Finding Joy in Queer Activism

An Autoethnography

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Abstract

This Autoethnography explores the contemporary UK student movement and how the high proportion of queer activists in the movement can change how groups organise. I look at The Group, a student activist group at an unnamed university, and analyse my experiences and observations from organising with them in two chapters focused on cultures of care and practices of hierarchy. I look at this through critiques of neoliberalism and its resulting consciousness deflation and the framework provided by Joyful Militancy (bergman & Montgomery, 2017) which points a route out of neoliberalism, arguing strong relationships and bonds between activists can help create new strategies and methods of organising. By reflecting on The Group's internal culture, I found a culture of care imbedded which allows the fluid forms of organising, attentive to the needs of the group at that present conjuncture, bergman and Montgomery outline.

Introduction

In Ghosts of My Life (2014), Mark Fisher argues that in the UK, the post-war welfare state created conditions for, "most of the experiments in popular culture between the 1960s and the 80s" (p.13). Cheap or squatted property, student maintenance grants and the fruits of a welfare state widely accessible for the first time helped create an "efflorescence of cultural invention" (p.13). The same conditions that nurtured this blossoming of culture also nurtured experiments in politics. Historically, bohemia and revolutionary movements are often drawn from the same demographics and coexisted side by side (Graeber, 2009, p. 253). It should be no surprise then, that this same period saw a spate of decolonial, black power, feminist, queer, New Left and countercultural movements emerge. Since then, however, progress in both revolutionary politics and culture has stagnated. The reformulation of power following the sixties – neoliberalism – is best understood as an "exorcising of 'the spectre of a world which could be free… a project aimed at destroying — to the point of making them unthinkable — the experiments in democratic social-

ism and libertarian communism." (Fisher, 2018a, p. 674). Berardi (2011) argued neoliberalisation in the seventies and eighties created the "slow cancellation of the future" (p. 13), explaining the intensity and precarity of work in late capitalism leaves us in a simultaneously exhausted and overstimulated state that prevents us from creating anything new.

Neoliberalism has since expanded to encompass most of the globe and this neoliberal hegemony works to limit our political imaginations. Hegemonic ideologies create a new "common sense" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 423) in which ideology fades into the background, becoming what Žižek (1989) calls a subconscious fantasy that structures social reality. This hegemonic naturalisation of ideology is part of what Fisher (2009) called capitalist realism, "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it," (p.2). The political status quo appears not as a construction, but instead as an innate reality of modern life. The effect of this is what Milburn (2019) calls consciousness deflation: If consciousness inflation is the process of raising people's consciousness and revealing what is perceived as inevitable as contingent and therefore changeable, then neoliberalism makes the inevitable appear as just that (p.44).

As students were a source of much of the experiments with culture and politics in the sixties, universities in the US and UK were among the first places to be touched by neoliberalism. Two texts produced by student activists in the seventies foreshadow the neoliberal university which transformed universities' function and the relationship with and between students and staff. Warwick University Ltd. (Thompson, 2014), first published by activists at the University of Warwick in 1970 details through the eyes of student activists a prefiguration of the neoliberal university and ways universities today are "subordinated" to the interests of capital (p. iv). The then-new University of Warwick, conceived to serve the people of Warwickshire, was hijacked by business interests and, "student, academic, democratic and community interests [were] relegated to the level of second-class citizenship," (p.28). It was branded the "Business University" (Thompson, 1970); its "managerial style" was modelled on a for-profit business (p.78), with prominent bankers and men of industry at its helm. The administration was characterised by its authoritarian nature, its, "insensitivity to or fear of open democratic decision-making and extreme insensitivity to genuine communication," (p.84) and students who attempted to affect decision making found their attempts were futile (p.69). In their protests the students found themselves confronted with the stymying bureaucracy of neoliberalism Fisher (2009, p.39–53) and Graeber (2015) railed against. The students recognised this could not be changed by new appointments or tinkering but must be overhauled from the bottom up.

Across the Atlantic, activists from Brooklyn College and the University of Massachusetts inspired by the Wages for Housework campaign began Wages for Students, publishing a pamphlet in 1975. At the time, New York City was heavily indebted and undergoing neoliberal restructuring. This included gentrification, defunding public services, crushing unions and forcing America's only free public university, CUNY, to charge tuition fees (Graeber, 2009). Instead of campaigning against fees, the pamphlet went further and argued that like housework, work done by students was also unpaid, reproductive labour and should be remunerated. In an introduction to a republished version the authors reflect that the pamphlet, "satirized and described," the shift to the new neoliberal university beginning to take shape, "where education becomes a commodity a student buys, an investment she makes in her future, and the institution itself is modelled on a corporation" (Caffentzis, Neil, & Willshire-Carrera, 2016, p. 8). The pamphlet introduces the notion that students self-discipline to carry out unpaid labour, training themselves to assume their

role as workers through various mechanisms such as understanding education (and fees) as an 'investment' in ourselves or grading which equates our value as students to performance.

These first manifestations paved the way for a decades long process towards the contemporary, British, neoliberal university. Universities, relying on income from fees and having to compete in a quasi-market, now think and act like businesses. "Blunt quantitative measures take precedence over any qualitative experiences," to create varying degrees of 'quality' for students to assess their value for money (Cole & Maisura, 2017, p. 605). As Fisher (2009) puts it, "all that is solid melts into PR" (p.39). How education appears when measured by these blunt metrics takes precedence over the actual function of education itself. Staff are over worked and underpaid (UCU, 2022). State support for students has been withdrawn, first revoking students' rights to claim benefits, then in 2012 trebling fees and creating inadequate maintenance loans. Rents and living costs have skyrocketed (Unipol, 2021) and as wages and loans have stagnated, students recently faced their largest ever drop in living standards (van der Merwe, 2022). UK graduates have the highest student debt in the OECD on average (OECD, 2023). The relationship between university and student is now a transactional one. Students are passive consumers of their education, weighed down by debt and social pressure to get good grades so those fees aren't wasted. In the job market, students compete by proving their worth with the grades they receive which have a moral value attached to them; the better the grade, the more employable you are and therefore the better a person you are. This underlying discourse of neo-liberalism ties a person's morality and self-worth to their performance. Students who get low grades have the pressure of both being a 'bad' person and wanting to get 'value' for the money they have invested into their education weighing on them, which has contributed to a mental health crisis (Pan, 2020). And if students protest, they are hit with repression which grows bolder each year (Glover, 2022; Larkham, 2023; Joseph-Salisbury, 2023).

Education was one of the places Fisher saw capitalist realism reified most strongly and this has had a depressive effect on student organising. This context is not one which is conducive to new ideas, experimentation and rebellion. Instead of the deep political organising and relationship building that effective political movements necessitate, "desperately short of time, energy and attention, we demand quick fixes" (Fisher, 2014, p. 13) or make ineffective complaints (Ahmed, 2021). Neoliberalism leaves us stuck at the end of history, unable to create or invent anything truly new to break out of capitalist hegemony. Political action now increasingly appears as a pastiche of previous action. In 2022 The National Union of Students (NUS) called a London demo for its 100th anniversary, bussing in students from around the country. It felt like a weak attempt to capture the energy of the 2010 student movement with their tactics, only this time less effectively with an event that, in comparison, some found embarrassing. There were no new modes of politics, no new understandings of how to fight in the current moment, only a poor copy of our last best efforts. Fisher (2009) wonders how long a culture can persist without the new (p.X) and this begs the question, how long can our political movements resist without the new?

Students have sunk into the apathy described in Capitalist Realism, comparable to what Spinoza describes as 'sadness' – a reduction in our ability to affect the world around us (bergman & Montgomery, 2017, pp.40–41). Joyful Militancy (2017) offers a glimpse at a remedy. It explains how the monopolising concept of Empire – a catch-all term to describe the web of complex, interlocking processes that work to create divisions and oppressions (p.48) analogous to Fisher's capitalist realism – "works in part by making us impotent, corroding our abilities to shape worlds together" (p.33), controlling our desires, identities and relationships (p.25). Resistance usually ap-

pears as 'rigid radicalism', a tangled web of beliefs that posits a fixed ideal of so-called-radicalism that limits the possibilities of organising (p.20). The opposite of sadness for Spinoza is 'joy', or the ability to create and affect the world. Crucially, joy is not happiness. Happiness, whilst not bad in itself, is often an aesthetic used to justify oppression to redefine harmful social norms as social goods: the happy housewife, the happy slave, domestic bliss (Ahmed, 2010) and becomes a tool of subjection. Joyful militancy is being militant about joy in the Spinozan sense; an increase in one's power to affect and be affected.

Spinozan Joy is relational and collective, relying on our relationships with others in organising spaces. It's a process and active theory which participates in struggle and affirms what people already intuit instead of directing it and creating new norms and ideals (p. 27). Joyful Militancy argues activists should attune to what is around them and those they work with by strengthening these relationships. Instead of following someone's blueprint for revolution, revolution starts by asking those around us what is really needed? What, right here and now, can make a useful intervention? By building relationships, working from them as a starting point and seeing revolution as a process continually made and remade through these relationships rather than an end point, vibrant movements that sustain struggles, spaces and forms of life where we can live and fight in new ways emerge (p.25). Activating joy, the authors say, is the key to undoing Empire and its hold on our lives. It can be how we find the 'new' Fisher believed was robbed from us and the process that allows these new ways of being, relating and resisting to be born. Fisher wrote, "real wealth is the collective capacity to produce, care and enjoy." (Fisher, 2018b, p. 510) and in his search for a post-capitalist desire, he spoke of the importance of "belonging to a movement: "a movement that abolishes the present state of things, a movement that offers unconditional care without community (it doesn't matter where you come from or who you are, we will care for you anyway)" (p.511). In a blog post for Plan C remembering Fisher, Milburn argues this search opened whole new areas of enquiry and encourages us to ask, "Where can we find post-capitalist desire expressing itself today? How can we help that desire to be realised?" (Milburn, 2017, para.4). Using the framework of joyful militancy, this is what I explore in this research through looking at the intertwining practices of care and hierarchy within The Group.

Methodology

Little has been written about the UK student movement in recent years that wasn't about the 2010 movement. The movement now looks very different to the one over a decade ago; parts of the movement that could be relied on historically like Students' Unions and the NUS are largely dead as organising spaces. Other groups may technically be part of The Movement™ but do little organising and campaigning such as Young Labour or various Marxist sects that usually function as reading groups and newsagents. Instead, what we largely have now are broad left activist groups existing sometimes as societies to get funding from Students' Unions but oftentimes not, without a much of a codified uniting ideology besides a hatred of capitalism, imperialism and university senior leadership. Perhaps the biggest shift is the huge influx of queer activists and their disproportionate presence in these spaces (although the Palestine encampments, which happened just as I finished writing this, bringing an influx of people of colour has been a notable change too). Sometimes a majority in groups are queer (Larkham, 2022, para.9). Many of the current active groups grew out of the School Strikes for Climate and Extinction Rebellion (XR).

Those organisers grew up and many went to university. Many of them came out as queer too, anecdotally at least. During the 2020 student rent strikes, the UK's largest for forty years (Wall, 2020), it became apparent many of the organisers and people who started rent strikes were veteran organisers of the school strikes (Wenham, 2021).

After the rent strikes, students kept organising and energy was directed towards setting up local groups. Many of these groups operate on broadly anarchist terms – even if not explicitly espousing anarchist politics – valuing consensus decision making, coalition and network building, direct action and autonomy over passing motions, winning votes and building a revolutionary party or more Liberal modes of politics. Groups are not necessarily part of broader national campaigns and, whilst linked up behind the scenes nationally through personal relationships, are largely focused on local campaigns ranging from housing and climate struggles to anti-arms trade campaigning and worker solidarity. There is no effective national campaign, union or federation uniting these groups. They operate as affinity groups, uniting students from different political tendencies to work together. It must be said that the majority of these groups are centred around Russell Group universities and other older universities with more prestige more likely to be populated by children of the middle-classes – even in towns and cities with multiple universities. Post-92 universities are still stubbornly difficult to organise and thus very poorly represented in the active student movement.

This study is about how these groups organise and the cultures within, particularly trying to understand the influence queerness has on group culture. I have done this through an autoethnography by reflecting on and observing my experiences with The Group, a student activist group at an unnamed university typical of the ones around the country that make up the most active parts of the student movement. The Group is majority queer, broad left group containing both Anarchists and (a few) Trotskyists but works along anarchist lines as described above: consensus decision making, engaging in direct action as its primary tactic but also working alongside other groups in coalitions and national networks.

When deciding how to conduct this research, an autoethnography presented itself for a variety of reasons. Firstly, my involvement for over three years in the student movement and activist spaces means I do have a bias. Ethnographies have scope for deeper personal reflection on relationships with research subjects other methods do not quite allow for in the same way. Given my proximity to student activism and involvement, it would be difficult to do research with other methods requiring a pretence of objectivity. Secondly, as an 'insider' ultimately my goals here are to further and benefit the movement. Ethnography should not have an exploitative relationship with subjects and instead can give back in meaningful ways other research methods cannot. Holman Jones (2021) calls for a queering of autoethnography that becomes something more than a recording of past events. Outlining the fragments of what he calls an anarchist anthropology – the practice of ethnography and utopianism in constant dialogue (Graeber, 2004, p. 12) – Graeber says, "the practice of ethnography provides at least something of a model, if a very rough, incipient model of how non-vanguardist revolutionary [academic] practice might work" (p. 11). Ethnographies involve observing practices and teasing out underlying logics to make sense of them in ways practitioners may not be aware of themselves. Graeber argues this is a role of radical intellectuals: "to look at those who are creating viable alternatives, try to figure out what might be the larger implications of what they are (already) doing, and then offer those ideas back, not as prescriptions, but as contributions, possibilities—as gifts" (p. 12). Graeber would go on to say that this vision should work as some form of autoethnography – examining the movements

which one has made some sort of commitment to and feels a part of (Graeber, 2005). Finally, ethnographies are particularly well suited to studying activism and social movements, particularly if research is on the culture of movements and how they organise internally. O'Reilly (2005) notes that, "topics which involve examining processes of change, examining negotiated lived experiences, topics which see culture as constructed and reconstructed through actors' participation' are especially suited to participant observation and ethnography" (p.29). Other methods can also overlook the nuance and complexity of social movements but as someone involved, I am acutely aware of these nuances and in an excellent position to conduct an autoethnography of the student movement.

The research contains two chapters exploring the following questions:

1. How does care function and what practices of care are implemented in these groups?

2. How does hierarchy operate in the student movement?

It has been necessary to situate contemporary activism, and ideas around care and hierarchy, within the current context. This meant tracing ideas around care and hierarchy in activist spaces over the last sixty years back to debates and ideas they are rooted in. This autoethnography explores my experiences and observations of organising but cannot explore that in a vacuum. Activist spaces are a product of lessons learnt from those that have gone before so it was necessary to look at how those ideas evolved over time. Besides this, my research employed a mix of observations of meetings and other events collected in a journal and observations from casual conversations. The line between activist and social lives are often blurred when fellow activists are also your friends and discussions with these friends are often on the topic of activism. I also draw on experiences from my last few years of organising in the student movement and a small number of interviews. Interviews were conducted when necessary to explore topics in more depth or get thoughts from key people in The Group. This will also draw on some experiences and conversations with those in the wider student movement – defined narrowly as activist groups that primarily draw their membership from students or campaign at/against universities. It is worth remembering all struggles are linked and the student movement is intertwined with animal liberation, anti-war, climate change, internationalist and many other movements. I do not mean to present The Group as a perfect example of the themes explored in this study, neither am I suggesting these students hold the key to revolution. Students I spoke to would be the first to list the many, many problems we are yet to solve and often practicing what is discussed later has been far from perfect. My hope is that this presents analyses and practices of care and hierarchy that can be replicated elsewhere and be built on by others.

The research has not been without its ethical complexities and dilemmas, largely about protecting identities and obtaining consent. In the last three and a half years of organising at universities I have been fined, assaulted and spied on by my university for activism (Joseph-Salisbury, 2023, p. 4&33). At SOAS, students experienced a violent, illegal eviction from an occupation (Larkham, 2023). Students at the University of Manchester reported similar experiences to me, as have students at the University of Sheffield. At the University of Sheffield students have had possessions stolen by security on several occasions (Larkham, 2023, para.6) and I have worked on an investigation with openDemocracy (forthcoming) into the university hiring private investigators to spy on activists. Repression of student activism at universities has gotten notably bolder since the pandemic and the examples listed above only scratch the surface. A key concern for

this research therefore was on keeping activists safe. Not doing this would be a betrayal of trust. Care is one of the key focuses of this research so it was important that was also embodied in producing this study. This was done through practicing active consent. Consent is important and frequently spoken about in activist spaces, partly because of the many polycules, relationship anarchy and sexual/romantic relationships between activists but also because consent extends far beyond sexual (or research) relationships. Youth liberationists assert that consent is often violated throughout childhood and this continues in our daily lives as adults under capitalism and patriarchy (Stinney Distro, 2017). The XR Consent Advocacy Circle argue, "Consent opens pathways to intimacy and pleasure. It also supports a healthy and connected life, and allows us to practice living in a way that brings joy and authenticity" (Extinction Rebellion, 2024). Well planned actions make all the information available to activists so they can enthusiastically consent to taking part, free of coercion and able to withdraw at any time. Consent as an active tool is empowering and should not be approached as a static obligation.

Consent became an embodiment of the findings of this study, requiring me to pay attention to people's needs and engage in an active dialogue around them. Students were not interested in filling out consent forms, and if they did would have used fake names, rendering the forms redundant. I was advised by university staff verbal consent would be enough. So, after presenting the participant information sheet to The Group explain the focus and intention of this research, the parameters of what I could/could not write about, how to obtain consent and how to protect activists were drawn up collaboratively with The Group. We decided on three conditions:

1. I must make people aware I'm taking notes and obtain consent every time. This was done verbally and by using a pink notebook participants could recognise as my ethnography journal.

2. The Group are allowed to proofread a draft to ensure everyone was anonymised properly. This meant leaving enough time between finishing writing and the due date for it to be read.

3. My supervisor's email is made available to The Group.

Additionally, being part of The Group and student movement outside of this research means there are alternative procedures for accountability should the situation arise.

A note on 'queer'

Here, it is worth defining what I mean by 'queer'. In common usage, queer often refers to people under the LGBT+ umbrella (Whittington, 2012). Whilst this is not inaccurate, for those under that umbrella (particularly activists), queer implies a more consciously political meaning. Queer theory has introduced the concept of 'queering', where queer becomes a verb rather than an identity. Wilkinson (2009) writes that, "to 'queer' something is to attempt to destabilize dominant understandings, seeing nothing is innate or unchangeable… Queer is not just a term for those who stand against normative sexuality, but questions all norms, positioning itself in opposition to all power hierarchies and oppressions" (p.37). Similarly, activists from Reclaim Brighton Pride write that queer, "is that of an oppositional force, forged in the fire of a war being waged on anything

that challenges normalcy. Normalcy is white supremacist, is capitalist, is allocisheteronormative, is patriarchal, is monogamous, is able-bodied. Queer, is everything else." (Reclaim Pride Brighton, 2021, p. 3). The 'everything else' is never clearly defined, leaving queerness an ambiguous, fluid concept, or as Sedgewick (1993) puts it: "a continuing moment, movement, motive-recurrent, eddying, troublant" (p.xii). A queer politics then, invites us to question every area of our lives, constantly challenging dominant modes and imagining alternatives (Wilkinson, 2009, p.42). It must 'queery' everything (Homocult, 1992), including our own intimate lives and relationships (p. 41). Positioning itself in opposition to hierarchies, challenging everyday norms, interactions and relationships, advocating direct action and DIY culture gives queerness a certain affinity with anarchism (Shepard, 2010).

Literature Review

Previously, university student movements have been identified as a vanguard of social, economic, and political change (Altbach, 1975; Levine, 1980). Students merit political analysis once we drop the image of students frequently playing decisive roles in determining national policies and instead focus more on matters such as strong influence over higher education policy itself, political recruitment, the generation of ideas, and legitimacy and disorder. (Levy, 1981). Activism in these past movements was not the volunteerism or what Alvarez et al. (1998) consider the co-option and 'NGOisation' of social movements. Instead, it was directed at "the established power structures in an effort to bring into existence a more democratic, more egalitarian historical system than the existing one" (Wallerstein, 2014, p. 160), a tradition that has been held by the student movement to the present day.

There is a wide depth and breadth of research on the UK student movement in the 21st century but it is nearly all on the tuition fee protests which Myers (2017) says lasted from 2010 to 2012 in his oral history of the movement, although organising for what became the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts started as early as 2009. The literature on the 2010 movement ranges from wide ranging commentary and analysis of the movement. Kumar (2011) produced commentary on the achievements and limitations of the movement finding there is a divide between the National Union of Students and the student movement, lack of vision and alternative solutions students have presented. Ibrahim (2011) drew on a two-and-a-half-year ethnographic study of the student movement to argue that the protests were a mobilisation in defence of an embedded tradition — affordable Higher Education — and that they were politically motivated by what they consider to be a violation of this entitlement. Although 2011 may have been too soon for this research.

Studies discuss student resistance but they do so usually through macro theoretical perspectives and look at the student movement's relation to wider society and social change. They rarely explore the movement itself and the ways students organise, who is organising and how they engage in research, produce knowledge, and enact social practices of resistance. Despite this, Hensby (2016) has looked at how students were united by a common grievance of rising tuition fees, responding quickly with a multi-repertoire mass campaign, which quickly fell away when the fees were finally introduced. Hensby has written extensively on the protests and has also explored the barriers to participation in social movement and the importance of networks in making protest a viable option (Hensby, 2014). He has also written on their use of the media as a

tool in student activism and discussed the strengths and limitations of mediated protest 'events' (Hensby, 2019).

The students of 2010 did not win and tuition fees were trebled, opening up the UK Higher Education sector to marketisation and financialisation. As a result, the context in which students are now organising is completely different and universities are very different institutions compared to a decade ago. This has very real implications for how students are organising, the tactics they are using and the nature of the movement. Anyone wanting to understand the student movement today would have to rely on literature written about events that are over a decade old.

Much like how the spectre of the 2010 movement haunts the current student movement, its significance has meant researchers have neglected current events and phenomena in favour of understanding a movement that ended a decade ago. Researchers seem unable to get past their fascination of the 2010 movement and begin trying to understand their current students and shifts in the movement. As such research on the UK student movement post 2010–2012 has been very limited. One paper reported on one of the first rent strikes at UCL at Campbell House in 2015, compiling a history and noting the importance of social media and in particular, the Facebook page, in organising activists (Hedges, 2017). Apart from that, researchers from two British universities interviewed rent strike organisers form the 2020/21 UK university rent strikes and noted how students' comments reflect Freire's (1972) praxis and made interesting links between their learning from the rent strikes and their formal learning (Wenham, 2021). Whilst it is not on the UK student movement, there is also research on rent strikes in 2020 during the pandemic in the USA and how students organised online when they could not meet each other in real life (Massarenti, 2020).

There are several books theorising how social movements (should) organise including Nunes (2021) who tried to look past the vertical/horizontal dichotomy of left organising in the 20th Century, Sophie K. Rosa (2023) who argues for a revaluing of intimacy as a political project to accompany traditional political organising and Emergent Strategy (brown, 2017) which encourages activists to start at smaller scale, doing deep slow movement building work necessary for creating big change. Graeber (2009) wrote an in-depth ethnography of the alter-globalisation movement provided detailed insights into the cultures and inner workings of activist groups.

With LGBT+ and Queer activists, research often focuses on their campaigning around LBGT and Queer issues. Mobley et al. (2021) have explored the presence of Queer and Trans students at historically black universities in the USA and how 'queer student labour' (p.28) done in organising and protesting around Queer and Trans issues is emotionally and physically draining for those students which affects them academically. The research done on queer students in the UK student movement outside of the queer liberation struggle is very limited, perhaps non-existent because I could not find anything.

The only writing on gender queer people in the contemporary British student movement has been by me. Interviews for a non-academic article I wrote (Larkham, Queer-led movements are driving change at university, 2022) revealed students have been trying to employ what they call radical care to support each other because they are marginalised. This supports what Longhurst & Johnston (2014) noted, that many forms of gender politics have a strong prefigurative element via the 'embodiment' of their demands, and vision of a better future within their organisations and groups. This goes some way to illustrate one of the practices students have been employing in the current student movement. My article also supported my assertion that queer students are over-represented in the movement and are often the ones getting involved in activism.

Finally, the literature demonstrates that ethnographies of higher education are scarce while secondary school ethnographic research is extensive (Jones et al., 2014; Pabian, 2013; Wisniewski, 2000). The use of ethnographies in higher education, despite earlier appeals for its use (Masemann, 1982), is uncommon. Apart from scholarship that falls under science and technology studies, few ethnographies have been written on the university and the everyday practices of its actors. That said, there is an autoethnographic account of the 1991 City University of New York (CUNY) strike movement written by some of the key organisers of the strike (McCaffery, Kovic, & Menzies, 2020). There is also an ethnography of the Honduran student movement (Funez, 2020) but not any of the UK student movement in recent years.

Care

"People who talk about revolution and class struggle without referring explicitly to everyday life, without understanding what is subversive about love and what is positive about the refusal of constraints, such people have a corpse in their mouth." – (Vaneigem, 2012, p. 11)

"I think care has got to be the thing which all other things stem from within movements." This was the first thing Bucket, a trans woman and comrade I've organised with for the last three years, said when I asked her about care within social movements. It makes sense then, for this to be the first topic explored. During the pandemic it became excruciatingly clear that, "our world is one in which carelessness reigns" (The Care Collective, 2020, p. 1), yet in student organising, care – finding ways to meet mental, physical and emotional needs so we can be present in our work – is prioritised. As explained in the introduction, students are now more alienated than ever before. Thatcher stated that 'economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul'. In universities, the heart and soul of has certainly been changed. Graduating with the highest levels of student debt in the OECD, most students have had no option but to internalise the logics of marketisation; increasing their 'employability' and gaming the system to get the highest grade with the least work instead of engaging with the course as designed to maximise learning. We have been alienated in our housing and now our university work and to afford all this, take on a part-time job or sometimes several. The neoliberal student is a sick student, overworked and stressed out with little agency over their work, housing and learning with this stress privatised, reduced to individual failings. As such, a survey by the mental health charity Student Minds (Lewis & Bolton, 2023) found 57% of respondents reporting a mental health issue. Sophie K. Rosa (2023) notes that, "since human 'hearts and souls' cannot be subsumed into the logic of capital without alienation and varying types of immiseration, the changes Thatcher refers to could in part be understood as mental illness" (p.17). 1970's revolutionary therapy collective Red Therapy described mental illness as "our bodies' rebellion against capitalism" (p.17).

At the same time as this mental health crisis, activist burnout is endemic in our movements, particularly in environmental groups. The climate crisis is no longer a distant future, we are living through it and there is a sense that we need to do everything now – critically referred to as an 'urgency culture'. This is present in the student movement too, where constant turnover of undergraduates makes long-term organising hard. In an urgency culture, typical macho demonstrations of power – big, loud, shouty, flashy actions – that groups like Just Stop Oil and Palestine Action lean towards are prioritised because, as the saying goes, 'direct action gets the goods.' Climate anxiety leads people to look for quick solutions that soothe those worries, often embodied

in direct action or civil disobedience that grants immediate relief because you feel like you've done something. In this paradigm, care is devalued and pushed aside because The Action is more important – 'We don't have time to create networks that can care and support one another, the world is on fire! Now do something useful and lock yourself to that gate.' Patriarchy therefore massively informs perceptions of what is considered 'good' or 'effective' activism, placing less importance on feminised reproductive labour and care work. Men, Levine (1984) suggests, "tend to organise the way they fuck — one big rush and then that "wham, slam, thank you ma'am"" (p.18). This way of working without care has burned through scores of enthusiastic activists and friends of mine, including many now in the student movement. Not to say direct action doesn't have its place, but it should not be the only expression of our politics. The importance of prefiguration here shines through in student movement groups' emphasis on care, insisting that our organising should embody our politics, not contradict it. "Care is really important and that without it we risk becoming really alienated from each other and ultimately alienated from the kind of politics we're trying to make." Trout, another transwoman in The Group, told me. "If we're trying to push towards a radical new kind of politics then we need to embody that in every part of the practice before because otherwise we're just perpetuating the same problems," she added.

Most activists in the student movement recognise this so 'care' is something often spoken about but frequently lacks a deep understanding, leaving it littered with contradictions and lacking a clear definition or set of practices. Despite this, care is also everywhere we look. Graeber (2014) argues most working-class labour (including students' hospitality and retail employment) is care work: "What we think of as archetypally women's work – looking after people, seeing to their wants and needs, explaining, reassuring, anticipating what the boss wants or is thinking, not to mention caring for, monitoring, and maintaining plants, animals, machines, and other objects – accounts for a far greater proportion of what working-class people do when they're working than hammering, carving, hoisting, or harvesting things" (para.7). Being powerful is not having to worry what others are thinking and feeling – "The powerful employ others to do that for them" (para.5). If not caring is the privilege of the powerful, for marginalised activists care is something difficult to avoid. Against a backdrop of dominant machismo in activism, care is also a queering of praxis – disrupting prevailing patriarchal modes of organising.

Care in activist spaces usually manifests in collective and self-care. Self-care has its roots in the intersection of feminism and black liberation. The Black Panther Party established survival programs – programs set up to care for black communities – in the sixties and seventies. They provided over sixty programs covering everything from healthcare, free breakfasts and martial arts training to pest control (Nelson, 2011). These programs were survival through self-care. By providing the basic needs of individuals they also met the community's needs. Collective and self-care were intrinsically linked and difficult to separate, in this framework self-care was care of a collective self. The Combahee River Collective (1977), a Black, feminist, lesbian, socialist organization in 1970s Boston wrote, "the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation are us. Our politics emerge from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work" (p.4). This self-love was a political self-love, and care was an expression of that. Whilst battling with cancer, Audre Lorde (1988) wrote that, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (p.130). Self-care here meant recognising the important work we need to do of looking after ourselves to sustain struggles or simply stay alive. It was a call for women who spend all their lives looking after others, to look after themselves too. Importantly, focus on the

individual here is still not separated from collective care. Feminist scholar Sara Ahmed describes it this way: "In directing our care towards ourselves we are redirecting care away from its proper objects, we are not caring for those we are supposed to care for; we are not caring for the bodies deemed worth caring about. And that is why in queer, feminist and anti-racist work self-care is about the creation of community, fragile communities, assembled out of the experiences of being shattered. We reassemble ourselves through the ordinary, everyday and often painstaking work of looking after ourselves; looking after each other" (Ahmed, 2014, para.39).

In recent years as self-care has entered mainstream discourse it became unmoored from these radical roots, disentangled from the collective, depoliticised and co-opted. A 2016 article in Glamour suggested yoga, baths, puppy pictures or a stroll could help Americans get through the Presidential election (Wakeman, 2016). The week after Donald Trump won, Google searches in the US for "self-care" peaked as despondent Liberals turned to self-care to soothe themselves (Meltzer, 2016). Self-care now refers to acts individuals do for themselves, often by themselves. A withdrawal from the world to protect yourself. Companies have been all too eager to capitalise on this, offering products to help you #SelfCare and be a more productive worker (Davies, 2015). Self-care becomes a way to perform health and wellness, instead of uncomfortable honesty (Crimethinc, 2013). Often products from wellness shops like Goop are bought because we are unhappy with ourselves – thinking we're too fat, too ugly – instead of because we love ourselves. This is neoliberal self-care: a privatisation of responsibility and an obfuscation and depoliticization of the roots of these problems (Michaeli, 2017). "Self-care cannot be an "act of political warfare" if the only battle you're waging is against your frown lines with $110 moisturizer" (Newman-Bremang, 2021, para. 6).

One activist I spoke to from Cambridge pointed out how in activist spaces neoliberal self-care can often be used as an excuse to avoid the "yucky bits" of organising – the difficult, complicated, sometimes painful or just less exciting parts of organising: doing the washing up after a communal meal, providing emotional support, harm reduction, filling out Excel spreadsheets. Here, self-care becomes a replacement and alternative to political action, prioritising comfort over the meaningful organising that must compliment care. When self-care is ripped from its original meaning it can have a tendency towards comfort and indulgence masked in the language of radicalism. An away day for this dissertation included a talk with tips and tricks to look after ourselves like breathing techniques, exercise and a maintaining good diet. The first thought for many of us was, 'what about lessening our workload, longer extensions, financial support?' Depoliticised self-care encourages individualistic (sometimes expensive) responses to structural problems and is often the privilege of the wealthy who have time, space and resources for it.

Activists meanwhile have been trying to reconnect self-care back to the collective. Without collective care, the political potential of self-care is rendered useless, encouraging us to turn from uncomfortable realities and sink into the comfort of a warm, overpriced bubble bath. Rose (2020) argues self-care must be a collective struggle to fight burnout. Meanwhile, Dutton (2014) has called for a queering of self-care that acknowledges the fluidity of self-care, resisting hierarchies of correct and incorrect forms of self-care: "Self-care might look calm, relaxed, and happy; or it might look like deep depression, sadness, or failing to function at all." (p.7). Coeden, a member of The Group, argues XR changed the culture of how UK activists organise after looking at the lack of care and burnout in environmental groups in the UK. A core part of their culture, particularly XR Youth's culture, was regenerative organising. Coeden describes this as the idea that, "we need to act in ways which don't burn people out, in which people are able to sustain the movement…

generally it was about having a conscious attitude towards meetings and towards group culture and towards making that group culture about supporting the people in it and not just about the actions."

Like the youth strikes, many of the current crop of university activists also learned how to organise in XR Youth and this emphasis on regenerative organising has followed them into other spaces, including The Group, as activists have shared experiences. The Group have tried to create what they call a "culture of care" where caring practices are imbedded in the way they organise. Trout describes this as "not specific acts or individual things. It's a way of being and conducting yourself… care being a consistent practice throughout everything. That it becomes culturally embodied where you don't need to have specific welfare people but welfare is ingrained within that space."

This requires a level of intimacy with each other. Sophie K. Rosa (2023) has written on the need to revalue intimacy – "a way of being together that might include fleeting or enduring experiences of affinity, vulnerability, nearness and love" (p. 2). She insists the personal is still political and that to, "remake the world we must pay attention to connection, care and community as sites of struggle" (p.4). Revaluing intimacy becomes a strategy to resist capitalism by strengthening revolutionary movements building "the kinds of relationships that could support our struggles for a future of abundance" (p.7). Additionally, care becomes a feedback loop for group culture. Caring for others means listening to them and their needs. Doing that strengthens bonds, trust and relationships allowing caring to become easier but also responsive and adaptable when needs change. Cultures are constantly made and remade by those that engage with them and if done correctly, a culture of care will be responsive to changing needs.

The culture of care has manifested itself in a variety of ways. The Group have prioritised joy in its traditional sense by committing to organising social events which Trout sees as having a regenerative function. By ingraining care into everything, "any mundane space or conversation to be one that could be a space of care" says Trout. In meetings, accessibility has been a big focus to make them caring spaces. Queerness often overlaps with neurodivergence (Warrier, 2020) so a meeting your average businessman attends will likely be extremely boring for a group of queers. Speaking from experience as a neurodivergent activist, this boredom quickly devolves in chaos if needs are ignored and shoehorned into meeting formats not designed for us. Facilitating a group of under/overstimulated neurodivergent activists can be akin to chasing headless chickens. To get around that, a facilitator chairs each meeting for The Group. A facilitator, says Coeden who claims (believably, as one of those people with seemingly limitless energy) to have gone to thousands of meetings, "is basically responsible for making sure that the meeting runs smoothly". 'Running smoothly' means reaching decisions accessibly and democratically. It means reading the room, having control of it so it can't be dominated and everyone can engage fully with it and helping resolve conflicts. In other words, it means caring for the meeting, being attuned and sensitive to the conversation, dynamics and individuals in the room. At the start of every meeting The Group holds there is a check-in where names and pronouns are shared in turn and space created to share how everyone is doing in their wider life and at that moment – in one meeting someone was in a particularly hyperactive mood that day with frequent stimming and wanted to communicate they weren't trying to be disruptive. Regular breaks happen during a meeting (usually every hour). A communal meal and snacks are at each meeting so everyone is fed, and at the end a check-out repeats the format of the check-in, providing space to say how people feel that meeting went.

When taken together, this builds a picture of meetings where care runs through from start to finish and helps build cultures where care is prioritised.

Much like the catharsis of collective action as self-care described by Ortega-Williams (2021), actions such as occupations can be seen in this light too. Occupations have been detrimental to the group and helped burn people out or push others away from direct action but there have been positive uses too. Bucket and I both agree that occupations can be a useful tool for internal organising and bringing people closer together through creating shared experiences and being held and supported by the collective through those experiences. For queer people who experience repression so often, occupations create temporary autonomous zones – temporary enclaves where alternatives to power can be realised (Bey, 2003). Normality and rules are suspended in a carnivalesque space where hierarchy can be inverted (Graeber, 2007). In 2022 I visited an occupation at the University of Nottingham. Here they created space for queer students to live with and care for each other side by side. They appointed welfare officers and held regular group check-ins to talk about how each of them was doing. Each night had socials ranging from poetry readings and dancing on tables to using management's top-of-the-range projector to screen Brokeback Mountain. One occupier told me, "I've never had such a safe space… It became a community because we all really looked after each other." (Larkham, 2022, para.18).

In line with Dutton's queering of self-care, there is often space for a whole range of emotions in this culture of care – although it is worth noting meetings often tend towards 'acceptable' emotions as outlined by (Wilkinson, 2009, pp. 39–40). Being a group that often engages in direct action, confrontation with security guards and repression by the university have plagued our organising and here care has played an essential role. In a zine The Group wrote, they noted building a culture of community and care has been essential to fighting against repression. Trout describes her experience of a university investigation as, "fundamentally uncaring… they wanted me to feel fragile and depressed, they wanted me to feel pushed to my limits." The idea, Coeden says, of having care imbedded in organising means "when people go through investigations there's people around that person. They're not isolated."

Care can be a powerful tool to keep a group together and continue campaigns in the face of something designed to tear them apart. In one sense Trout argues, it is necessary because to not care here "is not conducive to trust, its not conducive to strengthening friendships." Ultimately, Trout argues where care really becomes embodied is in criticisms, as the next chapter will show.

Anti-Hierarchy

"To be radical is to be radical in relation to a concrete situation, by identifying the most transformative action compatible with it… Outside of that, "radicality" is a purely aesthetic gesture… devoid of commitment to actually producing effects in the world" (Nunes, 2021, p. 271)

As mentioned previously, current active groups in the student movement function on broadly anarchist, or horizontalist, lines. Bucket sees the current tendency in one section of the left towards flattening hierarchies and consensus decision making (horizontalism) a continuation of a tradition that can be traced back through XR, Occupy (Leach, 2013), and alter-globalisation (Graeber, 2002) movements to even earlier iterations. But this way of organising has not been without its limitations. Milburn (2019) notes that when old organisational, action and interpretative models are artificially placed on a new situation and movement, it collapses and fails to

address the present conjuncture (p.68). If traditions are to be repeated, they must not be done uncritically and be rooted in present circumstances. This authentic creation requires new forms that, "criticise themselves constantly, constantly interrupt themselves in their own course, come back to what seems to have been accomplished, in order to start over anew" (Marx, 2005, p. 5). The other organising model, often associated with Marxists, is a strictly hierarchical (vertical) revolutionary party, of which anarchists have many critiques and is often viewed as a relic from 20th Century revolutions. Attempting to reconcile the two dominant approaches to political organisation, Nunes (2021) argues for an ecological approach to movement building that is "neither vertical, nor horizontal". Instead of aiming for a fixed approach, predetermined as the 'most radical', this approach calls for sensitivity to context and flexible power relations according to a situation's specific needs.

In this spirit, I will focus on how hierarchy operates within The Group through 'anti-hierarchy'. The concept of anti-hierarchy is, as far as I can make out, an original one. Drawing on her own and comrade's experiences of organising over the last 6 years, Bucket developed a critique of hierarchy, how it operates in groups and how we often fail to deal with the problems it throws up. She argues anti-hierarchy is part of a culture of care and difficult to separate from that, but nevertheless it's a concept worth analysing in isolation. It is a response to so-called 'non-hierarchical' groups that reject formalised hierarchies, but often end up obscuring hidden hierarchies such as cliques that can have oversized influence over a group because, as Bucket puts it sarcastically, "we're all equal here, comrade!" An influence on Bucket in this regard is 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness' (Freeman, 1984). Freeman argues cogently against "leaderless, structureless groups" (p.5) that made up the 1970s feminist movement. "There is no such thing as structurelessness" she says (p.6), wherever groups of people meet there is structure of some sort, formal or informal, to strive for structurelessness is to mask where power really lies and as achievable as an "'objective' news story" (p.6). It creates cliques that can come to informally dominate groups and lacking an explicit structure to name and criticise, the power of these cliques is hard to dismantle. Lacking formal spokespeople or a decision process on how to engage with the press, individuals were allowed to rise to the top and become "stars" (p.10). A movement that doesn't choose who exercises power and how, "does not thereby abolish power" (p.13). Freeman concludes with proposing "democratic structuring", a system that attempts to maintain the egality feminists were aiming for whilst specifying the location of power based on seven principles: delegation and distribution of authority, rotation and rational allocation of tasks, responsibility, diffusion of information and equal access to resources (pp.14–15). The second influence is a rebuttal, The Tyranny of Tyranny (Levine, 1984). Levine argues there is value in women's attempts to reject the patriarchal modes of organising. The alternatives women developed are a solution to the "over-structured, hierarchical organisation of society" (p.21) and do not need, "more structures and rules, providing us with easy answers, pre-fab alternatives and no room in which to create our own way of life." (p.19). Instead, Levine argues for a revolution based on friendship and anarchist-like principles the feminist movement had already developed.

Anti-hierarchy is a pragmatic synthesis of the two critiques, recognising hierarchies are often undesirable but not wanting to compromise organising principles that work. Bucket adds, some hierarchies can't be dismantled: "they're just facts of life because we live in an imperfect capitalist society. Even in some utopian society I don't think we can ever truly claim to abolish hierarchies because the act of saying you have removed hierarchies is how they begin to seep in."

Some hierarchies like skills and knowledge, where some know more than others or have a specific skill set, are not easily dismantled. Dismantling them may not necessarily be desirable. For similar reasons why activists describe themselves as anti-racist, rather than simply non-racist, the solution anti-hierarchy offers is thinking critically about hierarchies in spaces and being constantly vigilant for their emergence, rather than pretending they aren't there, or instituting strict hierarchies that are difficult to criticise and break down.

Anti-clout is a closely related aspect of Anti-hierarchy and it's a testament to Bucket's thinking on these concepts that she struggled to accept the concept could be seen as 'her' idea, "the more clout you have, the more anti-clout you should be," she told me. On an individual level, personal attributes like class, age, gender, ethnicity and disability (CAGED) or experience can intersect to determine the amount of power someone has in a room, or how likely it is they are listened to – in other words, how much clout they have. Bucket defines clout as, "when you get credit disproportionately large to your actual actions." Clout in this sense differs from Bourdieu's (1986) conception of social capital in that this is an analysis more specific to activist groups and political movements. Bucket suggested a few ways people can get clout within movements: getting (or claiming) credit for work that behind the scenes was a collective effort, but because often the work of women and queer people is invisibilised they won't get credit; being well networked and holding relationships with lots of other groups or doing lots of public facing or media work so your name and face become associated with a group or campaign in way that creates a micro-celebrity or poster child for a cause.

Anti-clout was largely formed from observing experiences of student activists who were involved in the University of Manchester 2020/21 rent strike. At the time, the rent strike drew huge national media attention. One person, Ben McGowan, was the group's go-to figure for many of these interviews. Despite being an organisation without any formal hierarchy, he effectively became the figurehead of the campaign because of these media appearances, despite, some organisers say, not even being on rent strike himself. Using this clout, he revealed his true colours as being far less radical than he appeared and wormed his way into the Labour Party establishment. McGowan's journey from 'radical' rent strike leader to Liberal stooge took only a few years – could that have been possible if he was not given the platform to build his public image?

In practical terms, the first step in anti-hierarchy is recognising hierarchies exist, and often are impossible to erase entirely. Hierarchies must then be named, brought out into the open to be critiqued. At the start of 2024 it was decided in a termly review The Group had much more work to do on developing group culture. We held a 'group culture day', which I helped plan, involving discussions and workshops about our group's culture. The first workshop was designed to visualise power in The Group. A short exercise involved asking a series of questions including:

- How much of your time do you currently spend doing activism?
- How long have you been organising?
- how many actions have you done?
- How many activist groups are you a part of?
- How many material items do you have for activism (clothes, burner phone etc.)?

- How many talks, workshops, meetings and sessions have you led or facilitated?
- How much public facing work have you done?

For each question people were asked to physically arrange themselves in the room on a spectrum from most to least. It is worth noting this day was not attended by as many as we would have liked which did not give an ideally diverse set of experiences. Predictably, a few individuals who have been organising for longer and been more deeply involved spent a lot of time at the 'most' end (Bucket, Coeden and I). It threw up some interesting results too. The starkest divide came when the room was asked if they needed to work to get through university, at which point the room was almost completely split, with the only black woman in the group being the only one of us who needed to work regularly whilst at university. Two of us were in the middle – Coeden who worked full time before coming to university but hasn't worked during and me, a part-time freelance journalist (not regular work, but still a job). Most people did not need to work whilst at university which really brought intersectional class divides in the space to the fore. The final question was 'how much clout do you have in this space?' which people were given the opportunity to suggest others move if they feel they over/underestimated their status.

After acknowledging the hierarchies and disparities, the next step is to think critically about those hierarchies: are they good? Do we want to or can we mitigate them? If not, what are we going to do to acknowledge them? Following the exercise Bucket, Coeden, a transmasc called Marvin and I went off into a group as those with more clout to discuss what we had seen and the others had their own chat. What followed was honest and frank discussions about discrepancies and inequalities in the room and why we think they exist – a critique and analysis of the hierarchies presented to us. Marvin, who some expected not to be in our group, pointed out that whilst on paper he has just as much experience as me Bucket and Coeden, the work he does is more behind the scenes such as dealing with finances and social media, whereas us other three do a lot of work networking or outward facing work that is more visible. Moreover, because this work is more visible, people in other groups reinforce this perception of who the 'big names' are. They will likely only know a few individuals and will perceive those people as more important, despite the fact we are all supposed to be equal. In the case of networking, it can be very difficult to have relationship with other organisations not held by a small number of people. Everyone in The Group cannot know everyone in XR, but a few of us can know a few key people in XR. This is a case of one hierarchy that cannot be entirely broken down but in naming it we were able to see aspects that can be mitigated by bringing newer people along to opportunities to network and raising up the hidden labour that goes on.

The final step, according to Bucket, is then working out how to structure your group in a way which deals with the fact hierarchies always exist and can nonetheless still be democratic and accessible for people to see where power lies and how to challenge it. Throughout the day we also had discussions on CAGED and how they can impact ability to get involved in activism. We had a discussion where each person took it in turns to describe their class background and experiences of that, how much money they and their family have, with the room being skewed towards a more middle-class demographic with a couple outliers below and two individuals who are far wealthier than any of us knew. Following this we committed to doing more work on CAGED to develop a deeper understanding of it and drew up early plans for a system to share money more equitably. After other conversations we have previously incorporated 'skill shares',

opportunities like workshops or trainings to share skills or knowledge between group members. Often, they are done in collaboration with other groups or run internally and I have run several. Skill shares mean skills and knowledge (like writing a press release) are more evenly distributed and aren't concentrated among an individual which can lead to them burning out, but it also creates a culture of educational praxis (see: Freire, 1972). The Group have also tried a 'buddy system' for tasks where those with less experience are paired with those who know what they're doing to create opporunities for learning and build confidence.

Anti-hierarchy has to be an active persistent process of critique that needs to be nurtured, requiring honest self-reflection to accurately assess and critique interpersonal dynamics. This level of critique and self-reflection can only be made possible by having a culture of care and intimacy described in the previous chapter. Trout told me, "ultimately, where care becomes embodied is in criticisms about hierarchy or clout. It's still coming from a position of care for that individual but also a position of care for the entire group and what the group's trying to achieve." It necessitates a high level of trust that allows activists to speak openly and honestly and make critiques that may sting but are given in good faith. Without care, criticism "could otherwise be seen as maliciousness, or just trying to sabotage another person of sabotage the group." The trust and care for constant critique allows for fluid forms of organising. The Group are not structuring themselves on the 'best' way, they are trusting themselves to work that out and adapt as they go along, creating new ideas and forms of organising as they go.

Discussion and Conclusion

What I have presented here is not particularly groundbreaking, paradigm shifting research. It will likely not reshape political organising but what it does show is there is a world outside rigid radicalism. I have also deconstructed joyful militancy, showing that by attuning to the needs of those around us we create healthy, vibrant, sustainable resistance. Prioritising care creates intimacy and trust between activists, building strong relationships which call us to listen closely to each other. This level of trust and intimacy creates space for comradely critique and self-reflection that is crucial for fluid modes of organising that don't work from a fixed ideal. Fluidity and strong relationships allow for the active theory of joyful militancy to take hold, allowing new ideas like anti-hierarchy to develop. In the methodology section I noted Graeber's (2004) vision for anarchist academia that can "look at those who are creating viable alternatives, try to figure out what might be the larger implications of what they are (already) doing, and then offer those ideas back, not as prescriptions, but as contributions, possibilities—as gifts" (p.11) I feel this research succeeds in that and will give them useful insights. I have also provided an account of the present student movement, what it is doing, its character, the queerness of its current form and how activists are queering organising, something missing from the literature.

There are limitations to this research, largely arising from time and word count constraints. In painting a picture of how care and anti-hierarchy should (and do) work, I feel I have not quite been able to capture the complexity of how they often do not work, or how they can fail to be implemented and had I more time and words I would have liked to explore that in more depth. Neurodiversity, as many of The Group are both queer and neurodiverse, is an aspect that runs through this research but could not be explored in this few words. As one of the older, more experienced members of The Group, there are certainly oversights I will have made by

not incorporating voices of people with less experience and clout than me as fully as I would have liked. Interviewing them was more difficult as they are unavailable more often and show up to meetings less so future research could try to incorporate the perspective of marginalised activists more fully, instead of largely being from my perspective as part of the dominant culture. Tracing the concepts of self-care and anti-hierarchy back to their roots as I have done could provide a good starting point for further research on these areas and their relation to activism. An area I started out wanting to explore is suffering and pleasure, and how they are experienced in activist spaces, often swinging from one extreme to the other. I think this would be particularly interesting in the light of Dutton's (2014) queering of self-care.

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