Punch Up * Kick Down Distro
Love as a Revolutionary Social Ethic
2024

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deepen them, regardless of the different shapes they may take. People can go from acquaintances to lovers to solid friends all while remaining committed to mutual respect, invested in one another's wellbeing, and celebrating membership in a larger community. A foundation of love is ultimately more important than ephemeral romance.

No matter what shape they take, relationships need honesty and trust and love. I find polyamory a useful framework for practicing a broader, social, radical love ethic. If it's not your thing, though, that's cool.

Love in the Time of Capitalist Hegemony

"To have faith in the possibility of love as a social, and not only exceptional individual phenomenon is a rational faith based on the insight into the very nature of man."

— Eric Fromm

If there is a universal human aspiration, it is love. If people have a central purpose, it is camaraderie, friendship, and connection. The desire to be in community with people who we trust and appreciate, and who share those good feelings towards us, is a quintessential part of being human. Systems of morality and codes of ethics throughout history point towards these basic principles as their foundation. People have unalienable *social needs* including secure personal relationships, a sense of belonging to a community, and interdependence in a supportive social environment. These shape and contextualize the notion of *love* as a social and political concept.

"Love" varies so wildly in meaning, and is so dependent on context, that any attempt to define it will inevitably fall short. For the purposes of this work, we are interested in understanding love not only as a personal experience, but a *social principle* – how it impacts the way our society is organized. It addresses how we relate to those in our lives *and* to humanity in general. This conception of love is broader than a passing consideration or empathic recognition of others, but an acceptance of what it means to be human in its totality. To be trusting of, and trusted by, the other people who occupy our lives builds our capacity to trust in the inherent goodness of humanity at large. Oriented towards love, we feel safer, more willing to be vulnerable, more motivated to connect. These are not simply feel good sentiments, but politically important concepts which shape how we interact with the world, engage in social relationships, and weave the fabric of our lives as we live them.

But love is so hackneyed a term that it is likely to cause the reader to roll their eyes. Why should we be so flippant about love as social need and powerful force? A dismissive attitude towards the significance of love can be a kind of defense mechanism, for it is easier to be cynical than to face the devastating reality that love *is* essential to life, yet glaringly absent. Without love, people find ways to substitute their longing with numbing agents, distraction, or short term satisfaction. A person deprived of love is more likely to be psychologically damaged and emotionally dysregulated. For a population subjected to unloving social conditions, all manner of peculiar neuroses and social ills present themselves.

Sandor Ferenczi writes that "our real aim in life is to be loved, and that any other observable activity is really a detour, an indirect path towards that goal."[1] It is not only the *absence* of love that people suffer from, but also the *presence* of constant invasive messages: that we are inadequate, that the only way to happiness is through consumption. Advertisers employ psychologists and neurologists to sell their products, preying upon our unfulfilled desires for connection. This distracts us from real opportunities for genuine kinship that present themselves throughout our lives.

In a capitalist society, life is organized around the profit motive, above all else. To prioritize market values of competition and consumption over interconnected social relationships and mutual obligations within a community makes for a social reality which is anything but loving. Capitalism is a socio-political structure which allows people to go hungry and without shelter; which views the natural world as nothing more than an exploitable resource of infinite extraction. This pursuit of profit over ethical principles, moral values, basic dignity, or *any other concern* is referred to as "the logic of capital."

[1] Sándor Ferenczi quoted in "Coming to Our Senses"

structures insist that we take responsibility for our own emotions and how we deal with them. Obviously, that doesn't mean we just bottle things up – we can lean on partners, friends, peers, or professionals to work through these feelings and find healthy, productive, and mutually beneficial ways of communicating them that do not exert power over, or elicit shame from, anyone.

Modern conceptions of relationships, romance, dating, and sex are often performative and weird. Dating apps gamify the spontaneous and embodied human interactions which might lead to romantic chemistry, while "dating culture" commodifies the experience finding closeness and connection with an expectation of gift giving, expensive outings, or romantic getaways. These all reinforce an idea that love can be, and should be, *and must be* purchased. When romantic love is just another commodity available in a marketplace of exchange, love is drained of its magic. At the same time, love and romance are highly mystified by a cultural industry which distorts people's expectations of what actual romantic relationships look like in the real world. In the process, Richard Gilman-Opalsky writes,

> their authentic feelings are displaced by prefabricated emotions; their love is replaced by the fetishization and desire of certain products … and their range of emotions is dulled and narrowed.[27]

Relationship models opposed to possession, coercion, codependency, and domination are applicable outside of the romantic context, too. They create space for changing dynamics. When relationships are rigid, they break under pressure. When they are fluid and flexible, there is room for growth. People change and relationships change – that much is inevitable. If we set up our relationships in a way that allows for and encourages change, we actually strengthen and

[27] Richard Gilman–Opalsky – "Imaginary Power, Real Horizons"

fulfilling relationships are based on free, autonomous connection – uninhibited by possessiveness, comparison, obligation, or entitlement.

Romantic love in a capitalist consumer paradigm is often nothing more than sexual objectification; a mechanism of domination and means of control over another person's body, emotions, and desires. Love — the all-powerful force, the universal human ambition — gets stifled and dulled, becoming merely an avenue for envy and insecurity to rear their ugly heads. (If I wanted to be extra pretentious about it) I'd say that love, in our cultural context, is often nothing more than the sublimation of our egoic self-worship through the subjugation of the other.

Our social norms around romance perpetuate the falsehood that there is one ideal person who will be your perfect match, who can happily and dutifully fulfill all your emotional, relational, and sexual needs. That just isn't true, friends. In fact, loving someone deeply, as your equal, means wanting their needs and desires to be met, even if it isn't by you!

Rather than mitigating, managing, or restricting a partner's intimacy or desires, our role in loving someone is to actively participate in supporting their capacity to live a fulfilling, joyful life. Being in love with someone is about the "respect you have for your partner, rather than about your requirements. This is not to say that your needs should not be met, but that you are part of a balancing exercise."[26]

Jealousy happens! There's no shame in it – particularly when you've been raised under social conditions that are obsessed with self-interested accumulation, and constantly exposed to media which is extremely limiting in its portrayal of love. Polyamorous relationships have the potential to exemplify ways of accepting feelings of jealousy, doubt, and uncertainty without responding to those emotions with possessiveness, restriction, or control. These relationship

[26] "Anarchy & Polyamory" – Active Distribution Dysophia 1

The logic of capital claims that people are inherently self-interested and competitive. However, our evolutionary history, and thus our *nature*, "expects or prefers, as its baseline state, a condition of caring – relative harmony and equilibrium of the kind that one obtains when interconnecting."[2] The false mythos manufactured by a capitalist ideology incentivizes behavior which further perpetuates its own logic while diminishing and devaluing social arrangements of cooperation which have been the standard of our species for millennia. This is not to suggest that pre-modern societies were romantic utopias, but simply that collective care and reciprocity were socially logical and materially necessary for the perpetuation of the species since the dawn of time.

While the premodern societies vary infinitely, generally speaking they were small band hunter gatherers whose survival depended on cohesive social bonds and reciprocal communal obligations. We might refer to these societies as more "loving" than ours in the sense that they were structured around a concern for the wellbeing of all members – material security and communal belonging were built in. The fact that human beings evolved in these sorts of societies explains why love, in a social form, is so essential. Societies without mutual obligation, interdependence and social connection woven into the social fabric – become highly alienated and disaffected – socially sick and capable of unconscionable dehumanization. Through love, we reject the disposability and cruelty that is so normalized under capitalism and justified by its logic.

bell hooks speaks of a "love ethic" which opposes domination and coercion by insisting respect for and a commitment to the well-being of others.

> Wherever domination is present, love is lacking …
> Love can never take root in a relationship based

[2] Gabor Maté – "The Myth of Normal"

> on domination and coercion. There can be no love where there is domination.[3]

hooks offers a critique not only of the abusive *personal* relationships which are all too common in our society, but also of an oppressive *social structure* which relies on domination and coercion to maintain power. Drawing largely on the work of bell hooks, Richard Gilman-Opalsky refers to love as "an active practice of human relationality incompatible with the logic of capitalist exchange." In his work "The Communism of Love", RGO expands upon the *logic of love* as a sort of antithesis of the *logic of capital*. "Love, if love means anything at all, is antithetical to the logic of capital … Exchange relations cannot be associated with love relations except as an opposing logic of relationality."[4] Gilman-Opalsky advocates for a love that is not static or fixed, but an *active process*.

This concept of love relinquishes control or possession and instead celebrates a potentiality which one might take an active role in. Concern for, and commitment to, the well-being of that which one loves is a giving action which rejects the passive, privatized version of "love" so pervasive in a capitalist culture. Love, in the ethical sense, expands that concern to all life. Revolutionary politics advocate for universal liberation and a total uprooting of the dominant social order and structures of power while a loving social ethic emphasizing our undeniable need for connection, autonomy, and supportive, caring community. Thus, we begin to give shape to a revolutionary love ethic.

If we accept that love is a human need and aspiration which is universally shared, and recognize that capitalism is logically, socially, and ethically antagonistic to love, then capitalism must be confronted and dismantled in order to fulfill the ultimate aspiration of human life. A concept of love

[3] Bell hooks – "Feminism is for Everybody"

[4] Richard Gilman-Opalsky – "The Communism of Love"

> paralyzes faith. Faith and hope allow us to let it go. Fear stands in the way of love.[25]

Those who act from love, as opposed to fear, hatred, delusion or indifference, are more likely to be emotionally secure, spiritually fulfilled, and socially supported. If we internalize our own inevitable demise, we become passive and disaffected, which drains our lives of meaning and purpose. We cannot allow cynicism to overpower our faith in love as an ethical social force. A belief in humanity's inherent goodness, a radical compassion for all, a faith in the revolutionary potential of love, and relentless hope for universal liberation are what makes life fulfilling, both socially and personally. If we love, then we've already won.

Addendum: In Defense of Polyamory

Listen, I get it. You're sick of hearing about the escapades and dramas of your roommate's polycule. You're perpetually told that the couple across the bar "likes your vibe." You're justifiably wary of tech bros preaching the gospel of "open relationships" while they engage in the same old patriarchal, misogynistic fuck boy behavior, under the guise of some "enlightened" rhetorical bullshit. I hear all that. Nothing is pure in this world and these bastards will gentrify everything, even radical models of interpersonal relationships.

Despite all that, let me just briefly speak in defense of nonmonogamy, pulling many insights from the pamphlet *Anarchy and Polyamory*. For me, polyamory is inextricably linked to social ethics and political principles. By that I mean my approach to relationships – romantic or otherwise – is in opposition to the logic of capital. By *that* I mean: in my experience, the most

[25] bell hooks – "All About Love"

> is the will to hold on to our values in the face of difficulty … What we need now is a resilient kind of hope … an expression of how much we love the people around us, of how much we love the world around us, of how much we love the people who will come after us.[24]

This definition of hope is congruent with a revolutionary love ethic. There is an uncertainty in loving radically – an ambiguity that nonetheless works according to a commitment to an expansive connection, a relentless devotion to caring for each other, and a radical faith in our own potential. We don't adhere to these values or take action because we have certainty about any particular outcomes, but because we are called to do so, because *we must*. If we love in a truly revolutionary sense, the political commitments and ethical principles required of us to pursue our radical visions for a better world are not begrudging obligations, but irresistible acts of joy.

Of course, not everyone holds radical compassion, not everyone maintains a loving social ethic. In the coming disasters, fear and precarity will be widespread. Come to think of it, fear and precarity are pretty damned widespread right now! We can choose to respond to this fact with more fear, othering, and isolation, or we can respond with compassion, understanding, and love. A revolutionary love ethic challenges us to reject the dehumanizing conditioning we have been subjected to by the logic of capital. We live in deeply uncertain, deeply frightening times. It is, in a sense, easier and more comfortable to comply with the destructive logic of capital, slowly hardening our hearts in denial of love, in passive resignation. But bell hooks is right when she says

> Cynicism is the great barrier to love. It is rooted in doubt and despair. Fear intensifies our doubt. It

[24] Tim DeChristopher quoted in "I Want a Better Catastrophe"

that is politically activated and socially engaged reveals the obvious limitations, depravities and absurdities of the logic of capital. Capitalism creates alienated, subjugated people who have lower capacity for authentic and fulfilling interpersonal relationships and are in turn less able to connect, organize, and take action for radical change.

Of course, capitalism is proficient at co-opting and commodifying everything- even love. But love is capable of exceeding and opposing the logic of capitalist value structures. Love offers us a way to see human and non-human life beyond their "usefulness", as intrinsically valuable. Therefore, love is a radically anti-capitalist logic. A revolutionary love ethic insists that overturning the capitalist hegemony and fulfilling our social and emotional needs are deeply intertwined. Love is both a philosophical orientation of the spirit, a material framework of relating, and a fundamental pillar of our political principles.

To harness love's power as a radical social ethic means expanding beyond love as a purely private affair of romance or an ephemeral mystery. Revolutionary love is not as much a relationship to a person or specific people, but an expansion which recognizes the wellbeing of others as inextricably intertwined with our own. Broadening our conception of love into the political and social realm could help us realize (that is, to make real) ethical principles which can confront, challenge, and dismantle the logic of capital. Using love as a social tool, we resist the precarity forced upon us by an exploitative, violent, profit driven social structure. A revolutionary love ethic embodies our social values and radical critique as an organizing principle for material political demands. A commitment to connection, compassion, dignity, and relationship over profit, accumulation, status, or competition — with these fundamental values, a revolutionary love ethic is formulated. Upon this loving foundation, our social realities might be built anew.

Beyond Romance

"Lovelessness is a boon to consumerism
and lies strengthen the world of predatory advertising."

— bell hooks

Because of the commodified mystifications of love, it seems almost easier to explore what love is *not*, particularly for the purposes of giving shape to a revolutionary love ethic. Love is so powerful a force, such a profound part of life, yet so often exploited and distorted by the logic of capital. An existential sense of dread and insecurity is so widely felt in our society that we find ourselves searching for something to make us feel safe — to feel like we belong. We seek pacifying comforts in seemingly endless forms – including a corrupted form of romance. Thus, love, in our culture, is almost exclusively understood in terms of individual romantic partnership. The logic of capital individuates emotion and privatizes experience. A cosmic force as powerful as love is reduced to the private desires of individual persons. Love is extremely limited by our society's idea of *romance* (particularly the heteronormative and monogamous couple). Love is so much deeper, more expansive, more defiant than can be expressed within the confines of romance.

To confuse romance for love is a common error. The abiding fundamental love we're referring to is foundation for caring relationships and just social conditions. Love cannot be substituted for mere pleasure seeking, surface level romance, or sexual gratification. Our cultural tendency is to interpret romance — or sex — as life's ultimate goal, the be-all-end-all of human desire, the fulfillment of which will bring an end to our suffering. Our innate need for companionship is limited to the *couple*, and our "erotic energies are captured by the institution

ing that vision — we "participate in a transformation worth experiencing and fighting for."[22]

Love ultimately provides us with the will to go on despite the challenges of the present and the bleak prospects of the future. Love is what motivates us to struggle against the capitalist empire which threatens life on earth, which drains life of its sanctity. Radical love is emotional and psychosocial disobedience to the status quo — it powers the engine of our resistance. "The fuel that drives this work is our aspiration to transcend into something more meaningful, less violent, more loving."[23] Love is at the heart of revolutionary struggle, it demands justice, it does not accept the violence and oppression of our society.

When you love something, or someone, you'd do anything for them. You'd take risks and make sacrifices. To expand this loving commitment to include future generations, the biosphere, all life on earth might shake us out of complacency and motivate us to risk our immediate comforts in pursuit of universal liberation. Love, to be fully realized, must be revolutionary. Revolution, to be realized, must be loving.

People have an existential longing to be connected to something greater than ourselves. The logic of capital cuts us off from meaning and purpose, from each other. hrough loving relationships, both interpersonal and social, we build a sense of belonging and closeness and interdependence. Not only do these help us carve the path for meaningful political action, they also provide us something to fight for, a reason to foster hope. Discussing the concepts of optimism and hope, Tim DeChristopher states that "optimism is the expectation that things are going to be okay, that we're going to have a 'good' outcome," while hope, in contrast

[22] Mariame Kaba & Kelly E. Hayes – "Let This Radicalize You"
[23] David Camfield – "Future on Fire"

In her work "Re-enchanting the World", Silvia Federici explains the transformative power of communal relations which allow us to recognize the world around us, other people, nature itself "as a source of wealth and knowledge, and not as a danger."[20] For Federici, collective relationships (and their tangible local setting referred to as "the commons") are experiential, not theoretical. She continues:

You live the commons. You cannot talk about them and even less theorize them. That, I imagine, is because of the difficulty to give words to such a powerful and rare experience as that of being a part of something larger than our individual lives, of dwelling on this earth not as a stranger or a trespasser, which is the way capitalism wishes us to relate to the spaces we occupy, but as home. But words are necessary, especially for those of us who live in areas where social relationships have been almost completely disarticulated.[21]

Committed, embodied, experiential social relationships put the concept of revolutionary love into practice. We cannot limit our political goals to merely benefiting a subcultural slice of the population, or building private utopias, but instead aim for the liberation from the internalized values of the logic of capital, universally. We must build power by committing to the care of and investment in other people – friends, family, community members, neighbors, and strangers alike.

Seeking out and contributing to these loving communities may be our most important work, because the most effective way to build a collective process of revolutionary transformation is through loving social relationships. Radical imagination and hope for the future relies on a faith in love's power as a social principle. If we can offer — as organizers, radicals, members of a community, or simply neighbors and friends – a vision of how things could be, and a structure for collectively realiz-

[20] Silvia Federici – "Reenchanting the World"
[21] Silvia Federici – "Reenchanting the World"

of sex."[5] There is no doubt that intimacy and a healthy sex life are important parts human wellbeing — to go without them can cause grave loneliness. But love takes on the grim reflection of consumerism when we anxiously crave affection, compulsively scrolling dating apps in pursuit of some quick satisfaction. Constantly clamoring for closeness, we are left still longing, still feeling empty

The pamphlet *Anarchy & Polyamory* makes the point that sex often dominates the vast and varied realm of intimacy. Sex has become a major arena whereby "the capitalist need for consumerism distorts [attitudes towards] sex and what sex even means."[6]

Living in a state of constant lack of *love*, we put too much pressure on *romance*, expecting some fairytale dreamboat to come along, sweep us off our feet, put an end to our existential dread. This is a story, and it's a fictional one. We romanticize romance, as it were. With love reduced to such superficial and unrealistic expectations, it is no wonder that people come to resent their partners when they fail to soothe every anxiety, meet every need.

This is not to say your romantic love for a partner is invalid or not "radical enough." Being in love in the romantic sense is one of the most fantastic things that life has to offer! Sexual desires and romantic relationships are certainly *an aspect* of the human experience of love, but "we must not mistake what may be attributes of love for love itself … Love and desire are not the same thing."[7] This is crucial to consider, because many desires (particularly in a capitalist society) can be totally lacking in love. Capitalist logic corrupts romance by creating constraints, ideals, and norms of conduct which shape our desires and behaviors in accordance to a capitalist worldview. Subjects

[5] "Kill the Couple in Your Head" Zine
[6] "Anarchy & Polyamory" – Active Distribution Dysophia 1
[7] Richard Gilman-Opalsky – "The Communism of Love"

of a society that incentivizes possession of property, valorizes physical domination, and feeds on envy driven competition is sure to reflect those values in their romantic and sexual relationships.

Our capacity for emotional expression and vulnerability is stunted by the material and social conditions of capitalism. Romantic or otherwise, love is unable to truly flourish when confined within a society shaped by exploitation, oppression, and violence. It's tough to devote the time and energy necessary to fall in love and maintain relationships when you are struggling to pay rent. Romantic love requires adequate "leisure time and opportunity to engage in intensely absorbing, emotionally satisfying activities."[8] In order to explore love to the fullest, our basic needs must be met without physically and emotionally subjecting ourselves to painful and alienating experiences.

Love cannot be confined solely to the romantic. In transcending the limitations of romantic love, we are offered more opportunities for "sharing our lives and resources beyond the couple."[9] An expansive, revolutionary love ethic shapes our social and political demands. "Love is a social concept and power … politics, which is fundamentally concerned with power relations in the human world, has got to take up the question of love."[10] Beyond romance, love is the guiding principle which informs our political aspirations, our radical hopes for the future, and our social ethics.

Radical Compassion & Universal Liberation

"At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that

[8] Valerie Solanas — Quoted in "The Communism of Love"
[9] "Kill the Couple in Your Head" Zine
[10] Richard Gilman-Opalsky – "The Communism of Love"

of communal support that will be the most crucial resource in the coming years of continuing, compounding crises. Being prepared for the inevitable collapse of our ecological systems and social structures is about more than accumulating cans of beans and building barricades. If we are to stay alive — *if we are to have any reason to stay alive* — we must retain and strengthen our capacity to love, to grieve, to celebrate, to mourn, to dance. These processes of collective emotional expression are just as integral to social cooperation as are the material needs of shelter and food.

These relationships are the building blocks of our concept of revolutionary love. It is the connections we make, the friendships we hold dear, the love we cultivate and the experiences we share which give life purpose and meaning. "Connection to each other is the most important thing to cultivate in the face of hopelessness. We don't want to cling to outdated paradigms; we want to cling to each other and shift the paradigms."[19] We can never know what effects our actions and affectations might have, but we can be certain that by supporting one another with love and compassion, we open up the possibilities for more fulfilling lives and radical social change.

A revolutionary love ethic is a universal demand for basic dignity as well as a path to healthy, fulfilling relationships with the people in our lives. Rather than being defined or theorized, Radical love is most credibly *experienced and practiced.* Building, joining, and contributing to communities and networks of mutual care — here and now — bring the reward of loving relationships. In this sense, what we do to support each other through the current crises and inevitable disasters to come simultaneously fulfills our universal aspiration for love and connection.

[19] Adrienne Maree Brown – "Emergent Strategy"

investment in each other's material and emotional wellbeing and fulfilled through networks of personal and communal support.

Love Wins

"When we are engaged in acts of love,
we humans are at our best and most resilient."

— adrienne maree brown

Rejecting capitalism in favor of a more just, humane and compassionate social arrangement would require fundamental changes in nearly all aspects of our lives. Lucky for us, the capitalist global empire will come to an end, guaranteed by its internal contradictions and unsustainable nature. However, collapse certainly does not guarantee a shift to a more just, caring world oriented around a loving social ethic. For a chance at that kind of future, profound changes must take place in the way we relate to each other, both socially and interpersonally. Raised in the cutthroat, competitive, self-oriented social context of neoliberal capitalism, not everyone is going to open their hearts to a new horizon of loving kindness and egalitarian cooperation. People are not empowered to live differently simply because crisis strikes. It is only through encounters with and involvement in robust networks of collective care that people build capacity for more loving, more compassionate, more collective ways of organizing their lives. As the current crises worsen, what will matter most for our survival and wellbeing will not be the contents of our "bug-out bag," our knowledge of radical theory, or our online social clout, but "whether we are a part of a loving community whose members are prepared to be there for each other."[18] It is connection to resilient networks

[18] David R. Loy – "EcoDharma"

the true revolutionary is guided by the great feeling of love.
It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality."

— Che Guevara

A revolutionary love ethic relies on a faith in the basic decency at the core of the human heart. Radical compassion calls for us approach every interaction with this faith as a foundation. With this conviction, our communities and political projects are better equipped to hold compassion for those who have differing worldviews than us – recognizing that social and material conditions are what shape human behavior. People's behaviors and beliefs are almost entirely determined by social, environmental, interpersonal, and communal conditions beyond their control, which should inform our extension of radical compassion to all people – even those who hold oppositional political beliefs.

Blaming the individuals who have been shaped by oppressive social conditions into beliefs we may find reprehensible, *rather than blaming the conditions themselves*, is a further perpetuation of the neoliberal individualization and moral posturing which we must recognize and oppose as such. In humanizing the "other", we see the conditions and circumstances which made them that way. Radical compassion is a guiding principle in building a revolutionary love ethic. We can simultaneously hold compassion for people while struggling against the logics they uphold. The authors of *Radical Dharma* are persuasive on this subject, asserting that a commitment to disrupting and dismantling structures that degrade humanity, [and] a commitment to practice of engaging the humanity of people wed to perpetuating those structures must coexist. Whether by arrogance, ignorance, or fear, we must bear witness to their suffering as our own, challenge what is unjust, invest in their basic

goodness, always moving towards integration. Without commitment and practice we merely mirror the destructive forces of polarization and power.[11]

People who feel bad for their participation in a social structure which they know to be cruel and destructive tend to project blame and guilt onto their perceived cultural enemies. A radical love ethic would encourage us instead to overcome that guilt, hatred, blame and shame and work instead to internalize a sense of compassion for ourselves and "the other." Liberation struggles depend on our ability to imagine, create, build and collaborate with others, which in turn depends on our ability to forgive ourselves, to love ourselves despite our flaws, embarrassments, mistakes, and traumas.

When we offer ourselves compassion, we become more capable of extending that same compassion to others. If we are serious about our political commitments or social values, we must extend radical compassion to everyone. "To love all is to fight relentlessly to end exploitation and oppression everywhere, even on behalf of those who think they hate us."[12] A revolutionary love ethic values every life because it recognizes that we are all interconnected, effected by and implicated in shared social conditions which shape people. This radical compassion, even for our political opposition, deepens our capacity to extend that same compassion to ourselves and members of our community. Offering dignity to those unlike us actualizes a social love ethic while strengthening the value structures on which our political projects and hopes for the future rely. Radical compassion acknowledges that our social well-being, our emotional health, and our material security are all collective processes.

[11] Llama Rod Owens – "Radical Dharma"

[12] Derecka Purnell – "Becoming Abolitionists"

each other, historically, and we will continue to do so as we respond to, and attempt to survive through, the continuing ecological disasters, social upheavals, and political instability that the capitalist Empire has condemned us to.

Radical love does not turn away from suffering or escape into naivety, nor does it romanticize catastrophe or acquiesce to nihilism. The collapse of our current paradigm is inevitable — *it is happening*. The compounding crises humanity faces will result in worsening ecological, social, and political conditions. We know too well that disaster capitalism is sure to exploit these fragile and volatile times to consolidate more power and resources. At the same time, it is sometimes crisis, tragedy, or disaster that exposes people to the lived experience of solidarity and mutual aid for the first time.

The coming collapse will challenge our communities' resilience, but these shifts may simultaneously offer an opportunity to reintegrate the kinds of reciprocal social relationships that fulfill our innate needs for connection. The ways that communities come together in times of crisis can deeply affect people, as they not only clarify our interdependence and reliance on each other but reveal the possibility of decentralized autonomous action and cooperation – people uniting to meet each other's needs despite "political" differences. These are acts of radical love; responses to vulnerability and insecurity with compassion, unconditional service, and no regard for the profit seeking logics of capitalism. Our collective survival may hinge on our ability to reorient according to the revolutionary love ethic exemplified in these acts.

No matter how small, any act motivated by love, rather than monetary gain, possessive competition, or a desire to "get ahead" is an action in service of a radical love ethic. Acts of mutual aid, political solidarity, or simple good-natured neighborliness — caring for other people without the expectation of some kind of monetary exchange — are all acts of rebellion against the logic of capital. Our loving social ethic is actualized through

Love & Grief & Crisis

"It's the connections that I make with people
that are actually the thing worth living for, and nothing else, really.
How can I reach out to other people and help them feel connected?
That's the only thing of any heartfelt importance to me."

– Daniel Maté

People are facing massive social, political, economic and ecological crises. Admittedly, it feels a bit glib to talk about love in times like these. Love is not all we need, in fact. We also need safe housing and adequate healthcare and decent food and meaningful connection to our natural environments – all of which are made unattainable by a capitalist society. While we may theorize about the grandiose power of a revolutionary love ethic, it is a challenge to actualize and embody radically loving principles in a social environment so deeply isolating and exploitative, so devoid of love.

For a subjugated population so thoroughly alienated and disenfranchised, the prospect of deep, loving connection can cause great anxiety. Loving is risky, it requires the sort of vulnerability that is difficult to justify in a state of constant material and emotional insecurity. Love seems almost terrifying because it is so foreign a feeling.

Although a logic of love may be oppositional to the logic of capital, it can only provide fleeting relief from a ubiquitous capitalist reality. We can sing all the love songs we want, partake in all the ethical non-monogamy we want, write all the zines we want – these practices and expressions alone cannot stop the powerful machine of destruction that is Empire. For the growing numbers of people experiencing financial and material insecurity, it takes tremendous time, effort, and energy

process our individual and collective traumas productively, we might open ourselves up to deeper connections and dedication to collective struggle.

While we accept the unsettling prospects of the future and process the disquieting emotions that crisis and uncertainty create, we also rejoice – we love, despite it all. Llama Rod Owens articulates this idea poetically:

> [uncertainty is] a triumphant testament to the glory of love, a way of making room for which we can't yet know and can't wait for any longer. Love is liberation, and liberation is love, especially when you're pretty sure you cannot win. We can still wrap each other in our chanting voices, add our radical love to the feelings of despair.[16]

If the ways we engage in love, in its multifarious expressions, ignores the suffering of the world, we only create another bubble sealed off from reality to reinforce our own personal comfort. A love that turns away from collective suffering, which refuses to engage social conflict and pursues only personal pleasure or private happiness, is no love at all. "That which does not confront the system becomes its instrument."[17] A revolutionary love ethic calls us to open ourselves up to the discomforting realities of our world, and love anyway. Rather than avoiding pain by clinging to pleasure, ruminating in impotent rage, or wallowing in pacifying despair, radical love guides us towards a liberating acceptance of what is – to think critically and find ways to act meaningful from there.

A commitment to a loving social ethic calls us to take action, take risks, and seize any opportunity for solidarity and common ground among disenfranchised, working class people. We all share the same basic needs. We have always relied on

[16] Llama Rod Owens – "Radical Dharma"
[17] Joel Kovel – "The Enemy of Nature"

just to stay alive. It's hard to imagine a bright future or "join the revolution" when the stresses of mere survival are nearly unbearable. It is difficult to take an active role in shaping a better world, in building more loving communities, when facing such unrelenting precarity and uncertainty.

While we cannot generalize about people's experiences or make sweeping assumptions about the future, what we can do – to the best of our ability – is live our lives more compassionately, more lovingly. This comes with no guarantee of political or social revolution. But love, as an ethical concept, reveals possibilities of different ways of living and relating – potentials for alternative forms of social organization. Radical love requires us to remain committed to our principles without knowing outcomes. When we shift from an orientation of individualistic possessiveness to one of communal reciprocity, we create the conditions for large scale social transformation while simultaneously building lives that are fulfilling and meaningful.

Opening ourselves to love means opening ourselves to pain. To fully internalize the fact of interconnection means recognizing that no matter where injustice and oppression occur, we are affected by it. The "comfort zones" built for us by a techno-consumerist society must be abandoned if we are to experience love's transformative potential. To be wrapped up in the well-being of others personally – and in the broad scope of social ethics – can cause great distress, anxiety, and grief. But love and grief are dialectically connected – we must hold them both at once. As Mariame Kaba & Kelly E. Hayes write:

> Grief, after all, is a manifestation of love, and our capacity to grieve is in some ways proportional to our capacity to care. Grief is painful, but when we process our grief in community we are less likely to slip into despair.[13]

[13] Mariame Kaba & Kelly E. Hayes – "Let This Radicalize You"

The communal aspect here is essential. Healthy processing of grief at least partially requires the support of both personal and communal relationships. If we attempt to deal with grief individually or refuse to process it all together, we suppress those emotions, succumb to paralyzing despair, or close ourselves off from connection or emotional vulnerability. Confronting our grief and processing it through communal rituals or artistic expression facilitates the acceptance of what is, allows us to let our guards down and be honest with ourselves and each other about what is happening in the world as well as in our minds and hearts. "When we enact grief with intention and in concert with other people, we can find and create moments of relief, comfort, and even joy, and those moments sustain us."[14] This framing places our grief for the suffering of the world, our justified rage at systematic exploitation, and joyous acts of collective resistance all confidently under the banner of love. Through a social ethic of love, our intense emotions can be expressed authentically, contributing to a structure of collective meaning.

Empowered by an unwavering and unconditional sense of love for ourselves and for others, we are far more durable. If we are loved and loving, in this radical sense, even experiences of personal tragedy or personal crises are charged with meaning which can reinforce resilience and solidarity. Our capacity to fully experience, express, and put into action our righteous indignation and justified rage is dependent on our feeling adequately loved and supported. By communally processing complicated emotions and complex social outrage we are better equipped to co-create a more loving future with other people. Revolutionary love provides us "a politic, a paradigm to organize, navigate, and recreate the world. Love offers … more agency than resistance or trauma ever could."[15] If we learn to

[14] Mariame Kaba & Kelly E. Hayes – "Let This Radicalize You"
[15] Llama Rod Owens – "Radical Dharma"