

Reflexivity and Imperfect Solidarity as Operational Infrastructure

Read together, Chapters 3 and 5 of Ginie Servant-Miklos's *Pedagogies of Collapse* address a problem central to "The Operationalization Gap": why does credible knowledge of systemic danger so rarely produce proportionate, timely action? McTague approaches this as a problem of decision architecture. Analysis needs a named decision-maker, observable indicators, thresholds, deadlines, reporting mechanisms, and stand-down conditions. Servant-Miklos examines what such architecture generally presumes but seldom tests: the psychological condition of the people expected to use it and the relational condition of groups expected to act together.

Her central insight is that information never reaches a neutral operator. It reaches people already managing grief, anxiety, identity, attachment, status, and competing commitments. Under pressure, they may deny the evidence, exempt themselves from its implications, retreat into compulsive activity, attack one another, or become unable to decide collectively. Operationalization therefore requires more than converting estimates into triggers. It also requires practices that enable people to receive threatening knowledge honestly and solidarities capable of acting before the opportunity closes.

Chapter 3 develops this argument at the level of the individual learner. Servant-Miklos begins with her own passage from climate anxiety and physical illness toward what she calls "resolute calm." Neither response she encountered in academic life proved adequate. Some engineering colleagues embraced technological salvation in almost mystical terms. Some humanities colleagues offered an informed fatalism in which catastrophic warming was acknowledged but treated as effectively settled. The latter may appear more sophisticated than denial, but it is scarcely more capable of generating action.

Her alternative is summarized as "learn, love, live." Learning means confronting collapse as an existential problem, not merely accumulating more information about it. Loving means committing oneself to the freedom and flourishing of others. Living means abandoning forms of professional and social pretense that consume energy without serving those commitments. These are not sequential stages in a technical method. They describe the dispositions needed to remain engaged after comforting expectations about progress have become untenable.

Servant-Miklos translates this personal development into a curriculum organized around three psychological lenses: cognitivism, psychoanalysis, and existentialism. Each is accompanied by reflective writing and personal feedback. Cognitivism provides an accessible entry point, particularly for students trained in science, economics, or business. Through exercises that map conflicting beliefs and behaviors, students examine the dissonance between environmental concern and practices such as flying or eating meat.

Several biases help explain how people resolve that dissonance without changing their conduct. Positive-illusion bias allows a reader to accept that conditions will become dangerous while assuming that they personally will remain secure. Fundamental attribution error makes one's own environmentally damaging conduct a product of necessity while treating another person's as evidence of bad character. In-group bias places responsibility on outsiders while preserving the innocence of one's own community. Prospect theory is especially relevant to operationalization: when every available option entails loss, people may gamble that the experts are wrong because disbelief appears to be the only remaining option that does not guarantee sacrifice.

These mechanisms illuminate the audience problem in systemic-risk literature. A reader can accept a diagnosis in general while rejecting every decision it might require personally. Denial and despair are

psychologically stable. A decision requirement is destabilizing because it imposes a cost now. More information may therefore reinforce inaction rather than overcome it. As Servant-Miklos's teaching experience suggests, information presented without space for grief and reflection can demobilize its recipient.

She nevertheless regards cognitivism as limited. It can classify rationalizations without adequately explaining the emotional force beneath them. Psychoanalysis takes the inquiry deeper. Drawing on Žižek's adaptation of Kübler-Ross, Servant-Miklos treats denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance as collective responses to collapse. Consumer behavior exemplifies "fetishistic disavowal": people know that endless material expansion is impossible but continue acting as though the next purchase confirms the system's permanence. Bargaining appears in political programs that promise transformative outcomes without disturbing the arrangements that produced the crisis.

Through Melanie Klein, Servant-Miklos describes a regression into binary, paranoid thinking. The Earth becomes alternately a nurturing "good mother" and a persecuting "bad mother," while technological entrepreneurs become omnipotent rescuers. This is not simply a criticism of billionaires. It is a criticism of the collective desire to be rescued without accepting responsibility. A related condition is environmental melancholia. People care about ecological destruction but cannot identify a discrete object of loss that can be mourned. What appears as apathy may therefore be care without an available form of expression. Servant-Miklos recommends naming ambivalence and undertaking concrete acts of repair. Such activity does not replace structural change, but it can restore agency and make larger commitments conceivable.

Existentialism supplies the chapter's ethical conclusion. Collapse threatens not only comfort but the projects through which people create identity and imagine their achievements surviving them. Servant-Miklos rejects both consumerist self-creation and forms of environmentalism that treat humanity itself as the problem. Drawing particularly on Simone de Beauvoir, she locates meaning in "generous love": willing the freedom of others and preserving their capacity to act. Certainty of success is not a prerequisite. Action can remain meaningful because of the relationships and freedoms it sustains, even when historical outcomes cannot be guaranteed.

Chapter 5 moves from the individual to the group. Its provocative premise is that polarization and identitarian hostility are not distractions from collapse but manifestations of it. Social disintegration enters classrooms and movements as trauma. Servant-Miklos traces one response through neoliberal individualism and meritocracy. Structural advantage is recoded as personal desert, while failure becomes an individual defect. In educational settings, this encourages a flight response: overwork, relentless scheduling, credential accumulation, and status competition. Activity becomes a way to avoid dependence, grief, and reflection.

This has a direct analogue in risk analysis. Continuous monitoring, proliferating indicators, and repeated revisions can resemble disciplined preparation while functioning as avoidance. McTague aptly calls this possibility "hypervigilance with an Excel spreadsheet." A framework can watch the world obsessively while never asking whether its operator remains capable of reading the results honestly.

Servant-Miklos associates a second trauma response—fight—with moral perfectionism and punitive political discourse. Her criticism of some identity-based activism is deliberately contentious. She argues that linguistic performance, confession, and denunciation can displace material improvement. Movements then direct their energy toward members susceptible to moral pressure, while institutions adopt the language of inclusion without changing exploitative practices. Her target is not recognition of structural

oppression. It is a politics that makes cooperation depend upon moral purity or assumes that people without identical experiences cannot understand or assist one another.

Her account of university climate occupations provides the clearest bridge to operationalization. After administrators mishandled a peaceful protest, students obtained an unusually favorable opportunity to negotiate. Their decentralized decision process, however, could neither reach agreement nor authorize a representative to accept concessions. The window closed. When another opportunity arose, the same problem recurred. The students possessed the information, leverage, and visible decision point, but lacked an architecture capable of acting before the information's value expired. This is McTague's Latest Time Information Is of Value in a nonmilitary setting: perfect process defeated attainable results.

Servant-Miklos proposes "imperfect solidarities" as the alternative. These reject competitive hierarchies of suffering and organize around shared material purposes. They permit people to use whatever access or privilege they possess, even when doing so implicates them in an unjust system. They also require self-respect, boundaries, and a preference for "calling in" rather than reflexively "calling out." Her tatami metaphor captures the principle: participants bow, train, pause when someone is hurt, determine what happened, and resume. Those who repeatedly refuse the rules may be removed. Solidarity is neither unconditional inclusion nor complete agreement. It is the durable capacity of imperfect people to continue working together.

Her classroom practices embody this position. Students help establish rules for disagreement. Unpopular claims are not punished but remain accountable to evidence. Overwhelmed students may withdraw and return. Extensions are granted generously. Yet the teacher maintains a crucial boundary: educators are not therapists, and institutions should not use trauma-informed teaching as a reason to withdraw professional mental-health support.

Servant-Miklos's analysis has important limitations. Her psychoanalytic account is suggestive but often asserted at a civilizational scale on limited empirical foundations. Her generalization from clinical trauma to political polarization is contestable. Her pedagogy is also highly dependent on an unusually committed teacher who reads personal journals, offers extensive feedback, and absorbs considerable emotional strain. It is not yet clear that this model can be transferred or scaled without losing what makes it effective.

Nevertheless, these chapters materially extend the operationalization argument. McTague's framework asks whether the operator has the resources and authority to execute a decision. Servant-Miklos adds a more difficult Friendly Force Information Requirement: is the operator psychologically able to interpret the evidence, accept its implications, and act with others? A model can contain valid indicators, thresholds, and deadlines and still fail because its user freezes, escapes into busyness, seeks rescue, attacks allies, or rejects an action that conflicts with deeper attachments.

Operational readiness consequently has both technical and human infrastructure. It needs observables, decision rights, clocks, and de-arming rules. It also needs reflexivity, explicit values, legitimate authority, trusted external judgment, and solidarities robust enough to survive grief, disagreement, and imperfection. Servant-Miklos's contribution is to show that these are not therapeutic additions to serious analysis. They are part of the machinery by which analysis becomes action.