For the Long Haul:
Challenging Ideologies of Social Movement Participation
Through Counter-Stories of Activist Burnout

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A thesis
presented to the Independent Studies Program
of the University of Waterloo
in fulfilment of the
thesis requirements for the degree
Bachelor of Independent Studies (BIS)

UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

Waterloo, ON, Canada
Six Nations of the Grand River (Haudenosaunee) Territory

2015

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ABSTRACT

It is a widely accepted truth, in the academic and activist literature alike, that burnout jeopardizes the sustainability of social movements and their actors. More disputable is whether its cause, or blame, lies in collective pressures or personal choices. This thesis takes up critical theory to develop a narrative inquiry into the dynamics between the two, in pursuit of answers to more complex questions about the origins of burnout: What ideologies of social movement participation dominate activist spaces? How do they manifest in subcultural norms and practices? And how do participants themselves navigate or negotiate these collective expectations, in order to "do activism" or do activism differently, in ways that are personally (un)sustainable? Narrative analysis was conducted using data collected during life story interviews with ten social and environmental justice activists from across Southern Ontario. Four distinct yet intersecting "ideologies" were discerned as forces shaping social movement participation within this region: an ideology of what activism is; an ideology of activist spaces as (anti)oppressive; an ideology of community relationships; and an ideology of how commitment is experienced or proven. These "activist ideologies" are also traced back to their roots in key ideologies that dominate western society more broadly, demonstrating an application of Althusser's theory of the ideological state apparatus and how the "trickledown effect" of oppressive relations—even amongst progressives and radicals—may be interrupted or subverted. This theoretical analysis is complemented by a creative analytic theatre script crafted from the original research data. Its purpose is twofold: While offering the reader a more engaging representation of that data in the context of this thesis, "the play" is also designed for use in social movement spaces as a tool to both encourage the sharing of activists' own burnout experiences and spark deeper, more strategic discussions of longterm social movement sustainability.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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"When it all comes down, will you say you did everything you could?
When it all comes down, can you say that you never gave up?"

~ *RISE AGAINST, "THE ECO-TERRORIST IN ME"*

"There must be those among whom we can sit down and weep, and still be counted as warriors. (I make up this strange, angry packet for you, threaded with love.)"

~ *ADRIENNE RICH, "SOURCES"*

CHAPTER 1: MY CALL TO ACTION
AN INTRODUCTION

"I'm kind of awed by you. I mean, you've only been doing this for, what? A year or two?"

It was a moment I'll never forget, that casual breath of validation, unbidden and exhilarating. We were coming out of a particularly draining meeting at an inter-city activist convergence in the early spring. The goal of the gathering was to coordinate a sustained, Ontario-wide campaign of organizing against Enbridge's Line 9 project: the proposed reversal of a decades-old pipeline not built for the dirty diluted bitumen—or "dilbit"—that the company cavalierly planned to ship through it regardless. Crossing countless watersheds throughout Ontario and Quebec, Line 9 had posed an environmental risk ever since it was first installed to transport natural gas. But if Enbridge's new plan for the pipeline was allowed to proceed, it would reproduce the conditions that led to the company's most notorious oil spill to date: the disastrous leak of over 1 million gallons of dilbit that destroyed Michigan's Kalamazoo River and its surrounding ecosystems. Within my then-primary activist group, our concerns for the project ranged from history repeating itself, with an oil spill that would this time destroy our own Grand River, to how Enbridge was failing to even pretend to consult with indigenous communities along the Line 9 route, to how shipping more dilbit east would only serve to expand Canada's Mordor, the Alberta tar sands. These issues had motivated a few of our members to get involved in organizing the convergence, and I had wanted to find out more so I decided to go along as a participant.

On the way, I asked a friend of mine about the schedule and goals for the gathering, so he talked me through their facilitation plan. It seemed pretty ambitious and provoked some follow-up questions from me, so we workshopped a few ideas. I guess some of my feedback was useful, because before we even arrived he asked if I'd be interested and willing to work with the rest of the facilitation team to help the gathering stay on track. I was taken aback, having not psyched myself up to do anything more than show up, but I was also kind of flattered that he thought my perspective and involvement could be valuable to them. At the very least, I figured it would be interesting to see the convergence from that angle as well, like watching a concert from backstage. So I ignored my apprehension and self-doubt to seize, instead, this opportunity to take a step up on the activist ladder.

It would turn out to be a whirlwind, a long weekend of late nights and early mornings spent trying to wrangle 50+ activists—many of whom had never met, let alone worked together before—to focus and come up with a campaign strategy that everyone could agree on. It soon became clear that our sights were set a little too high: hell, half of them wouldn't even differentiate between broader strategies and specific tactics, so if they didn't like any particular type of action (say, economic sabotage), the suggestion and subsequent debate could send our entire planning session off the rails.

Suffice it to say that, by the second night, the facilitation team was kind of fried. Their original (and very ambitious) plan was unravelling, having hinged on the failed expectation that our fellow activists would all be familiar with campaign planning and understand not only the process but its importance as well. So while our relatively carefree participants had the night off to party and get to know each other better, we were holed up in an apartment trying to chart a new course to make the most of the rest of our weekend. There were a few sessions remaining, and we were determined to emerge from the convergence with some kind of concrete plan for where to go from there in our fight against Line 9.

As a last-minute recruit to the facilitation team—or, as I liked to think of myself, more like an outside consultant—I didn't feel the weight of the gathering's success or failure so squarely on my shoulders, which lent me a unique—and uniquely calm—perspective on our plight. As in the car on our drive up for the weekend, I must have given some relevant feedback during that meeting, because when we finally broke for the night my friend was again looking at me with an unusual smile on his face.

"...I'm kind of awed by you..." I don't remember everything else he said in that conversation, as we left the apartment to join the other activists' revelry. But with that one little phrase, this friend whom I had always thought of as someone to learn from because he had accrued considerably more organizing experience than me, he made me feel like a peer whom he could maybe learn from as well.

I can still remember how that felt: kind of like graduating, or being knighted and finally granted a spot on the battlefield. Ultimately, it was recognition and validation as a productive and valued member of my chosen society, among rebels and anarchists and all who seek justice. It was like looking your long-sought life's purpose in the eye... and having it recognize that same purpose there in you. It was all the more poignant because, as my friend meant to clarify, it was only coming up on 3 years since I had so eagerly waded into the social movement fray, with my newfound comrades at the anti-G20 demonstrations in Toronto, back in 2010. But it felt like such a long time ago—like a lifetime, actually—since I'd felt at the time like I'd finally found my place in the world. Like at last, my life was really beginning.

So I don't think my friend could have realized the real weight of his words, and what his remark would mean to me. But regardless of intent, they felt like an affirmation—not only of my being there that weekend, but of what I stood to offer in our Line 9 struggle and beyond. So having found myself in what felt like the big leagues at last, why the hell would I ever stop?

Well, now I know.

1.1 Context and Motivation

The viability and sustainability of social movements, including the environmental justice front, is always up for debate among activists and non-activists alike. While often questioned and answered at a theoretical level, the will-we-or-won't-we of social movement success can also manifest—and continue its tug of war—in the lived predicament of activist burnout.

So what is burnout? While featured prominently in a brief and anonymously authored zine entitled *Sustainable Activism and Avoiding Burnout*, available in PDF format on the Activist Trauma Support website, the following definition comes from the book *Career Burnout: Causes and Cures* by eminent psychologists Ayala Malakh-Pines and Elliot Aronson:

> Burnout is defined, and subjectively experienced, as a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion caused by long term involvement in situations that are emotionally demanding. The emotional demands are often caused by a combination of very high expectations and chronic situational stresses. Burnout is accompanied by an array of symptoms including physical depletion, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, disillusionment and the development of negative self-concept and negative attitudes towards work, people and life itself. In its extreme form, burnout represents a breaking point beyond which the ability to cope with the environment is severely hampered.

When burnout sets in, it may be regarded by one's peers as a purely personal problem that affects only those directly afflicted by it. However, as Jen Plyler (2006) explains early on in "How to Keep on Keeping On: Sustaining Ourselves in Community Organizing and Social Justice Struggles"—equal parts social critique and activist self-help guide—the consequences of burnout extend far beyond those suffered by any individual activist, like the ripples inevitably following a sinking stone:

> In the context of everyday injustices like poverty, racism, heterosexism, colonialism and ableism, community organizing is often carried out with a strong sense of urgency. While this urgency is understandable given the intense struggle for basic survival on the part of those living on the streets, struggling with HIV/AIDS, coping with gender-based violence, facing police brutality, and/or facing deportation, it is often accompanied by a marked disregard for the question of long-term sustainability. Social justice work often takes a detrimental toll on activists. I have witnessed... organizers paying for their activism with their emotional, mental, and physical health. Instead of figuring out ways to take care of ourselves and each other, social justice groups lose brilliant and committed activists to burnout, disillusionment and poor health. As a result, movements are plagued by fragmentation, lack of reflection and discussion, and 'wheel reinventing' that keeps them from moving their agendas forward. (p. 123)

1.2 CRISIS AND CRITICISM

Whether leading to the worst-case scenario of "movement exit" or less extreme crises of confidence and interpersonal conflict (jones, 2007), activists' driving purpose of pursuing social and/or environmental justice at any cost can, in turn, become our downfall. Yet despite a growing body of literature on the subject that acknowledges burnout as a problem faced by a wide range of social movement actors—and that even, on occasion, recognizes it as a problem fundamental to the collective sustainability and success of social movements overall—the issue still remains relatively marginal to the broader academic and activist discourses surrounding social and environmental justice work. By not addressing it directly and proactively, social movements have *collectively* allowed the problem of burnout to grow, insidiously and behind the scenes, from one of milder and sporadic affliction to a crisis of epic—even epidemic—proportions.

As discussed at length in Chapter Two's literature review, burnout is more often than not characterized as a cross both built and borne by individuals—a problem to be suffered and solved personally rather than collectively. This view alone can be warped into a self-shaming interpretation of burnout as a sign of personal weakness or, even worse, as an indication of waning commitment to their activism, as will be discussed in Chapter Four. Experiences of burnout—as well as the reluctance to acknowledge or attenuate with them—may be further exacerbated by the tendency, within activist cultures, to view one's own pain or struggles as comparatively minor and secondary to those of others. Whether true or not, on a personal level, this perspective can lead activists to subsequently neglect their own health and wellbeing in a noble but nevertheless twisted demonstration of their dedication to the cause. The backdrop of mainstream workaholism and broad societal stigma surrounding mental health certainly doesn't help matters:

> The ceaselessly productive worker, with little time for rest, let alone any need or desire for it, stands today as a heroic icon… The desired persona is one that transcends needs for sleep, care, relationships, and any other obligation that might distract from work and profit.
>
> In this world, legendary figures are the ones who remain in the office for one hundred hours straight, working through their children's musical recitals and 104-degree fevers. The idea is that workers become superhuman through the refusal of self-care. (Tokumitsu, 2015)

Countercultural as our activism can be, these values can bleed over into so-called radical subcultures as well, such that being perpetually busy and lamenting one's exhaustion (on the way to yet *another* meeting, of course) can become not only commonplace but a way of conveying to others one's own critical role in the struggle. While burnout is considered a bad thing, living and fighting on the brink of it is seen as something to take pride in, or aspire to, rather than resent or avoid (although these sentiments may also coexist). In this context, then, the reticence of the burnt-out activist to slow down for their own sake (or even disclose their difficulties with otherwise trusted comrades) is revealed to be quite a logical, if self-defeating, response.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

I have been involved in social movement organizing, to varying degrees, for the past five years, and as Jen Plyler (2006) has reflected, "Although five years is a very short time, it has been long enough for me to find myself both deeply entrenched in activist culture and brushing up against burnout on more than one occasion" (p. 124). In fact, my escalating involvement in social and environmental justice activism led me to put off doing this project at all for about two of those years. When I decided to buckle down at last and finally focus on finishing my undergraduate degree, in part because I was so burnt out that continuing to prioritize activism was no longer feasible, the only topic I could conceive spending an entire year studying was the issue of burnout itself. I was already frustrated with myself for putting it off so long but also recognized the need to process my accumulated issues and frustrations with the activism I had neglected it for, so it seemed like a no-brainer. It also presented an opportunity to engage with other activists who had experienced burnout themselves, through what would turn out to be very in-depth, and often quite intimate, interviews due to the extent of personal experiences discussed.

Along with expanding the literature on activist burnout with a study specific to the sub-field of environmental justice[1] and making connections relevant to the social movement context of Southern Ontario, my other driving purpose for this project was the intentional communion with comrades on the subject of burnout in order to facilitate the sharing and validation of burnout experiences *between* activists, rather than merely about them. Much of the literature on activist burnout enables a theoretical response to the

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[1] In spite of the limited scope of an undergraduate thesis, I was initially rather reticent about limiting my investigation of burnout to one subset of activists, insofar as burnout is an issue plaguing all of our movements to varying degrees. However, even though my recruitment materials made clear that this study was seeking environmental justice activists in particular, all of my participants had histories of engaging in multi-issue organizing. Moreover, their comments on the intersectional nature of social and environmental justice issues reassured me that, even though I was made to limit the scope of this research project through narrower sample criteria than I had over-ambitiously wanted, the full spectrum of systemic oppressions remained on the table for discussion by my interviewees whenever it became relevant for them to do so.

problematic phenomenon of non-disclosure or "suffering in silence" when activists experience burnout—namely, by encouraging them to open up in spite of their anxieties to that effect, which is of course much easier said than done. However, as discussed below, this project takes its theoretical direction from the tradition of critical theory, which includes the tenet of praxis—that is, the process of putting one's theory, lesson, or idea into action (Berbary, 2012, p. 7). Accordingly, this project has attempted a praxis response to the aforementioned problem of activists experiencing burnout in isolation and remaining there until they get their inner fire roaring again. By conducting life story interviews with comrades who have also experienced burnout, my data collection "fieldwork" facilitated not only valuable discussion but also fellowship, affinity, and even mutual healing on the basis of these difficult and highly personal experiences— experiences that too often keep activists alienated from friends and allies they may otherwise trust with their very lives.

Further, even when some activists manage to cope with burnout successfully by turning to close comrades for support, they may remain relatively private about their experiences rather than sharing such hard-learned lessons with the wider movements in which they work. As such, without stories they can relate to and learn from, fellow activists may continue to burn out in much the same way as their peers and predecessors. This project endeavours to help break this cycle, with the research findings to be made more readily available and accessible through subsequent academic publications but especially through activist circulation, both in zine format and in the context of activist sustainability workshops to be built upon these foundations. If burnout becomes more widely and readily discussed by those who have experienced it themselves, I can foresee this contributing to the (re)creation of a social movement culture where personal struggle is not so taboo, where more activists will find themselves willing to admit when they, too, are feeling burnt out—or, better yet, will open up about their struggles and seek help before they reach rock bottom at all.

In these ways, both throughout the research process itself and with the intended use of its findings, this project has attempted a praxis response to the cycle of burnout and isolation that continues to plague and impede the success of our movements for social and environmental justice worldwide. Ultimately, it took me twice as long as expected to complete this thesis, but in that time the research process also broadened, for me, from the mere (but by no means impersonal) pursuit of knowledge to one of hard-won healing as well.

1.4 REDISCOVERING CRITICAL THEORY

Before I transferred into the Independent Studies program and set myself on the path towards this project, I was an undergrad in the University of Waterloo's Literature & Rhetoric program. During that time, I was introduced to critical theory and enjoyed the challenge of reading and applying some of its core tenets to the works of literature assigned in class. However, while I recognized almost immediately the great potential for applying critical theory to real-world situations, the course and program parameters of an English degree limited the exercise of my newfound intellectual muscles. This bridling of my true academic interests led to a transfer into the choose-your-own-adventure program of Independent Studies, which culminated in the thesis you now hold in your hands. In pre-thesis discussion of my research interests with Dr. Lisbeth Berbary, who

would become my primary supervisor for the project, I was nudged in the direction of critical theory once again.

While certainly glad to be back in not only familiar but favoured intellectual territory, I would ultimately select it as my theoretical framework for its particular applicability to this project. Where I had previously explored the notions of ideology, oppression, and praxis in connection with fictional works, I could now seize critical theory for a more grounded, real-world purpose: conducting narrative analysis of real-world accounts in order to critique the dominant ideologies and subsequent cultural expectations within activist subcultures that can lead to burnout.

In order to focus my analysis further within the broad framework of critical theory, I selected Louis Althusser's theory of the Ideological State Apparatus. Anticipating an interesting opportunity to explore potential relationships between the dominant ideologies operating within Southern Ontario activist subcultures and those of the surrounding capitalist, sexist, racist (etc.) mainstream, I would discover—as I discuss at length in Chapter Five—that while right-wing capitalists are wrong in thinking that wealth will trickle down from the upper echelons of society to those fighting for change at the bottom, mainstream ideologies and cultural norms actually do often follow that pattern.

1.5 THE BURNING QUESTIONS

The core research questions guiding this narrative inquiry are as follows:

1. What are the dominant ideologies enabled within Southern Ontario activist spaces?
2. How are these ideologies embodied by individual and collective practices within those spaces?
3. How do participants negotiate these cultural expectations in order to "do activism" or "do activism differently"?

As discussed in Chapters Four and Five, while particular ideologies will powerfully shape the cultures of activism into which new members enter, the ways in which those participants respond to the resulting practices and expectations over time—whether by fulfilling or challenging them—will, in turn, *recreate* that social movement culture as similar or different from what they first encountered there. It is this potential for changing those aspects of activist culture that foster unsustainable participation, and subsequent burnout, that I sought to explore in my research.

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORIES OF STRUGGLE
A LITERATURE REVIEW

"Oil-pocalypse now! Drip, drip, drop... / Pedal to the metal but the signs say stop... We're all gonna die if this shit don't stop! / Time's running out! Tic tic toc..."

Walking through Toronto's rain-soaked streets, the anti-pipeline rap Test Their Logik had just performed at our mass rally against Line 9 was still echoing through my mind. Their lyrics hit home with the undeniable truth of how high the stakes had risen— for the earth, and for those of us striving to save it.

In the six months since that regional gathering, my activist collective at home in KW had decided to take up the Line 9 fight as our primary focus. We launched a local campaign over the summer to get more people aware of the issue and, ideally, involved in the struggle. Our plan was to bottomline a coalition of local organizations that would share in decision-making and workload for organizing and carrying out what we envisioned would be a truly community-driven campaign. But while quite a few of the organizations we approached would be vocal with their support of our cause, none of them sent representatives (at least, not beyond the first coalition) to actually participate in what would remain, frustratingly and forever, our campaign alone. So this left our little activist group of seven, plus a few community supporters, with a dilemma: would we recognize that the campaign was overly ambitious and scale back accordingly, or would we continue as planned and keep trying to recruit other groups while ultimately doing all the work ourselves? I don't recall us ever discussing the first option, but really, how could we not keep going? We were the only people in our area trying to draw attention, let alone action, to the local dangers of the Line 9 project; to not do everything we could to stop it would feel like condemning the Grand River watershed to an inevitable oily death, not to mention standing idly by while the land and indigenous communities along the pipeline route were further colonized through the lack of free, prior, and informed consent. (Meeting that legal requirement for new industrial projects would have undoubtedly stopped the project dead in its pipes, considering the widespread outcry against Line 9 from those communities, so it's no wonder the National Energy Board let the Enbridge proposal slide by without it.)

In order to do my part of the now-overwhelming campaign workload, I had thrown myself into activism harder than ever and put everything else on hold. I was already heavily involved as a local and provincial board member for the Waterloo and Ontario Public Interest Research Groups (WPIRG/OPIRG) and I couldn't afford to scale back on that, so it was other areas of my life that had to take the hit. My undergrad degree had stalled because, in the face of our watershed being wrecked by a Kalamazoo-style oil spill, academia just seemed so abstract and impotent compared to grassroots organizing and direct action. Any social engagements that didn't somehow incorporate activist networking seemed like trivial entertainment for those who weren't involved in the struggle, while sleeping more than five or six hours and eating real food seemed like luxuries I could seldom afford. Sure, it could be stressful, and sometimes it was downright miserable. But I couldn't imagine doing anything else, or anything less. If I didn't, who would? There were already so few people truly engaged to begin with...

The heat and warmth of righteous indignation from our rally was already fading fast as I trudged through the cold October drizzle, heading back to the friend's house where I was staying for the weekend. I was hoping I'd have time to change and grab something to eat before heading to another inter-city organizing meeting, but it wasn't looking good.

Simple pleasures, huh?

2.1 BURNOUT ACROSS VOCATIONS: AN OCCUPATIONAL HAZARD

Acclaimed social psychologist Christina Maslach developed her eponymous burnout inventory nearly a quarter of a century ago, but at the time burnout was being studied as a problem specific to human services professionals (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Decades later, while physicians, nurses, psychiatrists, counsellors, social workers, and teachers continue to be the primary subjects for academic literature on experiences of burnout (e.g., Buchanan, 2010; Cohen, 2009; Cuomo & Massaro, 2014; Iglesias, Vallejo & Fuentes, 2010; Kopelovich, 2014; Krumer-Nevo & Barak, 2007), personal accounts and public discussions of burnout across a wide range of career paths have become prolific in the popular media (Borysenko, 2011).

Indeed, burnout is being increasingly recognized—or perhaps resigned—as a symptom of modern life itself, regardless of one's occupation. We live in an era of globalized capitalism that takes as a given the value of "forward" progress, constant production, and an ever-increasing efficiency of life itself, often at the expense of social responsibility, environmental ethics, or even personal wellbeing. On the wealthier side of North America's workforce, embodying this ethos can be framed as a measure of dedication to one's career, earning one professional "cred" even as it becomes harder and harder to overlook the personal costs associated with it. As cited by *Time* magazine, in "our always wired, always on-call world… [i]nsurance claims for stress, depression and job burnout are now the U.S.'s fastest-growing disability category" (Gorman, 2007, p. 81). Meanwhile, for the working poor, there is often no choice to be made when it comes to taking extra shifts or working longer hours: "Against a widening income gap," writes international development consultant and author Deborah Eade (2006), "the lower paid now find that no amount of overtime is enough to meet their rising costs, while those at the upper-income echelons are experiencing unprecedented levels of stress and burnout that can't be compensated for by any amount of extra money" (p. 229). Moreover, she explains, the very tools designed—allegedly—to save us time are in fact engineering the option, if not the expectation, of us to devote even more time to our work. For many people, it is no longer "just a question of the hours spent in the office" due to "the blurring of professional and private space made possible by ICT [information and communications technology] developments—cell phones, laptops, and home PCs now make it literally impossible…to switch off from work, irrespective of family life and whatever material comforts one's home might offer" (Eade, 2006, p. 229).

British media and culture scholar Mark Little (1999) corroborates this, acknowledging the "mortal contradiction…[of] burn out or collapse" that has emerged between the "extraordinarily high velocity" of contemporary social connections and the "low-velocity organic configurations" of our physical bodies (p. 193-194). And yet this undeniable contradiction—that we'll never have the same kind of staying power as our smartphones—remains an obstacle that workers around the world strive, often in vain, to overcome. It can be as simple and seemingly benign as swapping one less hour of sleep for one more cup of coffee, but Little readily bursts the caffeine addict's bubble with a blunt but oft-denied truth: "Traditional power boosters (such as drugs) that enhance the biological parameters of the body can only go so far, and have a point of diminishing returns" (p. 194). There is no shortage of statistics to confirm this, from health studies to shelves full of self-help books, so why do we keep pushing ourselves to one breaking point or another? Anyone who has not yet experienced burnout might roll their eyes and write

it off as "workaholism"—a trope that derives from the very real health risks of capitalism as a longstanding economic model now taken for granted as *the way of the (modern) world*. As Little sees it, "In order to keep the body up to the speeds demanded by…[the] economy, human organic parameters are being re-engineered ("enhanced") better to suit the pathological environment of capital" (Little, 1999, p. 194).

This puts the workers of the world, a category that encompasses virtually everyone under capitalism, under increasing stress across the board: physical, mental, emotional, and even spiritual or existential when it comes to finding value and meaning in one's life. Adding insult to creeping injury, *Time* magazine's Christine Gorman (2007) states the obvious (and embarrassing) when she quips that we westerners "tend to cope with stress in all the wrong ways" (p. 82). For example, "we frequently deal with chronic stress by watching television, skipping exercise and forgoing healthy foods," but such common, feel-good-in-the-moment coping mechanisms actually "keep you from doing things that help buffer your stress load—like exercising or relaxing with friends or family—or add greater stress to your body" (p. 83). This can have deleterious long term effects on workers that we don't even fully understand yet:

> Still unclear is how the body goes from having repeated activation of the stress response to showing the typically blunted cortisol [stress hormone] levels of someone suffering from burnout. "We are still studying this," says Samuel Melamed of Tel Aviv University in Israel. "But if there is no relief and the cortisol stays up for long periods of time, the body stops responding and readjusts the level." (p. 84)

This means that, even while protesting the greater levels of stress that we are putting ourselves under, our bodies will instinctively adapt to it. Just like workers who are miserable in their jobs but can no longer imagine an alternative to holding their noses to the proverbial grindstone, our bodies are similarly forced to normalize the conditions of their labour—even to the point of burnout.

So what does that breaking point actually look and feel like? Research indicates that it varies by person and by occupational context, but descriptions of burnout also range widely from basic symptoms to whole diagnostic categories. Explaining the vulnerabilities attributed to therapists working with trauma survivors, Rosenberg (2008) writes, "The term 'burnout' summarizes a variety of symptoms including fatigue, depression, boredom, agitation, and loss of compassion" (p. 52). Meanwhile, the widely-used Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) outlines three specific "subscales" by which burnout can be measured, according to varying degrees of physical and emotional exhaustion, depersonalization or loss of empathy, and feelings of personal accomplishment or competence (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). There is also some discrepancy surrounding the prognosis for people who have reached the far end of the burnout spectrum. As medical doctor cum psychologist Joan Borysenko (2011) sums up in a blog for *The Huffington Post*, "Motivation gets replaced by a 'why bother?' attitude… The end result looks a lot like depression." On the other hand, in discussing the experiences of advocates working within the AIDS movement, Brouwer (2006) suggests that "[b]urnout is not the same as a loss of faith in the importance of efficacy of one's work…though they might themselves be too exhausted to perform that work" (366).

It is, however, widely recognized that "burnout stems from both personal and institutional factors, in interactions between the worker and the workplace" (Poindexter, 2007, p. 20; see also Sunderland, Catalano, Kendall, McAuliffe & Chenoweth, 2011; Wong

2013). For teachers, this road to ruin has been characterized as a "progressive loss of idealism, energy, purpose, and concern as a result of conditions of work" (Edelwich and Brodsky, cited in Korthagen, 2004, p. 92) which include "what people experience as a lack of support when it comes to the realization of those ideals" (Korthagen, 2004, p. 91). The experience of one young teacher at a New York City high school exemplifies this:

> "Everything is urgent here," he explained to me, "so you can't tell what is important and what is not. You don't know what you have to do right away and what you can do later, and you can never get it all done." "You end up working and working," he elaborated, "and you feel like you're never accomplishing anything because there's always more and everything needs to be done tomorrow. No matter what you do, it's never enough." These comments suggest that teachers at [the school] are under significant pressure to perform. They are given more work than they can reasonably accomplish, even if they do sacrifice their personal lives, and the work is consistently presented as "urgent". This makes teachers anxious and sets them up for burnout, which results in high turnover (Seher, 2011, p. 175)

Education researcher Christopher Day (2006) echoes this concern in his critique of the increasingly "managerialist" model of teaching in western schools, wherein passionate teachers "who wish to prepare their students as activist rather than compliant lifelong learners in contexts of unpredictable change" find their pedagogies and "core moral purposes...threatened by corporate, entrepreneurial models that promote teaching and learning agendas that focus upon improving schools and raising student achievement within a restricted, measurable range of subjects, abilities or competencies" (p. 147). In this context, one's life's work becomes an uphill battle and teacher commitment has been observed as a catch-22, both "a critical part of teachers' job satisfaction, identity and self-efficacy, and a predictor of teachers' work performance, absenteeism, burnout and turnover" (151). Cohen (2009) describes how such commitment can also lead to "a kind of romantic self-abnegation" (p. 479) associated with great teaching, but she places the responsibility for this on the present culture of education rather than any inherent martyrdom on the part of individual teachers: "The new teacher is taught that the student comes first. He is taught this not only through intuited cultural messages, but also through his own teacher education, and in his observed experience with administrators in public and private schools" (p. 481). This, she continues, can result in burnout: "Research shows that years of psychic self-sacrifice take an enormous toll on teachers—a toll that leads to incompetence, depression, and attrition" (p. 481).

Patterns of self-abnegation and sacrifice emerge in the literature on other burnout-prone occupations as well, particularly for social services and community-based work wherein the emphasis is always on helping others. In social work, "[t]he risk to practitioners is that if they do not recognise and acknowledge the personal impact of their work they may experience excessive stress and distress, which may in turn contribute to phenomena such as burnout, absenteeism and mental ill-health" (Ward, 2008, p. 68). There is a growing body of research surrounding the negative health experiences of rape crisis and domestic violence workers (Giller, Vermilyea & Steele, 2006; Maier, 2011; Babin, Palazzolo & Rivera, 2012), which also points to the dangers of "suppressing the self" in the course of emotional labour that "can lead to such consequences as physical illness, burnout, and emotional numbness" (Shuler, 2007, p. 256). Reverend Dr. D. Darrell Griffin (2011) describes how religious professionals have a similar "tendency to exhaust themselves and to deplete their spiritual resources" which would otherwise "guard against burnout that can result in loss of energy and passion" (p. 4-5). Sunderland

et. al. (2011) found that, for community-based researchers whose work takes them outside of the academy and who "see themselves as moral agents who work toward a perceived good or moral outcome" (p. 79), it is reportedly common to experience "moral distress"— that is, "periods of burnout and disillusionment after prolonged exposure to entrenched social problems their community colleagues experience" (p. 74).

There is a notable theme in the literature that suggests confronting overwhelming issues on a regular basis can be a core risk factor for burnout, whether directly—as the focus of one's work—or indirectly, through personal experience of systemic oppressions in the course of doing one's work. For the former, the circumstances of those responding to the AIDS epidemic provides a clear example:

> Due to the disease's uncertainty and devastation, HIV managers and workers may suffer from reduced control, hope, self-efficacy, and/or interpersonal connection. The cumulative effect can leave managers and employees in the HIV field at risk of burn-out, that is, feelings of emotional exhaustion, social detachment, apathy, hopelessness, compassion fatigue, powerlessness, and reduced accomplishment or competence. [Moreover,] Due to HIV stigma, sometimes those workers are not able to access enough social support to buffer that stress. (Poindexter, 2007, p. 20)

Sexual assault and domestic violence workers face similar frustrations,

> knowing how ineffective the police and courts have been [in serving or supporting survivors]. In these crisis services, staff burnout is clearly tied to their firsthand knowledge of how limited many women's options are and how unequal their access to legal remedies continues to be. (Bart, Miller, Moran & Stanko, 1989, p. 434)

And then there are the firsthand experiences of systemic oppressions, which can be blatant or subtle but make for cumulative stress in either case. Education scholar Daryl G. Smith (1990) describes how,

> [i]n listening to the stories of minority faculty and staff, one cannot help but be moved by the burden such people face as they attempt to be role models and model scholar/teachers...while simultaneously experiencing explicit or subtle forms of harassment, isolation, and racism. (p. 31)

And although Poindexter (2007) is writing specifically about AIDS service organizations when she describes the prevalence of "antagonism between various groups (based on gender, sexual orientation, HIV status, level of physical functioning, educational level, role in the agency, or pay status)" (p. 21), such "internal conflicts" can arise in any workplace that employs people of diverse identities. For all marginalized populations, there is an increased risk for burnout as a result of interpersonal and institutional forms of discrimination (Ramsay, 1997; Rottman, 2006; Stitt, 2014). Experiencing such negative reactions to one's identity and presence in a chosen field can lead, in turn, to very different approaches towards ongoing participation among those marginalized members. Within the music industry, "Women band-members have talked of burnout caused by a constant defensive stance: even when opportunities arose, they felt unwilling or unable to take them" which is attributed to "the fact that the gatekeepers—those who controlled access to radio and television and to recording contracts—were invariably male" (Reddington, 2004, p. 442). In contrast, Adelman and Woods (2006) "observed LGBTQ students who overcompensate for their lack of public and self-acceptance by taking on

multiple leadership positions in school, community and work activities, which results in premature burnout and other health concerns" (p. 8).

Shrinking away from opportunities and attempting to prove oneself to the fullest extent are at opposite ends of the spectrum of possible responses to marginalization in the workplace. However, both reactions to discrimination are valid and may be prevalent, whether easily visible or not, in any workplace where systemic oppression isn't proactively addressed, or isn't addressed effectively. As Poindexter (2007) points out, this burnout factor can manifest in both interpersonal and institutional forms and it is most exacerbated when "organizational cultures are often crisis-oriented" and consequently "do not spend the time on intraorganizational reflection and debate" after such interpersonal conflicts arise (p. 22). In contrast, she suggests that "[c]reating a safe environment in which to engage in ongoing critical thinking and conversation and to acknowledge the interlocking oppressions and stigmas that staff and volunteers deal with daily *could lead to growth rather than atrophy*" (p. 22, emphasis added).

This is one of several strategies suggested in the literature for overcoming burnout at an organizational level, in terms of treatment but primarily with the aim of prevention. Workplace-focused solutions are emphasized for their ability to reach all employees proactively and, ideally, cultivate a collective shift towards healthier practices:

> Managers can work to create organizational cultures and structures that sustain and nurture the workers and the work. Flexible work schedules, supportive supervision (individual, peer, and/or group), and permitting appropriate emotional expression can facilitate the accommodation of stress situations. Managers can focus on building an empowering work environment, with supportive supervision and consultation (inside or outside the agency), along with positive reinforcement, recognition, and praise for employees' dedication and accomplishments… [Additionally,] managers should watch for signs of overwhelming stress and offer anti-burnout programs that teach self-care and coping skills, relaxation, and boundary setting, as well as encouraging a collaborative organizational culture. (Poindexter, 2007, p. 20)

Calls for education or training in personal self-care strategies ring out across the literature for a wide range of occupations, from domestic violence advocacy (Briggs, Lian, Yeo & Lushington, 2001; D'Enbeau & Kunkel, 2013) and social work fields (Ben-Zur & Michael, 2007; McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011; Shannon et al., 2014) to psychology and counselling (Giller, Vermilya & Steele, 2006; Ben-Zur & Michael, 2007; Cuomo & Massaro, 2014) and beyond. One aspect of effective self-care that stands out across the board is the capacity to set and respect boundaries between oneself and one's work, be it in terms of time, space, or emotional investment, all of which can be taken too far. As feminist geographers whose predecessors "have gone to great lengths to complicate notions of 'the field' and make clear that the field is not an easily bounded space" (p. 1), Cuomo & Massaro (2014) have, in contrast, "often found ourselves struggling to define the physical and emotional boundaries of 'the field' on the outside for the sake of our participants and ourselves" (p. 2). While they apply the concept of "boundary-making" to the context of doing research in a community of which one is already a member, every workplace is its own community of sorts and employees of all stripes can struggle with maintaining healthy boundaries— in terms of social relationships, on the one hand, and emotional or psychological investment in the work on the other. Research among athletes, in particular, suggests that burnout can be induced by an unhealthy or disproportionate commitment to one's cause—or, in this case, one's sport—that can result from "identify[ing] only with the

sporting role" (Gould & Carson, 2008, p. 68). One need only consider how someone with such an all-consuming sense of professional identity could be at risk if, for whatever reason, they were rendered unable to participate in their occupation of choice or suddenly became bored, resentful, or disillusioned with their role.

Of course, the sense that one's identity is inherently tied to their life's work is also a mark of passion and commitment, and it need not be a risk factor so long as balance is maintained. Suggestions for how to do so range from diversifying the professional activities that one engages in at work (Benatar, 2000) to taking a break from work altogether with a vacation or sabbatical, if that option exists (Van Der Westhuizen & Smith, 2000; Krumer-Nevo & Barak, 2007). However, according to early research by Maslach & Jackson (1981) in their development of the MBI, "burnout is likely to occur within the first few years of one's career" (p. 111), which indicates the need for novices to receive greater support from veterans in their respective fields. Training and mentorship are recommended across a wide range of career paths, from teaching (Buchanan, 2010) and preaching (Griffin, 2012) to nursing (Standing, 1999) and trauma support (Giller, Vermilyea & Steele, 2008). Moreover, such measures will likely be necessary in order to effectively combat burnout risks at a systemic level rather than a merely symptomatic one.

Unfortunately, burnout is still treated as a personal problem in many of these sectors. Within education, the "intervention focus is primarily on individual teachers rather than on promoting structural, pedagogical and cultural changes that improve working environments" (Johnson & Down, 2013, p. 704). While much of the literature on teacher burnout acknowledges the prevalence of this problem, some authors concede that the issue "only appears to be under control; it is not being adequately addressed" (Burch, Haberman, Mutua, Bloom, Romeo & Duffield, 2001, p. 280). Similarly, while select social work education programs are now incorporating self-care practices into their curricula, these are still fledgling initiatives of individual faculty members that aren't yet recognized as a field-wide necessity (Shannon, Simmelink-McCleary, Im, Becher & Crook-Lyon, 2014). This isn't surprising, given the grossly individualistic culture of contemporary western society and the economic climate of cutthroat capitalism. In fact, there are seditious whisperings to this effect in the literature on burnout among social workers (Honkala, Goldstein, Thul, Baptist & Grugan, 1999; Wong, 2013), pointing to this socio-economic context as both cause and barrier to overcoming burnout:

> Social workers are increasingly being pushed into the role of gatekeepers and agents of social control in order to facilitate the search for new markets and higher profits. The dismantling of social supports has become a prerequisite for any nation that wants to be a full member of the global capitalism fraternity. Social workers are expected to 'cope' with the aftermath of destructive social policies while also trying to be effective and avoid personal burn-out, which has been described not as a private trouble but as a public issue…[with] social action as a remedy: "All of us are experiencing stress from a common source. …Seeing needs as similar enables us to work together for change. This change might begin with an assessment of the workplace structure. Burn-out is a call for action." (Honkala et al., 1999, p. 534)

This breed of social worker sees her work as both personal and political, enabling a feminist and fundamentally anti-capitalist "role contestation" to challenge the economic order and avoid her own burnout at the same time:

> Role contestation begins with a refusal to view one's work as an isolated technical function and an insistence on seeing it as a part of a larger social process…which begins with an act

of defiance but in the second place involves the development of new norms and new criteria [for work] which are alien to capitalist logic. (Withorn, cited in Arches, 1997, p. 60)

Of course, key to doing this in the first place is developing some degree of "critical reflective practice" to even begin to know if one is burning out, to disrupt the maladaptive sense that feeling this way is normal. Because we have been raised in this culture, to do so can be extraordinarily difficult, as one young social worker describes:

> [Tracy] did not "know" wholeness and her burnout until the contemplative exercises made her stop and realize that she "was totally burnt out flat on [her] face": "my face was breaking out, my body was telling me you're not okay, difficulty sleeping, and anxiety, and too much in my head." Before taking in this "new" information from her body, she thought "it was natural" as she was brought up in a single parent household where she had to do what she needed to do to provide for herself and others without questioning it, but "just do-do-do-do-do." (Wong, 2013, p. 278)

This led her to "see how burnout had frozen her heart and spirit in her work" (Wong, 2013, p. 278), and while this may strike many professionals as a hippie-dippie sentiment, they may more readily appreciate the effects of this emotional deficit in terms of how it can make burnt out employees "go on autopilot mentally and behaviorally" (p. 283) to the detriment of their own productivity and quality of work. From a more critical perspective, "Tracy's statement that it is irresponsible for us to work with people when we are burnt out and clouded is a critique against this growing neoliberal climate in the social service sector" (p. 283) and, indeed, all areas of work under global capitalism.

2.2 ACTIVISM AS VOCATION: NOT JUST A JOB

In contrast to more conventional professions, burnout becomes an even more complex phenomenon when it comes to activism because social movements present an occupational context that diverges from the mainstream workforce in several key ways. To begin with, activism has the potential to be a uniquely immersive vocation, with numerous areas of an activist's life often overlapping or merging altogether:

> Many young activists are notable for being tirelessly involved in all sorts of issues; they go to meetings, organize information campaigns, participate in rallies, support community institutions, listen to political music and go to the shows -- both in town and when road trips are required -- stay in friendly and informative contact with young activists across the country and around the world, create direct actions, and much more. (Palano, 1999, p. 7)

For those who "live and breathe their activism with fierce, selfless idealism and devotion" (dr. hyena, 2007, p. 28), it follows naturally that they should seek to sustain that fire through politically-tinged activities and entertainment even on top of the organizational work (Palano, 1999; dr. hyena, 2007; Hudson, 2014). An activist's social world can easily be enveloped by "the movement" wherein "[a]lmost all of their friends are activists" (Palano, 1999, p. 7), with those relationships frequently overlapping or doubling as an activist's roommates, lovers, and "co-workers" in the sense of one's political organizing. This immersion can result in "your whole sense of identity [being] tied up with being the ever-busy activist" (Carlyle & Johns, 2012, p. 13) and activism can eventually consume one's entire life, for better or worse (Palano, 1999; dr. hyena, 2007).

Activism is often a volunteer pursuit undertaken in one's "leisure" time rather than one's "professional" or paid career. And yet, due to activists' widely-shared sense of "responsibility to save the world" (Carlyle & Johns, 2012, p. 13), social change activities are often prioritized as their "real" work. This is a second key difference between the social movement and mainstream workplace contexts, for while employees of any professions may face time/value compromises of their own, having to put one's true vocation on hold in favour of the schooling or paid work necessary to meet basic needs under capitalism can put a greater psychological strain on activists who may consider this a betrayal of their values, no matter how necessary for material survival (Palano, 1999; dr. hyena, 2007). Moreover, the critical perspectives that develop through participation in social movements can also lead to a painful awareness of how many industries and paid professions "definitely make the world worse" (Monroe, 1998, p. 107). This can cause interpersonal strife with peers who work in such careers, particularly family members or non-activists friends, as well as inner conflict if (or, more than likely, when) one is forced to undertake such a job to support oneself. It can be lonely or stressful for an activist to be "the resident radical" in a family, friend group, and especially in a workplace where they are resigned to spend the majority of their waking hours, and this dynamic can lead to further alienation from non-activist pursuits and relationships (Pogrebin, 1994; dr. hyena, 2007) and subsequent reinvestment in one's social movement or activist scene.

This alienation from mainstream culture is the third, and perhaps most significant, difference between conventional vocations and radical activism. Driven by "some sort of inner need, not externally inculcated morality" (Monroe, 1998, p. 106), these social and political visionaries "struggle daily to deconstruct and confront notions of power and oppression" (Green, 2010, p. 308) which puts them at odds with the rest of society in many ways. To engage in activism can be seen, by turns, as an altruistic pursuit that affirms one's values on a personal basis (Monroe, 1998; dr. hyena, 2007) or as a negative consequence that vilifies them in the public eye (Pogrebin, 1994; Munro, 2014). For radical activists, "their philosophy demands that they live what they believe" (Palano, 1999, p. 7), and the behaviours associated with this conviction—from consumer practices to protest actions and beyond—range from being deemed noble efforts that will guide this society in a better direction to being painted as crimes that jeopardize all that is good in the world. Characterizing this difficult position in appropriately ambivalent terms, Jacobsson & Lindblom (2013) see "activists as 'entrepreneurial deviants,' combining features of both moral entrepreneurs and deviants in society" (p. 133).

2.3 ENLISTING FOR DUTY: NEGOTIATING (SUB)CULTURAL NORMS

Between painfully confronting systemic injustice and being mocked (Munro, 2014), persecuted (jones, 2007), or even prosecuted (Potter, 2011) for it, joining a justice movement can feel like signing up for war. Between racist police brutality and species extinctions, transphobic hate crimes and the flagrant pollution of the air and waters; from the ongoing genocides against indigenous nations around the world to the capitalist enslavement of humanity as a whole, and on to the escalating eco-crisis threatening the future of all life on earth... the stakes have never been higher. Under such dire circumstances, then, it's understandable why activist subcultures are notorious for a workaholism that could rival those on Wall Street. In the words of a former manager of Amnesty International, "It's extremely difficult to say stop and the culture exists because

of the nature of the work that's being done" (Rodgers, 2010, p. 277). Unfortunately, this noble impulse is also prone to lead to the normalization of chronic self-sacrifice, whereby, "weary from another day's anger and tension...you attend another activist meeting, because you can't respect yourself if you go home to rest instead" (dr. hyena, 2007, p. 29; see also Hudson, 2014). Nonetheless, due to the increasingly high stakes undertaken by contemporary activists in pursuit of social change, to adopt such a "hyperactive lifestyle" is seen as more committed: "[t]he activist community rewards hyperactive people with status and friends and a semblance of a social life and the information needed to feel like one of the initiated," while "[l]ess active people are penalized with certain guilt and accusations of not being as dedicated, or even as sincere, as others" (Palano, 1999, p. 7). This can, in turn, feed the ironically vicious circle of self-sacrifice often present within activist groups: Despite a sense that one might need to slow down or take a break, due to the overwhelming sense that everyone *else* is also doing so much already, "*you* take on more than you should in order to rescue another work-horse from committing to more than *they* can handle" (dr. hyena, 2007, p. 28, emphasis added).

This subcultural normalization of overwork, even to the point of martyrdom, can foster a dual "sense of obligation, [and of] not wanting to be left out" (Hudson, 2014, p. 21). Going back to the immersive character of activist scenes, to step back from "the work" of social movement organizing can be akin to stepping out of one's entire world:

> *If you withdraw from your [political] activities, you also withdraw from your entertainment, your friends and—so it may seem to you on your bad days—you withdraw from your beliefs and values. ...If [activists] choose not to be active, then they opt out of the entire system. There is little room...for a healthy middle ground. (Palano, 1999, p. 7)*

It can also lead to a sense of reverse-motivation for activist work over other aspects of life, insofar as "everything [is] empty palaver that [is] not about liberation, not about imperialism or racism or Third World struggles" (Hudson, 2014, p. 21). The social movement literature reveals a common strategy for maintaining activist momentum from this perspective, from trying to embrace naturally-occurring negative emotions like "your fear of failure, your rage against injustice, and your always replaceable deadline-stress" (dr. hyena, 2007, p. 21) to proactive "micro-shocking" on an individual or collective basis, whereby activists deliberately expose themselves to horrific images or enraging rhetoric "to ignite in him or herself 'the righteous anger that puts fire in the belly and iron in the soul'" (Lindblom & Jacobsson, 2014, p. 133).

While this can be sustaining for some activists, particularly in the short term, others report that these strategies can ultimately lead to resentment and burnout (Alexander & Yescavage, 2010, p. 157). Such emphasis on negative emotions, even while directed outwards at sites of injustices, can also feed into "horizontal hostility" (Atmore, 1999, p. 91) and the fostering of an organizational culture replete with "cynicism, constant rage, or despair" (Harris, Lin & Selbin, 2007, p. 2126) even towards one's friends and comrades. When activist groups reach such an emotional rock bottom, even those with the most anti-oppressive politics may find their members slipping up in practice and reverting back to mainstream power dynamics (along lines of race, gender, etc.), silencing behaviours, and other inadvertently coercive interactions. Farley (2002) describes the immediate negative effects this can have on participants and relationships at a personal level; however, she also highlights how, at a deeper level, this can fundamentally sabotage the work such groups have collectively undertaken:

When we feel we cannot speak out and be heard without jeopardizing our character in the minds of others important to the survival of our [activist] identity or some aspect of our public reputation; when we cannot trust others to hear us sympathetically; when our experience leads us to feel that others' ways of understanding are so different that they may even look down on us, scorn us, or judge us to be crazy—then we may not be able to speak… Furthermore, these silences reinforce the very discourses we may wish to change. (Farley, 2002, p. 35)

This is a difficult but important pill for activists to swallow—that is, the hard realization that the very systemic oppressions being challenged by their social movements can at once be replicated within them, however radical the politics they hold dear. Srivastava (2006) hits the nail on the head when she cites the naive but widely held "assumption that social movements are uniquely egalitarian spaces" (p. 57). While many individual activists, and even some groups, make valiant efforts to challenge systemic oppression within their own ranks, social movements overall still have a very long way to go. In the meantime, vainly clinging to the fantasy that the radical subculture is a safe haven from the problems of mainstream society has the potential, not only to make the experience of oppressive behaviour in an activist context *more painful* for marginalized participants than it would be in a mainstream space, but also to inhibit more active work on a given issue (e.g., racism) by participants who are privileged along such lines (e.g., white people) and bear a responsibility to challenge the oppressive systems from which they benefit.

2.4 BATTLE FATIGUE: EXPERIENCING BURNOUT IN ACTIVISM

Any combination of the risk factors described above has the potential to lead to some degree of burnout, depending on the individual activist, their personal history, and how they respond to their circumstances. Various recipes for activist burnout are emphasized in the literature but their diversity evokes the complex reality that there is no one true path to reaching burnout, or recovering from it. For instance, the London Roots Collective (2013) describes how the highs of finishing an intensive project or achieving victory at the end of a campaign may be followed by "a quick, sharp comedown" and "the feeling that you need to hibernate for… ever?" (p. 33). At the same time, they acknowledge that burnout can also result from a "more subtle equation of ongoing workload and destructive attitudes and behaviours, regardless of whether [or not] everything's kicking off" (London Roots Collective, 2013, p. 33). Carlyle & Johns (2012) echo this understanding, describing burnout as an "exhaustion of physical or emotional strength or motivation usually as a result of prolonged stress or frustration" (p. 13), but it is Pogrebin (1994) who best describes the condition with the appropriately politicized term of "battle fatigue…the diminution of our troops [that] so often is what prevents us from moving forward" (p. 35). She also explains how the prognosis for burnout exists across a significant range and can create a ripple effect that goes beyond the individuals already suffering from it to varying degrees:

…[S]ome [activists] dip in and out of liberation movements and others have given up on collective action altogether, no longer believing change is possible. Before long one individual after another becomes exhausted or disillusioned, then one group after another shrinks and eventually disbands, and finally, what was a movement dissipates into separate

people nursing their separate dreams and disappointments, their energy lost to the liberal community which is only as strong as its rank and file. (Pogrebin, 1994, p. 36)

So why do some activists burn out while others don't, and why do some experience it worse than others? Much of the social movement literature that touches on burnout suggests a common tendency on the part of activists to neglect basic personal needs, consciously or not, in their dedication to the struggle. The London Roots Collective (2013) describes what many activists will recognize as a regularly arising formula for exhaustion: "There's a crucial opportunity, some amazing ideas and only a handful of people to do a lot of work. You carry on regardless, you're committed people, you'll make it happen, no matter how exhausted you get" (p. 33). Because while social justice work is commonly spoken of in terms of the "movements" that are pushing for change, many places have activist "communities" or "scenes" that are actually quite modest and a lot of the on-the-ground organizing work is done in small groups or collectives (Critical Art Ensemble, 1998; Valk, 2002). While such groups will on occasion band together to form larger coalitions with increased capacity, the "fluid, shifting, and irregular" nature of coalition-based organizing comes with its own frustrations. As Rothman (2007) explains, "new configurations have to be formed for different issues constantly—causing burnout and draining off energy that could be focused on external targets" (p. 31). By organizing in discrete groups with their own dedicated focuses, activists may opt for simplicity but sacrifice the potential for greater capacity that can come with broader participation. As suggested earlier, this can easily result in a group—and its individual members—not being realistic about how much work they can effectively take on by themselves (London Roots Collective, 2013; dr. hyena, 2007). Then, in a valiant attempt to meet their overly-ambitious goals, activists can find themselves easily justifying the neglect of basic personal needs: not eating enough real, nourishing food to fuel their high activity levels (Moran, 1991; dr. hyena, 2007); foregoing sleep or otherwise failing to rest long enough for their bodies and minds to rejuvenate (London Roots Collective, 2013; Hudson, 2014); not retaining or replenishing enough emotional energy to maintain healthy relationships with those around them (Moran, 1991; Pogrebin, 1994). Activists that neglect these needs can also compromise their immune systems and increase their likelihood of illness on top of everything else (Moran, 1991; Messinger, 2011), to the extent that their self-sacrificing dedication to the struggle has actually sabotaged their ability to participate in it.

While it may seem counterintuitive, even verging on martyrdom, when presented in these terms, for a lot of activists this "hyperactive lifestyle [can be] the only obvious way of life for years" before, "one day, it becomes too much: classic burnout" (Palano, 1999, p. 7). While some are able to catch themselves before reaching rock bottom and step back to replenish their reserves before diving back into their activism, others try to battle through the stress and exhaustion—which can actually do more harm than good, both for the individuals themselves and for the culture of activism they continue to participate in. While the following snapshot comes from the early 20th-century Swedish suffrage movement, it captures a situation that North American activists can just as easily find themselves in today:

It seems as if these women sometimes passed a kind of border when the 'cause' and their dedication to it became destructive. It is possible that the continual complaints about the 'others', those who did not have the same burning enthusiasm and willpower, had their roots in a disastrous fatigue which twisted people's minds. People did not even realize that they

had entered into a process whereby they began to despise those who were not prepared to sacrifice themselves to the same degree. On one occasion when, in a clear-sighted moment, she realizes that she has far too much going on, the otherwise so inexhaustible [activist] says: 'I wish no other heaven than to escape the vote and all my charity work'. (Florin, 2009, p. 191)

This exemplifies how activists that don't treat themselves well can unwittingly lose their capacity to treat others well, too. It can also exacerbate any internal divisions already present in an activist group or scene, whether personal or political (Flesher Fominaya, 2010). The "absence of formal organizational structures" that often typify the anti-authoritarian spirit infusing many radical activist spaces can actually end up "creating informal hierarchies" (Taylor, 2013, p. 744) that parallel the domination inflicted on marginalized members by mainstream society. On the flip side, this toxic dynamic can also lead to a backlash against those who are, or are at least perceived to be, enabled to do more work on account of various forms of privilege, resulting in what Whittier (1997) describes as "a norm of 'trashing' or intense criticism of [informal] leaders" (p. 765). This is also complicated by a widespread "sense of obligation" to do as much organizing as one can possibly bear to take on (Hudson, 2014, p. 21), along with the resulting sense that, since everyone is already doing so much, if you don't do it then no one will (dr. hyena, 2007). This can lead to activists doing work that may be focused, in terms of content, on an issue that they're passionate about but takes a form that, in repetition, can burn them out anyway (dr. hyena, 2007; London Roots Collective, 2013). Barker, Martin & Zournazi (2008) also address the risk that comes with a lot of western activism tending to be "task-oriented, with emotions playing a secondary role," and how "a preoccupation with action can lead to cynicism, burnout, and dropping out of activism altogether" when relationships and the "maintenance functions for building commitment and mutual support" are neglected (p. 423).

When this is the climate in which an activist is investing so much of her efforts, it can become a struggle to "keep the passion in your politics" and "protect against cynicism" (Pogrebin, 1994, p. 36). The small joys, and even victories, that she once cherished may eventually be overlooked altogether, leaving the activist with "no feeling of accomplishment" because the big issues don't seem to be getting any smaller (Hudson, 2014, p. 20). This can also lead to a dangerous loss of perspective capable of driving an activist even closer to the brink of burnout, whereby she loses sight of the fact that she's in this war against oppression for the long haul and ends up putting everything she has into a single short-term fight. This forlorn and overwhelming sentiment is captured in the words of a U.S. anti-war activist during the invasion of Vietnam, which was but one struggle in the fight against American imperialism at home:

They had not done enough, they had no risked enough, they had not tried everything, they had not fought hard enough, they had not, because the proof was before her every morning and every evening that the war went on. (Hudson, 2014, p. 21)

As diagnosed by pseudonymic activist-author dr. hyena (2007), it can be dangerously easy for activists to "choose to focus always on the big wrongs in order to ignore the costs of neglecting our own lives, our health and our relationships" (p. 28). But those who do are playing with fire and run a higher risk of burning themselves out. When an activist who has been "tirelessly involved" finally has to face her long-denied limits, it would not be

melodramatic to call this inner confrontation an "identity crisis" (Palano, 1999, p. 7) because, as previously discussed, her social world and her sense of who she is have become so integrated with the activist work that has come to dominate her life (Calyle & Johns, 2012; London Roots Collective, 2013). Moreover, when this is experienced in an activist context where comrades fail to recognize, discuss, or guard against the risk factors for burnout, the activist experiencing it can "feel stigmatized… defeated… alone" (Pogrebin, 1994, p. 35), even while her comrades may be feeling the same way.

A number of these stressors and risk factors fall under the tidy terms of what Pogrebin (1994) calls the three "Bs": backlash, backsliding, and backbiting. Beginning with the most obvious, backlash encompasses all the negative responses that activists receive as a result of their work, ranging from public indifference, complaints, and social ostracization to state repression in its many, often violent forms (Pogrebin, 1994; Woods, Anderson, Guilbert & Watkin, 2012). In fact, burnout has been explicitly articulated as *a desired outcome* of governmental "counterterrorism" practices (Davenport & Inman, 2012), which are increasingly being directed at social and environmental justice activists. The second B, backsliding, refers to the frustration with disappointments and failures in the course of one's activist work. Even "wins" can offer up a double-edged sword: On the one hand—and for short-term campaigns in particular—"when some activities are successful and protests are positively responded to, the need for further activity is alleviated" (Woods et al., 2012, p. 573); on the other hand, however—particularly for longer-term campaigns with multiple stages—achieving one milestone can make the exhaustion set in all the more, because as the adrenaline of that particular fight fades, you find yourself at the beginning of the *next* battle, while winning the war overall seems a long way off (Alexander & Yescavage, 2010). At that stage, renewed feelings of outrage, frustration, or despair at having to fight this fight in the first place may set in as well (Turell, Herrmann, Hollander & Galletly, 2012). Finally, backbiting encompasses the occurrence and frustrations with issues of internal conflict and oppressive power dynamics within activist groups themselves, as discussed above.

Again, any combination of these factors can lead to burnout and result in the hindrance or even demise of an activist group or social movement. In fact, Welty (2014) traces the dissolution of Occupy Wall Street to such a smorgasbord root causes, citing "some combination between activist fatigue, internal divisions, police repression, and public apathy" (p. 44). Activist burnout remains a serious issue within contemporary social movements *not least* because, as the literature suggests, many social movement organizations and participants continue to dismiss burnout as an indication of individual, rather than collective, weakness or vulnerability. Just as true now as it was ten years ago, Pogrebin (1994) sums up the sad lack of solidarity present when it comes to experiences of burnout: "Whatever the explanation [for someone feeling burnt out], the problem they describe is real, painful, and often ignored by leftists who are too busy trying to move forward to notice how many have dropped out along the way" (p. 36).

2.5 RALLYING THE TROOPS: ADDRESSING BURNOUT IN ACTIVISM

"The problem was that that state of being had become normal. Once the patterns were set, then breaking out of the edifice was very difficult." ~ Carlyle & Johns, 2012, p. 13

As the reviewed literature suggests, individuals often experience burnout as a result of their *personal* responses to the previously discussed *collective* norms and practices that pervade many social movements and activist scenes. These norms need not arise out of any malicious or masochistic impulses to sacrifice oneself or one another to the cause, but rather from activists' noble, if naive, assumptions about how far they can push themselves—unwittingly cultivating a subcultural standard for participation that many members will not be able to meet. This traces the problem of burnout, as a personal experience, back to its root in collective expectations that many activists will not even be aware of absorbing or perpetuating. This also gives probable cause for the widespread dismissal or denial of burnout that Pogrebin has pointed out. The tricky thing about burnout is that it can be experienced quite differently by a wide range of activists, while many others will perhaps never know its exhaustion or existential despair. However, by acknowledging how the shared culture can lead some activists to make detrimental choices which not only risk damaging their personal health and wellbeing but also jeopardize the collective strength and resilience of their movements, burnout can be better understood as a movement-wide problem in need of movement-wide solutions.

   For activists who experience burnout, this perspective may also help with renewing a sense of agency to engage in the struggle on one's own terms and with respect for one's own needs and limitations. As assured by the sage words of dr. hyena (2007), it is not selfish but rather a measure of responsibility for an activist whose heart burns with the fire for justice to temper those flames, lest they consume her:

> Make no mistake about it, activism can eat us alive; but only if we feed ourselves to it willingly... I posit that we can grow up a bit by facing the fact that our first environmental responsibility is to the fine human animal that we get to ride around in... This being endures all it can in devotion to our wishes, despite incomparable feats of abuse and neglect, cruelties that we'd never inflict upon any other creature. And we are useless to any cause without it. (pp. 28-29)

In her book *Aftershock: Confronting Trauma in a Violent World, A Guide for Activists and Their Allies*, pattrice jones (2007) writes at length about the risks of denying one's own human animality and the physiological needs that come with it. Most persuasively for activists who may be reluctant to heed their bodies' warnings, she also traces this mindset back to some of the very systemic injustices that many activists strive to challenge:

> *When we affirm that we are our bodies but deny that our bodies are property, we undermine one of the most destructive ideas in history: that people are something other than animals. Besides being factually untrue and leading to all kinds of atrocities against other animals, this idea helps to maintain a number of unnatural divisions, such as the distinction between mind and body and the segregation of people into races. ...By way of*

explanation let's look at some of the problematic divisions created by our imagined separation from and superiority to other animals:

- *The isolation of human animals from their enveloping ecosystems leads to pollution and manipulation of nature by people. The effects of these include climate and nuclear weaponry, both of which lead directly to calamity.*
- *The estrangement of human animals from other animals leads to cruelties including factory farming and extinction of species. The self-deception and suppression of natural sympathy required to perpetrate or enjoy the products of such cruelties leave people lonely and out of touch with themselves.*
- *The elevation of "people" over "animals" constructs a category of sentient living beings without rights. As long as that category exists, the process of "dehumanization" will continue to be deployed to push one or another group of people into it [according to gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, etc].*

So, we can see that the most catastrophic problems facing our planet, as well as the most oppressive processes among people, are all related in some way to the denial of human animality. (pp. 18-20)

These are all inherently negative attitudes, easily decried by activists. But jones follows this toxic idea as it trickles down into the noble-minded efforts of those same activists:

Like many other people driven by urgent purposes, activists—including animal liberation activists who really ought to know better!—tend to forget that they are animals. The ability to go without sleep or work without taking a lunch break is often mistaken for a measure of dedication. In consequence, social movements are much smaller than they ought to be, simply because so many people burn out or become convinced they don't have what it takes. (p. 22)

jones is also clear about the risks for those who manage, in the short term, to deny their physical, mental, or emotional needs and continue to battle through; while perhaps believing themselves immune to burnout now, they too may succumb to its long-term effects later on:

When traumatic events occur—as they too often do—the exhausted bodies of over-stressed activists may not have the resources to cope with the physical stress. Used to suppressing rather than expressing their more vulnerable feelings, activists may have even more difficulty than other people in managing the normal emotional responses to upsetting events.

Activists who want to be effective through a lifetime of long hard struggle must admit that they are animals. That includes embracing our animal emotions. (p. 22)

This is an element of activist self-care that several authors emphasize but also lament as receiving less than adequate attention (Harris, Lin & Selbin, 2007; Barker, Martin & Zournazi, 2008; Staples, 2010). Harris, Lin & Selbin (2007) acknowledge the natural prevalence of negative emotions within social movement culture as a result of the issues being confronted, but in the same breath they also warn activists of the attendant risks if such feelings are not appropriately dealt with: "Anger, sadness, disappointment, fear and anxiety...are common emotions for those who work for social change, and they can lead to burnout, cynicism, constant rage, or despair" (p. 2126). In her *Organizer's Memoir*, lesbian feminist and anti-racist organizer Mab Segrest (1992) describes how this can transpire so organically that an activist may not even notice until it's too late:

I figured that, next to denial, fear was the thing that held people most back from acting against white supremacist groups, and it needed to be addressed. ...But there was also a way that the very intensity with which I approached the work numbed me. [Nor was the anti-fascist work all I was sorting through. A close friend died of AIDS in 1986, and my mother died the next year, six months after my partner had a baby.] When I got sick, I wouldn't take the time to get completely well. Constant traveling undercut efforts at regular exercise and reasonable diet; and often my traveling companion turned out to be M&Ms and coke, or Big Macs and fries, or ham biscuits and coffee. By the fourth year I had compromised my immune system enough that I was sick off and on for four months. That scared me, and I started working part time. ...But I knew I needed to assimilate my experiences and my motives more fully than the work had allowed. At the end of 1990, I quit [my organizing group] altogether.

     Sorting through my mother's death proved to be a vital part of my healing process; recognizing and finally feeling the degree to which her chronic illness created in me a chronic anxiety that bled over into the rest of my life. That's when burnout comes, I found: when present crises bear down on old pains. (pp. 31-32, emphasis added)

As both a remedy and a preventative measure, strategies of emotional self-management (Barker, Martin & Zournazi, 2008) and mindfulness (Carlyle & Johns, 2012) are recommended. Carlyle & Johns (2012) describe mindfulness as

the ability to engage with one's emotions in a skillful and reflective fashion, as opposed to simply being buffeted this way and that by them... [It is] a key skill for dealing with the stress, disappointments and potential trauma involved in activism, as well as for cultivating the positive and healthy emotional states that enable us to flourish. (p. 13)

Barker, Martin & Zournazi (2008) take this a step further in calling attention to what they see as "a gap in theoretical understanding relevant to activists, namely an understanding of desirable emotions, as both means and ends, and the processes of self and group transformation to bring about these emotions" (p. 425). They speak of this emotional self-management as labour activists would speak of workers' self-management, in terms of taking autonomous control of one's emotions rather than being enslaved by them. In lay terms, they suggest that activists engage in personal as well as collective self-reflection to process any negative emotions as they arise, while also proactively identifying which sorts of feelings will enable rather than inhibit their social change efforts in order to actively cultivate desirable emotions. It should also be noted that *which* emotions are experienced as desirable and enabling—or not—will often vary from one activist to another. This provides all the more reason for emotional self-management to be engaged with both personally *and* on a collective level, between comrades in struggle who may experience shared circumstances in very different ways.

    Along similar lines, Hartnett (2010) suggests "turn[ing] away from activism as [solely] anger and confrontation toward activism as fulfillment and solidarity" (p. 86). To this end, it is recommend that activists intentionally make time for fun together and cultivate their sense of humour rather than always taking themselves so seriously (Donkor, 2007; Carlyle & Johns, 2012). This becomes all the more important for activists during times of lower momentum or higher repression, as Marilyn Frye and Sarah Hoagland reminded participants in their 1996 workshop on "Lesbian Futures" at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival:

> [Hoagland] said that we are indeed in hard times for lesbians and feminists, that it is important to know that and still know that what we do, even if it may be of smaller scale, is still vitally important. She reminded us that, "We are always in a political culture, but not always in a political movement phase of a political culture." She also emphasized the real threat of depression and burnout when faced with such hard times and the importance, therefore, of making our activities fun. She suggested mixing activism with socializing through potlucks and other ways of bringing people together in order to thwart the sense of dismay and isolation that can arise during politically difficult times. (leigh, mantilla & ruby, 1996, p. 18)

Such active participation and investment in the "strong sense of familial, emotional and political community" (Srivastava, 2006, p. 57) often cultivated within activist scenes can be a critical antidote to burnout. In contrast, it can be helpful to spend time with non-activist friends and family as well, as these relationships may provide the space and opportunity to engage with "different conversations, realities, perceptions, priorities, ways of having fun, [and even] ways of getting pissed" (Carlyle & Johns, 2012, p. 13).

Also on the subject of taking a break from activist work, Moran (1991) cautions tired organizers to discern between leisure *activities* and actual relaxation practices, and to critically consider what each will offer them:

> I was as adept as the next person at vegetating in front of a television set and blocking out real life. I knew how to go shopping, talk on the phone, and otherwise give myself snippets of relaxation here and there. What I hadn't realized is that those leisure activities are just that: activities. They're not relaxation. Relaxation, by clinical definition, is a state in which the body and mind are consciously and purposely slowed down. Detectable physical changes take place: the temperature in extremities goes up, blood pressure lowers, as does adrenaline production. When it is practiced consistently—20 minutes twice a day is the usual recommendation—stress diseases and tension/anxiety feelings can be avoided or improved. (pp. 44-45, emphasis added)

Notably, this distinction between taking time away from activism and actually recuperating from it hinges on pace and the healing power of slowing down from the commonly frenetic pace of everyday life. Predictably, as she goes on to point out, the practice of true relaxation doesn't always come easily to people, particularly activists who are already prone to overlooking their own needs:

> Sometimes conscious relaxation is wonderful—refreshing and fulfilling. At other times it seems like a silly exercise, when I could be spending the time writing a letter or an article. That's when I need to remember that the time spent in relaxation is time I'm investing in myself for more letters and better articles later. I tell myself that I'm worth spending some time on, and the more I do it, the more I believe it. (p. 45, emphasis added)

Moran is advocating for activists to adopt an attitude of investment in themselves as *vehicles of struggle*, requiring maintenance like the proverbial bicycle that so many activists use to get from point A to point B. To stay in the struggle for the long haul, activists need to avoid viewing themselves and their comrades as heroes or martyrs (Hudson, 2014) and confront feelings or practices that encourage an ethic of indispensability (Carlyle & Johns, 2012), whereby an individual activist is seen as so essential that a group or movement can't keep going without them. This orientation or mindset is likely to develop in one of two ways: (a) from the hoarding, intentional or not, of skills and/or power within an activist group that makes their collective work eternally

dependent upon particular members; or (b) during an organizing crisis, which can arise spontaneously in light of an emerging threat (e.g., the passing of a draconian new law, the deportation of a community member, etc.) but is more often a result of the oft-recurring equation of *too much work + too few activists*. In order to avoid falling into a *preventable* crisis mode with respect to one's organizing, many of the authors cited throughout advise their fellow activists to be realistic about taking on work, from a personal as well as a collective perspective.

At an individual level, activists must take responsibility for determining their own capacity for work and their personal needs for maintaining health and well-being. Based on that, activists can set boundaries for sustainable participation in activism; moreover, by sharing these parameters with their fellow organizers, the whole group will be better enabled to determine their combined capacity for taking on projects and campaigns. Truthfully, it can be difficult for many activists to admit their own limits. However, on the basis of having this discussion as a group, members can proactively and explicitly reassure one another that it is not only *acceptable* but often *necessary* to say "no" to opportunities or requests for their time and energy. This is critical, because without such honesty about how much and/or which kinds of work can be not only taken on but actually followed through on, the group is set up to fail in said work and individual members will risk burning out in vain attempts prevent that from happening.

At a collective level, activists are advised to identify the strengths, weaknesses, skills, and any gaps in desired group knowledge in order to ascertain opportunities for skill-sharing or whole-group development (London Roots Collective, 2013). While having a range of experience levels and abilities is often beneficial for an activist group, so too is some level of parity when it comes to key skills needed for one's chosen type(s) of organizing. When some group members have key skills that others don't, it can create a notable imbalance of power between peers, even within an expressly non-hierarchical organization (for example, when select members are positioned to speak for or shape the narrative surrounding their group's work). Such power dynamics can lead to resentment on both sides, whereby the activists who have such skills are burdened by the work that only they are capable of performing while the activists without those skills are disempowered and made dependent on their more experienced comrades.[2] In times of extreme busyness or urgency, it may seem more expedient for a highly skilled activist to just do something themselves rather than allow more novice activists to practice whatever skill is needed. But there will always be another organizing crisis around the corner, which is why making time for the sharing of responsibilities and opportunities to learn along the way is crucial in the long run. As dr. hyena (2007) has wisely deduced, to let a group, campaign, or project become dependent on any particular person(s) "is akin to sabotage, however well-intentioned the work-horse may be. When the stoic old girl drops dead in front of the plow…her indirect disservice to the cause (albeit selfless and noble) will show as clearly as her contributions" (p. 29). Without taking such proactive measures to share organizing responsibilities within a group or activist scene, the worst-case scenario is that "the work burden [will be] carried by a few volunteers, most of whom are working full-

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[2] The balance of power is tipped even further in cases where the activists with such key skills are also privileged over their fellow group members along lines of race, gender, class, etc. Predictably, this is quite commonly the case, as such privilege often equates greater free time and resources available to pursue activism in the first place.

time jobs elsewhere and are perpetually on the brink of burnout, [so that] every year the wheel, to some extent, must be reinvented" (Klawiter, 1999, p. 114).

This relates to another precaution that can be taken to avoid burnout, whereby activists are advised to make time to reflect on their work and ensure they learn from what they are doing. The London Roots Collective (2013) acknowledges how demoralizing it can be for activists to realize that they have been making the same mistakes or confronting the same challenges from one meeting or campaign to the next, but they emphasize the growth that can develop from debriefing both the good and the bad. They are also careful to highlight the importance of figuring out ways to consciously incorporate that kind of learning into future plans: as many activists would surely—and sheepishly—agree, "important insights are too often left languishing on carefully folded pieces of flipchart paper" (p. 33). Similarly, Pogrebin (1994) and Hudson (2014) both suggest making a priority of learning and deriving inspiration from other social movement struggles, both contemporary and historical. Other recommendations for activists to keep their inner fires burning well into the future include making time to invest in relationships that go deeper than just the work, which may not always be enough to sustain them, and making sure they are doing activist work that they are actually passionate about, in form as well as content. In her self-help book *The Lifelong Activist* (2006), Hillary Rettig suggests that activists figure out how they can act as bridges between the causes they are passionate about and the types of work that they are naturally inclined to do. There are countless ways to get involved in social movement struggles, so being true to oneself in deciding how to participate can be understood as a preventative aspect of self-care, no less necessary for sustainable involvement than regular eating and sleeping.

No life is ever completely devoid of stressful situations, least of all for activists who have taken it upon themselves to confront some of the most serious social and environmental justice issues that the world has ever faced. But Moran (1991) articulates a truth that is very easy for anyone to lose sight of these days: "stress is a reaction to outside events and… although I can't always change what is going on around me (moves and deadlines, for example), I am in control of my response to those things" (p. 45). This highlights a theme that runs through these reflections and recommendations, which is that while challenges will affect every activist's career, burnout is more likely to occur when those challenges are responded to in unhealthy ways. Pogrebin (1994) supplies a shortlist of recommendations for how activists can beat her three "Bs" and avoid the burnout that often ensues: When it comes to backlash, she advises activists to recognize repression as not only inevitable to challenging systemic oppressions but as a further sign of one's effectiveness as a threat to those in power, because "the harder they fight, the better we must be doing" (p. 36). At the same time, she also emphasizes the need to root out the kind of self-perpetuating repression that can spread within social movements as a secondary effect of state repression, such as paranoia and self-policing. When it comes to backsliding and dealing with disappointments or failures, she advocates mentorship by more experienced activists to support newer recruits in what will be a lifetime of struggle: "The endlessness of this work is the most predictable thing about it, which is why we must make the inevitability of backsliding an entry-level epiphany for every social activist who comes into the fold" (p. 37). This also suggests the need for peer support and friendship that won't leave one's dedication to the movement dependent solely on achieving campaign goals, because social change is often gradual and takes many forms. One such way is in how people treat each other on a basic social level, which brings us to the third

challenge—backbiting—and speaks to the need to address head on the infighting and negative dynamics that can develop in activist groups. While political differences can be a cause for strife, the most insidious type of conflict that can arise in an activist group is when more privileged members fall back into the oppressive power dynamics they were socialized to uphold. While this can be conscious and deliberate, such behaviour is more likely to emerge instinctively during times of stress for the individual or the group as a whole. As a step towards addressing this, Pogrebin stresses the need to proactively "place the subject of power high on the agenda for internal discussion" (p. 38) so that such behaviour isn't allowed to become a group norm. Of course, this is easier said than done, particularly in groups where a majority of members is privileged along particular lines, like race or gender. Acknowledging the problem and drawing it out into the light for discussion is an important first step in putting a stop to such behaviour, but it is only the beginning. Anti-oppression needs to be recognized as an ongoing process, not a box to check off on one's activist checklist, and the practice is far more difficult to master than than the theory. Moreover, if a group's more marginalized members do not feel able or willing to continue participating, their exit (or exodus, as the case may be) casts a harsh light on the higher standards of anti-oppression and accountability to which the more privileged members of that group must work to hold themselves, and one another.

This issue is far too often overlooked in the literature on activist burnout, which rarely acknowledges the experience of oppressive behaviour from one's peers— particularly fellow activists—as a cause for the kind of mental and emotional exhaustion commonly cited as a core symptom of burnout. This kind of psychological stress can serve to multiply the other effects of burnout when experienced by activists with various marginalized identities, particularly for those who choose to participate in spaces dominated by their privileged counterparts (e.g., women in predominantly male groups, people of colour in predominantly white groups, etc.). Lopez & Chism (1993) paint such a picture in the composite profile of "Jody" based on their interviews with gay and lesbian student activists:

> Her activism, Jody notes, sometimes brings her close to burnout. …Often, she struggles with accommodating the demands on her energies. She gets tired of answering questions such as, "In lesbian couples, who is the man and who is the woman?" and "What music do lesbians like?" The burden of educating others seems unreasonable to her sometimes. She finds, however, that she continually gets renewed by members of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community on campus, a group she calls "family". (p. 100, emphasis added)

While seldom linked explicitly to burnout, this is an issue faced by many activists with marginalized identities, particularly with respect to repeatedly explaining why certain language or behaviours exhibited by their peers is "problematic" and oppressive. This points to why the creation of "only" spaces (e.g., women and trans only, people of colour only) and identity-based caucuses at conferences and other large-scale events are so critical to the sustainability of social movements, as the very issues they exist to challenge continue to pervade many activist spaces in spite of the anti-oppressive politics promoted there. The literature on burnout lays bare the hard truth that even the best intentions can't protect activists from hurting themselves or one another, which is all the more reason for the risks and realities of burnout to be addressed proactively and movement-wide.

CHAPTER THREE: A RADICAL STRATEGY
MY RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

"I know what I'm trying to say! All these ideas are connected so intimately and intrinsically, just inspired! I just have to figure out where to start in order to make the world understand where it's going..."

It crept up slowly, the panic, like the Devil's Snare that nearly killed Harry and Ron. I didn't see my demise occurring in real time until I couldn't breathe, and couldn't ignore it any longer.

Days before the late-November deadline to submit proposals, I was finally sitting down to write up the vague but brilliant (maybe even revolutionary!) hypothesis I had come up with to explore in my thesis project, but I was sure the ideas would flow, no problem. After studying the sparse and barely legible notes jotted down excitedly over months of non-work on it, I had managed to churn out several Venn diagrams (hand-drawn on brown butcher paper because it was the only stationery I could find in the apartment) to pictorially represent the sweeping connections I hoped to prove through research, backed up by a series of rambling pages typed up on my roommate's computer (mine had broken down a month before, and I wasn't doing enough paid work to afford a new one). I had already managed to secure one potential supervisor, a prof I was friendly with from my Lit & Rhetoric days, on the basis of personal rapport and a vague plan to use the graphic novel form (his speciality) as a method of creative representation for my research. But the Independent Studies program required two supervisors for all undergrad theses, so I had researched any and all "rad" sounding profs across the campus, shamelessly playing several *academic fields by leaving brief but enthusiastic messages for an indecent number of faculty members.*

I had gotten a callback from one of them and was ready to check off that box on my extensive (but totally manageable!) to-do list, and I was grinning before even beginning to hear his reply. But my smile slipped as I listened to his message. It was much longer than the gung-ho go-ahead I had expected: he was intrigued, which was good, but like a responsible prof, he wanted to know more about the project... and I didn't have any more to tell him, not yet! Yet it was so late in the game...

But I could pull it out, surely. So I'd spent all fall term ignoring it in favour of juggling my part-time job with double-time activist responsibilities, and so what if I was exhausted as hell after that anti-climactic anti-pipeline campaign? That was just the everyday low price of fighting capitalism and the eco-crisis. Any anyway, last week I managed to fuck off to Vancouver for a conference on social movement spaces, because what a relevant topic for my thesis! Sure, I'd had to quit my job to go, and no, the piddly paycheques earned in my two months wouldn't cover the flight and *my rent and phone bills, but...*

I'd been pushing aside such sweetly creeping concerns for days, even as I put off -- again and again -- sitting down to work on my thesis proposal, until tonight. But as my writing stalled and I realized that reordering the paragraphs in my rambling attempt at an outline was not sparking further inspiration for what should come next, it finally sunk in -- slowly, and then all at once, like falling out of love with my own delusion.

I would not be able to pull this off. For the first irrefutable time in my life, not having a plan was neither whimsically romantic nor a hallmark of eccentric brilliance.

For once, prioritizing other things and failing to prepare for this only yielded a recipe for quiet and intimate disaster, as everyone had always warned they would.

At last, lesson learned.

3.1 PREPARING TO ENGAGE

Knowing I wanted to conduct a narrative inquiry and interview fellow activists is a far cry from knowing how to proceed in actually doing it. A fair amount of preparation was required, from familiarizing myself with the methodology to securing ethics clearance and recruiting suitable participants. Laying a foundation for the data and analysis in subsequent chapters, the following section details the process with which I prepared to enter the field and commence my research.

3.1.1 METHODOLOGY: NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative methodology that collects and contextualizes personal stories in order to illuminate particular aspects or experiences of a broader culture or subculture. As Berbary (2012) explains, narrative inquiry is

> concerned with how narratives contribute to larger understandings of the social world. In particular, it is concerned with the ways that **co-constructions** of narratives and the **re-storying** of narratives, specifically **counter-narratives**, can contribute to critique, change, and expansion of the taken-for-granted truths found within the "meta-narrative" of human progression.
>
> …This meta-narrative is made up of multiple "common cultural" narratives that help to "word our world" and construct certain ways of being, thinking, and acting. Post-structural theories often critique the reliance on meta-narratives to explain our world because meta-narratives are based on hegemonic ideologies… [and] often ignore or subsume the voices of non-dominant groups such as people of color, women, and lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ) individuals. (p. 16; original emphasis)

In the case of this research, the "common cultural" or "meta-narrative" eligible for critique and change is the assumed understanding of what it means to "do activism" within the context of radical environmental justice work here in Southern Ontario. My field research was designed to investigate: what dominant ideologies and subcultural expectations operate in that context; how they shape activists' own understandings of what it means to do activism; and what relationships or connections exist between those dominant ideologies, via cultural expectations, and activists' experiences of burnout and/or sustainable participation in activism, via their choices in navigating those ideologies and expectations. Privileging personal narratives is key to this methodology, and conducting in-depth, life story interviews with fellow activists who had also experienced burnout allowed for the emergence of complex narratives in which their protagonist-selves alternately upheld those ideologies, in some experiences, and challenged them in others. These latter tales were counter-stories of "doing activism differently" in contravention of subcultural norms and, as suggested above and explored in Chapters Four and Five, they "contribute to critique, change, and expansion of the taken-for-granted truths" of activism and activist culture that can, in turn, perpetuate the burnout phenomenon (Berbary, 2012, p. 16).

Through the collection and circulation of these counter-stories, especially in their re-storied forms as creative interpretations, this project is designed as an attempt to further disrupt the hegemonic ideologies that continue to pervade activist spaces even while activists themselves strive to disrupt such hegemonic ideologies in the mainstream.

3.1.2 DOING WHAT'S RIGHT: CONSIDERING THE ETHICS

The University of Waterloo has a detailed and rigorous application process for securing ethics clearance for research with human participants. The most obvious considerations for an interview-based study of this kind are the informed consent process, ensuring the anonymity of participants, and securing their data for confidentiality. Prior to meeting for our interview, each participant received, via email, a copy of the project's information letter and consent form (see Appendices A.2 and A.3, respectively). The latter would be filled out by them and signed at the time of the interview, with a clause providing the options of remaining anonymous or being publicly identified in my final thesis and any subsequent publications. While some participants preferred to keep their identities private, others were more comfortable with having their quotes attributed to them as a measure of transparency and accountability for their words and ideas within our activist networks. However, in all cases, I ensured the confidentiality of my participants' data by storing it on a password-protected USB drive which remained exclusively in my possession.

Another core area for consideration according to the University of Waterloo's ethical clearance process is a declaration of the potential benefits to be derived from the study. Unfortunately, given my limited personal finances and lack of institutional funding for the project, I was unable to provide remuneration to my participants for their time. It should be acknowledged that offering financial compensation for the interviews could have made participation more accessible and feasible for other activists who, for instance, might have been interested to share their experiences but could not afford to take several hours away from their jobs or other paid work opportunities.

As such, I was unable to offer any formal, direct benefits to participants as a result of their participation in the study. However, it would turn out that the interview process would yield an emotional and psychological value in and of itself, as numerous participants would tell me during or following our respective conversations. As discussed in Chapter Two, burnout can be an especially alienating experience, one that activists are not likely to openly discuss with one another unless expressly asked. In this way, then, my interviewees did benefit from their participation, and in a similar way to how I had hoped, from the very beginning, that future activist readers would benefit from the finished research.

This was another component of the ethics application: identification of known or anticipated benefits to the scientific community, or society, from the conduct of this study. Its ultimate goal is to foster greater understanding and discussion, amongst activists themselves, about the causes of burnout they face in the course of doing their life's work and, consequently, the development of (sub)cultural practices that foster more sustainable participation in environmental justice struggles for the long haul.

To ensure an ethical research process as I entered the field, I also considered carefully any potential risks to my participants. The anticipated risks were minimal, with respect to the sharing of difficult memories. In recounting their activist exploits, I expected some participants to touch on experiences that were personally distressing for them, insofar as such experiences could have contributed to their burnout. This did occur, to the point of tears in a few cases, but although I brought a resource guide—comprising a list books and city-specific counselling services offered for free or at a sliding scale—to each of my interviews, my participants demonstrated a resilience that would position

them well to write their own books on the subject. I can only hope now that the results of this research, derived from their selfless gifts of time and experience, will in turn offer such insight and support to any other activists who should someday read it.

3.1.3 *CALLING ALL COMRADES: SAMPLING & RECRUITMENT*

The population selected for study in this research was that of environmental justice activists who live and conduct activist work in Southern Ontario, and who have consequently experienced burnout at least once in the course of their activism. To qualify as meeting this description, participants must have self-identified as an activist (community organizer, advocate, etc.) for at least two years prior, with the intention or desire to continue operating as an environmental activist for the foreseeable future; in other words, eligible participants would consider their activism to be a significant and ongoing part of their lives. The rationale for these criteria was to ensure the recruitment of participants who are committed to their respective causes and hold activism as a significant aspect of their life and/or identity, rather than as a mere hobby or "hot button issue" that may be a fleeting interest for them. They must also have experienced at least one period of burnout which they self-identify as being causally related to their activist involvement. Finally, participants had to be capable of speaking fluent English and willing to be interviewed in this language, as English is the only language in which I myself am fluent. Beyond these criteria, I was open and encouraging of participants of all ages, genders, ethnicities, class backgrounds, etc.

Originally, I had set out to interview 6-8 activists, as a realistic sample size approved by my supervisors. Ultimately, however, I interviewed 10 activists in an effort to incorporate a more diverse range of identities and subsequent experiences of activist culture. Four men, five women, and one two-spirit person were interviewed: I spoke with three straight, white cis-men; two white, straight cis-women; one heteroflexible white cis-man; two white, queer cis-women; one Korean, queer cis-woman; and one gay, two-spirit Anishinaabe.

Recruitment began with the electronic circulation of a callout for participants via the email lists of the Ontario Public Interest Research Groups (OPIRG), a province-wide not-for-profit social and environmental justice organization with eleven chapters located throughout Southern Ontario. After taking advantage of this formal activist network, recruitment continued through extended social networks in a manner similar to "snowball sampling": a recruitment technique in which potential participants can suggest activists who may be interested to participate but who may not have received the callout. However, in contrast to typical snowball sampling, this method allowed those who received the callout to pass it on directly to their own contacts, rather than providing their contacts' names to the researchers themselves. Given that personal stories would be shared confidentially by participants in the course of this study, this measure of privacy during recruitment was particularly warranted.

The callout included a brief summary of the project, which would be detailed further in the information letter, along with contact information for getting in touch with me about participation. Upon expressing interest in the project, potential participants received a personalized copy of the information letter and consent form to review the details. If they wished to then participate in the project, we arranged to meet for an interview at a mutually agreeable time and location.

3.2 ENTERING THE FRAY

Having secured ethics clearance and begun recruiting participants, I was ready to begin collecting data. Given my research focus on the subjective negotiation of subcultural expectations within radical environmental justice activism, I adopted data collection methods as described and justified below.

3.2.1 RADICAL METHODS: LIFE STORY INTERVIEWS; AUTO-STORYING

Conducting in-depth life story interviews was my primary method of "field" research, allowing me to solicit detailed accounts of my participants' lived experiences over the course of their activist careers, including but not limited to experiences of burnout. Through personal networks as well as snowball sampling, I recruited a total of 10 participants to interview for the project (see Appendix A for recruitment materials). I travelled throughout Southern Ontario to meet with participants and interviews took place in both personal and public spaces, according to participants' preferences.

Even within the same field or career—in this case, that of environmental activism—no two lives follow exactly the same path, so an unstructured interview format was well-suited to this project. This led me to develop an interview guide (see Appendix B) driven by only three key questions, so as not to overly determine the course of the discussion, but further supported by a series of "probes" that were used to prompt participants to continue in particularly relevant directions that arose throughout their recountings. While it certainly required practice, as a novice interviewer, to not only listen to my subject in the moment but also make note of what to ask them later and when, the unstructured interview format ultimately fostered a much more organic conversation than a stricter interview schedule could have done. Moreover, I believe this also allowed for a swifter development of natural rapport with my participants that, in turn, drew forth a richer depth of data overall than might have been obtained with a more rigid interview schedule. It should come as no surprise, then, that these interviews ranged from 1.5h to 4h, for a mean runtime of 2.75h. Interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed by me, both in preparation for analysis and preliminary commencement of it. Field notes were also taken in order to capture relevant context, such as body language and tone of voice, that might be missed in the recording or eventual transcription of participants' narratives.

Auto-storying was also employed as a supplementary research method that would enable me to mine data from my own experiences as an activist. Prior to commencing the interviews, so as not to colour my own recollections with those of my participants, I retraced the orbit of my activist career up to the present day—including the complex trajectories by which I led myself, unwittingly, to increasingly dire bouts of burnout. I dictated and subsequently transcribed these recollections as done for the interviews so that my own experiences could serve as commensurate data for analysis, on par with the accounts of my participants: neither privileged nor negated.

3.2.2 TAKING IT ALL IN: TRANSCRIBING THEIR TALES

According to the tightly packed interview schedule I had organized, involving frequent travel to other cities to meet with my participants, transcription took place as its own

phase once all the interviews were conducted. In retrospect, this was not ideal, given that revisiting each interview shortly afterwards would have enabled me to make more conscious tweaks to the interview process. These subtle, but potentially significant, changes would have ranged from how various probes were worded, when asked, to my nervous propensity for incorporating multiple questions into one. Fortunately, this latter issue was one I was able to remedy early on, for the benefit of subsequent interviews, as a result of listening through part of my first interview in the company of my primary supervisor and her more experienced ear. Even listening through the others on my own, as they accumulated, would surely have given me further insight and perspective for my own interviewing process. Accordingly, in future research of this kind, I will strive to arrange my project schedules to allow sufficient time for the transcription of each interview as soon as possible after it is completed.

Further, preliminary analysis is enabled by the transcription process as well. With each interview, I had the opportunity to revisit my conversations and make note of new questions or connections sparked by the dialogue. These would be fleshed out and form the basis of my more fully realized analysis later on.

3.3 REFLECTING AFTER ACTION

With my data in hand, the theoretical and analytical adventures could begin. These were not without their hiccups, nor their trial-and-error redirections, but no experience truly worth the effort ever goes so smoothly. Moreover, having never before attempted a research project of this type, scope, or design, what I experienced (at least early on) as the "drowning in data" stage of the learning process was particularly intense and time-consuming, though extremely rewarding as well.

3.3.1 ALL BRIDGES, NO BORDERS: ANALYSIS ACROSS NARRATIVES

With the remaining chapters encompassing the fruits of my analytical labour, this section provides an overview and covers the processual steps which led to those results. Major findings will be introduced here, in brief, to facilitate the reader's understanding of the creative representation with which those chapters commence.

Contextualizing the data. Rather than use the more traditional mode of analysis—categorizing—whereby data is broken down into common themes and runs the risk of being taken out of context, I opted instead for *contextualizing* analysis, which allows researchers the latitude to explore their data beyond discrete categories. This type of analysis values the tensions and discrepancies that may arise in the course of data collection, given its grounding in critical and post-structural research paradigms that emphasize the value of participant voices and the multiple truths that emerge from their own lived realities (Berbary 2012, p. 24). Accordingly, my analysis followed a rather meandering and rhizomatic path of development, as illustrated and then explicated in the scenes and director's comments of Chapter Four.

Re-storying the data. As Berbary (2012) explains, "Re-storying is both related to the way a story is told AND how a researcher relays a story to the audience" (p. 17). With respect to the original teller, an oft-retold story is no less true in subsequent recountings

than when spun the very first time. In fact, it is likely to have been polished or even "re-packaged" in ways that will be more relevant to a given audience. I did this myself in the auto-storying done for this project. In the case of relaying my participants' stories, however, the re-storying was twofold. By virtue of involving creative analytic practice as a means of representation, I necessarily re-storied their narratives by transposing them into another genre than they were originally told. Additionally, because each scene involves composite characters drawn from the narratives of multiple participants, rather than corresponding to a single one, the data was re-storied once again for the purposes of representation.

Transferability of findings. Finally, in order to both understand my methodological route and fully appreciate the conclusions reached, it must be acknowledged that the knowledge gathered herein is offered up with humility and hope that readers may find it *transferable* rather than *generalizable*. With research of this kind,

> we provide detailed, in-depth, thick, rich description of our research location, participants, and findings so that others can decide for themselves if it transfers or translates into their own experiences. …It may apply to other [contexts] or it may not—BUT either way it is still meaningful and useful because qualitative [research] respects that each person can contribute to our understandings of the social world. (p. 22)

Accordingly, the data analyzed and discussed at length in the following chapters are not intended to "prove" any broader truths beyond those lived by the participants who volunteered to share them. While this research undoubtedly adds another layer to the collective knowledge surrounding social movements, and especially the subcategory of activist burnout, by no means does it purport to represent any activist's experience beyond those who volunteered to participate. True, I have set down a series of conclusions that crystallized for me through a (re)interpretation of our stories and Althusser's theory of the ideological state apparatus; beyond that, however, I can only hope that my colleagues and comrades find it relevant to their own work and lives.

3.3.2 ART AS ACTIVISM & ACADEMICS: CREATIVE ANALYTIC PRACTICE

By representing my data in a creative form, I sought to make this research at once more accessible to readers outside of the academic bubble and useful beyond these pages alone. Theatre has a great activist potential in its own right—as evidenced, I would argue, by the success (in spite of "controversial" subject matter) of groundbreaking musicals like *Cabaret* (war, fascism, sexual oppression), *Rent* (AIDS, poverty, gentrification), and *Next to Normal* (mental health/illness, the psychiatric industrial complex, family dysfunction). And that's not to mention lesser known but equally provocative dramas like *The Fever*, *My Name Is Rachel Corrie*, or *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*. In any case, a script can tackle complex social and political issues on multiple levels, through dialogue, stage direction, even costumes and set design. Moreover, with every performance, the audience manifests a temporary community uniquely capable of feeling and sharing the experience. And as American director and theatre critic Robert Brustein keenly observes in conversation with Anne Nicholson Weber (2006), we need this more than ever in today's highly individualistic, often isolating society:

> The audience once had a kind of hunger for going out and sitting next to other people. But we've gotten to the point where you don't have to leave the house at all in order to do your banking or communicate or entertain yourself. As a result, people feel safer in their own homes than they do on the streets. But at the same time, they miss the streets. And you have to go out in the street—you have to be with other people—to go to the theatre.
>
> It's interesting to me that even in the movie house, people prefer the isolation of home TV. You really don't want anyone else there with you; you want to be alone with your fantasies. When someone comes and sits next to you, you move to another part of the theatre. Whereas, if you are sitting with empty seats on either side of you at a play, you feel as though there is something wrong; you want to be next to someone, even someone you don't know; you want to share with that person the laughter or the grief, whatever you are responding to on the stage. So theatre remains a very communal experience, while the screen in all its forms remains a solitary one. Theatre is essential to our lives for that reason—because it socializes us, it makes us part of a community, in a way that the other media don't. (111)

This offers a particularly resonant medium for the exploration of activist burnout, which is an experience endured so often in isolation, even while surrounded by a society of comrades. It is for this reason more than any other than I decided to draft a theatrical script. Rather than producing a series of poems or short stories—both forms in which I have written before, and which I would have been infinitely more comfortable to work in again—I seized upon this exciting-yet-intimidating opportunity to explore and represent the issues leading to burnout, and activists' own experiences thereof, in a medium that holds the potential to actively *challenge* the silence and isolation surrounding such experiences within our movements.

While the timeline for completing this thesis did not permit me to produce it for an audience prior to submission, it is my intention to stage it in the near future. After the performance(s), I will also facilitate a discussion between the cast and any interested members of the audience about the themes and experiences portrayed onstage— extending the communal experience and encouraging participants to carry on the discussion when they leave the theatre. But this "community exchange" also goes both ways, and such discussion(s) may generate feedback for the play as well, perhaps prompting changes or additions that will make it more relevant to subsequent audiences. I am also intrigued by the potential for performing excerpts of the play as an interactive component in the activist sustainability workshops and organizational culture trainings that I have every intention of continuing in my non-academic life. Finally, after soliciting further "community input" from fellow activists and theatre buffs who can be persuaded to see a performance, I intend to format the script for free circulation in the form of a zine, with the humble hope that it will resonate and be of some use to any other activists who happen to get their hands on it.

With all of this in mind, as hypothetical as it may be in this moment, I take great satisfaction in recognizing that this creative analytic theatre script—or, more accurately, any and all performances to come—is more than just a creative exercise, or an academic one, and promises to be an exercise of the revolutionary praxis that critical theory so radically espouses. New as I am to working in theatre, some of my most profound emotional and spiritual experiences have occurred in the shadow of one inspiring stage or another, so I am inclined to agree with Scott Miller's claim in *Rebels With Applause* (2001) that "live theatre is still among the most powerful tools for social and political change in the world today" (viii).

The writing process. As much as I would like to end this chapter on that poetic note so it remains top of mind as readers enter the world of the play in Chapter Four, it is a methodological imperative for me to outline the writing process first. My claims that it represents actual research data must be supported, as the voices of my interview participants are included here as lines spoken by composite, fictionalized characters rather than direct quotes. This begs a high degree of trust from readers, and I was quite torn as to whether or not I should include more excerpts from the transcribed interviews to explicitly highlight the ideologies, first demonstrated in the scenes and then deconstructed in the director's comments. However, given the complexity of the issues involved and the sheer length of relevant quotations I would have liked to include, I elected to let the play speak for itself and hope readers will trust its summary of the issues. If nothing else, I hope my supervisors will appreciate this, given the already indecorous length of this paper. However, I will humbly accept challenges to this decision, from academic and activist peers alike. I look forward to further work with this data, for the purposes of exploring various elements in detail for other academic and activist publications, which will undoubtedly incorporate more direct quotation from my extremely data-rich interviews.

Identifying "ideologies" in the data. Ultimately, it is the play itself that best demonstrates, or perhaps portrays, many complex answers to my research questions, as they were voiced by my interview participants. Once again, these questions are as follows:

1. What are the dominant ideologies enabled within Southern Ontario activist spaces?
2. How are these ideologies embodied by individual and collective practices within those spaces?
3. How do participants negotiate these cultural expectations in order to "do activism" or "do activism differently"?

However, the process of discerning, distilling, and ultimately organizing these answers—from raw snippets of data into a cohesive, and creatively satisfying, whole—was just as complex, if not more so.

It all began with several read throughs of each interview—printed out in hard copy for easier reading and margin note-taking—to further familiarize myself with the data. And we got very familiar, to the point that I could hold many of the rough connections already forming in my mind, in addition to noting them on paper. Next, I began physically cutting up my interview transcripts—more specifically, cutting out the lines that were relevant to my burgeoning "ideologies" of activism. Once these "data points" were selected and sorted accordingly, I would attempt to "storyboard" my scenes (one for each "ideology") by arranging the cut-up interview lines into an order that would make sense as a narrative in its own right.

However, it quickly became clear that this process would not work for me. Going from raw data to narrative representation directly was premature: too much was being lost without further translation from one medium to another, and from individual lived experiences to those of fictional, yet accurately composite, characters. To solve this problem, I added the intermediate step of reviewing each interview again, line by line,

and typing up a "translation" of the relevant lines. Take the following excerpt from my interview with Janice Lee (whose interview was colour-coded "purple") as an example:

> Yeah, I mean, a criticism of a local activist group that is mostly men is like, they don't take care of each other's emotions. To the point where they're like, having a meeting in my house and I can walk into the kitchen where they're having the meeting and sense, right away, that one person is feeling like *shit* emotionally, and *no one is noticing*. And the meeting is just going on, when someone is, like, going through a crisis there, silently in a crisis. That's a problem.
>
> And is it because those other members are *ignoring* it, they see it and they ignore it? Or they just simply can't see it? Either way, it's a problem.

Janice has just described a complex situation, referring to multiple points of view and possible experiences in one short paragraph. I wanted to be able to explore how each side could shape the narrative, so I translated it threefold, as follows:

- Activists (esp. men) are oblivious to fellow activist's emotional crisis — purple 194-198
- Activist recognizes a comrade in emot'l crisis but ignores it, not their problem — purple 202
- Activist recognizes a comrade in emot'l crisis, wants to offer help, but unsure how? — purple 203

Such "translations" could thus captured a complex issue or experience described by an interview participant, but in a distilled form that would be easier to work with in the "storyboarding" phase. To retain the necessary connection with the raw data, each "translation" was tagged with its corresponding interview name and line number. This would allow facilitate my easy return to the raw data once it came time to script the scenes from this "translated" outline. The actual lines of the play are drawn heavily—indeed, often verbatim—from the voices of the interviewees themselves, which is what gives me the aforementioned confidence that the play can stand on its own as a representation of my data. On the grounds, once again, I hope readers will see fit to trust this assessment of my academic rigour. I hope they will enjoy the play in its own right, as well—so now, without further ado, turn the page for Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR: IDEOLOGIES & INSURRECTIONS
A CREATIVE ANALYTIC THEATRE SCRIPT

hey! you up for a meeting tonight? :)

I had dimmed my laptop's screen as low as it would go. But it still struck my raw eyes harshly, as I slowly registered the words silhouetted in its glare. I knew the only reason my friend had reached out was because we had work to do, just as I knew there was no way I'd make it to a meeting anywhere. The only question was whether or not I'd be honest about why. Saying I was "sick" would be at once true and plausibly euphemistically, seeing as it was winter now. It would also be easier, and probably more acceptable. The rest of our group wouldn't want to catch the flu with all the work we'd taken on, whereas my depression wouldn't be contagious to their brisk and determined minds.

The futon in my parents' spare room had been my bed for a few weeks already and wouldn't see the last of me until long after the snow melted. Most days I didn't even get up except to hit the bathroom or scavenge a bite or two of their leftovers from the fridge. I remember thinking, just before moving back there, that if not for the family option I might have looked into hospitals... basic survival needs seemed daunting, and their deservedness questionable at best. If I had so thoroughly fucked up my own privileged life and hadn't made a dent in the oppressive systems wreaking even worse havoc in the lives of those more marginalized than me, then why the hell was I here taking up any space at all?

I had been neglecting everything and everyone in my life that didn't—in my myopically tunnel-visioned mind during the preceding months—directly serve or support my organizing. My non-activist relationships were all but forgotten and I had failed, for another term, to come up with a thesis proposal and finally get on with finishing my undergrad degree (now in its fifth year already). And even then, in one of my groups, our work was floundering in the face of limited resources that didn't match our ambitions; meanwhile, the other was marred with interpersonal crises that we weren't equipped to resolve. And in both cases, I felt like I was growing more and more estranged from the mere handful of work-focused comrades I was still trying to maintain heartfelt ties with...

For months, anxiety had been eating me from the inside out with a brutally ravenous hunger. I doubted everything I did, feared the harsher feelings concealed in friends' offhand comments. I didn't trust anything, least of all myself. It was like that moment once you've realized you lost your balance and can't do anything to stop the fall... but all the time, forever. At least when your body falls there's a relief in finally landing; as painful as it may be, at least you know it's over. But I was always waiting for the final blow, frozen, unable to either flee from it or fight properly for our cause. I felt trapped between my own identity and this creeping inability to fulfill it any longer, like... like I wasn't really who I thought I was... who I'd always wanted to be. The heartbreak was excruciating, insidious and inescapable.

Until one day it faded altogether... and while this newfound absence of feeling seemed rather sad to what little rationality lingered in my activist mind, it was soothing in its own right. After the cruel firebrand of my anxiety, the depression was like frostbite, potentially just as fatal but nonetheless welcome for its numbness. The bitter wind of self-loathing still whipped my soul around like a plastic bag, but at least now I had the dissociative perspective to watch it from the window instead of running outside to be swept up in it altogether.

And this too shall pass.

4.0 PROLOGUE: THE STORM

Stage black. Thunder rumbles quietly and voices begin to speak in a whisper. Their conversation is mostly indecipherable, but snippets come through more clearly here and there.

> VOICE 1: Well, if we're not going to get there tomorrow, then we're never going to get there, because we only have tomorrow.
>
> VOICE 2: Okay, but we should pace ourselves too...
>
> VOICE 3: If we don't make things *entirely* better, you know it's going to get *entirely* worse.
>
> VOICE 4: We need to get serious about this...

Voices and thunder both grow gradually louder. A gentle but persistent wind begins. So does the sound of typing on a computer, relaxed at first before gradually speeding up.

> VOICE 1: Hey, you hear about the event/summit/conference? *[Director's Note: This can be specified by any production to make it as relevant for the audience and production context.]*
>
> VOICE 2: This is a serious opportunity, they're all gonna be there...
>
> VOICE 3: We'll show them what democracy looks like. Shit's gotta go down!
>
> VOICE 4: Uh, no, I don't know him, but I guess he got vouched for by them...

The sound of typing increases volume and speed. Lightning flashes briefly at stage left, projected on screen behind "clouds" of gauzy fabric. Ten seconds later, thunder cracks.

> VOICE 1: *[Enthusiastic, frenetic.]* Just gotta make it happen... make it huge...
>
> VOICE 2: *[Anxious.]* I'm getting kinda tired...
>
> VOICE 3: *[Scornful.]* You don't burnout by winning. We just need to win more.
>
> VOICE 4: *[Subdued, fearful.]* Fuck, I think they're following us...

The typing grows faster and louder than ever. Lightning flashes at stage right, but "closer" both to centre stage and to the audience (behind fewer "clouds") than last time. Five seconds later, thunder cracks (louder, again, than last time). The sound of riot police marching and beating their shields with batons begins, softly, from stage right and gradually moves to centre stage as the scene continues.

> VOICE 1: Where the hell were you? How is anything more important than this right now?
>
> VOICE 2: We need to have our shit together, and we really don't...
>
> VOICE 3: The plan is to have no plan. Agreed?
>
> VOICE 4: (This is it.) We're fucked.

Lightning flashes spectacularly at centre stage, followed immediately by a deafening crack of thunder, and all other sounds give way to the sound of pouring rain. Shortly after, this fades to silence.

4.0.1 *DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS: THE STATE WE'RE IN*

Beginning with broken dialogue about the world's current eco-crisis, this brief prologue sets the stage for the full scenes to come, establishing a tone and context on which the rest of the play can build. Pulling dialogue directly from my interview with Addison Lucas,

unseen voices initially lament the overwhelming urgency for action and change experienced by those who understand the scope and stakes of ongoing environmental devastation around the globe. The lightless stage also creates the sense that these voices could belong to anyone, to any activists struggling to get a campaign off the ground, with the added symbolism that they are fumbling around in the dark in a trial-and-error attempt to fight for what believe in. This is not only a matter of relative *personal* inexperience either: Given that a crisis of this magnitude has never been faced before in human history, and the sad truth that so many people remain in denial, it is not surprising that those of us looking disaster in the face should struggle with how to approach averting it.

The prolonged workload of a long campaign can be enough to burn anyone out under the "right" conditions, particularly if they aren't prepared for what could go wrong. However, as many activists will no doubt recognize, the sustainability and success of a campaign, and its participants, depends on variables beyond mere activist abilities. This scene also incorporates the increasingly common premise of radical activists—particularly Indigenous activists, environmental justice organizers, and anarchists—facing state repression and its consequences in the course of a serious campaign. This is hinted at most obviously by the eventual sounds of riot police; however, and perhaps most poignantly, the connotations of repression are evoked earlier in the scene through the allusions, in dialogue, to "increasingly obvious surveillance" of participants—and how this can at once raise the stakes of a campaign and further deplete activists' (inter)personal resources along the way. In my interview with Patrick Roth, he described his experience of this dynamic in the leadup to the Toronto G20 summit with the titular metaphor of a storm:

> I feel like that space was just this process of escalating anxiety and panic for most everybody involved, and for me, it was just like *so* much increasing stress… And being under increasingly obvious surveillance and there just being more and more police, and the public narrative just escalating towards this huge conflict and seeing the way people were responding to the organizing we were doing, and being like, "Holy fuck, this is going to be a crazy shitshow, we need to really have our shit together. And we really don't."

> It was sort of like the organizing equivalent of how you feel a storm building in the summer. You know? You can feel the pressure and the humidity increasing beforehand, and it makes everybody really irritable and not making good choices. They just want the storm to break but they're also worried about what will happen when it does. And that storm fuckin' broke.

Another related complication is introduced early on, one that might not stand out to the casual reader or audience member but would be a warning sign to many activists, especially now and especially in Southern Ontario. When one of the voices makes reference to someone they don't know but think was "vouched for" by fellow activists in unnamed group or city—and then leaves it at that, without inquiring further—comparison is once again made to the Toronto G20 protests and the now infamous counter-campaign

of police infiltration. In the roughly 18 months prior to the summit, numerous undercover officers managed to worm their way into activist groups across the province. They played off existing tensions and relationships within social movement circles in order to falsely establish themselves as trustworthy enough to be involved, eventually, in the Southern Ontario Anarchist Resistance coalition which formed as the core of anti-G20 organizing. It was from this network that the state would pluck its political scapegoats, prosecuting a few dozen activists for the righteously indignant actions of over a thousand protesters. The far-reaching effects of this repression continue to reverberate even today, five years after the fact, but the following scenes will focus on the more immediate aftermath of such a campaign and how many factors therein can lead to different experiences of burnout.

One final note in preface to the play and the deconstruction of its themes in the "director's comments" sections: While each scene is designed to highlight one of the "ideologies" of activism that can contribute to burnout, you will likely notice their themes overlapping throughout the play as a whole. This is quite intentional, from an authorial standpoint, but also inevitable insofar as the ideologies themselves intersect in much the same way as the systems of oppression from which they derive.

4.1 SCENE ONE: OR HARDLY WORKING

Dim spotlight left of centre stage, illuminating a table surrounded by chairs, where ZANNA sits alone. She appears to be in the middle of quiet, sober conversation on her cell phone, when ACE walks cautiously into the "room" carrying a dish of food.

ZANNA: *[Speaking into her phone.]* Okay. I'll see you soon then… I love you too. Bye. [To Ace.] Hey. Sorry to ignore you, Chris and I haven't quite worked out our phone schedule yet. It's good to see you again though.

ACE: Oh, no worries! Yeah, I'm excited to finally make it out to a meeting. How's he doing?

ZANNA: Not great. But okay, I guess. Having to live with his parents again definitely sucks, and they're still pretty upset about the criminal charges and impending court dates. I mean, they get why he does this work, they've never been completely opposed to it. But it's still hard for them now. I mean, we knew there could be consequences, but this is just… I don't know. Orwellian, almost.

ACE: How are you doing with all of this?

ZANNA: Well, it's hard, I mean… You knew we lived together, right? Did you ever meet him?

ACE: No, but I've heard good things.

ZANNA: Oh, okay. Right, I guess your time in the group didn't really overlap. Well, anyway, going from seeing each other every day to him living five fucking hours away, out in the boonies… yeah, it's not great. Even visiting is difficult, because he obviously can't leave but I don't have a car to take up there regularly. I'm gonna bring it up with folks tonight, actually. I'm hoping we can organize some small crews of his friends to visit together so he can see more people. At least Eden got to be Dakota's surety so they can still live together…

Their conversation trails away as other members of the group start to arrive. IAIN enters slowly and sits down, fidgety and tense but clearly trying to fully engage with the group. He's followed immediately by

EDEN, who enters at a far brisker pace, sits down, and immediately pulls out her laptop to work until the meeting begins.

IAIN: Hey. *[To ACE, alert.]* Hey, who are you?

ACE: Uh, hi, I'm Ace?

ZANNA: Remember that rad student I told you about, in the class I TA? This is them.

IAIN: Oh, right, yeah...

EDEN: Hey, team. Who brought food? Smells good.

ACE: Oh, I did—were we not supposed to? Zanna told me... I thought these meetings started with, like, potluck hangout time, or something...

IAIN: Uh, yeah, they used to. But then folks would skip it when they got busier and just come for the actual meeting, so it's not really happening anymore.

ZANNA: All work and no play, huh? Sounds familiar.

EDEN: We can have fun on our own time, and the work's gotta get done somehow. After all, that's why we're here, isn't it?

From just outside the spotlight's glare, DEREK answers, then enters with BELLAMY.

DEREK: Damn right. And on that note, this is Bellamy.

IAIN: *[Warily.]* Huh? What brings you here? How'd you find us?

DEREK: Chill, dude. He approached me after that campus talk I did, and he's interested to get involved. *[To EDEN, noticing that she's wearing makeup.]* Hey E, you got a hot date or something?

EDEN: *[Rolls her eyes at DEREK.]* Sure, something like that. *[To BELLAMY and ACE.]* Glad to have you on board. Are we ready to get this meet rolling then?

DEREK: Well, we could if Farrah would get here on time, for once. Somebody wanna text her, see if she's even coming this week?

EDEN: *[Snorts with derisive laughter.]* I doubt it, but will do.

BELLAMY: Is she sick or something?

DEREK: If you count being unreliable as an illness. Farrah's just been flaking out lately. Too bad, too. She was one of our best.

The the spotlight dims, and then smaller beams shine on ZANNA and DEREK only.

ZANNA: Come on, cut her some slack. She's been under a lot of stress lately, especially after picking up that second job.

DEREK: Yeah, I'm stressed too. We all are. The world's going to hell and our friends are probably going to jail for trying to do something about that. But the rest of us are here anyway, why? Because giving up isn't a valid option.

ZANNA: She's hardly given up, Derek! You've got no idea what she deals with every day. Did even you know her mom's sick, and staying with her when she's not in the hospital—?

DEREK: Yeah, and I'm on house arrest just like Chris—!

ZANNA: Oh, that's right, you wouldn't! Because why would any of us bother talking to you about anything but work? You'll just use it as a segue to remind us how bad things are everywhere and

why we need to keep fighting. And obviously we do, but sometimes we need to heal from our fights as well, and how are we supposed to do that when you turn everything into a gold-medal fight at the goddamn oppression olympics?

DEREK: Hey, I've dedicated my life to—!

ZANNA: Oh, get off your high horse and go count your golden eggs that you can afford to! "Struggle" isn't a choice for all of us, and it's not just meetings and black bloc marches.

DEREK: Look, Suze, I know you think I've got it easy. But this isn't some hobby, okay? I have a responsibility—

ZANNA: No shit, but you're missing a huge piece of it! Why won't you just shut up and listen for once?

DEREK: Fine, then tell me what *you* think I should do different!

ZANNA: Ugh, forget it. I'm done.

The personal beams fade out as the larger spotlight brightens again on the whole group.

EDEN: *[Checking her phone.]* She says she's almost here, so let's get on with the check-in so we can get to work when she arrives.

Everyone takes out their meeting materials (laptops, notebooks and pens, etc.) and gets settled down to work.

ZANNA: Okay, who wants to check in first?

No one responds. EDEN continues to work on her laptop and DEREK checks his phone, while the others look around at one another with uncertainty.

ACE: Um, sorry—what's a check-in?

ZANNA: It just means we do a go-round where everyone says briefly how they're doing, so we know where folks are at before digging into our discussion or assigning tasks.

EDEN: Basically, you let us know if there's anything going on with you that would affect your participation in the meeting, or your capacity to take stuff on and follow through on it.

ZANNA: Right, but if there's any other personal stuff you think we should know about, feel free to share that too. Anyways, I can start—

The group's final member, FARRAH, enters and pulls up a chair to sit down.

FARRAH: Hey everyone, I'm really sorry I'm late.

ZANNA: No worries, we were just starting to check in. Do you maybe wanna get settled and then go at the end?

FARRAH: Sure, thanks. *[Gets out her meeting materials.]*

EDEN: I can go next then. I'm good, just coming off a couple back-to-back conferences over the weekend and now back to full speed on organizing for our prisoner support campaign, the upcoming anarchist bookfair, fundraising for the new community space. Oh, and working on my Ph.D., as always. *[Laughs, nonchalant, like its nothing.]*

BELLAMY: Whew, that's so much!

EDEN: Meh, it's all stuff that I think needs to be done, and sticking with each thing makes me better at the rest of it. *[Looks at BELLAMY, sitting on her left, to check in next.]*

BELLAMY: Hey, everyone. Well, I'm new, obviously, and I'm kinda in this phase of consciously trying to expose myself to different ideas, different kinds of resistance and political stuff. So, yeah. Just glad to be here. *[Looks at IAIN, sitting on his left, to check in next.]*

IAIN: Oh, I guess it's my turn. Um, yeah, I'm doing alright. Same old, same old. Nose to the grindstone and all that. *[He grins weakly and falls silent.]*

The group stays silent for a long pause, as if waiting for him to say more. Then the spotlight dims, and then smaller beams shine on IAIN and ZANNA only.

ZANNA: *[Wild-eyed and overwhelmed.]* Yeah, I don't really know what to say either. With the aftermath of the storm, everything just... Y'know, sometimes it feels like organizing is the only thing that makes sense now, even more than it did before, but at other times it's like I just don't know what to do with myself. I miss Chris, and I feel paranoid all the time, like they're going to arrest all of us any day now.

IAIN: *[Deadpan.]* Yeah. It's fucked.

ZANNA: *[Softening.]* Shit, Iain, I'm sorry—it's gotta be even harder for you, not being able to talk to him.

IAIN: *[Heavily.]* I guess... I mean, he's your partner. But yeah, well, we've been best friends for... Anyway...

ZANNA: I know I'm not Chris, but Iain, you can talk to me.

IAIN: Well... I guess I feel kinda like I'm on autopilot? I mean, look at all that work we put in over the past year and a half, and now... We let so many issues slide, just within this group even, in order to take advantage of a real opportunity to see the state bleed—and now look at us, scattered and scarred, and...

ZANNA: Scared to trust people anymore?

IAIN: *[Sighs.]* I hate that it's my instinct now to think every new kid is a fucking cop. I just... [Holding back tears.] I feel fucking ashamed, y'know? I should have said something, done something. I had my suspicions—I think a bunch of us did—but what if I was wrong? I wanted everything to work out. I didn't want to fuck anything up, and now—

ZANNA: *[Emphatically.]* Iain, this is not. your. fault. Sure, we're going to have to learn from this and find ways to be more on guard going forward. But Iain, *they* played off our relationships, and our insecurities. That tells me we need to put more focus there, too, to make it part of our work, so we won't be taken advantage of again. And so we can get through all this, now.

IAIN: Yeah, I get that. I don't feel like I deserve it yet.

The personal beams fade out as the larger spotlight brightens again on the whole group.

IAIN: So... yeah. Who's next?

FARRAH: I'll go. So, I've spoken with a couple of you about this, but for everyone else... I've been struggling with some health problems lately, and it's been getting more and more difficult to handle, or try to get better, with everything I've got on my plate these days, so... I guess what I'm trying to say is, I need to take a break from our organizing for a little while and get some of my own shit together a bit more, y'know, so I'll be in a better position to do this work long-term.

ZANNA: That makes a lot of sense.

EDEN: Yeah, it's good you're going to take care of yourself. Do what you need to do and just come back when you're ready.

DEREK: *[Impatiently.]* Yeah. In that case then, there's really no need for you to hang around for the meeting, it sounds like you've got things you need to do. So I guess just let us know when you want to come back then.

FARRAH: Oh. Okay. I guess I'll see you all later then...

The group watches and waits in awkward silence as FARRAH pack up and leaves, looking back only once before stepping outside their circle of light.

DEREK: Okay, can we finally get on with our agenda then?

EDEN: Yeah, let's start with reportbacks on our action items from last week. I put together a rough schedule, a budget, and a list of organizing roles and responsibilities for the insert your cause/issue convergence[3] we're going to host on the Day of Action that just came up *[She passes out hardcopies.]* so we should take a look to make sure everyone's comfortable with it and then figure out who's going to bottomline what.

DEREK: Looks good. Does anyone have a problem with any of it?

Most members of the group continue perusing the document in silence, giving one another the odd sidelong glance, while EDEN and DEREK look around expectantly, then impatiently. The spotlight dims again, and then a smaller beam shines alternately on individual members, going back and forth with short soliloquies.

IAIN: Sure. But hey, whatcha gonna do, right? Make a perfectly reasonable objection just to catch a bunch of flack, like Farrah did last week? I don't have the energy to deal with that shit. Easier to suck it up and just do my part, whatever that turns out to be.

BELLAMY: Damn, I wanna work on everything... the big march, the convergence space, tabling and workshops... this is gonna be amazing...

ACE: Whoa, that's a lot of work... Looking really interesting, although I'm not sure I really get what the goal of it is. I mean, this sounds great for a weekend, but then what... Maybe they've already talked about that though, and I'm just not up to speed yet? *[Looks around at the others uncertainly.]*

ZANNA: Sure, let's forget about strategy altogether, or the question of how much capacity our little group has to get even half the work done to make an event like that happen. God, I could teach the fucking class on this. "Activism 101: How to Tell Yourself You're Making a Difference" — "Lesson 1: These are things we do, we call them political, we construe them to be useful." *[Sung wistfully to the tune of the main verse in "Pure Imagination" from* Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory, *1971.]* "There is no / One I know / Who still haaaaas a rad-i-cal imagination..."

BELLAMY: I never would have thought of doing something like this... I'll gonna learn so much from them... *[Glances around in surreptitious admiration.]*

IAIN: Ugh, after all this time, we still don't have any idea what the fuck we're doing. And what's worse, we still don't seem that interested in talking about it. How the hell are we supposed to "win" if we aren't even asking ourselves what success would look like?

ZANNA: I mean, I guess it's important to keep up with our organizing and not let the state win in that respect. But we haven't even really debriefed the *organizing* that landed a bunch of people in jail, let alone what the aftermath's been like. Far be it for us to talk about how it's affected us personally,

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[3] or gathering? convergence? day of action? etc.? (whatever makes the most sense as a setting for Sc. 3)

or how we could maybe channel it in healthier ways. I feel like we're just kind of ignoring the toll it's gotta be taking on all of us, in different ways… But no, when I suggested we put some our energies into some creative activism and making space for folks to share their stories, even their trauma, with others in the community—well, apparently that's not "serious" enough, "not the kind of thing" Derek and Eden think we should be focusing on, anyway. But if nothing else, we could really stand to invest some time tackling the fucked up dynamics we always fall back into. Especially now, with new folks joining… *[She now begins humming the tune of the bridge in "Pure Imagination"in time to sing the last line after the others have recited their final lines.]*

ACE: I wish I knew a bit more about this before…

BELLAMY: I can't wait to do all the things!

IAIN: I just feel adrift…

ZANNA: *[Sung, cynically this time.]* "Want to change the world? / There's nothing / To it…"

Fade to black.

4.1.1 DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS: AN IDEOLOGY OF ACTIVISM

This "ideology" of activism—along with those that follow each of the subsequent scenes— derives from the stories told to me by participants during our interviews. It has crystallized from my fellow activists' critiques of social movement cultures and from their own attitudes, forged in the belly of the beast. As discussed in Chapter Three, this analysis is offered up as transferable, rather than generalizable, and should therefore be read not as prescriptive but as a potential resource.

Thanks to ingrained socio-cultural biases and sensationalist media coverage, particular tactics and strategies of protest and community organizing have become synonymous with "activism" almost to the point of exclusivity, as least in the public eye. While other, often complementary, styles and orientations towards creating change are engaged in social movements throughout the world, certain assumptions dominate the unspoken rules for what is considered activism in Southern Ontario. However, not everyone can or wants to play by these rules.

The ideology: Activist is as activist does…

"Activism" is most often conceptualized as highly visible labour; traditionally masculine, intellectual labour; explicitly "political" and confrontational, insofar as focusing on external, rather than (inter)personal, problems of power and oppression; and intended to gain public attention. Even when "other" forms of activist labour (e.g., support work and relational labour, like accountability processes for resolving interpersonal conflicts; creative and artistic forms of resistance; childcare and other accessibility efforts, etc.) *are* acknowledged as valid, even necessary, they are unlikely to earn the same "cred" when

compared to more canonical tactics (e.g., street protests, organizing conferences, media and propaganda work, blockades and other "hardcore" or "serious" actions, etc.).

It is interesting to note that what is—and isn't—commonly legitimized as "doing activism" often falls along the same lines as what forms of labour are prioritized as "real work" under capitalism: feminized labour and artistic pursuits are regularly subordinated to intellectual and traditionally masculine career paths, from a financial compensation standpoint as well as that of social capital. They are naturalized as things that women and artists do instinctually, as labours of love, and thus negated as actual "work" (regardless of the personal resources invested for its accomplishment). Through this historic negation, institutionalized over centuries and throughout patriarchal and feudal (then capitalist) societies, these forms of labour have been invisibilized and ultimately excluded from the category of work—even within allegedly feminist and anti-capitalist spaces.

Ironic though this may be, it remains true—and truly frustrating—that if your peers don't see you "doing activism" as they understand, you are less likely to be seen as a ("serious") activist. Not participating in *prioritized* activist spaces and strategies can engender feelings of "FOMO"—the fear of missing out. This anxiety can often have less to do with a genuine desire to participate in such spaces or activities and more to do with a certain "see and be seen" mentality, whereby feeling (or being made to feel) like a member of one's social movement or activist community is dependent on "showing up" and renewing connections with peers, especially prominent comrades (however superficial those connections might be).

Also in need of consideration for the accessibility of "activism" are the requirements (finite personal resources like time, energy, ability to travel, etc.) as well as the risks and disincentives (social, legal, etc.) levied against participation in social movements, particularly for people who are already marginalized within mainstream society. For example, variously (dis)abled folks may not be able to meet the requirements (duration and forms of activist work) for maintaining a recognized activist status, whereas (im)migrants and people of colour could face disproportionately harsh repercussions for "serious" activist participation compared to their white comrades. Of course, none of this is to say that such folks can't or won't still participate in these ways, or even that the associated risks to personal health and safety would not be worth it; in light of the increasingly high stakes for resistance of all kinds, it is clear why many would elect to make such personal sacrifices, especially if those forms of resistance are (or are presented as) the only feasible avenues for change. However, from an anti-oppressive standpoint, these accessibility issues must be taken into account when examining the hierarchy of what constitutes "activism" and who maintains the privilege to participate—that is to say, who can *be* an activist and what our movements will look like, and prioritize, as a result.

The insurrection: Counter-stories of "doing activism" differently

"Other" types of resistance/justice work can be not only (a) necessary, as complementary to the "traditional" forms of activism practiced throughout social movements, but also (b) preferable for a variety of activists on a personal basis. Through less visible forms of struggle, we can engage in resistance on more intimate levels, such as challenging systems of power and oppression as they manifest in our own lives and relationships, rather than restricting our scope of opposition to public (and often symbolic) seats of power. The latter stance can still be useful and empowering, as when anarchist prison demos show incarcerated people that they have not been forgotten by society on the outside. However, to continue with this example, the disruption can also lead prison guards to punitively and arbitrarily cancel visitation hours, thus preventing those inside from seeing their friends and families. Alternative, albeit less "hardcore" or visible, ways to engage with this issue would be with prisoner support efforts that more directly improve their quality of life inside, such as organizing donations to prison libraries or committing to being a penpal for those without much support from the outside. Of course, many activists strive to participate at both ends of this public-private spectrum, recognizing that a diversity of tactics can accomplish more than singular strategies. Ultimately, this is the takeaway here, particularly for newer activists who may be drawn to the exhilarating yet limited potential of more public actions.

It is also interesting to me—not to mention ironic and suspiciously state-serving—that these forms of labour which are most frequently invalidated or overlooked are also those that could offer a game-changing potential for sustaining activists' participation within our movements (i.e., feminized labour like emotional support and childcare would better enable those who need them to remain active in "the struggle" while attending to their own, whereas the fruits of artists' creative labours could inspire current and future generations of dissidents to continue fighting for justice). But more on that in the "Commitment" section after the final scene, and in the discussion of an ideological *social movement* apparatus in Chapter Five.

Further effects: Where does this lead?

Activists can become alternately (a) radicalized, (b) repressed, (c) reinvigorated, or even (d) retired as a result of their participation—or the consequences of their participation—in such overt forms of activism. However, as discussed above, this can vary according to personal histories or circumstances as well as one's social identities (race, gender, (dis)ability, etc.): Participation in the same form of activism, or even identical roles in a particular action, but two different activists cannot guarantee identical, or even positive, experiences. These experiences can also be affected by the external social and political contexts that factor into one action versus another, such as the escalation of repression in Canada following the G20 Summit in Toronto five years ago versus the state/social movement climates experienced prior to that fiasco.

Movement success and potential for growth may also be inhibited by the limited opportunities for types of activism held up as exemplary of social movement participation. If current or potential activists aren't willing or able to participate in these types of activism, they may try to do so anyway; moreover, they may succeed, or they may burn themselves out in the process. They could, however, take it as an indication that there is no place for them in their desired movement, which is not only disempowering for them but a disadvantage to the movement that will subsequently lose out on their much-needed contributions.

This is not merely a gross oversight for our movements, insofar as it can hold us back from appreciating and incorporating into our strategies the diverse strengths, skills, and experiences of all who may wish to join us. It also constitutes a serious failure of our movements to make room for new and existing members[4] with a wide variety of needs, abilities, or circumstances. As it is now, current activists who feel tired of, or unsuited to, these forms of activism may navigate the waters in one of two ways: In the best case scenario, they find other ways to participate—perhaps in a different group, city, or movement altogether—with or without the conviction (or vocal support from their peers) that they are still valuable to the struggle. In the worst case scenario, they leave our movements entirely, having been burned out—physically, mentally, emotionally, and/or spiritually—by their experience of what fighting for justice is really like, at least in this context.

4.2 SCENE TWO: SITES UNSEEN

Stage lit with narrow, criss-crossing spotlights similar to those at a concert or sporting event. At centre stage is the same table from the last scene, but with fewer chairs, arranged on a raised platform bordered by parallel sets of ropes—like a boxing ring. A projection screen stands behind it, flanked by speakers raised on stands.

ZANNA stands in one corner of the stage, away from the table, clearly tense and mentally preparing herself for a fight. She is joined shortly by IAIN and ACE, bearing a towel and a water bottle. They stand on either side her in the corner and whisper words of comfort (inaudible to the audience, but apparent through the trio's body language).

EDEN arrives next and immediately sits down opposite, taking out her phone and getting settled as she did for last scene's meeting. ZANNA checks her watch.

ZANNA: *[To EDEN.]* Any idea when Derek's planning on getting here?

EDEN: *[Without looking up from her phone.]* I'm sure he'll be here soon.

ZANNA: *[Sardonically.]* Sure, it's not like we're waiting to start anything important. I guess it's a good thing we won't have to wait for Farrah now, too, huh...

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[4] It is important to note—again, from an anti-oppressive perspective—that everyone's needs, abilities, and circumstances can shift over time. For example, while some *currently* able-bodied activists may *currently* overlook the need for participation to be made accessible for their variously (dis)abled peers, they too may crave such empathy and solidarity should their own health and circumstances change.

EDEN, imperturbed, puts down her phone and takes out her laptop. Her email inbox appears on the projection screen, with a single new message highlighted at the top, bearing the subject line, "a letter to the ___[your city here]___ community". She clicks on it, and the message opens on-screen, in its entirety, where it will remain for the duration of the scene, as it would on EDEN's laptop. When EDEN is reading from it, however, FARRAH's voice will narrate those lines over the speakers.

> *dear activists,*
>
> > *we understand that you want to avoid conflict. conflict is hard, so why would you want to choose it?*

Everyone turns to look as DEREK enters, followed closely by BELLAMY. They sit down next to EDEN with DEREK in the centre.

DEREK: Hey. You haven't started yet?

ZANNA's team finish whispering to one another and walk, slowly and deliberately, to sit down at the table, opposite the others. EDEN glances down at her laptop.

> *…but conflict can be healthy. in fact, it can be our only choice at times, lest our hearts and minds be poisoned by painful feelings swallowed "for the greater good" and left to fester far too long. particularly when our movements are becoming sites of oppression in their own right.*

ZANNA: Obviously not. We kinda need the whole group for this.

DEREK: I guess. Though I'm not sure we need this at all right now. I mean, we had Mishka here a couple months ago for that workshop.

ZANNA: Yeah, and that was an opportunity for folks to lay their thoughts on the table, but we didn't end up having any follow-through on the issues that got discussed. We can't always have an external facilitator here, and the accountability process shouldn't stop when they leave. We need to actually work on it together.

DEREK: You don't suppose we have slightly more pressing problems to deal with right now, with the state breathing down our necks?

ZANNA: And when are they going to stop breathing down our necks, huh? This shit's been a problem for us since the get go, but we let things slide with the smell of resistance in the air. I'll even admit that it injected new life into the group, but that was never going to last. Something was always going to have to change if this group was going to work together much longer, and now with everything that's down in the storm, we actually have a chance to humble ourselves and confront our fuck-ups.

DEREK: Like what?

ACE: *[Tentatively.]* Like some of us not feeling our voices are valued—

DEREK: Oh, here we go—

ZANNA: Or even heard! Especially when we're drowned out by the more dominant, masculine personalities in the group.

DEREK: Come on, Zanna. You're clearly more than comfortable voicing your opinion.

ZANNA: Yeah, I am comfortable matching your super aggressive male tactics, like taking up space and raising my voice right back. But not everyone can or wants to do that, and if you're stuck in a group with loud men who interrupt you and you're not the type to raise your voice, you're gonna get squished out of the conversation.

EDEN continues reading on her laptop.

> *...sometimes conflict leads nowhere, though, and for our own sakes we must set boundaries. many women, people of colour, queerfolk, people with disabilities, and other members of our marginalized communities have decided not to work with white men and anarchists for that very reason. we are tired of putting up with oppressive behaviour, and we refuse to waste any more time trying to educate them.*

IAIN: And being heard isn't just about volume, right? So we're talking about the dismissal of those opinions, the way some people's ideas are accepted right away, or at least legitimately engaged with. We're talking about the way space is never really made to validate concerns or objections—

BELLAMY: We call for concerns with every decision. *[Condescendingly.]* That's how consensus works.

ACE: More like dis-sensus...

EDEN: We're already a non-hierarchical collective, so what more can we do?

ZANNA: We can start by acknowledging the informal leadership and power cultivated by a few members over and above everyone else.

DEREK: Care to enlighten us as to how that's supposedly happening here?

EDEN continues reading on her laptop.

> *...to your angry, defensive cries of "not all men" and "not all anarchists" we will admit: yes, we do work with some of you. but only those who have committed to the lifelong process of unlearning their patriarchy, white supremacy, heteronormativity, classism, and other forms of privilege still coveted by the rest of you.*

ACE: I mean, like Iain said, we can look at whose opinions are really seen to matter. I've been involved for a few months now, and we've only really acted on suggestions or ideas from Derek and Eden—

BELLAMY: No, I definitely suggested a few things we ran with.

ACE: *[Under their breath.]* Well, hey, if Derek's Mini-Me says so... same difference, really...

BELLAMY: Aw, fuck you, dude, you're just jealous that—

ZANNA: Hey! Can we please try to keep this civil?

DEREK: Well, come on, Suze, this is getting a bit absurd. An idea is an idea, and we're always gonna wanna go with the best ones.

EDEN continues reading on her laptop.

> *...you may ask, "why now? For so long, we've fought side by side in the trenches for justice——why are you deserting us now?"*

> *true, this subordinate affair you call solidarity has become familiar, but we are tired of fighting for space under your black-and-red flag. we are tired of working, not side by side, but behind the frontlines you've (re)drawn to put yourselves first once again.*

ZANNA: And what's enabled you to be the ones with the good ideas? How about not having to work multiple jobs, which has given you more free time to accumulate more organizing experience and activisty knowledge? Or the ableist privilege of being able to go-go-go all the time, doing the traditional type of activism? And for you, in particular, how being socialized white and male has given you the confidence, not only that no one will wonder what you're doing here, but that they'll all care to hear what you have to say on the matter. Any matter.

DEREK: *[Derisive, but defensive.]* So, you're saying it's an injustice that I'm so dedicated to the cause?

ZANNA: No, I'm saying the reality that your regular ol' privilege lets you do the shit that gets more activist cred—that will let you suck up even more privilege *within* our movements—I'm saying that's fucked up.

DEREK: Aw, come on, is this about Farrah again? Look! She left of her own free will, and I'm not about to condone flakiness from anyone...

ZANNA: You know there's a lot more to it than that.

IAIN: Folks who can't live up to this ideal are still valuable and should still be part of our movements—

DEREK: Oh, so you're okay with not being able to rely on your comrades?

ZANNA: Well, with that kind of attitude, it's not like your comrades can really rely on you either. We've talked to several former members of the group about why they left, and one of the big factors for—

BELLAMY: How can you give us criticisms from people who don't even organize anymore? They gave up their place in this conversation.

ACE: And it all comes back to what we were talking about earlier, with people's voices not being heard! You're still driving home your view of this, in this really semi-aggressive way, as if there's no other way to look at it—even though another way to look at it is actually being discussed!

The group falls into a tense silence, and EDEN pauses to read more of the letter.

> *...we have invested hours, days, years of our lives in spaces where the pressures to live up to certain ideals have taught us that we are not enough. the fight for certain types of justice, using certain types of resistance, has been full of certain types of people. and we have tried to be like them, like you.*

> *we have tried to do what you do. but many of us have fallen along the way, and you have not bent down to help us up. on this activist battlefield, our needs and skills have been weighed, our boundaries——our marginalizations——measured. and we have been found wanting.*

EDEN: Maybe we can get back to the issue of workloads, that seems a bit more tangible. I get that folks who take on more work can end up holding more sway in the group's decisions. But it does make sense, from a stakeholders perspective, that the folks most affected by a decision, because they're going to be responsible for carrying it out, should have a pretty strong say in setting the course. Otherwise groups can end up with great big plans, but the people who came up with them bailed when they got bored or busy.

ZANNA: Okay, but you seem to think it's all a matter of how much folks care about the work we're doing, like this is an equal-opportunity commitment. But if you're gonna call group non-hierarchical, or especially anti-oppressive, you have to look at why some members are able to consistently take on so much work while others have to be more cautious or modest about taking things on.

BELLAMY: Meaning?

ACE: Meaning some of us have other commitments and responsibilities.

BELLAMY: Uh, yeah, you're not the only student here, Ace!

ACE: I know that, and some of us actually have to work to pay our way through! Anyway, what do you know about responsibility? You haven't been to class in weeks.

BELLAMY: Uh, yeah, I've been a little busy with all the real work that needs to be done here.

ZANNA: That's another thing, though: what do we recognize as activist work? It seems to me like the more behind-the-scenes labour a lot of us end up doing isn't recognized in the same way, or even at all.

EDEN: Okay, I get that. But if you're interested to try something else, you can take on different tasks. I just volunteer for what I already know how to do because it helps me handle all my commitments.

IAIN: We're not just talking about if folks don't already know how to do it, they're going to need some skillsharing, which we rarely make time for anymore. I've heard you say multiple times how this or that task will go much faster if you just do it yourself, especially when we're organizing in crisis mode. And there's ongoing work we can be doing to keep ourselves from getting to that point, or at least being better equipped to deal with it when do...

Everyone pauses to consider this somewhat cryptic advice, and EDEN glances at her laptop again.

...we recognize the need to take care of each other, to teach those who follow in our footsteps how to get by in this world——not just the old world, even as we work to tear it down, but this new world we're building that already looks too much like what came before. this is hard work, we know, but necessary. and yet you don't see it that way. in your hardcore activist credit system, we're always in the red and rarely in the black.

EDEN: *[Looking conflicted.]* Well, sometimes we just need to get shit done...

DEREK: Yeah. This conversation is already stealing more time and energy from our work than it should be. We formed this group because we wanted a more confrontational collective that would get to do some serious actions, not just sit around debating identity politics.

ZANNA: Wow, stealing time and energy? For anti-capitalists, you sure focus an awful lot on productivity! And Derek, you n talk about confrontation? 'Cause it goes way beyond masking up and breaking windows. Much as I know you love that, it doesn't do much to destroy the fucked-up values that exist in society. Debating how we can stop devaluing different people's knowledges or contributions, even just within our own group, can be a lot more transformative than some smashy-smashy on the weekend. Otherwise, this is just gonna be one more space that becomes so utterly exhausting for people that eventually they need to walk away.

EDEN glances again at her laptop.

...we confront oppression every day, in every conversation. we have to decide, "do i care enough about this person to tell them why this is problematic? do i have enough patience and love and time to engage in this conversation?" and we have to ask ourselves if making your problems our problems is going to hurt too much. we have to remember the value of self-preservation.

DEREK: Hey, if you can't hack it...

ZANNA: Or if you're sick of getting hacked to pieces, all the time! If you can no longer justify it to yourself, to stay, to continue to participate in something that is actually grinding you down.

EDEN glances again at her laptop.

...we know that most of the world's problems are rooted in the emotional disconnect from other forms of life, including our peers, and we are fed up with manarchists brushing off bad dynamics as less serious than the next prison or pipeline project. THIS IS LIFE AND DEATH. this is right now, all the time. and you are letting it happen.

DEREK: Sometimes personalities just clash.

ZANNA: And sometimes people use that excuse to airbrush their own abuse.

BELLAMY: Whoa, hey!

EDEN: Way to keep it civil, Zanna...

DEREK: You don't know what the hell you're talking about, Suze. And I think I've had enough of being attacked for trying to be a good activist. See you all at the event.

DEREK walks out, leaving the group in a stunned silence.

ACE: *[Quietly, to ZANNA.]* Ohhhhkay, where the hell did that come from? I thought you wanted to focus on what's going on in the group.

IAIN: Yeah, strikes me as kind of a low blow, putting his meeting behaviour on par with direct abuse.

ZANNA: I'm not talking about meeting behaviour, I'm talking about Farrah.

BELLAMY: Oh, what now?

ZANNA: What, didn't he tell you? I mean, obviously he wouldn't talk about how he treated her, but I thought he might have at least mentioned their history.

BELLAMY: Huh?

EDEN: *[To BELLAMY.]* Yeah, they were partners, for about two years. *[To ZANNA.]* But I had no idea...

ZANNA: *[Packing up to leave.]* Yeah, well, you've always been closer with Derek, and it's not exactly something you'd disclose when there's no foundation for that kind of personal trust.

EDEN: I guess I figured we were close enough friends that she could come to me if something was really wrong.

ZANNA: Come on, Eden, we're basically just colleagues these days. Meetings are the only times most of us see one another, and on the rare occasion we bother with a check-in anymore, folks aren't even trying to hide that fact that they're struggling with something or other in their personal lives. *[Gets up to leave.]*

EDEN: *[To ZANNA.]* Hey! Um... will I see you next weekend then? *[ZANNA scoffs, like, "How can you ask me that after all this?]* I mean, you're facilitating the PoC space, right?

ZANNA: Yeah, and don't worry, I'm not gonna flake out on you. *[Exits.]*

EDEN glances again at her laptop to read the last lines.

...we hear you talk about "the [insert city name community" but where is this mythical brethren? and who is part of it? all we see is this general bank of people who share broad, vaguely leftist and supposedly "progressive" politics. when our personal ties are so loose that abuse can be overlooked, and the state can send its snakes to come between us, calling this a community is not only disgraceful——it's dangerous.

remain at your own risk.

—— the outsiders

Fade to black.

4.2.1 Director's Comments: An Ideology of (Anti)Oppression

In theory, activists possess enough anti-oppressive politics or "know how" to check whatever privilege they bear, such that their marginalized peers shouldn't* feel oppressed in activist spaces. (*Read: They shouldn't have to, but they also *should not*: for the sake of not being "divisive" or disruptive of "the work" or their movements.) In practice, however, activists can and do exhibit oppressive behaviour, in spite of good politics or claims thereof. Moreover, activists and their groups, movements, etc., can even perpetuate the very systems of oppression that they claim to challenge in their organizing efforts.

The ideology: My, aren't we (anti)oppressive!

By virtue of their variously radical stances towards mainstream society, with all of its structural oppressions, activists who are also privileged along various lines may be assumed to "have their shit together" more so than their mainstream peers. By extension, such activists may be optimistically—if naively—expected *not* to act in ways that perpetuate those structural oppressions, particularly if the issue in question is one they claim to explicitly challenge, or attempt to challenge, in their activist work. By further extension, activist "spaces"—physical in terms of gathering places, and relational in terms of the dynamics between activists populating them—may again play host to higher expectations for avoiding or challenging bad behaviour, such that *all ye who enter here* will be "safe(r)" from oppressive language, behaviour, etc.

   Similarly, activists who benefit from *x* privilege (e.g., white privilege, male privilege, etc.) but seek to challenge that form of structural oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, etc.) may see themselves as "allies" to marginalized comrades who experience that form of oppression. While this is certainly something to aspire to, becoming an ally is not something one can simply decide to do, or do alone; rather than a role or title one can claim simply by virtue of their politics or ideological commitment to another's cause, allyship is a relationship forged in battle, fighting side by side. Relationships between fellow activists, particularly those who share and espouse similar politics *in theory*, may be taken for granted and overlooked as "activist spaces" in need of anti-oppressive upkeep. Nonetheless, each friendship or comradeship constitutes a relational space between two people that bears opportunities—indeed, responsibilities—to challenge systemic oppressions *in practice*.

The insurrection: Counter-stories of oppression in activist spaces

Oppressive language and behaviour "occurs" in social movements more often than any activist would care to admit, which is perhaps part of the reason it continues to plague our well-intentioned efforts. It can take (inter)personal forms, as in explicit language or

behaviour from one activist to another, or manifest more structurally in the dynamics of activist groups or social movements overall, in terms of who is recognized as an activist or has access to the requisite resources and opportunities to become so. As introduced under the ideology of activism, in many ways these structures and dynamics can mirror those of mainstream society. For example, wealthy cisgender white dudes are likely to have confidence and experience in leadership roles but are less likely to skillshare with women and trans comrades; further, this leads such men to maintain even more implicit credibility and say-so as a result of the increased time and resources granted them as a cumulative result of their privileged upbringings, which in turn enables them to take on higher activist workloads.

An extension of this concern is how those who do take on higher workloads may hold proportionally greater sway over group direction-setting and other decision making, even within non-hierarchical (and attemptedly anti-oppressive) activist organizations. There is a logic to this from a "stakeholder" perspective, whereby those most affected by a decision are granted a greater say in making it; however, when used in the following way, it can be a double-edged sword for creating broader equity within activist group: On the one hand, it can be argued that members who do significantly more work should have a stronger hand in setting the direction from the group or project, because they will have a greater responsibility for executing it. The concern here is one of accountability: namely, that activists who take on less work will have less invested in the execution of ideas and may not even stick around to see them through, thus leaving the burden of completion to fall on their more active comrades—so why not let them plans things out in the first place? On the other hand, however, if those who do comparatively less work are limited in their involvement because of already marginalized identities (e.g., having to work multiple jobs and having less free time for group work, managing an anxiety disorder and needing to limit social interaction, etc.), they may be *further* marginalized within this activist group context, regardless of any professed commitment to anti-oppression from their more active comrades.

It should be clear by now that oppression need not be malicious in terms of personal intentions, or lack thereof. Within a social movement context, oppressive language and behaviour can be:

a) Wielded deliberately by one activist against another(s), in order to control or exert power in a personal or group situation;
b) "Let slip" accidentally, without intending to hurt or control the other activist(s);[5]
c) Exhibited without even acknowledging that their language or behaviour is oppressive or problematic in any way, whether because they consider

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[5] This is more likely to occur in situations that are already stressful, wherein activists may be less focused on checking their privilege and more intent on "resolving" (or perhaps just escaping) the situation as expediently as possible, even if that means reverting to negative power dynamics.

themselves anti-*x* "enough" to be "allowed" (e.g., to joke about racism) or because they haven't even stopped to consider it, which is more likely to stem from ignorance and a lack of anti-oppressive politics or practice.

In terms of others' experiences and reactions to it, oppressive language and behaviour can be "handled" in a range of ways. At one extreme, it may be let slide: overlooked, or even explicitly excused, on the grounds that the person engaging in it is *otherwise* "a really good activist" who "does so much important work" that the group, cause, movement, etc., just can't afford to lose them. This notion of indispensability in the face of oppressive behaviour is flawed on multiple levels. First, it assumes that an apparently dedicated activist would abandon their work and relationships over being called out or confronted for behaviour that is hurting people, which a well-meaning activist would presumably not want to continue doing anyway. Second, if that activist *did* decide to abandon their work and relationships over being asked to change *for the better*—most likely because they wouldn't recognize it as a necessary improvement to themselves and/or their activism—then they clearly weren't as dedicated and well-meaning as they claimed to be. Moreover, if that person persists in their unwillingness to even begin unlearning the oppressive ways inculcated by mainstream society, the group or movement in question has probably just cut its losses. (Who knows, that person may yet decide to do some unlearning on their own or even come crawling back after seeing the error of their ways.) Finally, and most fundamentally, to excuse an activist's oppressive behaviour on the grounds that they are doing some really valuable work *otherwise* is akin, in the extreme, to excusing a wife-beater's abuse on the grounds that he *otherwise* provides well for his family (not least of all in its capitalistic championing of a person's production value over their ethics and politics, at least in practice).

At the other end of the spectrum, oppressive language and behaviour may be "called out" or otherwise challenged, whether by the person(s) directly marginalized by said conduct or by a supportive comrade. Probable outcomes of such a challenge can range from positive to negative: The best case scenario would be for the perpetrator to be receptive to their comrades' challenge and endeavour to change their behaviour, which could help shape better dynamics for the group as a whole. However, the perpetrator can just as easily promise to change their ways and go on to claim that they are working on it, all the while continuing to exhibit the same behaviour. This can result in a negative feedback loop, leading the group to (a) eventually let it slide after all or (b) call it out again somewhere down the line, hopefully with better results. The worst case scenario would be for the perpetrator, possibly even backed by other members of their group or movement, to brush off the challenge to their "alleged" oppressive behaviour as unnecessary, even unfounded. (See: Denial and gaslighting.) The challenge may even be turned back on those who were marginalized by the oppressive conduct in the first place; these already marginalized activists may then have their experiences denied, may even be shamed or

accused of being "divisive" to the group or movement, merely because they were unwilling to accept further oppression from those who claim to challenge or oppose it.

Further effects: Where does this lead?

Activists experiencing oppressive behaviour, particularly as an ongoing problem within their own group or movement, can become increasingly burned out by it, whether by their "allies" inaction or by the effort of challenging it themselves. Ironically, and painfully so, the potential for success and growth of activist groups—indeed, of entire movement—is being stymied by the oppressive behaviour that goes unchallenged or is called out but ultimately allowed to continue. (This could be the closing sentence for this section, preceded by: "It must be acknowledged that the very existence of social movements is predicated on the need for collective and sustained hard work to challenge the systemic injustices that shape our very lives, the virtually ubiquitous structural oppressions that most of us have been born into and raised to uphold. It follows, then, that the unlearning of oppressive language, behaviour, and even basic views can be a lifelong process—not just for those who remain in the mainstream, but for activists as well. However radical we claim to be, we remain immersed in a world shaped—historically and presently—by structural oppressions. While we may believe wholeheartedly that this is wrong and may spend our entire lives fighting for justice, if we fail to challenge—and ultimately change—these patterns within our own movements and personal relationships, society will continue to function as designed: bestowing privilege on some and normalizing the oppression of others.

4.3 SCENE THREE: WITH COLLEAGUES LIKE THESE

The stage is set up with furniture to create semi-distinct spaces.

> *Stage right: Several tables are arranged with chairs behind them. One, set up for a panel discussion (microphones, glasses of water, etc.), should face inwards from the upstage corner. Two others, set up for "tabling" (bearing flyers, zines, patches, posters, etc.), should face inwards from the downstage corner so that actors are visible when sitting behind them.*

> *Centre stage: A hand-painted banner and several placards lean against the back wall, but otherwise this area (relatively small, given the other "sections" at stage right/left) remains clear, providing room for "attendees" to mill around and socialize.*

> *Upstage left: Backing onto the main stage, a "welcome table" (with a chair "behind" it, facing away from the audience) is set up to indicate the entrance/exit for the convergence space.*

> *Downstage left: A couch or comfortable chairs are arranged. A hand-drawn sign indicating "PoC (People of Colour) Space" is posted to the back of a chair, visible to the audience.*

FARRAH and ZANNA sit comfortably in the PoC space, talking quietly to one another. IAIN sits reading behind one of the zine tables and several EXTRAS styled as crustpunk types[6] sit behind the other, chatting cheerily and selling their handmade wares. Small clusters of EXTRAS dressed in stereotypical anarchist clothing (mostly black, maybe some red or dark purple, with hoodies, bandanas, military caps, Converse sneakers, Doc Martens, etc.) populate the open area centre stage, looking comfortable and talking amongst themselves (with a certain confidence and/or furtive suspicion towards others in the space). Another EXTRA sits at the welcome table.

[Director's Note: Each character should carry a mirror which they will make use of when saying lines in soliloquy. The mirrors should be incorporated cleverly, even symbolically, into each character's costume. For example, workaholic Bellamy could carry a clipboard with a mirrored surface, which he would glance into when thinking/speaking "to himself" (especially in the presence of another character); for another example, the increasingly disillusioned Iain could be wearing a mirrored button on his shirt and, moreover, could symbolically take it off after giving himself permission to leave.]

ACE enters from upstage left, carrying a box of flyers. They greeting the person at the welcome table in passing and wander slowly through the crowd towards the tabling area, looking around warily.

ACE: *[To self.]* Okay, so, not in Kansas anymore... *[Spots Iain with a look of relief and heads over.]*

BELLAMY bustles in from the wings, stage right.

BELLAMY: *[To ACE.]* Oh, the extra flyers, finally! Okay, if you can pass them out too, that'd be great. I've gotta check on the panel setup then, make sure everything's ready to go... *[Exits stage right.]*

ACE: *[To IAIN.]* Hey, how's it going?

IAIN: Not much. Pretty typical turnout.

ACE: Oh yeah? I've never been to an event like this before, so...

IAIN: Yeah. Especially for this city. You get a lot of the same faces.

ACE: *[To self.]* Pretty intimidating faces at that... *[To IAIN.]* Run into a lot of friends here then?

IAIN: *[Darkly.]* You could say that. Guess it depends on how you define *friend*. In my experience, spaces like this often just wind up encouraging a false unity that can fuck us over later on, with or without the state's help. *[Brightening slightly.]* I mean, it's not without it's merits, a space like this. Especially early on, when your politics are all shiny and new, it can offer that much-needed "you are not alone" experience. *[Wistfully.]* A port of resistance in the storm raging pretty much all around us... *[To self, looking out and surveying the scene.]* And then the skies clear enough for you to realize that all of your—admittedly enjoyable—anarchist sloganeering is mostly just masturbation, and not making a difference in anyone's life but your own. Maybe not even that. Hell, if that's really the case, I might as well be home, doing something that has a little more value for me. What the fuck am I even doing here...

ACE: *[Anxiously, to self.]* Riot grrrls, rebels, and punks, oh my... *[Psyching self up.]* No! You do not wish you were home! These are just people, people with the kind of ideas you've been looking for

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[6] "Crusties are distinctive for their unkempt appearance. They are associated with anti-capitalism, road protests, squatting, raves and begging. Typical dress styles involve dreadlocks, piercings, tattoos and dirty clothing, which are generally second-hand or army surplus. Similar to anarcho-punk, most clothing is black in colour. Earth colours are also common. Denim jackets, hooded sweatshirts with sewn-on patches, vests covered in studs, spikes, and band patches are characteristic elements of the crust punk style of dress." From the Wikipedia entry for "crusties" (from the related crust punk subculture). Last accessed Aug. 25, 2015. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crust_punk#Clothing>

your whole life. You can't turn back now. *[To IAIN, who's only half-listening.]* Right, I totally get that. I mean, I'm not the most social person... I'm trying to be more outgoing, though, knowing events like these are such a big part of the work...

An EXTRA walks over to check out THE CRUSTPUNKS' table, drawing ACE's attention there as well.

ACE: *[Uncertainly, to self.]* I guess dressing down is a big part of it as well. Or looking the part, anyway. Mum would drop dead to see me dressed like that though... I guess trying to live out your anti-capitalist politics is a good thing, but poverty isn't exactly something you advertise if you grew up with it. *[To IAIN, jokingly.]* Kinda makes me feel like I need a new haircut before the next one, y'know?

IAIN acknowledges this with a wry smile and surveys the crowd.

IAIN: *[Cynically, to self.]* Look at us, done up in our fucking costumes. Oh, the irony of an anarchist subculture with social uniforms....

ACE: *[Reasonably, to self.]* I mean, I guess some styles are avoided for a reason. Clothing can have power. I definitely wouldn't wanna walk in here wearing a suit. *[Looks at THE CRUSTPUNKS.]* But I don't really wanna make myself look ratty like that either. A little more colour might be nice too...

A small group of EXTRAS enter in glamarchist garb (some black clothing but also bright colours, like pink and turquoise, with plenty of glitter and sparkle from makeup, jewellery, and accessories). ACE watches them with interest as EDEN enters (looking quite glam herself) from the wings, stage-right, and rushes over excitedly to greet them.

EDEN: *[To THE GLAMARCHISTS, hugging each in turn.]* I'm so glad you made it!

GLAMARCHIST 1: And looking fierce and fabulous as ever, queering every space we enter—by force if necessary. *[Sizing up the surrounding crowd.]* This one in particular...

EDEN: I know, it's a bit stifling. That's the Kitchener scene for you though, hence the go-glam-or-stay-home instructions I gave you.

GLAMARCHIST 2: *[To EDEN.]* Hey now, it's not all of Kitchener. You, my friend, are a beautiful unicorn in a flock of black sheep.

EDEN: Well, I thought I'd step up my femme game a bit, on the off chance you folks would be around to appreciate it too. And now that Derek's not around to bottomline the femme-shaming.

GLAMARCHIST 3: Ugh, I'm so sick of all things feminine being shamed even in supposedly radical circles. It's like, you can't sustain the fight on just rage and roadblocks, it's not enough. The struggle's gotta take other forms too. *[Grinning at EDEN.]* And I know how squeamish you are about feelings, Eden, but there are plenty of those too that we can use to fuel our fight.

GLAMARCHIST 1: *[To EDEN, in disgust.]* I still can't fucking believe him though, calling you "un-feminist" for "sexualizing yourself" by wearing that tight t-shirt at Chris's going-away-to-jail party.

EDEN: Right? It's like, "No, you're fucking sexualizing me!"

GLAMARCHIST 1: Well, at least he's gone now. Though it doesn't really get rid of the problem, just passes his manarchist bullshit on to some other community. Where'd he move to this time?

EDEN: Wanna take a lucky guess? *[THE GLAMARCHISTS all groan.]*

GLAMARCHIST 2: Everyone thinks the grass is redder and blacker in Montreal.

GLAMARCHIST 3: And Oakland, and Athens... It's like summit-hopping for the new era. These fucking struggle-chasers just wanna go where there's already some hardcore history of resistance to latch on to for themselves.

EDEN: And maybe if they'd settle down and do some real community organizing, they'd learn how those legacies actually start. Speaking of which... I'll be back in a sec.

EDEN walks over to the PoC space and knocks tentatively to get FARRAH and ZANNA's attention.

EDEN: Hey, Farrah! I didn't know you were going to be here, it's good to see you. *[To ZANNA.]* I just wanted to check in and see if you needed anything else here, I'd be happy to go out for whatever.

ZANNA: No, we're fine here.

EDEN: Okay, well, maybe I'll see you later then, at the afterparty. *[Returns to THE GLAMARCHISTS.]*

ZANNA: *[To FARRAH.]* I'm so done with all these privileged activists thinking "the struggle" is just this big public thing they can lay claim to, calling their roadblocks and banner drops such "serious" actions.

FARRAH: Yeah. I mean, when we were doing shit like that, hardcore demos and stuff, I always knew they had my back, like if the cops came or whatever. But we never really talked about personal stuff much, so when I had serious stuff to deal with on my own... I really felt like I was on my own with it, you know?

ZANNA: Yeah. I'm really glad you felt you could tell me about Derek, though. I can't even imagine trying to deal with that situation all alone.

FARRAH: Oh, and I'm not trying to negate how you've been here for me either! It's meant so much to me, our friendship. I'm talking more about the group in general. Especially with Derek there all the time, trying to run the show himself and half the group looking up to him for it—can you imagine me calling him out in that context? I mean, it would have been a perfect storm of doubt and backlash, and I probably would have ended up leaving the group anyway. *[Wryly.]* So why not save myself a few bruises, huh?

ZANNA: Well, I do miss having you there, but I'm glad you're doing what's best for you.

FARRAH: I think you're probably the only one. Even now, after stepping back from organizing in the traditional sense... I mean, no one's really made an effort to stay in touch. Or get back in touch, I guess. It was strange to come here at all today, actually. I feel like there's not much between us anymore, y'know... Honestly, it kind of makes me wonder if there ever was.

FARRAH looks out at the crowd, leading the audience's attention back to EDEN's group.

GLAMARCHIST 1: Yeah, it's been frustrating me more and more when folks just up and leave. It totally ruins the potential for long-term trajectories of resistance, and then the rest of us just have to reset and start from fucking scratch.

GLAMARCHIST 2: Right? We're always arguing about what's effective and "How do we actually start to reach people outside of our bubbles?" But you're never gonna figure that out if you're just gonna leave in a year, and you're gonna fuck off to some other community... I mean, really, then what's the point of trying to figure out new relationships and groundings in a place, if they're not even gonna be here?

EDEN: That's definitely been a major frustration for me too. Lately, though, I've been wondering if we maybe have more to do with why that happens. I mean, why other folks might feel like leaving, folks

who aren't just on the hunt for a new resistance hub. Like if the relationship potential sucks, right? I mean, there's a good chance I wouldn't be in this business if not for folks like you.

BELLAMY pokes his head in from the wings, stage right, looking frustrated.

BELLAMY: *[To IAIN and ACE.]* Either of you seen Eden? I need her.

IAIN: *[Without looking up from his book.]* Nope.

ACE: No, sorry. But I can take a look around here and let you know. I actually wanted to talk to her about something anyway. *[To IAIN.]* Do you mind if I leave for a little bit?

IAIN: Yeah, I think I can handle things here.

BELLAMY: Okay, cool. Text me when you find her.

BELLAMY exits stage right. ACE meanders over to THE GLAMARCHISTS, then circles nervously to get within view of EDEN and try to catch her eye without interrupting. EDEN continues chatting but eventually notices and breaks off to acknowledge the newcomer.

EDEN: Oh, hey, everyone, this Ace. They're one of our newer members. What's up?

ACE: Um, Bellamy just came by our table looking for you, asked me to pass along the message.

EDEN: Oh, okay, thanks. How's that going? Iain's there with you, right?

ACE: Yeah, it's going fine. I mean, he's been reading for his comps, mostly, so, y'know… *[Tries to laugh it off.]* For a social forum, there's not a lot of socializing happening there, haha.

THE GLAMARCHISTS have continued to watch ACE in conversation with EDEN, who smiles expectantly at ACE, waiting for them to say more.

ACE: Right, well, I'll let you get back to your conversation! *[Quietly, to EDEN.]* Um, but I was actually wondering—are you free at all next week? I was thinking, maybe, if you wanted to grab coffee or something and chat a bit? Or you'd be welcome to come over for dinner, maybe before our next meeting? I mean, I know we're all so busy that it's hard to find time to come, but when I do I always make way too much and my roommates aren't really into vegan food…

EDEN: Oh, wow, that's really sweet of you to offer, Ace, thanks. Yeah, it's usually just a Red Bull and a couple samosas from around the corner for me on meeting nights. Which is most nights these days, actually. I'm gonna be pretty slammed next week, and probably for the rest of the month. But why don't we check in sometime in the new year?

ACE: Oh, okay, yeah. Sure, no worries! I guess I'll see you at our next meeting then.

ACE walks away, back to their tabling spot.

EDEN: *[To herself.]* Whew, okay, one less thing to have to schedule…

BELLAMY re-enters at stage right, looking around frantically before spotting EDEN. He rushes over and pulls her away from her friends.

BELLAMY: Why haven't you replied to my texts? We had a huge fuck-up with the closing panel—

THE GLAMARCHISTS indicate to EDEN that it's time for them all to leave and get ready to leave.

EDEN: *[To THE GLAMARCHISTS.]* Right! Yeah, you go, I'll be there in a bit. Just want to help clean up here first. *[To BELLAMY, leading him over to the "panel" area. She proceeds to pack up the various "rooms" (stacking everything around the edges of the stage) while they talk.]* Relax. Everything's fine now, right? You figured it out?

BELLAMY: Well, yeah, now it is, but we needed you!

EDEN: No, you managed to handle it fine without me. Which is good, because I won't always be here.

BELLAMY: Yeah right, you're always around, at least when there's organizing to be done. Don't get me wrong, a vacation would be nice, but the rev waits for no one, right?

EDEN: Maybe you need to slow down a bit, Bellamy. Don't burn yourself out.

BELLAMY: *[Scoffs.]* Oh, you're one to talk, *Eden*. I don't see you abandoning ship to take time off in paradise somewhere.

EDEN: Maybe not, but we all have limits, and I try to respect mine. At least most of the time.

BELLAMY: *[Incredulously.]* What are you even talking about? I've never seen you *not* working on something! You volunteer for every project, bottomline all the committees. When do you have time to sleep, let alone do anything fun? You're friends with everybody around here but you barely ever even come out to the bar with us after meetings anymore.

EDEN: Organizing is fun for me, and it's how I like to spend most of my time. I don't have hobbies or anything like that, but I *do* sleep *[Laughs.]* and I feel good when I can go for a run most nights. And I mean, I don't mind hanging out with the people in our group, but there are other relationships that are more important to me. I may be familiar with a lot of the folks in our networks, but you can't be friends with everybody. You'll spread yourself too thin if you try.

BELLAMY: *[To himself.]* Right, well that's easy to say when you've already established yourself in the community and don't need to prove you're part of it.

EDEN: *[Packs up the "welcome table" then straightens up and looks around.]* Anyway, looks like Ace and Iain are tearing down the last of it here, so I'm off. See you at the next meeting. *[She exits upstage left.]*

BELLAMY turns and stalks off stage right, past ACE, who looks after him in surprise.

ACE: *[To Iain, as they pack up the table.]* So, you get a lot of good work done today?

IAIN: A bit, yeah, though I probably would have been more productive at home.

ACE: Right. And whereabouts do you live again? I remember you mentioning…

IAIN: Uh, a little outside downtown… Why, why do you ask?

ACE: *[Taken aback.]* Oh, I don't know, just trying to get to know you a little better, I guess… I've actually been wanting to talk to you—I mean, to let you know that… I know it must be really hard to deal with all this court stuff, and especially the non-association with your friends. And I know I'm new and we don't know each other very well yet, but I wanted to let you know that I'm here if you ever want to talk, about any of that, or just hang out sometime. I know we're both busy, but…

IAIN: *[Looking pained.]* Right, well, thanks. I've actually gotta run though, are you good to finish up here?

ACE: Oh, yeah, sure. You go.

IAIN: Great, thanks.

IAIN walks over to the "exit" in the upstage left corner, passing the PoC space on his way out.

ZANNA: *[Watching IAIN leave.]* Iain's been struggling a lot lately, too. And he's talked to me a lot about it, but even if he hadn't, it's pretty obvious that he's not doing well since the storm hit. And it's really frustrating to me that no one else seems to have noticed! Especially because I've been trying to be

there for all the guys, and Iain most of all, at least next to Chris. But I kind of feel like I have to, like I'm the only person they have because they can't fucking talk to each other. Even the ones not on house arrest, though! These guys need to learn how to support one another. I mean, even when I'm there, it's like pulling teeth sometimes to get them to open up. But most of them don't even know how to reach out when they need to. Or don't recognize that they need to at all.

FARRAH: Yeah, you can be going through some of the same things as other people but not know it, and not feel like you should even admit it to them. I've always felt out of place in these spaces, like I'm not radical enough, at least compared to the kind of people who often show up. So I always ended up just hanging out with the people I knew, and who knew I was really fucking radical regardless of what I look like or how I talk sometimes. But it could have been an opportunity to reach out and bring in new folks who could very well be feeling the same way. That said, having a PoC space is preferable to me anyway, even if it is just one room in a way bigger event.

ZANNA: Yeah, I feel a lot more at home here than in the main space, just having this peer reflection that almost never happens in regular activist spaces.

FARRAH: Yeah. I don't really have any interest in putting myself in that position anymore, where I know I'm going to be the only person of colour somewhere, if I don't have to. When I was still in the group, at least I had you on my side. *[Smiles at ZANNA.]*

ZANNA: Yeah, and you always will. I guess our friendship was kind of built out of needing it, but just knowing you, and every time I see you, is just so nourishing, because I have a reflection of somebody...

FARRAH: I feel the same. It's so encouraging to know that there's someone else like me doing the same work. And also, we can talk about things like race very candidly and openly, and I don't have to feel like I'm hurting people's feelings, or that people feel uncomfortable.

ZANNA: Exactly! Ugh, what would I do without you?

FARRAH: Fall to the floor in a pile of ashes because your rage has finally consumed you?

ZANNA: *[Laughs.]* Most likely. Not everyone has a support person like you, though. *[Looks across the room at ACE, who has finished packing up the tabling area at last and now walks to the exit.]* Hopefully others have those connections somewhere else in their lives, at least.

4.3.1 DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS: AN IDEOLOGY OF COMMUNITY

In theory, relationships between activists are personal as well as political, with the former built on the shared foundation of the latter. The often immersive nature of social movement participation can make it necessary for "workplace" relationships to overlap with friends, family, lovers. Moreover, given activists' dedication to justice and a better world, some degree of shared politics can be necessary for such compatibility.

However, the activists interviewed here tell another side to this story as well. In practice, a cohesive and functional "activist community" within Southern Ontario—or even within its constitutive cities—does not exist insofar as it has been idealized, even by the same activists now lamenting their lived experiences of its absence. Rather, the sense of actual community within a particular locality may be cliquish, superficial, tenuous if

not already fractured, and frequently dysfunctional in their (mis)management of conflict.

The ideology: Community is everything. Until it isn't.

The personal and political dimensions of activist relationships are often mutually reinforcing: the more you work alongside someone, the closer you may become as friends or comrades, which can enable and encourage further work together. This may be felt most strongly in activist contexts that are more risky, in terms of legal consequences, wherein working together can necessitate (but also further cement) such trust and friendship between activists. On these grounds, it is sometimes assumed—particularly by members that are new to the local subculture—that "the community" is a functional, cohesive network of interdependent relationships. Moreover, these relationships are often assumed to be more than mere means to the end of accomplishing activist projects: surely these people must care about one another beyond their baseline capacity to "show up" and organize?

However, the common bond of struggle and activist work on which such relationships are built can also subordinate their personal value for the people involved. For instance, if one member of a group needs to step back or take a break from their organizing altogether, they may be encouraged to take care of themselves and come back when they're ready. While this sounds supportive, and may often be meant as such, it can also translate to burnt out members being directed to go recover on their own and return to the group—and their relationships—only when they are ready to work once more. This leaves struggling members to fend for themselves, thus belying the supportive connotation of "community" in the first place. This dynamic also harkens back to the capitalistic norms of activist labour discussed already, wherein this kind of support is not considered part of the work, which also leaves many activists—and male activists in particular—unskilled in supporting one another or even reaching out to try. As a result, when this relational labour is actually done, it is done disproportionately by women who may receive neither compensation, recognition, nor reciprocation of their efforts—and who may, in turn, be burned out by it as well.

The insurrection: Counter-stories of the activist "scene"

The term "activist community" is often used to signify (a) the larger social movement milieu, as associated with a particular issue or broad geographic region (i.e., Southern Ontario, even Canada), or (b) the local population of activists or politically-minded people in a given city, often better characterized as a *scene*. This term suggests that members share certain qualities or a common orientation, but without guaranteeing any obligatory degree of relationship between them.

Smaller social circles or cliques within a city's scene can also shape its activist priorities and may control the power dynamics or opportunities for involvement and investment within specific activist groups, including the potential for forming relationships. On the one hand, when someone is known (or at least believed) to have preexisting relationships with other members of an activist group or scene, others may assume no need or personal interest to develop relationships of their own with that particular person. On the other hand, when someone is singled out as having a lack of personal relationships with other, especially longstanding, members of a particular activist milieu, it may be taken as grounds for suspicion and a further need to hold them at a distance.

The suspicion that new activists may be informants or undercover cops sent to infiltrate the group or scene is not unfounded, either, particularly after the massive security operation in preparation for the 2010 Winter Olympics and G20 Summit that sent at least 17 undercover cops (UCs) to infiltrate activist groups in cities across the country. These undercover operations enabled the state to build its multi-year court case against "the Toronto G20 Main Conspiracy Group" in which 17 activists were variously co-accused of three main charges: conspiracy to assault police, conspiracy to obstruct police, and conspiracy to commit mischief over $5000. Without going into the case in detail, it is critical to recognize how its scope and severity of activist surveillance and prosecution has changed the political terrain of social movement organizing in Southern Ontario. The strategies used by the two most successful undercovers are also worth acknowledging in this analysis: "Brenda" entered Guelph as a predator in victim's clothing, using her backstory as a battered woman to deflect personal questions. Meanwhile, "Khalid" befriended the only other person of colour affiliated with his targeted group in Guelph ("person X"); even after Khalid was outed as a cop in Guelph and moved to Kitchener to continue his investigation, person X deflected the "rumours" from Guelph with accusations of classism and racism, thus sheltering the cop from suspicion by his new targets in Kitchener.

The zine "Toronto G20 Main Conspiracy Group: The Charges and How They Came to Be" poses key questions to consider as we try to learn from their infiltration strategies and strengthen our "communities" against future manipulation:

> Brenda was the more subtle of the two undercovers, but were there opportunities to call her out? At what point does our respect for people's privacy give way to a need to know personal details of each others' lives so that we can build deeper trust? (13-14)

> In what ways do the discomfort around having honest conversations about race and privilege in our movements make it easier for people like Khalid and [his unwitting ally] person X to disrupt them? (15)

Both of these strategies would be less effective if strong, interpersonal relationships—ones in which we are comfortable sharing our past experiences *and* have the humility to challenge one another's politics in the present—were prioritized as a "serious" part of

activist work. Until that happens more broadly, however, activist groups may consist more often of "comrades" or colleagues rather than true friendships.

Now, such relationships are not necessarily wrong or inherently negative; in fact, they can be advantageous on all sides if mutually and explicitly recognized, such as when ad hoc groups or short-term coalitions form to work on a specific project or campaign. In longstanding groups, however, the level of personal investment in one's relationships can be harder to discern. It can be hurtful, even devastating, if it becomes clear that different levels of value or commitment exist between activists who work together closely— particularly if the less invested "friend" seems uninterested in deepening the connection. The effects may be especially wounding when activists need to take a break from their organizing for personal reasons (e.g., burnout, illness, caregiving or grieving for a loved one, etc.). They may only need to take a step back from their activist *work* responsibilities, but they may also need their comrades to step up and support them through those relationships, rather than leaving them to fend for themselves. "Community support" (at least that which is conceptualized as explicitly "political") often focuses on enabling or sustaining visible activist work/projects and related social movement activities— to the neglect of mutual aid, let alone *infrastructure*, in the form of interpersonal support. However, such efforts could, in the long run, better support and swell the ranks of *sustainable* social movements, whose members would strive for holistic wellbeing themselves *while* fighting for broader social and environmental justice.

Further effects: Where does this lead?

Belying this false veneer, even delusion, of activist community is the lived experience of "members" (current or past activists) who have been led to feel that they are only as valuable as their visible contributions to the activist groups or projects in which they remain involved. Moreover, interpersonal issues ranging from lovers' spats to latent racism can, left unresolved, complicate or jeopardize activist work. For example, a messy breakup between two members of a group or project can render them unable to work together, leading to friends taking sides and the eventual collapse of their organization.

Beyond such social discomfort, when interpersonal issues between activists aren't proactively resolved, they may become a dangerous political liability for exploitation by informants and undercover cops sent to infiltrate, identify, and disrupt the work of social movement networks. It has been not only suggested but demonstrated, through the G20 gongshow, that manipulating the weaknesses and pre-existing conflicts present in activists networks is an effective strategy for the state to sabotage our movements. Many of us have learned these lessons the hard way and now have an opportunity, as well as a responsibility, to help our movements avert such crises in the future.

4.4 SCENE FOUR: FLOCKING OFF

4.4.1 DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS: AN IDEOLOGY OF COMMITMENT

In theory, good activists prove their values—and value to their respective movements—through a lived commitment to political struggle at all costs. This ideology overlaps with the ideology of what is, often narrowly, deemed to be activism or a part of the struggle. In practice, this ideology of how the fire of commitment can and should drive activists to their greatest lengths can also, in turn, drive them into the ground. Even the fiercest forest fire is slowed to a modest smoulder when its supply of fuel runs out, just as the warmest flames blazing in a cozy hearth can burn out entirely if not carefully stoked.

The ideology: When you make a commitment...

According to this ideology, an activist's work and commitment to their cause(s) should be of paramount importance in life, over and above a commitment to self, health, or any other aspects of their personal life. According to this ideology, these are seen as distinct from one's "political" life. True commitment is idealized as tireless, unflagging, all-sustaining and all-consuming. It is the fire that is never supposed to burn out. Putting oneself to work for the greater good is core to the activist ethos and, as such, service is core to practicing one's professed commitment. However, service can escalate to sacrifice, even martyrdom, whereby the long-term greater good trumps any personal needs experienced in the here and now.

Admittedly, this derives from the reality that the systemic injustices being fought by our movements are harming—indeed, often killing—more people, animals, and entire ecosystems around the world with every day that goes by. (Moreover, many of us are privileged by, or at least benefit from, various configurations of these systems, which gives us a greater responsibility to take action against them.) If they are allowed to continue, these systems will not only continue to oppress life on earth but, in the case of ongoing environmental devastation, potentially cause its extinction. Hence, the future is in the hands of those who recognize our opportunity and responsibility to act *now* to change the misguided course humanity has set for itself, so personal sacrifice is called for in the interests of our lives and those of future generations.

However, this ideology overlooks the importance of personal health and wellbeing for the sustainability of an activist's participation and commitment to their cause(s). Paradoxically, the neglect of personal needs can lead to an activist's burnout and temporary, or even indefinite, exit from social movement participation altogether. Moreover, it fails to recognize other factors that, in combination, determine an individual's capacity to participate in activism to varying degrees; as discussed above in relation to the ideology of activism, social identities (race, gender, class, disability, etc.) and their consequences (necessity of working multiple jobs, less flexibility for physical mobility or psychological expenditure, etc.) can shape what commitment looks like for individual activists. So, too, can personal circumstances, such as experiences of trauma, caregiving responsibilities, living farther away from activist spaces, etc.

Essentially, and ironically, this ideology is in itself one of praxis: people who profess a commitment to justice, in theory, are asked to demonstrate it through involvement in activist work. However, when it fails to account for the privileges and restrictions conferred by different social identities and personal circumstances which, in

turn, will enable or inhibit an activist's (or would-be activist's) capacity for involvement, one's level of involvement in activist work can no longer be reliably judged as a proportional measure of one's political commitment to justice. If Activist A is doing less work than Activist B, it may be assumed that Activist A simply cares less about the cause than they do; however, while it is possible that the more heavily involved Activist B does have a higher degree of personal interest and commitment to the political work they're doing, it's also quite likely that they have additional time or other resources available to do so, for reasons of privilege or other personal circumstances (e.g., having a job with relevant resources, not having to work multiple jobs because of class privilege, not having responsibilities as a caretaker, etc.). The logic of this ideology of commitment crumbles even further as it overlaps with the likewise narrow ideology of what is prioritized as activist work, thus coming full circle to the first ideology discussed earlier in this chapter.

The insurrection: Counter-stories of burnout and sustainability

According to this ideology of commitment, burning out would be evidence that an activist's inner fire (i.e., passionate commitment to fighting injustice) is not strong enough to sustain them, as if this is a personal failure or shortcoming. On the contrary, it may be a better indication of an 'overcommitment' to the cause(s) in question. While this may seem like a misnomer, given the aforementioned stakes for human society and life on this planet, it can still be considered an *over* commitment (on a personal level) relative to meeting—or, rather, neglecting—one's personal health and survival needs, which must be recognized as prerequisites for sustainable activist participation. Moreover, the longer one remains active—and actively fighting the forces of oppression—the greater the cumulative toll can become, from a psychological or even spiritual perspective. Non-activist friends and families may also have a hard time understanding this if they are unfamiliar with the struggle or skeptical of the need for it, hence the critical importance of strong personal relationships between the activists themselves.

Further effects: Where does this lead?

Burnout can, in itself, lead to a range of outcomes:
   a) Enlightenment, with respect to engaging in activism more sustainably or at least acknowledging the need for new habits and attempting to forge them;
   b) Temporary movement exit, insofar as needing to take a break before returning; moreover, this return can be to new habits, as suggested above, or to the same patterns, regardless of their tried-and-tested unsustainability; or
   c) Indefinite movement exit, at which point the movement racks up another preventable loss.

When an activist burns out, it is often demonstrative that (a) they do not yet know their own needs and limits; (b) they do not yet see the importance of respecting their personal needs and limits; (c) the activist culture within their group or broader social movement has not encouraged or prepared them for long-term participation *according to what is personally sustainable for them at the time*; or (d) all of the above.

   If an activist does not bother to identify their own personal needs and limitations— and we all have them—then even the most supportive group won't be able to help them

avoid burnout. However, it is also up to the group, collectively, to encourage individual members to identify and respect their own needs and limits. This can be reinforcing, if the group actually does so, or re-inhibiting if they neglect it. Activist burnout can also indicate a lack of sufficient training, knowledge, resources, and/or support received by those activists who are burning out. Everyone who burns out does so as the result of a unique set of reasons, but there are some common 'why' factors that can be observed and perhaps avoided. These broad cultural expectations within social movements prepare the soil for our struggle; but it is in our personal choices, whether we navigate them by fulfilling them or subverting them, that we plant the seeds from which an identical or different culture will grow. The choices we make now, the examples we set, the role models we become, will (re)create the cultural expectations for the next generation of activists.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS ARE JUST THE BEGINNING
MOVING FORWARD IN THE FIELD

I'm covering the workshop so don't worry about that.

But if you're feeling up to it you should come and just hang out with friends. People miss you and are saying they wish they could see you.

If you'd rather be alone, that's cool too.

It was just was I needed to hear from him after frantically texting to bail on my conference presentation only hours before it was due to begin. But my hand was shaking nonetheless, holding my phone as I sat at home, huddled on the couch in the cold morning light, finally consumed by the anxiety that had grown so gradually, creeping upon me almost imperceptibly, before burying its teeth in my soul. Fed on a diet of my scorned needs and overwrought shadows for months, maybe years, the little monster had lurked and lavished in my darker places, where I had refused to look, in denial for so long of my own mental, emotional, and physical deterioration. In my neglect, it had grown stronger than me, stronger even than my dedication to the struggle outside my privileged self. I cowered in its wake, in its throes: unable in the moment to fathom even leaving the house, incapable of uttering even the smallest of talks with anyone, least of all my closest comrades.

By mid-afternoon, I managed to pull my fragile self together and catch a bus to campus, where the conference was still going on. I've never been so apprehensive as when I finally walked through the doors and spotted some of my friends milling around in the lobby. Of course, hardly any of them knew that I was having a hard time at all; up until now, I'd channelled all my remaining energy into keeping the self-doubt and worldly despair to myself. I couldn't bear what I feared they'd think about me if they knew. But it had become too much to keep inside while I went about my life as usual, hence the early morning text I'd sent to my friend in a panic, forced to admit that I just wouldn't be able to run my workshop after all.

When I arrived and actually, finally, started telling a few of my friends the truth about what was going on with me, they were more supportive than I had dared to hope. The hugs and empathy I received that afternoon would haunt me in the best way for months to come, as I embarked on a winding journey of recovery from burnout, replete with relapses but ultimately bringing me to a place of fiercer strength and resolve—for the work, and for life as a whole.

So now I share.

5.1 THEORETICAL CONNECTIONS

> As Marx said, every child knows that a social formation which did not reproduce the conditions of production at the same time as it produced would not last a year. The ultimate condition of production is therefore the reproduction of the conditions of production. ...It must therefore reproduce:
>   1. the productive forces,
>   2. the existing relations of production.
>
> (Althusser, 1970, 1-2)

Any society, in order to guarantee its own future, has to both reproduce its population and reproduce the rules, or social relations, by which its members coexist. This happens both within mainstream Canadian society and within the country's subcultures, including social movements. Althusser adds that this process "may be 'simple' (reproducing exactly the previous conditions of production) or 'on an extended scale' (expanding them)" and while movement building through growth or expansion—through the development of current members' skills, abilities, etc., or the recruitment of new supporters—is often regarded as necessary for achieving the scale of social or environmental change pursued by many activists, the refrain of laments (and complaints) that our movements aren't getting any bigger or stronger continues to echo throughout activist discourse.

So what is causing this apparent stagnation? Finding ourselves thwarted in pursuit of such noble goals as ecological salvation and the possibility of a cooperative, anti-capitalist economy, we like to attribute our lack of success to outside forces like the government and their wealthy capitalist backers, who will always hold greater resources than our righteous ranks can summon from the unenlightened masses or rare deep-pocketed sympathizers (like tenured, liberally-minded university professors). We tend to look inside our movements for means of improvement and progress, like trying to do the work of two or three activists instead of one—and yet this, too, can stall any progress our movements are making, through the recurrent turnover of those who burn out along the way. As Althusser notes, in the language of "the average capitalist... each year it is essential to foresee what is needed to replace what has been used up or worn out in production" (2) and so, too, are our movements set back by the need to recruit and train new activists in order to replace, rather than augment, the ranks of those who came before them.

In this catch-22 of activist production, solutions to the question of sustainable progress can seem far-off, elusive. But what if we took a step back and started by looking for the *problem* within our movements instead? What if the *ways* in which we strive for justice are actually perpetuating the same forms of oppression we are so dedicated to fighting?

5.1.1 THE STATE ACCORDING TO ALTHUSSER

Althusser's thesis begins with a basic acceptance of this Marxist theory of the State, which "defines the State as a force of repressive execution and intervention 'in the interests of the ruling classes'" (12). However, after giving his philosophical forbears their due, Althusser proposes that "in order to understand further the mechanisms of the State in its functioning, I think that it is indispensable to add something to the classical definition of the State" and thus emerges his theory of the *ideological state apparatuses*: "another reality which is clearly on the side of the *(repressive) state apparatus*, but must not be confused with it" (12; emphasis added).

　　According to Marxist theory, the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) comprises the unified force of a society's government, administration, army, police, courts, prisons, and any other institution of state power that similarly "'functions by violence'—at least ultimately (since repression, e.g., administrative repression, may take non-physical forms)" (12). In contrast, Althusser identifies Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) as a plurality of "distinct and specialized institutions" that function primarily to disseminate, and perpetuate through normalization, their society's ideology, which he defines as "the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group" (22).[7] The ISAs comprise such spheres as religion, education, the family, the political (party) system, the press and communications, and the catch-all category of "culture" (the arts, sports, etc.). While clearly distinct in form and function, these two 'apparatuses' are mutually reinforcing in their collaborative structuring of society: "the (repressive) State apparatus secures by repression... the political conditions for the action of the Ideological State Apparatuses" (16) which, in turn, secure easier compliance—even acceptance—of the RSA's role in society: "It is the intermediation of the ruling ideology that ensures a (sometimes teeth-gritting) 'harmony' between the Repressive State Apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatuses" (16), which in turn ensures a society the kind of 'peace' that only coercion can attain. (Think Panem from *The Hunger Games*.)

　　While the cohesive functioning of the RSA's divisions through violent repression is fairly obvious, the manifold operations of the diverse and discrete ISAs call for a bit more explanation. Althusser sums up their collective functionality as follows:

> *1.*　All Ideological State Apparatuses, whatever they are, contribute to the same result: the reproduction of the relations of production, i.e., of capitalist relations of exploitation.

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[7] In the case of present-day Canada, I will argue, the state ideology is an intersectional framework of structural oppressions comprising capitalism, settler colonialism, racism, (hetero)sexism, ableism, etc.

2. Each of them contributes towards this single result in the way proper to it... [For example,] the communications apparatus by cramming every 'citizen' with daily doses of nationalism, chauvinism, liberalism, moralism, etc., by means of the press, the radio and television. The same goes for the cultural apparatus... [and the] family apparatus... but there is no need to go on. (19)

This confirms the transferability of Althusser's framework from the exclusive domain of class struggle to other forms of structural oppression, insofar as these ISAs have the potential to transmit any ideology, beginning with Althusser's all-consuming focus on capitalism but extending to the many other -isms pervading present-day society. Our own Canadian masses receive 'daily doses'—through the media as well as other institutions, such as the family and the education system—of the so-called 'multicultural soup' that is more a toxic cocktail of capitalism, settler colonialism, racism, (hetero)sexism, ableism, etc., drugging us into docility through the normalization of our mutual and overlapping oppressions.

Through Althusser's model of society, in which the RSA and ISAs serve to mutually reinforce these structural oppressions and maintain the domination of marginalized populations for the benefit of their privileged counterparts, it becomes clear how societies systematically (re)produce the oppressive relations that are often challenged, at least in theory, by radical social movements. As discussed in Chapter Four, activists often strive to oppose these relations as recognized in an external, or macro, context—the institutions of mainstream society from which we often strive to distance ourselves—by joining forces to form social movements that may collectively challenge structural oppression on a grander scale. However, even as we employ ourselves vigorously as vehicles for struggle, and towards a better world, we can lose sight of how these oppressive relations operate internally as well—within our collective movements, our close interpersonal relationships, even our own opinions and respect (or lack thereof) for ourselves. At an individual level, as seen in the play, living according to the 'activist equivalents' of these dominant ideologies and their relations (of social production) can lead to burnout along one of an infinite array of possible labyrinthine paths. In order to participate sustainably in social movements, we need to prioritize new relations that will strive, and that should eventually succeed, in working together anti-oppressively. Moreover, and at a collective level, if we maintain the old, oppressive relations in producing our resistance, we will continue to find our movements unsuccessful in either achieving or securing the better world we invoke but struggle to even imagine. And how could we imagine it, especially at such a macro level, if we can't even model its relational—and thus foundational—framework in the micro-contexts of our activist enclaves?

5.1.2 IS(M)A: AN IDEOLOGICAL SOCIAL
MOVEMENT APPARATUS?

> The tenacious obviousnesses (ideological obviousnesses of an empiricist type) of the point of view of production alone, or even of that of mere productive practice (itself abstract in relation to the process of production) are *so integrated into our everyday 'consciousness' that it is extremely hard, not to say almost impossible, to raise oneself to the point of view of reproduction.* (1; emphasis added)

Although critiqued quite baldly here in what will likely be written off by some activists as a masturbatory academic exercise, it is crucial to understand that the disconnect I am describing between having radical goals and falling back into oppressive relationship dynamics while pursuing them is not, in fact, activist hypocrisy—at least, not in broad or deliberate strokes.[8] Rather than focusing on the 'failure' of individual activists to overcome their own oppressive tendencies—although this is certainly valid in many cases and corresponds to varying degrees of privilege that insulate us from having to even consider the existence of those forms of structural oppression in the first place—for the purposes of this argument, it is more useful to regard the problem on a collective level. There, we can consider the other structural reasons for this thwarting of radical praxis at a relational level.

As observed by Althusser in the block quote above, our total subsumption[9] in a world organized and operating through structural oppressions makes it understandably difficult, oftentimes, to even recognize how we are reproducing those pathological relations within our own lives, let alone to eradicate them from our social movements more broadly. As discussed in Chapter Four, such relational work—on issues of intra-movement dynamics—is seldom regarded with the same respect or granted the same 'cred' as other forms of activist labour. There is hope to be found in the tentative supposition that "confrontation, in some ways, is, like, destroying the values that exist in society that, like, devalue particular people, knowledges, ways of living, being, feeling good about yourself" so that "pushing against and destroying those values is significant and can be transformative" (interview with Adam Lewis). And yet, as we know, the prevailing trend remains for other forms of resistance to be more readily deemed *political*,

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[8] It must be acknowledged that predators do exist and can enter social movement spaces under false pretense, claiming radical politics that they will then use to (attempt to) manipulate activists for their own pleasure or other personal gains. Examples of this were described anecdotally by several of the activists I interviewed.

[9] Most fundamentally in the context of our formal education, for "no other Ideological State Apparatus has the obligatory… audience of the totality of the children in the capitalist social formation, eight hours a day for five or six days out of seven" (21). Moreover, the engineering of this compulsory indoctrination is "naturally covered up and concealed by a universally reigning ideology of the School… which represents the school as a neutral environment purged of ideology" that "open[s] up for [children] the path to the freedom, morality and responsibility of adults by their [teachers'] example, by knowledge, literature and their 'liberating' virtues" (21). However, with an understanding of the ISAs' operation, we can recognize such knowledge and virtues as being handed down from the privileged and powerful in order to secure the status quo and their brethren's seats at the head of the table.

radical, or even necessary for achieving change—those forms that are considered more classically oppositional or that are directed externally at the institutions from whence these oppressions have sprung. It is interesting, then, how this dominant ideology of activism corresponds with Althusser's characterization of the RSA and ISA as public and private, respectively:

> [W]hereas the unified (Repressive) State Apparatus belongs entirely to the *public* domain, much the larger part of the Ideological State Apparatuses (in their apparent dispersion) are part, on the contrary, of the *private* domain.

It is not surprising that public activist discourse should harbour an almost instinctual penchant for discussing issues related to the RSA. In contrast, the ISAs may be so insidiously taken for granted that even while they are the source of our oppressive relations—the brain, if you will, behind our indoctrination to this oppressive culture—activists' attention and resistance are so routinely (mis)directed at the RSA, which exists to reinforce—violently, if necessary—the values introduced to us through the ISAs. To invoke an anarchist metaphor that highlights the tension between these two orientations towards struggle, as activists we are often so preoccupied with fighting the cops in the streets that we have no hope of killing the cop inside our own heads, which can leave bruised and even burnt out but no closer to liberation than when we left the house.

Moreover, the RSA has not only been equipped with vaster resources than grassroots activists could ever reasonably dream of drumming up; it has also, through the ISAs' discourse of social acceptability, secured a monopoly on the use of force, whereby *state violence*—through various institutions of the RSA—is normalized but any *resistance* to it that is deemed violent (whether accurate or not) is pathologized, and probably criminalized. To direct one's resistance towards the RSA directly thus requires one to situate their activism from a serious, strategic disadvantage, at least at this point in time; meanwhile, the ISA may continue its own parallel campaign of structural oppression relatively unencumbered.

This is not to suggest that resistance to institutions of the RSA are misguided or even doomed to fail; on the contrary, such resistance is often focused on improving the lives—or at least mitigating the suffering—of marginalized populations caught up in its fists (e.g., prisoner support, migrant justice organizing, challenges to police brutality and impunity, etc.), thus providing necessary stopgap efforts of solidarity in the here and now while our movements work towards a world in which the RSA no longer exists. However, for activists to prioritize and valorize organizing against the long and coercive arms of the RSA *at the expense* of organizing against the many-headed hydra of ISAs *whose values it exists to enforce*, we won't be nearly as radical as we think we are because we aren't getting to the root of the problem: the (oppressive) relations of (social) production taught to us through our participation in the ISAs, relations which have become our default for social interaction and must be consciously unlearned if our movements are to effectively

challenge the structural oppressions plaguing society as a whole. Althusser expands on this idea in his footnotes, with a quote from Marx's preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

> 'In considering such transformations [of social revolution] a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic—in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.'
>
> ...[However,] the class struggle extends beyond the ISAs because it is rooted elsewhere than in ideology, in the Infrastructure, in the relations of production, which are relations of exploitation and constitute the base for class relations. (42)

Althusser is referring here to how systems of privilege and oppression are maintained not only by the State, through its RSA and ISAs (the 'Superstructure'), but most fundamentally by its population (the 'Infrastructure') and their perpetuation of these divisive values through interpersonal relations that uphold each other's privilege and/or oppression. This illuminates the possibility that, if we can engage in new and better (read: anti-oppressive) relations to stop exploiting ourselves and each other even as we attempt to mount our resistance, we can finally *get to the root of intersectional oppression*—class oppression through capitalism, yes, but also settler colonialism, racism, (hetero)sexism, ableism, etc.—underlying all of our movements' causes, to varying degrees, and so become truly radical in whatever activism we engage in.

 This also highlights the potential for more *strategic* social change, *through* anti-oppressive relational work at a grassroots level rather than at its expense:

> Marx conceived the structure of every society as constituted by 'levels'... the infrastructure, or economic base (the 'unity' of the productive forces and the relations of production) and the superstructure, which itself contains two 'levels' or 'instances': the politico-legal (law and the State) and ideology (the different ideologies, religious, ethical, legal, political, etc.).
>
> ...It is easy to see that this representation of the structure of every society as an edifice containing a base (infrastructure) on which are erected the two 'floors' of the superstructure, is a metaphor... Like every metaphor, this metaphor suggests something, makes some thing visible. What? Precisely this: that the upper floors could not 'stay up' alone, if they did not rest precisely on their base.
>
> ...The effect of this spatial metaphor is to endow the base with an index of effectivity known by the famous terms: the determination in the last instance of what happens in the upper 'floors' (of the superstructure) by what happens in the economic base. (6-7)

In other words, Althusser is saying that the State and its ideologies of structural oppression (the two 'upper floors' of the 'superstructure') are only as strong as the people who support and perpetuate them (the 'infrastructure' or 'economic base') by acting in accordance with their laws and values. This calls up the collective power of the people to

determine the fate of their State—its continuance or its transformation—through their own actions, and whether they choose to comply with or challenge the ideologies shaping the parameters of their society. It follows, then, that insofar as oppressive dynamics continue within our movements, we are not only harming and holding ourselves back from the social transformations we seek by reproducing those 'activist equivalents' of society's dominant ideologies, as shown and discussed in Chapter Four; in so doing, we are also further stabilizing those 'upper floors' of structural oppression even as we strive, through our radical activism, to tear them down. Thus, to dedicate more of our time, energy, and other collective resources to developing better relations of (social) production—and to incorporate this into what is currently, even canonically, recognized as activist labour—would be both (a) a crucial investment in the long-term sustainability of our movements themselves, as they currently exist, and (b) a decidedly strategic shift towards *radically* challenging—and eventually revolutionizing—the structure of society more broadly.

5.1.3 BURNOUTS & THE SUBVERSION OF "THE STRUGGLE"

As participants in Canadian society and its various cultural institutions (or ISAs), we are inculcated with the norms and practices according to which these institutions operate—and according to which we, too, are expected to act (lest we face repression for our deviance). Through our unwitting indoctrination, then, compliance becomes almost instinctual, as if it was our idea or decision in the first place:

> The individual in question behaves in such and such a way, adopts such and such a practical attitude, and, what is more, participates in certain regular practices which are those of the ideological apparatus on which 'depend' the ideas *which he has in all consciousness freely chosen* as a subject. [For example:] If he believes in God, he goes to Church to attend Mass, kneels, prays, confesses, does penance… and so on. (28)

Similarly, in the case of one who believes in justice, resistance, revolution, etc., the individual gets involved in a social movement to attend meetings, express their rage at the system, protest… and so on, according to they have been led to believe constitutes (valuable, effective) activism. However, if going through these motions begins to fall flat or becomes a struggle, even an impossibility, for the activist—as in the case of burnout—they may start to question the ideology of what it means to 'do activism' and wonder, then, what it would mean to do activism *differently*…

However, such experimentation is not without risk, which fellow activists may (mis)interpret as a contradiction of our shared devotion to the struggle and a subsequent threat—that is, a subversion—of the integrity, and potential success, of our movements:

> Indeed, if he does not do what he *ought* to do as a function of what he believes, it is because he does something else, which… implies that he has other ideas in his head as well as those he proclaims, and that he acts according to these other ideas, as a man who is either 'inconsistent' ('no one is willingly evil') or cynical, or perverse. (29)

It is in this fear of social rejection that the repressive nature of the ideological (social movement) apparatus manifests, by which activists may—consciously or, more likely, unconsciously—coerce one another into participating in our social movements according to the same subcultural expectations and practices. Again, as shown and discussed in Chapter Four, these expectations aren't attainable—or even desirable—for many activists, but we often realize this through the painful trial and (alleged) error of burnout. The flawed logic of this negative, even shaming, perspective on burnout has already been deconstructed in the director's comments for Scene Four. However, I believe it begs reiteration here, for it is through such odysseys down to our darkest rock-bottoms—and our re-emergence, weathered but wiser—that these high-minded ideologies we seek to fulfill through our activism are finally revealed to be unhealthy and, ultimately, holding us back. Moreover, as discussed throughout Chapter Four, these ideologies derive along various lines from the structural oppressions that comprise mainstream society's ideology of intersectional domination. Thus, the subversion of such dominant *ideologies of struggle*—in order to illuminate their limitations and posit new possibilities for engagement—can, conversely, serve to build up our movements. Conflict can be healthy and necessary to any relationship, and I believe that such honest discussion of the needs, desires, and boundaries we all have within this work will key to strengthening our collective commitment—to our causes and to each other.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

A.1 EMAIL CALLOUT

SUBJECT LINE:
"For the long haul" - Seeking activists to share experiences of burnout & sustainability

Greetings, fellow activists, organizers, warriors, advocates!

My name is Kathryn, and I've been doing social and environmental justice organizing in Kitchener-Waterloo for a number of years now. I'm also a student in the Independent Studies program at UWaterloo, and for my fourth-year thesis project I'm researching the issue of activist burnout.

I've come to understand "burnout" as the physical, mental, spiritual, and/or emotional exhaustion resulting from a person's fulfillment of their chosen role(s) in life, to the point that they are experiencing significant negative effects from sustaining that type or level of activity and may feel torn about continuing to do so. Although burnout can be experienced by people in all lines of work and for a variety of reasons, I'm interested to find out what burnout looks and feels like for activists; to hear how activists deal with such experiences, personally or collectively; and to learn if there are unique risk factors specific to participation in social movements or grassroots organizing - in particular, environmental justice activism.

Most importantly, I'm interested to do this without shame or judgement for fellow activists who have faced personal struggles within "the struggle", because we're all approaching this work from different places and have a lot to learn from one another's experiences.

My hope is that, with better understanding of how and why burnout may develop for activists in our movements, we will be better equipped to support ourselves, friends, and allies in struggle - for the long haul. In order to do so, I need your help: I'm looking to get in touch with a variety of <u>environmental justice activists from Southern Ontario</u> (animal lib, land defense, organizing against fossil fuel projects, fighting environmental racism, etc.) who are <u>willing to be interviewed about your experiences</u> of doing this work and the personal consequences, <u>including burnout</u>, that you have faced as a result. All folks interviewed will have the choice to openly identify themselves or remain anonymous in both the final report and its more creative form, a theatre script/performance (which will be developed/staged to create a space for fellow activists to explore the issue of burnout in an open, creative, and collaborative way). Both will also be made freely available as a contribution to the current dialogue on making committed involvement in our movements more accessible and sustainable.

If you're interested to participate, or if you'd like more information about the project, please don't hesitate to get in touch! Interviews will be taking place from July to early August, but arrangements for a later interview can be made now as well. Finally, if you know anyone else who might be interested, please pass this callout along! I'd be stoked to hear from them too.

With thanks, in solidarity,

Kathryn Wettlaufer
Email: kmwettlaufer@uwaterloo.ca

A.2 Information Letter

INFORMATION LETTER for Interview
For the Long Haul: Burnout and Sustainability in Environmental Justice Activism
Independent Studies Undergraduate Thesis - University of Waterloo
[DATE]

Dear ***[NAME]***,

This letter is an invitation to participate in a research study about activist burnout and sustainability that I am conducting for my undergraduate thesis project in the Department of Independent Studies at the University of Waterloo, under the supervision of Dr. Lisbeth Berbary and Dr. Mark Havitz of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies. In hopes that you're interested, I'd like to provide you with more information about the project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

The focus of this project is to develop greater collective knowledge for activists and their communities about the phenomenon of burnout and, ideally, strategies to make involvement in social and environmental justice work more sustainable. I will be conducting "life story" interviews (in-depth and informal) with 6-8 fellow activists and community organizers about their experiences of participating in environmental justice activism, including how they have dealt with various challenges related to burnout over the course of their careers. With this goal in mind, I would be most delighted and grateful if you would be willing to participate and share your stories with me for this project!

Participation is entirely voluntary and will involve an interview of approximately 2 hours in length, depending on your availability, to take place at a mutually agreeable time and location. (Please note: While I live in Kitchener, I am more than willing to travel outside of this city to meet with you.) During our discussion, you are always free to decline from answering any of the questions I ask, and you may also withdraw from this study at any time simply by advising me of your decision. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded in order to facilitate a more open discussion and to ensure the accurate collection of responses, which will be later transcribed (also by me) for analysis. Following the interview, you will receive a full transcript and the opportunity for you to correct or clarify any information you had provided in the interview. You will also receive a copy of the full thesis once it is completed. In all cases, unless you wish to openly identify yourself, neither your name nor any other personally identifying information will be included in the interview transcripts, analysis, final thesis, or any publications resulting from this study; however, with your permission, anonymized quotations may be used. All information you provide is considered completely confidential, and all electronic files (text and audio) will be stored securely on a password-protected hard-drive under my care.

Finally, there are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study, and I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed by and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. If you have any questions about the project, feel free to contact me by phone (519-781-6062) or email (kmwettlaufer@uwaterloo.ca) at any time. Further, should you decide to participate and you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, feel free to contact the Director of the Office of Research Ethics at 1-519-888-4567, ext. 36005.

I look forward to speaking with you further, and thank you in advance for your support of this project!

Sincerely yours, in struggle,

Kathryn Wettlaufer

A.3 CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW

CONSENT FORM for Interview
"For the Long Haul" (Undergraduate Thesis)
University of Waterloo

By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigators or institution from their legal and professional responsibilities.

_____

I have read the information presented in the information letter about the study being conducted by Kathryn Wettlaufer for an undergraduate thesis project in the Independent Studies program at the University of Waterloo, under supervision of Dr. Lisbeth Berbary and Dr. Mark Havitz of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and to request any additional information I wanted before deciding to participate. I was also informed that I may withdraw my participation at any time by advising the student researcher.

I am aware that my interview will be audio-recorded, in order to facilitate more open discussion and to ensure an accurate recording of my responses. I am also aware that anonymized quotations from my interview may be incorporated into the thesis and/or any published articles to come from this research. It has been explained to me that all electronic files (text and audio) will be stored securely on a password-protected hard-drive under the care of this project's student researcher, Kathryn Wettlaufer.

I am aware that this project has been reviewed by and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee, and I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567, ext. 36005.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this research study.
☐ *Yes* ☐ *No*

I agree to have my interview audio-recorded.
☐ *Yes* ☐ *No*

I agree to the use of anonymized quotations in the thesis and/or any published articles to come from this research.
☐ *Yes* ☐ *No*

I wish to be personally identified as a participant in the thesis and/or any published articles to come from this research.
☐ *Yes* ☐ *No*

Participant Name: _____ *(Please print)*
Participant Signature: _____
Witness Name: _____ *(Please print)*
Witness Signature: _____

Date: _____

A.4 LETTER OF APPRECIATION

LETTER OF APPRECIATION for Interview
"For the Long Haul: Burnout and Sustainability in Environmental Justice Activism"
Independent Studies Undergraduate Thesis - University of Waterloo
[DATE]

Dear *[NAME],*

I'd like to thank you once again for generously allowing me to interview you as part of my research project, "For the Long Haul: Burnout and Sustainability in Environmental Justice Activism". As we've discussed, the purpose of this study is to identify risk factors for activist burnout and, based on that analysis, create a community resource that will foster a better understanding of how and why burnout may develop for activists in our movements. My humble hope is that, in the coming years, we will be able to create a social movement culture that can both mitigate the risks of burnout and better equip us to support ourselves, friends, and allies in struggle - for the long haul. By sharing your stories with me, you have helped us get another step closer to that goal. I greatly appreciate your contribution to this project, and I hope that you will find the results to be of interest and value in your future activist work. My thesis will be completed by December of this year, and I will be emailing all participants with a copy of the finished project at this time.

Please remember and be assured that (1) any data pertaining to you as an individual participant in this project will be kept confidential, and (2) any quotations selected from your interview will be anonymized so that they cannot be linked back to you (unless you had previously asked to be personally identified as a participant). As we've discussed, once all the data are collected and analyzed for this project, I hope to share the results more widely with fellow activists and scholars through journal articles, workshops, or presentations. If you're interested in receiving information about any such work that follows, please let me know and I can keep you updated.

In the meantime, if you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me by phone or email, as noted below. Once again, as with all University of Waterloo projects involving human participants, this project was reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. As we discussed prior to your interview, should you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please feel free to contact my faculty supervisors or Dr. Maureen Nummelin, the Director of the Office of Research Ethics, with the contact information provided below.

Sincere thanks, in solidarity,

Kathryn Wettlaufer

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APPENDIX B: LIFE-STORY INTERVIEW GUIDE

Lead-off questions:
Tell me about your experience of becoming an activist / organizer
Tell me about how you relate to other activists
Tell me about how you see yourself as a community organizer / activist

Probing:

Health and Wellness
> Probe:
>> How important is your health to you? (emotional, physical, mental, spiritual)
>> How do you react to signs of burnout? (in yourself, others)
>> Where do you seek support?
>> How do you relate activism to other areas of your life? (balance, sacrifice)
>> Where do you see activism fitting into the overall picture of your life?

Relationships
> Probe:
>> How important are your non/activist relationships to you?
>> How do you deal with conflict?
>> How do you relate to other activists? non-activists?
>> What does commitment look like?
>> Who do you learn from?

Activism as Performance
> Probe:
>> What you wear
>> How you talk, to whom
>> What you feel willing to do, where
>> How do you know how to act?

Identities
> Probe:
>> When did you first identify as an activist?
>> How do you recognize someone as a fellow activist?
>> Connections/tensions you feel between different identities
>> Times you have felt at home/empowered in activist spaces
>> Times you have felt out of place/marginalized in activist spaces