Anxiety, affective struggle, and precarity consciousness-raising

The Institute for Precarious Consciousness

Abstract

This article theorises the affective structure of neoliberal capitalism as involving a dominant reactive affect of anxiety. This differentiates neoliberalism from earlier periods, based on the dominant reactive affects of misery and boredom. Anxiety is theorised as an effect of social mechanisms, including precarity. It is suggested that current social movement strategies and pedagogical approaches are inadequate to respond to this context, as they are designed mainly to combat earlier forms of reactive affect. A method of precarity consciousness-raising is theorised as a means to overcome the political disempowerment caused by anxiety, and create a machine for fighting anxiety. The later parts of the article explore the affective and discursive effects involved in feminist consciousness-raising, and explore the possibility for using this approach as a model for a similar response to precarity and anxiety.

Keywords

Precariousness, consciousness raising, feminist practice, anxiety, emotions, resilience, Deleuze, neoliberalism

Introduction

This article will advance a possible pedagogical approach to revitalise movements of resistance, particularly in the global North. The article works from an assumption that Northern activism is in crisis. Anecdotally, evidence suggests that activists, at least in the UK, are suffering widespread disarray, trauma and burnout. This is both compounded by and contributing to a lack of numbers at major mobilisations. However, the point is not only to increase the effectiveness of existing forms of activism. It is also to extend transformation into the politics of everyday life. The basic hypothesis of this article is that there is an emergent disconnection between the focus of activism and the current structure of oppression in everyday life, which is at the heart of current problems. The article has two sections. Firstly, it expounds a theory that activism in each conjuncture is a machine for promoting active force by defeating the dominant reactive affect. It is suggested that a change in the dominant reactive affect is impeding activism. Secondly, the model of feminist consciousness-raising will be explored as providing an alternative which could also be applied to the dominant reactive affect today.

Active and reactive force

A first central claim here is that affect (feeling, emotion, and existential orientation) is crucial to activism. This is not a particularly contentious claim, although it runs against the mainstream of social movement studies. Studies suggest that the underpinnings of activism are partly affective. Autonomous movements have cohered around communities of action which provide emotional 'highs' of excitement and conflict (Peterson, 2001; Juris, 2008; Karatzogianni, 2012). Activist Pauline Bradley,for example, describes a social struggle as 'better than Prozac', 'emotionally momentous' and able to bring about life-changes which drugs, labels and hospitalisation could not (Bradley, 1997). However, the state seems to have undermined these emotionally reinforcing effects of activism by making the experience of protest feel increasingly disempowering and traumatic. This article will deploy a Deleuzian approach to affect (in which affects of active becoming are contrasted with those of reactive blockage), to understand transformations in the dominant regime and theorise the next step for activism.

Autonomous action has its roots in active force. This can be seen across a range of radical theories. For instance, Marx wrote of the goal of liberation as 'the fulfilment of the personality... governed by immediate enjoyment and personal needs' (Marx, 1975: 269). Revolutionaries in many traditions have similarly called for a return to immediacy and intensity (e.g. Vaneigem, 1967: 236; Faun, 1999; Bey, 1994). Where active force is the driving force, subjects arrive immanently at dissident positions. Reactive force, in contrast, has its origins in statism and capitalism (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 214-17). It aims to make social space 'neat and orderly' (Perez, 18-19), creating governable subjects conducive to top-down quantification and control (Escobar, 2001: 133-4), and providing the work-discipline and speed which capitalism demands (Berardi, 2009: 43). It relies on bodily, emotional and sexual repression (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 350-1) and operates 'through a restriction, a blockage, a reduction' (1984: 293). When reactive force is prominent in the social field, impasses of social movements begin to appear.

Reactive force should be theorised in continuity with alienation and decomposition. Ultimately, reactive force is active force turned against itself, through being disempowered and segmented (Deleuze, 2006: 57). Processes of alienation convert active into reactive force, attacking the field of abundance and creating a situation of scarcity (Baudrillard, 1975: 58; Guattari, 1996: 89-90). Hence one ends up with a world which denies life, but keeps 'force-feeding survival to saturation-point' (Vaneigem, 1967: 98). Scarcity has to be continually reproduced, as all systems tend back to abundance, requiring new ways to eat up the surplus (Savage, n.d.). The system also has to carry out a continual work of decomposition or anti-production, to keep connections inactive and forces blocked, enclosing new 'commons' as they appear and 'disjunct[ing]' workers and consumers from one another (Guattari, 1984: 20). In reactive systems, active forces are trapped so as to prevent their flourishing, budding, or connecting to one another.

This antagonism of social forces is central to most radical perspectives in one way or another. We can think of active and reactive force as social and political principles (Kropotkin, 1896), affinity and hegemony (Day, 2005), constitutive and constituted power (Negri, 1999), power-to and power-over (Holloway, 2002), instituting and instituted imaginaries (Castoriadis, 1998), in the Marxist terms of labour and its alienation, the eco-anarchist terms of wildness (abundance) and civilisation (scarcity), the poststructuralist terms of productive textuality and the closed text, or even the Buddhist and Taoist terms of life-energy and its illusory forms. Readers are invited to read this article through their own theoretical reference-points, seeing how the same structural forces can be conceived in various different perspectives.

So why are reactive forces prevalent today? To answer this question, the mutations of active and reactive force need to be studied. This paper theorises that each phase of capitalism has a *dominant reactive affect***,** which is particularly induced by its dominant forms of power (at least in the core regions). In the nineteenth century, the dominant reactive affect was *misery;* in the Fordist period, *boredom*; in the neoliberal period, *anxiety*. Each dominant reactive affect persists only for as long as effective resistances to it have not been formulated. Each phase personalises the dominant reactive affect, blaming the oppressed for their oppression. This is reinforced by social isolation, and by systems of distraction (self-help, consumerism, the 'emotional orgy', and so on). Each dominant reactive affect is a *public secret*, in the Situationist sense (also known as a sanctioned ignorance in Spivak [1999], a social symptom in Žižek [1999: 138-40], and a culture of silence or submersion in Freire [1970]). A public secret is something which is generally visible, which is either known or so visible that it appears it should be known, but which is not discussed or declared – like the Emperor's nakedness or the elephant in the living room.

The theory of dominant reactive affects is partly conceived as an alternative to theories which celebrate the rise of immaterial labour as a path to eventual liberation through the unleashing of human creative power (e.g. Virno, 2004; Hardt and Negri, 2000; Holmes, 2004). Such theories are limited in assuming that capitalism releases human creative potential, and that the main problem is the privatisation of its product. This paper suggests that capitalism *does not* release human creativity in these new forms, but traps it in anxiety through the compulsion to communicate and the management of performance (with "communication" here conceived in terms of artificial social performances within the dominant system's terms – what Crisso and Odoteo [n.d.] term 'conjugating the imperial verb). Alienation is *internal* to the functioning of immaterial capitalism, not simply exploitation of its production (c.f. Dyer-Witheford, 2005; Federici, 2006). The resultant political strategy seeks to resist these new forms of power. It is similar to the autonomist theory in which social movement crises follow from altered social compositions which interfere with effectiveness (Malo, 2004).

Boredom and Fordism

The "first wave", or "old" social movements, were directed against a context in which misery was the dominant reactive affect. Concealed by capitalism, this misery was revealed by theorists such as Marx (1867: Chapter 25), who saw immiseration as central to the proletarian experience. The movements of this era were a *machine for fighting misery*, through wage and welfare struggles and mutual aid. The defeat of misery by the first wave of social movements caused capital to switch to a new strategy based on boredom. Fordism, based on secure, decently paid but monotonous work, created an experience of a "flat" world with no outside (Marcuse, 1964). While it was unavailable to everyone, the "B-worker deal" of boredom for security (P.M., 1983: 10-27) underpinned this phase. Crucially, boredom was a public secret in this period, and was not recognised as a problem except by radical theorists (c.f. Adorno, 1974: 207, 1991: 207; Benjamin, 1999: 101-4). It was only in the 1960s that discourses emerged which showed the public secret. The inadequacy of existing social movements tactics (such as forming Leninist parties, staging A-to-B marches, and calling public meetings) – sometimes denounced as "boring" or simply recuperated – is linked to their operation mainly as machines against misery.

For instance, the Situationists advanced the claim that '[w]e do not want a world in which the guarantee that we will not die of starvation is bought by accepting the risk of dying of boredom' (Vaneigem, 1967: 18). In feminist theory, Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* revealed the existential root of feelings of malaise and depression among housewives: 'I do not accept the answer that there is no problem... it cannot be understood in terms of age-old problems of... poverty, sickness, hunger, cold. The women who suffer this problem have a hunger that food cannot fill' (Friedan, 1963: 37). In its context, feminist consciousness-raising served to challenge the public secret of boredom. In many ways, it can be seen as one of a series of similar approaches – Freirean critical pedagogy, militant inquiry, Theatre of the Oppressed, Situationism, the mass line, autonomist practices of 'slacking off' or 'dropping out' (Shukaitis, 2006), high-risk protest repertoires (Peterson, 2001: chapter 2) – which similarly articulated grievances based on the blockages of the era. Autonomists have analysed such processes as a general exodus from the dominant forms of (boring) work and social roles (Brophy and de Peuter, 2007: 180-1). Most of today's tactics (for example, sit-downs, sit-ins, carnivalesque protest, Black Blocs, protest camps) come from this era, and can be seen as a *machine for fighting boredom*.

While this resistance to Fordism partly succeeded, capitalism has recomposed with an altered affective structure, chasing the exodus[1] by subsuming the social field (Tsianos and Papadopoulos, 2006; Lorey, 2010; Mitropoulos, 2005; Neilson and Rossiter, n.d.; Federici, 2006; Frassanito Network, 2005). In other words, capitalism has either taken away the extra-work spaces to which the exodus fled, or enclosed and recuperated them as sources of value. At the same

[1] Exodus is a type of resistance characterised by fleeing or escaping those spaces which are controlled by capital or the state – for example, work refusal, squatting, dropping-out, and creating countercultural spaces such as free festivals and social centres.

time, as Dirlik (1994) argues, the 1960s wave has been partially recuperated through practices such as flattened hierarchies and niche markets. Hence, a new wave of tactics and strategies is needed. The idea of three dominant reactive affects parallels Day's three-way split into old, new and newest social movements (Day, 2005), with the newest paralleling the movements elsewhere termed autonomous (Zibechi, 2010; Katsiaficas, 2007). I would suggest that existing autonomous movements are in many ways the interregnum between the anti-boredom wave and an emergent machine for fighting anxiety. Movements from the 1980s onwards are faced with the new, neoliberal composition of reactive affect, but this composition has only gained coherence over time. Movements from the 1980s to the present day continue to use many of the modalities of the 1960s-70s wave, which have remained effective against the residues of Fordism which have only gradually been demolished, while also beginning to develop challenges to the neoliberal composition of affect.

Anxiety as the dominant reactive affect of precarious neoliberal capitalism

This paper hypothesises that there is now a dominant reactive affect of anxiety, which also corresponds to a public secret (and corresponding personalisation) of anxiety and over-stress. This is prefigured by previous accounts. The Invisible Committee suggest that we are kept in a 'chronic state of near-collapse' which is a public secret (2009: 31), while Berardi suggests that multiple anxieties are fuelling a 'global panic' (2009: 43). Crucially, anxiety is *generalised* – even to the excluded and self-excluded. This weakens the strategies of exodus which undermined the regime of boredom. McMarvill and Los Ricos (n.d.) astutely analyse the three kinds of anxiety: for the included, fear of loss of status; for the marginal, fear of exclusion and loss of subsistence; for the autonomous and excluded, fear of state violence and repression. The situation creates a feeling of powerlessness, when people are not in fact powerless. Studies of unemployed youths suggest that they are often hopeless both about getting work and rebelling; the desire for 'something more' has been corroded (Berardi, 2009). Hence, it can be concluded that anxiety and resultant feelings of powerlessness contain resistance to capitalism.

Anxiety is not a new affect within capitalism. For instance, Wilhelm Reich theorises anxiety as a result of conflict between the libido (or active force) and the outer world, and as the source of character-armour and reactive formations (Reich, 1980: 48, 342, 347; Brinton, 1972: 29). It has been argued that such anxiety now invests the whole of the social and emotional field, rather than being concentrated mainly on sexuality (Karatzogianni and Robinson, 2010: 41). There are various mechanisms for inducing anxiety. Firstly, people are compelled to communicate, or commanded to be communicable and 'networked' within neoliberal systems (Lazzarato, 1996; c.f. Berardi, 2009: 108-12). In fact this requires that people be communicable on dominant terms. Reactive force in neoliberalism functions through an *obligation to be communicable*, distinct from the prohibition on speaking of the earlier period.

However, it permits communication only along systemically mediated paths. The threat facing the incommunicable is systematic exclusion, or the destruction of social connections. This process is often reinforced by performance management mechanisms which keep people constantly running on the spot, so as to meet performance targets which are often unrealistic or require excessive labour. The subjective internalisation of these mechanisms leads to self-surveillance and an association of the self with quality metrics. Required performances of subjectivity also produce a constant veneer of artificiality.

Another set of mechanisms arise from 'telepresence' (Virilio, 1994), or the immediate presence of different spaces to one another. Telepresence causes generalised vulnerability to the gaze of others. Consumerism has been alleged to require particular social performances which, rather than being hedonistic *stricto sensu*, compel people to keep up an appearance of simulated happiness and participation (Baudrillard, 1998: 141-2, 148-50). Research confirms that security measures such as CCTV and gating increase anxiety (Minton, 2012). So does the current regime of credit-financed consumption (Gill, 1995; Escalate Collective, 2012).

Then there is the bureaucratisation of everyday life under regimes of risk-management and securitisation. Public spaces are subject to surveillance and regulation. Risk-management and securitisation impede alternative practices. Laws have proliferated which seek to manage "behaviour" in ever more intricate ways, often backed by punishment-by-process and summary powers. When people lack control of their own lives, they compensate by over-controlling whatever they *can* control (Bruley, 1976: 13). We thus see such phenomena as the micro-management of families ("parental management"), an intensified pursuit of thinness, fashions for time-management and emotional management, and petty intolerance fuelling moral panics and crackdowns. Another example is the prison system. Changes since the 1990s have led to securitisation and intensified panopticism, combined with a system of psychological control based on a graded system of 'privileges'. These measures have succeeded in creating a situation in which prisoners are 'cowed, alienated from each other, and placated', allowing the rollback of previously-won rights and a growth of prison numbers (Barnsley, 2000). In the field of activism, corresponding problems are connected to the use of punishment-by-process, pre-emptive control techniques (such as kettling), mass surveillance, and practices of disposability such as dawn raids and police brutality.[2]

The work situation is often summarised in terms of management by stress, based on disposability (Moody, 1997). Often, the criteria are such as to keep

[2] People are deemed disposable in neoliberalism in that traumatic and violent tactics can be used against anyone (even privileged subjects) without entailing systemic illegitimacy. A person deemed indispensable, or valuable in her/himself, can expect corresponding social rights not to suffer systematic violence, dispossession, or trauma, whereas disposable people can be discarded and violated at will. While earlier regimes, such as Fordism, rendered certain groups disposable, neoliberalism extends disposability into a general social condition.

people running unsustainably on the spot, or even so as to require failure. People are expected to undergo continual retraining and assessment to keep them 'employable' (Moore, 2007). Kolinko's militant inquiry into service centres suggests a general ethos of performance management through computerised metrics, self-surveillance, constant re-testing, and the denial of stability (Kolinko, 2002). Economically, anxiety is linked to global outsourcing, lean production and financialisation (Berardi, 2009: 75-7; Virno, 2004: 56-9). Indeed, there is a structural isomorphism between generalised anxiety directed towards the future, and an economy with 'an explosion in the quantity of "fictitious" capital in circulation lacking any prospect of redemption' in the real economy (Harvey, 2003: 61).

Anxiety is closely associated with precarity (though there are also other sources). The focus on precarity in this article is an attempt to suggest that anxiety is a socially manufactured affect, rather than a personal deficit or individual difference. Precarity is 'non-self-determined insecurity' across work and life (Raunig, 2004), with insecure access to means to survive or flourish (Precarias, 2004). It uses insecurity to impose normalisation (Lorey, 2010; Bourdieu, 1998: 85), and treats people as disposable (Mitropoulos, 2005). It operates by rendering people's lives 'contingent on capital' (Mitropoulos, 2005). Precarity leads to 'yo-yo hours and days' which interfere with human contact (Tarì and Vanni, 2005) and eliminate the sense of a distinct future, due to time-space compression (Neilson and Rossiter, n.d.) or 'present shock' (Rushkoff, 2013). It corrodes one's ability to distinguish life from work (Fantone, 2006). The affective effects of this situation contribute to anxiety. Berardi argues that precarity leads to constant bodily excitation without means of release (Berardi, 2009: 90-1), and with a socially-imposed impossibility of relaxation (2009: 119). People are constantly over-stimulated by information and sensory input which over-engages attention (2009: 97, 115), leading to a 'constant attentive stress' (2009: 42). We are here thinking both of the impact of precarity on workers and poor people – possibly preventing them from becoming radicals or activists – and also the impact on existing activists, undermining mobilisation. Young people are particularly affected, as precarity is concentrated both among young workers, and in emerging mechanisms in the education and benefit systems.

However, this situation of generalised anxiety and stress is a public secret, not widely recognised in official or tolerated discourses. Research by sociologist Elisabeth Katschnig-Fasch suggests that most precarious workers are unhappy, yet reluctant to admit it because of social taboos (Weber, 2004). Anxiety, depression, attentive stress and so on are recognised, but only as *personal* problems, explained away as neurological problems, faulty cognitive schemas or a lack of coping strategies. Indeed, the public transcript suggests that we need *more* stress and anxiety, so as to keep us "safe" and/or "competitive". Part of the public secret is related to the fact that dominant discourses continue to assume the normality of Fordist life-courses and expectations, against which precarians necessarily fail. Often, today's crackdowns (such as moral panics and anti-immigration ideology) seek to uphold the superstructure of Fordism (nationalism, community integration, "respect") in a context where the

infrastructure is long-gone. They blame precarians for precarity, seek to force people into communication within neoliberalism, and reinforce the personalisation of precarity as irresponsibility or deviance. Gramsci argues that there is a time-lag between economic change and corresponding ideological changes (Gramsci, 1971: 426). Today, this time-lag is keeping the precariat in conditions of affective deficit.

Just as capitalism earlier used national growth as a vicarious substitute for real welfare, and foreign wars as a channel for boredom-induced frustration (Marcuse, 1968), so today, real insecurity is channelled into support for securitisation, or security for spooks such as the nation and state. In particular, Appadurai (2006) argues that the intolerance of in-groups is a way of acting-out anxiety over the collapse of boundaries in the era of globalisation. This is a vicious circle, as securitisation intensifies the real sources of insecurity (surveillance, performance management and so on). Just as more people die in a normal week than a month of revolution, so more insecurity is caused in a normal week of securitised harassment and disposability than a month of “terrorism” or “rioting”.[3]

The experience of consciousness raising

So how might social movements formulate a pedagogy targeting anxiety? This paper proposes to get back to the base level of experience to unfold new theories and strategies to address the current context. There is a need to formulate autonomous social movement epistemologies which construct knowledge from the bottom up, avoiding the hegemonic status of vanguard intellectuals while also transforming affect (Motta, 2011). This paper proposes to revive such forms of knowledge-production in the global North, where they are currently weak. It is here important to reject a rush to action without understanding, which leads to action which is less radical (Sarachild, 1975a: 149) or premature (Levine, 1979). The proposal is for *precarity consciousness-raising*, focusing on personal problems in the lives of activists and oppressed people so as to unfold awareness of the structuring role of precarity and anxiety, while also creating spaces which begin to challenge anxiety. The aim is a 'reversal of perspective', seeing from the perspective of life rather than power. This requires making the public secret visible and speakable.

This article focuses on feminist consciousness raising as a model for the new method. This is not the only process which could have been used as a model. Other, similar methods include critical pedagogy in Latin America, *autocoscienza* in Italy (de Lauretis, 1990: 6), 'testifying' in the civil rights movement (Steinem, 1995: 21), and 'speaking bitterness' in revolutionary China. In China, the process has been analysed as a way of breaking habitual dependency and deference on the part of peasants (Solomon, 1971: 160-70). An account of feminist consciousness-raising will now be given, to provide a basis

[3] For example, there were five deaths during the unrest of 2011, averaging 1 a day; more than 6000 people committed suicide the same year.

for comparison for possible ways of challenging precarity.

Consciousness raising (CR) combines a reclamation of voice regarding everyday experience with the formulation of forms of grounded theory closely linked to such narratives. Part of the idea of consciousness raising is that grounded theory should emerge from the experience and interests of those it aims to liberate (MacKinnon, 1989: 83; MacKinnon, 1982: 520). However, it is not *simply* about speaking from experience – which, after all, is encouraged and even commanded within neoliberalism (as reality TV, vox pops, Facebook statuses, focus groups, and so on). The intersection of narratives of experience, firstly with others' narratives, secondly with a space encouraging the emergence of the 'public secret', and thirdly with a structural analytical framework, effectively re-frame experiences so they are lived and *felt* in transformed ways.

In Gramscian fashion, good sense is not simply recounted, but also *elaborated* into a new conception of the world which is felt as well as thought. This passage from "personal" to "political" is, however, carried out without vanguard intellectuals or parties to mediate the transition. It emerges immanently, within the everyday. Participation in analysis as thinkers is validating, while also revealing and challenging a widespread inability to think conceptually (Allen, 1970: 28). The new knowledges coming from consciousness-raising were also unfolded in a range of texts.

Speaking from experience

From a survey of the related literature, seven aspects of the process have been identified. The first of these is the act of speaking from experience. According to participants, CR was a 'conscious attempt to speak in words born of grassroots insight, including the resulting passion and anger' (Hanisch, 2010), to 'emphasise our own feelings and experiences and women' and test generalisations against this experience (Sarachild, 1975a: 145), 'studying the whole gamut of women's lives, starting with the full reality of one's own' (1975a: 145). Sarachild terms it 'going to the people – women themselves, and going to experience for theory and strategy' (1975a: 148).

The idea of a public secret or silenced knowledge was crucial. It was assumed that women's perceptions are 'cramped, darkened, frustrated, undeveloped, misguided or even seemingly replaced by a false consciousness', so that 'their own true individual awareness is somehow not really operative', either being 'blocked or stymied or repressed or just overloaded with so much shit' (Forer, 1975: 151). From a Gramscian point of view, it might be termed an elaboration of forms of good sense which are otherwise kept hidden for fear of common sense (Gramsci, 1995: 557). Similarly, Morales argues that consciousness raising 'is a permanent struggle against an ever impinging bourgeois ideology that attacks us not only in the form of political doctrine but also as fears, ambitions, resentments, feelings: the stuff of everyday political practice' (Morales, 1975: 199).

Validation: Recognising submerged realities

A second important aspect was *validation*. It was seen as crucial to validate the reality, and the political nature, of one's own feelings and experiences. Women struggled with their own reality and pain, with recognising 'that the pain is pain, that it is also one's own, that women are real' (MacKinnon, 1989: 91). The acknowledgement of validity is important in breaking down personalisation (Allen, 1970: 24-5). Validation also provides the underpinnings for political conclusions. As one account argues: '[w]e assume that our feelings... mean something worth analyzing... that our feelings are saying something *political*... Our feelings will lead us to ideas and then to actions' (Hole and Levine, 1971: 131).In research on the process, interviewees have suggested that it helps women to affirm that what they see is real (Reger, 2004: 218).

Crucially, through such a process of validation, the public secret ceased to be a secret. One of Shreve's interviewees described it as an 'eye-popping experience... I didn't know that there were all these other women out there feeling just like me. I thought everybody was home, baking, and being happy about it' (Shreve, 1989: 42). Levine suggests that consciousness-raising breaks down the repressive character-structure which acts as a 'moral policeman' or 'cop in the head' within each person, which causes personalisation (Levine, 1979: 7). In some cases, memories which had been repressed or pushed out of awareness were able to return, as in the case in Dreifus's group with experiences of rape, memories of which 'worked their way into our awareness' in the week before the meeting. Without CR, she suggests, 'it would have been another one of the invisible issues women never see, feel, or know – yet suffer' (1973: 213-14). Validation also challenges the internal attribution of blame which otherwise sustains conformity (Weitz, 1982: 233), undermining personalisation. It has a healing effect in 'momentarily relieving the individual of responsibility for her situation does occur and is necessary if women are to be free to act' (Allen, 1970: 30-1).

Constructing voice

Another purpose of the groups, where everyone was heard seriously, was to 'give to women what they did not have – a voice' (Cornell, 2000: 1033). They were organised as a way of sharing experiences through personal testimony (Sowards and Renegar, 2004: 535). Metaphors of hearing and speaking expressed a feeling of transition from silence to voice, with women often finding part of their own voice in others' experiences (MacKinnon, 1989: 86). The exercise of voice 'moved the reference point for truth and thereby the definition of reality as such... through a process that redefines what counts as verification' (MacKinnon, 1989: 87). Ruth Rosen argues: 'Having learned to see the world through men's eyes, one suddenly began to view life through the eyes of a woman' (cited Dean, 2013).

The construction of voice is related to depersonalisation of oppression. Through the construction of voice, the naturalisation of experiences and performativities

could be challenged (MacKinnon, 1989: 95; Cornell, 2000: 1034). The groups also created a climate in which the ability to reconstruct language is explored (Kalcik, 1975: 4). Crucially, this type of voice is dissimilar from the neoliberal obligation to communicate. It involves a more intimate, interpersonal, and slower-pace relationship. According to one account, the construction of voice in this sense takes time, as it requires overcoming habits of superficial communication (Bruley, 1976: 8). The slower pace of the process, compared to other forms of politics and everyday life, arguably allows the processes of community-building and analytical integration. As Susan Griffin observes, 'We do not rush to speech. We allow ourselves to be moved' (1978: 197). This seems to have had radical affective impacts. Surveys suggest that sharing experiences and feelings was the most noticeable group process for participants (Kravetz, 1978: 168). The effect is often one of 'speaking the "unspoken"', a process extended into the public domain (Dubriwny, 2005: 413), effectively exposing the public secret and rupturing the silence around it.

Studies of the rhetoric, or speaking style, of the groups show a particular style of social weaving which helps to explain how the groups were able to articulate collective experiences. The discussions involve a style of speech irreducible to traditional theories of rhetoric (Campbell, 2002: 51). Kalcik suggests that particular types of narrative arose in consciousness-raising which reinforced the goal of linking experiences to structures, and which followed an 'underlying aesthetic or organising principle' of harmonising accounts (1975: 6). In particular, this was enabled by the 'kernel story' or brief references to previous accounts, which allowed the weaving-together of experiences (1975: 3, 9; c.f. Shreve, 1989: 21). Kernel stories are used to weave together experiences and attribute similar meanings, even when experiences are different (Dubriwny, 2005: 406, 417; c.f. Allen, 1970: 26). Bruley also refers to the kernel story as a kind of 'shorthand form of communication which seemed to give the group a terminology of its own', allowing rapid reference back to earlier conclusions (Bruley, 1976: 8). Dubriwny analyses the process as a 'collective development of experiential knowledge' (2005: 395) involving a 'collaborative interaction of many voices' to give new meanings to experiences (2005: 398). New public vocabularies emerge 'as the product of the collective articulation of multiple, overlapping individual experiences', and persuade not by changing opinions, but through 'the creation of situations in which the telling of individual experiences makes possible a reframing of one's understanding of the world' (2005: 396). In such a context, recounting experiences allows their meaning to be reshaped (2005: 416). The process has also been termed re-socialisation (Eastman, 1973).

Creating a safe space

The creation of safe space seems to have been both a goal in itself and a means to construct a certain type of communication. Safety in this context is not so much risk-management as disalienation. According to Mackinnon, '[b]y providing room for women to be close, these groups demonstrated how far

women were separated' (MacKinnon, 1989: 87). It clears a 'space in the world' in which women can move (MacKinnon, 1989: 101). Each participant had as much "free space" as she needed to talk without interruption, encouraging less vocal members to participate in depth (Shreve, 1989: 13). When groups operated with rules (which varied), these were constructed so as to create this kind of space. Aspects such as confidentiality, the discouragement of judgement, and the absence of men contributed to creating optimal conditions for intimate speech. Crucially, the *mediation* of relationships was largely removed, as the usual mediation was via men.

The process is basically disalienating, breaking down horizontal separations. Arnold suggests that participants 'had been glued to our men and separated from each other all our lives' (1970: 160). Similarly, Bruley suggests that 'CR teaches women to relate to each other without the mediation of men' (1976: 21). Reger suggests that the groups fostered 'emotional expressiveness and caring, nurturing and personal relationships' (Reger, 2004: 212). Group members who started as strangers built up a great feeling of closeness (Dreifus, 1973: 52), described by interviewees as unconditional solidarity, an extended family (Shreve, 1989: 197) or actualised sisterhood (cited Dreifus, 1973: 259). The reorientation to immediacy is a form of reactivation of active desire, which follows from the removal of forces creating decomposition through alienation.

Affective or emotional transformation

Another recurring feature of accounts of the groups is their operation as a means to redefine and therefore transform particular emotions arising from oppression. The groups intervene in a context where reactive emotions are dominant, and personal affective expression is denied or invalidated. Women are seen as 'paralyzed... by emotions which have no corresponding terms in language' (Milan Women's Bookstore Collective 1990: 26), or by 'feelings of personal shittiness that tyrannize each and every one of us' (Levine, 1979: 8). Solitude leads to a 'feeling that we are misfits, antisocial, neurotic, hysterical, crazy', and to think of problems as 'personal defects' (cited Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, 1979: 41). A major task of the groups is to transform these affects in more positive directions.

This is clear in the literature, particularly through the reworking of anger. Reger's study suggests that such groups redefine certain emotions, including anger, frustration, hopelessness and alienation. They 'help transform personal emotions into a collectively defined sense of injustice' (Reger, 2004: 205). Faced with an experience which is oppressive, constant, and frustrating, the groups transform the anger and alienation resulting from the experience into a more positive, focused kind of discontent (2004: 214), by providing a constructive context in which anger can be felt (2004: 218). The group's 'permission' to feel anger can overcome earlier prohibitions, making anger an 'energizing force for change, increasing confidence, and enhancing relationships' (Randolph and Ross-Valliere, 1979: 924). One interviewee gives an example of responding with

anger instead of depression to sexism at work (Shreve, 1989: 102).

Bruley suggests that consciousness-raising challenges guilt about and suppression of anger. Instead, anger is recognised as a necessary response to oppression, and channelled into the women's movement and into intolerance of sexism (Bruley, 1976: 13). 'Through CR we learn that it is *good* and *positive* to be angry and to express that anger every time we face sexism and male chauvinism' (1976: 22). Levine suggests that the process is a way to 'turn... personal anger into constructive energy' and undo 'ancient shackles' (Levine, 1979: 6). The WMST-L guide, based on the Cape Cod Women's Liberation pamphlet, advises that anger should be used to 'confront... those who have actually hurt us' rather than turned inwards (WMST-L, n.d.). One interviewee recalls that discussions would 'touch on nerves that we didn't even know existed', in very emotional ways (Shreve, 1989: 49), effectively de-repressing sanctioned ignorances. In a related study, Taylor (1996) suggests that activist postpartum depression groups have handled depression, and related feelings of shame and fear, by transforming them into movement-connected anger.

The focus on anger gives a misleading impression of a mainly reactive process. However, some accounts suggests that this involves a switch from reactive to active affect. Allen suggests there is a distinction between 'resentment', based on 'feeling inferior', to other kinds of anger, and that participants become less resentful (Allen, 1970: 12), partly by initially venting this resentment (1970: 61). She also suggests there are needs both to affirm one's social worth and relieve anger at oppressors (1970: 46). Women's accounts suggest that emotions were expressed rather than programmed in the groups (Brownmiller, 1970: 152).

Other, more affirmative emotions were also constructed. Allen writes of a recognition of being 'individuals with emotional needs and fears' (Allen, 1970: 14). Opening up about one's feelings is a central need which is met by the CR process, and which disalienates emotional alienation (1970: 24). She also suggests that building trust is a central goal (1970: 59). The groups were also said to relieve feelings of shittiness (Levine, 1979: 8) and dissolve fears (Brownmiller, 1970: 151). Experiences often turn out to be similar, leading to a feeling of closeness (Dreifus, 1973: 52). Lee suggests that, in her case, 'to come to a class that addressed these issues directly and gave me the words for all those pent-up feelings and frustrations was a tremendously affirming and empowering experience' (2001: 68). Whereas isolation turns frustration into self-doubt, collectivity turns it into perspectives which can produce action (Allen, 1970: 27). The groups also provided a 'safety net' of solidarity which provided a backdrop to take risks and shed old ideas and performances (Shreve, 1989: 199), and a powerful feeling of being “okay” (1989: 240). The groups are also described as allowing withdrawal and respite from daily struggles (Allen, 1970: 60).

The “click”

Part of the purpose of groups is to experience what is termed the “click” (Reger,

2004: 211; Shreve, 1989: 53; Dubriwny, 2005: 418). Reger describes this as 'the moment of an individual's realization of societal inequities' (2004: 214), and Shreve as a moment of 'eye-popping realization... the sudden comprehension, in one powerful instant, of what sexism exactly meant, how it had colored one's own life' (1989: 53). It is a moment at which experiences and feelings suddenly make sense in relation to patriarchal structures – which is quite different from simply seeing sexism in the abstract. Afterwards participants feel they *know* the impact of male supremacy (Allen, 1970: 27), and that they have a 'personal "why?" of rebellion' (Dreifus, 1973: 6) or a more radical understanding (Sarachild, 1975a: 146). This is crucial to emotional transformations towards active force. According to Reger, 'the "click" brought about validation and focus to the women's anger, different from the sense of anger, mixed with hopelessness and frustration' which they experienced before (2004: 215).

Integrating and analysing – rather than simply presenting – experiences

Perhaps the aspect of the groups which sets them most aside from current academic views of reflexivity and experiential speech is the emphasis on a function of transformation, integration, and analysis of narratives of experiences. For radicals, the aim was not to recount each experience for its own sake, for psychological benefits, or to counter generalisations as such, but to provide a wider pool of knowledge and better generalisations (Sarachild, 1975a: 148). The addition of non-commonsensical propositions about oppression transforms narratives of experience, creating space for analytical reintegration. The main proposition added to narratives were that 'the personal is political', in the sense that personal experiences have structural, collective roots related to a common struggle, and not open to personal adjustive strategies (Sarachild, 19751: 147; Brownmiller, 1970: 146; Allen, 1970: 28; CWLU, 1971; WMSL-L, n.d.; Kalcik, 1975: 3). In discovering that the 'personal narrative is political', participants 'transform the dominant meaning of experience by bringing a different set of assumptions to bear on it' (Langellier, 1989: 269), effectively overcoming the personalisation of oppression (Bruley, 1976: 22; Bond and Lieberman, 1980: 268).

It also provides a sense of the commonality or coherence of narratives (MacKinnon, 1989: 85; Bruley, 1976: 21; Shreve, 1989: 244). Sometimes the process involved the emergence of *similar* experiences – for instance, the awareness that most women are unhappy with their body-image (WMSL-L: n.d.; Shreve, 1989: 39; Forer, 1975: 151; Bruley, 1976: 10). In other cases, it is the *weaving together* of experiences which creates commonality. A transcript of one discussion is provided by Firestone (1968), where recounting experiences reveals that the entire group have relationships with men they can't stand. In this case, the relationship situations of the participants are very different, but a similar structural nexus is identified. Hence, the pooling can relate to *common experiences* or to *common sources of distinct experiences* – the latter arguably important in thinking about the diverse, segmented field of precarity. In many

ways, the proposal that women are politically oppressed is *added to* the personal experiences in a way which alters their meaning.

This task was particularly carried out during the summing-up, after the personal contributions, when participants sought to draw out similar elements and conclusions (Shreve, 1989: 45; 220). Bond and Lieberman say that 'participants are encouraged to look at relatively small injustices as symbolic of larger issues' (1980: 289). This involved a transformation in perspective which 'implies viewing one's life in an entirely new way' (Bruley, 1976: 21). The process creates an 'operative theoretical horizon' (Malo, 2004). Participants learn to fit experiences (including psychological difficulties) into patterns of oppression (Arnold, 1970: 159; Shreve, 1989: 59; Dreifus, 1973: 5). Green suggests that the groups supply a 'vocabulary of motives' with group support, which alter perceptions and interpretations of everyday life (Green, 1979: 359). The process often had a generalising effect, articulating the local with the structurally global. Bartky refers to the process as understanding 'where we are in light of where we are not yet' (Bartky, 1977: 26). It provides meanings as to why one's life is in turmoil (Shreve, 1989: 40), giving a 'vantage point' on everyday life (Allen, 1970: 20-1; c.g. Shreve, 1989: 198). The means to establish such transformations is not political manipulation, nor explanation by those who are already conscious, but a kind of self-transformation arising from thinking structurally about experiences, culminating in a "click".

Psychological effects

Particularly relevant to the situation of anxiety as dominant affect is the impact such a process can have on affective configurations. Consciousness raising is psychologically positive in untying knots and releasing active force, even though it is not therapeutic in a conventional sense. There was a strong rejection in the CR movement of the label of therapy, which was often used by opponents (Sarachild, 1975a: 145). The main difference is that CR rejects the internal attribution of blame and the social adjustment orientation of therapy, instead emphasising social oppression and collective responses (Reger, 2004: 215; Dreifus, 1973: 7; Hanisch, in Brownmiller, 1970: 152; Shreve, 1989: 11, 200; WMST-L, n.d.). 'Wellness was not the point, because women already were well – it was the society that was ill... Rather, the collective was the point. The "click" was the point. The commonality was the point' (Shreve, 1989: 200-1). In addition, consciousness-raising differs from many forms of group therapy in that it does not confront people or seek to analyse their faults, with conflict discouraged rather than encouraged (Randolph and Ross-Valliere, 1979: 922).

This rejection of the label "therapeutic" should not suggest that psychological effects are irrelevant. Psychological benefits and personal transformations *do happen* in CR. Indeed, CR groups have also been described as alternative mental health resources (Kravetz, 1976), Surveys suggest that '[n]early all women [who took part] were highly satisfied with CR' (Kravitz et al., 1986: 257; c.f. Dreifus, 1973: 34, 36; Kravetz, 1978). The groups have a validating effect,

rejecting spoiled identity (see MacKinnon, 1989: 100) and providing a 'comforting realization that they were all in this together' (Shreve, 1989: 14) and a liberating opportunity to vent anger (Dreifus, 1973: 2). Realising a problem is political and social, rather than individual, tends to 'lift the problem off your shoulders', as the dominant construction yields its power over oneself (Forer, 1975: 151). The moment of the 'click' is recalled in interviews as 'one of enormous relief' (Shreve, 1989: 55). Many accounts suggest that the groups were a growing-up or life-changing experience (Bruley, 1976: 17, 21; Shreve, 1989: 203). They have also been termed 'an organized life-support system that is largely unavailable to women in our society today' (1989: 36).

Quantitative research suggested that CR did not reduce anxiety or depression, but it did raise self-esteem, awareness of one's potential, and awareness of social oppression (Bond and Lieberman, 1980: 300-1). Research by Rose Weitz concludes that 'consciousness raising may help women to increase their sense of control and externalize their attributions of blame, and may consequently increase self-esteem and reduce depression among participants' (1982: 231). In a review of empirical studies, Nassi and Abramowitz (1978) suggest that CR is globally effective in 'fostering personal development as well as political awareness', including 'pro-feminist attitudes', but empirical evidence for personal growth and self-esteem outcomes are ambiguous (1978: 139). Follingstad et al (1977) attempted to reproduce consciousness-raising groups in experimental sessions, and found both increased pro-feminist attitudes and increased self-esteem. Similar results emerged from school-based variants of CR (Abernathy et al., 1977). However, it is also widely noted that a raised consciousness without political change can be painful (Butterwick, 1978: 46; Dreifus, 1973: 73; Allen, 1970: 60), so the positive effects in question may depend on a combination of consciousness-raising with other forms of political action.

Given the positive psychological effects, it is possible that anxiety and related problems could provide a pathway into the political process, if groups are framed in a particular way. Research suggests that self-help or psychological support was a common motive for joining such groups (Home, 1980; Bond and Lieberman, 1980: 281), along with understanding one's experiences (Kravetz et al., 1986: 257), and emotional responses to either a pre-group “click” or a general sense of alienation (Reger, 2004: 212). Political motivation was less common as a motive (Bond and Lieberman, 1980: 281)Hence, it might also be worth promoting precarity-focused groups as a type of psychological support or “self-help”, albeit of a non-adaptive kind. It is necessary to insist that precarians are not “failing to adapt” to neoliberalism because they're neurotic, anti-social, and so on – that the problem is with the anxiety-inducing social roles precarity imposes, and the constant (failed) struggle to conform to these (often impossible) roles. However, recognising that the problem is social roles and not our own maladaptiveness is itself a psychological shift, a self-transformation.

It has been widely observed that consciousness raising does not always lead to political activation (Shreve, 1989: 217; Dreifus, 1973: 34; Gutierrez, 1995; La

Belle, 1987: 204). However, the groups were also said to provide 'a constant supply of recruits to the movement's social activist core' (Carden, 1974: 73), and Reger's research suggests that between a third and a quarter of participants became politically active (Reger, 2004: 208, 217).

There have also been political debates about the use of consciousness-raising. Most famously, Freeman (1972-3) argues that consciousness-raising provides an inappropriate model for political organisation, and is vulnerable to informal hierarchies (see Levine, 1979 for a response). The group is said to have converged with group therapy as it was adopted by liberal organisations (Rosenthal, 1984:309; Sarachild, 1975b:168). Some groups became focused mainly on personal "venting", or were subject to disputes over whether they should have a political dimension (Shreve, 1989:218-19; Allen, 1970:14; Dean, 2013), and some participants reportedly arrived at pessimistic conclusions that they can rely only on themselves in a hostile world (Shreve, 1989:60-1; Dean, 2013). While such problems are likely to recur in some groups, they are not necessarily fatal. We would suggest that an autonomous social movement approach provides an alternative both to processes which begin *and end* with the development of critical capabilities, and to approaches which funnel critical development into traditional organisations. In principle, consciousness-raising groups could mutate into affinity groups within a wide network of autonomous groups, with the networked context providing the capacity to move beyond critique to transformation (and in many cases, even enacting or prefiguring this transformation within emergent networks).

Applying consciousness raising to precarity

Given the discussions in the first section above, this paper will now attempt to show how precarity differs from and is similar to the context of consciousness raising in the 1960s/70s, so as to suggest its usefulness as a pedagogical strategy to combat anxiety as the dominant reactive affect. This paper does not deny that women's oppression has a specific reality – both in its Fordist incarnation and today. It does not deny that renewed feminist consciousness-raising on similar issues, some of which are unchanged today, would be a valuable process. It also does not argue that precarians have *the same experiences* as women had under Fordism. However, the focus of this paper is on breaking the public secret of anxiety, and hence with applying a similar method from a precarian subject-position.

Given the hypothesis that the dominant reactive affect of the Fordist era was boredom, it is not to be expected that the same social problems will emerge today, either among women or more generally among precarians. However, similarities exist. The combination of frantic activity with underlying dissatisfaction is reminiscent of housewife malaise. Another similarity is the existence of a constant, oppressive, frustrating situation which feels inescapable. The personalisation of problems which actually stem from structural sources is widespread. The immense spread of self-esteem and self-help discourses is

testament to this. The precariat is also privatised in a different way, through the economic “privatisation” of social functions and the associated discourse of individual responsibility. Precarians tend to fall for the offer of personalised solutions, in terms of a 'less-bad' life (Berlant, 2007: 291; Neilson and Rossiter, 2008: 57). This is distinct from the public-private split, but similar in denying the political nature of social structures, and hence possibly open to similar responses. The absence of a structural or “political” framing of issues is another similarity. Precarians are faced with difficulties acknowledging their own reality and their own pain in a world in which something must be counted (by 'quality' regimes) or mediatised (on the television or Internet) to be validated as real. Many precarians are unaware of belonging to an oppressed group, because neoliberal mechanisms of control have become normalised, and psychological effects are personalised. The status of anxiety as a 'public secret', and its submersion within dominant discourses, are further similarities.

Running through the seven functions of consciousness-raising outlined above, each is potentially important in challenging precarity and reconstructing anxiety. Speaking from experience is useful in overcoming personalisation and showing the social nature of the problem. Validation is important in overcoming accounts which personalise responsibility and deny the reality of precarity, and in breaking the silence around the public secret. The construction of voice is important to combat the widespread discourses blaming the precariat for precarity, as well as to reveal the public secret. A safe space is needed to allow people to speak about emotionally stressful and personalised (hence sometimes shameful) experiences, and to prevent anxiety from undermining the space itself. Affective transformation is crucial in transforming anxiety, a source of paralysis, into affective forms which enable recomposition, such as love, courage and focused anger. The click in this case would entail a recognition of anxiety as a social effect and a matter of power, which would in turn shift perceptions of the social field from a game of competitive success to a conflict scenario and a narrative of oppression and liberation. Integration and analysis are important in depersonalising anxiety, relating it to structural sources, and finding and combating the deep sources of reactive affect, thus discursively converting apparently insoluble surface problems into effects of politically tractable underlying issues.

However, certain difficulties problematise a too-easy extrapolation of methods. A first major difference is that precarity will probably turn out to be more mediated, layered and segmentary than Fordist-era gender oppression. Authors on precarity generally emphasise the diversity of the group, which is one reason why traditional political mobilisations fail (Sarrantonio, 2008; Tsianos and Papadopoulos, 2006; Neilson and Rossiter, 2008: 58, 64; Berardi, 2009: 93). Theorists of precarity recognise that the precariat is not a single subject, and that working across diversity is necessary (Shukaitis, 2006; Sarrantonio, 2008; Lorey, 2010; Raunig, 2007; Precarias, 2004). This means that, in precarity consciousness-raising, similar experiences will probably be less important than the similar structural nexus of diverse experiences. This renders the analysis-integration stage particularly crucial. Previous precarity movements have had to

focus on creating a 'context of experience and articulation' (Nowotny, 2004), rather than simply the pooling of similar experiences. However, precarity organising is concentrated among educated youths in countries where the loss of Fordism is recent (Fantone, 2006; Neilson and Rossiter, 2008: 54). Consciousness-raising might be crucial to expanding the movement to other sub-groups within the precariat, and to countries without a strong, recent Fordist history. In addition, whereas 'women' is a general social category, the precariat is not. This is arguably problematic if seeking to reach people who are not already radical, and alternatives such as 'creative workers' and 'socially excluded' might be considered.

A second difference is that, whereas women in Fordism were often literally separated, precarians are also connected in mediated forms, such as social media. However, this connectedness is limited by the compulsion to perform, self-censorship, and quasi-publicity (precluding intimacy). It happens in a form which allows contact only between ego-projections which typically mimic neoliberal subjectivity, and which thus impedes the meaningful sharing of experiences and the construction of common narratives. 1960s/70s consciousness-raising focused on obtaining voice and space. Today, the modality of providing space for voice runs up against the compulsion to speak (Berardi, 2009: 108, 112) and the surface level of neoliberal personalities which are the ones most immediately expressed (Amsler, 2008, 2011). This complicates the process of constructing voice. We would suggest that the most important aspects today are learning to speak with an inner voice (rather than a neoliberal performance), learning to take time-off from the obligation to perform, learning to listen (to self as well as others), and learning to reconstruct elements of fragmented lives into structural patterns.

One major barrier to this type of intervention is the structure of time for the precariat. Time pressure is a major barrier to this type of intensive group activity, especially given that time commitments are central to consciousness-raising (Allen, 1970: 18; WMST-L, n.d.; Shreve, 1989: 19, 226) and trust-building takes time (Shreve, 1989: 13). Yet as we have seen, precarians are subject to yo-yo hours, telepresence, and present shock, In response to this problem, it may be necessary to articulate a specific strategy of reclaiming the 'time of life' from work (Neilson and Rossiter, n.d.; c.f. Tsianos and Papadopoulos, 2006), or to partially secede from high-speed flows (Berardi, 2009: 43). In addition, a respite from daily struggles is itself a motivation to attend such groups (Shreve, 1989: 75). Another problem is the feeling of powerlessness. As Hanisch argues, '[r]egular meetings take a high degree of commitment that is hard to motivate when activity and the belief that big changes are possible are at low ebb' (Hanisch, 2010). The problem is a vicious circle, because low politicisation and powerlessness condition one another. However, this may be less of a problem if an initial framing of the groups as psychological support is used.

Latin American movements are in many ways ahead of those in the North in addressing the current conjuncture (Motta, 2012). One existing parallel is the

work of *La Ruta Pacifica*. This group theorise 'vital energy', similar to active force, as under attack (Cockburn, 2005: 21), and respond with a participatory, dialogical approach with a slower pace (Cockburn 2005: 17). Processes of 'social weaving', healing and morning are central (Colorado, 2003), and talking through fear is an important aspect (Cockburn, 2005: 10). The aim is to create new configurations of affect sufficiently powerful to interrupt the dominant construction (Cockburn 2005: 14). It is recounted by participants as helping individual healing and the recovery of inner strength (Brouwer, 2008: 85). It is described by participants as repairing social ties and weaving love knots, and it creates 'invisible threads' and has 'restorative effects'. Being 'bound' by social weaving is a way to control fear (Colorado, 2003). Such activities sometimes lead onto activities which reclaim public space (Colorado, 2003; Cockburn, 2005: 15). Such actions are 'painstakingly prepared' through a participatory process (Cockburn, 2005: 11) which seeks to deal with underlying fears. The situation in Colombia is distinct from that in the UK as the situation of fear relates to a sharper, but also more localised type of trauma connected to militarisation. However, the model is indicative of possible responses to widespread anxiety.

Examining the specific functions of consciousness raising listed above, there are some which would be similar, and others distinct. Speaking from experience, and validation, might proceed much as in the 1970s. The "click" is still similar, and is an important goal in a context where awareness of structural origins of problems is increasingly denied. In relation to voice and safe space, the main forms of separation within precarity operate via mediated (pseudo-)communication, and a central mechanism of consciousness-raising is thus to exclude these particular forms of separation. Rhetorics of performance management and behavioural classification, social media, and micro (as well as macro) discriminations are all relevant here. The most important question, however, is persuading people not to offer the neoliberal performance which has become, for many people, the automatic response to a request to "be oneself" or exercise voice. In relation to affective transformation, anxiety and related emotions (depression, frustration, trauma, excessive stress, and so on) provide a clear focus. The transformation of reactive affects into movement-focused anger of courage might still be viable, but the "binding" or transformation of anxiety also requires reconfigurations of horizontal connections which provide a kind of groundedness for life, warding off both meaninglessness and isolation. The affective "safety net" or "respite" function of groups is here particularly appropriate in reactivating active force. Since people are suffering 'constant attentive stress' (Berardi, 2009: 42), it is important that groups provide a relief from social pressure and the need to engage one's attention intensely. A quieter, more meditative modality should be encouraged.

Consciousness raising might ameliorate anxiety in several ways – through political awareness of the origins of affects, through the supportive forms of the groups themselves, and through political reactivation to create a less anxious context. This could activate the 'frightening' instead of the 'frightened' face of the precariat. Tsianos and Papadopoulos (2006) argue that the precariat is a

frightening force only when it does not succumb to anxiety. The psychoanalytic (Freudian-Lacanian) theory that anxiety is related to the lack of a symbolic dimension is largely incompatible with this approach, although it has a grain of truth (the capitalist demand to 'succeed' or 'enjoy' lacks a substantive script), and consciousness-raising groups clearly provide a 'symbolic' of sorts, in the form of what authors term a perspective, standpoint, or ideology.

Conclusion

We have suggested that a new wave of consciousness-raising may be useful to fight the current public secret of anxiety. These claims were offered as strategic suggestions to revive political struggle in the present conjuncture, particularly in those settings in the North where it is in remission. How far are these claims true? They are supported by the evidence cited here, when integrated by the theoretical propositions put forward. But there is no guarantee that the strategy will work. It is only by experimenting with the approaches put forward here that the analysis can ultimately be confirmed, modified, or denied. The approach is put forward as a hopeful possibility for effective transformation in a context where movement forces seem largely blocked, but ultimately, the process of formulating new strategies is experimental and unpredictable. Still, we have to start somewhere[4].

[4] Two articles related to this one have appeared on the Internet. A piece titled "Eight Theses on the Affective Structure of the Present Conjuncture" appeared in the 2014 issue of *Anarchy: Journal of Desire Armed*. A shorter piece, entitled "We Are All Very Anxious", appeared on the website of Plan C, at the address http://www.weareplanc.org/we-are-all-very-anxious/. An abbreviated version of precarity consciousness-raising was trialled at Plan C's annual gathering in September 2014, and largely confirmed the hypotheses (with the notable addition that most participants were more inwardly affected in their own identities and desires than the IPC formulation allowed). This latter piece went viral on social media and was republished as a pamphlet by CrimethInc in the US, translated and published in German by Analyse & Kritik, in Spanish by the Anarchist Library, and in Greek at Criticalepsy. We would like to clarify that the IPC and Plan C are separate groups, that Plan C has not collectively endorsed the theses on anxiety. Nevertheless, we are grateful to Plan C, and also to Anarchy journal, CrimethInc, Interface and others, for circulating our work. Sadly we are not much further with the practical side of the intervention than we were. Anyone interested in trialling or developing the approach is invited to contact us on precariousconsciousness@email.biz.

Two criticisms have emerged frequently in discussions and responses. Firstly, some of those we have spoken to seek to reduce the issue of anxiety to either capitalism or industrial society, suggesting that people were *always* anxious and we're saying nothing new. We would argue that this conflates the particular neoliberal regime of generalised anxiety with a much broader category of precariousness or potential vulnerability. Of course previous periods involved vulnerabilities which might provoke anxiety. Our point is precisely that social movements have strategies to defeat many of those older forms of vulnerability. These strategies are not as effective in the present period, which we hypothesise is due to the changed affective structure. If there's nothing new in this, why aren't the old strategies working?

Secondly, the periodisation, and the emphasis on boredom in the Fordist era, are perhaps the most contentious aspects of the article, and we would like to emphasise that these hypotheses are tentative. The crucial issue is that the strategies which worked against Fordism are no longer working; whether this is because boredom has been transcended by anxiety, because boredom

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has mutated through attentive stress, or because of a different kind of affective shift unrelated to boredom, is a matter for empirical and experiential investigation.

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