

A small piece of red sky to fly in

Transition pending revolution

A spectre is haunting transgender studies – the spectre of Marxism. Recent years have seen the emergence of numerous trans scholars, militants and organic intellectuals championing the centrality of Marxist analyses of social life to a thorough systemic understanding of trans subjectivity, oppression, and liberation. The appearance of queer and trans studies journals with a renewed interest in historical materialism, such as *Pinko* and *Invert*, testifies to the increasing consolidation of the field of transgender Marxism (which gives its name, indeed, to a collective volume edited by our comrades Jules Gleeson and Elle O'Rourke). Beginning from the Marxist premise that no aspect of life under capitalism, including sex, sexuality and gender, exists in isolation from the mode of production, trans Marxism considers the ways in which capital intertwines with trans life – through the medicalised and carceralised regulation of bodies, differentiated experiences of exploitation in labour, the ubiquity and material power of the normative family structure – and how this can be collectively overcome.

While we pen this answer to the question ‘why trans Marxism?’, the capitalist forces of dispossession, irregularly distributed around an international, gendered, and racialized division of labor, sow terror among the world proletariat. As you read this page, imperialist war and colonial occupation are marking the lives of the working class and the undercommons as ungrievable in Palestine, in the Congo, in Lebanon, in Yemen and in the oceans that guard fortress Europe. The borders of Mexico and the immigration detention centres of the West have systematized the forced separation and murder of migrants for the mere fact of being migrants. The death throes of the world power that was the United States spread the economy of war in the Pacific and the South China Sea. The native peoples of Abya Yala face a process of plunder and forced displacement to oil the cogs of mass production and the monopolistic tendencies of goods; the Southern Cone remains suffocated by debt. The far-right and the process of fascistization eat away every day at the illusory sense of freedom within the bourgeois democracies of the global north. The reproduction of the contradictory and moving totality of capitalist social relations has frenetically accelerated the ecosocial crisis, leaving in its wake a world in flames, metaphorically and literally.

But where the structural oppression of *racisheterocapitalism* manifests, there throbs the collective pulse of the insurgency. As we write, the Argentine working class overflows the streets in a national strike against the securitarian neoliberal authoritarianism of Milei; the roads of Chicago and the ports of the Red Sea come to a halt in internationalist solidarity with the liberation of the Palestinian people; the housing unions of Barcelona squat entire blocks of tourist apartments in the face of speculation by banks and vulture funds. As we write, the Naxalite guerrillas and the Communist Party of the Philippines are testing the hypothesis of socialism in their liberated territories. As we write, tens of thousands of people are marching through the streets of Berlin against the rise of the ultranationalist party Alternative für Deutschland. A viral video shows protesters chorally singing the verses of *La Varsoviana*: «¡A las barricadas, a las barricadas! ¡Asaltad el mundo, trabajadores!» Legend has it that this song, the union anthem of the anarchist revolutionaries of the Spanish state, reached the ranks of the CNT-AIT¹ through the visit of a German militant who used to sing it in the bathtub. Intimacy, too, is a territory of reproduction for capital, as well as a potential site of its antagonism. As Marxists, the entirety of social life in its becoming is a kernel of class struggle.

The skeptical reader may be wondering what precisely all this has to do with *trans*. We could, certainly, have mentioned the significant participation and leadership of queer and trans people in the union struggles against Starbucks, in the self-organization of sex workers towards decriminalization, in BDS campaigns against the state of Israel and in collectives such as Al Qaws challenging homonationalist pinkwashing, in ecosocialist assemblies, in prison- and police-abolitionist BLM movements and in the movements of rupture and self-criticism within the traditional communist parties of Latin America and their Stalinist legacy. We could, and yet we would not feel ourselves to have scratched the surface of anti-bourgeois abundance that we envision in *trans*. We could, of course, highlight the moral panic facing trans and non-binary youth in the imperial core, the attempt by certain states to prohibit the public manifestation of drag and gender dissidence in the sight of children, increasing institutional obstruction to accessing desired healthcare, the imposition of non-consensual interventions on intersex children and on any body whose existence challenges the naturalized canon of white capitalist,

¹ Confederación Nacional del Trabajo—Asociación Internacional de los Trabajadores, a Spanish confederation and international federation of anarcho-syndicalist labor unions.

cisheteronormative and productivist hegemony. We could, and yet we would not be fully realizing the horizon that trans Marxism opens up.

Transness presents itself today as a battlefield, both in and against. On the one hand, trans* as a category contains epistemic limitations, since its genealogy leads us to a specific time and place, being an experience situated through specific biomedical practices (with its corresponding subjectivation from suffering) and which operates solely within the framework of the modern/colonial gender binary (María Lugones 2007) under capitalism. In this sense, as many contributors to this journal have argued, trans* runs the risk of becoming an analytical tool in the service of racial capitalism and new exclusionary forms of normativity and citizenship. Radical transfeminist activist and academic Nat Raha termed *trans liberalism* the set of policies and discourses which consider obtaining rights for trans people (understood as a private, self-contained identity) within capitalist colonial society to be the solution to our oppression, without questioning that its roots spring from the very social relations that determine the production and reproduction of life under the present state of things.

Trans liberalism, by naturalizing gender identities as they take their spontaneous form within capitalism, strips of historicity the categories which cross and give meaning to our bodies. Trans Marxist theorist Nathaniel Dickinson points out that “as transgender people, we must work to prove that our genders pre-exist the work we do to produce them and make them legible to others,” thus reproducing an embodied form of commodity fetishism:

“Commodities are imbued with a mythical relationship to one another that bears no trace of the labour of human beings. In just the same way, gender is imagined as having an explanation that bears no trace of human effort. Our efforts, it seems, can only verify a truth that stands outside of history. Tools are not used to make gender, but to reflect it.” (2021, 208)

Trans inclusion within the framework of neoliberal states further operates as a living process of encapsulation: “trans people must be content to have their documents (or their bodies) checked when requested, which normalises the violence enacted through such checks... the nominal equality of rights hides individualised forms of duress, administrative violence, divestment/disinvestment and dispossession” (Raha and Van der Drift 2023, 13-14). Dan Irving

analyzes how transness under a neoliberal regime of accumulation is “constructed as an entrepreneurial project of the self” (2012:158) through discourses that frame transition in terms of neoliberal self-optimisation, justifying anti-discrimination workplace policies and healthcare coverage by “marketing trans people as valuable employees” (161). Truncated analyses which abstract transness from material, historical relations of oppression and exploitation in the service of establishing a “transnormative subject” (Snorton and Haritaworn 2013) are thus assimilated all too smoothly into hegemonic discourses, instrumentalized to serve the capitalist and (neo)imperialist interests and projects of dominant regimes.

Faced with this, our conception of trans is articulated as a collective and expansive practice of negativity against the sex/gender dialectic in its capitalist form. We declare ourselves heirs of the conception of *transgender* advanced by trans communist militant Leslie Feinberg as “people who challenge the gender boundaries constructed by ‘man’” (1992, 5), as well as the proposal of trans historian Susan Stryker to include under the term any phenomenon which denaturalizes normative gender and draws our attention to the processes that produce normativity (2007, 60). Faced with the confinement and the petrified appearance of capitalist social relations, trans takes the shape of an abolitionist fluidity. This is why, in our opinion, an analysis of the subjectivization of specifically trans people is only one element of the political necessity of a trans Marxism; trans life itself reveals nothing less than the bodily manifestation of a broader struggle for the reconfiguration of the human towards the coordinates of socialism.

Defining the ‘subject of trans studies’ has been an area of protracted debate, not least in this very journal. Attuned to the problematics of defining this ‘subject,’ many theorists of trans studies opt instead for what has been called a “subjectless critique,” envisioning trans less as a delimitable subject, object, or predicate than as a particular methodology. Toby Beauchamp, for example, advocates for “trans studies as a mode of analysis,” for “trans as a mode of critique rather than a specific subject position” (Aizura et al 2020:136), while Susan Stryker argues that “trans studies has a method, even if its object is fuzzy and undefined. Understanding trans as method – trans as a dynamic, prefixial concept attached to other things – that’s where the deepest critical action is” (2019). In the attempt to avoid ‘claiming’ particular subjects in potential capitulation to dehistoricizing, colonial, or taxonomical frameworks, however, the very subjectlessness of this critique often facilitates a detachment from the realm of present social reality that is itself

dehistoricizing – and indeed depoliticising. We offer a methodology of trans Marxism which refuses to capitulate to a subject/subjectless binary, reconstituting that binary instead as a dialectical relation; a movement which continually returns to the contradictory historical conditions through which ‘trans’ is materially (and) symbolically constituted, even as it works to overturn and transcend those conditions.

As Jamie C. Gagliano and Alexander Liebman précis in this issue: “Grounded in the classed and raced struggles of trans people for collective emancipation, transgender marxism develops a blistering critique of rights-based recognition, hetero- and homonormativity, apoliticized science, and the ways in which the biological family has been entrenched as the site of reproductive care to ameliorate the precarity and failures of financial capitalism” – and much more besides, as the contributions to this special issue demonstrate. The ‘subject’ of trans Marxism is no less expansive than the totality of social relations under capitalism, and we must take up the mantle of denouncing and resisting the fragmenting forces that seek to privatize trans struggle to the concerns of a depoliticized interest group. Everything that sustains our proletarianized queer, trans and non-binary lives in conflict with capitalist social reproduction forms a particular moment of the red insurgency, just as do strikes at the direct point of production or mass protests against a world that we no longer wish to reproduce. A trans Marxist analysis compels and is compelled by Leslie Feinberg’s declaration: “What are the goals of trans liberation? If you ask me, the aim should not fall a yard short of genuine social and economic liberation for everyone” (1998:135).

"Trans" is a collective action, not a privat(iz)e(d) ontology. In the flow of the socialized hormones, inherited binders, precarious housing situations, and erotic and militant pleasures that we share, those verses from *La Varsoviana* also sound. We wish to present, therefore – echoing our comrades Raha and Baars – the (merely) cultural and the economic as inextricable, such that the meanings encoded in trans and queer bodies produce positionalities within a racialized and gendered division of labor (2021, 3). The liberation open to all the dispossessed of the earth that trans Marxism pursues today was always part of the centrality of the class struggle because our tools to not only interpret, but also transform reality never pointed merely towards a minority of people. “Like transsexuality,” wrote gay liberationist revolutionary Mario Mieli, “the

revolutionary movement is one and multiple.” We want to build a new commons, a diverse *trans*totality*, capable of deposing the present.

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The contributions to this special issue answer the question of ‘why trans Marxism?’ in a plethora of interesting and interdisciplinary ways. Wren Ariel Gould addresses the question directly in relation to analyses of the present legislative backlash against trans people in the US, while Jamie C. Gagliano and Alexander Liebman make the case for the fruitfulness of introducing trans Marxism to the field of agrarian studies. JD Fulloon and Westley Montgomery investigate trans cultural production through Marxist critical-theoretical lenses, demonstrating their mutual suitability, and the usefulness for trans cultural studies of Marxist concepts such as reification and alienation. Alex Adamson, Alexis Davin, Eric Llaveria Caselles, and Bruno Monfort weave together Marxism and trans studies to make dialectical theoretical contributions to some of the key questions in trans Marxism: what is the value of the etiological question for trans politics, and how should it be approached? How does abjection shape the interaction of gender and value to determine differential disvaluations of trans labour? How can an immanent critique of gender and sexual identity-forms within capitalist social relations and biomedical regimes apprehend points of intertwining *without* either holding the two in binary distinction or collapsing them into one another – thus leaving space for agency and for trans revolutionary possibility? Can Marxism provide the dialectical key to rescuing trans negativity from trans nihilism?

Together the essays in this special issue weave a tapestry of fundamental concepts for those wishing to understand the relevance of Marxism for trans studies, and of transness to Marxism. The strength of the threads that bind the two is evident throughout the body of this issue – so much so that for the task of introducing each piece, a mind-map might be more appropriate than a monograph. Nevertheless, we have attempted below to tease out these core concepts in turn, introducing and explaining them alongside outlining one or more of the essays which centrally instrumentalise them.

The horizon of capital

In recent decades, neoliberal hegemony and a weakened left have conditioned an LGBT(Q)+ activist politics structured by goals which remain within the framework Nancy Fraser terms “affirmative”: “remedies aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them” (1995). Due in part to the population of mainstream LGBTQ+ ‘movements’ by third-sector ‘Equality, Diversity and Inclusion’ organisations and departments, whose funding depends legally on their segregation from politics as such, the ‘awareness campaign’ often takes prevalence in trans ‘activism’ over and above any view to *transformative* change in material social and economic conditions; “our domination by state bureaucracy, by landlords and employers, is often enough treated as a given, to be re-clad with sensitivity training workshops and pronoun go-rounds” (Gleeson and O’Rourke 2021:5). As Alexis Davin summarises in this issue, “the configuration of gender in the age of mass liberal trans politics demands locating the trans individual as a civil subject, devoid of pre-existing political content except for a lack of specific legal protection and recognition, and therefore similarly amenable to citizenship and formal equality as all others.”

The dissemination of the identity-political into the broader social fabric has taken place within a ‘post-political’ historical moment characterized by what Mark Fisher (2009) termed “capitalist realism” – the defanging of social movements’ transformative potential within a social atmosphere incapable of imagining any non-capitalist future, where history is reshaped to naturalize neoliberalism as the culmination of human society. The increasingly globalized anti-trans backlash, however, disrupts liberal presumptions of linear social progress, revealing the susceptibility of identity-based ‘rights’ and social tolerance to the vicissitudes of power. This whiplash between ‘tipping point’ and moral panic has boxed trans people and movements into a traumatic cycle of defense. However, as Federico Zappino argues: “if we conceive of our problems as entirely limited to questions of morality, we limit ourselves to understanding our fight as connected to a transformation of relations of recognition, rather than relations of production, consumption, occupational segregation, distribution and redistribution” (2020). Rather than recapitulating to essentialism and rehashing old strategies, we need to break free from the cage of moral panic in order to weave new dialectical understandings of the place of trans subjectivity and politics within the broader totality of capitalist social relations.

Wren Ariel Gould's 'Co-Constructing (Trans-) Capitalist Realism' forcefully demonstrates the utility of Marxist analysis for understanding the forces determining trans people's subjectivization – and the dangerous foreshortening of a trans politics which elides the horizon of capital. Gould analyzes the wave of legislative backlash currently impacting trans people in the US, reviewing the many complex entanglements of trans life with capital, and arguing “that Post-Marxist² theoretical tools reveal a Catch-22 whereby legislative attacks consolidate late capitalism while provoking a (liberal, progressive) response that colludes in that consolidation... the political danger of these legislative attacks lies not just in suppressing transgender communities, but also in shoring up late capitalism.” The polarization of the political field between anti-trans attack and essentialist medicalising defense constitutes “a trans capitalist realism in which trans anti-capitalism is rendered impossible.”

The increasingly politicized conditions of trans life provide a particular vantage point into the ostensible contradictions of 'neoliberal democracy': as we see transness, as biomedical technology and as drag brunch, wrenched ostensibly from the cogs of the profit machine and flung into the ghettos of criminalisation, neoliberalism reveals its authoritarian face. But to analyze legislative transphobia towards a critique of the *state* without an equally attentive critique of the contradictory workings of *capital* produces a foreshortened analysis which sees private profit as a haven rather than a vampire: “these critiques overlook the neoliberal context, that venues receiving state funding are obliquely targeted by these measures, in favor of a critique of authoritarianism that excepts the market pressures driving neoliberal authoritarianism.” Gould cautions the susceptibility to the same capitalist forces – bedecked in progress flags and pronoun pins – of a trans politics which fails to center class in its analytical horizon, and which thus (implicitly or explicitly) invests its vision of 'inclusion' in both the market and the carceral state. This form of (wealthy, white, Western) trans politics, Gould argues, appropriates the vulnerability of working-class trans women of colour globally, meanwhile redoubling the oppression they face via the project of constituting transness as part of a “respectable citizenship” implicated in gentrification, increased policing, and participation in

² Gould defines their use of 'post-Marxist' as “scholarship that draws from critical readings of Marx.” We as editors carry the banner of Marxism as an open, always-unfinished project which dialectically encompasses critique in its own expanded terms; “To do so is not to depart from historical materialism, but to rejoin it” (Perry Anderson 1978).

imperial violence. Marxist perspectives, Gould concludes, can provide “a necessary corrective to an identitarian focus that overlooks political economy... Indeed, Marxist critique may be imperative if transgender activists and advocates hope to win a more just world.”

Historical materialism and the contours of concretisation

In his reading of Marx’s 1857 introduction to the *Grundrisse*, Stuart Hall explicates the persistence of a theoretical tendency – one which, it is no stretch to argue, now holds instinctive sway in popular political consciousness – to understand the ‘abstract’ as a theoretical transcendental, in opposition to the ‘concrete’ of everyday lived experience. For Marx, the terms are reversed. The ‘concrete,’ while still referring fairly intuitively to that which is ‘objective’ and material – albeit with the caveat that no single object or relation can be concretely understood in isolation – is *not* empirically given. In order to conceptualise the complexity of differentiated, often contradictory relations, a certain abstraction is necessarily required of the thinking subject. What appears from a particular viewpoint as “a deceptively transparent, natural, ‘given’ category” is, in Marx, revealed in fact to be “‘concrete’ only in a common sense way” (Hall 1973:33) – an ‘imagined concrete’ that is in reality a (necessary) abstraction. In Holly Lewis’ words, “standing in a particular location does not guarantee the capacity to interpret experience; rather, only the understanding of one’s standpoint in relation to the whole can produce an accurate analysis of one’s position” (2016:71). Thus, the methodology of historical materialism consists in concretising this necessary abstraction through a dialectical movement which systematically deconstructs and reconstructs it, “decomposing simple, unified categories into the real, contradictory, antagonistic relations which compose them” (Hall 1973:34). One thereby returns to the now concretised abstraction “not as the chaotic conception of a whole, but as a rich totality of many determinations and relations” (Marx 1993:100). In Marx’s method, moreover, the ‘original’ imagined concrete (and/or standpoint) appears not as a dehistoricised ‘given’ from which analysis departs, but as something to be analytically *produced* – as well as a condition of possibility for this very (re)production.

Eric Llaveria Caselles opens ‘Contours of a historical materialist theory of transsexuality’ by evoking instances of his own lived experience of etiological confrontation with medical gatekeeping and familial guilt: “the answers I refused to give constituted me as a human

paradox... [a] sense of self detached from historical and social relations – yet so dependent and vulnerable to them.” The invocation of this sense of conflict speaks to a contradictory space trans people are intimately familiar with. In our individual and collective quests for bodies we can inhabit as liveably gendered, we prop up the system even as we shake its very foundations, finding ourselves – as Gleeson and O’Rourke put it – “at once immersed and resistant” (2021:10). Beginning from this experience of paradox, then, Llaveria Caselles proceeds through a variety of “problematizations” of transsexuality, dialectically engaging critiques and elements of each in a Marxian process of concretisation. His elaboration of the necessary conditions for an alternate “problematization” of transness explicates historical materialism’s core principles: the deconstruction and reconstruction of the symbolic order in terms of “the material historical processes that engender and uphold” it, and the need “to theorize social reality not just at the individual level, but also at the structural level, which can’t be grasped through empirical means alone.” The goal of such a problematization, moreover, is praxis-oriented: “the analysis of the historical constitution of the transsexual in terms that enable the task of creatively developing visions and practices for collective emancipatory transformation.”

In taking up Hortense Spillers’ concept of “symbolic substitution” to argue that the biomedical problematization of gender and the notion of gender dysphoria “insert in the realm of the individual and the psyche a conflict that resides at a structural and historical level,” Llaveria Caselles intervenes decisively in the etiological debate, positioning the biomedical construction of transsexuality as such “not as a site of origin, but as a secondary sociogenic movement that overwrites the primary conflict and displaces it to the interiority of the individual.” The primary conflict – following Marxist feminism and social reproduction theory – “occurs in the space of the household and the market... in relation to conflicts of social reproduction specific to western modernity and its articulation of a capitalist economy.” Returning to the lived experience of dysphoria in social-relational contexts from a structural point of view, then, recasts it as “a practical destabilization of the gender order which puts pressure on its foundational contradiction and demands a reorganization of social relations.” Transsexuality precariously contains “the possibility of defining the political field of gender at the level of its historicity, that is, the radical possibility of democratizing the organization of generativity” – towards “gender

self-determination as the collective political work of consciously imagining and practicing less violent ways of reorganizing the work of procreation and reproduction.”

Value, abjection, and accumulation strategy

Alexis Davin and Bruno Monfort’s contributions provide rich and complementary considerations of value and its significance for trans life, elaborating the political-economic process of abjection through which the disvaluation of trans labor operates. For Marx, as Monfort notes, “the methodological priority conferred on value starts from the recognition of its ontological priority in the organization of the totality of social labor.” The specificity of ‘value’ in Marxist terms bears emphasizing. Value is the social form labor adopts; the exchange-value of a commodity is determined by the total amount of “socially necessary labor time” required to produce it. Capitalism thus abstracts the particularities of both the subjective and the objective embodiment of labor in order to make it quantitatively exchangeable. Monfort explains that “Marx warns us about the commodity form that its exchange value is not derived from its use value; instead, a process of abstraction operates that reduces concrete labor to its abstractly human and undifferentiated character so that it can be exchanged as equivalent in the market.”

In ‘The Political Economy of Sexual Identity: From Gender Performativity to Social Reproduction,’ Monfort demonstrates an explication of the importance of this specificity of ‘value’ in his critique of Meg Wesling’s ‘Queer Value.’ His appraisal of Wesling’s analysis demonstrates the metaphysical pitfall encountered by analyses which fail – as explicated in the previous section on historical materialist method – to rigorously concretise their analytical points of departure, in this case precipitating “an interpretative turn in which the category of labor is erected as the point of view, and not as the object to be analyzed.” Wesling’s determination that the queer gender performance of Cuban *transformistas* constitutes dis-alienated, self-actualized, and yet (or even therefore) *value-producing* labor thus blurs two levels of analysis – labor in its transhistorical sense as transformative human activity, and labor’s specific organization under capitalism as the commodity labor-power. Based on this elision, Wesling “turns the claim for the social value of these structurally devalued activities into a political objective in itself” – thus attempting to transform the appearance of value-relations while in fact further obscuring their

material organization. ‘Value-producing’ labor, in Marxist terms, refers in fact not to labor that can be considered ‘valuable’ in a broad or moralizing sense – or even labor that contributes in a non-directly-market-mediated way to the reproduction of capitalist social relations – but specifically to the production of surplus-value; capitalist profit. “The temporality of value,” Monfort explains, “is a kind of retroactive temporality in which the abstract labor objectified in the commodity is only realized and incorporated as an integral part of social labor in exchange” – that is, for Marx, the abstraction inherent in the commodity-form means that value can differ only quantitatively, not qualitatively; the subjective nature of the labor makes no difference. Especially considering a critique of capitalist appropriation of queer and trans culture and practices as profit-making opportunities (see Gould), Wesling’s purposeful blurring of the analytical distinction between value-producing labor on the one hand, and dis-alienated social human activity on the other, risks allowing the latter to be cannibalized by the former rather than rising as the revolutionary phoenix from its ashes.

By what modalities, then, *do* gender and value interact within capitalism? Firstly, for Monfort, a Marxian reading of Foucault demonstrates how the process of abstraction through which gender and sexual identity is constituted mirrors that of the value-form: “the relations that constitute particular forms of subjectivity... are objectified by subsuming the particulars under a veil of abstract universality.” Both value and sex conceal their own historical processes of construction from view. In ‘Femboys in the factory: trans labour beyond abjection?’ Davin extends this analysis into the specifically contemporary social relations which have conditioned what she terms the “novel reification... of each aspect of gendered identity into independent and discrete quantification” within contemporary liberal discourse. Building, as do almost all our contributors, from Kevin Floyd’s queer Marxist theorisation of the reification of desire into particular sexual and gender categories (see the following section), Davin disagrees however with Floyd’s relegation of gendered performance to the realm of consumption, which renders this labor “resolutely unproductive.” “The present tendency towards the subsumption of labour,” she argues, “does not appear to respect the separation of gender into the sphere of consumption. The elaboration of a novel kind of reification of gender tracks the emergence of a new era in political economy dominated by austerity and an unchecked tendency towards crisis, one in which the situation of marginal, abjected labourers has become more characteristic of the workings of the

system itself. As such, performative labour may enter into relations of exchange, paradoxically starting with the most devalued.”

What is intended here by ‘abjected’ and ‘devalued’? “Capital,” Monfort explains, “exercises a type of domination of impersonal but embodied character, which produces subjects available for the sale of labor power disposed through cultural schemes of intelligibility that constitute differential axes in the allocation of value.” Gender and sexual identity is paradigmatic here: both Davin and Monfort take up the work of Rosemary Hennessey and the Endnotes collective to elaborate how “the processes of devaluation of the labor force are inscribed on the bodies of feminized subjects through a second skin... a type of embodied domination that becomes intelligible through the set of devalued identities,” which operate as “signifiers that mark the sellers of labor power in their access to the market. The body, taken to the market, becomes intelligible under cultural schemes mediated by the value form” (Monfort/Hennessey 2006; 2013). Endnotes extend ‘feminization’ to refer in turn to the tendency in contemporary capitalism towards precarious, deskilled labor; “the emergence of new categorical identities cannot be separated from the path through which individuals come to coalesce in different positions within relations of production and reproduction” (Davin). Abjection “appears in two closely related but slightly different forms... the devaluation of marked labourers within the market, and... the elimination of these labourers from the market entirely, relegating them to different spheres of work, not mediated directly by wages or possibly by the labour market at all” (Davin). For both authors, then, queer and trans labor-power is “simultaneously determined by subjection to the value form and a dissociation from the circuits of production and circulation of value in a context of increasing surplus population” (Monfort). Central to Davin’s encapsulation of these forces is Kay Gabriel’s framework of ‘gender as accumulation strategy’, which Davin summarizes as “a process by which divisions and disvaluations of labour appear in circuits of production which differentially exploit and expropriate from those subordinated in virtue of their genders to ensure the smooth, continued extraction of surplus value.”

‘Femboy’ streamers such as F1NN5STER form the particular focus of Davin’s analysis. Her investigation into the political economy of streaming demonstrates how it is exemplary of general neoliberal trends – towards precarity, piecework, disposability of labor, virtual emotional

labor, and the collapse of the distinction between labor and personal life – situating the devaluation of trans labor within the “ever more intensive subsumption of domestic and leisure activity.” Davin argues that the femboy is “more comfortably reincorporated as a politically benign and saleable public identity in at least some markets and contexts” than the trans woman, whose identity speaks to “a mass political struggle which extends in time far beyond the present reorientation of reified gender, and directly strikes at contemporary anxieties and reactive formations around sexual and social reproduction and the family.” Through an appreciation of Sianne Ngai’s theorisation of the ‘gimmick’, she concludes that “identification itself is therefore a decisive aspect of determining the valuation of a worker’s labour, in so far as it brings into view not a normative gender – femboys indeed still present an extreme effeminacy – but a commitment to a constellation of relations between gender, race and desirability that allow them to be retrieved as gimmicky exceptional cases of a new normative order, rather than being marked as excluded from that order.” In this, Davin disagrees with the Endnotes collective and others who have excluded the realm of self-identification as such from their consideration of the political economy of gender: “The differentiation of the valuation of trans labour clearly depends constitutively on the avowal, or indeed disavowal, of transness itself, and not only the social practices of transition that trans people are assumed to generally undertake, which are shared in common with femboys.”

Monfort’s conclusion segues through an analysis of the ‘abject’ which leads him to advocate for a trans political praxis articulated through negativity. Regimes of cisheteronormativity, he argues, “simultaneously produce and are produced by a constitutive outside of the process of extended reproduction of the capitalist class relation that defines and delimits all that is excluded from normativity without acquiring an ontological status of its own.” The ‘abject’ thus “operates as that condition of possibility of the social that remains dissociated from this sociability: the immanent and non-social element that constitutes the sphere of the social.” Monfort reads the abjection of queer and trans people as “confirm[ing] the impossibility of value subsuming the totality of social life under its abstract universality” – and here lies the kernel of possible resistance. Monfort reappropriates the queer anti-futurity of Lee Edelman for a political telos: the non-reproduction of the totality of capitalist social relations. Through this lens, “the current processes of (dis)identification of trans and queer subjects” can be apprehended as “a negative

expression of the crisis of reproduction of the capitalist class relationship, specifically of its structural inability to integrate the abject into institutionalized forms of social reproduction through wages.” Identity, shaped as it is by capitalist forces of abstraction, thus becomes “the privileged political terrain in which the proletariat must confront itself in its class condition,” both the condition of possibility for that confrontation and the limit it must overcome. “The political articulation of this latent negativity in certain identities,” Monfort concludes, “opens a series of questions for the development of political interventions that seek to open gaps in the processes of reproduction of the capitalist totality.”

Reification, historicization, and utopian desire

The concept of reification, one of the most commonly engaged in the trans and queer Marxist tradition, was introduced by György Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* to name a historical process of capital by which social life appears frozen to us, its meanings petrified (Preciado 2022, 410). As JD Fulloon summarises in ‘Shadows of the Empire/A New Hope,’ “reification refers to the treatment of social relations as objects, things that are not socially and historically contingent but rather unquestioned facts.” Reification is, therefore, an erroneous understanding of capitalist social relations, which makes us experience historical processes as natural laws that govern human life and elude our control (Floyd 2009, 23), in such a way that we cannot see the dynamics, relationships and changing states of existence for what they are; we turn verbs into nouns, processes into things (Lewis 2022, xxiv). We could well define reification in terms of the political function that Paul B. Preciado confers on statues: a fiction that hides their historicity (2022, 406). In this way, the reification of gender and sexuality is the process responsible for petrifying (naturalizing and dehistoricizing) the sexual fictions of capitalism, which constrain all human potential in watertight identities, in fragmented moments (Díaz, 2022). Such reified sexual identities, Rosemary Hennessy argues, are ways of seeing and knowing oneself and others that underpin the logic of commodity exchange on which capital is based, a logic that abstracts social phenomena, including human relations, of the historical conditions that make them possible (2000, 106).

Kevin Floyd’s *The Reification of Desire* (2009) specifically identifies the reification – “the substitution of the relational and qualitative content driving a dynamic for a static, and mutually

isolated collection of distinct properties, autonomous to human action” (Davin) – of erotic energy which developed through the emergence of psychoanalysis and post-Fordism in the mid-20th century, instantiating a form of denaturalised masculinity constituted and cyclically re-constituted through gender performativity. Building on Floyd, Alexis Davin’s account in this issue of more contemporary neoliberal machinations of gender reification encompasses a “paired construction of an inessential and politically inert trans subject and the debasing of all work to the lowest, and most precarious, common denominator,” which reflect “the subjective and objective sides together of a contemporary gender matrix which has further dissolved many of the connections between sex, labour and stylisation of its historical predecessors.” Reification therefore provides a framework through which to foreground and problematise the historical, ideologically veiled processes of fracture and sedimentation of gender and sexual identities, connecting them explicitly to the material social and economic conditions of particular capitalist modes of regulation.

What Floyd’s analysis also introduces, however, is a critique of Lukács’s straightforwardly pessimistic account of reification: the “radically dehistoricizing” entanglement of social differentiation and commodity fetishism which results in a fragmented and petrified consciousness, incapable in its “privatization and isolation” of any “critical comprehension of the social” (Floyd 2009, 17-18). This linear view of reification under capitalism as an ultimately unilateral “narrative of decline” is shaped by Lukács’ conflation – addressed in his 1967 preface to *History and Class Consciousness* – of ‘objectification’ with ‘alienation’ (a key concept entwined with reification, which will be explicated in a subsequent section). Assuming a necessary relation between the two, Lukács thus understands *objectification* rather than alienation as a condition to be superseded; he thus effectively presumes “some prior, harmonious integration of subject with object” (Floyd 2009:18), a presumption which implicitly excludes the realm of the natural world – and the material body along with it – from the dialectical movement of the totality of capitalist social relations. Lukács’ focus on the subjective experience of ‘consciousness,’ then, effectively elides the question of the reified *object*, which is “delineated entirely in terms of the subject’s experience of that object as radically ahistorical and beyond that subject’s control” (Floyd 2009:23). Floyd, however, engages Foucault in order to take up this elided “objective moment” of reification, arguing that thinking reification and sexuality together

– a process which brings the queer body to bear upon a unilinear “decline narrative” of reification – can furnish an understanding of the ways in which social differentiation produces an opening, not just a closing, of horizons for new epistemological possibilities, new critical perspectives on the totality of social relations under capitalism.

This opening of epistemological possibility is what interests JD Fulloon in ‘Shadows of the Empire/A New Hope: A Dialectical Critique of Gender Historicization and Utopian Desire in Isabel Fall’s “Helicopter Story”.’ Drawing from Floyd, they first make a case for the demystifying power of historicization; if we can see that things were once otherwise, we begin to question why they are thus and how they might be (made) different. Science fiction, Fulloon argues, is uniquely placed to offer the fictional perspective of the future upon the reader’s contemporary world: “This speculative ability enhances efforts to historicize the present, rendering social structures taken for granted as being merely temporary.” Thus the worldbuilding of ‘Helicopter Story’ “creates an inversion of Brecht’s technique of historicization, where, rather than the past, the speculative future is used to defamiliarize the audience with gender,” creating a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* (‘distancing effect’) which “provokes the reader to examine gender as historically contingent.”

Fulloon’s reading of Fall underlines the historical intertwining of gender’s reification with imperialism; particularly, in this case, U.S. colonialism’s “gendercide” (Deborah A. Miranda 2010) within indigenous populations – “The closing of the frontier was a pivotal moment in the formation of American gender.” Fulloon draws on C. Riley Snorton and Jules Gill-Peterson’s work on the construction and mobilization of ‘plastic’ ‘gender’ as a medical tool invested in the reification and defense of whiteness as much as binary sex. Recounting ‘Helicopter Story’’s chilling reflection on the speculative future-past during which the military has weaponised technologies of transition to “make gender tactical,” Fulloon points out that “by examining plasticity, one realizes that gender has always been tactical, as its original deployment was to stabilize the binary of biological sex.” Their gloss of the development and contestation of ‘gender’ over the last century weaves homonationalism and trans necropolitics into a critique of state-enforced transmedicalism, whose present functioning – they point out – comes ironically close to the dystopian image of government-run “sex-role control centers” painted by Janice

Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire*. In fact, they argue, "'Helicopter Story' and *The Transsexual Empire* share a broadly similar perspective and a common enemy" – "the fusion of state and medical power to determine and shape gender." Fulloon situates Fall's work within both a contemporary field and a more expansive genealogy of what they term "speculative gender fiction," repudiating the story's internet cancellation and arguing that it deserves a place in the genre's 'canon.'

Fulloon's return to theorizing the reification of gender proceeds through a digression into dialectics, which will be more expansively explicated in the following section. Fulloon's exploration of Fredric Jameson's work on utopia and dystopia, though, provides an illustrative introduction to the "dialectical mode of thought." For Jameson, the Cold War precipitated the collapse of the simplistic utopia/dystopia binary, complicating the distinction between the two. Fulloon explicates this via the Hegelian dialectic of identity (self-contained sameness) and difference (external opposition), which, in the dialectical mode of thought, "pass into their opposites" – revealing themselves as not incidentally but fundamentally related. Fall's story, Fulloon argues, can be considered in Jameson's terms as a "critical dystopia," politically enabling rather than nihilistic or one-dimensionally denunciatory: "Here, the dialectical mode of thought recalls that a dystopia based in a specific form of oppression must imply the value of resisting that oppression, just as capitalist oppression must dialectically give rise to a working-class revolution." It is the historicization of gender, the revelation of its construction and its contingency, that serves as the dialectical lynchpin in 'Helicopter Story' for the dystopian disclosure of utopian possibilities.

The utopian desire which opens onto the possibility of anti-imperialist gender positions is thus made possible, Fulloon argues, by reification. Gender in Fall's story takes the place of the taste of Proust's madeleine for literary modernism, narrated sensorily with "a fullness that both harkens to a time before reification and serves as compensation for the fragmentation of social reality under late capitalism." For Herbert Marcuse, whose theorization of reification informs both Floyd and Jameson, this "desire to be simultaneously in both the pre-reified past and the post-reified utopian future" is central: "utopian escape from reification requires leaning into its effects," as encompassed for Fulloon in the "dramatization of passive objectification" that forms

the climactic moment of ‘Helicopter Story’ – “the mediation of the author’s utopian desire.” Reification, then, through a queer and trans reading made possible by its fragmentary effects, enables its own “bodily negation” through a liberated erotic instrumentalization of the body. *The only way out is through.*

Dialectics, alienation, and negating the negation

Dialectical modes of thought are an essential tool for understanding and confronting the complex, contradictory and moving totality of capitalist social relations globally. As JD Fulloon’s explication of the utopian-dystopian dialectic in the preceding section demonstrates, a dialectical method – against a common tacit presumption of certain Marxism-skeptics – *troubles* binaristic formulations rather than reinforcing them. We have argued, indeed, that a trans Marxist methodology reconstitutes the subject/subjectless binary (and many others besides) *as* a dialectical relation. The fundamental difference between the two frameworks lies in their ability to capture *movement*: “For the dialectical method, not only is everything in motion, but in motion all things reciprocally influence each other” (Bordiga 1950). Dialectical analysis is thus a fundamental characteristic of the method of historical materialism explicated previously, allowing us to chart the complex, changing and reciprocal interactions from and between different standpoints without either petrifying them in fragmented opposition, or collapsing them in on one another. A dialectical analysis must proceed, moreover, from the revelation expounded throughout the preceding sections that to attempt to apprehend a particular concept or object *in-and-of-itself* – cleaved from the myriad of material social relations that determine its development – capitulates to the atomizing influences of capitalist reification which make it appear thusly isolated to begin with.

The dialectical force of trans Marxism, then, consistently returns to the processes of reification which determine the ‘trans’ standpoint that conditions the field’s own instantiation, even as it points back to the horizons that open on the lynchpin of the truth it thereby discloses: “You are as constructed as me; the same anarchic Womb has birthed us both” (Stryker 1994, 241). Trans people, argues Kade Doyle Griffiths, “make visible in the world that crucial Marxian analytic move – that what ‘appears’ is often enough the opposite of what ‘is’” (2021:144); from this perspective, we are exemplary “dialectical revolutionaries” who “destroy by force the

consolidated forms that block the road to the future” (Bordiga 1950). The contradictory space we inhabit – both immersed and resistant, as Eric Llavera Caselles evokes in the paradox of the etiological question – holds us back from the queer pitfall of constructing a new ‘antinormativity’ which, as an ethic of pure transgression, would simply consolidate itself as normativity’s new binary opposite. We are “spat out as the uncoded externality of gender” *and* we “labour to produce the very gender on which capitalism depends” (Giles 2019). Understanding this paradoxical position through a dialectical lens enables us to apprehend and proceed *through* the contradiction that sees “transsexuality as a social technology of containment of excessive possibilities of gender mobility and ambiguity” (Llavera Caselles) while simultaneously agitating for access to and control over the means of medical transition, *and* understanding transness to contain more repressive and more revolutionary potentialities than the reductionism of a transmedicalist definition can encompass. It is precisely through the impurity of our uneven complicity with normativity, in fact, that transness represents a de-reificatory threat to capitalism’s naturalizing fictions of gender. If we are always-already impure, the question of negating capitalist social relations through trans embodiments transforms itself from one of undialectical opposition into Stryker’s dialectically Frankensteinian call to “discover the seams and sutures in yourself” (1994, 241).

In ‘Epistemological Foundations of Transmarxism: Queer Dialectics and Marxist Humanism,’ Alex Adamson explains, in the first place, the importance for Marxian dialectics of the *sylogism* in Hegelian logic: the mediation between the universal, the particular, and the individual, which together constitute the social totality. He explains that dialectical analysis of a particular concept investigates how each of these three poles, in relation to that concept, mediates between the other two. Political philosophy which focuses only on one of the three moments of mediation (individual-particular-universal, particular-individual-universal, or individual-universal-particular) enacts one of several different forms of reductionism. Adamson draws centrally from Nathaniel Dickson’s elaboration of the gender-theoretical counterparts of these reductionisms – binaristic biologism, sex/gender separation, and neurological essentialism – each of which eclipses the role of *agency* in transness. Crucially, Adamson underlines, “it is in the process of mediation that one asserts agency rather than being reduced to external determinations.”

Marxism insists on the centrality of the determinate, material conditions which underpin and constitute these processes of mediation, which – crucially – take place not simply on a conceptual level but within historical time, in historically specific ways. It is this materialist character which distinguishes Marxian dialectics, shifting the battlefield of agency to the real, complex and contradictory social relations that make up the cogs in the capitalist machine. In his reading of the introduction to the *Grundrisse*, Stuart Hall posits that Marx’s insistence on the historically specific character of the social relations which make up a differentiated unity maintains – unlike its idealist counterpart in Hegel – “the possibility of break, of interruption, of suspension of conditions which ruptures the unities” (Hall 1973:31). Adamson offers a more recuperative reading of Hegel, outlining Karen Ng’s argument that Hegel overcomes Kant’s idealism via his “absolute method”: a dialectical understanding of life and consciousness, being and thinking, as both in unity/identity and in opposition/distinction. For Hegel, teleological (self-determined) activity exceeds the determinism of syllogistic logic; the enforcement of any objective universality thus instantiates a structural prevention or constriction of such activity, which constitutes a condition of violence. This, Adamson argues, underpins Marx’s critique of the violence of alienation – of being “reduced to external determinations” – on which basis they make the case for a trans Marxist humanism, turning on its head the anti-humanist argument which substitutes the subjective, dialectical universality of Marxist humanism for the alienating, objective universality it seeks to negate.

Adamson argues that Sylvia Wynter’s dialectical theorisation of a “Particular/Universal” autonomous feminism represents an example of Hegelian ‘absolute method,’ recuperating her critique of Marxist-Leninism as consummate with Marx’s critique of crude materialism. Following an appraisal of Wynter’s analysis of the international Wages for Housework movement, he takes up Nat Raha’s analysis of liminal group Wages Due Lesbians, through which she theorizes a ‘hi[r]storical materialism’ as a Muñozian ‘disidentification’ of “transmarxist feminist analysis with historical materialism.” Adamson points out, however, that the historically universalized predicates of the ‘left’ – male, white, cisheterosexual – subject to the critique of WfH and WDL were contingent rather than determinate elements of class struggle, cultivated strategically by the political right in the interests of capital: the UK’s Section

28, for example, “was a coordinated tactic by the state to divide issues of sexuality from a mass-based working class movement to abolish the prevailing state of things.” We follow this methodology of dialectically engaging critical disidentifications with Marxism within their material historical context as not only a coherent, but also a *necessary* part of a rigorous methodology of totality-aspirational historical materialism. Kathi Weeks (2011) describes Wages for Housework as an instance of Jamesonian ‘cognitive mapping,’ – “a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society’s structures as a whole” (Jameson 1991:51). This framework encompasses Wynter’s particular-universal dialectic *within* an expansive Marxist tradition which seeks to translate the abstract lived experience of oppressive social relations into new epistemological possibilities which “approach the universal... from the vantage of a specific location within that web of relations, a vantage that necessarily abstracts that totality in coloring everything it sees, but also makes possible broad understandings of social reality unavailable to other perspectives” (Floyd 2009:12).

The importance of a dialectical mode of analysis, for Adamson, lies in “its ability to identify how our current social relations embody particular kinds of alienation such that we can work to overcome these forms of alienation.” If alienated social relations represent a “first order negation of social life,” addressing them “requires a dialectical process of overcoming those relations and their replacement by re-humanized social relations,” a process which can be described in Hegelian terms as “the negation of the negation”: “a negation of a second order... that abolishes the capitalist totality while simultaneously creating new social relations corresponding to a new social totality.” This process differs from an undialectical assertion of ‘empty’ negativity; it constitutes, following István Mészáros, the “positive assertion of a relation of unity,” whereby privat(iz)e(d) life “acquire[s] the practical consciousness of its social embeddedness” (Mészáros 2005). The Marxist humanism for which Adamson advocates measures liberation by the democratic control of time and self-activity as well as the means of production: “The only universal determination of humanity is their special quality of “species-being” (*Gattungswesen*), which only becomes fully manifest when human relations are in- and for-themselves social... For Marx, human nature is that which overcomes (*Aufhebung*) external necessity through its appropriation of need through the dialectical transformational power of desire and will from a

perspective that can take the flourishing of humanity as a whole into consideration.” From this perspective, gender self-determination and the communization of transition strike at the heart of capitalist forces of alienation. Following Gleeson and Dickson (2019; 2021), Adamson advocates for trans politics to undertake a move of “reassociation” and “reunification” against the dissociation produced in us by alienated social relations. Trans people, they argue, “reveal the truth of gender as the product of labor within a particular set of social relations, also exposing the ways in which the cis-gender binary is the product of a particular set of determinate social relations.” Trans life therefore functions as an estrangement which dialectically opens out onto a new horizon, asserting that things can be otherwise: “transition is a form of negating the negation of alienation.” As Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2022) neatly summarizes, “this—making something into something else—is what negation is.”

Alienation and (de)subjectivization: Becoming Spectral

The Marxist concept of alienation has been demonstratively introduced in the preceding sections, but not so far explained from first principles. Alienation remained a relatively marginal concept in Marxist writings until the eventual 1930s publication of *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in which Marx explicates alienation not as an insurmountable human condition, but as specifically grounded in the capitalist mode of production. He outlines the reciprocal relationship between private property and the alienation of labor, both as objectified product and as self-estranging activity; when the product of a person’s labor is appropriated and made alien to them, their laboring activity becomes a process of self-*estrangement* rather than self-expression. Thus the alienation of labor implies in turn, Marx explains, the estrangement of people from their ‘species-being’ or social human nature, as well as from one another. This is why Alex Adamson describes alienation as the “negation of social life” – and why, for them, “the measure of our collective dis-alienation is the measure of the release of creativity, flourishing, and enjoyment in all of our relationships: social, political, economic, and ecological.”

Westley Montgomery’s essay ‘Becoming Spectral: Phantasmagorias of Late-Capitalism and Trans Desubjectivity in Hyper-pop’ captures a more ambivalent position towards the potentiality for dis-alienating social relations. Montgomery approaches alienation and subjectivization, two distinct but linked concepts, through the lens of the phantasmagoria. Originally an optical

illusion show of 'magic lantern' projections, for Marx, "its projection on the wall of material objects, its estrangement of human-to-human relationships through the illusions of human-made-thing, closely mirrored the process of alienation. From this mechanical process, a false or illusory subjectivity was produced by the spirits on the wall, the spirits of subjects made objects made subjects." Marx thus outlined his concept of commodity fetishism as the subsumption of the labor and social relations involved in an object's production beneath the *phantasmagorische* appearance of a relation between things. Commodity fetishism is the sleight of hand by which capitalism erases the workers on whose labor it rests, conjuring the illusory appearance of economic value as being inherent to a commodity: under the projections of capitalism, the human becomes object, and the object becomes human. The metaphor of the phantasmagoria, Montgomery argues, "reveals this dance of subjects and objects to be a matter of perceiving – a technology of perception." Perception is thus the dimension of alienation which grounds her analysis of trans hyper-pop artists' rejection of capital's cis-hegemonic, *subjectivizing* gaze.

Montgomery's Marxist explication might be instrumentalized as a decisive intervention into the question of the 'subject' of trans studies. For Marx, to begin with, the 'subject' could not be said to exist under the alienating conditions of capitalism: "When the subject's relationship with its subjectifying force is obscured by the phantasmagoria of capital, by the commodity that speaks with the subject's voice, it is replaced with subjectivity—the perception of the thing projected." Moreover, Montgomery argues, "late-capitalism in the current century reveals a further alienation—the substitution of subjectivities for subjectivizations." The process Marx identifies as essential to the estrangement of labor and thereby to the self "is further alienated when subjectivization, the beam of light from the magic lantern, becomes the locus of relationality under late-capitalism." The proliferation of taxonomical, individualized identity-exposition transforms people themselves into commodity-fetishes. "Neither subjects nor subjectivities, that is, unable to perceive power relations between either people or things, the self under late-capitalism is in constant search of meaning through alienated processes of self-making. A BuzzFeed quiz or a daily horoscope to determine the conditions of being and belonging. A commodified becoming." A visibility-focused trans politics which conceives of perception as a

vector of positive identity-formation and recognition, for Montgomery, misses the violence of capital's subjectivizing gaze.

Montgomery analyses trans hyper-pop artists Blackwinterwells, laura les, and quinn's embrace of synthesizers and the 'bedsheet ghost' to argue that "the body in hyper-pop is refigured, neither a commodity nor a fetish, but a technology... an insistence on a self beyond self-making, an identity without identification, the subject freed from the process of subjectivization: A desubjectivity." This vision of a 'beyond' is reminiscent of, but distinct from, both Adamson's call to "negate the negation" and Fulloon's Marcusean indication that the only way out of reification is *through*. Dispossessed of the means to directly negate alienated social relations, hyper-pop for Montgomery "demonstrates that we no longer have the option to extinguish the lantern in order to re-instantiate the relationships between alienated subjects. We have only the option of turning off perception itself. Of donning the very shroud of alienation. Of desubjectivizing ourselves. Of becoming spectral." Rather than an erotic instrumentalization of the body, then, trans hyper-pop artists instrumentalize the prostheses of bedsheet and synthesizer as a means of reappropriating the phantasmagoria: "No longer a technology of subjectivization through alienation, it takes the always-already alienated and pushes them further through the veil toward a new orientation toward perception, to a desubjectivized alienation."

Trans*forming fields

The clearest inheritance of trans Marxism woven through Jamie C. Gagliano and Alexander Liebman's elaboration of various sites of *campesino* resistance is the thread of disruptive extra- and anti-institutional marginality. Where other pieces have focused on trans subjects (or de/subjectivities), 'Trans*-agrarian marxisms?' assembles a cornucopia of other flowers blooming from the field of trans Marxism, "draw[ing] on transgender marxisms to historicize and think the possibilities for alignments across trans, queer, and agrarian struggles in relation to anti-colonial and anti-capitalist rural uprisings" – thus demonstrating the breadth of applicability of what Anja Weisler Flower (2021) termed a "transgendered Marxism". Gagliano and Liebman bring trans Marxism into conversation with critical agrarian studies (CAS) – a field arising out of a long history of peasant studies and a more recent critique of liberal 'development' – arguing that "gender and sexuality are central to the making of agrarian capital," and that "agrarian

questions of nature, productivity, and subjectivity” have much to gain from trans Marxism’s “close attention to historical and geographical particularity and the ways that gender is always already wrought in dialectical relation to capitalist transformation.” In dialectical turn, the authors also “hope that trans*marxism will draw from CAS’ sustained engagement with materiality, working class politics, political ecology, and global South critiques of development.”

Overcoming what they see as some of the shortcomings of CAS, for example, Gagliano and Liebman’s trans Marxist analysis of *campesinos* – subsistence farmers, smallholders and peasants who resist the forces of proletarianization – recasts the problem they pose the state and capital as “one of how normative and regulatory aspects of gender and sexuality, and their links to racialization, are materially enacted through agrarian (re)production.” They advocate resistance to the ‘resolution’ of this ‘problem’ in favor of understanding the *campesino* as “a potential site for Marxian praxis and the proliferation of queer and trans agrarian class struggle.” Diagnosing in CAS a political horizon of reproductive futurity “rooted in moralizing the peasantry,” Gagliano and Liebman propose a trans Marxist lens to “interrogate how intertwined gendered, sexual, and racial violence grounds agricultural regimes of extraction and dispossession without also positing heteronormative forms of agrarian productivism and its idealized pasts and recuperative futures in its place.” Despite the strengths of CAS in foregrounding scholar-activism and “overcoming divisions between the researcher and researched,” they argue, its uptake is nonetheless largely due to “its palatability and capacity to interface with entities invested in the status quo, such as the UN and global NGOs.” The resulting dilution of grassroots movements’ radical messaging into externally-evaluated and normatively regulated UN development programming “comes into tension with forms of *campesino* life and struggle that may veer away from productive frameworks or that seek forms of liberation antithetical to reform.” Both trans and *campesino* “fugitive practices” of revolt and resistance are marginalized in the process of “the good-intentioned management of dissent into existing frameworks which prioritize representation, poverty reduction, and NGO good-will.” A trans Marxist lens, for Gagliano and Liebman, reveals how “representation and visibility is always double-edged”; against the violence of capital’s perception, they argue, “transness is duplicity against clarity as survival tactic and as onto-epistemological worlding” – mirroring the fugitive practices involved in sustaining *campesino* life which “do not slide easily into

development agendas but which are key to resistance and insurgency at the plantation margins.” “What happens,” they ask, “when the trans*marxist bend of leaning into the unmanageable, the unpalatable and the profane as praxis is also taken up as the political horizon?”

Drawing on ethnographic examples from their fieldwork in Latin America, Gagliano and Liebman chart the late capitalist appropriation of neoliberal ‘diversity’ and the language of ‘intersectionality’ – which “has become common parlance within UN sustainable development goals” – as a “strategy of market integration” which has the effect of recasting systemic struggle in an individualist lens. They detail by example a response to the 2021 Colombian uprisings, during which “indigenous communities, landless campesinos, and youth militants shut down a rural part of the Pan-American highway for over 40 days.” Mobilizing a trans Marxist politics of family abolitionism “as a proliferation of kinship forms which leaves room for the historically and geographically diverse ways kinship and relations of care have been organized,” Gagliano and Liebman argue that for the *campesina* women, leaving the confines of the household to join, supply, and defend the blockades “transed their gendered womanness.” In response to the protests, ASOCAÑA offered to set up ‘women’s orchards’ – thus “reterritorializ[ing] women in the hills and in their gendered roles” by appropriating ‘affirmative’ (Fraser 1995) representational strategies as a means of containing and recuperating the transformational energies gestated by class struggle, energies which threaten to reconfigure the gendered and sexual relations of kinship and social reproduction central to the smooth maintenance of capital’s interests. “Sex/gender codification as agricultural development” thus “became a counterinsurgent force.” CAS’s detailed elaboration of agrarian processes of social reproduction, therefore, merits a dialectical engagement with trans Marxism in order to “open up the question of what is being reproduced, and how subversion to certain forms of reproduction proliferates.”

In closing, the authors advocate for a greater methodological exchange between the social science of agrarian studies and the eclectic, often textual critique of trans Marxism, whose divergent approaches to the archive they see as provoking a generative friction: “Speculative imaginings grounded in historical documentation might reveal different ways of constructing histories of kinship and ecological relations beyond documents noting agrarian reform policies and development programming. Transgender marxisms might undergird insightful analyses of

trans-proletarian struggles with scrutiny of debt cycles and financialization.” These different and dialectical forms of analysis, they argue, also embody “different political horizoning”: “Against the financed orchard, we listen for the proliferation of direct action and the subversion of the plantation, such as collective land invasion, crop sabotage, and communal actions to stop aerial pesticide action. These are moments of departure from reproduction-as-usual” – material embodiments of ‘negating the negation.’

Marxism against cisness

This return to the “unruly materialisms” of embodied resistance to alienated social relations provides us with a timely reminder that trans Marxism, as Anja Weiser Flower emphasizes, “meets its purpose as a weapon of struggle” (2021:234). No utopian vision of dis-alienated pleasure, Alexis Davin cautions, “is possible until we win the means of providing it to ourselves.” A trans Marxism worthy of the name is elaborated through the complexly dialectical material process of changing the world. This is where the alchemy between the spectrum of past revolutions and the trans lives of the present gives rise to something much more valuable than any theoretical speculation: a comradely refuge, with a beautiful bathtub, where internationalist proletarian solidarity flourishes from the diversity of the oppressed. As Marx said in the *Grundrisse* “the concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse.” The socialist movement has not always known how to marshall this Marxist conception of class unity, which is forged every day in open struggle against a series of determinations whose reified *appearance* is not straightforwardly ‘capitalist’: cisheterosexism, racism, ableism, whorephobia, and so on. Trans Marxism offers an unavoidable possibility for the revolutionary struggle, the real movement in which every subjectivized being takes control of their own destiny, to be a truly welcoming place for everyone; a *barricada* where we can share the long fight, where we can expand our trans joy, where we can embody utopia together. We conclude, then, by making our own the verses of that Chilean queer communist who, with a hammer and sickle bedazzled in glitter on her *travesti* face, once wished:

«A usted le doy este mensaje
y no es por mí
yo estoy viejo

y su utopía es para las generaciones futuras. Hay tantos niños que van a nacer
con una alita rota
y yo quiero que vuelen compañero
que su revolución
les dé un pedazo de cielo rojo para que puedan volar».

“To you I deliver this message
and it is not for me
I am old
and your utopia is for those who are to come. So many children will be born
with a little broken wing
and I want them to fly, comrade
may your revolution
give them a small piece of red sky to fly in.”

– *Pedro Lemebel, 1986*

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