

Riotology: A Dialogue on Riots and Resistance

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This exchange originally took place in the summer months of 2019, shortly after a paperback version of Joshua Clover's much-discussed book *Riot. Strike. Riot* (originally published in 2016) was published by Verso Books. Clover's book can be read as an ambitious attempt to provide a materialist explanation for the re-emergence of riots, blockades, occupations, and other "circulation struggles" in the early 21st century. The exchange discusses Clover's theses as well as some objections that have subsequently been raised against them. Several months after the initial draft was completed, insurrections broke out in a number of major US cities following the killing of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis Police Department. Parts of the exchange have subsequently been slightly revised in order to reflect on more recent developments.

Dennis Büscher-Ulbrich

Protests and riots have erupted in hundreds of cities in and outside of the United States, many of which are literally in flames, in the wake of the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020. A militant rebellion is taking shape before our eyes, and so is the capitalist state's authoritarian response. As we speak, riot police and the national guard are patrolling American streets: from the coronavirus lockdown to military curfew in history-making "66 Days" (see Clover 2020). Given the rise of Trump in the United States and the onslaught of political reaction in response to the global crisis of capital and proletarian struggles worldwide, it seems legitimate, perhaps even necessary, to turn our attention to the theory and practice of not just protest but riot. Even New York House Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez recently defended the riot as a universal form of resistance in response to brutal dispossession and marginalization—whether in Israeli-occupied territories or in Flint, Michigan: "I believe that injustice is a threat to the safety of all people, because once you have a group that is marginalized and marginalized and marginalized—once someone doesn't have access to clean water, they have no choice but to riot, right?" (2019). Refusing to stigmatize rioters and instead calling for social justice to prevent future riots, Ocasio-Cortez's humanist rationale echoes Martin Luther King's famous dictum that "a riot is the language of the unheard."

Joshua Clover's recently republished *Riot. Strike. Riot: The New Era of Uprisings* (2016a), on the other hand, offers a decidedly materialist theory of the riot and sketches a unique history of the return of the riot to the center of social struggles. Building on the work of E.P. Thompson and Charles Tilly, Clover shows that the riot was

the primary form of proletarian mass revolt in the 17th and 18th centuries, before it gave way to the strike in the era of industrial capitalism. Due to the restructuring of global capital and extensive class recomposition (especially since 1973), strike and riot crossed paths again in the late-1960s (think Detroit 1967 and Paris 1968) before the riot slowly but inexorably returned to the center stage, whereas union-led strikes diminished and took on an increasingly defensive character, at least in the overdeveloped world. To account for this historical shift, Clover relies on the Marxian critique of political economy and the work of James Boggs, Robert Brenner, Giovanni Arrighi, and Beverly Silver. The benefit of Clover's much-discussed book is that it provides a historical materialist account of the riot as a form of struggle brought to the fore by post-1973 transformations in global capitalism. Drawing on the work of Brenner and Arrighi in particular, Clover analyzes the riot as a "circulation struggle" waged primarily by proletarians whose lives are oriented by circulation rather than production, and who increasingly find themselves excluded from the sphere of wage labor (and, hence, cannot engage in strikes, which Clover defines as struggles in the sphere of production). Marx famously analyzed the production of "relative surplus populations" alongside the reproduction of the wage-relation in Chapter 25 of *Capital* Vol. I, where he used the term to describe the part of the workforce "no longer directly necessary for the self-valorization of capital" (Marx 1990 [1867], 557).

In the United States, the decentralized and initially demandless uprising of Los Angeles in 1992 provided the locus classicus for the new form of sub- or ex-urban riot—structured by racialized antagonism and overdetermined by class struggle—of which Ferguson 2014 was the most emblematic in recent years before Minneapolis happened. Readers may remember Glenn Beck on

Fox News fulminating against *The Coming Insurrection* (2007/2009) and its publication in the United States by MIT Press. Since then, both conservative and liberal media outlets have tried to banish the specter of riot, while the state continues to arm itself against it. Alain Badiou's hypothesis of the "rebirth of history" through a global series of riots and uprisings that arguably began with the 'Arab Spring' (see Badiou 2012, 35-43) stands confirmed in the light of recent events: from Seattle, Oakland, Ferguson, Baltimore, Standing Rock, Anaheim, St. Louis, or, taking a global perspective, Clichy-sous-Bois, Exarchia, Tottenham, Cairo, Athens, Paris, Beirut, Santiago, to the ongoing riots and uprisings that spread from Minneapolis. African-American labor history is instructive here, as Clover is well aware: "[u]neven deindustrialization first displaces black workers into informal economies and market struggles, people who now confront extreme policing, hyperincarceration, and the lived experience of being surplus to the needs of the economy" (Clover 2016c). The shifting yet inextricable social realities of dispossession, racialization, and repression remain constant features of capitalist crisis. Since the "surplus population" is bound to grow, or so Clover argues based upon Marx's "absolute law of accumulation" (Marx 1990, Chapter 25) and a Fanonian notion of neocolonial modernity, i.e. "a capitalism compelled to act as colonial" (Clover 2018a, 44), as fewer workers are absorbed into capital and state repression replaces the discipline of the wage relation, "surplus rebellions" (2016a, 27, 153) will of necessity take center stage in any future revolutionary struggles.

In other words, the age of riots has returned due to fundamental shifts in the structure of capitalism and the global crisis tendency of capital understood as a "moving contradiction" (Marx 1993, 91). Like other Marxist theorists of crisis, Clover insists that

if capitalist social relations must be theorized as a complex, contradictory totality, then the contradictions at a simpler, more abstract level must be grasped as determinate moments of it. *This is not to be confused with class reductionism.* Labor's changing relations to accumulation and the surplus population's relation to state violence have radically altered the terrain of struggle within and against capital. Rather than prescribing traditional or more legitimate forms of labor struggle, Clover's analysis keeps track of such fundamental shifts and reminds us that "people will struggle where they are" (Clover 2016a, 144)—be it on the factory floor or on the street, at airports or coalmines, in schools or prisons. In his new afterword, Clover looks ahead to the coming era of "climate riots" and offers a communist analysis of the resistance against the Trump administration as well as the struggles of the *Gilets Jaunes*, primarily understood as proletarian struggles waged in the "sphere of circulation" (Marx 1990, Chapter 3) rather than production:

This dystopia is already here. The exigencies of declining living standards and life chances, the *Gilets Jaunes*' end-of-the-month desperation entangled already with Macron's ecological claim, disclose this sequence as the early history of climate riots: uprisings which, whatever their declared theme, are conditioned by threat of climate collapse and grim panic over population control. What is already apparent, and will no doubt become more so is the state's willingness to seize this situation on behalf of capital and of its own consolidation of power, a Green Nationalism which leverages climate management regimes toward hard borders, xenophobic violence, differential citizenship, protectionist labor pacts, further intensifications of militarization and surveillance. Arguably most disturbing for those historically identified with the left is the inclination

of left parties across Europe and beyond to follow this shift [...]. This political collapse discloses other axes that superpose themselves to that of right/left; in both the labor market and the sovereign nation, the axis of inclusion/exclusion will structure social conditions in the first instance. Against this, against the varied impositions of immiseration, climate riots and their cousins are likely to ascend in significance, riven by contradiction and driven by immediate requirements for survival.

Thoroughfare, public square, pipeline, railway, dockside, airport, border, these will be our places (Clover 2019).

Before digging deeper into Clover's discussion of the "surplus population" and the possible relationship between circulation struggles and current political mobilization against the Trump administration, from the protests against Trump's inauguration and the airport occupations in protest of the Muslim travel ban to the blockades of ICE facilities and detention centers, we should first discuss Clover's theoretical model as well as his views on revolutionary political practice. Can we talk of strikes becoming relatively insignificant vis-à-vis riots when it was striking air traffic controllers who ended the recent government shutdown, or record numbers of teachers on strike throughout the United States? If the present form of riot, conditioned by historical changes in capital's regime of accumulation since the 1970s and especially since 2008, is a circulation struggle that potentially opens onto the commune form of social reproduction as its emancipatory horizon, can we also identify present forms of strike that extend beyond the sphere of production?

Perhaps we should first address the role of the state: Since the capitalist state is at once both the precondition for and result of

the neoliberal regime of capital accumulation, the present crisis of capitalism also expresses itself as a crisis of the state that is characterized by debt, austerity, and repression, as “police are concentrated in areas emptied of capital” (Surplus Club 2017). In other words, the state is no longer able to “purchase the social peace” (Clover 2016a, 165). State administration of the surplus proletariat corresponds to a globalized geographical zoning of labor forces expected to take on mounting importance in accordance with massive immigration and refugee flows (think ICE or Frontex). In the United States, the carceral state functions as a spatial fix to capitalist crisis as it provides the means for managing racialized surplus populations, “fixing” the surplus absorption problem (see Chen 2013; Gilmore 2007; Wang 2018). It is thus a mistake to even try to disentangle race and class relations today, as Clover is well aware. Rather, the process of racialization is itself intimately entangled with the production of surplus populations, each functioning to constitute the other according to varying logics of profound exclusion:

The rise of the anti-black US carceral state from the 1970s onward exemplifies rituals of state and civilian violence which enforce the racialization of wageless life, and the racial ascription of wagelessness. From the point of view of capital, “race” is renewed not only through persistent racialised wage differentials, or the kind of occupational segregation posited by earlier ‘split labour market’ theories of race, but through the racialization of unwaged surplus or superfluous populations from Khartoum to the slums of Cairo (Chen 2013, 217; quoted in Clover 2016a, 27).

According to Marx, the extended reproduction and accumulation

of capital, including automation and the shift from formal to real subsumption, ultimately produces a *growing* “surplus population,” and it is in this sense that “accumulation of capital is therefore multiplication of the proletariat” (Marx 1990, 764). Rather than absorbing more and more labor, capital increasingly ejects workers from the immediate process of production into the sphere of circulation. Clover has termed this dialectical process “the production of nonproduction” (Clover 2016a, 26), which emphasizes that the twin phenomena of exploitation and exclusion are not simply opposed to each other, but are both mediated by the historical dynamic of capitalist accumulation. The problem, of course, as Michael Denning aptly quipped, is that “[u]nder capitalism, the only thing worse than being exploited is not being exploited” (2010, 79). While capital may no longer need these workers, “they still need to work [and are often] forced to offer themselves up for the most abject forms of wage slavery in informal and illegal markets alongside failures of capitalist production” (Endnotes 2010; quoted in Clover 2016a).

Subject to police repression and excluded from the wage relation, they are “the exemplary subjects of a global recomposition of class since the 1960s within which the riot of surplus populations is not a likelihood but a certainty” (Clover 2016c). Since the turn of the century, the hyperghettoized global *banlieues* have seen a resurgence of a new kind of riot, often structured by racialized antagonism and triggered by habitual police killings of black youth. Such “surplus rebellions” generally occur in spaces of circulation rather than production, where the most oppressed and immiserated groups increasingly find themselves. Positing a “deep relation of riot and crisis,” Clover thus conceptualizes the

contemporary riot as follows: “crisis signals a shift of capital’s center of gravity into circulation, both theoretically and practically, and *riot is in the last instance to be understood as a circulation struggle* [...]” (Clover 2016a, 129). More and more people are market dependent without the forlorn opportunity to become wage dependent. They too are thus cast into circulation. For Clover, the recent waves of struggle from Oakland to Ferguson and Baltimore thus reveal the riot of racialized surplus populations to be “the other of incarceration” (Clover 2016a, 163). For if the neoliberal state’s solution to the problem of crisis and surplus is austerity and carceral management, “the riot is a contest entered directly against this solution—a counterproposal of unmanageability” (Clover 2016a, 163). This is certainly true in the sense that racialized surplus proletarians literally have nowhere to go and nowhere to hide: “[t]he police now stand *in the place of* the economy, the violence of the commodity made flesh” (Clover 2016a, 125).

We have thus addressed the intersectionality of race and class—or rather the interaction of racialization and surplus-proletarianization—in relation to the riot as a form of circulation struggle. What about the material conditions of possibility for new forms of solidarity and struggle to emerge? What are the implications of Clover’s theoretical model and historical periodization for American studies more broadly? More urgently, then, what is the role of Trumpism vis-à-vis the “end of absorption” (Clover 2018b)? What are we to make of the growth of far-right militias in the American hinterland in relation to riots, resistance, and revolutionary possibilities?

Marlon Lieber

Thank you so much for this succinct summary of Clover’s argument,

Dennis. Even though we have discussed his book and related issues numerous times, it might be good to put our thoughts down in writing (and while we are at it, we should give a shout out to Hendrik Burfeind who has often participated in our discussions and certainly enriched them). You raise some pertinent questions about this timely book, and I hope we will get to address some of them in more detail. For now, I would like to offer some general remarks on the book, awaiting your response to see which thread you will pick up. First of all, I think it is useful that Clover squarely rejects the tendency so pervasive among members of the left to condemn rioting, particularly the practice of directly appropriating goods “*sub specie use value*” (Marx 1991, 157). And it is not just social democrats or left liberals, who are horrified by the specter of looting; influential Marxists like David Harvey (2011) called the participants of the 2011 London riots “mindless.” While it is certainly understandable to have reservations about the riot as a tactic, it does not seem useful to me to simply reject it because it is not identical with a form of practice that one has determined in advance to be the “correct” one. This is what I take to be very valuable about Clover’s book: the attempt to genuinely understand the “restructuring” (Théorie Communiste 2017 [1997]) of post-1973 capitalism to elucidate the “repertoire of collective actions” (Tilly 1977, quoted in Clover 2016a, 39) available in the present. Of course, he might be wrong about either the nature of the transformation or the practical consequences that follow (or both), but in any case, I believe that it is valuable to work through the arguments presented in his book even if you end up rejecting all of them (which I do not).

And the story he tells very often feels intuitively persuasive. One of the reasons for this is that Clover is a great writer. I do not say this along the lines of “oh, he’s a poet, you know....” No, it is

not just that he can craft elegant sentences and comes up with many catchy phrases and quips—some of which you have already quoted—but the entire narrative of a progression from riot to strike to “riot prime,” during which capital and proletarian activity move from circulation to production and back to circulation, is very elegantly constructed. Much of this has to do, I think, with his way of organizing his argument around apparently antithetical pairs such as riot and strike or circulation and production, which effectively emphasizes shifts from determinate moments in the history of capital accumulation to other related yet different ones.

Having expressed my appreciation of Clover’s book, I should say that the elegance and economy of his account risk losing sight of phenomena that cannot be easily integrated into his narrative, though at times I have found Clover’s elaborations on his thesis in subsequent articles and interviews (see, for instance, Büscher-Ulbrich and Lieber forthcoming) to be more nuanced than the book itself. To be fair, he is well aware of this, writing that “the whole will necessarily be a simplification of reality’s endless complexities; such are heuristic models” (2016a, 8). As such, it should not be read as a conclusive history of capital and labor from, say, 1740 onward, but rather as an intervention into discussions about revolutionary strategy and tactics today. I think Alberto Toscano (2016) has a point, however, when he asks why it should be necessary to look for a “singular figure” that now embodies all revolutionary hopes—though, to be sure, *la recherche du sujet révolutionnaire perdu* has a long tradition. Perhaps it is true that the workers’ movement in the form it took from the late nineteenth century onward is no longer the primary “*fighting form*” the proletariat assumes (Endnotes 2015, 75; original emphasis), but this does not have to mean that its strategies and tactics, including the strike, have become obsolete.

To be sure, that is not quite what Clover says, but perhaps we should talk about a possible evasion of the realm of production as an arena in which to act that comes with the focus on “circulation struggles”—including in a possible commune, which, according to Clover, “emerges [...] as a tactic of social reproduction” (2016a, 191).

In fact, we might also ask whether the definitions of riot and strike, respectively, are entirely satisfactory. A case in point: you have mentioned the strike of air traffic controllers that ended the long government shutdown in early 2019. This does not quite correspond to Clover’s account of the strike as a form of struggle taking place in the realm of capitalist production organized around a demand for higher wages; in fact, it is more like the “blocking of traffic, the interruption of circulation as an immediate and concrete project,” which is how Clover characterizes the highway blockades that followed Michael Brown’s murder at the hands of the police (2016a, 182). A strike, then, can be a riot; or, better yet, we could ask whether the more useful distinction is not the one between “production struggles” and “circulation struggles,” with strikes and riots potentially appearing on either side of this categorical divide. Yet, we should also acknowledge Kim Moody’s reminder that Clover’s account relies on a somewhat literalist understanding of circulation that seems to “conflate the spatial movement of materials and commodities” with the realm of circulation (2018). Still, material blockades, despite not necessarily permanently interrupting the “circulation of money as capital” (Marx 1990, 253), can be very effective; think of what Clover has more recently begun to call “climate riots” (2019). Indeed, the German group *Ende Gelände*, which regularly attempts to shut down coal mines, thus interrupting, among other things, the transport of coal to power plants, is a good example. Moreover, why should “climate

riots” not emphatically intervene in the realm of production by, say, strategically disassembling the industrial infrastructure reliant on fossil fuels? This certainly sounds more promising than a tax on carbon dioxide emissions or perhaps even a “Green New Deal.” Do I sound like a Luddite? Perhaps, but what choice do we have? “Fully Automated Luxury Communism” (Bastani 2019)? I do not think so.

Dennis Büscher-Ulbrich

Great, Marlon, many thanks for raising a number of crucial points and opening up further avenues for inquiry. Shout-out to colleagues and comrades here and elsewhere, indeed. Let me first pick up on the practice of looting and Clover’s defense thereof—which, I guess, is really anathema to liberals and social democrats and also frowned upon by many Marxists. Clover is right, of course, to point out that looting has always been part and parcel of rioting, historically speaking. Whether in the context of so-called “bread riots” and “export riots” in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, where rioters would gather in markets and ports to seize or destroy the goods that had become too expensive for people to buy and thus survive on—a form of collective price-setting, if you will. Or in the context of today’s circulation struggles, in which rioters smash windows and loot stores, whether to seize goods or to practically critique private property and the commodity form, so to speak. In Italy during the late 1960s and 1970s, members of the radical left *Autonomia* casually referred to organized looting and shoplifting as “proletarian shopping” (Edwards 2009, 61; cf. *Aufheben* 2003), and wild-cat strikes were every bit as violent as riots, which holds true for many strikes throughout the nineteenth century as well. Perhaps there are strong strategic arguments to be made against looting outside of moralizing and

reformist denunciations of militant forms of struggle, given the dominant media representations and public perception of looting and rioting bodies? But that is a different question. What ultimately is, or can be, at stake in looting and collective acts of property destruction is breaking the index between one's labor input and one's access to necessities. For Clover, therefore,

looting is not the moment of falsehood but of truth echoing across centuries of riot: a version of price-setting in the marketplace, albeit at price zero. It is a desperate turn to the question of reproduction, though one dramatically limited by the structure of capital within which it initially operates (Clover 2016a, 29).

In the wake of the Minneapolis riots and country-wide insurgency more and more people have embraced looting as a militant tactic. Activist-scholars such as Aren Aizura and Vicky Osterweil have offered engaged historical materialist accounts “in defense of looting” (see Aizura 2020 and Osterweil 2020).

To briefly answer your question regarding the aptness of Clover's definitions of strike and riot respectively: I agree, they are not entirely satisfactory. But they are very precise, which is one of the main advantages. So, for Clover, the strike is the form of collective action that: “a) struggles to set the price of labor power [...] [including the conditions of labor]; b) features workers appearing in their role as workers; c) unfolds in the context of capitalist production, featuring its interruption at the source [...]” (2016a, 16). Now, the riot, on the other hand, is the form of collective action that “a) struggles to set the price of market goods (or their availability [...]); b) features participants with no necessary kinship

but their dispossession; c) unfolds in the context of consumption, featuring the interruption of commercial circulation” (16). This does not yet say anything about the intransigent social centrality of either, but I will get to that while dealing with Moody’s critique of the book below. The broader categories of “circulation struggles” and “production struggles,” of which riot and strike are ideal types, I find very useful and conceptually sound. That said, I also agree with Clover’s characterization of strikes as “temporal struggles” over conditions of production and riots as “spatial struggles” in capital’s built landscape or infrastructure of circulation. So, either I have become an uncritical fanboy at this point, or most critics operate with different and often less specific conceptual notions of strike and riot respectively. Take for example the striking Amazon warehouse workers (see Dangerfield 2018)—if we use Clover’s conceptual apparatus, these so-called “strikes” can be understood as “circulation struggles” rather than “production struggles,” of course, because an Amazon warehouse is not a factory floor where goods are produced but rather a logistics node for the circulation of commodities, which still need to be bought and delivered for their value to be realized.

You already pointed out that Clover’s work is strongly influenced by *Théorie Communiste* and *Endnotes*. This is also where Kim Moody’s critique of Clover’s “literalist understanding of circulation” and underestimation of the strike comes into play, as you mentioned before (2018). To be fair, Clover *does* emphasize capital’s “built landscape of circulation.” But why not? This seems less problematic to me than the opposite danger of “de-materializing” circulation. Conceptually, I would argue, Clover does keep track of the fact that production and circulation are not simply discreet spatial realms but interdependent and intersecting

“spheres” and insists with Marx that circulation is “a condition for the production process” (Clover 2016a, 141). Regardless, Moody essentially charges Clover with being a “circulationist” (2018). Together with Alberto Toscano, Moody also questions Clover’s “splicing of Robert Brenner, Giovanni Arrighi, and value-theoretical accounts of crisis to provide the logical and historical armature of the overall account” (Toscano 2016; quoted in Moody 2018), which is exactly what I find most helpful and convincing in Clover, next to his understanding of racialization. Although I do believe that Moody is somewhat correct to call into question Clover’s bracketing or sidelining of much of the private service sector (except FIRE) and the entire public sector, or what remained of it under neoliberalism.

But let us consider the following excerpt from Moody:

What has risen most for decades is not circulation in the limited sense of finance, as Clover emphasizes, but the many private-sector ‘services’ that capital has increasingly captured, of which FIRE (finance/insurance/real estate) accounts for about a third in value added. The other services representing two-thirds of value added, and over 90 percent of private-sector service employees—such as health care, food service, transportation, communications, travel, accommodations, entertainment, waste management, utilities, etc.—scarcely exist in Clover’s account of a hollowed-out capitalism bifurcated between goods production and finance (2018).

Clearly there is some truth in this regarding the rise of the service sector. But it is simply not true that Clover’s is a model of “a hollowed-out capitalism bifurcated between goods production

and finance.” In fact, Clover puts very little stress on finance as such and instead focuses very much on (finance-fueled) global logistics, without relying on a narrowly “circulationist” argument:

[W]e are not claiming that struggles in circulation have privileged relation to value production. In the shift that follows crisis, capital, unable to generate adequate surplus value or growth through conventional manufacturing production, is compelled into the space of circulation to compete for profits there, by decreasing its costs and increasing turnover time for an ever greater volume of commodities. Struggles in this space are thus central to each given capital’s ongoing existence (Clover 2016a, 141).

Clover thus affirms the proposition “that the current phase in our cycle of accumulation is defined by the collapse of value production at the core of the world-system; it is for this reason that capital’s center of gravity shifts toward circulation, borne by the troika of Toyotaization, information technology, and finance” (Clover 2016a, 23).

This systemic reorganization (aka “globalization”), as noted by Clover’s fellow theorist Jasper Bernes, “indexes the subordination of production to the conditions of circulation, the becoming-hegemonic of those aspects of the production process that involve circulation” (Bernes 2013, 185). Both Clover and Bernes rightfully insist that there are implications in this development for contemporary struggles. For if logistics is “capital’s art of war, a series of techniques for intercapitalist and interstate competition” (185), it will require a counterart that adapts itself to this transformed terrain and “recognizes logistics space as peculiarly structured

by capital's needs, the sort of machinery that the proletariat may not simply lay hold of and wield for its own purposes" (Clover 2016a, 142). Seizing industrial production without radically transforming it, moreover, would inevitably worsen the global crisis.

Let me briefly return to the representation of rioting bodies and the question of the political subjectivity of the dispossessed and excluded—*la part des sans-part* as Jacques Rancière would say (Rancière 1999). Rioting bodies, and racialized bodies at that, are (seen as) abject; their speech is generally heard as noise. "To riot," as Clover puts it, "is to fail the measure of the human. To fail to be the subject" (Clover 2016a, 166). If the contemporary riot increasingly "transpires within a logic of racialization and takes the state rather than the economy as its direct antagonist" (2016a, 11), this is because today "the state is near and the economy far" in the sense that "production is aerosolized; commodities are assembled and delivered across global logistics chains [...], while the standing domestic army of the state is always at hand—progressively militarized, on the pretext of making war on drugs and terror" (2016a, 29). The contemporary riot thus cannot help but antagonize the state in the form of the police. Now, this does not automatically mean that the riot is an emancipatory force, of course, but it is a *practical* rather than symbolic protest that can win certain practical goals. Just remember the Macron government's raising of the minimum wage in France to appease the Gilets Jaunes in October 2018. People who oppose all forms of violence—including property destruction and the "divine violence" (Benjamin 1996, 249) of insurrection—often defend strikes, forgetting that strikes are historically every bit as violent as riots. They forget how many people died in mass strikes to achieve practical goals such as a shorter working day, affordable housing, protections, and the like.

People often say, “Riots aren’t revolutions!” Clover knows this, of course, and never claims that the riot as such is revolutionary: “The vast majority of riots never become revolutionary. On the other hand, show me the revolution that started without a riot” (Clover 2018b).

Despite all difficulties and the immense risks that accompany the riot and related forms of circulation struggle, it can be a form of proletarian self-emancipation. This can hardly be said of social democratic inter-classism, left-populist electoralism, and reformist trade-unionism. As Benjamin reminds us in “On the Concept of History”:

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘emergency situation’ in which we live is the rule. We must arrive at a concept of history which corresponds to this. Then it will become clear that the task before us is the introduction of a real state of emergency; and our position in the struggle against Fascism will thereby improve (2003a, 392).

To introduce “a real [communist] state of emergency,” then, which can only be brought about by what Marx and Engels called “the real movement which abolishes [aufhebt] the present state of things” (1978, 162), proletarians would have to resist both the siren songs of right-wing strongmen such as Trump and the dominant neoliberal (“post-political”) mode of ideological interpellation that Rancière has re-conceptualized as a kind of non-interpellation: “Move along! There’s nothing to see here!” (Rancière 2010, 37). This encapsulates the ultimate “consensual” rationale of what Rancière aptly if polemically calls “police” distribution:

Politics is generally seen as the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the orga-

nization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution. [...] I propose to call it the police (Rancière 1999, 28).

For Rancière, politics proper thus always takes the form of a radical rupture. However, if we are to avoid lapsing into idealism, on the one hand, and vulgar materialism, on the other, this needs to be related to the sphere of circulation (of bodies and commodities) and the logic and compulsions of state and capital on a global scale. Thankfully, Clover never loses sight of this:

On the one hand, more and more of capital's churn depends on the global scope and velocity of circulation; on the other, more and more people are market dependent without the forlorn opportunity to become wage dependent. They too are cast into circulation (2017).

Marlon Lieber

Many thanks, Dennis, for specifying what Clover means by riot and strike, respectively. Yes, Clover's definitions of riot and strike are precise, as you put it, but perhaps only when we consider them as Weberian ideal types rather than as descriptions of actual events. That is, they are useful as heuristic models that allow us to make sense of an ongoing historical shift and can serve as the basis for making claims about, say, the form the "real movement" can take today. But while the precise distinction between strike and riot makes sense, we also encounter practices that do not quite belong to either category. To be fair, Clover himself finds those "hybrid" struggles to be interesting as his comments on the mass picket suggest. However, he is critical of struggles that "remain[] on the

side of the strike” and focus on the “individual enterprise as the locus of struggle” (Clover 2016b; original emphasis), and not without reason. Labor struggles about issues pertaining to the “conditions of labor” can be subject to what he calls the “affirmation trap” that forces labor to “affirm[] its own exploitation” (Clover 2016a, 147). In other words, when workers demand higher wages or better working conditions, they do not exactly challenge the capitalist mode of production, but rather fight to improve their position relative to capital. Which is, needless to say, entirely understandable from the perspective of the worker dependent on a wage to survive.

If we think of the example of the striking miners in Harlan County, Kentucky, who began to block train tracks used to transport coal in July 2019 (see Hassan 2019), there is, however, yet another dimension to the “affirmation trap”: if the miners, hypothetically, were to be paid again and the coal trains continued to deliver coal, the result would be, among other things, the burning of more coal and, thus, increased carbon emissions. The workers would therefore not only affirm their exploitation, but also the ongoing ecological catastrophe. Drawing on Walter Benjamin’s demand for revolutionaries “to activate the emergency break” (2003b, 402) in order to stop the accumulation of catastrophe that is history, Benjamin Noys suggests an “interruptive politics”—that is, a kind of circulation struggle (in the sense of materially interrupting circulation) that attempts to “prevent catastrophe” and is perhaps precisely what is needed (2014, 90 and 92). Andreas Malm, too, concludes his seminal *Fossil Capital* by quoting the same Benjaminian lines and dreams of “some global edition of the Plug Plot Riots,” which refers to the pulling of the plugs out of steam engines that workers engaged in in the 1840s (2016, 226 and 394).

Yet, we cannot just make it all stop, can we? That is, “[e]very child knows,” as Marx put it in a famous letter to Kugelman, “that any nation that stopped working, not for a year, but let us say, just for a few weeks, would perish” (Marx 1988, 68), which is why the question of organizing social production poses itself by necessity. But perhaps dodging the question of (communist) production and putting their confidence entirely in the ability of people to spontaneously take care of their needs in the absence of the social forms that mediate human activity under capitalism is one of the weak spots of communization theory, as has been noted by the Friends of the Classless Society (2016), who elsewhere remark that

[t]he commune shouldn’t be conceived as something that will put an end to all of humanity’s problems. On the contrary, only after the relations of production have been revolutionized will everything that is today “solved” by blind mediation, domination, and force even begin to appear as a problem requiring a solution. (2020)

It should be acknowledged, however, that within the communizing current there are notable exceptions (Bernes 2018).

Let me offer some thoughts on the relationship between riot and communism by way of a detour through contemporary cultural production. You and I have both written about the figure of the zombie (Büscher-Ulbrich 2018; Lieber 2021). Clover’s book provides a useful framework to periodize transformations in the representation of the living dead. It should not be too controversial to suggest that George A. Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) created the contemporary zombie—the “world-historical year 1973” that signified the end of

the postwar boom and the beginning of the “Long Crisis” (Clover 2016a, 9) is, thus, conveniently wedged exactly between the two. What distinguished Romero’s zombies from their ancestors is, of course, that the latter used to be workers while the post-1968 zombie is not. Instead, it is introduced as a consumer. To David McNally this shift signifies a loss of the zombies’ critical potential. They have become, he writes, mere “mindless consumers” (McNally 2012, 213). To wit, the choice of words echoes David Harvey’s rejection of “mindless rioters” (2011). With Clover, however, we can make better sense of the transformation. First of all, the notion of consumption would need to be rethought. Critics of consumerism tend to use the term “consumption” to designate the act of buying commodities. But this should more properly be called exchange, as in the exchange of money and commodity. Consumption is better understood as the “individual appropriation” of products—say, food—through whose use “the human being produces his [sic] own body” (Marx 1993, 89 and 90). What zombies do, then, is pure consumption: they appropriate the objects they need to reproduce their (undead) bodies. The scandal represented by the zombie, therefore, is primarily a political-economic one: they consume without engaging in acts of monetarily-mediated exchange first—they do not pay before taking a bite. In this respect, the zombies’ consumptive behavior seems to be an allegory for the practice of looting, which, as you pointed out, is characterized by Clover as a “desperate” attempt to access necessities without being able to pay for them (2016a, 29). And, similarly, the structural necessity to destroy the monsters to rescue “narrative as such” from the threat this “antinarrative mass” poses (Swanson 2014, 386 and 385) runs parallel to the necessary suppression of looting by those “active servant[s] of the commodity” who ensure “that a given product of human labor

remains a commodity” that needs to be purchased before it can be used (Debord 2006 [1965], 197). And, with Clover, it is easy to see why this zombie made its appearance in the late 1960s. If the Long Crisis produces “nonproduction” (Clover 2016a, 26), that is, a stagnant surplus population of proletarians excluded from the sphere of wage labor, the problem of “consumption without direct access to the wage” (Clover 2016a, 28) poses itself with a vengeance.

What if we did not just treat zombies as a representation or reflection of the historical shift described in Clover but tried to see what the form of the zombie narrative can tell us about the revolutionary horizon outlined in *Riot. Strike. Riot?* Narratives that position the viewer or reader in such a way that they root for the destruction of the zombies are usually reactionary, either in the form of a “paranoiac right-wing fantas[y] of civil unrest, vigilante justice, and impending race war,” as you have put it (Büscher-Ulbrich 2018, 387) or as a naïve liberal fantasy relying on global institutions’ ability to solve the global crisis under American leadership (plus the Christ-like sacrifice and rebirth of Brad Pitt) as in *World War Z*. So, we cannot want the zombies to lose, but what would it mean for zombies to win? We cannot know, which is why the most interesting zombie tales—Romero’s and Colson Whitehead’s, for instance—cannot provide meaningful narrative closure. We can imagine a “total disorder,” as Clover calls it with Fanon (2004 [1961], quoted in Clover 2018a), that ultimately destroys the world as we know it. But what is to follow is harder to imagine. My point is not exactly that it is the responsibility of Clover to sketch a detailed vision of communism. Instead, I believe that both his book and zombie narratives are symptoms of a situation where it is fairly easy to see that capitalism needs to give way to something we might want to call communism,

but pretty difficult to imagine how to get there from here.

This is why it seems to me that Jameson's line that "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism" (Jameson 2003, 76) is flawed for framing it as an either/or-question. It is not. The end of the world would, barring the colonization of other planets where capitalist social relations could be recreated, at the same time be the end of capitalism (no more humans left to exploit). Instead, the issue is that the end of capitalism is exclusively imagined as the end of the world. What is missing is an idea of what a "happy" ending could look like; that is, a revolutionary overcoming of capitalism and the establishment of communist relations. So much contemporary cultural production is obsessed with thinking of ways in which this world—and, hence, capitalism—will come to an end. It is much harder to conceive that the end of this world would be the beginning of a better one. For all I know, Clover might have a point in suggesting that the crisis of capitalism is terminal. And so we stand before the question of organizing the apocalypse, as someone puts it in André Malraux's *Man's Hope*. Not the least, and I know that this is something that you are concerned with in your work, because there is the danger of riots expressing an emphatically anti-emancipatory content.

Dennis Büscher-Ulbrich

I basically agree with you and Friends of the Classless Society that dodging the question of production is a weakness of communization theory. But I also sympathize with it. Let me try to explain why.

If the commune, according to Clover, "emerges [...] as a tactic of social reproduction" (2016a, 191) and ultimately presents

“the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labour” (Marx and Engels 1986 [1871], 334), the commune would have to generalize itself to such an extent that the capitalist mode of production can be superseded and its relations of production cease to exist. Clearly, this is difficult to even imagine. Marx infamously antagonized all enemies of the Paris Commune though, including socialists:

Yes, gentlemen, the Commune [...] wanted to make individual property a truth by transforming the means of production, land, and capital, now chiefly the means of enslaving and exploiting labour, into mere instruments of free and associated labour. But this is communism, “impossible” communism! (Marx and Engels 1986 [1871], 335).

The simple fact that communization—or any other form of self-emancipation—cannot but appear impossible vis-à-vis the given order, that it necessarily comes in the form of a “dissensual rupture” (Rancière 1999) or “real state of emergency” (Benjamin 2003a) can hardly be overemphasized. It is a collective rather than individual “pulling oneself up by their bootstraps,” which as every good liberal knows is but a *Münchhausenlied*. Self-emancipation seems impossible because, well, collective action and practical solidarity are habitually disavowed. But proletarians and other *sans part* have to pull each other up by their bootstraps, or swim along and drown. Undoubtedly, if one identifies proletarian with factory worker or manual laborer, or with the poor, in general, one misses what is radical in the proletarian condition:

The proletariat is the negation of this society. It is not the collection of the poor, but of those who are “without reserves,”

who are nothing, have nothing to lose but their chains, and cannot liberate themselves without destroying the whole social order (Dauvé 2015, 47).

Je suis zombie, nous sommes zombie! But here is the rub: the militant affirmation, which I think is correct, of the emancipatory potential of the commune form does not automatically render questions of strategy null and void. In other words, another weakness of communization theory may be that it dodges the question of counter-revolution. The fact that the Paris Commune was ultimately defeated militarily by the state was one of the main factors that gave rise to the concept of “dual power” as developed by Lenin, who also praised the commune. Building “dual power” is not to be confused with seizing state power or immediately erecting a Leninist party state. I do not think Clover would agree with Fredric Jameson on the prospect of *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army* (2016) but I really wonder if he would agree with council communist Noel Ignatiev’s notion of “dual power” in a recent interview for *Hard Crackers*:

No revolution has ever taken place without passing through a phase of dual power; people overturn an existing society and create a new one only when the new society has appeared in tangible form— workers’ councils, liberated zones, etc. The task of revolutionaries is not to wait until these new forms are fully matured before transferring their loyalty to them but to recognize them in their embryonic stages, elaborate them, link them together, pose them against existing patterns and help those who invented them become conscious of their implications. That is what I mean by a strategy of dual power. (Ignatiev 2018).

Lenin's inescapable question does not necessarily require a Leninist answer. Regarding the so-called "affirmation trap" I may only find myself in partial agreement with Clover. Trade-unionist consciousness is not the same as class consciousness, of course, and production struggles that merely aim to improve the conditions of labor are obviously reformist in character and appear fundamentally flawed in the face of global capital's (terminal?) crisis. But we should be cautious not to prematurely reject the strike as an efficient form of social struggle. Dauvé, for instance, insists that fighting

for higher wages or shorter working hours is no obstacle on the road to revolution. [...] Reform is anti- communist when it binds together labour and capital. The criterion does not lie in numbers or fighting methods, but only in the historical function of the reform. A local strike [...] for a 50 centime per hour rise can help the strikers get together and realise what they are and could do. On the contrary, when sit-downs involving millions of strikers, as in Europe and the US in the 1930s, reinforced the integration of labour into capital, via mass support for the New Deal [...], these strikes ended up being negative factors from the point of view of proletarian emancipation (Dauvé and Nestic 2007).

Let me return to the question of zombies and our post-apocalyptic cultural imaginary and use this as a segue to the problem of the new right and far-right militias in the American hinterland. Both of us have argued elsewhere that zombie spectacles since the 1970s can and should be read as symptomatic allegories that articulate elements of displaced class struggle. Zombie riots, of course, generally promise "no future for nobody" except small bands of survivors in a Hobbesian state of nature/war. This, however, would

be to ignore the undead zombie horde's capacity to allegorize the condition of racialized superfluity, the abjection of "wageless life" (Denning 2010), the return of the riot to the repertoire of social struggle, and right-wing fantasies of all-out race war. Nobody wants to be a zombie, not even the zombies. For to be superfluous to the needs of capital and permanently excluded from exploitation means to be abject and, increasingly, to be subject to state violence and premature death. A symptomatic materialist reading of the zombie riot or apocalypse would thus "reveal" the human survivors as exploited wage laborers threatened by superfluity and pitted against the excluded in a reactionary basic constellation. This would be to extend rather than reject critical readings of the zombie metaphor as a product of colonial slavery—a metaphor that still speaks to the gendered and racialized global divisions of forced labor and rising debt ("rising dead") that continue to haunt neocolonial modernity. Clover's insights are crucial here and quite illuminating in regard to understanding the role of Trumpism in managing the end of absorption in the Fall (or is it Winter already?) of capital:

What happens when you don't have an absorptive capitalist economy anymore? You shut borders. The management of labor circulation is an obvious response to the end of absorption. We're shifting away from a liberal democratic model [...] toward a more colonial mode, which is defined by the fact that you're never going to absorb these colonial subjects into the economy. They're always going to be managed by force, by the army or the police. [...]. Trump is the great expression of this. His job is to manage the end of absorption. That's one way to think about the drama of what he represents without getting too invested in him as a causal factor (Clover 2018b).

At a time when the most precarious and stigmatized sections of the working class, including those rendered surplus by “the production of non-production” (Clover 2016a, 26) are put at an ever greater risk of falling victim to state and/or vigilante violence as a consequence of racism and “wageless life” (Denning 2010, 79), the New Right is pitting exploited and precarious wage laborers defined in nativist terms against dispossessed and racialized surplus proletarians without remorse. *Such is the state of the rat race.* While the path of global class restructuring that neoliberal capital has taken since the 1970s has been one of intensified differentiation and inequality, the much greater inequality is between plutocratic capital and both wage laborers and surplus proletarians. What gets lost in both the liberal and democratic-socialist framing of the problem is the question of political subjectivity of the dispossessed and what it means to grasp categories of social critique as simultaneously abstract and concrete: the ability to critique discussions already “saturated by an excessive empiricism whereby categories of ‘discrimination,’ ‘exclusion’ and ‘expulsion’ [of labor] reductively obscure the antagonistic social processes constitutive of the capital-labor relation” (Surplus Club 2017). We need to call out and confront such blind spots if we are to fully grasp the significance of Trump’s political pandering to those who are indispensable for capital and those who prove themselves useful to its unrestricted rule—whether as state functionaries, corporate managers, or fascist goons on the streets of Charlottesville and elsewhere.

Phil Neel’s *Hinterland: America’s New Landscape of Class and Conflict* (2018), a recent book of communist geography, insists much like Clover that “the character of production sculpts the character of class” (144). In addition, however, it takes into account the ability of far-right militias in the hinterland to organize social reproduction

for some. Neel demonstrates that political support under conditions of combined and uneven crisis in the hinterland tends to follow “whomever can offer the greatest semblance of strength and stability” (2018, 80). Unlike Clover, he emphasizes that “traditional methods of transforming class antagonism into racial difference are beginning to reach a sort of saturation point, as unemployment, mortality, and morbidity rates all start to overspill their historically racial boundaries” (80). Shifting our attention away from urban centers, Neel shows that, as the Long Crisis continues, a) “the hinterland grows and peri-urban zones undergo the harshest forms of stratification,” b) “white poverty deepens alongside the influx of new migrants and the displacement of inner-city poverty into the suburbs,” and c) “the intricate ways in which exclusion from the wage forces proletarians into vicious, predatory behavior for survival also ensures that the expanding bulk of corrupt bureaucracy will cleave such neighborhoods into warring parties” (170-171).

In other words: capital’s Long Crisis since the 1970s has created and continues to create the conditions for “whitelash” and, if only to some extent, fascism. Liberalism offers no solution, and the new rents (in the Marxian sense) of the near hinterland begin to determine new political polarities with opposing poles of the near hinterland warring against each other. The far right, then, is currently based in the hinterland’s white exurbs, “finding in these neighborhoods a pragmatic border between the poverty of the far hinterland and the predatory flow of income drawn from the city and the near hinterland” (173). The liberal residents of the city proper, as Neel insists, are able to build political legitimacy by “disavowing these right-wing hubs while still depending on them for the security of the palace walls” (173). This, in turn, “reinforces the warrior mythology of the far right, which sees

itself as a form of bitter but necessary barbarity mobilized against the greater barbarity of the proletarian horde (of which they themselves are just one disavowed fragment)” (173).

Hinterland describes this as a geography of latent civil war—echoing Marx’s *The Eighteenth Brumaire*—and argues that any evolution of the riot in these conditions will be defined by how it manages these polarities. This is a mode of critique that is absent from Clover’s account, in which the far right simply does not figure. Yet much like Clover, Neel is adamant in defending the riot as a tactic, given that “the economy is the name for a hostage situation in which the vast majority of the population is made dependent on a small minority through implicit threat of violence” (Neel 2014). His concern is not that the riot could be appropriated by far right militias but that the left ignores the task of building power and organizing proletarians in the most crisis-ridden spaces and places in and outside of the United States thus playing into the hands of the far right:

Far-right solutions agents—[...] will tend in the final instance to fuse with the predatory party [Marx’s “Party of Order”] in this civil war, as is obvious in the case of groups such as Golden Dawn in Greece, bolstered by the votes and donations of police, civil servants, and nativist workers. Communist, or at least proto-communist, potentials will exhibit the opposite tendency, advocating and inclusive allegiance with the abject, including poor whites, and the absolute rejection of any ‘community’ that denies such universalism (Neel 2018, 173).

Neel agrees with Clover that the evolution of the riot is a process of building power within the interstices opened by the Long Crisis. But he remains fundamentally agnostic with regard to the riot’s or any other

tactic's or strategy's revolutionary potential—perhaps also because as a materialist geographer he is keenly aware of the quasi-apocalyptic dimension of capital's climate crisis. *Hinterland* thus concludes:

The fact is that the approaching flood has no name. Any title it might take is presently lost in the noise of its gestation, maybe just beginning to be spoken in a language that we can hardly recognize. There will be no Commune because this isn't Paris in 1871. There will be no Dual Power because this isn't Russia in 1917. There will be no Autonomy because this isn't Italy in 1977. I'm writing this in 2017, and I don't know what's coming, even though I know something is rolling toward us in the darkness, and the world can end in more ways than one. Its presence is hinted at somewhere deep inside the evolutionary meat grinder of riot repeating riot, all echoing ad infinitum through the Year of our Lord 2016, when the anthem returned to its origin, and the corpse flowers bloomed all at once as Louisiana was turned to water, and no one knew why. I don't call people comrade; I just call them friend. Because whatever's coming has no name, and anyone who says they hear it is a liar. All I hear are guns cocking over trap snares unrolling to infinity (175).

I sure hope that Neel is wrong and that the present wave of proletarian insurrection, militant climate action, labor organizing, and social reproduction struggles will create an opening. Given that the state already wages a war by other means on migrants and refugees (ICE, Frontex, etc.), however, the question remains: how can international proletarian solidarities be forged outside of shared experiences of exploitation and alienation, say, between racialized surplus proletarians, wage laborers, and indebted students? What are the

material conditions of possibility for new forms of struggle to emerge? Against capital, against the state. For survival, for emancipation. I still find Clover's analysis extremely helpful in this regard.

Marlon Lieber

I agree that Clover's book provides a useful lens to think through "the material conditions of possibility for new forms of solidarity and struggle." In a recent interview, Bini Adamczak argued that the revolutionary Left often does not seem to know "what it would mean to win" (2017, 104). The striking Kentucky miners, on the other hand, do. *In These Times* published an interview with one of them—and if that miner had not existed, Clover would have had to invent him, because he almost perfectly represents the strike as conceptualized in *Riot. Strike. Riot* (so much for my claim that Clover's concepts are mere ideal types). He claims that the miners demand to "get paid" before allowing the trains to move again. Confronted with the issue of a "just transition" that would include switching into a line of work less environmentally destructive, he expresses regret:

When you mine coal, it's a lifestyle. [...]. You've got such comradery and solidarity with the men you work with. [...]. It's a good workplace. It's muddy, it's dark, sometimes it's miserable. But it's an honest way to make your money (quoted in Lazare 2019).

So, it is a struggle about the "price of labor power" that is waged by workers who appear "as workers" and emphatically affirm their class position and the working-class identity that goes with it (Clover 2016a, 16; original emphasis). The interviewee, in other words, has fallen into the "affirmation trap," essentially calling for the exploitation of labor to continue under slightly more agreeable

conditions. But still, he and the other miners have a sense of what it would mean to win this particular, local struggle. And, at least, he basically invites climate activists to “get together” and discuss ways of providing a living to the miners in the case that the coal mines are shut down (quoted in Lazare 2019). Ideally, such a meeting might lead to the realization that their demands—essentially a decent life without poverty on a planet whose ecosystems are not entirely destroyed—cannot be provided under the conditions of capital accumulation. Thus, the local, “affirmative” struggle might, in theory, transform itself, once it encounters certain limits insurmountable on its own terms, into a more revolutionary one. Perhaps one could follow *Théorie Communiste* (2010 [2009]) in acknowledging that the riot itself is another limit to be overcome rather than the form that already transcends the limits of production struggles in the current conjuncture.

Parts of the Democratic Socialists of America used to have an idea of what winning would look like, too. For them it was about getting Bernie Sanders elected President of the United States in 2020. Then, a host of programs benefiting working-class people in particular could have been implemented (universal health care, free public colleges and universities and the cancellation of student debt, decent jobs for every American, a Green New Deal, and many others). Again, the issues listed on Bernie’s campaign website do not include the self-abolition of the proletariat or the establishment of communes. Still, despite the limitations of the Social Democratic project, a Sanders presidency might have given radicals a slight chance to push the administration further to the left on some issues. In any case, it was probably naïve to believe that the Democratic establishment would have felt the Bern, in the first place. Instead, they have chosen to play it safe and closed ranks around a candidate accused of

sexual assault, who is known for making incoherent speeches. On the other hand, it took but a couple of days of nationwide rioting for murder charges to be filed against all four cops involved in the killing of George Floyd and city councils to discuss disbanding police departments. Whatever you think about the prospects of the riot to anticipate the emergence of communes and all that, there is certainly room for “collective bargaining by riot” (Hobsbawm 1952, 59).

Alas, the far right also knows very well what winning would look like. And it is one of the merits of Neel’s book that he has taken up the task of analyzing the right’s resurgence in the hinterland without simply assuming that they are all irredeemable white supremacists anyway. The first two positions I just sketched—victories in local labor struggles or electoralism—might well assume that things continue to go on as they did before while hoping for incremental improvements. Certain parts of the far right, in Neel’s account, embrace the collapse of capitalist modernity and offer their own ideas about what is to be done: “the creation of cult-like ‘tribes’ capable of building ‘autonomous zones’ and returning to the land” (2018, 24). Combined with a commitment to allegedly masculine values, their vision reads like a twenty-first century version of the old frontier myth including a dream of “separation, temporary regression to a more primitive or ‘natural’ state, and *regeneration through violence*” (Slotkin 1992, 12; original emphasis). “The Wolves of Vinland are becoming barbarians,” writes Jack Donovan. He continues:

They’re leaving behind attachments to the state, to enforced egalitarianism, to desperate commercialism, to this grotesque modern world of synthetic beauty and dead gods. They’re building an autonomous zone, a community defined by face-to-face and fist-to-face connections where manliness and honor

matter again (quoted in Neel 2018, 25-26).

As you have already pointed out, Neel asserts that the far right has understood that they can “build power” within the “wastelands” of the American hinterland, thus “outcompet[ing]” a state incapable of offering much to the denizens of these regions (2018, 31), even if the latter does not initially share the right’s “ideological positions” (2018, 32). Perhaps there is a lesson here. Sometimes Clover’s book reads like he is suggesting that, since the global capitalist economy and the nation-states organizing the conditions for capital accumulation can no longer offer to guarantee the reproduction of increasing fractions of the proletariat, there will be a wave of circulation struggles that more or less spontaneously assume a communist direction. What if they do not, though? Neel’s book serves as a reminder that reactionary forces are well prepared to act in a context in which both state and economy are crumbling. Those interested in creating emancipatory and solidary social relations instead should, then, also think about how to organize in the face not only of a collapsing capitalist economy but also of an accelerating climate catastrophe. A strategy of building dual power, as per Ignatiev, does not sound like the worst idea. And riots, by suggesting, if only for a moment, that a world without cops and commodities is possible, might certainly play a role in getting there.

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