

Unchaining Solidarity

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On Mutual Aid and Anarchism with Catherine Malabou

Edited by
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and Petr Kouba

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Chapter 3

Solidarity as Necessity

Subject, Structure, Practices

Thomas Telios

Intersectionality is not just a rapidly developing feminist theory. It also constitutes a promising research agenda, providing a theoretically demanding and elaborate conceptual framework intended to serve not only as a tool for analytical diagnoses of societal phenomena but also as a compass and blueprint for emancipatory political action. Born from the practical necessity of accounting for the discriminatory experiences of Black women who were un(der)represented within the mainstream of White, middle-class, heterosexual feminism, intersectionality's theoretical roots go back to the manifestos and pathbreaking writings of activist groups and scholars from a variety of fields. These include Black feminism (bell hooks 1984), critical race and women of colour feminism (Spelman 1988; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1984), Black lesbian socialist activism (the Combahee River Collective), French poststructuralist philosophy (primarily Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault) and, finally, postcolonial and anti-Eurocentric feminism (Mohanty 1988). A quite recent sociological tradition, intersectionality surfaced in the United States at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s in the writings of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), Patricia Hill Collins (1990) and Chela Sandoval (1991) and was consolidated into a global theory within the following decade. Michele Tracy Berger and Kathleen Guidroz attested, as early as 2009, to the relevance of intersectionality when they declared that 'to be an informed social theorist or methodologist in many fields of inquiry [. . .] one must grapple with the implications of intersectionality' (2009, 7). Seven years later, in her rendition of the intellectual history of the concept, Hancock (2016) contended that intersectionality had become – just thirty years after its introduction – something even more significant, namely a matter of 'social literacy' (Hancock 2016, 4).

Intersectionality consists, first and foremost, of the assertion that ‘social identity categories such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability are interconnected and operate simultaneously to produce experiences of both privilege and marginalization’ (Smooth 2013, 11). Accordingly, it provides the theoretical and methodological tools to analyse historically embedded modes of subjectivity production that generate or perpetuate different axes of discrimination and subordination. At the same time, intersectionality aims to offer forms of resistance and self-determination ‘vis-à-vis [. . .] power-laden social relations and conditions’ (Lykke 2011, 51). In this light, intersectionality is not a mere theoretical instrument that presumes that the subject is a product or intersection where different modes of subjectivity production encounter each other and are therefore always-already ‘potentially at a crossroads’ (Townsend-Bell 2013, 43). Intersectionality is also a political device the potentiality of which emerges due to the clash that is generated as the different modes of subjectivity production cross each other in the subject.

Nevertheless, and despite the vast and ever-growing literature on intersectionality, the status of the relation between the partial identities that originate from the different modes of subjectivity production is still fiercely debated within the intersectional discourse. Judith Butler is critical of what she has pejoratively called ‘that embarrassed “etc.” at the end of the list’ (1990, 182), thus rejecting the possibility of an exhaustive list including all possible modes of subjectivity production. In a similar gesture, Wendy Brown argues that ‘we are not fabricated as subjects in *discrete* units’ (Brown 1997, 86; emphasis added), meaning that the different domains of discrimination and subjectivation that intersectionality highlights as parts of the subject’s identity are incapable of compartmentalising and dividing the subject, which can only appear as an integral individual. In response to these concerns, intersectional theorists have emphasised that given the complexity of social structuration and stratification, intersectionality is meant to ‘foreground a richer and more complex ontology than approaches that attempt to reduce people to one category at a time’ (Phoenix and Pattynama 2006, 187). In this light, intersectional theorists attempt to expand the modes of subjectivity production, acknowledging ‘the crucial importance of the separation of the different analytical levels in which social divisions need to be examined’ (Yuval-Davis 2006, 202). They take as a starting point the need for ‘theory formation and research which accounts for the diverse conditions which gave rise to the constitution of differences as well as their historical interconnectedness’ (Knapp 1999, 130) and juxtapose this to monosemantic accounts of subjectivity that tend to address the subject as the product of only one mode of subjectivity production. Among the various theoretical propositions that have been suggested to solve this Gordian knot, I return to Yuval-Davis’s older call for ‘a richer and more complex ontology’ (Yuval-Davis 2006, 195). She points out that, ‘each

social division has a different ontological basis, which is irreducible to other social divisions' (*Ibid.*). Drawing on Roy Bhaskar's dialectical critical realist philosophy, Lena Gunnarsson has recently argued that it is possible to think of those multiple and shifting identities as each depicting a social position 'that intra-acts with other social positions but which nevertheless has its own irreducible properties' (Gunnarsson 2017, 11).

In what follows, I make a similar claim and turn to the notion of solidarity as a heuristic model. Thereby I do not only intend to explain how the identities that house the subject's body relate to one another. More importantly, I aim also to illustrate what kind of political practices correspond to this kind of structuration of subjectivity. Having sketched the main tenets of intersectional thought in this section, I begin the next section by approximating the notion of solidarity via the concept of Peter Kropotkin's concept of mutual aid, arguing that mutual aid is best understood as a *social-ontological constant*. I then turn to Catherine Malabou's materialist interpretation of Kropotkin's concept of mutual aid to corroborate the political significance of mutual aid within this framework. Finally, I demonstrate how this reappropriation of mutual aid helps us to rethink not only how different identities relate to one another in the subject's body but also the kind of practices that correspond to such an understanding of subjectivity. As will be shown, the latter is rendered possible due to certain Spinozist elements that permeate the philosophies of both Kropotkin and Malabou and will be proven pivotal in this regard.

FOUNDING SOLIDARITY: PETER KROPOTKIN'S CONCEPT OF MUTUAL AID

When dealing with Kropotkin's concept of mutual aid (1902) as a theory of solidarity, the first thing to bear in mind is that we must avoid understanding solidarity as an intentional, one-sided practice (Bayertz 1999; Wilde 2013) where the person who acts in solidarity is expected to bear the costs of his/her actions (cf. Sangiovanni 2015) and the beneficiary of solidarity is often expected (cf. Wildt 1999) to act in a correspondingly solidary way when in the exact same position as the person(s) who already showed solidarity to him/her in the first place (see Costa this volume).

For Kropotkin, mutual aid is another name for what he passionately describes as the 'far wider, even though more vague feeling or instinct of human solidarity and sociability which moves me' (Kropotkin 1902, xiii). Love, sympathy and self-sacrifice are but mere expressions of this most fundamental feeling or instinct, 'upon which Society is based' (*Ibid.*). According to Kropotkin, mutual aid reveals itself, first, as an anthropological characteristic pertaining to the nature of human beings, not as a quality

shaped or adopted through processes of socialisation. In maintaining this, he anticipates the neuroscientific work of Michael Tomasello. In his *Why We Cooperate*, Tomasello attempts, through a series of experiments with young great apes and young children, to provide an answer to modernity's fundamental dilemma: 'whether humans are born cooperative and helpful and society later corrupts them (e.g., Rousseau), or whether they are born selfish and unhelpful and society teaches them better (e.g., Hobbes)' (Tomasello 2009, 3). Kropotkin addresses the same question, but he brackets the dilemma and reorients the question. Mutual aid must be seen as a natural law that frames human behaviour to the extent that it constitutes an intrinsic structure of human practices. Therefore, it need not be evaluated as morally good (Rousseau) or morally bad (Hobbes). Mutual aid, for Kropotkin, is morally not assessable and as such a neutral tool that can both delimit and enhance human action and can thus prove equally detrimental and productive.

Second, mutual aid is characterised as a descriptive constant and not as a normative principle dictating (human) practices. The later becomes apparent through Kropotkin's depiction of the appearances and transformations that the concept of mutual aid has undergone throughout history. In this regard, it is important to point out that, for Kropotkin, mutual aid is not a teleological or progressivist vector of completion and perfection, driving the development of humankind to better and higher forms of existence. Against belligerent Hobbesians and vying (vulgar) Darwinists, Kropotkin aims to make us aware of the fact that there have been times throughout history where solidarity was practised effectively. This (perhaps even unconsciously practiced) solidarity is all the more significant to the extent that these solidary practices took place amid a mindset that privileges self-centeredness and solipsism, waging 'a war on the idea of interdependency' (Butler 2015, 67). Further, by demonstrating how mutual aid has permeated human history from antiquity, via the Middle Ages, to late- and post-capitalist societies, Kropotkin conceptualises mutual aid as a transhistorical constant in a twofold way: On the one hand, as a constant that is possible and feasible without being compulsory. As Nightingale puts it: in his analysis Kropotkin 'does not tell us what he thinks solidarity *could* or *ought* to be'¹ (Nightingale 2015, 79). On the other hand, Kropotkin discloses mutual aid as a historically conditioned constant, not as a principle. Every time mutual aid breaks through it takes on the particular and concrete traits of the historical context within which it is embedded. From this perspective, it helps to reconstruct ex post what took place without nevertheless

¹ If not otherwise indicated, the emphasis in the quotes is original.

subsuming historical events within a predominant and overarching narrative (cf. Kropotkin 1902, 6).²

Third, mutual aid does not just manifest an underlying and preexisting, intersubjective, relation between two members of a family, guild, town and so on. It also underscores that in addition to these intersubjective relations there is yet another bond at work that binds this time the subject to its surrounding group or community and renders the subject identifiable through the qualities of that surrounding group. Contra Max Stirner's individualist (if not egoistic) anarchism, Kropotkin opposes his collective (and not merely social) anarchism, where the group enriches and enhances, instead of constraining and delimiting, the subject and its development.

Fourth, and finally, the entanglement of the subject with its surrounding group raises a question concerning the relation between the immediate group that encompasses the subject and further concentric or even disjoint sets of social groups. Crucial in this regard is a debate that permeates the literature on Kropotkin and that delves into the question of whether his concept of mutual aid bears any similarity to Émile Durkheim's notion of mechanical solidarity, despite the undoubted absence of a documented, direct connection between them (cf. Gehlke 1915; Crowder 1991; Williams 2014). While the reasons why mutual aid does not resemble organic solidarity are obvious, since the latter is based on regimes of labour division, when it comes to mechanical solidarity the case seems more complicated. Nightingale points out that, though, 'Kropotkin's political prescriptions are not intended to encourage similarity or sameness' (Nightingale 2015, 98). This is especially important given that Durkheim introduced the concept of mechanical solidarity precisely in order to account for professional similarities and family relations that are not chosen but inherited, aimed at automatically reproducing the very concrete family or societal structures from which they arise. In this light, it is neither assimilation nor the forfeiting of individuality but a sense of what we would nowadays call communitarian (cf. Ritter 1980) inclusivity, belonging and attachment that he postulates when writing that 'without the whole the "ego" is nothing; that our "I" cannot even come to a self-definition without the "thou"' (Kropotkin 1922, 11).

Seen in this way, Kropotkin's concept of mutual aid bears similarities to preceding concepts of solidarity, just as it also anticipates a series of similar concepts. When arguing, for instance, that 'the ant, the bird, the marmot, the savage have read neither Kant nor the Fathers of the Church nor even Moses. And yet all have the same idea of good and evil' (Kropotkin 1970, 91), it is

² See also Genter (2017, 17) according to whom, 'by stressing the unpredictable, open-ended nature of the evolutionary process [. . .] Kropotkin echoed Spinoza's contempt for metanarratives of human development'.

obvious that Kropotkin recognises in the iteration of practices of mutual aid the origin of ethical feelings that Adam Smith (2002) had also recognised in practices of sympathy. Further, by inviting us to ‘arrange matters so that each man may see his interest bound up with the interests of others’ (Kropotkin 1886, 16), Kropotkin prefigures Sally Scholz’s concept of political solidarity since both Kropotkin and Scholz disconnect solidarity from the sharing of the same worldviews and recalibrate it as ‘a response to a situation of injustice or oppression’ (Scholz 2008, 34) that strives for ‘a society without exploiters and without rulers’ (Kropotkin 1886, 16).

Nevertheless, Kropotkin’s concept of mutual aid is best understood as pioneering the work of thinkers such as Raimo Tuomela and Brian Epstein, which would subsequently render mutual aid a *social-ontological constant*. For Tuomela, ‘social ontology is not only a study of the basic nature of social reality, but at least in part a study of what the best-explaining social scientific theories need to appeal to in their postulated ontologies’ (2013, ix). Emphasising the praxeological (in contrast to the metaphysical) character of social ontology, Epstein argues that ‘[s]ocial ontology should not be thought of as the study of “ontological claims” such as “social groups exist” or “there are no social spirits”. But instead, it is the study of *ontological building relations between different kinds of entities*’ (2016, 149). Instead of the exhaustive listings of the properties of things that we know from classical ontology, social ontology operates on the following twofold basis: it provides us with the guidelines that help qualify certain entities as the objects and the things that the social order consists of while at the same time offering us the necessary toolkit to address those only allegedly ahistorical (ontological) entities as what they have always been, namely historical (social) procedures of becoming.³ As we have seen, mutual aid indeed provides for the ontological framework for human behaviour and practices, just as it brings forward, through the forms it acquires, the social juncture in which it developed. As an explicit social-ontological constant, mutual aid is additionally capable of (i) bringing to the fore an intrinsic mode of the subject’s way of be(com)ing, (ii) serving as a hermeneutical toolkit according to which we can analyse a given historical situation and (iii) acting as a compass and blueprint for practices

³ I would even go as far and argue that mutual aid is for Kropotkin a *critical* social-ontological constant. As Reha Kadakal defines the task of a critical social ontology,

‘[s]ocial theory as critical ontology grasps social reality not simply in terms of a positivist notion of “facts”, but rather in terms of its very processes of becoming, and it attempts to comprehend these processes through questions that are simultaneously theoretical and normative’ (Reha 2015, 167).

Unfortunately, I cannot delve deeper in this debate here. For some primary reference, cf. though Testa 2015, Renault 2016, Thompson 2017 and Telios 2019.

that correspond to the subject's historical composition and derive from this theoretical analysis.

CATHERINE MALABOU AS A READER OF KROPOTKIN

Catherine Malabou took up Kropotkin's concept of mutual aid in a series of recent papers. The most significant of these are undoubtedly the paper given in Prague in February 2018 which was developed into Malabou's chapter in this volume and the paper delivered in April 2020 for the wandering and collectivist artistic project *Fall Semester* based in New York in 2020. While the first paper tackles the concept of mutual aid theoretically, the second highlights its practical-political implications. To a certain extent, my chapter is merely an attempt to explain and link these two papers with one another by demonstrating why Malabou's reappropriation of mutual aid in the first paper is capable of deploying the political implications that she sketches in the second.

Turning to Malabou's reappropriation of Kropotkin's concept of mutual aid, it is important to underline that this is best understood through the lens of her critique of the discursivity of French poststructuralism and her subsequent turn to materialism, which she launched with her *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* (2008). This work is essential not only because Malabou outs herself in it as an 'entirely materialist' (2008, 13) thinker. More importantly, this book is important because it lays the foundation for a materialism that does not regress to a mere reversion of idealism. On the contrary, the materialism that Malabou carves out is a new type of anti-reductionist materialism that – just like intersectionality – is inclusive, pluralistic and antihierarchical. As Malabou states with regard to the debate on whether the subject's practices trace back to a purely biologically determined brain or historically contingent consciousness, the 'reasonable materialism' that she advocates addresses the subject as the joint and collective product of both its underlying biological-neuronal and socialised information. This new form of materialism respects and factors into its analysis and critiques the different modes of subjectivity production and tries to expand and enhance its range with the ever-growing modes of subjectivity production. Seen this way, what should be apparent is not only the compatibility of this *collectivist* – as I would call it – materialism with the intersectional understanding of subjectivity sketched above. Furthermore, this should also clarify why Malabou joins her voice to a broad variety of thinkers from fields of contemporary metaphysics, speculative realism and/or object-oriented ontologies in their critique of the primacy of linguistic and discursivity. The materialism that Malabou posits does not tolerate the distinguished position that poststructuralists bestow on language.

Within this framework, Malabou identifies the following three characteristics as inherent to the concept of mutual aid. Mutual aid is (i) social; (ii) moral; and (iii) dynamic. As Malabou defines those notions, mutual aid is *social* because it 'is a mode of organization based on voluntary and reciprocal exchange of resources and services' (Malabou 2018, 1). It is *moral* because it promotes 'horizontal relationships' (*Ibid.*). It is *dynamic* because it is 'a problem-solving process that produces a result: security, equality and trust' (*Ibid.*). The similarities between the three dimensions of mutual aid and the characteristics of mutual aid (not only in its role as a *social-ontological constant*) as sketched above are clear. Yet there is a further reason why the concept of mutual aid helps Malabou to enhance her conceptual arsenal with another plastic concept. This reason is that mutual aid provides the missing, long-awaited, vector that illustrates the concrete politics that an abstract concept like that of plasticity can set in motion.⁴ Malabou is categorical in affirming the political advantages that the concept of mutual aid offers. If we are to overcome the current, irrefutable 'shift in the morphology of democracy' (*Ibid.*), then we 'need to reelaborate the concept of community outside the strict domain of state policy' (*Ibid.*). The latter must take place and expand 'at both micro and macroscopic levels without external institutionalized help: and this goes from neighborhood issues, urban policy up to social and economic inequalities or ecological crisis' (*Ibid.*). Mutual aid comes in to provide for this 'chain' as Malabou calls it, or 'plastic chain' as I would like to address it by paying tribute to Malabou's key concept. As Malabou acknowledges right away, though, a plastic chain is a (performative) contradiction. But then again, it is precisely in the double character of plasticity – as both a plastic and an explosive operation (cf. Malabou 2004, 9) – that the promise of a chain with mutually bound parts lies. While a chain is the sum of parts that are indestructibly and inescapably tied together, a plastic chain is a collective articulation of joints and links that depend on one another and are defined by being attached to one another. Just as Malabou's materialism is collective in the sense that it is inclusive and postulates interdependence, the notion of the plastic chain is equally all-embracing while respecting the autonomy of the parts that are linked together to form its joints.

In this respect, mutual aid is called upon to prove that it can overcome the pitfall of essentialism as well as the all too hasty identification of anarchic forms of self-organisation with the minimisation or extinction of the state

⁴ I do not assume here that Malabou's concept of plasticity is lacking in practical applications; quite the contrary. The past few years bear witness to a rising tide of what can be described as plasticity studies, where the concept of plasticity has been fervently implemented in a series of disciplines spanning from educational methodologies and the arts to areas including the philosophy of law, the critique of political economy, digitalisation, cybernetics, literature studies and feminist philosophy.

that characterises ‘ultra-liberal philosophy’ (Malabou 2018, 3). Malabou is certainly not wrong when she interprets some of Kropotkin’s arguments as falling into a kind of essentialism in the form of biological determinism, since ‘it links all living beings across time and space along the evolutionary line’ (Malabou 2018, 7).⁵ I think, however, that Malabou would agree that passages similar to the one just mentioned can be read differently. Instead of seeing in mutual aid another essentialist grand narrative capable of joining the scattered pieces of the history of humankind, mutual aid can be interpreted as proof that, against the narrative and legitimisation of solipsism and individualism brought forward by Western modernity, an alternative storyline is possible. Malabou would then again be right to counter-argue that this understanding of mutual aid as, for instance, a materialised and practicalised Derridean *différance* still relapses into what she calls a discursive form of essentialism. As she points out, this time quoting Saussure, articulation of speech

designates either the subdivision of a spoken chain into syllables or the subdivision of the chain of meanings into significant units [. . .]. Using the second definition, we can say that what is natural to mankind is not oral speech but the faculty of constructing a language, i.e. a system of distinct signs corresponding to distinct ideas. (Saussure 1916, 88, cited in Malabou 2018, 8)

My last line of defence would then be to argue that mutual aid as a social-ontological constant does not function as a normative principle that, as soon as it has been restored as an *agens movens* of history, demands that we either act according to its dictates or await a messianic improvement of a certain political situation. On the contrary, addressing mutual aid as an *ex post*, merely hermeneutical tool helps us to create a link between what is given and what is contingent, that is, with the alternative forms that the given can assume. Mutual aid does not oppose solidarity to individuality. It does not coerce the subject to fuse with other subjects, since this would result in the loss of the individual’s singularity and in the individual’s assimilation in a collective that is itself an individualistic entity given that it is integral and undifferentiated. Rather, mutual aid binds the given (social and political) reality to its necessarily existing alternative forms. At the same time, it makes clear that these alternative forms of reality are possible only through mutual aid, since it is mutual aid that showcases their possibility. Does this coincide with a fallback to essentialist patterns, in which mutual aid is a transhistorical truth? Not at all. Essentialism is the preponderance, by means of exclusion and universalisation, of a single identity, or the postulation of that identity’s

⁵ Herein she follows the post-anarchist critique of Saul Newman (2001) and Andrew Koch (1993) instead of Brian Morris’s (2014) line of argumentation, which I find more plausible.

impossibility. Mutual aid is opposed both to this unified identity and to its declaration as dead. Instead, mutual aid brings forward the existence of this intersectionally subjectivated being that by the logic of its social structuration cannot but communicate and include in its existence all possible identities. To that Malabou would agree. After all, as she concludes: ‘Mutual aid of course proceeds from a need, the need to be together, to make connections. It is time, though, to think that connections can be links without chains. Mutual aid today is the paradoxical solidarity of the unchained’ (Malabou 2018, 14).

The only thing that remains to be seen is on what grounds the necessity of mutual aid can be founded, and for that we will need to turn to Spinoza.

SPINOZA: NECESSITY AND METAMORPHOSIS

If what brings Malabou and intersectionality together is this novel understanding of materialism that is opposed to hierarchies and fosters inclusivity and pluralism, then what *genuinely* binds Malabou and Kropotkin are the Spinozist elements shared by both philosophers’ views.⁶

Kropotkin’s most relevant account of Spinoza is the one he offers in his *Ethics: Origin and Development* (1922), a magnificent and unfortunately mostly overlooked history of Western Ethics. For Kropotkin, Spinoza – just like Hobbes – immanentised morality by denying an ‘extra-natural origin of morality’ (Kropotkin 1922, 95). At the same time, and contrary to Hobbes, Spinoza did not ‘conceive morality as something based on coercion exerted by the State’ (*Ibid.*, 96). Spinoza rejected the view of moral concepts as ‘revelations from above’ (*Ibid.*, 167), whether political or divine, arguing instead that ‘the moral conceptions of man are merely the further development of the moral habits of mutual aid, which are so generally inherent in social animals that they may be called a *law* of Nature’ (*Ibid.*, 166). This naturalisation of mutual aid is what differentiates Kropotkin’s reading of Spinoza from that of other anarchist thinkers, and the following two factors are essential to grasping the latter: first, the *origination* of mutual aid as a naturalist tendency or condition, and second, the clarification of the character of this natural characteristic as either *necessary* or *obligatory*.

⁶ Within Malabou’s philosophy, we find an alternative way to found the necessity of collectivity that is not Spinozist but Hegelian in origin. The argument would thus be to turn to Malabou’s (2004) interpretation of the operation that the process of simplification (*Vereinfachung*) designates within Hegelian dialectics (cf. Malabou 2004, 146–152). From this perspective, collectivity would not be necessary from a naturalist perspective, as is the case with Spinoza. Rather, it would be necessary from a logical/conceptual perspective. Unfortunately, such a comparison regarding the different foundations of necessity, no matter how fruitful, is beyond the scope of this article.

Concerning the former, Kropotkin's argument, from Part III of Spinoza's *Ethics*, is in a nutshell the following: Body and mind are inseparable from one another. The mind is intelligible through the way it thinks, and the body through the space it acquires in the way it acts. Nevertheless, these are modes of approximation that correspond to the different qualities that mind and body possess and do not testify to a distinction in the way that the body and the mind exist. On the contrary, body and mind share one important qualification, namely the fact that they actively strive for what brings pleasure. In this light, Spinoza's philosophy acquires both a eudemonistic and an actionist character. The subject is not just in need of happiness but is actively and interventionistically seeking to achieve it (cf. Kropotkin 1922, 97). Reformulating Spinoza, Kropotkin asserts that 'we endeavour to bring into existence everything which we imagine conduces to joy' (Spinoza cited in Kropotkin 1922, 96). Herein lies the crux and the pivotal point of Kropotkin's fascination with Spinoza: What is conducive to joy, furthers the mind to its completion, and, last but not least, motivates the body to act, is their dependence on something, an *Other*, residing *outside* the subject. As Kropotkin declares, the cornerstone of Spinoza's philosophy of morality lies in the realisation that '[l]ove is just *pleasure with the accompanying idea of an external cause*' (Note III:13). Love – and along with it pleasure, mental development, actions and ways of thinking – is not an intentional expression of the subject directed wilfully at another subject. Rather, it is the realisation of a relation between the Other and the subject that binds them. The origin of pleasure is externalised and attached to a place outside the subject. The latter alludes to a process in which an externality is detected as conditioning the subject's way of becoming. Put succinctly, Spinoza's naturalisation of the mutuality defining the subject's way of be(com)ing lies in interdependency – the mutual dependency of the subject on its other and of the other's dependency on the subject.

This insight brings us to Kropotkin's second focal point in Spinoza's philosophy, concerning the dialectic of necessity and obligation. The latter has always been a pressing matter among the various tendencies of nineteenth-century anarchist philosophy (cf. Crowder 1991; Cohen 2006; Colson 2007) since – following the example of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1870)⁷ – the anarchists saw in nature 'a matrix that made freedom possible and desirable but not necessary' (Cohen 2006, 79). Kropotkin deviates in this regard from the majority of his fellow anarchist thinkers and does not hesitate to assert that 'there is nothing in

⁷ Proudhon deserves to be further mentioned for bringing forward one of the most original understandings of what shortly will be called the 'collective subject', or, according to Malabou, the subject eventuating as a collective event. In his 'Philosophy of Progress' (2012), Proudhon lays down the foundation for an ontological understanding of a subjectivity that, as he states, 'has as a synonym the group' (Proudhon 2012, 23). Unfortunately, I cannot delve deeper here. Nevertheless, I wholeheartedly refer the reader to the excellent work of Rothman (2016) on this issue.

nature, wrote Spinoza, that is *obligatory*: there is only the *necessary*' (Kropotkin 1922, 96). The nuance here is essential. Spinoza writes in his first scholium to proposition I: XXXIII that: 'A thing is called "necessary" either by reason of its essence or by reason of its cause. For a thing's existence follows necessarily either from its essence and definition or from a given efficient cause' (Spinoza 1901, 71). Mutual aid falls under the second part of the definition. It is necessary by reason of its cause because if the other (who is external to the subject) did not condition the subject, there would be no pleasure, and subsequently no development of the mind nor incentive for the body to act. Even when Kropotkin asserts that 'morality, for its realization and development, has no need of the conception of *obligation*, or, in general, of any *confirmation from without*' (Kropotkin 1922, 192), he does not turn against identifying the subject as dependent on an entity that lies outside of it. Rather, the mutuality that Spinoza detects between subjects is a structural modality that brings to the fore the historicity of the subject's becoming, as vectored through the Other.

With regard to Malabou's reading of Spinoza, it is important to realise that this too bears the marks of Malabou's collectivist materialism. For Malabou, this involves emancipating the accidental and putting it on a par with the (subject's) essence instead of addressing it as merely contingent, transient and therefore unworthy.⁸ Spinoza does not appear among the chorus of thinkers (such as Hegel, Heidegger and Freud) that Malabou subjects to her plastic reading. Just as Kropotkin is an author who proposes *a vision of the link between biology, ethics and politics without elaborating a biologism* (Malabou 2020), Spinoza is 'the first philosopher to recognize the ontological, or essential, importance of the nervous system' (Malabou 2012b, 18f.). Yet there is a passage in Spinoza's *Ethics* that Malabou mentions in passing in her *The New Wounded* (2012a), before taking it up again in her *The Ontology of the Accident* (2012b), that is crucial to my argument. In this passage, Spinoza uses the motif of death as a metaphor for the radical transformation inflicted upon a subject from an unforeseeable external cause – one that leaves the subject so radically altered that it is unrecognisable. Even if, phenotypically, the subject seems unaltered, 'there is no reason', writes Spinoza in his first scholium to IV: XXXIX, 'which compels me to maintain that a body does not die, unless it becomes a corpse; nay, experience would seem to point to the opposite conclusion. It sometimes happens, that a man undergoes such changes, that I should hardly call him the same' (Spinoza 1901, 216). Malabou recognises in this metonymic potentiality that Spinoza attributes to death the 'annihilating metamorphic power' (Malabou 2007, 201) that she

⁸ In her attempt to illustrate this materialism Malabou utilises also rhetorical means and the figure of the *asyndeton* is the most prominent of them (cf. Malabou 2012b, 62). Unfortunately, I cannot elaborate further on this matter here.

calls *destructive plasticity*. In the *Ontology*, Malabou revisits this Spinozan conceptualisation of death, which henceforth encompasses and connotes (i) ‘a radical personality change’ (2012b, 33); (ii) a partial alteration in the subject’s body or affective state; and (iii) the dying out of a concrete and particular body organ, without its entailing the death of the entire body. If, for Kropotkin, Spinoza sketches processes of subjectivation in which the subject, seeking to find pleasure *from without*, must attach itself to this other, Malabou detects in Spinoza the depiction of a process in which – every time the subject encounters its other – an unprecedented and unforeseeable transformational process is initiated, in which the subject may not lose itself but is transformed to something different. In this light, Malabou and Kropotkin find in Spinoza an interlocutor who helps them to explain dependency without having to relinquish autonomy. In addition, Malabou finds in Spinoza the origins of a plastic process of fundamental transformation, since what should have been a contingent and unimportant accident results in the complete transformation of the subject and in the emergence of a new essence. Seen this way, the subject occurs as an event, a collective event, a συμβεβηκός. No subject originates solipsistically on its own but as the joint ensemble of the subject bound to the other outside of it.⁹ Tying the subject to its other results in a process that, as Malabou writes in accordance with Spinoza, results in ‘the *transformation of the body into another body in the same body*’ (Malabou 2012b, 34; emphasis added). And this transformation, which is triggered in the subject every time it encounters the other, belongs for Spinoza and Malabou, just as for Kropotkin, to the nature of the subject.

CONCLUSION: SOLIDARITY AS MUTUAL AID – FROM STRUCTURAL MODALITY TO ORGANISED PRACTICES

Where do these insights leave us regarding mutual aid as a heuristic device¹⁰ for tackling the intersectional conundrum?

⁹ Malabou follows the Greek view of the event as συμβάν, from the verb συμβαίνειν, which means: ‘at the same time to follow from, to ensure and to arrive, to happen’ (Malabou 2004, 12). In doing so, she concentrates only on the one strand of meaning of the verb συμβαίνειν – to be precise, on the meaning that locates the scholastic accident in συμβάν. There is, however, another chain of connotations inherent in συμβάν that drives or causes both the eventfulness and the classification of a feature as an accident, and this lies in the collectivity implied by the prefix συν-. The word συμβάν denotes a collectively executed practice, a collectively executed occurrence, the concurrent rise and appearance of something (συν-βαίνω, συν: together + βαίνω: to go), and thus the realisation that the subject eventuates as a collective conditioned through the other that co-originates simultaneously. On this point, see Telios (2021).

¹⁰ Malabou would most likely have used the term hermeneutic motor scheme (cf. Malabou 2009, 13).

Returning to where we began, namely the intersectional conundrum, how can mutual aid that functions as a *social-ontological, collectivist-materialist, naturalist and necessary constant* help us to reconsider the way in which identities relate to one another and to the body? To start with, mutuality in the form of a *social-ontological* human disposition debunks methodological individualism once and for all as an ideological illusion. It shows that, due to the constant of mutuality, a *prima philosophia* based on a single, unified and universalised identity instead of a pluralist one can only be indicative of political pathologies and authoritarian mechanisms of appropriation. Second, it makes the search for the other identities hyperbolic. Mutuality will always pulse through the subject. Seeking to broaden the horizon of relations of interdependence and enhance intersectionality's list with even more axes of subjectivity production is not embarrassing (contra Butler). Rather, the intersectional methodology constitutes a scientific imperative derived from the nature of the subject's be(com)ing. Additionally, only if we keep expanding the horizons of possible attachments that bring forward the subject and revolve around the microscopic spheres of the subject's life (spheres that are camouflaged under the alleged cloak of freedom and self-determination) will we ever be capable of carving out practices that account for the subject's singular construction at the crossroads of different modes of subjectivity production.¹¹

Moving on to the *collectivist-materialist* elements of Malabou's rendition of the concept (inclusivity, pluralism, flat hierarchies), the first element is that such an antihierarchical concept of mutual aid is opposed to classifications of the different modes of identity production in primary and secondary. All identities, like all links in the mutual plastic chain, must be considered as contributing equally to the subject's development and structuration. Further, they ought to be regarded as irreducible and incommensurable to one another. Being bound together in the subject's body does not entail that the different identities forfeit their uniqueness or autonomy. Quite the contrary. After having penetrated the subject by bringing it forward according to the ideological content of the respective modes of subjectivity production, all identities continue to house the body of the subject. When the context appears, they spring forward, forcing the subject to act, thereby revealing the respective identities. Finally, mutual aid's inclusivity helps us to bring together different modes of production without having to straighten them or make them coherent, subsuming them in a cohesive narrative. Seen in this way, attesting that

¹¹ In this light, I would argue that Kropotkin's concept of mutual aid, if applied to the intersectionality debate on how the different identities relate to one another, answers the fundamental question concerning the existential right of intersectionality, especially against the abovementioned critiques from Butler and Brown.

the subject is more than a discursive act, the reproduction of class mechanisms, gender, the exchange of electrical or chemical signals and so on, is not enough. Rather, we must recognise that these identities, when found within the subject's body, mutually inform each other. This makes it essential to turn to the entanglement of those identities and to thematise the respective reconfiguration of these entanglements according to each and every case. Again, mutuality as an inclusive, pluralist, and antihierarchical modality makes us aware of the fact that there can be no structurally predominant identity that overshadows the others. Rather, all identities and their entanglements must be thematised alike and in respect to their historical situation.¹²

Finally, mutual aid discloses the subject as a collective amalgam of modes of subjectivity production and not as an inert entity waiting to be codified and signified by them. Seen in this way, such an understanding of mutual aid is opposed to a line of intersectionalist thought in which the subject is ascribed self-reflective competencies that render it capable of becoming aware of the axes of inequality and discrimination that cross through it. Rather, mutual aid finds in the other the cause of the subject, a cause located as coming '*from without*'. Diagnosed as a relation underlying the production of subjectivity, mutuality demonstrates the constitutive role of the other as a vector of subjectivity production. This does not mean, however, that there is no reflexive potentiality left for the subject. Spinoza's motif of death, as explicated by Malabou, seems to be essential to explicating how the subject can be collective and mutually informed (from one identity to the other, from one subject to the other) without forfeiting its singularity. The latter pertains to the fact that acknowledging the subject's socially constructed collective subjectivity does not entail that the subject must continuously act out all of its multiple identities. The subject may be a woman, a woman of colour, a worker, a lesbian, an activist, a mother, a citizen of a certain state, a graduate from a certain university, a member of an urban community, an atheist and so on. but it is not *only* a woman, *or only* a woman of colour, *or only* a worker, *or only* a lesbian, *or only* an activist, *or only* a mother, *or only* a citizen of a certain state, *or only* a graduate from a certain university, *or only* a member of an urban community, *or only* an atheist and so on. Rather, the subject *is*, at each and every point in time, the simultaneous and sedimented palimpsest of all these identities. Nevertheless, this does not entail that the subject must necessarily *perform* all of these identities in a simultaneous way. The subject can also behave and perform *exclusively* as a woman, *or/and* a woman of colour, *or/and* a worker, *or/and* a lesbian, *or/and* an activist, *or/and* a mother, *or/and* a citizen of a certain state, *or/and* a graduate from a certain university, *or/and*

¹² Seen this way, Malabou's reconceptualisation of mutual aid helps to answer the question concerning the modes of entanglement of the different identities within the subject's body.

a member of an urban community and so on. In this light, the subject consists of all those identities but not all of the identities that encounter each other in the subject's body have to be performed. Many lay dormant and suspended, springing forward only when they find themselves in a favourable context, one that fits their respective mode of subjectivity production. They are all constitutive components of the subject and help the subject to eventuate as their collective event,¹³ a συμβεβηκός. However, neither the subject nor these particular identities are reducible to one another. Seen in this way, mutual aid helps us to explain these internal deferments and transformations as Spinozist 'transformation[s] of the body into another body in the same body' (Malabou 2012b, 34).¹⁴

From this perspective, the concept of mutual aid provides us with valuable insights into pressing matters that loom large over debates within the theory of intersectionality. At the same time, however, it helps us to revisit issues regarding what kind of political practices can be carved out from such an understanding of subjectivity. It is from this perspective that we can finally turn to Malabou's last paper on Kropotkin's mutual aid where – as mentioned above – Malabou occupies herself with its practical-political implications. The internal structuration of the intersectional subject alongside the social-ontological, collective-materialist, naturalist and contingent lines is not the only political application that can be derived from mutual aid. Mutual aid is also capable of serving as the compass and blueprint for political practices by defining the actors who – structured alongside those characteristics of mutuality – have been implanted the capability to also express and exert mutuality.¹⁵ Malabou calls the latter the 'historization of the biological' (Malabou 2018, 13; 2020) and does not hesitate to proclaim the agent of this mutualist New International. As she declares: '[t]he actors of mutual aid in contemporary societies are the "anonymous masses"' (Malabou 2018, 14; 2020). In this light, mutual aid does not just manifest itself as a heuristic device that helps us to explain the necessary social-ontological structuration of subjectivity as a collective entity. As such it helps us also demonstrate how such a structuration of subjectivity necessitates

¹³ Hints of a collective subject can also be found in a shorter piece by Malabou, which unfortunately has yet to receive the scholarly attention it deserves. In her 'The Crowd' (2015), Malabou draws attention to Elias Canetti's critique of Freud, who resisted viewing the masses in a positive way. What Freud, according to Canetti, overlooks is not only that there are 'crowds around me' (Canetti, cited in Malabou 2015, 27). More crucially, Freud overlooks that there are also 'crowds *within* me' (*Ibid.*, emphasis added).

¹⁴ From this perspective, the Spinozist elements that permeate both Kropotkin's and Malabou's concepts of mutual aid help us to rethink the relation of each identity to the overarching and collective event that is the subject.

¹⁵ The following three quotes appeared originally in Malabou's recent paper presented in New York (2020) that in contrast to her 2018 paper presented in Prague – which dealt with the analytics of mutual aid – tackles the *politics* of mutual aid. While reworking her paper for this volume though, Catherine Malabou decided to fuse the main ideas from the two papers.

collective practices as its solely appropriate form of action. Collective forms of practice are not to be engaged in only when individual actions have failed. Rather, collective forms of practice must be regarded as the primary mode of emancipatory, self-determining action. Anonymous masses can ‘organize resistance to political hegemonies’, (*Ibid.*; Malabou 2020, 16) as Malabou points out, precisely because they correspond to, translate and materialize the collective structuration of the subject into practice. Seen in this way, mutual aid, like intersectionality, stops being a mere heuristic device for expressing the subject’s way of becoming. Mutual aid becomes a political necessity.

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