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Resisting the 2010 Olympics: Learning within the Praxis of Activism

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I. Introduction

Olympic Games, as multi-billion dollar undertakings, are well known to have significant impacts on host cities. While officials and organizers cite positive effects, others have documented social, environmental and economic impacts that include eviction, displacement and arrest of vulnerable persons; unsustainable land-use development; damage to ecologically sensitive land; increased pollution and waste; and rapid gentrification (Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, 2007; Lenskyj, 2000, 2002). Vancouver's 2010 Olympic Winter Games can be seen as a compressed *time* and *space* in which broader relations of capital (along with imperialism, and repression) played out in a historically specific dynamic. This local, two-week mega-event represents the culmination—on a global stage—of many years and billions of dollars of corporate and publicly financed development, advertising, and merchandising; it thus presented activists with a poignant opportunity for critique and resistance. Amongst local activists, Olympics-related organizing was broadly considered a success. However, the *black bloc* tactics and/or acts of assault and vandalism undertaken during a February 13th *Heart Attack!* demonstration sparked a fierce debate within and beyond Vancouver's activist community.

In this paper, I consider the 2010 Winter Olympic—and especially the resulting *Heart Attack!* debate—as a poignant context of activist learning in which diverse groups came together to develop collective approaches to action. Drawing on the dialectical Marxist analyses of Jean-Paul Sartre and Paula Allman, I theorize these discussions as potential sites of dialogical inquiry and collective *critical/revolutionary* praxis. I consider areas of consensus, debate, and tension—between activists, and between theory and practice—to identify key questions that could be taken up within future inquiries, and to explore how actors might strengthen ongoing processes of collaborative, reflexive learning within the praxis of social change.

II. A Dialectical Marxist Analytical Approach

This paper draw on analyses within traditions of Marxist-Humanism and dialectical Marxism (see Allman, 2001, pp. 4-6)—in particular the work of Jean-Paul Sartre (e.g. 1943, 1957, 1960a); and Paula Allman's (e.g. 1999, 2001) elaboration of Freire's approach and Marx's dialectical method. Sartre's intellectual project is grounded in the philosophical tradition of existentialism and thus centres on explicating the possibility for conscious choice and moral responsibility within Marx's emphasis on collective and structural relations (Flynn, 2004). Allman's work is significantly influenced by the work of Freire (e.g. 1970) and Gramsci (e.g. 1929-1935), in addition to Marx, and focuses on developing the *practice* of revolutionary social change through critical education, which is based on a rigorous, experiential understanding of capitalist relations. It is thought that Sartre's analysis anticipates many central insights of postmodernism while avoiding its common pitfalls (Butterfield, 2004), and Allman (1999, 2001) engages in direct dialogue with many relevant theoretical and practical challenges that are commonly understood as postmodern.

Marx's conceptualization of the dialectical unity between thought and action (praxis) provides the basis from which both Allman (2001) and Sartre (1960a) have explored the human condition. Allman develops the term *uncritical/reproductive praxis* to signal how, by participating in "the relations and conditions that we find already existing in the world and assum[ing] that these are natural and evitable…, these material relations become integrated into our thinking" (2001, p. 72). The theorizations of both authors emphasize the embeddedness of capitalist relations within all realms of human (material, social, and psychological) experience, and thus highlight the problematic nature of strategies for social change which imagine the existence of a autonomous, identity-based, discursive, civil society (or any other) sphere that somehow lies outside the influence of capitalism (see also Holst, 2002).

Allman's elaboration of ideological and *uncritical/reproductive* praxis resonates with many (e.g., cultural, feminist, and postmodern) critical analyses that interrogate dominant modes of thought. However, the dialectical theorizations of both Sartre and Allman arguably place more emphasis on *historicity*—"the impermanence of domination" (Agger, 2006, p. 7)—and to developing Marx's theorization of the possibility for class-conscious collective action. To this end, Allman (2001) elaborates how Marx's dialectical theory of consciousness implies a second, very different type of praxis; she describes how praxis can become *critical/revolutionary* when, instead of uncritically accepting and participating in unjust social relations, we focus on and direct our energies towards abolishing or transforming both the relation and the conditions it maintains. Sartre's elaboration of the development—from within conditions of alienated seriality—of a *praxis group* elucidates the possibility for free and collective action that is based in mutual need, common purpose, and relations of reciprocity.

Allman (2001) describes how—while some rigid interpretations of Marxism have envisioned a socialist future as inevitable—Marx theorized the equal possibility that the future of humanity could be one of extreme brutality and suffering. Historical and dialectical analyses such as those of Sartre and Allman thus portray the future as a horizon of (potentially radically different) possibilities "constrained but not determined by the past and present" (Agger, 2006, p. 6) This theoretical tradition suggests that in order to fully conceive of our capacity for freedom, we are first required to *make it*.

III. OLYMPICS RESISTANCE

In its winning bid to host the 2010 Winter Games, Vancouver's Olympic organizing committee (VANOC) promised to host social, economic, and environmentally sustainable Games (VANOC, 2007), achieve unprecedented involvement of aboriginal peoples, protect civil liberties and public safety, and prevent Games-related homelessness or involuntary displacement (Vancouver 2010 Candidate City, 2002). However, as the Games approached, activists increasingly organized to underscore *Vancouver 2010's* connection to social, economic, and environmental injustices—particularly its staging on unceded Coast Salish Territory.

A. Diverse tactics

Challenges to the 2010 Olympics reflected a variety of awareness-raising, rights-based, and direct-action strategies. Various national, regional, and local organizations, such as a newly formed *Impact on Community Coalition* (IOCC) began to monitor Games-related concerns. The Vancouver Public Space Network and the Carnegie Community Action Project (CCAP) undertook to map, respectively, the increase in surveillance cameras (Vancouver Public Space Network, 2009) and the loss of affordable housing (CCAP, 2008) in the Downtown Eastside over the lead-up to the Olympics. The British Columbia Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA) drew media attention to undisclosed, ballooning Olympic security costs and threats to free speech by proposed Olympics policies (e.g. CBC News, 2009; Keller, 2009).

As early as 2002, First Nations activists organized to expose *Vancouver 2010*'s exploitation of aboriginal land and culture, as well as the grassroots dissent which lay below the appearance of indigenous support for the Games (Constantineau, 2009; Kukstemc, 2002; no2010, 2008). CCAP and its allies began staging annual *Poverty Olympics*, and Pivot Legal Society launched a Red Tent campaign for a National

Housing Strategy. While many organizers sought mainstream media coverage, initiatives like the Vancouver Media Co-op (vancouver.mediacoop.ca) emerged as platforms for activist and independent journalism.

The BCCLA also pursued legal strategies, backing a civil rights lawsuit against proposed bylaws that would ban 'non-celebratory' signs.(BCCLA, 2010a) It trained over 200 volunteers to observe and document security activities in order to safeguard the rights of demonstrators and others (BCCLA, 2010b). Although policing practices during the Games were generally considered restrained, the Legal Observer program documented questionable activities including plainclothes officers entering protests, patrols by Canadian Border Services agents, and the police with semi-automatic military weaponry at demonstrations (BCCLA, 2010c; Legal Observers, 2010).

Direct actions included a 2006 blockade of construction of the Sea to Sky highway Olympic expansion at Eagleridge Bluffs—a rare urban rock outcrop and unique wetlands habitat within unceded Squamish Territory. Throughout Canada, various protests forced rerouting of the Olympic torch relay, including one in which a Mohawk community permitted entry of the torch, but not its RCMP escort (Rakobowchuk, 2009; Worboy, 2009). Beginning on the third day of the Games, a broad coalition of housing activists and homeless individuals erected an Olympic Tent Village, occupying a Downtown Eastside Concord Pacific-owned parking lot for the duration of the games. Alongside these diverse efforts, activists also organized a broader Olympic Resistance Network (ORN) as a space in which to coordinate anti-2010 Olympic efforts across movements. This effort included a two-day summit, web-based resources, and billeting for out-of-town activists (ORN, nd).

B. Heart Attack!

Rallies and protests intensified with the arrival of the Games. As the torch entered Vancouver on the day of the opening ceremonies, it was rerouted by at least three separate protests. The largest demonstration, *Take Back Our City!* saw a broad spectrum of some 2500 people turn out to 'welcome' the Olympic torch with a festival, parade/march, and protest at BC Place where the official opening ceremonies were ongoing (ORN, 2010b).This large *Take Back our City!* event had been organized as family friendly, and, aside from one or two isolated arrests and some pushing-back of the protest line by police, the protest was broadly considered to be peaceful (BCCLA, 2010c; The Canadian Press, 2010).

However the following morning of February 13th, the first full day of official Olympic competition, a second major mobilization—dubbed the *2010 Heart Attack!*—endeavoured to "clog the arteries of capitalism" by disrupting "business as unusual" and blocking the Olympic bus route to Whistler. The event, which had approximately 300 participants, was advertised as respecting the *diversity of tactics*: "we may practice one tactic or action, we do not choose yours" (ORN, 2010a). During the event, a significant portion of protesters wore black clothing and masks, and some engaged in property damage along the route, including pulling overturned mailboxes and newspaper boxes into the street. When the march reached Georgia Street's shopping district, a group of protesters broke a TD Bank window and several display windows of the Hudson's Bay Company downtown store. As the march continued through downtown, participants chanted "No justice, no peace" and "Whose streets? Our streets!" Police presence intensified, and eventually police squads in riot gear began to surround, divide and close in on different groups of protesters.

Accounts describe police tackling and hitting demonstrators and onlookers, as well as protesters hitting police officers and attempting to "un-arrest" those being taken into custody. Some saw protesters pushing onlookers, and swatting notebooks and cameras from journalists. The Vancouver Police (VPD) reported 11 arrests connected with the event. Following the demonstration, an anonymous communiqué was issued by participants and organizers of the *black bloc* presence in defence of their actions. (Dembicki, 2010a, 2010c; Harris, 2010; Vancouver Police Department, 2010a) Unsurprisingly, mainstream media covered the vandalism, and featured pictures of masked, black-clad protesters throwing newspaper boxes and chairs

through the Bay's window. In some news articles, BCCLA Executive Director David Eby is quoted as saying "he was 'sickened' by the reports of the incident" (e.g. Matas, 2010).

The following day saw a record number of some 3000 participants attend the 19th annual Women's Memorial March for the Downtown Eastside's murdered and missing women; the March (organized and attended by many activist groups) was solemn, and saw no interaction with police. The remainder of the Olympics was marked by numerous other resistance activities (including a 12-hour occupation of Hastings Street), as well as activists' continuous occupation of the Olympic Tent Village (no2010, 2010), however there were no other significant police actions or arrests.

Olympics resistance organizing had demonstrated an impressive degree of collaboration across diverse movements and activists in the months and years leading up to the games. However over a few short hours the *Heart Attack!* demonstration had, it seems, unearthed some significant divides. In particular, David Eby's public comments became a flashpoint. Many anti-Games and social justice activists deplored the *black bloc* tactics and/or acts of assault and vandalism undertaken during the Heart Attack demonstration. However, others were outraged by Eby's statements to the media, accusing him of—among other things—violating a covenant of respect for diversity of tactics, and solidarity within the anti-Games movement. At a public talk five days after *Heart Attack!*, David Eby was just about to address a room full of anti-games activists when one of them pushed a pie in his face (see Dembicki, 2010c).

IV. *Heart Attack!* and Diversity of Tactics: Debating Theories of Anti-Olympic Praxis

Despite the apparent hostility, activists on all 'sides' of the *Heart Attack!* debate called for meaningful discussion about the events of the march. At his talk days after the demonstration, David Eby "wiped the pie off his face and delivered a long talk to a tough crowd" (Dembicki, 2010c) in order to respond to detractors and clearly communicate his position. One week after *Heart Attack!* a second packed public forum was held in which speakers presented different perspectives and responded to audience questions. On both days, the discussions contained periods of significant tension and hostility, but also moments of apparent consensus marked by an underlying shared commitment to social justice. Many of the comments reflected nuanced analysis of complex historical and ethical issues.

Exploring Olympics resistance through the perspectives expressed by openly affiliated activists and spokespersons in public forums (which represents only a brief and partial shapshot of the ongoing debate), I find it helpful to consider the "routes and roots" (Gregory, 2006) of the discussion. There exists widespread agreement on the need for continued debate about the effectiveness of various tactics; however, the question of *effectiveness* is itself contested, reflecting a myriad of often conflicting understandings of the dynamics of capitalism, social change, and consciousness.

A. Theories of change: comrades, the elite, and disrupting 'business as usual'

During the two public panel discussions and in related online comments, various activists and commentators characterized the *Heart Attack!* black bloc as effective and/or necessary. For one thing, the major downtown Lions Gate Bridge *had* been shut down, disrupting business-as-usual on the first day of the games (Working TV, 2010b). Citing Barbara Ehrenreich's critique of the ritualized nature of modern civil disobedience, activist and panellist Harsha Walia asserted that such insurrectionary attacks tended to be the only effective means of attracting mainstream media scrutiny to Olympic Industry sponsor corporations. Walia and several others asserted that the more threatening black bloc tactics created 'space' for mainstream tactics (such as the tent village occupation) to be viewed as 'acceptable' (Walia, 2010).

Black bloc supporters invoked historical examples including the American civil rights movement, India's independence movement, and the end of South African apartheid, arguing that threat of force was integral to these movements and is thus a crucial element of successful revolution (Garvey, 2010; Working TV, 2010b). The communiqué issued by black bloc participants described black bloc actions as "active

self-defense… autonomous direct action against the corporations, authorities and politicians who wage war on our communities" (Anonymous, 2010). Citing Canada's history of state violence against striking workers, a blog on the topic stated: "revolutionary movements at the time were required to defend themselves, and… were incapable of doing so. We need to be conscious of this history and to be planning how to defend ourselves, our allies and our movements." (Garvey, 2010)

Individuals opposed to the actions of black-clad demonstrators argued that public acts of vandalism and 'offensive' attacks on police officers alienated potential supporters and weakened or obscured the messages of other groups participating in the march. Panellist and anti-Olympic activist Chris Shaw called the vandalism a "wet dream" for officials wishing to justify their security expenditures; he asserted that "proactive" property damage could not be justified by the same argument as defensive action undertaken to protect land and peoples (as in blockades) (Shaw, 2010). In the same discussion, Eby asserted the actions had failed to either shut down the Olympics or tarnish sponsor reputations. He condemned unprovoked attacks against police officers as assault, stating that this—as well as property destruction—reinforced understandings of dissent as a security threat (Eby, 2010).

I read many of these arguments as resting on differing theorizations—and experiences—of state, corporate, and civil society dynamics. While *new social movements* are thought to devote decreased attention to class and state power (see Buechler, 1995; Cohen, 1985; Holst, 2002), the analyses of a range of environmental, peace, indigenous, and women's organizations engaged in Olympics-related organizing shared a broad recognition of corporate and state interests as central to social and environmental injustice (e.g. DTES Power of Women Group; Gatewaysucks.org; no2010, 2007; StopWar, 2009; The Council of Canadians, 2010). In particular, no2010.com draws determined connections between the Olympic state-corporate-media structure and a range of issues (including colonialism, ecological destruction, homelessness, and violence against women).

For some, the analysis of state-corporate-media integration corresponded to the sense of a clear, structural, distinction between "elites" and "comrades", "enemies", and "allies." One black bloc supporter described video footage being freely shared between security forces and the Olympic broadcaster, "Cop TV (CTV)" (Paley, 2010). Another criticized mainstream protests and rallies for giving [progressive] politicians "a free stage despite the daily violence that politicians in this government are responsible for" (Walia, 2010). During one forum, the mention of unprovoked attacks on police officers sparked loud cheering, indicating that for some groups, collective understandings of police as "enemy" are particularly coherent.

However, not all activists and organizations seem to share the notion of a fully integrated state-corporate-media complex. Nor is there widespread agreement of the need to build capacity for a violent revolution. The past efforts of the IOCC, Pivot Legal Society, CCAP and the BCCLA demonstrate efforts to work with and through mainstream governance and policy-making processes, legal mechanisms, and mainstream media—for instance, by submitting reports and recommendations to governments and Games officials. In some cases, these efforts achieved successes, or appeared to demonstrate cooperation on the part of government and state actors. For instance, the CCAP's Poverty Olympics achieved local, national and media coverage (Poverty Olympics Organizing Committee, 2010), and Pivot Legal society's Red Tent campaign negotiated a minor concession from the joint RCMP-VPD Integrated Security Unit (see Shot In Vancouver documentary photography, 2010).

The BCCLA's legal strategies in particular had resulted in a number of successes: the amendment of Vancouver's anti-free speech bylaws, increased media attention to security expenditures, and public scrutiny of police harassment and brutality (e.g. BCCLA, 2009; Bellett & Woo, 2010). The BCCLA's ability to attract mainstream media attention, use legal tactics, and its willingness to work with the VPD (for instance, educating officers about the Legal Observer program) can be understood as one factor that contributed to the relatively restrained response of security forces during anti-Olympics demonstrations and housing actions such as the Olympic Tent village. While these legal strategies represent "rearguard"

actions, noted Eby, they were significant (Eby, 2010). Thus, for organizations such as the BCCLA and others who situate their work within the "Olympic accountability movement" (Eby, 2010), there is an experiential basis for the belief that it is possible to make some gains by working in and through 'the system'. In the same way, there is certainly an experiential basis for others associating the Hudson's Bay Company with historical colonial violence, and for understanding police officers as brutal, and murderers.

B. Theories of consciousness-raising: the vanguard and the public

A common critique of February 13th's black bloc was that associated images of property destruction had weakened other movement messages. Anti-Olympic activists had produced an impressive variety of material detailing their analyses and calling for public participation. Refrains like "No 2010 Olympics on Stolen Native Land", and references to the "Corporate Circus", the "Tar Sands Olympics", and the "Freeway Olympics" underscored connections between the Olympics, privatization and corporatization, ecological destruction, militarization, and ongoing colonial injustice. Demands such as "Homes not Games" and "End Poverty: It's Not a Game" highlighted the absurdity of allocating public funds to spectacles for the wealthy, instead of addressing grinding poverty. Several discussion panellists suggested the *Heart Attack!* actions distracted media attention from these issues; reduced the message of the entire demonstration to one of "broken windows" (Shaw, 2010); and —because vandalism was not isolated to Olympic sponsors—communicated a message of "randomness" (O'Keefe, 2010b).

Black bloc supporters suggested the tactic actually strengthened movement engagement by garnering world-wide attention, creating opportunities for word-of-mouth education, and inspiring people who are disillusioned by ritual protest but find direct action empowering (see Walia, 2010; Williams & Schulte, 2010; Working TV, 2010b). However, others disagreed, suggesting the black block tactic can exclude vulnerable individuals (who cannot risk being hit or arrested) (e.g. O'Keefe, 2010b), that it only appeals to individuals "already in the choir" (Shaw, 2010), and that it "put off a lot of people who perhaps would have come our way [otherwise]" (Working TV, 2010b). The tactic, noted Eby, had damaged public confidence, and was both ineffective and inauthentic:

> Have you ever tried to win over someone who is afraid to a new perspective? People retreat to comfortable assumptions when afraid. And many of those assumptions are not beneficial to the message we're seeking to deliver. We criticise the media for creating a climate of fear and then say nothing when people use the same tactic nominally in service of our ideals. (Eby, 2010)

Several critiques of black bloc actions were grounded in the idea—reminiscent of Marxist analyses (e.g. those of Gramsci (1929-1935), and Sartre (e.g., 1960a))—of the need for agents of change to cultivate, or prefigure, future relations of equality from within present relations of injustice. At the February 17th forum, Eby stated:

> … my concern is about far more than a broken window. If, as I hope, our goal is to build a peaceful, just society, I believe we cannot do it by responding to physical attacks with more physical attacks… While we are properly convinced about the justice of our cause, rest assured there are many who are convinced of the justice of their [opposing] cause… The cycle of attack and counter-attack has no discernable end, benefit or outcome, other than fear, retribution, and escalation. (Eby, 2010)

Media images of masked demonstrators engaged in vandalism and assault cast black bloc supporters in direct contradiction to the above analyses which suggest the need to prefigure a "peaceful, just society." On the other hand, however, these analytical differences may not be as marked as they appear. As suggested by earlier comments about empowering disillusioned groups, many black bloc supporters shared with other anti-Olympic activists, a common concern for building public awareness and mass support. The black bloc communiqué devotes considerable attention to awareness raising, endeavouring to unsettle *common sense* notions of violence:

> The media are now busy denouncing the political violence of property destruction, such as the smashing of a Hudson's Bay Company window, as though it were the only act of violence happening in this city. They forget that economic violence goes on daily in Vancouver. People are suffering and dying from preventable causes because welfare doesn't give enough to afford rent, food or medicine, and because authorities routinely ignore the medical emergencies of poor or houseless individuals. This economic violence has gotten worse as we lose housing and social services because of the Olympic Games. (Anonymous, 2010)

Further Despite the February 13th actions of property damage and assault, it is clear that many black bloc organizers and supporters share this same commitment to *prefiguring* radically transformed relations. Prior to the *Heart Attack!* demonstration, the ORN organized *spokescouncils* during which black bloc and other organizers participated in "healthy, fruitful, constructive" debate (Walia in Working TV, 2010a). During spokescouncils, the decision was taken to designate a 'safe zone' at the back of the march for groups who wished to remain separate from any property damage or police action (see Beneath The Snow, 2010). In her panel statement, Walia described how black bloc and anarchist activists participated in various other resistance events—including marching, unmasked, in solidarity with the Women's Memorial march. Further, she noted, several black bloc supporters were playing key roles at the Olympic tent village, where they participated in daily village meetings and put in "16 hour days to contribute... That includes grave yard shifts to do security… de-escalation with law enforcement… construction, cooking, and clean-up of the site under the leadership of downtown eastside residents and elders". (Walia, 2010) (See also Kardas-Nelson, 2010) Thus, despite the apparently inconsiderate and/or destructive actions of *Heart Attack!,* many black bloc participants or supporters were simultaneously engaged in significant work with other activists and marginalized individuals, often within relatively radical relations of co-operation, equality and dialogue.

Based on this exploration, extremely divergent sides of the diversity of tactics debate can be understood as reflecting common concerns about movement-building that are founded upon different theorizations of consciousness-raising and mobilization. Instead, it seems that the point of contention is the question of *who?* Activists who voice concern that the *Heart Attack!* actions weakened movement messages and alienated prospective supporters assume the existence of a *general public* of potential sympathizers whose support is integral to effecting change. While activists on all sides of the debate deplored shoddy mainstream media coverage of activist messages, those focused on winning the support of this *public* understand mainstream media to be their means of reaching this group; concern with being discredited in the media stems from the conviction that "it's a mistake to think we can win without bringing the rest of population along with us" (Eby, 2010).

However, other activists have not only written off mainstream "Cop TV", but also—to some extent—have written off the necessity, and perhaps even the possibility of amassing public support:

> I don't think building a mass movement is always the gauge of the success of a tactic. If that was the case, indigenous blockades would not be happening because we'd have to wait for every single Canadian to denounce Canadian patriotism and Canadian nationalism. Direct action happens because there is a need for it; direct action happens because people are fighting back, and we're not waiting for millions of people to stand beside us for the revolution to happen." (Walia, 2010)

In this way, many divergent responses to the *Heart Attack!* actions can be traced to different understandings, not necessarily of the nature of change being sought, but of *who* needs to be engaged in effecting this change. These theorizations, in turn, reflect the very different experiences of politicization, activism, and social location, which constitute the personal and collective histories of activists and movements.

C. *Theories of solidarity: the problem of We*

Perhaps the most passionate arguments within the *Heart Attack!* debate relate to the theme of *solidarity* within—and across—movements. Despite the concerns of postmodern, post-Marxist, radical pluralist theorists regarding the feasibility or desirability of a broad, collective project of emancipation (see Carroll, 1997), a spectrum of activists characterized co-operative anti-Olympic efforts as successful and significant. Shaw noted "for the first time in anti-Olympic history, there was a movement in the streets… something that [unified] people in this broad coalition which was really remarkable for Vancouver…" (Shaw, 2010)

This broad commitment to co-operation and solidarity had been expressed through years of Olympics-related organizing, but also poignantly demonstrated within specific anti-Olympic actions. Accounts by visiting anarchist participants describe how, during the *Take Back our City!* march, "the black bloc patiently stopped to listen to speeches along the route" and "didn't… diss the liberals in this event." Further, in reference to the February 14th Women's Memorial March, they state:

> at home if there were a similar event: most anarchists wouldn't have attended during the "excitement" of a mobilization. Here, though, the anarchist (and other) organizers against the Olympics had agreed not to do anything on this Sunday… More than that, the anarchist organizers and nearly every anarchist who had participated in either the Olympic torch relay disruption…, the Take Back Our City… black bloc…, and especially the autonomous, more militant Heart Attack direct action of yesterday joined this commemoration, and mostly not in black. All respected the boundaries and mood of this memorial. Many of the anarchists, too, were crying. It was hard not to. (Beneath The Snow, 2010)

In many ways, the *solidarity* question within the Heart Attack! debate is emblematic of the 'devil in the details' when it comes to reconciling—in practice—a widespread commitment to collective, emancipatory action with understandings of autonomy and difference. In addition, it brings to mind Sartre's caution that despite our best intentions, the circumstances of life often distort our efforts: one's goal is not necessarily what one achieves (Barnes, in Sartre, 1960b). Despite a commitment to respect and solidarity on the part of many anarchists and black bloc organizers, some of the February 13th actions *had* infringed on the efforts of other groups; the acts of violence and damage to property had overshadowed mainstream coverage of other protest messages, and had weakened the critique of security spending. Further, some protester actions (such as pushing bystanders) had not been acknowledged or condoned as part of the black bloc tactic and thus warranted critique (at least) at the level of implementation.

Based on these various disjunctures— between intent and result, across different strategies, and between strategy and practice—individuals on all 'sides' of the discussion have called for critical, constructive, and ongoing debate about the effectiveness of various strategies, the meaning of *diversity of tactics* and the notion of solidarity (e.g. see Eby, 2010; Garvey, 2010; O'Keefe, 2010b; Walia, 2010; Working TV, 2010b). Many stressed the need to critique *all types* of tactics—particularly the mass movement "mono-culture" of symbolic rallies (Walia, 2010) (see also O'Keefe, 2010a)—in light of history, context, and aims. But beyond this common commitment to dialogue, once again the sticking point relates to *who*?

The pie-shaped burst of outrage hurled at David Eby marks activists' significant disagreement regarding who should be engaged in movement strategy and critique. In addition to holding spokescouncils to discuss diversity of tactics, in January 2009 the ORN had circulated a Statement of Solidarity and Unity in which it recognized a multiplicity of opposition to the games. The statement, endorsed by many groups, makes visible the framework through which many black bloc organizers and supporters came to understood Eby's denouncement as 'betrayal':

> *We* realize that *we* may have many differences in analysis and tactics and such disagreements are healthy. However *we* believe such debates should remain internal and

> *we* should refrain from publicly denouncing or marginalizing one another especially to mainstream media and law enforcement. In particular, *we* should avoid characterizations such as "bad" or "violent" protestors. *We* respectfully request that all those in opposition to the 2010 Olympics maintain our collective and unified commitment to social justice and popular mobilization efforts in the face of massive attempts to divide us. (ORN, 2009 [my emphasis])

Although the BCCLA had not endorsed the ORN Statement of Unity, Eby's scrutiny of policing and facilitation of legal support to activists had caused him to be understood as part of the Statement's "we". Thus, while Eby's critique of the assault and vandalism of February 14th reflected his commitment to the justice movement and to taking an ethical "stand", black bloc activists experienced this as a defection—a breach of their understanding of authentic dialogue in which concern and debate should have been addressed internally.

For many activists with a clear-cut analysis of government-state-media *integration*, of the difference between "elites" and "comrades", "enemies", and "allies", the question of *who* should participate in authentic, critical movement dialogue was obvious: not the state, not the wealthy, not the mainstream media, and most definitely not the police. As Walia put it, "...the corporate media and the police should not be let off the hook by us replicating their smears… Before we're going to start denouncing our comrades, let's be clear about who our allies are and who are enemies are" (Walia, 2010). However, for other activist-organizations who seek to engage the general public, or achieve strategic successes through collaboration with sympathetic actors within the state, media, or other "enemy" structures, it seems less possible to draw a line about where the "we" and thus, the dialogue, should end.

These varied understandings of *we*, which are integral to activists' theories of change, relate—in part—to fundamental understandings about the nature of 'being-in-society'—specifically, the extent to which social and economic location determines our capacity to engage in revolutionary action. These understandings are not only conceptual, but are rooted in personal and collective experiences of position and privilege along a myriad of lines including gender, ethnicity, sexuality, health, and class. For activists whose indigenous sisters went missing in the face of government and police inaction, who live in abject poverty amidst an increasing number of fortified condominiums, and who are regularly harassed by wealthy young Gastown partygoers, the line between "elites" and "comrades" is established daily.

Other times, however, personal and collective histories or circumstance can blur the boundaries between the *we*, the *general public*, and even, the "enemy"—raising questions about the possibility or desirability of limiting open debate. One online commenter stated:

> Well I'm an anarchist. I'm also a single mother and it's been quite a few year since I have been able to attend many meetings. Since I was not able to participate in ORN, [a]m I allowed to raise criticisms of some of what happened? I criticize my local MP all the time, even though I did not campaign for her. I criticize movies I watch, even though I did not work on producing them…. (response to O'Keefe, 2010a)

Further, for some activists and organizations, a call to arms against 'elites' would mean breaking ties with organizational allies or sympathetic individuals in positions of influence. The suggestion to *start the revolution* without *bringing the public along* may require the theoretical writing-off of people they know personally to be 'well-intentioned'—people who include their colleagues, neighbours and families. In this way, theories and strategies for change can be disrupted by practicalities of history, circumstances, and agency-in-situation—particularly when the *we* is endeavouring to grow.

V. TENSIONS, QUESTIONS, AND DIALECTICAL INQUIRY

In exploring 2010 Olympic resistance as a site of activist learning, I have found that reading the 'theory' of activism helps to uncover points of debate wherein a surface appearance of difference may

actually mask more fundamental commonalities. Elsewhere, disagreements at the level of 'tactic' can be understood as rooted in more fundamental assumptions about capitalism, consciousness, and the dynamics of social change. Such an analysis suggests there is much to gain by engagement in careful, mutual, exploration of the social dynamics of capitalism to realize common objectives, and scrutinize the assumptions, which undergird commonsense strategies for change. Further, conceptual tools offered by Allman and Sartre suggests additional insights which could be taken-up in future dialogue, and 'tested' within action.

A. Exploring dialectical social relations

Within the diversity of tactics debate, a significant ongoing tension relates to the question of violence. While many activists were quick to underscore the distinction between property damage and violence, Marx's thinking underscores how, within the alienating relations of capitalism, property damage can actually be experienced as 'violence'. In the historically specific dynamics of capitalism, concepts of property and ownership have become integral to not only our identities, but also to our understandings of individual freedom and equality within collective life (Allman, 1999). Within capitalist relations of seriality, we relate to others through objects (Sartre, 1960a). Thus, despite protesters' seemingly obvious message that "buildings don't have feelings" (Dembicki, 2010b) it is possible to understand how broken glass can be experienced as a personal attack.

More fundamental, of course, is the way in which this commonsense, historically specific understanding of vandalism as 'violence' serves to obscure and legitimize the absurdity of economic violence, whose victims experience actual, flesh-and-blood pain. The restriction of basic human rights to those with purchasing power, the hoarding of wealth for luxury, rampant ecological destruction, and overt historical and ongoing violence (both physical and cultural) against labourers and indigenous peoples remain legitimate, protected (and even necessary) practices within capitalist society. Through breaking display windows, black bloc actions endeavoured to unsettle this commonsense notion of 'violence', which prioritizes property over people. Exploring the social relations of capitalism reveals how the *not violent* is experienced as 'violent', while the decidedly *violent* is experienced as 'commonsense'. Through this exploration, it might become possible for activists to move past disagreements about the definition of 'violence' to explore a common question: what is the most effective way to counter the violence of exploitation?

Additionally, there is the question of whether violence can be justified as a necessary element of revolutionary struggle. Sartre's assertion that values are created through practice and that that we must make our own future; de Beauvoir's (1947) emphasis that violence is an affront on freedom; and Allman's elucidation of praxis as the unity of thought and action; all suggest that engaging in violence—the intent to harm another person—is extremely difficult to justify in the name of pursuing a peaceful and free future. That said, the reminder that "we make the road by walking it" acknowledges that we must always choose within the *givens* of here and now. Based on this, the question that activists might ask becomes: do we need to engage in violence (or property damage, or whatever) *here and now*? Marx's realization of the potential for a positive future informed by the past and present (Agger, 2006) suggests it *is* important to examine the role of armed conflict within other revolutionary struggles; however the same thinking underscores that the need for violent action is never predetermined. One cannot predict for all of eternity whether defensive or other forms of violence might in some moments appear to be the most ethical choice. But until those moments, it seems vital to work continuously to achieve and preserve the possibility for non-violent action.

In her analytical work, Allman (1999, 2001) has endeavoured to distinguish between reform-oriented strategies and those, which fundamentally challenge capitalism as a dialectical relation. This thinking invites a careful, collective analysis in order to fully more fully grasp a particular fundamental relation and pursue strategies, which seek to abolish it altogether rather than merely jockeying for a better position within the relation itself. For instance, *anti-capitalist resistance* and *capitalism* can be understood as a

dialectical *unity of opposites*, in which capitalism has a position of advantage and thus seeks to preserve the relation. This conceptual tool can be used to explore how some practices of resistance can actually serve to strengthen the relation. This is most obvious in the case of 'green capitalism', or in counter-cultural fashion statements whose aesthetic innovations are appropriated, mass-produced and sold to would-be revolutionaries (see Heath & Potter, 2004). Further, activist messages that highlight political corruption and which write-off the legitimacy of government can inadvertently contribute to a prevailing mood of public cynicism and disengagement in which the 'competition' and 'efficiency' of privatization appears more credible. As Frank Tester has noted (2007, personal communication), Greenwald's (2005) revealing documentary, *Walmart: the high cost of low price*, has the effect of blaming a particular corporation rather than directing the viewer's attention to the broader relations of capital.

Sartre's elaboration of capitalism's social *milieu of scarcity* provides additional insight in this regard. Sartre has described how in choosing capitalism, and thus scarcity, as our mode of relating to the world: "each person understands that every other person is a consumer of something [he or she]… needs… The recognition that the Other is a threat, materially, promotes a network of relations based on fear and violence." (Hayim, 1980, p. p. 78) Based on Sartre's thinking, it is possible to understand how activist messages that rely on a threatening *Other* can reinforce our experience of scarcity. For instance, messages that highlight threat of *Americanization* (that is, invasion of the Other) divert attention from a more fundamental dynamic: collective alienation from political power (on all sides of all borders) in the face of the rising power of corporations. In the same way, strategies that rely on vilifying police officers as Others can serve to reinforce practices of police brutality—and protester violence—instead of revealing these phenomena as symptomatic of a larger, more fundamental milieu of mutual threat which supports the status quo. Further, Allman's (1999, 2001) effort to clarify Marx's dialectical understanding of class underscores how both police officers and protesters are, in fact, members of the labouring class; mutual *Othering* and hostility on the part of both groups is a significant part of the dynamic which obscures their common interests and position. As long as police and protesters are focused on 'battling' one another, there is little possibility that they could pose a significant (let alone united) threat to more fundamental relations of capital.

B. Exploring being and consciousness

Further insight into the tensions of the *Heart Attack*! debate can be gleaned from dialectical Marxist-humanist theorizations of the human condition. Allman's elucidation of Marx's negative concept of *ideology*, and her careful treatment of consciousness as praxis, makes clear how people can 'know' opposing truths; the imprint of *situation* upon our consciousness varies drastically according to history and circumstance. Exploring these experiences of *being* within scarcity may help disrupt binary understandings of 'enemy' and 'ally', and reconcile apparent contradictions wherein 'good' people, are complicit in perpetuating relations of injustice. Sensitivity to capitalism's pervasive milieu of threat may help to interrogate how these relations extend within social movements themselves, causing fragmentation and animosity to undermine potential for solidarity.

Consideration of *uncritical/reproductive praxis* (Allman, 2001), and *being* within scarcity suggests why many activist critiques of injustice may not resonate with Canada's general public—working or middle classes who experience the world through ideological understandings of competition and meritocracy. As Allman (2001) notes, these ideological knowledges are not *false consciousness*; they are to some degree *real* in that they resonate with our lived experiences. Within a milieu of scarcity, even the relatively wealthy do not experience our 'quality of life' as comfortable, easy, or the result of privilege; instead, our material comfort has to some extent been achieved through experiences of struggle and sacrifice in a pervasive milieu of threat:

> One thing… that people in almost every kind of work share to some extent is a growing sense of insecurity. It's not just cheap, low-skilled labor that has been forced to compete in a global labor market but relatively well-paid, high skilled labour as well. With the

> exception of company CEOs in large corporations… the net effect for many people who are fortunate enough to be in employment has been the driving down of wages and salaries and the increasing insecurity of job tenure. (Allman, 2001, p. 19)

Thus, angry activist characterizations of 'the elite' as all-powerful and inhumane appear to lack credibility; these characterizations fail to account for lived experiences of uncertainty, struggle, and of *earning* what one has achieved. Nor do they account for other human experiences which are virtually universal: moments of utter powerlessness, and acts of solidarity and kindness that occur across inequalities of power.

Sartre's careful elucidation of the possibility for revolutionary collective action eschews such static or deterministic analyses of injustice, and underscores the need to convey domination as impermanent (see also Murray, 2009). Likewise, during the 2010 Olympics, activists' political actions and common commitment to prefiguring relations of cooperation, to some extent projected a *possible future* in which diverse individuals can overcome political alienation and reabsorb "some of our political powers into our daily existence and the expression of our humanity." (Allman, 1999, p. 129) As one activist noted:

> maybe it starts here... Maybe we have created that incandescent moment here in Vancouver where people realize they can resist…they can take back the commons. They don't have to… just blindly accept what the corporations and the governments are doing … We did that this week. … I thought what we actually projected to the world was a very positive vision—an alternative vision of what society could look like if it wasn't going to invest in services and parties for the rich…. (Shaw, 2010)

VI. "Where Do We Go from Here?" Diversity, Solidarity, and Dialogical Praxis

In the wake of anti-Olympics organizing, Vancouver-based activists have expressed concern for continued collaboration and dialogue. During the *Heart Attack!* debate, several activists asserted such discussion should occur "on our own terms", for instance, within online activist forums. My analysis of activists' Olympics-related debate suggests one of the most pressing themes for discussion and clarification would be the question of *unity in diversity* and its implications for "concepts of truth, coherence, universality, difference/diversity and humanity." (Allman, 2001, p. 234) Among activists involved in Olympics resistance organizing and debate, it is evident that much practical learning about *unity* and *diversity* has already taken place: the creation of the ORN as a space for the coordination of efforts; the crafting of a *Statement of Solidarity and Unity*; the organization of spokescouncils; the designation of a *Heart Attack!* march 'safe zone'; daily community meetings at the Olympic tent village; and concerted attempts to resolve tensions between a diverse range of resistance tactics. Each of these efforts—however imperfect—represents an important body of experiential knowledge from which to move forward.

However, it is my sense that there is much learning still to be done. As one activist asked, "how is it that the Right wing, even though they have divisions within them, manage to be so coherent?" (Paley, 2010) While the *Heart Attack!* debate reflected a widespread commitment to critical reflection, much of the discussion—particularly in online forums—could not be considered constructive or conciliatory (see, for example, many of the early online responses to O'Keefe, 2010a). Further, the discussion forums, set up much like political debates, often resulted in sequences of *attack-and-defense* punctuated by audience clapping or jeering. The question of anonymity (e.g., in the case of masked activists, or in online forums) poses additional challenges with respect to dialogue. Several observers and participants, in both online and face-to-face discussion, highlighted the need for concern and vigilance with respect to what one forum audience member described as the "tone" of discussion. These latter comments highlight not only deficit, but also the very real capacity within these networks to engage in the ongoing pursuit of diversity and autonomy within relations of cooperative mutual respect.

In my mind, Allman's (1999, 2001) theoretical and experiential account of Freire's dialogical pedagogy provides a practical model through which local activists might continue to build on and learn from their collective experiences of Olympic resistance. Within a dialogical process of activist inquiry, activists and others might carefully explore how personal and collective histories of politicization, activism, and social location (or privilege) shape differing understandings of state, corporate, and civil society dynamics, notions of *the public*, and the types of strategies, which appear effective or possible. These different histories can often cause frustrating clashes in perspective, however they might also be seen as a resource—a means of more fully grasping the dialectical relations, which lie beneath each partial experience of knowing.

While postmodern attention to *difference* can reinforce a capitalist culture of individualism (Agger, 2006), Allman takes inspiration from Marx's early writings in which he asserted the possibility of creating a society based on mutual desire to meet one another's needs:

> Therefore, the greater our diversity, the "richer" (in quality) our society will be. [Marx's] idea of socialism is of a society in which individuality rather than individualism would flourish and in which we would authentically appreciate and depend upon our differences, embracing them because of their potential to enrich the quality of our lives. (2001, p. 154)

Similarly, Freire's (in Allman, 2001) conceptualization of dialogical learning suggests that the greater the diversity of the movement's *we*, the greater its capacity for *knowing*.

The significance of a dialogical process of activist inquiry lies in its dual potential as a practice through which activists might not only more powerfully interrogate unjust social relations, but also simultaneously experience—and prefigure—transformed relations of reciprocity (see Allman, 2001). Because of the pervasive nature of capitalist relations—with ideologies of individualism and difference—which are embedded so pervasively in every dimension of our world, Allman (2001) describes how Freire's transformed relations of dialogue must be continually recreated and critically examined at each point of encounter.

Further, Allman's (1999) elucidation of Gramsci's concept of *hegemony* underscores that such critical, reciprocal relations of dialogue should extend beyond the activist 'vanguard' to broader practices of education and consciousness-raising. Contrary to ideas of ideological struggle as "the challenge to an inferior ideology by a better, more comprehensive, socialist ideology" (1999, p. 106), she asserts that activist-educators' task is to communicate "a way of understanding the structure that would enable people to change it" (1999, p. 109) and thus enact "a type of leadership [wherein] consent is not manipulated or managed but arrived at through critical choice." (1999, p. 106)

However, Fraser (2009) and others have outlined the considerable difficulties—both practical and theoretical—related to *making real* collective and meaningful forms of decision-making and dialogue. Online media and social networking technologies offer powerful tools through which local activists engage in organizing and education, but it is difficult to know if these mediums can be conducive to the type of deep and continuous dialogue that Freire has put forward. Holst (2002) asserts the need to seriously consider formation of a revolutionary party through which both conceptual and practical forms of education could occur. Allman, for her part, sees revolutionary potential in cultivation of an international network of critical educator-activists through which it might be possible to develop a "pro-humanity form of worldwide togetherness" (2001, p. 221)

In the interim, however, what appears most possible and promising is the continued engagement of Vancouver activist-organizers in critical and meaningful dialogue about "where do we go from here?" Further, as one speaker suggested, local practices of learning have potential to support and inform the work of others within a broader project of change:

I think this really brings us to the point… Where does the movement go? Is it about what ever people decide they want it to be about, individually, or is it about us collectively deciding how we build a movement in Vancouver that may be a model for movement-building, in a larger scale, really around the world?" (Shaw, 2010)

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