## 1NC

### 1NC

Topicality

#### Interp: the negative should not be burdened with rejoinder against 1ACs that do not affirm the resolution.

#### Topicality is defined by:

#### ‘Resolved’ means to adopt a policy by law.

Words & Phrases 64, Permanent Edition

Definition of the word “resolve,” given by Webster is “to express an opinion or determination by resolution or vote; as ‘it was resolved by the legislature;” It is of similar force to the word “enact,” which is defined by Bouvier as meaning “to establish by law”.

**The United States federal government means the three branches.**

**OECD 87**, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Council, 1987, “United States,” The Control and Management of Government Expenditure, p. 179

Political and organisational structure of government The United States of America is a federal republic consisting of 50 states. States have their own constitutions and within each State there are at least two additional levels of government, generally designated as counties and cities, towns or villages. The relationships between different levels of government are complex and varied (see Section B for more information). The Federal Government is composed of three branches: the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch. Budgetary decisionmaking is shared primarily by the legislative and executive branches. The general structure of these two branches relative to budget formulation and execution is as follows.

**“Collective bargaining rights” are requirements for union recognition and good faith bargaining, secured via law.**

**GAO 02**, U.S. Government Accountability Office, September 2002, “Collective Bargaining Rights: Information on the Number of Workers with and without Bargaining Rights,” *Report to Congressional Requesters*, pp. 23-24, https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-02-835.pdf.

Definition of Bargaining Rights

An important issue in this analysis is the definition of bargaining rights. There is variation in the rights provided under the NLRA, the Railway Labor Act and the many state and local laws governing collective bargaining. These differences span a host of issues, from the procedures governing representation elections, the right to strike, and binding arbitration, to the scope of bargaining and the remedies for violations. Although the right to strike could be considered part of a “core definition of bargaining rights,” we based our definition on the concepts of union recognition—permitting individuals to join together and form unions and the requirement that employers recognize employee organizations—and “good faith bargaining”—bargaining with intent to reach an agreement.1 These are key elements of the rights granted under the NLRA.2

#### ‘Strengthen’ means achieving a higher net level of protection for bargaining rights

IUCN 10 – International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, 2010, “Draft International Covenant on Environment and Development. Fourth edition: Updated Text,” https://portals.iucn.org/library/efiles/documents/eplp-031-rev3.pdf

ARTICLE 43

ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS AND CONTROLS

1. Parties shall cooperate to formulate, develop, and strengthen international rules, standards and recommended practices, as well as indicators on issues of common concern for the conservation of the environment and sustainable use of natural resources, taking into account the need for flexible means of implementation based on their respective capabilities.

2. Parties shall adopt, strengthen and implement specific national standards, including emission, quality, product, and process standards, designed to prevent or abate harm to the environment and to enhance or restore environmental quality.

Article 43 concerns national and international standard-setting. The dynamic nature of this obligation is reflected in the use of the term “strengthen” in both paragraphs and the reference to enhancing environmental quality in Paragraph 2. The order of the paragraphs indicates that national standards should be based on international norms and that due account should be taken of nonbinding recommendations and similar texts.

Like UNCLOS (1982) and other treaties,424 Paragraph 1 of this Article obligates Parties to cooperate in the formulation of international rules and standards. There is a need for harmonization and coordination in addressing issues of common concern, in particular for protection of the global commons. This will avoid conflicts and competitive distortions and enhance the reduction or elimination of trade barriers. Although the norms to be adopted are to be jointly agreed, the needs of developing countries are taken into account in the call for flexible means of implementation. This corresponds to the concept of common but differentiated responsibilities enunciated at Rio (see Draft Covenant Article 12). To be noted is that, as far as possible, international standards should be based on achieving a higher level of environmental protection.425 Given their different ecological, social and economic circumstances, individual Parties should not be prejudiced in their right to set more stringent environmental standards, provided that they are not disguised barriers to trade (see Article 34(1) (Trade and Environment)).

#### T is a voting issue for fairness and clash:

#### Debate’s structure generates competitive incentives that are best channeled by a limited topic. Debate is inherently competitive---both sides want to win and ask for the ballot---without a limited, predictable stasis point, retreating from controversy becomes strategic and unchecked. Only our interpretation requires and rewards engagement and testing, which locks in a role for the negative. This ensures teams refine arguments over the course of a season which actualizes every benefit of the activity.

#### T comes prior to substance and turns-case. It’s impossible to negate if we can’t prepare, so bracket out case and vote Neg on presumption. Anything else results in false positives.

#### Only the resolution establishes a burden of proof and rejoinder on each team. Any other metric is ad hoc and lacks a logical obligation to respond because there’s no shared standard of evaluation.

### 1NC

Asterisk K

#### We endorse a counter-reading of the 1AC with the word “trans” replaced with “trans.\*”

#### The asterisk is key to inclusivity of people whose gender expression exceeds binary understandings of transness. Failing to include it turns the case by reproducing hegemonic understandings of trans identity.

Avery Tompkins 14, Associate professor of sociology at Transylvania University, 2014, “Asterisk,” Keywords in *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 1-2, pp. 26-27, https://read.dukeupress.edu/tsq/article/1/1-2/26/91872/Asterisk.

The asterisk (\*), or star, is a symbol with multiple meanings and applications that can mark a bullet point in a list, highlight or draw attention to a particular word or phrase, indicate a footnote, or operate as a wildcard character in computing and telecommunications. In relation to transgender phenomena, the asterisk is used primarily in the latter sense, to open up transgender or trans to a greater range of meanings. As Sevan Bussell (2012), a blogger and advocate for using trans\*, has explained, ‘‘The asterisk came from internet search structure. When you add an asterisk to the end of a search term, you’re telling your computer to search for whatever you typed, plus any characters after.’’ Though trans\* has appeared sporadically in print and online for several years, discussions of this new nomenclature began appearing regularly in online gender-community spaces only around 2010.

Although transgender has been used since the early 1990s as an umbrella term to cover the widest possible range of gender variation, it is now understood in some circles to represent only binary notions of transness and to refer only to trans men and trans women rather than to those who contest the gender binary (Killermann 2012). Proponents of adding the asterisk to trans argue that it signals greater inclusivity of new gender identities and expressions and better represents a broader community of individuals. Trans\* is thus meant to include not only identities such as transgender, transsexual, trans man, and trans woman that are prefixed by trans- but also identities such as genderqueer, neutrios, intersex, agender, two-spirit, cross-dresser, and genderfluid (ibid.).

Ironically, typing ‘‘trans\*’’ into a search engine yields only results that include the trans- prefix, thereby reinscribing the very conceptual limitations of trans being argued against by those who advocate using the asterisk. We therefore must consider how the asterisk may have a more multifaceted theoretical application. Recalling the variety of ways in which the asterisk can function, trans\* blends the symbol’s wildcard function with its use as a figurative bullet point in a list of identities that are not predicated on the trans- prefix formulation. Similarly, starring trans draws attention to the word, indicating the possibility of a deeper meaning than the prefix itself might suggest. Finally, the asterisk may act as a footnote indicator, implying a complication or suggesting further investigation. In this sense, the asterisk actually pushes beyond the trans- prefix and opposes it as the only legitimate way to refer to trans\* identities and communities.

### 1NC

Joy Deficit K

#### Sociology faces a “joy deficit.” Trans studies overwhelmingly depicts trans experience in negative terms by constructing a narrative of trans unlivability that is psychically and politically destructive. Kansas’s call for trans-maladjustment enacts an epistemological foreclosure that collapses transness and disability into the terrain of negative affect.

Stef M. Shuster 24, associate professor in Lyman Briggs College and the Department of Sociology at Michigan State University; and Laurel Westbrook, Associate Professor of Sociology at Grand Valley State University, August 2024, “Reducing the Joy Deficit in Sociology: A Study of Transgender Joy,” *Social Problems*, vol. 71, no. 3, pp. 791-805, https://academic.oup.com/socpro/article-abstract/71/3/791/6603089?redirectedFrom=PDF&casa\_token=9y87WaJA5zwAAAAA%3awH8lJtKne47mldxWpdQqq7-wwFt8zEX61rbtCQllIaDJE6BV6xDoUXRrWkpQEMnkG2HG3UOZZ2xC&login=false.

If emotions are, as Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta (2000:65) suggested, the “ultimate Rorschach test for sociologists, revealing their basic theoretical assumptions about social life,” then one might assume that most sociologists are killjoys. The typical convention in sociological scholarship about marginalized groups is to focus on negative experiences and inequality (Cieslik 2015; Thin 2014). This makes intuitive sense, as sociology is often thought to be the study of social inequalities (Lamont 2018). However, sociology is actually the study of society and negative experiences are only part, not the whole, of social life (Veenhoven 2018). Despite the limitations, this focus on the negative remains dominant, because, as sociologists of knowledge have documented, once a way of thinking becomes established, it gains legitimacy and becomes difficult to change (Bourdieu 1977; Foucault 1973; Kuhn 1962). In sociology, as in all other academic disciplines, knowledge systems, or epistemes (Foucault 1973), eventually take on a life of their own (Berger, Luckmann, and Zifonun 1967; Connell 2020), which makes them difficult to break away from. Moreover, when only certain kinds of questions are asked, the possibility for producing new knowledge is barred, resulting in epistemic foreclosures which perpetuate the status quo (Cetina 1999; Henricks 2016; Moody 2004).

Like knowledge systems, the narratives academics tell about marginalized groups create particular realities. Academic writing substantiates what is known about a topic, models the “proper” way of telling stories with data, and emphasizes certain topics (Franzosi 1998; Polletta et al. 2011). In sociology, marginalized groups are often only depicted as suffering negative life experiences, including discrimination, stigma, and bias. In these canon-building storytelling practices, sociologists have (unintentionally) left out a core component of the lives of marginalized people. That is, sociologists do not know much about the joyful aspects of being a member of a marginalized group, which has created what we term a joy deficit in sociology.1 This deficit is particularly troubling as joy is vital to human well-being (Emmons 2020; Thin 2014), can sustain people experiencing and mobilizing against oppression (Wettergren 2009), and helps make life worth living (Westbrook 2021). As such, joy is sociologically relevant to fully understanding people’s lived experience.

Although the lack of focus on joy is pervasive throughout sociology, it is particularly prevalent in trans studies. Much of the sociological research on transgender people has documented the myriad ways in which trans people experience extreme inequalities across all domains of social life. As the literature demonstrates, transgender people face rejection, discrimination, violence, uneven access to major institutions such as education and the law, bullying, stigma, and restrictive gender norms (Schilt and Lagos 2017). Contributing to the pervasive inequality that trans people experience is a durable dichotomous system that positions cisgender people as “normal” and transgender people as “other” (Schilt and Westbrook 2009). This dichotomy is solidified in dominant systems of language that boxes trans people into normative gendered expectations in social interaction (Shuster 2017). There are also power struggles between binary and nonbinary transgender people over who is “authentically” trans (Garrison 2018). Moreover, transnormativity, the belief that there is one correct way to be trans (Johnson 2016; Vipond 2015), insists that all transgender people should, or should want to, engage in medical “transitions” to a binary and normative gender expression. Undergirding these narratives of trans experience is the trope of the transgender person in misery, which we suggest is, within itself, a normative narrative about trans experience. Sociologically, when scholars equate oppression with misery in the study of social inequalities, this way of thinking becomes culturally entrenched (Bourdieu 1977; Harwood 2004) in how cisgender people understand trans people and how transgender people come to understand themselves.

In response to the joy deficit in the sociology of trans studies, we ask: What if sociologists asked different kinds of questions about marginalization? What new insights might be found if we shift our attention away from exclusively focusing on the negative outcomes of being transgender and asked, instead, about the joyful aspects? To address these questions, we analyze 40 in-depth interviews with transgender people to demonstrate the methodological and theoretical importance of asking about joy.

Our focus here is on joy, but we are mindful of recent critiques about the commodification of happiness (Cabanas and Illouz 2019) and how it has become linked to conceptions of the ideal citizen. We do not advocate for disregarding the oppression that transgender people experience. Nor are we suggesting that if trans people (and sociologists) simply practiced positive thinking, inequalities would diminish. Instead, our questioning of the episteme around marginality extends insights from the sociology of trans studies by analyzing aspects of transgender life that have been consistently overlooked in the scholarship. We found that those interviewed expressed immense levels of trans joy—the joy of being transgender. Transgender people’s quality of life improved, and they developed meaningful and vibrant connections with other people, as a result of being trans. In addition, although we focus on transgender people specifically, our findings demonstrate a vital need to address the joy deficit that exists in the sociological scholarship on marginalized groups in general. Narratives about marginalization are exhaustively told through the lens of negative outcomes, as sociologists have a tendency to study social harms (Cieslik 2015; Thin 2014). Examining joy adds nuance to understandings of the lived experiences of marginalized people that has been absent from much of the sociological scholarship. Thus, the findings presented here offer sociologists new ways of thinking about social problems, transgender people, and marginalization in what we hope will be a catalyst for a joy revolution in sociology.2

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF EPISTEMIC FORECLOSURES

Although transgender joy has increasingly become a topic of public discussion, appearing in publications such as The Washington Post and The Guardian, among others, transgender joy is rarely addressed in the academic literature (Burt 2019; Connor 2019). Joy, happiness, and pleasure are almost never mentioned in the foundational The Transgender Studies Reader and do not appear anywhere in its index (Stryker and Whittle 2006). Similarly, joy, happiness, and pleasure are not explicitly discussed in the Annual Review of Sociology article on transgender studies in sociology (Schilt and Lagos 2017) or in “The Transgender Issue” published by GLQ (Stryker 1998). What causes this lack of attention to joy in academic analyses?

Epistemes, Accepted Narratives, and Conventional Questions

The social study of knowledge has demonstrated that once particular ways of thinking are established, they accrue legitimacy, are hard to change, and often perpetuate inequality (Foucault 1973; Kuhn 1962). Foucault’s (1973) now classic work on the development of ideas and knowledge suggested that normative values are assigned not only to what we know, but also how we know and who is doing the knowing (see also Collins 1989). For example, Connell’s (2020) work on the neoliberalization of higher education and knowledge production found that educational administrators are increasingly concerned with ranking systems such as journal impact factors and citation counts that mark only certain forms of knowledge as legitimate. Disregarding knowledge from the Global South or that is published in certain venues contributes to the canonization of restrictive ways of thinking. These epistemes, or knowledge systems, are taken-for-granted and often invisible to knowledge producers (Foucault 1973) as they come to take on a life of their own and are propagated without question (Berger et al. 1967; Hacking 1999). As such, epistemes produce serious consequences in the production of, and lasting gaps in, knowledge by encouraging a focus on certain types of problems and particular methods used to study them (Cetina 1999; Moody 2004).

Legitimated knowledge systems encourage scholars to tell particular narratives when reporting their findings. Although academics do not usually think of themselves as storytellers, scholars who study narratives argue that all researchers construct narratives about their data (Ferber 2000). Like knowledge systems, narratives convey values and construct a particular version of reality (Franzosi 1998). As Polletta et al. (2011:113) noted in their review of the literature, “what passed as universal categories, neutral standards, scientific facts, and objective progress were actually stories: moralizing accounts whose claim to truth rested on their verisimilitude rather than their veracity.” As such, narratives are one of the tools used in academia to maintain claims to “truth” and “objectivity.” However, narratives are not objective; instead, they are shaped by epistemes.

The questions researchers ask shape what is known about a topic. When only particular questions are valued, possibilities for producing knowledge are blocked, resulting in epistemic foreclosures that perpetuate the status quo, reproducing inequality (Henricks 2016). If, for example, scholars include only the binary option of female and male on surveys with no additional question for indicating cisgender or transgender, it restricts the data to particular kinds of people and maintains binarist and cisnormative assumptions in the survey design and data reporting (Westbrook and Saperstein 2015). Notably, those who perpetuate epistemic foreclosures often benefit from doing so. Those who uphold the status quo tend to reap more rewards than those who challenge long-standing positions, knowledge, tastes, and preferences (Swidler and Arditi 1994).

Concerns about a Focus on Happiness and Joy

Sociologists may shy away from studying joy due to concerns about reproducing dominant ideologies such as the “tyranny of happiness.” Recent critiques of the tyranny of happiness have astutely recognized how happiness has become the “incarnation of today’s ideal image of the good citizen” (Cabanas and Illouz 2019:3). In these pop psychology renderings rooted in American exceptionalism and consumerism, if one works hard enough and is virtuous, they can attain happiness (Ehrenreich 2009). Thus, beliefs about happiness can be used to justify oppression (Ahmed 2010). Pointing to images that circulate in the public imagination, such as the “happy housewife,” Ahmed (2010) found that happiness has cultural currency that normalizes heteronormative relationships and gender hegemony.

Moreover, sociologists may fear that focusing on joy will take attention away from social problems. Skepticism about the relevance of positive feelings can be traced to classical sociologists. Marx (2015), for example, believed that happiness was an elixir to quell mass revolt and authentic ways of living. Positive feelings, such as happiness, are often perceived as superficial and fleeting emotional experiences, and, therefore, viewed as problematic by sociologists because they distract from more significant and underlying processes that shape social lives (Cieslik 2015:422). However, there may be conceptual confusion in the difference between feeling joy and buying happiness. For example, many social movement scholars (e.g., Gamson, Fireman, and Rytina 1982) have theorized that anger, frustration, or humiliation are necessary to catalyze collective action. However, recent work has documented how joy, laughter, and fun are crucial for sustained movement mobilization (Wettergren 2009) and how feeling good most of the time may be a precursor to feeling angry about social injustice (Kushlev et al. 2019). Moreover, joy can be an important outcome of collective action. The recent #BlackBoyJoy movement cuts against the grain of popular narratives by uplifting the joyful aspects of being a Black boy and helping to instill a sense of pride (Moody-Ramirez 2019).

The Consequences of Not Attending to Joy

The status quo in sociology now encourages scholars to ask questions, gather data, and then construct narratives about negative life experiences and structural inequalities (Veenhoven 2018). As sociology tends to focus on social problems, particularly inequality, there is a joy deficit in sociological research. This deficit is concerning, as joy is vital to human well-being (Emmons 2020; Thin 2014), a topic of central interest to sociologists. Moreover, experiences of, and the search for, joy and pleasure shape behaviors (Higgins and Hirsch 2007). As such, joy can be studied in the social sciences as both an outcome and an explanatory variable (Emmons 2020). Some academic disciplines, such as psychology (Johnson 2020), have begun to include joy in their analyses, and a few sociologists have called for attention to happiness, well-being, and pleasure (e.g., Cieslik 2015; Jones 2020; Kroll 2014). However, there remains a missing joy revolution in sociology.

The absence of joy in the academic literature has important consequences. It is not only what is known that shapes the trajectory of scholarship—what we do not know also matters greatly. Researchers at the intersection of knowledge and narratives have demonstrated the advantages to unmooring epistemes by flipping the standard script and asking what is unknown and why we don’t know what we don’t know (e.g., Almeling 2020), which enables scholars to tell different kinds of stories and ask different kinds of questions about taken-for-granted “facts” of lived experience and social life. As discussed earlier, knowledge and narratives about groups of people shape realities, including beliefs about, and lived experiences of, those people (Polletta et al. 2011). However, only certain sorts of stories tend to be told in sociology about marginalized groups. Sociologists often take social inequality as the centralized focus of scholarly work. In so doing, we have foreclosed possibilities to fully understand the experiences of marginalized groups. This has led to glaring omissions across all major areas of inquiry in sociology.

Not only do sociologists not focus on joy, pleasure, or happiness, they also disproportionately tell narratives about pain and suffering. The consequences of this focus on misery, particularly when studying marginalized groups, do not stay contained within academia. Instead, these narratives travel, shaping everyday understandings and experiences of being part of that group (Ferber 2000). If the main story told about a group is that their lives are filled with trauma, discrimination, and violence, then that is likely what most people believe about the group, including members of the group itself (Harwood 2004). This occurs because as individuals become a part of thought communities, “they enter spaces of shared meaning and knowledge bases and certain items are emphasized and prioritized over others” (Cerulo 2008:10–11; see also Bourdieu 1977). Without balancing an academic focus on oppression with one of joy, “we are as likely to be shackled by the stories we tell (or that are culturally available for our telling) as we are by the form of oppression they might seek to reveal” (Ewick and Silbey 1995:212). This can result in unlivable lives filled with stress and fear (Westbrook 2021).

Given these negative consequences, sociologists of narrative have examined how to tell different, more liberating stories (e.g., Polletta 2009). Although it is difficult to break out of standard ways of thinking, paradigms can shift. New paradigms emerge when there are doubts about prevailing approaches or grievances with dominant intellectual practices (Frickel and Gross 2005; Kuhn 1962). Moreover, “stories that are capable of countering the hegemonic are those which bridge, without denying, the particularities of experience and subjectivities and those which bear witness to what is unimagined and unexpressed” (Ewick and Silbey 1995:220). We do not deny that transgender people experience oppression. Yet, positioning trans people as always-already subject to discrimination and violence precludes scholarly attention to elements of trans people’s lives beyond the typical trope of misery. Furthermore, stories about joy may help reduce stigma and violence against trans people (Westbrook 2021). Thus, we ask, what knowledge would be gained, and what social problems may be addressed, by attending to joy?

METHODS As a part of a larger project on the lived experiences of transgender people, stef conducted forty indepth interviews in a Midwestern metropolitan area. The call for participants specified an interest in speaking with trans people, so anyone who saw themselves as within that category responded. All identity labels and pronouns used in this paper correspond with how participants self-identified in the interview. All names are pseudonyms. To find interviewees, stef used a purposive snowball sampling method, which began with personal networks in gender justice organizing across the Midwest. After completing an interview, interviewees were asked to forward the study information to three to five other people. Snowball sampling has challenges reaching groups outside of the networks of origin (Berg 2004; Noy 2008). To reduce these limitations, stef made additional contacts through attending community groups and events across the city, as well as posting the call for participants in places such as LGBTQþ-owned coffee houses and bars and LGBTQþ resource, health, and community centers. Interviews ranged in length from one to three hours. The average interview time was two hours and occurred in whatever location the participant had requested to meet. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for data analysis purposes. Interviews were structured to resemble a conversational tone, rather than more formal question and answer exchanges, which enabled detailed accounts of lived experiences and collaboration in the exchange (see Gerson and Damaske 2020). Interviewees were asked broad questions to explore their transgender identity formation, relationships to communities and with others (i.e., friends, family of origin, coworkers, and relational partners), experiences with inequality in everyday life and interactions, as well as how they navigated gender-segregated spaces. To balance the typical conventions of sociological methods that emphasize negative experiences with oppression, the question that concluded the interview was: What do you find joyful about being trans? This was a spontaneous question that stef began asking during the first interview to end the interview on a positive note. This was not a naı¨ve desire. It was clear that asking about joy might be a small, but important, way to undercut the dominant narrative that being transgender equals pain and misery and intended to open space for reflection on how being trans might also bring joy into their lives. It was a question that resonated for many, but few had ever been asked. Data Analysis Trans joy was a topic that came up one evening when we were sharing vegan pizza and discussing lasting gaps in the sociology of trans studies. Laurel had just completed a book on how anti-violence activism is done on behalf of trans people and stef was finishing a book on lasting uncertainties in trans medicine. Both of us were troubled by the fact that joy was rarely discussed in trans studies or sociological scholarship. Through this conversation, we felt compelled to examine the data from the joy question and to see what patterns might arise and what we may learn about joy that could speak to broader sociological concerns. To analyze the interview transcripts, we used an inductive approach - a recursive process of moving back and forth between the data, coding schema, and existing literature with the goal of looking for patterns in the data (Gerson and Damaske 2020). Each author began by coding the full transcripts on their own without a coding schema. We wanted to see how two sociologists who work in trans studies but attend to different topics and theories within the field would approach coding the interviews. Although the words we used to name a particular pattern were slightly different (i.e., one person’s “know yourself better” code was the other’s “self-knowledge” code), we had substantial overlap. After the first round of coding, we discussed and resolved the remaining discrepancies, re-coded the data, and cross-verified our coding schema one last time. From the final coding stage, four major themes emerged: 1) the value of asking about joy; 2) the joy of being from a marginalized group; 3) the improvement of quality of life; and 4) the increased connections with others. FINDINGS “Oh. Damn. That’s a good question.”: The Value of Asking about Joy Although the academic literature and mainstream cultural narratives focus on the miseries of being a member of a marginalized group, less than a fifth of the people we interviewed (7 out of 40) struggled to answer the question about what they found joyful about being transgender. For those few, most first responded by mentioning challenges they had faced because they were trans, including family rejection and the constraints of transnormativity. However, after briefly mentioning those challenges, all quickly turned to describing how being trans brought them joy. For example, Tom­as, a 34- year-old Latinx trans man first responded by saying, “Oh. I mean. I told you that stuff with my family is fucked up. My brothers won’t speak to me. My parents have disowned me,” but then he went on to detail the support he experiences from friends and the “sense of calm” he feels now because he does not “have to pretend anymore, to be a woman.” He concluded his answer by stating, “Yeah, I think for me the joy is being able to be me.” The fact that everyone interviewed was able to answer the question and that only a few struggled at first demonstrates that questions about joy can easily be incorporated into interview schedules. There were no notable patterns in terms of race, gender, or age for those interviewees who struggled to answer. Moreover, the vast majority (over 80 percent) answered with relative ease. Despite its being the last question in an extensive interview, many gave long, detailed responses. As we demonstrate below, those answers reveal aspects of transgender people’s lives that are often overlooked by academics. As Seth, a 29-year-old Latinx genderqueer person, stated when asked what they found joyful about being a trans person, “Oh. Damn. That’s a good question.” “It’s not a curse to be transgender. It’s a gift.”: The Joy of Being a Member of a Marginalized Group Scholarship consistently reaffirms the narrative that being from a marginalized group means that one’s life is full of misery. This narrative is supported by much of the research on social inequalities that draws attention to the negative consequences of marginalization (Lamont 2018). As such, a tacit assumption is that if one’s life is permeated with inequality, one cannot possibly find joy in being a member of a marginalized group. Yet asking about joy created new opportunities to hear about how, as Elsa, a 23-year-old Latinx gender fluid person, stated, “I really like being who I am” and, as Austin, a 23-year-old white trans man, put it, “I love the fact that I’m trans.” Indeed, about half of the interviewees explicitly stated that there is intense joy in being members of a marginalized group. In this section we flip the script on the dominant narrative that marginalization equals misery. Our findings add more nuanced understandings of the everyday experiences of marginalized groups that has been absent from the scholarship by emphasizing the joyful aspects of being transgender. Due to discrimination and stigma, the common belief is that members of marginalized groups experience high levels of shame. Liam, a white 30-year-old trans man, challenged this belief: The more I move into being trans, this is just a part of who I am, and I like it. I’m not going to sit in that shame framework. I feel really grateful. After years and years and years and years, it’s almost like fighting for my own self-definition of my existence. Now that I feel pretty solid, this is who I am. I am who I am. As Liam described, he initially had a sense of shame about being a trans man because that is a typical narrative of how one ought to feel about being trans. However, he was able to defy that narrative by finding joy in himself and on his own terms. In so doing, he “felt solid” in who he is and recognized other ways of being trans that do not depend upon self-hatred. Seth similarly said, “One of the joys is finding solace in my identity rather than trying to fight it. And that was a huge fucking relief.” Related to the belief that marginalization equals misery is the common misunderstanding that, if given the option, no one would choose to be from a marginalized group. For example, many people believe that no one would choose to be gay (Pickhardt 1998). Consequently, as historian John D’Emilio (2002) documents, “Beginning in the 1990s, the idea that homosexuality is biological and that lesbians and gay men are ‘born this way’ spread through American culture with amazing rapidity” (154). There is a similar belief that no one would want to be transgender. Aaron, a white 53-year-old trans man, countered this narrative by sharing: I mean, I think overall my trans experience has been joyful. I wouldn’t trade coming out or coming to terms with gender stuff. I’ve never really thought about like, “Oh, life would be so much easier if I was cis.” Because I think about all the stuff I would miss, all the questions and opportunities and people and experiences it opens up for me. So, while it’s been hard and we could focus on the negative things like the discrimination, the fucked-up situations, all that stuff, there is so much good that comes out of being more actualized around yourself. As Aaron, and many others stated, there is intense joy in being transgender, including being able to have experiences and perspectives that they would not have if they were not part of a marginalized group. A few people (5/40) said that what they found joyful about being transgender was that they were different from the norm. These interviewees treasured how their identity and embodiment called gender norms into question and encouraged themselves, as well as those around them, to question things that others often take for granted. As Matt, a white 59-year-old trans man, put it: I feel like I transcend gender and I’ve actually come to see that as a gift; being able to be on the outside of American culture not by choice but by circumstance. I really had to learn to reframe that for myself because it’s only been within the last couple of years that I’ve thought in terms of it’s not a curse to be transgender. It’s a gift... . As transgender people, as people who transcend gender, we have always fought for the right to self-expression. No matter what society said to us, they couldn’t hold that back. In a sense, that is our gift. That is what we have to give to not just our communities, but to our cultures. Thus, by living lives outside the norm, members of marginalized groups can find joy in challenging, and possibly changing, those norms. These interviewees expressed hope that this would increase freedom and decrease inequality. As Nico, a Black 31-year-old genderqueer person, said, “There’s a freedom to it that feels joyful. There’s a joy in feeling like there’s an opening up that’s not just personal but is bigger than that for everybody, whether they identify as male, female, or something other. It opens things up for them and that feels really exciting.” Being outside of the norm also enabled our interviewees to access deeper self-reflection and understanding. Felix, a 30-year-old white genderqueer person, shared: Because of my experiences with gender and my questioning of gender, my disenfranchisement with gender, I feel like it has caused me to learn more about myself and the world around me because I’m constantly coming up with answers that have more questions. So, I’m constantly asking more of myself and more of the world; how to understand and how to be in it and how to know myself more. That, to me, is really great. I feel really lucky in that aspect because I don’t feel like as many people are pushed to know themselves. You know? ... I’m very grateful that I am the way I am. There’s definitely no regret or shame or desire to be different. Not at all. I’m very grateful. As Felix recounted, being transgender enabled them to gain personal insights that they may not have had if they were cisgender. From their perspective, identifying as genderqueer instigated continual reflection of how to be in the world. Aaron similarly said, “For me, trans doesn’t mean—I know some people talk about being trans is like coming out as your true self—but I think it is about exploring the depth and breadth of possibilities for yourself.” Thus, for these interviewees, being part of a marginalized group was joyful because it enabled them to question the world around them and their own lives and use those questions to enable personal growth and positive social change. As our interviewees demonstrated, there are joys in being from a marginalized group, even if that group experiences discrimination and inequality. In highlighting those joys, they do work towards unspoiling identity (Winder 2017). Social scientists too often have focused on the negative aspects of marginality (Fine 2016). However, it is vital to attend to positive marginality, or the benefits of being from a marginalized group (Smith 1986). This reframing adds to sociological knowledge of marginalization and can, itself, add to the joys experienced by members of marginalized groups. “You look so happy! You were so miserable before.”: How Quality of Life Can Improve through Embracing a Marginalized Identity A dominant narrative that populates our social imagination is how being from a marginalized group not only brings an extraordinary amount of shame, but also that even if one can overcome the selfhatred and embrace the marginalized identity, the person will still have a low quality of life. For transgender people, this is often assumed to mean resigning oneself to a life of desolation and dread (Grossman and D’augelli 2006). We do not dispute the structural and interpersonal inequities that transgender people, and marginalized groups generally, experience. In reflecting on joy, however, our interviewees described how embracing themselves as trans people improved their quality of life by boosting self-confidence, allowed for body positivity, and resulted in an overall sense of peace. In so doing, trans people offered a marked contrast to the popular narrative that being from a marginalized group equals anguish. There are two main types of members of marginalized groups: those who are seen as lower on the social hierarchy from birth, such as cisgender women and people of color, and those who adopt or acquire a stigmatized identity over time, such as LGBTQþ people and some people with disabilities. As transgender people, our interviewees fell into the latter category. Going through a process of coming out as a member of a marginalized group created opportunities for them to note the differences in what life was like before and after. With these temporal references, interviewees shared that there was much joy to be found in oneself after coming out and they were significantly happier after they embraced their marginalized identities. Almost half of those interviewed explicitly expressed that life was better now than it had been before they identified as transgender. Notably, no one said that their life was worse. Laura, a white 23- year-old trans woman, reflected, “You know, my friend always teased me because I have this glare that I give to everyone. But that’s the thing. I don’t have to glare at people anymore because I don’t feel threatened anymore.” Earlier in the interview, Laura had described how partners and family members tried to box her in as a feminine gay man and her experiences with constant harassment on the street. However, as Laura suggested, her life has improved because she does not feel as vulnerable as she did before coming out as a trans woman, and being able to “embody all of me because that makes me so much more powerful of a person.” Isaac, a 23-year-old mixed race transfag, shared that other people also noticed the improvement in quality of life: “I came out to my coworker, and she was like, ‘You look so happy! You were so miserable before.’ And I was like, I know!” Numerous studies have documented the link between low self-esteem and heightened health risks, such as self-harm and suicidality for trans people (Austin and Goodman 2017). We do not negate the seriousness of these heightened risks. However, we contend that, like other facets of social life and popular narratives about marginalized groups, these public health concerns may gloss over a significant portion of people who have never, or who no longer, use self-harming coping strategies. We found that transgender people had a lot to say about how being trans increased, rather than decreased, their self-confidence. As Isaac stated, “[I’m] feeling more confident in who I am and feeling comfortable with myself. That’s really the joy that I have since I realized that or started identifying as trans.” Reflecting on joy and improvements in quality of life, transgender people described how their self-confidence was bolstered by embracing a trans identity and eschewing the typical conventions in public discourse that consistently link being transgender with hardship. Interviewees described having a noticeably stronger foundation on which they could thrive once they embraced a marginalized identity. This sense of being anchored or grounded was invaluable for people to feel less fragmented. As Jax reflected: I’m doing all these things and balancing all these things, holding all these things that I tried to hold before and fell through because my foundation was cut into so many pieces but now I have at least a large slab of who I am so it’s ok that these things are solidly planted on them. These statements document how transgender people can build self-confidence, both in spite of, and because of, persistent inequality and trans oppression. These findings are significant because they challenge an academic narrative that may, in fact, be causing problems in transgender people’s lives. As psychologist Michelle Fine (2016:349) has noted, “Despair and self-harm may worsen when gross inequities are made to seem natural and irreversible.” In addition, many interviewees spoke about how coming into one’s identity meant finding a sense of inner peace, which greatly improved their quality of life. Some described this feeling as connected to spirituality. Others expressed how, despite the challenges they had experienced as trans, they knew that they would be ok. Liam shared, “It’s almost like because it’s felt like swimming through mud that at some point, I just feel grounded and I’m at peace.” Identifying as transgender meant that our interviewees could “be with themselves” and not just, as previous scholars (e.g., Garrison 2018) have importantly documented, “be themselves.” As trans people suggested, embracing being in a marginalized group meant that they felt more comfortable in their own skin. Nico said: You know how there’s the saying when people come into their own? I feel like there’s this line and all these pieces are taken out of it. As they start coming in and making the line there’s just a different way of walking in the world, a different way of seeing the world. Sitting with yourself [in a way] that feels powerful and right and peaceful and bold. As Nico describes, having deeper self-knowledge was tethered to a sense of empowerment. In feeling more comfortable in their own skin, transgender people experienced an improvement in their quality of life. Trans interviewees also identified increased body positivity after coming out, challenging mainstream beliefs that trans people are “monstrous” (see Nordmarken 2014; Stryker 1994). Rather than perceiving their bodies as grotesque, abject, or unrelatable, our interviewees described finding pleasure in their bodies, humor in bodily changes for those engaged in medical interventions, and the capacity to, “feel comfortable in my body and feel attractive. I no longer have to edit the way I look,” as Avery, a 22-year-old white genderqueer person, shared. Some of the body positivity narratives were invoked when interviewees remembered a moment when they anticipated how they might appear if they could transition. Ava, a 30-year-old Black trans woman, delighted in how she appreciated her appearance: Being pretty. I know [Laughs] it’s bad. But when I look at my picture, I get happy. I remember being that little boy who always wanted to look like this. Sometimes I look at my pictures and am like “Oh, my god, you look so pretty.” And that makes me happy... . It just makes me feel really proud I became that girl that I always thought of in my head. Others reflected on how they felt more positive not only about their bodies, but about other people’s bodies too. Alex, a 23-year-old Latinx genderqueer person, described this: I’ve been moving into a space where, yeah, bodies do crazy things and bodies are all kinds of weird ways, and they like have all these fluids that come out in different ways, and like it’s great and it’s really reaching a point where I sincerely feel and believe that on a level that’s never been true before, and just being like super body positive and able to embrace other people and really other people’s bodies, and I don’t know, all the imperfect and weird and gross things that they encompass [Laughs]. These narratives of embodied pleasure counter the transnormative narrative that mandates that access to medical interventions may be granted only if a trans person feels disgust with their bodies. The medical establishment’s inability to understand how trans people can both embrace their bodies and seek to change them through medical interventions perpetuates trans oppression (Shuster 2016). Rather than offering gender-affirming care only for trans people who proffer stories of bodily disgust, our interviewees suggest that the medical community’s assumptions about why people may seek gender-affirming care needs to be updated. Moreover, that trans people were able to find pleasure in their bodies, both as they are and as they might become through physical interventions or social transitions, underscores the importance of empowering marginalized people to inhabit their bodies based on their own self-definitions. It is imperative to note that, although our interviewees expressed that their lives improved after embracing a marginalized identity, they also mentioned that they did not hate themselves before coming out as trans. This runs counter to the medicalized transnormative discourse that a “true” trans person is supposed to hate themselves and that the only way to overcome self-hatred is through medical interventions. In these bleak portrayals, scholars suggest that trans people’s discomfort with their sex assigned at birth spills over into poorer mental health outcomes, including generalized depression, distress, and unhappiness with one’s life (Casta~neda 2015). From this rendering, trans people are supposed to understand themselves as having been born into “the wrong body” and medical interventions alleviate this “error.” Countering this, Summer, a 68-year-old white trans woman noted how, after seeking gender-affirming interventions, that “All of those things that I liked about me before are still here.” Vic, a 23-year-old Latinx trans man, also reflected on this medicalizing narrative and highlighted how he found joy in who he was before the use of gender-affirming medical interventions: And another thing that just makes me really happy is to think of my former self and my female self, and be ok with that and to feel like I don’t know. I feel really at peace with that connection, and I don’t resent it, and I never hated myself. You know? I didn’t feel right, I didn’t feel like I was comfortable the whole time. But I never, wanted to get rid of that whole part of my narrative. Like, “Man, I really hated myself and I felt like I was trapped.” No, I didn’t feel like I was trapped and I didn’t feel like I was in the wrong body. I just felt like my body needed to be matched up with something else. Looking back, that makes me really happy. Vic’s story might make some medical providers uneasy. The medical establishment has historically, and contemporarily, justified the use of medical interventions by understanding gender-affirming medicine as a public health intervention that alleviates self-hatred and self-harming behaviors among transgender people (Shuster 2021). However, as Vic, Summer, and other interviewees shared, they had an appreciation of who they were before seeking gender-affirming care, while also finding joy in being who they were after medical interventions. Reflecting on what they have noticed after adopting a trans identity, our interviewees suggested that embracing membership in a marginalized group improved their lives. Several interviewees explicitly rejected the narrative that “good” trans people hate themselves before transitioning. The majority of interviewees also said that their lives were better because coming into their trans identity increased their self-confidence, body positivity, and sense of peace. Thus, asking about joy provided a much more nuanced narrative about trans lives than often appears in social science research. “I love being in the trans community.”: Connecting with Others Social connections offer access to vital resources, better health outcomes, and social support (Campos-Castillo et al. 2020; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears 2006). Traditionally, scholarship on marginalized groups has focused on how discrimination hinders these valuable connections with others, particularly for groups like transgender and LGBQþ people whose families of origin do not usually share their identities (Acosta 2013). Indeed, the social isolation of trans people has been well-documented (see Stewart, O’Halloran, and Oates 2018). Due to the focus on exclusion and discrimination, scholars often fail to attend to how being from a stigmatized group can facilitate connection, including through gaining membership to a community of those who share one’s identity (for exceptions, see Crenshaw 1991; Stone 2013). Moreover, experiencing marginality and embracing one’s identity may deepen emotional relationships with a wide variety of people. Many of our interviewees described feeling isolated when first coming out as transgender. However, the majority of our interviewees shared that the story of coming out does not end in social isolation and 70 percent (28/40) explicitly mentioned connections with others as one of the joys of being trans. When asked about joy, interviewees detailed how being trans allowed for membership in supportive communities, deepened their emotional connections with family and friends, and enabled them to find intimate partners. Thus, rather than resulting in exclusion, being trans helped them connect with others. Community membership was a joyful aspect of being transgender cited by many. As Austin stated, “I mean, I love being in the trans community. I love the community.” Moreover, several interviewees spoke explicitly about how they would not have the community they have if they were not transgender. River, a 20-year-old mixed race genderqueer person, explained: I know a lot of trans people, but I had never been close to them. Now being in the community, I have noticed that they’re really great people. I probably wouldn’t have spoken to them as much or been in the same spaces with them as often [if I were not trans]. So, I have met a lot of really great friends lately. Paige, a 26-year-old Black trans person echoed this, arguing: I feel like I have met some amazing people over the years of doing social justice work. In the last 5 years, as I was really coming into an understanding of myself, it has provided more room for me to be open to other people in ways that I perhaps never was before. That really has led to establishing strong ties with beautiful amazing people. I wouldn’t have a trans community if I wasn’t trans, you know? Thus, rather than hindering connections with others, having a marginalized identity facilitated connection in unexpected but rewarding ways. Membership in a community can provide many sources of joy and support for those with marginalized identities. Several interviewees discussed how the transgender community functioned like a family for them. As Bailey, a 24-year-old white gender fluid person, stated, “I fucking love my community... . They [the trans community] are like my family... . I find joy in having this community who has brought me in and fed my soul and helped remind me that I am cared for.” Reaffirming this idea, Julian, a 31-year-old Latinx genderqueer person, said, “Kindness, looking out for people, and almost like family. That shows up in a lot of queer community and I have access to that, that I wouldn’t if I didn’t have this experience.” Moreover, for some interviewees, membership in a community provided them with the sort of care that they were denied by their family of origin. For example, Ben, a 22-year-old white trans man, stated: I kind of feel like a lot of my life is a source of joy. I was really lucky; if I hadn’t come out to my parents at a young age, I wouldn’t have met these amazing people who are now my family... . I am so appreciative that I have gotten to meet so many of the people in my life, and I wouldn’t have met any of these people without this aspect of my identity. As such, even if being part of a marginalized group may reduce access to some sources of love and support, such as from one’s family of origin, it can provide access to others, such as through participation in queer and transgender communities. Being a member of a marginalized group can also facilitate connections with others outside of identity-based communities. Many interviewees said that being trans helped them have deeper emotional relationships, as their experiences of discrimination and stigma made them more open to understanding others. Oliver, a 34-year-old white trans person, stated that what he found joyful was “finally having some sense of peace and feeling grounded in a way that I could actually be open to other people and establishing deep connections with people that I don’t know otherwise.” Morgan, a 25-year-old white genderqueer person, echoed this, answering the question about the joys of being transgender with: Trying to help other people. That’s what I got, a lot, from coming out. Like being able to just not look at myself but everyone else in a new light and in ways people are awesome. Let’s try to make everyone awesome. Awesome in that awe-inspiring way of being able to be so powerful. I think it opens up this connection and willingness to hear others that can be very close to, if not the same thing as, a spiritual definition of peace. These experiences contrast with the myth of damaged goods that circulates about being a trans person, which positions trans people as so “broken” by systemic oppression and/or internalized shaming that they are unable to be emotionally available (Levitt and Ippolito 2014). Finally, in describing the joyful aspects of being transgender, many pointed to how coming into one’s identity and feeling more connected with people also facilitated romantic relationships. Some shared that they previously did not trust that others would be attracted to them as transgender people inhabiting trans bodies, but they found how the unanticipated joy in settling into their bodies gave them the confidence to have healthy, affirming romantic relationships. As Megan, a 32-year-old white trans woman, noted, “A joy in my life is being a trans person and finding love and all that stuff [Laughs]. It sounds so cheesy. But I really thought that being a trans woman would mean never having a partner. And certainly not one as hot and thoughtful as mine.” Counter to dominant understandings that being part of a marginalized group decreases one’s sense of self-worth, many interviewees noted how embracing their identity did the reverse. Laura, a 23-year-old white trans woman, explained: I really struggled to date and I haven’t wanted to be by myself and I think a large portion of that was always wanting someone to legitimize me and make me feel like I was important and valuable and worth loving and all of that. And I now know that I already am, and nobody else needs to do that for me. So I feel free to date, or have friends, or do whatever I want because I’m right. Matt, a 59-year-old white trans man, related, “I think what transitioning did for me more than anything else was allow me to be the man that I am. Because I can accept that in me, I can say, okay, now I love myself and I’m ready to love other people as well.” Although scholars tend to focus on the challenges transgender people face in forming or maintaining romantic partnerships (see Iantaffi and Bockting 2011), our interviewees suggested that being trans created opportunities for love and companionship. This finding is a poignant reminder of how focusing on the hardships of stigma precludes understanding the breadth of human experience for marginalized people. The answers given when asked about the joyous aspects of being trans demonstrate that the relationship between social isolation and being a member of a marginalized group is an empirical question that has, thus far, been insufficiently addressed. Currently, the literature tends to assume relative isolation for stigmatized groups or inquire only about isolation (Link and Phelan 2001). However, when asked about joy, many interviewees spoke about the social connections made possible by being transgender. Thus, rather than assume that members of non-stigmatized groups connect with others easily and those of stigmatized groups do not, future research should examine how marginalization facilitates connection, including forms of connection that are either unavailable to, or more difficult for, those with more privilege. CONCLUSION

Joy is a fundamental aspect of social life. However, it is an understudied topic in sociology (Cieslik 2015; Thin 2014) and is rarely mentioned in research on the experiences of marginalized groups. Instead of joy, pleasure, and happiness, sociologists tend to focus on problems, inequalities, and misery. Sociological scholarship on negative aspects of society is rewarded, as it upholds the status quo in how to frame social problems (Henricks 2016; Thin 2014; Veenhoven 2018), and this epistemic foreclosure is self-perpetuating, resulting in a joy deficit in sociology. Although attention to joy, pleasure, and happiness may seem frivolous to some, particularly when society faces so many problems, we argue that the failure to focus on these aspects of social life is, itself, a problem. If scholars do not attend to joy, they cannot contribute to knowledge about how to foster it. This is perilous even for sociologists interested in only problems, as joy can help combat issues such as stigma and negative self-esteem (Lamont 2018; Riggle et al. 2014). Moreover, focusing only on the adverse aspects of being part of a marginalized group may actually harm members of those groups as it perpetuates beliefs that marginalized people live in misery. Telling narratives only of negativity contributes to the construction of unlivable lives (Westbrook 2021).

To address the joy deficit in sociology and in transgender studies more generally, we presented an analysis of how interviewees answered the question, “What do you find joyful about being trans?” Our findings demonstrate that transgender people were easily able to identify what they found joyful about their marginalized identity. Counter to beliefs that people who regularly experience discrimination would rather be part of a more privileged group, interviewees argued that, despite high levels of oppression, they preferred being transgender. Indeed, many interviewees talked extensively about how their lives became better once they embraced their marginalized identity due to increased selfesteem, body positivity, and a sense of peace. Moreover, most pointed to the connections they were able to make with others because of their transgender identity, including community membership, deeper emotional ties, and forming romantic relationships. Asking trans people about joy enabled them to express parts of their lives that are often overlooked in academic research.

As our findings reveal, much knowledge is lost when academics fail to ask about joy. The lives of members of marginalized groups are multifaceted (Westbrook 2021). However, when scholarship focuses exclusively on negative experiences and outcomes, the facets related to misery and oppression become erroneously magnified, while the aspects that make lives livable become obscured. These partial truths about lived experiences then become perceived as the whole of marginalized existence. This cycle of knowledge construction runs the risk of becoming a self-fulfilling prophesy; if one searches only for inequalities, one will likely find only inequalities.

#### The alternative is a material and affective commitment to queercrip joy. Voting negative refuses trans-maladjustment in favor of prefiguring joyful and livable futures beyond the memorialization and the overdetermination of violence.

Megan Ingram 25, queer disability studies scholar and documentary filmmaker who holds an MA in Sociology from Queen’s University in Canada; and Kai Jacobsen, trans health researcher and MA student in Sociology at Carleton University, 2025, “Both because of and in spite of: Towards the reclamation of queercrip joy,” *Sexualities*, vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 800-807, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/13634607241264319.

For trans people, the affective burden of resentment stems from the overdetermined association between transness and suffering that renders trans joy unthinkable. Transphobia operates structurally by denying and restricting trans people’s access to life chances–the resources and opportunities that enable quality of life (Spade, 2015). Spade (2015) highlights how life chances are unequally distributed according to transphobia as well as racism, misogyny, ableism, colonialism, and other axes of oppression. As such, queer, trans, and disabled people all experience the unequal distribution of life chances and futures according to their social location. For example, trans scholar Jules GillPeterson has argued that the current wave of anti-trans laws sweeping the United States “aim to fully disenfranchise trans people from public life beginning in childhood” (2022). By banning life-saving gender-affirming care, the state leaves trans people vulnerable to suicide and denies trans children the chance to become trans adults. These bans compound the existing slow violence of oppression that create the conditions of poverty, violence, homelessness, incarceration, and illness that trans people disproportionately experience (Spade, 2015; Westbrook, 2023; Yarbrough, 2023). In addition to the clear material consequences of structural violence and deprivation, these conditions of oppression also have symbolic and affective consequences for trans, queer, and disabled people. They make it difficult for us to imagine ourselves as happy adults in the future and for trans and many disabled and queer youth to imagine themselves as adults at all. As such, experiencing joy and love for one’s self and community is a discursive and affective impossibility.

Highlighting the violence and discrimination that queer, trans, and disabled people face is undoubtedly important, and commemorating the lives lost to transphobic and ableist violence and suicide communities play important roles in activism. However, this can also lead to what stef shuster and Laurel Westbrook call “epistemic foreclosure,” where transness (and in the case of our theorizing, disability) become synonymous with tragedy, suffering, and pain in the popular imagination (2023: 3). Laurel Westbrook argues that overfocusing on violence can create the appearance of a “vulnerable subjecthood” in which all trans people are inherently and constantly vulnerable to violence at all times (2021: 15) This emphasis on vulnerability is mirrored in disability discourses that construct disabled subjects as both abject and infantile–a community who is both “good to mistreat and good to be good to” (Hughes, 2019: 831 emphasis original).

This duality of mistreatment/charity facilitates very specific futures and identities for disabled people that are paralleled in the discursive construction of queer and trans futures. In one form of structural oppression, disabled people are denied the resources and opportunities that enable quality of life such as inaccessible medical care and enforced poverty through disability welfare plans that offer sub-sub-poverty rates (Hughes, 2015; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2022). However, in a more insidious move, the discursive construction of what constitutes a ‘good’ life and the incitement by medical professionals and the broader public towards this life make certain lives unimaginable for disabled people (Mosleh and Gibson, 2022). Kelly Fritsch argues that neoliberal biocapitalism1 incorporates some disabled people through assimilation and tokenistic inclusion while abandoning others deemed less desirable. Indeed, “some disabled people flourish in the future precisely because their futures gain traction through neoliberal biocapitalist practices and that these tractable futures demand that others have no future” (Fritsch, 2016: 12). Disabled people can therefore be made profitable through either rehabilitation into productive workers or through extraction for profit by institutions, adaptive technology manufacturers, pharmaceutical companies, therapy providers, and the rest of the disability industrial complex. Trans people are similarly incorporated into neoliberal biocapitalism to the extent that they can be made profitable. Dan Irving has argued that trans communities have “responded to pathologization and erasure by cultivating social subjectivities that demonstrate their ability to contribute to economic progress” (2008: 55). This is reflected, for example, in advocacy efforts to demonstrate that genderaffirming care is cost effective because it improves trans people’s wellbeing and therefore reduces their overall healthcare costs. Both trans and disabled people, therefore, are valued under neoliberal biocapitalism for their profit potentials.

Neoliberal biocapitalism also manifests in the emphasis on developmentalism in medicalized disability discourses. Developmentalism constrains the lives of disabled people in ways that cut off the potential for alternate affective attachments to their disability, experience, and identity. Disabled people are held accountable to normative developmental trajectories, with any deviation pathologized as ‘atypical’ or ‘abnormal’, and for individuals with congenital or childhood onset disabilities, as the ‘failure’ to meet normative milestones (Mosleh and Gibson, 2022). The labeling of disability over the lifespan in terms of deficit and aberrancies acts as another form of epistemic foreclosure. Resultantly, disabled people “risk internalizing the idea that they are inherently ‘broken’ and in need of fixing in order to live a ‘good’ life” (Mosleh and Gibson, 2022: 129). Under this discourse, disabled joy is only seen as possible through assimilation and cure with disability itself as an unhappy object.

Developmentalism in the medicalization of disability is paralleled by the “cruel optimism” (Berlant, 2011) of homonormativity and transnormativity. Queer youth are promised that “it gets better” and that they can overcome the pain of bullying and suicidal ideation as they grow into homonormative adults (Grzanka and Mann, 2014). Trans people are similarly encouraged to embrace transnormative “affective narratives that frame life ‘pre’ transition as characterized by a reductively bleak emotional surround and cathect life ‘post’ transition to a bright-sided promise of social ease, domestic comfort, and existential peace” (Malatino, 2022: 20). As such, queer and trans joy are only seen as possible through assimilation into homonormativity and transnormativity, making deviation—and queerness and transness themselves—into unhappy objects.

Understanding disability and queerness as objects of resentment and unhappiness is crucial as social and affective bonds in contemporary western society are built through a collective orientation towards shared happy objects (Ahmed, 2010). Under western neoliberal capitalism, these objects include the cisheteronormative nuclear family, independent living, and a well-paying normative career. Individuals are expected to both orient towards these objects and progress linearly towards them in pursuit of the ‘good’ life. When individuals deviate from this linear path and therefore fail to reaffirm others’ normative affective responses, especially happiness or ‘success’, they disturb (Ahmed, 2010). The (dis)orientation of trans, queer, and disabled subjects away from these assumed trajectories “gets in the way of other people’s enjoyment of the right things” (Ahmed, 2010: 67). By failing to invest in normative happy objects and reproductive futurism, queer and disabled subjects are positioned as‘affect aliens’ who “affect others in the wrong way” (Ahmed, 2010: 67). It is this capacity to “be affected in the wrong way by the right things” (Ahmed, 2010: 67) or perhaps be positively affected by the ‘wrong’ things that brings us to the question of queercrip joy. While scholars have accounted for queer/trans/crip failures to perform and affectively orient towards normative objects, little scholarly attention has been paid to the affective objects that queer, trans, and disabled subjects do orient towards and what that reorientation might mean. Resultantly, we now turn our attention towards how joy is articulated and experienced in trans and disabled communities.

Moving towards joy

We conceptualize joy in this paper widely, drawing on its previous theorization as an emotion that shares “conceptual space with other positive emotions such as gladness, elation, [and] happiness” (Johnson, 2020: 6). In conceptualizing queer and trans joy, we frame gender euphoria as an affect falling under the broader conceptual umbrella of joy, with the distinction between the two being one of intensity. Indeed, Massumi (2015) asserts that affect is about intensity, and in many ways is intensity, with the strength of an experience indicating the experience itself. We therefore conceptualize euphoria as an intensification of joy, wherein all euphoria is joy, but not all joy is euphoria. Thus, while we speak to gender euphoria specifically as it relates to trans joy, we do so not to collapse the two, but to indicate how joy can be experienced as a ‘mixed-emotional state’ encapsulating this breadth of experience and intensity (Fredrickson, 2001).

Trans joy

Perhaps the most prominent form of trans joy is gender euphoria. Jacobsen and Devor define gender euphoria as “positive emotions resulting from affirmation of one’s gender identity or expression” (2022: 126). The term encapsulates a wide variety of experiences, feelings, and sensations trans people may have related to their gender and body, such as a “joyful feeling of rightness,” (Beischel et al., 2022: 8) and can describe both intense ecstatic joy as well as calm contentment (Austin et al., 2022; Beischel et al., 2022; Jacobsen and Devor, 2022). While gender euphoria has only recently received academic attention, the term has been used in trans communities for decades (Jacobsen and Devor, 2022).

A recurring theme in the limited body of literature on gender euphoria and trans happiness is the joy of challenging gender norms. In Kai’s previous research on gender euphoria, nonbinary and genderfluid participants described combining seemingly contradictory gender expressions as euphoric, such as lingerie and a beard, or long hair and a deep voice (Jacobsen and Devor, 2022). Other scholars have framed these forms of creative gender expression as a form of resistance to gender norms. In their qualitative interviews about trans joy, shuster and Westbrook found that many trans participants found joy in being part of a marginalized community “because it enabled them to question the world around them and their own lives and use those questions to enable personal growth and positive social change” (2022: 9). Similarly, other scholars have found that some trans people describe challenging gender norms as key to cultivating authenticity and a positive self-concept and as a form of embodied resistance to cisnormativity and transnormativity (Ogle et al., 2023; Tebbe et al., 2022). As such, creative, contradictory, and expansive gender presentations are joyful not merely because they affirm one’s identity, but also because they challenge normative ideas of what forms of gender expression are valuable and appropriate.

Disabled joy

Disabled joy has remained so unthinkable in normative academic spaces that keyword searching “disability” and “joy” or “disabled” and “happiness” into a research database returns only articles that lament the loss of quality of life and happiness with disability onset, and the disability gap in happiness across welfare states. While research on disabled pleasure and self-care have minimal yet powerful scholarship clustered around them (for an example see Kim and Schalk, 2021), disabled joy as an overarching affect that moves beyond narratives of care and overcoming remains undertheorized within the academy. We highlight this difference to note the ways that conceptualizations of disabled joy can encompass these practices of radical self and mutual care, while also expanding beyond them to account for ways of being that are rooted not in care practice, or even counter to what may be deemed as care (e.g., pushing yourself to the point of pain/symptom flare to have an experience). However, an abundance of writing on disabled joy is present across genre-crossing books such as Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha’s (2022) The Future is Disabled and Alice Wong’s (2020) Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories from the Twenty-First Century, and the expansive presence of blogs, Instagram profiles, and organizing in disability community (e.g., #PandemicJoy, #DisabledJoy). Disabled joy is found in challenging ableist assumptions of ability, in getting a new mobility aid and gaining access to things previously closed off, in the access intimacy that one experiences with those who just get your access needs (Mingus, 2011), in stimming, and in the comfort of eating a safe food after a difficult day.

Disabled joy exists in both the moments of joy that may seem normative and align with what brings a non-disabled individual happiness, but it also opens up entirely new ways of being and feeling in the world that may be unthinkable to those without the embodied experience of disability. Indeed, for non-disabled people, as Piepzna-Samarasinha (2022: 301) writes:

Our vibrant, weird, improbable crip bodyminds enjoying ourselves in ways the abled and normal may not have ever considered has the power to shock and upend both their ableism and their idea of the way things—bodies, movement, life—are supposed to be.

The capacity to find joy in new, expansive, and disability-specific ways is crucial to understanding the liberatory potential of disabled joy. In many ways, places, and bodies, disabled joy exists not despite disability, but because of its very presence and the way it shapes lives and relationships.

Because of and in spite of: Joy beyond binaries

Both trans and disabled joy trouble the classification of experiences, emotions, and lives as‘bad’ or ‘good’. Finding joy in experiences that normative ideas of a ‘good life’ may see as failures disturb the assumption that ‘negative’ affects are always bad, and ‘positive’ affects are always good. As affect aliens, queer, trans, and disabled people can find joy and euphoria in orienting towards the ‘wrong’ happy objects (gender and sexual nonconformity and disability), or away from the ‘right’ ones (cisheteronormative and non-disabled futures). Queercrip joy is more than finding new happy objects—it is refusing to collapse ‘positive’ affects and ‘negative’ affects into a mutually exclusive binary.

While gender euphoria and dysphoria are opposites in that euphoria describes positive gender-related emotions and dysphoria describes negative emotions, gender euphoria and dysphoria can also be experienced simultaneously (Beischel et al., 2022; Jacobsen and Devor, 2022). While the absence of dysphoria can be experienced as a kind of euphoria, euphoria is not merely the lack of dysphoria, nor is dysphoria simply the lack of euphoria (Beischel et al., 2022; Jacobsen and Devor, 2022). Rather, they are two separate but related concepts. Trans euphoria, as an intensity of joy, exists both because of and in spite of the pain of dysphoria. Disabled joy exists both because of and in spite of the pain of impairment, inaccessibility, and isolation. While many cisgender people experience moments of gender affirmation and discomfort, the intensity of euphoria and dysphoria distinguishes trans experiences. Similarly, while non-disabled people may know the feeling of leaving the house after an injury, of being in a comforting space, or of having a new hobby, the intensity of joy and care that comes from symptom resolution, environmental safety, or special interests differs in its intensity. The euphoria of a flat chest after top surgery exists because the flat chest has not always existed; the all-consuming full body joy of savoring food exists because of latent chronic nausea, nausea that may still linger as one eats–the experience’s affective intensity is created in many ways in opposition, while allowing for the coexistence of lingering “bad” experiences. And yet, joy, and thus euphoria, also exist in spite of this dysphoria and grief–in spite of the allconsumingness of pain, and the overdetermined narrative of trans, queer, and disabled sadness, tragedy, and suicidality.

Disabled, queer, and trans joy ultimately exist in the grey space of these intersections– both because of and in spite of the material, sociopolitical, and affective realities of these identities. Eli Clare calls for a “messier story” of disabled and trans joy, arguing that “there is no real way to reconcile my lifelong struggle to love my disabled self exactly as it is with my use of medical technology to reshape my gendered and sexed body-mind. I can either try to fix the contradictions or embrace them.” (2017: 177). By embracing these contradictions, we can find joy in disrupting, in killing the joy associated with the fantasies of reproductive futurism and business as usual, and in body modification, surgery, and/or the refusal of medical care. Queercrip joy expands beyond the limits of normative understandings of joy in ways that render it affectively alien–an alienation that can move us towards liberation.

The limits of queercrip joy

As alternatives to the distress-focused conceptualization of transness that revolves around dysphoria and the deficit-oriented assumption of disability as counter to the ‘good’ life, euphoria and joy serve as alternative affects to orient around. While dysphoria and grief are something to move away from, euphoria and joy are something to move towards. However, positioning euphoria and joy uncritically as the goal conceptualizes transition, acceptance, and in some cases ‘cure’ as a process of creating the conditions for happiness. And yet, euphoria and joy do not eradicate dysphoria or pain, nor guarantee constant happiness. While these ‘positive’ affects can make the ‘negative’ ones more bearable, it cannot rid the world of transphobia, homophobia, ableism, racism, and the many other forms of oppression that structure queer, trans, and disabled people’s lives.

While emphasizing euphoria over dysphoria can resist the pathologization of transness on an individual and cultural level, it falls flat as a political strategy. Positioning trans joy as evidence that transness is not an illness or disorder implicitly positions trans dysphoria, depression, and negative affect as evidence that transness is an illness. This tactic does not disrupt the ableist logic that justifies the harms of psychopathologization, it merely seeks to exempt trans people from these harms. Positioning trans as happy and therefore healthy and good distances trans people from disability and madness, reinforcing ableism and sanism (Pilling, 2022). Notably, Cameron Awkward-Rich (2022) argues that the proponents and beneficiaries of trans happiness discourses are primarily white non-disabled transmasculine people, whose access to whiteness and masculinity allows them to distance themselves from other racialized, feminized, and disabled trans people. As such, while trans joy discourses enable some trans people to escape some of the harms of oppression and pathologization, they fail to disrupt the power structures that maintain oppression. The palatable trans person is similarly reflected in disability pride narratives that rely on assimilation into cisheteronormative and white supremacist ideals of overcoming, defeating, and eliminating shame, symptoms, or disability itself, as evident in the trope of the Paralympian. Even in texts where disability pride is based in a rejection of overcoming narratives, the incitement to see pride as the emotion to orient to and the “end” of the disability acceptance journey creates another affective expectation that in many ways parallels developmentalist narratives. In both cases, the mechanisms of ableism and sanism seek to distance queer, trans, and disabled people from themselves as well as from each other to block coalitional politics.

Overcoming shame and pain in pursuit of joy requires subjects to perform a particular affective narrative to be seen as the ‘right’ kind of queer, trans, or disabled person. Normative joy narratives that rely on linear trajectories mimic the very same curative and developmental narratives that have pathologized and constrained queer, trans, and disabled lives. Here, the linear development narrative from disability to cure parallels the assumption that disabled joy requires an affective trajectory from grief and sadness to pride and happiness. Similarly, while many trans people experience increased euphoria and decreased dysphoria as a result of accessing gender-affirming medical care, transitioning should not be understood as a linear trajectory, let alone one with an clear affective move from dysphoria to euphoria (Jacobsen and Devor, 2022).

Queercrip joy does not require the erasure of physical or psychological pain, of dysphoria, or of any number of ‘negative affects’ in a move towards‘positive’ affects such as euphoria. Indeed, merely replacing dysphoria with euphoria as the defining emotion of transness, or grief with pride as the defining emotion of disability still require queer, trans, and disabled people to perform a particular affective narrative to legitimize their identity. As Hil Malatino writes, “Transitioning doesn’t have to be wholly curative, or even minimally happy-making, in order for it to be imperative. It doesn’t have to guarantee survival in order to be necessary” (2022: 3). Indeed, Frye (1983) asserts that oppressed subjects are often required to perform a degree of happiness and cheer, placing them in an affective double bind. Oppression, to Frye, involves signaling one’s docility and acquiescence to the situation at hand–“to participate in our own erasure” (1983: 2). These affective performances uphold the fantasy of normative happy objects and reinforce the affective alienation of oppression. It is from these parallels of structural oppression, the limitations of purely ‘positive’ affects’, and the location of queer trans and disabled people as affect aliens that we formulate the potentials of queercrip joy.

Towards queercrip joy

Queercrip joy is more than just joy and euphoria; it is a complex formulation of intimacy, pleasure, pain, validation, refusal, and relationality. Queercrip joy resists the easy binaries of positive/negative affects to instead embrace joy and pain as simultaneous and coconstitutive. Queercrip joy exists both because of and in spite of the pain of enduring oppression and physical and psychological pain. As such, queercrip joy is not merely a pure “happy object” (Ahmed, 2010), but embraces the affective messiness of reorientating towards new, ‘wrong’, or ‘unhappy’ objects and futures. Queercrip joy allows us to feel the grief of non-conformity, the shame of failing to align with the ‘right’ political horizon, the dysphoria and dysmorphia of bodily difference, and still understand that we can have a ‘good’ life and that our lives can be happy, full, livable, and imaginable.

While queer trans and disabled liberation cannot be predicated on happiness, we argue that happiness can still be one of the goals of liberation. Queercrip activism embodies what Jules Gill-Peterson calls a “powerful articulation of desire that leads directly to concrete material politics” (Gill-Peterson, 2022). Enabling joy requires changes to the material conditions that produce unhappiness. It requires access to gender-affirming care without gatekeeping, the right to refuse medical care when it is unwanted, affirmative and accessible mental and physical health care when it is wanted, an end to poverty, freedom from incarceration in jails and psychiatric facilities, safe and secure housing, and ultimately, an end to all the forms of oppression that impact queer, trans, and disabled lives.

One example of an approach to queercrip joy that centers these material politics is Trans Day of Snack. The day originated in a tweet discussing the perils of Trans Day of Visibility and what could replace it, in which one user, Lilith, jokingly suggested Trans Day of Staying In and Having a Nice Snack. Tuck Woodstock, creator of the trans podcast Gender Reveal, took this tweet seriously and created a Trans Day of Snack mutual aid program in 2021 (Rhodes, 2023). In 2024, the project sent over $13,000 in snack payments to 655 trans people living in US states most affected by anti-trans legislation as well as nearly $22,000 in mutual aid payments for 217 trans people in need of immediate financial support to meet their basic needs, including medication and disability care supplies (Woodstock and Yin, 2024). Of course, there is no snack in the world that can bring about trans liberation. But free pizza and $100 in mutual aid can make life a little bit easier and more joyful for trans people. Trans Day of Snack refuses visibility as a prerequisite for joy or liberation and instead turns towards mutual aid and communitybuilding. Trans Day of Snack is an effort to create the material conditions that enable trans joy that exemplifies the practice of affective care we term queercrip joy.

The pursuit of queercrip joy as a political strategy dares to imagine better futures in which all queer, trans, and disabled people not just survive, but thrive. Queercrip activism requires new strategies to prefigure joyful and livable futures. Westbrook argues that trans activism must move beyond memorializing lives lost to violence and instead employ strategies that help create the conditions for livable trans lives. A similar invocation of livable futures is taken up in Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha’s book The Future is Disabled where they assert that recording “the disabled survival strategies, communities, and tech we create by and for ourselves as disabled BIPOC people” is part of imagining and moving towards a crip future (2022: 23). We argue that celebrating queer, trans, and disabled joy, and moving beyond binary understandings of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ affects and objects is one such survival strategy that can move us towards these livable futures.

### 1NC

Capitalism K

#### Contemporary capitalism renders the aff’s mode of resistance futile---their affective energies are translated into designer capitalism’s commodities, made fungible via algorithms that control society.

Jan Jagodzinski 17, Professor of Art and Media Education in the Department of Secondary Education, University of Alberta, Canada, hates Moodle with a burning passion, 2017, “The Precarious Future of Education, Education, Psychoanalysis, and Social Transformation” Ch. 1: The Precarious Future of Education: The Speculative Fictions of Education

Another meaning of ‘resistance is futile’ emerges with the recognition that resistance today is to be found everywhere; today’s art is resistance and resistance is art. Resistance has become a way of life and a very profitable activity. Today resistance exists on every corner but nothing changes. Resistance is just another brand like FCUK. In a contemporary context, artworks are staged within a binary of a critical model based on negation, deferral and lack, or an aesthetic model based on the ideas of transcendence. 15 In 2011, TIME placed the ‘Protester’ as the Person of the Year, a 25-year-old woman who decided to protest against the Bank of America. Even the non-sanctioned Occupy Wall Street protests were removed through fire regulations and municipal laws governing public parks and festivals. To protest today is to occupy no ground whatsoever; one must become a perpetual moving sign with placard in hand, a zombie routed through streets ‘peacefully’ by police on horses or motorcycles. Does this simply confirm that the public–private divide has all but disappeared? You can eat your lunch and read in a park, but in what spaces you can truly protest have all been repressively desublimated: in other words freedom of speech and civil liberties have become restricted through the structural manipulations of open spaces; only cyberspace is left that is not yet fully controlled and regulated to get your message out. But this too is being shut down slowly, regulated incrementally. Modern liberal politics as we once knew it has all but disappeared. It is the lament that a liberal arts education and the humanities are no longer ‘useful,’ that there is an aversion to social values and civic mindedness, and a waning of intellectual integrity. 16 The future that the humanities once entertained seems to have dimmed and even in some universities gone out.

Romantic resistance in ‘societies of control’ emerges around the agency over the body: notably punk, Goth, body tattooing, piercing and modifi cation, and porn-chic (the so-called slutwear and hookerwear—belly shirts, visible G-strings, sexercise), and plastic surgery of private parts such as vaginal rejuvenation and penis enhancement and abdomen tucks for men. Now, as a number of sociologists have argued, even the headscarf or hijab has become commodified and marketed (especially in Turkey) as a form of class distinction and rebellion against orthodoxies of Islam (Göçek and Balaghi 1994). The bulk of these resistances is metonymically located in girl’s bodies. In all these cases, however, resistance is equated with autonomy and agency over one’s body, which is tied to commodity consumption for special niche markets, which then feeds back into the neo-liberalist agenda of capitalism—namely, freedom as attached to chains of debt.

These forms of resistance are the remaining vestiges of the disciplined society as outlined by Michel Foucault that have now become commodified in their own right. The trend is oxymoronically towards mass customization or designer capitalism of the ‘goods life’ (jagodzinski 2010). In control societies resistance is an assemblage of flows: The G-string or belly shirt can mean fashion in one context, sexual availability in another, pride in one’s body, or functionality—it is hot outside or simply sheer habit. The headscarf can be a sign of fashion, of religious belief, political ideal, all or none of these depending on the assemblage that is formed where desire is circulated and holds the meaning in circulation for a given period of chronological time. Any stability of a defining image no longer holds for long.

The diagram of the panopticon has been supplanted by a reconfigured abstract machine, the synopticon, which now regulates and modulates a smooth, continuous and uniform space rather than as a striated or hierarchical one. One has to spray a mist over such space to make visible the forces that are at work, much like in many action sci-fi movies where a spray reveals the laser beam lights that crisscross and defi ne the space to set off the alarms; many boundaries remain invisible, without detection, so that the body can be choreographed and positioned without coercion.

‘Resistance is futile’ in a control society has to be rethought for the future of education, especially now that digitalization has brought to fore what now characterizes globalization or the contemporary world order in general where the modern dialectic of inside and outside has been replaced by a play of degrees and intensities, of hybridity, artificiality and immaterialism. Immaterialism, after Jean-François Lyotard ( 1991), has nothing to do with being the opposite of matter; rather, it is the manipulation of matter via structural rules of organization (matrixes and algorithms) that no longer are human measures of space and time. The collapse of art, science and technology is one such obvious occurrence of the posthuman, where artists must now share with technologists and engineers the co-creation of the ‘work,’ thus separating the artwork from the collaborative team that made it happen, desubjectivizing its creation. The creative assemblage of tool making (or instrumentalization), composition, performance and reception through the intra-personal collaboration of a production team, best thought of as a cell, like Critical Art Ensemble, provides the implosion of disciplines that necessitates the creation of a new nonsense signifier for art—something like ‘art-techno-sci’ since this is no longer ‘art’ in the modernist sense. Art-techno-sci is created as much by accident, technology, the structure of matter, the context of presentation than by an entity called an ‘artist’ who expresses him or herself consciously through the so-called language of art. Agency is not only dispersed throughout this network of forces, but desire as the unknown factor X only emerges once the ‘work’ is released. ‘Work’ has the specificity of affect in this way of understanding, as an event.

#### Their communicative praxis is subsumed by capitalism’s mediation of information---regardless of ends the communication itself is a commodity.

Jodi Dean 14, professor in the Political Science department at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in New York state, 11/11/14, “Communicative Capitalism and Class Struggle”, <https://spheres-journal.org/contribution/communicative-capitalism-and-class-struggle/> \*modified

Communicative capitalism refers to the form of late capitalism in which values heralded as central to democracy materialize in networked communications technologies. Ideals of access, inclusion, discussion and participation are realized through expansions, intensifications and interconnections of global telecommunications. In communicative capitalism, capitalist productivity derives from its expropriation and exploitation of communicative processes. This does not mean that information technologies have replaced manufacturing; in fact, they drive a wide variety of mining, chemical, and biotechnological industries. Nor does it mean that networked computing has enhanced productivity outside the production of networked computing itself. Rather, it means that capitalism has subsumed communication such that communication does not provide a critical outside. Communication serves capital, whether in affective forms of care for producers and consumers, the mobilization of sharing and expression as instruments for “human relations” in the workplace, or contributions to ubiquitous media circuits.

Other names for communicative capitalism are knowledge economy, information society, and cognitive capitalism. Although they are all trying to designate the same formation, each highlights something different. Knowledge points to combinations of skill and content (know-how and know-that); information points just to content, although its circulatory systems are implied. Cognitive is too narrow and is linked to the idea of immaterial labor, which has rightly been subjected to thorough critique. I highlight communication in part because I want to underscore the impact of this iteration of capitalism on democracy: it subsumes it, eliminating its capacity to designate a critical gap within the social field. What Jürgen Habermas theorized as communicative action does not provide a critical alternative to instrumental reason and the one-dimensional society. It does not because communication has become a primary means for capitalist expropriation and exploitation. Linguistic, affective, and unconscious being-together, flows and processes constitutive not just of being human but of broader relationality and belonging, have been co-opted for capitalist production.

Marx’s analysis of value in Capital helps explain how communication can be a vehicle for capitalist subsumption. In his well-known discussion of the commodity, Marx considers how it is that different sorts of goods can be exchanged with one another. His answer is human labor; understood as quanta of time, labor renders different goods commensurable with one another. But how is this possible? Why would an hour of mining labor be commensurate with an hour of farming labor? The answer involves the fundamentally social character of labor. What is common to different kinds of human labor is that they are all labor in the abstract, components of the larger homogeneous mass of human labor. Labor, and hence value, is inextricable from the relations of production and reproduction constitutive of society. Products of labor are “crystals of this social substance, common to them all,” that is to say, values. Communicative capitalism ~~seizes~~ [takes over], privatizes, and attempts to monetize the social substance without waiting for its crystallization in products of labor. It does not depend on the commodity-thing. It directly exploits the social relation at the heart of value. Social relations don’t have to take the fantastic form of the commodity to generate value for capitalism. Via networked, personalized communication and information technologies, capitalism has found a more straightforward way to appropriate value.

One of the clearest expressions of communicative capitalism’s direct exploitation of the social substance is Metcalfe’s Law: “The value of a communications network is proportional to the square of the number of its’ users.”12 The basic idea is, the more people using a network, the more valuable it is. The truth in Metcalfe’s Law is its association of value with the communicative network itself. Value is a property of the relations, the links, between and within pages. Google’s PageRank algorithm is one of most successful information retrieval algorithms because it takes linking into account, mining and extracting common knowledge. PageRank puts to use the fact that networked communications are the form of capitalism’s subsumption of the social substance to its terms and dynamics. Matteo Pasquinelli thus argues that, “Google is a parasitic apparatus of capture of the value produced by common intelligence.”13 He treats the prestige that PageRank attends to (and reflexively enhances) in terms of the network value of any given link. Network value describes a link’s social relations: How many other links is it related to? Are those links related to other links? How many? Google captures this value, the link’s social substance and its place within a general system of social relations.

Communicative capitalism subsumes everything we do. It turns not just our mediated interactions, but all our interactions, into raw material for capital.14 Financial transactions, GPS location data, RFID tags, interactions that are filmed or photographed, and soon, the data generated by the small ubiquitous sensors in what is called the internet of things, enclose every aspect of our life into the data form. A few years ago we might have understood this as a communicative commons. Now, with the absorption of a wide array of forms of unstructured data into massive data pools, it is clear that we are dealing with something even more all-encompassing. Big data is the capitalists’ name for this material that Marx understood as the social substance.

#### Such semiotic codification creates a form of technovisuality in which static algorithms of productivity dictated by capitalism function as the metric by which bodies are deemed valuable, forming the register through which violence is enacted.

Jonathan Beller 13, Professor of Humanities and Media Studies and Critical and Visual Studies, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, NY, Edited by Arne De Boever and Warren Neidich, “Pathologistics of Attention,” *Psychopathologies of Cognitive Capitalism: Part 2*, Archive Books, p. 117-155 //brackets for clarity

This study of the pathologistics of attention, is then necessarily also about the scrambling of the symbolic order, the bankruptcy of sign-function, the de- and re-structuring of grammar, the proletarianization of the senses, the expropriation of the cognitive-linguistic, the installation of the regime of cognitive capitalism over and on top of or adjacent to the persistence of spectacular, industrial and feudal regimes, the mining of attention as an amalgamating means of command-control-production, the current and ostensibly indominatable reign of short-termist thinking, the life-sucking suction of financialization, the acid-corrosiveness of the Wall Street nano-second, the ever-advancing seizure of the commons, and the effect of all these projects in relation to mentality, warfare, global dispossession and planetary collapse. It is also, not entirely incidentally, an effort to explore the following irritant: today, in the neo-liberal West at any rate, the liberal is a fascist who thinks they are a democrat.  
So, in addition to the breakdown of language function and the re-distribution and/or liquidation of meaning, this paper is unavoidably on the psychopathology and the logistics of perception of contemporary fascism, otherwise to be thought of as the totalitarianism of finance capitalism— a formation that is at once without us and within us. You, my readers, will already have noted that it is only with real difficulty and a certain tentativeness that I can name my object of analysis, a problematic that has everything to do with what I am calling the pathologistics of attention. Expressed in the briefest formulation possible, this formula refers to the dialectic between the expropriation first of labor and then attention on the one side, and the shortcircuiting of the body and then of thought on the other, as the definitive means for the production of the present, such that it is… present.2  
[cont.]  
Well, if in 1960 the normal man masturbated, what does he do today? What do any of us do? Particularly after half a century of cinema, digitization, visual saturation, and visual financialization? Citizen Kane or Norman Bates? Neurotic megalomania or psychosis? Two programs for subjectivization. In today’s world in which the entire visual field is posited as a site of value extraction, it is no secret that pornography represents 30% of internet traffic at minimum. If we consider that computer energy usage has expanded to account for more than 3% of electricity consumption world-wide, that’s a significant amount of fossil fuels devoted to jacking off. Still if reaching orgasm in order to ward off psychosis were the main use of fossil fuels, the world might be a better place. However, the effects are somewhat more serious than all that: structural violence, systematically deployed, titrated with highly fungible vectors of racism and sexism—are embedded in the technovisualization of everything that appears with the express goal of capturing sensual labor and the consequence of liquidating both subjects and the subjectivity of their objects. Bernard Stiegler’s notion of the stripping of the libido and the proletarianization of the senses by what he calls “retentional systems” would be useful here. As is Marcuse’s idea of one-dimensional man. From Kane to Bates to porn we witness the mediatic functionalization of subjectivity and the virtualization of the object world. These three pathways are programmatic compensatory means to ward of the radical disempowerment wrought by programs. More than a tendency, the result is an automation of psychic function by computerized and capitalized apparatuses.  
But our analysis thus far is only to 1960, and predominantly in the U.S., more specifically, the white U.S. Indeed the forms of neurological and psychic dysfunction and reformation, described herein—people fragmented, castrated, and cut up by money and machines and driven to seek subjectivity by pathological means—are relatively easy to understand, delimited as they are and as compared with the logistics of perception now current. Not to minimize them, since they violently imposed various regimes of the body, psychology, personhood and desire, on subjects as well as upon those who became objects for said subjects, but we must remark here that they are local manifestations specific to a few dominant nations, races and classes in a particular epoch.  
Nonetheless, their mainstream expression and dissemination makes them valid precursors, if you will, to the (con-)temporary psychosis of today’s mainstream. Yesterday’s white supremacist capitalist patriarchy still configures today’s white supremacist capitalist patriarchy in the U.S. and Europe and beyond—a formation that is symptomatically specific to one class fraction but nonetheless potentially deadly to every planetary denizen (if also to itself) for all that.  
Admittedly, there are countless other ways to render this analysis, but since my theme was psychopathology I found myself going to these films first. In any case, outing the whiteness of my examples thus far is not to universalize them, but precisely the opposite. For with Fanon, we should also recognize the limits of psychopathologizing discourse, which is to say the limits of psychoanalysis. For Fanon, no talking cure was going to cure the sicknesses of either torture victims or socio-paths, only insurrection and revolution could overthrow the forms of egoism and hatred endemic to colonialism and fascism and thus bring about the needed paradigm shift. So in tracking the white psychopathologies that lead towards the dissolution of their hosts, we are witnessing the implosion, the practical deconstruction of whiteness.  
By way of moving towards a conclusion, I want to make two final points: one about whiteness and what Anne Anlin Cheng astutely calls the melancholy of race—this will be an additional and indeed constitutive patho-logistical vector that characterizes the operating system of the representational dominant. Then, a second concerning a generalized liquidation not just of particular human beings but of human being and of being itself.  
Anne Cheng in The Melancholy of Race reminds us that the melancholic is both sad and aggressive. She writes, “Dominant white identity in American operates melancholically— as an elaborate identificatory system based on psychical and social consumption-and-denial. This diligent system of melancholic retention appears in different guises. Both racist and white liberal discourses participate in the dynamic, albeit out of different motivations. The racists need to develop elaborate ideologies in order to accommodate their actions with official American ideals, while white liberals need to keep burying the racial others in order to memorialize them. Those who do not see the racial problem or those who call themselves nonideological are the most melancholic of all because in today’s political climate, as Toni Morrison exclaims in Playing in the Dark, ‘it requires hard work to not see.’”9  
Though Cheng will be interested in “the question that Freud does not ask: [namely] what is the subjectivity of the melancholic object?”10 for the moment I want to remark that the canonical cinema of the U.S. can be thought of as a melancholy canon—organized as it is to portray white narratives as universal narratives in a society profoundly structured by racial inequality—organized in other words “to not see.” While bell hooks and many others have commented on “the oppositional gaze” in Hollywood cinema, particularly the oppositional gaze of black spectators watching white films, we must learn to better recognize how whole systems of visualization and thus for the organization of attention are structured around a disavowal of racism or of the existence of racialized bodies, and oftentimes the active annihilation of racialized bodies. Cheng, citing Thomas Mann, who says that “[w]hat we call mourning for our dead is perhaps not so much grief at not being able to call them back as it is grief at not being able to want to do so”, shows that “it is exclusion rather than loss [that] is the real stake of melancholic retention.” 11 Indeed, melancholia approaches psychosis when the lost/excluded object rises up to challenge the melancholic who in truth no longer desires [or can abide by] its return.  
Take for example Clint Eastwood’s all too convincing portrayal of “Dirty Harry,” a sad cop whose disillusionment and melancholic self-loathing have almost cost him his job on the SFPD. When one of the rare black characters in Hollywood cinema asserts himself, albeit scripted in the most stereotypically racist of ways—black bank robber running from the interpellation of a white man who also happens to be a cop—the line of sight through the peephole of psycho, a masculinity machine if their ever was one, becomes the sight line down the barrel of Clint’s 44 [[[the]]] magnum. The title of the sequels, Magnum Force and The Enforcer, are telling, because the psycho does not simply deny reality (the possibility of other ways and practices beyond his ken); he imposes his vision on others, by making them dead, if necessary. Eastwood’s persona from Dirty Harry forward is that of being too much a man for these muddled, liberal and overly tolerant times—his career turns out to be a heroic elegy of his racial melancholia, which is to say the melancholia of his racism. As one blogger appreciatively writes, “Dirty Harry put a bullet in the heart of the flower power generation” and it’s true, psychosis overcame poetry and too many Americans loved him up.  
Here we can grasp the virility at the end of Peeping Tom’s camera, which he uses to film women as he murders them, in the form of the camera’s bayonet blade extension, and the virility in the extension of Eastwood’s racist gun. These prosthetics of the gaze constitute what we should understand as the working-edge of so-called universal man. Dirty Harry’s melancholia is of a profoundly different order than that of African-American filmmaker Charles Burnett’s characters in his extraordinary Killer of Sheep. That film, which could be read as a kind of black Modern Times in which images of the desultory Watts community in the mid- 70’s is also metaphorically figured as composed of sheep (and on occasion as killers), but here the machines hardly work. The film is a kind of bearing witness to the lived temporality, disempowerment and affective experiences of racialized exclusion. One finds in this film a distinctive composition that creates an apperceptive space of black knowing which is in certain real ways outside the economy of visual forms and structures proferred at the Hollywood box office (even as it is arguably a partial result of this economy). Following the lead offered in Saidiya Hartman’s work, one might say that the incommunicability and opacity of the legacies of slavery, racism, and Jim Crow are partly the contents of this film. The very difficulty of generating a subject constituting line of sight, image, or fully resolved perspective or representation testifies to a non-hegemonic visuality, an unrealized subjectification, and the presence of counter-histories that mobilize a perceptual mode different from that which will align itself and hence be at once repurposed and devoured by the mainstream.  
However, the annihilating gazes abstracted and in-formed in Psycho, Dirty Harry, Peeping Tom, etc., are a condensation of a specific mode of white life’s universal application of a violently imposed sexism and racism to the organization of its perception. These “pure gazes” mobilizing racism and sexism on various platforms for the prosumption of post-fordist tramps to the profit of today’s entrepreneurial Citizen Kanes, small and large, are also the legacy of colonialism, of slavery, of imperialism and humanism. Today these vectors of for-profit programmatic annihilation consolidate to form, among other manifestations, the predatory gaze of the drone in a global war to be human. These pathological programs of visualization continue to function in ways that are equally as important as the digital computer. The drone, effecting what Allen Feldman calls a liquid archive, couples all the capacities of computation for aerodynamic navigation, videography, cartography, facial recognition and weapons deployment to create technologically enabled psychosis. Cyber-psychosis. The drone and its melancholic functionaries—its cybernetically incorporated pilots (who will go home to kiss their kids after pulling the trigger on someone else’s family half a universe away) along with their entire staff of statisticians, researchers, and commanders who serve both machine and country— draw on a panoply of mutable, and thus programmable raced and gendered assumptions. As does the press that covers these exploits, and “the nation” that sanctions them. In short, data processing can morphologically produce whatever variant of racist/sexist phobic rage is required for any operation.  
It being understood, of course, that an operation here means the liquidation of the visualized target. The violent and incorporating logistics of this gaze are utterly banalized in the technical rationality of computers, national security, military protocols and the scoops of networked news that together produce the required taxidermic effect on each days’ requisite Other. Thus the drone, as both financial exploit and paradigmatic mode of visualization in the era of mediatic finance capital also represents the full automation of not just visuality but subjectivity. Because all systems (computation, financialization, visualization, militarization, national borders and migration, racialization, aestheticization, etc.) tend towards its logic, subjectivity within these programs is only to be found in the logistics of the annihilating gaze—subjectivity has itself become a program and all outsides are zones of crisis. This subjectification through annihilation is the real meaning of “convergence.”  
So alongside the regular fare we have war games, war porn, food porn, fashion porn, news porn, reality porn and regular porn. In fact that is the regular fare and it is all part of the attention economy. This all-consuming production by mediated sensual labor functions at a variety of levels from the ratification of a particular screen image to the game, blog, show or channel through to the interface or platform and their advertisers, shareholders, banks, militaries and states. We have the bundling of modes of attention by computerized delivery systems and systems of account. We have, in short, the programmatic simulation of reality, the virtual mise-en-scène of all looking, without the guarantee of any real event beyond that orchestrated by the inexorable logic of advertising and value extraction. That our thoughts and perceptions are programmed, accumulated and capitalized testifies to the automation and expropriation of the general intellect. The general intellect, distributed across media platforms and automated in various apparatuses is, not just part of the means of production in the industrial sense, it is the means of production of sense perception and knowledge. It has rendered sensuality productive for capital and subjectivity at once automated and fully virtual. Subjectivity is a contingent instantiation (and always was), but the mediatic matrix of its materialization has fully transformed the local conditions of production and it has itself entered into computation.  
In some brilliant pages of Alex Galloway’s new book The Interface Effect is the following proposition: “The computer, [which Galloway calls a metaphysical medium because it functions through simulation and instantiates its own objects] is not of an ontological condition [as cinema is purported to be], it is on that condition. It does not facilitate or make reference to an arrangement of being, it remediates the very conditions of being itself. If I may be so crude, the medium of the computer is being.”12 Galloway continues, “If the cinema is, in general an ontology, the computer is, in general, an ethic”.13 The distinction, as Galloway tells us, is comparable to that between a language and a calculus. The profilmic event as “referent” versus the program that in object-oriented computing instantiates the very objects it will then manipulate.  
As evocative and indeed arresting as this formulation is in defining the flight from being as a metaphysical transformation ushered in by the digital computer, it is also partially incorrect, at least if we are going to abide by Vilém Flusser’s notion of the photographic apparatus—a machine that automates forms of thinking by executing concepts in a programmatic fashion. For Flusser, the technical image, produced by the apparatus known as the camera, is the first post-industrial image, in as much as the camera is already a computer—a programmed apparatus whose function is informed by the linearly written notations of the sciences of optics and chemistry. An apparatus for Flusser is something that automates an aspect of intelligence, and it is no less composed of programs than is a digital computer. Thus, Flusser claims quite convincingly that for nearly two centuries cameras have organized the world for the improvement and proliferation of cameras, such that today everything exists in reference to photography, suggesting that this constellation of programs evolves as the photographic apparatus by subjugating humans to its functions, much as a Darwinian evolutionary vector might transform and then dominate a habitus.  
Thus one might say that if “computation is an ethic”— the imposition of strict rules upon the emergence and trajectories of entities, then cinema was a mode of computation whose ethos was ontology—at least for a time, the time of Bazin. Indeed we already know that this was only true for a specific modality of cinema, deep focus, as montage with its production of attractions and concepts, already involved a derealization of the profilmic “content” of the image. It’s useful to say things this way because doing so provides a necessary corollary to W.J.T. Mitchell’s notion that “there are no visual media,” that can be used to show that the computer is still fundamentally embroiled in the visual. Mitchell argues that since even the most “purely visual” media rely on other mediatic modes to function—silent cinema for example had its musical score and intertitles, Abstract Expressionism had its critical discourse—no medium is really visual. The corollary, indeed anticipated by Mitchell himself is that they are all visual media, but what’s important, as Mitchell tells us, going back to McLuhan, is the sense ratios. And, we must add, the program. For visuality is overrun with programs. Thus we see that while the computer is a break in the mode of informaticization (the way in which worlds are textualized and then treated as information [for it must be remembered that nothing is ontologically information—“information” is itself a conceptualization of what to do with being, and thus a program]), it remains under the sway of the program of visualization induced by the co-function and indeed convergence of visual media, which, emphatically now, are all of them.  
Already in Antonioni’s Blow-Up and as far back as Eisenstein, the profilmic real was not real, it was, material, raw material organized by semiotic systems. This is no less true with computation, which utilizes abstraction to work on the world. The computer is an apparatus composed of apparatuses, a program composed of programs. For all this, actually existing computing is no less keyed into the visual nor into the pathologistical vectors I have identified here. The alienation of “man” from “his” object, is not alienation 2.0, it is alienation to the google: programmed, weaponized, photographic apparatuses evolving an extraordinary materialist complexity that runs from the atomic to the planetary by siphoning off the sensual activity of human life to the point in which this process has presided over a generalized liquidation of being. Emergent media however, like the species’ enlarging carbon footprint, do not cancel what has gone before but rather develop media-ecologically, that is, in relation to extant energetics, whether considered from the standpoint of thermodynamics, labor or information. No doubt new media are marked by quantitative transformations that precipitate qualitative effects, however we are looking at a transformation that has taken place over several centuries. The ontological categories and ontology itself have been shifting towards a complete liquidation of being—as a category, as an experience or (and here this word ceases to make sense), as a “reality.” This, indeed, is the story of twentieth century philosophy in the West which, taken as a whole turns out to be a theory of the image.  
Nonetheless, we find it necessary to insist that race and gender based exploitation, systemic encampment, rape, enslavement, national wholesaling of populations, and murder, continues apace with capitalism’s evolving algorithms— inequality and injustice is the substrate of capitalist simulations. Thus we can be sure that while the patho-logistics of capitalism are our common lot, they function on a system of differences. These differences are lived, and contradictorily perhaps, we will claim that these lived differences are real and that they matter. For otherwise love is outmoded and indeed impossible, and there is nothing to non-capitalist values, less perhaps profound naiveté or cynicism. Capitalism, the very image of non-being, the very life of non-life, would remain our conceptual horizon, however, the world that haunts today’s images persists. And it is calling you. It rebels.  
Paul Virilio, whose inflection of the term logistics I have heavily relied upon here, would agree that there is a crisis, and that the intensifying rhythm of the pulverization and reformation of subjectivity is today endemic to the function of power. In his recent book length interview entitled The Administration of Fear he speaks of the developmental sequence of three bombs, the atomic, the informational and the ecological. “The second is no longer atomic and not yet ecological but informational.” 14 This bomb comes from instantaneous means of communication and in particular the transmission of information. It plays a prominent role in establishing fear as a global environment, because it allows the synchronization of emotion on a global scale. Because of the absolute speed of electromagnetic waves, the same feeling of terror can be felt in all corners of the world at the same time. It is not a localized bomb: it explodes each second... It creates a “community of emotions,” what Virilio only half-ironically calls “a communism of affects.” “There is something in the [global] synchronization of emotion that surpasses the power of standardization of opinion that was typical of the mass media in the second half of the twentieth century...”;15 and a little later on: “With the phenomena of instantaneous interaction that are now our lot, there has been a veritable reversal, destabilizing the relationship of human interaction, and the time reserved for reflection in favor of the conditioned responses produced by emotion.”16  
So rather than deep focus and the time of the long take, Virilio sees us in the thrall of a new order of montage (already dimly visible in the newsreel from Citizen Kane)—what in an earlier work I called the cinematic mode of production. Far more intensive than Eisenstein’s programmatic montage or even the ambient but still cinematic montage of midtwentieth century mass media this digital montage is produced by the continued and near continuous arrival of information and affect bombs all competing, in increasingly self-conscious ways that are feed-back loops of the market, for the capture and expropriation of human attention. Ours is an increasingly impoverished and militarized society, characterized by a total war on the body, on consciousness, and on the senses, but also on equality, on solidarity and on democracy. Today’s attractions rely on sequence, certainly, but also frequency, intensity, channel, repetition and spectrum. Taken together, these “attractions” generate ideas, affects, panics, crisis and swarms: a global impulse network evolved (if that’s the word) to manage and expropriate a world population by revamping its sensory inputs. The cultural ballistics, arguably akin to the sensory deprivation and over-saturation of interrogation techniques designed to force the ego into existential crisis, institute an establishment of fear as a so-called global environment.  
The expropriation of increasing quantities of subjectivity that might otherwise have been used for purposes other than capitalist production and annihilation is today the condition of and for the continuing intensification of the capitalist media environment—the fragmentation and as has been noted, fractalization, induced by capitalized media machines. But more than that, the induction of fear and prevailing if not permanent psychosis is at once a result and a strategy, a modus operandi, a mise-en-scène. Not just a result of but a condition of production of the reigning administration, it has succeeded in giving us many good reasons to be afraid. But it is also an administration that, as Pussy Riot recently demonstrated subsequently articulated from prison, may fear nothing more than poetry and thus makes every effort to drive it out.17 For it may be that the world making practice of poetics, in all its forms, is what remains to those extrinsic crisis zones: zones, peoples, parts of people, aware of their oppression and refusing to seek liberation through oppression. Otherwise, awash in intentional signals, literally caught in myriad and all pervasive gazes in which seeing and being seen have become one and the same act, everyone, à la Baudrillard, is just sending messages that ratify the dominant codes. We are the media…; We, the media... Everyone, desperate to make words, to make images, that will testify to their existence in an environment of semio-war. But the situation functions as if each and all were suddenly in the position of Borges’ narrator Yu Tsun in “The Garden of Forking Paths.” Each person a nodal point of multiple inheritances seeking agency in a battle for the control of information. Warding off abjection for themselves and for their ancestors in an informatic war, and pressed, to convert another or many others into a sign, by murder, if necessary, if only to flash their own existence on some platform’s program. Let us offer a definition of Psychosis in the contemporary: the instrumental inscription of signs and images on the lives of others, at speeds and intensities that foreclose their being.

#### The romanticization of affective micropolitics fragments collective struggle---turning inward as political expression reifies neoliberal individuation, obstructs durable opposition to capital, and defers the communist horizon.

Patrizia Zanoni 20, Professor at Hasselt University (Belgium) and Chair in Organization Studies at the Utrecht University School of Governance, 2020, “Prefiguring Alternatives through the Articulation of Post- and Anti-Capitalistic Politics: An Introduction to Three Additional Papers and a Reflection,” *Organization* (London, England) [London, England], vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 3-16, https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508419894699.

Advancing the conversation on alternative economies: Post-capitalism and the communist horizon

Addressing the relation between alternative organizations and their outside is central to our commitment, as critical organizational scholars, to taking seriously the prefigurative power of alternative praxis, and appreciate the ‘possibilities offered by “the community” or “the local” as sites of transformation’ and ‘the capacity of radical and innovative projects to instigate change’ (Phillips and Jeanes, 2018: 699), without however falling into political naivety or romantic idealization. In our discipline, this reflection needs to be more explicitly embedded in the current debate on what political vocabulary, grammar and modalities are conceivable and viable at this specific time in history (Douzinas and Žižek, 2010). As observed by Bailey (2019), the Left is still – theoretically, politically, affectively – recovering from the de facto integration into global capitalism of those societies and economies that had historically positioned themselves as an alternative to it. Despite the ever rising consensus on the destructive effects of capitalism and awareness of the vibrant non- and anti-capitalist life around us, the historical failure of ‘actually existing socialism’ (Habermas, 1990) to perform institutionally (already prior to the fall of the Berlin wall) has left us with a lasting hangover. We are today largely ‘unable to agree upon, or commit to, a particular political path’ (Bailey, 2019: 372; see also Dean, 2015b). The current political landscape is characterized by the polarized coexistence of a pervasive capitalism and the global multiplication of ‘extra-capitalistic impulses’, against the background of a Left which has been, after 1989, unable to elicit sufficient consensus on and commitment for a broader political project.

A productive entry point into this broader politico-philosophical debate are the key-note speeches Stephen Healy and Jodi Dean delivered at the Rethinking Marxism conference in Amherst in September 2013, the last one of a series inaugurated in the highly symbolic year 1989 (Dean, 2015a, 2015b; Healy 2015a, 2015b; and the commentaries to their articles by others published in Rethinking Marxism, 27(3)). In a large auditorium whose vintage architectural décor suggested we were still in full Cold War, Dean (2015b) held a resolute plea to reclaim the party, understood as a ‘solidary, militant, international organization’, as opposed to ‘an outmoded or ‘fully saturated’ political form’ (p. 332). She argued for the need to ‘rethink and renew that form of political organization through which communists think collectively about political power, act together to generate it, and inspire one another to use it for the collective determination of the world we produce in common’ (Dean, 2015b: 332). In her analysis, it is the Left’s ‘realism’ – or the conviction that there is no alternative to capitalism – that has led to the abandonment of the party as a modality of radical politics in favour of immanent, ‘momentary acts of resistance or small reforms that leave the capitalist system intact’ (Dean, 2015b: 332). These experiences, she argues, lose oppositional power when they are disconnected from organized militant politics. The emphasis, since the 1990s, on alternative economic (micro-)practices represents a depoliticization of the struggle as ‘lifestyle choices for small groups’ and even risks to ‘fetishize the local’ by highlighting differences and repressing commonality.

Highly critical of the effects of ‘humanist, culturalist and postructuralist post-Marxism’ on the understanding of the revolutionary subject, Dean (2015b) deplored identity politics, through which in her evaluation the Left has been mimicking neoliberal communicative capitalism’s fragmentation, localization and pluralization (p. 333). Differentiation, she held, is key to sustain capitalistic competition, which produces losers as ‘a multitude of singularities’, rather than a mass, and underpins the political project of dismantling the welfare state. A focus on the ‘micropolitics of self-transformation’ drives attention away from ‘building and occupying institutions with duration’, ‘ced[ing] society and the state to a capitalist class that acts as a global political class intent on extending its reach into and strengthening its hold over our lives and futures’ (Dean, 2015a: 396). Caught into individuation and singularities, the Left becomes unable to think commonality to oppose neoliberal governmental policies, which in turn, in this reading, explains the rise of the extreme Right since the 2008 crisis. As no ‘class simply relinquishes power’, and ‘no assortment of disconnected enterprises – no matter how communal – converges automatically into communism’ (Dean, 2015a: 397), to avoid co-optation, absorption or repression, Dean argues, we need to strategize and organize ourselves to win.

Today, Dean continues, we need the party to conduct a political project of creating a collective subject analogous to Marx’s revolutionary subject of communism, the proletariat. This subject should be organized across ‘workplace, sector, region, and nation’ (Dean, 2015b: 338) in commonality and solidarity, across differences, and this communism should be antiracist and climate activist, or it shall not be (Dean, 2015a: 300). Importantly to our purpose, she stressed that the proletariat is fundamentally different from the working class, which is a subject of capitalism, as it is defined by its relation to capital, and which struggles with the bourgeoisie for economic gains within the capitalist field. The party is assertive, namely, it offers a new ‘field of possibility’ which is other than the matrix of our desire established by capitalism, opening up a terrain for the desire of another subject that is collective and political. The party does not know the truth but rather ‘provides a form for the knowledge we gain through experience and that we analyse from the perspective of the communist horizon’ (Dean, 2015b: 340), a notion she borrows from Bruno Bosteels (2011).

Dean (2012) understands this horizon as:

designat[ing] a dimension of experience that we can never lose, even if, lost in a fog or focused on our feet, we fail to see it. The horizon is Real in the sense of impossible – we can never reach it – and in the sense of actual (Jacques Lacan’s notion of the Real includes both these senses). The horizon shapes our setting. We can lose our bearings, but the horizon is a necessary dimension of our actuality. Whether the effect of a singularity or the meeting of earth and sky, the horizon is the fundamental division establishing where we are. With respect to politics, the horizon that conditions our experience is communism. (pp. 1–2)

In sum, her argument is that, to take political power, we need a viable political form beyond self-assertion, and the party is that form.

Speaking from the scholarly tradition of the Community Economies Collective (e.g. Gibson-Graham, 1996a, 1996b, 2006; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013), Healy’s speech delineated the contours of a post-capitalistic politics revolving around an understanding of the economy as a heterogeneous space. This space includes multiple, coexisting ‘class relations’ – arrangements for producing, appropriating and distributing surplus – some of which might be more desirable than others and thus deserve our attention. In this sense, conducting research is a form of activism, as it thoroughly engages with alternative practice. He took issue of Dean’s dismissal of an understanding of communism as immanent, depoliticized ‘living in common’ and reaffirmed that class should be conceptualized as a process, one that is not only constituted through ideas but also, more mundanely, by our daily ‘habits, practices, desires, and self-conceptions’ (Healy, 2015: 344), which define our mode of existence and are therefore key to changing it.

Healy’s contribution stressed the uncertainty and unknowability of the communist horizon amid economic and ecological precarity. In light of the inescapability of our being-in-common, this double precarity urges us to be more cooperative, privilege sufficiency over excess, and be less arrogant, relinquishing the pretence to ‘know how things are’ (Healy, 2015a: 345, emphasis in original). He challenged Dean’s critique of post-capitalism as abandoning the communist horizon and ‘a settling for a compensatory project focused on economic diversity’, which ‘ignore[s] that difference and dominance can happily coexist’ (Healy, 2015: 345–46). He affirmed that capitalism ‘coheres in part by enrolling our desires, habits, and practices (even those of the anticapitalistic Left), and that it [the capitalist class process] is made possible when we live life by its measures and values’ (Healy, 2015: 346). Undermining capitalism thus involves refusing to do so, and living differently. Difference is not a goal itself, but rather a strategy to unveil the heterogeneity within the economy and discern post-capitalism in order to move forward.

Healy sees here a partial reconciliation with Dean’s analysis of Occupy as a movement of recognition, different desire and capacity for action. Relying on Lacan, he emphasized that the coherence and durability of capitalism is crucially rooted not only in material and symbolic practices but also in our imaginary, fantasy and enjoyment (Healy, 2015: 347). Capitalism thrives by appeasing our intrinsic lack of coherence as human beings ‘providing cohesion through a compensatory fantasy narrative’ (Healy, 2015: 346) made of well-functioning markets, preferences, meritocracy and so on. Communism should accordingly be understood, according to Healy, as the overlap between the lack of the Other, capitalism, its incompatibility with the people, and our own lack, our precarity and inability to know the form of an egalitarian society. Despite our own lack, this works in so far we become aware that capitalism is ridden with contradictions that the coherence of the capitalist system is a fantasy, which in turn gives us a reason not to cede our desire for communism.

Along these same lines, Özselçuk and Madra (2005) argue that:

we should refrain from defining communism as a social utopia that promises to deliver what the bourgeois program of equality has failed to achieve. [. . .] In contrast, [. . .] communism [should be] explicitly [defined] as a starting point, a principle, an axiom that asserts that no one can have exclusive rights over the dispatching of the surplus. An important condition of possibility of this social reclaiming of surplus is precisely its psychic letting go [. . .] of the idea that the right to enjoy surplus can be exclusive. This is what we mean by traversing the fantasy in the context of class transformation. (p. 93, emphasis in original)

Clearly, from this perspective, what counts as surplus and how it should be redistributed is an ethico-political decision that will vary depending on the specific context and the wider society and is likely the object of contestation. Our task is to ask the right questions (e.g. How do we organize work equitably? How do we exchange in markets and other spaces in ways that support each other’s well-being? How do we invest our wealth sot that future generations can live well?) and to produce tools that allow to measure, valuate and account for differently (e.g. Gibson-Graham et al., 2013).

Healy concluded his speech against the background of the massive, psychedelic image of Saint Francis of Assisi. It blew me away: I had not expected such ‘cattocommunist’ imagery, to use an Italian term, nearly proselytic, at a Marxist conference in the United States in 2013. His reference was to the Franciscan order’s message of poverty as a form of life, rather than a norm. Agamben’s (2013) interpretation of Franciscan life, a life not given as property but only for common use, could not have been more theoretically appropriated to support his plea.

The juxtaposition of these perspectives on ‘what needs to be done’ evidences their respective strengths and weaknesses, also foregrounded in the various commentaries to the written versions of the speeches published in issue 27(3) of Rethinking Marxism. Dean’s championing of the party as the subject of revolutionary transformation, while exposing with force the potential weaknesses of a communism built through multiple, dispersed praxis, does not indicate what kind of concrete practice the party entails, and how it fundamentally distinguishes it from most parties we have historically known. On this point, Ramsey (2015) proposes to think the communist party as a verb rather than a noun: ‘communist partying’. Crucially, it is not very clear how the identification of the individualized, isolated and precarized neoliberal subject with a communist horizon can in practice be achieved. The problem might not be so much one of depoliticization, as Dean holds, or, conversely, that her plea might boil down to ‘reverting to a utopian notion of communism’ (Özselçuk and Madra, 2005). It might more mundanely be the viability of the modalities of repoliticization she offers. As we know, post-1989 (Bosteels, 2010), post-Foucault, post-Laclau and Mouffe (cf. Chakrabarti and Dhar, 2015) and post-Open Marxism (Böhm et al., 2010; Dinerstein et al., 2019; Pitts and Zanoni, 2018), it has become particularly difficult to conceive of resistance outside neoliberal capitalist subjection (Fleming, 2014; Moisander et al., 2018; Mumby et al., 2017). As Vidaillet and Bousalham’s (2020) study clearly shows, the question of identity and difference is at the very core of alternative praxis, not at its margin (see also De Coster and Zanoni, 2018).

Healy’s championing of post-capitalistic alternatives, on the other hand, provides a solid theory of re-subjectivation through praxis and ‘immanent’ communism, yet leaves far too open the question of how multiple context-bound praxis should be articulated to redefine the framework of power, or those norms that produce the conditions of (im)possibility for such praxis to occur, expand and indeed be transformative of both the economy and life as a whole. Although the role of ‘post-capitalistic governance’ is included in the analyses of specific experiences to build alternative economies, it remains underemphasised in the theoretical narrative that privileges the symbolic (language, cultural norms) and the affective (desire, libidinal dynamics). Yet, for its valorization, capital crucially relies on coercion – more or less authorized and legitimized by the law – and most often so to dispossess the most vulnerable among us (Federici, 2016; Lazzarato, 2006). An emphasis on the symbolic and the affective might unwittingly reflect our own (relatively privileged) specific position, in processes of valorization of capital. As Peticca-Harris et al. (2020) show, Uber taxi drivers’ fantasy of entrepreneurial autonomy is predicated on the precarity of their existence, the absence of material alternatives to make a decent living, to socially reproduce themselves (see also Zanoni, 2019). As Esper et al. (2017) tell us, decisive moments in the struggle for the survival of workers’ recuperated factories in Argentina took place in the courtroom, when judges had the formal authority, in the name of the bourgeois state, to make the decision whether workers could keep the factory or should be expelled by the police, and later, when the recuperated factories had to be turned into cooperatives to become legally legible within the Argentinian context. Tellingly, the ability of Cooperativa Insieme (Pansera and Rizzi, 2020) to retain its civic economic mission is predicated on its extensive and successful politico-institutional work to sustain a broader ‘ecosystem’ allowing it to flourish.

In his commentary to Dean’s and Healy’s speeches, Miller (2015) goes back to the original work of Gibson-Graham (1996a) to argue that post-capitalism and anti-capitalism should be combined: ‘A thousand possibilities exist between the dangerously liberal image of proliferating points and the dangerously authoritarian image of the party’ (Miller, 2015: 365). He points to the necessity to chart alternative livelihoods and work at establishing linkages and synergies between them, while at once reconstructing a radical critique. On this point, Daskalaki and Kokkinidis (2017) state that:

the potential of SIs [solidarity initiatives] to resist capitalist socio-spatial arrangements (such as hierarchical organizational structures, neoliberal urbanism, privatization of public services and land) is critically based on their capacity to (dis)connect from/to other activist spaces and co-produce translocal organizing practices. (p. 1316)

Reflecting on the modalities of political activism in spatial, relational and processual terms, Featherstone (2011) proposes to use the notion of articulation to infuse into assemblages a more ‘directly political edge that they generally lack’ (p. 141). De Angelis (2019) has recently argued for understanding the commons as ‘holons’, or ‘multilayered systems of parts and whole, dynamically striving to balance centrifugal forces of individual self-assertiveness and centripetal forces of integration’ (p. 750).

#### 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.

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

<<TEXT CONDENSED, NONE OMITTED>>

“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).

<<PARAGRAPH BREAKS RESUME>>

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.

#### Alt solves the case better. Class struggle is necessarily inclusive of trans people’s struggles, but it formulates an alternative basis for trans people as revolutionary subjects than the 1AC.

Kate Doyle Griffiths 21, Anthropologist at City University of New York’s Graduate Center and a lecturer at Brooklyn College, “Queer Workerism Against Work: Strategising Transgender Labourers, Social Reproduction & Class Formation,” in Transgender Marxism, Eds. Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O’Rourke, Pluto Press 2021, pp. 136-142.

This chapter argues for the strategic necessity of organising queer and trans workers and the political possibility of a deeper, more thoroughgoing, universalist politics. Just as ‘identity’ and ‘class’ are a false dichotomy, so too are the oppositions between workplace organising, ad hoc affinity-group models, and so-called community struggles. No distinctions of this analytic kind appear so clearly during actual moments of class war. Struggles in many contemporary workplaces occur through looser gatherings of affinity and wider networks built on trust, solidarity, and social support formed through shared recognition arising from similar circumstances.

Marxist strategy and gender as the terrain of class

This conclusion is suggested by another book that’s been much celebrated among both critics and proponents of ‘anti-woke’ workerism, Kim Moody’s On New Terrain. 10 Moody is probably the most well-known Marxist analyst of class composition and strategic power in the Anglophone world. His research has been a central touchstone for many socialist organisers attempting to implement rank-and-file and shopfloor strategies for worker self-organisation. Despite this popularity among many of the most vocal class reductionists who propose themselves as strategists of the US socialist movement, Moody’s latest book-length intervention challenges notions that are widespread on the left and in academia. Especially the idea that deindustrialisation and precarity are a universal tendency in class composition. Moody complicates this picture by emphasising the dialectically simultane- ous tendency for workplace power to be concentrated in only a few job categories, and then in specific sectors.

In the stark absence of strategy-focused Marxist analysis that looks beyond or primarily outside electoral efforts, or that which reverts entirely to a celebration of spontaneity, Moody’s decades of writing emphasise the changing structure of the working-class-in-itself. His work adopts a dogged focus on the potential role of Marxists in organising the working class beyond efforts to rebuild either a labour or working-class party. Specifically his approach to rank-and-file organising has lately been popularised within both the right and left wings of the DSA, and well beyond.

For this reason, I think it is both fruitful and illustrative to reread Moody through a transgender – which is to say, a fully Marxist – lens. Both as a counter-position to the most stagnant and apolitical forms of class-reductionist workerism that is still gaining traction on the socialist left, but also as a method of conceptualising a new Marxist strategy for class organisation. One that not only affirms ‘trans rights’ as a moral or even tactical position – but transgender liberation. A struggle through which trans workers deploy Marxism in service of a practical strategy to bring communism about though working-class self-activity.

This mashup – of Moody’s rank-and-file strategy, and Transgender Marxism made explicit – isn’t exactly obvious. But considering them together provides a means to go beyond simply countering transphobia on the left, or in broader social discourse. And towards one that specifies and elaborates concrete and detailed efforts to outline how Marxists can best apprehend the changing structure of class society – and then most effectively intervene.

On New Terrain builds upon Moody’s previous work outlining the rank-and-file strategy.11 Here, he expands the breadth of its initial focus on the power of logistics workers and union democracy. This orientation provides for a strategy combating conservative union leadership, in favour of a labour movement built on an active ‘militant minority’. Militants are defined by their focus on class politics proper, rather than narrow sectionalism. In this earlier iteration – and even more so in its practical translation into socialist strategy – the rank-and-file strategy heavily emphasises the importance of ‘chokepoints’ in logistics. Bringing clearly into view the work of dockers, warehouseman, truckers, and the like, these forms of labour appear as critical points of intervention for Marxists. A strike or slowdown at these points can wield significant gains through their power to disrupt profit-making. This opportunity appears both at the point of production, and in sectors further downstream. Actions by even a small number of logistics workers can offer remarkable leverage during broader class struggles, and therefore these are the sectors that should be a high priority for Marxist and socialist organisers.

On New Terrain introduces the necessity of analysing a second category of ‘chokepoint’, adding to Moody’s focus on the strategic power of workers in logistics. In the book, Moody recognises waged social reproductive labour in education and healthcare as strategically critical. This is a significant development in Moody’s rank-and-file strategy, which has seen revived interest over the past five years. Though written in 1990, this book was canonical for DSA activists and others looking to build socialist politics ‘from below’ within the labour movement. This follows its longstanding interest among many others who are simply interested in ‘thinking through’ the most pertinent strategies on the US left, for building socialist and working-class politics.

This revision, following in the wake of significant interventions by social reproduction theorists over the last several years, is extremely welcome. But I argue that trans and queer experiences can be seen as offering us additional access to an often neglected aspect of the fragility of capitalist relations. Namely, chokepoints of social reproduction.

The teacher strike wave demonstrates that social reproduction chokepoints are now central to a new wave of struggle; workers who are paid to do the work of the daily remaking of the working-class-in-itself play a central role in expanding and politicising workplace struggles. These moments allow for raising universal class-wide demands, precisely because workers in feminised reproductive sectors like education are in daily contact with the deepening crisis of care that impacts the entire class. Moody himself has taken up much of this argument in an essay for the ‘workerist’ socialist magazine Jacobin. 12 This suggests a different emphasis than earlier discussions of the ‘chokepoint’. These actions usher onto centre stage previously underappreciated aspects of the debates about what ‘particularism’, class politics, and the ‘rank-and-file strategy’ looks like in practice.

The periodisation of the recent history of class struggle and the model of its development that Moody maps is one that he presents as complementary to an Arrighian frame, which analyses the development of historical capitalism over the longue durée,tracing its ascent and expansion through the rise and fall of successive hegemonic centres of capital accumulation.13 This precisely lends itself to incorporating and validating Beverly Silver’s globe-spanning, and comparative analysis of the role of social reproduction struggles and public sector strikes at the early stages of periods of class struggle over the last century.14 Silver’s book provides a quantitative overview of strikes over the last 150 years. With remarkable continuity, she demonstrates that time and again social reproductive strikes and public sector strikes are often predominant or concurrent in early waves of struggle. Rather than a sideshow, these are the crucial foundations for those more explosive moments in working-class history. Struggles around crises of care are interwoven with those broader movements in the history of working-class resistance.

Transitional organisations and trans strategy

Classically workerist formulations often counterpose workplace struggle with other forms of working-class organising. This opposition is at the crux of class-reductionist conceptions of a counter-position between ‘identity’ and ‘class’ politics. Moody’s formulation of transitional organisations can help us break down these dichotomies, which are never so rigid or apparent in practice. In The Rank and File Strategy, Moody proposes that cross-sectoral ‘transitional’ organisations and multi-union campaigns, like Labor Notes or Our Walmart, can play the role of connecting shop floor organising to larger class-wide and movement politics. Alongside movement coalitions, these organisations can connect labour struggles to other forms of pro-immigrant, feminist, anti-racist, and ecosocialist organising. Through considering queer and trans communities, we can address arguments Moody raised concerning the undeveloped aspects of the rank-and-file strategy; most urgently, how it relates to socialist politics and organisation.15

Rather than lay out the further details of that argument here,16 I’m going to supplement it by explaining the role I think trans and queer workers play in this strategic elaboration.17 If the workplace and community distinction is collapsing (such as it ever held), what do struggles by queer and trans workers today tell us about chokepoints more generally?

It’s not enough to say that logistical and productive, and social reproductive, chokepoints are each necessary, but not sufficient, to express the power and breadth of any potential class-for-itself politics. A third element of strategy is, I think, crucial to its full development. Rather than stretch the chokepoint image too far, let’s take a simpler view. Socialists and communists must recognise and engage the uneven development of class consciousness. We have to recognise that this unevenness is rooted in experiences that are particular – but ones which foreshadow and make possible the development of a class consciousness. The implications of this goes beyond the politics of ‘bread and butter’, to one of bread and roses.

Roses here signify a humane and insurgent response to and recognition of the deeper and universal depredations and alienations of working-class exploitation:18 from the length of the workweek as a perpetual site of struggle, to the experience of direct violent repression by the state and the family, to the embodied humiliations and alienations of working-class subjectivity that are particularly crystallised in the experiences of trans and queer workers. Through the figure and the social reality of the transgender worker, I want to arrive at a new ‘workerism’. A politics that can effectively confront work as the defining experience of life under capitalism. This transgender workerism will allow us to think through a left strategy with a practical shot of achieving utopia.

This proposed relation between trans and queer workers and class formation is not distinct from what we’ve seen developing concretely in terms of the connection between feminist activity and workplace organising. Rather it is an intensification of this dynamic. Gender and workplace struggles are already merging: from strikes of thousands of workers at hotels and in the fast-food industry sparked by the #MeToo movement against sexual harassment as a modality of labour control, to walkouts of tech workers at Google and Amazon against sexism and racism at work and in favour of climate and immigration justice,19 to the developing and generative interaction between teacher-wildcatters in West Virginia with anti-Kavanaugh organising and the grassroots struggle in the state against an abortion ban.20 A wave of rail and port blockades in Canada, by and in solidarity with the Wet’suwet’en people (and echoing the Dakota Access Pipeline struggle) have demonstrated potential for white and indigenous workers as effective comrades. These breakthroughs have shown a new possibility for a politically effective interplay between ‘particular’ struggles, and an overarching strategy leveraging the profit-disrupting power of targeting chokepoints of circulation.

Trans/queer workers have the potential to intensify this connection between workplace organisation, targeted strategy with respect to logistics, and class consciousness. And also between shopfloor struggles and social movements – united around class demands. The first task is to locate trans and queer people in the labour market, and then move through a concerted effort of worker inquiry.21 An investigation that will no doubt uncover unexpected and surprising connections.

But even before that work is complete, I want to hypothesise that queer and trans workers represent a dynamic and specific sliver of the class. A sliver that is vastly over-represented in the work of paid social reproduction, and particularly in the material organisation of its expression as intellectual labour.

In the present and historically, trans/queer people have also tended to find themselves grouped into key nodes of distribution and logistics networks22 – in warehouses, in air travel and air cargo, and shipping and trucking of various kinds. This holds even as these are not the most common occupations of trans people taken as a whole (as they aren’t for cis people as a category, either). This holds so widely for reasons that may not be immediately obvious. Several accounts detail the lives and experiences of trans/queer workers in production and logistics, but few offer any systematic quantitative accounting of our presence. In Semi Queer, Ann Balay illuminates the lives of ‘trans, queer, and Black’ long-haul truckers. Balay uses personal accounts that demonstrate how these workers are often the most marginalised in an industry hard hit by deregulation and increasingly exploitative labour conditions. In Steel Closets, Balay similarly uses an ethnographic approach to draw attention to the lives and oral history of trans and queer people in that quintessential ‘working-class’ industry, steelworkers. Through this, she criticises the dominant, bourgeois LGBTQ politics disseminated by major NGOs and other liberal institutions. However, her account does not shy away from the often horrific homophobic and transphobic treatment these workers encounter on the job.

Trans and queer people have at various times drawn on the social worlds of queer life. These scenes serve to bridge the kinds of social division segregation and isolation that are reproduced in the organisation of work, labour, and housing markets. We have been drawn to radical organisation in disproportionate numbers – even where these organisations have been formally and practically hostile to queer and trans people. For the purposes of tracing the contribution and potential of a living, political, and strategic ‘Transgender Marxism’, the reasons why this is the case should be concretely investigated and understood. Through exploring the connections between these points of practical interest we can provide more detailed accounts than the usual offhand gestures toward queer/trans people. Concrete investigations of how queers navigate the everyday demands of exploitation must come to replace us serving as quaint representatives of the expansive tolerance, or emblems of social radicalism, of the left (contra wider society). The left is not only unusually ‘tolerant’ of queers and trans people: it also consists of us.

## Case

### 1NC---Presumption

#### Vote NEG on presumption---scholars have been circulating their arguments outside of debate, and no change has happened. No reason the symbolic affirmation of voting AFF is key.

#### The AFF can’t escape the neoliberal university---gets coopted and diluted.

Aidan Gnoth 19, PhD Graduate and Researcher at the National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at University of Otago, “A crisis of criticality? Reimagining academia in international peacebuilding,” Thesis for doctorate degree in Philosophy at the University of Otago, November 2019, https://ourarchive.otago.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10523/9990/Gnoth%20Aidan%20-%20A%20Crisis%20of%20Criticality.pdf?sequence=1

Intellectuals, particularly within Western societies, occupy privileged positions which enable them to scrutinize the actions of those in power – having the time, expertise, and resources to analyse motives, expose lies, and imagine alternative futures. This ability is not a given however, and it manifests in a multitude of ways as academics’ epistemological and ontological biases, normative interests, and career security are continually renegotiated in the face of increasingly neoliberal rationales. Since the foundation of Peace and Conflict Studies over half a century ago, these pressures have played out along a problem-solving/critical theory dichotomy, in which problem-oriented scholars produce knowledge to improve the current system, while critical theorists seek to transform the entire paradigm and establish more emancipatory and positive types of peace. By assessing how this contestation has played out within the discourse of international peacebuilding, this thesis seeks to understand how critical theorists have challenged the status-quo by exposing and challenging the epistemic, discursive and institutional barriers to radical and transformative peacebuilding critique. To do this, it undertakes a critical discourse and citation network analysis of 111 prominent Peace and Conflict scholars writing on peacebuilding between 2005 and 2017, synthesised by observations drawn from over 40 interviews. It evaluates the scale and limits of critique by exploring the questions and problems that scholars concern themselves with, the extent to which their studies reflect on broader systemic and conflict promoting factors, the alternatives and possible futures that are envisioned, and the ways in which academia and surrounding institutions constrain and dilute radical critiques.

By systematically unpacking and assessing the problems addressed by academics and the arguments they make, the thesis identifies a lacuna of radical and imaginative writing which is further diluted and gentrified from within the academy itself as ideas are disseminated, popularized, and utilized. It finds that studies on international peacebuilding are overwhelming focused on perceived problematic ‘post-conflict’ locales within the Global South, and while the actions of Global North actors in these operations are often scrutinized, this does not extend beyond the immediate post-conflict environment. Paradigm critiques and reflexive challenges to institutions such as violence, the Westphalian state, and the international economic system are exceedingly rare and are most often problematized only in relation to the post-conflict paradigm. Furthermore, very few scholars engage with or offer a conceptualisation of peace which extends beyond status quo systems of management and order experienced by those within the Global North. Consequently, the possible futures and types of peace that are envisioned by scholars are iterative rather than revolutionary, seeking to integrate states within the existing international order rather than finding ways to challenge and produce new international orders which are more adept at responding to issues of environmental degradation and social justice.

Ultimately, the negotiation between critical and problem-solving theories has erred on the side of caution and reflected the interests of power and order in the face of uncertainty and change. Where more critical work has emerged, its emancipatory intent is overlooked and repurposed by the performances of academia itself which transmit realisable empirical findings and problematize operational elements of peacebuilding at the expense of fuzzy and difficult transformations. More broadly, the subservience of academia to power in the face of neoliberal pressures and self-regulation has relegated the role of speaking truth to power to the subaltern, and while critical scholars increasingly turn their gaze to these locales to amplify their voices and identify alternative orders, these efforts are continually subsumed into the status-quo as interventions delve deeper into the private sphere, placating resistance and reshaping transformation. A radical reassessment of pedagogy is needed that repurposes engagement with the post-conflict other in favour of sincere transformation and resistance, led by renewed and extensive reflexive critiques on the structures and systems of power within the West which exacerbate inequality and promote social injustice. The potential for peacebuilding to offer emancipatory transformation of the international system remains, but post-conflict societies cannot, and should not need to undertake this task without being met by equal reflexive and critical efforts within the Global North.

#### Visibility Turn---the narrative performance of the 1AC at the 2026 Dartmouth Round Robin (and every time it is performed, recorded, or archived) reinforces dominant cultural and political norms by demanding legibility through hegemonic codes. Reject their narration.

Elahe Haschemi Yekani 22, Professor of English and American Literature and Culture with a Focus on Postcolonial Studies at the Department of English and American Studies at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 03/12/2022, “The Ends of Visibility,” in *Revisualising Intersectionality*, 1st ed., *Springer Nature*, pp. 96-98, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-93209-1.

But even within the realm of more hegemonic forms of representation, marginalised communities have found ways of resistance on the level of identification with such content. José Esteban Muñoz, whose work was crucial in establishing the field of queer of colour critique, criticises linear (often psychoanalytically inflected) models of identification that presume a heteronormative pattern of desire in his analyses of film, performance, and art.26 While post-representational art and trans artistic practice challenge the fixing of identity as bodily difference at the level of the visual text, Muñoz additionally queers the process of identification with forms of (visual) representation. Going beyond Stuart Hall’s famous model of encoding/decoding that distinguishes “dominant-hegemonic” codes, “negotiated” codes, and “oppositional” codes (Hall 1991 [1973]), Muñoz is concerned with “bad objects” of identification. Muñoz mentions that queer men of colour, for instance, often imagine themselves in the position of the glamorous white Hollywood diva in film. But this does not mean that they uncritically wish to emulate white femininity. He describes this as a more complex form of “disidentification” with white feminine beauty ideals. These are queer desires that do not follow a strict identitarian logic (and are therefore hard to grasp in either a psychoanalytical or an intersectional matrix). Muñoz writes,

queer desires, perhaps desires that negate self, desire for a white beauty ideal, are reconstituted by an ideological component that tells us that such modalities of desire and desiring are too self-compromising. We thus disidentify with the white ideal. We desire it but desire it with a difference. The negotiations between desire, identification, and ideology are a part of the important work of disidentification. (1999: 15)

In this sense, disidentification is an anti-assimilationist strategy that minoritarian subjects resort to in encounters with existing forms of representation. It is both resistant and productive in enabling alternative forms of desire that might not have been the intended meaning of a work of art. Representation and identification are hence not limited to a linear heteronormative model, and marginalised subjects have always found ways of imagining themselves into fictional worlds, even worlds that disavowed them (cf. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s (1997) notion of a “reparative reading”). Other ways of seeing can thus include the production of alternative imageries but there is also the potential of gleaning pleasure from forms of representation that are not made with a certain audience in mind, as Muñoz emphasises. Yet another strategy relates to a more radical refusal to be represented within normative orders entirely.

This refusal of representation relates to the juxtaposition of transparency and opacity. French-Martinican philosopher and writer Édouard Glissant (1997: 111–120) uses the visual metaphor of opacity to question the transparent logic of linguistic correspondence. He demands the right to not be legible within specific hegemonic codes and dismisses the notion of a standard language. Glissant highlights the ambiguity of literary translation and proclaims a poetics of opacity that cannot be reduced to one correct meaning. This also concerns the question of identity and the relational qualities of identity formation as well as the limits of ever being fully “transparent”, even to oneself. Opacity also points to the tensions between interpellation, identification, and affect (cf. Gunkel et al. 2015). Kara Keeling elaborates on the “right to opacity” as both a strategy of artistic practice but also engrained in political fights of populations that are constantly exposed to violent modes of surveillance and seek to imagine another world apart from constraints of group classification:

To insist upon a group’s ‘right to opacity’ in sociocultural terms, therefore, is to challenge the processes of commensuration built into the demand for that group to become perceptible according to existing conceptions of the world. It is a way of asserting the existence in this world of another conception of the world, incomprehensible from within the common senses that secure existing hegemonic relations […]. (Keeling 2019: 31)

Such a counter-hegemonic insistence on the right to opacity can also be found in critical migration studies that are inspired by Deleuzian philosophy. Dimitris Papadopoulos and Vassilis Tsianos, for instance, mention practices such as the burning of documents or the strategic rehearsed responses to the standardised interview questions that refugees are subjected to. They argue that migrants negotiate demands of identification in ways that exceed conceptions of representation. They write, “Instead of visibility, we say imperceptibility. Instead of being perceptible, discernible, identifiable, current migration puts on the agenda a new form of politics and a new formation of active political subjects whose aim is not a different way to become and to be a political subject but to refuse to become a subject at all” (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2008: online). In this way, the authors contest more radically whether political subjectivity requires legible representation. While there is a danger in romanticising the refusal of legible subjectivity within surveillant migration regimes as a form of active refusal and not consider it also as the result of a more fundamental disenfranchisement, I think we must recognise agency when it comes to migrants’ tactics of resisting scripts that reduce them to idealised objects of an often sentimental and objectifying gaze. In this understanding, the right to opacity is another way of disrupting notions of politics and representation.27

### 1NC---Law Good

#### Political engagement and mobilization enable trans livability and agency.

Beatrice Rothbaum 25, Derner School of Psychology, Adelphi University; et al., 2025, “Trans Rights and Safety, Political Self-efficacy, and Well-Being,” *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, vol. 22, pp. 5-6, https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13178-024-00997-2.

Self-efficacy is an agentive, developmental construct encapsulating an individual’s belief in their ability to successfully perform in a given setting and exert influence over their own life (Bandura, 1977). A strong sense of self-efficacy facilitates an individual’s ability to persist at challenging tasks, despite failures or setbacks (Bandura, 1977). Individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy experience less anxiety when facing stressful or threatening events (Bandura, 1988). Alternatively, lower levels of self-efficacy can lead an individual to avoid challenges and/or dwell on personal deficiencies when faced with difficult circumstances (Bandura, 1977).

Building on this work, theorists have explored political self-efficacy as a contributing factor to political engagement (Caprara et al., 2009; Vecchione & Caprara, 2009). As Vecchione and Caprara (2009) noted, “citizens who believe they can influence the political system are likely to take action in the pursuit of their goals, even at the cost of personal risk” (p. 497). Caprara et al. (2009) conceptualized political self-efficacy as individuals’ beliefs in their ability to choose candidates, mobilize voters, campaign for parties, petition, fundraise, lobby, contact representatives, and negotiate within one’s party or with other parties. As Caprara (2008) stated, “When people vote […] they express their individual autonomy, assert the equal dignity of their views, affirm their belongingness and inclusiveness, [and] attest to their trust in concerted action” (p. 642). Thus, political self-efficacy provides a framework for understanding how an individuals’ sense of personal agency shapes how they interact with others and collaboratively work toward changing their sociocultural environment (Caprara et al., 2009).

To date, there is a dearth of research exploring political self-efficacy among trans individuals. For example, the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey used only one question (out of 324 questions) to explicitly examine participants’ beliefs regarding their ability to influence government decisions, although additional items were included regarding political actions such as voting (James et al., 2016). While the extent of measurement is limited, the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey did report that 44% of the 27,715 participants believed that they could have some influence on government decisions compared to 32% who believed they could not influence government decisions (James et al., 2016). Utilizing the same data set from the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, Billard (2021) found that participants’ beliefs in their ability to influence government decisions was a significant predictor of trans civic engagement and political campaign contribution. For example, researchers found that trans individuals were more likely (19%) than the general population (16%) to not vote, despite being registered to vote, because they felt their vote would not make a difference (James et al., 2016). Given the limited body of research on the subject, the present paper utilizes a mixed-methods approach to further explore the motivators and barriers to trans individuals’ political self-efficacy and engagement.

Motivators for Trans Political Engagement

Traditionally, political activism has referred to direct, intentional, and organized efforts to bring about political or social change (e.g., voting, party membership, campaigning, contacting elected officials; Loader et al., 2014; Norris, 2003). However, recent research on social media use indicates that twenty-first century political behaviors also include less formalized actions such as participating in online discussion forums, subscribing to political status updates, advertising that one voted, and posting support for a candidate (Carlisle & Patton, 2013). In other words, traditional forms of political activism were understood to largely occur explicitly within the citizen-political system (Loader et al., 2014), whereas contemporary forms of political engagement now include individualized, online, and offline networks of socio-relational political action that are often informal (Bennett, 2007). For example, Etengoff’s (2019) transvlog analysis identified diverse trans online political transformation pathways such as critiquing the status quo, explicating new possibilities, envisioning new activity and identity patterns (e.g., transdisruptive narratives), and committing to concrete actions aimed at change. Additionally, extant scholarship on trans activism has expanded the political action scope to include trans individuals’ unique efforts to increase visibility by educating others about trans identities and dispelling trans stereotypes (Riggle et al., 2011). To encompass these diverse and varied forms of trans political action, we utilize the broader framework of political engagement versus the narrower traditional scope of political activism. For the purposes of this paper, we therefore define trans political engagement as the diverse and complex ways that trans individuals advocate for themselves and their community via both formal political action efforts (e.g., voting) as well as informal, grassroots social networking actions (e.g., online and offline political discussions). Moreover, we adopt Farthing’s (2010) stance that political engagement is a continuum of action that cannot be reduced to a binary understanding of dis/engagement.

Mansbridge and Morris’s (2001) theory of oppositional consciousness proposes that group marginalization and oppression can motivate high levels of political engagement. When socially excluded individuals find each other and create new communities that reaffirm their identities, they can begin to pool resources and amass collective power to address systemic oppression (Bowers & Whitley, 2020). Through this lens, trans individuals may engage in collective political action as a proactive form of coping with trans oppression (Breslow et al., 2015). Indeed, recent qualitative studies have found that in response to the rise of anti-trans stigma during the 2016 election, trans Americans adopted agentive resilience strategies such as connecting with their communities and empowering themselves via collective political action (Gonzalez et al., 2022; Riggle et al., 2019). Similarly, Hagen et al.’s (2018) qualitative study found that sexual minority women (n = 13), trans (n = 4), and gender queer (n = 6) individuals engage in activism and advocacy to support both themselves and other community members, which may increase their sense of agency to change their circumstances. On a larger scale, Goldberg et al.’s (2020) mixed-methods study of 491 trans college students’ activism identified personal values, community responsibility, and desire for community as predictors for campus activism. Specifically, trans students linked their own experiences of oppression to their desire to give others the support and resources they lacked (Goldberg et al., 2020). Similarly, Billard’s (2021) 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey analysis found that trans community connectedness was a more significant predictor of civic engagement and political campaign contribution than any single demographic factor (i.e., gender, age, race, education, income). In sum, by challenging discriminatory practices to improve their own lives as well as the lives of others, marginalized individuals and communities can strengthen both their own voice and their sense of social connection (Quaye, 2007). As trans individuals connect with each other and collaboratively confront oppression and inequality, they can actively choose how to structure their own lives and communities (Etengoff, 2019). Building on this foundation, the present paper theorizes that while the harm of oppression is notably significant, some trans individuals may be agentively responding to this oppression with political resistance.

#### Trans-antagonism is not static.

Dirk H. de Jong 25, Coordinator of Field and Associate Professor of Social Work at Siena College, June 2025, “ “The changing gender landscape: is social work on board?” *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15313204.2025.2511949?needAccess=true.

“Ladies, gentlemen, and those who have yet to make up their minds” – This is how Lola and Charlie, two of the characters in the award-winning musical Kinky Boots, addressed audiences in the United States and around the world (Fierstein, Citation2013, p. 96). Elsewhere in popular culture, American reality TV portrayed Caitlyn Jenner’s life following her gender transition, transgender actress Laverne Cox received an Emmy nomination for her role as a trans woman on Orange is the New Black, and popstar Miley Cyrus came out as gender fluid. Meanwhile, less publicly, countless people, especially in younger age cohorts, have been finding new ways to describe their gender identity (Steinmetz, Citation2017). The Williams Institute of UCLA’s School of Law estimated that, in the United States, 1.6 million people (ages 13 and older) identified as transgender (an umbrella term in this case), a quarter of whom identified as gender nonconforming (Herman et al., Citation2022). According to a survey by the Pew Research Center, two percent of people in the 18–29 age group identified as trans and an additional 3 percent as nonbinary; also, 44% of U.S. adults reported knowing a transgender person (A. Brown, Citation2022). Furthermore, polling by the Public Religion Research Institute in 2019 showed that 40% of Americans agreed with the preposition of a gender spectrum versus a gender binary (Greenberg et al., Citation2019).

Before embarking on an optimistic and some would say utopian tour of the changing gender landscape, it is necessary to acknowledge the ugly vestiges of the patriarchy: Sexual assault, sexual harassment, and misogyny occur all too frequently in all corners of society. Of course, there is also the wage gap (Wisniewski, Citation2022). Yes, there is still a very long way to go toward gender equality, let alone a postgender world. Nevertheless, in a parallel universe of sorts, cultural shifts are happening to which social workers should pay attention. However, besides a token acknowledgment of transgender issues, it seems that the social work profession as a whole has been ignoring a gender revolution. Clearly, transgender issues are important in a political sense, especially given the current backlash against transgender rights in multiple state legislatures (Hassan, Citation2024) and President Trump’s recent Executive Orders aimed at eradicating the notion of transgender altogether (Associated Press, Citation2025). However, they are also manifestations of a larger cultural shift that is disrupting the oldest and – still – one of the staunchest and most oppressive forms of social categorization, i.e. the social categorization by gender. This paper describes the content and origins of that shift, and explores its potential consequences for social work and social work education, particularly with respect to the use of oppression theory and identity politics in framing social change efforts.

Changing theories about gender

Historically, in mainstream society, gender identity was assumed to be fixed and gender was thought of and culturally enforced as a binary classification system. Significant changes in perspectives on gender came about in the late 1980s and 1990s, when third-wave feminism started to replace essentialist conceptualizations of gender with new models based on social construction, as illustrated by the phrase “doing gender” (West & Zimmerman, Citation1987, pp. 137, 138). However, the notion of “doing gender,” coupled with a burgeoning of identity politics, tended to reinforce, rather than resist, traditional notions of what it means to be male or female, masculine or feminine (Deutsch, Citation2007; Gergen, Citation2001). The writings of Judith Butler, a postmodern feminist who emphasizes intersectionality, critiqued these developments. Butler wrote about gender as a “historical category (…) open to a continual remaking” (Citation2004, pp. 9, 10). They viewed gender as “performative” (Butler, Citation1990/1999, pp. xv–xvi), with the inherent capacity to disrupt repressive norms (Butler, Citation2004). Emphasizing the dynamic and relational aspects of gender, Butler became one of the champions of queer theory, which also built on transgender and gay activism. Queer theory analyzes the connection between heteronormativity (Warner, Citation1991) and romanticized ideas of femininity and masculinity (Butler, Citation1993), and offers an alternative described as “a new form of personal identification and political organization” (Jagose, Citation1996, pp. 77–78).

It should be noted that the transgender movement made a particularly significant contribution to queer thinking by insisting that one’s gender identity goes beyond the traditional binary elements of behavior, role, or embodiment (See Stryker, Citation2008b). The experience of intersex people, further proof that the “sexed body” is itself a relative concept, has also demonstrated the need for a postgender framework (Butler, Citation2004; Hester, Citation2004). As both critique and proposal, queer theory allows for the acknowledgment and validation of an array of personal identifications not previously imagined.

With respect to the futuristic notion of a postgender world, one may ask if the individual acts of resistance inspired by queer theory are sufficient to create a new social order. Not surprisingly, given the withdrawal from identity politics, critics have raised questions about queer theory’s potential to fuel structural change (see Kirsch, Citation2000). On the other hand, it seems that the new challenges to the gender binary have a social impact that will only grow with time.

Additionally, queer theory is inherently political, since it provides a framework for analyzing gender and sexual identity vis-a-vis power. These new perspectives are not, as some religious conservatives have charged, just a matter of ideology (see Campoy, Citation2016), based on values and beliefs. They are, in fact, supported by such relevant research as studies demonstrating that gender identity has a very significant neuroanatomical component (Saraswat et al., Citation2015), or that human brains are not inherently male or female (Joel et al., Citation2015).

While transgender and gender-variant persons have become more known and visible over the past couple of decades (Bornstein, Citation1994; Lev, Citation2004; Stryker, Citation2008a), the notion of a postgender society is still not discussed much. Postgenderism can be defined as “a radical interpretation of the feminist critique of patriarchy and gender, and the genderqueer critique of the way that binary gender constrains individual potential and our capacity to communicate with and understand other people” (Dvorsky & Hughes, Citation2008, p. 13). The idea was first discussed in academia following the publication of Shulamith Firestone’s controversial The Dialectic of Sex (Firestone, Citation1970). Firestone, a radical feminist, argued that the reproductive role of women lies at the base of patriarchy and all forms of inequality. Her proposals for a “cybernetic socialism” (p. 238) included technology-assisted childbearing, communal childrearing, family restructuring, and – by extension – the devaluation of biological sex differences. Similarly, Donna Haraway, in her A Cyborg Manifesto (Haraway, Citation1991), outlined an identity no longer based on bodily characteristics, thereby disrupting concepts of sex and gender. Finally, with respect to terminology, Marxist sociologist Erik Olin Wright (Citation2011) proposed the notion of “genderlessness” as an alternative to “gender equality:”

Gender relations are inherently coercive in the sense that they impose socially-enforced constraints on the choices and practices of men and women. This is what it means to say that gender is socially constructed. Such constraints, I will argue, thwart egalitarian ideals of a world in which all people have equal access to the social and material means necessary to live a flourishing life. (pp. 403, 404)

As noted, queer theorists (and many third-wave feminists) have chosen self-expression over identity politics, even while the debate about the efficacy of individual agency continues. Young people especially ran with the idea of individual empowerment. Thus, as the transgender movement entered the mainstream, it sparked in its wake a new discussion about the pitfalls of social categorization based on gender. While we may not yet have arrived at a postgender era, traditional conceptualizations of gender are being queered on websites, in blogs, and through art exhibitions, many catering to intersectionalities. For example, Shantrell Lewis’s Dandy Lion Project challenges stereotypes of Black masculinity and showcases Black dandyism, which – by the way – has a long history in the United States and abroad (Sanchez, Citation2017).

Due to the internet and social media, the discussion about gender has intensified and now takes place on a global level. Moreover, while young people might be providing its impetus, the gender revolution is not limited to only their culture. For example, in 2014 Facebook added more than fifty gender options for its users (Herbenick & Baldwin, Citation2014). As of this writing, seventeen countries provide for a third-gender option on official documents (Equaldex, Citation2025). In 2022, the Biden administration allowed for a gender-neutral marker on United States passports, but this policy was rescinded when President Trump came into office (U.S. Department of State, Citation2025). However, sixteen U.S. states and the District of Columbia still provide a nonbinary option on birth certificates (US Birth Certificates Team, Citation2025).Additionally, despite reactive “bathroom bills” in a number of U.S. states (Lavietes, Citation2024), gender-neutral restrooms are not uncommon in many schools and colleges, in government buildings, and in stores and corporate offices. Moreover, after previously opening up membership to gay and transgender members, the decision by the Boy Scouts of America to allow girls to join the organization (Bosman & Chokshi, Citation2017) may well be viewed as the ultimate rebuke to strict gender categorization. It should be noted that besides the large and small cultural changes that suggest a shift in thinking about gender, advances in reproductive technology are playing a role as well, as indicated by the increased options for the LGBT population to have genetically related children (Eyler et al., Citation2014). As these advances promise to make some of the futuristic conceptualizations of a postgender society attainable (Dvorsky & Hughes, Citation2008), they also pose complex ethical questions which leave their true potential for social change as yet unclear.

#### Undoing squo power relations requires analyzing and attacking power structures through pragmatic struggle---normative appeals alone are ineffective.

Naomi Zack 17. Professor of philosophy at the University of Oregon. 02/2017. “Ideal, Nonideal, and Empirical Theories of Social Justice: The Need for Applicative Justice in Addressing Injustice.” The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Race, Oxford University Press.

Ideals of justice may do little toward the correction of injustice in real life. The influence of John Rawls’s A Theory of Justice has led some philosophers of race to focus on “nonideal theory” as a way to bring conditions in unjust societies closer to conditions of justice described by ideal theory. However, a more direct approach to injustice may be needed to address unfair public policy and existing conditions for minorities in racist societies. Applicative justice describes the applications of principles of justice that are now “good enough” for whites to nonwhites (based on prior comparisons of how whites and nonwhites are treated). Social information just dribbles in, bit by bit, and we simply get used to it. A single story about a person really hits home at once, but the grinding injustices of daily life are endured. It is easy to ignore them and we do. Judith Shklar, The Faces of Injustice (Shklar 1990, 110) IDEAL theory about justice extends from Plato’s Republic to John Rawls’s A Theory of Justice, including many careers devoted to analyses and criticism about such texts in political philosophy. Rawls offers a picture of the basic institutional structures of a just society, on the premise that in order to correct injustice, we must first know what justice is. According to Rawls, while “partial compliance theory” studies the principles that govern how we are to deal with injustice, full compliance theory, or ideal theory, studies the institutional principles of justice in a stable society where citizens obey the law. Rawls began A Theory of Justice with the claim: “The reason for beginning with ideal theory is that it provides, I believe, the only basis for the systematic grasp of these more pressing problems” (Rawls 1971, 8). Rawls’s ideal theory is too abstract to correct injustice or provide justice for victims of injustice in reality, because it is based on a thought experiment and the assumption of a “well-ordered” society in which there already is compliance with law (Zack 2016, 1–64). What people care about in reality concerning justice is not what ideal justice is or would be, but how immediate injustice can be corrected. Injustice is always specific in concrete events that are recognizable as certain types, for example, theft, murder, or police racial profiling. Injustice can be corrected by punishing those responsible for it in specific cases and instituting social changes that prevent or reduce future occurrences of the same type. Rawlsian nonideal theories of justice, constructed for societies where people do not comply with just laws, rely on ideal theory as a standard for just institutional structures. The main question driving nonideal theory is how to construct a model or picture of justice that will result in the future correction or avoidance of present injustices. John Simmons quotes John Rawls from Law of Peoples, on this matter. Nonideal theory asks how this long-term goal might be achieved, or worked toward, usually in gradual steps. It looks for courses of action that are morally permissible and politically possible as well as likely to be effective [LOP p. 89]. (Simmons 2010, 7) However, injured or indignant parties may not care about the long-term goal of justice that could lead to balance or compensation for their situations. Not only are what P. F. Strawson (1962) called “reactive attitudes,” such as moral indignation, blame, and a desire for deserved punishment, strong in their focus on injustice, but the best theory of justice in the world does not tell us what to do about the injustices we are faced with in the here and now, especially “the more pressing problems” of race-related injustices. Such questions cannot be answered with reference to ideal theory or some application of ideal or nonideal theory to their concrete situations, because the a priori nature of both of these does not provide a fit with specific contingencies—ideal and nonideal theories do not generate practical bridge principles. As theories, they posit ideal entities, but without the apparatus of scientific theories which provides connections to observable entities or events. (Moulines 1985). The correction of injustice or injustice theory requires a philosophical foundation for itself. Models of justice have often been naïvely utopian throughout the history of philosophy, because they are based on an assumption of automatic total compliance, as though the right words or pictures by themselves have the power to transform reality, or as though agreement with those right words or pictures will automatically result in action that will automatically make the world instantiate those words or pictures. When they are not fantastically and ineffectively utopian in this way, such models have been used to justify the already-existing dominance of some groups over others. (A prime example is John Locke’s Second Treatise of Government, written decades before 1688 Glorious Revolution, to express the interests of the new rising class of landed gentry, which were eventually fulfilled by a Protestant king on the throne and a strong representative parliament after that revolution [Laslett 1988].) Models of justice have legitimately served to inspire law in modern societies with government constitutions and national and local law. But, sometimes, as in US founding documents, although universal and absolute justice is proclaimed, subsequent events make it clear that this language was intended to legitimize just treatment for members of selected groups only, that is, white male property owners, at first. As a result of just law and its selective application, over time, there comes to be justice for an expanding group, but still not everyone in society. However, what is written, together with descriptions of real justice for some, can be a powerful lever for obtaining justice for at least some of the excluded. To understand how that works, it is necessary to develop an approach to justice that begins with injustice, in real situations where there is already some degree of justice in a larger whole. The extension of existing practices of justice to members of new groups is applicative justice, a concept with substantial historical and intellectual precedent, although not by that name. In what follows, more will be said about the idea of applicative justice and then its history will be considered. Voting rights and housing rights are examples of candidates for applicative justice in our time. Finally, content in the form of narrative may be motivational for social change. The Idea of Applicative Justice Applicative justice is an approach to justice with the goal of making the unjust treatment of some comparable to those who already receive just treatment. Applicative justice takes a comparative approach, for example, comparing how young black males are treated by police officers in contemporary US society, to how young white males are treated (Jones 2013; Zack 2013, 2015). Applicative justice rests on a pragmatic approach to social ills, which includes the premise, based on Arthur Bentley’s 1908 insights in The Process of Government, that government is much more than the apparatus of state and written laws and court decisions. Government is an extended, dynamic process, an ongoing contention among interest groups in society. This full-bodied, empirical and pragmatic view of government process entails, for example, that we consider as parts of the same political mix/phenomenon/raw material all of the foregoing: the Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments, the 1960s Civil Rights Legislation, doctrines of probable cause, the disproportionate incarceration of African Americans, racial profiling, and police homicide with impunity. Thus, Rawls’s insistence that “the rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests” (Rawls 1971, 4), should be understood as “the rights secured by justice should not be subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests.” In reality, “the rights secured by justice” are constantly subject to political bargaining and the living calculus of social interests. One consequence of this empirical perspective is that moral outrage, critiques of white supremacy, or analyses of white privilege, along with other forms of blame, cannot be assumed to have the power to change anything, by themselves. By contrast, changing relationships between police officers and their local communities, or changing the rules of engagement when police stop or attempt to stop suspects, might on this view have some causal power (Ayres and Markovits 2014). It is important to realize that such changes in practice would not be specific applications of a theory of justice, but ways of changing social reality into a different political mix. However, a better theory of justice, even a more racially egalitarian one and even a theory of applicative justice that was widely accepted, would still be no more than a change in what Bentley calls “political content.” Any theory of justice or any set of just laws is compatible with widespread racially unequal and unjust practice. And the converse also holds. Unjust laws or laws with gaps for unjust practice are compatible with just practice. Thus, applicative justice is pragmatic in taking the whole political mix/ phenomenon/raw material as its subject for a specific injustice. Unlike ideal or nonideal justice theory, the applicative justice approach brooks little faith that reality can be changed by a special conceptual space or mode of critical moral discourse that is undertaken apart from reality. Reality cannot be changed by normative pronouncements, by or on behalf of the oppressed, but only by shifts in existing interests of groups of real people. To base hopes for change on normative content alone may paralyze [eliminate] the means for taking action that could result in change, because such content proceeds as though matters of justice were only matters of argument. Those who have opposed social racial justice have understood this well enough, because instead of mainly arguing against new just law over the twentieth century, they have taken action to block progress. Race and Justice Consideration of race and injustice together, within political philosophy, focuses on the need for specific groups to not be treated unjustly. For a group to be treated justly, a large number of its members need to be treated justly. But for a group to be treated unjustly, it is sufficient if a smaller number or lower proportion than required to meet the standard of just treatment be treated unjustly. One reason for this asymmetry is that just treatment is easily normalized within communities, whereas unjust treatment of only a few is disruptive and considered abnormal among other members of the group to which victims belong (although not necessarily by members of groups who are generally treated justly). The unjust treatment of a small number ripples from their friends and relations to other members of the same group, who realize that they are subject to similar unjust treatment from their membership in that group alone. More broadly, if the group treated justly and the group treated unjustly belong to the same larger collective, such as whites and blacks in the United States, then the unjust treatment of even a very small number of that total collective of residents or citizens should be disruptive to the whole collective, given promulgated principles of “justice for all.” But that does not always happen, at least not in ways that result in real change. Apathy and self-absorption of those not treated unjustly is part of the reason, although another significant part is that the group treated justly already knows that the national collective rhetoric of justice is intended to apply primarily to them. It is that kind of disparate treatment, which does not disrupt everyone, even though it should, which calls for a theory of applicative justice, on the abstract level where people call for justice. But applicative justice is not only an abstract theory. Applicative justice requires comparisons of group treatment. If minorities are treated unjustly, a description of that injustice does not require an ideal or nonideal theory or model of justice, but simply a comparison with how the majority is treated. (The term “minorities” refers to those disadvantaged or oppressed, because sometimes minorities are greater in number than “majorities,” e.g., blacks under apartheid in South Africa, American slaves in some Southern states, or black Americans in some twenty-first-century cities.) The principles and mechanics of justice that work well enough for most white Americans need to be applied to nonwhite Americans. For rhetorical purposes, it might be evocative to talk about black lives or black rights, but strictly speaking the subject is a racial framework that is color-blind in an important part of law—constitutional amendments and federal legislation—but not in reality. This gap between written law and social reality can be viewed as hypocrisy, racial bias, or white supremacy, only if one assumes that written law is an accurate description of, or blueprint for, social reality. But a perspective that takes in the whole process of government reveals that the gap and what is permissible within it, are parts of the same whole process. The contrast between blueprints and maps is important to consider. Political philosophers often proceed as though their writings about justice are blueprints, when they should instead begin by constructing maps. Present politics or a political party in power may present obstacles and challenges to applicative justice in any specific case. Those who aim for applicative justice must struggle against such obstacles and challenges, as well as the ignorance, prejudice, and ill will of large parts of voting publics under democratic government, and in addition, media misrepresentations, business interests in a status quo, and lack of understanding of oppression by those who are treated unjustly. For example, the injustice in the disproportionately large number of African Americans in the US criminal justice system has been supported by law-and-order politics, the War on Drugs, belief in racial gender myths (e.g., the larger-than-life black rapist), explicit racism, media sensationalism of crime committed by black men, profits made by for-profit prison corporations, and embrace of self-destructive subcultures by some black men who become incarcerated. At the same time, as an efficient cause or precipitating factor, ongoing racial profiling by police helps feed the system with new suspects, about 90 percent of whom plead guilty in preference to the risks and costs of a trial (Kerby 2013; Rakoff et al. 2014). Intergenerational poverty, unemployment, and undereducation contain people within this system, and the high rates of nonwhites in the prison population are used as official justification for racial profiling (Zack 2015, chap 2). Thus, the complexity of causes and background factors associated with the disproportionate number of African American male prison inmates can be understood through a number of approaches. The normative approach of applicative justice would be to address those causes or factors, distinctly and individually, through specific changes in concrete practice, as well as changes in law, as relevant.

### 1NC---Unions Good

#### Unions promote trans people’s interests.

Joanna Wuest 24, Assistant professor of politics at Mount Holyoke College, 9 June 2024, “The Best Way to Secure LGBTQ Rights: Unions,” *Jacobin*, https://jacobin.com/2024/06/lgbtq-rights-unions-labor.

Queer workers’ organizations and the broader trade union movement frequently provide protections and benefits that legislators, courts, and corporations are often unable or unwilling to deliver. A look at demographics is instructive here. LGBTQ Americans experience higher rates of poverty than their straight cisgender peers in a country where high rates of debt, inadequate health insurance, and at-will employment are already widespread. According to a 2021 report published by the Williams Institute on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Law and Public Policy, 17 percent of LGBTQ people experienced poverty compared to a 12 percent rate among straight cisgender people. Trans people exhibit even higher rates of poverty than most other cross-sections of the queer population. What might account for these disparities? A 2017 report issued by the Human Rights Campaign and the Trans People of Color Coalition observed that the “risk factors and causes” of antitrans violence were likely rooted in “some of society’s most challenging issues.” Among these were unaffordable health care, workplace discrimination, reduced employment opportunities, and safe, inclusive schools. In other words, the life chances of many poor and working-class trans people — like all poor and working-class people — are diminished primarily because they lack the basic material needs and comforts that unions routinely provide to their members.

Indeed, queer-inclusive unions offer advantages over the paltry protections offered by federal civil rights law and enforcement mechanisms. Title VII’s prohibition on sex-based employment discrimination — which until a few years ago excluded LGBTQ workers from such protections — has historically been interpreted as guaranteeing a narrow formal legal equality. Although this rendering of equality was far from preordained — in contrast to mere legal protection from discrimination, labor feminists have long advocated for a robust set of public-goods-based reforms including worker protections, living wages, and care work programs — it has come to characterize the federal civil rights regime. Furthermore, federal courts have interpreted Title VII narrowly to cases in which an employee can demonstrate evidence that an employer had engaged in discriminatory “animus” because of that employee’s protected class status (e.g., race, religion, or sex).

By conceiving of discrimination as arising less from structural economic factors and more from prejudice-based discrimination, Title VII’s impact was sharply curtailed long before the Supreme Court decided in Bostock v. Clayton County (2020) to apply its protections to LGBTQ employees. Moreover, Bostock came on the heels of the court’s anti-union decision in Janus v. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (2018), which forced right-to-work constraints upon the country’s public-sector unions. In other words, LGBTQ employees have gained some limited rights against discrimination while losing their rights as workers. Still more, the Supreme Court appears willing to limit the impact of recent LGBTQ rights victories. This is clear given the court’s 2021 decision allowing a publicly funded Catholic social service agency to deny married gay couples seeking to foster and adopt, as well as its 2023 ruling allowing a Christian website designer to refuse service to a queer couple planning their wedding. Whichever path the court takes on future LGBTQ rights issues — either a narrow formal equality route or an overtly anti-LGBTQ one — its decisions stand to do more harm than good to working-class people, queer or otherwise.

Unions often have the power and will to deliver what civil rights law cannot. In recent years, many locals have added “gender identity and expression” and “sexual orientation” to existing antidiscrimination contract language. Union members within the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees Union (AFSCME), for example, have negotiated over one thousand contracts with such protections. Rather than relying on the courts where the deck has been stacked against antidiscrimination claims, queer union members benefit from grievance procedures and the power of their membership, which can pressure employers to rectify abuse. Such provisions for trans workers actually predate national civil rights protections by several decades. In the 1980s, the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU) in New Jersey negotiated antidiscrimination contract language on “change of sex” after a trans worker experienced harassment after gender-affirmation surgery. Even earlier, in 1975, a trans worker in Lordstown, Ohio, successfully sued General Motors for mistreatment, using a new UAW attorney services benefit. Today’s unions also furnish LGBTQ workers with additional benefits. Recently, the United Steel Workers (USW) eliminated restrictions on gender-affirming care from its health insurance plan, giving union members and their families access to potentially life-saving — and, in some cases, expensive — treatment.

Deep Ties: Queer Workers and the Labor Movement

Although the labor movement’s attention to LGBTQ issues may seem like a contemporary phenomenon, such integration extends back to the early twentieth century. The late historian Allan Bérubé traversed North America, teaching activists about the Marine Cooks and Stewards Union, which by the early 1930s was an increasingly racially desegregated union with both communist ties and a gay-friendly culture. As the gay and lesbian rights movement gradually garnered national attention throughout the mid-century, independent queer labor organizations and caucuses within existing union locals were formed — but not without a struggle. The independent New York–based Gay Teachers Association, for example, spent several years pressuring the United Federation of Teachers to simply advertise their existence to the membership. By the 1980s, workers in publishing — among them employees at the Village Voice — as well as workers in government, food services, retail, and education were organizing caucuses within their locals and fighting successfully for antidiscrimination protections, HIV/AIDS education trainings, and domestic partner benefits. Recognizing the growing importance of queer workers’ needs within the labor movement, the AFL-CIO created Pride at Work in 1998, which now functions alongside other AFL-CIO constituency groups, including the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists.

For decades, queer-sympathetic workers’ organizations have thwarted the religious right’s dual assault on minority rights and labor power. Throughout the 1970s, the nascent religious right was orchestrated by those like Christian political strategist Paul Weyrich and industrial leaders in oil, alcohol, and aluminum manufacturing. This coalition aimed to convince Christian blue-collar voters that the Democratic Party’s New Deal and Great Society social and economic reforms had undermined so-called traditional conceptions of morality and liberty. Searching for a scapegoat, the religious right settled on the gay and lesbian movement, decrying its early civil rights victories as a sign of the country’s cultural decay (other targets included desegregation policies and abortion rights). In 1977, the ominously named “Save Our Children Inc.” succeeded in overturning a Miami-Dade County antidiscrimination ordinance, thus inaugurating the religious right’s antiqueer crusade.

Inspired by this victory, California state senator John Briggs — an infamously anti-labor lawmaker — introduced Proposition 6, a 1978 ballot initiative that would have banned queer people from teaching in public schools. The Briggs Initiative spurred gay and lesbian workers to action, forming groups like the Workers Conference to Defeat the Briggs Initiative, which brought together rank-and-file members of the AFT in California as well as the UAW, the USW, the Teamsters, the Culinary Workers Union, and the American Postal Workers Union. Eventually, regional labor groups, including California’s AFL-CIO council, the San Francisco Labor Council, and the California Teachers Association joined the fight. This coalition of queer union members, trade union leaders, and advocacy groups defeated the Briggs Initiative, which they perceived as an attack not just on queer workers but also on public sector workers more broadly.

Unions made a similar difference in defeating conservative groups in the 1990s. Clashes over queer rights erupted in once-prosperous Pacific Northwestern towns, devastated by the decline of lumber and other major industries. Conflicts over antidiscrimination laws were catalyzed when cosmopolitan middle- and upper-class families emigrated to these towns from cities like Seattle and San Francisco. The liberal cultural values of these wealthier transplants were easily conflated with the adverse effect that their homeownership had on the property taxes and rents of poorer longtime residents. Opportunistic conservative politicians made quick use of metastasizing resentments, sparking outrage over multicultural school curriculums and antidiscrimination ordinances. In what has been erroneously termed a “culture war” by some, attention was deflected from the economic roots of class conflict, particularly declining union job prospects in the lumber industry. When state ballot initiatives preempting local antidiscrimination ordinances began to pop up around the region, union density played a significant role in voter outcomes. In right-to-work Colorado, progressive groups did not prevail. But in Oregon, workers led by Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 503 contributed to the defeat of a 1992 antigay initiative.

Scapegoating at the State Level

Organized labor continues to play a crucial role in combatting state-level assaults on LGBTQ rights. Just as John Briggs forged an anti-labor agenda with a ban on queer public-school teachers, Republican Florida governor Ron DeSantis has demonized queer and queer-friendly public-school teachers while undermining the state’s public sector unions. The DeSantis agenda has been characterized by its aggressive policing of public-school curriculums and library holdings, particularly materials dealing with sex education and LGBTQ and civil rights history. While Florida’s Parental Rights in Education Act (popularly known as “Don’t Say Gay”) immediately became national news, less coverage has been devoted to the governor’s support for a “paycheck protection act.” The latter prohibits employers from taking union dues directly out of members’ paychecks and outright eliminates public sector unions that fall below 60 percent membership. Notably, unions representing police officers, firefighters, and correctional and probation officers — that is, unions that tend to endorse Republican Party officials — are exempt from the law.

DeSantis ally Christopher Rufo has spelled out the overall strategy quite clearly. In Rufo’s words, the goal of anti-LGBTQ legislation and the foreboding rhetoric of “grooming” schoolteachers is designed to create “universal public school distrust.” If voters can be convinced that unionized teachers and public schools threaten childhood innocence, public education and progressive unions alike can be more effectively dismantled. Recognizing the existential threat posed by the DeSantis administration, Florida’s unions have pushed back against both anti-LGBTQ curriculum policies and laws that weaken public sector unions. At its 2023 annual gathering, National Education Association delegates devised a plan to address anti-LGBTQ bills and to protect queer teachers and students in states like Florida.

The Bottom Line Is Still the Corporate Line

It is true that many US corporations have offered inclusive benefits and protections to queer white-collar workers for decades, long before many unions extended similar benefits. Businesses have also pressured governments to expand civil rights laws. For example, 125 major US companies organized as the Business Coalition for Workplace Fairness advocated for national civil rights legislation over two decades ago. Occasionally, those corporations have even threatened to withhold investments from cities and states that oppose LGBTQ rights.

However, the limits of corporate benevolence for LGBTQ workers further underscore the advantages of a labor-backed progressive response. Not long ago, there remained some hope for the power of corporate-induced boycotts. North Carolina’s Republican governor Pat McCrory lost his 2016 reelection bid just months after signing an antitrans bathroom bill, which had led several large employers to cancel business expansions in the state. Fearing economic backlash from activist CEOs and chambers of commerce, governors became cautious about signing legislation that excluded trans athletes from competition or banned gender-affirming care. Pointing to the bottom line, companies stressed the business advantages of LGBTQ diversity, noting queer employees’ alleged aptitude for pursuing untapped consumer markets. Suddenly, none of that seems to matter. Hundreds of antitrans bills have been filed since 2021 and dozens have been passed.

It appears that, once antitrans policies spread beyond a few conservative states, the threat of corporate-led boycotts receded. After all, corporations tend to seek out favorable “business climates,” which are plentiful among right-wing states that have weaker unions and lower taxes. Defending its decision to move operations to Tennessee despite the state’s recently enacted anti-LGBTQ legislation, Oracle Software executives reasoned that the company itself would create an inclusive environment for state residents. While the company’s policies might benefit a tiny portion of the state’s workforce covered by Oracle’s in-house diversity, inclusion, and equity policies, the vast majority of Tennesseans stand to gain nothing.

Overall, the pursuit of profits has stalled corporate America’s capacity and motivation to thwart anti-LGBTQ policies. Again, Starbucks offers an example. As baristas have challenged corporate leadership, the supposedly trans-inclusive coffee chain has ominously suggested that unionized workers jeopardize the company’s much-lauded gender-affirming health care coverage. In this sense, trans issues today are used by some nominally progressive corporations against worker solidarity much in the way bosses have historically stoked racial animosity among workers.

Affinity or Solidarity?

Whether one looks at history, demographics, or legal developments, it is clear that the fates of most queer people in this country are entwined with those of working and poor people more generally. Two points are worth reemphasizing here: this entwined fate stems from the fact that most queer people are working class or poor, and queer people have historically made excellent scapegoats for those seeking to raze social welfare and organized labor. On the other hand, the category “LGBTQ” is heterogenous in the manner that all identity-based population categories are. LGBTQ people run the gamut, meaning that a fraction of queer people are corporate executives, small-business owners, or defined by some other variant of capitalist, managerial, or petit-bourgeois status. In addition, national queer advocacy organizations are dependent on donations from businesses and wealthy queer people and their allies, which usually delimits those organizations’ agendas to a narrow support for civil rights. While these truths are perhaps easily comprehended on their own, together they can create enormous contradictions for those who would pursue a queer working-class politics.

Although often celebrated as an early moment of queer-worker solidarity, the Coors boycott offers a cautionary tale. In 1974, Teamsters leader Allan Baird led Northern Californian unionized beer distributors in struggle against a recalcitrant Coors management that refused to expand contract benefits. Sensing a possible collaboration, Baird brought Bay Area gay activists into the union’s boycott activities by highlighting Coors’s right-wing political advocacy — Joseph Coors provided seed money to the anti-LGBTQ Heritage Foundation — and discriminatory workplace practices. This collaboration proved to be symbiotic: the boycott created relationships that spurred unions to implement antidiscrimination contract protections and persuaded gay rights activists to organize against antilabor ballot measures.

A few years into Baird’s alliance-building project, it became apparent that queer advocates could be wooed just as easily by corporate “allies.” Realizing the threat that displeased gay consumers posed to the company’s bottom line, Coors quickly pivoted, adding sexual orientation protections to its companywide antidiscrimination policy in 1978 and donating to AIDS charities throughout the 1980s. By the end of the 1990s, Coors had implemented domestic partner benefits, contributed large donations to queer nonprofits, and hired gay liaisons, including future vice president Dick Cheney’s daughter, Mary Cheney, to launder its image. To the Teamsters’ dismay, Coors once again flows from queer bars’ beer taps. Ironically, what made the Coors boycott so successful — that is, the fact that a company’s policies toward queer people could mobilize consumers to action — is what broke it apart.

Instead of conceiving of LGBTQ issues as those particular to a small fraction of workers, we might think creatively about organized labor’s capacities for promoting both equal treatment and general welfare. In some instances, union advocacy for public-goods spending could benefit many trans people even more than trans-specific reforms do. Take the example of public transit and sex markers in Philadelphia. From 1981 through 2013, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority’s (SEPTA) monthly transit passes were marked with a male or female sticker, which caused problems for trans women like Philadelphia-based trans rights advocate Charlene Arcila. Whether Arcila presented an M-stamped or F-stamped pass, she was turned away by bus drivers who were tasked with interpreting her sex. Importantly, SEPTA’s motivation for implementing sex markers had nothing to do with trans-identified riders. The sex designations were an anti-fraud measure, designed to prevent revenue loss by stopping married (cis) men and women from sharing passes. For decades, SEPTA workers organized in the Transport Workers Union have rallied for increased transit spending and against efforts to privatize transit lines. Additional funding could reduce the pressure to squeeze every last cent out of riders.

Instead of additional funding, however, a trans-specific reform was implemented that did less for many trans Philadelphians than a public-goods approach might have. SEPTA’s 2013 move to scrap its sex markers was fundamentally disconnected from any investment in its infrastructure as evidenced by the system’s current financial crisis. So, trans riders are no longer subject to humiliating onboarding experiences, but all riders — trans and cis alike — now suffer under the collapse of the poorest big city in America’s public transit system.

Queer Working-Class Politics in Perilous Times

The current state of Starbucks unionization offers a concluding perspective on queer working-class politics. The thrill of watching unionized coffee shops rapidly dot a map of the United States has been replaced by the pain of witnessing the setbacks and stalemates Starbucks workers have endured. According to journalist Steven Greenhouse, Starbucks executives have overwhelmed the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) by violating so many labor laws that the board simply cannot keep up with its caseload (penalties for breaking labor law are often puny). This all comes at a time when the board itself is headed by a progressive general counsel, Jennifer Abruzzo, whose pro-worker agenda has been impeded by the NLRB’s budgetary crisis. That crisis has sapped the agency’s ability to run union elections effectively and to protect unionizing workers who have been unlawfully terminated. Workers could soon meet an even greater challenge as the Supreme Court hears cases concerning the constitutionality of the NLRB.

In this daunting moment, it is no wonder that many labor advocates find hope in young, diverse workers organizing behemoths from Starbucks to Amazon. However, those who are inspired by today’s queer working-class politics would benefit from thinking structurally and historically about the opportunities and pitfalls that such a politics entails. The slogan “an injury to one is an injury to all” directs one’s attention not just to the particulars of one group of workers’ hardships but also to the fundamental class interests shared by LGBTQ and all other workers.