



“To Preserve the Possibility of Communal Life and Emancipation”: An Interview with Joshua Clover

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Dennis Büscher-Ulbrich and Marlon Lieber: Now, for a while it seemed as if a specter was haunting the United States—the specter of Democratic Socialism. Talking heads already hallucinated impending public executions in Central Park—and, indeed, the purges have begun as Chuck D kicked Flavor Flav out of Public Enemy for failing to feel the Bern. Yet, by now the majority of the Democratic Party has decided to cut the Malarkey and closed ranks around Joe Biden in order to exorcize the specter. Do you think that the parliamentary road to socialism remains a valid anticapitalist strategy in 2020 (and has it ever been such, for that matter)?

Joshua Clover: I suppose this question pivots on how we define socialism. Is it still the lower stage of communism, a step along the way? None of contemporary anglophone socialism’s leading lights seem to think so; they tend to articulate whatever they are calling socialism as the end of the road. Moreover, the imagined course of capitalism→socialism→communism that has been with us at least since “Critique of the Gotha Program,” and was a kind of common sense of the worker’s movement a century ago, was premised on a historically concrete situation in which industrial production oriented social organization, and worker control of that sector gave onto total expropriation of the expropriators. Is that still true? Is there still a worker’s movement in that way? Even if there were, does the hard limit of climate collapse mean that the unfettering of industrial production on which that particular vision of the emancipation from labor was premised is not survivable? To the extent that any of these questions have answers, they all point *away* from the promise of what we now call socialism as a program of emancipation. It seems more to be a progressive management strategy for capital. It will ease some misery. It will point itself toward managed competition and



greater democracy in a fraction of workplaces. Those are all to the good. I honestly don't know if this contemporary iteration of socialism is, in addition to its limited gains, a blockage to movements that could meaningfully challenge capital. That is a serious and undervalued question. The tradition of elections as ways of capturing rather than enabling social movements remains as of now empirically persistent. History has not been kind to the notion of a progressive, step-by-step shift that arrives at a qualitatively different social arrangement. The good news is that, if we take the logic of "combined and uneven development" seriously, it suggests that there is no historical *requirement* to pass through the lower stage to get to the higher stage.

If we no longer believe in a ratcheting, incrementalist motion that ends in emancipation, we have to sit with the knowledge that the leap down either course will mean forgoing the virtues of the other. Sooner or later revolutionary movements have to risk losing short-term and limited gains in exchange for shooting the moon.

DB and ML: Your book *Riot.Strike.Riot* uniquely offers a historical materialist account of the return of the riot as a form of social struggle brought to the fore by post-1973 transformations of global capitalism which you analyze by drawing on the work of Giovanni Arrighi and Robert Brenner. While traditionally many Marxists would argue that meaningful social struggles take place in the realm of production, you conceptualize the riot as a "circulation struggle" that is a function of "a shift of capital's center of gravity into circulation." Could you elaborate on the relationship between the dynamic of capital accumulation and the potentials and limits of revolutionary class struggle and the forms that it might assume?

JC: You mean, summarize the book? I dunno, buy the book, or steal it, the paperback has a nice afterword.

The book's theoretical intervention derives from the dictum (sympathetic to strike and to riot both) that *people fight where they are*. What follows is an exploration of *where people are*, within the overall structure of capital where location is both metaphorical and actual. The argument is that, within the great interlocking circuit of production and circulation which forms the expanded circuit of capital's reproduction, capital in the west, confronted with declining profitability in manufacture and industry, has shifted its strategies for profit and for routing around labor's resistance into the sphere of circulation. This looks like trying to reduce circulation costs, the *faux frais* of production, and to profit on speculation schemes, zero-sum games that yield no accumulation. Logistics, finance, etc. All of this is a commonplace, what we call deindustrialization, or post-Fordism, or finance capital, or a handful of other names. Whatever the name, this shift moves people. It moves them into circulation-side jobs, and it moves them out of the formal wage altogether. However, people pauperized and rendered superfluous to capital's production of surplus value are still market-



dependent; they are captured within circulation while they hustle to stay alive, to find derivative access to somebody's wage somewhere (much as unpaid workers in the domestic sphere—"housewives"—have to hustle to get derivative access to the "family wage"). So we have this real shift not just of capital but people into the logic and lifeways of circulation. Inevitably, you get an increase in struggles there—that's what riots are, and blockades and occupations and barricades and so on. The fact that production workers can join in these circulation struggles is an interesting and largely unidirectional feature; it's much harder for, say, unemployed people to join in a labor strike. And it's at this point that the theoretical unfolding meets the historical, empirical actuality of a long-term decline of the worker's movement (the recent recovery of which is heartening but should not be exaggerated; it remains an order of magnitude diminished from the average strike activity during the long boom).

In short, we are talking about an internal restructuring of class relations with consequences for how we fight, which is why riots must in the first instance be understood as part of class struggle (not displacing other forms, just emergent within the ensemble). But of course they have limits. They are not in themselves revolutions, though it is hard to conjure a revolution without them. Their great limit is not "organization" or their seemingly limited duration, but the fact that they exist in reference to the market, to struggles over the price of things, whether it is bread in 1800 or petrol and internet usage in 2019. A completed revolution does away with price entirely. Asking for lower commodity prices is no more revolutionary than asking for better pay or more jobs—but also no less. They both still require reference to a world where one's access to what is necessary is indexed to how much labor one contributes. Communism is the breaking of that index; from that break, true emancipation becomes possible.

DB and ML: One of the most fascinating chapters of your book focuses on the role of African American workers and the organizations they created such as the Black Panther Party or the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. Do you think that the history of those sections of the proletariat that do not neatly fit the ideal of the "collective worker," who was always tacitly seen as white and male, can be particularly instructive in theorizing shifts in the form revolutionary struggles have assumed (and might assume in the future)?

JC: Well, obviously yes, with a couple of caveats. One is that I think it is *sometimes* overstated, the degree to which the imagined subject of labor exploitation is implicitly a straight white male. I think many people are pretty cognizant of the fact that laborers are a heterogeneous grouping. Another is that I think there's a danger that, if we start from, say, race or gender to think about "shifts in the form of revolutionary struggles," we can overlook the ways in which various kinds of social organization do the work of



racializing and gendering. I sometimes hear something like “militancy is masculine, we have to think about gender and how we value care work” and I am never sure what to do with this—in part because I know so many militants who identify as women or femme; in part because I don’t think militancy and care form a true opposition; in part because, you know, when I read Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, when I read Maya Gonzales and Jeanne Neton, it’s pretty persuasive regarding how care work makes gender rather than vice versa.

So, those are my caveats. That said, I do think we lose a lot when we focus on “the working class” rather than the proletariat, because the former certainly implies a direct relation to the wage, while the latter designates all who are confronted with the problem of surviving the month when they wake up each morning. And that distinction isn’t just some abstract “relation to the means of production” claim. It is self-evidently raced and gendered among other things, in part through the history of chattel slavery and its afterlives, in part through the history of unwaged reproductive labor. My book makes a theoretical argument that I tried to set forth above, but it shouldn’t obscure all that is historically concrete about these developments in the west—most importantly the extent to which the exclusion and surplusification I describe is racialized. It’s in no way chance that contemporary riots are consistently set off by moments of state-sponsored racial terror, which is among other things a way of “policing the crisis” as Stuart Hall et al. would say.

But, to turn again, that should not suggest to us that race is some autonomous feature of society. This historical racialization should not and cannot be separated from the realm of critical political economy. I would want to navigate between the various approaches that propose some degree of separation between race and class: on one side something like afropessimism, on the other the tendentious class reductionism offered by a sort of “orthodox marxism.” Those latter people are generally more frustrating to me. They should really read some Marx, and see that he provides not a set of static categories but a method that we can apply to the world before us. The class reductionists often seem not to have much of an understanding of how you get surplus value, how it requires a social hierarchy, a stratification within the proletariat regarding who is most hireable, who is most killable, and so on. The job of police is to make and remake this hierarchy, to produce differential citizenship. I think of this as a “political economy of social death.”

In trying to think these things together, I began with the question—it’s inescapable—of why riots, a historical phenomenon that looks a lot like blocking the road and preventing a merchant from shipping grain out of the county in the early modern period, now appear persistently in the west as racialized events. And I locate these contemporary riots in the restructuring of the social order that we call



deindustrialization and production of surplus populations, a dramatically racialized process. Earlier I mentioned the ways that women often must seek access to survival through providing care for a male earner and family, in what Silvia Federici and others have called the “patriarchy of the wage.” And this is part of what makes gender. In the west we can think about these surplus populations having to seek access to survival through various kinds of derivative access to the wage. It is easy to think here of drug vendors and sex workers, but I think always of Eric Garner, killed by the police for the crime of selling individual cigarettes, “looseys,” on the streetcorner. Certainly there are great numbers of racialized wage-workers, especially when we think about low-wage earners; the working class, we can never stop insisting, is multiracial as part of its real heterogeneity. But this operation, of systematic exclusion from the authorized labor market, is one of the great racialized and racializing operations of capitalism, especially in the present—perhaps we could call it the whiteness of the wage. This suggests a certain shape for social contest.

My hope is that deriving the unity of racial and political-economic being can get us past the illusory separation sometimes indulged by purported leftists, who often struggle to recognize the political self-activity of black people as political, as class struggle. That’s what the book has to say, in the end: we can use the categories of a materialist critique of political economy, both to understand the dramatic transformations in how people are likely to fight against their conditions (a political economy of social movements), and to recognize what are misleadingly called “race riots” as a moment of class struggle.

DB and ML: Would you mind unpacking your notion of “the production of nonproduction” for us? How exactly do we get from Marx’s “law of accumulation” to a Fanonian notion of “a capitalism compelled to act as colonial” which fails to absorb substantial parts of the global proletariat?

JC: I think without necessarily meaning to be, this is the largest possible question, so I hope everyone will forgive an extended answer. The first thing I should say is, in the spirit of Lacan declaring he is just a reader of Freud, I am just a reader of Marx. *Production of non-production* is the ongoing production of excess capacity, excess labor supply, and excess capital, none of which can eventually be employed productively. This is a summary of Chapter 25 of *Capital* Vol. 1 (English edition) as seen from the perspective of capital itself, nothing more. “But in fact it is capitalist accumulation itself that constantly produces,” Marx says, “...a population which is superfluous to capital’s average requirements for its own valorization, and therefore a surplus population.” So that is the production of non-producers. But as an ever-lesser share of the total capital goes to wages, a larger share necessarily goes to means of production, until we reach a moment of crisis when the diminishing surplus value extracted from the relatively



shrinking pool of labor takes profitability below what capital requires, and the factories go dark—as will be the case when profit is the only logic through which goods are produced within capitalism. Now you have a vast amount of unused capacity: both the capacity of workers to labor, and factories to churn away. That’s what crisis looks like: unused labor next to unused factories. And in a great irony (the affect of the dialectic), there is no reason from capital’s perspective to bring these two surpluses together, as it isn’t profitable to do so. So they just sit there moldering. Keynes think you can bring them back together with deficit spending; Marx in the end does not. It is important that “production” is not used here in the general sense but in the specific: the *capitalist* production process produces this outcome.

One way to think about it is through what I call the *arc of accumulation*. We can see that the production process necessarily increases productivity—more output per hour of work at average intensity—over the course of capitalist development. This is all that “capitalist development” has ever meant: increasing productivity, increasing ratio of means of production to labor power used. That’s even what Trotsky means, explicitly, when he first uses the formula “combined and uneven development”!

Productivity does not mean unemployment, not initially. At first these increases don’t expel labor but draw it in: think of the great expansion of the auto industry as it became hugely profitable and capital flowed in to the sector as new firms, new plants opened, both automakers and ancillary enterprises. That is the ascent of the arc. Then it starts to level off: maybe demand for cars still increases, but it can be met with productivity increases while total employment stays the same. Eventually the market approaches saturation, even with planned obsolescence of its goods, while those productivity advances—compelled by intracapitalist competition—continue. At this point the arc starts to decline as the sector sheds labor even while it maintains relatively high levels of production; that is all that deindustrialization means (here we might expect various firms to “wash out” and ease the problem of overproduction; Brenner is incisive in showing how and why this doesn’t happen in the manner of some “natural” market-clearing that the Austrians would predict). So increasing productivity has different consequences for employment at different moments in relation to the world market. And because profit in the end depends on surplus value and surplus value comes from exploitation of labor power, the descent in the arc of accumulation is the descent of profitability. Of course one can always hope for new industries to open and hope, if one is a capitalist, for countervailing forces to preserve profitability—they exist, but they are temporary. Productivity increases are infinitely iterative. As my friends say, #linegoesdown. This happens at the level of a given industry, of a sector, of a whole world-system (as Fernand Braudel and Giovanni Arrighi have shown so persuasively). *Riot.Strike.Riot* is about how the orienting forms of social contest transform at different moments along that arc.



Now we take a vital turn. So far we have been talking only about a very familiar model which sees only exploited labor on one side, exploiting capital on the other. Many people have quite thoughtfully noted that this doesn't seem to capture some of the other historical relations of appropriation, for example that of chattel slavery or unpaid and gendered domestic labor or settler-colonialism. That is not a debate that I think we have space for here in full, though it is in some sense the most important of the great theoretical debates, and a crucial, necessary *practical* debate concerning emancipation and flourishing. But I can say a couple of things in brief. One is that I think at this late moment, there truly is a global market and global market dependency; even those who are not exploited in the conventional labor process, who most directly experience appropriation via land dispossession and its grim companions, still must survive on goods that were produced by exploited laborers. Their buying power, wherever it comes from, is being set in real relation to the value of the labor of producers somewhere. If we look from the other direction, the most orthodox manufacturing enterprises require fossil fuels made available and cheapened by colonial plunder half a planet away. So it's very hard to disentangle the political economies of classical capitalism and settler-colonialism (Glen Sean Coulthard uses the very helpful term *settler capitalism*) unless you look at things through an analytically artificial local frame.

But we can probably agree that there are some practical differences, because life is lived locally, and these modes of appropriation are experienced differently by actual existing humans. If we think about the particular and persistent modes of violence through which a colonial power has to remake the relations of colonization over and over—I think the history of indigenous dispossession and genocide in North America is a good which is to say horrific example here—that's a distinct social structure from the one named on the Statue of Liberty, the nationally ennobling poem that basically says, *come here, we need more labor inputs, we hereby promise that you will be internalized into the circuits of exploitation*.

Now, I think that capital needs both of these. Marx says this. He doesn't say all value comes from labor but from the bringing together of nature and labor. "Nature" is maybe not a helpful abstraction here, and certain implications including ecological limits are sometimes lost on Marx. But it's helpful to see the logic of that claim at various scales. Obviously it is true if we look at, say, textiles, the source of the great fortunes in medieval Europe: you need the labor of spinning, and you need some sheep. They might be in the same place, you can see both those inputs at once. But it is also true at a global scale, which brings together construction in South Korea with Bakken shale. If capital needs to exploit labor, in order to do so, it also needs cheap extractivism. Fossil fuels and various metals are core to means of production.



So what happens when we reach the descent in the arc of accumulation, start pushing up against the production of non-production? Well, you might expect intensifications of extractivism and its dispossessions. That looks like the cheapening of inputs through violent seizure and control of land, the buildout of infrastructural projects to cheapen extraction. These are powerful countervailing forces to declining profitability. We can argue about whether this process is “accumulation by dispossession” in a way that seems to falsify Marx’s suggestion that the so-called primitive accumulation was a historical event, necessary for the condensation of capitalism but now in the past, or whether we are talking about something else like plunder. I think that is maybe academic. We can still understand this colonial extractivism within a unitary global political economy, and indeed are obliged to do so. When we see the ongoing development of anti-infrastructural encampments like Idle No More and Standing Rock and Unist’ot’en camp, which in North America are central to indigenous struggle with a long tradition, we can see that they have this double character. Clearly they are land struggles waged by the colonized; just as clearly they are confrontations with capital, with transnational firms that are themselves dependent on labor exploitation and supply other enterprises that are generic examples of industrial capitalism. The good news is that however you see them, they are a core practice of climate survival.

But to return to your original question, the descent in the arc of accumulation means it is much harder for an economy to absorb new labor inputs, even when labor is cheapened by mass surplusification. So you get formations of state and capital that may have appeared as industrial powers, as classically capitalist powers, compelled to *act* as colonial powers in places that once looked like the industrial core, to manage populations increasingly according not to the logic of wage discipline but colonial domination. I think this transformation is one reason we are seeing so much brilliant and committed decolonial thought these days—I myself am doing my best to learn from what seems to me like a great wellspring of indigenous thought. I have been learning great amounts from Glen Sean Coulthard, Nick Estes, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, the #Landback collective.

In the end, while I would still argue for something like a unitary model for understanding capitalism as a world phenomenon, the center of balance for that planetary political economy is not static. It is true both that questions of colonial political economy have been for a long time undervalued, and that their importance grows ever more pressing.

DB and ML: As the state already wages a war by other means on racialized surplus proletarians, migrants, and refugees, what about the material conditions of possibility for new forms of solidarity to emerge? In the context of combined and uneven crisis,



how can proletarian solidarities be forged outside of shared experiences of exploitation and alienation, say, between racialized surplus proletarians, nativist wage laborers, and indebted students?

JC: I want to take up this question in its most material version, not about what we should be doing, but how does this happen as part of a set of historical developments? I think we have already seen some provisional answers. The Occupy movement, which has suffered the extraordinary fate of being both dramatically overvalued and undervalued, was for me a sort of test case for the possibilities of a collectivity shared by those truly surplus to the economy and those who were firmly within it but downwardly mobile. This is probably a global question about the relations of the excluded and the indebted, a question related to our earlier discussion of land and labor. And Occupy failed this test in the end, though not out of any moral inadequacy or political misprision, I don't think. It may simply have been the case that the downward trajectory of what we sometimes call the "middle class" was not yet intense enough—it was still possible to dream of a sort of restoration, a new Keynesian compact, and this made impossible a real collectivity with the people who had never benefited from someone else's good old days. But this has changed even in the nine years since Occupy. The data on downward mobility, declining life chances, these are clearer every day. And that probably brings the possibility of those solidarities significantly closer.

Occupy was itself, if you hung around the plaza, quite a variegated affair. I'll never forget being in a jail cell with a fellow occupier who proclaimed that their ideal form of government was "a mix of socialism, capitalism, and fascism." Less dramatically, there was no shortage of patriots in all denominations, certain that the problem was corruption, the Fed, that we had forgotten the great truth of the Constitution. These people, not "the middle class" but *a middle class* absorbed neither into a true opposition nor apologetics for the status quo, formed a mass in some ways similar to the role that Marx lays out for the lumpenproletariat in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in the end rather easily conscripted by state populism and claims of restoration. I am not sure that this particular fraction will recur in the same way. Divisions seem to me to be intensifying, as the U.S. state's capacity (or lack thereof) to deal with national decline grows more evident, and the mobilization of especially racial and ethnic animus intensifies its role as recompense for this failure. I think that those who feel alienated from the state are likely to move further in that direction, while those subject to a desire for the state's purification will increasingly perform the role of its unpaid deputies. However, even with such a scissioning of that mass, every large social movement will inevitably have within it reactionary forces, cod-fascists, and so on. Some of these might be "won over" but for the most part they have to be expelled. This is the struggle within the struggle, and it is one reason to be very skeptical when someone assures you that these problems of racism and misogyny and transphobia and so on can be dealt with



later. They can't, because the people that are the bearers of these problems bear within them the dissolution of the movement. So on the one hand, it's futile to demand some prior political or ethical purity from a mass movement. On the other, we have to grasp the ways in which some solidarities—we all hate the government, say—aren't enough, and you have to fight for the solidarities that hold open the door to emancipation.

The remarkable pandemic which we are right now in the midst of, from which I write, will likely accelerate the social reorganization that allows for new solidarities—the already fairly proletarianized tranche of entry-level entrepreneurs, for example, people who run small restaurants, bars, markets, retail shop, these people's aspirational participation in liberal capitalism will be annihilated. It's hard to imagine we won't see some version of Hooverilles after the pandemic, which is to say, Occupy Again, and this time I expect it will have greater force. It will be a place where refugees can come in substantial number. That will be one way it is different from the last iteration. This time I expect it will be more committed in moving from plazas to disused buildings, and more successful in organizing neighborhoods communally. That turns out to be a sort of segue to the next question.

DB and ML: Thinking of the recent shift from riot to general strike in France, do you see the general strike as a crucial form of struggle within and across both spheres (production and circulation), or as severely limited by bracketing the question of social reproduction?

JC: This is one of those questions that is hard to answer legibly, because the definitions of all the terms within it are so contested. Even “general strike” means different things to different people. I don't think it brackets the question of social reproduction; certainly the International Women's Strike people define a strike as including reproductive labor. I do think we won't get far in the quest for shared usages until we stop *valorizing the strike* as intrinsically better than other forms of struggle, which makes people in turn want to claim it not for, say, the particular way that a strike has leverage in a specific situation, but more to claim the inheritance of the historical worker's movement and its successes. For me it's just a tactic among others, one that had a period of ascendance during the ascent along the arc of accumulation, just as the riot is a tactic among others that comes to the fore along the descent.

I hope that the schema I offer is useful for some people trying to think about these things, maybe yes, maybe no. I would suggest that just as strike is the exemplary form of the production struggle and riot of the circulation struggle, the exemplary form of the reproductive struggle is the commune, that great mode of social reproduction that exists without reference to the wage and the market. There is no matter of choosing among them: for one thing, the seeming oppositions among riot, strike, and commune are largely a product of the division of labor (in the broadest sense) under capitalism.



Moreover, we don't want to overvalue the unconstrained choice of tactics. People fight where they are, as I said, and will drive toward one of these horizons depending on where they find themselves. A general strike in its full sense is probably a concatenation of all of these, overlapping, intersecting, energizing each other, riot, strike, commune.

DB and ML: In your book, you also draw on the work of *Théorie Communiste* and communization theory, more broadly. This approach has been criticized by the Berlin-based Friends of the Classless Society (*Freundinnen und Freunde der klassenlosen Gesellschaft*) for tending to ignore the question of (communist) production. Maybe you can help readers understand what your conceptual understanding of the commune is? How do we get from a desire to “make the world stop” to communist social relations and a post-capitalist mode of production, especially in the face of overwhelming state repression?

JC: I think this involves a confusion of *is* and *ought*. I absolutely agree that the thinking of much of the communization current doesn't focus on communist production. But the idea that it *should* is bizarre. What I draw from that tradition is not an act of advocacy about how people should revolt or how they should remake social relations. It is a description of political possibilities given changes in class composition, in the structure of global capital, and so on. It says, there are material reasons that a transitional program presented itself as the royal road to the rev a century ago, and reasons it does not now, and our task as thinkers is not to get caught in a static model where it is always 1917 or whatever. The fact that a transitional program is now foreclosed is just... true. Whether or not we think about *x* or ignore *y* has no bearing on this.

I am interested in description and prediction, in deciphering the underlying character of change over time, in understanding the materiality of the constraints in which people act. Not really into telling people what to do. I also want to be thoughtful about Jameson's lucid argument against imagining the details of that world from within the ideological constraints of this one. I'll leave the task of saying how things *should* be to others who are more arrogant than I. One thing I do feel comfortable saying, that I think I mentioned earlier: our vision of an ever-increasing productivity but communist this time—a vision that runs from Marx's fettering thesis through Lenin's electrification plus commanding heights to the solecisms of fully automated luxury communism—is probably foreclosed. If we are to believe science at all, it is pretty persuasive that there is to be no decoupling: that economic growth means growing emissions. A survivable post-capitalist mode of production seems from here like it clearly means non-industrial and relatively low-productivity. That means work. But it won't be labor, and anyone who has ever worked with their friends and comrades knows the ways that this is qualitatively different, that it feels like part of life rather than premature death. I think communism is life.



DB and ML: You have coined the term “affirmation trap” and referenced Lauren Berlant’s notion of “cruel optimism” to describe the impasse in which the traditional labor movement has often found itself: by fighting for an improvement of their situation *as workers* through, for instance, higher wages, they necessarily affirm their subordination to capital. Does the worsening climate crisis suggest that the affirmation trap is raised to another level when successful struggles of (industrial) workers to protect their jobs would probably mean more carbon dioxide emissions in the end? How do you evaluate the actions of the miners in Harlan County, KY, who blocked coal trains while demanding back pay? How do we find a way out of the apparent opposition of economic and ecological demands?

JC: I found Lauren’s concept of cruel optimism incredibly generative. She opens her book, “A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing.” I like to think that, generous as she is, she would encourage my crude displacement into a somewhat different conceptual architecture. She has many great examples, though I think something like an attachment to electoral politics, voting, might be the purest example of cruel optimism within her framework. In mine it’s labor, the thing you can’t abandon even though it destroys you—you remain attached to it not out of a psychological impasse, a vision, a dream, an affect, but because otherwise you starve. So you are compelled to affirm it just to stay alive and thus compelled to remain within its grasp. From this kernel arises what I have called the “affirmation trap,” drawing on the analysis of *Théorie Communiste* and others especially regarding the transition by organized labor in the seventies toward assisting with the stability of capital in return for the preservation of employment.

I think you correctly name the next scalar leap of this trap. We have seen it already, over and over, at the scene of infrastructure blockades: a struggle which seem to pit pipeline jobs against water defenders, labor against climate. But really this opposition is everywhere. It’s there in the *Gilets Jaunes*, a movement which begins from the opposition between what is purportedly a climate mitigation tax on fuel and the needs of workers to commute by car to their jobs. It’s there in Amazon’s demand for massive tax breaks in return for purported job creation when that tax money could be used for ecological abatement. And so on. As long as it remains the case that people need jobs to eat, need jobs to get food for others who are excluded from labor for various reasons, this will be an impasse.

There are two important points to make. One, we must say over and over that this is not actually an opposition between climate and workers but climate and capital. Bosses have only about five moves in the world, and one of them is, *if you interfere with my profits, you are actually harming the vulnerable*. This is the moment in which their great care for their employees real and imagined rises like smoke from a chimney even as they



burn through those employees' lives every day. Every time this debate comes up, the first question must be, who set up this situation where this seems like an opposition, how do they benefit, is that the basis of the impasse? And second, you know, Jameson (drawing on Althusser, Lacan, and Lévi-Strauss), describes ideology as "imaginary or formal 'solutions' to unresolvable social contradictions." If anything ever deserved this description, it's "green jobs." There is no green jobs solution, that's exactly the figure that in its imaginary character signals the real contradiction that you name. It's a contradiction of capitalism, maybe *the* contradiction now. There's no way out within capitalism, within wage labor and commodity production for profit, and we should stop pretending there is, the sooner the better.

As a sort of postscript, since you mentioned the Harlan County blockades, I would just note what a suggestive moment that is. It feels like a kind of confirmation of my thesis: even struggles over the value of classically productive labor now take the form of circulation struggles, forced to block extractive flows to win anything. But this also underscores the growing fissure between the need for jobs and the reality of jobs. In interviews with those miners, they say over and over that what they want beyond their back pay is the return of the coal industry. They are compelled to wish for that, they're not going to learn to fucking code despite a series of insipid initiatives offered to Appalachia that were basically scams. But whatever they wish for, those jobs are not coming back. Those struggles will intensify in ways that are substantially autonomous of anyone's ideological attunement. That's the thing about real struggles. They are based on real shit.

DB and ML: You have written about the state's willingness to seize the climate crisis on behalf of capital, about the formation of "a Green Nationalism which leverages climate management regimes toward hard borders, xenophobic violence, differential citizenship, protectionist labor pacts, further intensifications of militarization and surveillance." What about the material conditions for the rise of not just Bonapartism, but outright fascism? Phil Neel's book *Hinterland* insists much like *Riot.Strike.Riot* that "the character of production sculpts the character of class" and frames the long crisis as a geography of "latent civil war" between what Marx called the "party of Order" and "the party of Anarchy" in which "any evolution of the riot [...] will be defined by how it manages these polarities." Neel also takes into account the capacity of far-right militias to organize social reproduction *for some*, arguing 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." What's your take on that? What does this mean for indigenous struggles on the front line of resistance?

JC: A lot of smart people, peering out at the wreckage of the global capitalist project and the final impossibility of resolving its contradictions through growth, have begun to



envision various forms of volatile autarky, from the return of the city-state to a kind of neo-warlordism. Phil Neel's book is interesting in this regard; so is "It Could Happen Here," a well-liked podcast that offers up the plausibility of a new civil war in the United States. I was also really taken by a recent piece of SF called "I Sexually Identify as an Attack Helicopter" (the title recaptures and explodes a transphobic meme) which dramatizes among other things the collapse of the United States into a welter of micro-autarkic forces in a war of all against all.

Which is to say, I think your question puts us in the realm of speculative fiction, especially here in the US; certainly people living in, say, Somalia have a different experience of such breakdowns. We will see increasing pressure on the borders as climate refugees make their way across the planetscape, which is a large part of why I focus on Green Nationalism as a mode of state management; the logic of national resource husbandry will be the last remaining justification for a state that no longer provides much in the way of care or services. It will provide the final veil over the state's role as coordinating committee for capital. But climate death will also put more direct pressure on industrial capitalism in ways that have often previously remained abstract, or hidden behind more proximate causes of misery. Kim Stanley Robinson is one of my best drinking buddies and I could never do what he does, but if I were to compose a speculative fiction set 30 years ahead, it would feature something like future Luddites, mobilized bands roving the landscape destroying visible objects of carbon burn: anything with a smokestack, to start with. Of course in some sense this will be an error, as the enemy is not the smokestack, it is capital itself. It is an error with a kernel of truth though. They won't be doing it out of a romanticized vision of a less "technological" past world, any more than the original Luddites did. The Luddites, in an exact inversion of their received meaning, were future-directed; they saw that these instruments would make a livable life impossible. Same with the people about whom I am now speculating. And capital will build the future version of moats, and the state will defend these sites with the military in a way that demonstrates the achieved perfection of the unity of state and capital, and their antagonists will finally know that you can't fight one by swaying the other. This confrontation will be a vital nexus of a planetary civil war.

But it is important to understand that this war has already begun. It began some time ago. It is always hard to choose origin points. In North America, one place to look is to the Mackenzie Valley in the seventies, in what is called Canada. Early fights against the current regime of carbon infrastructure begin there, alongside the Dene Declaration of 1975, a "Fourth World" manifesto that is among other things explicit about pipelines as the enemy of freedom. It was not necessarily evident at the time that this struggle for self-determination was at the same time a struggle for everyone's survival, but this is now clear to all.



I do not mean here to make any claims about who is the real subject of revolution. If we are to follow that line of thought, the goal is surely to *expand* that category rather than narrowing it down to the one true subject. But this trajectory of indigenous struggle in North America is an example of the way that a movement which might look at first particularistic to some is gradually disclosed as part of a universalism. I don't know if the factory-wreckers of 2050 will be indigenous people or not, but that will be their lineage. Here I should stress that this dramatic image of factory-wrecking is perhaps somewhat spectacular and that there will be many other reorganizations of social organization alongside as people figure out what life looks like without global trade and without the presumption of a state to safeguard survival.

And I guess what is important to say is that this is a story of the hinterlands too, and of a civil war, but a somewhat different one. It will be organized by the lived indissociability of capital and climate annihilation. And I think that the socialities that emerge will be in the best case organized by arrangements that can be both self-sustaining, can have a kind of autonomous capacity for their own reproduction, while at the same time making the operations of settler capitalism impossible. That synthesis can be glimpsed in Standing Rock or in the Unist'ot'en Camp, and when I have even the least moment of crystalline optimism it is because I think there will be more of that.

I think that is my vision of the commune. Not as an achieved utopia into which we arrive after great travails—I don't think communism is a promised land, nor do you reach it by waking up one day and deciding that communism is good actually, much less by having someone show up and tell you this. I think there is a struggle to preserve the possibility of communal life and emancipation and flourishing, and this struggle has two faces. Care and militancy. It must be capable of its own reproduction, be a site of mutual care; and it must be capable of breaking the procedures of capital. These are not opposed, they are the same struggle, and that unity is the real movement.

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