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Research article

Care and crisis in David Graeber's New York: Anarcha-feminism, gift economies, and mutual aid beyond a global pandemic

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Abstract

The scholarship and life experiences of David Graeber provide a context to investigate the notion of care during crises. The COVID-19 global pandemic serves as a critical flashpoint to explore concepts such as gift economies and mutual aid, as noted throughout his work. Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of Peter Kropotkin and Marcel Mauss, this article highlights a discussion of 'gifting' put forth by Mauss and (re)investigates Kropotkin's work as taken up by Graeber. Through a trajectory of historiography and autoethnography, I examine the significance of anarcha-feminism embodied by and through that of Emma Goldman as significant to anarchist practices that reverberate in Graeber's life and work. I, therefore, introduce a theoretical concept of phantom power to describe this phenomenon. Further, I situate anarcha-feminism within collectives of care and relate this work to anarchist interventions such as Occupy. I argue that Graeber's anarchist framework for Occupy provided the foundation for contemporary mutual aid groups in New York that were active not only during the pandemic but, importantly, to ongoing mutual aid and direct action projects. Finally, I acknowledge this article to be an engagement with the phenomenology of David Graeber, who remains influential in my research, teaching, and activism.

KEYWORDS: David Graeber, Marcel Mauss, Occupy, anarchism, mutual aid, care, crisis

The ultimate, hidden truth of the world is that it is something that we make, and make and could just as easily make differently.

(David Graeber, The utopia of rules, 2016, p. 54)

Introduction

On the morning of David Graeber's death, I was up late at my home in upstate New York, preparing a paper for the Anarchist Studies Network biennial conference. Working on my talk, I turned to my bookshelf and grabbed my copy of Graeber's Direct action (2009)—almost instinctively. Knowing that I should put the book down and finish the conclusion for my paper, my mind flashbacked to working with the Direct Action Network in New York and meeting with former students and old friends involved with organising Occupy. Little did I know these memory flashbacks may have been a final connection of sorts with David as he passed to another dimension. The following day, I woke up early to finalise my paper. It was during my panel that word spread that David Graeber had died. I fell quiet hearing/reading the news of David's death. It seemed a bit surreal learning of his death at the Anarchist Studies Conference—recognising that he was not a fan of labels such as "anarchist anthropology" or "anarchist studies".

Ever the champion of the working class, David Graeber embraced the essence of collaborative care through his analyses of academic repression, critiques of the neoliberal State, the financialisation of everything, student loans, and bullshit jobs.[1] He advocated mutual aid and direct action. Graeber's work inspired creative performances of resistance that illuminate my work with anarchist collectives, some of which began with the Positive Force Collective and Riot Grrrl.

In this article, I investigate the notion of care and resilience during crisis, including the ongoing global COVID pandemic and excavate concepts such as gift economies and mutual aid as noted through the writing and experiences of David Graeber. In doing so, this essay highlights the work of Marcel Mauss and his analyses of market theory as influential to Graeber with interpretations that suggest relations of mutual aid, espoused by Peter Kropotkin, are necessary for a complete understanding of capitalism as a system.

[1] I often think of David Graeber as a modern-day flaneur, a fusion of carnivalesque personas, whom he adored complete with a waistcoat and pocket watch. And as Astra Taylor writes, 'his mischievousness suffused everything he did, including his writing and his activism' (Shah et al., 2020). These choices all seemed logical to me as he had grown up in New York City, being pushed and pulled along in the carnival of survival—where those in the working-class bumble along with bags of our belongings as we rush from one job to the next with different uniforms and identities in tow. Meanwhile, the elites roll uptown and downtown in gas-guzzling black S.U.V.s, eating gourmet salads, and making deals that lead to further gentrification, dislocation and eviction of working families, who encounter a multitude of crises as they try to feed their kids and keep a roof over their heads.

My journey as an anarchist and academic informs this essay, interweaving my experiences with anarchist collectives that presented opportunities to cross paths with David Graeber. Methodologically, I employ an approach that incorporates histography and auto-ethnography, along with brief semi-structured interviews of mutual aid activists. The arguments here draw upon historical narratives that link anarchism with feminism and advance the anarchist feminist politics espoused by Graeber. This article highlights critical observations of present-day phenomena from which a history of the present begins, linking Graeber's anarchism to a theoretical framework of phantom power and conduits of anarchists from the past to the present.

Faithful to dialectical praxis, I examine what may seem at times like a Graeberian greatest hits lexicon. However, I endeavour to present a bricolage of his work to broader structural forms and experiences. I choose to write in an accessible discourse that aligns with Graeber's approach to theoretical and anthropological analyses, acknowledging activist experiences in tandem with academic projects. I build upon my earlier writings on anarcha-feminism and collectives of care and relate this work to Graeber's scholarship and anarchist interventions (Kaltefleiter & Alexander, 2019).

I embrace and briefly highlight mutual aid projects, influenced by Graeber's essence of direct action, throughout New York. As such, I extend the recuperation of home, self, and care by underscoring anarchist values of autonomy, solidarity, mutual aid, and community. Finally, I highlight and interact with the phenomenology of Graeber's scholarship and everyday life experiences that have profoundly impacted my research, teaching, and activism, ultimately serving as a wake-up call to attend to my physical health and wellbeing.

Mauss and Graeber: A dialectic of gift economies

> *In a human economy, each person is unique and of incomparable value because each is a unique nexus of relations with others.*
>
> *(David Graeber, Toward an anthropological theory of value, 2001, p. 158)*

David Graeber embraced the intellectual work of French Anthropologist Marcel Mauss (Hart, 2011; Stewart, 2017; Grubačić, 2020). I was introduced to the theories of Marcel Mauss through readings and cursory discussions with/of David Graeber. One might say David became my virtual de facto tutor in anarchist economics. I became fascinated with Graeber's engagement with Maussian analyses of market theory as outlined in Mauss'

book, *The Gift*. Graber notes, 'Mauss set out to critique the principles of Western economic theory and the "rise of the market as the main medium of human relations' (2001, p. 152). In addition, Mauss surveyed a wide range of indigenous cultures through the literature, gathering together examples of how gifting and other forms of exchange operate in non-Western societies. Mauss's book continues to inspire new generations of scholars across a range of fields, including psychology, philosophy, and others, with anarchist studies as filtered through the cogent writing of David Graeber, who, as Stewart notes, 'provides a particularly erudite, readable and comprehensive review of Mauss's work in context, and the ensuing debate, written from a 21st-century point of view' (2017, p. 3). Herein, Graeber declares, 'I believe Mauss' theoretical corpus is the single most important in the history of anthropology' (2001, p. 151).

Throughout his writing, Graeber situates Mauss beyond a continuum of Marxist analyses and critiques of capitalism and 'avoids speculation as to what a more just society might be like' (2001, p. 161). Rather, he introduces a juxtapositional dialectic that suggests 'Mauss is much less interested in understanding the dynamics of capitalism than in trying to understand—and create—something that might stand outside it' (ibid). Graeber offers a synthesis between Marx and Mauss and articulates a politics of possibility infused with anarchist politics and economics. Valentinos Kontoyiannis suggests that Mauss's theory of the gift may be applied to show that 'production and exchange have the potential to be oriented towards reaching an understanding and consensus and can thus escape the confines of instrumental reason' (2014, p. 5). Mauss elaborates that 'other economic principles were present in capitalist societies and that understanding this would provide a sounder basis for building non-capitalist alternatives than to break with markets and money entirely' (Hart, 2013). Mauss, and by extension Graeber, call into question our modern economic assumption of "self-interest" or put differently, the desire to accumulate objects that "belong" to us. His theory challenges elements of economics and social science that 'do not adequately represent the common sense even of people in our own society' (Appleton, 2021, p. 2)

Graeber (2011) investigated ways in which institutions such as war and slavery played a central role in converting human economies into market economies. Graeber (2009) and Hart (2013) both argue that the human economy is a combination of mechanisms of which the market is only one. Hart (2013) notes that the idea of radical transformation of an economy conceived of monolithically as capitalism into its opposite was an inappropriate way to approach economic change. Graeber advances this idea and suggests that one might pay attention to what people are already doing and build economic initiatives

around such work, giving new direction and emphasis instead of supposing that economic change requires reinvention. He interrogates the Marxist concept of alienation and suggests that it occurs every time an object changes hands. Returning to Mauss, Graeber (2001) asserts,

> Marcel Mauss reminds us that just as socialization does not end at age twelve or eighteen, the creation of objects does not end on the factory floor - things are continually being maintained, altered, and above all, vested in new meanings, even as they are often repeatedly detached and alienated again. (p. 163)

Stewart extends this dialect of gift economies and states, 'Graeber concludes that the many forms of gifting and exchange fall more logically into two categories he calls "open" and "closed" reciprocity: open-handed hospitality, including what Mauss termed "total prestation" on the one hand; and careful accounting on the other' (2017, p. 3) Graeber eloquently excavates and differentiates gift-giving and subsequently illuminates a trajectory of mutual aid. He asserts,

> Open reciprocity keeps no accounts because it implies a relation of permanent mutual commitment; it becomes closed reciprocity when a balancing of accounts closes the relationship off or at least maintains the constant possibility of doing so. (2001, p. 220)

The framework of open reciprocity becomes important to mutual aid and is significant in the context of social movements to resist capitalist and colonial domination by which wealth and resources are extracted and concentrated, and in the process, highlights these extractive relationships. At the heart of mutual aid is the notion of caring for one another and participating in actions that unlock the potential of local networks to reduce isolation and vulnerability in society. Graeber and Grubačić situate the work of Kropotkin and advance an anarchist economy of care through mutual aid by interrogating capitalism and communism. They note,

> Kropotkin aimed to understand precisely what it was that an alienated worker had lost. But to integrate the two would mean to understand how even capitalism is ultimately founded on communism ("mutual aid"), even if it's a communism it does not acknowledge; how communism is not an abstract, distant ideal, impossible to maintain, but a lived practical reality we all engage in daily, to different degrees, and that even factories could not operate without it. (Graeber and Grubačić, 2021, p. 23)

David Graeber's work combats alienation in everyday life through enduring optimism. His optimism was contagious to many and underscored by a do-it-yourself, (re)purposing, and (re)discovering ethic noting, 'To create a new world, we can only start by rediscovering what is and has always been right before our eyes' (Graeber and Grubačić, 2021, p. 23). Hence, 'the political relevance of ideas first espoused in *Mutual aid* is being rediscovered by the new generations of social movements across the planet' (Graeber and Grubačić, 2021, p. 23).

David Graeber's life journey becomes a gift for all of us, but perhaps importantly for anarchists and academics. Thus, the work of Mauss and Kropotkin serves as critical texts in his academic and activist life. Two years before the orchestration of Occupy, Graeber's book, Direct action (2009) lays out the framework for what would follow. Notably, he argues,

> Anarchism as a political philosophy and anarchist ideas and ideas have become more and more important in the world. There is a broad realization that the age of revolution is by no means over, but that revolution will, in the twenty-first century, take on increasingly unfamiliar forms. (Graeber, 2009, p. xvii)

These words and his subsequent writings carve out a path in which we might interrogate crises and negotiate systems of collective care and mutual aid that would become reified in Graeber's everyday life, taken up through Occupy, the Debt Collective, and later COVID-19 outreach actions.

David Graeber, crisis, and the politics of New York City and beyond

> *I don't know anyone who has chosen not to do or let be, speak or be silent without an eye to whom they piss off and what the consequences might be.*
>
> *(Cory Doctorow, David "Debt" Graeber Evicted, April 3, 2014)*

The concept of crisis is articulated as various and multifaceted and expands on work that addresses issues of austerity, worsening inequality, loss of income and benefits, and a more comprehensive loss of social structure given neoliberal policies and economies (Jupp, 2019). Moreover, crises become knotted within everyday practices, relationships, and subjectivities. David Graeber found himself embroiled in several crises throughout his life. In New York, his personal story of eviction attests to a politics of resistance toward the police state, neoliberalism, as well as purges of the poor and working class. Those who critique dominant ideologies and the system are caught out on technicalities

and shown no grace or accommodation, left only to liquidate their belongings in an expedited manner. In April 2014, Graeber tweeted, 'I am cleaning out my family home in New York—Evicted. (police intelligence seems to have played a role)'. He continues, 'There is a pattern here: almost everyone mentioned in the press as involved in the early days of OWS has been getting administrative harassment…They definitely tried to turn certain people into informants' (Graeber, 2014). Friends of Graeber responded with supportive words and yet pointed out that the deviance of systems ensures life-long suffering as David Moeller (2014) tweeted, '…Progress of civilization. Let your opposition live but make everything as inconvenient as possible.'

Graeber's eviction extends beyond his place of residence to that of his career. His struggle within academia, particularly at Yale University, follows a familiar pattern. Those in power, who through their membership on promotion and tenure committees, use their stature to influence outcomes of personnel decisions that impact careers and lives of researchers and scholars. At issue, too, are the politics of institutions, influenced by external forces and connections such as law enforcement and university trustees. In Graeber's case, those who represent the very financial institutions and corporations that he dedicated his life to deconstructing, analysing, and fighting.

David Graeber's eviction caught my attention. I received word from friends in the city that 'David had to empty his family apartment,' and he was handing things to people who came to help him and those on the street, literally 'giving it all away.' Profoundly, the essence of The gift (Hyde, 1999) comes into play here as David embraced the ethos of giving it all away—out of necessity, solidarity, and agency. He enacts the notion of open reciprocity, expecting no payment, keeping no account of transactions, but rather understands exchanges and relationships as a sense of permanent mutual commitment (2001a). Recollections of those such as myself who were not in David's day-to-day life but would meet up, sometimes by chance, at various conferences or organising events underscore this sense of reciprocity. As Mark Lance (2021) writes,

> The personal side of thinking about David Graeber is harder to describe. I thought of him as a friend, sort of. Maybe y'all have relationships in your life like this. We met a few times that I recall. Each day is a vividly remembered joy. At the first event, he would greet me like an old friend. We would hug like we were neighbors or family. (Facebook, 2020)

The phenomenology of these encounters with David Graeber goes beyond a state of temporality or acquaintances to one that is interwoven with care. The essence of these exchanges acknowledges the situation as not trying to be seen as more it is, but instead

just: being there when needed or being there when called upon should one ask. And somehow knowing that should I or anyone be in such need, a response would surely come and not to worry about it. I share the idea that acquaintance is too shallow of a word to describe my exchanges with David Graeber and the fact that 'I always knew that he was there in the world and was confident that there would be more days of organizing, laughing, and having fun. And both those facts made a difference to how my world was. It made everything just a little bit better' (Lance, 2020). In *The dawn of everything* (2021), Graeber and David Wengrow explore this sensibility noting,

> *Security* takes many forms. There is the security knowing one has a statistically smaller chance of getting shot with an arrow. And then there's the security of knowing that there are people in the world who care if one is. (2021, p. 20)

Graeber imparted support, care, and generosity to many, and yet his life included a series of dislocations and losses, from a tenured post at an elite university, the forfeiture of his family home, the bulldozing and clearing of the Zuccotti camp, and ultimately the loss of community and country, in which he is rendered to a liminal state of being, made clear as he tweeted, 'Until police intelligence & counter-terrorism had a little chat with the Penn South building management, I'd always had N.Y.C. as my real residence; in London, I was always a lodger, had at best a room in someone else's flat' (Graeber, 2019). His extended losses underscore his exile in which he states, 'Yes, I lost my family, home, neighborhood, city, activist community and country and probably the chance to ever have my own family, but yeah, London and LSE are nice' (Graeber, 2017). In the end, this tweet epitomises a bodily self that is untethered, floating between spaces of existence as reified through a series of illnesses and treatments in the final year of his life, ending sadly with his death. In this way, David Graeber battles the politics of academia and New York in direct resistance to neoliberal states and institutions, ultimately giving his life devoted to and for anarchist actions of solidarity and social justice.

Phantom power: From Goldman to Graeber embodied in Occupy

> *I imagine the Ghost of Zuccotti Park is like Marley in a Christmas Carol but with like drums and a well-thumbed copy of a Graeber book (or Graeber himself).*
>
> *(Ingrid Burrington, Ghost of Zuccotti Park Tweet, February 12, 2016)*

David Graeber's academic exile mirrors that of Emma Goldman, who, along with Alexander Berkman, was exiled to the U.S.S.R. in 1919. Edgar Hoover pronounced

Goldman and Berkman as the two most dangerous anarchists in America (Hoover, 2019). Goldman's life situated anarchism as constitutively outside, for it was an entity that must be excluded from the nation so that the "inside" can remain familiar, clean, and safe (Ferguson, 2011). To that end, David Graeber's academic exile illuminates the university's role in shaping or limiting ideas through its disciplining of staff and students. The circumstances behind his dismissal at Yale remain connected to larger to geopolitical issues underscored by his involvement in the anti-globalisation movement as well his support for the unionisation of graduate students. Thus, his discharge from Yale operates as a warning and action as part of a politics of containment and exclusion so as to retain the professionalism managerialism and capitalist advancements of the State. Maskovsky (cited in Shea, 2013) recounts Graeber's academic ostracism stating,

> It is possible to view the fact that Graeber has not secured a permanent academic position in the United States after his controversial departure from Yale University as evidence of U.S. anthropology's intolerance of political outspokenness.

Graeber's political actions and outspokenness resemble the spirit of Emma Goldman, reified in her speeches, flyers, and newspaper articles. Such artefacts and action act as a critical flashpoint to contemporary anarchists and scholars such as Graeber, serving as conduits of what I to refer to as a form of phantom power, one that connects to the everyday life experiences of a dense radical habitus of the past to present and the ways in which anarchist experiences of the past become influential to contemporary scenes of resistance.

Phantom power in this context operates on two levels that include technical aspects as of audio equipment and sound processing, along with a theoretical examination of historiography linking anarchists, anti-fascists and anarcha-feminist actions of the past to the present. In the technical sense, DC electric power is transmitted through audio cables to operate microphones that contain active electronic circuitry that allow for the amplification of speech, sound, and music, as well as applications in which power supply and signal communication take place over the same wires. Beyond technical circuitry, phantom power speaks to an ethereal state of being and cultural agency. It creates connectivity near and far—and a politics of resistance or ethos of translocation by embodying elements of anarchism or anarcha-feminism, direct action, and mutual aid (Kaltefleiter, 2019). Phantom power builds upon the work of early scholars who argued for various coalition strategies and explores how the bonds between text, image, and identity weave between themselves and as such are embedded in the mundane and everyday experiences of the altermodern. The core of this new modernity is 'the experience of wander-

ing in time, space and mediums' (Ryan, 2009, p. 2). Phantom power allows for a wandering rather than fixed space time; one that remains fluid through creative play and masquerades, experiences that Graeber espoused in his everyday life.

The flash forwardness of phantom power from Goldman to Graeber is emphasised through an anarcha-feminist circuitry that illuminates what Pierre Bourdieu describes as 'the dialectical relationship between the body and a space as a structural apprenticeship which leads to the embodying of the structures of the world, that is, the appropriating by the world of a body is thus enabled to appropriate the world' (1977, p. 89). Symbolic manipulations of a corporeal experience—movements in and out create the integration of the bodily space with that of the cosmic space such that embodied virtue can be translated or translocated into ethereal collectives. As Kathy Ferguson notes, 'The life world of anarchists took in, made a place for, Goldman's embodied presence which was thus enabled to take in, make place for, that life world, and on and on and on' (2011, p. 267).

Constructions of anarchist positions such as that of Goldman resonate in the anarchist actions of Graeber, wherein he too would be painted as "dangerous" by those in power in New York and at Yale. Like Goldman, Graeber embodied anarchism. His presence and engagement with Occupy, which he deemed a mass American anarchist movement, illustrates a phenomenology of an anarchist lifeworld, taken in and lived through in everyday life. While the "We are the 99" slogan is attributed to Graeber, his contribution to the theory and practice of Occupy and its conduct and tactics was much more profound and formative for the movement (Shah et al., 2020).

My engagement with Occupy and, by extension, exchanges with Graeber came through my involvement with the Positive Force House anarchist collective and Riot Grrrl movement in Washington, D.C. As I have written elsewhere, the Positive Force House served as a meeting and organisational space for Riot Grrrl in the early 1990s. Riot Grrrl officially began in the summer of 1991 when five young women in Washington, D.C., came together to protest neighbourhood gentrification, racial profiling, and abortion clinic bombings (Kaltefleiter, 2009). A city police officer had shot a Latino man. Members from area bands, punks, and Positive Force members fought the police and viewed what was happening as "the revolution". The street actions in Washington, D.C set the tone for future anarchist activities such as the World Trade Organization (W.T.O.) protests or the Summit of the Americas demonstrations, which Graeber poignantly documented in his ethnographic study *Direct action* (2009).

Occupy Wall Street (OWS) drew upon organisational tactics used by Riot Grrrl, Positive Force, and other anarchist collectives to create a framework for future demonstrations.

The early meetings of Occupy Wall Street resembled early Riot Grrrl gatherings, taking place in dark basements and backrooms such as at the Positive Force house. In July of 2011, New York anarchists and activists began organising. Getting the call to come to Tompkins Square and help organise embodied Riot Grrrl actions that were spontaneous, exciting, and inspiring.

The Occupy Movement offered a critique of capitalism amid the worst economic collapse since the Great Depression. Zuccotti Park became a *de facto* Positive Force House. Those in residence drew upon their experience of organising assemblies, workshops, food kitchens, and other forms of mutual aid practised by collectives such as Food Not Bombs. Graeber meandered around the camp, engaging in conversation and often speaking during the assemblies, underscoring his commitment to dialogue. In addition, he traveled to other locations in the city where gatherings took place. On August 14, Graeber (2014) tweeted, 'I am so exhausted. My first driving lesson. Then had to facilitate an assembly in Tompkins Square Park for like three hours.'

Far from merely performative, he looked to these general assemblies as spaces for direct democracy. The drumming sounds from Zuccotti to Wall Street harken back to the days of demonstrators beating on pots and pans on the Washington Mall, especially during reproductive rights protests. Strategies of unity, consensus building, and solidarity emerged in using the human microphone, a communication tool that harnesses the voices of many to create a loudspeaker. Interestingly, the human microphone draws upon its sense of phantom power generated by the energy and agency of those in proximity. Graeber understood the meaning of the human voice as beyond the mundane or everyday life, not just a low-tech solution to the problems of technology's absence. As Moraine (2011) notes, 'Language is one of the most fundamental forms of technology that we possess; the ability to organize around a specific task is another.'

To that end, 'when technologies are removed, the foundational elements remain embedded and embodied in our cyborg brains' (Moraine, 2011). The spectacle of crowds playing back words spoken from one individual becomes amplified to push the boundaries and recuperates an individual existence and coalesces in a tonality that modulates between listening and repeating—wherein a new power frequency and agency broadcasts and connects an everyday dialogue that Graeber embraced.

Occupy relied on anarchist modes of consensual decision-making and refusing to issue a set of demands, as repeated by David Graeber in his many media interviews. Engagement in collective decision-making turned Occupy into a vast experiment in radical democracy of heretofore unseen in the U.S. (Ehrenreich, 2013). The everyday logistics,

human microphone, and decision-making of Occupy emphasise an ideological transposability of individual practices that facilitates a structural similarity between the body and the world. In turn, we see Graeber's embodiment, in and through anarchist writing and activism, open other channels of phantom power by continuing the legacy of Mauss, Kropotkin, and Goldman, and at the same time creating systems of disruption that result in action in anarchist spaces such as Occupy. Thus, the appropriating of the world by the body itself is enabled to appropriate the world. Thus, through this dialectic of mutual appropriation, bodily selves and the world exist in a relationship of mutual influence and aid that reverberate through Graeber's work and life.

Anarcha-feminism, revolution, mutual aid: COVID-19 and an ethics of care

> *I want us to act as if the State is not a protector and to be keenly aware of the damage it can do. People deeply committed to mutual aid think of it as a crucial, everyday practice, not as a program to pull off the shelf when shit gets bad.*
>
> *(Mariame Kabe, We keep each other safe video, 2020)*

David Graeber's work as a scholar and activist navigates crises through an ethics of care grounded in anarcha-feminism or that which is anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist, anti-state, anti-patriarchy, and anti-oppressive. Emma Goldman's essay, *The social situation of women* (1937), foregrounds domestic labour and care through an anarcha-feminist lens. Goldman herself made her living primarily as a nurse and midwife, tending to bodies, performing essential work, and interrogating the embodiment of conditions in which women struggle to feed and care for their families. Goldman cautions, however, that even in revolutionary situations such as Spain (Mujeres Libres), women's liberation is often not valued as part of the social transformation (Ferguson, 2011, p. 253). She urged women to ensure that they are part of the larger liberation struggle that would include facets of care.

Care encompasses aspects of everyday practices, forms of emotion, and material labour, and relationships. Eleanor Jupp elaborates, 'Care continues to be undertaken by women within their own home or commodified within the homes of others or in privatized institutions, while the State overall promotes neoliberalism' (2019, p. 89). Jane Franklin notes, 'Social care has a long history of building capacity. A renewed emphasis on this goes well beyond the social care sector and must focus on what people can do for each other' (2019, p. 31). Here, the work of Peter Kropotkin's *Mutual aid* (1902) is illuminated

with an emphasis on the importance of collaboration which he believed could benefit isolated individuals and the species as a whole.

From an anarcha-feminist perspective, care is an intrinsic aspect of human life, including revolutionary practices. Graeber imparted this notion of care through his engagement in street actions wherein care is not an activity specifically located in the personal or intimate spaces of home and community but extends through all social, cultural, political, and economic experiences. To illustrate this, one need only examine Graeber's commitment, engagement, and activism with the Kurdish freedom movement and the revolution in Rojava, where he travelled to war zones to sit in on revolutionary committees and inspire people to live differently. Women in Rojava took on significant combat actions against the forces of the Islamic State. Similar to Occupy, popular assemblies emerged in Rojava as the ultimate decision-making bodies. Rojava embraced principles including social ecology, direct democracy, and women's liberation. As Graeber reported, 'Councils were selected with careful ethnic balance in each municipality, for instance, the top three officers have to include one Kurd, one Arab, and Assyrian, or Armenian Christian, and at least one of the three has to be a woman' (2014b). Women and youth councils emerged, engaging in do-it-yourself actions that reminded me of early Riot Grrrl demonstrations and embracing the revelatory call, "Revolution Girl Style Now!". To aid the revolution, Graeber remarks, 'In a remarkable echo of the armed Mujeres Libres (Free Women) of Spain, and the "Y.J.A. Star" militia (Union of Free Women) carried out a large proportion of the combat operations against the Islamic State' (2014b). Graeber and Grubačić assert, 'The ongoing social revolution in Democratic Federation of Northeast Syria (Rojava) has been profoundly influenced by Kropotkin's writings about social ecology and cooperative federalism.' Further, they (re)articulate the significance of Kropotkin's work, rescuing it from Leftist critics who sought to contextualise his work as "lifeboat socialism" and "naive utopianism" (Graeber and Grubačić, 2021, p. 24). The political relevance of Kropotkin's ideas in *Mutual aid* (1902) continues to be discovered by the new generations of social movements across the planet, from Rojava to New York.

Just as women took on leadership roles and combat operations in Rojava, armies of women stepped up during the COVID-19 pandemic to help people in need amidst the public health crisis by establishing mutual-aid networks. *Time* magazine ran a double issue titled Women and the pandemic. COVID outreach actions and mutual aid efforts relied on existing networks in New York set up during Occupy and hailed other organising forces and tactics from previous groups such as the Black Panthers, the Catholic

Workers, and Jewish mutual aid societies. New York City became ground zero for the coronavirus pandemic in the United States. The city was overrun with cases in mere days, with death tolls rising to over 200 people a day in March 2020 and hitting a peak of over 800 people a day in April. *Shut it Down NYC*, a group of activists who came together after no justice was served in the murders of two African American men Mike Brown and Eric Garner, mobilised immediately with support from fellow anarchists and activists who had been involved with Occupy and Black Lives Matter. They gathered with one united goal, to help and care for the people and for each other. Groups across all five boroughs signed up as volunteers to provide childcare and pet care, deliver medicine and groceries, and raise money for food and rent. On March 17, 2020, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, held a public conference call with the organiser Mariame Kaba about building a mutual-aid network. Ocasio-Cortez called for action stating,

> We can buy into the old frameworks of, when a disaster hits, it's every person for themselves. Or we can affirmatively choose a different path. And we can build a different world, even if it's just on our building floor, even if it's just in our neighbourhood, ev, en if it's just on our block. She pointed out that those in a position to help didn't have to wait for Congress to pass a bill, or the President to do something. (Tolentino, 2020, p. 3)

The following week, the *New York Times* ran a column with the headline, *Feeling powerless about coronavirus? Join a mutual-aid network* (Warzel, 2020). Vox, Teen Vogue, and other outlets also ran explainers and how-tos. Suddenly mutual aid became a buzzword incorporated into social media feeds—Facebook posts, Instagram stories, and tweets on Twitter. Although announcements for food, supplies, medical assistance, and financial support were shared widely, these discussions failed to discuss the mutual aid and its anarchist roots.

Nonetheless, the ethos of Shut it Down NYC and mutual aid actions extended to Upstate New York. My town is in a rural area of New York State. Like much of the Northeast, the community of Cortland has experienced economic instability over the last two decades. Before the coronavirus pandemic, food scarcity was already an issue, with over 52 per cent of children on the reduced or free lunch programme. In response, volunteers, neighbours, and self-identified anarchists created a mutual aid network that started with a small group of women. Several of us drew upon our experiences with groups such as Food Not Bombs, Occupy, and the Direct Action Network to organise food and supply distributions and supplies to those in need. Before the pandemic, many of us had

worked with food exchanges, clothing swaps, repair workshops, and do-it-yourself clinics.

Direct action remained at the forefront of all the mutual aid work taken on in the community. The consensus of those involved with Cortland Mutual Aid, and a new group, Mutual Aid of the Finger Lakes, mirrors David Graeber's idea of direct action wherein, 'The structure of one's act becomes a kind of micro-utopia, a concrete model for one's vision of a free society' (Graeber, 2009, p. 210). A do-it-yourself ethos inspired mutual aid efforts and continues beyond the pandemic. Food cupboards built by volunteers are stationed strategically around town and in neighbourhoods in greatest need. People could donate food as well take items needed creating a fluidity of a share and care network. Mutual Aid of the Finger Lakes, embracing Graeber's notion of giving it all away, started Free Stuff Pop-Ups, giving everything away for free. Some people responded with suspicion, asking, "What's the catch?" Our response, nothing, "Take what you like. Take what you need." As one member of the group put it,

> From the very beginning, we approached food scarcity and the pandemic from the perspective of direct action—calling on individuals or groups to use their own power and resources to combat the crisis and call for social change. We tried to underscore not relying on the State, but let's be clear we will get the resources to the people by any means necessary. (Mutual aid of the Finger Lakes member, August, 2020).

In this way, anarchists came to terms with grappling with a politics of antagonism to access food, clothing, medical care, and shelter during the crisis and beyond, agreeing to engage in citizen actions of participation. Dean Spade (2020) elaborates,

> Mutual aid is a form of political participation in which people take responsibility for caring for one another and changing political conditions, not just through symbolic acts or putting pressure on their representatives in government but by actually building new social relations that are more survivable.

David Graeber understood that crises intensify the antagonism between the government and the people as workers, especially during disasters, may force otherwise opposing sides to work together, advancing a micro-utopia to supersede efforts by the State. For instance, during Hurricane Sandy, the New York National Guard relied on the help of Occupy Sandy to distribute supplies in the face of government failure. Occupy Sandy would not have existed had it not been for Graeber and all who came to Occupy Wall Street the previous year. In this way, Graeber's notion of collective care is a constant

process or continuum through which participants engage in a diversity of tactics. Sorting through conflicts, conditions, and visions becomes part of a larger project. Hence the day-to-day practice of anarchism and revolution is a matter of prefiguring the world in which one wants to live and create the next layer of resistance and action locally and globally.

Conclusion: David Graeber's final gift

> *I don't understand how the body can give out on a mind and spirit so alive, excited and alert, and full of passion and conviction and ideas and plans. We've lost a central member of a precious tribe: activist academics are a rare breed, and rarer still are ones that are eccentric, ingenious, and committed.*
>
> *(Astra Taylor in David Graeber 1961–2020, Shah et al. 2020)*

This article ends where it began: by documenting David Graeber's legacy and commitment to direct action through possibilities. I sought to examine Graeber's academic and activist work. His presence continues through his writings that amplify discussions on debt culture, up-ending political terrains and hierarchies, and advocate small-d democracy. Possibilities such as those discussed in this essay infuse an ethics of care in everyday life as espoused by Graeber. Care in this capacity is not merely the responsibility of transcendent or reflexive subjects. Rather care, as woven through Graeber's work and life experiences, consists of everything we do to continue, to repair, and to (re)create ourselves in the world. David's tenacity to not only question authority but also look for creative means of resistance offers a framework for continued direct action—care and creative resistance.

Graeber's insistence on creative resistance informs my teaching, research, and community outreach. Recently, I told my students, "We are channelling David Graeber" as we set up a "teach-out" space on campus, one that was reminiscent of Graeber's outdoor teach-outs during university strike actions at LSE. My students bring camping chairs, and we create a circle for discussions. The students' energy reminds me of the early days of Occupy and being at Zuccotti Park. They go about making the space their own, playing music before class and using the human microphone to amplify announcements, directions, discussions, and observations, all the while charting Graeber's *Direct action* (2009) and Kropotkin's *Mutual aid* (1902) into their everyday lives. These classroom discussions set forth a creative landscape to navigate new infrastructures and organisations, renew

class consciousness, and learn organising skills for subsequent social movements. These actions are part of a tapestry that perhaps Graeber left unfinished, full of possibilities, one that as Thomas Gokey writes, 'It's up to all of us to make the world we want to live in together, and it is going to take all of our love and creativity to win' (Shah et al., 2020).

David Graeber bears out such prescriptions, embodied in his everyday interactions,

> who as a rare intellectual whose acts and life forms corresponded with his ideas, and who took risks in thought and deed, and whose words had such a clarity about them that they opened doors to radicalism to so many. (Shah et al., 2020)

The radicalism in his work encapsulates a phantom power wherein his ethereal state of being creates connectivity near and far. As such, I see a connection to an agency as illustrated in cultural histories such as those of the Shakers who believe they received their art as gifts from the spiritual world. There is no doubt that David Graeber is an anarchist instrument whose bodily self has left this earth planet but that which his anarchist spirit remains, one that encompasses the work of Marcel Mauss and the Maori idea of *hau* the "spirit of the gift" where the giver's "soul", or some kind of personal quality, is entangled with the gift object that wishes to return home to its owner. Thus, compelling the receiver to make a return (Appleton 2021).

And so, a return, if you will, to bring this essence of gift home to me. I took to heart the reporting of David Graeber's death, his mysterious stomach illness as detailed by his partner Nika Dubrovsky (2020), who notes, 'David developed strange new symptoms. It all started with a peculiar soapy taste in his mouth.' Reading her work, I, realised that I, too, was experiencing strange tastes in my mouth and stomach pains that seemingly would never go away no matter how much ginger tea I drank. I met with my doctor, who referred me to a gastroenterologist. I ended up in the emergency room and a stay in hospital to have a series of tests and thankfully receiving an all-clear, minus a severe case of gastritis and acid reflux. Nonetheless, I must acknowledge that I would not have taken immediate action had it not been for thinking about David Graeber's life and searching his works. Rather than a sense of indebtedness, I feel an energy and frequency to help carry forward Graeber's ideas to return an existential gift that captures heuristic contributions to his work. Therein, the motivation to reciprocate lives inside the gift itself, and by extension, life all-encompassing, and points to more significant questions about the relationship between persons, things, and experiences (Appleton, 2021). Each reflection and experience such as those discussed in this essay is a gift extrapolated from Mauss but imparted by, and to, David Graeber.

In all, this article explored everyday life experiences of the late David Graeber, charting the work of Marcel Mauss and theories of gift-giving as central to an ontological development of contemporary anarchist theory with attention to contributions of anarcha-feminism to his Graeber's work. As such, I introduced the theoretical framework of phantom power that suggests contemporary anarchist scholars, such as Graeber, embody an ethereal state of being and cultural agency, creating a connectivity and translocation of anarchism. The everyday life experience of anarchists of the past is reified in activist concerns of the present. Anarchist thought is applied to overarching social issues and advocates an ethics of care and new ways of being not only in crises now but especially in a post-pandemic society. Future research might explore mutual aid outreach, care networks, and impact of direct action projects envisioned by Graeber, (Rolling Jubilee, Debt Collective, and Museum of Care to name a few). Finally, the (re)reading of Graeber's scholarship and activist interactions creates critical reflection and renders exchanges that serve as an invitation as he may have wanted--to spark the kind of dialogue and dialectic between scholars and activists, involved in radical social movements, especially those most passionately engaged in actions of justice and the human condition.

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Povzetek

Akademska pot in življenjske izkušnje Davida Graeberja zagotavljajo kontekst za raziskovanje pojma oskrbe med krizami. Globalna pandemija COVID-19 je kritična točka za raziskovanje konceptov, kot so ekonomija daru in vzajemna pomoč, ki prežemata njegovo delo. Članek, ki temelji na teoretičnih okvirih Petra Kropotkina in Marcela Maussa, poudarja razpravo o "darovanju", kot jo je predstavil Mauss, in (ponovno) raziskuje Kropotkinovo delo, kot ga je prevzel Graeber. Skozi usmeritev zgodovinopisja in avtoetnografije preučujem pomen anarho-feminizma, utelešenega v in skozi Emmo Goldman, ki je bil pomemben za anarhistične prakse, katere odmevajo v Graeberjevem življenju in delu. Zato za opis tega pojava uvajam teoretični koncept fantomske moči. Nadalje, anarho-feminizem umeščam v kolektive za nego in to delo povezujem z anarhističnimi intervencijami, kot je Occupy. Trdim, da je Graeberjev anarhistični okvir za Occupy zagotovil osnovo za sodobne skupine za medsebojno pomoč v New Yorku, ki so bile aktivne ne le med pandemijo, ampak, kar je pomembno, za tekoče projekte medsebojne pomoči in neposrednega ukrepanja. Nazadnje potrjujem, da se članek ukvarja s fenomenologijo Davida Graeberja, ki ostaja vpliven pri mojih raziskavah, poučevanju in aktivizmu.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: David Graeber, Marcel Mauss, Occupy, anarhizem, medsebojna pomoč, skrb, kriza

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