## Case

#### Modi’s actively pandering to farmers while trying to crack down on middlemen---he’d jump on the plan.

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On November 19, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced his government’s decision to repeal three controversial farm laws passed last year, yielding to the central demand of thousands of farmers who have been protesting on the borders of New Delhi since November 2020. Concerned with the impact of the corporatization of agriculture that the laws proposed, farmers took to the streets and headed towards New Delhi, while the government refused to budge. With key state elections in sight, this rare withdrawal of a major policy commitment highlights the limits of brute majority governance in Indian politics.

The repeal is a rare retreat for a government reputed for undertaking drastic policy measures while withstanding concerted opposition. The combination of a challenging policy landscape in the near future with a sense of electoral vulnerability in upcoming state elections are driving this decision.

What were the farm laws and why were farmers protesting?

Taken together, the three laws opened avenues for deepening the role of the private investment in agriculture, a sector in which regulatory policy had historically restricted the operations and growth of large corporations. Uncertain about their economic outcomes in the absence of robust legal guarantees and safety mechanisms and upset over the perceived lack of political will to address their concerns, farmers around the country took to the street and those close to the capital headed to New Delhi to have their voices heard.

The first law allowed farmers to trade their produce outside of the physical markets notified under various state Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee laws (APMC acts). The second established a legal framework for contractual farming where farmers could enter contracts directly with buyers before sowing season to sell at pre-determined prices. The third law dispensed with the Central Government’s ability to impose stockholding limits on food items except under extraordinary circumstances. As per the government, these laws would thus open options for farmers other than monopolistic APMCs and eliminate the need for middlemen who would claim a large portion of revenues.

With key state elections in sight, this rare withdrawal of a major policy commitment highlights the limits of brute majority governance in Indian politics.

Farmers were alarmed by the lack of safety measures as the sector opened to corporations, particularly by the absence of a Minimum Selling Price (MSP) provision. Farmers feared that corporatization of agriculture would lower demand for their produce in local markets—pushing down prices—and would expose them to exploitation without a minimum price guarantee in markets and in contractual agreements. The ubiquity of the concern among farmers around the country, particularly in the heartland close to New Delhi in Punjab, western Uttar Pradesh, and Haryana, helped stitch alliances that transcended communal or religious divides. Unlike the widespread protests opposing the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in late-2019, early-2020, the farmer protests were not anti-Hindutva in nature.

This crisis was born out of the brash and uncompromising way the reforms were pushed through. Introduced through an ordinance during a pandemic, with little consultation and no widespread consensus, and passed through brute majority ignoring vigorous opposition inside and outside Parliament, the passage of the laws did little to address the insecurities regarding a perceived pro-corporate tilt. Early protests were faced with heavy police clampdowns. The government engaged in 11 rounds of talks with union leaders, while members of the ruling party continued portraying the farmers as the illegitimate other—as Khalistanis, anti-nationals, large land-owning elites seeking to keep rents, paid non-farmers, or as Modi referred to them, “aandolanjeevi” (ones who protest for a livelihood). The manner led to an extreme level of mistrust regarding the government’s intentions with the laws. Meanwhile, the government stared down at the protests for a year hoping the farmer movement would blink first.

A (nearly) unprecedented U-turn

After a year of staunchly standing by the three laws which they insisted would benefit farmers at large, the government’s decision to retreat is significant not merely because of its implications for the agricultural sector, but because it is rare for this Modi government to budge to any sort of public pressure. This government has carefully crafted a narrative of invincibility where it can undertake drastic reforms withstanding concerted opposition, reforms they claim should have been handled by earlier regimes. Having promised vikaas (progress) in 2014, this is a government that gets things done.

This narrative of resolute strength has entailed a governance model of no apologies, no withdrawals and open confrontation where acknowledging mistakes would itself be a mistake. It stuck with demonetization even when it became clear that the economy was not prepared for the shock. It did not give in to international protests following the abrogation of Article 370 and the revocation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir. It refused to compromise on the Citizenship (Amendment) Act or the National Register of Citizens in response to nation-wide demonstrations that continued until the coronavirus-induced lockdown. Similarly, it did not ease lockdown restrictions even as an enormous humanitarian crisis ensued. It has also avoided issuing apologies under public scrutiny for questionable comments made by its ministers or senior party members, for instance when Member of Parliament Pragya Thakur repeatedly celebrated Gandhi’s assassin.

The only other instance of the Modi government committing a major policy U-turn was in 2015 when it withdrew a contentious ordinance which intended to overhaul India’s land acquisition law. However, it was much weaker in the Rajya Sabha at the time and could not pass laws by brute majority. And just one year into its tenure, it came under strong criticism as a “suit-boot ki sarkar” (government of the corporates). But in this case, the laws had already been passed. This raises the question of what about the opposition to these farm laws compelled the government to retreat.

A critical moment for the BJP

As we head into 2022, the government in New Delhi faces a large set of daunting issues at hand that are not easily resolvable. These include a recovering economy, internal and external security threats, and a potential public health crisis as a third coronavirus wave is not out of the question with only a third of the population fully vaccinated. Additionally, wide-spread protests against the farm laws are diverting attention and adding to the vulnerabilities of the government in a country where the farmer is a revered patriot (for instance “jai jawan, jai kisan” or “hail the soldier, hail the farmer” is a wartime slogan integrated in popular culture). The government and the BJP is especially concerned about losing control over the narrative.

Under this context, deepening mistrust and alienation in Punjab, a mighty agricultural state from where a large portion of the protesting farmers hail, is the last thing the government seeks. The prolonged protests were re-igniting questions of identity and agency in a state that witnessed the chaotic separatist Khalistan movement in the 1980s that has now for the most part completely died out. Given the multitude of issues at hand, agitation against the farm laws was the one issue where the government held the cards and could pursue at least a short-term resolution through compromise. The choice of Guru Nanak Jayanti to repeal the laws, a day celebrating the birth of the first Sikh guru, points to an attempt to outreach to those in Punjab, a state where the majority religion is Sikhism. However, these problems have persisted for some time now; why repeal them now?

Fears of an electoral pushback

This is a tactic of damage limitation. The BJP government is attempting to repair its reputation ahead of elections in early 2022 in the key states of Punjab and Uttar Pradesh as well five other states through the year. The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition is in power in six of those states, which is a disadvantage in a country characterized by anti-incumbency sentiments. The states headed into elections, Uttar Pradesh (UP), Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand are heavily invested in agriculture. These are all states geographically close to New Delhi, with many protesting farmers hailing from these states. The continued salience of the protests provided constant fodder at the local level for opposition campaigning by keeping the narrative on farm laws as the most pressing contemporary issue in rural areas. Furthermore, the prominence of the Lakhimpur Kheri incident in which four farmers were run over by a car allegedly driven by the son of a Union Minister further risked the development of linkages between the farmers movement and electoral outcomes in important state elections.

In spite of the Indian state’s seeming immunity against social movements over the last seven years, the agitations against the farm laws reveal that there is still scope for social movements in the world’s largest democracy.

The electoral loss in the state of West Bengal earlier this year has given the BJP more reason to worry. The Modi government has relied heavily in recent years on the government’s increasing presence in rural life through schemes such as PMKISAN and Ujjwala Yojana among others to maintain political power. However, the three farm laws amounted to a withdrawal of the state from a key rural sector. The BJP’s worries have been reaffirmed by disappointing outcomes in civic polls in Punjab and a by-election in Haryana, another agriculture-heavy state earlier this year. The swiftness of the Modi government to slash excise duties on petrol and diesel, whose prices had reached record-highs, after heavily disappointing electoral results in November shows that the government feels somewhat vulnerable about its electoral prospects. The repeal should also be understood under that context.

Conclusion

The status quo is not to be celebrated; it results in suboptimal outcomes for the farmer who receives a small fraction of the retail value of their produce, the consumer who pays artificially high prices for groceries, and the rural economy that struggles to take off. The agriculture sector desperately needs to be reformed. The three laws did that but largely favored the entry of the private sector. They were pursued with little regard to public consultation and instead engendered deep mistrust of the government’s intentions that was heightened by its heavy-handed response to protesting farmers. Faced with the choice between a suboptimal system that they have endured for decades and one introduced by an untrustworthy agent in New Delhi that they believed risked exposing them to new forms of exploitation, the farmers chose to stick with the devil they know. The repeal creates the possibility of renegotiating the arrangement and tackling the challenges of agricultural reform, but the experience may also deter governments from undertaking the task.

An unintended but consequential outcome of the repeal is that it will embolden farmers and social movements more broadly in India. While Modi appealed to the protesting farmers to return home, it is now their turn to not budge. They insist they will remain in place until the law is formally struck down in Parliament and Union leaders are also expected to pen a letter with six demands for the government, of which one would be price guarantees. The repeal highlights the importance of consensus-building in governing a large country and the limitations of brute majority. In spite of the Indian state’s seeming immunity against social movements over the last seven years, the agitations against the farm laws reveal that there is still scope for social movements in the world’s largest democracy.

#### Prefer pragmatic utopianism. Pairing dialectical advocacy with praxis-based experimentation shapes labor movements into realizable counterhegemonies.

Heather M. Zoller 25 - Professor in the School of Communication, Film, and Media Studies at the University of Cincinatti. “Pragmatic utopianism in the union cooperative movement: (Dis)Organizing transformative social change,” Communication Monographs 92(2), pg. 279-307.

Promoting realistic hope around ongoing dis-organizing tensions: Strategic capacity

The network’s experiences suggest that dialectical tension management can spur hopeful action that pragmatically supports “utopian” movement building. However, organizational communication research on dis-organizing observes that “solutions” to tensions may engender new strains and paradoxes that may dissolve those nascent forms of order (Ashcraft & Trethewey, 2004; Bisel, 2009; Dempsey et al., 2011; Fairhurst & Sheep, 2019; Harris, 2016; Jensen, 2021). Knotted tensions and paradoxes are more perilous in organizing from below, particularly given that flexibility is often imposed on marginalized groups due to their precarious positionality within neoliberalism (Cruz & Sodeke, 2020; Kang & Krone, 2022; Pal, 2016). I argue that a dis-organizing lens is crucial to understanding grassroots experimentation, which “requires the courage to venture into the unknown, risk failure” and engage actions “that we can only hypothesize will yield the desired outcome” (Ganz, 2009, p. 8). Pragmatic utopianism involves countering status quo forces that continually threaten mobilization around transformational visions by undermining plausibility structures.

The network’s pragmatic utopian response to ongoing tensions reflects their grounding in civil rights and labor organizing history, including insights from the United Farm Workers (UFW). Here I describe how 1worker1vote promoted realistic hope in the face of disorganizing forces by connecting dialectical framing with strategic capacity building. In the book “Why David Sometimes Wins,” Marshall Ganz (2009) attributed the successes of the UFW’s social movement unionization (David) versus established unions including the ALF-CIO’s (David) to improvisational strategy: “how we turn what we have into what we need to get what we want” (p. 8) and strategic capacity building, the ability to continually generate new strategy and tactics.

Reinforcing dialectics, feminist, and decolonial literatures (Ashcraft, 2001; Dempsey, 2007; Kang & Krone, 2022; Long et al., 2020; Mitra, 2013; Putnam et al., 2016), Ganz highlighted how the UFW’s dialogic and heuristic practices facilitated continual learning. Highly motivated leaders outmaneuvered established unions through their biographical and cultural embeddedness among farm workers, growers, and other unions. This heuristic and relational approach yielded opportunities to continually improvise new tactics and resources.

Sharing Glaude’s (2007) Weickian approach, Ganz (2009) emphasized the UFW’s ongoing, reflexive tactical reassessment in changing conditions. The union also engaged reflexivity to ensure that new tactics were consistent with the social mission. Ganz attributes the UFW’s later degeneration as a social movement to the loss of accountability structures (for other examples see Cloud, 2011). Based on this approach, Research Question 3 asks: How do network leaders engage strategic capacity building to promote realistic hope in the face of ongoing disorganizing forces and failures?

Communicating realistic hope through strategic capacity building

In this section, I describe how Co-op Cincy, along with other network members, maintain pragmatic utopianism in the face of disorganizing forces. Leaders engage strategic capacity building to communicate reasons to believe in the face of knotted tensions and failures related to their innovations around intercooperation, unionization, and hybridization.

Co-op Cincy links dialectical framing with strategic capacity building through the “Polarity Thinking” model (https://clear-impact.medium.com/exploring-polaritythinking-debf802cb7e3). In a 2021 symposium session, Kristen Barker described polarities in dialectical terms as “interdependent pairs that need one another over time.” She observed:

When we overfocus on one pole to the neglect of the other, we get into the downside of that pole, and ultimately a vicious cycle. … you can leverage the natural tension between the poles so it becomes a positive, self-reinforcing loop or virtuous cycle.

Crucially, their “Polarity Mapping Worksheet” fosters strategic capacity building by providing space to identify the “upsides” and “downsides” of each pole and list potential strategies and resources to capture benefits and avoid problems. Reflecting the pragmatic utopian focus on hopeful action in the face of risk, a session leader observed, “If people are resistant to doing the process, that is a sign you are getting at something positive. Fears and concerns can help you move.” This approach to strategic capacity building helps the network manage plausibility around a “family” of ongoing, interlinked disorganizing tensions (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2024).

First, although the intercooperation principle guided the constitution of the 1worker1vote network as a credible way to achieve scale and local accountability, the problem of initiating that cooperation remains a disorganizing threat. For example, Co-op Cincy’s decision to first incubate Our Harvest food hub to promote the local food access vision threatened viability because this highly resource-intensive and low-margin business (competing with subsidized corporate agriculture) required ongoing time and capital rather than generating profits to incubate new businesses.

Reflecting the UFW’s continually evolving strategy (Ganz, 2009), incubator and farm leaders improvisationally generated a series of tactics to withstand this initiation challenge. Assessing available resources, highly charismatic leaders initially relied on relational capital resulting from networking and community education to catalyze financial support. Unlike nonprofits that rely on institutional isomorphism to gain resources (Seo & Creed, 2002), Co-op Cincy engaged their novel and inspiring model to mobilize support including new start-ups, donations, volunteers, and grant funding. These methods yielded the opportunity to improvise new resources by creating a cooperate grocery in the founders’ racially diverse, mixed-income neighborhood. Uniting values and viability, this store would fulfill “utopian” food access goals and pragmatically assist Our Harvest. ASM’s Project Manager described the intercooperative vision: “In keeping with the sixth principle of cooperation among cooperatives … Our Harvest will be the backbone of Apple Street Market’s produce department.”

While the grocery represented a continuation of Co-op Cincy’s efforts to expand intercooperation through larger start-ups, the incubator also engaged in reflexive and heuristic dialogue with their ecosystem (co-op workers and incubator members), the 1worker network, and other union and cooperative movements about how to counterbalance this strategy with less risky businesses. This approach spurred Co-op Cincy to incubate Sustainergy, an energy retrofitting with low startup costs. Reflecting the Polarity Thinking model, leaders sought to capture the “upsides” of small businesses (communicating proof of concept and quickly generating surpluses to support additional incubation) and larger businesses (creating scalable jobs and larger profits). At a 2018 planning retreat, Kristen described their improvisational approach: “We are experimenting and going with what works.”

Co-op Cincy’s ongoing strategic assessment is guided in part by the need to communicate plausibility around these challenges. For example, a planning retreat focused on how best to communicate scale. Phil Amadon, a founding leader, recommended more stringent project assessment: “some dreams are going nowhere. We need big national/international efforts” while others discussed incubating a larger number of smaller initiatives. Participants also discussed how long to incubate new businesses to secure a credible record of success versus saving incubator resources for other projects.

Second, scale and resource challenges are knotted with ongoing cooperative/union cultural tensions that threaten the network. Unions’ weakened position makes it difficult for labor leaders to invest time and resources supporting the network’s small existing footprint versus protecting larger bargaining agreements. Rob Witherill (network co-founder, United Steelworkers representative) explained, “start-ups generally involve a small number of people. Large unions need bigger numbers of jobs. Four to five in a business doesn’t move the needle” (2017 Symposium). At the 2021 Symposium, network leaders were still appealing: “We’ve been going to foundations. Unions can be doing this financing.” Simultaneously, some cooperative advocates still question unions’ adversarial versus collaborative decision-making, and Symposium attendees acknowledged that workers ask, “why join a union if I’m an owner?” These ongoing, interlinked tensions represent disorganizing forces that threaten the network.

Leaders promote continued faith in the movement by highlighting new resources that emerge from patient forms of mutual capacity building. Co-op Cincy’s history webpage touts small but key union contributions, such as the UFCW funding Our Harvest’s market study. Participants at a 2019 symposium session on the union model highlighted labor’s financial expertise (garnered through collective bargaining) in assessing prospective businesses for cooperative conversion. These improvisational opportunities result from relationally embedding the union and cooperative movements. Motivating audiences at a 2021 session on mutualism, Kristen Barker shared:

People assume that they can’t do things because they don’t have money. We had no money. Don’t be stopped by that. We started with no resources. The UFCW allowed her [Ellen] to work on the network as part of her job. Time is a resource. A Dayton union gave money to study the conversion process. Steelworkers provide money, sit on boards.

Reflecting the strategic capacity building embedded in the “Polarities” approach, advocates seek to dialectically capture the upsides of both unionization and cooperation by treating each as not only material resources but also ideological resources for the other. For example, network leaders situate cooperatives as a long-term solution to labor’s contraction. When someone observed at the 2021 Symposium, “Slow growth can be hard to support,” Kristen Barker responded,

Unions invest a lot of money in elections. Then two years later, they have to do it again. If they could invest a smaller amount of money in co-ops, over the longer term it would lead to infrastructure, something solid to show for it.

Network leaders address cooperators’ doubts about unions by situating labor as key to achieving solidarity. For example, Co-op Cincy suggests that cooperative ownership “draws workers into mutual assistance and understanding of worker’s struggles around the world” (https://coopcincy.org/history). While acknowledging times when unions failed minoritized groups, Phil Amadon inspired symposium audiences by observing that New York home healthcare union organizers, “lobbied for all workers not just union members … At their best, unions work for greater alliance … Black– white unity, male-female unity, unity across national lines.”

Reflecting the pragmatic utopian focus on realistic hope, advocates use the results of incremental strategic capacity building as a plausibility structure to inspire greater involvement. For example, a 2019 symposium session featured a successful conversion of a woodworking business, initiated by a union lawyer and former Co-op Cincy board member. While acknowledging risks that these Ohio workers may drop unionization, the lawyer observed that instead of closing, “workers now make $26 per hour and 100% have insurance” and the union prevented management from instituting inequitable raises.

At the same time, the network seeks to expand their strategic repertoire and their footprint by experimenting with larger initiatives. Leaders tout the promise of scalable initiatives including a New York City drivers cooperative. Advocates are also developing autonomous loan funds pooled from network members and cooperative institutions like Seed Commons. Members continue extensive mutual education (see Table 4F2) to withstand these cultural and material disorganizing forces.

Third, the network reflects UFW insights by working to prevent the “pragmatics” of strategic capacity building from threatening the social vision through reflexive practices. Despite successes in transcending values-viability tradeoffs, conflicts do emerge from innovations. For example, although hybrid multistakeholder cooperatives facilitate economic inclusion, this “solution” threatens to disorganize the vision of worker control. Introducing community owners potentially conflicts with Mondragon principles of Sovereignty of Labor (labor as a driver of economic and social development) and Worker Democratic Control.

Although many ASM community owners (who vote for designated board seats and receive profit dividends) supported the vision of worker ownership, some struggled to understand worker control and shared decision-making. Reflecting on this tension, Co-op Cincy leaders strategized ways to capture the upsides of community ownership while protecting the worker ownership mission. A primary strategy involved drafting bylaws giving worker-owners seven board seats and three to community owners. Kristen Barker encouraged community owners at the 2017 annual meeting to approve the changes because workers have more “stake in the business because this is their livelihood” whereas for consumers, “this is a place where they shop.” Ellen Vera added: “workers are closer to and more involved in the business than consumers are” (see also Zoller, 2023). This reflexive structural change acted as a value “guardrail” (Smith & Besharov, 2019), subordinating capital by preventing fundraising strategies from eroding worker power. ASM’s board also subordinated capital by promoting equitable democratic control among community owners. For example, when ASM lost the store site (as I discuss next), fundraising became critical but unrealistic. When several community members put major funds in escrow, the decision to disburse or return those funds was contingent on a majority owner vote rather than the loaners themselves. Thus, wealthier supporters helped fund the project without diluting the power of lower-income owners, countering gentrification risks in social enterprise organizing.

Co-op Cincy also ties strategic capacity successes to the social vision embedded in Mondragon principles. For example, the incubator applied the resources resulting from creative and hybrid fundraising towards equity goals. Leaders used non-profit, charitable, and business funds to hire a “Racial Justice Coordinator” to promote ownership for racial minorities. They developed the “Power in Numbers” boot camp to recruit and support Black-owned businesses. In their ecosystem, “75% [of workers] are people of color and 66% are women” (2022 Annual Report), and many initiatives are immigrant led (more in Table 4F3).

Pragmatic utopianism, strategic capacity, and hope in dissolution

These examples demonstrate how strategic capacity building communicates ongoing hope in the face of disorganizing forces. However, the confluence of tensions also leads to failures. Here I describe how Co-op Cincy enacted “pragmatic utopianism” through ASM’s dissolution

Opening local cooperative grocery stores is slow and risky (LeGreco & Douglas, 2021). Startup costs are high. ASM spent $100,000 for membership in the cooperative purchasing network Associated Wholesale Grocers (AWG) to access affordable pricing and business support. Raising funds from owner loans is challenging in lower-income neighborhoods. Public skepticism about ASM grew when a nearby consumer cooperative closed in 2017, despite major differences between the projects. Kroger’s Cincinnati headquarters also created political and economic barriers (Zoller, 2023).

The slow timeline (although typical for cooperative groceries) led to frustration and doubts, further threatening fundraising (see Table 4G1). The board member heading the 2017 fundraising canvas stalled, finally admitting they questioned the project’s viability. These doubts ironically contributed to the project’s demise: as later successful fundraising efforts demonstrated, we could have secured the site and broken ground had we completed that campaign. Many community owners pushed to open a smaller store more quickly. However, smaller footprints challenge the social mission because accessing AWG’s competitively priced brands requires minimum size and sales projections.

Co-op Cincy’s response reflected “pragmatic utopianism” by engaging an optimistic search for new strategies to open a store, but only one offering affordable pricing in solidarity with low-income residents. However, status quo forces overwhelmed these attempts. For example, pursuing city development funds secured $500,000 but introduced disorganizing forces related to timing and project control. Supporters took considerable time learning how to lobby, and when City Council approved the funds, doubtful city administrators delayed disbursement for a year and then distributed funds to our community finance partner. The delay instigated the loss of our primary funding source when banks paused new market tax credits due to Trump’s 2016 election. That delay spurred the community financing partner to develop a different project (senior LGBTQ housing) on the site due to their newfound lack of confidence in store fundraising (see Table 4GI).

Even in this dire situation, supporters rallied optimism around available sources of hope. ASM owners encouraged the board to continue searching for a site for two additional years. Although several board members left, Kristen Barker continually gathered community leaders and local experts to search for locations and discuss financing. The Board discussed how to optimistically but realistically frame these efforts (see Table 4G2). As available sites dwindled, Kristen Barker finally described the location search as “not without hope but currently not existing.”

Only when no viable accessible site meeting AWG criteria could be found did the board encourage a dissolution vote. The board chose to end the project rather than open “a small, high-priced store” (ASM newsletter) that would undermine affordability, access, and worker ownership.

Supporters enacted pragmatic utopianism in dissolution by attempting to maintain community hope for solidarity economy organizing. Co-op Cincy sought to build community strategic capacity by improvising with (and contributing to) remaining resources to return as many funds as possible. “If we dissolve now, we can return loans waiting in escrow … and pay back” a portion of previous loans (ASM newsletter). Leaders encouraged grant funders to shift dedicated resources to food access initiatives including two buyer’s clubs.

The board also engaged reflexive analysis, hosting stakeholder feedback sessions to elicit and affirm feelings of “deep disappointment” and frustration as well as identify lessons for the future. Seeking to keep this failure from reflecting on the union cooperative movement or inhibiting future food organizing, newsletter and social media posts positively emphasized project benefits, including securing the site for senior LGBTQ housing. The last newsletter shared,

Apple Street’s organizing inspired Gem City Market in Dayton to come to life … Apple Street shared our business plan, technical support, equipment plans, and more with Gem City. Excitingly, they just opened in May. Neighbors are organizing a Buyer’s Club … to bring affordable food to the Northside area” (More in Table 4G3).

Co-op Cincy continues to experiment with building food access and capacity for Our Harvest, incubating several immigrant-owned food businesses including Bhutanese Bari and Hopes Fulfilled food trucks.

Experimental, transformative organizing entails risks and tactical failures. Co-op Cincy and the larger network maintained realistic optimism by reflexively adapting strategy amid ongoing flux and creatively adapting capacity to promote the vision of economic solidarity in dissolution.

Discussion and conclusion

This study develops critical pragmatism as a theoretical lens for understanding democratic social change. It also elucidates and expands on pragmatic utopianism (Lopez Bunyasi & Smith, 2018) as a conceptual frame for managing communication challenges unique to transformative organizing. I discuss the theoretical and practical implications for mobilizing support for idealistic movements from the margins.

First, this study demonstrates the value of critical pragmatism as a tool for understanding not just resistance to power but attempts at social transformation. Critical pragmatism recognizes the interconnectedness of domination and resistance within hegemonic relationships (Gramsci, 1971), but takes an affirmative stance towards social change. Although the perspective is compatible with ideological criticism, critical pragmatism pushes scholars to investigate embodied, experimental forms of praxis as pathways to counterhegemony.

Critical pragmatism’s focus on experimentation challenges capitalist reproduction logics. Rather than presume that alternative economy organizing either reinforces or fails to displace neoliberalism, I theorized 1worker1vote.org’s vision of inclusive worker ownership as a counternarrative to neoliberal extraction, accumulation, and alienation, and situated the union cooperative model within larger efforts to organize solidarity economies to replace late capitalism.

Critical pragmatist theorizing also eschews orthodoxies that privilege singular forms of social change and resists the tendency to treat different paths towards achieving social justice in binary or zero-sum terms. This analysis demonstrated potential synergies rather than conflicts among movements for autonomy, state protections, socialism, cooperativism, and unionism. For example, 1worker1vote’s market-based entrepreneurialism integrated with rather than undermined governmental and philanthropic mechanisms. Although critical theorists may equate pragmatism with expediency or ideological compromise, the union cooperative network demonstrates that methodological flexibilities (e.g., entrepreneurialism and philanthropy, hybridization) can aid rather than undermine transformative social visions when paired with reflexive accountability structures. Ultimately, pairing pragmatic experimentation with utopian social ideals counters perceptions of hope as naïve and pragmatism as ideological compromise.

Expanding pragmatic utopianism for alternative organizing

Second, this paper expands theorizing of pragmatic utopianism from a communication perspective. Lopez, Bunyasi, and Smith (2018) called attention to marginalized groups who promote solidarity through a bold critique of the status quo, while recognizing the limitations of the existing system. I argue that by highlighting the resistant value of social dreaming (utopianism) when paired with embodied efforts to achieve change (pragmatism), pragmatic utopianism captures the tensional nature of organizing transformative change from the margins. Analysis of the 1worker1vote movement highlights strategies for managing key communication challenges in pragmatic utopian organizing.

The movement demonstrates that translating critical imaginaries into embodied practice requires pragmatic utopian organizers to communicate plausibility structures akin to religious movements (Berger, 2014). As the grocery’s experiences showed, doubts arising from status quo values-viability tensions can be demobilizing and therefore are paradoxically a major risk to viability. Given that constructive forms of hope and doubt, in contrast to both unrealistic hope and pessimism, spur political action (Marlon et al., 2019), communicating plausibility entails promoting realistic hope.

The network establishes realism by communicating symbolic and material “reasons to believe” in the face of acknowledged risks. Those reasons to believe were rooted in innovations that emerged from optimistic and flexible thinking aimed at dialectally meeting multiple goals (Sheep et al., 2017). Reinforcing theorizing of tension management as constitutive of organizing (Putnam et al., 2016; Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004), Mondragon’s “both-and” framing of scale and culture tensions led to 1worker1vote.org’s networked and unionized cooperative model, and Co-op Cincy’s “more-than” approach to inclusion/resource tensions led to hybridized worker/consumer cooperatives. These material innovations not only serve communicatively to build credibility, they dialectically support the movement’s social vision and business success.

In contrast to many values-based businesses (D’Enbeau & Buzzanell, 2011; Mitra & Fyke, 2017; Putnam et al., 2016), 1worker1vote transcends perceived values-viability dichotomies by communicating social ideals as key to business success and vice-versa. This trancendence hinges on redefining the overall role and purpose of business. Moreover, the movement relies on Mondragon principles as a resource in building resourcing and scale in ways that prevent rather than threaten values degeneration. The principles themselves reflect pragmatic utopianism by combining values ideals (e.g., Social Transformation) with practical, flexible methods (e.g., intercooperation;Cheney, 1998). This “ideal-real” blending undercuts the tendency for “utopian” visions to remain unrealizable because actions either appear to fall short of the ideal (Silverman, 2013) or become reified in ways that prevent adaptation (Richter, 2001). Mondragon’s principles are therefore a significant model for other transformative groups in communicating plausibility.

At the same time, a dis-organizing lens encourages us to question apparent solutions in light of ongoing tension, flux, and precarity that threaten nascent forms of order (Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004; Vásquez & Kuhn, 2019), forces that are amplified in experimental organizing from the margins. Despite its association with optimistic innovation (Sheep et al., 2017), dialectical tension framing alone cannot sufficiently build pragmatic reasons to believe “utopian” goals. The network’s experiences highlight the need to pair innovation with ongoing improvisational strategic capacity building (Ganz, 2009) to promote realistic forms of hope.

Maintaining plausibility in the face of ongoing threats to survival requires pragmatic utopian groups to not only innovate, but continually enrich their tactical repertoires. This study reflects the shared Weickian theorizing in Glaude’s (2007) critical pragmatism and Ganz (2009) strategic capacity building, which emphasizes the need for continual improvisational experimentation, assessment, and adaptation. During this study, 1worker1vote faced the challenge of initiating mechanisms such as intercooperation and unionizing cooperatives, requiring the network to improvise with a small foundation of existing resources. Opportunities to devise new tactics (using what we have to get what we want, to paraphrase Ganz) resulted from heuristic and dialogic relationship building.

In contrast to nonprofits that gain resources through institutional isomorphism (Seo & Creed, 2002), 1worker1vote.org demonstrates that transformative groups can build on the inspirational and practical value of their novel model to grow the movement. At the same time, the network utilized insights from the UFW and civil rights movements to both reflexively assess tactics in changing conditions and balance innovative methods with commitment to the social vision.

Co-op Cincy’s strategies to maintain union cooperativism’s plausibility in the face of ASM’s demise also reflect pragmatic utopianism. The network’s response to tactical failures, which are inherent risks in experimental organizing, is instructive for other groups. Leaders acknowledged the loss, assessed its causes to learn for future projects, and promoted continued faith in the movement by optimistically highlighting community benefits and marshaling remaining resources towards the social mission of food access.

Additional research into dis-organizing tensions can expand repertoires for managing hope in the face of setbacks. More broadly, this example points to the need for scholars and practitioners of transformative change to address the political discourses of failure. Whereas capitalist business closures are not equated with capitalism’s failure, solidarity economy business challenges are often attributed to the movement’s inadequacy (Bamberg, 2017). The shuttering of one cooperative does not undermine the union cooperative model’s viability any more than the Save-a-Lot’s closure signaled capitalism’s demise. We can also do more to frame capitalist “success” via externalization of risks including wealth inequality and ecological collapse as failure.

This study is limited to the case under consideration. However, researchers can use the pragmatic utopian framework to investigate how other movements from below communicate plausibility structures to promote realistic hope around transformative visions and manage disorganizing forces. Additional research should consider how multiple experimental approaches work together to achieve transformation and develop new models for organizing healthy, sustainable, and just institutions

#### Fiat is good. Presenting the positive case for what should be done to decarbonize is a vital tool to respond to Trumpian moves to dismantle government expertise and management. Refusing to imagine otherwise cedes power to the right.

JW Mason 25 Economics @ John Jay College & Fellow @ Roosevelt Institute, “Writing about Policy in the Trump Era,” https://jwmason.org/slackwire/writing-about-policy-in-the-trump-era/

Policy writing is a particular kind of writing. It’s defined not just by its topic but by its orientation: What should government do, to address some agreed-on problem, or achieve some agreed-on goal? It is premised on a public debate, in which ideas are adopted based on their merits. It is addressed to no one in particular; it assumes we all have a say in the decision, and a stake in the outcome. It posits some shared values or ends, so that particular actions can be compared on a rational basis. It implies a vision of politics as conversation.

Is that sort of thing worth doing? Is it worth doing now?

Some people might not think this kind of writing is ever worthwhile. (One can imagine various reasons.) Obviously I am not one of them. I have written many policy pieces of this sort, mostly for the Roosevelt Institute. (For example here, here, here, and here.) I would like to keep doing it. The premise of shared problems and a political authority that is both attempting to solve them and responsive to the public, has always been false in some important ways, and effaced important dimensions of politics that are about organized conflict rather than rational debate. But it nonetheless seemed to me that, within its limits, "policy" was a useful framework for asking some important questions. (For example, the links above.)

But one might say: The US government is now in the hands of a clique whose defining purpose seems to be precisely the rejection of collective solutions to common problems and a public of equal citizens. Their immediate project is dismantling the systems through which any kind of rational policymaking operates. So hasn't, now, the gap between the imagined world of policy writing and the real political world gotten unbridgeably wide? When the people in authority are actively ripping up all the efforts to, say, expand renewable energy, does it still make sense to propose helpful ideas about how to decarbonize? Or is that simply an exercise in denial? Or worse, does it legitimate a project that’s fundamentally hostile to that goal, and should be approached instead as an enemy to be defeated?

One doesn't have to write about policy. There are plenty of other kinds of politically oriented writing. You can write poems, or fiction. You can write about books. You can write about history — perhaps especially valuable right now, as long as one approaches the past on its own terms and not simply as a negative space for whatever one wants to say about the present. You can do journalism. You can do practical work — write speeches, press releases, technical reports — provided you are part of an organization.

Most obviously, for someone who might otherwise be doing policy writing, there’s descriptive work, trying to understand and explain what’s going on in a clear and precise way. In this moment, simply documenting what is happening is extremely valuable. As time goes on, we will also want to understand the consequences of what's happening. If a big increase in tariffs happens, say, we’ll want to be able to describe what happens to prices and trade flows and production in the US. This kind of work doesn’t require one to be proposing anything, in the way that policy writing does.

But let’s say we do want to do policy writing. How should we approach it?

That’s what I started writing this post to try to clarify for myself. The post got quite long as I was writing it. I wrote down 10 points in an outline, and I’ve only gotten through four of them. So this should be the first of a couple posts. In this one I’m writing about general principles; hopefully in the next I’ll move toward more specific questions.

These thoughts, I should emphasize, are not intended as directives for anyone to follow. They’re preliminary notes rather than developed arguments. They're an effort to put down on paper some things that I have been thinking about, as I think about how to be useful.

1. There’s only a very loose connection between policy substance and electoral outcomes. It’s tempting to argue that a better program will help the Dems or whoever win elections, but I think we need to accept that this isn’t something one can say with any confidence. I don’t think people voted for Trump because of his platform, whatever that is. I’m not sure that a better or stronger position on climate or immigration or labor would reliably help win elections. The problem isn’t that voters don’t want that; the problem, from my point of view, is the implicit model in which voters have well-established presences on the whole range of issues, and pick the candidate who best matches them. You can win an election as strong opponent of immigration (obviously); I think you can also win an election as a strong supporter of immigration. What matters is having some substantive position, and connecting it to a larger vision and persona and program. It’s not a question of checking the right item off on a list.

Conversely, I am not sure that better substantive outcomes are mainly a function of better electoral outcomes. (There’s some connection, of course.) To take the immigration example again, Trump’s biggest impact so far has not been anything he’s done (so far!), but the extent to which leading Democrats have adopted his position. It’s not so many years ago that some of the most prominent Republicans were supporting legislation to legalize millions of undocumented people. Here in New York, we have a lot of horrible people in charge - I’m not sure if, considering them strictly as individuals, there is much to prefer about Andrew Cuomo or Eric Adams over Donald Trump. Nonetheless we do get some nice things here from time to time, because the environment they operate in is so different from the national one.

Admittedly, this doesn’t make a big difference right at this moment. I put it first mainly to make a negative point, that “how will this help win the next election” is not a very helpful question as a guide to writing about policy right now (or ever, perhaps, unless you are actually working for a campaign.)

2. Good ideas are worth arguing for on the merits. This is the converse of the previous point. The reason to argue for good ideas is because good ideas do not get adopted, or even come into being, without people arguing for them.

The reason to talk about welcoming migrants rather than driving them away, is because welcoming migrants is better than driving them away, not only for them but for the rest of us as well. Arguments for better regulation of food safety or power plant emissions will, over time, result in safer food and cleaner air. Defending the rights of trans people expands everyone’s freedom to exist in our bodies in different ways regardless of what sex we’re assigned. Again, I don’t think that one should count on any immediate electoral payoff from preferring good ideas to bad ones. The reason to argue for good ideas is that arguing for good ideas makes good ideas more likely to be adopted. But I do think that, over the long run, organizations and politicians that consistently hold positions on the merits will be more successful than ones that tack to the prevailing winds.

I feel like arguing for good ideas on the merits has gotten a bit undervalued lately. When, let’s say, Ezra Klein says that we should pay less attention to “the groups,” what he’s rejecting is the exact thing he himself used to do — assessing policy ideas on the merits. He’s saying that politicians should listen less to people who have devoted themselves to studying some problem and to coming up with ideas to deal with it.

There’s another reason to focus more on arguing for good ideas because they are good. It’s a useful form of self-discipline. It’s easy to get too clever, and think that something that is bad on the merits will lead to something better down the road, when those further steps are tenuous or uncertain or just assumed. It’s easy to get too angry, and base all your arguments on being against people who are wrong. Wrong they may be! But there are many ways to be wrong, and the opposite of a bad idea is often another bad idea. Focusing on making positive arguments for things you believe in is a way of avoiding these errors. Politics is always a mix of moving toward a distant destination and starting from where you are. But when your immediate surroundings are especially treacherous or confusing, it becomes more important to keep yourself oriented toward that ultimate goal.

3. Professionalism is worth defending. The disinterested desire to do one’s job well, and the norms and institutions that go with that, are, it seems to me, both essential to the routine functioning of society (more so than, for instance, markets) and an important base for socialist politics.

This is something I’ve thought for a while, and written about occasionally, but it seems especially relevant now. It’s not just that this administration is beginning with an all-out attack on professionals and professional standards in the federal government. (Although that is a central fact about this moment.) It’s also clear that for many of the billionaires who the administration answers to, the labor problem that concerns them most is the relative autonomy of their professional employees. Listen to this from Marc Andreesen:

Companies are basically being hijacked to engines of social change, social revolution. The employee base is going feral. There were cases in the Trump era where multiple companies I know felt like they were hours away from full-blown violent riots on their own campuses by their own employees. … you’d get berated at an all-hands meeting as a C.E.O., where you’d have these extremely angry employees show up and they were just completely furious about how there’s way too many white men on the management team. … What people say from the outside is, “Well, you should just fire those people.” But as a C.E.O., I can’t fire 80 percent of my team.

He is not talking about the cleaning staff here. He is talking about technicians, engineers, low-level managers who are using their relative independence and lack of replaceability to assert their own values and priorities, against those of their bosses.

It’s very clear, when you read stuff like this, that some large part of complaints about DEI, wokeness, and so on are employers’ complaints about workers who are “feral” and disobedient, who reverse the natural order of things by berating the boss, who can’t be replaced and who’ve been spoiled by a college education.

A purely negative, reactive criticism of these attacks on professional employees is not enough. What’s needed is a positive argument for the values of professionalism — of technical expertise, credentials, the autonomy of the professional to do their work according to their own standards. The post-Luigi controversy about insurance companies limiting anesthesia services was a nice teaching moment for these values. The backlash reflected people’s concerns about being denied care, but it also reflected a broader sense that certain decisions — like how long a patient needs anesthesia for — should be made by the domain expert who is doing the work.

Or think about strikes by teachers or journalists, which are motivated not only by demands for better pay — which god knows they deserve — but also by demands to be able to do their job properly. Something that’s very needed in this moment, I think, is a positive defense of why professional civil-service jobs (and their private sector equivalents) are important. Air traffic controllers, say, need job security not just for fairness, the way all workers do, but even more so because that’s what frees them to focus on doing on their work according to their own professional norms.

There are endless examples around us, which we normally don’t even think about. I watched a video with the kids the other night about postal codes, which talked about Ireland redesigned theirs from the ground up so a single 9-digit code specifies any mailbox in the country. (As a parent of two school-age kids, I can say that we are living in a golden age of educational videos.) That didn’t happen because people voted for it, let alone because there were market incentives. It happened because the people with the responsibility for organizing the postal system, who had the relevant expertise, took their jobs seriously and were given the freedom to do them right.

Attacks on professional norms, it seems to me, are a central part of the Trump project, and defense of those norms are one of the central grounds on which that project is being resisted. When the California Department of Education announces its refusal to comply with Trump’s orders banning LGBTQ materials in the classroom, they are not doing so (just) out of self interest, or even out of concern for the kids it would harm. They are doing it because government is not a monarchy, there are rules that assign certain specific authorities to certain roles, and domain-specific decisions — say, what textbooks to use in the classroom — are assigned to the specialists in that domain. It’s these specifically professional norms that are the organizing principle for collective action here.

And of course there’s another reason why an affirmative defense of professionalism is important now. It’s what allows government to do all the other policies we might want it to. Bhaskar Sunkara has been urging socialists to reject “professional-class” politics and focus on working-class issues like Medicare for All. I also am a big supporter of universal public health insurance. But I am not sure how it is going operate without professionals or managers. I certainly see the appeal of “anti-PMC” politics, and there may be contexts where it is called for. But what we need right now is exactly the opposite. We need a program that moves from the defense of specific groups of professionals (like teachers or air traffic controllers) to a broader argument in favor of professional norms and civil service protections in general.

4. Our program needs to be argued for in a principled, positive way. Many of the actions this administration is taking will make the lives of many people much worse. But is that the best grounds to oppose them on? I am not sure it is. I think that in most cases, in both the short and long term, we are better off arguing for what we think is right, rather than that what they are doing is wrong.

Take the case of deportations. A negative critique can just as well be that he is deporting too few people as that he is deporting too many. The only solid footing from which one can oppose the administration’s actions on immigration is a clear principled position on what immigration policy should look like. The same goes for trade policy: 25% tariffs on Canada seems very crazy! But is the counterargument that free trade is the only correct policy, or is it that deglobalization should be a more cautious and gradual process, or is it that steep tariffs should be imposed on enemies but not on allies?

The answers to these questions are not easy, and not everyone on our side (for any reasonable value of “our”) is going to agree on them. But one way or another, opposition to this set of policies is going to require an affirmative case for a different set of policies. And that is going to require articulating some general principles about how society should be organized. If the Trump administration was wrong to put people on planes to Brazil and Colombia, does that mean that those people should have been allowed to stay in the USA? Does it mean they should be allowed to return? Does it mean that other people in those countries should also be allowed to travel to the US, and live and work here? I personally think the answers to these questions are Yes. You don’t have to agree with me. But you are not going to be able to oppose Trump’s actions towards migrants unless you have a substantively different immigration policy to offer in their place.

The problem — or perhaps the opportunity, depending on how you look at it — is that the state of things pre-Trump was not the application of any particular set of principles. It was just the way things had worked out. So any kind of principled argument against what’s happening now, is necessarily going to be an argument for something quite different from what we are used to. Take the very basic principle of one person, one vote. If you are going to oppose current efforts to roll back the franchise on the grounds that every person has an equal right to choose their government, then you are going to have to oppose other long-standing features of American politics, like the malapportioned Senate or felon disfranchisement or Democratic primaries that let some states vote before others, or limiting the franchise to US citizens. And this goes even more when we are talking about mobilizing people and not just making arguments. If you expect people to fight and bear costs and take risks, it is going to have to be for a positive program.

(A related problem, with immigration particularly, is that almost no one has any idea what the existing policy is. Under what conditions can someone from Mexico legally immigrate to the United States? Unless you are a specialist in immigration law, or you or someone close to you has been in that position, I would bet you don’t have any idea.)

This point is stronger now than it was before Trump was elected. “Trump will be a disaster, better to stick with the safe status quo” obviously was not a winning argument, but at least it was an argument. Now there is no status quo to stick with.

**wrongWAR. Death drive is particularly bad at explaining it---too many contextual overriding factors.**

**Roland Bleiker 14**, Professor of International Relations, University of Queensland, “International Theory Between Reification and Self-Reflective Critique,” International Studies Review, 16(2), 6-17-2014, p.325-327

This book is part of an increasing trend of scholarly works that have embraced poststructural critique but want to ground it in more positive political foundations, while retaining a reluctance to return to the positivist tendencies that implicitly underpin much of constructivist research. The path that Daniel Levine has carved out is innovative, sophisticated, and convincing. A superb scholarly achievement. For Levine, the key challenge in international relations (IR) scholarship is what he calls “unchecked reification”: the widespread and dangerous process of forgetting “the distinction between theoretical concepts and the real-world things they mean to describe or to which they refer” (p. 15). The dangers are real, Levine stresses, because IR deals with some of the most difficult issues, from genocides to war. Upholding one subjective position without critical scrutiny can thus have far-reaching consequences. Following Theodor Adorno—who is the key theoretical influence on this book—Levine takes a post-positive position and assumes that the world cannot be known outside of our human perceptions and the values that are inevitably intertwined with them. His ultimate goal is to overcome reification, or, to be more precise, to recognize it as an inevitable aspect of thought so that its dangerous consequences can be mitigated. Levine proceeds in three stages: First he reviews several decades of IR theories to resurrect critical moments when scholars displayed an acute awareness of the dangers of reification. He refreshingly breaks down distinctions between conventional and progressive scholarship, for he detects self-reflective and critical moments in scholars that are usually associated with straightforward positivist positions (such as E.H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, or Graham Allison). But Levine also shows how these moments of self-reflexivity never lasted long and were driven out by the compulsion to offer systematic and scientific knowledge. The second stage of Levine's inquiry outlines why IR scholars regularly closed down critique. Here, he points to a range of factors and phenomena, from peer review processes to the speed at which academics are meant to publish. And here too, he eschews conventional wisdom, showing that work conducted in the wake of the third debate, while explicitly post-positivist and critiquing the reifying tendencies of existing IR scholarship, often lacked critical self-awareness. As a result, Levine believes that many of the respective authors failed to appreciate sufficiently that “reification is a consequence of all thinking—including itself” (p. 68). The third objective of Levine's book is also the most interesting one. Here, he outlines the path toward what he calls “sustainable critique”: a form of self-reflection that can counter the dangers of reification. Critique, for him, is not just something that is directed outwards, against particular theories or theorists. It is also inward-oriented, ongoing, and sensitive to the “limitations of thought itself” (p. 12). The challenges that such a sustainable critique faces are formidable. Two stand out: First, if the natural tendency to forget the origins and values of our concepts are as strong as Levine and other Adorno-inspired theorists believe they are, then how can we actually recognize our own reifying tendencies? Are we not all inevitably and subconsciously caught in a web of meanings from which we cannot escape? Second, if one constantly questions one's own perspective, does one not fall into a relativism that loses the ability to establish the kind of stable foundations that are necessary for political action? Adorno has, of course, been critiqued as relentlessly negative, even by his second-generation Frankfurt School successors (from Jürgen Habermas to his IR interpreters, such as Andrew Linklater and Ken Booth). The response that Levine has to these two sets of legitimate criticisms are, in my view, both convincing and useful at a practical level. He starts off with depicting reification not as a flaw that is meant to be expunged, but as an a priori condition for scholarship. The challenge then is not to let it go unchecked. Methodological pluralism lies at the heart of Levine's sustainable critique. He borrows from what Adorno calls a “constellation”: an attempt to juxtapose, rather than integrate, different perspectives. It is in this spirit that Levine advocates multiple methods to understand the same event or phenomena. He writes of the need to validate “multiple and mutually incompatible ways of seeing” (p. 63, see also pp. 101–102). In this model, a scholar oscillates back and forth between different methods and paradigms, trying to understand the event in question from multiple perspectives. No single method can ever adequately represent the event or should gain the upper hand. But each should, in a way, recognize and capture details or perspectives that the others cannot (p. 102). In practical terms, this means combining a range of methods even when—or, rather, precisely when—they are deemed incompatible. They can range from poststructual deconstruction to the tools pioneered and championed by positivist social sciences. The benefit of such a methodological polyphony is not just the opportunity to bring out nuances and new perspectives. Once the false hope of a smooth synthesis has been abandoned, the very incompatibility of the respective perspectives can then be used to identify the reifying tendencies in each of them. For Levine, this is how reification may be “checked at the source” and this is how a “critically reflexive moment might thus be rendered sustainable” (p. 103). It is in this sense that Levine's approach is not really post-foundational but, rather, an attempt to “balance foundationalisms against one another” (p. 14). There are strong parallels here with arguments advanced by assemblage thinking and complexity theory—links that could have been explored in more detail.

**Reductionism is offense, and it’s a clear drawback of psychoanalytic approaches.**

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If we are to avoid exacerbating the psychotic person’s sense of alienation, it follows that we should foster theoretical perspectives that are non-reductive. Charles and O’Loughlin (2012, p. 411) argue that constrictive views of psychosis have the effect of isolating the afflicted. With this in mind, in so far as we cannot avoid embodying our own assumptions (whether explicitly formulated as “theoretical” or otherwise), a good theory helps the clinician to assume a more self-reflexive position and assists rather than obstructs communication. Psychoanalytic thinking has sought to find ways of working with our assumptions either (from a classical perspective) so that they do not interfere with the patient’s process, or (from a more relational perspective) so that this interference might have a restorative value for the patient. The shift from a one-person to a two-person model of practice has often been taken to signify a less dogmatic approach to theory, wherein the clinician’s theoretical supports do not diminish the lived-experience of the patient. However, in so far as approaches of this kind proceed on the basis of assumptions pertaining to the causative nature of human relationships, in our fundamental position we seem not to have moved all that far. If the significance of libidinal drives is merely replaced by that of object relations, we remain caught in a causal-reductive approach to the psyche. When the very act of theorizing seems liable to distance the clinician, how might we develop ways of thinking about clinical practice that actually facilitate relationship? While of great significance for the development of psychological approaches to the treatment of mental illness, mainstream psychoanalysis has often proven an inadequate yet necessary lean-to in the therapeutic approach to madness. Historically, this body of ideas has done much to question the assumptions of those that would seek to rely solely upon organic explanations, yet the psychoanalytic milieu has never quite been able to reconcile itself with the radical alterity of its own position in respect of mainstream psychiatry. One sign of this is the extent to which psychoanalytic practice has tended to rely on causal thinking. Although Loewald (1971, p. 141) argues that a future-oriented approach is implied by Freud’s notion of a life instinct, teleological theorizing has largely been perceived as “unscientific”, and hence excluded from discourse. Any question that mental illness might be purposive tends to constitute a radical challenge to conventional thinking. If we are to attend to madness, however, and move beyond the assumptions of an established order, then the subject of transcendence and questions of spirituality raised by a teleological position would seem of fundamental importance. Within the field of psychosis, in so far as spirituality is respected, it is often at a polite distance. McCarthy-Jones, Waegeli, and Watkins (2013, p. 255) make a distinction between “spiritual” concerns, such as finding a new direction in life, and more “secular” concerns, such as ending an abusive relationship. Distinctions of this kind reflect a compartmentalizing attitude that has unfortunate consequences for the perception of psychosis. In keeping with such a distinction, in so far as spiritual issues have been taken seriously by mainstream thinking on psychosis, this is typically framed in terms of what religious or spiritual beliefs might be able do for the patient’s well-being (Phillips & Stein, 2007), and not as a question that might emerge in the very act of our theorizing about the nature and treatment of madness. What is the spiritual value of our theorizing, and how might examining this question inform our approach to psychosis? This article suggests that the clinical reliance on causal-reductive thinking further accentuates the sense of alienation in patients, and that the emerging evidence of a relationship between trauma and psychosis can actually be adopted as a means of questioning existing models rather than supporting them.