

# Imagining New Worlds: Revolutionary Love and Radical Social Transformation in the Twenty-First Century

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**Abstract:** As we witness the collapse of the neoliberal consensus and the subsequent rise of authoritarian ‘strong men’ and xenophobic nationalisms across the globe, the capitalist hegemony that was consolidated by the neoliberal project remains very much intact. In pursuit of a sane alternative to this post-neoliberal world order this article proposes love as a key concept for political theory/philosophy and for performing a central role in the revolutionary transformation of contemporary global capitalism. Through a close reading of the works of Emma Goldman and Michael Hardt, and specifically their own pursuit of a political concept of love—I draw on, and make links with contemporary ideas of love as a political concept for radical social transformation in the twenty-first century. I argue that new love-based political subjectivities, practices, and group formations offer exciting opportunities for a reimagining of the frame within which an alter-globalisation can occur, and link theory to praxis by introducing an ongoing Collective Visioning project which illuminates a new post-capitalist, post-patriarchal, post-colonial, and post-anthropocentric synergetic politics grounded in revolutionary love.

Revolution is love if it wants to be worthy of its name.  
—Srećko Horvat, *The Radicality of Love*

In October 2018, the socio-political movement Extinction Rebellion (XR) was launched in the UK—adopting tactics of non-violent civil disobedience in pursuit of radical change to minimise the risk of mass extinctions and ecological collapse. In a speech made on an occupied Westminster Bridge on Rebellion Day, 17 November 2018, XR organiser and activist Skeena Rathor articulated the centrality of love as a grounding principal for this new movement:

If we are honest with ourselves and look into our hearts' deep interior, if we are honest from there—then this isn't just about saving humanity, this is about our courage to love as we have never loved before. Let us live now at the edge of our courage to love.<sup>1</sup>

In April 2019, the group disrupted London with eleven days of protests that have been cast as the biggest act of civil disobedience in recent British history.<sup>2</sup> XR occupied four prominent sites in central London for over a week: Oxford Circus, Marble Arch, Waterloo Bridge and the area around Parliament Square—bringing central London to a standstill and leading to over 1,100 arrests with chants of “we love you” each time an arrest was made. Iconic locations were blocked, the Shell building defaced, trains stopped, Goldman Sachs targeted, and a Day of Love was organised with rebels marching from the Eros Statue at Piccadilly Circus to Oxford Circus in a profoundly non-violent act of civil disobedience. Within two weeks, on 1 May 2019, the UK Parliament had been forced to declare an environmental and climate emergency (a key demand of XR)—making them the first government in the world to do so.

Throughout the last century there have been many such examples of political actors revolutionising love to align with specific political and social ideals of freedom, but as a subject of enquiry love has caused a significant amount of “academic anxiety” to date.<sup>3</sup> Within contemporary theory generally the subject of love has usually evoked an embarrassed response with the topic suggesting a conservatism, a denial of politics and “an aura of naïveté and sentimentality.”<sup>4</sup> Is it therefore possible to locate and define what it is we mean by *love*? And if so, is it possible to do so in an unapologetically political context? bell hooks laments that if she had been given a clear definition of love earlier in her life she might have become a loving person far sooner, and that if she had shared with others a common

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1. From a speech made by activist Skeena Rathor, Westminster Bridge, 17 November 2018.
  2. Faulconbridge and Marshall, “Extinction Rebellion Has a Message.”
  3. Morrison et al., “Critical Geographies of Love,” 507.
  4. Toye, “Towards a Poethics of Love,” 40.

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understanding of *what it means to love* it would have been far easier to *create love*.<sup>5</sup> As a useful starting point, ancient Greek philosophy isolated four distinct definitions of love: éros, storgē, philía, and agápe, each of which this article will argue can legitimately be considered as inherently political. Through this process I will explore how both Éros (desire/passion—often, but not always—physical/sexual) and Storgē (familial tenderness, love and affection) have acutely divergent potentialities—the potential for abuse, inequality and domination<sup>6</sup> or the potential to encourage alternative and liberatory forms of relationship beyond separateness and competition.<sup>7</sup> Similarly I will examine how Philía (affectionate regard/friendship/kinship) at once offers the potential to act as a basis for building a radical solidarity<sup>8</sup> or of legitimising xenophobic nationalisms, patriotisms and fascisms.<sup>9</sup> The fourth facet of love Agápe (which this paper frames as the unconditional love for all human/non-human life) perhaps more than any other offers potential as a truly politically transformative force—causing Sean Chabot to refer to it as *Revolutionary Love*.<sup>10</sup> As I will discuss, the agency of such a revolutionary love has a direct (and *direct-able*) causal effect on the trajectory of these other love relations, and therefore to the extent to which éros, storgē and philía might lead to intimate or social relations of *domination or liberation*.

There is now a small yet growing body of contemporary work exploring love as a catalyst for the revolutionary transformation (*alter-globalisation*)<sup>11</sup> of modern global capitalism—presenting opportunities for the disorienting of our conventional political schemas and for the reimagining of new political schemas based upon love, solidarity and justice. In what follows I will argue that new love-based political subjectivities,

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5. hooks, *All about Love*, 11.

6. Goldman, *Marriage and Love*.

7. Lynch, “Why Love, Care, and Solidarity Are Political Matters,” 183.

8. Foran, *Taking Power*, 274.

9. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 122–23.

10. Chabot, “Love and Revolution,” 812.

11. The term *alter-globalisation* is most closely associated with the specific movement wave spanning from the WTO protests in Seattle in 1999 into the first decade of the twenty-first century. This article reclaims and extends the meaning of the term *alter-globalisation* as a useful way of framing the ongoing series of movements whose proponents support global cooperation and interaction while opposing global capitalism—in general subscribing to anarchistic principles of freedom and the practice of a non-hierarchical democratic politics—and within which I would include movements such as the Arab Spring, Spain’s indignados, radical environmental movements, and the global Occupy movement.

practices, and group formations present opportunities for a reimagining of the frame within which an alter-globalisation can occur. I will first use the works of influential anarchist/autonomist thinkers Emma Goldman<sup>12</sup> and Michael Hardt<sup>13</sup> and their theories and praxes of revolutionary love as a ground for this argument, before turning to emerging work in posthuman theory which further extends political thought around love to include non-humans and the environment. Finally, I will connect this theory to praxis by introducing an ongoing Collective Visioning project which illuminates a *post-capitalist, post-patriarchal, post-colonial* and *post-anthropocentric* synergetic politics which is firmly grounded in such a revolutionary love.

### A Challenge for Contemporary Activism

For most of the last century, efforts to animate radical social change were focused on the state, with the main debates concerning how to win state power—whether by parliamentary or by extra-parliamentary means. The history of the twentieth century confirms that in all cases the winning of state power failed to bring about and sustain the changes that the militants had hoped for—with neither reformist nor revolutionary governments succeeding in radically changing the world.<sup>14</sup> Laurence Davis concludes that “revolutions tend to go astray because of the inclination of some revolutionaries to make use of and eventually monopolise the very mechanisms of power that their masters formerly used to oppress them.”<sup>15</sup> Contemporary anti-capitalist movements are simultaneously examples of the finest expressions of emancipatory traditions and sites for their contradictions, hierarchies and exclusions,<sup>16</sup> and will not be liberatory by simply imposing new hegemonic discourses based upon old and/or familiar structures.

As we witness the collapse of the neoliberal consensus and the subsequent rise of authoritarian ‘strong men’ and xenophobic nationalisms around the globe, the capitalist cultural hegemony that was consolidated by the neoliberal project remains very much intact—not widely recognised

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12. Emma Goldman (1869–1940) was a political activist, theorist, and leading figure in the anarchist movement of North America and Europe in the early twentieth century.

13. Michael Hardt (born 1960) is an autonomist political philosopher and literary theorist—best known for co-authoring the *Empire* trilogy with Antonio Negri.

14. Holloway, “Twelve Theses.”

15. Davis, “Love and Revolution in Le Guin’s *Four Ways to Forgiveness*,” 107.

16. Conway, *Edges of Global Justice*.

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as an ideology but accepted on faith as a natural and self-evident universal. As these objective societal structures are fully internalised as personal core beliefs and values, our mutually contingent relationships reproduce the same (capitalistic) structures ad infinitum, generating and regulating social and cultural norms. Forms of domination are embodied in languages, texts, knowledge, policies and human practices, and thus, are naturalized to such an extent that they become unconscious and sometimes unrecognizable.<sup>17</sup> This process is further compounded by the disorienting effects of the media saturation and algorithmic conditioning in which we find ourselves increasingly immersed. As Murray Bookchin argues in *The Ecology of Freedom*, the state's capacity to absorb social functions allows it to physically and psychologically rearrange social life so that it seems indispensable as an organising principle for human consociation—with the state's unique *political epistemology* imprinted upon our psyches and minds.<sup>18</sup> Subsequently there is a danger of movements unconsciously reproducing the very systems of domination they aim to challenge. Reflecting on his participation in the 2014 People's Climate March in New York City, Arun Gupta describes such a subversion of struggle:

Branding. That's how the climate crisis is going to be solved! We are in an era of postmodern social movements. The image (not ideology) comes first and shapes the reality. The P.R. and marketing determines the tactics, the messaging, the organizing, and the strategy.<sup>19</sup>

This Non-Profit Industrial Complex<sup>20</sup> has largely succeeded in institutionalising relations of domination through what Dylan Rodríguez calls the “velvet purse of state oppression”<sup>21</sup>—extending into left politics itself. Bound to an NGO sector which under neoliberalism replaced social welfare programs and other sources of stability for working class people, and funded by foundations, government grants and directly from the corporations themselves, this “fantasy of struggle”<sup>22</sup> finds itself unable to challenge the status quo without challenging the elite sources which fund the operation, and subsequently serves to reproduce structures of domination rather than transform them.

Populated by interconnected organisations with a diverse array of ideologies, methodologies, identities and cultural norms, there is a pressing

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17. Dillabough, “Class, Culture and the Predicaments of Masculine Domination.”

18. Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*.

19. Gupta, “How the People's Climate March Became a Corporate PR Campaign.”

20. INCITE!, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*.

21. Rodríguez, “The Political Logic of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex,” 23.

22. Jay, “The Postmodern Left and the Success of Neoliberalism.”

need for a framework of plurality within our current movement wave which avoids the dominations and hierarchies of previous structures, resists co-option and subversion by capitalist forces, maintains its constituent diversity, and yet allows for the construction of a cohesive collective identity. Through analysing the causes behind some three dozen revolutions in the Global South between 1910 and the present, John Foran speculates about the future of revolutions in an age of globalisation and argues that love is “the emotion that most strongly underlies the vital force that impels many ordinary people into extraordinary acts, across time and place.”<sup>23</sup> Such a revolutionary love, he claims, expresses hope and optimism, and might provide a constructive counterpoint to the powerful forces of domination. The animating role that such a force might perform across revolutionary political cultures suggests this to be an area that revolutionaries of the future (and present) might usefully learn to nurture and build upon.

Although often omitted by conventional political histories, there are many examples throughout the twentieth century of revolutionaries who have dared struggle to change the established order by revolutionising love to align with specific political and social ideals. It is here where the lines between the personal and the political blur, where we have seen glimpses of potentiality for love as a radically transformative revolutionary force. It is here where we might discover that love has always performed an intimate catalytic role within revolutionary politics. The following sections will now turn to the works of Emma Goldman and Michael Hardt and their theories and praxes of revolutionary love which emerge from a wider political alignment conforming to an anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, anarchist revolutionary narrative.<sup>24</sup> Exploring their themes of love as domination, love as transformation, and love as freedom I will draw on and make links with contemporary ideas of love as a political concept for radical social transformation in the twenty-first century.

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23. Foran, *Taking Power*, 274.

24. While the work of Hardt is often positioned as post-anarchist, he personally rejects such labels. The autonomous Marxism associated with his *Empire* co-author Antonio Negri more easily aligns with Hardt’s own interest in reclaiming the ‘common in communism.’ In either case, whether libertarian socialist or social anarchist, the revolutionary love which ignites the politics of both Hardt and Goldman offers great potential in similarly igniting a politics of alter-globalisation no longer confined by party systems or nation states.

## Love as Domination

Goldman is well known for her ruthless criticism of state sanctioned marriage throughout her life and works, in line with her anarchist principles. For her, such an institution perpetuates a “perversion of love” rather than its “ideal form.”<sup>25</sup> In the 1911 article *Marriage and Love*, Goldman argues that conventional marriage is primarily an economic arrangement, an “insurance pact”<sup>26</sup> which differs from ordinary life insurance agreements only in it being “more binding, more exacting.” Leaving little doubt in her condemnation of the institution, she claims that Dante’s motto over *Inferno* “Ye who enter here leave all hope behind” applies equally to marriage, a pact which a woman must pay for with “her name, her privacy, her self-respect, her very life, until death doth part.”

Goldman’s critique of marriage and love illuminated the inextricable interrelationality of the personal and the political. This theoretical achievement allowed her to reposition intimate asymmetrical power relations from a private matter dismissed by most revolutionary groups to a public concern worthy of political struggle.<sup>27</sup> Goldman was acutely aware of the distinct privileges and oppressions that both marriage and the emerging rights based equality offered to women from different classes, aligning women’s social freedom with financial status within a patriarchal, capitalist system.<sup>28</sup> As a woman from a working class, immigrant background, Goldman’s indifference to the suffrage movement and commitment to intersectionality arose from an embodied, lived experience of multiple forms of domination, and her passionate, revolutionary love armed her with a counterforce unconstrained by patriarchal or capitalist power. Such a counterforce might offer inspiration for a coherent, radical political praxis for contemporary activists who likewise find themselves marginalised in modern liberal societies within which freedom, as in Goldman’s time, remains aligned to capital, and intimately relational to class, gender and race.

Hardt similarly critiques the “corruption” of romantic love which he sees as a process of “becoming the same” requiring the couple to “merge into unity.”<sup>29</sup> He describes how the contemporary dominant notion of romantic love requires adherence to a mandatory sequence of couple-marriage-family, closing the couple into a unit that corrupts the common. This

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25. Hemmings, *Considering Emma Goldman*, 45.

26. Goldman, “Marriage and Love,” 97.

27. Lowe, “Revolutionary Love,” 193.

28. Zittlow-Rogness and Foust, “Beyond Rights and Virtues,” 154.

29. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 182.

“family love,” argues Hardt, applies pressure to love those closest to you within the family, and requires the exclusion or subordination of those who fall outside.<sup>30</sup> Hardt is further concerned about how such a familial logic is reproduced through political organisation and exclusive social bonding, leading to manifestations of patriotism and love of nation.<sup>31</sup> Hardt fiercely rejects patriotism, or love of nation/race, as a corrupt, identitarian form of love.<sup>32</sup> Such patriotic love attempts to push aside difference and multiplicity to form a united national people and a national identity, in turn bringing into being the other. From this perspective, Hardt argues, populisms, nationalisms, fascisms, and religious fundamentalisms are not so much based on hatred, as would commonly be claimed, but on a “horribly corrupted form of identitarian love.” It has now become common for right wing fascist hate groups to rebrand themselves as organisations of love, claiming to act out of love for their own kind and for the nation, rather than out of hatred for strangers and others.<sup>33</sup> We can see in contemporary politics globally how such an appropriation of love as a justification for hate can (and frequently does) frame those who oppose such groups (such as anti-fascist, anti-racist, anti-war activists) as working against the nation, and subsequently against love. On the logic of patriotism Goldman ridiculed the “peace-loving people” who claim to hate bloodshed and are opposed to violence, yet in the name of love of country “go into spasms of joy over the possibility of projecting dynamite bombs from flying machines upon helpless citizens.” This “patriotic lie,”<sup>34</sup> Goldman argued, must be undermined in order for a true internationalism to exist, and for the truly free society she so yearned for to finally emerge.

### **Love as Transformation: The Entanglement of Individual and Public Affect**

The works of both Goldman and Hardt repeatedly highlight the seeming antinomies of personal-political, individual-communal, and of a revolutionary love grounded in existing struggles whilst simultaneously envisioning a utopian beyond—positions often met with significant criticism. Goldman’s critique of marriage and her scandalous public advocacy of free love meant that her own intimate life commanded a great deal of attention, both then and now.<sup>35</sup> A number of feminist scholars have criticised

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30. Ibid.

31. Özselçuk, “Fifteen Years after the *Empire*,” 130.

32. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 182.

33. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 122.

34. Goldman, “Patriotism: A Menace to Liberty,” 57.

35. Ferguson, *Emma Goldman: Political Thinking in the Streets*, 177.

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Goldman's lack of consistency between her anarchist ideals of personal freedom in intimate relations, and her own apparent longing for loving and stable relationships with men, expressing disappointment in their feminist role model. Candace Falk saw in Goldman a "pattern of denial"<sup>36</sup> which meant that she could not acknowledge how deeply conflicted she felt about many of her most adamant public stands and that her "contradictory longing for the security of husband, children, and a home"<sup>37</sup> while rejecting the forms in which such stability was commonly manifested kept her from being able to work honestly on a popular revision of the article *Marriage and Love*. Alice Wexler similarly laments the gap between Goldman's private life and "her legend."<sup>38</sup>

It seems curious that it surprises these scholars that Goldman would experience the desires, obsessions, insecurities, fragilities and complexities that the vast majority of us are similarly called upon to navigate in activism and in daily life as emotional-sexual-social human beings. Rather than a betrayal of her anarchist principles, such apparent contradictions might be reframed as evidence of Goldman's dual commitment to imagining new worlds while being grounded in the existing one—thus anchoring her "radical imagination" in "material, yet extraordinary experience."<sup>39</sup> Such criticisms are in danger of obscuring Goldman's wider political vision of the transformative power of love. Although she made a sustained, fierce critique of the institution of (state/church controlled) marriage, her core interest was in the transformation of intimate relationships rather than their eradication. In her 1896 essay *Anarchy and the Sex Question* she continues to rail against the "unnatural unions which are not hallowed by love"<sup>40</sup> and the "chain which has been put around their necks by the law and Church."<sup>41</sup> Goldman then proceeds however to present "an anarchist's dream"<sup>42</sup> of what a free marriage could be, one in which "each will love and esteem each other, and will help in working not only for their own welfare, but, being happy themselves, they will desire also the universal happiness of humanity." Goldman's vision of free love was not as Gurstein describes, aligned to the "sexual realism—anaemic and cynical—of advertising and pornography,"<sup>43</sup> but a free love which exhorted people to "live in

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36. Falk, *Love, Anarchy and Emma Goldman*, 402.

37. *Ibid.*, 135.

38. Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life*, 278.

39. McBride, "Emma Goldman and the Power of Revolutionary Love," 164.

40. Goldman, "Anarchy and the Sex Question," 2.

41. *Ibid.*, 1.

42. *Ibid.*, 3.

43. Gurstein, "Emma Goldman and the Tragedy of Modern Love," 87.

the open air.” She imagined an anarchist love which extended far beyond (but not excluding) the family, a love which informed the construction of a free and equal society, by free individuals.

Hardt’s theoretical ideas around the corruption of love through a process of becoming the same have also received significant criticism from contemporary feminist scholars who argue that they work to uphold dominant scripts of masculine mobility and freedom. Such a script positions the home and intimate sphere (and by association, women) as confining men and holding them back from ‘real’ political action.<sup>44</sup> As Ann Ferguson reminds us, the tensions and contradictions between love relations as experienced by individuals, couples, parents, and wider social groups in our hegemonic racist capitalist patriarchy clearly persist,<sup>45</sup> and therefore from this perspective Hardt’s multitude will tend not to be women with young children, sick relatives, or elders to care for.<sup>46</sup> A material example of this can be found in the revolutionary praxis of Ernesto Che Guevara who in 1965 famously proclaimed that “the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love.”<sup>47</sup> By reading a little further however we can notice a desire to escape the limitations of what he refers to as “the level where ordinary people put their love into practice.” The “great feelings of love” he claims are necessary for the true revolutionary appear to be firmly situated in the public domain. He defers the love practices involved in affective and caring labour to the “ordinary people,” one assumes mainly women, in order to unlock the mobility and freedom required for ‘genuine’ revolutionary activity. Such a theory and practice of love fails to acknowledge the different subject positions held within a group, movement or society itself, not to mention the transformative potential inherent in such ordinary love practices, and is therefore incomplete.

Rosemary Hennessy similarly contends that Hardt’s notion of a liberating bio-politics obscures the unmet need capitalism produces and its relation to political agency.<sup>48</sup> Hennessy does not claim that bodies are irrelevant to politics, but rather that making life the fundamental political subject might overshadow the historical and material interface between bodies and the social relations through which needs are met. Within the social relations of capitalism, needs are continuously unmet, and Hennessy believes that this unmet need (rather than love) is the complement of the surplus labour accumulated in the marketplace and home, and

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44. Wilkinson, “Love in the Multitude?,” 238.

45. Ferguson, “Feminist Love Politics,” 259.

46. *Ibid.*, 260.

47. Guevara, *Che Guevara Reader*, 225.

48. Hennessy, “Bread and Roses in the Common,” 267.

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the surplus from which revolutionary knowledge and action spring: “If unmet need is the seedbed of organised struggle against exploitation and oppression, surplus common fertilises it.”<sup>49</sup> Arriving at a partial degree of alignment with Hardt however, Hennessy subsequently proposes that we might call a passionate politics that transforms such unmet need into the possibility of reclaiming this common love—but as a political praxis grounded in rather than breaking free from the loving-caring relations which fundamentally constitute society.

Social constructionism therefore performs a central and important role in feminist theory, highlighting capitalism and patriarchy as central in understanding women’s oppression, and challenging essentialist and determinist claims concerning static or inescapable roles of women in society. However, by adopting a social constructionist approach without questioning its inherent mechanistic understanding of matter as both passive and separable, Rachel Tillman argues that feminism has “refused nature” rather than “reconceptualising it”<sup>50</sup>—perpetuating a Cartesian subject/object divide and attempting to subsume nature into culture. As we will explore at greater depth later in this article in the section on post-human theory, Karen Barad proposes a new materiality in which the relationship between humans, other agents, and material reality is framed as one of intra-action, as opposed to interaction<sup>51</sup> and thus reframes the individual from a sovereign and separable unit to a contingent, profoundly entangled set of relationalities—offering potential for the co-constitution of political agency through the formation of new subjectivities and intersubjectivities. Such a dynamism, she claims, is generative not merely in the sense of bringing new objects into the world but in the sense of “bringing forth new worlds,” of engaging in “an ongoing reconfiguring of the world.”<sup>52</sup> Rosi Braidotti—a feminist theorist and leading figure in the new *posthumanities*—in fact positions herself *alongside* Hardt as part of a community of Spinozist scholars working on the politics of life itself as a “relentlessly generative force,” requiring an “interrogation of the shifting interrelations between human and nonhuman forces.”<sup>53</sup> From this perspective Hardt can be read not as seeking to negate current social relations of domination, but as attempting to “discover and live” a love which

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49. *Ibid.*, 269.

50. Tillman, “Toward a New Materialism,” 31.

51. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*.

52. *Ibid.*, 170.

53. Braidotti, “The Politics of ‘Life’ Itself and New Ways of Dying,” 206.

creates “spaces of liberation”—which have the power eventually to co-create alternatives to capitalist—and patriarchal—society.<sup>54</sup>

Forms of resistance which reclaim and affirm identities which have become the focus of oppression have been—and continue to be—necessary and effective forms of struggle, but as Hennessy points out, a central tactic of liberalism has been to “substitute the politicising of identities for the politicising of capitalism,” resulting in the obscuration of capitalism in much of contemporary theory by a resurgence of identity politics.<sup>55</sup> She suggests that we instead reorient the politicising of identities to begin with human needs. But here Hardt, like Goldman before him, sets sight on a longer-term goal in the pursuit of freedom, which is to “abolish the very identifications on which oppressive social hierarchies are built.”<sup>56</sup> Even intersectionality (although providing a useful analytical approach to understanding how an experience of domination or oppression is dependent on one’s positionality) is inextricably linked to the production and maintenance of identity categories.<sup>57</sup> Both identity politics *and* intersectionality thus serve to fix us to the present, and simply “changing the political grammar of our contemporary political moment” will not remove us from “the script that is always already in place.”<sup>58</sup> Rather than sticking to this script, Jennifer Nash argues that as practitioners of love politics we should collectively dream of an as yet unwritten future, a world “ordered by love, by a radical embrace of difference, by a set of subjects who work on/against themselves to work for each other.” Such a vision does not negate the numerous ways in which structures of domination continue to act upon individuals and groups, rather it is a rational, critical response to the “violence of the ordinary” and the sheer persistence of inequality that urgently calls for a “politics of the visionary.”

Goldman’s own insistence on the power of individual will to change one’s own circumstances and those of society similarly brought her great criticism from feminist scholars who felt this position conflicted with her analysis of women’s oppression and constraint at the hands of their male partners.<sup>59</sup> On the contrary argues Hardt—a political concept of love must betray the conventional divisions between personal and political and develop the power to create bonds that are at once intimate and social.<sup>60</sup>

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54. Hardt, “Pasolini Discovers Love Outside,” 128.

55. Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure*, 225.

56. Frassinelli, “Biopolitical Production, the Common, and a Happy Ending,” 126.

57. Nash, “Practicing Love,” 5.

58. *Ibid.*, 18.

59. Lowe, “Revolutionary Love,” 203.

60. Hardt, “For Love or Money,” 677.

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Once again, rather than negating *power-over* relations, Hardt proposes that we shift perspective so as no longer to consider a body as an entity, but instead as a relation. He suggests that “when a new relation is added, a larger body is composed, and when a relation is broken, the body diminishes or decomposes.”<sup>61</sup> This means that the border between the *inside* and *outside* of bodies, between *internal* and *external* causes, is “fluid and subject to our efforts.” Hardt argues that love as a “social muscle” requires a kind of training in order to increase its power, but that this has to be done with the *many*.<sup>62</sup>

Contemporary activism, with its tendency to favour forms of protest which are oppositional rather than creatively propositional, might learn from Goldman and Hardt’s modes of political praxis. Their revolutionary love, through illuminating the inextricable inter-relationality of individual and public affect, aims at transforming the political subjectivities and intersubjectivities of women and men and in so doing creating revolutionary subjects. Clare Hemmings describes Goldman’s counter-politics as a place of “intense feeling and reimagined relationships” and a “space for exemplary joy against the odds.”<sup>63</sup> Viewed in this way, the affective processes upon/between individual or social bodies might act as a vehicle for a revolutionary love to both transform domination relations *and* constitute the free society *simultaneously*, avoiding the reproduction of domination-subordination relations that socialist-feminists have rightly analysed as being involved in normalised practices of the previously mentioned *éros*, *storgē*, and *philia* modalities of love in this capitalist, patriarchal and racist world order. Previous research I have undertaken exploring gender transformative education has supported this potentiality for love as a lens through which to understand and transform the processes that reproduce domination whilst simultaneously providing the frame, motivation and energy required for revolutionary social change.<sup>64</sup> The research found that through introducing the concept of love (in this case via the southern African concept of Ubuntu<sup>65</sup>) as a habit of mind, at a level of functioning where moral consciousness, social norms and world view are produced, substantial changes in the subjectivities and inter-subjectivities of

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61. Hardt, “The Power to be Affected,” 220.

62. Davis and Sarlin, “On the Risk of a New Relationality,” 2.

63. Hemmings, “In the Mood for Revolution,” 542.

64. York, “Transforming Masculinities.”

65. The concept of Ubuntu is best expressed through the Nguini proverb “Umuntu ngu-umuntu ngobantu,” meaning “I am because we are.” This sense of collective solidarity characterises Ubuntu through love, caring, tolerance, respect, empathy, accountability, and responsibility.

participants are produced. Further, due to the emphasis upon love and solidarity within the Ubuntu concept, newly formed attitudes, beliefs and behaviours reflected these values, allowing culturally congruent transformation to occur which promoted radical and non-violent social change, and significant reframing of schemas concerning patriarchy, power and violence for the young men, boys, women and girls in the communities involved.

### Love as Freedom

The convergence of Goldman and Hardt's ideas of love as a political concept can be traced to a wider alignment of political positions conforming to an anarchist revolutionary narrative which is anti-capitalist and that transcends party and state. Might this revolutionary love which ignited the politics of Hardt and Goldman offer potential in similarly igniting a politics of alter-globalisation unconfined by nation states or party systems?

Hardt's revolutionary love is the element that animates all other theoretical elements of his political theories, the *multitude* of the poor, the social productivity of *biopolitical labour*, and the *exodus* from capitalist command, into one coherent project.<sup>66</sup> Hardt pursues a love which serves as the "central, constitutive mode and motor of politics," an essential (and greatly undertheorised) concept for contemporary political thought.<sup>67</sup> For him, this revolutionary love is the "event that arrives from the outside and breaks time in two,"<sup>68</sup> shattering the structures of this world and creating a "new world." In relation to political struggle Hardt rejects a reason/emotion opposition, arguing that reason cannot be devoid from passions and affects,<sup>69</sup> and like Goldman and her anarchist contemporaries he positions solidarity, caring for others and cooperation as central human survival mechanisms. He contends that when we band together in social solidarity we form a social body that is more powerful than individual bodies, constructing "a new and common subjectivity."<sup>70</sup> Hardt's revolutionary love produces affective networks, schemes of cooperation and social subjectivities. Rather than being spontaneous or passive as it is often presented, Hardt proposes love to be "an action, a biopolitical event, planned and realised in common." He takes a Spinozan perspective of love as an ontological event which marks a rupture with existing being to create new being, a production of the common that "constantly aims upward," a creative

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66. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 179.

67. Hardt, *The Procedures of Love*, 5.

68. *Ibid.*, 4.

69. Özselçuk, "Fifteen Years after the *Empire*," 130.

70. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 180.

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expansion with ever more power, culminating in “the love of nature as a whole, the common in its most expansive figure.” Hardt’s love therefore remains beyond the control of capital, refuses to be privatised and is inherently open to all.

Similarly for Goldman, love is the revolutionary force she holds above all others in her pursuit of a free society: “Love, the strongest and deepest element in all life, the harbinger of hope, of joy, of ecstasy; love, the defier of all laws, of all conventions; love, the most powerful moulder of human destiny.”<sup>71</sup> She remarks on the notion of free love and questions if love could be anything other, claiming it can “dwell in no other atmosphere.” Goldman understands that such a love is revolutionary because it remains elusive to capitalist and patriarchal control. Reflecting on the challenge presented to capitalism by such a love she remarks how “all the millions in the world have failed to buy love,” and how love is “the element that would forego all the wealth of money and power and live in its own world of untrammelled human expression.”<sup>72</sup> She perceives a similar relationship between love and military oppression, noting how “man has conquered whole nations, but all the power on earth has been unable to subdue love.”<sup>73</sup> She also provides a taste of the potentiality of love utilised as a dual power strategy, claiming that “all the laws on the statutes, all the courts in the universe, cannot tear it from the soil, once love has taken root.”

Just as Goldman had illuminated the inextricable interrelationality between the personal and the political in order to transform the political subjectivities and intersubjectivities of women and men, and in so doing created revolutionary subjects, Hardt similarly realises that love “composes singularities” not in unity but as a “network of social relations.”<sup>74</sup> Bringing together these two faces of love—the *constitution of the common* and the *composition of singularities* argues Hardt, is the central challenge for understanding love as a political act. Using the example of the *Gezi encampment* at the centre of the 2013 wave of demonstrations and civil unrest in Turkey, Hardt describes how many of the activists involved had experienced this protest as love—as a transformative encounter.<sup>75</sup> Hardt claims that this transformative nature of love is central when considering love as a political concept. More than merely recognising solidarity and forming a coalition of *the same*, love transforms, love creates something

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71. Goldman, “Marriage and Love,” 101.

72. Goldman, “What I Believe,” 18.

73. Goldman, “Marriage and Love,” 101.

74. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 184.

75. Özselçuk, “Fifteen Years after the *Empire*,” 132.

new. In unity, through examining events such as the Arab Spring, Occupy Movement and New Left, Srećko Horvat suggests that we explore what connects these events in a deeper sense, which he proposes to be love:

What connects them, more than anything, is something that can't be reduced to pure facts. What can't be reduced is this feeling of presence beyond classification or definitions; a presence of submergence; the feeling that you are completely alone but not abandoned, that you are more alone and unique than ever before, but more connected with a multitude than ever as well, in the very same moment. And this feeling can be described as love. Revolution is love if it wants to be worthy of its name.<sup>76</sup>

This apparent paradox concerning feelings of heightened individuality *and* solidarity during moments of revolutionary rupture animated by a spirit of love are further examined in the next section through the *entangled empathy* in which identity and agency are co-constituted by our social and material entanglements, with our individual subjectivities forming as an expression of entanglements across multiple interrelations.

George Katsiaficas's work on developing the concept of the *Eros effect* through a deep analysis of revolutionary events from the global revolutions of 1968 through to the Occupy movement and Arab Spring concludes that the activation of such events are based more upon an *inherent* feeling of connection with others and an *instinctual* "love for freedom" than with the specific economic or political conditions they oppose.<sup>77</sup> When this Eros effect is activated, their "love for" and "solidarity with" each other suddenly replace previously dominant values and norms—cooperation replaces competition, equality replaces hierarchy, and "power gives way to truth." But (as Katsiaficas enquires) can we make ourselves fall in love? Can we simply will ourselves to remain in love? Hardt pursues the same questions and concludes that such transformative events will not simply repeat themselves, suggesting that we can learn from such events, from the transformative power of love, and create habits which prolong or reproduce such encounters. New political constitutions of this kind will not be generated using conventional political logic. Neither 'we the people' nor any singular identity can act as founder, for such a politics does not aim at unity.<sup>78</sup> For Hardt, a political constitution *arising through and grounded in* a revolutionary love must generate encounters between different social multiplicities which produce new plural relationships, which in turn transform into smaller/larger multiplicities, requiring and generating new encounters. In reframing the conventional genesis of political

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76. Horvat, *The Radicality of Love*, 6.

77. Katsiaficas, "Eros and Revolution."

78. Hardt, *The Procedures of Love*, 9.

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constitution from unity to multiplicity, from fixed structure to dynamic process, Hardt's revolutionary love manages (theoretically at least) to prolong and extend the force of the revolutionary event to form and repeatedly transform social and political institutions, translating the "force of the event" into a "temporal process."<sup>79</sup>

Hardt's revolutionary love is not a unifying force aimed at some kind of *love monoculture*—a *love year zero*. Like Goldman he envisions free individuals living in cooperative social relations and in so doing constituting the common, the free society. In this way, love is not *anti-political* by ignoring the differences necessary for political contestation. Love could, claims Hardt, function as an "antagonistic engagement of differences that form stable bonds" and which remain based on multiplicity.<sup>80</sup> Of course, any political realist worth their salt would argue that such a society is as impossible now as it was in the time of Goldman. Through identifying the *corrupt* forms of love however, Hardt manages to displace *evil* as a primary element of human nature in favour of love, solidarity, caring for others and cooperation—human traits long held by anarchist theorists as the key mechanisms for human survival and prosperity. If evil, or as many Social Darwinists might describe it—the *individualistic competitive struggle for survival*—was truly the primary human drive then we would indeed need to yield to domination in order to restrain our fundamental human natures. Positioning love as primary suggests however that it holds the power to combat such corruptions, and therefore a revolutionary love has no need to "accept the rule of a lesser evil."<sup>81</sup> Hardt cautions that we should not imagine that we can defeat evil once and for all, and clearly the corruptions of love will continue long into the future, but this does offer great optimism for political contestation and the struggle for an alter-globalisation. Like Goldman before him, Hardt is ultimately interested in *what human nature can become*. If evil, as he contends, is secondary to love, then "the battle is ours to fight and win."

### Love beyond Anthropos: Entangled Empathy

The revolutionary love of both Goldman and Hardt succeeds in displacing the realist notion of sovereignty at the individual and social level, making clear the intimate relationality of social formation. This disorienting of conventional political schemas and the expansive trajectory of their political imaginary prealign Goldman and Hardt with some of the emerging work in posthuman and entanglement theories in which a number of

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79. *Ibid.*, 12.

80. Özselçuk, "Fifteen Years after the *Empire*," 133.

81. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 198.

scholars are starting to extend their thinking about love to include non-humans, the environment, technology and even matter itself—challenging the anthropocentric bias of contemporary political thought.

*Posthuman theory* positions the (human) subject as fully immersed in and imminent to a network of non-human relations.<sup>82</sup> This emerging field calls for a *love of the world* leading to an ethics of “political cohabitation” grounded in a respect for and responsibility towards our *more-than-human* plurality.<sup>83</sup> Such a “nontotalising, nonhomogenising earth ethics”<sup>84</sup> calls upon us to embrace our shared life on this planet with a multitude of *others*. The responsibility to engender response, or facilitate the ability to respond, in others and the environment, is the primary obligation of this *earth ethics*. The separation of epistemology from ontology assumes an inherent difference between human and non-human, subject and object, mind and body, matter and discourse. In remedy, Karen Barad proposes the use of an “*onto-epistem-ology*—the study of practices of knowing in being” as a better way to think through how we understand specific intra-actions to matter.<sup>85</sup> The Anthropocene has coincided with an era of high technological mediation which challenges anthropocentrism from within.<sup>86</sup> This decentring of *Anthropos* challenges the separation of *bios* (life as the prerogative of humans), from *zoe* (the life of non-human entities). What has come to the fore instead is a “nature-culture continuum”<sup>87</sup> which reconceptualises the self as embodied, embedded, relational and extended. The frame of reference therefore becomes the world, in all its “open-ended, interrelational, transnational, multisexed, and transspecies flows of becoming.” In relation to this particular enquiry, the *more than human* inter-relationality being described by these theorists offers a frame within which a revolutionary love might work to build the critical consciousness required to animate the scale of activism necessary to avert the impending anthropogenic ecocide.

This emerging field usefully extends the work being undertaken through affect theory to explore how all bodies, human *and* non-human, come to matter through the world’s *intra-activity* and concludes that the very nature of materiality itself is an *entanglement*.<sup>88</sup> From this perspective what we commonly take to be individual entities are not “separate

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82. Braidotti, *The Posthuman*.

83. Oliver, *Earth and World*, 104.

84. *Ibid.*, 240.

85. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 829.

86. Braidotti, “The Critical Posthumanities,” 388.

87. *Ibid.*, 381.

88. Barad, “Matter Feels, Converses, Suffers, Desires, Yearns and Remembers,” 69.

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determinately bounded and propertied objects,” but rather are (entangled parts of) phenomena that extend across time and space.<sup>89</sup> Ethics therefore shifts focus from finding the correct response to an externalised other to an obligation to be responsive to the other, who is not entirely separate from what we call the self. In pursuit of a revolutionary love, such an *entangled empathy*<sup>90</sup> presents a robust relational ontology through which identity and agency are co-constituted by our social and material entanglements, with our individual subjectivities forming as an expression of entanglements in multiple relations across “space, species, and substance.”<sup>91</sup> We therefore care about others because they are *fundamentally* part of our own agency. An example of this empathic entanglement can be seen through the story of environmental activist Julia Butterfly Hill who in the late 1990’s spent two years living in a redwood tree she named *Luna*. Her goal was to save it from being cut down by a logging company. She succeeded in saving both Luna and a surrounding three-acre swath of trees, becoming an inspiring symbol of environmental direct action. She later reflected on her motivation for taking this action, and on what had sustained her through the two year period:

I realized I didn’t climb the tree because I was angry at the corporations and the government; I climbed the tree because when I fell in love with the redwoods, I fell in love with the world. So it is my feeling of connection that drives me, instead of my anger and feelings of being disconnected.<sup>92</sup>

Such a radical solidarity can trace its lineage back to the many theorists and activists throughout history who have revolutionised love to align with their pursuit of freedom. The expansive, creative, disorienting, revolutionary love that is emerging through posthuman and entanglement theory is—we might argue—the very same force that animated Goldman’s radical politics a century ago. In this post-neoliberal era of increasing authoritarianism and xenophobic nationalism, finally fulfilling the promise of a political theory and praxis grounded in revolutionary love constitutes a pressing political project for all those engaged in authentic contemporary struggles for an alter-globalisation, and one deserving significant further exploration.

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89. Barad, “Nature’s Queer Performativity,” 125.

90. See Gruen, *Entangled Empathy* and “Expressing Entangled Empathy.”

91. Gruen, “Expressing Entangled Empathy,” 458.

92. Hill, “The Taoist and the Activist.”

## Love as Total Liberation: A Revolutionary Praxis for the Twenty-First Century

It is clear from the experience of revolution over the past century that authoritarian attempts at societal change towards alternative systems, however noble the intended outcomes, were conclusive failures. The evidence suggests that if we are to successfully realise a more cooperative, non-exploitative, ecologically sustainable and peaceful world, the forms of organisation which lead the transition towards such a system (in order to avoid similar authoritarian results) require a pre-modelling of the quality of world envisioned, by adopting a prefigurative politics grounded in revolutionary love. Such an approach might offer a clear, cohesive frame of reference within which the new system can be incubated, nurtured and sustained while simultaneously allowing the construction of a counter-hegemony to subvert and supplant the failing neoliberal project.

Colectivo Situaciones—an Argentinian Research Militancy collective likened engaging in such prefigurative praxis to a “process of falling in love.”<sup>93</sup> Their understanding of love in this context is not as something which happens to *one* with respect to *another*, but as a *process* which, in its constitution, requires two or more—a multiplicity. Such a love relation, they claim, participates beyond the mediation of a predetermined framework, with the inter-subjectivity of two or more “pierced” by this shared experience—“reconstituting” and “remaking” the subjects involved in the process.<sup>94</sup> This *love* then facilitates the co-creation of knowledge and praxis—composed through multiplicity—and until that moment segregated by individuality. An approach of this kind offers an important and complementary alternative to current methods and abstractions which act to isolate bodies into quantifiable exchangeable objects—thus mirroring the capitalist market. Here we see an attempt to utilise revolutionary love as political methodology, with activists/scholars facilitating/participating in a *constitutive becoming*, and illuminating a new commons.

Such an approach acts to reveal “glimpses of a future world”<sup>95</sup>—of the seeds of liberation already existing in the present. For Ernst Bloch, such imagination is “productive of the revolution,” and revolution is “the changing of the world”<sup>96</sup>—positioning imagination not as mere fantasising, but as a *process* inherently attuned to “objectively real possibility”<sup>97</sup> and there-

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93. Colectivo Situaciones, *On the Researcher Militant*, 4.

94. *Ibid.*, 5.

95. Shukaitis and Graeber, *Constituent Imagination*, 37.

96. Brown, “Ernst Bloch and the Utopian Imagination.”

97. Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 145.

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fore to the “properties of reality which are themselves utopian” (which already contain future). Similarly Katarzyna Balug positions imagination as the central driver of cognition and perception, concluding that society can therefore “only create that which its members can imagine.”<sup>98</sup> Without engaging in such future-oriented discussion on values, goals and visions it will never be possible to “take over” that very future.<sup>99</sup> Utopian political imaginaries have largely been rejected by conventional politics since the end of the Second World War on the epistemic grounds that such thought is abstract and metaphysical, and on the normative grounds that a utopian desire for justice and perfection might well rupture the ordered fragility of the international status quo.<sup>100</sup> Such a negation of imagination has led many political theorists to narrow their focus to the empirical *now*—thus constraining contemporary political imagination to a fixed and restricted present.

This is not to negate the importance of a political praxis which is responsive to the present and rooted in everyday experience, or as the Zapatistas put it: “preguntando caminamos” (“walking we ask questions”)—but simply to acknowledge that without visions of how the world *might be* different, struggles will stagnate and decline.<sup>101</sup> Might it be possible to develop a mode of praxis that simultaneously imagines futures which realign movement trajectory *and* which grounds itself in present moment realities—an imaginative/responsive ongoing process? Ruth Levitas suggests reframing Utopia *as method*, an “imaginary reconstitution of society” which addresses both the new society *and* the transition to it—thus maintaining a “double standpoint” between present and future and, she suggests, “re-reading the present from the standpoint of the future.”<sup>102</sup> Taking this logic even further, Laurence Davis draws a clear distinction between *transcendent utopias* which imagine and strive for perfection in an impossible future, and what he terms *grounded utopias* which imagine qualitatively better forms of living latent in the present—transforming the restrictions of the “here and now” into an “open horizon of possibilities.”<sup>103</sup> Such *grounded utopias* both emerge out of, and support the further development of, historical movements for social change—and thus are not “fantasised visions of perfection to be imposed on an imperfect world” but rather provide the space for a utopian re-imagining of

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98. Balug, “The Imagination Paradox,” 4.

99. Mannermaa, “Introduction,” 4.

100. Brincat, “Reclaiming the Utopian Imaginary in IR Theory,” 585.

101. Haiven and Khasnabish, *The Radical Imagination*, 63.

102. Levitas, *Utopia as Method*, 218.

103. Davis, “History, Politics, and Utopia,” 136.

current (and therefore future) social relations which are firmly grounded in contemporary grassroots struggle.

An ongoing *Collective Visioning* project which I currently facilitate utilises this utopian imagination as a methodological frame—exploring the thoughts, feelings, ideas and imaginings of a cross section of activists internationally in relation to the revolutionary love this article pursues.<sup>104</sup> The approach has been adapted from participatory methods used within the global Occupy movement as a tool for collaboration and collective action, involving a group process of intentionally generating a vision that is long-term, expansive and solutions-driven, and which proceeds to an action planning process in order to prepare strategy for prefiguring that which has been collectively envisioned. Subsequently the method utilises *utopia as process*—transitioning the functionality of utopia from *noun* to *verb*, and operationalising imagination as a *productive power* in the pursuit of new knowledge and praxis. Participants of this Collective Visioning include activists from South Africa, Mexico, *Trouwunna* (Tasmania, Australia), Ireland, UK, Syria, Uganda, Germany, Canada, the Netherlands, Turkey, USA and Jordan, with movement engagement including anti-capitalist/alter-globalisation activism, anarchist organising, radical environmental activism, indigenous rights activism, feminist activism, refugee solidarity work, food sovereignty projects, cooperatives and permaculture projects.

A number of themes arising out of this process are providing clear and encouraging evidence of how the theory explored in this article connects with a new *post-capitalist, post-patriarchal, post-colonial* and *post-anthropocentric* synergetic political practice on the ground:

- The majority of participants describe a *radical solidarity* which they frame as *love*—acting to construct a *framework of plurality* providing a cohesive, collective identity across the often divisive array of ideologies, methodologies, identities and cultural norms found within their movements and across society itself.
- A clear theme has been the importance of *re-positioning love* (and the matrix of loving-caring relations which constitutes society on a daily basis—hidden and devalued in patriarchal society) as the *central and primary social driver*. Activists from both the global South and North have discussed how in many cases indigenous knowledge has never forgotten this, and how this truth has been obscured in modern capitalist societies, and replaced by neoliberal values which reduce all things

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104. See research website at [www.love-and-alterglobalisation.net](http://www.love-and-alterglobalisation.net).

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to profit—reshaping the organisation of our social and psychological structures.

- A number of participants involved in some of the more recent dramatic socio-political uprisings across the world described the revolutionary moment itself as being co-constituted by love—as a joyful and emotional experience in which previous divisions of class, gender, race, ideology, and religion fell away (at least temporarily)—prefiguring the new society they wished to see. This prefiguration of a society grounded in love continues to be a common theme throughout the collective visioning process, and the construction of practices to extend this revolutionary love in order to *co-constitute the new society post-revolution* remains a key area for further exploration.

In conclusion, the agency of this revolutionary love offers a direct (and *directable*) causal effect on the trajectory of our multiple loving-caring relations, and therefore to the extent to which éros, storgē and philía might lead to intimate or social relations of *domination* or *liberation*. Such a revolutionary love can be seen to materialise in moments where our collective psycho-socio-material entanglement is realised, experienced and embodied. Conversely this revolutionary love can be invoked, activating a radical solidarity, a (more than human) psycho-socio-material commons. Strategically developing political praxes grounded in this revolutionary love might present us with both the means and the end when pursuing radical social transformation in the twenty-first century—providing the basis upon which to co-constitute society anew in the revolutionary moment rather than reverting to default capitalistic, patriarchal, racist or anthropocentric modes of reproduction, and offering a means of sustaining such a system in the absence of domination.

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