

RPA NEWS

Radical Philosophy Association Newsletter

New Series, Number 9

April 2012

From the Co-Coordinator's

Classical empiricism teaches that knowledge begins with perceptions and builds from there. What is most certain is perceptible and taken in by the senses at once. Thinking works up perceptions in various ways, giving rise to doubts as the distance from immediate perceptions increases. To attain knowledge involves so much “value added” by the mind that the results are qualified as true for us. On the task of knowing the world, many of the best educated remain skeptics.

It is unfortunate that philosophy is stuck in skepticism just when grasping the global economy requires thinking that goes beyond the visible to grasp the real abstractions of capitalism.



The economic horizon for most of us concerns wealth, the tangible goods and wages that sustain us. What could be more real than the meal on the table and a paycheck? In school students learn that value depends on perceptions, cultural outlook, and feelings: “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” They graduate without much grasp of the fetishistic power of money and commodities over our lives. Social construction cannot make sense of how trillions of dollars worth of value can disappear in a financial crisis without one

commodity destroyed. Whose idea was that? Marx compares the law of value imposing a massive devaluation to the law of gravity asserting itself when your house collapses on you. The destructive power of tornadoes can be grasped. When jobs, savings, house values, benefits, and wages vanish, whom do we blame? As Muley Graves’s son cries out in *Grapes of Wrath* when the family farm is tracted out by the Cherokee Land Company, “who do I shoot?”

The bourgeois horizon that holds sway in the intellectual community excludes the questions that make real thinking possible. The Occupy Wall Street movement has jarred open public discourse on capitalism in ways not seen or heard in generations. (See Jack Hammond’s essay

“Occupy Wall Street in Real Time and Real Space” in this issue.) The effort to brand Keynesian common sense as the new red menace keeps colliding with the facts. Three decades of free-market “reform” has resulted in greater income and wealth inequality in the U.S. than in any other developed country. As intolerable as these inequities are, getting past redistribution to the deeper question of the social form and purpose of wealth is our task as critical thinkers. How does wealth differ from value, the sort of value that money measures? How do we think about value’s strange supersensible social objectivity, with all its “metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties”? What are the consequences of having value measure wealth? What is the value treadmill? How do we get past explaining the financial crisis in terms of perennial human faults such as greed? How do strategies straining to eke out surplus value create instability and crisis?

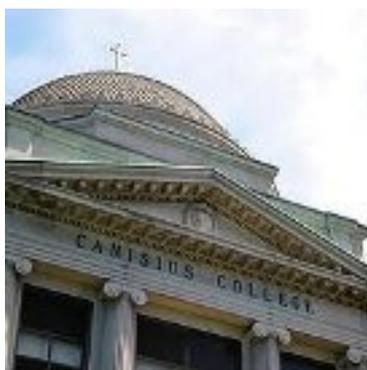
Unfortunately, being well educated often means being trained not to think deeply about the world. Instead, we acclimate to horizons of thinking that keep basic questions out of sight. Good concepts shed light on the hidden dynamics of capitalism. They help us to make sense of what haunts the world and makes ordinary life senselessly hard.

Somewhere on the road to California, Steinbeck’s migrant families shifted from a sense of abject personal failure to a people unjustly forced off their land. Consciousness of belonging to a people summons a power greater than the monster of capital. Thinking that takes us into the world gives solidarity and resistance new force and direction.

THE TENTH BIENNIAL RADICAL PHILOSOPHY ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE:

October 11-14, 2012, Buffalo, New York,
hosted by Canisius College, Tanya Loughead, conference organizer

The Tenth Biennial Radical Philosophy Association Conference, which will also mark the 30th anniversary of the Radical Philosophy Association, will be held October 11-14, 2012, in



Buffalo, New York. The conference is being hosted by Canisius College and organized by Tanya Loughead, a member of the Canisius Philosophy Department. Tanya has arranged for housing with three hotels in downtown Buffalo with easy connections to the Canisius campus. Please see the hotel information in this newsletter for details.

In view of the double RPA anniversary, the theme selected for this tenth conference is “What is Radical Philosophy Today?” The Program Committee for the conference, chaired by Melissa Burchard, has extended the deadline for submissions for the conference to April 16, 2012. See the Call for Papers with the extended deadline in this issue. Please consider making a proposal for the conference and spread the word, encouraging colleagues and friends to do likewise.

The Program Committee has organized three plenary panels and an invited author-meets-author panel:

What is Radical Philosophy? Plenary Panel:

Lewis Gordon, Temple University

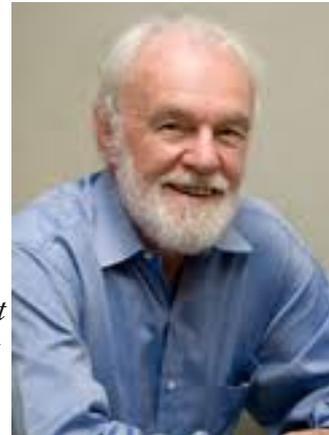
Anne Pomeroy, Richard Stockton College of New Jersey

Hugh Silverman, Stony Brook University (SUNY)

Thinking Radically About Identities Plenary Panel:
Kim Hall, Appalachian State University
Eduardo Mendieta, Stony Brook University (State University of New York)
Reiland Rabaka, University of Colorado at Boulder

Radical Approaches to Political and Economic Crisis Plenary Panel:
David Harvey, City University of New York Graduate Center
David McNally, York University, Canada
Tony Smith, Iowa State University

Author-meets-author panel “Against Capitalism: From a Feminist Point of View”: a discussion of *Capitalism, For and Against: A Feminist Debate*, by Nancy Holmstrom and Ann Cudd (Cambridge University Press 2011)
Ann Cudd, University of Kansas
Nancy Holmstrom, Rutgers University, Newark



THE ELEVENTH AND TWELFTH BIENNIAL RADICAL PHILOSOPHY ASSOCIATION CONFERENCES

The RPA is looking for locations, host institutions, conference organizers, and program committees for the Eleventh and Twelfth Biennial Radical Philosophy Association Conferences. Please consider making a proposal to host a future conference or serve on a program committee at the business meeting of next October's biennial conference in Buffalo.

IN THIS ISSUE OF THE RPA NEWSLETTER

In addition to the Call for Papers for the Tenth Biennial Radical Philosophy Association Conference, with the deadline extension to April 16, 2012, and the hotel information for the October 11-14 conference at Canisius in Buffalo, New York, this newsletter contains:

--A listing of the up-coming RPA Group Sessions at the Pacific APA Meeting, April 4-7, in Seattle. Thanks to José Jorge Mendoza for organizing the two sessions.

--The Call for Papers for RPA panels at the World Congress of Philosophy, Athens, August 4-10, 2012, has been extended to May 1, 2012.

--RPA Treasurer Harry van der Linden's annual treasurer's report shows that "the RPA is in fine financial shape," though we continue to seek membership renewals and new members.

--The Seminar on Socialist Renewal and the Capitalist Crisis will be held in Havana, Cuba, June 18-22, 2012. Act quickly on this invitation; contact cuba@globaljusticecenter.org with a proposal by April 2, 2012.

--The Table of Contents and the Guest Editors' Introduction to Violence: Systemic, Symbolic, and Foundational (*Radical Philosophy Review* 15.1), which collects papers originally presented at the Ninth Biennial Conference of the Radical Philosophy Association (2010).

--Former RPA Co-Coordinator Richard A. Jones (Howard University)'s generous and challenging "The RPA's Future Estate." Richard's concise article, "The Radical Philosophy Association," appears in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences journal *International Critical Thought*, Vol.. 1, No. 3, September 2011, 363-364.

--"Occupy Wall Street in Real Time and Real Space," by Jack Hammond, who teaches sociology at Hunter College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York.

THANKS

Thanks to RPA secretary Harry van der Linden, RPA Secretary Richard Peterson and all the members of the RPA Advisory Board; to Tanya Loughhead, organizer of the Tenth Biennial RPA Conference; to Melissa Burchard and all the members of the Program Committee for the conference; and to Richard Schmitt for his work in putting the newsletter together.



Call For Papers

THE TENTH BIENNIAL RADICAL PHILOSOPHY ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE AND THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE RPA

What is Radical Philosophy Today?

Canisius College, Buffalo, New York

October 11-14, 2012

Call for Papers:

DEADLINE EXTENDED TO APRIL 16, 2012

The Radical Philosophy Association Conference Program Committee invites submissions of talks, papers, workshops, roundtable discussions, posters, and other kinds of conference contributions for its tenth biennial conference, to be held at the Canisius College, Buffalo, New York, October 11-14, 2012.

In the spirit of collaboration, and in the recognition that radical philosophy is often done outside traditional philosophical settings, we invite submissions not only from philosophers inside and outside the academy, but also from those who engage in theoretical and/or activist work in other academic disciplines – such as ethnic studies, women's studies, social sciences, and literary studies – and from those engaged in theoretical and/or activist work unconnected to the academy.

We especially welcome contributions from those often excluded from or marginalized in philosophy, including persons of Africana, Latin American (Americana), Indigenous, or Asian

descent or traditions, glbt persons, persons with disabilities, poor and working class persons.

CONFERENCE THEME

“What is Radical Philosophy Today?” The adjective “radical” is used in many different ways politically and philosophically. It is especially important to explore some of these various meanings as the Radical Philosophy Association looks back on thirty years of intellectual and political activism and advocacy on behalf of justice and liberation and forward to the future through and beyond our current crises.

It seems to many that the world faces several deep problems. How does specifically “radical” philosophy help us to understand and address them? For example, capitalism demands and enforces increasing gaps between the wealthy and the middle class and the poor worldwide. Oppressive systems of class, race, gender, heteronormativity, and able-bodiedness continue to function, defining people and their lives in harmful and de-humanizing ways. Violence continues to deform people’s lives and possibilities by permeating our everyday experience and invading our consciousness, making us both less aware of it and thus more accepting of it.

For these reasons and many more, we invite submissions that answer (or raise) questions about the nature of radical philosophy and its roles in understanding and responding to current crises.

What is radical theory? How can radical theory be made more effective in responding to crises? What philosophies/philosophers are radical?

What is radical practice? What does one have to do/be to be radical? Is being radical important? Do some forms of radical practice need to be criticized?

What is radical identity? How does one think radically about identities of race, gender, nationality, citizenship, able-bodiedness, sexuality, etc.? What constitutes a radical identity? How do individuals in groups historically labeled or excluded by race, gender, nationality, etc., redefine, refute, or revolt against the western histories of those categories?

What radical responses are needed to address the crises in economics worldwide? What place does class (and class analysis) have in discussions of radical ideas, radical politics, or radical critiques of the political economy? How does one radically rethink the concept of class in light of current crises?

How does one think radically about democracy or statehood/nationhood? What is radical political engagement? What does radical philosophy have to say about current protest movements in the US and worldwide?

What is radical art, radical expression, a radical style? How can such aesthetic categories and concerns contribute to changing/transforming the world?

What is radical pedagogy? How can teachers help to radically change the world in positive ways?

We thus invite submissions for the Tenth Biennial Conference of the Radical Philosophy Association: “What is Radical Philosophy Today?”

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSIONS

In keeping with the spirit of radical thinking embodied by the RPA, we encourage submissions

that employ formats and media that challenge the standard conference presentation. For instance, we urge presenters to use formats that allow for greater interaction between participants and audience (e.g. presenting an outline, rather than reading a paper) and that emphasize collective inquiry (e.g. organizing a workshop).

Please note that participants will be selected for at most one presentation (talk, workshop, poster session, etc.) during the conference; submissions should be presented with this in mind. (This limit does not include chairing sessions.)

Please submit all the information requested:

For an individual talk/paper/workshop/poster/performance or other type of individual presentation:

1. Name, address, email, affiliation (independent scholar, activist, educator, etc.), of presenter
2. Nature (talk, workshop, etc.) and title of proposal
3. Abstract of 250-500 words
4. Equipment needs

For a group panel/workshop/poster/performance or other type of group presentation (note: maximum three panel participants not including chair):

1. Name, address, email, affiliation of the group's contact person and of each participant
2. Nature (panel, workshop, etc.) and title of proposal
3. Abstract of 250-500 words for group proposal
4. Titles and abstracts of 250-500 words for each paper (if applicable)
5. Equipment needs

Panel chairs: If you would be willing to serve as a panel session chair, please indicate this on your submission form. Session chairs are responsible for introducing participants in panel sessions and ensuring that each presenter gets her or his fair share of the available time.

Mailing Address for Submissions:

Please submit paper, workshop, poster, and other proposals as an email attachment (.doc) to rpa2012meeting@gmail.com . NOTE: Please do NOT submit complete papers.

EXTENDED DEADLINE FOR PROPOSALS: APRIL 16, 2012

For further information, contact members of the Program Committee:

Melissa Burchard mburchar@unca.edu (chair)

Tommy Curry t-curry@philosophy.tamu.edu

Gertrude Postl postlg@sunysuffolk.edu

Devin Shaw devinzshaw@gmail.com

Sarah Tyson sarah.tyson@vanderbilt.edu

Scott Zeman scott.zeman@vanderbilt.edu

The local organizer of the conference is Tanya Loughead tanya.loughead@canisius.edu

Hotels for Radical Philosophy Association (RPA)

Tenth Biennial RPA Conference

Canisius College

October 11, 2012 – October 14, 2012

NOTE: All three of these hotels are in downtown Buffalo and in walking distance of the subway line that takes one directly to the Canisius College campus, where the conference will be held. When making reservations indicate that you will be attending the Tenth Biennial Radical Philosophy Association Conference at Canisius College. Please note the deadlines for making hotel reservations.

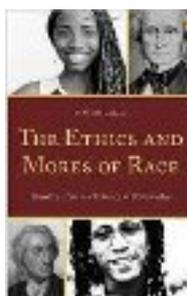
The Hyatt Hotels & Resorts	Best Western	Hampton Inn and Suites
Hyatt Regency Buffalo	Best Western on the	220 Delaware Avenue
Two Fountain Plaza	Avenue	Buffalo, NY 14202
Buffalo, NY 14202	610 Delaware Avenue	Phone: 1-800-HAMPTON
Phone: 716 855-4950	Buffalo, NY 14202	Fax: 716 880-3506
Fax: 716 855-4958	Phone: 716 886-8333 or 1	\$139.00 – price good until
\$109.00 – price good	888 868-3033	9/11/12
until 8/16/12	Fax: 716 884-3076	
	\$109.00 (Single); \$129.00	
	(Double) – price good	
	until 9/11/12	

Radical Philosophy Association Group Sessions

to be held at the

86th Annual Meeting of the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association
April 4 - 7, 2012, Westin Seattle, Seattle

Friday Evening, April 6, 2012, 7:00-10:00 p.m.
G7G



Topic:

Author-Meets-Critics: Naomi Zack, *The Ethics and Mores of Race: Equality after the History of Philosophy*

Chair:

Rhea Muchalla (University of Oregon)

Author:

Naomi Zack (University of Oregon)

Critics:

Kristie Dotson (Michigan State University)

Lewis R. Gordon (Temple University)

José Jorge Mendoza (University of Oregon)

Lucius T. Outlaw, Jr. (Vanderbilt University)

Saturday Evening, April 7, 2012, 7:00-10:00 p.m.
G9H

Topic:

Solidarity with Those Most Vulnerable: Ethical and Political Responses to Immigration

Chair:

Michelle Switzer (Whittier College)

Speakers:

Dana Rognlie (University of Oregon): “A Response to Jose Jorge Mendoza’s ‘Neither a State of Nature Nor a State of Exception’”

Shelley Wilcox (San Francisco State University): “Borders and Economic Vulnerability: A Relational Egalitarian Approach to Immigration”

Rhea Muchalla (University of Oregon): “Brutality, Bodies, and Borders: Untangling Immigration, Illegality, and the Global Sex Trade”

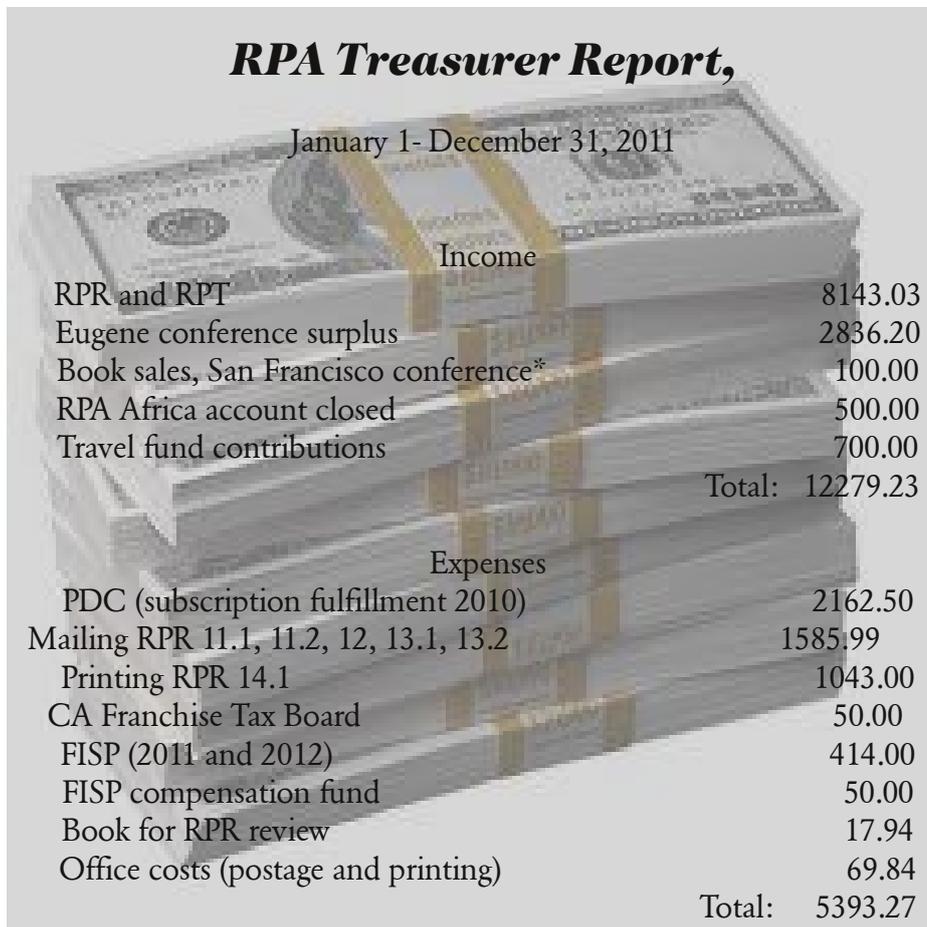
Rita Manning (San Jose State University): “Criminalizing Immigration”

Amelia Wirts (Boston College): “The Duty of Restitution: Immigration and National Borders”

Call for Paper Proposals

Radical Philosophy Association Panels
at the 23rd World Congress of Philosophy in Athens, August 4-10, 2013

The RPA plans to have at least two panels at the 23rd World Congress of Philosophy in Athens, August 4-10, 2013 (<http://www.wcp2013.gr/>). RPA members are invited to submit paper proposals or propose panels. Preliminary inquiries of interest are also welcome. Please contact by May 1, 2012: Harry van der Linden at hvanderl@butler.edu or Richard Peterson at petsrnt@msu.edu.



RPA Treasurer Report,
January 1- December 31, 2011

Income	
RPR and RPT	8143.03
Eugene conference surplus	2836.20
Book sales, San Francisco conference*	100.00
RPA Africa account closed	500.00
Travel fund contributions	700.00
Total:	12279.23
Expenses	
PDC (subscription fulfillment 2010)	2162.50
Mailing RPR 11.1, 11.2, 12, 13.1, 13.2	1585.99
Printing RPR 14.1	1043.00
CA Franchise Tax Board	50.00
FISP (2011 and 2012)	414.00
FISP compensation fund	50.00
Book for RPR review	17.94
Office costs (postage and printing)	69.84
Total:	5393.27

*An envelope with \$100 cash was found at SFSU, the book sales of our 2008 RPA conference.

Surplus: 6885.96

Funds on hand on 1/1/2011: 9553.34

Funds on hand on 12/31/2011: 16439.30

The surplus is misleadingly large since we will soon receive a large bill for the printing, mailing, and typesetting of RPR 14.2. Still, the RPA is in fine financial shape.

Harry van der Linden, RPA treasurer

You are invited to a historic exchange with leading Cuban thinkers this June in Havana.

Seminar on Socialist Renewal & the Capitalist Crisis

A Cuban-North American Exchange
Havana, Cuba June 18-22, 2012

Part I: SOCIALIST RENEWAL

A. Cuba's Economic Reforms

- * Need for Reform: Problems in Cuban Society
- * Building a New Consensus
- * The Reform Program
- * Obstacles to Reform
- * Outcomes?
- * A New Model for Socialism?: Theory of Socialism

B. Latin America Moves Left

- * 21st Century Socialism
- * Protagonism and Participation
- * Endogenous Development
 - * Solidarity Economy
- * ALBA

Part II: CAPITALIST CRISIS

- * Overaccumulation Crisis and Stagnation
- * Corporate Globalization
- * Financialization
- * Exhaustion of Neoliberalism
- * Austerity Fix
- * Class Power and Growing Inequality
- * Political Crisis
- * Popular Fight Back
- * Strategic Alternatives



Call for Presenters and Commentators Part I will give the Cubans an opportunity to inform their NA comrades about cutting edge developments in their country. Part II will give NAs an opportunity to share their insights on developments in the capitalist world. Bi-national dialog is encouraged. Submit a brief abstract of your proposed presentation by April 2, 2012 to cuba@globaljusticecenter.org

Pre-Seminar Activities Various group activities prior to the Seminar will include visits to cooperatives, urban gardens, community development projects, social research centers, and educational and medical institutions. These will involve people-to-people contact.

Cost Estimated cost for the entire program, June 11 through 23, 2012 is \$1500 plus airfare. This includes 12 nights in a shared room in Hotel Vedado with breakfast, translation, transportation, and group activities.

License The U.S. government severely restricts travel to Cuba except by license from the US Treasury Department. Professionals doing research in Cuba can go legally under a General License for Research. Others can travel under our license for people-to-people educational exchange.

Organization Center for Global Justice (a project of Radical Philosophy Association), and Facultad de Filosofia e Historia, Universidad de la Habana, Instituto de Filosofia, and Sociedad Cubana de Investigaciones Filosoficas.

For further information contact cuba@globaljusticecenter.org

Endorsers Cliff DuRand, David Schweickart, Harry Targ, Leo Panitch, Victor Wallis, Milton Fisk, Ed D'Angelo, Ofelia Schutte, Al Campbell, Jualynne Dodson, Carl Davidson, Betsy Bowman, Bob Stone.

Radical Philosophy Review

"Violence, Systemic, Symbolic, and Foundational"

RPR 15.1, papers from the Ninth Biennial Conference of the Radical Philosophy Association, held at the University of Oregon, November, 11-14, 2012

Guest Editors: Brandon Absher, Anatole Anton, and Jose Jorge Mendoza

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SYSTEMIC VIOLENCE

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Harry van der Linden, *On the Violence of Systemic Violence: A Critique of Slavoj Žižek*

Naomi Zack, *Violence, Poverty, and Disaster: New Orleans, Haiti, and Chile*

Lisa Heldke, *An Alternative Ontology of Food: Beyond Meataphysics*

Brandon Abscher, *Toward a Concept of Ecological Violence: Heidegger and Mountain Justice*

SYMBOLIC AND FOUNDATIONAL VIOLENCE

Joan Cocks, *Foundational Violence and the Politics of Erasure*

Andrew Sivak and Michael Moeller (Winner of the I.M. Young Award), *Fuck Your God in the Disco: Music, Torture, and the Divine at Guantánamo*

Nikolay Kharkov, *Alienation and Its Discontents: Marxism, Conceptual Violence, and the Colonial Difference*

Niki d'Amore, *The Violence of the Signifier and the Intelligence of the Flesh: Feminine Jouissance as Real and Substitutive Satisfaction*

RESISTANCE

Milton Fisk, *In Defense of Marxism*

Can Capitalism Lead to Peace?: Revisiting Hilferding's Theory of "Realistic Pacificism"
William Smaldone

Geoffrey Karabin, *The Heavenly Protest: Toward a Liberation Theology of the Afterlife*

Thomas Nail, *Violence at the Borders: Nomadic Solidarity and Non-Status Migrant Resistance*

Richard Schmitt, *Socialist Solidarity: How Can We Tell Whether It Is Possible?*

Guest Editors' Introduction

The papers collected in this volume were initially presented at the Ninth Biennial Conference of the Radical Philosophy Association in 2010. The theme of this volume, following the theme of that conference, is "Violence: Systemic, Symbolic, and Foundational." Whereas conventional views of violence isolate it from any broader context, these essays view violence in its essential connection to institutions, practices, and relationships to others and the surrounding world. Taken as a whole, the essays attempt to expand our understanding and conception of violence beyond direct, intentionally inflicted harm to include systemic, symbolic, and foundational forms of violence. And although more than a year has transpired since the conference, the essays collected here are no less relevant or timely than they were at the moment of their original presentation. Similarly, questions raised at the conference about the meaning and forms of violence are no less pressing.

Indeed, the systemic violence of capitalism in the US and in the world has reached perhaps unprecedented levels. For example, a report released by the Pew Research Center offers an indication of the harm inflicted by the continuing economic crisis and its uneven impact. According to the report, the median wealth of black households in the US fell more than 50% between 2005 and 2009. Simultaneously, median wealth dropped by 16% for white households. The median wealth of white households, themselves in trouble, is now twenty times greater than their black counterparts.¹ This data only serves to underscore the harsh realities faced by poor and working people, immigrants, women, and racial minorities in this time of crisis: not to mention the decline of the so-called "middle class" in the United States.

This economic violence is only one aspect of a much broader system of violence. There are now, for example, more than two million

people incarcerated in the US – with the US housing almost a quarter of the world's prison population. People of color are incarcerated at much higher rates than their European American counterparts, and women are the fastest growing demographic in prisons. The prison-industrial-complex now encircles the globe, as detention facilities along with military bases and aircraft carriers follow US military escapades. Abuse of all kinds against women, elders, children, and the dispossessed has become part of the fabric of everyday life in America.

The tenth anniversary of the attacks on the World Trade Center has only recently passed. The anniversary of this act of violence is followed closely by other anniversaries. For ten years now, we have lived with the "War on Terror" and the sprawling apparatus of surveillance, repression, and fear that it entails. As of October 7, 2011, the United States and its allies had conducted a decade of brutal war and occupation against the people of Afghanistan. And on March 20, 2012, the War in Iraq, though officially over, entered its tenth year. One cannot calculate the suffering inflicted by these wars or the violence that they wrought.

Underlying all this suffering and violence is the decades-long neo-liberal project. Neo-liberalism has not been successful in its own self-professed goal of promoting economic growth. But, it has been wildly successful as a re-entrenchment of capitalist class power – dismantling mechanisms of redistribution, organs of working class power, and social safety nets worldwide. As David Harvey has emphasized, the details of this program and its worldwide implementation were elaborated very early on in the occupation of Iraq by the Coalition Provisional Authority.

Continued on the final four pages of this Newsletter

The RPA's Future Estate

—Richard A. Jones

In the hubbub of living an engaged life of worthy radical struggles, one sometimes loses sight of “future estates.” Having attended ten colleges and universities during my lifetime, I am often besieged by alumni offices asking me to “remember” them in my estate planning. Because I know that most of these universities possess sizable endowments and continue to profit from the student loans I undertook to attend them, I am somewhat less than eager to support them in my will. I am not one to dwell on insurance policies and legal arrangements. However materially vulgar, given my increasing sense of my own mortality as I approach seventy years, I am remembering the Radical Philosophy Association in my will. Over the course of my association with the RPA, its members—Alison Jaggar, Richard Schmitt, Lucius Outlaw, Harry van der Linden, Cliff DuRand, Anne Pomeroy, and Jeff Paris—have played vital roles in helping me complete my dissertation, secure my first academic appointment, publish my first paper, and sustained my hopes that philosophy is more a way of living in the world than the idle quest for academic rank. Without the members of the RPA, my engagements in philosophy would surely not have been as meaningful and fulfilling. So, while I have remembered the RPA in whatever meager “estate” I have, I would encourage and remind my radical colleagues to do the same. The RPA’s glorious and robust future depends upon us! We need to ensure that in the coming decades the RPA will have funds for radical scholarships, fellowships, and internship programs. We need to ensure that the Struggle will Continue!



Occupy Wall Street in Real Time and Real Space

Jack Hammond
Hunter College and Graduate Center, CUNY
jhammond@hunter.cuny.edu

The eruption of Occupy Wall Street (OWS), its geographical spread, and the public attention it has garnered must astonish anyone familiar with the recent doldrums of progressive movements in the US. On September 17, 2011, a few hundred demonstrators prepared to occupy Wall Street in Manhattan. Because they had made no secret of their

called Zuccotti Park and set up camp.

They were inspired by the Green Movement of 2009 in Iran, the Arab Spring of 2011 that spread from Tunisia to Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Syria, and elsewhere; the occupation of the state legislature in Wisconsin protesting the curtailment of public employee unions; the indignados in Spain and the Greek protests against austerity. In these protests, demonstrators, often summoned by electronic social networking media, filled an outdoor public space (except in Wisconsin) and proposed to remain indefinitely, day and night, until some demands were met. The occupiers of Zuccotti Park had a similar agenda except that they deliberately refrained from making any demands. Their manifestoes denounced financial-institution control of US politics and the escalating inequality of wealth and income, but they argued that it is not their role to propose concrete political actions; rather, they want to avoid entanglement with the political system and remain free to call attention to these issues with direct action.

Early in September of last year I completed a paper on the role of social movements in the struggle for socialism (Hammond, forthcoming). In it I wrote that it was hard to have faith in the power of social movements at a time when they appeared to be totally quiescent. A short few days later, the Occupy movement proved me wrong. The rapid rise and spread of a movement like OWS could hardly have been predicted even by those who created it.

The occupation struck a responsive chord. It inspired hundreds of occupations, large and small, in cities and towns around the country, joining in the protest against escalating inequality. The movement is decentralized, and prides itself on being leaderless (or “leaderful,” according to some—everyone is a leader). Each occupation is independent of the others, but they are in constant contact using modern media of communication.

There are many stories that can be

told about Occupy Wall Street—the background in the Middle Eastern and European protest movements earlier in the year, popular resentment at the bank bailouts rewarding those who caused the economic crisis, the personal impact of that crisis on individuals and families who lack health care or have lost their homes, the wildfire that spread the movement to hundreds of towns and cities across the United States, the repeated confrontations with abusive police, and the upsurge of political activity inspired by its example.

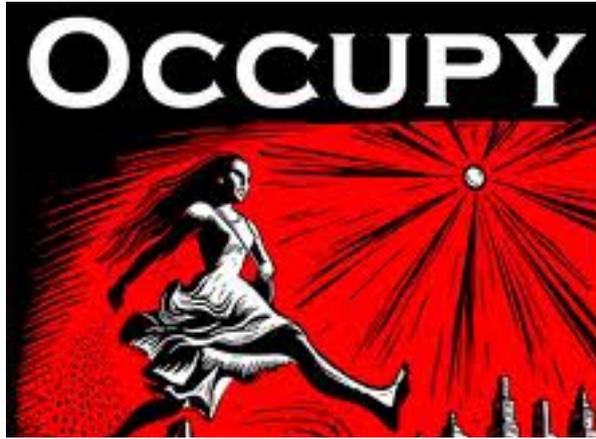
Here I want to tell a different story. One of the most surprising aspects of the Occupy Wall Street movement is its restoration of face-to-face interaction, in real time and real space, to the political life of the left in the United States. (I write from my experience in New York, but according to reports something similar has gone on in other occupations.) For the last decade, too much “activism” has been limited to sending e-mails and signing online petitions—what Evgeny Morozov (2011: 189-191) calls “slacktivism.” Click a mouse, sign a petition; you have done your duty. (I plead guilty.)



In striking contrast, the Occupy movement, while it depends heavily on the internet for initial and ongoing organizing, also recognizes the internet’s limitations. OWS has understood that as important as electronic communication is, it achieves little unless it leads to face-to-face interaction in which people do more than respond passively

and reflexively. It is when people come together visibly in physical space, debate and discuss, march and demonstrate, and live a community life that social movements can empower them and prefigure future social relations.

The occupation has created a



community, of feeling and common life, among the occupiers. One cannot spend an hour at the occupation site in New York without feeling the sense of pulsating, vibrant energy. People on the sites (that is, not the websites but the physical locations of the occupations) mill about, peddle their causes, talk and debate in informal groups and somewhat more formal committees. They meet in the daily General Assembly to make collective decisions. They perform the tasks that keep the occupation going. They interact in the public space where each person's actions are visible to everyone else.

There is a people's library with donated books. Groups are drumming or preparing artworks. Others are busy with logistics: keeping the place clean, receiving food donations and distributing them, preparing the seemingly daily demonstrations, and chatting up the local merchants who have generously allowed the people camping out to use their facilities.

At any occupation, a large part of the day is spent in intense conversations about political issues, personal troubles, the structure of the economy and the polity, and the future. Groups form and dissolve as people switch back and forth from concrete

tasks to deliberation and discussion. These activities are shared by full-time occupiers and others who just drop in. All of them join in these conversations and find the experience energizing and liberating. The conversations take on an intensity and intimacy created by coming together with a common purpose. They constitute the basis of democratic participation: they reinforce the sense of equality and joint ownership because everyone can take part, everyone can share the experience. In talking to each other, occupiers and others who drop in rehearse their commitment to social justice at the macro level and personal empowerment at the micro level. This opportunity is what makes the occupation of a physical space so important. They have liberated space to create a Habermasian public sphere in which deliberation about goals and future plans can take place (Habermas, 1989).

Oral communication also goes on in meetings, facilitated by the most innovative medium enlisted to support face-to-face communication (apparently adopted from the demonstrations in the spring of 2011 in Spain): the "people's microphone." Using bullhorns in public in New York requires a police permit, so occupiers have found an alternative: at mass meetings, a speaker pauses after each phrase and the people near the speaker repeat it in unison to the crowd; if the crowd is big, a second circle of shouters repeats it. If it is even bigger than that, people on the periphery listen on their phones and shout it to the crowd.

The people's mic is used in big meetings, and also to attract attention at an occupation site. Someone who wishes to make an announcement, or just sound off, will shout out, "mic check!" Those nearby repeat "mic check!" in unison. The speaker shouts "mic check!" a second time and, if all goes well, a larger group, now paying attention, will repeat it. The speaker then goes on to make the announcement, broken up into short bits that can be repeated by the crowd.

The mic check may also call out supporters for a joint action, cultural activity, or small group meeting on the site or off. Sometimes someone shouts out an appeal and raises a small, spontaneous crowd of a few hundred to march to a demonstration called by some other group. Occupiers in New York have joined in demonstrations called by education advocates protesting school closings and picketers in labor disputes.

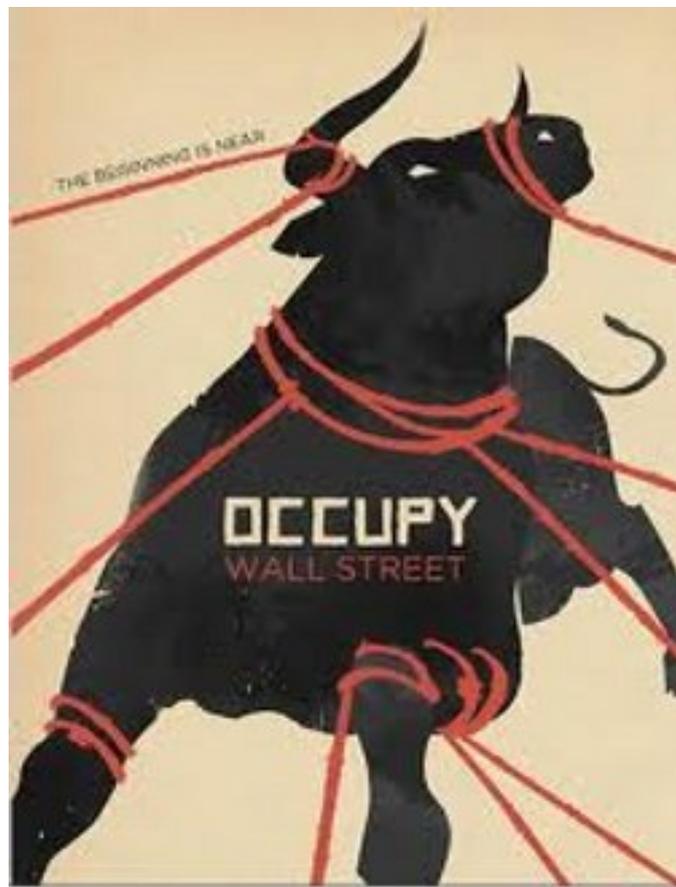
The people's mic does not lend itself to long or complicated presentations, a limitation which brings both advantages and disadvantages. A speaker must talk in short Twitter-like sound bites. Nevertheless it provides a sense of power: I can personally attest that if you say something and dozens of people repeat it, you have the feeling of really being listened to. And for those playing the role of the mic amplifying a speaker's voice, the call and response is physically energizing and provides a strong sense of participation. If the people's mic was initially adopted as a form of resistance against regulations that occupiers regard as imposed to silence them, it can become a source of joy: people take so much pleasure in using it that sometimes a small group that can hear perfectly well nevertheless goes through the ritual of repeating each speaker's words.

Occupiers are also deft practitioners of the new social networking media: Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Livestream. Their use comes naturally to a generation to whom computers are old hat and you can do anything with the phone you carry in your pocket. The technical capacity has improved and the costs have come down, making them widely available. The new media embody occupiers' cultural commitment to open access because they allow anyone both to produce and to distribute ideas. High-tech media are deployed not as an end in themselves but to promote nonhierarchical, egalitarian, but above all active participation in the

movement's activities, interaction in real time and real space. The point is not to consume the media in private but to activate people on the ground ("off of the couch and into the streets!") Live streaming is especially important to convey the reality of life in an occupation and, even more, to capture in real time the brutality inflicted by the police on occupiers who are not behaving illegally but exercising their legitimate rights of free speech.

The occupiers emphasize the participatory process of consensus building that has been developed in other direct democracy movements. But OWS adds an element. It is decentralized: an infinity of activities goes on at the occupation site or proceeds out from it. The many occupations around the country are all autonomous and have endorsed diverse goals, and they range widely in numbers. All have been inspired by the action in New York, but each operates on its own in response to its local situation.

I write in the present tense. Most of



the occupations have of course been disbanded, whether voluntarily or forcefully, and occupiers have disappeared from public view. Some will wonder why I don't use the past, but actually I prefer the future. The occupiers have not gone into hibernation. Dozens of working groups and issue-oriented groups have been meeting regularly and laying plans for further actions. They promise to provide a warm spring season.

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They issued the following orders: “the full privatization of public enterprises, full ownership rights by foreign firms of Iraqi businesses, full repatriation of foreign profits... the opening of Iraq’s banks to foreign control, national treatment for foreign companies and... the elimination of nearly all trade barriers.”¹ The implementation of similar policies around the world has led to an unparalleled upsurge in global inequality and has added fuel to the on-going economic crisis.

And now we are seeing a global reaction against this project. Sparked by revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, cities worldwide are engulfed in protest against inequality and policies of austerity. The Occupation Movement has a foothold in every major city in the US and quite a few small towns, and has spread globally. The US working class is learning again to think of itself in class terms, as part of the “99%”, in the parlance of the Occupation Movement. A recent report from the Pew Research Center shows that 66% of American adults now feel that there is “strong” or “very strong” conflict between the rich and the poor.² But even as the message of global dissent and resistance has grown louder, police and military repression has grown more extreme and intense.

With these facts in mind, it is important to remind ourselves why a reflection on the nature of violence is necessary and why an understanding of its many forms is an essential aspect of any radical critique of the present. There is perhaps no greater tool in the hands of global capital and its authoritarian clients than violent spectacle and the fear it engenders. Mainstream media outlets act as sensationalist purveyors of “shock and awe,” undermining solidarity among the exploited and oppressed with stories of terrorism, murder, violent protest,

and extreme repression. These images and the acts they report often stifle dissent, pit workers and other oppressed people against one another, and legitimize systems of exploitation and oppression in the name of security. At the same time, the focus on violent spectacle paints a moral veneer, which casts the victims of systemic violence – those who suffer the extremes of pain and physical and psychological degradation – as evil and morally corrupt. This is exemplified most egregiously in the 2011 riots in London and across the UK, riots which David Cameron referred to as a “slow-motion moral collapse.”³ It is our hope that sustained reflection on violence can serve as a vehicle for the germination of narratives and concepts capable of disabling this spectacle and lay bare the realities of exploitation, dispossession, and oppression that underlie it.

This hope, however, should also lead us to a deep questioning about the role of philosophy in our society. In its institutional form, philosophy often acts as a bastion of bourgeois values and as an accomplice in providing an ideological smokescreen necessary for maintaining systems of exploitation and oppression. To this degree, philosophy has forgotten its original Socratic impulse. Indeed, consciousness on the whole suffers extreme alienation. Critical questioning and moral cultivation have been forsaken in favor of research – the methodical application of abstract rules and the accumulation of data. Education has been reduced to a commodity – rather than shaping and enhancing people’s intellectual and moral capacities, educators are now called upon to mold a technocratic elite. More than ever, it seems, consciousness is lost to servile immersion in the exigencies of the “real world.” Meanwhile, the “real world” is increasingly untenable for teachers and students alike, with mounting debt, overwork,

and precarious employment now the norm.

Philosophy, for its part, must stand against these trends or it will be lost entirely. A person committed to critical questioning and moral cultivation cannot hover above the fray. Consciousness must become a genuine historical force. Even though philosophy must take a stand, this does not mean that it should be forsaken in favor of blind activism. Rather, we mean to say that philosophy only fully realizes itself in discourse aimed at the transformation of existing social reality. In accordance with its original Socratic impulse, then, philosophy must burst the grip of reification, common sense, and ideological abstraction in order to enact a higher humanity. As Marx insisted early in his career, it must translate the dreams and sufferings of the oppressed and exploited into an articulated vision of social hope and transformation.

This issue of the RPR, therefore, is aimed at unearthing and opposing the forms of violence that characterize our contemporary world. The issue is divided into three sections: Systemic Violence, Symbolic and Foundational Violence, and Resistance. What these three sections have in common is a commitment to the task of deepening and broadening the very concept of violence itself.

The first section examines the forms of violence that are embedded in our social and economic institutions and practices. In the first essay, Richard Peterson questions whether non-violence is a distinctive ethical idea. To answer this question, he develops a conception of violence as inhering in social relations and as constitutive of identity and individual agency. Rather than tactical or strategic instruments of social struggle, violence and non-violence are, according to this view, distinctive forms of social relations that open up specific kinds of identities and possibilities. By contrast, Harry van der

Linden offers a word of caution about expanding the concept of violence beyond its core meaning. Although van der Linden appreciates that this expansion has some emancipatory value, he argues that in practice it can lead to a facile celebration of retributive revolutionary violence. He points to the work of Slavoj Žižek as such an example, where exploitation and oppression are taken to be sufficient to justify even the worst excesses of revolutionary terror. In her essay “Violence, Poverty, and Disaster: New Orleans, Haiti, and Chile,” Naomi Zack explores the violence of natural disasters. As Zack demonstrates, the effects of natural disasters are socially mediated and have the most severe consequences for the most exploited and oppressed. Not only do these people lack the social and material infrastructure necessary to protect them from natural disaster, but also they are the most vulnerable to capitalist “depredation” – the pillage of the few social goods to which they have access. Following this, Lisa Heldke explores the forms of violence inherent in our current food system and the paradoxes faced by a person committed to eating ethically. Whereas many vegetarians and vegans seek to remove themselves from processes that cause the suffering of animals, Heldke argues for a wider vision that takes into account the exploitation of workers and other social and environmental harms. In contrast to an ethics of eating based on a substance ontology, Heldke argues that our food choices should be grounded in a relational ontology – that is, they must take into account all the complex relations and mediations that bring food to our table. Similarly, in his essay “Toward a Concept of Ecological Violence: Martin Heidegger and Mountain Justice,” Brandon Absher develops a conception of the ecological violence committed through the mining practice known as mountaintop removal. According to Absher, ecological violence is committed by social practices that: (1) treat the environing world as an aggregate of entities available for calculable ordering, (2)

determine value/meaning in abstraction from the sustaining relations that make human existence possible, and (3) understand human beings as fundamentally independent of their broader contexts. Viewing mountaintop removal as an instance of ecological violence, Absher argues that the struggle against mountaintop removal should be anti-capitalist.

The second section of our volume deals with foundational violence, which institutes a social order, and the symbolic violence through which such order is maintained. The opening essay by Joan Cocks, "Foundational Violence and the Politics of Erasure," examines the violence committed in the foundation of the modern nation-state on two dimensions. In the first place, there is the "fratricide" through which people are made to identify with the state and dissociate with others who are not citizens – a process that often takes the form of direct and bloody violence. Secondly, there is the erasure through which this initial act of violence is forgotten and covered over through national myths and formal legal processes. In the second essay, "Fuck Your God in the Disco: Music, Torture, and the Divine at Guantanamo," which won the Iris Marion Young award for best graduate-student paper presented at the 2010 RPA conference, Andrew Sivak and Michael Moeller connect the musical torture committed at Guantanamo Bay and other sites in the US "War on Terror" to acts of sacrifice and excess that express sovereign power. According to Sivak and Moeller, sound becomes "sacred noise" in such moments, intended to overwhelm and destroy the ego through a surge of sovereign force. As they argue, such forms of torture have become increasingly popular among liberal democratic states, who must maintain the façade of respect for human rights. In the two essays that follow, Nikolay Karkov and Niki D'Amore explore the silences that haunt dominant conceptual and symbolic orders. In his essay, Karkov

interrogates the limits of Western emancipatory theories and conceptions of "alienation" to suggest that they may inflict "conceptual violence" on indigenous people. He argues that struggles and ways of conceptualizing the world are always local and that the importation of European ways of thinking can function as an extension of colonialism even when the ideas are meant to be emancipatory. Finally, in her essay "The Violence of the Signifier and the Intelligence of the Flesh: Feminine Jouissance as Real and Substitutive Satisfaction," D'Amore argues against the ineffability of specifically feminine forms of gratification. Even though the symbolic order into which one is inculcated is always the "law of the father," identification with which expresses a fundamentally masculine form of enjoyment, D'Amore shows that this order is subtended by flesh that is itself intelligent. Thus, feminine jouissance is given voice in hysterical speech in which intelligent flesh is allowed to speak for itself – an event accompanied by the dissolution of the fundamentally masculine ego that identifies itself with its place in the symbolic order.

The final section deals with resistance to violence. In the opening essay, Milton Fisk argues for a "minimalist" socialism, the primary aim of which is to avoid social collapse. In contrast to "perfectionist" and utopian forms of socialism, Fisk argues that the primary goal of a socialist movement should be to protect and enhance the social bond that holds society together, rather than to achieve ideals such as harmony or justice. The second essay of this section, William Smaldone's "Can Capitalism Lead to Peace?: Revisiting Hilferding's Theory of 'Realistic Pacifism,'" recounts the attempts of Rudolph Hilferding to articulate a similarly realistic stance in the early 20th Century. Like Francis Fukuyama more recently, Hilferding argued that the rise of capitalism and corporate centralization had mitigated class antagonisms and made war increasingly

unlikely among the developed nations. Thus, he advocated for a broadly electoral strategy of social reform. As Hilferding was and remains an important theorist of the rise of finance capital, Smaldone maintains that his strategic successes and failures hold important lessons for us today. In the next essay, "The Heavenly Protest: Toward a Liberation Theology of the Afterlife," Geoffrey Karabin makes the case that a belief in the afterlife can be an important source of solidarity and inspiration in the struggle for social transformation. Whereas many Marxists hold that a belief in the beyond compensates for and inures people to the suffering and hardship of earthly life, Karabin follows other advocates of liberation theology in suggesting that belief functions to prevent despair, giving meaning to struggle and connecting it to an ultimate realization of justice in the hereafter. The following essay, "Violence at the Borders: Nomadic Solidarity and Non-Status Migrant Resistance," by Thomas Nail, explicates the idea of a nomadic solidarity that extends beyond legal or social status. According to Nail, the figure of the nomad is becoming

increasingly important, as borders function ever more as pervasive "sieves" distributing flows of people and goods in accordance with the demands of capital. He looks to the forms of resistance developed by the Canadian organization No One Is Illegal as a model for future anti-capitalist struggle. In the final essay, Richard Schmitt further develops the theme of solidarity. Schmitt notes that efforts toward solidarity fail because we do not know how to put our ideals into practice. He uses the early kibbutzim as an example. The founders were clear about their socialist principles but did not know how to put those into practice in such simple situations as the distribution of clothing. Schmitt concludes from this example that efforts to build socialist solidarity are often impeded by our ignorance of the concrete techniques and arrangements needed for a socialist society built on solidarity.

Brandon Absher
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