Near Hemel Hempstead

Tim Armstrong

Intellectual Barbarians: The Kibbo Kift Kindred, Whitechapel Gallery, 10 October 2015 – 13 March 2016
Annebella Pollen, *The Kindred of the Kibbo Kift: Intellectual Barbarians*, London, Donlon Books, 2015; £35 paperback

The exhibition of materials relating to the Kindred of the Kibbo Kift at the Whitechapel Gallery represents a return to the venue for some of the items. The visitor can, like those visiting the KK's Educational Exhibition there in 1929, peer at the costumes, totems, banners, heraldic devices, and photographs of rituals and marches of Britain's most colourful and eccentric social movement, now mostly archived at the Museum of London. The exhibition is accompanied by Annebella Pollen's well-researched and beautifully-illustrated study, *The Kindred of the Kibbo Kift: Intellectual Barbarians*, which documents the movement's founder, the charismatic John Hargrave (aka White Fox), and the twists and turns of his organization throughout the twenties, resurrecting a lost history. While the Kibbo Kift appear to be part of the story of modernism – and Hargrave did see them as akin to contemporary national movements for cultural revival like those in Dublin, Prague and China – the story is more complex, permeated by forms of cultural eclecticism and radical nostalgia for a past that never was.

Hargrave was a Quaker who had his first art exhibition in London while still a teenager (memorably sketching Joseph Conrad, who recommended

Kibbo Kift Kindred members at camp, 1928. Courtesy of Judge Smith, Kibbo Kift Foundation.

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Moby Dick). He served as a stretcher-bearer at Gallipoli, and entered the scout movement as the originator of 'Lonecraft', a DIY method for scouts. He soon fell out with the militaristic and imperialistic Baden Powell, and started his own woodcraft movement, which grew to a membership of several hundred (though with various mass defections and ejections) and attracted high profile supporters. The Kin met, camped, exercised, carved and sang; they marched in their green cowls in a wedge formation, and drove to Neolithic sites with their totems. Their rituals were Native American, Anglo-Saxon, and pure invention. At the end of the 1920s they transmigrated into the more sober Social Credit Green Shirts, following their founder into a politics that nevertheless continued to be based on a heliocentric vision of renewal and plenty. Their oddness is everywhere manifest in their ceremonies and publications, though often tempered by a vein of self-mockery, tom-foolery and the production of outsider art which is part of a recognizably English tradition: officers of the KK took names like 'Will Scarlet' and 'Old Mole'; they produced mummer's plays and puppet-theatre; many of their heraldic devices look as much like pub signs as modern logos. The fact that the fabricated skull of Piltdown man was one of their venerated ancestors signals that eccentric tradition, and signals their kinship with the equally radical literary Diffusionists in the period – in a loose collocation of writers which includes Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Wyndham Lewis, whose draftsmanship Hargrave has some affinities with.

The Kibbo Kift were always small (though attracting plenty of attention from the press, newsreels, and even from MI5), and as their detractors pointed out, largely lower middle-class in makeup. But Hargrave's vision was of a seed group which, in its creativity, would help engender a new kind of human, dynamically attuned to the modern world but with the eugenic fitness of primitive 'man' (women had a matching but lesser role, though interestingly Pollen notes that many former suffragettes made their way to the movement). His grandiose vision even included specialised KK air squadrons and, ultimately, the establishment of a world state as predicted by H. G. Wells (one of the 'names' drafted in for the Advisory Council). But there was a tension in the movement between his hopes for a broad cultural impact, on the one hand, and a tightly-organized avant-garde unified by a secret teaching on the other. 'Tribal Training' involved woodcraft skills, recapitulation of the stages of human evolution, ritual, and at the highest levels an esoteric initiation in Hargrave's own lodge kept from other members. One of the strengths of Pollen's book is that it looks for the first time in detail at Hargrave's mysticism as detailed in his *Lodge of Instruction*, derived from an eclectic mix of sources including Theosophy, Aleister Crowley, Bergson's vitalism, the rituals of rebirth in *The Golden Bough*, and English folklore. Hargrave was curiously bookish for a cult leader who stressed outdoor life and 'doing': he published a number of reasonably successful novels including the 877-page *Summer Time Ends* (1935), planned a movie based on *Beowulf*, as

well as his outpouring of designs, leaflets, plans and guides to his philosophy, all from a quiet back lane near Hemel Hempstead.

The Kin's artefacts, crammed in a relatively small upstairs room at the Whitechapel, make for a rather claustrophobic experience, though the artefacts even in their names create a mysterious world: the Kinlog, the Bok Scamel, the Skald, the Kist; the Kistbearer's tabard. One longs to join them out in the fields at the Althing (gathering) at Dexter Farm or Ricksmansworth; but as Pollen reports, even the dressed-up rituals there could have their longueurs. The exhibition assembles what is inevitably a graphic version of the movement, stressing the visual appeal of its brightly-coloured sigils, staves, fabrics, and tents; the embossed cover of the Kin Psalter, the *Tid Sang*, and other great books; the circular pattern of the Althing. Hargrave's training as a visual artist who worked in advertising and his overall creative control is evident everywhere, but so too is his encouragement of aesthetic experiment in others. The Kibbo Kift were lucky to have among its membership a brilliant photographer, Angus McBean (Aengus Og), whose photographs of camps and of posing Kinsmen, clothed or naked, at the White Horse of Uffington, at Old Sarum and elsewhere nicely aestheticise its preoccupations (as well as pointing towards his later Surrealist innovations in fashion photography). Pollen claims that 'the articles of Kin art, craft design and dress stand not as empty reminders of a failed project but as evidence of Kibbo Kift's greatest cultural production' (p.122). That is perhaps a historical judgement: Hargrave genuinely wished to change minds, bodies and ultimately the world, and anything less was a disappointment. In the thirties he campaigned tirelessly for Social Credit, even going to Alberta in Canada to advise its Social Credit government, though remaining in some ways outside the movement's mainstream. For a while he was Ezra Pound's main English correspondent, and Pound's idea of a charismatic leader, until they fell out over Pound's Fascism – though they met in Venice many years later, and Hargrave left a remarkable caricature of the elderly Pound in his papers at the LSE.

Pollen's coda on 'Resurrection' has a certain poignancy. Judge Smith, of Van der Graaf Generator, became fascinated with the movement and produced a musical about what he saw as an anticipation of 1960s youth movements, *The Kibbo Kift: A Rock Show*, in 1976, to which the still-living Hargrave came. Smith almost single-handedly ensured that the artefacts and memories of the movement were saved. Annebella Pollen has contextualized the movement with skill; and Donlon Books' designer Roland Brauchli has done an inspired job in marrying scholarship and the KK's visual elan in a book crammed with photographs and set in an arresting typeface. It is only fair to say that 2015 represents something of a resurrection for the KK: as well as Pollen's book, Cathy Ross and Oliver Bennett have published *Designing Utopia: John Hargrave and the Kibbo Kift* (London, Philip Wilson Publishers, 2015, £25, paperback), another fine study.

Diana, and everything else

Catrin Lundström

Raka Shome, *Diana and Beyond: White Femininity, National Identity, and Contemporary Media Culture*, Champaign, University of Illinois Press, 2014. £22.99, pp272.

How does the life – and death – of Princess Diana of Wales concern us who are relatively bored by news about celebrities in general and royalties in particular, or who simply think that their lives have little to do with ours? This seemingly obvious question is not one that comes to my mind when reading Raka Shome's book *Diana and Beyond: White Femininity, National Identity, and Contemporary Media Culture*. In fact, I realise quite rapidly that the 'Diana phenomenon' is about something else in Shome's reading. It is about the world we live in, and the inequalities that structure it.

Shome contextualises Diana's death in the production of a new national narrative of Britishness during Tony Blair's era in the 1990s, linking it to a wider representation of privileged white women and the neoliberal formation of citizenship in North Atlantic nations. The book is based on a large amount of (Western) media materials and narratives produced (mainly) after the death of Princess Diana in 1997 and offers a contextualized, situated analysis of white femininity and of the white woman's body and its 'genealogies, stories, myths, and desires' that have given meaning to Western imperialism (p5). Two questions guide the book: How do representations, articulations, and actions of privileged white women of the Global North impact, inform, and intersect with larger geopolitics? How does the body of the privileged white woman – symbolically and materially – circulate through transnational relations of power and in the process maintain and reify (and sometimes unsettle) the hegemonic logics of those relations (p5)?

Of utmost importance in dealing with these questions, according to Shome, is to understand the relation between representations of (some) white women and the formation of a national identity. One of the threads running through the book is the analysis of how Diana's body became a vehicle for the transition from a national Britishness to a global cosmopolitan hegemonic position, through expressions of new 'monism', multicultural fashion, global motherhood and white spirituality. As Britain had just experienced a major shift with the victory of the Labour Party in the general election of 1997, the Blair administration in post-Thatcher, post-tory, postcolonial Britain was searching for a new way to brand Britishness – a context in which concepts such as New Britain, Cool Britannia and New Labour were launched. In this political context:

> Diana's body became a site of articulation through which racialised, sexualised, gendered, and global relations were rewritten in the performance of a postcolonial neoliberal British identity (p36).

The analytical structure of the book is organised in five chapters, each chapter examining aspects of articulations between the representations of Diana and the reconstruction of 'New Britain'. The themes that represent such articulations are, in Shome's analysis, white motherhood and national modernity, fashion and the citizenly body, global motherhood and its transnational (and transracial) intimacies, transnational masculinity and the 'Muslim man', and in the final chapter, cosmopolitan healing and the spiritual fix of white femininity.

In chapter two, Shome begins her analysis of white motherhood by focusing on racialised constructions of motherhood in neo-liberal Britain, present both in the re-construction of the nation and in 'new' geopolitical power relations, mirrored in the figure of the Asian 'Tiger mom'. Shome explores the underlying danger with the phenomenon of perfect motherhood, as it, on the one hand, is impossible to achieve, and on the other hand, constitutes a ground for 'moral panics' and welfare cuts. Politically, Shome argues, the representation of the perfect mother was used to push women from 'dependency' on 'welfare' to becoming 'active citizens'. Analytically, the representation of whiteness in this mother figure shapes new logics of white universalism - of perfect white women unlimited in their involvement - further neglecting the different kinds of kinship patterns of non-white, non-Western origin families. Whiteness is here - as always - about what it is not.

In the following chapter on fashion, Shome illustrates how the fashionable figure of Princess Diana transcends the British context, through the embodiment of national perfection and ideals as well as through a specific kind of absorption of 'difference' that lays the ground for the emergence of a white multiculturalism in Britain. In Shome's view, the 'multicultural' fashions that grace upper-class white women both obscure inequality and tighten the relation between upper-class whites and rich Asian/Indians/South Asians. At the same time, the aesthetics of multiculturalism performs the function of projecting racism from the upper class towards the working class and non-cosmopolitan people who cannot afford or who simply cannot 'be' multicultural.

Shome has a brilliant capacity to pick up details and embed them in structural hierarchies and geopolitical relations, as manifested in the subsequent chapter on global motherhood. A 'simple' touch from 'global mother' Diana does not pass Shome's scrutiny as a neutral gesture, but something that captures the relation between the white, healthy woman touching – and potentially healing – the children, the disabled, the poor, the black – like Virgin Mary. From this point Shome asks the seemingly simple but profound question: who can be touched without permission and why is

this touch never a mutual practice? What are the global relations that are re-produced by this touching?

By looking into Diana's relation to a 'Muslim man', Mohammed 'Dodi' Al-Fayed, Shome unveils the geopolitical frustrations towards Muslim men in particular, and the Arabic world at large. With the backdrop of the sense of threat by this non-Western civilisation, not doomed to and controlled through slavery, Diana chooses to have a relation with a Muslim man. In British media, alongside overt and covert islamophobia, Dodi is portrayed as having a vast appetite for sexuality and disorder. Only after her death could Diana be re-patriotised in white British heteropatriarchy.

The chapter on multicultural healing and how multicultural techniques could heal the national icon of Princess Diana and the British nation *per se*, is one of my favorite chapters of the book. Shome's description of 'New age Diana' and how multicultural healing through Asian techniques created a new Diana with new energy is full of irony, humor and razor-sharp insights. One may wonder why this upper-class woman with no experience of hard work and plenty of money - sunbathing on yachts around the world - needed so many health enhancements?

As Shome follows Diana and other middle- and upper-class women on their touristic health journeys to India and surrounding Asia through yoga, Ayurveda, acupuncture, tai chi, colonic irrigation, detox diets and aroma therapy, she raises other important questions about the work of non-white non-Westerners providing these treatments. As an insider, born and raised in India, Shome reminds us of the problematic stand when taking a share of a culture without actually engaging with it, imagining that you can take part of the very inner soul of a culture just like any other commodity. Having a number of friends going back and forth to 'spiritual India', I am often taken by surprise of their lack of interest in Indian (or Burmese, or Thai) society and politics. For Shome, these practices act as a form of biocolonialism that reinforces the white nation and global whiteness.

To summarize, the white woman in *Diana and Beyond* functions as a tool for the reinvention of a new model for citizenship and national politics – away from the collective towards the individual. In contemporary Britain, Shome discusses the succession of Princess Diana by Kate Middleton as representing a shift from Blair's Cool Britannia to Cameron's Conservative Britain.

Shome skillfully ties together the disciplines of sociology, cultural studies, media and communication studies and gender studies, with aspects of politics at national and global levels. Reading *Diana and Beyond* from a Swedish perspective inspires me to apply Shome's analysis of renewed models for welfare to post-Social Democrat Sweden. Probably the most flagrant example of racialised politics in support of white motherhood is the tax deduction for hiring domestic workers, a benefit primarily used by the top 10 percent of income earners.

It is with great pleasure I read an analysis in which the Diana phenomenon has

'to do with everything else', in Stuart Hall's words. An analysis that highlights whiteness – as the powerful and structuring force it has the potential to make itself – without re-inscribing it as the centre of the world. Instead, Shome's view departs from places excluded or seemingly fixed by the white gaze. In fact, she dedicates the book to 'all women of color, and underprivileged women in and from the Global South'. By looking at the Diana phenomenon from the inside as well as from different outer sides, the book offers nuanced analyses of whiteness, gender and nation, and the ways they are co-constituted with class, sexuality, or able-bodiedness.

I am also captivated by her sharp analysis of how neoliberal logics have fundamentally changed the politics in the North Atlantic societies in the past decades – as in the shift from 'welfare' to 'wellness'. This capacity makes Shome an indispensable voice within the field of critical whiteness studies, but *Diana and Beyond* certainly speaks to many fields of study. In her own elegant way, Shome demonstrates how Princess Diana of Wales has to do with everything else.

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We Other Dickensians

Sara Hackenberg

Stephanie Polsky, *Ignoble Displacement: Dispossessed Capital in Neo-Dickensian London*, Alresford, Zone Books, 2015; £17.99 paperback

As I write this, the BBC has just concluded its new drama *Dickensian*, a spectacular costume mash-up in which Tony Jordan has re-imagined Dickens's fictional universe as a kind of Victorian *EastEnders*. In the show, over forty of Dickens's iconic characters inhabit the same street and are enmeshed in the same whodunit plot about the murder of greedy moneylender Jacob Marley. The ease with which Jordan has moved from a soap opera born in the midst of neoliberal Thatcherism to the world of Dickens's *oeuvre* is testament to the deep connections we can find between Dickens's London and our own - connections that Stephanie Polsky pursues in *Ignoble Displacement: Dispossessed Capital in Neo-Dickensian London*. In this book, Polsky joins a growing wave of thinkers who posit that we can best understand our neoliberal and postmodern present by scrutinising the liberal modernity that marked Victoria's reign. Polsky is up front about her participation in the 'trend towards neo-Victorianism,' a trend that she argues 'impacts all of our debates related to economic crisis, globalisation, consumerism, social justice, neoliberalism, and neocolonial warfare' (p3). *Ignoble Displacement* reads Dickens's fictions as providing us with a resonant narrative description of the liberal political economy that continues to inform the ideology and policies of Britain's Conservative government today.

Polsky's book offers four extraordinarily long, wide-ranging, and often meandering chapters, which variously read London's housing crisis, contemporary finance capitalism, imperial labor, and neoliberal empire in relation to Dickens's novels *Oliver Twist*, *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Great Expectations*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Our Mutual Friend*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, and *A Christmas Carol*. Her first chapter, '"Tomorrow" and Yesterday: The Peculiar British Property of Domestic Dispossession,' concerns issues of insecure housing both in Dickens's London and ours. Chapter two, 'Bank Draft: The Winds of Change in *Little Dorrit*'s Domestic Economy,' reads *Little Dorrit* as providing an early view into how 'neoliberal policy has fractured the sovereignty of the state' (p131). Chapter three, 'Cosmopolitan Fortunes: Imperial Labour and Metropolitan Wealth in Dickens's *Great Expectations*,' considers the intersections of the category of the 'gentleman' with working-class, criminal, colonial, and slave forms of labour in Dickens's novel and contemporary London. Her final chapter, 'Age and Ills: Dickens's Response to the Indian Mutiny of 1857 within the Present Context of Neoliberal Empire,'

attempts to read London's dependence on empire in both Victorian and contemporary times.

In insisting on the connections between Dickens's fictions and current neoliberal policies, Polsky comes close to suggesting that the rejection of mid-twentieth century progressive social projects was made all the easier because of the influential persistence in the cultural imaginary of Dickens's fictional world. By making such a suggestion more explicit, Polsky could significantly strengthen her argument about why we must return to Dickens to understand fully the financial crises and pernicious social effects of twenty-first-century neoliberal, neocolonial conservatism. As it is, Polsky is largely inconclusive about what kind of history her analysis of Dickens finally provides. She alternatively finds Dickens's novels reactive and prescriptive, both complicit with and resistant to the effects of imperial, liberal capitalism. Seeing Dickens as both creator of and at times possessed by his characters and stories, she locates Dickens as equally a shaper and a symptom of his - and our - culture. Does Dickens simply offer us a well-known depiction of the processes of modern capitalism, or is his 'writing…a kind of liberation theology for industrial times'? (p45). The conclusion she eventually arrives at, a few pages from the end, that Dickens not only describes an early version of the neoliberal world we inhabit, but also offers us visions of friendship and 'class mutuality' as ways to counteract its pernicious selfishness, would have been better if marshaled much earlier and used throughout to increase argumentative coherence (p290).

Polsky's method is as idiosyncratic as her argument. All too often, her meandering lines of reasoning and sentences that regularly approach Dickensian lengths obscure her interesting ideas. She utilises a kind of collage technique, interspersing the ideas of a range of scholars from across several disciplines, including literary criticism, economic theory, and cultural studies, with contemporary journalism, passages from Dickens's public and private writings, and moments in Dickens's life. In the study's best moments, bringing such diverse elements together can produce unexpected, illuminating insights. It is surprising but interesting to find the opening object of Polsky's investigation - an innovative, multi-media exhibit at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2013 about a fictional 'failed British architect' - brought into conversation with Dickens's early anxieties about maintaining his first family home and his eventual philanthropic housing projects (p9). In chapter three, Polsky harnesses insights from Eric Eustace Williams's mid-century *Capitalism and Slavery* in her discussion of *Great Expectations*: although *Great Expectations* is not usually considered a novel that deals with the slave trade, this juxtaposition allows for an illuminating view into the variety of forms of labour the novel engages. In her final chapter, she usefully frames her discussion of Dickens's conflicted responses to the Indian Rebellion of 1857 with Paul Gilroy's *Postcolonial Melancholia*.

In its weaker moments, Polsky's collage method produces a baffling

incoherence. Polsky spends the first two thirds of her third chapter reading *Great Expectations* against a broad set of ideas about empire, slavery and globalised banking in an interesting, if not exactly new, exploration of the relationship of the colonies to the Metropole in Dickens's novel. While she can't quite decide if Magwitch is racially coded or not, or if Pip is part of the problem or himself victimised by the system, such inconsistencies pale against her eventual protracted meander into discussions about the décor of the West Indian front parlour and the World Cup competition. Although interesting subjects in themselves, the connection of these discussions to her analysis of *Great Expectations* is left frustratingly unclear.

Moreover, Polsky's scholarship is often careless. Her quotations (for instance, from Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt's *Practicing New Historicism* in chapter three) are sometimes slightly inaccurate. At times she cites the editors rather than the specific contributors to essay collections. She discusses both *A Tale of Two Cities* and Dickens's final, unfinished novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* in chapter four, but does not include them in her works cited. More seriously, her collage-like method can make it difficult for readers to understand fully whose ideas they are encountering, and at least once it causes her to hover at the edges of plagiarism. It is startling to find some of the core ideas from her introduction -concepts that frame her study, such as the way today's neoliberal culture understands the 'human being as an arbitrary bundle of investments, skill sets, temporary alliances' who is 'both employer and worker simultaneously,' and how 'under the new vestiges of neoliberalism there are no more classes in the sense of the older political economy' (pp5-6) -repeated again verbatim in her closing pages, but only there attributed to Philip Mirowski (p285). While acknowledging that Zero Books are rapid-response texts, perhaps more aligned with political pamphlets than works of scholarship, one still would have hoped that she, or her editors, would have caught such errors before publication.

Despite the troubling inaccuracies and moments of incoherence that Polsky's scholarship and method produce, her book offers a few truly pleasurable moments. Her epilogue, 'Crony Capitalism and the *Mutuality* of the Market,' brilliantly opens with a reading of David Cameron as a latter-day Mr. Podsnap. This reader delighted in the parallels Polsky draws between Cameron demanding permanent austerity at the opulent Lord Mayor's banquet and the bombastic pronouncements of Mr. Podsnap, a magnificently complacent, self-satisfied character from *Our Mutual Friend* who lives off inherited wealth and who sweeps away social truths with a majestic wave of his hand, insisting that poverty is the fault of the impoverished. Such a moment again raises the question of the power of narrative not just to reflect but to shape the world: in some ways, we might see Dickens as *inventing* Cameron and his cronies.

In closing, I return to the BBC's *Dickensian*. In the show, Jacob Marley - Dickens's generic, callous businessman who dies of natural causes and

then has a posthumous change of heart -is shockingly transformed into a prostitute-beating child-seller, whose misogynist violence causes his mysterious murder. While Tony Jordan's twenty-first century version of Marley shows us the flexibility of Dickens's fictions, it also indicates how it is no longer enough for Marley or Scrooge's hardhearted capitalist practices alone to indicate their wrongdoing. As a culture we have become inured to the stock figure of the 'unscrupulous capitalist'; Jordan's transformation of Marley suggests that capitalist villains today must overtly enact the violence inherent to capitalist systems in order to be recognisably, satisfyingly villainous. Stephanie Polsky's book also attempts to get us to see anew the violence of systemic and neoliberal capitalism, an aim achieved with moderate success.

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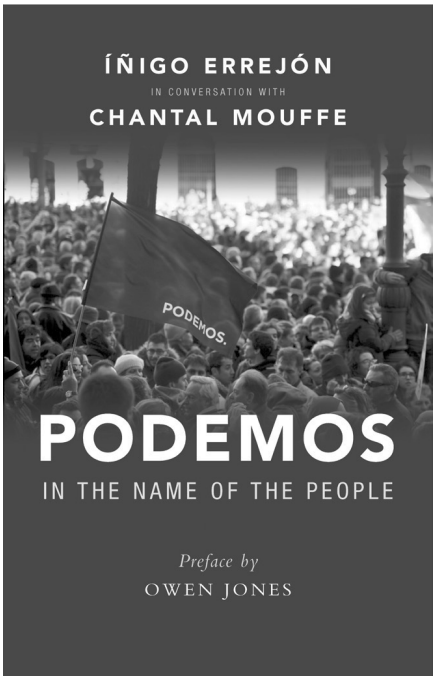
Podemos:

In the Name of the People

Íñigo Errejón in conversation with Chantal Mouffe

Introduction by Owen Jones



Íñigo Errejón of Podemos and political theorist Chantal Mouffe discuss the emergence of new political initiatives in Europe, and in particular of Podemos. They critically engage with both older traditions and the newly emerging parties and movements; explore new ways of creating collective identities and building majorities; and reflect on the major political challenges facing the left. This is a conversation between two people who are ideally placed to draw on the seminal earlier theoretical work of Mouffe with Ernesto Laclau, and to link it directly into the practice of the new politics.

Translated from Construir Pueblo

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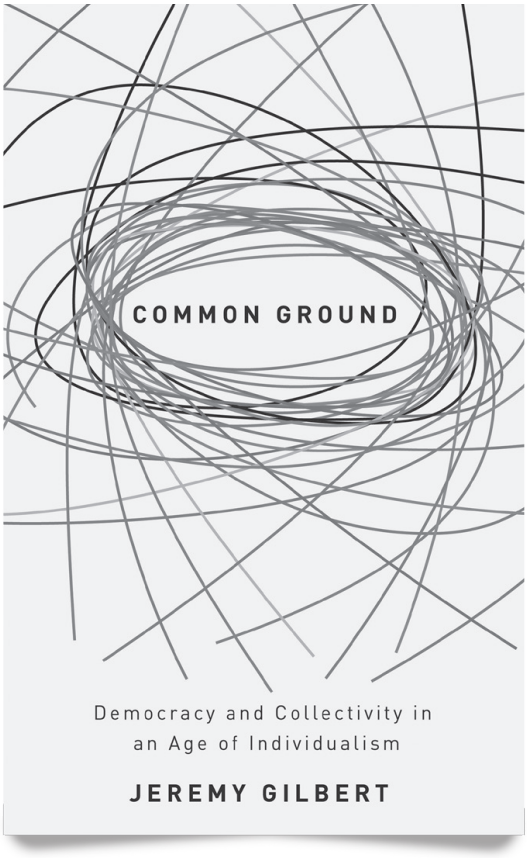

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