and reserve the term rationality for the more restrictive conceptualisation of Przeworski and others.

46. Bowles, *Microeconomics*, 10.

47. *Ibid.*, 11.

the expression of altruistic “genes” in cases where such behaviour helped to preserve closely-related kin and therefore, by extension, the genetic material that codes for it. And yet, numerous examples of altruistic behaviour cannot be made sense of by kinship theory: how to explain cooperation between species, or cooperation between individuals who share too little genetic material for kinship benefits? The prisoner’s dilemma scenario establishes a high hurdle for such explanation, since cooperation must benefit not only the group (as it most obviously will) but the individuals displaying cooperative behaviour. The seminal breakthrough was the publication by Robert Axelrod and William Hamilton of “The Evolution of Cooperation” which met the challenges of the prisoner’s dilemma directly by establishing the conditions for the “initiation of cooperation from a previously asocial state”.⁴⁹ Axelrod and Hamilton investigate the “iterative prisoner’s dilemma” which Endnotes refers to, examining how through a series of encounters a cooperative strategy might emerge and prevail. In such cases, the best strategy is neither “always defect” nor “always cooperate” but rather “Tit for Tat”, where the player cooperates on the first turn and then mirrors the other player’s previous move on every other turn. In the simulations that Axelrod and Hamilton ran, Tit for Tat not only scored better than other strategies but, in games where the distribution of strategies in a particular round was tied to the payoffs for those strategies in the previous round — i.e., where the number of players using Tit for Tat was proportional to the total payoff for such players — Tit for Tat eventually went to “fixation”, meaning every player was using Tit for Tat and thus every player was cooperating all the time. This is a measure of the “robustness” of the strategy, or how easily it spreads. In addition to “robustness”, Axelrod and Hamilton add two other measures necessary to determine the probable success of a strategy: “stability” and “initial viability”. Tit for Tat is stable because the emergence of players using another strategy will not displace it as the dominant strategy. Initial viability is a bit more complicated. Tit for Tat can take over whenever there is a significant clustering of people willing to employ the scenario. In an evolutionary scenario, this can happen with kinship effects, but Bowles and Gintis provide another explanation for such initial viability among humans. Noting that bands of early

48. R. Axelrod and W. D. Hamilton, ‘The Evolution of Cooperation’ *Science* vol. 211 no. 4489 (1981): 1391.

49. *Ibid.*

humans were probably too large for such kinship effects to establish initial viability, they propose, instead, that intense inter-band violence and competition for resources created a situation in which those groups which had a high number of altruists (people willing to risk suffering and death for their group) would fare better on the field of battle, and thus their genetic material would be conserved. Whether true or not, the natural historical irony here is impressive. Given the violent crises from which revolutions emerge, we may want to hold in mind the idea that altruistic human behaviour arose as a consequence of inter-group violence.

Tit for Tat is an example of what is called “reciprocal altruism”, which means that other-regarding behaviour is ultimately compatible with self-interest and self-preservation, since the results for the individual are good in the long run. In other words, Tit for Tat does not require humans to be innately altruistic. This is probably how Marx and Engels conceived of not only the class interests of the proletariat but also a communism in which “the free development of each is the condition of the free development of all”. Bowles and Gintis, however, find examples of “other-regarding” and altruistic behaviour far beyond the reciprocal case. In a survey of far-ranging studies undertaken with people in numerous cultural contexts, Bowles and Gintis find that people act with an eye to the benefit of others even when there’s no chance that such action will ultimately benefit them. People generally cooperate in the prisoner’s dilemma, even when it’s a one-off game and they’ll never encounter their partner again. Furthermore, people seem not only to value the well-being of others (beyond family and kin) but also display a distaste for inequality and unfairness: they will give up something to punish those who exploit others and they appear to value this punishment for its own sake and not just its ability to ultimately improve their lot through indirect effects. Strictly egoistic behaviour seems to be largely an artefact of certain situations and relations. In an n-dimensional version of the prisoner’s dilemma — called the public goods game — people conform to the Olson scenario eventually, over time, as a small number of defectors eventually lead people to conclude that cooperation means they are simply being exploited. This helps us understand how the self-interested behaviour we observe in capitalism is a product of wage and market and the individualising structure of modern life, rather than the other way around.

None of this implies that people sacrifice themselves body and soul to the common good; the well-being of others and equality are values in and of themselves, but by and large people are only willing to give up a certain amount for such principles. If given a magic wand with which they could heal a terminally ill stranger, few people would not do so, if their only cost was the time it took to wave the wand in the air and repeat some magic words. This alone shows that people are not indifferent to the suffering of others. But now, imagine what happens if we increase the cost for the altruist: use of the wand now requires some sacrifice. One can cure the stranger but only if one agrees to go a week without visiting one's lover, to spend a few hours filling out paperwork, or drink tea rather than coffee for the rest of the month. The costs most people are willing to assume in such a situation are not zero, it seems safe to say, but they are also probably not very high. The experiments Bowles and Gintis cite and construct, we should note, involve relatively low stakes. The point for us is that there are situations, revolutionary situations in particular, in which "social" rather "selfish" preferences, can flourish, but there are also situations which crush them. Furthermore, the criteria that evolutionary game theory hands down—robustness, stability, initial viability—are a good shorthand for the conditions which communist practices will have to satisfy. They must emerge, they must flourish, and they must repel more or less all subsequent attempts to repel them. Communism would be a situation in which the opposition between social and selfish preference has been undone, where the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all. We need not have anything to say about human genetic evolution, of course, nor should we accept the idea that communism relies on the behavioural characteristics of individuals rather than the practices that emerge between them. The evolutionary approach succeeds by thinking the problem of change, but along with the Walrasian paradigm there is still a focus on the micro-economic, on iterative, dyadic encounters, that may not serve to capture the complex, many-sided unfolding of motive and determination in revolutionary situations that involve both individual and collective decision making. Nonetheless, we can summarise the value of the approach of Bowles and others: its emphasis on equilibrium state as destination rather than origin and its willingness to think through the problems of path-dependency; its elaboration of the

criteria of robustness, stability, and initial viability; its reminder that egoism and altruism are, to some degree, the results of social structure rather than expressions of human essence and, in any case, only in opposition within certain constraints; and finally, its reminder that group size matters, especially for producing conditions of reciprocity.

TOWARD A THEORY OF REVOLUTIONARY MOTIVES

We now have in place a number of key ingredients for a theory of revolutionary motives. Motives are, let's recall, different from beliefs and ideas, and cannot be subsumed by a theory of ideology, even where such a theory, as in Althusser, sees ideology as the product of particular material institutions and their power to compel action. Motives emanate from underlying needs and desires, and while in the long-term these may be conditioned, formed or generated by social structure, the capitalist institutions cannot compel behaviour through a change of motives. Rather, they must act through a modification of beliefs or ideas about how such motives must be realised. Two proletarians with the same motives, for example, may behave differently for the simple reason that they have different beliefs about the consequences of their actions. The pastoral and pedagogical approaches to revolution often confuse motives with ideology, and think that the former can be educated or transformed in the same manner as the latter. But it is very difficult to educate people's most fundamental desires. One cannot easily educate away, for instance, one's desire to be fed, housed, clothed. A revolutionary theory must work with people's motives, with desires as they are. Nonetheless, a theory of motives does not imply that revolutionary action is reflexive and instinctual, a blind expression of immutable necessity. We should reject what E. P. Thompson called the "spasmodic" view of human action, in which collective action is a "simple response to economic stimuli" and "compulsive, rather than self-conscious or self-activating".⁵⁰

Motives manifest as tendency, on average and in the long-run, and since the consequences of action are unclear, motives unfold through forms of deliberation, reflection and collective discussion. The convergence of proletarian motives (not to mention the motives of other classes) is never a given, despite sometimes

50. E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century' *Past & Present* vol. 50 no. 1 (1971), 76.

optimistic accounts. In certain situations, individual interests oppose collective interests, not because of an inherent egoism but because of the atomising, competition-inducing character of the wage relation, the money-form, and the fragmentation of the labour process and social reproduction. Capitalist society is structured so as to inhibit the formation of collective interests at any sort of scale. Whether or not such a collectivity emerges has to do with a number of factors, as noted previously. To recapitulate, the size of the group and the degree of its heterogeneity matters, with smaller and more heterogeneous groups finding convergence easier. Defensive struggles seem to have an easier time than offensive struggles, and this seems to depend on whether or not the character of the threat is individualising or collectivising; defensive struggles also often focus on rights and privileges that already have a clear subject, whereas struggles for gains or changes not yet achieved have to call a group into being. Struggles have different temporalities, too: they can be immediate or open-ended; they can have short-term goals or long-term goals or no clear goals whatsoever; they can feature smooth, gradual change or jagged discontinuity. The temporality of struggle is, by and large, irreversible, exhibiting a strong degree of path-dependency such that one has to consider the question of viability from given historical conditions and not simply in general. There are all manner of social arrangements incapable of any existence beyond the blackboard. Furthermore, different tactics and strategies may require different degrees of collectivisation: labour organising by way of the strike weapon, riots, and guerrilla warfare will require different degrees of convergence.

As stated earlier, a theory of revolutionary motives is different from a theory of motives in general. A theory of revolutionary motives is concerned with motives that are basic, elemental, and common and operates with the assumption that, in revolutionary situations, these become the basis for collective action. A theory of revolutionary motives is different in this way, from the concept of motive one finds in the criminal courtroom or in literary criticism. In the court, motive is the soul of incriminating evidence; it is what gives forensic shape to the constellation of empirical and pseudo-empirical observations that prosecutors must use to convict defendants. It is an absent cause, rarely observed directly, endowing with meaning the actions of the accused. In the novel and in drama, motive is the watermark that

guarantees the authenticity or coherence of a character, barely discernible between sentences or lines. Revolutionary motives are, on the other hand, the motives of the many. They may be individualising, but they individualise great masses of people. When we move from jury box to barricade, the question of motive is not why one did it but why one would. What convicts the defendant is the ground of the partisans' conviction—acting in common, without judge or jury, often requires laying bare those grounds. Such partisans do not compose a revolutionary “subject”, nor much less a collective protagonist, except by the worst sorts of simplifications. Not only will the basic motives at play be multiple but the ideas about how to realise them, as well as the actions that follow from these ideas will be multiple, inasmuch as the partisans find themselves placed differently and confront different structures and constraints. A guiding assumption for most theorists of revolution is that the class of proletarians must unify itself before any revolutionary undertaking, overcoming its internal differences, in order to act decisively. If the goal is the overcoming of class society, however, such unification may be both unnecessary and counterproductive; counterproductive because it can end up hypostatising the class condition it should abolish and unnecessary because a many-sided fight, a situation of revolution inside revolution, can itself destabilise capitalism and provide the opening for communism to emerge. A theory of revolutionary motives will, ideally, help such partisans understand the plural field of revolutionary actions and its probable unfolding, understand their own and others' motivations. There is no singular protagonist, but there is a shared narrative: the revolution is an epic without heroes, a crime that, if successful, leaves behind no one who might judge it.

Reciprocity under Fire

Many treatments of motive attempt to explain the source of everyday behaviour, to tell us why a consumer may choose one commodity over another or why a worker may choose more free time instead of more money. For my part, I am only concerned with the motivated actions of people in exceptional situations of great social instability where the stakes are extraordinarily high. As such, I can leave undecided the question of whether or not any coherent economic or sociological

theory of motives can be developed from and for quotidian interactions. Revolutionary motives are not necessarily everyday motives, and what serves to explain one may be more or less useless in the case of the other. It is possible that many everyday actions and interactions are habitual or customary, unmotivated, and ungrounded. Riots, rebellions, uprisings, and revolutions, however, are extraordinary situations in which people can no longer rely on habit or custom, on conventional techniques for meeting their needs and getting through their day; they are forced to deliberate and strategise, individually or collectively, in order to meet basic needs. At the same time, these are situations of great optimism, in which the possibility of a total restructuring of society mobilises people's most profound desires, both for their own well-being and, beyond that, perhaps for the well-being of people in general.

Jean-Paul Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is unique, at least among philosophical treatment of motive, in its willingness to situate questions of collective interest and group formation in exceptional moments of crisis and insurrection. One of the key examples in his book is the storming of the Bastille, an event that transforms the atomised individuals of the working class districts of Paris into an "ensemble of solidarities" or *fused group*.⁵¹

For Sartre, group action occurs through the overcoming of "seriality", defined as the passive being of individuals as they are gathered into inert collectives, unified by and through their separation from each other. His primary example of seriality is a gathering of people waiting for a bus on a Parisian street corner.

They are a collective, in Sartre's terms, oriented by a common goal (to get on a bus and travel to their destination) but this by no means produces a practical unity. First off, they are set against each other by conditions of material scarcity: there are not enough spaces on the bus for each of them. At the same time, as generic individuals they confront "the impossibility of deciding which individuals are dispensable in terms of the intrinsic qualities of the individuals".⁵² Lest they descend into a war of all against all in the face of scarcity, some mechanism must be introduced which makes it possible to "differentiate every Other from Others without adding anything to his characteristic as *Other*". In the example of the bus stop,

51. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (Verso 2004), 346.

52. *Ibid.*, 261.

this mechanism is the bus ticket which establishes their first come first serve right to a seat, but, as we learn elsewhere, market prices, gossip and radio broadcast can also serialise individuals quite effectively. In all his examples, worked matter as the residue of past labour (which Sartre calls the *practico-inert*) plays a role in determining the arbitrary orders and establishing the necessary conditions of scarcity which seriality presupposes. The technical characteristics of the bus and the abstract characteristics of the ticket together serialise individuals. The bus can only run so often and can only contain so many people; the tickets are identical and yet, at the same time, marked with a distinct number. Seriality is thus determined by objects but also by a *formula*, some way of ranking or otherwise dividing the members of the collective to assure their fungible atomisation, where "everyone is identical with the Other in so far as the others make him an Other acting on the Others".⁵³ One can know one's place in the line (n) only by taking count of every person before (n-1, n-2, ...) and after (n+1, n+2, ...).

53. *Ibid.*, 264.

Critique of Dialectical Reason provides an admirable account of the fusion of serialised and opposed interests in the heat of riot. Exchanges between potential insurgents and authorities have the effect of unifying an otherwise serialised crowd. In the breakdown that preceded the storming of the Bastille, for instance, the appearance of troops in the streets of Paris led people to loot the arsenals in the Tuileries as a defensive measure. Sartre is insistent that these were not group actions, but acts of "serial, defensive violence" motivated by *contagion* and *imitation*: "everyone was forced to arm himself by others' attempts to find arms, and everyone tried to get there before the Others because, in the context of this new scarcity, everyone's attempt to get a rifle became for the Others the risk of remaining unarmed".⁵⁴ However, what the authorities saw in the looting of the Tuileries was that "the people of Paris armed themselves against the king". This violent designation as enemy had the effect of unifying Parisians after the fact. As the army took up position outside the working-class district of St. Antoine, residents were massified by the simple fact that they shared a potential future as victims of a massacre. Sartre's discussion is unique in the role it assigns to the material construction of the neighbourhood: "the opportunity for troops to enter the district by coming from the west and

54. *Ibid.*, 354.

the north-west in order to massacre people there". This "hodological determination" produced a basic division of labour among the unified rebels; some people would have to defend against the troops, whereas others would have to storm the Bastille, whose cannons shadowed the district, and whose stockpiled arms would need to be taken from the troops and distributed to the people. It was the totalising power of the threat that unified the rebels of Paris and made possible later forms of collective action with a more explicit basis.

Sartre also provides a rich phenomenology of collective action, describing beautifully the experience of being swept up within the fused group. This experience, Sartre argues, does not depend on a binary relationship (between the individual and the group) but a ternary one (between separate individuals who, as third parties, themselves stand in for and act as the group for each other). In the unfolding of insurrection, every person becomes the face and voice of the group and anyone can speak up and direct the group: *stand back! watch out! go left! let's barricade this street!* In the same way, every person becomes, through the mediation of the group, subjected to any other person's direction. This state of reciprocity, of seeing oneself in the other and seeing the other in oneself, by way of the group, is the very basis of meaningful collective action. Sartre's book is unique in that it not only tells us what these mass affects feel like but also provides a compelling account of how they originate. Revolutionary motives emerge where material infrastructures (such as the Bastille) and the actions of antagonist forces (such as the French crown) collapse serial and collective interests. With Sartre, we have a properly historical rather than moral account of collective action. We also have an account of how an incipient division of labour results from the material arrangement of spaces and forces, such that even the most spontaneous groups must spontaneously segment themselves in order to confront an enemy that approaches, for example, from two separate directions.

In the chapters that follow his introduction of the fused group, Sartre chronicles how groups decay back into serialised collectives. For Sartre, the differentiation of functions within the group is the necessary but not sufficient condition of such re-serialisation. Groups persist beyond the immediacy of uprising through a form of *pledge*, which maintains group identification despite spatial distance (the members are members even when they are in separate neighbourhoods) and

temporal distance (the members agree to stay together because they anticipate a future moment when group self-defence will be necessary). Once pledged, the homogeneity of the group and the fungibility of its members can be maintained despite a differentiation of function. Division of labour is not itself a problem, since reciprocity and the equalities of the fused group can be maintained despite it: anybody can potentially fulfill any of the functions, just as anyone can stand up and direct the group in the middle of a riot. The decay of the group into an institution, a thing, occurs not because of functional differentiation but because individuals become identified with their function such that reciprocity is weakened: *I know what I'm doing, thus I do not need to listen to you*. The result is distrust and dysfunction and the reintroduction of atomising, serial force to which the only response is the creation of immovable structures that compel decision behind the backs of participants: discipline now must be codified by various rules and enforced by sanction, incentive, and organised violence.

Egoism and Counter-revolution

Sartre thus distinguishes between the collective, the group in fusion, the organisation, and the institution. If the serial individuals waiting for the bus are a *collective*, and the rioters storming the Bastille a *group in fusion*, the *organisation* begins to differentiate itself internally while maintaining the reciprocity of the fused group, whereas the *institution* makes those differentiations the basis of renewed seriality, once sanctioning power stands over and against each individual, weakening reciprocity. This is one way, perhaps, of understanding the opposition between serial and collective interest as an emergent, historical phenomenon rather than an ontological one. We might need to modify Sartre's presentation, however. While it's probably true that the institution emerges as a solution to the problem of seriality, it may be equally true that seriality emerges as the consequence of institutional attempts to remedy it. The cure is also the poison.

The best histories of the revolutions of the 20th century make this much clear. Donald Filtzer's study of Stalinist industrialisation, for example, revolves around a counter-intuitive but compelling argument: workers in the USSR were more atomised, egoistic, and serialised than labourers in capitalist countries, not because they were too weak

but because they were too powerful.⁵⁵ Stalinist industrialisation was extraordinarily wasteful, not only of raw materials but also of labour inputs. Demand for labour quickly outstripped supply, which led not only to widespread job turnover, as workers sought out pay differentials in the fragmented labour market, but also to extreme insubordination: the labour shortage made it difficult for managers to dismiss workers for absenteeism or insubordination. Since this dynamic was not only caused by waste of labour and raw materials but produced it as well, the Stalinist elite were incapable of eliminating the problem at the root. What they could do, however, was lower wages uniformly and, subsequent to that, crush any attempt by workers to organise openly and collectively to protect the value of their labour power. The result was a working class that was weak collectively but incredibly strong individually. Filtzer summarises the conclusions of his study as follows:

Deprived of any means to defend their interests collectively, the labour shortage and the subsequent breakdown of the traditional labour market, in particular the disappearance of the threat of unemployment, placed the workers in a position to appropriate considerable control over the individual labour process, most notably their work speed, how they organised their work, and the quality of the products they produced or the operations they performed. Managers, under their own pressures to meet production targets under near chaotic conditions, had little choice but to accommodate. Managerial concessions to workers were of two types. First were those to do with violations of labour discipline. This was a simple function of supply and demand: workers were scarce and managers could not afford to fire workers who committed grave violations of discipline regulations. As the regime imposed more stringent penalties for absenteeism, lateness, alcoholism, and insubordination, managers found themselves having to take a more active role in insulating workers from these sanctions... Managers needed not only to hold on to their workforces but to achieve some basic degree of

55. Donald A. Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: The Formation of Modern Soviet Production Relations, 1928-1941* (M.E. Sharpe 1986), 116-24, 254-71.

co-operation in order to minimise disruptions to production endemic in the Stalinist system. They therefore came to tolerate workers' substantial control over how they used their work time, did little to combat the persistence of irrational and inefficient forms of work organisation, accepted relatively high levels of defective or poor quality output, and took steps to protect workers' earnings by keeping output norms low and inflating their wages.⁵⁶

56. *Ibid.*, 256-57.

The Stalinist regime also introduced various moral appeals to labour discipline combined with institutional incentives — first the system of “shock workers” and then “Stakhanovism”. But this only gave the managers more tools to retain workers and introduced more disorganisation into the pattern of accumulation, leading to waste of inputs, defective outputs, and production of goods without any sense of whether they were in demand or not. By making itself into the sole representative of the collective interest of the working class — a collective and pseudo-universal interest disguising particular, opportunist interests — the Soviet elite produced structures that amplified and overdetermined the egoism of Soviet workers, making any sort of merger of collective and serial interest impossible. Institutions of this sort produce serial interest even more than they respond to it.

This is then one way to understand the passage from revolution to counter-revolution. While Mancur Olson and others recommend overcoming the dilemmas of collective action through moral appeal, ideological re-education, and institutional sanction or incentive, these supplements in fact generate serialised, egoistic motive much more than they address it. The result is a vicious cycle in which attempts to resolve these dilemmas exacerbate the problem of serial interest, and then seem to require even more violent or unequal institutional compulsions. (Moral enjoiner is, of course, abandoned at a certain point, except as a fig leaf for organised violence or opportunism). Michael Seidman's *Republic of Egos* demonstrates that counter-revolutionary dynamics cut across ideological divides often thought to immunise virtuous and noble revolutionaries from their deluded or craven peers, plaguing anarchists in Republican Spain just as much as the Stalinist elite in the USSR.⁵⁷ For Seidman, the militancy

displayed in the first few months of the Spanish civil war, motivated not only by a quest for material well-being, but by ideological commitment, heroism, and sacrifice, quickly gave way to a succession of opportunism, cynicism, and finally, when the chance that the revolution would succeed seemed totally extinguished, a survivalist war of all against all. As expected, the subversion of Republican efforts by selfish motives was, in many regards, the result of choices undertaken by militants. For example, military units that provisioned themselves by looting peasants quickly undermined whatever support they might have expected from this group. As Seidman summarises:

The Republic proved incapable of fighting an industrial war, particularly a trench war, which required massive supplies of food, clothing, materials, and weapons. Although Loyalists inherited initial advantages in resources and industry, their enemies proved logistically superior. The ephemeral Republican victories at Teruel and Ebro and even the defense of Madrid may have boosted morale, but they could not resolve its problems of political economy. Privation caused growing alienation. The Republic was unable to retain the commitment and devotion of the urban dwellers who initially sustained it. Nor did it arouse the enthusiasm of rural populations, including collectivists, who resented its price controls... However, internal divisions among workers themselves compounded political tensions and economic deficiencies. Many, if not most, gave priority to their own needs first and then considered those of communities larger than themselves and their families. Activists devoted to a cause had to confront a relatively selfish rank and file. Village requirements provoked more solidarity than region, republic, or revolution. The degree of commitment declined as the group became bigger or the cause more abstract.⁵⁸

57. Michael Seidman, *Republic of Egos: A Social History of the Spanish Civil War* (University of Wisconsin Press 2002).

58. *Ibid.*, 235.

The result was a cascading erosion of solidarity, as seriality was entrenched in all but the most dedicated fighters, and those originally committed to the cause decided, in the face of persistent defeat and privation, that they needed to focus on survival for themselves and their intimates. As the geography of the war placed the Republic in a materially disadvantageous situation (cut off from the grain and cattle lands of the southwest), attempts to ameliorate its logistical problems through “wage and price controls...backfired by reinforcing agrarian egotisms”.⁵⁹ These then created the situation for egotism among would-be militants and military defeat. Seidman’s book is in many regards under-theorised as an account of revolutionary motives; he doesn’t say much about whether or not egotism is the invariant bedrock of social action or, in this case, a contingent feature of unfortunate historical unfolding. His account seems motivated by little more than a desire to overturn the heroising accounts of the Spanish civil war (for many, the only noble 20th-century revolution) and lay bare its tragic flaws. It is nonetheless useful as an account of how revolutions die.

59. *Ibid.*, 236.

Powers of Spite

In Seidman and Filtzer, we see how attempts to overcome the atomisation of interests through moral suasion or institutional compulsion produce further atomisation and further destabilising egoism. We may be inclined to believe in this sense that moral and social motives are in general only strongly held by a small group of people, an active minority which, as the residue of some prior mass action, remains in the space of the insurrection through the prolonging force of the “pledge”. This is no doubt one viable revolutionary scenario: the fused group emerges as a consequence of material infrastructures and the actions of antagonist groups but begins to weaken as the urgencies of the insurrection open into the undefined landscape of revolution. Some drift away but others remain through an act of will, bolstered by deep social motivations. Confronted with the impasses and obstacles to collective action and their own dwindling numbers, the group introduces institutional structures that re-serialise both actual and prospective partisans.

But altruism isn't the domain of the activist minority exclusively. As noted earlier, there is extensive evidence that altruist motives are, although fairly weak, present among all but a small minority of the population. Mass action can emerge not only as the result of self-defence or a collective struggle for material betterment but as collective outrage at injustice experienced only indirectly. The police kill an unarmed black man in a way that cannot help but inflame the knowledge in everyone's mind of the profound racism of the police and policing: people take to the streets, attacking the police, burning their vehicles, destroying private property, and looting markets. The black proletarians mobilised are, for the most part, those who have been the direct objects of police violence and repression. Despite the fact that most do not know the victim, they or someone they know have themselves been beaten and persecuted and killed by the police. Still, this is a different scenario than the storming of the Bastille. The participants are not under direct and immediate attack, such that they need to defend themselves by counter-attack on the police. In other words, though they are constant targets of police violence, it's hard to imagine that many conclude a riot will substantially weaken or even abolish the police, lessening the violence they suffer and improving their material well-being. No, the riot provides an opportunity to punish the wicked, to avenge their injuries and the injuries of their beloveds. Without a doubt, the opportunity to loot will encourage some to join for reasons of direct material interest, but as anyone who has ever been out in the streets in a riot like this knows, many if not most are interested in nothing so much as an opportunity to throw rocks at cops, destroy their property, and beat up white racists. Vengeance is the order of the day. It may be that this scenario activates, in a symbolic manner and through forms of group identification, the reciprocities of the Sartrean scenario — makes one feel *as if* one is under immediate attack requiring collective self-defence. Or it may be that such scenarios confirm what Bowles and Gintis have shown — which is that there is a weak altruistic and egalitarian impulse observable in a great range of human societies, independent of any sort of enlightened self-interest, and that furthermore, this impulse often manifests as *spite*, as a desire to harm those who harm others, who profit by exploitation and domination and hurt the innocent.

Revolution and Perfectionism

Such motives can explain a great deal of political behaviour, but they can also explain the *limits* of many mobilisations. Altruism and spite are, for most, weaker than materialist motives and self-interest proper. In most cases, the riots end after a few days, or they shrink to a smaller, hard core, especially if the costs of participation are raised. The passage from punctual, limited flare ups based on outrage and vengeance to something more enduring requires that participants feel that sticking it out and risking their lives is *likely* to produce change that will benefit them. This is quite clearly why riots end; people do not see any future in them, any chance that they might improve their lives, and the value of spite's enactment no longer outweighs the risks. There are, of course, many for whom spite and altruism remain reason enough, even in the face of the heaviest of consequences. Nevertheless, the fact that material interests supervene over altruism and spite explains not only the dwindling of the riot, but the inability of insurrection to convert into social revolution. Unlike the riot, the insurrection involves the breakdown of established order; governments collapse, workplaces stand idle, police begin to desert their outposts. As a result, the theological whims and niceties of private property evaporate: the things of this world no longer appear as possessions of this or that owner, but as unmarked social possibility. Participants take what they need and give what they can. Even when lives are hardly improved, such scenarios mobilise a tremendous amount of hopefulness. Even if things aren't better today, the proletarian participants reason, there is a high likelihood that they will be better tomorrow. As insurrection passes over into revolution, the faith participants extend to the process is essential; revolutions can persist on these projections, on what we might call *future anterior* motives, for quite some time. But sooner or later present interests take precedence, as participants demand immediate rather than pended satisfaction, and the counter-revolutionary dynamics described by Filtzer and Seidman and others unfold.

The future anteriority of revolutionary motives raises a point that has been hinted at but so far not enunciated. Even if survival is almost always at stake in such struggles, proletarians are motivated by more than bare, biological reproduction. The phrase I have used throughout

is “increased well-being”. Not just to live, but to live better: this is the basis of the revolutionary hope described above. There are of course infinite forms such betterment may take: increased comfort and decreased toil, more varied pursuits and new opportunities for learning or spiritual growth, for participation in collective life, in art and play. The term Marx uses to characterise this betterment is “development”: communism is a state of affairs that allows for “all-round development” or “free development” in opposition to the “one-sided development” imposed by the capitalist division of labour, which Marx continuously describes as a kind of stunting of body and mind.⁶⁰

The specific content of the improvement or betterment is left undefined, by necessity, since free development presupposes, in some sense, the open-endedness of what it is to be developed. Spinoza’s account of *conatus* is sometimes described as perfectionist, inasmuch as his emphasis on “striving” indicates not just simple reproduction of the conditions of being but expansion or improvement of such conditions. In other words, Spinoza, too, places development at the centre of his concept. Joy for Spinoza is the affect associated with that striving toward the things we desire, and increases as those things increase.⁶¹ The point of free development is free development itself, and though the content can be infinitely varied, the form is fundamentally the same.

Capitalism subsumes these perfectionist impulses, as much as possible, within money and the wage relation: any increase in well-being, in comfort, in freedom from toil, has a price. Furthermore, capitalism is unique in that it both encourages and hinders this development. On the one hand, constant increases in productivity make it possible for proletarians to receive more social wealth (often in a new form) in exchange for their labour as well as a reduction in the amount of time they need to work. On the other hand, crisis dynamics and the rule of profit ensure that these opportunities are foreclosed for some large segment of proletarians. From this dynamic of interrupted and foreshortened development, one can deduce hatred of oppressive heteronomy as an auxiliary revolution motive. Proletarians will resist whatever external arrangement hinders this development and accept what do not.

60. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 86, 272, 464–65. On one-sidedness, see *Ibid.*, 81; Marx, *Capital* vol. 1 (Penguin Classics 1992), 470, 548.

61. Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader*, 60–61, 201–4.

We should not be misled, however, into believing, as capitalism would have us believe, that “perfection” is a simple function of use-values per person (or, in what amounts to the same thing, decreases in labour time per good). The very open-ended and historically indeterminate character of development precludes this understanding, and there are no doubt spiritual, aesthetic, and cultural forms of development that escape productive-force reductionism. At the same time, full development is impossible — at least for most — except where everyone can freely access social wealth and freely participate in social activities without restriction and where survival no longer preoccupies the majority of people’s activity. This is why we can aggregate it with the basic or materialist motives discussed above. It has survival and free access to material necessities as its foundation.

COMMUNIST MEASURES

We are in a position now to draw some preliminary conclusions. Riots, strikes and social movements may be fueled by a diverse arrangement of motives beyond desire for survival and increased well-being, in particular altruism and spite. Revolutions (of which insurrections are the first stem) are different, inasmuch as they involve intense dangers and hardships and therefore activate the most elemental and powerful of motives. Failure may mean death and famine, and thus survival motives are activated. At the same time, these situations activate the deepest hopes that proletarians have for themselves and for each other, the possibility of increased well-being, development, and growth, in innumerable forms. It is the combination of the survivalist and perfectionist motives that makes revolutions such profoundly passionate occasions. Revolutions must activate and satisfy these desires or fail, and they must do so relatively soon, in the medium term rather than the long term. We make a mistake if we understand counter-revolution as betrayal from within or military defeat. Revolutions will fail when they can no longer harness the enthusiasm of a majority of people, and instead must rely on moral imprecation, violence, and impersonal social structure to achieve their aims, a process which ends up subverting such aims.⁶² We do not know what a successful communist revolution looks like, but we can say for sure that it will

62. To be clear, this isn’t the only reason why revolutions fail. See Jasper Bernes, ‘Logistics, →

definitionally involve a massive number of dispossessed people consciously reckoning that communism is the best path. Revolutions involve situations of mass deliberation and mass reason that do not exist in everyday life. In revolutions, people really do consider their options and weigh the risks, and if a revolution succeeds it will be by working with this motivated reason and not against it. The best way to do this is to produce, as quickly as possible, the material benefits that other failed revolutions decided to pend until some future date. One does not win the civil war against reactionary forces and then make communism; one wins the civil war by making communism, by giving proletarians something to fight for together.

The successful revolution unfolds as a series of enchainned, mutually ramifying “communist measures” that, in their totality, weaken and eventually vanquish class society through a process of communisation. Here, I draw upon the theory of communisation pioneered by Gilles Dauvé, Bruno Astarian, *Theorie Communiste* and other French theorists, and extended in the pages of journals such as *Sic* and *Endnotes*. This theoretical line of inquiry has been enormously fruitful, but what it has lacked is a theory of motives that can help explain not only why revolution in our time must unfold also communisation but also how. Dauvé provides a lucid précis of the concept:

The idea is fairly simple, but simplicity is often one of the most difficult goals to achieve. It means that a revolution is only communist if it changes all social relationships into communist relationships, and this can only be done if the process starts in the very early days of the revolutionary upheaval. Money, wage-labour, the enterprise as a separate unit and a value-accumulating pole, work-time as cut off from the rest of our life, production for value, private property, State agencies as mediators of social life and conflicts, the separation between learning and doing, the quest for maximum and fastest circulation of everything, all of these have to be done away with, and not just be run by collectives or turned over to public ownership: they have to be replaced by communal, moneyless, profitless,

Counterlogistics, and the Communist Prospect’ *Endnotes 3* (2010), for an account of the many ways in which the ‘worked matter’ of late capitalist restructuring presents strong obstacles to a revolutionary project.

Stateless, forms of life. The process will take time to be completed, but it will start at the beginning of the revolution, which will not create the *preconditions* of communism: it will create communism.⁶³

63. Gilles Dauvé, ‘Communisation’ *Troploin* (2011).

What must begin from the earliest days are these communist measures. The reason is not simply definitional, but has to do with the counter-revolutionary dynamics we’ve examined; only direct satisfaction of needs through the communist measure can recruit the participation of the majority of proletarians while at the same time abolishing capitalism. These steps must go together. Further, as we’ve seen, actions that mobilise smaller, well-defined groups have the best chance of overcoming the opposition between serial and collective interests. Though there is no upper limit on the number of people that might undertake a communist measure — expropriating and freely distributing some property — for the most part, one will see this happening with groups in the hundreds or thousands if not dozens. Sometimes, these measures will overcome the coordination problem by virtue of the totalising forces that Sartre encounters in defensive struggles, because people are being dispossessed, as a group, of their access to the material necessities. In other situations, the communist measure will provide a clear, tangible objective for which coordination is necessary and therefore entirely in accord with material interests, unlike the often vague and open-ended objectives of reformist struggles. The power of the communist measure derives from this combination of small- to medium-scale with immediate objective, though it should be said communist measures are only communist measures when embedded in a sea of similar measures. Looting a store in the middle of a riot is not a communist measure, since it is quickly reabsorbed by capitalism. Looting a store while hundreds of others are likewise expropriating property during an insurrection is, however, a communist measure.

Communisation is therefore a curious thing, as Leon De Mattis makes clear in his article on the topic, “simultaneously immediate and extended in time, simultaneously total and partial”.⁶⁴ Alongside the *Endnotes* essay “Spontaneity, Mediation, Rupture”, De Mattis goes further than most other theorists in examining this dynamic

64. Leon De Mattis, ‘Communist Measures’ *Sic* no. 2 (2014), 20.

in terms of motive. This paradox is in part explained by the character of human action, which is both immediate and future-looking. Communist measures are not “undertaken unwittingly”, not action undertaken “because the struggle has left no way forward”.⁶⁵

If a group of hungry people raid a warehouse where food is kept, they obviously do so on the basis of material needs, but it would be a mistake to think they had no choice, that such needs produce, by some sort of chemical reaction, reflex action. They might have, at the very least, continued to suffer hunger, wagelessness, and dependency, or perhaps found another way to meet their needs. When we speak of necessity, we speak of constrained choices, and motivated actions. When taken in the context of other similar actions, the raid on the warehouse becomes a communist measure, and has the possibility of mobilising both concerns for well-being, as well as altruism and spite, such as when one distributes the food in the warehouse to other hungry people and recognises that this expropriation weakens the owners of capital who are the source of one’s hunger. However, those who looted the warehouse might also have hoarded the goods in order to sell to other desperate people. As expropriation rather than appropriation, the communist measure eclipses other forms of action under conditions of reciprocity: one has been the beneficiary of other communist measures and therefore responds in kind rather than hoarding or profiteering.

The communist measure succeeds because people are not simply short-sighted egoists, but capable of enlightened self-interest and legitimate altruism (which includes spite). It is the capacity of the communist measure to activate all of these motives without pitting them against each other that marks out the course of its potential success. Once communist measures chain together in a communising dynamic, spreading through imitation, and motivating coordinated expropriations on larger and larger scales, they produce the conditions of their own rationality with regard to material interest. One recognises that the ability of the enemy class to stop such communist measures decreases with their extent, intensity, and the speed at which they spread. The more there are, the more successful they become, and the more they make sense. Furthermore, once one has taken a communist measure, for example, to provide oneself and one’s neighbours with housing by taking over abandoned condominiums, or with food and

useful things by expropriating land and equipment, then one will naturally want to protect one’s access to such things by ensuring communism continues. As they enchain and proliferate, communist measures become more deliberate and intentional: as De Mattis notes, “in a period of communism, when communist measures are linking up and becoming widespread, the overall pattern of what is being established becomes obvious to everyone”.⁶⁶

Furthermore, just as the increasingly straitened circumstances of a revolution and the increasing use of violence by activists has a tendency to produce a vicious cycle of egoism and disinvestment, necessitating more political violence, the communist measure has the capacity to unlock a virtuous cycle: as more and more people’s needs for material well-being are satisfied through these measures, altruistic and spiteful motives are allowed to come to the fore. The active minority, people who are willing to risk much for the success of the revolution and who act not only on the basis of material interests, swells. As such, communist measures are undertaken not simply in order to directly satisfy one’s own needs, but in order to weaken the enemy, strengthen communism, and help the afflicted. Self-interested and altruist motives chain together in such actions, such that it is ultimately impossible to tell actions apart in these terms. Once social life is organised in this manner, its motivational appeal for those living in non-communist zones will be almost unstoppable, ensuring almost constant insurrection and undermining the ability of class societies to reproduce. The remaining powers will need to gather together their forces for a final assault on the offending zones—while fending off internal threats—or perish. But here the power of the revolution as we have defined it is not military nor is it merely negative; it is its ability not simply to negate or destroy capital but to actively posit something that takes its place, something that cuts along rather than against the grain of the deepest revolutionary motivations.

ADVENTURISM OR VANGUARDISM

In the old farmland where the big wave of the city’s growth had crashed with the real estate market in the years before the revolution, leaving behind thousands of acres of half-completed subdivisions, a few hundred people from one of the decaying suburbs nearby plant

squash, corn, and beans, taking advantage of the warmer climate's longer growing season. They complete some of the houses so that they can stay out there in summer, though most live in town and will only return for harvest, bringing the produce in on expropriated trucks and distributing it directly. In the next suburb over, some people with hepatitis, many of them formerly incarcerated in the nearby prison, have found the engineers who ran the pharmaceutical factory. They have re-started it and, sending for necessary equipment and inputs located in another city, converted it to produce the interferons they need, which have been in short supply since the first days of insurrection. Now that the weather has turned warm, a few dozen of the most committed take from their kitchen cabinets the money they haven't used in over a year, pack a few items into packs, and head north to the edges of the zone, where they will await communication from the partisans and guerrillas. Already food trucks and grain shipments are hijacked daily, sent back into the zone or distributed in the armed proletarian neighbourhoods; police stations and weapons depots are raided, as much to disarm the state as to arm the people. Factories in the areas still held by the state have encountered severe shortages of workers, as people flee to the communist zones where they know life is better. Some of them have taken to imprisoning their workers in order to ensure a steady supply of labour. But this only enflames the subjugated towns further. Already this month over thirty factories have caught fire in the province. Seeing the writing on the wall, many owners flee, leaving the workplaces to the employees.

In the successful revolution, just as in class society, people seek out the means to meet their needs and the needs of those they care about the most (family, friends, neighbours). The communist measure is one such way, but certainly not the only one. Where success is possible, the partisans plant the land, loot warehouses, and hijack trucks, taking what they need. But there is often a surplus, and instead of attempting to profit from it, to hoard, trade, and exchange, they simply gift it to whoever else needs it (whether through prior arrangement or ad hoc distributions). The interaction between constraint and motive is here double: in scenarios where a strong communising dynamic

is already underway, they may not find anyone with whom to trade, since everyone else is already meeting their needs directly or through gifts from others. In fact, signalling one's intention to trade and profit may motivate others to expropriate whatever surpluses one has, with ostracism and exile resulting if one continues. The risks outweigh the benefits, from a purely self-interested perspective. Furthermore, the strong conditions of reciprocity encourage one, from a perspective of enlightened self-interest, to do unto others as they might do unto you, to provide benefits for those from whom one has benefited. And once one's material needs are satisfied, the weak altruism present in most people will be activated.

For some, the activation of this altruism will be so strong, and so little offset by the panics of self-interest that situations of scarcity produce, that they will begin to act in a mostly "selfless" manner. They may travel, as above, into the areas where class society and capitalism are still operative in order to weaken it by expropriating materials and sending it back into the communist zone or delivering it to the needy residents still unfortunate enough to suffer its iniquities. They may participate in catalysing armed insurrection and expropriation of necessities by proletarians for whom such actions would definitely be motivated by self-interest but who may not act unless the scales are tipped. These communist measures are undertaken with a sort of surplus of intentionality — that is, they are a form of the pledge that Sartre talks about, a willed commitment to the cause of the revolution, an intention to intend, a way of extending intention. We should not let the presence of such will embarrass us, nor try to explain it away through a theory of human action that imagines it as analogous to biomechanical reflex.

These altruist communist measures are what we might call *adventurist*. They may lead the way, provoke, catalyse, or assist the actions of people motivated by desire for material well-being, but they do not try to direct the actions of others, to incentivise, instruct, or force through violence. (Violence is of course directed at those who have shown themselves opposed to the cause of liberation, but is all the same not part of the reproduction of the internal workings of the revolutionary zone). These actions run along rather than against the grain of human motives. Every revolution will always involve individuals and groups whose actions are based on a partial (though probably

never total) transcendence of self-interest. Successful revolutions will see this group swell, while failing ones will see it shrink, as there is for almost everyone some level of risk, danger, and probability where self-interest takes the wheel. These individuals and groups inevitably link together into formations that attempt to intervene in the course of the revolution; such is unavoidable, especially in moments of peril. The question is whether such formations act, as above, in an *adventurist* manner, and through the communist measure provide for others the material basis upon which they will freely choose to go in the direction of communism, or alternately act as *vanguardists*, using moral and pedagogical re-education campaigns, organisational hierarchy, monopoly over resources, direct violence, incentive structures, and other forms of instruction and compulsion, to *force* others down a road presumed to lead to communism but that in fact heads off a cliff.

UNTHINKABLE THOUGHTS

Call-Out Culture in the Age of Covid-19

What do we do with unthinkable thoughts?

Who are we in our unthinkable thinking moments?

How do we adapt together if the clues to our next pivot are unthinkable?

Maybe sharing these unthinkable thoughts will help?

I'll start with the scariest unthinkable thought for me, which is that maybe we as a species are in a state of apocalyptic fatigue—exhausted in the face of all the changes and endings we are living through. Our current collective circumstances require us to think about death, to grieve, and to consider that everything we have known has to change or come to an end. And long before this pandemic, we in the U.S. have had to live with leadership that protected our right to shoot each other, authorized state killing of citizens in our streets, in our homes, and denied every move to intervene on the climate catastrophe we have helped produce.

In the past, I have lost my connection to life, to wanting to live, thought it didn't much matter if I was

here or not, and so it didn't much matter how I treated myself or others. When I was in that phase of ambiguous commitment to life, I took risks with my mind and body that I couldn't imagine taking now. I practiced cynicism and hopelessness, as if they were the measures of humor, of intelligence. It was a brief phase of my life, but during that time I believed in nothing.¹

It "seemed easier to just swim down" in that place.²

I have had to choose life from deep within me. That's why I'm still here. I want to live. I want to want to live. I think everyone chooses each day to move towards life or away from it, though some don't realize that they are making the choice. Capitalism makes it hard to see your own direction.

I am writing this in July 2020, from within the Covid-19 pandemic. As I have watched the world respond to the pandemic, the borders between nations shift meaning in my mind. I can see which countries choose life, and which don't; which countries have a majority life-oriented citizenship, which countries/

1 Suicidal ideation shows up differently for everyone. I am trying to put my finger on a collective feeling that only feels familiar to me when I remember my own struggle here, and I do not intend to assume anyone else's experience or normalize mine.

2 Lin-Manuel Miranda, "It's Quiet Uptown," song from the second act of *Hamilton: The Musical*.

regions elect leaders who they believe will care for them;³ which countries pivot at the highest governmental level to protect their people, to guide their people to protect themselves—places with a variety of economies and exposure have found ways to move towards life.

I wonder about the movements in those countries, what it might feel like to live and organize in a place that truly orients towards life. I don't want to romanticize any human experiment, I know each country has its trade-offs. But what would it be like to have leadership able to admit to being wrong when new information presents itself about the dangers around and amongst us? What would it be like to organize and apply pressure to a government committed to adapting such that the majority of its citizens stay alive, rather than the stubbornness to stay the same? In our current context, it feels like movement has to push towards life against an avalanche of crisis energy that undermines a viable future.

The U.S., as a nation, does not choose, or love, life. Not in our policies, in our safety practices, in our

3 I am aware that anti-abortion efforts have long staked a claim on being "pro life." I want to reclaim the language of choosing and orienting towards life for a much broader framework of choices and behaviors that align with long-term human existence. I do not think we should surrender language to those who misuse and denigrate the sacred spell inside the words.

relationship to the planet and other nations. Not yet, and possibly never before.

Other nations, many amongst the most developed in the world, initially shrugged at Covid-19. Then they adapted.

The U.S. response has been more egregious than a shrug; it's been a flagrant disregard, running towards a category-five pandemic tornado. It's meant that those of us who want to live are watching in horror as the mutating coronavirus fills in the pre-existing grooves of collective hopelessness and the resistance of those who love life—with climate deniers and corporate polluters on one side, environmental and climate justice movements on the other. White supremacists and patriarchs on one side, solidarity movements in race, ethnicity, class, gender, ability, and sexuality arenas on the other.

We are a nation not just diverse or divided, but torn—pulled towards life and pulled towards death. When I get that torn feeling within, which in recent years comes very rarely, in twinges and wisps, I now recognize it as a suicidal tendency in me. It's not the truth, not the only truth, not my truth, not the choice I want to make. But the tendency is wily, using the voices of people I love to make itself heard. I have to be vigilant, listen between the lines, ask: who would

benefit from my absence? Who benefits from my self-doubt?

Under our blustering exceptional patriotism, our nation has a tendency towards its own destruction, a doubt of its right to exist, which is rooted in our foundation. It's a shame-filled foundation. Can we heal all the way down to the roots of this nation, especially if it's the only way we will want to go on?

I think our movements struggle inside this larger national hopelessness and overwhelming history of trauma and shame—we are combating that which we simultaneously internalize. We want to grow, but at the same time some of us don't seem to believe we will all get there, or get anywhere better, in time. That we can't, and won't, put forth the effort.

Maybe the idea of our future generations experiencing peace and abundance is not quite enough to keep us going.

Maybe we just need some more immediate signs of life.

Maybe we are terrified.

I, we, have to be able to discern what is me/us and what is fear.

Which leads to my next unthinkable thought: do I really know the difference between my discernment and my fear?

My dear friend Malkia Devich Cyril teaches me that there is the fear intended to save your life, versus fear intended to end it. What I mean by discernment is the set of noticing, fears, wisdoms, deductions, and gut tremblings that want to save, or even just improve, my life, versus the fear that makes me unable to do anything, that makes me unable to draw on my life force to take action.

Do I think I am being discerning when I am actually frozen in place, scared to change?

Am I too scared of standing out from the crowd to pause and discern right action?

Am I acting from terror?

Am I able to discern a decision or action that makes sense?

I was in Italy when the pandemic really became clear as a threat to my well being. I froze. In my frozen state I would hear just a bit of the news, the new numbers of crisis, and shake my head at the idiots in office, and then numb back out. Having quickly identified who I blamed, I was less able to feel any agency in myself. I froze and delayed and froze until I was overwhelmed.

Then I had an excellent therapy session where I noticed:

Oh. *I am afraid.*

I am afraid that the pandemic is on the rise

everywhere and I am going to leave safety for a dangerous unknown.

Oh!

I don't know what to do!

As soon as I acknowledged I was afraid I was able to move into discernment. My fear became data—I am afraid because the numbers are daunting and no perfect move is available. My fear is actually screaming on behalf of my informed intuition.

My fear made me freeze until I allowed myself to feel my actual panic, my grief, my powerlessness, my limited options. Therapy helped me notice I was afraid, deepen my breath, and return to discernment.

I see the same vacillation between fear and discernment in our movements right now, with no therapist in sight.

We are afraid of being hurt, afraid because we have been hurt, afraid because we have caused hurt, afraid because we live in a world that wants to hurt us whether we have hurt others or not, just based on who we are, on any otherness from some long-ago determined norm. **Supremacy is our ongoing pandemic. It partners with every other sickness to tear us from life, or from lives worth living.**

So we stay put and scream into the void, moving our rage across the Internet like a tornado that,

without discernment, sucks up all in its path for destruction.

Our emotions and need for control have been heightened during this pandemic—we are stuck in our houses or endangering ourselves to go out and work, terrified and angry at the loss of our plans and normalcy, terrified and angry at living under the oppressive rule of an administration that does not love us and that is racist and ignorant and violent. Grieving our unnecessary dead, many of whom are dying alone, unheld by us. We are full of justified rage. And we want to release that rage. And one really fast and easy way to do this is what I experience as knee jerk collective punishment in movements.

I am speaking of the social destruction of call outs and/or cancelations. Call outs have a long history as a brilliant strategy for marginalized people to stand up to those with power. Call outs have been a way to bring collective pressure to bear on corporations, institutions, and abusers on behalf of individuals or oppressed peoples who cannot stop the injustice and get accountability on their own. There are those out of alignment with life, consent, dignity, and humanity who will only stop when a light is shined onto their inhumane behavior.

But many of the call outs burning through our movements today don't feel aligned with the lineage of this tactic. Right now, call outs are being used not just

as a necessary consequence for those wielding power to cause harm or enact abuse, but to shame and humiliate people in the wake of misunderstandings, contradictions, conflicts, and mistakes. I want to place my finger on the destructive power of punitive justice currently unleashed in our movements, and see how we bring abolition, vision, and skill to the wounds.

In the past week I have seen people and organizations called out for embodying white supremacy in the workplace, for causing repeated or one-time sexual harm, for physical, emotional, or digital abuse or harm, for appropriation of ideas and images, for patriarchy, for ableism, for being dishonest, for saying harmful things a decade ago, for doing things that were later understood as harm or abuse—for embodying all of the pain that supremacy holds.

The call outs generally share one side of what's happened and then call for immediate consequences. And within a day, the call out is everywhere, the cycle of blame and shame activated, and whoever was called out has begun being publicly punished. Sometimes, there are consequences—loss of job, community, reputation, platform. Sometimes there is just derision, and calls for disappearance. The details of the offense blur or compound as others add their own opinions and experiences to the story.

We don't have a collective clarity about the distinctions between conflict, harm, or abuse, but online, we seem to respond to all of it with the same energy—consistently punitive, too often joyful.

I am not speaking of survivors naming their abusers or perpetrators here—the work of a survivor is to survive, using any and all tools available to stop the abuse and pain being exacted upon them.

I am speaking about what we do when we hear of harm, abuse, or conflict—we as community members, friends, family, partners, coworkers, comrades, people engaged in our own cycles of harm and healing. As movements trying to break cycles of harm and abuse, how do we hold survivors and those who cause harm as community members once they speak up?

Currently, a wide variety of harm doing gets collapsed into one label of “bad, disposable person/organization” and receives one punishment: a call out, often for some form of instant cancelation. And in relationship, alongside of, sometimes overlapping with these cycles of naming harm and abuse, are conflicts. Our conflicts, our interpersonal disagreements, can currently get escalated into the language and response of harm and abuse.

We are afraid, and we think it will assuage our fears and make us safer if we can clarify an enemy, a someone outside of ourselves who is to blame, who is guilty, who

is the origin of harm. Can we acknowledge that trauma and conflict can distort our perspective of responsibility and blame in ways that make it difficult to see the roots of the harm?

Instant judgment and punishment are practices of power over others. It's what those with power do to those who can't stop them, who can't demand justice. This injustice of power is practiced at an individual and collective level.

What concerns me is how often it feels like this instant reaction is happening within movement. It feels like a feeding frenzy. In nature, a feeding frenzy happens “when predators are overwhelmed by the amount of prey available.... This can cause [them] to go wild, biting anything that moves, including each other or anything else within biting range.”⁴ There is an abundance of harm, abuse, and righteous conflict surrounding us right now. But we in movement don't identify with predators—our historical reality is that we are the prey, trying to defend ourselves, protect each other. There is such complexity with trying to name this dynamic within our movements. I persist in this line of inquiry because it's also true that we are practicing,

4 Wikipedia entry for “Feeding Frenzy,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feeding_frenzy.

training ourselves through repeated motion, a strategy of moving in frenzy towards punitive actions, even as we try to put transformative language on our behavior.

How do we, in movements, become responsible for each other, accountable to a vision beyond the carceral system that will only come to pass if we practice it in the present?

This generation of movements for justice didn't create this punitive system of justice. We didn't create the state, we didn't choose to be socialized within it. We want to dismantle these systems of mass harm, and I know that most of us have no intention of ever mimicking state processes of navigating justice.

The tools of swift and predatory justice feel good to use, familiar, groove in the hand easily from repeated use and training, briefly satisfying. But these tools are often blunt and senseless.

Unless we have an analysis of abolition and dismantling systems of oppression, we will not realize what's in our hands, we will never put the predator's tools down and figure out what our tools are and can be.

My third unthinkable thought—why does it feel like we are committed to punishment, and enjoying it? Why do our movements more and more often feel like we are moving with sharp teeth against ourselves? And what is at stake because of that pattern, that feeling?

Why does it feel like someone pointing at someone else and saying: "that person is harmful!" and with no questions or process or time or breath, we are collectively punishing them, tearing them, and anyone protecting them, to shreds?

Sometimes we even do it with the language of transformative justice: claiming that we are going to give them room to grow. They need to disappear completely to be accountable. We are publicly shaming them so that they will learn to be better.

Underneath this logic I hear: we are good and we are getting rid of the "bad" people in our community or movement. We are affirming our rightness and power.

Which isn't to say that some of the accused aren't raging white supremacists in movement clothing. Or abusers who have slipped through the fingers of accountability. Or shady in some other way.

Which isn't to say that a public accounting of harm, and consequences, isn't necessarily the correct move. In cases of rape, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and abuse, the callout can be the only move that stops the immediate harm without engaging the state. Shaming behaviors of abuse in a culture where they have been normalized is, and has been, a necessary survival technology.

Which isn't to say we don't believe survivors. Because we must. In fact, part of what inspired this piece is making room for survivors to be heard.

But how do we believe survivors and still be abolitionist? And still practice transformative justice?

To start with, I have been trying to discern when a call out feels powerful, like the necessary move, versus when it feels like a feeding frenzy.

The first and biggest thing is that call outs never feel powerful to me as a move to resolve conflict, especially when that conflict is unveiled without the consent of both or all parties in the dispute. Call outs don't work for addressing misunderstandings, issuing critiques, or resolving contradiction.

Call outs feel most powerful when they are used with their tactical intention—for those with less positional, political, economic, or other power to demand accountability to stop harm or abuse. I want to spend some time here, because even in that context, I believe we have a responsibility to be in principled struggle and transformative justice—to seek consequences in a context of ancestral, generational, and present-day trauma, to unlearn the pleasure of punishing each other with public humiliation and shame. We need to understand that each call out puts our community members, survivors, and harm doers, on the radar of a state that has a

history of surveilling, infiltrating, and otherwise strategically weakening movements that are having, or could have, actual impact in changing material conditions for oppressed peoples.

Here are some questions I sit with when I am asked to engage in a call out:

- Have there been any private efforts for accountability or conflict resolution?
- Is/are the survivor(s) being adequately supported?
- Has the accused individual or group acknowledged what they've done, or are they saying something different happened, or even that nothing happened?
- Has the accused individual or group avoided accountability? Have they continued to cause harm?
- Has the accused already begun the process of taking accountability?
- Does the accused person have significantly more power than the accuser(s)—in what ways? Are they using that power to avoid accountability?

- Is this a demand for process and consequences that will satisfy the survivor, the community, the movement?
- Is this call out precise? Is the demand for accountability related to the alleged harm?
- Does it feel like we can ask questions?
- Is all the attention going towards the person accused of harm?
- Are we being asked to rush to action? Is there enough time between the accusation and the call for consequences to make sure we know what's going on and what's possible?
- Is the only acceptable consequence to those making the call out for the accused to cease to exist?
- Is the accused from one or more oppressed identities?
- Is there any discernible power difference between the accused and the accuser(s)?

- Does this feel performative?

We have to recognize that we are on dangerous territory that is not aligned with a transformative justice vision when we mete out punishments in place of consequences, and/or when we issue consequences with no inquiry, no questions, no acceptance of accountability, no process, no time for the learning and unlearning necessary for authentic change...just instant and often unsatisfactory consequences.

A moment on this: one of the main demands in call outs is for a public apology. To expect a coherent authentic apology from someone who has been forcibly removed from power or credibility feels like a set up. Usually they issue some PR-sounding thing that works like blood in the water, escalating the feeding frenzy instead of satisfying our hunger for justice.

We've all seen the convoluted, denial-accountability-nonapology message from accused harm doers, especially when physical or sexual harm is involved. Sometimes they are claiming innocence, sometimes they are admitting to some harm, rarely at the level of the accusation. Sometimes they say they tried to have a process but it didn't work, or they were denied. Who knows what they mean by process, who knows if the accuser was ready for a process, who knows what

actually happened between them, the relational context of the instance or pattern of harm? Who knows?

The truth about sexual assault and rape and patriarchy and white supremacy and other abuses of power is that we are swimming in them, in a society that has long normalized them, and that they often play out intimately.

The truth is, sometimes it takes a long time for us to realize the harm that has happened to us.

And longer to realize we have caused harm to others.

The truth is, it isn't unusual to only realize harm happened in hindsight, with more perspective and politicization.

But there's more truth, too.

The additional truth is, right now, in the frantic pause of pandemic, we have the time.

The additional truth is, even though we want to help the survivor, we love obsessing over and punishing "villains." We end up putting more of our collective attention on punishing those accused of causing harm than supporting and centering the healing of survivors, and/or building pathways for those who are in cycles of causing harm to change.

The additional truth is, we want to distance ourselves from those who cause harm, and we are steeped in a punitive culture, which, right now, is normalizing a

methodology of "punish first, ask questions later." And, because we are in the age of social media, we now have a way to practice very publicly.

"Instead of asking whether anyone should be locked up or go free, why don't we think about why we solve problems by repeating the kind of behavior that brought us the problem in the first place?"

—Ruth Wilson Gilmore

The other metaphor that feels deeply present in this period of call outs is cancer. Supremacy works as a collective cancer, an invisible and highly productive disease that quietly roots deep within us. We are better than... someone. We might experience supremacy due to race, citizenship, gender, class, ableism, age, access, fame, or other areas where we feel justified to cause harm without consequence. Sometimes we don't even realize we have caused harm, because supremacy is a numbing and narrowing disease.

I want us to let go of the narrowness of innocence, widen our understanding of how harm moves through us.⁵ I want us to see individual acts of harm as symp-

5 Prentis Hemphill, "Letting Go of Innocence," Prentis Hemphill blog, prentishemphill.com/blog/2019/7/5/letting-go-of-innocence, July 5, 2019.

toms of systemic harm, and to do what we can do collectively to dismantle the systems and get as many of us free as possible.

Often a call out comes because the disease has reached an acute state in someone, is festering in hiding, is actively causing harm. I want us to see the difference between the human and the disease, to see what we are afraid of, in others and in ourselves, and discern a path that actually addresses the root of our justified fears.

This is not a case against call outs. There is absolutely a need for certain call outs—when power is greatly imbalanced and efforts have been made to stop ongoing harm, when someone accused of harm won't participate in community accountability processes or honor requested boundaries, the call out is a way of pulling an emergency brake. But call outs need to be used specifically for harm and abuse, and within movement spaces they should be deployed as a last option.

We must be able to acknowledge that we are on new ground, where the pressure of a call out is no longer localized, relational, or sector specific. Transformative justice is relational, it happens at the scale of community. Call outs now often happen at the scale of viral threads amongst strangers. The consequences of being called out in this hyper-connected age can be extremely dire and imprecise—facilitators and mediators like myself

often get the call after, when someone accused of harm is struggling to stay alive after losing their reputation, community, and/or work. If we are lucky we can connect them to therapy or support community accountability. But often we are overwhelmed, and people slip through the cracks to cause harm to themselves, or leave movement and continue their abusive patterns elsewhere.

Additionally, and historically, the presence of infiltration in our movements is documented and prevalent. This also comes to those of us who facilitate movements often—the quiet whisper that someone in the meeting leaked the notes, is antagonizing without principle, appeared out of nowhere and started taking up a ton of space. The reach of COINTELPRO and subsequent surveillance and infiltration campaigns is still being uncovered, and this strategy reaches back as long as humans have waged war against each other. Call outs are an incredible modern tool for those who are not committed to movements to use against those having impact.

Right now calling someone out online seems like first/only option for a lot of people in the face of any kind of dissonance. We need to have the skills to be able to discern what kind of dissonance we are we dealing with or being asked to help with, what kind of support is actually needed, and the capacity we have to meet that need without calling on or informing the state.

Too often, we are using call outs to avoid direct conflict. Call outs are also being used to tilt public opinion about organizational or sectoral conflicts. Conflict, and growing community that can hold political difference, are actually healthy, generative, necessary moves for vibrant visions to be actualized.

I can't help but wonder who benefits from movements that engage in public infighting, blame, shame, and knee-jerk call outs? I can't help but see the state grinning, gathering all the data it needs, watching us weaken ourselves. Meanwhile, the conflicts are unresolved, and/or harm continues.

This piece is crucial to me. If the kind of call outs currently sweeping through online organizing space and spilling into real-life formations actually stopped harm, resolved conflict, ended supremacy, transformed people, I'd be a gung-ho call-out machine! I *love* functional tools. But what happens more often is that people step back, move through their shame, leave movement, or double down and return with even more egregious acts of flagrant harm and/or unprincipled struggle methods.

I long for more people to experience the satisfaction of the processes I have been in and held—not perfection, but satisfaction. People getting to name what caused hurt, where the conflict is, what is needed; people receiving an authentic apology; people getting to

commit to paths of unlearning harmful belief systems and behaviors.

I don't find it satisfying, and I don't think it is transformative to publicly call people out for instant consequences with no attempt at a conversation, mediation, boundary setting, or community accountability (which often happens in a supported process with a limited number of known participants).

It doesn't make sense to say "believe all survivors" if we don't also remember that most of us are survivors, which includes most people who cause harm. What we mean is we are tired of being silenced, dismissed, powerless in our pain, hurt over and over. Yes. But being loud is different from being whole, or even being heard, being cared for, being comforted, being healed. Being loud is different from being just. Being able to destroy is different from being able to generate a future where harm isn't happening all around us.

We are terrified of how widespread and active harm is, and it makes us want to point the finger and quickly remove those we can identify as bad. We want to protect each other from those who cause harm.

Many of us seem to worry that if we don't immediately answer the feeding frenzy invitations in our DMs, that we will be next to be called out, or called a rape apologist or a white person whisperer or an

internalized misogynist, or just disposed of for refusing to group-think and then group-act. Online, we perform solidarity for strangers rather than engaging in hard conversations with comrades.

We are fearful of taking the time to be discerning, because then we may have to recognize that we aren't as skilled at conflict as we want and need to be, and/or that any of us could be seen as harm-doers. When we are discerning, when we do step up to say wait, let's get understanding here, we risk becoming the new target, viewed as another accomplice to harm instead of understood as a comrade in ending harm, viewed as an opposition in conflict instead of someone trying to find movement alignment.

Perhaps, most dangerously, we are, all together now, teetering on the edge of hopelessness. Collective pandemic burnout, 45-in-office burnout, climate catastrophe burnout, and other exhaustions have us spent and flailing, especially if we are caught in reactive loops (which include the culture of multiple daily call outs) instead of purposeful adaptations. Some of us are losing hope, tossed by the tornado, ungrounded and uprooted by the pace of change, seeking something tangible we can do, control, hold, throw away.

The kind of call outs we are currently engaging in do not necessarily think about movements' needs as a

whole. Movements need to grow and deepen. We need to "transform ourselves to transform the world," to "be transformed in the service of the work."⁶ Movements need to become the practice ground for what we are healing towards, co-creating. Movements are responsible for embodying what we are inviting our people into. We need the people within our movements, all socialized into and by unjust systems, to be on liberation paths. Not already free, but practicing freedom every day. Not already beyond harm, but accountable for doing our individual and internal work to end harm and engage in generative conflict, which includes actively working to gain awareness of the ways we can and have harmed each other, where we have significant political differences, and where we can end cycles of harm and unprincipled struggle in ourselves and our communities.

Knee-jerk call outs say: those who cause harm or mess up or disagree with us cannot change and cannot belong. They must be eradicated. The bad things in the world cannot change, we must disappear the bad until there is only good left.

6 Grace Lee Boggs, *Living for Change: An Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 153; Mary Hooks, quoted in "The Mandate: A Call and Response from Black Lives Matter Atlanta," SONG website, <https://southernersonnewground.org/themandate>, July 14, 2016.

But one layer under that, what I hear is:

We cannot change.

We do not believe we can create compelling paths from being harm doers to being healed, to growing.

We do not believe we can hold the complexity of a gray situation.

We do not believe in our own complexity.

We do not believe we can navigate conflict and struggle in principled ways.

We can only handle binary thinking: good/bad, innocent/guilty, angel/abuser, black/white, etc.

Cancer attacks one part of the body at a time, I have seen it—oh it's in the throat, now it's in the lungs, now it's in the bones. When we engage in knee-jerk call outs as a conflict-resolution device, or issue instant consequences with no process, we become a cancer unto ourselves, unto movements and communities. We become the toxicity we long to heal. We become a tool of harm when we are trying to be, and I think meant to be, a balm.

Oh unthinkable thoughts. Now that I have thought you, it becomes clear to me that all of you are rooted in a singular longing: I want us to want to live.

I want us to want to live in this world, in this time, together.

I want us to love this planet and this species, at this time.

I want us to see ourselves as larger than just individuals randomly ping-ponging around in a world that will never care for us.

I want us to see ourselves as a murmuration of creatures who are, as far as we know right now, unique in all the universe. Each cell, each individual body, itself a unique part of this unique complexity.

I want us not to waste the time we have together.

I want us to look at each other with the eyes of interdependence, such that when someone causes harm, we find the gentle parent inside of us who can use a voice of accountability, while also bringing curiosity—"Why did you cause harm? Do you know? Do you know other options? Apologize." That we can set boundaries that don't require the disappearance of other survivors. That we can act towards accountability with the touch of love. That when someone falls behind, we can use a parent's voice of discipline, while also picking them up and carrying them for a while if needed.

I want us to adapt from systems of oppression and punishment to systems of uplifting and transforming.

I want us to notice that this is a moment when we need to orient and move towards life, not surrender

to the incompetence and hopelessness of our national leadership.

I want us to be discerning.

I want our movement to feel like a vibrant, accountable space where causing harm does not mean you are excluded immediately and eternally from healing, justice, community, or belonging.

I want us to grow lots and lots of skill at holding the processes by which we mend the wounds in our communities and ourselves.

I want satisfying consequences that actually end cycles of harm, generate safety, and deepen movement.

I want us to have an abundance of skill in facilitation and mediation when what needs to be addressed is at the level of misunderstanding, contradiction, mistake, or conflict. I want us collectively to be able to use precise language and to be comfortable asking each other questions for the sake of providing each other the absolute best, most healing and most satisfying support possible.

Within Black movement, I want us to hold Black humanity to the highest degree of protection. Yes, even when we have caused harm. I want us to see each other's trauma-induced behavior as ancestral and impermanent, even as we hold each other accountable.

I want us to be particularly rigorous about holding

complexity and accountability well for Black people in our movement communities who are already struggling to keep our heads above water and build trust and move towards life under the intersecting weights of white supremacy, racialized capitalism, police brutality, philanthropic competition culture, and lack of healing support.

I never want to see us initiate processes for Black accountability where those who are not invested in Black life can see it, store it, weaponize it. I want us to acknowledge that the state is watching, listening, and making use of our limitations. I want us to abolish the state, including the ways we support them to dominate us. Replace Black in that sentence with any other oppressed peoples and I still feel the same way. It is not strategic, and, again, it is rarely satisfying.

I want us to ask who benefits from our hopelessness, and to deny our oppressors the satisfaction of getting to see our pain. I want them to wonder how we foment such consistent and deep solidarity and unlearning. I want our infiltrators to be astounded into their own transformations, having failed to tear us apart.

I want us to acknowledge that the supremacy and hopelessness and harm and conflict are everywhere, and make moves that truly allow us to heal into wholeness.

Because against all odds in space and time? We. Are. Winning.

We are winning in spite of the tsunami of pressures against us. We are moving towards life in spite of everything that wants us to give up.

We in movement must learn to choose life even in conflict, even when seeking accountability, composting the tension and bad behaviors while holding the beating hearts.

Moving towards life affirming movements includes asking:

- In cases of abuse or assault, what does the survivor need?
- In cases of conflict, what resolution is possible?
- What are the visible and invisible power dynamics?
- Do I have the necessary information to form an opinion?
- Do I have the time to seek understanding?
- Did a conversation/process already happen?
- Is a conversation/process possible?

- How do we be abolitionist while gaining accountability here?
- Who benefits from me doubting that our movement can hold this?
- Who could hold this well?
- What will end the cycle of harm here?
- What will help us find a way forward?

We must learn to 'do this before there is no one left to call out, or call we, or call us.

Accessibility

Entry via the front door of the 146 building is wheelchair accessible with a mobile ramp available. Toilet is wheelchair accessible with handrails. We encourage everyone to wear a mask and they will also be provided. Air filter will be used.

**SOLIDARITY,
TRAUMA AND
INTERNAL LIMITS
TO STRUGGLE**