

Meanings of Magic

The Pickets and Undergraduate Participation

By Chiara Fishburne

In the winter of 2020, a picket line took place at the base of the University of California, Santa Cruz campus that was centered around graduate student workers' demand for a cost of living adjustment. Many participated in these: graduate student workers, faculty, community members, people in solidarity from other campuses, and undergraduates. Undergraduate participants, though, greatly outnumbered all other groups. And while the number of undergraduates at the University of California, Santa Cruz in total, is much larger than all other groups of people, undergraduate participation and support at the pickets was astonishing and unexpected by many. This is because undergraduates were a large presence where many put their bodies in threatening situations, devoted a large amount of time and energy towards the pickets, and were fully committed to the space for what seemed like ambiguous reasons. This paper is focused on undergraduate participation in a prolonged action that did not explicitly seem to have any positive, material, direct, or immediate effects on their lives or the lives of other undergraduate students. This is not to say that undergraduates were not deeply supportive of a cost of living adjustment for graduate student workers; in contrast, they were committed to the demands and wanted to witness graduate student workers achieve them. But the large sacrifices that so many undergraduates made seemed excessive and incomprehensible to many participants of the pickets. Why, then, were undergraduates so devoted to this space?

This essay is led by this question, as I begin by analyzing and questioning the semantics of descriptions of the pickets. In my research, I spoke to many who described the space in ways that communicated a mystical atmosphere as a way to describe a situation that seemed otherwise indescribable. The pickets operating as a magical space was the most common description used by participants reflecting on their experiences. This term is one used throughout the community

to vaguely describe the space, events, and feelings that arose from the protests. This paper is driven, then, by another question: What is the significance of subjects describing these pickets with fantastical terms like “magical?”

By combining the former question with the latter, I aim to clarify how the pickets were a dynamic space, not bound by categorical roles within activism, but allowing for the space to be affected by undergraduates. By analyzing the language of solidarity and undergraduate participation, viewing the pickets through a lens of care, and acknowledging the space as one capable of producing extreme feelings of effervescence, we can better understand complex meanings behind the description of words like “magic.”

The body of this essay will be categorized in three sections. The first is titled Solidarity and Other Things, the second, Care at the Pickets, and lastly, Effervescent and Feelings of Collectivity. In better recognizing the internal working of the pickets and the demonstrators involved, I will turn to solidarity and undergraduate participation. The pickets were a space where different groups of people (actors) came together, a stage created by graduate student workers demanding a cost of living adjustment and a place where undergraduates came to support this demand. While this kind of solidarity was important, the role of undergraduates and conceptions of solidarity expanded as the action progressed. Undergraduates still participated within solidarity, but they began to expand their participation to address their own needs and larger structures of the university. This expansion on behalf of undergraduates shifted the space of what the pickets became. The space was obviously affected by the actors involved, and therefore undergraduate involvement and shaping of such space was integral to its form. The pickets must be recognized, then, as a space largely shaped by undergraduate participants who worked alongside graduate students to create a space that served us all.

In better articulating the expansion of the pickets to encompass undergraduate needs, the section Solidarity and Other Things will draw on Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony and the Socialist Strategy* in order to better understand the ways the pickets became a space of convergence where essentialist categories were broken down. This allowed for the space to become one that expanded in order to unite the actors and address a variety of social problems (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). This section will introduce de la Bellacasa's *Matters of Care* to use and expand on Haraway's ideas about situated knowledge and how particular knowledge builds worlds around it (de la Bellacasa 2017; Haraway 1988). This is useful in depicting the ways by which undergraduates and graduate students were situated in a particular time and space which contributed to their feelings of unity. While *Matters of Care* will be integral to the paper later on, here, it helps in depicting the way participants understood how the world directly affected the space they built (de la Bellacasa 2017). The section will also introduce Butler's *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*. While Butler will also be relied on in later sections, here, their claim that lives cannot be lived outside of the structures they are subjected to is important in understanding my own claim that undergraduate lives function in relation to university structures (Butler 2015).

Ideas of care must be addressed in order to better understand the space of the pickets. It is important to recognize that the concept of "care" used throughout this essay is not a standardized set of enactments. Rather, "care" is something participants felt and actively participated in. This example of care is worthy of addressing because participants believed it to be and said it was. Care throughout the pickets was important because participants of the pickets prioritized it. In interviewing participants, one of their most common recollections was feeling cared for. They felt cared for in the space, contributed to this shared feeling, and communally defined care in

relation to the picket. Care took on various manifestations and shifted with the space. This is to say that the care was dynamic. By analyzing the space though as a lens of care, in the section, Care at the Pickets, it becomes evident that this space was one created to address the needs of the participants in order to sustain themselves and the space they had created. De la Bellacasa's work is relied on in this section to articulate the way that care is integral to building communities and how individuals in those communities become committed to each other. (de la Bellacasa 2017). It helps in depicting the building, sustaining, and commitment of the community while also articulating the ways in which forms of care are dynamic and can shift with circumstances.

This was a space of effervescence and feeling a part of a collective. The section Effervescence and Feelings of Collectivity will touch on the stories about being pulled to the picket for no particular reason and intense feelings that emerge when people are together. The effervescence that was felt encapsulated emotions that were later described as magical because it shows actions that people took without much rational self interest behind them but rather an affective state (Gould 2009). This affect was one felt by many and this shared feeling that is elicited by people being together was often mentioned when discussing the pickets. In order to understand what people meant when they describe the space as magical, this feeling that people have vaguely described must be further addressed. The classic sociologist Durkheim and his idea of collective effervescence is important to this section and assists in beginning to understand feelings at the pickets that many have been unable to describe (Durkheim 1912). To further this understanding, Butler becomes integral to explaining emotions that arise when being a part of a collective that moves together. Butler's work helps in articulating that bodies coming together is performative when they create excess meaning and realities by the action of assembly (Butler 2015).

Methodologies

In my research I interviewed both graduate student workers and undergraduates. While this paper is focused on undergraduates' experience and participation, it is important to understand the space of the picket as one made up of the relationships between undergraduates and graduate student workers. These interviews took place over zoom or on the phone due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of COVID, my research was socially distanced, and I did not meet with any interviewees in person. These interviews began in October of 2020 and went until January of 2021. Because of COVID, participant observation was not an option and I, like the people I interviewed, had to recall the pickets and try to construct coherence out of memories. Things have been blurry for me. Others reported this feeling too, as if we were still processing the experience in a time of a global pandemic. I realized this process was partly due to the fact



(Figure 1. Yuvali 2020)

that we have been attempting to describe our memories with words like “magic.” This terminology only communicates vagueness, and perhaps a reason things are blurry is because we have not addressed what we mean when we say the pickets were “magical.”

In order to better communicate the experience of the pickets, the language used within the community will be utilized

in this essay. This is to say, the police will often be described as “cops” and the picket line will be called “the picket,” “the pickets,” or “the space.” There are also a few acronyms that were

frequently used within the community. “COLA” is an acronym for the demand for a cost of living adjustment for graduate student workers. It was often represented with Coca Cola bottles like the one depicted in the picture above. There is also a group which formed and was present at the pickets called COLA4ALL. This is partly an acronym that describes a cost of living adjustment and was also intended to be an internet hashtag, where “4ALL” is not an acronym, but a way to illustrate the purposeful unity of this group. It will be further explained, but the COLA4ALL group worked to expand the cost of living adjustment demand to people other than graduate student workers, asking people to think about what a cost of living adjustment (in a more theoretical sense, meaning not always a literal effort where people would receive money) would mean for others who are struggling to support themselves. Magic is a local term used by the community to describe the atmosphere of the pickets and the meaning behind this term will be a central focus in this paper.

Some of the interviewees in this paper will be introduced in order to better depict the participants of the pickets. In their introduction, pseudonyms will be used in order to protect their privacy.

This essay’s style draws off multiple sources. It is influenced by the experimental ethnographies, *The Day of Shelly’s Death*, to communicate first hand, emotional experiences through poetry (Rosaldo 2013). This book, written by Anthropologist Renato Rosaldo uses poetry as a form of analysis in order to understand multiple complex cultural understandings of a single event. I have also built off works focused on activism. Gould’s book, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP’s Fight Against AIDS*, was integral to understanding how to write about organizing experience. The interviews I conducted will be found throughout the paper in the italicized words woven between my own analysis. This writing style is one I learned from Gail

Hershatter in their book, *The Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China's Collective Past* (Hershatter 2011). For example, when Hershatter is describing women activists, the women intertwine their own analysis with the stories of informants: "After her marriage, Qiurong continued to sing over the objections of her mother-in-law. She said *what she wanted to say, and I sang what I wanted to sing*. Musical performances legitimized women's presence at public occasions, bringing the vocabulary and gestures of state campaigns into music, motion, family relationships, even the way a woman carried herself" (Hershatter 2011, 42). While I have used this style as inspiration and expanded its usage, Hershatter's writing has been useful in this paper for the way it allows interviews to be brought inside the description and analysis of events, rather than a segregation of the two. The following passage is the first instance of this writing style in my paper where the non-italicized words are my own and the italicized were provided by my informant's during interviews.

Day 3

We run our hands on gravel and chant to be taken seriously. *It reminded me of activity back in Wisconsin which was the year of all the Occupy protests*. Collectively suffering to end what we can. *And that kind of feeling of the raw power in numbers was something I hadn't felt in a long time*. Can you not hear the cracks in our voices? Does the sun really dry our tears so quickly that you are unable to see? We did not ask to fight. *There were hundreds of thousands of people in the streets of Madison, Wisconsin fighting to defend public-sector unions*. We are students. We are wide eyed and do not know what to do except feed each other and sit in roads until you give us our friends back. *And there was that kind of feeling that comes from raw power in numbers*. We are still learning what activism means. Are you afraid? Is that why you hit us with sticks? *We took over a building and held it*. We are demanding responsibility so that we may live, so we can

learn, and you respond by hiring police. *Until of course, we were forced out by the cops.* We are friends, but we will demand to be treated like humans. We are united, so until your violence stops, we stand arm and arm with our hands in the air bleeding for community. *But there were these weird coalitions of college students and nurses and anarchists that just occupied the capital building for weeks.* We are not afraid. *There are these spaces where people come together, which is magical.* Our tears are not weakness. Our cracks are not faltered. Our blood will spill at the hands of the law if that is what it takes for us to stand with each other. If our education has taught us anything, perhaps ironically, it is that we cannot break, that we are smart enough and strong enough to create change. *There was just that spirit of revolution in the air.* We are students – raised on books of revolution. We do not want to fight, but it seems like the only way to retain our humanity. *And that kind of feeling was something I hadn't felt in a long time.*

On the third day of pickets at the University of California, Santa Cruz hundreds of students sat in the middle of an intersection for hours, chanting, talking, and blocking the entrances to school and effectively shutting down operation on the campus. This was not reactive to the first day, where police beat students with batons and arrested one for attempting to bring protestors water, but the brutality at the hand of the university had already been witnessed and noted as we went into this action. For the hours we occupied the streets, I rarely let go of the arms to my sides and when I did, it was only momentarily to take hold of the water, food, or sunscreen that was being brought to us.

The non-italicized words are a poem I wrote after the day's events while I tried to process what I had just experienced. I wrote a lot of poems during this time. After long days at the pickets, I would walk home and write things that were mostly incoherent as a way to process something that seemed to be growing more than I could imagine. Using poetry in this paper

assists in bringing my own affect and experience into the analysis of the events. I draw on Deborah Gould's definition: "To get a better idea of affect, consider how we often experience our feelings as opaque to ourselves, as something that we do not quite have language for, something that we cannot fully grasp, something that escapes us but is nevertheless in play, generated through interaction with the world, and affecting our embodied beings and subsequent actions. I call that bodily, sensory, inarticulate, nonconscious experience *affect*" (Gould 2009, 20). Poetry, rather than prose, better expresses the affect that arose as it is able to capture the affect that myself and others felt in the events we experienced.

The italicized words in the opening passage are from an interview with a graduate student worker named "Patrick" who recalled the picket by describing his past experiences with activism and actions. There are parallels between both tellings that help to recognize that activism on the left elicits similar feelings. These feelings are noted in both the poem and Patrick's telling. While my poem tries to capture a feeling, Patrick attempts to say it by using words like *magic* and *a spirit of revolution in the air*. Both of these descriptions attempt to explain something that happens in spaces where people come together. There is a feeling that has best been described as *magic* that arises in activism and arose at the pickets. Poems and descriptions of *magic* work to give words to what cannot be spoken. In both of our attempts to capture, we have done so without really describing the feelings that collectively arose.

Poetry helped me think through what participants meant when they used the words *magic*. Poems work to capture the uncapturable, and *magic* works to assign a single word to a world of possibilities. They work to capture affect. The description of *magic* is one I often came across in my interview process. This, along with the poems I produced, while having many functions, can act as ways to describe what cannot be fully put into words. These descriptions

were not often idealized versions of the pickets, but instead ways to describe something that was otherwise indescribable. *Magic* is a filler word. In the westernized world, it is used when one does not know how to explain or cannot explain. *The revolution in the air* is almost too perfect of a euphemism used to describe the pickets, whereas it attempts to capture not only the actual feelings during the time, but the overall descriptions of them as well. This is to say that air is ungraspable. During the pickets, there was a feeling that could not be described, and this feeling transferred to being explained in interviews as *magic*.

The pickets were initially a space created by and for the COLA campaign. This is a graduate-student-worker struggle that demands a cost of living adjustment. This struggle spread across the UC system as the pickets progressed. But as many graduate students have pointed out, the living conditions in Santa Cruz are especially inadequate for many students who attend UCSC because of high and increasing rent; so the demand was especially pressing. The COLA strike started only months before the pickets began when graduate student workers withheld their fall 2019 grades from the university. After escalations from the university with threats of firing and dismissive responses on behalf of the UCSC administration, the graduate student workers decided to go on a “full-teaching strike.” This usually means workers would not contribute their labor, but in the case of these actions, many workers still held class and office hours for their students; but rather than conducting them on campus, they held them in the grass area at the pickets. Even so, there was significant work stoppage during this time, as Santa Cruz metropolitan transit district buses refused to cross the picket line, supportive professors and faculty canceled classes or held their classes on zoom and made attendance optional, and on the days of the street actions, campus entrances were closed by the bodies in the street.

Every day, starting at seven in the morning and going until five at night, graduate student workers, undergraduates, faculty, and community members occupied the grass area in front of the University of California sign. While we sat, we would talk, sometimes sing, await street actions, dance, eat, and do various forms of other work. What began as a place to sit and wait for street actions to advocate for a cost of living adjustment for graduate students shifted into a space that was magnetic, exciting, and emulated care.

Participants of the Pickets

There were many participants of the pickets including graduate student workers, faculty, community members, and undergraduates. The focus here though, will remain on mainly undergraduates. This is not to say that graduate student workers did not have a large influence in the space; in contrast, it would not have been created at all without graduate student workers demanding a cost of living adjustment and deciding to go on a full teaching strike. The space was possible because of them. But instead of understanding the pickets as solely a space for them, it is better to recognize it as a space that began as a strike tactic for graduate student workers to push their demand, which then provided a platform for other actors to contribute to and shift the space into one where a kind of *magic* could occur. This alternative understanding allows for the pickets to be viewed in complex and dynamic ways, where its space and the actors in it grew, shifted, and adapted to the ongoing process. Undergraduates obviously participated because of solidarity, which surely contributed to this space, but there was much more. Throughout the entirety of the pickets, there were about 50 undergraduates that were a part of different activist groups who were consistently present for day-to-day activities. These 50 undergraduates are the ones who will be focused on in this paper. While the pickets became a space for us to come together, in order to understand the actors involved, the undergraduate participants can be

categorized into different organizations. This is not an attempt to compartmentalize the actions of undergraduates. In fact, many of the 50 people were a part of more than one of the following groups. It is simply a way to recognize the actors involved and realize that undergraduates greatly consolidated larger actors in the pickets.

The People's Coalition is an undergraduate group that is consolidated by different activist groups at UCSC which came together to form one larger group. They became visible during actions and were integral to shaping the space by the centering of queer, people of color, and indigenous people. The People's Coalition organized and ran a variety of the street actions, took over dining halls to feed students (whether they had an overpriced university meal plan or not), and held their own rallies and marches with ungraduate needs centered. Alongside The People's Coalition, a group largely made of the same students, who are mainly people of color, is COLA4ALL. This was the first group able to articulate and act on the fact that a COLA for graduate students workers was only the beginning of solutions for students. COLA4ALL brought to light that there are other reasons to fight against the UC system besides solidarity when many are affected by the structures of the university. Besides the People's Coalition and COLA4ALL was a group of about 15 undergraduates who also contributed to the space by being there every single day and providing different kinds of support and voices. I was among the undergraduates participating in the pickets everyday and a part of one of the activist groups that would become part of The People's Coalition. I was offered tremendous support from the People's Coalition and, on rare occasions, participated in their meetings and actions. They are a strong group that has been in formation over the past few years and has worked closely together to create their queer, POC-centered group. My participation formed a basis for the interviews I conducted, just as, in turn, the interviews allowed me to rethink my participation.

We as undergraduates contributed to the creation of the space and shifted its focus from a material cost of living adjustment for graduate student workers to a place where students could come together to address a variety of needs. Their participation illuminates the fact that common ideas of solidarity are not an adequate way to fully describe the space. While undergraduates understood the situations that needed to be changed, were participating because of the loyalty towards graduate students, and deeply wanted their demands to be met, it is too simplistic to understand our participation only as this. We participated in the pickets for ourselves and for each other as a way to protest and survive in an institution that refuses to serve us.

Solidarity and Other Things

Solidarity

Patrick is the person whose story I used in the opening passage of my essay and is a graduate student in anthropology. I first met him sitting in the middle of the street while I was attempting to do my homework and simultaneously hold up a banner blocking the entrance to the university. We were the only two people stabilizing the makeshift poles and were assisted by the duck tape stuck to the street lights holding up the ends of the sign. He was the first graduate student I talked to in a way that removed the power structures of the university that comes along with the TA-student relationship. *When you come in as a grad student, the first thing the University does is bulgur you into submission; you are a pigeon, and you're below them. And it's this kind of discipline that recreates that weird hierarchy in the classroom, the thought is I can only teach you if you know your place but that's a medieval model of pedagogy.* This leveling of power did not come easily to all, but it seemed natural for Patrick. Sitting in the street, throughout the rest of the pickets, and in our interview long after the actions were over, he continued in a manner allowing us both to speak as trusted equals with the shared experience at

the pickets. This removal of power became a way of care and would be further practiced by participants, and while horizontal power distribution was a form of care, its enactment was flawed oftentimes at the picket. Partrick, however, seems to have grasped this kind of interaction. He talked to me about my work and thought it was funny that I was leaning over my computer typing with one hand and holding a banner with the other while sitting in the middle of an intersection. He would later invite me to a meeting in his department in hopes that more undergraduate voices could be represented in the current and future struggles. Months after these events, I talked to him about the pickets. He was one of the first people I interviewed, and he extraordinarily articulated sentiments and descriptions I would later hear from many others. Patrick talked at length about the feelings and energies of what he called *magic* at the pickets and what many others would touch on when asked about their own experiences and perceptions.

Towards the end of Patrick describing the events in Wisconsin, he mentions the *weird coalitions* that were able to form in the space of the capitol building. This space is one that is parallel to the space of the pickets at UCSC in the way that it allowed for people to come together to form coalitions. During the initial events in Santa Cruz, this space was unplanned and unexpected. *Before we went on strike everyone was like, "Do we have the numbers? Is it going to be impactful?" Because it's like a couple hundred grad students out of like sixteen hundred or something, "How many people do we need for this to be a presence for it to be impactful?" And I don't think grad students really expected or understood how much undergrad support there would be.* In understanding the pickets as a place to contest the ways the university treats graduate student workers, it supports *the theory that the only thing that works is the pressure of labor withholding your labor, but I think it was the double whammy withholding grades and withholding labor; but it's also a PR nightmare and a visible show of force and power. Frankly, I*

don't think we wouldn't have gotten almost anything if we didn't have that kind of show of force; they would have just ignored us, and they would have let us hold the grades. The fact that undergraduate presence and participation was integral to the spectacle of the pickets allowed for undergraduates to take part in creating the space. The combination of graduate-student-worker power and undergraduate power allowed for a spectacle to form where the university was contested in an extremely public way. And while *undergraduates were there for the graduate struggle, they used this stage to advocate for different struggles.* The space allowed for people to collide in a way that is not often possible in the university setting and *come together. It's amazing and strange. What was kind of unique about it was that a lot of different people who had different political motivations and projects found each other at the picket. Sometimes there are just these spaces where people who are interested in the same kinds of politics, that have different aims and different things that the undergraduates were there for the graduate struggle, they used this stage to advocate for different struggles they are working on but they come together, which is magical. You have the numbers, you have your specific goals which are not the same, but the broad strokes of what you're trying to build is the same world. You're working on different factions of this better world that people are trying to to make and for me that is the most exciting.* The world building that was possible at the pickets because people came together to work on different political projects rather than one specific one elicited a kind of affect. And while the intended plan for the pickets was to focus on the very material demand of a cost of living adjustment for graduate students workers, this demand itself upsets the entirety of university structures. This is because, in operating like a business, the role of a graduate student worker is to provide extremely cheap labor, therefore making a cost of living adjustment demand one that upsets the functions of the UC system. A demand for a COLA is one that intuitively expands to address the

structures of the university and specifically the way in which those structures lack care for the people within them. This expansion of the COLA demand was *out of anyone's control. I think that like seventy percent of what happened was sort of out of anyone's immediate control and I think that was part of the magic.*

The space of was one that grew to allow both graduate students and undergraduates to contest the structures of the university. In contesting the university, both actors needed each other in this instance in order to create the kind of spectacle that was produced at the pickets. And while *we were there in solidarity, those are my friends, there's loyalty, but it was more than that.* Essentialist underpinnings, as described by Laclau and Mouffe, that hinder conceptions of progress and organization were broken down (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 48). This is to say that different actors were not bound by the categories they found themselves in, but rather, all the actors merged together at the pickets to collaborate within different struggles. In this breakdown of essentialism, ideas of solidarity expanded and the structures of the university were being contested at the pickets and undergraduates joined in that contestation, to support graduate students, but also advocate for their own struggles.

A common understanding of solidarity is *standing alongside someone who has different struggles than your own.* Solidarity implies that whatever is being contested does not immediately or materially affect you in the same ways in which it affects those who are centered in the struggle. This though, was not the case during the actions at UCSC, so the commonly understood definition of solidarity must be expanded in order to better understand the participants in the pickets and the space that was created.

The university structures being contested negatively affected the lives of undergraduates as well as graduate students in very material ways so it is not difficult to reason them as an

enemy. The pickets became a space to contest the university because the demand for a COLA radically undermined the structures of the university system in general and intuitively called for expansion, allowing for undergraduates to recognize the enemy (the university) as their own. Here, “the multiplication of antagonisms and the construction of a plurality of spaces within which they can affirm themselves and develop, became a contributing factor to the space.” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 48). A transformation took place where the COLA demand stretched beyond itself to address a variety of university antagonisms. While it is true that the logistics of the struggles of graduate student workers (inadequate wages) and undergraduates (high tuition) are different, very often they have similar, material effects that are caused by the same institution. These material effects have been felt by undergraduates and the pickets became a place where a plurality of spaces were able to develop. So in solidarity, in understanding, and in our own interest, undergraduates contested the structures of the university at the centralized area of the pickets because the structures have not served us.

Situated and United

The pickets were a space situated in a historical and structural time that built off other activist movements as mentioned earlier, and were created in accordance with the time period in which they exist. The participants are of course, also situated within this time, causing the space to be shaped by participants' situated knowledge. This is to say, “That knowledge is situated means that knowing and thinking are unconceivable without the multitude of relations that make possible the worlds we think with” (de la Bellacasa 2017, 69). Understandings between graduate student workers and undergraduates are culturally, historically, and structurally situated, which allowed for a knowledge with the potential for unity. While one person indeed has an individual understanding of the world, the time, age range, and structures that the participants of the pickets

were alike and allowed for a similar and broad knowing of the world. Culturally and historically, both actors have lived in similar times and places, contributing to an analogous understanding of the world while structurally, both actors are subjected to the university system and its effects. These situated positions formed an idea of solidarity that benefited all actors. The pickets as a space created for and by those involved in it made a space based on their own understanding of the world. It is also important to recognize that the actions were situated in a history of prior struggles and built off the sit-in at UCSC by the Black Student Union years before, used chants from civil rights protests, and following histories of labor and university struggles. While this



(Figure 2. Payusmore, 2020)

was surely a uniting factor that contributed to the space and especially the tactics and understanding of the pickets, a material way in which a situated understanding of the world was expressed was through memes.

Memes became a way to represent the space of the space as well as contribute to its production. In these representations,

they exhibited the participants' understanding and perspectives. Memes here are important in illuminating the ways in which the participants of the pickets were situated. This is to say that memes represent particular understandings and are constructed off humor, culture, and knowledge that has been built and shared through a certain age range of people. This shared understanding is one that was unique to the participants who were involved in the pickets. While many memes were produced and distributed, this one is exemplary of how understandings and

resistance against the university were displayed. The meme itself is not an isolated piece of work but rather an image that has been circulated on the internet and made into a joke. Memes offer a background for people to provide thoughts, meaning that are constructed by providing a background of images and allowing anyone to fill in the commentary. The background of the memes are built off cultural understandings of jokes. This particular meme, like many others, has layers. The image is a reference to a famous Michelangelo painting: *The Creation of Adam* (Michelangelo, 1518). Knowing this, makes the juxtaposition of the popular culture images of Pikachu and Baby Yoda funnier. Here the two popular culture images unite to create an image that begs for commentary. The production and understanding of memes is shared on the internet and on social media platforms that are mainly made and viewed by younger people. Memes were produced and were understood mainly by the participants at the pickets as a unique way to communicate something that could largely only be understood within the group. The meme became unique to COLA actions because of the little commentary that was added. While undergraduates are seen to be the Pikachu and grad students are Baby Yoda, the message is that they are untied in the COLA struggle. This is seen with the wildcat logo in the middle of the heart. While this is funny to a particular audience, it is also clearly situated in the time, culture, and structures that it is addressing. It addresses some of the main actors in the strike and also references the situated struggle that the participants found themselves in. This is to say that the depiction of undergraduates and graduate student workers uniting is in response to university strike breaking tactics. During the strikes on multiple occasions, the university attempted to pit undergraduates against graduate students as a way to weaken the pickets. This overall, did not work and instead had the opposite effect of many undergraduate students. This meme is situated

in this particular struggle and shows the university that their actions were unsuccessful and resisted.

Before the Pickets: Undergraduate Struggles

While there are many instances of the negative ways in which the university has impacted undergraduate lives and long lists could be made explaining these instances, the point is not to list struggles, but to show the ways in which undergraduates have been affected at the hands of the university in a state of “induced precarity” in order to better understand participation in the pickets (Butler 2015, 22). The institution of the UC system induces precarity for those subjected to its structures by negatively affecting material and day to day lives of individuals. The institution can be seen to induce his precarity in the ways that it does not care for its students or workers (as will be shown) and instead, asks them to sacrifice basic human needs in order to be intimately tied to the university. Strike participants told me that as an institution, the University of California negatively affects day to day lives of those that are subjected to its structures. In understanding that, “The dependency of human creatures on sustaining and supporting infrastructural life shows that the organization of infrastructure is intimately tied with an enduring sense of individual life: how life is endured, and with what degree of suffering, livability, and hope,” helps in acknowledging the large effect that the UC system has on the lives that are attempting to function within it (Butler 2015, 21). Both graduate students and undergraduates' lives are tied to university structures where bodies suffer, attempt to endure, and hope that a life can be sustained despite the effects of the university.

Tomas was an undergraduate at UCSC in the creative writing program. In order to afford school he lived in his van and began an activist group called the Snail Movement in order to attempt to create a safe parking program on campus. I worked closely with Tomas in advocating

for house-less students on campus and was able to have many meaningful conversations with him and other house-less students. In many of our conversations, Tomas made it clear that he chose to be house-less, it was a choice he made in order to gain an education and was not something to be victimized for. What Tomas did not choose was to be harassed by police on the UC Santa Cruz campus. What he thought was a realistic solution to this problem was a safe parking program that would provide a safe place where house-less students could sleep. However, the many times we presented this idea to administration we were given sympathetic looks from them and told by a third party communicating administration's response swiftly afterwards that the university would *never* implement a safe parking program because it looks bad to have homeless students on its campus.

Tomas Tedesco is a poet that wrote a collection of poems about his experience with house-lessness. The following poems depict his struggles within the university system as a house-less student and show the ways in which individual lives are tied to university structures.

College Student Sleeping in a Van

Hear a voice.
Wake up.
A dog barks behind the metal
wall beside you.

Skip a heart-

beat. **Beat.**

Beat.Beat.

Beat. **Beat.**

Feel the heat of your bed.
Cold air lingers outside your lungs.

Try to silence your chest as it pounds your mattress.
Whisper to your blood distributing organ, "Be quiet, they'll hear us."
Hesitate to breathe, move.
Slowly.
Listen.
Realize that you are not persecuted tonight.
Encased in darkness, you hear your neighbor leave.
Tonight,
You won't need the pepper spray in your backpack that you've never used. You won't have to jump from the cargo area into the cabin, turn on the ignition key of your own car like a criminal, make eye contact with a random old person and flee the scene, rushing
on your moving bedroom;
You continue to lay in the only place where you are unseen, in plain sight.
Wait for the night to end, wait for the two years of college to end. Breathe.
Grab your phone, at 5:45 AM and write this down:
"This is what you are here for."

Be Real

We are tough, that's how we survive on the streets, but we are also weak. A student said thank you when I told them I was working on getting us harassment free campus parking, I was trembling while the cops gave me a ticket. I shook when I heard a sound in the school parking lot the next day, afraid it would be another cop. Tweakers have never made me feel this way because they stayed physically away, although their breath was even closer. So we might not complain, we might be puzzled when someone is sadder than us about our situation but if you are going to help us, you need to be real. You need to know the burning spotlight of the patrol car right up your face, you need to experience civility and silhouettes without name talking to you, at 4.20am in the morning, and then later, throughout the day and in your dreams, you begin to cry, humiliated, because you weren't awake enough to ask for their names, they avoided becoming humans right in front of you, but you asked them how to change this, but you didn't ask for their names, and they knew so much about you, in your pajamas and your strawman hair, defeated back into activism,
You don't cry because you are in class, but your bony body is a bundle of electrical towers that haven't been discharged of their negative current. Only changing things will allow that (Tedesco 2019).

Many students, like Tomas, have their stories of living in “induced precarity” because the university does not value the lives of those subjected to its structures, but rather allows them to sacrifice basic needs and well being for a public education. Because of this, the space of the pickets quickly became a place to “remediate neglect” (de la Bellacasa 2017, 162). Many participants have expressed frustration over the way the university's acts as a business institution rather than a place of education and has not allowed students to live in an acceptable way. The word neglect here must be understood properly then. While neglect implies the passive ignorance of an actor or a problem, the neglect that the university has shown is one that neglects their responsibility as a public university. This is to say that from a more abstract view, the university has been passive in its responsibility to positively impact the public. This becomes more clear when the more material, personal, and active forms of this neglect are illuminated. The university actively causes negative impacts on the lives of its students and workers. This is seen in so many different ways from charging unreasonable tuition, fee, housing, and food rates, to not paying teaching assistants enough to live, to perpetuating racist, sexist, colonial, homophobic, and industrial ideologies. This neglect is actually felt by the students at UC Santa Cruz who are sacrificing personal conditions in order to gain an education. The pickets as a space to remediate neglect began simply because we could not live with so many sacrifices anymore. To be clear, this is not to say that we were simply tired of living with the sacrifices, but it was difficult to survive.

Care at the Pickets

Participants told me that the space of the picket was one centered around care. This section relies on de la Bellacasa's book *Matters of Care* in order to describe what occurred at the pickets (de la Bellacasa, 2017). Care here, “...is everything that *is* done... to to maintain, continue, and

repair 'the world' so that *all...* can live in it as well as possible (de la Bellacasa, 2017, 161).

Bellacasa is arguing that care is central to deciding what matters and participants of the pickets echoed this point. There was a world created at the pickets through care. This world was one that was necessary for the participants given the ways that the university has negatively affected the lives of so many. Butler's idea of "induced precarity" is addressed at the pickets, as many students described the way that the community formed subverted the induced precarity that the university causes and remediated this neglect by creating a space that allowed for participants to take care of themselves and each other (Butler 2015, 22; de la Bellacasa 2017, 162). While the pickets became a centralized area to contest the university, they became a space that allowed for participants to address the needs of and care for each other. In attempt to maintain the world and live in it as well as possible, care had to shift forms as the university continued to cause precarious situations. This shifting care exemplifies the ways that participants became interdependent on each other because a community formed at the pickets where care was integral to the maintenance of this community. Participants' active contribution to the space was a commitment to the community and its constitutes so forms of care shifted to ensure that all were taken care of.

The week before

I marched along with hundreds of undergraduates and dozens of graduate student workers through the University of California, Santa Cruz campus to the chancellor's house yelling Fuck the UC. As I walked through the redwoods with hundreds of others I thought about how much longer the walk had turned out to be. We were making stops and taking turns to extend the march so more people could join and the organizers of this action could make empowering speeches about the violence of the university system. While I was happy to be a part of the prolonged walk

I worried about the calories I was burning and the fact that I did not have food for the rest of the day. In my 12 hour days I had been spending on campus in the winter quarter of 2020, I spent my breaks in the Cowell Coffee Shop, a basic needs cafe that offered what free food and coffee it could to any student who asked. I would plan my day around being there because I did not have the time nor the money to grocery shop and my food intake for the week would greatly depend on if the coffee shop had food to offer. Sometimes they did, they had small four hundred calorie meals, but other days I would enter the shop to be told a sympathetic sorry from the person behind the counter who could only offer me some bread with hummus and information on other food resources. I was well aware of all the resources on campus and while individuals tried their best to help students like me, it did not solve my in-access to regular meals. But the march disrupted my plans for the day and I told myself it was fine, there are much bigger things to address than my own food intake, and besides the coffee shop might not even have food that day. Did you know if you drink enough water, you can trick your stomach into thinking it's full? I drank more water as I walked. This trick does not work. A lot of water does not substitute for nutrients and telling yourself you are full without food does not actually make the empty stomach, the fatigue, the weight loss, the headaches go away. But this was a routine I was used to. It is hard to afford school and rent and food all at the same time; and as much as I would like to choose food over tuition, is not a choice I am able to make, as the university has reminded me of on multiple occasions. So sacrificing the rest of my food intake for the day to march with other passionate people to the chancellor's house as a way to address some of the inadequacies of the university that are putting myself and many others in worse positions than my own seemed worth it to me. I would just pretend like my tricks worked and be fueled by the spirit of revolution. Right?

After walking through redwoods, chanting, and thinking about how I was not already hungry, we approached the chancellor's house. After the organizers talked more about the symbolic representation of the house and what that means for a university who cannot care for its students, they cut the wired fence so we could all step over to take our seats in the front lawn. I sat amongst some organizers I was only beginning to know and we talked about how this action could help in pushing forward our own ideas. I asked how long people thought this would go on for. The crowd formed a semi circle around the chancellor's house and left space in the front and center to mimic a stage so the conversations we were surely about to have could be heard by all. One of the organizers who had been making speeches along the march stood in the center and we all sat with astonishment and awe as if what they were about to say would be the start, the catalyst, to spark the change we all deeply wanted. They stood center stage, with hundreds of people attentively listening for instructions on how to go about dismantling the violence of the university system and said, "Before we start to discuss, we want to make sure everyone is fed."

The small, material instance of giving food exemplifies the way that care unfolded during the pickets in the following weeks. While there were many instances of care, they were all similar in the way that the care provided filled a gap. This is to say that the pickets became a space to fill this void of care that many students had experienced. And this void of care exists because of university neglect. I could not afford food because I had to pay for tuition, graduate student workers were on strike because they were not being paid enough to live, security measures would be established at the pickets because the University of Santa Cruz paid 300,000 dollars a day for riot police to ensure their insurance policy (Payusmore 2020). Students felt that in prioritizing money over well being, the university exhibits the way in which it operates as a business and not a place for meaningful education or any kind of care for its own students. This

is not a surprising statement. It is not a shock that an institution runs like an institution and prioritizes only its own existence and income, it is rather unfortunate though, that both undergraduate and graduate students attend university in hopes of making a life for themselves only to find that trying to live under these structures is itself a burden. So, “When caring is neglected, obligation of care calls upon commitment to share troubles and burdens of the neglected” (de la Bellacasa 2017, 162). The university neglects the care of its students and workers in order to prioritize its own needs over the needs of the individual that make the existence of the institution possible. This is an observation that was often expressed by participants where they understand themselves as *the neglected*. We created a space in which we could share the troubles of being neglected by committing to the contribution of a space that cared for us all. The space of care created by the neglected was one that served the needs of those involved in making it. “Again, this is not a moral abstract principle of solidarity but a doing that takes meaning and value with relational arrangements- practices and ecologies” (de la Bellacasa 2017, 162).

The space made was an interrelational one that called upon its participating to contribute to care for themselves and each other and remediate the neglect of the university. “ ‘Alter’ refers to a way of confronting biopowers by creating different forces of world-making relationalities- that would... cultivate “power with” and “power -from-within” rather than “power -over” (de la Bellacasa 2017, 165). By contesting the structures and remediating the neglect of the university, the pickets became a space where participants empowered and cared for each other and themselves. This kind of care helped to create and maintain the space and those involved in it. An alter-world was able to be built around care because it addressed the needs of participants in ways that had not been addressed prior. The world of the pickets allowed for those involved to be

cared for. In turning to care to better understand the extension of undergraduate support, care must be seen “first as a political commitment” (de la Bellacasa 2017, 7). In understanding care as a political commitment that took place, care became a collective way to sustain ourselves, each other, and the space while also contesting the university. Undergraduates helped to create a space of care because we all needed a space of care. And as will be shown, once the collective space was established and there was a communal commitment to sustain it.

In the context of care, the pickets can be understood as world making. “Caring here is a speculative affective mode that encourages intervention in what things could be” (de la Bellacasa 2017, 66). An alternative space was created that imagined a different world and attempted to implement this imagination. The central part of this imaginative world was care, because it was necessary in surviving and therefore opened up possibilities of what the participants as a collective could be. These, “Worlds seen through care accentuate a sense of interdependency and involvement” (de la Bellacasa 2017, 17). This is especially true in the case of the pickets. While we were independently unable to provide for ourselves prior to the pickets, during them, participants collectively came together to share the burden of care. This is to say that collectively we did what we could, *people went into their day thinking ‘Okay this is what I can do’ and then did the thing they could do. Like some people were like, ‘Okay i’m just gonna do this food thing or okay I’ve got the sign making’ and I was like ‘Okay I’m gonna write emails and I’m gonna walk and set up the tent every morning.’* Everyone involved contributed to the pickets in the best way they knew how and in doing so, helped to create the space, “Where the living web of care is not maintained by individuals giving and receiving back again but by a collective disseminated force” (de la Bellacasa 2017, 20). This is to say that while individuals consolidated the space, the interrelational and interdependent ways in which individuals

interacted and cared for each other in a non-reciprocal way created a collective force. Non-reciprocal here does not mean that some did not contribute to the space where they were cared for, but rather that the capitalist logic of individuals giving (care) to get back (other forms of care) from another individual was not present and reciprocity was not expectations from the participants involved in the making of this space. Instead of reciprocity, participants were interdependent on each other to contribute to the space in the best way they could. Here, expectations shift from a reciprocal, capitalist logic, to an interdependent one. Where, “Interdependency is not a contract, nor a moral ideal—it is a *condition*” (de la Bellacasa 2017, 70). The condition of interdependency was one that could only be sustained due to the fact that it was integral to our own material needs. It became the world of the pickets where we showed up for each other and for ourselves and a way to sustain us and the space. This condition was integral to the alter-world created where the structures of the university were not serving us, making it hard to survive as individuals, who had the chance to collectively come together to help each other and the space survive. The survival of each other within the space of the pickets was a cyclical process where the survival of one, informed and sustained the other. “From that perspective, where living means entangling ethos and milieu, even moves that may at first appear as individual, strategic, or instrumental have a dimension of affective interdependent entanglement” (de la Bellacasa 2017, 154). This interdependence was one that grew more and more entangled as the pickets proceeded.

The pickets offered, as one of my interviews put it, *a centralized area that had been dreamed of* because of the way that it allowed graduate students and undergraduates a space to come together to address the university. This space was one that had been anticipated and understood by undergraduates as something that could easily grow to address problems with the

university. And very quickly there were *deep insurgent feelings, deep excitement and deep care* for what we were and what we were creating. As the pickets progressed the insurgent feelings were realized, the excitement grew and the care flourished. The insurgency manifested itself in street actions where the university responded violently. *People were being harmed and there was first hand experience of state violence.* Throughout the pickets we were beaten, stalked, arrested and harassed by the police with people of color experiencing a disproportionate amount more violence than others. *We really understood what was at stake.* This understanding was multifaceted. We understood that we were facing violence, we understood our TA's were going to lose their jobs, we had a feeling we were being surveilled by police only to later find out we were right (Gibbons 2020). Even so, *I always felt safe, even in the precarious situations we were in.* In the growing face of threats *all of us showed up for each other to create a new way of living. And we were committed to being there because there was no other option.*

In the face of growing and active threats from the university and aggressive police presence within the space of the pickets, the feelings, actions and conditions of care grew. Here, care, “...is an obligation that is inseparable from the material continuation of life... it pertains to modes of maintenance, repair, and continuation of life through ecological practices that unsettle traditional binaries...When caring for and taking care, or having something or someone to care for us, particular actions become *obligatory*: they create and re-create demands and dependencies, they become necessary in a specific world to subsist and thus somehow *oblige* those who inhabit that world ” (de la Bellacasa 2017, 155). As the pickets grew as a place where participants’ feelings of insurgency, excitement and care could grow and materialize, the safety of participants and the space were threatened. In maintaining the space and those involved, the demand for care became all the greater. Participants did not ignore this arising need. Instead,

participants felt obliged to the community being created and those invested in the community and shifted ways of care in order to best protect and care for each other. With this growing demand for care, we became more dependent on each other to care for one another and keep each other safe in the face of violence.

Undergraduates were committed to this world because we were a part of the interdependence. We were contributing to a world that we were invested in building. Undergraduate participation was, "... not a utilitarian relation, it is not either an altruistic self-sacrificing one, where nature has value for 'itself. ...Here precludes a speculative engagement with what could be becoming possible in this specific conception of relationships and mutual obligation where living-with rather than...living-*for* are at stake" (de la Bellacasa 2017, 148). Because of the fact that we were so affected by the structures of the university, it is not enough to see undergraduate participation as solidarity, but rather it was an involvement that served us as well and we became committed to serving. In thinking about undergraduate participation in their relationship with other actors and the space, it is important to recognize that, "Relations are always connected to specific worlds; they do specific worlds and create interdependencies in ways that become ethos" (de la Bellacasa 2017, 154). Undergraduate's relation with the pickets was entangled with our own care, the care of others and the space of care being built in the space. They cannot be separated from each other because they grew together and were interdependent on each other for their own sustainability. "Living with... is becoming-with" and they cannot be disconnected or un-entangled from each other (de la Bellacasa 2017, 90). In committing to caring by participating in the making of a space, we became entangled in each other's material conditions and *became* a collective where care was prioritized.

Effervescence and Feelings of Collectivity

Effervescence, as theorized Durkheim occurs when bodies come together, united by action, thought, where feeling and excitement is elicited. This concept of effervescence contributes to Durkheim's theory that the social world is a force in itself and is not itself beyond the sum material things that make it up (Durkheim 1912). These feelings help in understanding what was meant when people described the pickets as *magic* by analyzing the shared and unexplainable draw and excitement that seemed to surround them. In addition to Durkheim, I draw on sociologist Kearney's work, *Totally Alive: the Wisconsin Uprising and the Source of Collective Effervescence*, in order to present a consolidated and clear definition of Durkheim's theory of effervescence to provide a basic understanding of the feelings of being pulled to the pickets, meaning that people could not seem to stay away due to indescribable excitement (Kearney 2018). Next, a more complicated but clarifying approach to effervescence will be taken in order to better understand the *feelings* of collectivities and bodies moving together. These feelings will be further described but as a definition can be understood as being enthusiastically committed to a group and driven by effervescence. First, activist and journalist L.A Kauffman's account of actions, *In How to Read a Protest*, will be drawn on in order to recognize that feelings of collectives are common in actions where many bodies are together (Kauffman 2018). Feelings of collectivities will be further elaborated with Butler's *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. This assists in depicting what bodily enactments have the potential to *do* and *say*, and the meanings they create. And the theory of performativity asserts, these meanings become the reality that bodies inhabit, eliciting collective feelings (Butler 2015). The expansion of solidarity, the contestation of university structures, and the worlds of care created all contribute to the feeling of collectivities and traces of these contributions are apparent in the following section,

but they will be further understood through a lens of feeling. Effervescent was an atmospheric contribution to the pickets that assisted in their description as *magical* in the way that intense and communal feelings were elicited that made it seem like there *was* revolution in the air.

Being Pulled to the Pickets

The effervescence felt was one of magnetism. We would come to the grass area everyday, sometimes only to sit in the sun. *I didn't understand at the time why people weren't coming to the pickets.* The people that showed up everyday could not understand why others did not join, but looking back on it, cannot find their own reasons as to why they felt such a need to be present at the pickets everyday. *I thought about that a lot and couldn't get it.* There was a feeling, a kind of pull that those who largely participated experienced and did not seem to want to break.

Participants experienced collective effervescence which, “is a state of shared hyper-enthusiasm that transports participants outside their normal mode of behavior” (Kearney 2018, 234). While there were times when the pickets needed bodies, and there were actions in the streets that demanded presence, other days, the pickets were uneventful. When there were no actions, the days would consist of us sitting in the grass area, eating, attending teaching and doing our own homework. And as the pickets progressed, the undergraduates that were often at them knew when actions were taking place. We were not sitting and waiting to see if we would be of assistance, we were just sitting together. No matter, there was still a feeling that we needed and wanted to be present.

Ariel is an undergraduate who was active in different groups on campus. When I asked them about their experience of the picket they told me *it was hard to compartmentalize everything* because they were so involved in so many different aspects that converged in this

space. They are a part of the People's Coalition, therefore, greatly contributing to the actions and environment of the space.

Day 10

I had to get my wisdom teeth out in the middle of the pickets. One the tenth day, Ariel was not present. *I was like I'll just hop on a bus and come right back to get back* so as to not miss too much of the actions. Even though the pickets were not always exciting, they were a shared space that people wanted to be at. It was a priority for people to physically be present at the picket. *And I did, like why did I do that?* While it is difficult to make sense of unwavering presence and participation at the pickets when reflecting on it, this feeling of enthusiasm to be present was one shared by many. *Looking back, I don't know why so many people were affected.*

The feeling of effervescence is one that contributed to the feeling of *magic*. “According to Durkheim, collective assemblies create belief in a reality that is greater than the individuals assembling. That higher reality, constituted by society but externalized as various spiritual beings, totems, and forces, gives rise not only to morality, religion, and law, but also to categorical thinking, and thereby all forms of scientific thought. Perhaps it gives rise even to meaning itself” (Kearney 2018, 233). We were being pulled to the pickets because it was all that mattered. We were creating a reality by being together and we believed in the building of that reality. Collectively we built, because we feel like we must. One contribution to the *magic* was in the feeling that we were building something meaningful. We could feel the world being produced around the pickets and that we were able to contribute to its construction, and we wanted to be a part of it.

Feelings of Collective Power and Potential

We run our hands on gravel and chant to be taken seriously. Collectively suffering to end what we can. Can you not hear the cracks in our voices? Does the sun really dry our tears so quickly that you are unable to see? We did not ask to fight. We are students. We are wide eyed and do not know what to do except feed each other and sit in roads until you give us our friends back. We are still learning what activism means. Are you afraid? Is that why you hit us with sticks? We are demanding responsibility so that we may live, so we can learn, and you respond by hiring police. We are friends, but we will demand to be treated like humans. We are united, so until your violence stops, we stand arm and arm with our hands in the air bleeding for community. We are not afraid. Our tears are not weakness. Our cracks are not faltered. Our blood will spill at the hands of the law if that is what it takes for us to stand with each other. If our education has taught us anything, perhaps ironically, it is that we cannot break, that we are smart enough and strong enough to create change. We are students – raised on books of revolution. We do not want to fight, but it seems like the only way to retain our humanity.

This poem, as mentioned in the beginning of this essay, was written after the third day of the pickets when hundreds of people, mostly graduate and undergraduate students, occupied the intersection to the entrance of campus by sitting in the middle of the road. We sat in circles with our arms locked for hours while police surrounded us and at times, would move in on the crown of people in the middle of the street. Linking arms is a tactic used by activists as a way to protect from police brutality and secure yourself and those around you in place. Sitting in circles makes certain that if someone does get arrested others are there to watch out for each other. When we first linked arms and sat in the middle of the road, the people in the circle I was sitting in all checked up on each other to see how we were feeling about the situation we would all experience

together. We were all undergraduates. We were fine. In fact, we were laughing, joking about the long day ahead of us, about how it was midterm season and we were sitting in the middle of an intersection instead writing papers, and when the police moved in to arrest us, we held each other tightly, but we were not afraid. Sixteen people were arrested on the police's first attempt to break up the occupation. In response to this, the hundreds of bodies in the middle of the road stood up and demanded to let those arrested free. The police threatened to move in again. Nobody in the street budged. Instead we stood and looked at them in their riot gear to let them know we would sit and face arrest if others were not released. There was a strange kind of fearlessness that emulated throughout the pickets and only grew as the actions became more creative and threatening to the university. This feeling emerges, “When you’re in the midst of a demonstration, especially a very large one, the sense of collective power is stirring and immediate. There’s a great feeling of purpose and unity when you stand with a huge crowd of other people who share your outrage over an injustice and your eagerness for action. Joining a protest, whatever the cause, gives you the direct bodily experience of being part of something larger than yourself. In a literal and immediate way, you add your heart and your voice to a movement.” (Kauffman 2018, 1). The unity of bodies allows for the feeling of protection, drive, and enthusiasm as single bodies become a collective body that moves together and feels together. The fearlessness felt during the days of the pickets was because of the sense of collective power. The sense of collective power makes it *feel like anything is possible*.

These bodily enactments elicited a feeling of intense power that hundreds of people felt. In order to better articulate this feeling and the days at the picket while also understanding what bodies can do together and what we did together, “We have to rethink the speech act in order to understand what is made and what is done by certain kinds of bodily enactments: the bodies

assembled ‘say’ we are not disposable, even if they stand silently. The expressive possibility is part of plural and embodied performativity that we have to understand as marked by dependency and resistance” (Butler 2015, 18) On the third day, we refused to leave the middle of the street as an act of resistance to the police and the university. We were dependent on those around us to hold us and not leave our side in order to perform our in-disposability. To be clear, this in-disposability was one that itself said multiple things this action went on. It started with, “Our teaching assistants are not disposable, you cannot fire them” which in the middle of the action eventually took on the meaning, “Our fellow activists are not disposable, you cannot arrest them and expect us to leave” to, “This collective is not disposable, we will not be broken.” By refusing to leave the middle of the road we were saying, “We are not disposable.” Embodied actions are performative, meanings emerge and realities are created by embodied actions that go beyond the explicit or literal thing being said. This is to say there is an excess of meaning that emerges in embodied actions.

Single bodies understanding themselves as a collective body is a reality that arises in excess from bodily enactment, “So this movement of stillness, this parking of my body in the middle of another’s action, is neither my act nor yours, but something that happens by virtue of the relation between us, arising from the relation, equivocating between the I and the we, seeking at once to preserve and disseminate the generative value that equivocation, an active and deliberately sustained relation, a collaboration distinct from hallucinatory merging or confusion” (Butler 2015, 9). Actions are collective because there is a group moving in unison. This sounds like a cliché but groups literally move together because they are committed to each other and the group as a whole. We can understand this by thinking back to the obligatory care that arises in communities (de la Bellacasa 2017). Bodies are committed to caring for the larger community

and are committed to sustaining it. One is committed to the person next to them because there is a relationship that asks us to care, one that is formed in knowing the experience of the pickets as both mine and yours. One is dependent on the person next to them as the person next to them is dependent on them and this is true for all sitting in the road. Responsibility, here, is collective so the actions taken are all of ours' and the problems that arise are for all to solve. In enacting something together, the *Us* is created and felt by the bodies constituting it.

While relations are an excess produced by a bodily gathering, "the gathering itself signifies persistence and resistance" (Butler 2015, 23) While persistence and resistance were not the immediate intended effects of the occupation at the pickets, they were absolutely communicated. In the face of multiple police threats, the crown of bodies did not move. Instead, we exemplified persistence as we stood in the sun for hours. And while the pickets began as a place for graduate student workers to contest and resist the university it became a space of resistance for all involved. We resisted the police and the arrests they made on students. We resisted the way the university perpetuates racism, classism, sexism, and colonialism. We resisted the UC system and the ways they did not care for us. And we resisted the narrative that we could not create a space that cared for and about each other.

Starting on the third day of the pickets we all sat with each other contesting the university in hopes of trying *to create radical imaginaries*. "A second sense of enactment, then, emerges here in the light of embodied forms of action and mobility that signify in excess of whatever is said" (Butler 2015, 8). The relations that developed, the persistence that continued to grow in the face of threats, and the resistance that flourished from a single demand for graduate student workers were excesses that came together to create further excess. In the embodied form of

action taken, the feelings that anything was possible lead to the freedom to radically imagine different worlds for ourselves and for each other.

Conclusion

The *magic* was constituted by the power and potential that participants felt when being together. These descriptions work to tell about the atmosphere and feelings that were present at the pickets to attempt to encapsulate the intense experiences that took place in the space. And while there were a variety of different experiences, I work to outline the ones that contributed to the meaning of *magic*. The section Solidarity and Other Things works to understand how ideas of solidarity were expanded in the space. There was an expansion of ideas that simultaneously became the reality that the participants experienced. Care at the Pickets depicts the way in which participants were intertwined with one another and how manifestations shifted with the needs of the community. It depicted a world that was created by the participants that met the needs of them as well and the power that derived from such manifestations. Effervescence and Feelings of Collectivity diverge from the former two sections slightly by looking at the pickets through a lens of feeling in order to communicate the affect that was felt among hundreds who spent their days together. It, I think, can only be fully understood by looking through poetry because in this section we return to the indescribable that arises from excess and intensity. These sections and the writing style used, work together to communicate the multifaceted world of the pickets. Imaginaries were enacted into reality and feelings that seemed unrealistic were felt by hundreds. The *magic* that was felt was one that arose from the world that was created by those that were committed to being together.

Activism is situated. It is built upon a history of work that has already been done and is a potential contribution to future struggles. This space was unique in many ways, but also reflective of many other organizing efforts. Which is to say that much more work needs to be done that addresses activism, actions, and organizing and all of the complexities they surely encompass. Work especially must be continued in the recognizing universities and the American education system as a place for contestation. With rising tuition, lower wages, and layoffs in all forms of education, including but not limited to the UC system, contestation and work being done to fight for the right to accessible education must be noticed and taken into consideration especially by those who have had the privilege to access it.

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