# 1NC---Dartmouth---Round 3

## Off

### 1NC

Topicality:

#### Our interpretation is topical definitions establish the burden of proof and rejoinder to set the confines for a debate to unfold. In that context, ‘the USFG’ must be the subject and ‘should’ denotes action.

Hiland ’24 [Alexander; 2024; Senior Lecturer in Communication & Media at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute; A Short Guide to Policy Debate, “Analyzing Debate Topics,” Ch. 1]

In preparing for policy debates, topic analysis serves three essential functions. The first is to develop a tentative understanding of what specific issues will be argued by both sides of the topic. The second is to develop a strategy for how to research the topic, to maximize the likelihood of being adequately prepared to be competitively successful. The third is to determine what the affirmative must demonstrate to be true in order to justify the judge voting for them, and by extension what the negative side will have to disprove.

To satisfy the first function, a debater would be well served to consider two things. The first is what area of policy is the focus of the resolution. The easiest way to make this early determination is to identify the relevant “terms of art” within the resolution. These terms are typically nouns or verbs that, either singly or frequently in combination, denote something greater than what is found within the dictionary for the terms used individually. These terms of art typically are used by the topic committee to ensure that the resolution reflects debates taking place outside the narrow confines of the debate community.

To identify terms of art, there are a couple of productive steps that one should follow. First, consider punctuation, the inclusion of hyphens or quotation marks are good indicators that a term of art is in use. Second, look for terms that only seem to make sense in conjunction with each other. Below, we will look at one example from the 2023–2024 debate season. One more strategy would be to review the controversy paper submitted for the topic, which often has research compiled about the terms of art relevant to the controversy.

Using the 2023–2024 debate topic, one example would be the phrase “nuclear triad.” A search of the term from Merriam-Webster would return no results, but a search that entailed looking for “nuclear” and “triad” separately would produce results that provide definitions of both words. The result would be:

Nuclear: 2c(1)

: being a weapon whose destructive power derives from an uncontrolled nuclear reaction6

Triad: 1

: a union or group of three: TRINITY7

This combination of definitions provided without context might allow someone familiar with the term to deduce the correct interpretation, but for those who are less familiar with the term of art, it is not an especially helpful pair of definitions because it doesn’t really provide much specificity for how those words are used in conjunction.

By contrast, recognizing the term “nuclear triad” as a term of art allows rather rudimentary searches (for more detail on how to perform searches, see Chapter 3) to produce much more helpful definitions contextualized to ongoing debates in the field of nuclear weapons policy. For example, the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, a non-partisan non-profit that advocates for the reduction of nuclear arsenals,8 defines the “nuclear triad” in the following way,

The U.S. nuclear arsenal comprises thousands of nuclear weapons and three methods of delivery, sometimes called “legs.” Warheads can be launched from the air via strategic bombers carrying gravity bombs or cruise missiles, from the sea by submarines holding ballistic missiles, or from underground silos housing intercontinental ballistic missiles. Collectively, these delivery methods are referred to as “the Triad.” Currently all three legs of the Triad are being modernized at a cost of $494 billion, or about $50 billion every year from 2019 to 2028.9

This definition, although it carries a suggestion of bias given the interests of the organization offering the definition and the emphasis placed on the cost of modernizing the legs of the triad, is much more helpful because it is contextualized to ongoing debates about what to do with the triad. To help ensure the validity of the definitions provided for a term of art, it’s always a good idea to find two or three definitions that are essentially similar to help control for bias.

After identifying terms of art within the resolution to help clarify the topic students would be well served to grammatically interpret the topic in order to validate their interpretation of how the topic will be debated. Although many debaters and their coaches ignore this step because they assume the wording of the topic is secondary to the norms for how collegiate debate typically functions, those assumptions can be risky, especially where certain terms might carry a substantial meaning for the topic depending on their usage. More importantly, for those looking to get started debating, this step can be remarkably productive in understanding how debates tend to play out.

In the resolution which we will be using, the object of the sentence is identified as the “United States Federal Government,” which is significant because in standard English grammar, the object of the sentence has agency to affect the subject of the sentence; hence, the United States Federal Government is referred to as an agent. The verb in the sentence is “should restrict,” indicating that the agent of the resolution will be obligated to curtail the subject of the sentence which is indicated by the determiner “its.” The subject of the sentence is “nuclear forces.” The sentence is modified after the subject by the phrase “one or more” meaning that the affirmative might choose between multiple options, with a list indicated by “following ways” and the subsequent colon.

In each of the listed items we have a gerund form of the verb indicating that where the interpretation of the verb is not clear from the definition of the word it will be interpreted as a form of the initial verb in the sentence (restrict). This illustrates why reading the topic grammatically is helpful because it clarifies that the gerund form of the verb beginning each sentence subject to the term restrict, meaning the affirmative cannot defend an expansion of nuclear forces.10 Subsequently, each line has a subject noun that sets the parameters for what the United States Federal Government can do under the auspices of the resolution by constraining the number of subjects which can be acted upon.

#### ‘Federal’ means central government of the US.

Cambridge ’25 [Cambridge English Dictionary; 2025; most popular dictionary and thesaurus for learners of English; Cambridge English Dictionary, “federal,” https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/federal]

federal

adjective

uk /ˈfed.ər.əl/ us /ˈfed.ɚ.əl/

Add to word list

C1 [ before noun ]

relating to the central government, and not to the government of a region, of some countries such as the US:

the federal government

a federal agency/employee

A federal system of government consists of a group of regions that are controlled by a central government.

Fewer examples

They were charged with violating federal law.

#### ‘CBRs’ are strengthened via governmental action.

Powell ’25 [Russell; February 3; professor of law and endowed scholar at Seattle University School of Law; UC Law Business Journal, “Fallout and Fiduciary Duty,” vol. 21]

Labor power has decreased over the past forty years, partly due to increasing corporate opposition to unions, which has pushed Congress, the Executive, and courts to weaken existing protections.121 Efforts to fortify labor rights might include laws that strengthen collective bargaining rights, mandate equitable pay, and enforce stricter workplace safety standards.122 Regulatory agencies could be empowered to provide more rigorous oversight and penalize unfair labor practices, ensuring compliance with labor laws; however, recent Supreme Court decisions have significantly curtailed agency enforcement power.123 Ultimately, the Supreme Court would probably have to restore or at least clarify agency authority, as well as interpret labor statutes more broadly to favor workers' rights.

#### That process produces testing, creating a cycle of improvement. This process does not proscribe particular styles or forms of argument but does require a common point of disagreement around which arguments can be organized.

Poscher ’16 [Ralf; February 19; Director, Institute for Staatswissenschaft & Philosophy of Law; Professor of Public Law and Legal Philosophy; Metaphilosophy of Law, “Why We Argue About the Law: An Agonistic Account of Legal Disagreement,” pp. 191-226]

This also holds where we seem to be in agreement. Agreement without exposure to disagreement can be deceptive in various ways. The first phenomenon Postema draws attention to is the group polarization effect. When a group of like‐minded people deliberates an issue, informational and reputational cascades produce more extreme views in the process of their deliberations.105 The polarization and biases that are well documented for such groups 106 can be countered at least in some settings by the inclusion of dissenting voices. In these scenarios, disagreement can be a cure for dysfunctional deliberative polarization and biases.107 A second deliberative dysfunction mitigated by disagreement is superficial agreement, which can even be manipulatively used in the sense of a “presumptuous ‘We’”108. Disagreement can help to police such distortions of deliberative processes by challenging superficial agreements. Disagreements may thus signal that a deliberative process is not contaminated with dysfunctional agreements stemming from polarization or superficiality. Protecting our discourse against such contaminations is valuable even if we do not come to terms. Each of the opposing positions will profit from the catharsis it received “by looking the negative in the face and tarrying with it”.

These advantages of disagreement in collective deliberations are mirrored on the individual level. Even if the probability of reaching a consensus with our opponents is very low from the beginning, as might be the case in deeply entrenched conflicts, entering into an exchange of arguments can still serve to test and improve our position. We have to do the “labor of the negative” for ourselves. Even if we cannot come up with a line of argument that coheres well with everybody else’s beliefs, attitudes and dispositions, we can still come up with a line of argument that achieves this goal for our own personal beliefs, attitudes and dispositions. To provide ourselves with the most coherent system of our own beliefs, attitudes and dispositions is – at least in important issues – an aspect of personal integrity – to borrow one of Dworkin’s favorite expressions for a less aspirational idea.

In hard cases we must – in some way – lay out the argument for ourselves to figure out what we believe to be the right answer. We might not know what we believe ourselves in questions of abortion, the death penalty, torture, and stem cell research, until we have developed a line of argument against the background of our subjective beliefs, attitudes and dispositions. In these cases it might be rational to discuss the issue with someone unlikely to share some of our more fundamental convictions or who opposes the view towards which we lean. This might even be the most helpful way of corroborating a view, because we know that our adversary is much more motivated to find a potential flaw in our argument than someone with whom we know we are in agreement. It might be more helpful to discuss a liberal position with Scalia than with Breyer if we want to make sure that we have not overlooked some counter‐argument to our case.

It would be too narrow an understanding of our practice of legal disagreement and argumentation if we restricted its purpose to persuading an adversary in the case at hand and inferred from this narrow understanding the irrationality of argumentation in hard cases, in which we know beforehand that we will not be able to persuade. Rational argumentation is a much more complex practice in a more complex social framework. Argumentation with an adversary can have purposes beyond persuading him: to test one’s own convictions, to engage our opponent in inferential commitments and to persuade third parties are only some of these; to rally our troops or express our convictions might be others. To make our peace with Kant we could say that “there must be a hope of coming to terms” with someone though not necessarily with our opponent, but maybe only a third party or even just ourselves and not necessarily only on the issue at hand, but maybe through inferential commitments in a different arena.

f) The Advantage Over Non‐Argumentative Alternatives

It goes without saying that in real world legal disagreements, all of the reasons listed above usually play in concert and will typically hold true to different degrees relative to different participants in the debate: There will be some participants for whom our hope of coming to terms might still be justified and others for whom only some of the other reasons hold and some for whom it is a mixture of all of the reasons in shifting degrees as our disagreements evolve. It is also apparent that, with the exception of the first reason, the rationality of our disagreements is of a secondary nature. The rational does not lie in the discovery of a single right answer to the topic of debate, since in hard cases there are no single right answers. Instead, our disagreements are instrumental to rationales which lie beyond the topic at hand, like the exploration of our communalities or of our inferential commitments. Since these reasons are of this secondary nature, they must stand up to alternative ways of settling irreconcilable disagreements that have other secondary reasons in their favor – like swiftness of decision making or using fewer resources. Why does our legal practice require lengthy arguments and discursive efforts even in appellate or supreme court cases of irreconcilable legal disagreements? The closure has to come by some non‐argumentative mean and courts have always relied on them. For the medieval courts of the Germanic tradition it is bequeathed that judges had to fight it out literally if they disagreed on a question of law – though the king allowed them to pick surrogate fighters.109 It is understandable that the process of civilization has led us to non‐violent non‐ argumentative means to determine the law. But what was wrong with District Judge Currin of Umatilla County in Oregon, who – in his late days – decided inconclusive traffic violations by publicly flipping a coin?110 If we are counting heads at the end of our lengthy argumentative proceedings anyway, why not decide hard cases by gut voting at the outset and spare everybody the cost of developing elaborate arguments on questions, where there is not fact of the matter to be discovered?

One reason lies in the mixed nature of our reasons in actual legal disagreements. The different second order reasons can be held apart analytically, but not in real life cases. The hope of coming to terms will often play a role at least for some time relative to some participants in the debate. A second reason is that the objectives listed above could not be achieved by a non‐argumentative procedure. Flipping a coin, throwing dice or taking a gut vote would not help us to explore our communalities or our inferential commitments nor help to scrutinize the positions in play. A third reason is the overall rational aspiration of the law that Dworkin relates to in his integrity account111. In a justificatory sense112 the law aspires to give a coherent account of itself – even if it is not the only right one – required by equal respect under conditions of normative disagreement.113 Combining legal argumentation with the non‐argumentative decision‐ making procedure of counting reasoned opinions serves the coherence aspiration of the law in at least two ways: First, the labor of the negative reduces the chances that constructions of the law that have major flaws or inconsistencies built into the arguments supporting them will prevail. Second, since every position must be a reasoned one within the given framework of the law, it must be one that somehow fits into the overall structure of the law along coherent lines. It thus protects against incoherent “checkerboard” treatments114 of hard cases. It is the combination of reasoned disagreement and the non‐rational decision‐making mechanism of counting reasoned opinions that provides for both in hard cases: a decision and one – of multiple possible – coherent constructions of the law. Pure non‐rational procedures – like flipping a coin – would only provide for the decision part. Pure argumentative procedures – which are not geared towards a decision procedure – would undercut the incentive structure of our agonistic disagreements.115 In the face of unresolvable disagreements endless debates would seem an idle enterprise. That the debates are about winning or losing helps to keep the participants engaged. That the decision depends on counting reasoned opinions guarantees that the engagement focuses on rational argumentation. No plain non‐argumentative procedure would achieve this result. If the judges were to flip a coin at the end of the trial in hard cases, there would be little incentive to engage in an exchange of arguments. It is specifically the count of reasoned opinions which provides for rational scrutiny in our legal disagreements and thus contributes to the rationales discussed above.

2. The Semantics of Agonistic Disagreements

The agonistic account does not presuppose a fact of the matter, it is not accompanied by an ontological commitment, and the question of how the fact of the matter could be known to us is not even raised. Thus the agonistic account of legal disagreement is not confronted with the metaphysical or epistemological questions that plague one‐right‐answer theories in particular. However, it must still come up with a semantics that explains in what sense we disagree about the same issue and are not just talking at cross purposes.

In a series of articles David Plunkett and Tim Sundell have reconstructed legal disagreements in semantic terms as metalinguistic negotiations on the usage of a term that at the center of a hard case like “cruel and unusual punishment” in a death‐penalty case.116 Even though the different sides in the debate define the term differently, they are not talking past each other, since they are engaged in a metalinguistic negotiation on the use of the same term. The metalinguistic negotiation on the use of the term serves as a semantic anchor for a disagreement on the substantive issues connected with the term because of its functional role in the law. The “cruel and unusual punishment”‐clause thus serves to argue about the permissibility of the death penalty. This account, however only provides a very superficial semantic commonality. But the commonality between the participants of a legal disagreement go deeper than a discussion whether the term “bank” should in future only to be used for financial institutions, which fulfills every criteria for semantic negotiations that Plunkett and Sundell propose. Unlike in mere semantic negotiations, like the on the disambiguation of the term “bank”, there is also some kind of identity of the substantive issues at stake in legal disagreements.

A promising route to capture this aspect of legal disagreements might be offered by recent semantic approaches that try to accommodate the externalist challenges of realist semantics,117 which inspire one‐right‐answer theorists like Moore or David Brink. Neo‐ descriptivist and two‐valued semantics provide for the theoretical or interpretive element of realist semantics without having to commit to the ontological positions of traditional externalism. In a sense they offer externalist semantics with no ontological strings attached.

The less controversial aspect of the externalist picture of meaning developed in neo‐ descriptivist and two‐valued semantics can be found in the deferential structure that our meaning‐providing intentions often encompass.118 In the case of natural kinds, speakers defer to the expertise of chemists when they employ natural kind terms like gold or water. If a speaker orders someone to buy $ 10,000 worth of gold as a safe investment, he might not know the exact atomic structure of the chemical element 79. In cases of doubt, though, he would insist that he meant to buy only stuff that chemical experts – or the markets for that matter – qualify as gold. The deferential element in the speaker’s intentions provides for the specific externalist element of the semantics.

In the case of the law, the meaning‐providing intentions connected to the provisions of the law can be understood to defer in a similar manner to the best overall theory or interpretation of the legal materials. Against the background of such a semantic framework the conceptual unity of a linguistic practice is not ratified by the existence of a single best answer, but by the unity of the interpretive effort that extends to legal materials and legal practices that have sufficient overlap119 – be it only in a historical perspective120. The fulcrum of disagreement that Dworkin sees in the existence of a single right answer 121 does not lie in its existence, but in the communality of the effort – if only on the basis of an overlapping common ground of legal materials, accepted practices, experiences and dispositions. As two athletes are engaged in the same contest when they follow the same rules, share the same concept of winning and losing and act in the same context, but follow very different styles of e.g. wrestling, boxing, swimming etc. They are in the same contest, even if there is no single best style in which to wrestle, box or swim. Each, however, is engaged in developing the best style to win against their opponent, just as two lawyers try to develop the best argument to convince a bench of judges.122 Within such a semantic framework even people with radically opposing views about the application of an expression can still share a concept in that they are engaged in the same process of theorizing over roughly the same legal materials and practices. Semantic frameworks along these lines allow for adamant disagreements without abandoning the idea that people are talking about the same concept. An agonistic account of legal, disagreement can build on such a semantic framework, which can explain in what sense lawyers, judges and scholars engaged in agonistic disagreements are not talking past each other. They are engaged in developing the best interpretation of roughly the same legal materials, albeit against the background of diverging beliefs, attitudes and dispositions that lead them to divergent conclusions in hard cases. Despite the divergent conclusions, semantic unity is provided by the largely overlapping legal materials that form the basis for their disagreement. Such a semantic collapses only when we lack a sufficient overlap in the materials. To use an example of Michael Moore’s: If we wanted to debate whether a certain work of art was “just”, we share neither paradigms nor a tradition of applying the concept of justice to art such as to engage in an intelligible controversy.

#### All social organization involve some judgement and intervention, so it is just a question of effectiveness.

Ypi ’16 [Lea; 2016; Professor in Political Theory in the Government Department, London School of Economics; The Trouble with Democracy: Political Modernity in the 21st Century, “From Realism to Activism: A Critique of Resignation in Political Theory,” Ch. 10]

If we take seriously the unavoidability of conflict thesis, we will come up with two different interpretations of legitimacy demands compatible with norms internal to it.9 One interpretation leads to the idea that since politics is by its nature inherently coercive and ill-suited to promote a variety of ends, we should seek to contain its reach by theorising alternative associations (economic, cultural, religious) where individuals can pursue their interests and act together in a more spontaneous form.10 Thus, if we limit our ambitions to the attempt to secure order rather than guarantee justice, we will contain the potential for abusing power in seeking to realise the latter. But the problem with this view is that it conflates the statement that politics is essentially coercive with another one, which appears more controversial – namely, that only politics is essentially coercive. Although it is plausible to say that any exercise of political power, however noble its inspiration, is likely to result in a few elites imposing their own standards of legitimacy on the rest of the civic body, it is naïve to suppose that only political elites are vulnerable to a similar critique. If disagreement among individuals exists and is unavoidable, it will shape any association in which they take part. If rules are needed to contain such disagreement, the question of who makes such rules and in what name will apply to all circumstances characterised by division of labour, structures of co-ordination, and collective decision-making. Thus, not just political institutions but also families, the market, religious organisations (to mention but the most relevant examples) will entail some degree of coercion in order to flourish. It is contrary to the spirit of realism to assume that they will spontaneously guarantee the pursuit of agents’ ends free from any degree of unilateral interference. Even more importantly, if disagreement pervades all areas of human interaction, the distinctiveness of the political as that realm in which collective decisions must be made on the face of such disagreements seems difficult to capture.

#### Education about the benefits of unions makes individuals more likely to join.

Stanford PACS ’24 [Stanford PACS; April 30; Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society, “New Stanford Study Finds 92% of Americans Underestimate the Benefits of Unions, Correcting Misperceptions Can Boost Support and Engagement,” https://pacscenter.stanford.edu/news/new-stanford-study-finds-92-of-americans-underestimate-the-benefits-of-unions-correcting-misperceptions-can-boost-support-and-engagement/]

A new study from Jonne Kamphorst and Robb Willer of the Polarization and Social Change Lab (PaSCL) at the Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society (Stanford PACS) shows that Americans systematically underestimate the material benefits of unionization—and that when informed about the actual benefits, Americans express greater support for unions and pro-labor policies, and greater interest in joining a union and helping to organize a union in their workplace.

“Polling shows that unions are increasingly popular among Americans, drawing the highest levels of support in decades,” Jonne Kamphorst, PaSCL Research Fellow and lead author of the study, said. “Yet our research suggests that unions would likely be supported even more if people viewed them more accurately—a finding that could have important implications for American workers, voters, policymakers, labor advocates, and businesses.”

To explore Americans’ perceptions of the benefits of unionization, Kamphorst and Willer conducted a survey on a representative sample of 1,430 Americans asking them to estimate the levels of material benefits earned by unionized and non-unionized workers in the U.S., considering annual income, health care, retirement benefits, and more.

The survey found that a large majority of Americans greatly underestimate the material benefits of unions. For example:89 percent of surveyed Americans underestimated the life-time income premium associated with union membership;72 percent underestimated the percentage of union members who receive health insurance from their employer; and97 percent overestimated the average union dues rate (estimating it to be more than 10 percent of a union worker’s income when it is in fact close to 1 percent).Using an overall, composite measure of all the benefits studied, 92 percent of Americans underestimated the material benefits of unionization.

Kamphorst and Willer also tested the effect of correcting Americans’ perceptions, by randomly assigning the Americans they surveyed to receive accurate information, drawn from academic and government research, on the benefits associated with unionization. They then re-surveyed their participants after receiving this information (or not), finding that those whose perceptions were corrected showed more positive views of unions across many measures. Americans who received the corrective information reported greater support for unions and pro-labor policies and greater interest in joining a union and helping to organize a union in their workplace.

“Our results suggest interest in joining unions—and support for policies that would reform U.S. labor law—would be higher if not for significant underestimates of the material benefits associated with unionization,” Robb Willer, director of PaSCL and faculty co-director of Stanford PACS, said. “These misperceptions may help explain why interest in joining unions in the U.S. continues to lag behind peer countries. Highlighting the benefits of unionization to the American public could change that dynamic significantly.”

#### The labor movement is at an impasse. Only further engagement with labor law through theory-testing makes labor activism effective. Debate has liberatory potential AND we ought to orient our discussions around it.

Naidu ’22 [Suresh; Fall; Professor of International and Public Affairs and Jack Wang and Echo Ren Professor of Economics at Columbia University; Journal of Economic Perspectives, “Is There Any Future for a US Labor Movement,” vol. 36]

Or it might. So long as work occupies such a large share of time for so many people, the process of joint production can generate a set of unique social ties. These networks can be enlisted by employers for their own political or social ends (HertelFernandez 2018), or deployed to facilitate collective action by workers themselves. The gig economy, which may at first seem to separate workers, may paradoxically provide the scaffolding for such an organization: when workers all interact online, the emergence of online fora to coordinate and make demands can be successful. Traditional unions were born in factories that brought together workers who has previously been dispersed in the “putting-out system” (Marglin 1974). Modern platforms centralize jobs that were once too dispersed and marginal to organize, and thus give unions and workers a single organizational target: Jin, Kominers, and Shroff (2021) offer an overview of what unions could look like in platform sectors. The increasing need for caring labor, be it health care, counseling, education, or mental health, will not soon succumb to automation, and indeed is very likely to continue to be subsidized by the government, creating scope for a rise in readily unionized public employment. Finally, the steady increase in income inequality, and general support for pre-tax measures to curb it (Kuziemko, Marx, and Naidu 2022), will keep labor organizations in the minds of policymakers and advocates.

Rapid increases in union density are like wildfires (or pandemic waves), and I have little confidence in predictions about whether worker organizations will grow, or even persist, in the twenty-first century. If they do, I suspect they will be very different from the labor organizations of the twentieth century. These new organizations, possibly incubated inside or alongside existing labor unions, will depend on government in new and multiple ways, deploy collective action at multiple scales for both economic and political goals, and use and bargain over technology in ways that are hard for any middle-aged academic to anticipate. In the current lopsided legal environment, labor market tightness has been an important input into emboldening workers to organize: a sharp recession could quickly restore employer temerity to discharge workers and dampen whatever sparks in labor organizing we have now. But rising unemployment could also trigger even more militant labor activism.

One role for researchers in a moment of renewed labor activism is to build partnerships with unions new and old to study the problems of mobilization and organizing that I have highlighted in this paper, both as a laboratory for testing theories of collective action and workplace social networks and in pursuit of a subject of intrinsic policy interest. Economists have built partnerships with private companies, governments, charities, and nongovernment organizations to obtain access to administrative data and study scientific problems with randomized control trials on topics of mutual interest. Adding labor unions to this list gives us, as social scientists, a front row seat to assess which strategies of an energized labor movement might catch fire.

### 1NC

Capitalism K:

#### Voting aff locates causality in ideology instead of material structure, which mystifies the workings of capital.

Gonçalves ’25 [Bruna; 2025; Researcher, Department of Law, European University Institute; The Sage Handbook of Decolonial Theory, “Decolonial Social Theory: Co-optation and the Problem with the Epistemic Turn,” Ch. 10]

Before starting any actual analysis, I should clarify what do I consider critical, if not the intuitive meaning of the word. Of course, criticality is a fluid idea, like any other term. But among these definitions is what I consider to be critical in a stricter sense: the project of understanding the fundamental social mechanics grounding violence with the intent of transforming it. This definition originates in Marx and is expanded in Max Horkheimer’s early works. There are two quotes, one from each author, which express the core of the idea: Marx’s saying ‘to be radical is to grasp the matter at its root’,21 and Horkheimer’s claim the purpose of critical theory ‘is not simply to eliminate one or other abuse, for it regards such abuses as necessarily connected with the way in which the social structure is organized’.22 Root and social structure, here, should be read in light of historical materialism.

In Grundrisse and in the first volume of Das Kapital, Marx explains this method as a response to the dominant method of his time, empiricism. Empiricists looked at the big picture and explained it through pre-conceived abstracts, which they took as universal and natural, without the need for further explanation (e.g. state, population, commodity, etc.). Marx considers that insufficient to understand the social apparatus in which we live. He argued the premises of the system (e.g. individualism) could not be assumed to be human nature, as 18th-century philosophers had done, and its origins had to be investigated as a social product.23 His alternative was inverting the order of investigation and deepening it. For example, the definition of state reveals a number of other abstract concepts, such as population, territory, border, class, and so on. If we limit our comprehension to this level, we are unable to understand from a social perspective what it means from an organizational perspective; why society is organized this way. To define what state is, I need to know what population is. To know what population is, I need to know what class is, what territory is, and so on. None of these concepts can be presumed.24

Historically, we know there are infinite ways to organize society – assuming this is the only possible or, to the very least, the best possible is not only foolish and arrogant but wrong. The dialectical materialist would attempt to find the last level of the dependency chain connecting the abstract concepts we use to describe social organization. At the end of this chain, denying ideas are founded upon themselves as spontaneous mind creations and that social organization arises from spontaneous ideas without a change in the material basis of social experience, they find a concrete reality. That is, a social practice established through gradual transformation, action.25 This investigation reveals to the dialectician the basic logic upon which the complex of institutions and structures operates. Marx derives his analysis from the mode of production because he considers only two things can be presumed about the logic of human interaction: that we depend on means of subsistence (e.g. food), and on each other. The mode of production concerns the way we organize our interdependence through the means of subsistence.26

By revealing the conceptual and material origin of the organizational system, the method enables imagining and strategizing what it takes to transform it; which level of the chain requires intervention. To inherit the system from past generations here refers not to the ideological context of the individual or the institutions, but the very form which institutions and behaviors assume. History is, then, not the temporal and chronological origin of things but the establishment of the chain. Olúfèmi Táíwò, in a brilliant attempt to describe that, uses the metaphor of the continuous appliance of Roman aqueducts in water management. Organizational structure, he says, ‘spans the globe, channeling, instead of water, advantages and disadvantages from one place to another. The system describes which way future waters will naturally run, and where they will not run without intervention’.27 The waters, in that case, encompass all the aspects of social life, where difference is expressed and reinforced: ‘money, media, violence, advantage, disadvantage’.28 They are the visible and experienced facets of the system. But the aqueducts are its cause. Dialectical materialism aims to understand the mechanics of the aqueducts based on the motivations for their creation more than the narrative story of how they were built or the conditions of the water. This is what its followers will refer to as social structure: the logic upon which the system is built. Theory aims to find the mechanics of the complex totality through an investigation of the material origins of the system’s premises. That explains why Marx, as a philosopher, did not focus on inequality per se, but through breaking down the basic premises of capitalism, he unveiled the inherent exploitative character of the commodity form.

Now, looking back on the example I gave of Crenshaw, what she investigates is not the social structure in the sense delineated by Marx. She identifies a network of events within the lived experience that results in identified violent experiences. The intent here is to find remedies for the victims of such violence, considering they are not seen by the law, which only considers violence in isolation from context. To put it differently, she aims to eliminate the experience of abuse, though with only a broad understanding of how the social structure underlying them works. For example, domestic violence can be connected to financial dependency, which can be connected to poverty, which is higher in racialized communities due to institutionalized racism and misogyny. In order to fight domestic violence, society needs to address the root cause of discrimination. Structure is, for her, that ‘root cause’: social hierarchies embedding institutions and interactions. She then exposes the consequence of the system (the experience, the outcome), but its mechanics remain hazy, broadly defined as ideology.

When addressing intersectionality, Crenshaw does not explore what in the legal form, for example, hampers addressing complex axes of discrimination. She only hints at a problem with the law’s ‘remedial scope and normative vision’.29 Her real concern is with the law’s (and feminist theory’s) content, ideology – how the white feminist and liberal ideologies permeate the law, and how the law reinforces those ideologies with its definition of discrimination.30 In other words, the dialectical relationship between the legal superstructure and a dominant worldview. The methodological choice is oddly similar to that of empiricists, though, instead of looking for facts through a pre-conceived procedure, it relies on personal narration. Despite this difference, they equally rely on the idea that ‘research is (it is argued) the laborious ascent from the description of social phenomena to detailed comparisons and only then to the formation of general concepts.’31 That translates as assuming ‘the genesis of particular objective facts, the practical application of the conceptual systems by which it grasps the facts, and the role of such systems in action, are all taken to be external to the theoretical thinking itself’.32

I want to be very clear that I am not saying the sharing of social experience is entirely negative – I find it extremely valuable as a resource for building solidarity and bringing light to realities often hidden from the mainstream academia and media, dismissed as unscientific or solipsistic. However, when it lies in the center of theory, rather than an anecdote or a context for the analysis, it ends up exposing only the surface level of the issue. That, in turn, results in a loose strategy for tackling the identified problem. If we only look at the experienced result and the surface-level causality between different facets of violence (domestic violence and financial dependence, for example), it is possible to presume a malfunction in the existing institutions without even questioning the possibility of it being fundamentally flawed. It is ironic that Crenshaw criticizes the courts’ approach for focusing on the outcome of violence,33 but she also only focuses on the outcome – the structural outcome – when looking exclusively at experience instead of the social mechanics.

This type of investigation follows another definition critique, associated with the Foucauldian genealogy and Derridean deconstructionism, and with the influence of literary theory, and broadly identified as the aftermath of the ‘linguistic’ and ‘hermeneutic’ turns in philosophy and sociology, respectively. Characterized by its post-positivism, it instructs the investigation of how individuals experience the effects of the social structure, and shape these experiences - ideology, linguistics, history, etc. Post-positivism (or post-empiricism) is a theoretical orientation combining interpretivism, and anti-foundationalism.34

Interpretivism concerns the interest in the normative character of language and experiences; discourse. Social experiences are studied in light of the politics of the knowledge contained in them, their history and situatedness in social ecologies. This is not entirely foreign to Marxism since a fundamental aspect of dialectical materialism was its opposition to the objectivism implied by empiricists - that is, the existence of a permanent matrix and root of power that repeats in every society or a general logic. The concepts shaping social reality are, for Marx, historically grounded. The fact that structures are built around this history, however, create objective bodies that reproduce the original logic as if it was natural, which is the starting point of his theory. Ideology follows this pattern, and therefore is described as a superstructure, and not a structure – it is conditioned by the foundation of the system. Western Marxists, starting with György Lukács, add an extra Hegelian touch to the theory and theorize the visible reality as a mediation of the underlying logic, taking the outcome experiences of people in the superstructure as their object of study. That also grounds the quest taken upon by part of the Marxist feminist and Black scholarship in rearranging Marxism to address the influence of culture and ideology.35 But that is not the path adopted in the later take on interpretivism.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore explains interpretivism as ‘[understanding] the means through which ordinary people do or might organize, promote ideas, or bargain in the political arena. Such understanding might be achieved through figuring out how people make sense in and of their life.’36 That is, the researchers look in the outcome of social mechanics, the social experience, to interpret social dynamics. With the linguistic turn, this comes to mean something different than for Marxists. The linguists do not reject a priori analytical categories, like Marx, because they promote idealism (the notion that social reality is constituted by consciousness), and in doing so limit theory (failing to understand the premises of social organization and accepting a false ‘naturality’ of the regime). They do so because of their social implications as ideas, the experienced effects of the ideological limitations they produce in presuming universalism and objectivity; their role as discourse. The concept of discourse here conveys the understanding language and social semiotics are constitutive of social experience.37 In other words, language and ideology play a role in social organization – they are determining elements of the structure. Though this may be entangled with the material aspects, discourse theorists tend to dislocate the materialist character of the social foundation and embrace idealism (which is why discourse is often distinguished from ideology in the literature)38 – the notion that ideas constitute reality, to the detriment of factual experience.

The disseminated and unstructured character of language leads them to a second consequence: the denial of a foundation to look for in social analysis. In that case, we have anti-foundationalism. Anti-foundationalism rejects the existence of a root of social mechanics, as sought by Marx and in Horkheimer’s original definition of critical theory, and resigns to the idea of a broad logic, referring to a social pattern rather than a proper structure. Here is where it makes sense to talk about the structure as widespread inequality and an experimental causal chain, rather than as a conceptual chain (as seen in Crenshaw). As a result, theory loses its capacity to strategize social transformation. After all, how do you change a loosely defined pattern? When you abdicate the search for its functional logic, its practical origin? The analytical focus of social theory disappears to hermeneutics. Historical and cultural continuums then take a central role as the explaining features of an observed pattern of domination, replacing the conceptual-structural continuum. They also becomes central to theorization and emancipatory strategy, working as a diffuse reasoning of behaviors and experiences, from which it is possible to ‘interrogate, evaluate and even overturn and disrupt their meanings’.39 We think here of the perception of multiple ways to look into one same practice as a way to challenge, and (thinking of social change) delegitimize the authority of the dominant discourse interpreting it in social organization.

In the history of ideas, this framework is loosely connected to the former. One of its many inspirations is the other side of the Frankfurt School’s relationship with Marx: its critique and relativization of his lessons. Its critique included, for example, the denial of the proletariat’s role as the agent of change, the rejection of the political developments in the Soviet Union, and a certain disbelief on the possibility of revolution.40 Theory-wise, this led to an expansion of the search for the determining factors of the structure to the ‘material conditions, human needs, and social struggles against oppression’,41 and an overall focus, especially from the 1930s onwards, on the role of ideology. This gradually took over the different projects within the Frankfurt School and led to its overall distancing from Marxism. Initially, as a Marxist school inspired by Lukács, critical theory saw the study of superstructures as a study of the mediations of the totality.42 They were means to look at the underlying root but were not the interest of the theory itself. The later contributions of Frankfurt nevertheless overwhelmingly embraced anti-foundationalism and, with it, meta-theoretical investigation, epistemology, and psychology predominated.

Regretting this turn, authors such as Nancy Fraser and Patricia Hill Collins have become engaged in reconstructing critical theory’s goals, emphasizing its original focus under the title of critical social theory (the former, reigniting the project’s Marxist undertone). The authors rescue the concern with the mechanics moving social process as a whole and remember such investigation is strictly aimed at social intervention – the analytical focus and its critical purpose. In other words, critique is reasoned as ‘a guide to strategic action for bringing about an alternative order’.43 Intervention depends on the identification and elaboration on the mechanics of the system, not just the experience of inequality. This is the role of theory.

The proposal marks a return to foundationalism, for it rejects that only disseminating ideas can bring forth social change. Praxis is rescued as a dialectical relationship between thought and action where action represents social organizing informed by a theoretical framework, instead of being seen as a spontaneous result emerging from a gradual process of ideological shift in a society. If it were to be seen in this other way, action and knowledge would appear as one sole thing, with knowledge doubling as the source of change, but the authors explicitly reject that. Horkheimer already said that‘[i]f a theoretical procedure does not take the form of determining objective facts [understanding the mechanics of concrete reality] with the help of the simplest and most differentiated conceptual system available, what can it be but an aimless intellectual game, half conceptual poetry half impotent expression of states of mind?’44 Fraser proposes a similar inquiry. ‘A critical social theory,’ she preaches, ‘frames its research program and its conceptual framework with an eye to the aims and activities of those oppositional social movements with which it has a partisan though not uncritical identification’.45 She understands from that criteria that the empirical adequacy of critical theory can be assessed with the questions ‘how well does it theorize the situation and prospects [of the movement] (…)? To what extent does it serve the self-clarification of the struggles and [their] wishes (…)?’46 Such a framework can be compared with Gilmore’s Marxist reading of theory as a means ‘to learn how to interpret the world in order to change it.’47 It should serve as ‘a guide to action’; it explains how things work.’48

#### The 1AC elasticizes maladjustment, obscuring material processes of value production that turn the maladjusted into sites of extraction.

Hettinga ’25 [; 2025; Assistant professor of gender studies and critical theory at Utrecht University; Transgender Studies Quarterly, “Extractive Abandonment: Trans-Crip Materialism in Transgender Health Care,” vol. 12]

Further, Cameron Awkward-Rich's Terrible We (2022: 7) leans on Garland-Thomson's misfits as an inspiration for his deployment of “maladjustment” as a trans mode of being. Noting how both antitrans and trans-affirmative discourses pivot on the “sanity” and “health” of the transgender subject to mobilize their strategies, Awkward-Rich expresses concern at the disavowal of madness and disability within transgender studies. Trans studies’ insistence on the sanity and self-authorizing position of transgender subjects prevents us from reckoning with trans archives rich with madness and maladjustment. For Awkward-Rich, affective divergences such as depression, social withdrawal, or suicidal ideation are particularly endemic to trans experiences. To characterize trans experience as particularly structured by antisocial affective positions, a misfit between the individual and the social, resonates with how transness is already delineated as a problem of social/body incongruence. As Awkward-Rich writes, “While all minoritized lives are marked by similar conflicts within the social, both cause and effect of their marginality, trans does seem to have special trouble insofar as it is, in this time and place, defined by a discrepancy between gender attribution and gender identity” (124). In this case, the “misfit” of bodies and their environment helps us approach trans maladjustment as a relation between things, one that can become characteristic of, but not a condition inherently located in, the individual.

Indeed, the dynamic ways in which alignment and misalignment shape subjectivities and bodies is at the heart of Garland-Thomson's conceptualization of misfitting. Introduced as a feminist materialist concept that circumvents problems of elisions of bodily materiality in social constructionist approaches within disability studies, “misfit” describes an encounter of the body and the world that is characterized by dissonance rather than harmony (Garland-Thomson 2011: 592). She writes, “Misfits are inherently unstable rather than fixed, yet they are very real because they are material rather than linguistic constructions. The discrepancy between body and world, between that which is expected and that which is, produces fits and misfits” (593). Bodies that do not fit particular environments become misfits. In other words, it is through the encounter and the experience of misalignment that the misfit is produced, meaning that the “problem with a misfit, then, inheres not in either of the two things but rather in their juxtaposition, the awkward attempt to fit them together” (593).

Misfitting thus usefully points to how questions of alignment and incongruence are always about a dynamic relationship between elements that are in part constituted through their encounter. For trans misfits, this means an interesting relocation of the issue of alignment, in which “misfitting” reframes how incongruence shapes transgender embodiment. Misalignment, then, is not an internal incongruence between an assigned sexed body and a felt experience of gender, but rather an incongruence between one's embodied experience of gender and a world that fails to recognize and accommodate gender transition or diverse gender expressions. The failure of accommodation produces the misfit. However, an issue that arises here is that the converse might not be as convincing. Put differently, if we are not interested in romanticizing misfitting as an identity, what can accommodation, alignment, or “fitting” look like, if not ending up as a liberal model of inclusion? Here we see how the problem of alignment between body and world is a problem of transition: does the body change for society, or does society change for the body? In many ways, that would be a misplaced question that disregards the impossibility of distinguishing between the two.

This problem is highlighted in Kadji Amin's (2022) insightful discussion of gender dysphoria, a radically insufficient yet dominant model for offering an account of transgender subjectivity. Since the medicalization of transsexuality in the global North in the twentieth century, the central characterization of gender dysphoria has been distress. This distress, expressed in suffering and incapacitation, offers both the evidence of transness and the grounds for medical approval for procedures. As Amin points out, it becomes a difficult task to account for this distress. Does the distress arise from an internal misalignment between sexed body and gendered sense of self? Or does the distress arise from moving through a world whose order of gender, full of visual codes and social expectations, misrecognizes and fails to accommodate that sense of self? Or do trans people experience distress because that is the dominant model of transness available to us, thus shaping our self-articulation? The list goes on: “Any number of stressors—including racism, transphobia, hyper visibility, social isolation, lack of access to health care, imprisonment, the fallout of self-protective coping mechanisms, and even the way that passing renders transness shameful and secretive—can lead trans people to experience distress” (37). In other words, we can state that transness and distress are inseparable, yet it would be impossible to make a distinction between a distress that emanates from one's embodiment and a distress that emerges from one's misfitting in the world.

Here we can start to see how a model of (mis)alignment between body and world requires more nuance in terms of the material conditions that produce fits and misfits. If trans misfitting is an expression of the incongruence between body and world, we need to ask: which body, and which world? I briefly return to Garland-Thomson to highlight the limits of generalizing these terms. A misfit, as Garland-Thomson (2011: 592, 594) writes, “describes an incongruent relationship between two things: a square peg in a round hole” and occurs “when the environment does not sustain the shape and function of the body that enters it.” If these definitions appear to be highlighting dynamics of material collision and friction, that would be her intention, since the question of materiality is central to misfitting. However, she locates materiality in the domain of “feminist materialisms,” which, as becomes clear in her Baradian discussion on material-discursive becoming, refers to new materialist inquiries, not materialist feminist ones (592). Here materiality refers to “form, function, comportment, and sensory modes of human bodies” and “human, built, and natural environments,” both materializing in their ongoing encounters (601). While these definitions might qualify both body and world as material, this still falls short of examining the material conditions that produce and reproduce both body and world.

The endless elasticity of the misfitting model risks universalizing both the body and the world, which raises several issues. First, a focus on the process of misfitting can obscure the foreclosures already operating in delineating what the body is. While misfitting emphasizes the constitutive force of the misfit encounter and, thus, that both the body and the world do not completely preexist their encounter, it still reifies a body with an ontological existence that enters this encounter. Yet the question of the beingness of a body is precisely what is at stake, an issue that becomes more apparent in a consideration of the racialised underpinnings of gender's coherency (Hayward 2017). Hortense Spillers's (1987: 67) work demonstrates how the possibility of gendered embodiment is foreclosed through the “theft of the body” in the transatlantic slave trade. Building on Spillers, Calvin Warren (2017: 269) underscores the consequences of this impossibility of bodily ontology: “The (non)place of black gender is the foreclosure of a call to being—since no ‘into’ exists for blackness from which being can be called.” The “being” of the body is not a given, and as Rizvana Bradley (2023: 59) argues, the “black body” functions as the medium through which the world materializes but can only appear in as a dissimulation, a “phantasmatic presence of an absence.” In other words, the world materializes through extractive foreclosures that shape what and who can appear as a body in the first place.

Second, and relatedly, we need to attend to how such foreclosures enable other modes of fitting, or tolerable forms of misfitting. The relationship between body and world that is privileged in the misfit model can thus obscure the fact that the fitting of some trans/crip bodies requires the misfitting of other bodies. For example, Jules Gill-Peterson (2024) demonstrates how the simultaneous reliance on, and disavowal of, trans femininity is a prime scene of extraction for both modes of statecraft and liberal identity politics. Similarly, Eva S. Hayward (2017: 193) writes, “It is no surprise that Time magazine's ‘tipping point’ cover features Laverne Cox; conscripted labor of black trans women is the inevitable violence that institutional trans/sexual/gender projects (broadly imagined here) need in order to become, in order to potentialize the politics of identity. These projects then, are an effect of progressive humanism, with white uplift as their aim” (emphasis added). This extractive capacitation of transgender resonates with how projects of disability inclusion create an appearance of body/world alignments that hinge on obfuscating how economic conditions structurally debilitate bodies (Erevelles 2011; Puar 2017).

Taking into account how racial violence and scenes of extraction are the foundation that enable a “transgender identity” or a “disability identity” to emerge requires us to resituate the debate on trans-crip alignment within a biopolitical perspective, in which both fitting and misfitting, alignment and incongruence, can function as sites of extraction. Rather than aiming to make more bodies fit into this world (and its structures of exploitation, ableism, trans abjection, and racism) or affirming the negative potential of misfitting, a biopolitical perspective enables us to grasp the shifting and at times contradictory ways in which extraction takes place both in the abjection and the inclusion, in the foreclosure and consolidation, of trans and disabled bodies and subjectivities. To elucidate this argument with more specificity, I turn to the domain of health care as a case study.

#### That displaces class struggle with ideological abstraction, allowing capitalist cooption and atomizes individuals.

Kipcak ’20 [Yola; December 2; Leading activist of Der Funke, the Austrian section of the IMT; Socialist Revolution, “Marxism vs Queer Theory,” https://socialistrevolution.org/marxism-vs-queer-theory/]

This absolute pessimism toward social movements, the belief that any resistance is automatically doomed, shows how little these philosophers understood of the revolutionary movements of the 1960s and 1970s and the reasons for their failure. They reflect the hopelessness of the feminist deadlock, of the petty bourgeoisie that doesn’t trust the working class (if they even believe it exists). Instead of understanding and criticizing the role of the mass organizations’ leadership, they look for new ways of “resistance” without a clear idea against who or what this resistance should be directed, and what methods should be used. The possibility of an overthrow of the ruling system appears unfeasible and impossible.

As a consequence, Queer Theory suggests a practice that makes even the mildest reformism look radical. It retreats completely into the field of culture and language. There should be new “terms” for identity, a “new grammar” developed or a “new ethic” drawn up (Gayle Rubins). For instance, in order to “expose” the illusion of sexes, Butler suggests parodying gender identities through “cultural practices of drag, crossdressing and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities” (GT, 137). This is the only practical suggestion in the whole book Gender Trouble! And Nancy Fraser, relieved, explains:

The good news is that we do not need to overthrow capitalism in order to remedy [the economic disadvantage of gays]—although we may well need to overthrow it for other reasons. The bad news is that we need to transform the existing status order and restructure the relations of recognition. (285)

Read: we need to improve the image of homosexuality. Here, Fraser, who is comparatively more practically inclined, openly displays her reformism: luckily she doesn’t have to overthrow capitalism! She only has to change how society views homosexuality! It is no wonder that Queer Theory has been willingly taken up by some reformists within the workers’ organizations in order to evade the responsibility of leading an actual struggle against discrimination with strikes, mass protests, in short, methods of class struggle, and instead focus on demands for language reforms, quotas, cultural free spaces and rainbow-colored crosswalks.

By omitting the class question, Queer Theory is not only a useful tool in the hands of bureaucrats within the workers’ organizations, it also serves as an ideological justification for a section of the bourgeoisie and capitalist forces to present themselves as LGBT friendly and paint a liberal and progressive image of themselves. Corporations such as Apple or Coca Cola, who exploit tens of thousands of people in terrible working conditions, support LGBT campaigns in their companies or finance party trucks handing out free alcohol at commercialized Pride parades. In order to finance the production of seemingly radical, but actually (for the ruling class) completely harmless ideas, thousands of Euros are spent on gender studies professorships, departments and queer study scholarships, while the left-liberal media and publishers print benevolent articles and novels.

Many queer activists are aware of these tendencies and are clearly against the coopting of their resistance by the ruling system. However, Queer Theory does not offer the ideas necessary to fight this usurpation by the ruling class; on the contrary it is part of the ruling ideology that individualizes and camouflages exploitation and oppression, while dividing the united struggle against the system, precisely because united struggle is alien to Queer Theory.

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Despite its origin as a criticism of traditional identity politics of the 1970s and 1980s, with its circle mentality and internal fights, it has failed to overcome precisely this type of identity politics. Since we can’t escape the omnipresence of power in society, it is also impossible to escape identities even though they are seen as fictitious. Since identifications “are, within the power field of sexuality, inevitable” (GT, 40), and we can at best hope to “parody” these identities, Queer Theory, which started out as a critique of identity politics, ends up exactly where it started: with identity politics. In practice, the old squabbles of who may represent whom continue unabashedly, just like in the radical feminist circles (and against them). Butler states aptly: “Obviously, the political task is not to refuse representational politics—as if we could.” (GT, 8). Any form of collective action and united struggle of all the oppressed becomes a fight, since “unity” and “representation” automatically lead to exclusion and violent oppression: “unity is only purchased through violent excision” (Butler, Merely Cultural, 44). This leads to an individualization of those who oppose the oppressive system under which we live. For instance, queer-feminist Franziska Haug complains that “the identity of the individual—origin, culture, gender etc.—becomes the crux of the matter” in queer-feminist debates, and “the right to speak and fight is being decided depending on the identity of the speaker” (Haug, 236). There is a competition about who is the most oppressed and thus has the right to speak, and who can’t be opposed. Against unwelcome arguments we often hear accusations along the lines of “you, being a white man/cis woman/white trans person don’t have the right to disagree with me, or revoke my subjective point of view.” While trying to exclude no one through “violent generalizations,” a countless number of identities are created that are supposed to cover all thinkable combinations of sexual, romantic, gender and other preferences and that are being administered in a range of queer cliques. Instead of a united struggle of all who want to fight against the system, this logic often leads to mobbing and exclusion within different groups. One queer feminist gives a vivid account of this in her paper, “Feminist Solidarity after Queer Theory” which almost reads like a desperate and intimate diary entry: Despite my qualms about the term bisexual, this descriptor provides a kind of home for me, when everywhere else feels worse. Both heterosexual and lesbian spaces have their own comforts for women, and I have often been excluded from both. I have also been told that I needed to change to ﬁt into those spaces—by acceding either to my true hetero-or homosexuality—and I have felt the moments of truth as well as the sometime hypocrisy and complacency of those demands … It is both necessary and troubling to seek out a home as a gendered or sexual being: necessary because community, recognition, and stability are essential to human flourishing and political resistance, and troubling because those very practices too often congeal into political ideologies and group formations that are exclusive or hegemonic. (Cressida J. Heyes, 1,097) From these lines we can sense the misery created by the pressures and the oppression of capitalism and what they do to our psyche and self-esteem. But it also shows the deadlock of identity politics. Even though the text sets itself the task of finding a form of solidarity between all feminists, it can’t imagine a unity that isn’t based on identity. In practice, identity politics leads to a split in the movement. For instance, in Vienna there have been two separate marches on women’s day on 8 March for years: one by the radical feminists (which can only be attended by women and, in one block, by LGBT persons), and one by the queer activists (where at first no cis men, but since 2019, all who see themselves as feminists can attend). A united demonstration was repeatedly declined by both sides. Against the background of the upswing of mass movements surrounding demands for women’s rights around the globe, and the dormant potential in Austria under a right-wing government, this example reveals the divisive role of identity politics.

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It is only natural that many people, in particular young people, question established norms in society such as sexuality and gender roles. This has always been the case and as Marxists we defend the rights of all people to express themselves and identify however they want to. But the problem arises here when the personal experience of individuals is theorized, raised to the level of a philosophical principle and generalized for the whole of society and nature. The Queer theorists tell us that being queer or non-binary is progressive and even revolutionary, as opposed to being binary (i.e. man or woman, which the vast majority of humanity is), which is deemed reactionary. Here, however, it is Queer Theory that shows its reactionary side. For all its radical talk against oppression, it opposes a united class struggle and promotes atomization of individuals on the basis of sexual and personal preferences, dividing the working class into ever smaller entities. Meanwhile, the whole rotten exploitative and oppressive edifice of capitalism remains in place.

#### The alternative is a Marxist party---a politics of organizing centered on class consciousness that disrupts the core of capital realism. Only structured organizing and concrete demands can successfully eliminate the logics of capital that further racial and gender divides.

Kanna ’23 [Ahmed; 2023; Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of the Pacific; Focaal: Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology, “Enlisted in Struggle: Being Marxist in a Time of Protracted Crisis,” vol. 95]

The Marxist party, by contrast, aspires to meet workers “where they are” in their contradictory, complicated lives. It seeks to bring workers into a higher, unified class consciousness and militancy. Dean stresses accountability and collectivity, in particular that which is carried by the term “comrade” in its illocutionary function, which in practice becomes “an ego ideal: the point from which party members assess themselves as doing important, meaningful work. Being accountable to another entails seeing your actions through their eyes. Are you letting them down or are you doing work that they respect and admire?” (2019: 4).

As became clear from conversations with interlocutors, seeing with one’s actions through a comrade’s eyes does not only result from accountability but also from seeing oneself as situated in a long tradition of working-class struggle, of which the party is a kind of archive. Being a comrade means, further, that you have like-minded militants at your back. Committing to a revolutionary Marxist project, as Dean explains, is an acknowledgment that communism is “the long fight” that can only be fought together beyond “one-off actions” with “comrades you can count on” (2019: 4).

The dominant anthropological literature on political movements (Della Porta 2006; Flood 2021; Graeber 2009; Juris and Pleyers 2009; Maeckelbergh 2009; Razsa 2015) has focused on, and often celebrated, so-called “decentralized and horizontalist” (non-hierarchical) anti-capitalist organizing, which emerged especially after the fall of the Soviet Union. My interlocutors, by contrast, would agree with Dean’s recuperation of the socialist party to meet conundrums posed by objective class-struggle conditions in the United States. They see this form as a more powerful instrument for uniting diverse struggles, as an arena where workers come together to democratically discuss movement tactics and strategy. It was with this perspective that Socialist Alternative activists attempted to intervene in the political mass events that I discuss below.

Applying Dean’s insights, we can see that the militant ethnographer does not merely practice reflexivity, which can often take the neoliberal forms just mentioned. Rather, they ask how ethnography is informed by the “collective critical practice” of radical anti-capitalist spaces. In my own case, I began to experience an irreconcilable contradiction between the extractive, neoliberal model of ethnography, the baggage I carried from previous socialization, and the communist model theorized by Dean. More specifically, terms such as “comrade,” along with concepts like “democratic movement spaces” and “uniting struggles,” taught to me by more experienced activists, became central to theorizing the meaning to activists of the party form.

Enlisted in struggle

Individuals are motivated to join groups like the DSA and Socialist Alternative for a variety of reasons, but a main thread running through comrades’ narratives highlights a combination of political and social trends and a group’s visible involvement in activism or political education. As one comrade put it, workers and young people gravitate to socialist groups because they propose practical solutions to the material crises we face, but also, as another comrade put it, because they offer meaning. For the latter, Socialist Alternative illuminated a “path for (working class) struggle” in a society that otherwise pushes down working-class people.

Struggle connotes, in part, a negation of what Mark Fisher (2009) has called “capitalist realism,” the daily submission to the idea that there is no alternative to capitalism, but it also has a positive valence and answers the question of how heightened class consciousness can be achieved. This is reflected in the comment made by a Minneapolis-based Socialist Alternative comrade on a public Facebook post: “Almost from the minute I got [to Minneapolis], I felt enlisted in local struggle even as I was being embraced as a newcomer to its political and cultural particularities.” They added:

In reciprocity to the leviathan (sic) efforts of some of the most tireless and dedicated organizers I’ve ever had the honor of knowing, ordinary people, the rank-and-file of the city’s working class, simply give more of themselves—whether it be an hour here or there volunteering, showing up to a community meeting or a rally, donating another dollar to a radical membership-based organization, or opening themselves towards taking on a more revolutionary role, this place is special because ordinary people dare to imagine and support political alternatives through heightened levels of self-sacrifice.

Others often articulated similar themes in relation to joining an openly socialist organization. They expressed a frustration with the alternatives for left -wing activism in mainstream society, such as reforming the Democratic Party or “realignment.” They were also suspicious of the nonprofit sector, which many saw as aligned with the Democrats. Occupy’s lack of structure or demands was also problematic. To this they juxtaposed Vladimir Lenin’s idea of the (communist) “party of a new type” or the earlier iteration of the party originating in the reformist Second International (Blanc 2019; Elbaum 2018: 148—151).4 Finally, they found Marxist party-type organizations—at least some of them—to be more democratic and inclusive than other far-left formations, which they critiqued as elitist subcultures.

Alex, an International Women’s Strike organizer and member of another Marxist organization who I got to know well in common work, further concretized the meaning of “struggle” and situated it, indissociably, alongside membership in a communist-type organization.5 To really be a Marxist, she said, you have to take active part in contemporary struggles, but you do not start by pretending that your organization is a mass organization. You start with struggles you are involved in and your party comrades provide you support in the form of Marxist ideas and their class-struggle experiences. Throughout that, you can collectively plan to win those around you to Marxism, and eventually you can scale up toward the goal of becoming a communist party with mass influence. Hailing from a Latin American country with a rich tradition of working-class militancy and Marxism, she spoke from personal experience.

Alex situated Marxists’ emphasis on learning from the history of past struggles within the socialist party form of organization. The two are inseparable in her analysis. The notion that the party is an educator, or “memory,” of the working class—a repository of the historical memory and lessons from past struggles—was centered by many other interlocutors. In an interview in 2017, Grant, a Black Lives Matter and Socialist Alternative organizer based in New York, centered the idea of class memory: “I strongly believe in the idea of historical memory. Capitalism works in sound-bites, with the idea that things are constantly changing.” This antihistorical logic, he argues, helps capitalism reproduce itself. To concretize this and to contrast it to a Marxist conception of historical memory, he deployed an idea drawn from Ghana:

I believe in the concept of the Sankofa bird, the bird that’s always looking back on the past. As working people engage in struggle, of course they have to engage with concrete contemporary questions, lack of food, poor housing, police terror. But they also have to have a historical memory, that these (problems) are not new, that that’s how power under capitalism works. Any people engaged in struggle have to know where their struggle flows from, where their tactics and strategy come from.

For Marxists, these are not just idle musings on the importance of “learning from history.” They are reflections on the fundamental importance of understanding that the interests of capitalists and workers are always in conflict and of the correct approach to organization in the workers’ struggle.

Objective conditions

The popularity, on the left, of Sanders and Seattle City Councilor Kshama Sawant, a Socialist Alternative member (Silverstein 2021), and, on the right, of Trump, are subjective (political) responses to objective material conditions. A generation ago, economists began to deploy the term “secular stagnation” to describe a US economy with chronic low growth resulting from exploding debt and wealth inequality (Magdoff and Sweezy 1987). As Harry Magdoff and Paul Sweezy (1987) explain, low growth, large excess capacity, and endemic unemployment are structural to monopoly capitalism. The financialization of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries merely exacerbated the system’s contradictions, triggering waves of speculative bubbles and deepening stagnation. In this context, capitalists have resorted to intensified rounds of accumulation by dispossession to regenerate profits (Brenner 2020). This, in turn, has produced or intensified a host of effects such as global warming, state carcerality and militarized border regimes, deepening racial and gender oppressions, and gentrification and other forms of primitive accumulation (Endnotes 2020; Federici 2018; Jay 2017; Jones 2016).

These objective conditions pose a conundrum for the socialist movement. Deteriorating material conditions both make workers, especially those suffering racial, gender, and other forms of oppression, less able to spare time and energy on political organizing and, contrarily, more potentially radicalized. The specific history of the United States is an even more imposing objective impediment. The US bourgeois regime’s origins as a slaveocracy and white supremacist terror state still cast a long shadow. This is a history in which racism has been a potent tool for destroying independent working-class movements. Especially after World War II, anti-communism became the expression of this synthesis of white supremacy and hostility to labor, an instrument of repression that US imperialism deployed both domestically and internationally to smash justice movements (Bevins 2020; Burden-Stelly 2021). As Grant discussed above, one of the most important roles of the Marxist party is as an educator in class struggle, and one of its basic lessons is that fascism grows out of the crises of capitalism.

Openings for the far right

For my interlocutor and comrade Jake, reading early communist analyses of monopoly capitalism and the rise of fascism at an Oakland branch meeting was eye-opening on the crisis tendencies just described, and helped, in particular, in understanding the far right (Zetkin [1923] 2017). Jake grew up poor in the Deep South and moved around a number of progressive and radical groups in the South and on the West Coast. In high school, his girlfriend’s father, a “middleman” for a small business, had politics that would now be called “Trumpist.” “For me, the right wing is very real. This is something (I feel) that a lot of the left doesn’t get. If things collapse, the right is ready to step into the breach.” He elaborated with a critique of reformism, in which he included not only Democrats but a large swathe of the new social democratic movement. They seem “to just want tweaks here and there.  (They’re) not ready for revolutionary struggle, for taking power. I feel there’s a lot of, maybe unconscious, dependency among the left,” a dependence on both the nonprofits and the Democratic Party, including Bernie Sanders. These leftists are just waiting “for someone to come in and be their savior.”

Rereading Jake’s comments, made in 2017, a year aft er the 6 January 2021 pro-Trump riot, I am struck by his prescience. A lot of those rightwing people, he said, “think the government is thoroughly corrupt.  They’re very anti-corporate, which they think of as ‘big business,’ but they’re still very capitalist, in the sense of being for ‘small businesses.’ A lot of them support both Trump and Sanders.” And this is why, he urges, “the left must differentiate itself from the Democratic Party and liberalism.”6

Reformism versus revolution

Other interlocutors shared Jake’s fears that capitalism’s current crisis is fertile soil for far-right tendencies that have long festered in US society. This analysis often went along with the organizational question. Activists’ logic went like this: if capitalism will inherently fall into crisis and if this creates openings for the far right, what type of organizing do we need to do to prevent that? If the Democratic Party and the nonprofits are ineffective in combating the aforementioned tendencies, might they even inadvertently contribute to them by demobilizing workers? This did not mean that these activists never worked with Democrats or liberals. There are many examples of fronts between the left and liberals. To mention a few, there was the 2017 Women’s March, Sawant’s tactical alliances with progressive Democrats on Seattle City Council, and periodic common work with nonprofits. When Marxists do go into such collaborations, however, they tend to do so under the tactic of the “united front.” That is, they maintain their organizational structures, rejecting calls to dissolve them into larger “mass” formations, and they retain their right to critique such alliances.

A good example is offered by Robert, a Black Lives Matter and tenant organizer and Socialist Alternative member from St. Louis. For him, being in a Marxist organization helped bring both a revolutionary and an international perspective on the struggle against racist police murders and a path out of the dilemmas of Occupy’s collapse. In contrast to the latter, Marxism helped him better understand the necessity of articulating political demands—for example, anti-racist and police abolitionist demands—along with economic demands.

A US Army veteran radicalized by his deployment to Iraq, Robert became active as a communist when he moved to St. Louis in 2013. “When Mike Brown got murdered, I started appreciating more (the Marxist) approach to movements.” He described how both the intensive reading of history and theory within the Socialist Alternative activist space and the support he received to intervene in local struggles helped him better understand the demobilizing role of the Democrats and nonprofits. The insights of more experienced international comrades also helped: “I was having lots of conversations with comrades from South Africa and trying to apply their insights. Some of the conversations [involved] trying to figure out how to connect police brutality to issues of wealth inequality and how to show that to folks, how to show how the fight in Ferguson is relevant to people outside of North St. Louis, the larger community, because at first it was just people from Ferguson that were involved, ordinary folks from the community.”

“I took lots of analysis from Occupy, the original writings from the Black Panther Party, synthesizing them,” he continued. One insight “was the need for demands. How do we actually make more demands to broaden [the] movement? For example, in the Ferguson movement there were a significant number activists arguing for boycotts without concrete demands.”7 By “concrete demands,” he meant that “it takes organization to boycott, which wasn’t there. What I did was to argue for a democratic structure within the movement. If we want a boycott to happen, then there needs to be a way that the community can voice what their demands are.” The key question, he went on, was how “to demand justice for Mike Brown while also making broader demands to help the community overall.” Being an organized Marxist helped him see that that political basis for the boycott was conservative: “The idea that the Black community has billions of dollars of purchasing power, what that does is it obfuscates the point about systemic inequality, and also it doesn’t require the amount of energy that would push the movement forward, where you need people on the street.”

For Robert, one of the positive effects of being active in a Marxist party (Dean 2019) was in the theoretical and organizational support it provided in navigating the diverse struggles highlighted by the police murder of Mike Brown, struggles to address the intersecting poverty, class exploitation, and racism that intensified the vulnerability of the Black working class (Jay 2017). Further, Marxism offered a model of organization that could democratically bring together and thereby empower these currents of struggle. In the remainder of this article, I analyze two examples where Bay Area Socialist Alternative members similarly attempted to apply the communist principle of working-class unity. While the first helped build activists’ confidence and commitment to the group, the second challenged members to rethink their approach, in particular with respect to coalitional work.

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“Fuck dogma!” Bernie Sanders’s run for the Democratic Party presidential nomination in 2016 confronted Marxists with a conundrum. Unlike the DSA, which had always followed their founder Michael Harrington’s injunction that they represent the reformist “left wing of the possible,” Trotskyist groups such as Socialist Alternative, the International Socialist Organization (ISO), and Solidarity rejected political support for Democrats. Th e editors of Black Agenda Report (BAR), self-identified revolutionary (non-Trotskyist) socialists, expressed a common sentiment with their slogan that the Democrats were “the more effective evil.” Yet here was Sanders, openly defining himself as a socialist, attacking the neoliberal wing of the Democrats and figures like Henry Kissinger, and firing the imaginations of a large section of the US youth. By the end of 2016, the DSA’s membership quintupled, from around 5,000 to 25,000 dues-paying members, on Sanders’s coattails. Unlike other revolutionary left organizations, Socialist Alternative decided to support, albeit critically, the Sanders campaign. While this tactic was vigorously debated within the organization, a majority of the membership agreed with the perspective that by popularizing socialism, Sanders’s campaign would heighten the conflicts within the Democratic Party and advance the process of the formation of an independent workers’ party.8 They did not want to stand outside that process as, they felt, other revolutionary groups were mistakenly doing. In mid-July 2016, about a month after Hillary Clinton defeated Sanders in the California Democratic primary, Socialist Alternative Bay Area organized a “Beyond Bernie” public meeting at the Berkeley Public Library, which would, it was hoped, help crystallize the kind of democratic space discussed earlier by Robert. Because Sanders had always made it clear that, should he lose, he would mobilize his supporters for Clinton, many who had gravitated toward his program and who refused to support Clinton wondered what the next steps were. A week before the meeting, and adding solemnity to it, were the police murders of two Black men, Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge and Philando Castile near St. Paul. Numerous Socialist Alternative Beyond Bernie meetings, held nationally, represented the organization’s attempt to intervene in this moment. Over 200 people attended the Berkeley meeting, of whom only 19 were Socialist Alternative members, many more than we expected. Th is caused some logistical difficulties: the meeting, which was standing-room only and consisted of short speeches by audience members, became somewhat chaotic. During her opening speech, a Socialist Alternative Bay Area leader stated: “Obama said that we won’t resolve the history of racism in his lifetime and probably not in his daughters’ lifetime. Well, the Black Lives Matter activists taking to the streets can’t wait until Obama’s daughters grow old.” The attendees reacted with enthusiasm. The comrade’s message, that the struggle against racism is winnable, and militant street uprisings, such as the current one being led by Black organizers, will lead the way, seemed to resonate. Th is framed the meeting by posing the question: what strategy would both advance the struggle against racism and build upon the popular demands of the Sanders campaign? After video greetings from Sawant and Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein, who both discussed future common work between their organizations, numerous people lined up to give statements. Only four speakers, a small minority, were Socialist Alternative members. The first, rushing to the front, was a member of the Spartacist League. A tiny group often seen selling their *Workers Vanguard* paper at events organized by other groups, their main “organizing tactic” seems to consist of haranguing other leftists for being sellouts. As if on cue, she immediately launched into a denunciation of the “opportunists” Sawant and Sanders. While a few other speakers made similar attacks, most focused instead on their particular causes, from teenagers who talked about a campaign to reduce the voting age to 16 to a member of the Alameda Green Party who encouraged attendees to register Green, to a person wanting to sue the Democratic National Committee for voting corruption. When another person, a member of the Peace and Freedom Party, attacked Socialist Alternative for “endorsing” a “Democratic” politician, an audience member yelled out “FUCK DOGMA! FUCK DOGMA!” Some Socialist Alternative members told him to be quiet and to let the speaker continue. Each person who wanted to speak was allowed to and given an equal amount of time, approximately two minutes. There was a rough balance between voices that were sympathetic to Socialist Alternative, neutral, and critical of the group. Politically, the attendees were a microcosm of the US left. The majority had reformist politics and were focused on elections. This includes those who wanted to reform the Democratic Party and the overlapping group whose definition of socialism was coterminous with Sanders’s Scandinavian-inspired social democracy. A minority, by contrast, were dogmatic, sectarian types who seemed to only want to come to political events to tell others why they were “wrong.” It did feel during and aft er the meeting that, compared to the reformist types, our organization presented a sharper, more focused, class-struggle message, and vis-à-vis the sectarians we seemed serious, realistic, and good listeners. Most importantly, we seemed to have effectively both clarified the difference between the reformism on display and Marxism, and disseminated the idea that what is needed to win the reforms for which Sanders was calling was an independent party that could unite diverse struggles. This relative success was not a spontaneous product of our members’ meritorious qualities but a combination of external events and correct organization. Most of our Bay Area branch members, like me, were new to political organizing. Most of us were trying to apply the political education with which we had been collectively engaged at least since that summer’s national party congress, with its workshops and detailed debates on the “Bernie tactic.” This involved consistent attention to a set of interrelated questions: which demands resonate widely with the working class, which of these are unlikely to be conceded by the ruling class, and how do we create spaces where people in struggle can meet to discuss next steps? A few days later, branch leaders sent out a debrief. While it was generally positive, it also cautioned against overestimating our “subjective” (leadership) role. Th e higher-than-expected attendance owed more to the recent California Democratic primary than to members’ organizing eff orts. But it did also highlight positive aspects of our intervention, which included our distinguishing ourselves from “the ultraleft.” Moreover, while our comrades attempted to “generalize and argue for the bringing together of movements that a mass workers’ party could represent,” the vast majority of other attendees “spoke to their own small agendas, such as detailed aspects of electoral reform, promoting their nonprofit work, a protest on this or that, overwhelming (sic) pointing people away from coming together.” At the time of the Beyond Bernie public meeting, we counted among our Bay Area branches a few dozen members, mostly young—with an average age in the mid-20s—and politically inexperienced. Most had been active socialists for barely a year. By contrast, the multiple Seattle branches, with which I volunteered on the 2015 Sawant campaign, was (by Leninist group standards) large, numbering by my own estimate in the triple digits, and counted numerous seasoned activists along with a larger periphery of non-member supporters in the city’s labor and social movements. Th is meeting was, in the local context, a chance to gain organizing and political intervention experience. Th is experience would be severely tested a few months later in a much more challenging context: the election of Donald Trump. Our attempt to initiate and lead a protest against Trump in Oakland would show how challenging it still was to scale up our organizing, to do coalition work, and to agitate for spaces of workers’ unity. A setback The night of the 2016 presidential election, my partner and I hosted a Socialist Alternative election watch party and fundraiser at our home in Oakland. About a dozen comrades came out. As the results began to indicate a Trump victory, a stunned silence came over the gathering. A comrade named Aaron, a leading Seattle activist sent by the national organization to Oakland to help build our branch, stood out for his sangfroid. He and a few others proposed that we organize an anti-Trump rally in Oakland’s Oscar Grant Plaza (OGP), a central location just off City Hall that had been the focal point of Occupy Oakland five years earlier. Within a few short hours of our posting the Facebook event for the rally, about 5,000 people indicated that they would attend. The next day, November 9, was a blur. Our strategy involved having two to three comrades give speeches, respectively, on the responsibility of the Democratic Party for the debacle and the need for working-class independence, followed by leading a march in downtown Oakland along with flyering and recruitment. I volunteered to give a speech on a “party of the 99 percent,” a tactic then favored by national Socialist Alternative and a synthesis between the slogan of Occupy and the Leninist notion of a party of class unity. Shortly before 5:00 pm, about two dozen of us headed over to OGP, which was starting to fill with people. Th e plaza is a complex of spaces including an amphitheater and a large grassy public space off of City Hall, and is the usual gathering point for large political events in the city. The initial trickle of attendees quickly turned into the largest crowd I and everyone to whom I spoke had seen there since Occupy, an overflow gathering. Th e energy and atmosphere were beginning to get palpably intense. We set up a table with newspapers, pamphlets, and buttons at the back of the crowd, near the intersection of Broadway and 14th Street, but it soon got swallowed up by the crowd and generated little interest. Th e mood of the attendees, it would soon become clear, was intensely angry and not many people were interested in political discussions with activists from, for Oaklanders, a still obscure organization. I remember my heart racing in response to this mood (and it still does a little bit today), so uniquely effervescent it was. Aaron had coordinated with more experienced Oakland comrades to reach out to other organizations that off ered to support the event. This is how we came to co-emcee the rally with Cat Brooks, an eminent Oakland Black Lives Matter leader and future mayoral candidate along with some of her comrades from Oakland’s Anti Police Terror Project (APTP). Brooks and the APTP were (and are still) well-known in Oakland’s activist community. Th at they shared the stage with us we saw, initially, as a credit to our organization, though eventually we, and maybe they, came to see the collaboration more ambivalently. Soon aft er 5:00 pm, with the sun going down, Aaron, looking down from a raised stage, asked me whether I would be willing to be the first speaker. “Sure,” I unthinkingly said. Fate would soon intervene to prevent me from going first. Aaron soon asked if it would be okay if another comrade, Chris, went first and whether I would not mind moving his (Aaron’s) car, which in a hurry he had illegally parked. I was one of the only people in the group who knew how to drive a stick shift. After parking the car, I took a spot behind the stage. Chris, a white man in his early 20s and an inexperienced party member, began his speech, and the situation almost immediately unraveled. He received some initial light applause when he called out Trump for being racist and misogynist. However, when he then launched into how eight years of “the fi rst Black president” brought no promised change or hope, the heckling started. I still remember cringing at Chris’s tone-deaf remark and thinking: “Oh shit, we bit off more than we can chew.” Chris became defensive and started talking about how he was then reading a book on the Black Panthers, then moved into a somewhat excruciating anecdote about how his younger brother, who is gay, called him in tears aft er Trump won. It came off as pandering. As more hecklers began piling on, Chris exited the stage, visibly shaken. I went up to him, patted him on the back, and told him not to beat himself up for it. I made a mental note to discuss with him later lessons from this incident. Th e next speaker was a middle-aged African American man, a prominent leader from the APTP. He tore into Chris. He spoke about how he would not allow a white man to lecture him about the history of “my people.” Th is brought huge cheers. His speech was passionate, full of rousing rhetoric, as were the following speeches, including the one by Cat Brooks, a brilliant public speaker. My heart sank. I went up to Aaron and told him that my speech, which now seemed hopelessly academic if not pedantic, would be a disaster. Admittedly, I was especially nervous about the topic of my speech, on the necessity of a multiracial party, in a moment where Black and other BIPOC speakers were focusing on the racial trauma of the imminent Trump presidency. Eventually, the speeches ended, and the marchers took to the streets. Th e energy of the rally’s initial moments dissipated, the result of a combination of police crowd control and a lack of clear political leadership and messaging. Specifically, although the other speakers were rhetorically sharp, none offered an answer to the question of “where to next?” that we, in our admittedly fumbling way, were trying to address. Th e much-hoped-for scaling up from the Beyond Bernie event would, at least in the Bay Area, have to wait for at least some months. The Oakland protest was part of a wave of large protests around the country. Our participation and attempt to lead it exposed important flaws in Bay Area Socialist Alternative’s organizing capacity. In particular, our inexperienced group had yet to develop deep, organic connections both with the region’s working class and with its large, diverse activist community. Further, our tactics that day had failed to consider that the Democrats, and Obama in particular, were more popular than we had predicted. Our less-than-thorough tactical preparation was exposed by our lack of strategy for a protest that we should have expected to be large, angry, and impatient with speeches more appropriate for calmer settings. On the positive side, our role in the protest, which was covered by CNN and other major media outfits, did gain some national attention. Several contacts reached out to our national organization to ask about joining. Our organization gained a small number of new members and received a brief moment of positive media coverage, but, at least in Oakland, we learned that we had not yet done the work of basic coalition-building, let alone that of creating an organization that can, to paraphrase Lenin, win masses upon masses of workers to communism.9 Conclusion The 2016–2017 anti-Trump protests were a key moment in which the small US socialist movement sought to pose the question of working-class political independence. Should the movement break with the Democratic Party or not? Groups like Socialist Alternative, the ISO, and others at this time were quickly eclipsed by the “big tent” DSA, which, with its much larger membership and reformist politics, effectively answered the question in the negative. This eventuated in two crises in the movement, one in the revolutionary wing and, eventually, another in the reformist wing. The former either folded their organizations into the DSA or dissolved.10 The latter, represented by the DSA, re-turned “to form as a social-democratic lobbying operation within a capitalist party,” a party that “now oversee(s) a society in full-blown crisis, ravaged by Omicron, record levels of inflation, and horrific climate disasters” (Smith and Post 2022).

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If the revolutionary wing of the socialist movement has posed the question of political independence, the Black Lives Matter movement, which led some of the largest protests in US history in the summer of 2020, showed that the potential for it exists. It was no surprise—at least from a socialist perspective—that the US regime met this movement both with repression and cooptation. The compounding crises in which the United States finds itself entangled are both clarifying and disorienting. They clarify the enormous violence, structural and physical, required to reproduce the contemporary racial capitalist order. But it is also challenging to grasp the trajectory of events clearly. With one half of the political regime more openly embracing authoritarianism, it is undeniable that something sinister is rumbling within US society. My interlocutor Jake’s comments about the actuality of the far right in the United States are both prescient and arresting. They also express the paradox that, as the far right builds a base by conjuring the specter of communism, the only thing that can stop it is a revolutionary labor movement—in short, politically, communism.

Even liberals are now developing a materialist analysis of fascism and figuring out that racism is a ruling class tool to divide the working class.11 A Marxist might say “better late than never,” but the solutions on of er are, as we would also say, “idealistic and utopian.”12 They propose, for example, that “we have to agree on basic democratic principles” such as respecting one person–one vote and recommitting to electoralism. The interlocutors profiled here know that these are illusions, that the threat of fascism is the sharp end of the capitalist class’s arsenal to prevent self-emancipation by the working class. The crisis gestates in decades of economic development and manifests in the violence of the right and the confusions of the left.

Despite these setbacks, my interlocutors continue to participate in revolutionary organizations, including Socialist Alternative and others that (unlike Socialist Alternative) refuse to fold into the DSA, and which continue to adhere to the Marxist party form. For them, the intensifying general crisis is continuous with the history of US racism and capitalism. Unlike the disorientation experienced by large swathes of the left, they seem both more serene and steely in their determination to win workers to Marxism. This should not be puzzling. While liberals and progressives, who are usually disorganized—lacking organizations rooted in Marxist theory and history—tend toward demoralization (“fascism is around the corner!”), the Marxists profiled here and many others know that they have comrades at their back in the long struggle for socialism.

#### That’s both necessary and sufficient to counter the ethical and existential threats of capitalist polycrisis.

Meisner ’25 [Lukas; 2025; Fellow at the Institute for Critical Theory Berlin; Critical Marxist Theory: Political Autonomy and the Radicalising Project of Modernity, “Conclusion: The Radical Politics of Political Autonomy,” Ch. 10]

Today, humanity is facing the manifold dire threats of a capitalist polycrisis. The ecological balances of the earth-system are increasingly out of joint; the international enmities between rivalling imperialist powers are, once again, openly negotiated with the means of war and destruction; and neofascism, modelled after the racist fearmongering of the original, is on a victory march all around the world—comparable only to the 20s of the previous century. Hence, a new Critical Theory is demanded by the global capitalist circumstances themselves. After all, was its first version, developed in the Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung about a hundred years ago, not a Marxist reaction to the rise of barbarising tendencies at the heart of so-called civilisation? Indeed, it was—as Chapter 2 of this study outlined.

Yet, ever since the death of Adorno in 1969 and the death of Marcuse almost exactly ten years later, there has been a domestication of the main strands of the Frankfurt School (Chapter 3). To better understand and overcome this domestication, the book has traced, with the means of a Critical-Theory-historiography informed both by philosophy and by sociology, its two affirmative steps in a liberal and in a postmodern turn (Chapters 4 and 5). As an alternative to both, it has defended Habermas’ project of modernity, yet only by disentangling it—in Marxian fashion—from capitalist modernisation (Chapter 6). This disentanglement was at the same time a political radicalisation since the cultural ideal(s) of the project of modernity—the realisation of qualitative individuality in a rational society of human autonomy—can only become a material reality beyond the framework of capitalism. On this basis, the book has proposed Marxist political autonomy as a concept confined neither by liberal approaches nor by operaist traditions. Rather, it has rephrased concepts such as social freedom, democratic communism, class struggle and the end of prehistory for the overall sake of emancipatory praxis. In this way, political autonomy was developed both as a legitimate criterion for justified critique (Chapter 7) and as the philosophical foundation (Chapter 8) and emancipatory goal (Chapter 9) of a pluralist yet transcapitalist Critical Marxist Theory.Footnote 2

Today, we need this kind of emancipatory Marxism more than ever. In times of rising neofascism, imperialist friend-enemy-logics and a humanity closing its eyes to the anthropogenic crisis of its only ecological habitat, ideology-critical totality-analysis becomes essential. That is because we not only have to understand how the totalities of the Capitalocene, of capitalism, patriarchy and the colonial matrix are interwoven (totality-analysis), but we need to get beyond the capitalist infrastructure to fix the polycrisis into which capitalist modernisation has thrown us (ideology-critique). Hence, the dialectic of ideology-critique and totality-analysis as the method of Critical Marxist Theory is a crucial tool for strengthening the contemporary radical left—which is our only hope of dealing with the multifaceted threats of today. Moreover, I have developed the Critical Marxist Theory of political autonomy to help further radicalise this left towards the radical universalism of class struggle for the sake of a classless society; towards a substantial democratisation by socialism for the sake of an end of the prehistory called capitalism; and towards the historical, realistic and concrete utopia of democratic communism as a revolution for living beyond alienation.

What the criterion, foundation and goal of Critical Marxist Theory—political autonomy—can do regarding the capitalist polycrisis of neofascism, neoimperialism and ecological devastation, I will sketch at the end of this conclusion. Before doing that, I want to dwell for a while on the potential blind spots, gaps and weaknesses of my approach. After all, no conclusion can be called complete if it misses pointing out the work that needs to be done—hopefully somewhat unalienated—in the future.

1 Blind Spots, Gaps, Weaknesses? A Further Explanation of the Study in Terms of Race and Gender

As in any account, there are weaknesses in the present one. They range from the sheer breadth and depth of the study right through the decision to propose alternative approaches rather than proving well-known ones all the way to the counter-hegemonic strategy focused on springing counterarguments instead of securing established ones. Yet, these weaknesses follow, rather naturally, from the style, approach and strategy chosen for reasons internal to the goal of this study. More importantly though, we should be checking on content-specific theoretical weaknesses. Namely, they may be found in the scarcity of explicit theorisations of either racism (including suprematism, ethnocentrism, chauvinism, orientalism, xeno- and islamophobia—in short: the colonialist matrix) or sexism (including androcentrism, misogyny, heterosexism, homo- and transphobia—in short: the patriarchal matrix).Footnote 3 Indeed, I do not wish to deny a certain weakness of theoretical exposition in regard to these subjects. Whereas no study, no matter how much it attempts a totality-analysis, can deal with everything, I do not want to blame my faults here on the practically always necessary restriction of scope. Also, I do not want to make responsible the limit to space for the mentioned weakness of exposition. What I do want to do, however, is spend a few paragraphs defending the present work in terms of race and gender, which I think apposite because, if not explicitly than at least implicitly, it has been tackling the problems of racism and sexism—or of patriarchy and colonialism—throughout.Footnote 4

Moreover, I want to stress that this ‘implicitness’ is in no way the result of a belittlement of the huge problems race and gender pose to the project of emancipation. Rather, it is the result of a method that sees capitalism as an infrastructural totality including both modern sexism (patriarchy) and modern racism (colonialism).Footnote 5 From the viewpoint of the ideology-critical totality-analysis of Critical Marxist Theory, the capitalist infrastructure entails the totalities of patriarchy and the colonial matrix. After all, historically, no capitalism has ever existed that was not a racial capitalism or a patriarchally gendered and thus misogynous capitalism. In other words, that race and gender are not explicitly dealt with in many sections of the study is not because they are seen as less important but because they are part and parcel of the core problem of capitalism—as much as antiracism and feminism are intrinsic to any democratically socialist or communist project.

Yet, instead of clustering identities into a mosaic of addable particularist experiences, the goal was and remains to infer the obstacles in the way towards truly universalist emancipation from the capitalist infrastructure as totality.Footnote 6 Still, this argument for an ideology-critical totality-analysis of capitalism does not alleviate the potential allegation that I may have under-theorised the particularity of the problems of race and gender, racism and sexism, or colonialism and patriarchy, within this very capitalist infrastructure. Indeed, this problematisation seems to point out a real weakness I do not wish to deny.Footnote 7 At the same time, again, I think this weakness is more a problem of the exposition (e.g., the focus) of the present study and not so much of its design (e.g., its approach). After all, there may well be and there should be other studies in Critical Marxist Theory focusing on the particular role race and/or gender play in the capitalist infrastructure; and of course, there are many emancipatory Marxist approaches which do precisely that.Footnote 8 What I want to do with the upcoming paragraphs is nothing more than lay out some arguments that justify—or at least try to explain—the chosen exposition of this study.

To begin with, there was a counter-hegemonic reason for this. Since the study was written in a certain hegemony of left-liberal identity-politics within academia, for which it has been rather fashionable to talk about race and gender against Marxism, it at least seems to stand as a legitimate choice to put a stress, for once, on the less fashionable (but related) topics of class and capitalism instead. After all, as bell hooks had already put it in the beginning of the 2000s: “Nowadays it is fashionable to talk about race or gender; the uncool subject is class.”Footnote 9 The present study, therefore, has not only concentrated on class and the proletariat but it has focused more on the totality of capitalism as an ideological-material infrastructure than on the mainly discursive level of cultural constructions. Yet, by arguing that the economy itself is a cultural formation as well, that the proletariat consists of the 99%, and that a classless—non-identical—society is the image of a universally emancipated society, the focus on class has in no way been an exclusion of race or gender.

Not only, however, is the present study’s method an ideology-critique of the infrastructural totality of capitalism in which race and gender feature as well, even if only implicitly, but its political horizon is one of an emancipatory universalism that defends the necessity as well as the possibility of a solidarity for each in which everyone shall participate equally. As I have argued in this spirit, Critical Marxist Theory is less identity-political than post-identity-political, or more universalist than particularistic in its method, cultural politics, criterion and goal.Footnote 10 Here, Cornell West’s warning should be taken seriously: “It is all too easy to fetishise race or gender as an identity without linking it to a critique of predatory capitalism.”Footnote 11 Hence, instead of ‘fetishising identities’ by abstracting them from capitalism and thus introducing a kind of competition amongst those who suffer most through ‘ranks in privilege’ (as left-liberal identity-politics), Critical Marxist Theory is interested in a universal emancipation as an end to all exploitation, expropriation and discrimination by ending capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy alike. After all, since socialism and substantial democratisation refer to each other, each democratic socialism is, in and of itself, also antiracist and antisexist. And that is the case not only because capitalism is racist and sexist but, more fundamentally, because communism’s goal is universal emancipation.

Consequentially, even if in the present study racism and sexism are under-theorised in their particularity, they are no ‘blind spot’ or ‘gap’ of Critical Marxist Theory, since antiracism and antisexism cannot be abstracted from capitalism. Importantly, Critical Marxist Theory’s focus on the proletariat as the main actor of transcapitalist political autonomy does not ignore antiracism and antisexism. Conversely, any non-ideological proletarian class consciousness must be antiracist and antisexist by definition. There are two main reasons for this which I have already touched upon.Footnote 12 First, capitalism itself is racialised and sexualised so that any transcapitalism proper must entail antiracism and antisexism by necessity. Namely, capitalism is racialised along the lines of the Global North and Global South as centre and periphery (from neo-colonialism to neoimperialism). This is not restricted to the over-exploitation ‘abroad’ but entails the racialised over-exploitation of migrant and illegalised labour ‘at home’, as well as the racialisation of unemployment and criminality. Moreover, capitalism is genderised along the lines of the production/reproduction-dualism and the ‘houseworkerisation’Footnote 13 of female labour, the non- or underpayment of care work and the fact that women still earn structurally less whilst performing the same jobs as men.Footnote 14 Hence, the only non-ideological form of proletarian class consciousness is one that includes antiracism and antisexism since all proletarian class struggle that thinks it could allow forms of racism or sexism would undermine itself by hindering itself from overcoming capital’s logic and structure.

The second main reason why all non-ideological class consciousness must be antiracist and antisexist by default is because both racism and sexism are the capitalist ideology that disunites the 99% of the proletariat and thus makes its universally emancipatory struggle impossible. Namely, capitalism disunites the 99% with the help of racism and sexism, amongst other ideologies, in at least two interrelated ways. First, “capitalism is likely to co-opt whatever extra-economic oppressions are historically and culturally available in any given setting”, and second, “capital derives advantages from racism or sexism” because “they disguise the structural realities of the capitalist system”, thus helping to further “divide the working class”.Footnote 15 In both senses, for capital, sexism and racism have the function of disuniting the 99% of the proletariat. First, racism and sexism disunite the proletariat as a workforce whose racialised and genderised hierarchies are integral to the functioning of capitalist surplus extraction; and second, racism and sexism disunite the proletariat in its solidary organisation, from unionisation to internationalisation. Since the capitalist totality is never just an abstract economic logic but always culturally and historically concrete, it thus depends on racism and sexism both for its economic functioning and for its political continuation. Hence, racism and sexism need to be abolished by non-ideological class struggle not only because it is deeply inscribed into capitalism’s functioning but because without this abolition, the proletariat will remain disunited since its class struggle would fail. After all, “the power that capital exerts still depends upon the degree of ideological and organizational disunity among working people.”Footnote 16 Therefore, in the face of socialism as substantial democratisation that cannot be exclusive and democratic communism as universal emancipation that is all-inclusive, antiracism and antisexism are already economically and politically integral to every non-ideological class struggle.

Antiracism and antisexism, then, are necessary ingredients of any non-ideological proletarian class consciousness and struggle because the exploitations, expropriations, discriminations (and so on) of the 99% spread over the world intrinsically belong together. As Nancy Fraser points out, “from the era of New World racialized chattel slavery to that of direct-rule colonialism, to postcolonial neo-imperialism and financialization”, “the expropriation of some has served as a disavowed enabling condition for the profitable exploitation of others.”Footnote 17 In that sense, I would hold that it is at least not the entire truth, say, that the proletarians of the Global North profit(-ed) from the over-exploitation of the proletarians of the Global South, since profiting—in any case—is always only the gain of capital. Indeed, even the racism pseudo-legitimising (neo-)colonialism in the Global North is no gain for workers there because it undermines—by undermining their internationalism—their own objective interest in emancipation from capital. Indeed, precisely this is why ‘all proletarians of the world’ must unite, the proletarians of the North and the South as well as the male and non-male, the black and non-black proletarians all over the globe. As soon as the proletariat forgets about this credo, it is ideologically trapped and will not be able to overcome its own exploitation and reification. Without feminism and antiracism, then, there will never be any democratic socialism.Footnote 18 The political autonomy of Critical Marxist Theory, in that sense, necessarily entails antiracism and antisexism.

Still, there remains a certain under-theorisation of the particularity of race and gender within the infrastructural totality of capitalism, or, rather, an underrepresentation in exposition. As I have tried to show with the last paragraphs, however, the detected weakness does not refer to race or gender as ‘blind spots’ or ‘gaps’ since they are implicitly thematised throughout the work, including its stress on class and capital. That is the case because the radical universalism of Critical Marxist Theory has found ‘non-males’ and ‘non-whites’ constituting the vast majority of the proletariat. That is, people of colour and non-males have a much greater share in the proletariat than, say, white Western males; to work on helping the proletariat’s emancipation, then, is to work on helping their emancipation—also vis-à-vis their male, white and Western colleagues.

Hence, I hope the weakness of underrepresentation in exposition that nevertheless remains can itself be weakened by inserting the work into the rich complex of studies explicitly dealing with racism and sexism from a materialist perspective, thus reinforcing the understanding of antisexism and antiracism as a trans-ideological proletarian class struggle. I have already started this work elsewhere.Footnote 19 To summarise, then, with Ellen Meiksins Wood, the “socialist project should be enriched by the resources and insights of the (now not so new) ‘new social movements’, not impoverished by resorting to them as an excuse for disintegrating the resistance to capitalism.”Footnote 20

2 The Radical Politics of Political Autonomy

Now that we have reached the end of this study, let me turn back to its beginning and thus to politics proper—particularly to the political struggles of our day.Footnote 21 Interested in emancipation throughout this work, I have sided with approaching an end of capitalism to be enabled to end the (ecological, neofascist, nuclear…) ending of the world—or to begin history once and for all. Yet although the ‘end of history’ itself also seems to have come to an end in the global West, what is on the horizon looks once again more like the end of the world than like the end of capitalism. In other words, capitalist realism increasingly leads the world into surreal if not unreal and completely irrationalist states since its polycrisis has totalised. The more ecological devastation becomes undeniable, the stronger the forces which blame those parts of society who point the devastation out. The more neoimperialism intensifies, the more national economies invest in war preparations ‘to prevent armed conflict’, suspecting everyone not in line with militarisation of speaking for the enemy. And the more the political centre fascises by normalising racist anti-migration-policies, the fiercer its attacks on leftist theory and practice that still resist this normalisation. Indeed, these three arenas of conflict—eco-crisis, neoimperialism and neofascism—are entangled and can only be overcome together.

Globally, progressive neoliberalism has been replaced by authoritarian neoliberalism: even the times when liberals distanced themselves from far-right positions are largely over. Since liberalism has never been able to offer explanations for and even less solutions to systemic capitalist problems, the further the left falls into crisis, the more easily right-wing pseudo-explanations and pseudo-solutions can spread. That is because, without a strong anticapitalist alternative, there is only the back and forth of authoritarian and liberal forces that, together, creep towards the abyss of capitalist polycrisis: “Without a left, in other words, the maelstrom of capitalist ‘development’ can only generate liberal forces and authoritarian counterforces, bound together in a perverse symbiosis.”Footnote 22 Yet, back in times of ‘progressive neoliberalism’ (Fraser), the main question was still whether, in this ‘perverse symbiosis’, the so-called centre of (neo-)liberalism won by suppressing all structural connections between capitalism and societal problems, or whether right-wing populism gained strength by misidentifying actually existing problems with specific minorities and the differences they mark—thus being able to construct a graspable even if imagined foe. Meanwhile, these two positions have merged in a new-old logic of friend and enemy from which a new-old criminalisation if not dehumanisation of those counting as internal and/or external enemies has followed: from the hostile imperialist blocs abroad to migrants and leftists at home. In short, fascisation seems to be the trend of a deepened imperialist tendency—an insight to which Marxism has been privy from the start.

The so-called political centre, meanwhile, is less so being ‘taken over’ by fascisation than enforcing it itself. Again, the main historical reason this further right-wing shift of both the alt-right and the old centre could become hegemonic has been the waning of the left as a radical alternative to the given institutions and structures that have been, ever since, in deep crisis of legitimation. Apparently, the ideological forces of the status quo can only deal with this crisis by reintroducing fascist means. In turn, the withdrawal of the radical left followed from the anticommunism, (neo-)liberalism and postmodernism with which large parts of the former left have identified at least since the Eastern Bloc transformed into the former East. In this way, what I call the ‘former left’ has allied, over the past decades, with (neo-)liberalism’s so-called (liberal) centre, thus only leaving rightward paths for people in search of political meaning for their frustrations.Footnote 23 Accordingly, this study—in its critique of defeatism, liberalism and postmodernism—directly intervened in the crisis of the left that triggered the global rise of neofascism. Without a return to Marxism, socialism and communism, this crisis and thus the strengthening of the right cannot be overcome.

At the same time, the fascising forces—including the (neo-)liberal centre itself—have been able to draw on the neoliberally induced loss of trust and its rampant delegitimisation of the entire political and cultural spectrum. They have done so by pushing forward, more and more openly, brutal policies of repression and ressentiment.Footnote 24 By claiming, internationally, that ‘outsiders’ are responsible for the global capitalist polycrisis, and that ‘measures’ against these outsiders are pushed through ‘against the resistance of the establishment’, fascising forces fool the voting demos into the belief that, for once, its voices are being heard. Now, I would like to argue that to combat this rhetoric of tactical distraction, today’s radical left should take the people’s call for dignity and their wish to self-determine not less but more seriously. That is, the left must not claim—as liberals do—that people’s dignity is not trampled over daily, that the established system is not as bad as they think, or that established institutions have not been delegitimised. Instead, today’s left has to demonstrate why those who rob the people of the most basic control of their lives and their dignity are not migrants or foreign governments or any other ‘others’ (like leftists, queers or pacifists) but capital and its character masks and policing policies—from huge corporations and global economic institutions via national repressive apparatuses like the police and the army to the political and media representatives of one’s own imperial bloc. In other words, the radical left should remind itself and the people of “the irreplaceable will of the Marxist heritage” which is about people’s “seizing control over their own destinies” through “the conquest by human beings of control over the otherwise seemingly blind and natural ‘laws’ of socio-economic fatality”.Footnote 25 Hence, to reclaim dignity and control from capital means to reclaim what I have called political autonomy. In that sense, the present study has not only attempted to de-domesticate Critical Theory but to remind the left of the core message against capitalist barbarisation and society-wide fascisation. This message appeals to the shared will of taking back control not from minoritarian scapegoats or constructed foreign enemies but from the capitalist totality in which we are all globally stuck. In that way, political autonomy could be the crucial tool for a radical politics beyond the interconnected tendencies of neoimperialism and neofascism.

Yet, political autonomy is the best way not only to tackle the dangers of imperialist fascisation—including (world) war—but to deal with the imminent threats of ecological crisis.Footnote 26 That is because, to start solving the problems of a warming planet, of the increasing extinction of species, of desertification, deforestation and pollution, of collapsing ecosystems and of the deepening of the imbalance of nature’s equilibria, humans need to reclaim responsibility for their own productive forces and the reorganisation of their own economy from capital’s rule.Footnote 27 In other words, political autonomy is needed to alleviate the danger of ecological crisis in a responsible manner because it reorganises—by mediating societal objectivity (material culture) with social subjectivity (individuals) in a substantially democratic manner—the always necessary historical metabolism between society and nature. Already Marx saw this ecological challenge as one of the crucial tasks of socialism, as Alfred Schmidt points out: “Marx wanted to achieve something qualitatively new: mastery by the whole of society of society's mastery over nature.”Footnote 28 Since such societal ‘mastery’ is identical to the self-mastery of society’s processes, I have also called it substantial democratisation (of material culture) or democratic socialism in this study. As such, what Schmidt phrases ‘mastery’ is not about ‘master’ and ‘slave’ at all but about the reclaiming of the fate of life on earth by those living beings that have brought it—and thereby themselves—under the threat of extinction.Footnote 29 After all, as already Engels had pointed out, “at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature – but that we, with flesh, blood, and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst”.Footnote 30 In that sense, the founders of Marxism were, against common wisdom, no advocates of a Promethian mastery over nature. Rather, they voted for a much more peace-seeking self-mastery of humans not over nature but over the kind of relationship they have with nature. This kind of human self-mastery is, more precisely, a social “mastery of previously ungoverned processes of social development”Footnote 31—or the social decision to overcome as much of social mastery vis-à-vis nature as possible.

Again, then, political autonomy is not about the domination of nature but about reorganising the historical metabolism between society and nature in the most life-enhancing, nature-friendly and peaceful manner possible. Put differently, the point of political autonomy is not to abstractly erase the natural ‘realm of necessity’ as if this were even possible, but to democratically administer the ways in which it is in constant exchange with the human ‘realm of freedom’.Footnote 32 As John Bellamy Foster has shown repeatedly, the ‘metabolic rift’ between society and nature is not a historical necessity of nature-dominating civilisation or ‘identifying’ reason and not even of modern production as such but a false necessity of the specific capitalist disorganisation of an always necessary metabolism to the detriment both of humans and of the rest of nature.Footnote 33 Political autonomy, then, not only knows of humans’ influence as actors that factually transform the earth-system but adds to this knowledge the demand for a self-determination and thus responsible shaping of this very influence. Political autonomy is therefore crucial not only for human but for more universal emancipation because, as Andreas Malm has it, other animals’ “objective interest – as subjectively mute as it might be – aligns neatly with that of the human enemies of the 1 percent.” Hence, he follows: “Other species, too, await our liberation.”Footnote 34 Accordingly, political autonomy—which includes the most life-enhancing organisation of the historical metabolism between nature and society—encompasses, in its radical universalism, not only all humans but non-human living beings as well.Footnote 35 That is because there is no emancipation of inner nature if there is no emancipation of outer nature at the same time—as much as there is no individual autonomy without social and political autonomy. The class struggle of the proletarian 99%, then, may lead to a classless society in which even non-human animals are no longer declassified. As such, political autonomy’s radical politics entails a revolution for living that frees human as much as non-human life from the dead labour of capital and its internal death drive threatening to consume our very conditions of survival.

### 1NC

Civil Service CP:

#### The United States federal government should substantially strengthen collective bargaining rights for workers in the federal civil service.

#### America’s civil service is on the brink---loss of bargaining rights removed its most important line of defense against unfair treatment and partisan retaliation.

Moynihan ’25 [Deuon; September 3; PhD, Professor of Public Policy, University of Michigan (wow!); Can We Still Govern? "Your government is breaking: EPA edition," https://donmoynihan.substack.com/p/your-government-is-breaking-epa-edition]

Civil servants are sending out SOS signals at an unprecedented level, despite great personal risk. NASA and NIH wrote public protests about damage to their organizations. CDC leaders chose to quit to send “a bat signal” about the assault on science in their agency, and more than 1000 HHS employees have signed a letter calling on RFK Jr. to resign. FEMA employees who wrote an open letter about how bad things are were put on administrative leave. Now some EPA employees who did the same were fired. They join the almost 1 in 4 employees who have departed the agency since Trump arrived.

According to the law, these employees have for cause protections, meaning the government must document that they performed poorly at their job to be fired. But laws that are written down, and the practices of the Trump administration, are two different things. And in today’s America, our court system is increasingly favoring the latter.

The EPA employees were fired on Labor Day weekend, a Labor Day that marked a historic assault on labor. Half a million federal employees have lost union protections under Trump, with more to come. Legal agreements between the government and the unions were voided because, Trump said, national security demanded it. The justification beggars belief, since the employees are from across all sorts of agencies, not just those with a national security function, and strip rights from employees with no plausible national security responsibilities, such as janitorial staff.

Meanwhile, unions that have been more supportive of Trump, such as the Teamsters, have been exempted. Shamefully, courts are happy to go along with the fiction that this is an issue of national security, rather than Trump targeting organizations perceived as political opponents.

Unions might be imperfect, but they are the best organized representative of government employee interests at the time when Trump have been purging the government, including removing internal safeguards that would typically adjudicate on claims of unfair treatment of employees.

While unions are often portrayed as self-interested, lets look at the EPA. The American Federation of Government Employees renegotiated their union contract with EPA in 2024. With the potential for the Trump administration in mind, they union focused on protecting the scientific integrity of their member’s work. This is something that professional scientists care about, and which benefits the public. In other words, it is a domain where the public interest and union goals overlap.

The Trump administration has cancelled the contract and EPA bargaining rights, again invoking national security claims.

Clearly, a concern for science is not top of the Trump administration agenda. Hundreds of EPA employees signed a letter charging that actions of the Trump administration “undermine the EPA mission of protecting human health and the environment.” Fearing retribution, many did so anonymously, but 170 signed their names. Key parts of the letter focus on the assault on science within the EPA:

Ignoring scientific consensus to benefit polluters. This administration's actions directly contradict EPA's own scientific assessments on human health risks, most notably regarding asbestos, mercury, and greenhouse gases. Health-based regulatory standards are being repealed or reconsidered, including drinking water limits for four PFAS "forever chemicals" that cause cancer. Under your leadership, Administrator Zeldin, EPA is promoting the fossil fuel-powered auto industry while simultaneously stripping away support for cleaner electric vehicles. You are supporting new technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), without addressing AI's intense consumption of environmental resources. The decisions of the current administration frequently contradict the peer-reviewed research and recommendations of Agency experts. Such contradiction undermines EPA's reputation as a trusted scientific authority. Make no mistake: your actions endanger public health and erode scientific progress--not only in America--but around the world…

Dismantling the Office of Research and Development. EPA's research provides the scientific basis for its rulemaking, stakeholder needs, and other key decisions. U.S. Law (42 U.S.C. § 4363) states that the EPA Administrator shall "establish a separately identified program of continuing, long-term environmental research and development," which is currently led by the Office of Research and Development, or ORD. Your administration has proposed a reorganization that moves EPA's foundational research to the Administrator's Office and reassigns ORD's research staff to the program offices. A move that places ORD scientists in regulatory program offices will make EPA science more vulnerable to political interference. In addition, the gutting of staff and science and your proposed budget cuts for the coming year will leave ORD unable to meet the science needs of the EPA and its partners and will threaten the health of all Americans.

The basic claim here is that political leadership is ignoring science, and eliminating scientific offices in what is fundamentally a scientific agency.

About 140 employees were put on administrative leave for signing the letter, before at least seven of those employees were fired. Trump appointees said that “the Environmental Protection Agency has a zero-tolerance policy for career officials using their agency position and title to unlawfully undermine, sabotage, and undercut the will of the American public that was clearly expressed at the ballot box last November.”

It is not an unreasonable claim that bureaucrats owe a duty of loyalty to their political bosses. Elections, after all, do matter. On the other hand, shouldn’t we want scientists to alert Congress and the public about what is going on inside their agency when they see red lines being crossed?

The administrative law professor Jennifer Nou has considered this question. She argued that many civil servants are too quick to dissent, but also provided a logic for when dissent might be justified. She calls for “reciprocal hierarchy” – a system where disobedience is inappropriate as long as political actors engage with and consult with bureaucratic experts on factual matters related to their expertise. But, when political actors fail to engage with bureaucratic actors on their domains of expertise, domains that Congress has invested in and built up over time, the hierarchy is no longer operating in a reciprocal manner. Under such conditions it becomes defensible to engage in dissent.

And those are very much the conditions we operate under now. Not only are scientists ignored; anyone raising public concerns about mismanagement of government programs and undermining of statutory missions can expect retaliation. The dysfunction must be kept secret.

Administrative myths: The gold bars

It is not just eliminating employees. EPA is also eliminating grants that were previously funded by Congress. And again, Trump’s allies on the courts are letting them do it.

At stake is $20 billion in grants to address climate change, which the EPA is trying to cancel. The grants are provided via the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF), funded by the Inflation Reduction Act, which ordered the money to be committed in 2024. The grants were publicly announced, with the goal of encouraging private capital to join in climate change responses, and help low-income families reduce energy costs with upgrades.

There is no meaningful evidence that the grants were mismanaged or wasteful. They were distributed in a agreement to Citibank to distribute and provide oversight of the grants, and allowing them to raise red flags for wasteful spending. (The use of this kind of public-private Financial Agency Agreements is more common than you would think). However, the existence of the money at Citibank offered a tempting target, and EPA has sought to reclaim the funds.

In the US District Court for DC, a judge paused the cancelations, pointing to constitutional violations. Two Trump appointees on the DC Circuit overturned the lower court decision. They say that the grants were actually contracts, and therefore only the Court of Federal Claims could review the claim.

This feels like a pattern of the second Trump term. Judges blocking Trump point to major violations of the law and constitution, while Judges supporting Trump often rely on technicalities to allow him to move forward. And so Trump ploughs ahead, and does what he wants.

The DC Circuit said that the affected firms that lost the grants can ask for compensation for their losses (for which EPA and taxpayers will potentially be liable). But this misses the point. The courts are allowing the administration to cancel prior policies involving obligated funds. That is the broader harm: the Trump administration negated the distribution of past funds as ordered by Congress, effectively cancelling a lawful climate change program without going through Congress to do so. The decision is part of an ongoing pattern of the Trump administration claiming Congressional powers, and of Trump appointees in the judiciary enabling this power grab.

In dissent, Judge Pillard said:

the majority allows the government to seize Plaintiffs’ money based on spurious and pretextual allegations and to permanently gut implementation of major congressional legislation designed to improve the infrastructure, health, and economic security of communities throughout the country.

To illustrate how pretextual these claims were, and how much judicial pretzeling the majority needed to engage in, I have to tell you about the gold bars. It is a bit of a detour, but bear with me.

Mention of the EPA tossing aside gold bars is “damning” according to Neomi Rao, the judge who wrote the majority opinion, and “supports EPA’s good faith in deciding to terminate the grants and recommit the funds with proper supervision and accountability.”

EPA Administrator Lee Zedlin refers to these gold bars a lot. For example, this is the EPA website.

The gold bars paint quite a picture. The problem is, they do not actually exist. They are a potent symbol, and symbols is what you go with when you don’t have evidence.

At the heart of the issue is that the Trump administration has tried and failed to present the grant funding as criminal, the financial arrangement as crooked, and the plaintiffs as suspicious.

None of this is true, but Trump’s politicized justice system was happy to play along.

FBI employees were sent to investigate EPA employees as part of a criminal probe. Career prosecutors within DOJ refused to open an investigation because there simply was not evidence of wrongdoing. Indeed, one resigned rather than engage in such a blatant abuse of the law. Her resignation letter, addressed to the then-acting US Attorney for DC, Ed Martin, includes the following:

As I shared with you, at this juncture, based upon the evidence I have reviewed, I still do not believe that there is sufficient evidence to issue the letter you described, including sufficient evidence to tell the bank that there is probable cause to seize the particular accounts identified. Because I believed that I lacked the legal authority to issue such a letter, I told you that I would not do so. You then asked for my resignation.

Emil Bove, a Trump DOJ appointee and now a federal judge, pushed another set of career prosecutors to investigate, but they also refused.

The goal was to use allegations of criminality to justify a de facto seizure of assets. Non-partisan actors who looked at the allegations could find neither smoke nor fire. This did not deter the Trump administration, who assumed they could find a partisan actor — in the form of Trump federal judges — who would let them reclaim the money regardless. They were correct.

So where did the gold bars come from?

The short answer is that it was an off-hand remark by an EPA employee, Brent Efron. Efron thought he was on a date with an unusually inquisitive partner who wanted to learn about his job. The date was actually an undercover agent for Project Veritas, the right-wing smear machine, which employs the tactics of spy agencies to deceive and discredit public employees.

The date occurred after Trump’s victory but before his inauguration. Efron talked about how his agency was doing their best to get money out the door before the Trump administration took office, saying: “It truly feels we’re on the Titanic and we’re throwing gold bars off the edge.”

Efron was being recorded. The video became the proof to conservatives of the criminal conspiracy that the EPA and DOJ were unable to prove.

Efron was a mid-level official with no real control over the flow of billions of dollars engaged in barroom bluster. After the story blew up, with the help of Elon Musk, Efron faced an internal investigation (he was cleared), and the predictable abuse that followed. Efron left the government in January. He has been unable to find work since then according to a recent profile. When the FBI interviewed him in February, a prosecutor from the US Attorney’s office and investigators from the EPA Inspector General office were present.

Lee Zedlin has used the “gold bars” video relentlessly to justify cancelling the grants (he refers to them as grants, even if the court calls them contracts). Zedlin was the one who asked an Inspector General to open an investigation. He told Fox News: “The entire scheme, in my opinion, is criminal. We found the gold bars. We want them back.”

Again, it is very important to note, there are no gold bars. Nevertheless, they were invoked by the judge who wrote the opinion allowing Trump to block distribution of the funds. Now, lets be real here: the judge in question, Neomi Rao, worked in the Trump Office of Management and Budget and is hoping for a Supreme Court seat — she knows better but has other goals.

The idea that one administration wanted to insulate its policies from its successor is not surprising. The basic reality is that the Biden administration wanted to spend money on climate change, and Congress funded it. They found a well-used legal mechanism that they felt would protect the spending from a de facto impoundment under Trump. There is no criminality in that. The issue is simply about whether a President can cancel previously appropriated and allocated grants. The courts are effectively allowing Trump to do so.

What are the big lessons here?

Stripping employees of union rights and civil service protections makes it easier for a government to stifle dissent, even when that dissent exposes profound mismanagement. It is one way that weakening employee protections undermines accountability to the public.

#### Civil servants manage a raft of catastrophic risks. Insulating experts from mass purges AND the threat of political pressure is key---else, self-censorship and loyalist replacements lead to existential crisis metastasis.

Schulman ’22 [Loren DeJonge; August 12; MPP, vice president of research, evaluation and modernizing government at the nonpartisan, nonprofit Partnership for Public Service, previously served in senior staff roles at the National Security Council and the Department of Defense; Lawfare, “Schedule F: An Unwelcome Resurgence,” https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/schedule-f-unwelcome-resurgence]

Over 2 million career civil servants working across dozens of large and small agencies are hired under the competitive service process. More than 70 percent work in national security-oriented agencies, such as the Defense Department, the State Department, the Treasury Department, and the Energy Department. Many more work in technical, administrative, policy, and legal roles. They do work that often results in news that makes headlines—negotiating sanctions policies, advising on the legality of drone strikes overseas, maintaining relationships with allies and partners, preparing procedures and resources for future pandemic response—and a great deal more behind the scenes that may end up on a cabinet secretary’s or president’s desk for consideration.

Author Michael Lewis describes civil servants’ responsibilities in the “The Fifth Risk,” calling the U.S government the manager of “the biggest portfolio of [catastrophic] risks ever managed by a single institution in the history of the world.” Some are obvious—the threat of nuclear attacks, for example—but most are glacial and opaque, demanding a portfolio of reliable and steady risk managers who can prioritize the nation’s security without fearing for their job security.

Thousands of such “risk managers” who work in policy-adjacent roles would be implicated by a Schedule F policy that removes the civil service protections set out for them in the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978. Civil servants today are protected against possible political retaliation, coercion, or removal by presidents and political appointees. They must be hired on the basis of relative ability, knowledge, and skills, using fair evaluation metrics. And they are protected against reprisal for whistleblowing.

These rules are frequently shorthanded derisively in (false) assumptions that civil servants cannot be fired. To the contrary, there are set guidelines for when federal employees can be lawfully terminated and disciplined based on performance or misconduct. The antiquated federal hiring process faces similar—albeit fairer—criticism, but its slowness is intended to screen for those who have “a high standard of integrity and trust to promote the interests of the public” and for good reason. Overall, these critiques misunderstand that the competitive hiring process and subsequent protections are what make it possible for civil servants to perform exceptionally, particularly in high pressure, complex policy areas where the government is managing extreme risk on behalf of the country, such as national security.

By protecting them from political reprisal, these rules give civil servants in policy roles the foundation to offer advice that may be tough for presidents to hear, to execute policies with high stakes, to report illegal activity and misconduct as a part of their duties, and to trust that they and their peers owe their first fealty to protecting and defending the Constitution. They do all of this with the confidence that their integrity will be rewarded and protected.

At best, shifting policy-aligned roles to Schedule F roles would have a chilling effect on such policy experts whom we rely on for their unique expertise, candor, and integrity, potentially making them more cautious about the advice they give, the portfolios they support, the risks they take in defending the Constitution, and their willingness to call out malfeasance or bad news.

Worst-Case Scenario: Harming National Security

At its worst, Schedule F will make it possible for presidents to remove thousands of experts who make U.S. global leadership possible. By shifting protected civil servants to at-will employees, Schedule F makes it possible to fire them without the due process currently owed to civil servants. In other words, civil servants could be fired for any reason at all—for giving unwelcome advice, for prior jobs, for being the subject of unsubstantiated accusations of any type, for perceptions of partisan affiliation, or simply for being in a role the president wishes to open up for a loyalist.

Some Schedule F advocates make clear that large-scale removals are under consideration and that removal, not oversight, is their ultimate goal for Schedule F. “Fire everyone you’re allowed to fire,” one commented, according to the Axios reporting. “And [then] fire a few people you’re not supposed to, so that they have to sue you and you send the message.”

Because the policy would also allow replacement of current civil servants without a competitive process, replacements for nonpartisan civil servants could be made without regard to qualification and suitability, or based on partisan affiliation, creating a new kind of political appointee.

The potential loss of talent could be wide and extremely damaging. Axios also reported that, according to sources close to Trump, the former president intends to “go after” the national security establishment as a matter of “top priority,” including those in the intelligence community and State Department. Policy roles that could be reclassified as Schedule F could cut across many high-import areas: Russian defense strategy, Iranian nuclear programs, or Chinese regional security capabilities, among hundreds of other categories. The harm to national security of removing and replacing civil servants—whose work, as we have established, requires expertise, relationships, and clear understanding of risk—with individuals with no required qualification except loyalty to a single individual is self-evident.

But, should a future president pursue this action, beyond missing an endless list of risk portfolio managers, the United States will miss something more fundamental to its success and security: its reliability. American alliances are valuable because of the steady undercurrent of the nation’s civil servants who maintain networks, expertise, and consistency regardless of who inhabits the Oval Office. Despite its turmoil, the American political system is a strong model and international interlocutor because its civil servants serve expertly and well across presidential administrations of any political affiliation. Schedule F, by stifling or removing long-serving civil servants, would make the United States a weaker, less reliable, and less trusted partner.

Why Shouldn’t the President Get a Say?

A president’s desire to shape a policy team, and to be sure it is filled with strong performers who are closely aligned with their views, is understandable. After all, presidents are elected to implement their chosen policy agenda, and having a team around them who can work in support is critical. But presidents already can wield enormous influence over both their closest policy advisers and the most far-flung agency overseers: through the 4,000 political appointees who are named, or removed, at the pleasure of the president. The Schedule F proposal would be an enormous and unnecessary expansion of this already poorly utilized system.

Most administrations never come close to seeing all those politically appointed policy roles filled despite the tremendous access and leverage such appointments bring them. And some presidential teams still struggle to make best use of political appointee and career civil servant partnerships. Rather than adding more chaos and instability with a Schedule F policy, administrations could be maximizing the opportunity that comes with leveraging their career and political leaders together. As noted in a recent Partnership for Public Service and Boston Consulting Group report:

Career executives bring program and policy expertise from their long familiarity with their agencies which can help them manage programs better and work more effectively with external stakeholders and inside actors. Politically appointed leaders can bring energy, risk-taking and responsiveness into an agency’s decision-making process which can improve performance. When leaders are matched with missions, agendas and teams that align with their distinct approaches and perspectives, they can find success in creating a government that is more efficient, innovative and responsive to the needs of the public.

The civil service system is not perfect. The pay system has its origins in World War II. The hiring process, though well-intended, is glacial. The permeability of the system in an era that requires close understanding and collaboration across sectors is limited. But the fundamentals are powerful, and they serve as a critical ingredient to the success of the United States’ global leadership and the sustainability of its democracy.

The U.S. government is able to take on high-risk, high-cost ventures—nuclear security, pandemic response, environmental clean-up, food safety, and more—because civil servants are hired based on qualifications, not party affiliation; give advice based on data and integrity, not fear of reprisal; and owe allegiance to the Constitution, not the president. It needs to stay that way.

#### Care locks in right-wing violence---a progressive role for the state is needed.

Huneke ’22 [Samuel; July 26; Professor of History at George Mason University, PhD from Stanford University; The Point, “Toward a Queer Theory of the State,” https://thepointmag.com/politics/toward-a-queer-theory-of-the-state/]

Moreover, when it comes to issues of identity, rights and the future of our planet, it’s clear that progressives struggle to articulate a coherent framework for thinking about the role of the state. Progressive politicians’ response to the Supreme Court’s Dobbs decision striking down Roe v. Wade has, in the best cases, largely focused on supporting community abortion funds and ensuring that women in states that now ban abortion will be able to access the care they need. This is, of course, vital. But it can only be a Band-Aid on the problem until there is a state that is able and willing to guarantee women’s equal rights and access to care. Few politicians have yet endorsed any of the many creative solutions President Biden might adopt to counteract the Supreme Court’s decision, from ignoring the Dobbs ruling or expanding the Supreme Court to operating abortion clinics on federal lands or even calling a general strike.

Similarly, the partly has been nearly silent on the wave of transphobic and homophobic legislation now sweeping across the country—the latest evidence that social conservatives have never shrunk from using the state to advance their agenda. Party leaders have preferred to tell their frustrated base that the best solution to any given national problem is to “vote,” perhaps forgetting that the 2020 election delivered to the Democratic Party unified control of the federal government, that they in fact have the power to act. That forgetfulness is not, I think, strategic or even necessarily intentional; it is rather the culmination of decades of neoliberal politicking and anti-statist theorizing, which have colluded to make Democrats unable to conceive positively of state power. As Walter Benjamin suggested of European parliamentarians a century ago, “they have not remained conscious of the revolutionary forces to which they owe their existence.” If we are to counter the rising threat of the populist right, this is something that will have to change.

We might begin charting a new path by returning to Benjamin’s critique of violence, which resonates so deeply with queer critiques of the state. To directly compare the two, however, makes plain that something is missing in queer theory’s approach. Queer theory’s rejection of the state rests on the tacit assumption that violence can be transcended, that with the right form of critique and with the right forms of direct action, we can break free of history’s moorings.

Yet Benjamin recognized this as pure fantasy: there is no externality to violence. When queer advocates call for a retreat from the state and a return to forms of community organizing as a way to escape the state’s violence, they are engaged in wishful thinking. And if they imagine there is any way to solve the crises we face without power, they are deluding themselves. “Every conceivable solution to human problems,” Benjamin wrote, “remains impossible if violence is totally excluded in principle.”

## Case

### Theory---1NC

#### We should connect scholarship about disabled trans people to political goals.

Super, 21—queer/disabled/trans/nonbinary undergraduate student at Ohio State University (N., “Collaboration: the importance of activism for undergraduate pedagogy in queer/trans/crip Studies,” https://queerdisabilitystudies.wordpress.com/collaboration-the-importance-of-activism-for-undergraduate-pedagogy-in-queer-trans-crip-studies/, dml)

It is important to do more than just study queer, trans disabled people or include more queer, trans disabled people. To work together, we must also change the fields so that they inform each other’s methods all the time.

Teaching students about political movements and activism is something that I find helps connect the theoretical work to its practical applications. In my classes, we have discussed the activism of Eli Clare, Mia Mingus, Dean Spade, and Sins Invalid as examples. Many political movements show the shared goals of queer, trans and disabled liberation, including reproductive justice, environmental justice, abolition of police and prisons, and mutual aid. The goals of queer, trans, and disabled liberation are all tied together and so it is clear why we need to work together.

I choose to study these fields mostly because I want to understand oppression and learn how to work towards liberation. Social movements have inspired me to continue to educate myself outside of classes. For example, when the Black Lives Matter movement was at its height in the summer of 2020 and people across America were organizing against racist police violence, I learned a lot about abolition.

When we learn about activism and political movements, it teaches us the radical histories of the people who came before us, like Audre Lorde, Marsha P. Johnson, and Lou Sullivan. It teaches us the power of solidarity in politics. It helps us imagine what we are fighting for in the future. Studying activism gives students real world examples of how to apply their work and inspires them.

#### State action and ‘rights’ are in-line with the 1AC.

Currah ’22 [Paisley; 2022; Professor of Political Science and Women’s & Gender Studies at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York; Sex Is as Sex Does: Governing Transgender Identity, “Sex Is as Sex Does: Governing Transgender Identity,” p. 96-97]

Ultimately, the arguments of this book should not just better our understanding of states' decisions about sex, but also inform a politics that challenges these injustices. Certainly, there is a real harm here—many transgender people are misclassified by states and do not wish to be— that should be resolved. But the conviction that sex misclassification is unjust is not grounded in the findings of science or medical authority. Nor is it based on any utopian ideal of a state that does not classify and does not (mal)distribute. Of course, state decisions on sex classification have real effects on individuals and those effects can be unjust. Having the "wrong" sex designation creates obstacles to full and equal participation in social and civic life. As an advocate for transgender equality, I have relied on the traditional rights-based approach to recognition and have crafted policy proposals for agencies to reform their standards for determining sex. I have sat on agency advisory committees and worked with officials to change standards for sex reclassification, relying heavily on the "medical model" in the process. As a political theorist, I have also critiqued attempts to fit into systems of sex classification and argued for the "disestablishment" of sex/5 I have suggested that the goal of recognition leaves intact the power of the state to decide who gets what, and that ending its ability to use sex to distribute resources, rights, and privileges—marriage, and the benefits that derive from it, is the most obvious example—should be a priority for the movement. Like many in and around movements for transgender rights, transgender equality, and gender justice, I hold both positions simultaneously. They are not necessarily incompatible. One might see them, instead, as inhabiting different time frames, or moving at different speeds: one is a short-term objective of recognition to alleviate the material problems of misclassified individuals in the here and now, and the other is a long-term vision of a government that does not tell anyone what sex they are. Despite my earlier breakdown of the various camps and their arguments, these different viewpoints are not necessarily held by distinct sets of people. The appearance of one or the other might depend, instead, on what position is most intelligible and useful in a particular context.

#### They ought connect their politics to concrete strategies. Theorizing trans life as inherently disruptive oversimplifies and depoliticizes.

Cull, 25—Research Fellow at Trinity College Dublin (Matthew, “Ideal Theory, Literary Theory: Whither Transfeminism?,” The Routledge Handbook of Non-Ideal Theory, Chapter 18, pp. 254-256, brackets in original, language modifications denoted by chevrons, dml)

The above points us away from ideal theory approaches to understanding trans people. Rather than relying on idealizations about trans people and the societies that they inhabit, one should look to the specifics of trans life, the contexts that they find themselves in, and the approaches that they take to navigate an often hostile world. However, the above considerations do not merely point to better ways to theorize about trans people. They also point to a transfeminist politics.

Remember the ways in which both queer theorists and cultural feminists were critiqued for idealizing the political capacity of trans people. By virtue of existing whilst trans, trans people were positioned as inherently disruptive or oppressive, inherently able to overthrow or reinforce oppressive systems. Such views wildly overstated the political power that trans people have just in virtue of being trans people. This does not, of course, mean that trans people are completely powerless: not at all. However, political power requires more than merely existing as trans – it requires organization, movement building, and developing popular support. Trans people, in virtue of our low numbers and relative material disposses- sion, cannot rely solely on ourselves to make political change. We need to build a broad-based movement that builds alliances with other working-class and lumpen populations to resist transphobia, exploitation, racism, and so on.

Of course, despite Namaste and Prosser offering powerful reasons to reject ideal theory in both its queer theory and cultural feminist forms, ideal theory continues to find support in some quarters. On the one hand, Raymond-inspired right-wing anti-trans movements have of course found a new life in the late 2010s and early 2020s. On the other hand, an unexpected revival of ideal theory in the queer theory mould has emerged from the afropessi- mist tradition in the work of Marquis Bey. I suggest that we must reject both of these forms of ideal theory, instead building a transfeminist movement led by trans people and grounded in the experiences and needs of trans people.

Certainly, we cannot just, as Bey has recently suggested in Black Trans Feminism, build a transfeminist movement on an abstract notion of transness, distinct from being transgen- der (Bey, 2022, p. 44). Bey seems to have entirely missed the critiques of Prosser and Namaste to return to a queer-theory-like conception of transness as inherently radical. For Bey, transness is “primarily a movement away from an imposed starting point to an undis- closed (non)destination, [which] emblematizes abolitionist gender radicality: the fixedness and presumed immutability of bodily bestowal is dissolved through a departure toward something else” (Bey, 2022). This is ideal theory par excellence – and we may rightly ask of Bey exactly where trans women, especially Black trans women, fit into the vision of Black trans feminism being put forward. Bey at least has the self-awareness to declare that “black trans feminism is not about black trans women” (Bey, 2022, p. 32). Bey’s position appears to posit an idealized social ontology, idealized political capacities, abstracts away from the realities of trans life, and so on, in precisely the kinds of ways that Prosser and Namaste were worried about in their Millsian critique. Nowhere is the contrast between Bey and our non-ideal theorists clearer than when Bey claims that trans people are “an impossible peo- ple” (Bey, 2022, p. 105).17 Compare Namaste:

[I begin] with the mundane assumption that TS/TG people exist, that we live – and die – in the world … I take it for granted that transsexual and transgendered people exist, and that we shall continue to do so even as the theoretical frameworks that explain our etiology, celebrate our transgression of a sex/gender binary, or condemn us to psychosis go in and out of style. (Namaste, 2000, p. 55)

We exist. We are possible. Not only does such queer theorizing fall victim to the critiques of ideal theory mentioned above, such theorizing is also politically paralysing <incapacitating>. Instead of concrete calls to action and demands based in the lived realities and needs of trans people, we get a call for the abstract idea of “abolition.” Unlike those in the Black radical tradition whose call for abolition is a concrete set of demands (the defunding of the police, the end of incarceration, and so on) based on the actual violence that Black people face (police brutal- ity, mass incarceration, and so on),18 in Bey’s revival of idealist queer theory, we get a call for abolition which is a call for the end to an abstract idea – the end to “logics of captivity,” where such “logics” seem defined primarily in terms of the use of categories (Bey, 2022, pp. 228, 72–77). Even if the use of categories is always bad (though I submit it is not – see Cull, 2019; Cull, 2024) I suggest that our political movements ought probably to focus on abolishing the actual prisons, not the metaphorical ones.

#### Anti-queer animus is shaped by context and history---activists view the law as a pivotal tool in pushing back against institutionalized violence

Thoreson ’14 [Ryan; 2014; Specialist in the LGBT rights program at Human Rights Watch, author of Transnational LGBT Activism: Working for Sexual Rights Worldwide, J.D. from Yale Law School, D.Phil. in Anthropology from the University of Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, bachelor’s degree in government and studies of women, gender, and sexuality from Harvard University; Sexualities, “Troubling the waters of a ‘wave of homophobia’: Political economies of anti-queer animus in sub-Saharan Africa,” vol. 17]

When homophobias are understood to be only one of many forms of anti-queer animus, it is easier to see how they are inflected by the sociopolitical systems from which they arise. The most nuanced understandings of anti-queer animus typically come from local activists, academics, and journalists who are keenly aware of the history, politics, and ideologies that give rise to anti-queer incidents (Behind the Mask, 2011; Bop, 2008; Gay Uganda, 2011; Tamale, 2003). The specificity of their accounts are often lost as a wider network of actors becomes involved—for instance, as political leaders dismiss homosexuality as ‘unAfrican,’ journalists seek out regional patterns and metanarratives, and activists respond with the putatively universal frameworks of human rights and public health. When this occurs, external efforts to show solidarity and support have sometimes been unhelpful or counterproductive (Cameron, 2009; Haritaworn et al., 2008; Long, 2009; Massad, 2002). The loss of nuance in globalized campaigns is in part because of the dearth of frameworks that can identify particularities as well as transnational patterns.

Given the nation-state’s distinctive roles in producing antipathy toward homosexuality, a political economy approach is especially helpful. In spite of transnational capital, regional governance, and religious fundamentalisms, the nation-state retains the near-exclusive ability to regulate sexuality through penal legislation, family law, and a wide variety of state programs. Indeed, in the face of encroachment in other arenas, articulating a particular understanding of gender, sexuality, and the family has become an urgent project for many governments. The nation-state thus remains relevant in multiple ways. It is frequently invoked as an idea by those who link sexuality to the interests, morality, or tradition of the nation as an imagined community (Anderson, 1983; Engelke, 1999: 298–307). As a political apparatus, agents of the nation-state craft and sanction particular stances on homosexualities, and institutionalize these in state policies. The nation-state also functions as an arena where proponents and detractors of LGBTI populations engage in struggles over rights and recognition. Although a number of analyses have detailed how the nation-state structurally and ideologically shapes LGBTI mobilization (see Adam et al., 1999), greater attention must be paid to its complex roles in the production of anti-queer animus.

Using a political economy paradigm, evidence of plural forms of antiqueer animus can be found in a variety of venues. In this analysis, I look at three of these: structures shaped by the history and legacy of colonialism, contemporary political dynamics, and the role of key state and non-state actors in the sociopolitical system; discourses in legislation, judicial rulings, public statements by different stakeholders, and the media; and episodes of homophobia where people navigate their attitudes in specific interactions and performances.

A comprehensive approach to political economies of anti-queer animus requires an interdisciplinary analysis of all three of these elements. The anthropological toolkit is virtually indispensable in this project. In particular, episodic animus is difficult to analyze without a rich understanding of the role that hostile attitudes and interactions play in the larger sociocultural systems that generate and shape them. Attitudes fluctuate, and thick description is necessary to provide insights into the specific inflections of animus, how attitudes are actualized in context, and critically, when prejudices may be set aside or overlooked.

### Solvency---1NC

#### Focusing on authentic trans selfhood reaffirms neoliberal individualism.

Zimman, 19—Associate Professor in the Department of Linguistics and Affiliated Faculty in the Department of Feminist Studies at UC Santa Barbara (Lal, “Trans self-identification and the language of neoliberal selfhood: Agency, power, and the limits of monologic discourse,” International Journal of the Sociology of Language, Volume 2019, Issue 256, dml)

Neoliberal selfhood produces a subjectivity in which individuals who exercise their autonomy can, at times, make choices that run counter to dominant cultural ideologies like gender norms. Such is the case with gender self-identification, which draws on the well-worn Western distinction between a true inner self versus its outer bodily shell. For transgender identities to make sense, the inner self must be able to exercise a certain agency – at least enough to say that the gender it was assigned is in some way not desirable, comfortable, or authentic-feeling. The power of self-identification is thus rooted in the determinations of a neoliberal subject. Yet here, too, the freedom to act is not available to all, nor does that freedom guarantee a warm reception. When each person is free to determine their own fate, and hence responsible for its quality, unfulfilled goals suggest a failure of the person rather than a failure of the processes that govern achievement. The same process that produces the free subject also erases the power disparities it creates.

Recognizing the cultural basis of gender self-determination helps account for the disjunctures between self-identification as a linguistic practice and the way identification has been theorized in sociocultural linguistics. From the perspective of a theory like the tactics of intersubjectivity (Bucholtz and Hall 2004, 2005), even self-identifications are always necessarily dialogic. If there is one great shortcoming to the discourse of self-identification, it is that it does not identify the role of the interlocutor. If gender is for each of us to define for ourselves, at what point does the other step into the picture?

The goal of this discussion is not to undermine the elements of empowerment that self-determination offers. As trans theorists like Stanley (2014) have described, gender self-determination is a matter of liberation in the face of brutality and trauma. Instead, this article contextualizes one set of trans self-identification practices in their sociopolitical context in order to highlight the erasure of power dynamics within different segments of the trans population. The deployment of gender self-determination as a radical transformative politics carries ideological baggage that must be acknowledged: an exclusive focus on the freedom to self-identify masks the way power provides legitimation of some identifications while denying that legitimacy to others. Identity is a dialogic accomplishment, and a politics of trans liberation that sees beyond neoliberal subjectivity requires more than trans monologues. Despite its subversive potential, self-identification runs the risk of promising access to a form of power that ultimately proves out of reach. But it would be a mistake to conclude that the power derived from self-identification is entirely illusory; after all, trans activists have already effected a great deal of change in the language ordinarily used to refer to trans people, even if the acceptance of those changing norms is far from universal. What may ultimately be necessary to further that success, however, is a more overt recognition of the dialogic aspects of gender identification. Such a model of trans identity, with an explicit role for the interlocutor, would push forth an interpolative call of its own: a call to consider the political implications of our language as we construct one another.

#### Micropolitics turns into conformity and *enclave politics*.

Myers ’13 [Ella; 2013; Associate Professor of Political Science and Gender Studies at the University of Utah; Worldly Ethics: Democratic Politics and Care for the World, “Worldly Ethics: Democratic Politics and Care for the World,” p. 46-49]

The therapeutic ethics advanced by Foucault and Connolly resonate strongly with dominant features of American culture. In particular, therapeutic ethics echoes a widely held popular belief, captured in this chapter's second epigraph, that working on oneself is the path to broader social change. This view is expressed quite clearly today in the doctrine of ethical consumerism, which holds that individuals should critically reflect on their consumption practices, making changes in themselves and in their personal conduct (namely, in what they buy) in order to generate collective change. In addition to expressing the striking and disturbing conviction that a primary way of shaping the self and becoming a better person is through purchasing commodities, this orientation rests on the belief that each individual's action will additively amount to something greater, producing transformation on a large scale. This is a more simplistic model than Connolly's in that it recognizes no difference between micropolitics and macropolitics, treating the latter as simply the cumulative result of the former. There are, nonetheless, real similarities between Foucauldian inspired ethics and the more generalized conviction that transforming oneself is the most important and even the most politically significant project a person can undertake.

Even though Foucault's and Connolly's accounts of ethics may not intend to further the prevalent popular belief that you change the world by changing yourself, conceptualizing ethics primarily in terms of self intervention is dangerous in the context of an American cultural environment that can fairly be described as narcissistic.1l5 There is no doubt that the Foucauldian-inspired arts of the self Connolly advocates are meant to challenge reigning ways of being and to transform individuals in ways that enable them to engage more effectively in collective projects, including critical and oppositional endeavors that aim to alter status quo arrangements. Yet the massive popularity of self-help programs disseminating the view that worldly events are the direct result of one's personal thoughts, in conjunction with capitalist ideologies that tend to reduce the aesthetics of existence to the acquisition of a lifestyle through shopping, along with many other cultural influences that promote questionable techniques of the self, should make one hesitate before embracing an ethics that focuses so heavily on concern with oneself.1l6 Even Connolly's version of therapeutic ethics, which he wants to demarcate from unappealing forms of self-indulgence, runs the risk of being captured by prevailing habits and beliefs that can render arts of the self nondemocratic, even antidemocratic.

Some of Connolly's own formulations bring this danger into relief. For example, Connolly sometimes uses the term micropolitics to refer not only to the self's reflexive tactics but also to small-scale intersubjective relations and projects that might not typically be recognized as political in nature but which Connolly maintains can support and enhance macropoliticsP7 Micropolitics of this sort are already "ubiquitous," but they can be developed, readers are told, in ways that are "more or less conducive to democratic politics."1l8 This dimension of micropolitics is sometimes depicted by Connolly as a bridge connecting concentrated work on the self to organized forms of collective citizen action. But the concrete examples of micropolitical activity that he gives, even those that extend beyond the self's relation to itself, raise new doubts about how resistant or transformative such activity really is. Indeed, some of what Connolly has in mind seems depressingly adaptive to contemporary arrangements, considering how focused his examples are on individual lifestyle choices rather than on the admittedly more difficult problem of how to mobilize energies for more collaborative, oppositional, and inventive endeavors. Writing of micropolitics, Connolly counsels, "If you are in the middle class, buy a Prius or a Volt and explain to your friends and neighbors why you did; write in a blog; attend a pivotal rally; ride your bike to work more often; consider solar panels; introduce new topics at your church." While these things may be worth doing, it is not clear why one should believe they will foster an urge to "participate in larger political assemblages in more robust ways," as Connolly wagers.ll9 Indeed, these recommendations seem to reinforce the belief that political change is a happy by-product of small decisions made by each individual. Despite Connolly's best intentions and his ambitious calls for broad transformation in the direction of deepening pluralization, greater economic equality, and less vengeful foreign policy-the therapeutic ethics he endorses is too easily absorbed, even co-opted, by a dominant culture that rewards forms of preoccupation with the self that do little to facilitate associative democracy.

This point seems to be unwittingly made, in a slightly different context, by Cressida Heyes's Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies. Heyes's stated objective is to rescue Foucault's work on ethics from misreadings that liken self-care to self-indulgence, in order to defend the importance of "somaesthetics," in which the self strives to cultivate a body in ways that are resistant to normalization. Yet although Heyes is devoted to the idea that ethical self-diSCipline, performed by the self on the self, can be an "art of living with greater embodied freedom," the vast majority of the book is spent investigating, in great detail, case studies involving contemporary practices of askesis (sex reassignment surgery, Weight Watchers, and cosmetic surgery), which, Heyes convincingly argues, help to produce "docile bodies."12o So although Heyes continues to hold out the hope that concentrated work on the self, and specifically on one's body, can serve as a site of resistance against normalizing power, the overwhelming sense conveyed by her research is how readily and thoroughly care for the self is promoted and practiced in conformist, "self-absorbed" ways.l21 There is little acknowledgment of the difficulty her examples pose to her celebration of a transgressive, liberating somaes- thetics. What does it mean to endorse an ethics focused on rapport asoi and on "somatic askesis" in particular, in the context of a society that, by Heyes's own account, obsessively and successfully markets forms of selfcare that produce compliant and often solipsistic selves? Why should one believe that Heyes's preferred example of good somatic self-discipline, yoga, is somehow safe from the normalizing influences so well documented in her treatments of sex reassignment surgery, organized weight loss, and cosmetic surgery? Like Connolly, Heyes seems to neglect the way in which even the best-intentioned calls for care of the self may still be too complicit with an American culture that celebrates and aggressively markets depoliticizing modes of self-care.

Still, the appeal of therapeutic ethics is undeniable. It soothes with the promise that one need not get tangled up in the messy, fraught world of intersubjective political struggle in order to engage in politically meaningful action. Whether tending to the self is seen as synonymous with politics, as in the popularized version of therapeutic ethics, or whether it is understood as a precursor to collective endeavors, as in Connolly's view, the suggestion that one ought to begin with focused attention on oneself is comforting. It spares one the challenges of attempting to address a public problem by acting in solidarity with and in opposition to other citizens, where there may be no assurance of success and when fatigue, disappointment, and frustration are likely. When the political landscape looks bleak-because there are few opportunities for ordinary citizens to govern themselves, because of growing corporate influence over politics at all levels, or because of any number of other depressing facts-therapeutic ethics reassures with the idea that one can be an engaged citizen all by oneself.

#### Endurance is smoke and mirrors for capitalism AND can never resolve the violence described in the 1AC.

Cotter ’13 [Jennifer; 2013; Assistant Professor of English at William Jewell College, Ph.D. in Critical Literary and Cultural Studies from the University of Pittsburgh; Stories in Post-Human Cultures, “Posthumanist Feminism and the Embodiment of Class,” p. 27-37]

‘Survival,’ ‘endurance,’ and ‘putting up with hardship and physical pain,’ while maintaining a ‘positive affect’ are represented by Braidotti as forms of ‘radical feminist resistance’ within and at the same time beyond capitalism. This is a politics which marginalises the necessity of collective transformation of the ‘ensemble of social relations of production’ and focuses on changing the felt experience of exploitation within capitalism in crisis. ‘A radically immanent intensive body’ Braidotti argues, is ‘a portion of […] forces […] that is stable enough to sustain and undergo constant […] fluxes of transformation.’ 29

Braidotti’s theory glosses over the historical and material relations in which the conditions of survival for increasing numbers of women around the world depend upon their capacity to sell their labour-power to capital for a wage and thus become part of the logic of the capitalist working day. In doing so, she romanticises exploited women, while conveniently dispensing with the necessity to critique and to transform the material relations in which women are exploited. Posthumanist feminism is ultimately a ruling-class survivalism that bypasses the social – particularly the need for social transformation to abolish the exploitation of labour – and returns to the ‘elemental’ and the ‘natural.’ To put this another way, posthumanism ideologically naturalises the way in which wage-labour/capital relations exploit the surplus-labour of workers and reduce workers to basic survival for the next working day.

4. Feminist Science Fiction, Survivalism and Wage-Labour

This logic is also evident in the film, Hanna which has been proclaimed by its director Joe Wright to be a feminist science fiction film. 30 Hanna is a teenage girl who is the product of a now terminated CIA led bio-genetic engineering programme to breed children as ‘perfect soldiers’ for U.S. imperialism. The defunct programme, led by CIA agents Marissa Wiegler and Erik Heller, recruited pregnant women from an abortion clinic, including Johanna, Hanna’s biological mother. Upon ending the program Wiegler exterminated all of the children, except Hanna, who escaped with Johanna and the now ‘rogue’ agent Erik. In flashback scenes, Wiegler pursues Erik, Johanna and two year old Hanna – tropes of a young, loving, nuclear family – shoots and kills Johanna, who whispers to Wiegler upon her death, ‘she’ll never be yours.’ Meanwhile, though Wiegler is in pursuit with intent to kill, Erik Heller escapes with young Hanna.

The film opens with teenage Hanna, raised in isolation in the forest by Erik who is training her as an assassin to kill her would-be assassin, Wiegler. Though not without fatherly affect, Erik’s affective education of Hanna is represented as stunted. For example, during fireside reading, Hanna longs to know ‘what music feels like,’ and Erik gives her an encyclopaedic definition of music. Hanna wishes to ‘hear it for herself’ and struggles to reconcile rote description with affective experience. 31 D D The film in this sense is a bio-political coming of age story in which Hanna, the genetically-engineered killer, is ‘ready’ to undertake her adult mission to assassinate Wiegler – which begins by flipping a switch that signals Wiegler of her remote location, thus setting Wiegler in pursuit, and along the way longs to become part of an alternative, affective, community that is latent within and yet suppressed and marginalised by a cold, austere, techno-mediated world.

Like Braidotti’s writings, the film’s narrative formally distances itself from cyberfeminist depictions of technology and the imperialist expansion of capitalism as ‘emancipatory’ for women. It does so, however, through gendered caricature. This is particularly evident in the character of Marissa Wiegler. Austere, calculating, and consumerist, Wiegler is at once a technologically adept imperialist aggressor and the ‘motherless career woman’ who has ‘made certain choices’ and now reacts with vengeance against mothers and children. 32 When Hanna’s grandmother confronts Wiegler by saying that she will never know what it is like to lose a child because she has not had the experience of motherhood, Wiegler loads a gun and puts a bullet in her head.

Through Wiegler’s character the film alludes to the fact that in transnational capitalism now, a small class fraction of women in fact do hold positions of wealth and power, alongside of ruling class men, and have a vested interest in maintaining and profiting from material relations in which other working class women and men, boys and girls are exploited. Yet, at the same time, the film’s narrative ‘ideologically resolves’ the material contradictions of wage-labour/capital relations in which the majority of women are exploited, attributing them to a loss of ‘ethics,’ love, affect, and, ultimately, family values. This is underscored by the presence of sympathetic ‘mothers’ in the narrative – Johanna; Hanna’s grandmother; and Rachel, the mother of a bohemian English family traveling the world in a campervan – who provide a space of acceptance, love, and affect but who are all captured and/or assassinated by Wiegler and her henchmen.

Such a narrative not only pits working class women with and without children against each other, it obscures the relationship of gender, the family, and technology to the social relations of production in capitalism and mystifies the material basis of the exploitation of women in the theft of surplus labour. The family continues to be what Jen Roesch, following Engels, calls an ‘economic unit’ under capitalism in which ‘employers pay workers a wage, but take no responsibility for most of the social costs of maintaining the current generation of workers – or for raising the next generation of workers.’ D 33 D Inequality continues in an era of high development of technology and increased participation of women in the paid workforce not, at root, owing to a loss of affect and family values but because the exploitation of worker’s surplus-labour by capital continues to shape social life in the 21 st century. Marx’s explanation of the social relations of exploitation behind the development of new technologies and the integration of women into wage-labour continues to provide the most effective means for understanding the material relations behind the deepening inequality of women now. When women were restricted to unpaid domestic labour, Marx explains:

The value of labour-power was determined, not only by the labour-time necessary to maintain the individual adult labourer, but also by that necessary to maintain his family. Machinery, by throwing every member of that family on to the labour market, spreads the value of the man’s labour-power over his whole family. It thus depreciates his labour-power. To purchase the labour-power of a family of four workers may, perhaps, cost more than it formerly did to purchase the labour-power of one, but, in return, four days’ labour takes the place of one, and their price falls in proportion to the excess of the surplus labour of four over the surplus labour of one. In order that the family may live, four people must now not only labour but expend surplus labour for the capitalist. Thus we see that machinery, while augmenting the human material that forms the principle object of capital’s exploiting power, at the same time raises the degree of exploitation. 34

It is the theft of surplus-labour by capital and the increase of the rate of exploitation that explains why women and men are becoming poorer at a time of the development of new technologies and the further integration of women into the workforces of capitalism. 35

Hanna is ultimately a D film that puts forward ‘endurance’ and ‘survival’ as forms of ‘radical resistance.’ At the hands of Wiegler, Hanna endures the pain of loss of all persons with whom she has established any affective connection. The film ends where it begins. In the opening scene Hanna shoots an elk during a training session and laments her failure: ‘I just missed your heart.’ 36 In the end, in the final standoff with Wiegler, Hanna does not want to hurt anyone anymore and attempts to walk away proclaiming ‘it’s over.’ D 37 D When Wiegler shouts ‘don’t you walk away from me, young lady,’ draws her gun and shoots Hanna anyway, quick-reflexed Hanna simultaneously shoots Wiegler with an arrow laying Wiegler flat on her back. Hanna repeats the refrain, ‘I just missed your heart,’ picks up Wiegler’s gun and shoots her. 38 Hanna has become the assassin that she has been bred to be and fulfils her coming of age mission. The film represents this as a radical act of survival and resistance to an austere techno-mediated world. Hanna is not able to ‘pierce the heart’ of Wiegler or to escape her embodied existence as a killing machine. She cuts her losses and kills Wiegler, presumably to endure and move on. At the same time, through the repetition of the refrain, Hanna is represented as recognising the necessity of the ‘heart’ and therefore as maintaining an alternative trans-humanity in the face of Wiegler’s instrumentalism.

Yet, this is precisely the way in which the film and the larger narratives of posthumanist feminism do not represent a break from the ideology of capitalism but a cultural updating of it to adjust women to the exigencies of capitalism in crisis. Cyberfeminism obscured these conditions by equating the development of new digital technologies and neoliberalism with freedom for women. Cyberfeminism failed to bring about freedom for women because it is not technology that is the root of freedom from necessity, but the abolition of exploitation and the social relations of production founded on private property relations. Posthumanist feminism legitimates relations of exploitation by advocating a pragmatic adjustment to them as existential conditions of life as such. By arguing against the necessity of materially transforming the relations of production and, at the same time, arguing for the ‘endurance of pain and hardship’ and ‘expressing positive affect’ within capitalism, posthumanist feminism is, in effect, arguing for increasing the endurance of women workers and, therefore, increasing their productivity, within increased rates of exploitation. This is an austerity feminism that preaches on behalf of capital to the exploited women of the world to get by on less, endure more, survive, and maintain a positive affect instead of struggling for social transformation.

#### The aff as a hermeneutic approach to politics is disastrous and props up capitalism, rights are redeemable.

Ruti ’17 [Mari; 2017; Professor of Critical Theory and of Sexual Diversity Studies at the University of Toronto; Columbia University Press, “The Ethics of Opting Out: Queer Theory’s Defiant Subjects,” pp. 152-155]

For many queer theorists, rights-based models of justice—models that rely on a set of normative ideals—are merely an insidious form of biopolitical control, a means of further constraining us even as they profess to protect us. Undoubtedly this is sometimes true. And it is also true that rights-based models of justice cannot solve structural problems such as sexism, racism, homophobia, or poverty and that their practical application consequently often falls short of the ideals they profess. But this does not mean that I am prepared to simply just throw out the ideals in question, for I do not believe that the system’s inability to live up to its ideals automatically means that the ideals themselves are intrinsically corrupt. The ideal of formal equality under the law may be frequently violated in practice. But the demise of this ideal would arguably have even more drastically oppressive consequences.

Nor is it the case that normative ethics is inextricably tied to the Enlightenment subject of abstract reason. As feminist philosophers such as Amy Allen (2008), Seyla Benhabib (2006, 2011), and Nancy Fraser (2010, 2013) have illustrated, it is entirely possible to envision a set of a priori norms that are historically constituted—rather than metaphysically grounded—and that therefore remain open to continuous modification. Indeed, many of the norms that we, collectively speaking, live by have been conjured into existence through relatively recent processes of negotiation. Though there is no doubt that such negotiations always exclude certain individuals and populations—and though there is consequently no doubt that we need to stay vigilantly attentive to the constitutive exclusions of our normative systems—the alternative of discarding all attempts to improve these systems by, say, rendering them more inclusive or more consistent in their application would hardly be a productive course of action.

In this particular instance, Butlerian negotiation with power seems like a better option than Lacanian-Edelmanian and Foucauldian-Hufferian antinormativity. I would in fact go so far as to say that queer antinormativity can only survive to the degree that it operates against the backdrop of basic rights. As deficient as these rights are, as insincere as the foundations of contemporary liberal democracy may be, their absence would obliterate the political space within which queer antinormativity can operate. In this sense, antinormativity presupposes the persistence of “liberal” values even when it engages in a vehement critique of (neo)liberalism; ironically, as I already mentioned in chapter 1, the antinormative critic can only flourish to the extent that she can implicitly “count on” the practical (boringly prudent) liberal to keep defending the very rights that she shuns.

In this context, it seems fitting to raise the possibility that queer antinormativity, like queer performativity, might in some ways play right into the hands of neoliberal capitalism. Is it not the case that capitalism, like antinormativity, despises limits? Does it not thrive in the absence of constraints? After all, the self-absorbed neoliberal individual who is used to an endless array of existential possibilities and who does not like limitations on her freedom—including her freedom to choose her hair color, breakfast cereal, video game, and mode of exercise—may be perfectly happy with the idea that she should not be beholden to norms that might restrict her in some way. From this perspective, a priori norms could be argued to war against the neoliberal capitalist ethos of unmitigated choice, perhaps even decentering the neoliberal subject (and its project of self-actualization) by introducing within its being “alien” elements (norms) that it experiences as constraining. As a result, queer theory’s categorical rejection of a priori norms can come across as a bit too convenient, as a symptom of the very neoliberal system that this theory condemns.

In addition, though collective norms that trump the wishes of the individual can be tyrannical, so can a radical antinormativity that veers into anything-goes relativism and that consequently fails to distinguish between just and unjust actions. Though there is no doubt that there are norms that are simply just oppressive—such as heteropatriarchal norms of gender and sexuality—there are others that may be the most effective way to counter the abuses of power. Yet other norms can cut both ways. For example, Benhabib (2011) points out in the contexts of global human rights discourses that even though such discourses can be—and have frequently been—used to advance Western economic and political interests across the world, they can also be—and have sometimes been—used to protect non-Western populations from precisely those interests (for instance, by placing restrictions on the exploitation of labor in free-trade zones).

That so many individuals and political groups around the globe are demanding basic human rights may on some level signify the triumph of Western imperialism; but on another level, it is an indication that there is something appealing about the prospect of such rights (my assumption being that people outside the Western world are not mere passive dupes of Western values, that they are perfectly capable of deciding which political goals they want to support). Likewise, even though rights discourses within Western societies can promote the socioeconomic agendas of the powerful, they can under certain circumstances be used to shield the less powerful against such agendas. The fact that rights-based justice fails as often as it succeeds does not mean that it never succeeds, that it accomplishes nothing.