KOSHKA DUFF, ROWENA AZADA-PALACIOS, ADAM FERNER & NOEMI MAGNANI

# Unifying Against Oppression: The Radical Republicanism of Dara Bascara (1983-2021)

Rachelle Dyanne 'Dara' Bascara was, not necessarily in this order, a philosopher, a Filipino, and an activist. Across these complexly related selves, in registers both abstract and intimate, she grappled with problems of oppression: What is it? How can we identify it? What must we do to overcome it?

Dara's unique approach to these questions integrates feminist, Marxist, and anti-imperialist perspectives on social power with a rigorously analytic methodology. From a background in left-wing struggles in the Philippines, including as a student activist at the University of the Philippines Diliman in Manila, Dara studied at University College London and the University of California, Berkeley before completing a PhD in Philosophy at Birkbeck, University of London. Wherever she went in the world, she was an active organiser with groups including the Campaign for Human Rights in the Philippines, the Filipino Domestic Workers Association, and other migrant solidarity campaigns. The ambition of her doctoral project, 'Towards a Unified Theory of Oppression' (2020), was to rethink the concept of oppression through the lens of civic republican theories of domination.

This special issue, the editors and contributors of which are mostly philosophers, is, first and foremost, an attempt to engage with her conceptual work. At the same time, we recognise that conceptual work is not the preserve of academic texts and cannot (or should not) be detached from broader lived contexts of struggle (hooks 1994; Rossdale 2021).

Dara offered at least three distinctive contributions to the philosophy of injustice and resistance. Firstly, she aimed to develop from Philip Pettit's republicanism a theory of oppression that could unify structural and agential accounts of oppression. Applying Pettit's (2007) definition of interpersonal domination to social groups, her analysis posited two groups, in which members of the first (the privileged) have the capacity to interfere with members of the second (the oppressed) in ways that do not track the objective interests of the


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latter. Secondly, building on Cheryl Misak's (2000; 2018) pragmatism, she developed a pragmatist standpoint epistemology of oppression, using this to argue that inquiries into whether oppression is present must be undertaken by those liable to suffer arbitrary interferences themselves. Finally, with respect to the responsibility for overcoming oppression, she argued that the oppressed have a duty to self-emancipate.

Several pieces in this special issue engage with one of the most provocative dimensions of Dara's work: the challenge of self-emancipation. Her powerful contributions to this debate, originally comprising the ultimate chapter of her thesis and converted by Koshka Duff into a stand-alone article, are published here as 'Towards Self-Emancipation: Thoughts on Overcoming Oppression'. Orlando Lazar's essay comments on the distinctive standpoint from which Dara develops this idea, in starting from the position of the oppressed rather than a 'we' who helps the oppressed from a presumed position of social dominance and affinity with state power. The next two papers consider the implications of this proposition for two different groups. Laurencia Sáenz Benavides considers these implications by asking whether self-respect is a duty that the oppressed must hold and proposing a Spinozian intervention that could portray self-determination as an active endeavour rather than a duty. Connor Woodman's paper explores what her insights might mean for members of dominant groups, positing a moral duty for the 'privileged radical' to 'voluntarily proletarianise'.

Two of the pieces offer constructive critiques of Dara's 'epistemology of the oppressed'. Lorna Finlayson's paper argues that political philosophers' common worries about 'paternalism' – which Dara's pragmatist standpoint theory is centrally concerned to address – are misconceived. Finlayson offers the counter-case of children, who can plausibly count as oppressed but for whom the pragmatist standpoint approach does not seem to work. Darlene Demandante's paper challenges Dara's stipulation that (real or hypothetical) consensus within the social group is a condition for establishing that oppression is present; she draws on Rancière's work to argue for the importance of disagreement/dissensus within the task of identifying oppression.

Two of the works in this collection engage less directly with Dara's philosophical claims and more with the Philippine socio-political context of violence from which she wrote. Rooted in the same philosophical traditions that inspired Dara, Pamela Joy Capistrano's paper considers the enmeshment of interpersonal relations and structural injustice. Ken Reyes draws on the theme of flesh in Black feminist thought and Philippine folklore to reflect on violence in the (post)colonial state.

Shining too in Noemi Magnani's paper co-authored with Dara – on 'Being Undocumented in a Pandemic' – is the aspiration of political philosophy to intervene directly, meticulously, and compassionately in the normalised and extraordinary violences of the present.

Each of the above pieces enacts a yearning to continue conversations with Dara beyond her passing. But many of the contributors conversed with her not only in the language of academic philosophy, but also in the everyday language of comradeship and friendship (hence our unease with referring to her impersonally, by her surname alone). A final piece in this collection, then, is quite literally a conversation between some of Dara's colleagues and comrades, one in which we wish she herself could have taken part, about the role of philosophy in political struggle.

Bringing together this issue has been a special process for us (pun inescapable). Many of the contributions emerged from a symposium, 'Unifying Against Oppression: The Radical Republicanism of Dara Bascara', which took place in August 2021, a few months after Dara's death. The workshop was hosted by the Nottingham Centre for Social Philosophy and co-organised by Koshka Duff and Tom O'Shea (thanks, Tom!), who was Dara's external examiner. In the years since, we have worked as an editorial collective to facilitate the transformation into fully-fledged papers of the vital ideas shared at the symposium, and to bring exciting new contributors on board. For instance, we are delighted to have expanded the issue's engagement with political philosophy in, from, and about the Philippines.

In line with the project's values, the issue makes space for a diversity of voices and formats, including shorter 'interventions' alongside more traditional journal articles. Our goal throughout the review process has been to support authors in enhancing the intellectual cogency and communicative power of their contributions, without necessarily pushing them to conform to the strictures of a pre-set academic style. Prioritising comradeship and care – for our authors, reviewers, ourselves, and others in our lives – against the imperatives of 'output culture' has also shaped the temporality of the project. Moving forward more slowly, it has grown deeper roots. And, we believe, borne juicier fruit!

We are hugely grateful to the editors and editorial assistants at Global Justice, and to all our generous reviewers, for supporting this vision through their careful and creative labour. We round off this introduction with two personal reflections from members of the guest editorial collective. Anyone who knew Dara will remember the distinctive, sometimes mischievous, sometimes steely way that she pursued an argument and dealt with the toxic environment of

academic philosophy. The first reflection (from Adam Ferner) considers how Dara worked with others, in the seminar room, in the lecture hall, over dinner. This essay is a thoroughly partial view of a wonderfully complex person from the position of someone who knew her, first and foremost, in the academy. The second (from Koshka Duff) explores some challenges confronted and posed by Dara's philosophical project of unifying against oppression.

## *The Philosopher-Activist*

### Adam Ferner

Senate House is a tall, austere building in the heart of Bloomsbury. The pared-down art deco design makes it one of the most distinctive and imposing structures in London's university district. It is bone white. It is, in many ways, an ivory tower. Since 1995, it has also been home to the meetings of the Aristotelian Society.

Founded in 1880, the Aristotelian Society is one of the oldest philosophical institutions in London and a standard setter for the discipline more broadly. Its speakers are either illustrious or up-and-coming, and the annual Joint Session is the largest philosophical conference in the UK. As the website points out, its presidents have included: Bertrand Russell, G.E. Moore, A.N. Whitehead, C.D. Broad, Susan Stebbing, Gilbert Ryle, A.J. Ayer, J.L. Austin, Karl Popper and R.M. Hare. It organises fortnightly meetings, which I attended regularly while working on my PhD.

In the 2010s, when Dara and I were at Birkbeck together, attendance at these meetings was unpredictable. Sometimes the white room would be full, all thirty odd seats filled. During one notable lecture by Michael Thompson, more seats were requisitioned from neighbouring seminar rooms. At other times, I would be sitting with a half dozen others, including the speaker and Chair. Although these evening talks are free and 'public' events, those attending were typically students or friends of the speakers, from nearby London colleges like UCL, Birkbeck and King's. And although it is a 'public' event, my experience of the Aristotelian Society was of an organisation that, like so many other philosophical institutions, made few concessions to those unversed in the arcane idioms of the discipline. The organisers did, however, provide a number of tasty biscuits, which attendees would fold into napkins and tuck in their pockets for later.

In recent years, the Aristotelian Society appears to have made attempts to 'diversify'. It aims to be more inclusive, with respect to attendees, speakers and officers. This is the result of the efforts of London philosophers like Nathaniel

Adam Tobias ~~Coleman~~, Sara Ahmed, Darren Chetty – and Dara – to confront the overwhelming whiteness of the discipline. The point of the description above is not critique, necessarily, but a gesture towards the ways that whiteness is often implicitly tied to epistemic authority.

In 2016, when attending one of the Aristotelian Society's fortnightly talks, I bumped into Dara, whom I knew at the time as Rachelle. We had overlapped at Birkbeck (while I finished my seven-year PhD and she worked through her MPhil Stud). She was part of a friendship group I occasionally socialised with, which includes some of the other contributors to this collection. Dara and I had stood on student steering committees together and chatted at the odd party and departmental dinner. She was rambunctious in a way I am not and considerably more energetic (she ate a lot of Haribo). I knew her from our graduate seminars as well. In all honesty, I was slightly intimidated by her. After pouring ourselves some tea, we sat near the front of the long room and listened to the talk.

The talk was given by a white man and chaired by a white man. I am a white man and the same was true for most of the audience. The same is true of the 'notable' presidents of the society, mentioned above, except for Susan Stebbing. I am being blunt.

The talk was about something called persistent philosophical disagreement. In philosophy (and by this, the speaker meant analytic, Anglophone philosophy) there has been a distinct lack of progress. The only thing (analytic) philosophers seem able to agree about is that there is widespread disagreement (cue laughter). No philosophical problems have ever been solved, which (predictably enough) is the subject of much discussion and disagreement (cue more laughter). The speaker referenced Peter van Inwagen, William Lycan, James Ladyman, Don Ross, Bertrand Russell, Fraser MacBride, Colin McGinn and David Chalmers. The speaker went through the reasons why, as a discipline, philosophy fails to offer hard and fast solutions to its puzzles. In doing so, he asserted as a 'fact' the claim 'that some people are better at doing philosophy than others'. There is (the speaker said) a continuum of philosophical ability. After fifty minutes, we took a five-minute break before the question-and-answer session.

Given that the London philosophical community is relatively small, the Chair often knows the attendees and will call on them by name. When Dara raised her hand, he pointed and said 'Yes?' Referring to her written notes, Dara asked the speaker to clarify what he meant when he had said some people are better at doing philosophy than others. In answering this, which he did cursorily, the speaker invoked the notion of 'epistemic superiors'. Apparently, an epistemic

superior is someone who has a firmer than average grasp of an area of study. Some people, he said, are really great philosophers – much better than the rest of us. He gave David Lewis and Saul Kripke as examples. He mentioned Bernard Williams. I remember that, during his presentation, he referred to Quine as 'the master'.

The assumption about a hierarchy of philosophical ability is common if contestable. There is also an issue that emerges from this hierarchical view. During the break, Dara and I looked through the hand-out; its bibliography was comprised exclusively of men – except for Penelope Maddy – and entirely of people racialised as white. The speaker's examples of epistemic superiors (and the entire cast of his thesis) were all beneficiaries of a certain kind of white power. This of course was not mentioned by the speaker, though citational monoculture has been the focus of work by Sara Ahmed, Kristie Dotson, Nathaniel Adam Tobias ~~Coleman~~, Darren Chetty and Richard Delgado (as well as others involved in the #DecoloniseMyCurriculum and #WhyIsMyCurriculumWhite movements). In *Living a Feminist Life*, Sara Ahmed reflects on this point, writing:

> Citation is feminist memory. Citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because we deviated from the paths we were told to follow… We cannot conflate the history of ideas with white men, though, if doing one leads to the other then we are being taught where ideas are assumed to originate. Seminal: how ideas are assumed to originate from male bodies (Ahmed, 2017: 15–16).

It is consonant with this bias towards whiteness and masculinity that when I pressed Dara's question, I was given a more substantive answer than hers, though it was still unsatisfying. The speaker claimed the bibliography was 'gestural' and of course, when I raised it, he said that he didn't think that the only examples of epistemic superiors were white men. To evidence this, he pointed to a well-known logician sitting in the audience – a white-passing Jewish woman – and declared 'She is my epistemic superior!' To this, the logician said nothing, her expression neutral.

Over the months that followed, Dara and I exchanged a few emails about this episode. In those communications, and others, she began to refer to me as her 'epistemic superior'. She wrote this, I think, half-ironically and half-seriously. I had completed my PhD and maintained a position in an organisation adjacent to the academy. Those who knew her will know she was always carefully respectful to those higher up in the perceived hierarchy. She was the only PhD student I

have ever met who referred to faculty members as 'Professor', a practice that was viewed as something of an oddity by her peers. Rowena Azada-Palacios tells me this kind of deference is normal in the Philippines – and in Asian academia more generally – as well as the States, where Dara also studied. It may also have had something to do with Dara's engagement with forms of democratic systems, and the importance of honorifics within some marginalised communities. Either way, it was not an 'oddity'.

We didn't use the phrase, but Dara and I often emailed about what Sara Ahmed refers to as 'a sea of whiteness' (2012, 35). We spoke about it in the reading group we attended on Barbara Applebaum's *Being White, Being Good* (2010). It was there, with Laurencia Sáenz Benavides and Noemi Magnani, that we also met Rowena and Darren Chetty.

> If we get used to inhabiting whiteness (it can be a survival strategy to learn not to see it; to learn not to see how you are not reflected back by what is around), it does not mean whiteness does not still affect us… When you inhabit a 'sea of brownness' as a person of colour you might realise the effort of your previous inhabitance, as the effort of not noticing what is around you. It is like how you can feel the 'weight' of tiredness most acutely as the tiredness leaves you… (Ahmed, 2012: 35–36).

There were spaces, like the Applebaum reading group and the Kanlungan Filipino Consortium (a charity for Filipino, East and Southeast Asian migrants in the UK), where I think the sea of whiteness receded slightly for Dara (both because of the composition of attendees and because of the ideas being discussed). At the time, there was a distinct lack of diversity in the Birkbeck faculty, and I can only imagine that this absence, combined with these attitudes about epistemic superiority, would have had a tangible effect. When Dara called me her 'epistemic superior', she was being serious and playful. I didn't think about it at the time, but it figures as the tragi-comic mode described by Cornel West (Strube and West 2013). For people of colour living within an unremittingly white supremacist society, hope may seem unwarranted. That doesn't make despair inevitable. Dara's phrasing was funny, but also very sad. Her humour – which I found goofily absurdist, sometimes caustic – was, perhaps, a defence against these kinds of social pressures.

In personal interactions, Dara was iconoclastic. In seminar settings, she was always clinically polite, often hard. In one of her emails, she described herself to me as aggressive. She wrote 'I blame philosophy that I have become so aggressive!' I take this accusation seriously. There are now a considerable number of studies, from Jennifer Saul, Helen Beebee and others, that focus on the combative, often

masculinist nature of what Janice Moulton once called the 'adversarial' method of engagement. I don't know what constitutes philosophical training these days, but when Dara and I were studying – at UCL and Birkbeck – this was what was expected. The aim was to 'destroy your opponent', to reveal 'fatal flaws', to engage in the 'cut and thrust' of debate. Tempest Henning has shown the way this affects women of colour, and Dara clearly thought (and I think rightly) that it alienated her from those who would otherwise be allies. In reading groups, she would engage with texts enthusiastically, but her enthusiasm could be read as antagonism, which I think could be a cause of alienation.

I remember once hearing Mike Martin – at the time, a well-known professor of London philosophy – explaining that the seminar room should be modelled on the scientist's laboratory. Of course, this scientistic attitude is typical of Anglophone philosophy, which (following Russell's instruction to 'divide and conquer') breaks problems down into supposedly manageable lumps before dissecting them. Behind this thought, that we should maintain 'a scientific distance', is the assumption that we can detach ourselves (emotionally and perhaps conceptually) from the ideas we have and work with. I suspect Dara would have endorsed this assumption. I also suspect she would not have liked what I have so far written, precisely because it lacks any 'real argument'. She and I would have disagreed (vigorously, maybe teasingly) about this. New ideas (I think) are produced in beautiful (and ugly) and complicated ways, rarely by individuals, and all ideas bear the marks of the people who had them. When you state an idea you believe in, you have an emotional involvement in it and an investment in its future. This is something the laboratory model – and much of Anglophone philosophy – misses.

It is only relatively recently, after the memorials, that I have begun to get a real sense of the extent of Dara's political activism. She was a member of the Board of Trustees of Kanlungan and the Secretary of the Campaign for Human Rights in the Philippines. She was constantly working for the rights of domestic workers. She was deeply invested in struggles against the devastation wreaked by mining companies in the Philippines and she conducted fact-finding missions in Mankayan, Benguet to learn about their effects on indigenous communities. She had grown up in a country riven by neo-colonial rule. She had family, friends and political associates whose lives were imperilled by the policies of the government under the direction of Rodrigo Duterte (Amnesty International's reports on Duterte's governmental initiatives provide a harrowing introduction).

I wonder what it would have been like for Dara to be surrounded (in seminars, in conferences, in lectures, at dinners) by those with a merely theoretical interest

in political philosophy, who treated arguments, beliefs and ideas as items to be played around with. I wonder what it would have been like to have her research – including her PhD thesis, 'Towards a Unified Theory of Oppression' – read and discussed by people with only a tenuous grasp of politics outside the Anglosphere. It can't have been easy, especially because Dara's philosophical activism was one of the most compelling things about her. Her work and her life were structured around creating systemic change. Hers was a standard of activist-philosophy that few philosophy professors live up to. I doubt that most people who train to be 'professional philosophers' have the resilience to carry and contain all these things, while writing, teaching and giving talks at conferences.

The last time I saw Dara in person was at a Friday night dinner shortly before the first UK lockdown. We were visiting a mutual friend of ours, Jonathan Nassim. The three of us went through Jewish prayers and ate copious quantities of vegan lasagne. We complained about our PhDs. We chatted about religion. Jonathan has a particular talent for making people feel welcome, which over the years Dara and I both benefitted from. He is a gentle listener, who works with other people, who helps them think – and in our case, his support helped us finish our research projects. But excellent as Jonathan is, we shouldn't need friends like him to help us work. The discipline should be able to reckon with its own issues without farming out its pastoral labour and responsibilities to other people.

There should be proper mental health provision. There should be meaningful institutional and disciplinary change, which includes methodological change, to mitigate the suffocating habitus of UK philosophy. There should be accountability; an acknowledgement of the tangible harms of discursive and administrative violence; a commitment to build responsive systems of care for the future. And there should be a recognition and a remembering of the ways that people like Dara have changed the discipline through their written work and their steel, their anger, their humour and their mischief.

### *(Un)welcome*

**Koshka Duff**

Welcome. Thank you for opening this special issue. Whatever has brought you here – knowing Dara, hearing something about her ideas and life that resonated for you, caring about the same questions and problems as she did (as many readers of *Global Justice* will), or some search-engine accident – we hope you

find the encounter nourishing. We also hope there will be more and more people like you. You are needed.

In some ways, Dara's work was always unwelcome – that's why it is so important. It works, we might say, within and against liberal political philosophy (Emily Dyson aptly described this approach as a kind of 'intellectual entryism') and therefore runs the risk of aggravating everyone. It challenges people left, right and centre. And it has seriously challenged me. That's what I want to focus on in this reflection. To set the tone of this special issue – that we're not here only to applaud and agree with what Dara had to say (although there is much to applaud and agree with), but to take it seriously, which means engaging with it critically – I would like to share some of the unease, scepticism even, that I've felt about the project of *Towards a Unified Theory of Oppression*.

There are four interconnected aspects of Dara's project that have worried me. Firstly, it is a project of definition that is ahistorical. The thesis tries to come up with necessary and sufficient conditions for X to count as oppression that hold across all times and places. Of course, the thesis itself is not ahistorical, and it does not have an ahistorical goal. To put her definition of oppression to use, Dara saw that it must be filled in with real historical political analysis, and she intended for it to feed into real political struggles. At the same time, her approach seems to presuppose that, for a concept to be useful, it must have an underlying essence – something all its instances have in common.

My concern, thinking with Ludwig Wittgenstein (1991) and others, is that this might impose a dogma onto language (Kuusela, 2008; McGinn, 1997; 2021). It rules out the concept of oppression having instances that stand in relations of 'family resemblance' to each other: exhibiting multiple points of connection and shared features across different family members without there being one feature all have in common, allowing for near and distant relatives, and so on (Goldfarb 1997). A further concern, thinking now with Sylvia Wynter (2001), T. W. Adorno (1973) and others, is that detaching a concept from its history – the complex contexts in which it has been developed and contested – means refusing to recognise its richness and the internal contradictions that may be part of its structure as a product of this sedimented history (McKittrick, 2021; Dotson, 2012; O'Connor, 2004; Geuss, 2001). Inquiring into the kinship, rather than the essence, of concepts, might allow us better to trace tangled or fractured ancestries, imagine blended and chosen families, confront racist uncles (Dilawri, 2025).

Secondly, I was concerned that the project's unifying ambitions – its aim of bringing everything together into one framework – made it a totalising

theory in the sense criticised by many feminist, queer, and decolonial thinkers (Singh, 2018). A totalising account is one that claims that all (relevant) social phenomena can be derived from and explained in terms of a single theory or analysis. My concerns here, which I often discussed with Dara, were especially around the psychology of this totalising impulse. I was concerned that the need to be a unified person, and to have a unified and comprehensive worldview that will give us a determinate answer to all (significant) questions, is an anxious reflex. We strive after big-answer-giving abstractions because we believe they will make us feel safer. But can we really achieve a feeling of safety that way? Is total unification of the complex, multiple, sometimes conflicting aspects of the self – and of the world we're part of/looking at – an achievable or desirable goal? Do we feed the anxiety by pursuing it?

Thirdly, I had concerns about the moralism of the project – a feature Dara was aware of and did not shy away from. There are several aspects to the worry about moralism. Firstly, Dara seems to assume that moral dilemmas are ultimately resolvable if you follow the right theory – that it's possible to do the right thing and avoid being an oppressor. I am more sympathetic with Adorno's (2005) thought that, for individuals in the disastrous circumstances of crisis capitalism, there may be 'no right living in the wrong life' (*kein richtiges Leben im Falschen*), i.e. complicity in oppression may be unavoidable and there may be no moral Houdini trick to release us from the double binds we face. Secondly, I worry that centring concepts of moral duty and preoccupations with questions like 'Is X permissible?' and 'Who is to blame for X?' might limit our ethical imaginations. These concepts and questions seem closely tied to an ethics defined by rules, an obedience/transgression dichotomy, and the imperative to punish those (including oneself) who break the rules.

Some of these possibilities were raised by Elizabeth Anscombe in her paper 'Modern Moral Philosophy' (1958), in which she criticises both consequentialist and deontological traditions in favour of a more Aristotelian approach. More recently, police and penal abolitionist perspectives on harm and transformative justice have identified such assumptions as 'carceral' – that is, as ways of thinking that sustain and arise from a society that fundamentally relies on institutions of punishment and incarceration (Brazzell, 2021; Davis et al. 2022). Dara was interested in abolitionist politics but felt they were often detached from the struggles in the Global South to which she gave her primary commitment.

Finally, I have been concerned about Dara's aspiration to give a definition that everyone can agree on, regardless of political perspective. My misgiving is

that this aspiration – familiar from liberal attempts to frame state institutions as 'neutral' towards different 'conceptions of the good'[1] – pushes towards an empty or contentless definition in which all the important questions are shunted into the business of working out how to apply the concept. In that case, we might wonder what has been achieved by getting people to agree on the concept. Does this agreement merely mask the inevitably political and contested nature of concepts like oppression? We could describe this as a worry about formalism.

Dara and I had many conversations about these issues. She always had plenty to say in response, but my worries remained. It was only after her death that I read her thesis and saw what her approach really meant when put into practice. I was blown away. Page after page came insight after insight. It was dazzling and utterly compelling. This didn't mean that my concerns about her project went away; rather, I started to see how I could make sense of it through something like the principle of diversity of tactics.[2] Could there be space for a project like hers within an ecology of forms of resistance to oppression that also made space for the critical thoughts I raised above?

Driving this approach was the following observation: Dara's pursuit of a unifying, perhaps totalising, perhaps moralising project of perhaps ahistorical definition is just so *fruitful*. It generates important shifts of perspective, prompts vital discussions. Perhaps then, I thought, its value lies in the process as much as (more than?) in the answers it comes up with – the process of trying to define, trying to unify, trying to extract points of consensus from an inevitably conflicted plane. Perhaps that has value, even if (or precisely because) you always fail. And while you're engaged in that trying, other people can be doing other things – pointing out the exclusions and the ruptures and the historical variation and contingencies that your trying will always butt up against. But what you are doing is still important. Because perhaps there are some insights only to be gleaned by risking failure, or even embarking on a task that is guaranteed to fail somehow (Jack Halberstam (2011) might say something like this). Perhaps other people will gain from your attempts even as they criticise them.

I knew from our conversations that Dara had often not been able to write exactly what she wanted or what she believed. To do so would be unacceptable

1 Attempts decisively critiqued by Iris Marion Young (1990), Lorna Finlayson (2015) and others.

2 Diversity of tactics is a value articulated in the context of protest and direct action movements, notably those resisting militarism and neoliberal globalisation around the turn of the 21st century (Rossdale, 2019: ch. 7; Graeber, 2009). The term expresses an urgent need to build solidarity across differences of analysis and approach (e.g. diverse perspectives on 'nonviolence') in the face of state repression and hostile media strategies that work by dividing 'good' from 'bad' protesters (Duff, 2023; Cristiano et al. 2023).

in a PhD thesis which was, as she understood it, still an apprenticeship into a bourgeois institution: the (neo)liberal academy. I was therefore half-expecting to read something put through the wringer of academic hypocrisy, a diluted product, a lesser thing. Again, my preconceptions were challenged. Yes, her voice in the thesis was a *disciplined* one, in several senses of the term. It was the voice of a persona: a persona highly trained in the language of analytic liberal political philosophy who argues in a way that (at least some) liberal political philosophers – much to their chagrin – cannot help but understand. But it was also, unmistakably, brilliantly, at times hilariously, Dara. *My beautiful comrade*.

Or rather, a part of her. And I wondered: Can we be at peace with being in pieces? With not being unified? Understanding Dara's project as intensely fruitful within the frame of a diversity of tactics – a part of the self that can challenge others but still co-exist with them – makes a lot of sense to me. Here's a further worry, though. Is understanding it in this way somehow failing or refusing to take the project seriously, to take it at its word? Maybe a totalising theory is like a monastic life, or a monogamous relationship – you're not really doing it if you have the weekends off. You're doing something different. How far can you travel on a train you only have one foot on?

These are just a few questions that – without always being directly thematised – I hope this special issue can help us to keep reflecting on, and struggling with, together.

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