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Drawing on scholarship in the fields of history, literary studies, media and communication, anthropology, folkloristics, sociology, and American studies, among others, SOAR: Society of Americanists Review's mission is to bring together an interdisciplinary and international conversation on the history, culture, and social life of the United States.

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The journal publishes work in a variety of formats, including research articles; forum, discussion, memorial, and state-of-

the-field essays; dialogues and interviews; reports on programs, organizations, and pedagogy; as well as book, exhibit, and media reviews. Multimedia content is encouraged and can be accommodated at the discretion of the editors.

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Editors' Note: Resistance, Delayed

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In early 2019, the editors of SOAR: The Society of Americanists Review called for submissions on the topic of "'The Resistance' conceptualized broadly and historically, as an act of individuals, groups, institutions, or in other settings." The present volume collects articles, essays, and reviews that respond in different ways to that call.

Yet, writing in early January 2021, this much-delayed collection has taken on a somewhat different tone and meaning. If reformulated now, we might add to the concept of "resistance," might take both an even broader angle (i.e., human resistance to pathogens) and a somewhat more troubled tone, given the rhetoric of resistance that underwrote the violent US Capitol Insurrection of January 6, 2021.

It is much to be hoped that the thoughtful and erudite works assembled here will contribute to the kind of robust and restorative discussions on the role of resistance in a democratic society that are so desperately needed and which Americanists are uniquely positioned to provide. We thank our authors for their tremendous patience as we worked to assemble SOAR 2, and we look forward to continuing this discussion in the pages of SOAR 3.

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The Trump Resistance's Repertoire of Contention and its Practice of Civil Disobedience (2016-2018)

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Abstract: The Resistance, formed in opposition to Donald Trump, has seen progressive groups ally in marches and rallies all over the United States. Yet one of its most striking features is that there have been few acts of civil disobedience. Using the tools of social movement studies and political sociology as well as ethnographic data, this paper investigates why breaking the law has not been a more popular form of nonviolent direct action, and why activists seemed to favor permitted marches at a time when civil disobedience had become if not legitimate, at least increasingly accepted as a democratic practice.

The election of Barack Obama as well as the Great Recession of 2008 marked a subsequent revival of protest politics in the United States, with movements ranging from campaigns for better living wages such as Fight for $15, Black Lives Matter actions against police brutality and institutional racism and strikes in the public sector (Wisconsin in 2011, the Chicago teachers' strike of 2012). Additional protest politics movements include the "Nonviolent Moral Fusion Direct Actions" of the Moral Mondays in the South in 2013 and Occupy in 2011, that held public space in opposition to "corporate greed" and the financialization of the economy. If these movements have adopted different strategies and repertoires of contention, they have stayed clear of electoral politics and have criticized the legitimacy of the American political system.

The latest iteration of this renewed protest cycle is the Resistance, which formed in opposition to Donald Trump's candidacy and subsequent election, and has seen progressive forces galvanize since November 2016. Political groups and coalitions, most of them newly founded, have allied in marches and rallies all over the country (The Women's March, March for Science, #MarchForOurLives) in numbers never seen before, or at least not since the Vietnam War.[1] They have also embraced electoral politics (Indivisible, Swing Left, The Town Hall Project), and in doing so have contributed to shaping the "Blue Wave" that has played a crucial role in the Democratic Party taking back the House of Representatives in the 2018 Midterms. Yet despite its strength and vitality, one of the most striking features of the Trump Resistance is that there have been few acts of un-permitted direct action and civil disobedience—a political tradition that is "primarily American in origin and substance" (Arendt 1972)—since the last Presidential election.[2]

As a strategic form of political intervention operating outside institutional channels, nonviolent direct action, in its un-permitted form, regroups asymmetrical "methods of protest" (Sharp 1973) that seek, through confrontation and risking arrest, to change established power dynamics and to force activists to position and confront themselves to the authorities. Examples of direct action includes die-ins, street protests in which participants seize public space and block traffic, unfurling banners, and interrupting public speeches or private events.

In the past decades, civil disobedience in the United States seems to have become increasingly accepted by the polity as a democratic practice, if not deemed entirely "appropriate," thanks to its sustained bond with the reform and social movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Debouzy 2016). While political history and philosophy demonstrate that the concept is so volatile that it is impossible to derive a stable and uncontested definition of civil disobedience, its level of institutionalization within the American repertoire of contention has become widely discussed amongst scholars and activists, as some of them believe that the practice, in its liberal acceptance, has become ineffectual.[3] The "Rawlsian consensus"—which implies that those who use disobedience adhere to the principle of superiority of law over force and therefore cannot challenge the prevailing social contract—might lead to an idealization of disobedience or even to activists abandoning it as it has come to be perceived as too respectful of institutions and as having lost its subversive streak (Milligan 2013).

In light of all of this, this paper examines the Resistance's main repertoire of contention and its conception and practice of civil disobedience and nonviolent direct action. It investigates why activists who are dedicated to opposing the government seem to favor "conventional"

and permitted actions such as rallies and mass-demonstrations, and even sometimes acts of civil disobedience (#CancelKavanaugh/Be a Hero, #Trumpcare/Save our Healthcare) that are pre-negotiated with the police, over the more radical forms of nonviolent dissent or "political disobedience" that have recently emerged at Occupy Wall Street and then through the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

Using the tools of social movement studies and political sociology, this paper draws from the conclusions of my doctoral research and from data collected during an eighteen-month ethnography in New York City and Washington, D.C. from October 2016 to June 2018 amongst Resistance groups, and from interviews conducted with activists and veterans of organizations such as The Center for Popular Democracy, Rise and Resist, ACT UP New York, Gays against Guns, NYC Shut it Down and the Granny Peace Brigade.[4] These advocacy and grassroots groups have all experienced an upheaval since the election of Donald Trump and one of them, Rise and Resist, was even born in response to it. They all embrace the repertoire of nonviolent direct action and in such place themselves within the American political tradition of civil disobedience.

Risking or Seeking Arrest in the United States in 2018

From the first wave of feminism to the civil rights movement to the fight against AIDS, direct action has been a steady feature of American social movements. Academia has had an ongoing interest in the subject, particularly within the field of political philosophy. Even if the practice and the theory of civil disobedience and direct action have rarely gone hand in hand, they have somehow concurrently evolved in the past decades and are currently undergoing profound changes.

Civil Disobedience and Nonviolent Direct Action in the 2010s: Towards a "Radical" Turn?

Civil disobedience, as a political practice, is traditionally used by activists working outside of regular institutional channels. They deliberately break the law nonviolently and are willing to accept the legal consequences of their actions (Perry 2013). The most noted contributors to the philosophy of this position in the United States (Henry David Thoreau, Martin Luther King, Jr., Hannah Arendt, John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin—this list is by no means exhaustive) have suggested that civil disobedience is first and foremost an evolving concept and that it is impossible to stabilize or fix an uncontested definition of the term. However, when practiced as a collective action and not as an individual act or a personal ethic, a certain consensus can be drawn around three different elements: the "public" nature of the act, which distinguishes it from criminal enterprise; its political claim, which considers that some laws can be broken for the common good; and that it can only be exercised within a democratic context, as disobeying the law under an oppressive regime is labeled as insurgency or terrorism (Mellon 2008; Ogien 2011). The boundaries between civil disobedience, non-violent resistance, and direct action are porous, especially on the activists' side, as they rarely feel the need to draw separate lines between such concepts (Lovell 2009). In the "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (1963), a response to white religious leaders of the South, Martin Luther King, Jr. himself conflated the terms by interchangeably employing the expressions "nonviolent direct action", "civil disobedience" and "nonviolent witness" to defend his strategy for the Birmingham campaign.

According to Tony Milligan, even if civil disobedience is a problematic concept, most commentators agree that it is a form of address.

However, he notes that "preferences concerning how to define [it] are strongly shaped by the exemplars which are adopted," (2013, 19). This contributes to explain why the notion is constantly evolving, and is exemplified by the difference drawn between its "direct" and "indirect" form – whereas the Greensboro sit-ins were challenging racial segregation head-on, blocking traffic to oppose the Iraq war lacked a straight connection with the issue protested.

In the second half of the twentieth century, and due to its strong ties with the social movements of the 1960s, a liberal acceptance of civil disobedience has been prevailing, led by John Rawls' conception of the notion (1971). But for Robin Celikates (2014), by emphasizing its peaceful, respectful, and symbolic features, liberal theorists tend to depoliticize and ignore the complexities of civil disobedience as practiced in the twenty-first century. Occupy Wall Street seems to have marked a turning point for the critical analysis of disobedience because of its relative acceptance of violence against property and of its relationship with political institutions. Demonstrators radically rejected the legitimacy of the American political system, as illustrated by the slogan "this is what democracy looks like" that came from the popular chant of the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle (Kauffman 2016, 145). Within these circumstances, a broad wave of scholarly work from a younger and more radical generation of political thinkers (Carter 1998; Celikates 2016; Pineda 2015) has recently been challenging the liberal consensus. They are reassessing disobedience by foregoing the notion of civility, in order to accommodate this new political paradigm – the fact that contemporary protest movements such as Occupy or #BlackLivesMatter are "resist[ing] the very way in which we are governed," and reject the legitimacy of political institutions and of higher law (Harcourt 2012, 33). In the wake of Donald Trump's election, and as progressive forces have

aligned themselves in opposition to what they perceive to be a threat to democracy, one could think that this epistemological shift would translate en masse into disobedient actions. Understanding why Resistance activists are favoring permitted marches and events requires a look at how these take place and who organizes them.

Exercising One's First Amendment Right: Un-permitted Protest in Practice

As mentioned above, civil disobedience and nonviolent direct action in the twenty-first century seem to be well integrated within the American repertoire of contention (Hayes and Ollitrault 2012). However, they both remain radical forms of civic engagement, as they require physical commitment, risk-taking, as well as an unreserved acceptance of the legal consequences of one's actions.

Activists who are currently engaging in direct action draw from the work of previous movements, and most notably from the legacy of the women's, queer, peace, and ecology movements from the late 1970s and 1980s such as The Clamshell Alliance or the Seneca Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice. These movements were characterized by flat-power structures, caucuses, and direct or grassroots democracy through consensus decision-making. Their political commitment stemmed from their social identities and not from their ideological beliefs (Polletta 2002). As such, they were the polar opposite of the old Left and of the democratic-socialist or Marxist-Leninist groups that had traditional leadership models, top-down power structures, and rigid sets of creeds.

The Nonviolent Direct Action movement of the 1970s and 1980s had an "anarchist, antiauthoritarian impulse" (Epstein 1993, 17) that

relied heavily on affinity groups, which are small, decentralized, and flexible units of people that adopt a prefigurative approach (Breines 1989) and allow for planning actions collectively. For large-scale events such as Democratic or Republican National Conventions or international summits, groups partner with allies to form clusters that run on consensus decision-making (Graeber 2009). This model has since been taken on by later movements (Act Up, Direct Action Network, Occupy) and has come to be seen as a "defining structure […] of direct-action organizing" (Kauffman 2016, 14).

Several key roles are allocated within affinity groups: direct participation that might lead to arrest, marshaling, jail support, street medic, spokesperson, police liaison, legal observer, and legal aid.[5] Arrest is an occasion that requires strategic choices. Before and even during the action itself, groups can make decisions on their level of cooperation with police forces. During the different stages of detention, they can choose to collaborate to be released as soon as possible and go back to the action, or practice solidarity with the other arrestees by not cooperating. And finally, courts can be used as an opportunity to transform the judicial arena into a political stage.

This locally based model of organizing contrasts with how bigger organizations run their marches, and of which radical activists often disapprove. This disapproval is demonstrated in a recollection of the protest that took place at the 1984 Democratic National Convention. The protest was organized by a coalition that included the AFL-CIO as well as mainstream gay and lesbian groups—the action was, according to organizer David Solnit:

> a living critique of the left's forms of protest: monitors con-

> trolling and moving people like cattle, tactical leaders with bullhorns repeating monotonous chants, and even anti-nuclear sit-down-and-wait-for-the-police-to-arrest-you civil disobedience that felt too much on the terms of the police (as cited in Kauffman 2016, 84).

This testimony illustrates another distinct feature of direct action when done by grassroots groups: the refusal to collaborate with the authorities to organize a protest, since seeking a permit requires that activists hand over information and money to the police. Their main purpose, as the Lesbian Avengers (2011) articulate it, is to "not ask for permission to do actions and […] not negotiate with the police in advance." Of course, adopting and applying this stance requires that groups already possess or quickly gain a high degree of activist knowhow as they must engage with the police over what constitutes their First Amendment rights to free speech and freedom of assembly. Trainings and manuals abound to provide groups with this expertise, such as the "Protest Marshal Training Guide" of the New York chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America (2018, 2) that goes to great length to educate first-time activists on the legal and strategic choices they face when organizing an action:

> **Yes, you have First Amendment rights**
>
> - But these rights don't do much for you when you're in the street. The legal process is a back-up plan, to be adjudicated AFTER the right has been violated. We much rely **on each other, ourselves, and best practices** to stay safe and complete our goals at protests.
>
> **Do you need a permit to protest?** It depends on what you want to do.
>
> **You don't need a permit if you want to**
> - distribute handbills on a public sidewalk, or in a

public park;
- chanting/standing on a public sidewalk, so long as you don't block the way;
- have a demonstration, rally or press conference on a public sidewalk;
- or march on a public sidewalk and you **do not intend to used amplified sound.**

You DO need one if you want to use
- amplified sound on public property;
- want to have an event with more than 20 people in a New York City park;
- or wish to conduct a march in a public street, you will need a permit.

In keeping with their ethos of rejecting ideological rigidity and being pragmatic and strategic, direct-action groups do not outright reject participation in permitted events and can even, under special circumstances, seek a permit. One of the main reasons they do this is to make their events more inclusive of those who are deemed too vulnerable to risk arrest, such as undocumented people who would face deportation, lawful permanent residents who might encounter difficulties renewing their status or gaining citizenship, or public servants – teachers for example might be suspended if they were to face legal prosecution.

If civil disobedience and non-violent direct action have both come to be part of the "traditional" American repertoire of contention, not every U.S. citizen can seek or risk arrest. Indeed, only a narrow pool of activists, regardless of their ideological commitments, is able to bear the cost of un-permitted protest.

Who Can Bear the Costs of Risking and Seeking Arrest?

The legal restrictions mentioned above also extend to active duty military or anyone whose profession prohibits them from engaging in political activity, especially federal employees who are governed

by the Hatch Act of 1939. For the majority of Americans who work in the private sector, the First Amendment offers no guarantee of protection from being fired, as it only protects free speech from any action taken against it by the U.S. government. Private employers are prohibited from firing anyone because of their race, religion, or gender, but not because of their political affiliation or activities, even when those take place outside of the workplace. At a time when social media has taken such an important role in both organizing and activists' lives, the problem has become more acute.

Other more personal factors determine who faces greater risk when they are arrested. People with health issues, whether physical, mental, or emotional, are not outright precluded from engaging in civil disobedience. HIV-positive members were participating in every ACT UP action, and activists from Adapt are regularly arrested in their wheelchairs, but the experience of being handcuffed and subjected to highly stressful situations can take a particular toll on these individuals.

One last set of determining factors are the consequences that having a criminal record can have on one's life. Given the current criminalization of poverty, these consequences potentially exclude a sizable segment of the U.S. population from risking arrest in activism.[6] People with previous felonies or misdemeanors—even if these offenses are old or unrelated to any political activity—might face higher charges or sentences than activists who have been arrested countless times but have never been convicted of anything.[7] Parents or prospective adoptive parents are also more susceptible to the negative impacts of an arrest: if they have an open case with the Administration for Children and Families or if they seek to adopt a child, a criminal arrest could be brought to bear on those proceedings as well. In these circumstances, who are the activists that can engage in direct action?

Sociological Portrait of Direct-Action Activists

The activists documented in this study who are currently risking or seeking arrest in New York City fall within the demographics that previous studies of direct-action groups have identified (Epstein 1993; Kauffman 2016). The practice seems to be gendered, as women tend to engage in civil disobedience much more frequently than men do, which is something informants acknowledge in interviews but cannot explain. Queer women, men, trans and gender nonconforming people are disproportionally involved in these actions. A large number of the activists come from at least middle-class backgrounds and are. at a minimum, college educated. They most often have careers in healthcare, teaching, or social work, or they own businesses or work as artists. The majority of activists are age 50 or above, which means that a large proportion of them are retired and do not have young children.[8] Being "biographically available" (McAdam 1988), they have time to plan actions, get arrested, and then go to court without having to lose a day's work. Age is also a tactical advantage against the police, as the 73-year-old member of the Granny Peace Brigade Carolyn Hart explains: "It's different for me as an older person. A lot of the police look at me as their grandparent." Most of these activists are so well integrated into the protest networks that they can rely on the services of highly experienced movement lawyers who will support them pro bono in court and also advise them during planning.

Primarily, civil disobedience and un-permitted nonviolent direct action are sustainable activities because affiliated arrests have taken on a certain routine. Most activists only spend eight to ten hours in custody and are released with only a desk-appearance ticket, as opposed to being arraigned and released

on bail. This is exemplified by testimony from activist Elisabeth Nettle, member of Gays against Guns, describing her arrest after successfully shutting down Trump Tower for the second time:

> Our getting arrested is arrest-light. We're sitting there as a group completely non-threatening. The police aren't chasing us down or threatened by us or angry at us. They're just bored. They're like "Oh God, more paperwork for me." You know. They take you in. We're sitting there with our friends for a few hours. And then let us out and there are people there waiting to give us a hug and a snack.

This testimony is also striking when put in perspective with the racialization of criminal justice that has been under way since the 1970s (Alexander 2010; Brewer and Heitzeg 2008) and which has led to the mass incarceration of people of color. In contrast to the civil rights movement, civil disobedience has now become a practice that is almost exclusively performed by white people. This shift is something activists are acutely aware of, as they are constantly being reminded of their "white privilege" when taking to the streets. As Catherine Day (Rise and Resist), Anna Blum (NYC Shut it Down) and Carolyn Hart (Granny Peace Brigade) explain:

> And there was this one woman, older lady, and she was African American. And she was talking about, she... I didn't notice this I guess, it was just like, in there I didn't think about it with this lens, but there aren't black people, or you know, that get arrested. Or... very rarely. And no criticism of that, but just observ-, just observing that, realizing like I'm in a good position to cause this civil disobedience, to kind of needle people. Because I can take advantage of this white privilege. Whereas

people who are margin... They have to be extra careful. Look at the guys that are getting shot just because they're standing around. They're holding a cell phone or a bag of Skittles. So I can step up and do that. (Catherine Day)

All of these times in Shut it Down (a group affiliated with #BlackLivesMatter), you know, I've been just as arrestable as everyone else marching in the street without a permit. But like I've been physically shoved onto the sidewalk while someone else is pulled into handcuffs, you know, because.... whatever.... because I'm white and I'm small and... you know. (Anna Blum)

(imitates a white person in jail) "Can't I have a bottle of water? My handcuffs are too tight!" I understand it damages people, the handcuffs. And some, and people have really been injured. But there's a way in which the other day in, with the JVP (Jewish Voice for Peace), some of those kids had never been arrested before. […] And, and so this one woman, who's just been arrested, first time or second time. Says to the police (imitates her) "My red barrette! You have one of my red barrettes! I got it in Denmark. Where did you put it? Can you find it for me?" This was in the police car. And I turned to her and I said "I think you need to be careful about interacting that way. If you were a person of color you would be slammed for saying so. So please..." It was hard for me, but I was so upset that she'd say (imitates the woman again) "Oh my red barrette!" Her hair barrette, I mean it's like... You know. And I've spoken to Sam about some of the, the having feeling like we need to talk about behavior when we're arrested. And to not use, you know... And to remember that yes, not all cops are bad, but they are part of the system, and that is who they work for. And

> someone being nice or smiling at you doesn't mean in one second he won't turn around and beat someone up. (Carolyn Hart)

The activists that are currently risking or seeking arrest consider themselves to be part of the Resistance, an umbrella term for a counter-movement in which all Trump opponents can gather. But their philosophy and practice of direct action and civil disobedience differ from most of the protesters who have been convening all over the country in response to the 2016 election. If it is too early to make any conclusion regarding the scope and nature of the Resistance as it is ongoing, preliminary studies are already available on its first two years. They allow us to draw a broad portrait of the biggest movement the United States has seen since the 1960s.

The Trump Resistance: An Exploratory Portrait

A Grassroots and "Leaderful" Movement[9]

The Resistance started during Donald Trump's campaign and soared after his election. Several projects are attempting to map and analyze it, such as the Crowd Counting Consortium (2018), which gathers openly accessible information on protest events using local newspapers and television websites. It estimates that from the 2017 Women's March to December 31, 2017, there were 8,700 protests in the United States that drew between 5.9 million and 9 million people. 89% of these events were against Donald Trump and/or his political agenda.

Indeed, the 2016 election triggered a moral and emotional shock that has launched many activist careers (Jasper 2018), as new protesters have taken to the streets in droves and often with-

out any previous direct affiliation with a specific organization. Dana Fisher et al. (2017), in their study of the 2017 Washington, D.C. Women's March, demonstrate that the attendees tended to be highly educated white suburbanite women in their 40s. Fisher's subsequent research (2018a) reveals that those who participated in the three other most important marches that took place in Washington, D.C. in this period had similar profiles.[10]

Lara Putnam and Theda Skocpol (2018) have drawn the same conclusions, describing the typical members of the Resistance not as leftist Tea Partiers but as "retired librarians rolling their eyes at the present state of affairs, and then taking charge." Their careers as teachers, small business owners, nonprofit workers, or in social services have helped them quickly gain activist knowhow, as they were already accustomed to organizing meetings and events, often through their churches, unions, or Parent-Teacher Associations.

Putnam and Skocpol characterize these activists' political affiliations as progressive or left-of-center and report that they overwhelmingly voted for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 general election (2018). Far from being radicals striving for a complete overhaul of the system, they want to protect—not question—liberal democracy, and as such are able to connect with independents and disaffected Republicans. Their embrace of electoral politics and their engagement with the Democratic Party, seen as the only option in a country regulated by a two-party system, is highly pragmatic. They aim to reconnect with individuals at the local level to counter the infrastructural deficit of the DNC, which had led to the rise of the Tea Party and to the loss of local power for the Democratic Party in previous elections (Fisher 2018b). This approach

to organization contrasts with what Liza Featherstone (2017) defines as the "culture of consultation" in American politics, where citizens are treated as passive consumers, endlessly polled and focus-grouped, and not as participants in the political process.

Political practices seem to have changed since November 2016, and they are also challenging some of social movement studies' core beliefs. For example, the notion of differential protest participation (Saunders et al. 2012) has been updated by Dana Fisher's work on the Resistance. She remarked that activists have become "repeat protesters" (2018a, 11) that attend events that are addressing a wide variety of political issues – women's rights, health care, gun rights and so on. It is a new phenomenon and attests to the intersectional inclination of the Resistance, but it is not the only way in which protesters behave unexpectedly.

Political engagement and first-time participation are also a stalwart that has been revised by the Resistance. Many people joined the Women's March by themselves or after meeting online, often through the Pantsuit Nation Facebook group. But they had nobody to broker them in and no pre-existing group to join. Thus, large number of Resistance Groups were born on the buses back home. This is particularly true for the 5,000 local chapters of Indivisible that popped up after January 21, 2017. However, as Putnam and Skocpol describe it (2018), the Resistance is neither a national nor a local movement. It is decentralized, but not virtual. Groups take advantage of digital means of communication, but their actions are anchored in real-life and in the public sphere (taking to the streets, attending town halls, canvassing, phone banking, contacting an elected official). They are also highly pragmatic: local leaders adopt the strategies and frameworks of national organizations but pick and choose

what they think will be best under their specific circumstances. This is exemplified by groups in red states refusing to follow the Women's March call for a strike on National Women's Day in March 2017 and eventually starting a more grassroots network of organizations called March On (McSweeney and Siegel 2018). However, organizing big-scale events drawing hundreds of thousands of people requires resources and experience that only seasoned activists can match.

A Movement Coordinated by Nonprofits and Professional Organizers

According to resource mobilization theory (RMT), grievances alone are not sufficient to start a mobilization, as social movements must be produced and supported by organizations that can provide funding, supporters, media access, resources for coalition building, and access to power holders (McCarthy and Zald 1977). If the mass-marches that took place in 2017 were sparked by outraged citizens who published a call on Facebook, the actual organizing work was executed by experienced activists and professional organizers who had access to a wealth of resources and connections.[11] These massive events have provided great opportunities for nonprofits to reach out to a new crop of unaffiliated and unseasoned protesters, such as when the Hip Hop Caucus' "Respect My Vote" Campaign dispatched hundreds of volunteers tasked with registering young voters for the upcoming Midterms during the 2018 March for Our Lives (Fisher 2018b).

The relationship between Resistance groups and nonprofits cannot be fully explained by RMT, because it is a structural framework that ignores the strategic role that agency, culture, and emotions play in building and sustaining a movement (Jasper 2006). However, it is helpful to highlight the crucial role entrepreneurs have

played in the Resistance movement. The civil disobedience campaigns organized in Washington, D.C., mostly by the nonprofits Housing Works and the Center for Popular Democracy (CPD), are helmed by veterans of the grassroots organization such as ACT UP New York. The Women's March itself, far from being the flat power structure activists envisioned at its inception, is led by the former executive director of Al Sharpton's National Action Network (Tamika Malloy), the executive director of the Gathering for Justice (Carmen Perez), and the executive director of the Arab American Association of New York (Linda Sarsour). One could argue that their experience and knowhow is one of the reasons why an estimated five million people marched nationwide in January 2017 or why hundreds were arrested protesting the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court in September 2018.

The extensive role that nonprofits play in American politics can be traced back to the professionalization of activism that began in the 1970s (Walker et al. 2011). Radicals joined liberal organizations that decided to embrace electoral politics, lobbying, and top-down decision-making as a way to advance their agenda—for example, the National Organization for Women that spent two decades (unsuccessfully) pursuing the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. At the same time, community organizing has become a formalized career in its own right, which has led to the fragmentation of political labor and to a further rift between professional organizers and grassroots (i.e. unpaid) activists (Petitjean 2017; Polletta 2002). Political groups and social justice organizations are critical of the way the social movement arena is currently structured. Many decry it as a "non-profit industrial complex" (Smith 2017, x) in which organizations are financially controlled by foundations that sustain and uphold systems of domination. Indeed, according to Skocpol,

"subsidized philanthropy is literally at the heart of American public policy" (2016, 433); it allows politically engaged billionaires and millionaires to push their partisan agendas by setting up the foundations on which many groups rely to finance their activities.

The U.S. federal government is also involved in structuring activism, as all groups are required to have a formal structure if they want to function administratively on a basic level, such as being able to open a bank account to rent meeting space, print posters, or raise funds. Many choose to become 501(c) nonprofit organizations, which allows them to hold tax exempt status and, depending on the section they choose to file under, receive unlimited tax-deductible contributions from individuals, corporations, and unions. Even grassroots groups file for 501(c) status, as the risks of being charged with fraud by the IRS are too costly, and because other statuses are not as practical and flexible. Achieving this status compels these groups to comply with government requirements to write bylaws and policies to maintain and file proper records, and to be governed by an executive board rather than consensus-based or flat power structures. Given the number of attendees and the nature and demographics of its main organizers, it is therefore unsurprising that the Resistance's repertoire of contention mainly consists of permitted events.

The Resistance in Action

The most famous and biggest Resistance actions have drawn massive crowds from all over the country. They, more or less, all follow the same broad strokes that combine having a rally and march marshaled by hundreds of volunteers with celebrity endorsements, jumbotrons, trademarked merchandise, branded logos, and 501(c)(4) organizations to raise funds. Ever since the 1963 March on

Washington, the capital has become accustomed to accommodating mass protests. The sheer scale of the Resistance's main events compelled the organizers to ask for a permit, as they do not share direct-action groups' culture of taking to the street to express their First Amendment rights. Nor do they have the experience to deal with the authorities—when their permit request for a march on the National Mall was denied, the main organizers of March for Our Lives quickly complied by holding a rally on Pennsylvania Avenue. The $5 million event was run by Hollywood producer Deena Katz, sponsored by companies such as Bumble and Lyft, and funded with the help of celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey (Hoisington 2018). But the attendees did not march—they watched the rally broadcast, standing on the street and penned by police barricades. If demonstrations have become legitimate forms of political action that open temporary spaces for conflict, these big events are more akin to parades regulated by the authorities, and Resistance leaders, who are professional organizers, willingly cooperate with them. As mentioned, most attendees are new activists lacking knowhow. They tend to be averse to any potentially violent outburst, and working with the police is not an ideological issue for them. Seeking to accommodate these newcomers in such large numbers, organizers go out of their way to explain how to protest and to make their events as inclusive as possible. As the document "Frequently Asked Questions" prepared for the attendants of the Women's March on NYC (Siemionko 2016, 13) explains:

> **Safety:** This is a peaceful march. If you riot in a manner that causes damage to city or private property, harm another human being, break the law, or willfully disrupt an otherwise peaceful march, no legal or financial assistance will be provided. You are on your own.

> You march at your own risk. The NYPD is one of the best mobilized and well-trained law enforcement institutions in this country. They will keep you and the City safe. If a serious terrorist threat is received, the NYPD will notify us and we will cancel the event.
>
> A team of volunteer Crowd Control and Monitor's will be onsite to assist in de-escalating tense situations.
>
> Equality is truly for all. Please keep in mind that you may be marching next to a group whose beliefs conflict with yours. Allow yourself to be generous in spirit and see human first.

The Resistance has also been mobilizing new activists who are ready to take their political commitment to the next level by seeking arrest. They have organized several campaigns of massive civil disobedience to oppose Donald Trump's policies and decisions, such as his failed attempts to overhaul the Affordable Care Act, his successful tax cuts in 2017 or Brett Kavanaugh's appointment to the Supreme Court. These direct actions are usually devised and organized by the Center for Popular Democracy (CPD), sometimes in coalition with other nonprofits, and have managed to get several hundred people arrested in the same day.

These actions all follow the same script: small affinity groups comprised of people who never previously met gather in the atriums or corridors of the Congressional office buildings. They then start "people's lobby" visits, during which they make stops at targeted Congress members' offices. They deliver personal and emotional testimonies to aides, after which they refuse to leave the premises and are arrested while the crowd surrounding them chants loudly in support.

The visits are extended for as long as possible and are often repeated over several days, with the same people getting arrested over and over—something organizers refer to as a "catch and release" model.

Civil disobedience arrests in Washington, D.C. are conducted like a well-oiled machine—Carolyn Hart describes her experience there as "much more user-friendly than" in New York. When done the way nonprofits operate, they usually fall under post-and-forfeit charges. Activists tend to be released quickly, and rarely have to go to court to pay their $50 fine. This, combined with the excitement and light peer pressure of the group and the drama of being so close to power, explains why people who have never been arrested are more willing to try it for the first time. As recalls Gays against Guns activist Ulrike Sims, talking about her first ever arrest:

> Basically, the D.C. police, and I am not saying that all police are like this at all, you know, it would be different for me to be arrested in New York, I'm sure. Um. Basically, a lot of people said a D.C. arrest would be an easy arrest because they'd already been through the entire summer arresting people in wheelchairs.

CPD provides pizza for the arrestees as well as hotel rooms for those staying for several days. They are able to mobilize activists through listservs and manage their campaigns via spreadsheets. People who want to come to Washington, D.C. fill in Google forms in which they indicate the level of risk and commitment they are willing to take and the role they want to play, whether to offer support, to share their personal and intimate story publicly, and/or to participate in what organizers call "arrest opportunities." CPD then manages buses and other means of transportation and design

the master plan for their campaign. All decisions are made at the top as all of the actions are planned in advance. They sometimes instruct participants to not go limp and not to resist arrest, a personal choice that is usually left to individuals when the actions are devised by consensus. The authorities are not exactly tipped, but CPD's actions are not covert either, since they aim to get as many people as possible arrested on a single day. Police are there when groups enter the buildings and then swiftly arrest the trespassers as soon as they have given their third warning. This routine is not lost on more seasoned and radical activists who join these campaigns. Comparisons between the different methods of civil disobedience are telling in how the organizational structure and the culture of a group impacts participants' experiences. As explained by Nelson Rogers, member of Rise and Resist who participated in CPD actions:

> I felt more supported with Rise and Resist. Getting out of jail and just having like a crowd of folks you know, cheering for you, that's you know, just a wonderful experience. Whereas with, um, in this case, like they did, there were like 180 people arrested, so you know they obviously have more on their plate and they also don't know you, you know. So like when I got out of jail there was one guy there who said "Oh you can go to the hotel down the street to get your stuff." So it isn't, doesn't have the same kind of joyous feeling. And, um, probably just because they were organizing, you know, so much more, including transport, and people with disabilities and everything. You maybe wound up feeling a bit more like a pawn or like just a body rather than, you know, having friends celebrate what you're all doing together.

Members of the Republican Party have portrayed those who participated in the September 2018 campaign to oppose the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court as "far-left mobs" (Carney 2018). Yet the reality on the ground was that activists were anything but the "middle-aged ladies" described by Fisher et al. (2017) and Putnam and Skocpol (2018).[12] The Trump administration has heightened the stakes for the American left, and the issue of political violence has resurfaced to become a source of dissension within the American political arena, as the backlash to antifascist organizing can attest (Bray 2017). But "progressive" activists are acting within a broader context in which political violence against people and against property has come to be reviled at most points on the political spectrum (Falciola 2015). Thus, they stay away from violent actions that would preclude them from gaining political legitimacy. Current Resisters are engaged in a process that, by gaining knowhow and seeking arrest, has led some towards the path of high-risk activism (Fillieule 2001). But the organizational constraints they face, shaped by the extensive involvement of nonprofits as well as their demographics, suggest that they are nowhere near tipping into more radical and violent ways of protesting (McAdam 1988). The 2020 Black Lives Matter protests did break the taboo of property destruction amongst the left, and they surprisingly did so while retaining support from a majority of U.S. adults (Thomas and Horowitz 2020). But they remain far from matching the legal and physical risks undertaken by feminist and temperance activists such as Carry Nation or Alice Paul and the Silent Sentinels.

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Endnotes

1 A Washington Post-Kaiser Family Foundation poll shows that from late 2016 to early April 2018, one out of five Americans participated in a march or a rally (Jordan and Clement 2018).

2 Writer and activist L.A. Kauffman (2018), using the resources of the *Crowd Counting Consortium*, shows that out of the 13,000 protests that took place all around the country during the first 14 months of the Trump administration, fewer than 200 were acts of civil disobedience.

3 For a summary of the debates, see Perry 2013, Celikates 2015, and Lovell 2009.

4 In keeping with academic customs, every informant quoted in this paper has been given an alias.

5 These last two roles can be taken on by external actors such as legal organizations that focus on civil liberties and dissent (National Lawyers Guild, Center for Constitutional Rights).

6 Moreover, the Brennan Justice Center estimates that 70 million Americans have a criminal record indexed by the FBI (Friedman 2015).

7 In New York State, the majority of civil disobedience cases do not get charged with more than a class B misdemeanor, as actions are often planned for the lowest-possible charges (a violation) and usually fall under trespassing, resisting arrest, disorderly conduct, unlawful assembly, failure to obey a lawful order of public officer, and obstructing government administration. Most of the time, activists are acquitted, their case is dismissed, or they get an Adjournment in Contemplation of Dismissal (ACD), which allows the court to dismiss the case and seal the records if the defendants "behave" and do not get arrested again for a period of six months. This explains why some people have been arrested over 40 times.

8 Several members of the Granny Peace Brigade were over 80 years old and still engaged in civil disobedience (Wile 2008).

9 The expression is used by the leaders of the Women's March: "[a] leaderful movement is a movement where there isn't a singular person whose vision creates the strategy but rather many people who can be visionary leaders. Ideas and power converge into something more powerful than what one leader could do on their own. It is like the force of a finger versus the force of a fist" (Janaye Ingram, quoted in The Women's March Organizers 2018, 47). It had previously been used by Opal Tometi, Alicia Garza, and Patrisse Cullors to describe #BlackLivesMatter.

10 These are the 2017 March for Science, the 2017 March for Racial Justice and the 2018 March for Our Lives.

11 Indeed, 400 organizations partnered with the 2017 Women's March (Planned Parenthood, the National Resources Defense Council, Black Lives Matter, and the American Civil Liberties Union).

12 "You saw our groups, right, we're mostly middle-aged ladies. For some reason this... Well, who can afford the time and the, you know... Middle-aged ladies, right? It... This seems to be a middle-aged-lady thing." Personal interview with Elisabeth Nettle.

Weapons of Criticism, Criticism by Weapons: On Punching Nazis

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Abstract: *This essay reflects on the uses of political violence in the contemporary "Resistance" movement against the US far right. In particular, I focus on the figure of "punching Nazis." Neither denouncing nor endorsing the latter, I sketch a dialectical position that might be dubbed "anti-anti-punching Nazis."*

As white supremacist, Richard Spencer, began to explain the meaning of his Pepe the Frog lapel pin during a street interview on January 20, 2017—the day President Donald Trump was inaugurated—he was suddenly punched in the face by a masked assailant (probably a member of the anti-fascist movement, Antifa).[1] Video of the attack quickly went viral, inspiring numerous Facebook posts and tweets, Tumblr pages, musical remixes, and, more substantively, a debate over the legitimacy of political violence in the "Resistance" movements against the contemporary American far right.

"Is it OK to punch a Nazi?" mused Liam Stack of *The New York Times* on the day following the inauguration (2017). To some political commentators, the punch was an attack on free speech and the normative foundations of liberal democracy. According to this view, expressed by liberals and conservatives alike, punching others with whom one disagrees sets a dangerous precedent that can legitimize violence against almost any political opponent. Moreover, since the punch assailed the liberal principle of civil discussion, it channeled the authoritarian spirit of the Nazis themselves and lowered the puncher to their moral level. Being a Nazi and punching a Nazi are thus virtually the same (Stack 2017). For others, the punch was not only a satisfying comeuppance for Spencer, a dangerous bigot who has advocated for "peaceful ethnic cleansing" (Southern Poverty Law Center n.d.), but it was also a necessary and justified response to the white supremacist and fascist elements of Trumpism. Writing for *The Nation,* Natasha Lennard described the punch as "pure kinetic beauty" and reasoned that

> if we recognize fascism in Trump's ascendance, our response must be anti-fascist in nature. The history of anti-fascist action

> is not one of polite protest, nor failed appeals to reasoned debate with racists, but direct, aggressive confrontation (2017).

The videogame designer Ramsey Nasser makes a similar point by way of parody in *Dialogue 3-D* (2017).[2] A modification of the popular first-person shooter *Wolfenstein 3-D* (1992), *Dialogue 3-D* is Nasser's response to liberal defenders of civility. In the original version of the game, the player is an Allied spy who battles Nazi soldiers. But when the player in *Dialogue 3-D* encounters an armed Nazi, a dialogue box opens and prompts the player to consider the following questions: "Wouldn't peaceful protest be more effective?"; "Has violent resistance ever solved anything?"; "Is it okay to deny fascists a platform?"; "Doesn't this make you the real Nazi?" Like Lennard, Nasser's game suggests that dialogue and debate are radically inadequate responses to far-right violence.

The shorthand "punching Nazis" raises difficult questions about the proper tactics for resisting an ascendant far right. To be sure, I sympathize with Lennard, Nasser, and even the puncher himself. The dangers posed by the American far right are real, serious, and underreported. Lennard notes that since 1990, "there have been 450 deaths caused by white supremacist violence in the United States, compared to only one believed to be related to far-left activity" (2019, 12). In many ways, the framing of confrontations with far-right figures and movements as conflicts over free speech is a red herring. It ignores the far right's disproportionate violence and supports its conspiracy theory that a leftist Big Other, to use a Lacanian term, is suppressing truths that the far right alone has the courage to express. But the figure of the Nazi that animates much of the debate is misleading. Consider how *Dialogue 3-D* uses what Ian Bogost calls the "rhetoric of videogames" (2007) to

embed an argument about the necessity of violence in the game's rules. Since the dialogue box interrupts the player's action but allows the Nazis to shoot, the player can usually survive only a few encounters before dying. By procedurally linking dialogue with death, Nasser attempts to persuade players to share his own conclusions about the absurdity of being civil with Nazis.

But the same processes that make the game compelling as an act of digital rhetoric—namely, the way it uses algorithmic rules to constrain players' actions and force a particular outcome—weaken its political analysis, especially if the game is played in the context of the assault on Spencer. For even if we reject Spencer's insistence that he is not, in fact, a Nazi—this "alt-right" leader identifies instead as a "white identitarian" or "white nationalist"—we must still concede the obvious fact that he was not shooting at people like the Nazis in *Dialogue 3-D* and *Wolfenstein 3-D* do. Nasser suppresses this distinction; the game's procedures automate the identification of Spencer and the Nazi combatants of World War II. Obviously, it is justified to do much more than punch actual Nazis in the context of war and self-defense. But Nasser's "Nazi" is an abstraction that smooths over the differences between the Nazis of World War II and the contemporary American far right; between Germany in the 1930s and the United States under the Trump administration; between the contemporary far right's various and sometimes conflicting factions; and between racist speech and physical violence.

While critics of Spencer's attacker are guilty of a "bothsidesism" that absurdly groups white supremacy together with its opponents, the case for punching Nazis suffers from its own paucity of political distinctions. The problem with punching Nazis is not that it makes the puncher a Nazi, too, or that it violates a civility

that, when insisted upon with sacrosanct unconditionality, gives license to the free circulation of genocidal propaganda. Instead, punching Nazis is problematic because it obscures theory and tactics. Is the United States in what Antonio Gramsci (1971) calls a "moment of consent," in which a hegemonic coalition rules by popular consensus, or a "moment of force," in which a weak ruling coalition must resort to coercion to secure its domination? Or more concretely: in what specific ways, and for which social groups, did Trumpism rule by popular consensus, and in what specific ways, and for which social groups, did Trumpism rule by force? Where are the various elements of white supremacy, from neo-Nazis and the alt-right to more institutional and mediated forms of racism, located in this political terrain? How are structural ("organic" in Gramsci's terms) phenomena, such as economic stagnation, manifested in particular, conjunctural situations of struggle?

To be sure, the issues are not so clear cut. Force and consensus often overlap in hegemonic rule; rightwing factions share ideas and members even as they disagree; structural-organic phenomena and conjunctural situations can be difficult to distinguish from one another. But only by confronting the issues in their full complexity can political movements transcend abstract enthusiasms for punching Nazis and mobilize around theoretically-informed tactical action. Such action requires careful analysis of the types of response that are appropriate to particular individuals and political formations at particular times, and not to others. As I will clarify below, physical force is legitimate against *some* actors and under *some* conditions, but not all. When Lennard praised the "kinetic beauty" of the punch, she substituted analysis with the undeniable, yet nonetheless inadequate aesthetic pleasure of watching a bigot get his just desserts.

The internet meme that Lennard celebrated is also problematic because of its cultural location in transgressive internet humor. Although the meme is usually understood as leftist, it shares its cultural form with the ideologically flexible internet humor that Angela Nagle describes as being rooted in "public humiliation as viral entertainment" (2017, 5). While political memes express a broad range of political participation (Shifman 2014), the Punching Nazis meme exists in a digital ecosystem of memes with a common form, which has been called "justice porn." The website, Know Your Meme, defines justice porn as "online media depicting events in which criminals, bullies and other aggressors are thwarted, exposed or punished for their wrongdoings" ("Justice Porn" n.d.). Justice porn appeals to a desire for spectacles of "pure" justice, preferably dished out with maximum public disgrace, and without messy questions about who is truly in the right. One critic notes that in another kind of justice porn, reality court television, "[a]ll power is consolidated in the hands of a single capricious authority, judgments are rendered swiftly and permanently, and even if the metaphorical glove don't [sic] always fit, defendants get the punishment they deserve" (Beato 2009). Since morally simplified justice is the core of justice porn, one can celebrate Richard Spencer's masked assailant with one click and Darien Long, the so-called Kickass Mall Cop, with the next. Among Long's many recorded encounters with customers at the Atlanta shopping center where he once worked is a video of Long tasing an African American woman in front of her children. Long, who was eventually fired and jailed for his vigilantism, is a justice porn hero on the social news website, Reddit. Although punching a white supremacist and tasing a mother are two radically different acts, they are consumed in the same meme ecosystem and get their "lulz"—a corruption of "Laughing Out Loud"—from summary judgment and "amusement at other people's distress" (Phillips 2015, 27).

To return to the question of free speech, Samuel Farber's "A Socialist Approach to Free Speech" (2017) is a useful attempt to think concretely about political distinctions and how they might inform political struggle. Farber's argument is based on the difference between what he terms "racist persuaders" and "violent racist intimidators" (2017). On inauguration day, Spencer was a racist persuader. Racist persuaders spew all manner of dangerous nonsense, but their action remains discursive and is legally protected as long as violence is not intended, likely, and imminent, to use the legal concepts of the so-called Brandenburg Test established by *Brandenburg v. Ohio* (1969). If we find the racist persuader's ideas to be repugnant, then we should counter them by expressing our own free speech—assembling, picketing, shaming, heckling, and discursively refuting them, but stopping short of using physical assault to silence them. When Spencer appeared at the deadly "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017, he was no longer a racist persuader, but part of a mob of violent racist intimidators. To appreciate the difference, consider the 2003 Supreme Court case *Virginia vs. Black*. In 1998, three men were convicted of violating a Virginia statute that held that cross burning is "prima facie evidence of an intent to intimidate a person or group of persons" (*Virginia vs. Black* 2003). The Court found that cross burning with the *intent* to intimidate is not protected speech, but also that some cross burning is done without such intent. The Court thus struck down the Virginia statute's definition of cross burning as an *inherently* intentional act of intimidation. In a rare display of passion, Judge Clarence Thomas's dissenting opinion emphasized the Klan's long "reign of terror" against African Americans prior to the Virginia statute. Thomas described cross burning as "unlike any symbol in our society" because "there's no other purpose to the cross, no communication,

no particular message. […] It was intended to cause fear and to terrorize a population" (Greenhouse 2002). Thomas challenged the applicability of free speech law to the Virginia statute and wrote that "just as one cannot burn down someone's house to make a political point and then seek refuge in the First Amendment, those who hate cannot terrorize and intimidate to make their point" (2003).

Thomas's terroristic cross burners were among the white supremacist groups that gathered in Charlottesville in 2017. These groups were not interested in discourse. When they marched through the University of Virginia on the evening of August 11 carrying torches and chanting "Blood and Soil," "white lives matter," and "Jews will not replace us," they unambiguously represented political groups with histories of genocidal violence, and were engaged in a show of force designed to terrorize. In Farber's words: "Violent intimidators are not trying to persuade, but to intimidate. Their language is the language of violence" (2017).

In this situation, the Brandenburg rule that speech is protected up to the moment when violence is imminent "should not apply to these violent intimidators" because "that principle allows them the choice to select the time, place, and manner most favorable for their violent actions" (Farber 2017). In other words, if violent racist intimidators are misrecognized as racist persuaders, the Brandenburg rule's protections may simply grant them greater latitude in organizing terror. Indeed, this is precisely what happened after the torchlit march through the University of Virginia. On the following day, members of the same white supremacist groups brutally beat DeAndre Harris and killed Heather Heyer. More counter-protesters might have been killed if not for forceful resistance; Cornell West,

for example, thanked Antifa specifically during an interview on *Democracy Now* for saving his life in Charlottesville. It thus seems clear to me that punching Nazis, as a synecdoche for physical force against violent racist intimidators, was justified in Charlottesville.

But tactical analysis remains indispensable. This analysis must tarry with questions about whether the opposition consists of racist persuaders or violent intimidators and which type of force is possible, given the level of organization and political consciousness. It must also consider which type of force is appropriate, given the political context and the composition of the opposing forces, which might include various elements of the state or commercial media. Using disproportionate violence to shut down racist persuaders and intimidators could backfire by confirming the far right's narrative of persecution in the eyes of the media and public, thus helping the right's recruiting efforts. Moreover, even if the concern over free speech arguments can be a red herring, resistance movements have a strong interest in preserving free speech rights because their own political rights are under threat. To give just one example, California police collaborated with white supremacists to identify and charge anti-racists who demonstrated against the Traditionalist Workers Party, a neo-Nazi group, at a violent rally in Sacramento in 2016 (Levin 2018).

In the text from which I have derived this essay's title, Karl Marx seems to provide a justification for political violence that is tailor-made for punching Nazis. In his introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law,* in which he comments on the abstractness of German political thought, Marx observes that "the weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism by weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force" (1975, 183). If white supremacists are a material force, then the

opposing force must be equally material; Nazi violence can be stopped only by counter-violence. But Marx qualifies his claims: "theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses. […] Theory can be realised in a people only insofar as it is the realisation of the needs of that people" (183-184). While political transformation is a material process that cannot happen through words and ideas alone, words and ideas can become a material force in their own right when they are embodied in a mass political movement whose needs they articulate. The "weapon of criticism" and "criticism by weapons," discourse and force, analysis and action, are thus not opposites but dialectical pairs.

Resistance should not be abstractly committed to one in isolation from the other, especially when considering how to combine the negative moment of resistance with the positive moment of building a mass political movement. Riffing on Hannah Arendt (1972, 143-55), we might say that punching Spencer was an individual demonstration of *strength*, but not necessarily an act of political *power*, which requires collective action and deliberation. Critical political thought must repudiate the bothsidesist critique of punching Nazis without reifying resistance as sheer aesthetics, humor, and moral simplicity.

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Endnotes

1 For a concise history of the video, see the website Know Your Meme ("Richard Spencer Punched in the Face" n.d.). On Spencer, the alt-right, and Pepe the Frog, see Neiwert (2017) and Phillips (2018).

2 The game can be played at https://nasser.itch.io/dialogue-3-d.

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. 1, 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 Kugelmann, "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.

DennisBüscher-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 Nesic 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 to 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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Charlton D. McIlwain. 2020. *Black Software: The Internet and Racial Justice, from the AfroNet to Black Lives Matter*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. X+296 ISBN 0190863846)

In *Black Software,* Charlton McIlwain, NYU Professor of Media, Culture, and Communication endeavors to represent Black American participation in the development and use of computing and digital technology from the late 1950s into the early 2000s. He examines the conflicting policies of government, business, and academia, who used these technologies to both promote and thwart affirmative action and civil rights gains, leaving progress largely to individual Black efforts to secure technology access and education. Counterintuitively, these exclusions fostered a budding network in the form of a "Black software" community, which developed both an activist and entrepreneurial agenda. This persistence of Black American engagement with computing technology, as well as resistance to exclusionary forces, provided fertile ground for the rise of a Black digital activism. McIlwain examines how these activist efforts sought to eliminate the unequal conditions of access across racial and gender lines that became known as the "digital divide." In compiling this history, McIlwain seeks to answer this question: "…will our current or future technological tools ever enable us to outrun white supremacy?" (8, 112).

The work is organized into two halves, both drawing from an extensive set of government, business, and media documents and interviews. The first half explicates notable points of public policy and computing history that impacted the access and education available to Black Americans in the 1960s-70s. Within this

framework, McIlwain cites the following: *disparate impact theory*, a stipulation promulgated in the 1964 Civil Rights Act which sought to eliminate discrimination policies and practices that negatively impacted protected groups (31); the 1968 Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's efforts to expose discriminatory promotion practices (including progressive monolith IBM); and the academy's struggle (specifically at MIT) with civil rights groups, admission processes, and technology access. These examples, among others that McIlwain cites, indicated that affirmative action efforts by no means guaranteed equal access to or success with technology.

Concurrently, McIlwain reveals an emergent and loosely organized network of Black hobbyists, entrepreneurs, digital organizers, evangelists, activists, and knowledge brokers during the 1970s-80s (7). Referred to by McIlwain as the "Vanguard", their individual histories represented how Black people negotiated different modes of technological participation through educational access, employment and entrepreneurship, community organizing, and content development and distribution. Vanguard members emerged from a variety of experiences, such as traditional civil rights organizations (CORE, SNCC, EPIC) and the early network systems projects of the 1960s-80s (ARPANET, BBS, Project MAC, Usenet, FidoNet, NSF Network and AOL). As they came together, these members began collaborating in the new business and activist networks of the 1990s internet.

McIlwain positions the Vanguard's efforts as a corrective to the combined government, business, and academia failures of the 1960s-80s to provide people of color equal access to technology. Numerous conventions during the 1990s formalized these networks, including the Congressional Black Caucus's "A

Gathering of Eagles" and the "Interactive Niagara Movement" of 1994 (111). The 1999 Vanguard briefing at the Clinton White House, which sought to prioritize internet content and capital investments, substantiated their efforts to increase access to the "information superhighway" for Black communities, college students, and businesses. Consequentially, in the late 1990s, the Vanguard experienced significant upheaval as the "Battle for Black Cyberspace" (141) created competition between online spaces such as GoAfro, Universal Black Pages Afronet, NetNoir, and Blacknet. This competition highlighted important debates over form and content while paving the way for other Black American networks and contributions in the 2000s.

McIlwain uses the second half of the book to explore how the computer and civil rights "revolutions" of the 1960s created dual concerns of job loss due to computer automation and institutional use of computers to restrain the political, economic, and social gains made by Black Americans. The era's increase in urban social protests and the subsequent debate over whether to frame them as "riots" or "civil disorders" provided social engineering opportunities using computing technology. Here McIlwain places IBM at the center of this development. The 1965 Watts conflagration exemplified the coordination that occurred between government, business and media to solve the "Black urban-crime problem. He describes how IBM's courting of the Johnson Administration, in particular through the Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice Commission and the Kerner Commission on Civil Disorders, as well as the major media outlets, to propose its computer-networked Criminal Justice Information System. This software program became part of the new national law enforcement model after Kansas City adopted it

following its 1968 "civil disorder." This dynamic came to dominate the relationship that Black Americans experienced with computer technology for decades, as a much more coordinated criminal justice system could observe, profile, and isolate potential "ghetto agitators" (210). Consequently, the Johnson Administration's "law and order" campaign encouraged this targeting which escalated the mass incarceration of Black men.

Against this backdrop, McIlwain uses the Vanguard to provide contrast. Here he turns his focus to technology-minded Black women as a source of resistance to being technologically disempowered and as leaders in computer-based Black activism. He includes a brief mention of the Black female analysts at NASA in the 1960s before devoting significant attention to reluctant 1980s technophile Anita Brown, who became "the best-known Black woman on the web" during the 1990s (164). A rare example of a Black female technology advocate and activist, Brown created *Black Geeks Online*, which sought to "connect tech-savvy African Americans (who) are willing and eager to bridge the widening gap between technology haves and have-nots" and *Taking IT to the Streets*, an offline effort that created urban cyberlabs where computer literate volunteers trained and modeled computer literacy and activism. These activities exhibited how Black producers of computer and internet content could connect to Black consumers in order to strengthen technology awareness and presence, an important theme that McIlwain carries throughout the book. He also showcases freelance writer Farai Chideya's upstart journalism in the late 1990s-present at Harvard, *Newsweek*, CNN and *New York Online* blog *PopandPolitics*. Her efforts acted as a model for new ways to produce Black multimedia content that discussed pop culture, political analysis, literature, and civic

engagement among others topics.

Perhaps McIlwain's strongest illustration surrounds Congresswoman Maxine Waters's charge to the 1996 Congressional Black Caucus Convention. She demanded of these leaders an integration of issues regarding internet access and connectivity with larger social justice issues, such as the war on drugs, to strengthen awareness of inequalities through newer modes of computer mediated activism. McIlwain uses Waters's charge to compare the racially unequal treatment of cocaine-as-stimulant use among Whites in the Silicon Valley technology corridor to the crime-producing, urban Los Angeles crack epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s. He effectively extends this into a "coding" metaphor to elucidate the promotion of white supremacy and purity as opposed to the isolation and removal of the Black male through the unequal treatment of crime and access to technology.

McIlwain completes his compelling work by examining the Vanguard's Web 2.0-era activities and the subsequent rise of digital activism. Using the *Black Lives Matter* movement to illuminate the emergent use of digital media and social networking, McIlwain reinforces the point that individual persistence in Black communities will continue to be necessary to maintain a stake in technology access, production, and direction. McIlwain concludes by rephrasing his original question, "there is something that is definitely different…but can we ever outrun our history?" (258-59). While clearly cautioning the reader against lofty expectations for unprecedented change, McIlwain effectively narrates how one generation's grass-roots computer networking influenced the next generation of "netizen" activists. He successfully portrays how the broad range of 1960-70s Black activism translated into

representation in the various technology platforms of the latter twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

While the book repeatedly meanders through the time period, the narrative effectively combines past and present to generate clear examples of technological representation. Although not exhaustive in any one area of technology, McIlwain's collection is substantial enough to paint a picture. As a historical work, this book pieces together a wide range of actors, events, and efforts that underscored the importance of both White and Black contributions necessary in encouraging individual activism and thwarting institutional control. The humanistic research he conducted, specifically, the historical research, ethnographic methods, and impressive interview collection, represent a valuable collection and method for students and instructors in the humanities. *Black Software* is an important addition to the growing scholarship of Black representation and identity in communications, media, and emergent technologies.

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Whitney Phillips and Ryan M. Milner. *You Are Here: A Field Guide for Navigating Polluted Information*. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2020. 280 ISBN 9780262539913)

In *You Are Here: A Field Guide for Navigating Polluted Information*, Whitney Phillips and Ryan M. Milner, communication scholars who specialize in digital media, argue that academics and journalists who study and report on reactionary digital media can reduce the harm that comes from repeating the messages and amplifying the voices of reactionaries. They recommend practicing "ecological literacy," a phrase Phillips and Milner borrowed from ecologists and then significantly altered. For the authors of *You Are Here*, ecological literacy refers to two practices: describing communicative connections through which discussion of harmful media causes further harm and using metaphors that evoke nature to talk about political discourse.

The authors build on media ecology—scholarship that analyzes information technologies in the environments that support them—to address the ethics of studying their political opponents; however, they do not instruct their readers in the art of reading the world as ecologists do. *You Are Here* neither requires nor provides an education in ecology and, in fact, presents metaphors that contradict the standard ecological worldview.

The book opens with a passage that clarifies how far from ecological thinking Phillips and Milner stray. Phillips presents an interesting recollection of taking a morning run through an artificial marsh created to treat wastewater. The poetry is that, just as good municipal citizens have come together to manage their sewage, so the good citizens of digital media should do the same for digital pollution. The ecological metaphor begins here; it also ends here.

Throughout their book, Phillips and Milner refer to harmful communication in "scatological" terms while claiming that only some people make the scat. They would have it that only a certain number of people, a readily identifiable group of bad actors, are directly responsible for the mess that everyone else must clean up. The wastewater would be reactionary trolling online; the treatment would be applied ecological literacy. But their metaphor does not work. Everyone produces harmful waste. An ecological account of the problem of sewage makes all of us directly responsible for the problem. We all make the stuff.

You Are Here's misappropriation of ecology matters because Phillips and Milner use ecological terms to provide rhetorical support for their argument that their research provides enough benefit to justify the harm it causes to vulnerable communities. Their argument is unconvincing for three reasons: 1) they do not explain why mapping the communicative path of harm reduces harm; 2) they do not explain why ecological metaphors diminish the amplification of reactionary voices; 3) they are not undertaking an ecological project, but rather a sacralizing one. They argue that they themselves should be exempt from rules prohibiting the harmful study of reactionary digital media, because they have anointed themselves worthy of such an exemption.

Their foundational ecological metaphor is the pollution of information ecologies: reactionary "disinformation," "misinformation," and "malinformation" pollute communication (1, 4). Their first chapter recounts the Satanic Panics of the 1980s and '90s, as a model of this process:

> The people carrying the messages from Evangelical [information] networks to secular networks may have been oblivious

> to their role in the filtration process. Still, cross-pollinating Evangelicals did a great deal to spread the panics far and wide. Loose connections across multiple networks were all it took to bring the devil to secular doorsteps. (I, 20)

Phillips and Milner think the sewage of these particular Christians' beliefs flooded through communication pipelines to contaminate even those well-equipped to resist infection. The Evangelicals polluted the media landscape by communicating their belief in a world structured by fallenness, a world that encourages devil-worshipers to befoul what should be clean. Yet the Evangelicals themselves spread the "raw sewage," by speaking of the devil: they repeated the harmful trolling of actual Satanists and amplified satanic voices (I, 22). Indeed, pranksters trolled panicking Evangelicals by adopting satanic tropes. Then, secular authorities, such as law enforcement and mental health professionals, transmitted the Evangelicals' panic, leading, the authors argue, to unjust prosecutions and invalid diagnoses.

Phillips and Milner wish to avoid those secular mistakes, but, despite their use of ecological language, the world Phillips and Milner describe in *You Are Here* does not resemble the complex systems studied by ecologists. Their world resembles the Evangelicals' world, one made to allow and even encourage evil doers to do evil. *You Are Here* is a feast of troll-bait. The authors would like to see "a Green New Deal for digital media," because these media have become toxic, especially to the most vulnerable populations, but they find the political world structured to be fallen. The weight of the system is too much for reform to lift, due to wrongs done long ago: "we don't foresee government or industry signing on to the necessary structural changes any time soon" (I, 5-6). Phillips and Milner believe that bad structure alone does not cause bad consequences; it also

takes bad people to pollute information. Pollution comes from "citizens of bad faith," although "well-meaning citizens" (I, 5) can unwittingly pass along the poison excreted by the "bad actors" (II, 21).

Phillips and Milner talk about digital reactionaries in the same way Evangelicals talked about Satanists. They find Christians guilty of the polluting sin of creating a "subversion myth," a story of bad things done by "an evil internal enemy" (I, 5). They frame their history of the Satanic Panics with a story of subversion they do not recognize as a myth: the accusations of Satanism brought to bear on Hillary Clinton and her allies in 2016, after the release of e-mails written by John Podesta, her Presidential campaign chair. Reactionaries seized on some odd language in these messages and spread rumors of Clinton's partaking in satanic child abuse. Phillips and Milner interpret this trolling as similar to the Evangelicals' Satanic subversion myth, but then they themselves characterize the event in terms just like those used by Evangelicals about suspected Satanists: "the emails were procured through a coordinated effort by a hostile foreign power to subvert American democracy" (I, 2).

They sincerely believe Clinton lost the 2016 Presidential election because of a conspiracy between foreign devils and "citizens of bad faith". They reveal how they came to this belief in their second chapter, which aims to expose the cesspool that formed in the internet culture of the 2000s. By "internet culture" (II, 4), they do not mean everything on the internet, but rather the "subcultural trolling" they studied then and continue to study now (II, 6). For Phillips and Milner, the major event of 2003 was the founding of 4chan in October. They make no mention of the Iraq War, which began that March. Nor do they mention the 9/11 attacks, the event that was illegitimately used to justify that war. Nor the financial crisis of 2007/08. They also ignore

both the Occupy movement and the anti-war protests. Phillips and Milner focus instead on their own and others' presentations about memes at a handful of conferences throughout the aughts. Perhaps we can't expect the murder of hundreds of thousands of people or the suffering of millions to move scholars of popular culture, but *You Are Here* concerns reactionary meme culture and politics. All of these unmentioned events had a pretty big effect on both.

Now, Phillips and Milner do regret these conferences—not because they ignored the most important events of their times, but because there, the authors, who consider themselves citizens of good faith, mistakenly communicated the pollution excreted by citizens of bad faith. Philips and Milner confess to the venial sin of studying the cardinal sins of people who posted on websites such as 4chan. They note that it was common for presenters at meme conferences to show a meme featuring a racial slur, then analyze it, thereby aggravating the meme's harm. In their recounting of this mistaken approach, they repeat a racial slur in all caps and analyze its use—but now, Phillips and Milner believe, their presentation of this language in *You Are Here* no longer causes harm. Or the harm is worth it, because now their research is no longer apolitical. Thus, they claim: "Amplifying racism normalizes racist ideology" (V, 16). This claim seems absolute, but they qualify it later:

> Silence isn't always advisable. The challenge is to be strategic about the messages we amplify. More than that, the challenge is to approach amplification with ecological literacy. The question isn't just "to amplify or not to amplify?" The question—to be asked anew case after case, click after click—is: What are the environmental impacts of my choices? (VI, 9)

An important cause justifies risking harm, and Phillips and Milner have arrived at a method that allows them to decide for themselves that their own scholarly work on reactionary digital media is just such a cause. In Evangelical logic, one must confess to a wrongdoing, in order to keep doing it, and *You Are Here* offers a detailed recounting of the multitude of harms done by the alt-right, before and after Trump's win, from Pizzagate to Roseanne Barr to QAnon. Apparently, this account does not amplify reactionary voices, which, Phillips and Milner claim, is something other scholars and journalists do: "Ironically, the powerful signal boosting afforded by the center-left is a primary catalyst for far-right intensification" (IV, 20).

How do Phillips and Milner distinguish themselves from those who do things the wrong way? By declaring themselves to be ecologically literate, a declaration that raises many questions, none more obvious than this: are they?

Not if their ecological metaphors have anything to say about it. As covered above, scatological metaphors are unsuitable for the project Phillips and Milner have undertaken, because such rhetoric would indict all people (which would be the proper ecological indictment on the matter of excrement). But their goal is not a society that respects ecological limits. They want a discursive crusade against those who do not practice the faith of good citizenship. The ecological conceit does not serve this goal.

Consider their likening of reactionary conspiracy theories to hurricanes: just as anthropogenic climate change has worsened these storms, so bad practices in the media climate have strengthened the storm of these theories. The authors want "to prevent these storms from forming in the first place" (III, 3). This is

another bad metaphor. There will always be hurricanes and there should be: these storms are crucial to the health of the Earth System. Phillips and Milner are naturalizing polluted information in one breath, while promising a world without it in the other.

Further, it seems judicious that one ought not to lionize "citizens of bad faith," because reactionaries will gleefully adopt such imagery, as the authors note. But Phillips and Milner describe reactionary trolls as "the lions and tigers and bears at the top of the biomass pyramid" (VI, 7). Their "citizens of bad faith" become "apex predators." This is ecologically confused and argumentatively confusing. Apex predators are essential to their ecosystems. Are "citizens of bad faith" essential to democracy? Beyond the confusion, this metaphor violates the authors' own recommendations. Phillips and Milner dress up their villains as lions, hurricanes, poison fruit, and wellsprings of excrement, all while sermonizing scholars and journalists to beware the temptation of fetishizing their political enemies.

Media scholars should take care with ecological metaphors. Ecological thinking is a sub-discipline of the study of complexity or "systems thinking," and wisdom garnered from studying the complex system we call nature is not often applicable to the complex systems we call human societies. The planetary system limits human ones, but that doesn't mean we must manage every complex system as if it were the planet. Humanity cannot impose limits on the violence and filth of nature; humanity must limit its own violence and filth.

What is more, it is dehumanizing to compare people to storm systems and predators, not least because of what such a comparison implies about those harmed by reactionaries: Phillips and Milner

talk about alt-right provocateurs the way settlers talked about wolves—which raises questions about both who the sheep are and how the land fared when the ranchers wiped out the wolf.

Ecology is too tangled a path to support the straightforward moral campaign Phillips and Milner wish to wage. Could they have used any of the many systems thinking approaches to communication to make their case? Maybe not. Their arguments for the importance of their work undermine the possibility of doing that work. They have established reactionary digital media as so toxic that any handling of it must cause harm. Really, their logic is not that of the toxin contained by science, but that of the taboo purified by ritual. *You Are Here* rules out academic approaches and leaves only sacralizing ones.

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