

Collective hysteria:

Embracing hysterical emotions, developing political and emotional solidarity

Introduction: Experience and the Multitude

The history of resistance servitude is full of what have been defined as hysterics; resistance from below is hysterical when it is unintelligible to prevailing systems of power and the state-of-things. Drawing on psychoanalytic interpretations of Hegel's master slave dialectic and the study of political affect we can analyze the emotive dimension to living our politics that is both in the moment of the everyday as well as the holding of powerful and exceptional affective spaces, which can revitalize our political selves and movements. Describing the political environment today through a "post-Marxist" lens, in which anti-capitalism needs to be reconciled with a reaction against grand (often liberatory) narratives and thus localized resistance. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri point out a similar problem of local untranslatability in *Empire*; the Marxist image of the proletariat has been displaced by a multitude of struggles, but these new struggles against global imperial capitalism speak to the local context and are untranslatable. The problem from the position of mobilization is that "(potential) revolutionaries in other parts of the world did not hear of the events in Beijing, Nablus, Los Angeles, Chiapas, Paris, or Seoul and immediately recognize them as their own struggles ... *struggles have become all but incommunicable.*" (Hardt & Negri 2001, 54; emphasis in original). What binds together any serious analysis is a local emphasis on affective connections among localities and collectives within those localities. This is what I intend to speak to, that the formation of mutual cooperation and collective struggle requires an affective orientation toward struggle and the proliferation of techniques of radical awakening and concerted struggle.

Why hysteria? The hysteric is my figure because she is ever present in the cycle of domination, the cast-off that must be cast-off in order to make the identification of capitalism with progress coherent and translatable. The hysteric is the enigmatic voice of the excluded and I will argue that the (broken) connection between servitude and hysteria provides a potential for the creative positioning of one's own struggle within a broader and emotive framework toward a mutual appreciation of and hopefully mutual aid in struggle. I will focus on the inward development of collective local struggle in this regard, but the implications for the multitude are much broader.

When we think of hysteria in the West what do we think of historically? The hysteric is typically understood as a feminized Other, whose emotional outbursts or somatic movements are deemed obscene or are not within the scope of phallic-centric pleasure. As one historian of the history of the science and technology of organisms put it hysteria often came to represent “the ordinary and uncomfortably persistent functioning of women's sexuality outside the dominant sexual paradigm” that being the Androcentric model of sexuality ([Maines](#) 1999). The diagnosis of female specific hysteria declined over the years due to a combination of a “diagnostic drift.” The decline of the disorder is in many ways, in which the definition was broken down into constituent symptoms and distributed across a new medical categories, some of them being recognized more readily as Syphilis and some showing up in the rise of depression and narcissistic disorders ([Minkle](#) 2000). Yet, while hysteria as a diagnostic category in Western medicine may have declined and lost its particular gendered character, the connection of hysteria and the characterization of resistance to more “rational” forms of state control has been with us for quite some time.

Hysteria is a coded language to discount demands against the state-of-things, and is deeply embedded in the rationalization for existing power relations and domination under capitalist auspices. Jacques Lacan reformulates the hysteric as a part of four central discourses of power and knowledge, the hysteric represents a fundamental challenge to the knowledge of the master to name and have a totality of knowledge. The knowledge of the slave is the knowledge of the body that the slave is forced to endure. The hysteric exposes the fragile hold on the totality of knowledge desired by the master, the articulated knowledge, and shows that he is impotent. For Lacan the Oedipus complex was in fact Freud's dream of returning power to the holder of the phallus and what he missed was the fundamental subversive nature of his hysterical patients. Rather than being an articulation of knowledge of the state or of capital, the hysteric demands that the master account for himself but accepts none of the same language used to justify her subordination. Becoming more in tune politically with our own hysterical impulses is a collective and collaborative process of mutual expressions of powerlessness without reducing the multitude of truths to yet another articulation of knowledge over the subject.

Solidarity with the hysteric is also a means of reaching a political home on which we can develop politically meaningful action and grow communities opposed to the state and aiming toward liberation. I propose that we do not have to understand another's identity on a conscious level, but on an emotive level dealing with understanding the process by one feels domination based on their body, it's gender, its race, its

ability, and its movement and work. Forming solidarity through our experiences of Otherness guide our actions, and increased interconnectedness, makes art and expression of personal narrative all the more insurrectionist and generative of counter collective resistance.

The colonial project's hysterics

Where should we begin such an analysis? In the interests of consistency I will again start with the outward facing analysis and narrow in on our subject. Politicizing hysteria is important because it is the somatic expression and movement of bodies that are obscured from what is to be considered socially (re)productive. The movement of bodies and the regulation and disciplining of rogue emotional fulfillment is at the heart of the development of capitalism. Silvia Federici ties the development of scientific rationalism with the development of state sovereignty and the nascent development of primitive capitalist accumulation. Resistance to early capitalism was met with the witch hunt, the gender and class dimensions of the witch hunt in Europe, and exported during colonization, as an attack on women's sexuality and in particular their control over reproduction and knowledge of healing (Federici 2009). The early development and deployment of state sovereignty was tied to the rational enforcement of the body as a machine and thus required the expropriation of power of sexuality and the disciplining of women or their exclusions as witches. This is the story of primitive accumulation that Federici argues that Marx misses in his acceptance of the idiocy of the peasant and their resistance to more "rational" means of production. It is not so much the reality of witchcraft that is at issues, as even those who approved of burning witches, such as Jean Bodin and Thomas Hobbes, were themselves well-to-do skeptics of the supernatural, but it is the regulating of sexuality and health away from the feminized Other and its connection to non-capitalist rationalities of work discipline that is key to understanding the scope of this resistance and the fundamental challenge it has to the State as a mechanism of control.

Such mechanisms of highly gendered control cannot be simply analyzed in European isolation, where the witch-hunt in America and elsewhere in the colonial world influenced anti-witchcraft ideology in Europe (Federici 2009, 233). The hysteric was not simply an export of colonization, but developed as new hysterical others were named and enslaved in the violent project of colonial expansion and slavery. Susan Buck-Morss argues that the metaphorical use of slavery in Hegel, as well as prominently in the big three social contract theorists, cannot be abstracted from Hegel's knowledge of *colonial* slavery (not as many

scholars have argued as a reference to Aristotle) and his knowledge slave revolts in Haiti of which he was very much aware of despite self censorship. Hele's central point of liberation in the master-slave dialectic is precisely the realization of the dependence of the master on the slave for its own reproduction, and the slave's unwillingness to be treated as a thing. This metaphor of slavery as legal domination of Europeans does not extend to the really existing slavery on which Europe's own civilization was build. This apparent contradiction, for Buck-Morss, provides the possibility of recovering a truly universal history as well as a full understanding of the cultural narratives of resistance through the spiritual practice of Vodou, which combined a fragmented history and practices with a radical discontinuity of those practices when imported into an enslaved reality and became a source of radical self-consciousness as part of the practice. Those practices of Vodou has historically been decried at the center of empire as the practice of cannibalism and even homosexuality and the infantilization of slaves is so evident as as to need very little elaboration. Thus the metaphor of the liberation of a childlike existence to a fully self-conscious adult was turned back on the slave. The slave's knowledge of the master was though a knowledge of the the master as needing the slave. But the master also has knowledge, the master's knowledge is of the law, the rational ordering of the relationships that sustain the master.

The movement of bodies is of great concern for the state. It is important to note that while, the conventional sovereignty of the state, that is the exercise of absolute authority within defined boundaries and "autonomous" Westphalian borders may be eroding in some important respects (see Krasner 1999; [2004](#)), the state is an adaptive concept and always has been. Resistance must also be adaptive. Again, for Hardt & Negri this is the post-modern synthesis filled will illusions to cyberpunk "mixtures" and Mutations, and for Paolo Virno this is the result of the response of adaptive capital to the failed demands for autonomy, represented by the Autonomia movement. (Hardt & Negri; Paolo Virno). Virno does open the possibility for developing the shared experience of the multitudinous many, the enemy of the unified Hobbesian liberal State's "people," as a way to cooperatively combine intellect and political action and to a "sphere of common affairs which is no longer state-run" (Virno 2004, 69). Experiences from the margins are implicitly tied up with structures and institutions of the state and the identities formed are painfully aware of this. The fashioning of the self, through emotive language and symbol is a deeply political act and connects us to one another and expands our horizon for analyzing our position of oppression. It is not simply that different communities have different needs, which is true, but that different communities have different origin stories

and thus different outward manifestations of oppression. This of course greatly impacts how they analyze their oppression and solutions through collective resistance to their mythical loss of self to the process of development of there new more rational bodies and arrangement of bodies. Within the layers of oppression and structure a conversation of privilege is necessary for building vibrant and durable coalitions of solidarity and thus a deep understanding of the psychological impacts of living and constructing one's identity in the reality of the struggle of the multitude.

Hysterical demands

The state is predicated on the existence of “the people” and a rejection of “the many,” the individual is only allowed insofar as they acquiesce to the demands of the centralized state-people, or the people as civilization. For Virno the common experience of the multitude is what he calls a not-feeling-at-home, and this experience should be seen at the center of “their own social and political praxis” (Virno 2004, 35). Virno then turns to an Aristotelian concepts of *topoi koini* and *topoi idioli* or “common places” and “special places.” Virno’s argument is that special places, creative linguistic spaces for developing imaginative ethos for political and social action, are dying out and the many increasingly turn to common places as the skeletal structure for interacting with each other. The many feeling not-at-home communicate their resistance and form a unity unlike the demand of the state for a people, but maintaining a plurality of experience (ibid., 43). Assimilation demands the opposite it demands not a One of a “people” envisioned by state, but a far more complex adherence to a normalized concept of the individual. To deny the existence of the collective ways in which our lives are mediated, would be to deny our political selves and our existence as embodied beings creating and searching for meaning. Mediating the demands of a multiplicity of collective communities with the demands of the individual has become an overarching problem for developing sustained and intentionally directed political struggle. This mindset of the individual is so deeply ingrained that we tend to think of the collective as an individual, as a body politic, or as a dangerous aggregate of “interests.” Aristotle conceptually developed the terms Oikos and Polis, the home and the political respectively, as interconnected concepts. While most scholars have taken the oikos as the constitutive element of the polis, the household being the ultimate metaphor for a functioning political order, the term oikos itself has a variety of meaning and there is more evidence that in Athens the oikos had a much more fluid meaning and may involve close relationships beyond blood family (Roy, 1999). Of course, the nuclear family was important

for both Athenian life and Aristotle himself, as any cursory reading of *The Politics* would demonstrate his ample misogyny and essentialism. However, speaking back to power is tied to this metaphor of the home as an evolving political space in which we can find and develop nurturing community from the margins and more importantly solidarity via a deep emotional understanding of differing struggles and then yell and scream in a unison of dissimilar voices.

This evolving political home is the development of a solidaristic development of the language around experiences from the margins. The need for a home is the need for a multiple communities of voices and and developing communities of communities to further advance and strengthen political struggle through more intersecting networks that take emotional connections with one's oppression and identity seriously. In short, this takes us on the path of an ethical commitment to the struggle and survival of the Other without assimilating this under our own sense of self. Collective action and a commitment to individual separatism are thus not opposed concepts but mutually depend on the production of a type of solidarity among beings containing multitudes of identity.

As home is a space of potential transformation and empowerment so to are our bodies, built up as a grammar, a language of how we love through the world and are shaped by the dominant forces of production and recreation. R. D. Laing politicizes the experience of the schizophrenic as not only an inner relationship, but a relationship among individuals within “relevant contextual social systems” (Laing 1967, 28). The imposition of a singular experience is the essence of social control as acceptable forms of individuality, the “right” way to experience, often as consumers; adaptation to groups through the enforcement of common experience can only impose a violence. The trick is to treat the multiplicity of experience without a reference to a natural order of things, a “family nexus” a reinforcing interiorization of group experience. Laing points out the plurality of social experience today and the fact we may belong to various groups with their own interiorizations, perhaps at odds with other groups. We navigate these contradictions daily, particularly of interest is when we experience these in our political communities and work toward collective action of liberation of the multiplicitous experiences of the self. Lacan (2007) refers to the bodily experience of the hysteric as being at odds with power and seek our own meaning. Yet, meaning is never just our own, it does not come from within but is mediated by the body of personal experiences we have and our interactions with others. The hysteric is the slave who won't fit into her own slavery; the gendered dimension of hysteria as a category should not be forgotten, but it should also not be

overdetermined and instead be the leftover of social power, the rabble that cannot be contained and the possibility for structural renewal of the self as mediated by language.

When developing the four discourses Lacan self-consciously starts with the master's discourse and the effect it has to actually existing chattel slavery of the colonial project, or in the Marxist reformulation of the modern capitalist master, the abstracted wage slave of the assumed to be historically evident proletarianization of the world. The master's field is divided into Cartesian quadrants in the upper left is the location of the master signifier, the agent who addresses the discourse to the Other in the upper right, in this case the knowledge of the slave. The slave produces the excess that the master appropriates for his own desire. Yet the discourse is attempting to express something through the master signifier, a truth, in this case the truth is of the subject who is divided, split between consciousness and the unconscious, the subject is alienated by the language which brings her into being and attempts to subjectivize her to a discourse. This relation of alienation may be fundamental in psychoanalysis. As Bruce Fink points out, the subject is barred - alienated - because of this fantasy for a total subjectivity; it is only after the injection of the Symbolic order of language that the subject can articulate her as such as a desiring subject (Fink 1996, 58). While for Fink this is seen clearly in the mother-child relationship, the subject becomes hysteric in a political sense when the subject is constituted by a language imposed (more-so than the general imposition of language). In the modern discourse of the capitalist master this is the place of the subject as true and real, and this for all we can say about it could perhaps be said to be homo-economics. The hysteric is who is excluded from the realm of production, of the rational ordering in accordance with the desires of the master. The hysteric must be cleared away, or to be subjectivised in accordance with the desire of the master, to make it possible for the work of the slave to continue undisturbed by the presence of her disruptions. The hysteric reveals the master's hold on the discourse and relation to the surplus of production. This relationship is incomplete as demonstrated by the existence of hysterical subjects. The mastery of knowledge that is the fantasy of the master to hold.

The four discourses explained

The subject may also be divided with respect to the self/Other distinction in which we come to know ourselves through the relation of others. The \$ represents the discourse we are caught up in scaled down to one single variable; it represents the subject that capitalism attempts to over-determine in order to

perpetuate its domination over the subject. The four related discourses are represented graphically as follows:



For Lacan, psychoanalysis is subversive and leads to the hysterization of discourse, which reveals the function of the master and his reliance on surplus knowledge. This surplus knowledge is what Lacan refers to as *jouissance*, or pleasure. The pleasure of the master is unmasked as domination and the feminine *jouissance* is ineffable since it does not conform to the phallic function and must be excluded. The hysteric is encouraged to speak through analysis of the innately hysterical act of speaking and reconstructing this structure of the desire to know, to know absolutely. The analyst takes the position of the objet petit a, the object of desire and provokes the subject to project on the analyst the truth of an all knowing knowledge. Yet, truth is in fact impossible to grasp, evident in the fact that knowledge is what occupies the position of truth in the discourse of the analyst. It would never come to pass the a psychoanalyst would say that say that there is absolute knowledge, but that it is unconscious knowledge that is what the patient attributes to the analyst (Wajcman, 2003). What the patient produces is the Master signifier which will allow them to understand their own subjectivity. It is then not about understanding the self as some affirmative holistic being. What is important to keep in mind is that the subject for Lacan is not a unitary subject. The subject is not reducible to an I, since every I is in fact an alter-I, a projection rooted in a particular discourse. This partial subject carries with it the possibility to be articulated in any number of ways depending on how the discourse manifests itself, particularly in reference to a master signifier. Identification is relational and social for Laclau and Mouffe as well and is never complete resulting in a “polysemy” of the signified that has the possibility of disarticulating a discursive structure, and continues:

“The practice of articulation, therefore, consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning; and the partial character of this fixation proceeds from the openness of the social, a result, in its turn, of the constant overflowing of every discourse by the infinitude of the field of discursivity.” (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001).

The system is open to subversion on a discursive level. Because the subject is split and is always in a process of identification with the social order she needs a means of articulating her position. It is in the

possibility of the contingency inherent in the re-articulation that allows for subversion. The subject's need to be re-articulated is unavoidable, we don't have to give up identity as such. The aim of identification does not to be either extreme, one of reifying identity and another of an abolition of our identities or a thin identification with an ill-defined human subject. However, this also does not mean that we can change the types of identifications that are socially available to us. If it is an aspect such as gender or sexuality that is fundamental for social interaction it could not be done away with as long as those social relations were paramount or if that same expression was not replaced by some other significant set of relationships that provide us with a basis for collective meaning making. Sexuality and gender are examples of categories deeply embedded into the social fabric and ones that are open to change, but not simply obliterated and replaced with nothing but a vague sense of human dignity. Yet we are not “falling short” of such an ideal to eliminate the hysteric and gain a pure knowledge of the subject, they hysteric is a challenge to go deeper into ourselves and challenge our own supposed mastery of knowledge and categorical order. Yet, if social interactions among actors are more equitable and horizontally structured, then we can claim a political victory. Just because there will be discursive domination in some social space does not mean that there will be political domination of all social spaces, particularly if those spaces are fluid, permeable, and localized toward collective need for mutual aid and recognition.

Lacan himself is at times explicit in the political implications of his four rotating discourses, particularly when it pertains to the Analyst's Discourse. This discourse has at the site of production the master signifier. The master signifier has no fixity of meaning and thus the analyst gives up the ability to speak of the possibility of “another style of master signifier” (Lacan, 2007, 176). This is also subversive to the master's discourse since it gives the subject the insight to produce the discourse of what is said to hold mastery over her. Often what is going on when a subject is “hailed,” to borrow from Althusser's concept of ideological interpellation, is hidden from view of the subject. Psychoanalysis would of course give the patient insight into how they are reacting to the social institutions around them as they are being filtered by the unconscious. The Analyst is actually a deceptive term for the whole process. The analyst does not analyze a thing, except through instances of the analysis own counter-transference on the patient that can give insight for the analyst to act in such a way to facilitate their position as an object for the patient's own transference. The patient has to come to their own conclusions in order for analysis to be successful. There are insights that are not merely momentary but are like an acquired skills for the patient. Recognizing one's transference

onto the world on some way becomes the patient reacting in more socially acceptable ways, as is a Foucauldian critique of psychoanalysis where the analyst denies madness as valid and instead of silencing in the asylum exploits the structure in a quest for orderliness (see: Huffer, 2010, 159). While I agree with Huffer that queer theory often uses dubious Freudian(Lacanian)-Foucauldian hybrids and that the History of Madness poses a problem for a happy uniting of Foucault and Psychoanalysis, I would also say that psychoanalysis has developed in many ways that make these criticisms less salient. We gain knowledge from this experience, perhaps not a knowledge in the psychoanalytic sense, but a practical knowledge of our own self. The hysteric is the one being analyzed because her symptom is a knowledge, but not a specific knowledge it is one of the knowledge of the process of subjectification which cuts off possibilities. It is also that while the discourse of the analysis produces the master's discourse it is by no means the same as enforcing that upon the patient and “curing” their hysteria. There are certainly instances of Foucauldian curing and educating exercised on the part of the analyst. Yet it seems that the target of Foucault is not the discourse of the analyst who holds knowledge in subordinated position to the subject-object relation but rather the discourse of the *university* which holds knowledge as the agent acting and producing intelligible subjects.

Knowledge is not produced through the discourse of the university, it is quite the reverse. Knowledge is captured and bounded, kept low and manageable. Of course calling the hysteric the source of knowledge and not the university is an uncomfortable proposition. What am I doing now? What are you reading? Is this is an exercise in the University Discourse? Well yes and no. As Žižek points out, this does not refer to a “vague notion of some speech being part of the academic interpretive machinery” but refers to systems which attempts to domesticate excess, such as modern capitalist bureaucracy (Žižek , 1997).¹ The university discourse as a discourse cannot stand sustained subjectivity but is bound to establishing the law of existence. The analyst, on the other hand, omits the question of knowing altogether while the university is driven by the possibility of the master signifier, addresses knowledge to the object and produces the subject. Knowledge is not benign if it is control and applied law-like on unwilling subjects. It simultaneously produces us as subjects but at the same time denies that it is producing subjects rather that it is producing authoritative texts on a range of objectified subjects and disciplines. This formulation is also disconcerting for

¹ Žižek goes on to point out the irony of treating antiuniversitarians such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, or Benjamin, as prime “feeding stuff” for the academic machine. Though these theorists may have the last laugh so to speak because they often defy strict rules of interpretation. They are their own ciphers through which our desires are articulated.

our potential iteration in it because of the the master signifier in place of truth. The function of the university discourse, or the function of knowledge as agent, serves to legitimate the Master's Discourse. This kind of authorizing the mastery of the social over the experience of the individual has also been resisted in psychoanalysis. R.D. Laing was very much politically involved in the anti-psychiatric movement for the reason that it did not take seriously the condition of madness as a necessary function of the self. Laing identifies schizophrenia, among other things, as a generalizable journey of the psyche where we travel from the outer to the inner and back out again refashioning a new I as we go (Laing, 1967, 89). Schizophrenia, hysteria, and other pathologies are the result of categorization and a lack of respect for the subjects journey to self discovery. Madness as a pejorative typology is analogous to the silencing of the subject when it runs up against the inconveniences of the master.

What then is the hysteric speaking to the master? It is not so much that the hysteric is speaking in the sense that she is informing the master with her excess of knowledge. Rather the hysteric demands from the master an accounting of the chain of signifiers in which both are caught up in identifying the master with an abundance of knowledge of the divided subject. In Lacan's formation it demands an accounting for herself and that her desire is to have a master, but a master that she can control (Lacan, 2007, 123). *The hysteric is not the slave of the master, but reveals the master's reliance on her to be subordinated by his knowledge; the hysteric points and demands her Other to justify himself.*

Hysterical movements

The development of subaltern knowledge must be originated on the basis of a set of emotive experiences with the world historical development of the modern state and it's post-congealed elements of systematic totalitarianism and domination on a global economic scale. Is Hegel's story of the resolution of the master slave dialectic liberatory, or did his own position prevent his own historicism from being thoroughly critical of state slavery. Karl Popper criticized Hegel's historicism, in particular his reliance on Plato to demonstrate the "worship" of the state as a pure collective being over and above the movement of the individual; Popper saw this state spirit as a root of modern totalitarianism despite Hegel's own radicalism (Popper 1962, 31). Indeed Popper links totalitarianism to the desire to maximize the pleasure principle (which he thinks will inevitably lead to totalitarianism) and references a history of the Black Death where dancing mania's were described and which Popper attributes to mass hysterias brought on by terror

and despair (Ibid., 304). Maximizing pleasure for the master deprives the slave of the agency in determining that pleasure and ignores those who are excluded from “reason,” which is to say those who are excluded from the Master’s discourse of “reasoned” rule.

The hysteric is the malcontented expression of a systemic sense of powerlessness, the inability to challenge the reproduction of one’s own experience of subjectivity. From utterance of the hysteric, the world is encountered as alien to one’s emotional and physical well being. It is a constant and persistent denial of pleasure and as a pejorative it is used to index our desire to the logic of another. The development of emotional solidarity should be seen as central to the development of resistance struggles and for *affecting* resistance, of moving people and bodies in collective ways that sustain us collectively in that cyclical nature of struggle in our present reality. Developing a successful resistance, successful in terms of revolutionizing power relations in some fundamental way, is done through some shared affective space that is co-created by those who encounter social and political spaces that are not set up for our emotional survival and well being. Direct confrontation from the state comes most harshly against those who refuse. The legitimacy of the law, but more specifically the law of the mythical formation of the state as itself just; this is why Jacques Derrida claims that the possibility of justice is in the exercise of deconstruction, and the experience of the impossible (as he then goes on to deconstruct his own position of authority in giving a keynote address). Derrida’s address/performance takes him to reference Walter Benjamin’s the *Critique Of Violence* and in it a potential analogous action to justice in the form of the general strike. The general strike is a refusal on a social level which opts out of the capitalist state and in a way does violence to the state. The violence is done because it forces the state to confront it’s own founding violence. The state can no longer go on and must fight for its existence. State reactions to general strikes are often swift and violent and shows the violence inherent in the State. For in this sense Derrida’s deconstruction is active in it’s potential range of refusal. The general strike is not one which the aim is to replace the state, but suppress it. Though the ability of refusal, this ideal of justice, is made through the collective struggle for solutions and mutual aid and solidarity among those in such a struggle.

There is an inner dimension to the politics of organizing spaces of collective creativity and aid and often leads to feels of depression and hopelessness that are public expressions of the private feelings of political failure. Ann Cvetkovich writes about the linkages to depression and political failure in *Depression: a public feeling*. Our political speaking, rather than being hopeful of a future, are often spoken half jokingly

and half mournfully. We meet hope with despair; Cvetkovich defines affective politics as “a way of coming to terms with disappointment, failure, and slowness of change; it is a politics that comes from remaining patient with moments before and after the so-called revolution” (Cvetkovich 2012, 7). This so-called revolution may in fact be failure itself, as J. Jack Halberstam would like to see a queers to embrace. While I do find empowerment in an embrace of my failure of gender, I would only have this possibility within a community who holds space for my existence outside capitalist (re)production. My failure is nurtured, upturning its meaning, through the collective work of emotional, physical, and spiritual mutual aid and solidarity. Lauren Berlant poses an alternative to the framework of the recurring punctuated political events event casted as trauma and crisis, to a lived reality of daily intuition and practical sovereignty in spaces of the new ordinary. Berlant, drawing from David Graber on anarchism and Gibson-Graham on neo-communitarianism, characterizes these tentative solutions as forging a *immediacy* to our politics, a muddling through in collective struggle, yet is ambivalent to these kinds of practice for fear that they are merely a reflection of the neo-liberal ideology of “cutting through the noise” and speaking directly to the people as a post-public. Yet, it is by understanding hysteria as a reflective mechanism on the experience of the lack of possibility to form immediate relations to the political. It means rooting politics as emotionally oriented toward the feelings of failure and powerlessness that defines the hysterical demand.

The psychoanalytic deployment post-Freud of the hysteric has a lot to tell us in terms of developing collective *responses* of resistance and struggle. Freud’s original use and deployment of the hysteric has been challenged by Jacques Lacan as a fundamental misinterpretation of what the hysteric desires. For Lacan, the hysteric desires a master, but more importantly she desires a master she can reign over. Such an experience expressed is marked off, marginalized, from the collective movement of society as hysterical. In Lacanian terms the hysteric rejects the truth of the master but has nothing to replace it with, no *collective* sense of self. A collective movement can help us make sense of ourselves outside of the dominant sets of signifiers that justify our domination under an increasingly neoliberal logic of internalized mastery. We find these spaces within the cracks of our daily lives outside the reproduction of that which we call modern civilization; we experience freedom, not in isolation, but in collective struggle. The hysteric pushes to put everything back into question and toward a new truth that is constructed based on our shared experience of struggle for something else. I use struggle to denote the open ended stiving that defines the hysterical experience and the search for a collective buttressing of such experience into a political manifestation of resistance. The

experience of embodiment of racialized and sexualized narratives of the self are hysterized are politically marginal. The hysteric demands an explanation for the feeling of living a life mastered by the coordination and political management of bodies.

Hysteria is not experienced in isolation, it is the stand in for every other possible combination of social and collective existence that is barred from our politics. It is personal at the same time as it reflects the roots of the everyday ambivalence we feel toward other around us. We develop deep personal connections, but those exist within a broader context from which we are alienated from. I'm not in this paper or in any part of my life seeking a cure for the alienation, a salvation in the form of abstract liberation. Rather struggle is an enduring practice of revolt. The demand for liberation in a concrete sense is not the same as that is liberation abstracted. I use struggle here in place of liberation to avoid truncating our politics before we've developed the *practice* of liberation as a holistic practice of living and not a teleological development of *the* movement.

How do we develop our collective voice when speaking back to the state, without reducing our demands to a enforced unity and instead multiply the sites of resistance? Articulating struggle against all forms of domination requires we deal with the state and the diffuse apparatus of power. We must not start from the premise that the state has a privileged position over humanity. That is, when we encounter the state in our struggle it must be clear that fundamentally the historic reality of the state has been the enforcement of unity, a people. It is not new in academia to say that Western History is a weapon (Zinn) and that the modern state's development is filled with failed promises and economic despotism (Scott). To resist this we must create the kind of counter narratives, but not just in the past, they must be a creative and collaborative history mixing our action with the emotional investment of community of a multitude of knowledge. These are subjugated knowledges, and are what Patricia Hill Collins' talks about in her discussion of the empowering knowledges of Black women to resist their domination; such collective experience is always generative of the means to resist subjugation through community. The shifting nature of this analysis lends itself to the identification of collective narratives of exclusion in its constantly multiplying forms.

The state has been in many ways the direct or indirect hindrance on the project of emancipation. Will that change? We have no way of knowing, but if it does change it will also change ourselves. What I am proposing is a dialogue of social justice that exists outside of the state. This would eschew the notion that a dialogue must be had on neutral ground as someone like Jürgen Habermas proposes. By positing the

subordinated subject as the expert, we can look for novel and innovative ways of reaching a political discourse that can recover some promises of emancipation through a dialogue that is not neutral but insurrectionary and multiplicitous in a way as to enact strategic political praxis. A dialogue that does not aim at speaking within the dominant normative paradigm but in changing it by making it account for itself. Something which the master cannot do, exposing the inadequacy. The dialogue is also insurrectionist as it does not require a neutral ground for speaking to the Master. Affectual expressions can be seen as a dialogue which has a potential for political mobilization. The writing, or symbolizing, of the self allows for people to find and develop such communities that have better capacities to deal with feelings of despair and apathy. If politics is to be conceived of as a struggle for refusal, those involved need to focus on developing mechanisms of accountability within an emerging anti-oppression dialogue. Growing dissatisfaction with the neo-liberal economy and austerity has become palpable in demonstrations, and the connecting of struggles around the globe facing capitalist backlash has been framed in an increasingly intersectional or multitudinal lens of oppression.

When movements fail at acting against the multiple and intersecting forms of oppression, a critique from below is may emerge, and as more and more communication is opened up we can see more and more of this dissent in dialogue, particularly from those occupying intersections and spaces of ambiguity on the global scale. As an example Flavia Dzodan wrote a piece in 2011 entitled “MY FEMINISM WILL BE INTERSECTIONAL OR IT WILL BE BULLSHIT!” that engaged in what she called a “connecting the dots” strategy of linking state violence with the inaction of Western feminists. Dzodan's continues:

And if you cannot see how this issue is so deeply interconnected with all of the above, with racism, with violence on WoC, with rape culture, with colonialism, with our disdain for people from the Global South, with whose bodies are deemed human and whose are not (and as such, unrapeable), with institutionalized violence, with wars waged by our Nations on the countries where these people come from... if you cannot see all of this as part of the same landscape, as part of the same gigantic, oppressive shit puff pastry, then maybe I should not call myself a feminist. Maybe, indeed, throwing flames in the direction of feminism is all I have left (Dzodan 2011).

The fully self-aware emotively angry reaction was based in a fundamental nonrecognition of one aspect of her identity over another, her womanhood was colonized by a white feminist dialogue that exotizes black and brown bodies and relegates them to the Other's of the world. The purpose is to fabricate a unity, not a solidarity with anyone. Questioning this problem has been the task of critical feminist theories particularly as it relates to defining a woman's experience and who feminism speaks for (Young, 1997). A turn to pragmatic theorizing from the standpoint of a problem, or more accurately a constellation of problems with shifting connections to each other, is my goal. However this cannot be done by standing outside or above

the fray. It means getting emotionally involved with a subject, especially when your subject is the experience of oppression deeply felt by people with varying social, economic, or political connections. The full weight of Howard Zinn's caution that you cannot be neutral on a moving train, becomes all the more complex when you consider the politically evolving collectives of communities developing and doing, creating new political spaces of struggle. That of course means that gaining perspective on our own biases as people who observe and analyze the political happening around us mean gaining personal insight as to how we are positioned in already existing structures of domination. It means that we need to take seriously the notion that one's experience of oppression is a type of expertise that needs to be listened to. It means developing networks of mutual care and allowing for the creative ability of self-authorship that may conceive of one's identity as fundamentally incompatible with the prevailing structure. It thus becomes less of an issue of racism defining black bodies as inferior to white bodies, but a systematic white supremacy and the criminalization of black bodies. Queer bodies are not simply deviations from a norm, but a reminder of the precarious position that exists within our own sexed and gendered bodies. This is not to equate the two in any ways as each modality of oppression operates differently on different bodies. Even within people of color anti-black racism has a distinctive character of violence and itself manifests differently in different regions. Fanon's observations were explicitly confined to the Antilles, with some generalizations beyond that specific context. However, the use of those deviations for Fanon was not to equate but to interconnect the process of bodies subjectivized under racial orders. Making such interconnections requires great care, but it is my contention that part of this care has to come from within the group and their own experience of being embodied as oppressed taken as a meaningful expression of the power of the social over the psyche. This is cyclical process of understanding and sharing of experience which has both a therapeutic and a political dimension. For politics to be embodied it must always be in motion.

For our politics to be embodied in a meaningful way, it must be given meaning that is able to be conveyed to others and through that conveying new possibilities, new political horizons may open. The fabrication of the self through a language of personal narrative is the focus of Patrichia Gherovichi's *Please Select Your Gender: From the Invention of Hysteria to the Democratization of Transgenderism* in which she analysis from a Lacanian framework gender transition narratives. Writing the self is a therapeutic exercise, but since we are at the level of experience there is always the existence and interactions of others in our writings. Gender transition narratives are particularly interesting for Gherovichi because of the

“complex relationship that transsexuals have to their body” (Gherovichi, 153). Gherovichi's work takes particular interest in Lacan's idea of the *sinthome*. Introduced in Seminar XXIII *Le Sinthome*, the *sinthome* is a doing through writing that re-knots the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real, that is it makes sense it produces a *jouissance* that cuts again the chaos. The Imaginary is the ideal formation of the I which comes to us through our childhood development where we see the self for the first time as assume it as a coherent whole, prior to the signifiers of language in the Symbolic. Writing the self is a therapeutic exercise, but since we are at the level of experience there is always the existence and interactions of others in our writings. There is no relation to the body that is not a *sinthome*, a re-knotting of aspects of the psyche that allow one to live. It transverses both the body and language determinate definitions of sexed and gendered bodies non-stable and based on an individual's experience and development in the mirror stage, the development of the imaginary, and through the subsequent symbolic adaptations one's gender takes on in terms of being surrounded by language symbols holding meaning over our bodies. It is the latter that I am concerned with and how more positive and politically challenging narratives of the self can become collective projects allowing people to find political homes in unlikely places. The function of the organ is not determinative of the meaning of the organ as it is commonly taken to be, rather “one makes use of the organ as best one can” (Lacan, 47). There is always some leftover some Real and sex cannot be fully symbolized from the body, there is always some sense of seeking a master an Other for Lacan. However Gherovichi poses a different solution to this psycho-social problem, what she calls “identifying with one's *sinthome*” (Gherovichi, 247). *Failure is not only an option; it is a means of living.*

What this means is an ethical commitment to the Other, to the choice outside the bounds of what has been deemed non-pathological. It however is not free liberal democratic “choice” in the sense of a free agent choosing their own destiny. This would be akin to reducing the body to an infinitely malleable commodity. Yet it is radically democratic in the sense that it relies on a refusal to identify, to strike against, and form new relations to one's body in an artistic mode. It is my contention that this writing extend far beyond the body and into the political ether. Allowing for us to find one another through a mutual commitment for the Other, which exists without context, but as I have shown can become a useful device to direct our politics. Hierarchies depends on a complementary view of the self in relation to others and not to a broad based commitment to a heterogeneous development of the self and communities.

A text, like one speaking back to heterosexuality, represents the possibility that those who are in subordinated subject position will show the limits of the dominant category thereby exposing a fundamental anxiety within the master subject. The process of normalization is the focus of *Heterosexuality*, but what is unique about this text is how it places the challenge of heterosexuality to justify itself, to respond to a direct call. It argues from a position of rhetorical strength. The primary editor of the volume writes in the preface: “... we are engaged in a struggle for change. Whether we will it or not, we are subversives, claiming by our existence and our utterance that heterosexuality is no more 'natural' than the feudal system ever was” (Hanscombe et al. 1987, 9). The non-normative identity category is always in the position of justifying its own existence. One contributor remarks after recounting a situation in which she was asked, like many lesbians are, to explain what she did in bed: “These sorts of conversations are ridiculous but they still go on. It's difficult, impossible, not to feel resentment and anger that heterosexual rarely, never, are subjected to this sort of questioning or have to explain themselves” (Hanscombe et al. 1987, 139). These confrontations can beget more confrontations and start a political dialogue that mediates our personal lives with our political lives. These experiences often further contextualize theory that circulates around in activist circles. The same author, Jan Parker, recounts being politically aware of the debate over political lesbianism in feminist spaces, but that her experience came slowly, and painfully, as did her resonance with the word written and shared by others, particularly Adrienne Rich's *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*. While she resisted an internalized coercive desire to conform this did not translate to a watered down politics of “Glad to be Gay” because the focus on heterosexuality as a structure and not a given. She writes that the infamous ten percent figure was tactical, not factual; its tactic is to “deflect attention away from the amount of energy and force that is put into keeping the vast majority on the heterosexual track. It is what these practices are, how they operate and how they can be changed that we've got to concentrate on” (Hanscombe et al. 1987, 142). This is a speaking out that aims to change both parties, not to take either identity as a given but concentrate on the compulsory structures which situate it. It is still a dialogue, one that may be read in pamphlets and seen spray painted on walls. It is an insurrectionist dialogue, one that demands to be heard through direct action and community formations. It is important here to note, that the focus of this kind of dialogue is to act as a *starting* point, outside of established institutions, to voice the demand for the kinds of structural change needed beyond current political horizons. Institutions may, in time, form around these

dialogues and create some process for this dialogue. But these ad hoc institutions must be compelled, from below, to come into existence through a critical masses of voices and experiences.

The framing of this project itself speaks to the importance one's subjective experience of processes of normalization to one's political commitments and theory. Gillian E. Hanscombe, co-editor of the volume, describes in the preface how this project centered on speaking back to heterosexuals came about. Her initial reaction was in the form of a joke, that she would contact only friends or friends of friends and not look for "stars" for the sake of legitimacy: "There was truth implicit in this tease., since at a serious level it was my view – and still is – that any one of us has something worth saying on the subject of heterosexuality, because whether we wish it or not, it's a subject we're forced to be an expert about by virtue of merely living our lives" (Hanscombe et al. 1987, 7). She goes on to further justify this move against charges that this work will be substandard by quipping: "Heterosexuals after all, on the subject of homosexuality, rarely – if ever – stop before they speak in order to examine their credentials for describing us." Merely living as oppressed burdens one with a knowledge of one's own oppression. Humans beings no more simply act then we simply think and reflect on our lives, we do both. Human activity cannot "be reduced to either verbalism or activism" (Freire, 2000, 125). Both are mirror reflections of each other, if one is removed the other likewise fades. Choosing how to act is premised on a humanistic self-understanding and that any account of politics theory that does not take that into account is "radically incomplete" (Grant, 2002). It is not only that we should simply understand political action as containing an aspect of self-reflection, but we can understand that sharing these self-reflections among the oppressed is what builds social and political solidarity and ultimately theories of actions. Sharing of ourselves is a radically political act. Strategies and tactics of radical politics actors are grounded in a theory that is itself gleaned from the asymmetrical social relations experienced by those participating.

Martin Humphries, co-editor of the collection *Heterosexuality*, wrote a piece detailing his political evolution from within an anti-sexist men's writing collective, *Achilles Heel*, and his experience working alongside non-gay men in socialist political structures. He writes: "There appeared to be a lot we could learn from and give to each other; sharing the experiences of our lives was important in this and in developing our abilities to feel political connexions between our personal lives and a wider social sphere" (Hanscombe et al. 1987, 90). This kind of understanding of the politics of the everyday is not self-indulgent, but can form these very real linkages and communities. The oft-used phrase "the personal is political"¹ was developed in

feminist thought to describe personal problems as symptoms of larger networks of oppression. Carol Hanisch's essay described a process of conciseness rising as having affinity with therapeutic practices, but not reducing politics to personalistic models of therapy where the point is to adjust to one's surroundings. It instead can be used to frame personal symptoms of anxiety as systematic of broader cultural norms. It acts as a lens by which feeling and action are merged and create a theory of political action; Hanisch explicitly warns against action only derived through abstract theory and not through experience (Hanisch, 2006).² Humphries remarks working with this group of largely non-gay men was far more beneficial because it was not predicated on a simplifying of identity but a complicating of them not reduced to "banal compromise." This is not to say that a gay politics cannot have transformative possibilities, but that it can immeasurably benefit from sharing in difference and finding connections. No one comes out of a radical or revolutionary movement the same, even if the revolution fails to exert that energy outward on society. That is to say, a critically engaged politics can never remove itself from those embedded social relations. These social relations are not simply produced, but are reproduced. Writing on ideology Louis Althusser identifies the school as a focal point in which it is not only a skills that are reproduced but at the same time "a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order" (Althusser, 1984). In other words, ideology is not inert, but is itself a practice. Furthermore, social relations are iteratively reproduced through a process of interpellation in which the State, usually personified as the police, calls or addresses a subject and in that interaction the response is recognition of that social relation as valid. On the subject of teaching, Rosanna Hibbert, a contributor to the volume we've been discussing, passionately remarks: "So teachers, to your siege machines! That is to say, watch your language. Words are our essence and our only weapons, yet how many of you use words which teach girls anything they don't 'know' already?" (Hanscombe et al. 1987, 22). Institutions of social order are admittedly an easy target because there are explicit rules and norms that we can look to. The experience of learning and educating cannot be separated from a learning of one's own identity. Discourse analysis in education relies on placing the context of identity of teacher and student at the center of the learning process and that forcing education in a top down way without this exploration of identity has a detrimental effect on students. In the context of LGBTQ students Amy Vetter writes "Youth must find ways to construct multiple identities within an institution that sometimes works

² It is important to note that in the 2006 reprinting of "The Personal is Political" Carol Hanisch credited the origin of the title phrase (as well as some of the major theoretical premises of the paper) with being developed among the movement itself.

against those constructions” (Vetter, 2010). Vetter further invokes an Audre Lorde quote “the learning process is something you can incite, literally incite, like a riot” yet only goes as far to say that educators can do this by providing “space” for students to explore identity. This tension between institution and learning to riot is palpable. What would learning like a riot look like? Hibbert, herself an educator, laments the ineffectiveness of teaching primary school children in the classroom because the playground is often where so much of these norms are reinforced. The classroom is an easy target because it is a microchasm of the world around us and yet there is a political poetics that comes from viewing the world this way and holding “classes” (yes, riots) outside, where out textbooks are sprayed on the walls and chorus of off-key voices shout for resistance.

That is we need not have the exact ends of a political struggle in mind, but that having the struggle is part of freedom itself. Simone de Beauvoir highlights the social nature of liberation against a highly individualistic conception: “Man can find a justification in his own existence only in the existence of other men... To will oneself free is also to will others free” (Beauvoir, 1976, 72-73). The ambiguity of freedom is not found in some unity for Beauvoir, but occupies a space of ambiguous possibility for aiming toward freedom itself:

Since the liberation aimed at is not a *thing* situated in an unfamiliar time, but a movement which realizes itself by tending to conquer, it can not attain itself if it denies itself at the start; action can not seek to fulfill itself by means which would destroy its very meaning.(Beauvoir, 1976, 131).

An ethics of this type cannot furnish us with formulas to grasp and categorize our actions. For example the artist can no more tell us the exact procedures to produce something beautiful (134). We must act in order to be free and discover the effect of those actions by experience not through logic. Affect is a type of experience that can happen through the introduction of ideas through symbols or poetry but does not give us a precise rubric to act. Yet, we are still said to be moved by art when we experience it.

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