**Notes from PHS+50 / M4N – "Thinking Together Again"**

**Saturday**, 16 June 2012; all day

(10:00+/-)

Experiences c.1969 / People's Park / UCB / etc. as a background for events in today's world

Creating People's Park, and the UCB resistance…

Diana Oughton / Children's Community School, and the community's lack of support for it

She felt that we must reach the children early on with a sense of community, or, later in life, there is no resonance with and no response to "community"

(?) c. Feb 1970, when she asked for help to find a space for the school (what location?), there was no response from those in the "community" that would be expected to rise to the call; my feeling at that moment that the whole bourgeois pluralistic liberalist crowd was compromised by the war system

Letter from Diana sent to my father; conversation between Diana and me that my father had not responded; (who could have known that she'd be gone just a few months later in March 1970,?); the letter was left unread in my father's papers by accident, and not discovered until I was cleaning the house out (1990's?); the letter has never been opened

(Might it be opened at the UM October conference? The historians would all be sitting on the edges of their seats)

The events of People's Park, CCS etc. are related, in a way, to current events (A2 warming shelter, Library Park, Camp Take Notice): there are those who "don't want to give 'community' 'a space' ".

Handing out info on the PHS and on a list of topics

For this weekend, we need to do two things:

Gather people's thoughts on the various topics that might go into a manifesto

And also, amongst the various topics, hear from people about which 2/3/4 topics might sift to the top

For the PHS, it was the Bomb and Discrimination: Obliteration and Oppression/Injustice

**For us, here, now**, what might be **our** "issues that can't be overlooked"?

An outline for thinking about it might be three questions:

1) What is going on – locally, nationally, globally

Economy, society, polity, political situation; how do these come together?

2) What is to be done; what do we want

3) How will we do it

One such issue: Life systems, and the war system vs. the peace system

"The sins of the father are unto the third and forth generations"; if we don't begin to address these several topics, the aggregate negative feedback systems are beginning to overwhelm the life systems

Aggregate consequences of a lot of bad policy

What drives it? What is it about the larger culture that drives it?

War system vs. peace system

People want to consume

Perfectly decent people, and an industrial system that gets these peoples' 'need' met
Consumerism: How people are lead to believe that: "People 'need' a particular level of consumption in order to lead a reasonably decent life"

In such a personal-consumption-based environment, how do people value a "natural resource"?

Regarding A2's Library Lot, people are confused by its "purpose":
Is it a park, to be "used"; or is it a commons, with people as its stewards, co-creators, maintainers?

Economic governance of the commons
Elinor Ostrom, University of Indiana
Many heard her speak a few years ago; she passed on just recently

Where does the struggle locally for the commons intersect the struggle globally?

Rio + 20; leverage on these ideas
Steady-state, sustainability, a comparable level of life, but different
Transitions: No nuclear "transition step"; zero nuclear, get these poisons out of the system

Society has (at least in the past) learned to self-impose boundaries which we agree are humane and decent; example of child labor

Without being ascetic or fascist about it, how do we, as a society, begin the discussion about increasing our self-restraint, and imposing boundaries on ourselves where necessary?

What are ways that appropriate boundaries can be created/adopted?

For example: "Consume less"

Discussion about various forms of "Advocating it"

Model it – Actual actions

For OWS, part of the appeal

Spontaneous movement/creativity/innovation
Expresses a rising consciousness
For many: Actions are preferred and focused-on (rather than words) because they actually ARE change

1) "Modeling it" includes many of the examples we're hearing about today

Experiments, partial solutions

Speak/Argue for it – Making the case in words/writing

For OWS, not a successful effort

One particular motivation is coming up with a short, concise answer for the high school students who asked re: the OWS Declarations "what is the big picture that summarizes all of this?"

No adult could verbalize it for them; how can the next generation be expected to advocate for a better future if even the adults can't describe it?

For many people: Words are considered less immediately helpful and necessary (than actions)

Take more time and are more frustrating; seem only to increase debate and quarreling

But: We need to make the case in words

To engage people in the long-term big picture; to clarify and focus on essentials, to build shared understanding and continued conversation; to have an answer to "what next?"

A partial answer to "Why do we need a Manifesto For Now?

2A) Advocating via self-action: Explaining your own reasons

A first step: Getting to the "why" beyond the actions

Beginning to generalize from the examples we're discussing; moving beyond mere "witness"

For many people: Considered more acceptable & convincing to focus on self actions, rather than just telling others what to do

But: For many issues, this approach is just not broad enough

2B) Advocating for other-action: Persuading others that they should/must do certain things

This is what the Manifesto For Now will need to do (and why we're here today)

For many: Very difficult; worth it?

Spreads wider, beyond just changes in their own world, to changes in the wider world for the sake of others; need to make the broad case that these things are objectively/demonstrably "better" or "right"

But: Essential on larger and global issues that are obviously beyond direct self-action

Comment from previous day:

Why advocacy is worth the effort: The belief that:

Even though many people are on paths that are detrimental to society and to the world's life systems,

None the less they sense/feel that something is amiss,

And are keeping an ear open for what this could be,

And are therefore reachable in that sense

Concerns about the motivations of "speaking-on-behalf-of-others" advocacy

The stumbling-block of "self-interest": its place, function, perhaps necessity

Concern: Care vs. Co-incident self-interest

Are you really acting on behalf of others (care)?

"Or" are you just benefiting yourself somehow (self-interest that coincides with others)?

Implications: How much does the "motivation" impact the effort and the success?

Is one or the other source of motivation more generally successful? In the short term / long term? On particular issues? On the most critical issues?

Nature of the 1950's, 60's, 70's liberation movements

Oppressed people fighting social ascription

People no longer willing to stay where society puts them
Others fighting along side
For justice on behalf the oppressed individuals
(Which will not directly benefit them = care)
For the cause of liberation
(Which may directly benefit them too = co-incident self-interest)
Probably both motivations contributed to successes

In the language of today
Speaking to the self (as a way to make the case for action)
Action because of a personal belief that it's the right thing for self
The intrinsic value of this (course of action) for self

Speaking to the heart (for others) (as a way to make the case for action)
Action "because" of society
The vicarious value of this (course of action) for others

For the issues of today
The fate/future of the planet
Clearly has some self-interest involved
You would think that most people would at least be concerned about the world that their children will inherit…
Malachi, and the results of "generational war"

The fate/future of the poor and disenfranchised
For this issue, many people cannot see (refuse to see) a self-interest aspect
In this case, maybe the most crucial consideration is "What will touch the heart (care for others)"

Harder to "model" the things "not" do (vs. the things that "should" do)
Finding a way to describe it, to make it present and visible even though "not" do it
Example: Children in productive work of a non-commercial sort

Harder still, how erect boundaries in areas where an economic disincentive to do so
Example: Dis-employment of the less-efficient…

Other topics touched-on but not discussed:
Stigmatizing certain people
Confronting larger societal customs
Confronting the lies in the media

People who oppose new/changed boundaries
Uncritical people brought up in systems
How is and how should be
Works for them
Self-interest not even seen at basis

Well-intentioned philosophy, whose political view sucks (example: Libertarians)
Model of good society is unworkable

Conscious opposition
I don't want to even look at change
I want it to go away; I will erase it, beyond just denying it
Create mis-information
Deliberately undermining intellectual basis, creating false consciousness
Peddled under media "balance"; "Establishment journalism"
"Fair and balanced" idea used to leverage opposition to anything; presented as somehow an "equal" point of view

Relationship between power and knowledge; legitimacy
C Wright Mills on this topic; relationship in a democracy

It's different than just "greed"
Told to believe in American Dream
Lead to believe in basic levels of food, shelter, health
And also a level of comfort
An expectation, not a conscious urge
Assumptions re: what good life is about

What do we use as a <u>name for this state of mind</u>, which does not have its source in naked greed, but none the less causes us to consume hugely?
"Uneducated 'want' "?
It thinks narrowly, not broadly; it is in excess of "need", of "possession"; almost it seems like a psychic vacuum…
Not simply a few extreme cases; this is the "we"

We need to keep <u>working on a better name for this concept</u>; it underlies many of the larger, more visible problems…

Comment: Allows us to accept the imperialism done in our name

What are some of its characteristics?
"It" resists attempts at "education"; "It" is unapologetic
People don't want to accept that "it" represents a problem
In Greek tragedy, once the tragic hero understood his complicity and guilt, there was much tearing of hair etc.
(No one today is ready for the third act…)
Without getting self-righteous, "atonement" is a widely understood human capacity that is not seen much today
How "are" we, such that we need to change "this" about ourselves

"It", as a state of mind, is stoked by US culture
Can be called "achievement"
Sometimes greedily
Sometimes "sincerely" (sustaining the mystique)

Rockefeller, Carnegie, Turner, Gates

Can be called merely "consumerism"

This state of mind is deeply embedded in modern economics
Since depression and Keynesian model
Gov't role to stimulate "consumption", a "certain level" of consumption
Also consume and throw away
Galbraith and The Affluent Society

In the end, both are about <u>having more and better</u>…

Are we re-thinking, or just making an adjustment

We could tackle the issue directly: about what really constitutes a "good" life
But the most we've been able to muster is "how" to achieve it (our current level of consumption) in an "alternate way" ("sustainably")

Suggest that a crystallization is in the making

Stuck in old paradigm
It's breaking down, all know it's coming
Minimally taken care of by the system
No functional support; people like refugees
<u>Human social collective culture is not being supported (Camp Take Notice)</u>
<u>Actually fighting against one thing that could save us</u>

Other topics touched-on but not pursued:

A definition of "politics" that captures this conflict between perspectives:

Politics as "organized conflict over values (material, spiritual, ethical): who gets what, when, where and how"

Invisible Hands: The businessmen's crusade against the New Deal, by Kim Phillips-Fein (2009)

Discussion of the Invisible Hand concept, and the creation of the conservative movement since WWII

2010 Supreme Court <u>Citizens United v Federal Election Commission</u> decision

Many have noted the irony in that "Citizens United" is the name of a conservative advocacy group which receives corporate funding and works to promote increased rights for corporations
Activism to overturn the decision

(11:30+/-)

Regarding support for people at risk (above): current budget-cutting mood is slashing at public workers
- Both at workers and at jobs
- Grant money also that pays for these

State of the faith communities (at a popular level) regarding the poor
- Of the large, popular, organized church movements that link themselves to Christianity in some way, what attitudes are now being seen?
  - What attitudes toward selves?
  - What attitudes toward the poor and the rest of the world?

- Some conservative perspectives
  - Pivot on concepts of the chosen, the poor will always with you
  - Do nothing, blame the people
  - Prosperity churches
  - <u>If want it bad enough</u>, it will be provided / magical thinking / urged to be very specific
  - Also, not focused on maintenance, not leave good things behind for those left behind

  - Emphasis in some shifting from taking care of poor to activism on particular issues
    - Plight of nuns / abortion activism

- Some liberal perspectives
  - Pivot on concepts of individual spiritual journey
  - Don't do anything to interfere with anyone's life path; they chose it
  - "Intentionality"
  - Posters of <u>what we want</u>
  - The Course in Miracles

- Traditional "mainline" Protestant churches
  - Much smaller numbers these days
  - Noblesse oblige
  - Helps, but maintains the system

- Missional church
  - No building
  - Be with the poor
  - Doing what asked to do with respect to poor people
  - Also, "reverse" mission; undo bad things done to indigenous peoples
  - Restorative justice
  - Consciousness raising

- Charismatic faith leaders undergoing transformations
  - Carlton Pierson / Tulsa / inheritor of Oral Roberts congregation
  - Looking with fresh eyes at their traditions; seeing something mistaken, missing
  - Confronting "the heresy of universalism"
  - Rejection by many, followed by some

Overall, vast majority of congregations linking themselves to Christianity in some way are none the less not actively interested in the poor

Political intervention

Similar to original PHS stance:
Only plausible intervention is through the Democratic Party:
Re-progressivize it; 3rd parties not going to do it

Example 1989 US Green Party in A2:

Ran under Demo Party with Green platform, got 48% vote
Ran again under Green Party with same platform, got 1% vote
People not going to change "identity" to "independent"

Piedmont Peace Project, Kannapolis, NC

Voter registration drive highly successful; without leaving the Republican Party, able to show power, caused elected officials to change vote on 80% of targeted issues

The issue is mobilization of progressives
Interest in 3rd parties is marginal; but interest in "an independent politics" is much stronger

Need to focus on how transition of power

Previous struggle with this question grounded out on "revolutionary theory" (armed struggle)
People not going to go there
Rather, what is a win?

Transition models

President as a hero leader
Transitioning to
President with team / President as team

What would you do as President
This is a personal (not abstract) question in a democracy
In a democracy, leadership is personal

Understand the concept, but believe that method not going to work
Vast majority of Americans have no ability to participate in such a structure
Believe rather that it will be movement from "not participate" to "participate in a different way"

Social sphere and political sphere intersect at alternative living structures

Example: Community gardens, Co-housing as community

Need to deal with conservative hegemony of message

Grasps hearts and minds

Tells a story that is very persuasive to average person

These crazy liberals… (selected examples)
We're the ones who are smart, and know how money and the system works… (selected examples)

You too can be rich one day…
The only thing keeping you from being rich is government (wider societal pressure) on your back…
Throw it off at every level…

Then supports people in getting active with the message
Trains people for elected office
Taught to do well at it
Supported after elected
Supported to keep going to city council

Builds on an underlying feeling
Feel deprived: material goods, safety, respect
"Deprived" of what? Deprived of "ease"; "Lack of ease"
People say "stop watching TV", but TV is the last thing they have; last escape from reality

Leverage of and cultivation of this "perceived deprivation"

Fragmented as individuals, deprived of sustaining and meaningful work and of real community, and without a ready language to express this, people experience an un-named lack that is free-floating
Easily attachable to many different targets; Transformed to a more concrete perceived lack of whatever it is guided toward (Note similarities to Solnit's critique below)

This feeling is easily stoked, "preached to", by organized groups with a coherent message, faith, media, political etc.

"Success" is that it gives them what they truly are missing: a community to belong to, of one form or another

(1:00 pm +/-)

Discussion is circled back to the earlier question regarding:
1) Topics for M4N
2) Priority among topics (similar to PHS)

So far, the discussion has suggested as priority topics:
A) Threat to life systems
B) Broad sense of "perceived deprivation", that underlies/drives both consumerism and the suppression/denial of feelings that we need to change our lifestyles

Additional topics suggested:
Money
The commons
(Understood broadly as the means to live, as well as in the sense of physical space)

State capitalism
Libertarians both left and right
A new and better concept for fathers, other than in war or as a boss; what a father can be

The commons:
Various understandings of the commons, including:
Creative commons
Lands/spaces for community, and their expropriation, specifically in the global south
Example: in Africa, the removal of the village as a social safety net
Demise of communism, search for a new language for this topic
Example: Collapse of Soviet Union,

Focus here today on lands/spaces for community
Line of reasoning regarding the commons; steps in its evolution
Make some distinctions with other related topics

Natural resource (free goods, possess by force), vs. sacralizing nature
Responsible to it, vs. "stewardship" (where power over it is implied)
Example: Selling off water: Bolivia, Schenectady

The Commons (as the possessed resource) vs. the common good
Not just citizenship makes you eligible for it
Still carries with it a sense of exclusion: those who don't belong to this village
Important to understand differences with "common good"
For the Common Good: Redirecting the economy toward community, the environment, and a sustainable future; John Cobb (1989)

Law then traditionally recognizes (local) power over commons

World bank and its policies
Socialize cost, privatize profits
Mechanical, destroying the commons

Also, new language for discussing these issues
Americans shy away from reclaiming means of production
Refer to reclaiming "earth" or "planet"
But not to reclaiming "this" building

Those who never lost sense of outrage
Never agreed to concede to predominant conversation, therefore dismissed
Ostracized as "misfit" vs. "continuing the fight"
Example: Richard Wright, regarding race

Other topics touched-on but not pursued:
Unpaid labor of reproduction
Not under sign of commons but under "women's work"

Re-thinking relationships between self-identity, work, business

In many varying (both pos & neg) directions

Corporations "gives us" jobs, vs. our work gives them wealth

Need to understand and address "class shame"

Silence, because voice would force need to admit part of the class

Those growing up in semi-rural SE MI; future as either farmer or factory employee (both not "successful", not "respected"); nothing imagined beyond this

Re-understand as "class pride"

Re-understand selves as "source of wealth"

Similar to re-thinking other historical concepts: "protectionism" re-thought as "revitalizing local economy"

Taken beyond superficial "us vs. them" implications

Varies with circumstances

Seen this in her role as preacher to congregations with Walmart employees

In subsistence situations

Minimal choice of work vs. prison

Threat of this used as means to separate people so always a pliable work force

In "middle class" situations

Example with Walmart in rural Arkansas (?)

These folks assume there is no other choice available to them

An acquaintance re-thought Walmart as savior, because no one else would give her a job; she thinks my criticism of Walmart is crazy

"Self-blaming" is more a component of "middle class" concerns; less/not a component of "lower class"

"Middle class" people don't even have the "survival skills" of those in "lower class" who've had to scrape out a living all their lives

"Middle class" successfully taught to hate the people below them; "fear of falling"; Rush Limbaugh as maintaining this

"Middle class" as "mid-level social control stratum"

Resistance to re-thinking

When PHS written, not a sense of the extent of the hate around us

Degree to which people had been "enemy-fied"

Recently someone commented "not coming to A2 because so much hate in that town"

Spirit behind blog comments always been there, but now, reading them…

Strangely, also directed at anyone doing anything positive; as if taking action was an offense in itself

Important for us here today to remember: Anger is not hate

Apathy (this generation's version)

A focus of original PHS in 1962

Out of Apathy, by Edward P Thompson ed. (1960)

In 2012, not one response to invitations sent out

Not even an email expressing thanks and hope; how much easier could it be?

Inaction (toward discussion and toward manifestos certainly), but feels like many different facets to it…

Lack of clarity & conviction

Criticism of modern liberalism: Tolerate anything, therefore lose your own convictions

Lack of urgency

Too comfortable

Too difficult

Talk self into impotence: If I believe no change is possible, then I won't try to change anything

Desire for action not discussion

The call of the action is more powerful than the call of the pen

Sense of the efficacy of the action has declined (series of defeats)

(Could be interpreted positively as "building of experience"…)

Preaching to choir is pointless

This is valuable! Keep up spirits of those are making an effort

Easier to respond to something than to generate it

Ideas in gestation

Not where original PHS writers were

Denial

You can't un-know something; but many people are trying to…

Choice of (apparent) non-action

Avoid jumping too quickly

If centralize, cut off local action and solutions

Yet "non-leader" leaders also have power

Mgt of agenda, access to floor

OWS as "apolitical"?

Not indorse candidates?; not take two million?

This is not building the movement, it's killing it

Stewardship of money narrows access, power; creates dynamics
Managing the mechanism
How deal with the money
Strategies
Why not give it all away in the service of the cause?

Choice of (apparent) ineffective actions
Choice of confrontational approach

Apathy and "human nature"

The "apathy" discussion eventually, gradually, transitions without pause into general negativity re: human nature

Std. assertions: Selfish, help self first…

Red flag raised in discussion:

Plenty of psychological research that there are other altruistic components to human nature also, opposite of std. assertions; why do we slide into these negative assertions so easily?

"A Paradise Built in Hell: The extraordinary communities that arise in disaster"; by Rebecca Solnit (2009)

From Washington Post review (8/23/2009):
…Solnit's demonstration that disasters give rise to small, temporary utopias in which the best of human nature emerges and a remarkable spirit of generosity and cooperation takes over. …People suffering unimaginable misfortune often revert not to savagery but to an almost beatific selflessness, comforting themselves in extremis by aiding others….

…a withering critique of modern capitalist society… Solnit explains this phenomenon by suggesting that everyday life is "already a disaster of sorts, from which actual disaster liberates us." She argues that capitalism is premised on scarcity and requires all of us to compete against each other relentlessly. The mental and spiritual energy we might pour into perfecting society is channeled instead into perfecting our own individual lives -- as by shopping or undergoing psychotherapy.
Endlessly focused on ourselves, we become bored, alienated and unhappy. Our natural state, Solnit maintains with a nod to the anarchist Peter Kropotkin, is tribal and communal. "The possibility of paradise is already within us as a default setting," she writes. A disaster returns us temporarily to that state of grace, which is why people remember the experience with surprising appreciation.

…Solnit also addresses the way authorities behave during disasters. …she quotes with approval University of Colorado sociologist Kathleen Tierney's description of elite panic: "Fear of social disorder; fear of poor, minorities and immigrants; obsession with looting and property crime; willingness to resort to deadly force; and actions taken on the basis of rumor."

"Apathy" in academia

PHS+50 conference at UM in Oct 2012; name changed (because of a suggestion):

From: "The Port Huron Statement and the Making of the New Left, 1958-1965: A Fifty-Year Commemoration"

To: "A New Insurgency: The Port Huron Statement in Its Time and Ours"

From a retrospective stance, to a pro-spective stance

What does this indicate?

"Role" of academia as distanced; permanently takes it out of being part of change?

To survive, need to take a step back from direct relevance; distancing

Intelligent but not relevance

Not what the university is about

Relaxing into our societal roles? (see Roles notes below)

Yet not always so; in SSW, class on "community organizing" (which she taught several semesters) was a regular, accepted portion of the curriculum

Accepted by everyone until Randians signed up for the class en mass, disrupted it, gave bad reviews, and caused it to be dropped

What are some characteristics?

Particular academic "job environment"

Lack of detachment = loss of status

Afraid of criticism

Chewed up since not whole picture

Work load

Self critical, macho work ethic

For women, no sacrifice not undertake

Overwhelmed just like the rest of us

The activist one allows the others a way out, to relax themselves

No compensation for it

EW: No compensation for almost anyone acting outside their regular role; does that lessen our need to take action, to speak?

Our roles in the system, vs. individuals with wider perspectives/callings/responsibilities

Assert that <u>there has to be an individual responsibility **beyond** our "role in society"</u>

Invisible Hand predicated on checks and balances

Allows, encourages, "depends on" us acting in our own self interest

Asks us to abandon self-imposed boundaries and to rely on system

<u>Asks for a kind of moral/ethical abdication</u>

When the system no longer even closely provides these checks and balances

It unleashes on the world a populace – us – <u>with no internal limitations</u>

Trained to only serve ourselves; to ignore others; to externalize any governance of the self

A major question of the 1960's SDS was "what is the name of the system?"
Seeing the whole as a system, analyzing it as such
Corollary: <u>What is the name of the system we are trying to create?</u>

The Mass Psychology of Fascism; by Wilhelm Reich (1933)
The question at the heart of Reich's book was this: Why did the masses turn to authoritarianism which is clearly against their interests? (from Wikipedia article)
Displacement of social energy force to leader; internal emotional repression
Banned in Germany c.1934, and in the US in 1956

Gestalt Therapy; Fritz Perls (1940s-50s)
"Relationship is emphasized, along with contact between the self, its environment, and the other." (from Wikipedia article)
The key idea of the statement is the focus on living in response to one's own needs, without projecting onto or taking introjects from others. It also expresses the idea that it is by fulfilling their own needs that people can help others do the same and create space for genuine contact (from Wikipedia)

A Name for Ourselves: Feelings about authentic Identity, love, intuitive politics, us; by Paul Potter (1971)
Potter's question, echoing the SDS societal question:
<u>What is it **in us** that has **not found its way into our politics**</u>

(Side note: Potter's wife initiated call for PHS+50 conference at UM this fall)

(After 5:00 pm +/-)

Topics from the remainder of the day:
(Notes to be added for each topic ASAP)

Resistance to paying for social justice work
The Right pays for support and development of its ideas/future, why not the Left?
Peace Table, Megiddo
1973: What is the shape of the peace table; 1999: Hague Appeal for Peace
Dwindling of interest in organized religion
For better and for worse; an opportunity for a new vision
Social-justice community-building examples
Thrift shops; breakfast together
Anecdotes from religious communities as examples of treatment of others, even within their own congregations
Mormon communities
UUA churches
Palestine/Israel conflict
A society suffering from PTSD

"I touched the wound and rationality was gone"

UUA current stances and history behind it

Can be "pro", but not "anti"; entire social justice statement process has become contained, limited

UUA's (effective) position, and logic behind it: We can be against racism (against group attributions), but not against economic injustice (class inequality), <u>because to be anti-classist is to be racist</u> (to make a group attribution); class has nothing to do with race

How local congregations address homelessness

Before Alpha House / now with Alpha House

(End of the day's discussion at 10:45 pm)