

**GENDER
AFTER
CIVILIZATION**

heresy distro presents

GENDER AFTER CIVILIZATION

QUEER LIVES IN THE AFTERMATH

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queer means attack! an introduction

This journal is intended to dispel a prominent myth within the wider anarchist community: that of the-so called "forest TERF."¹ That is, the idea that anti-civilization anarchists are exclusionary of those who are trans* or gender non-conforming. This, of course, we know to be a falsehood: because we are queer and we stand against civilization. We believe that this myth is, ironically, detrimental to queer lives for a number of reasons:

- Indigenous and so-called "primitive" peoples have had complex systems of nonbinary gender long before techno-industrial society. Hence, the implication that trans* lives are somehow endemic to industrial civilization denigrates the real, lived experiences of these queer folk.²
- The charge that trans* people cannot exist in the aftermath of civilization (and thus that the destruction of civilization is necessarily an erasure of trans* people) implies that trans* people have a necessary need to transition medically. Of course, this is not true: trans* lives are valid regardless of whether or not one decides to undergo medically invasive procedures.³
- Further regarding transition, one who subscribes to the "forest TERF" myth fails to recognize that a desire for medical transition is produced by cisheteronormativity: that is, the ideology that individuals of a certain gender act or look a certain way necessarily. In this failure, they reproduce the cisheteronormativity they claim to oppose.

The list can go on (and does, throughout the mainmatter of this volume.) But as queer anti-civilization anarchists (and simply as anarchists) we must "own up" per se to those who claim to be anti-civ but reproduce civilized and oppressive notions of gender and race. Our spaces are continually being invaded a new breed of ecofascist: those who, such as Derrick Jensen,⁴ seek to exclude trans* comrades from the struggle in defense of the Wild; and those who project their

¹ For those out of the loop: trans-exclusionary radical feminist.

² For example: the *muxe* in Zapotec communities, the wide-variety of two-spirit people in U.S. indigenous communities, and the *hijra* in West and South Asia.

³ This is not to say that medical transitioning is somehow oppressive, only that those who transition are not "more" authentic than those.

⁴ "I liked what I said to Julia or whatever his name was who wanted to join DGR: You are not a woman. You are a man who believes he is a woman." Derrick Jensen, as published by Earth First! Newswire in the article *Deep Green Transphobia III: Derrick Jensen's Hateful Tirade*.

bigotry onto an image of Nature and declare their ideology primitivism. *We must resist by any means possible.*

Our first chapter is *Firedog*, by prose-poet aggressor Graeme Fisher. Our second chapter is *Arming negativity: towards the queerest attack*, by the great anarchist theorist Flower Bomb, originally distributed by Warzone Distro. It is a response to *Beyond negativity*, which we included in chapter 6 along with a critical (or perhaps insulting) introduction by yours truly. Chapter 3 is *Identity and power*, a zine by our friends over at Here and Now. Chapter 4 is *Fight for nothing* by Edith Doyle, sent to us by our beautiful comrades Down and Out Distro. Chapter 5 is the figurative spark that ignited the power keg, *Gender nihilism* by nihilist-turned-Marxist-Leninist Alyson Escalante, also the author of *Beyond negativity*.

This volume is split into two parts, Revelations, which comprises either new or incredibly important work by queer anti-civ authors; while Revisitations is comprised of critical or well-disseminated pieces, published here for archival & reference purposes.

Against all cages!

With love –

Heresy Distro

Part I

Revelation

Firedog

The evening chill has already pervaded my cabin when I sit down to make my fire. I touch paper to lighter and as I blow on the trembling nest of twigs the flame bursts into easy life. It is an eager companion so tonight there is no need for desperate petitions. Filling the rectangular maw with larger branches sawn to length I construct a stack to house the flame. As its growth tastes the bark, appetite blooms and then swells upward, sending a tendril over the cusp of the baffle. The chimney pipe begins to draft furiously, sucking air gluttonously over my body into the box and causing the cook plate atop to clamor. The space around me now warm enough that I relax my supplicant posture—but not enough to sleep, so I sit back upon my carpet content to wait for the first load to burn down.

...

I look happily upon the roaring I have made. As the heat builds I strip off my clothes, layer by layer.

...

I live in a landscape of catastrophe. This year: five months without rain. It is not even called a drought anymore. So it shouldn't come as any surprise that this fall the town of Paradise was razed to the ground overnight. Travelled more quickly than cars could flee. The fires consume the future: for just as easily it could have been here. My home, sleeping in my bed. Here I am, at this very moment fostering a handful of cinders in a cabin set on a meadow of dry dormant grass and leafless trees like living kindling—stray sparks.

...

Getting restless in my spot, I reach for the dustpan to whisk away the copious grime of ash. Dry bark, lichen and moss that have collected from my labor: I dump the soot and dustings into the ash bucket. Rising to drink a glass of water, I am struck by a potent odor until now wafted above my head. I have risen into a fragrant cloud of

unidentifiable origin, a forest perfume released no doubt from some vaporized woody resin or volatile oil seeping from some misplaced pine bough that has snuck into my woodpile of fallen valley oak. With intrigue I sit again to examine the blaze. Night has fallen. All that remains to light my body is this torchlight in the grate. I decide at last without confirmation: it is an attar of cedar that graces my nostrils.

...

I remember the cul-de-sac where I first leavened the endless boredom of the suburbs with the brief flash of fire. Somewhere I had learned that a magnifying glass could be perverted from its purpose to create a point of white heat. I set out immediately with my lens: I was looking for ants to immolate. With the sun at my back and duplicated upon the ground in a burning focal point I would play god and separate the elect from the damned to writhe in flaming death agonies in the dirt.

...

My observation has deepened into fascination and I cannot take my eyes from the tongues of flame rolling over the round shafts of the branches, some strange crankshafts enmeshed in the workings of an infernal machine. Bright blades desiccate each pore and parched filament of bark, cause every cell of their being to slowly give, exploding the chains of their constitution, to vent blades of gas feeding more tongues to lap and grow. My hands drift as I watch. They trail down my front, over my open thighs. Shifting my weight to one hip, my fingers trail over the button of my hole. With time the branches collect their own fierce glow and consume themselves. Alchemical deposits of black soot and white char calcify onto the surface of the wood, and then are devoured again into glowing orange, methodically unwinding every furrow of its shape, every turn of the trees' rings, every knot of history undone, regressing to mineral, to earth. Blossoming, I catch the pungent odor of my burning as it joins the scents in the air. I stare longingly into that glare and remember easily how someone once must have imagined a glowing city in the ruins of the crystalline heart of embers. Thought of following that road into the fortress of inferno.

...

As they reach their zenith the fire box blasts back heat over my body and I begin to sweat. I can do nothing but to lean back knees spread to form a parabola against it, a pale moon reflecting its radiance.

Lubricated with sweat, my hole gulps down my finger. A soft tremor runs up my spine. Wet beads condense on the cool side of me, rolling down my back in rivers. And as quickly as it took flight the edifice begins to crumble under its own force; I break the spell to add more fuel to the fire.

...

4. OPERATION OF THE ROOM HEATER

For your safety, follow these installation instructions. If the stove is not properly installed, a house fire may result.

- 4.1 Use wood only as fuel. The wood should be air dried for at least 4-6 months, preferably one year. Kindle some sticks at the front of the heater, then put in some full length logs. At the beginning see that the draft is sufficient, and then regulate it down towards the combustion desired. The fire will now slowly spread inwards. When the wood has reached a glowing state, the air intake should be reduced. In place of constant rekindling, the heater should be kept burning continuously day and night

...

It wasn't much after the day with the ants that I discovered the neighbor boy Alex had access to fireworks his parents bought at the Indian reservation. I remember distinctly a kind of flying bomb that when you lit would jet sparks, spinning madly on the pavement in a circlet of blue flame until lifted on short wings above our heads and exploded with a violent crack. Alex's pyromania was more developed than mine being a year older so he would drop M16s into the open rain sewers to terrify pedestrians and their silly dogs on the sidewalks. He insisted that to have a duel by shooting roman candles at each other was the greatest fun but I was too frightened.

...

I kneel before the cast iron and gently comb the ashes into a flat on which to place my kindling, stirring up old embers still smoldering there from last night. Reaching into the heat I place two short thick lumps of wood that will serve as supports. Stretched across them I place some arrow-straight walnut trimmings and a folded bundle of dried basil stems saved away from harvest, still faintly aromatic. Unfurling a sheaf of newspaperâ€”one which I collect yet make a point not to readâ€”I crumple and shove it below the span of twigs. The paper billows into a sickly green flame and withers abruptly.

The air rolling down from the chimney pipe is dank; there is condensation on the inside of the windows. For a moment the twigs weep steam from their cut ends as they expel their last moisture. I unfurl another sheet and replace it, whispering to the coals that have been reawakened by my first attempt. With a breath the paper ignites again enveloping the sticks, chasing away the damp. After a moment of gathering strength I throw a knot of oak branches atop and greedily the flame accepts them, thundering to life. As it laps the flue, I pull off my dress: tonight is not so cold and the cabin air is already warming. Impatiently I sit naked on the unswept rug before the mouth of the stove. Bits of lichen and grit press into the soft skin of my thighs.

...

And SOON shall they stand before me like dry grass and prairie, and verily, weary of themselves—and panting for FIRE, more than for water!2 Small fire of my spirit, of my loins: meet the conflagration of the world.

...

Some logs when they are thrown in the fire will scream, a last gasp of gas torn from some sonorant crevice. Others issue a wistful mating call of chirrups as if the wood was inhabited by the spirit of song-birds. Others still after roasting impassively for many minutes suddenly gasp in alarm and pleasure as they are consumed in the flames and disappear.

...

A single tear of exudate boils up and drops from the tip of an oaken branch.

...

Again I bask in the radiating heat. The firelight plays over my bare stomach and spread thighs, a flickering golden glow alights on my pubic curls. I sidle closer to the flames to intensify the warm wash of energy over my surfaces. I stroke myself staring at the fire. My hair hangs in damp ringlets, sticks to my face. I pant, drip sweat. It runs in a rivulet down the furrow of my chest to collect forking in the creases of my thighs. I lean back on elbows and water runs from my brow, stinging my eyes—but I will them to stay open, riveted upon the heart of the furnace. Soon they cannot no longer focus and the flame blurs into a darkly churning orange emanation.

...

Much later, in a different childhood, with the house to myself I once spent a day playing with lighting puddles of fuel I poured on the concrete floor of the garage, making fire cyclones by sweeping my foot 2 Thus Spake Zarathustra through the dancing blue spirits. With the last of the gas can, I soaked my shoes on my feet, set them alight and ran laughing hysterical until they went out.

...

The stove is packed to the brim with a wall of ashes from last night. I must shovel them out into the metal bucket to build my fire but each scoopful reveals more embers, an entire underground flame still alive beneath white cinders.

...

Watching the flame. If I build the fire just so a coil of flame will uncurl under the baffle plate, a vortex of fire. It is not so difficult to understand how ancient people, gathered around their hearths of simple stones, would stare into those helical depths and see beings there dancing. In fact all of my language seems to imply that the fire has a will, a hunger, an ethereal body. The animate fire dances in my hearth tonight. I stoke my hole. We smolder together.

...

A poisonous vapor fills the room. My head reels. What could it be? The neighbor burning trash so late at night? No, it couldn't be. A leak of smoke from the stove pipe? No— in my haste to build a fire, I have forgotten to remove the ash bucket from the cabin. The few embers buried in the ash have continued their simple labor of loving self-combustion, exhausting the room.

...

But I would be wrong! It is surprising that it would be so easy to make fire a thing when it is so clearly not. It is the opposite of solidity, of stasis: it is flux, transformation of element to elemental. One must remember that the 'fire' is contiguous with the 'smoke,' a high energy flow of particles, some of which are charged enough to emote blue, orange, white light and heat. Violent air. I try to remember but I cannot.

...

The dying flame gasps through the closed air grate. I lit it early tonight to head off the wet chill of the day and let it burn alone now

as I read. It is too hot: the thermometer glances eighty-six Fahrenheit. I strip off my jacket and my pants to sit before the fire. The air almost heaves and wavers as if the cabin is a desert mirage. My mouth is dry. I suppress an impulse to get up, to get a glass of water. I imagine sweating everything out, boiling dry until every last drop of liquid had evaporated and run streaming from my pores. My eyes gummed open, engrossed in the theatre of flame before me. My lips cracking, bleeding dust. Becoming kindling.

...

Sometimes a flame is so arranged that it produces the effect of a diaphanous blonde mantel, cascading in a gale, cast around the shoulders of a gnarled effigy. I wish to wear that garment.

...

Onto the rampart of coals I begin to shove new fuel. The last of the straight, sawn-to-length logs have been used up so I ram improbable after unthinkable bent and misshapen branch into the narrow gullet of the stove, so that they dangle out the box like frog legs from a dog's mouth. My desire for heat matched by its boundless desire for sustenance. Half-burnt the loose ends endeavor to fall out but I press them back in. Scraping black scraffiti into the chalky white, palimpsest over the indecipherable hieroglyphics embossed there on the plates, leaves monochrome hash marks on my knuckles. I test the intricacy of entwining space as I build a nest aflame. I lay back on the floor with my feet towards the heat, naked and exhausted by the endless exuberance of the blaze.

...

Some time later, with renewed vigor I pull myself up and hoist a massive split round into the fray. It has been drying under the feet of the stove for two nights, like me preparing itself. It ignites immediately sending off a tumult of sparks from fragments of moss that singe to nothing instantly like hair. Excitedly I begin to stroke my body in powerful strokes over my legs and abdomen in faster and faster movement, building friction to match the fire. I get engorged and start to dally between my legs; inflaming myself, I surge into life perspiring. My hole is a wet puddle beneath me. Tears or sweat run down my face. My breathing ragged. The enormous log is a black blot on a livid screen of orange-white.

...

But just as suddenly my momentum falters and my ecstasy dries out, pales. Its impossible: I cannot masturbate my hole alone. Somehow I need my nub: but then the symmetry of hole and hole is broken. The firebox has no clitoris. I need more, to touch the fire. I can imagine pressing my hands upon the burning metal of the stove for release—but cannot enter the flame.

...

I still remember crisply the weekend of my childhood the fires came. My parents were gone on some getaway. They left me at the house of a friend of my brothers'. Not a wildfire but a firestorm: the sky turned black and glowed sulfurously; it is hard to breathe outside and yet we sit on the roof, armed with a running hose, and watched as the houses down the hill raged grinding ever closer and then past, beyond us. Even from that distance our faces glow hotly, unbearable. Supposedly that day the fire jumped eight lanes of freeway, unfettered.

...

Fire of love. Why this particular metaphor written everywhere? Moving intensity, brightness, heat: the flush of skin, the frictive burn of contact

...

I didn't mean to reproduce these tired truisms myself, rather it began the other way around. One night, I found something in the stove. I needed to figure out what it was and why my body. Fire is not something within us; we are instead beings of water and earth. It is only through long training that we think of our internal fires, our promethean separation from the beasts. As if we were engines. Divine spark, becomes a molten landscape, breath of arsonists? I wonder what will bloom from this ash heap when we, it finally sizzles out. The smell of woodsmoke in my hair, on my skin. Personal attribute.

...

The fire resounds in the stove violently like a blast furnace. Tonight, I have come prepared: my nails shimmer in the orange light their own golden hue; the tips of my fingers shine in the darkness as I reach for a glass bottle of unguents, a body oil laden with gold mica. I spurt drops of liquid gold upon the open bowl of my thighs and belly, and they each roll down striping me with molten metal that catch and intensify the firelight. My tongue lolls like a dogs'. I rub it

into the skin, smoothing it over my crotch and begin to touch myself languorously, flaring with the heat as the oil carries the flame even closer against my skin. My hands, my thighs, my belly, my pubis glint with the scattered sparkles of a golden promise. I am a flame.

...

I always returned with joy to Iron Mountain, fittingly named at least after the fires leveled it. I loved the severe environs of the desert made starker by scorching: a sable crust of earth, the violent verticality of a stand of ocotillo, now black, a heap of charred boulders strewn like wreckage. From the peak, everything to the horizon was subsumed into that texture. I traveled a thousand years in an instant.

...

I light the paper. A star chart on the back pages of the Times blackens and withers, drawing into itself like a scrotum in cold water. Likewise, a politician's face. The stock numbers. Tiny worms of orange writhe in the paper, sucking it of its substance, leaving behind a flaky tissue that turns to dust. Consumed, erased; teeth bright, I smile.

...

A tiny spider descends from a branch amidst the coals frantic. Helpless, I watch its torment filled with contrition. Her legs bend back clawing desperately shielding herself from the onslaught of the heat. She freezes in the ashes held aloft by three legs, deadened but doesn't burn. I look at her there lit in the depths of the box for a long time before a stray flake of something swirls over her body and she is gone. To atone I graze my fingertips over the hot metal scalding them there for an instant.

...

Getting an idea I hoist a thicker log that has dry rotted in the woodpile. It is featherweight in my grip. I rush it into the flames and flows of heavy wet smoke pout from gaping pores. Then boiling out of its crevices come its denizens, innocents sleeping: earwigs. Already they are aflame and their bodies stew as they panic at the precipices, squirting seething white foam and coiling into themselves, to fall into the hot embers, becoming nothing. Then disgusted I am finished with the fire tonight. I roughly spin shut the air grate with a clank to suffocate it, closing up its light. Its rank heat still hangs in the air.

...

I light up. I have just come home from a second night's tussle. My hair a mess, my hole is raw and puffy, still ringing dimly like the long echo of a bell toll. I hold in me a memory of that strike of the clapper. I feel a lump in my throat, knotted, wooden. I pull a long drag of smoke deep into my body, inviting the fire in my lungs. Then splitting, pour it out of my mouth like a drool of air. When the cherry pulled down onto my lips I step inside, the fire heat rolling over me like a wave. My brain bakes in the shallow pan of my skull. The plant infects my skin, causing crystals to precipitate, adding scintillation to the shimmer of the air. I flick the cherry into the glowing embers and press in after it paper, sticks, a lump of pine resin. It flares up over my hands but doesn't sting me. Light but not heat. I kneel: softly whisper to the nascent flicker, get it rolling. I build a cabin of straightish dowels, or a ziggurat rather, which pulls the fire up to fill its hollow form, expanding it like the draw of a bellows. The flame beats on the ceiling of the stove box starting to suck and gush. I start to work myself up, now almost every time I tend the fire I do. I jam a larger piece in crushing the house and jerk down my pants around my thighs. I set my bare ass on the cold smooth ground, my sore pucker adoring the contrast, the heat rubbing over it. Damp pubic hairs dry and uncurl. The memory inside me reverberates in the warmth, reawakening. I inch forward. The ringing has become a slow pulsation that rolls up my spine. I lean to rest on my elbows, my head back. Ardor. My mouth becomes the bell and a low hiss slips out of my throat unbidden. My hips begin to rock, my melting brain drips from my skull out a hole. Bright beads of sweat dew the slice of my exposed stomach. I squirm even closer so that my inner thighs begin to cry out at superheated denim. Then a hundred airy tongues caress my aching hole, shivering sweat. The temperature of my spine liquifies: a wave rolls through me. The memory roars, crushing nothing and I fall back.

...

I am a dark animal the shape and size of the night. I am a black dog at the bonfire's edge. I am an insect. I am a moth to the flame.

Arming Negativity: Towards the Queerest Attack

We are radicals who have had enough with attempts to salvage gender. We do not believe we can make it work for us. We look at the transmisogyny we have faced in our own lives, the gendered violence that our comrades, both trans and cis have faced, and we realize that the apparatus itself makes such violence inevitable. We have had enough.⁵

⁵ Page 38 of this volume.

Rather, what comes after gender nihilism must be a materialist struggle against patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism which understands and is attentive to the complex interrelations between these structures and which refuses to reduce any one of them to any other. We are not looking to create a better system, for we are not interested in positive politics at all. All we demand in the present is a relentless attack on gender and the modes of social meaning and intelligibility it creates.⁶

⁶ Ibid., pg. 56

The essay *Gender Nihilism: An Anti-Manifesto* was an explosive reflection of my own experience with both “gender” and “nihilism.” As a queer who possessed no desire for queer recognition and societal assimilation, the quote above summarized a position of pure negation which I found exciting affinity with.

I wanted to write this essay, not as a critique of Gender Nihilism but as praise, and as a personal response to some of the questions posed in *Beyond Negativity: What Comes After Gender Nihilism?* In this essay I outline a few quotes from that piece and respond with my own gender nihilist perspective.

As such we are left with the need for the abolition of gender, the need to push back against reformist projects that simply seek to make an expanded notion of gender. What remains to be created is the establishment of a path forward.⁷

⁷ Ibid. pg. 55

I think it is important to acknowledge that many individuals craft their own paths of queer negation towards society and its projects of assimilatory reform. For me personally, a path forward means a queer nihilism armed, wild and ferocious against the social standardization of gender and industrial control. This includes but is not limited to an individualized path of destruction which targets the internalized governance and roles that define an assigned gendered identity. The personalization of this governance, which dictates the

roles and behaviors of the assigned identity, surrenders the shapeless wildness of individuality to the solitary confinement of politics. Towards the abolition of gender and against reformist projects, my anarchist war does not limit itself to the confines of politics. Instead, it includes a queer nihilist life-experience of becoming ungoverned by gender and any other social constructs intended to subjugate and discourage individual uniqueness. Beyond the limitations of theory, this also includes clandestine attack on the manifestations of society, negating the domestication of law and order.

Only real, concrete, and organized struggle can move us forward. Mere negation, senseless violence, or embrace of unintelligibility cannot be enough. In short we must move beyond negativity. The project at hand is to adequately account for the violence of gender, the necessity of its abolition, and the strategies for achieving that abolition in material terms. Only then will we have the ability to not only achieve abolition, but to change the world.⁸

⁸ Ibid., pg. 56

I believe real, concrete, and organized struggle is most powerful when orchestrated at the individual level. Since in daily life, it is the individual who experiences the struggle of survival in this gendered nightmare, no one other than that individual is most qualified to materialize that revolt. Gendered violence is unique to each individual who accumulates a history of struggle against it. Electing identity-based movements or organizations to represent individualized experience often flattens differences found between individuals, erecting a false sense of unity. This often leads to one's association with an identity determining the legitimacy of one's experience, rather than the experience being legitimized as individually unique. This point was eloquently summarized by Lena Kafka in *Destroy Gender*:

My personal experiences with gendered violence are only taken seriously in light of revealing myself as a trans woman. Our theories should start from the ways we have experienced gender violence in our daily lives, not identity. Our relationships to each other should be based upon our affinities and similarities with each other, rather than based upon the lowest-common-denominator politics. Daily life is far too complicated to be reduced into two categories.

From my own individualist perspective, nihilism is so much more than just pessimism, negation and violence; it is the personification of anarchy, the reclaiming of individuality and the embracing of ungovernable uniqueness. Queer negativity is hostility towards socially constructed expectations, those who enforce them, and is subsequently the emancipation of one's undefinable "self" from gender conformity. This includes the expropriation of violence and the total abandonment of victimhood. Queer nihilism materializes itself as a declaration of war on society. For every possibility of sexual

assault there is a blade being sharpened for self-defense. Dangerous spaces are personified, replacing the positive politics of safety. Armed queers don't just make waves; they are tsunamis against the logic of submission.

This means recognizing that these things can only be overcome by a communist politics oriented towards the future. Abandon nihilism, abandon hopelessness, demand and build a better world.⁹

⁹ Ibid., pg. 56

My queerness is an experimentation that never ends. It is the totality of a life lived against the law, insubordinate and wild. It is not a communist politics but a nihilist negation to all systems that attempt to subordinate individuality. It is not the leftist politics of demanding and building a better world but an anarchist insurgency of reclaiming life day to day, and setting fire to its captors. Since gender is embedded in every fabric of this industrial, civilized society, I find no hope in salvaging any part of it- only joy in every second of its calculated demise.

I think its telling that I am presented as the voice of the gender nihilism, when two of the other largest contributors are indigenous trans women. Their voices matter in this debate more than mine, yet people have completely and consistently centered my voice and perspective. This is harmful.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ibid., pg. 44

Society and those who wish to preserve it require identity politics to categorize people based on socially assigned constructs. Identity politics is where individual experimentation goes to die. Like studying the bricks in a wall rather than venturing beyond the wall itself, identity politics, like all politics promotes the death of imaginative exploration. Politics represent the fixed ideological prescriptions of living, assigned to "the masses" who are treated as if they are incapable of thinking and acting as individuals.

In the realm of academic recognition, identity politics predetermines the popular narrative by reversing the hierarchy; those belonging to the marginalized category become the dominating group who then are given a pass to trivialize the experiences of those they view as opposite. But this hierarchical reversal doesn't challenge hierarchy itself - it only reforms it in an attempt to create a power masquerading as equality. This power, composed of social capital, is then used as the power to ridicule, coerce and dominate others with impunity.

Anyone who presents a single individual as the voice of something as wide spread as gender nihilism is someone who interprets the world in terms of textbook definitions rather than the organic fluidity of free thought and social interaction. Quite simply, it erases all those individuals who had already discovered and lived gender nihilism but didn't have the academic language or status to be credited and

recognized in the mainstream. Alyson's experiences with gender are not trivial to mine simply because I am a person of color. Their experiences are unique from mine, and far more complex than the oversimplifying measurement of social constructs and any theoretical analysis of identity and privilege. And it is this uniqueness of individual experience that gets lost in the homogenizing formations of identity politics. In my opinion, the harm here is the assertion that voices belonging to certain individuals matter more than others. Ironically, there is inequality in pursuit of "equality" and the common denominator is always a social construct in one form or another.

Rather, what comes after Gender Nihilism must be a materialist struggle against patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism which understands and is attentive to the complex interrelations between these structures and which refuses to reduce any one of them to any other.¹¹

¹¹ Ibid., pg. 56

Patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism have identity politics of their own. They each essentialize a role and behavior which reinforces their power socially. In addition to physically attacking these institutions, for me it is important to reclaim my self and emancipate from their mental captivity. This means refusing their language to define others, allowing others to define themselves beyond identity-based assumptions. It also means any positive projects that attempt to occupy space in the courtyard of capitalism compromises the integrity of their rebellion. The transforming of "queer" into another rigid, social identity by capitalism and liberalism is one of many examples. The positive politics of queer identity legitimizes the state and glorifies a civilized standard of submission. With the help of internalized and often celebrated victimhood, "queer" soon becomes another identity pacified and manufactured by capitalism.

This is why my queerness is not a positive project. It's meaning runs contrary to the collectivized subordination in both capitalism and the left. Queer nihilism means arming negativity against the pacifying effects of positive politics, exploring the intimacy of criminal affinity with others, and arming individuality with the queerest savagery against domestication. The fire in my heart burns every gendered prison assigned to me. Queer is confrontation: my desire for freedom has intercourse with my hatred for civilization. What blooms is a lifelong dance that materializes the queerest attack on capital and social control. I find myself immersed in the chaos of bloodied weapons, broken glass and shrieking alarms. My body is a dangerous space of love and rage ungoverned by the morality of non-violence. With love, and in solidarity with the wild, and with all those who embrace queer anarchy with hysterical laughs of joy towards the queerest attack upon the civilized order!

Identity and Power

Introduction

We're writing this zine because we want to get free and because we experience oppression around our identities. This zine is written specifically to and for people who also experience oppression around their identities, with the hopes of starting critical conversation amongst ourselves. Throughout this essay, when we use the words "we / us / our" the meaning varies. At times we are referring to ourselves as the authors, at other times we are referring to marginalized people in general, and even at others we're referring to anyone who wants to get free. First, we'd like to acknowledge the many complexities of oppression and how it affects us and those who've come before us, how it has shifted throughout time and place, and how it continues to shape the current contexts of our lives. This zine does not aim to dismiss the ways in which our realities are affected and limited by our identities. Even though we understand identity to be at the root of many oppressions and struggles, we won't allow that to stop us from developing critical perspectives around it. When we use the terms liberation and freedom, we mean total freedom. What does this mean to us? To us freedom means to live with no restrictions. Unfortunately, this is impossible with all of the systems currently in place that dictate our lives (economy, government, societal roles...). These systems are sources of domination and exploitation and in order to end oppression we would need to destroy all of the inner workings holding these systems in place. With the way things are now we do not have control over our lives, the systems in place control us and how we move through the world.¹² Only through their destruction, can we imagine freedom for everyone, freedom from all oppression and domination. Anything less, would result in freedom for only some, and freedom from only some oppressions.

Around us we see certain approaches to identity clouding struggles that could otherwise aim for liberation. We will explain how these approaches are not actually liberatory. We see these struggles

¹² For example with an economy we are not free to live how we desire since we are forced to participate within it to ensure our most basic necessities (ie: we need work/money to buy food and pay rent in order to survive); governments control how we are allowed to move through the world with their borders and laws restricting our movements and actions; societal roles such as wife, student, employee, son, etc. confine and punish us within the limits of acceptability and morality (i.e. we stop ourselves /or are stopped by others from expressing ourselves).

against domination moving toward half measures like inclusion, guilt, representation, reparations, safety and comfort, and so many other partial measures. Although these moves can provide temporary relief up to a point, the problem lies in the fact that they don't go beyond that and often can't. Identity politics is an approach to political struggle and analysis based on racial, religious, social, ethnic, or cultural identities that has the goal of leveraging or gaining power. Identity politics are about new hierarchies and/or inclusion, not liberation. This can look like fighting for inclusion within the systems in place, changing how the system treats oppressed people, wanting better placement within the system, wanting a different system, etc. Identity politics do not lead to freedom because they do not aim to, instead their goal is to re-arrange the structures and systems that keep us unfree. They have the tendency to first center identity then decide what to do from there. We don't consider approaches to struggle that acknowledge or even center identity that seek liberation outside of the system, to be identity politics. An example of this is the Maroons, groups of ex-slaves and indigenous people, who escaped into the swamps to live freely, and raided and ambushed colonizers. Another example is the Bash Back! Tendency, queer anarchists who fought capitalism and the state, homophobia and transphobia, by rioting, stealing, and physically hurting their oppressors.¹³ We don't consider these struggles to be identity politics because they aimed to attack power outside of the system. That they revolved around identity has more to do with who participated than an intention to adjust or reshape the relations of oppressed people to their oppressors.

Temporary relief

Dying of oppression is our tragic reality. The suicides, work accidents, deaths on the block, murderous boyfriends, medical neglect, deaths in prison, ODs, bombings, and police murders are man-made plagues among us. This society has no problem letting us die and no problem killing us. For some of us, survival is impossible, for others death looms so closely, we are constantly facing the overwhelming task of survival. Enveloped within this looming death, it is understandable to lose sight of anything outside of not dying. Survival and healing are crucial to our existence, literally. Nonetheless, survival on its own is not getting free, it's just getting by. Many of the ways we survive as oppressed people are subversive. We often choose to or must use subversive means to stay alive and take care. We break the isolation imposed on us to process trauma, we spread joy in our subcultures, we put what we need in our bags when our boss isn't looking, we duck the cops when we are carrying drugs

¹³ To learn more about the Maroons we suggest the essay "Autonomous Resistance to Slavery and Colonization; Two Essays by Russell Maroon Shoatz." To learn more about Bash Back! we suggest the book "Queer Ultraviolence: A Bash Back! Anthology".

or weapons. These moments of rebellion and slipping through the cracks get us through the day, and can sometimes make us stronger, but they won't tear down the society that feeds on our death. We do not think marginalized people surviving even in subversive ways is inherently revolutionary. Not dying is not enough to end domination. It's 2021, there's yet to be a violent revolution that kills all rich people, the new president of the USA is a charming latinx trans woman from LA, she's the first woman, trans person, and latinx person to be commander in chief. She sends a few programs to the hood for nicer swimming pools, and arranges to have more people of color in her progressive party, uplifting their voices. Her and her cabinet continue to order bombings of the Middle East, send armed men (and women!) to patrol the border, and generally keep the country running smoothly. What do we gain when we center marginalized people? Someone's identity does not determine if and how they want to be free. As long as there's a pedestal to put people on there'll always be people looking up, instead of around, at each other and themselves. Our oppressors are already on pedestals they've installed for themselves, when we try to outdo them we enter into their game. What if we knocked down every pedestal? What if there were no pedestals? As long as power exists, there will be hierarchies, and a re-positioning of who's on top still leaves others on the bottom. Creating spaces that center oppressed individuals and attempt to exclude oppressive ones¹⁴ are important and in many cases necessary, but are not ultimately freeing in and of themselves. Does centering oppressed people eliminate power or simply rearrange it? Imagine going to an all queer punk show, you see a lot of your friends, you enjoy the bands, there's no shitty dudes bro-ing out! You have a great night, later you take the bus home, and go to sleep, it felt good to be amongst your people. The next day you wake up and go about your life. This kind of experience is held up as liberatory, and in a way it is temporarily, but it doesn't take the offensive. This kind of environment can be cathartic and healing, but it won't take down the systems that keep queers oppressed. For these spaces to point toward a total freedom (instead of a freedom from certain people, at certain times, in a certain place) they would have to orient themselves toward getting rid of oppression outside of just those spaces. We are frustrated with identity politics and the ways in which identity is prioritized above liberation. We are even more frustrated when these approaches portray themselves as liberatory. We understand that some people are content with partial freedom ie: more rights and privileges, visibility, temporarily freeing spaces etc., we aren't here to judge them. We just wish they would stop calling it something that it's not. For those of us in what's called North America we have a

¹⁴ It is impossible to exclude oppressive people from any space. It is a false dichotomy to think that the oppressed and the oppressors are two separate groups. Oppression is multi-faceted, people can be oppressive and oppressed at the same time.

500 year rearview mirror to look into the ways race and colonialism have made life hell. Those of us who aren't men can look back even longer and see why gender is terror. In everyday life we see how people treat us as though they don't care about us. If we want to be free, we might want to consider taking seriously that our oppressors ACTUALLY don't care about us. This means we cannot expect begging, looking good, or entitlement to their emotional generosity to do much more than they ever have, which is to say, not much.¹⁵ It is centuries worth of ridiculous to think that having a "human right" or "moral obligation" to freedom will be enough to get it. Being an oppressive and powerful dirtbag is a hill many people are more than willing to die on, if that's the case being entitled to their generosity and humanity is probably useless. Let's imagine they did give a shit for a second, just hypothetically. The liberal oppressors have done a horrible job of actually getting us free. When they 'freed' us from slavery we still had to work to not die, just in a money system instead of a slave one. Where we've gotten to vote, and get jobs, they've only pulled us deeper into their web of control. Where we've been 'allowed' to be gay it's only been to sell us more things and keep better track of our lives. It's almost like our oppressors are better at including us in ways that benefit them than they are at helping us to get free, even if some of them genuinely think they're doing what's right. On the other hand I know some of you want to be given a certain amount of power, you feel it's our turn now, you feel that we deserve to be credited for all we've brought to society and for how much we've suffered for it, you know a certain pleasure in leveraging a privileged person's guilt to get what you want. This switching of roles lets us be on top for once. This is cathartic, but it isn't freedom. Wanting people to bow down based on privilege is wanting to be in charge (ie: a boss, authority) so this is yet another form of authoritarianism.¹⁶ It perpetuates the system, this time with new faces at the wheel. There's still a top and a bottom, people continue to suffer at the expense of others. This is where our struggles diverge, we do not believe liberation (or even equality for those who seek it) are possible while authority is maintained. Our struggle for liberation must be fundamentally anti-authoritarian.¹⁷ Aside from being authoritarian, when we leverage guilt we reinforce our dependance on our status as oppressed people and our reliance on our oppressors. We see this trend that manipulates guilt dominating social media, taking the form of reparations. Your computer breaks, you're already tied down with work and bills, so you make a sweeping call asking white cis men to buy you a new computer. This not only bounces back to other ideas we've already mentioned of the entitlement and ridiculous expectation that someone with more resources will give them up, but

¹⁵ The Civil Rights Movement and the struggle against colonialism in India are often held up as successful movements based in begging and looking good, but these movements were more complicated and confrontational than they are shown to have been.

¹⁶ Authoritarianism by definition is the enforcement or advocacy of strict obedience to authority at the expense of personal freedom.

¹⁷ To be clear, using force to destroy an oppressor is not necessarily authoritarian, but expecting obedience or submission is.

it also reinforces a dynamic of helplessness, where one is relying on someone else to feel guilty enough and morally obliged to help us. There is a big difference between helping one another from a genuine place of interest, solidarity, friendship, or desire to share and receiving help because we feel like someone “should” help us and that they are wrong if they don’t. We don’t want relations of guilt, imposed duty, or debt, we want relations of friendship, solidarity, care, empathy, and even hostility. We would rather steal a computer than receive a guilt gift, rather start from ourselves than lean into our oppression and our oppressors. There is an interesting contradiction that happens when we leverage our identity to guilt someone into doing what we want. At first, we might achieve a quick fix, feel a fleeting sense of control. Even though this may help us in the short term, it certainly isn’t a reparation. Do we really imagine that getting a few hundred or even thousand dollars will “repair” generations of exploitation and oppression? To really repair the losses we face from our identities, we would need to find ourselves on equal footing with each other which is impossible with the way things are since the whole system is based on us being oppressed. Attempts to get reparations makes us more invested in the things, people, identities oppressing us without challenging the systems that made them necessary in the first place. This dissuades us from fighting oppression and figuring out how to get what we need directly, through our own creative means, alone or with our friends. What would it look like if instead of relying on the charity of others and digging ourselves deeper into our own victimhood, we began imagining how to find our own strength and start getting what we needed ourselves, on our own terms? We’ve seen too many times someone blow off a criticism of their actions by pointing out how oppressed they are compared to their critic. To us this feels like a cheap trick, playing the game of oppression olympics. Oppression olympics means using one’s oppressed identities as a means to scale a social ladder, the more oppressed one is, the more agency they’re allowed in the network of radical social justice spaces. This is yet another attempt to reverse a power dynamic instead of destroy it. Dismissing someone’s criticisms or wanting them to not speak up because they’re less oppressed than us is an ignorant cop-out and is weak. Are we really not able to defend our own ideas anymore? It’s exhausting to deal with frustrating men, annoying white people, and clueless straight people, certainly, and if we don’t want to engage that’s fine. We can say “I don’t care right now” or “bruh, I’m tired”. It’s another thing to expect them (or anyone) to simply silence their criticism because of the identities we’ve inherited. When instead of articulating our own arguments, we resort to using “I’m a woman of color so how can you criticize

me?" we're not only rebuilding and climbing back up pedestals, we're also building a culture that dismisses conversation and critical dialogue. Let's not forget that someone who is marginalized can still perpetuate oppression, identity doesn't excuse people's behaviors. We are against identity because we think it holds this oppressive reality together. Our identities as marginalized people are our inheritances that separate us as inferior. For centuries, distinctions of inferiority have been used as the building blocks for exploitation and control. Identity is the infrastructure of our suffering and would need to be shattered if we wish to see oppression demolished. Presently, identity pits us against each other instead of against the system's infrastructures. Scrambling to tally distinctions of how oppressed we are in comparison to others and what we deserve to be compensated doesn't end our exploitation and only keeps us distracted from making the necessary calculations to sabotage the infrastructure holding domination in place. No one is "responsible" more than anyone else for undoing systems of domination (whether they benefit from them or not). The continued existence of domination is everyone's fault. Whether people play their roles as victims, oppressors, or attempt to be "neutrals" they are still upholding the system. That is, unless they are actively fighting to break it down.

So, where do we go from here?

We can survive forever without the misery ending. We can find ways to secure more comfort in our lives, but maintaining comfort only ensures contentment. We don't care about contentment, we'd rather be free. More often than not, we will be stifled by our own security if we are not already suffocating from the oppressive conditions that surround us, and we will have to face the choice between letting things remain as they are or moving in uncharted directions towards living freely. To put an end to the world of suffering imposed on us we need to do more than survive. Widening the cracks, taking aim at the sources of oppression, exploding our small refusals into revolt, these have the possibility of finally putting an end to oppression. Liberation won't be given to us. Freedom must be snatched up, stolen, taken by force or cunning. When we rely on our oppressors or use their means to become free the results are pitiful anyway. We've seen how easy it is to follow trends that are well accepted without using our imaginations since we are taught to rely on the instructions of others to guide us or the system to serve us. It's easier to cling to systems already in place because we don't have to think for ourselves or take risks. Nonetheless if we wish to create a new freedom, it is essential that we begin to undertake the more difficult task of going

into the unknown, thinking outside the means of struggle that others have thought up for us, moving beyond these boxes of identity and prescribed ways of living, and start thinking and acting for ourselves. One way to do this is by seriously examining our desires and visions for what we'd want freedom to look like, and what we would do with that freedom. We know best what we need, and we are the only ones equipped to make it reality. Instead of entitlement, guilt trips, and waiting for handouts, can we imagine what it would take to make our freedom ourselves, despite and against our oppressors? No one is free until we're all free.

It cannot be ignored that revolt against oppressive systems is scary, risky and dangerous, even more so for the more marginalized. It is understandable that these consequences might dissuade us. Ultimately, since most will not prioritize taking the risks that are required for a new free way of life, where does that leave us? Some of you may ask, is freedom even possible? What can the destruction of all these systems actually look like? How do we deal with the circumstances we are in? Can't healing be transformative? Can't these "partial moves" contribute to creating conditions that allow for future liberation? The answer to all these questions is.. you have to find out for yourself! Hit us up tho if u got shit to say! Thereandnowzines@riseup.net¹⁸ We're excited about the conversations this zine will produce.

¹⁸ Note from the editor: Also, hit us up at feralliberation@autistici.org.

Appendix: words too vague

Identity places us into vague homogenous groups that cannot account for our individualities or all the different ways in which we are oppressed. No two black people experience anti-blackness the same way, their hairstyle, the lightness or darkness of their skin, the words they use, the depth of their voice, their size, are all factors that will affect "how black" they will be treated (without, of course, the possibility of not being treated as black), and that's before we even take into consideration the intersection with other identities they "have". We see these umbrella groupings of identity lazily used to erase the different intersections that are at play when we experience oppression. For example, two people of color can experience racial discrimination in completely different ways. It's also possible that they do not share the same class background, race, gender, sexuality, or ability, all of which greatly affect the ease with which they move through society. Catch-all terms like people of color, women, or queer do not distinguish between the ways that experiences of oppression differ within these groupings. These terms are used to flatten people's experiences as if they are the same.

Fight for nothing: some thoughts on queer nihility

Foreward

By way of introduction, the writers of this piece would like to cite a number of factors and nuances which frame the form of nihilism we will advocate here. Firstly, that we see the nihilistic lens as inseparable from, and foundational to any meaningful queer and insurrectional project, that without this trinity (A Queer, Insurrectional, and Nihilist one) each of these lenses become isolated, stagnant, and meaningless. Second, that we position our nihilism within the “active” tradition, meaning that we take nihility (nothingness/the void) as a stimulus to action, to joy, and to love, rather than as the popular conception of nihilism might regard- to the passive pursuit of nothingness/inaction. Finally, we do not see the nihilist lens as solving any problems or generating solutions- we understand that this is unpalatable to some, and unfeasible to many. We acknowledge that our nihilism is the product of our particularly nuanced struggles, oppressions, influences and experiences. We don't ask that queer nihility work for you, or wish to spread it like some facile ideology. We simply acknowledge its possibility within our own lives and express the raw joy it evokes in our encounters with the world.

“Dead in the land of the living” (Nihilism as a tool for breaking queer stagnation)

In a moment where ‘queer theory’ has come to mean little more than critical analysis, where ‘queering’ has become the treasured verb of ‘alternative’ academics to mean simultaneously anything and nothing, and where bourgeois, cis men would have us believe that now is the time of ‘post-queer’ politics; there is a need for a radical reclamation of what it means to be queer, a need to remember that just because some rich gays can get married, many of us are still ‘marked to die’ based on our being trans, sex workers, black/of color, and/or poor. Queer Insurrectional Nihilism proposes a framework to reject this reality whilst also recognizing that many of the ‘solutions’

offered by the police, the state, and ‘movement managers’/NGO Anarchists,¹⁹ such as ‘safety’ and ‘inclusion’ are themselves worthy of rejection. This means that safety and inclusion are often posited as liberatory, transgressive, and desirable means to an end; whilst in reality the mechanisms necessary to maintain these projects rely on increased hostility, pacification, and oppression of other marginalized people such as trans women and/or black women and women of color. Coupled with this this rejection of the increased hostilities inherent in ‘safety’ discourses, is a total rejection of, and hostility towards the existence of the police, the state, and ‘movement managers’. Queer and Insurrectional nihilists will generally view these bodies (police, states, movement managers) as authoritarian, oppressively violent, dogmatic, and (in many cases) as enemy combatants. As such, solutions offered by these bodies, and indeed the continued existence of the bodies themselves are to be rejected. A nihilist lens suggests that whilst we should recognise the reality of our own potential destruction/death at the hands of independent transphobes or police officers as negative; we must also reject our absorption into any positive project or campaign that would ‘protect’ queers from these experiences whilst still maintaining the bio-political fabric of society at large. Queer, Insurrectional, nihilism rejects any inclusion or protection within/from society (since there is a recognition that any inclusion will always come at the cost of someone else’s oppression) and instead endorses an anti social turn, declaring open conflict with society: “The machinery of Control has rendered our very existence illegal- and of course, in turn we’ve committed our lives to criminality.”²⁰

“I want to be negated” (Nihilism as a lens for imagination)

Starting then from this stance of “the excluded” and “self excluding” queer insurrectional nihilism begins by positioning itself beyond the realms of that which is existent, and into imagined realms of possibility. This stance seeks not to repair, reform, or even engage in the existing paradigm of reality (except in moments of attack against it), but rather to live something unnameable, destructive, and joyous in the margins. To describe this pursuit, let us use the term “criminal Joy” which may take any number of different articulations- from the pursuit of sex with imagined or re-purposed/renamed body parts, to the kneecapping of a gay politician/businessman, or a simple physical or mental pursuit into another reality (daydreaming for example). Coupled with the pursuit of “Criminal Joy”, a nihilistic approach to gender is one that allows us to look beyond corporeality, to attempt a dismantling of identity, and to explore the possibilities

¹⁹ By Movement Managers/NGO Anarchists we mean both groups and individuals who seek to control, manage or direct the uncontrollable mob, mass of people, or collective anger of those struggling against domination in order to make ‘coherent movements; and/or “palatable demands” — Think ‘Stonewall’, those ‘organizing’ the general assemblies during occupy, or that dude talking about ‘the movement’ in the last meeting you went to.

²⁰ ‘A Gang of Criminal Queers’- Criminal Intimacy in Total Destroy- Milwaukee, WI: 2009

of flows of force, removing the “I” or the self as an active creator of experience, and existing instead as a vessel for and embodiment of experience. A practical example of this is the lived experience of some trans women whose womanhood often exists distinct from the supposed ‘reality’ of their prescribed ‘gender’.

“No future, utopia now” (Nihilism as a practice of the present)

Whilst speaking of re-imagining and breaking from reality, it is important to note that the nihilistic lens rejects prefigurative politics and the putting forward of programs for the future; any attempt to claim the future is misguided and authoritarian. Instead, queer nihilism encourages us to stake a claim on the present, firmly and fully occupying it- not “to be the change we want to see”, but rather to take everything we desire here and now. To this end, it is important to understand that queer nihilism is neither a project nor a program but rather a way of existing, a recognition that any demand is co-optable and as such the struggle for ‘nothing’ is to be preferred to the one for ‘something’.

Part II

Revisitation

Gender nihilism: an anti-manifesto and addendum

Introduction

We are at an impasse. The current politics of trans liberation have staked their claims on a redemptive understanding of identity. Whether through a doctor or psychologist's diagnosis, or through a personal self affirmation in the form of a social utterance, we have come to believe that there is some internal truth to gender that we must divine.

An endless set of positive political projects have marked the road we currently travel; an infinite set of pronouns, pride flags, and labels. The current movement within trans politics has sought to try to broaden gender categories, in the hope that we can alleviate their harm. This is naive.

Judith Butler refers to gender as, "the apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine take place along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes." If the current liberal politics of our trans comrades and siblings are rooted in trying to expand the social dimensions created by this apparatus, our work is a demand to see it burned to the ground.

We are radicals who have had enough with attempts to salvage gender. We do not believe we can make it work for us. We look at the transmisogyny we have faced in our own lives, the gendered violence that our comrades, both trans and cis have faced, and we realize that the apparatus itself makes such violence inevitable. We have had enough.

We are not looking to create a better system, for we are not interested in positive politics at all. All we demand in the present is a relentless attack on gender and the modes of social meaning and intelligibility it creates.

At the core of this Gender Nihilism lies several principles that will be explored in detail here: Antihumanism as foundation and cornerstone, gender abolition as a demand, and radical negativity as method.

Antihumanism is a cornerstone which holds gender nihilist analysis together. It is the point from which we begin to understand our present situation; it is crucial. By antihumanism, we mean a rejection of essentialism. There is no essential human. There is no human nature. There is no transcendent self. To be a subject is not to share in common a metaphysical state of being (ontology) with other subjects.

The self, the subject is a product of power. The "I" in "I am a man" or "I am a woman" is not an "I" which transcends those statements. Those statements do not reveal a truth about the "I," rather they constitute the "I." Man and Woman do not exist as labels for certain metaphysical or essential categories of being, they are rather discursive, social, and linguistic symbols which are historically contingent. They evolve and change over time; their implications have always been determined by power.

Who we are, the very core of our being, might perhaps not be found in the categorical realm of being at all. The self is a convergence of power and discourses. Every word you use to define yourself, every category of identity within which you find yourself place, is the result of a historical development of power. Gender, race, sexuality, and every other normative category is not referencing a truth about the body of the subject or about the soul of the subject. These categories construct the subject and the self. There is no static self, no consistent "I", no history transcending subject. We can only refer to a self with the language given to us, and that language has radically fluctuated throughout history, and continues to fluctuate in our day to day life.

We are nothing but the convergence of many different discourses and languages which are utterly beyond our control, yet we experience the sensation of agency. We navigate these discourses, occasionally subverting, always surviving. The ability to navigate does not indicate a metaphysical self which acts upon a sense of agency, it only indicates that there is symbolic and discursive looseness surrounding our constitution.

We thus understand gender through these terms. We see gender as a specific set of discourses embodied in medicine, psychiatry, the social sciences, religion, and our daily interactions with others. We do not see gender as a feature of our "true selves," but as a whole order of meaning and intelligibility which we find ourselves operating in. We do not look at gender as a thing which a stable self can be said to possess. On the contrary we say that gender is done and participated in, and that this doing is a creative act by which the self is constructed and given social significance and meaning.

Our radicalism cannot stop here, we further state that historical evidence can be provided to show that gender operates in such a

manner. The work of many decolonial feminists has been influential in demonstrating the ways that western gender categories were violently forced onto indigenous societies, and how this required a complete linguistic and discursive shift. Colonialism produced new gender categories, and with

them new violent means of reinforcing a certain set of gendered norms. The visual and cultural aspects of masculinity and femininity have changed over the centuries. There is no static gender.

There is a practical component to all of this. The question of humanism vs antihumanism is the question upon which the debate between liberal feminism and nihilist gender abolitionism will be based.

The liberal feminist says “I am a woman” and by that means that they are spiritually, ontologically, metaphysically, genetically, or any other modes of “essentially” a woman.

The gender nihilist says “I am a woman” and means that they are located within a certain position in a matrix of power which constitutes them as such.

The liberal feminist is not aware of the ways power creates gender, and thus clings to gender as a means of legitimizing themselves in the eyes of power. They rely on trying to use various systems of knowledge (genetic sciences, metaphysical claims about the soul, kantian ontology) in order to prove to power they can operate within it.

The gender nihilist, the gender abolitionist, looks at the system of gender itself and sees the violence at its core. We say no to a positive embrace of gender. We want to see it gone. We know appealing to the current formulations of power is always a liberal trap. We refuse to legitimize ourselves.

It is imperative that this be understood. Antihumanism does not deny the lived experience of many of our trans siblings who have had an experience of gender since a young age. Rather we acknowledge that such an experience of gender was always already determined through the terms of power. We look to our own childhood experiences. We see that even in the transgressive statement of “We are women” wherein we deny the category power has imposed onto our bodies, we speak the language of gender. We reference an idea of “woman” which does not exist within us as a stable truth, but references the discourses by which we are constituted.

Thus we affirm that there is no true self that can be divined prior to discourse, prior to encounters with others, prior to the mediation of the symbolic. We are products of power, so what are we to do? So we end our exploration of antihumanism with a return to the words of Butler:

My agency does not consist in denying this condition of my constitution. If I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility.

Gender abolition

If we accept that gender is not to be found within ourselves as a transcendent truth, but rather exists outside us in the realm of discourse, what are we to strive for? To say gender is discursive is to say that gender occurs not as a metaphysical truth within the subject, but occurs as a means of mediating social interaction. Gender is a frame, a subset of language, and set of symbols and signs, communicated between us, constructing us and being reconstructed by us constantly.

Thus the apparatus of gender operates cyclically; as we are constituted through it, so too do our daily actions, rituals, norms, and performances reconstitute it. It is this realization which allows for a movement against the cycle itself to manifest. Such a movement must understand the deeply penetrative and pervasive nature of the apparatus. Normalization has an insidious way of naturalizing, accounting for, and subsuming resistance.

At this point it becomes tempting to embrace a certain liberal politics of expansion. Countless theorists and activists have laid stake to the claim that our experience of transgender embodiment might be able to pose a threat to the process of normalization that is gender. We have heard the suggestion that non-binary identity, trans identity, and queer identity might be able to create a subversion of gender. This cannot be the case.

In staking our claim on identity labels of non-binary, we find ourselves always again caught back in the realm of gender. To take on identity in a rejection of the gender binary is still to accept the binary as a point of reference. In the resistance to it, one only reconstructs the normative status of the binary. Norms have already accounted for dissent; they lay the frameworks and languages through which dissent can be expressed. It is not merely that our verbal dissent occurs in the language of gender, but that the actions we take to subvert gender in dress and affect are themselves only subversive through their reference to the norm.

If an identity politics of non-binary identity cannot liberate us, is also true that a queer or trans identity politics offers us no hope. Both fall into the same trap of referencing the norm by trying to “do” gender differently. The very basis of such politics is grounded in the logic of identity, which is itself a product of modern and con-

temporary discourses of power. As we have already shown quite thoroughly, there can be no stable identity which we can reference. Thus any appeal to a revolutionary or emancipatory identity is only an appeal to certain discourses. In this case, that discourse is gender.

This is not to say that those who identify as trans, queer, or non-binary are at fault for gender. This is the mistake of the traditional radical feminist approach. We repudiate such claims, as they merely attack those most hurt by gender. Even if deviation from the norm is always accounted for and neutralized, it sure as hell is still punished. The queer, the trans, the non-binary body is still the site of massive violence. Our siblings and comrades still are murdered all around us, still live in poverty, still live in the shadows. We do not denounce them, for that would be to denounce ourselves. Instead we call for an honest discussion about the limits of our politics and a demand for a new way forward.

With this attitude at the forefront, it is not merely certain formulations of identity politics which we seek to combat, but the need for identity altogether. Our claim is that the ever expanding list of personal preferred pronouns, the growing and ever more nuanced labels for various expressions of sexuality and gender, and the attempt to construct new identity categories more broadly is not worth the effort.

If we have shown that identity is not a truth but a social and discursive construction, we can then realize that the creation of these new identities is not the sudden discovery of previously unknown lived experience, but rather the creation of new terms upon which we can be constituted. All we do when we expand gender categories is to create new more nuanced channels through which power can operate. We do not liberate ourselves, we ensnare ourselves in countless and even more nuanced and powerful norms. Each one a new chain.

To use this terminology is not hyperbolic; the violence of gender cannot be overestimated. Each trans woman murdered, each intersex infant coercively operated on, each queer kid thrown onto the streets is a victim of gender. The deviance from the norm is always punished. Even though gender has accounted for deviation, it still punishes it. Expansions of norms is an expansion of deviance; it is an expansion of ways we can fall outside a discursive ideal. Infinite gender identities create infinite new spaces of deviation which will be violently punished. Gender must punish deviance, thus gender must go.

And thus we arrive at the need for the abolition of gender. If all of our attempts at positive projects of expansion have fallen short and only snared us in a new set of traps, then there must be another approach. That the expansion of gender has failed, does not imply

that contraction would serve our purposes. Such an impulse is purely reactionary and must be done away with.

The reactionary radical feminist sees gender abolition as such a contraction. For them, we must abolish gender so that sex (the physical characteristics of the body) can be a stable material basis upon which we can be grouped. We reject this whole heartedly. Sex itself is grounded in discursive groupings, given an authority through medicine, and violently imposed onto the bodies of intersex individuals. We decry this violence.

No, a return to a simpler and smaller understanding of gender (even if supposedly material conception) will not do. It is the very normative grouping of bodies in the first place which we push back against. Neither contraction nor expansion will save us. Our only path is that of destruction.

Radical negativity

At the heart of our gender abolition is a negativity. We seek not to abolish gender so that a true self can be returned to; there is no such self. It is not as though the abolition of gender will free us to exist as true or genuine selves, freed from certain norms. Such a conclusion would be at odds with the entirety of our antihumanist claims. And thus we must take a leap into the void.

A moment of lucid clarity is required here. If what we are is a product of discourses of power, and we seek to abolish and destroy those discourses, we are taking the greatest risk possible. We are diving into an unknown. The very terms, symbols, ideas, and realities by which we have been shaped and created will burn in flames, and we cannot know or predict what we will be when we come out the other side.

This is why we must embrace an attitude of radical negativity. All the previous attempts at positive and expansionist gender politics have failed us. We must cease to presume a knowledge of what liberation or emancipation might look like, for those ideas are themselves grounded upon an idea of the self which cannot stand up to scrutiny; it is an idea which for the longest time has been used to limit our horizons. Only pure rejection, the move away from any sort of knowable or intelligible future can allow us the possibility for a future at all.

While this risk is a powerful one, it is necessary. Yet in plunging into the unknown, we enter the waters of unintelligibility. These waters are not without their dangers; and there is a real possibility for a radical loss self. The very terms by which we recognize each other may be dissolved. But there is no other way out of this dilemma. We

are daily being attacked by a process of normalization that codes us as deviant. If we do not lose ourselves in the movement of negativity, we will be destroyed by the status quo. We have only one option, risks be damned.

This powerfully captures the predicament that we are in at this moment. While the risk of embracing negativity is high, we know the alternative will destroy us. If we lose ourselves in the process, we have merely suffered the same fate we would have otherwise. Thus it is with reckless abandon that we refuse to postulate about what a future might hold, and what we might be within that future. A rejection of meaning, a rejection of known possibility, a rejection of being itself. Nihilism. That is our stance and method.

Relentless critique of positive gender politics is thus a starting point, but one which must occur cautiously. For if we are to criticize their own normative underpinnings in favor of an alternative, we only fall prey once again to the neutralizing power of normalization. Thus we answer the demand for a clearly stated alternative and for a program of actions to be taken with a resolute “no.” The days of manifestos and platforms are over. The negation of all things, ourselves included, is the only means through which we will ever be able to gain anything.

Addendum

It’s been a few months since I first wrote and attempted to distribute *Gender Nihilism: An Anti-Manifesto*. In that time, the reactions to this piece have been diverse and divisive. While there have certainly been some who have praised it as useful, there has been some very pointed (and often very important) criticisms of the piece. It is in light of this criticism that I am writing this addendum. My piece lacked a few important things, namely: context, an explicit address of race, and explicit articulation of gender as a colonial product, and perhaps a clarification as to the nature of the piece itself. I hope to add those here.

First, it would be deceptive to pretend that I am unaware of the amount of critiques which also have called my character, social location, and motivations into account. Let me address these. I am writing from an academic context, I study trans theory in an academic context, I am planning and aiming for a career in the academy. I understand the academy is a massively corrupt and oppressive institution and I understand its products are imperfect. I think we need to walk a fine line of realizing these products have value, and that they are never the end all or authoritative voice in any context.

I have also been accused of anti-blackness for various reasons

only slightly related to the anti-manifesto, but this is being used to make a tacit critique of the piece. Let me acknowledge that as a non-black person of color, I am inherently bound in anti-blackness to the degree to which my social location is dependent on its structural instantiation, and my ideology is informed by that location. I will not contest how black folks within the online community I was part of have perceived me, it is not my place to say whether I am anti-black or not. I will say I try hard to interrogate my own anti-blackness and step down when a failure of that interrogation causes me to place myself into contexts and conversations I ought not be. It is ultimately non up to me, or any other non-black person to decide what this means. That is all I have to say on that.

This leads me to the first important addition to the text: context. I wrote the anti-manifesto out of desperation. Like many trans women before me (Susan Stryker has articulated this phenomena beautifully), I turned to theory to try to explain and contextualize my lived experience. Gender Nihilism was conceived in community, through discussion between myself and a group of comrades primarily composed of other trans women of color. It was an attempt to articulate how gender had affected us all and to expose the violence of that. What we discussed was largely centered on a few thinkers, but one who was very important to us but did not make it into my piece was Maria Lugones. Through her work on the coloniality of gender, we had tried to articulate how the gender we refer to in gender nihilism is not a term inclusive of indigenous and non-western genders, but is a specific regime on knowledge imposed onto bodies through colonization. For the sake of time, I did not include this in the Anti-Manifesto; for those of us having this conversation this assumption and framing of decolonial critique of gender was implicit.

This was a mistake, not everyone had this context. Without this context it quite understandably appeared that my critique of gender was not of a specific colonial phenomena but rather of all the diverse, and multiplicitous phenomena which that term could possible call to mind. This was wrong of me to exclude, this was a mistake and this is why this addendum is necessary. If you want to understand this context I highly suggest you engage the work of Maria Lugones, especially *Towards a Decolonial Feminism*. I no longer blog, but the work is easy and I trust that if you are interested you can explore it yourself. I also implore you to listen to the voices of the other folks involved in Gender Nihilism. I think its telling that I am presented as the voice of the gender nihilism, when two of the other largest contributors are indigenous trans women. Their voices matter in this debate more than mine, yet people have completely and consistently centered my voice and perspective. This is harmful.

Finally, this piece was not meant to tell anyone how to think about gender, it was the result of a collective analysis by a specific group of people which came to conclusions that allowed us to understand our lives. If you don't like that understanding, feel free to discard it. I do not ask or demand you agree with me. I am happy that discussion and discourse towards these ideas continues. I made mistakes with omitting crucial contextual framings which caused my piece to be at least tacitly complicit in whiteness and coloniality. I am not back to defend myself, I simply wanted to point out where you could pursue a way forward in thinking through these ideas to avoid that mistake. Keep resisting, keep struggling, keep discussing, keep surviving. I hope I have not made that more difficult, and I sincerely hope I may have at least somewhat helped.

Beyond negativity: What comes after gender nihilism?

Note from the editor: In the years after writing *Gender nihilism: an anti-manifesto*, the well-known *camarada nihilista* Alyson Escalante has gone from a comrade of ours to a ~~oop fascist~~ Marxist-Leninist, as she describes herself on Twitter.²¹ As she describes us:

²¹ As of May 2019, @Alysonesque.

...the popular text Desert is devoted to the impossibility of mass revolution...post-civ and anti-civ people in particular have totally rejected the possibility of any sort of revolutionary politics and openly mock those who strive for universal human emancipation...the ideal anarchist in this nihilist vision is one who has given up hope of progressive change and has instead chosen to pursue their own personal liberation from power and obligation through cathartic violence.

To the nihilists among us (such as yours truly) this may seem ~~fuckin' badass~~ like an exaltation of our views, but she continues:

This approach to liberation is echoed in fascist notions of the rugged and heroic individual or anarch who is strengthened through the mass violence of the fascist society. The obsession with a rejection of modernity and civilization is also shared between fascists and post-left.

Of course, this is not only a (probably willfully) mischaracterization of post-left theory (which isn't a monolithic discourse as Escalante seems to believe,) but also an example of how MLs appropriate the real, lived struggles of those who struggled under fascism to further the colonial goal of a "global revolution." Make no mistake: "global revolution" means Western hegemony. Amongst those critical of anti-civ theory, it becomes incredibly evident that they use it as a veil to critique the lived experiences of those they relegate to the status of "primitive": if anti-civ anarchists are anti-revolutionary for wanting to live outside of industrial civilization, how anti-revolutionary are those who already live outside industrial civilization? When will Escalante *et al.* attempt to lead a revolution in the Amazon to "liberate" the indigenous peoples who live wholly outside the colonial system?

Of course, climate change is a facet of colonialism, capitalism, and civilization, insofar as they face deforestation, thus, they are not

outside of the colonial system in this sense. However, many so-called ‘uncontacted peoples’ have preserved their way of life in the face of Leviathan. Further, this is not to imply that indigenous peoples are “anarcho-primitivist” or even “anti-civ” in the context of the anarchist tendency. The great Wolfi Landstreicher tackles this in *A Critique, Not a Program: For a Non-Primitivist Anti-Civilization Critique*, which we highly recommend.²²

We digress. Our point in this section is so that our readers will understand why we included this essay in our volume. So, without further ado, we present to you *Beyond negativity*. (***note from the editor ends here.***)

Introduction

I’ve spent quite a lot of time trying to figure out how to respond to my previous work *Gender Nihilism: An Anti-Manifesto*. For the last year or so, I’ve had a very strong conviction that I must respond to it, but have struggled to do so adequately. I wrote an addendum that is now attached to the original article where it is hosted on Libcom. I had felt it was necessary to try to explain the context in which *Gender Nihilism* was written, and to explain the criticisms it had generated. I’ve spent the years since the original posting of *Gender Nihilism* ruminating on the many criticisms it received, as well reflecting on the many people who reported finding it useful, insightful, and radical.

In my mind, *Gender Nihilism* has a mixed legacy. It is, sometimes to my frustration, the most popular work I have ever written, and it has received greater distribution than I could ever have imagined. Given the surprising popularity of the article, it has been my conviction that I have an obligation to write something which could correct some of the errors of the original theory. This essay is my attempt to do so.

In broad strokes, my thoughts on *Gender Nihilism* and the ideas that developed around it are as follows:

Gender nihilism correctly diagnosed a problem. What I at the time called “the proliferation of identity” designates, I believe, a real trend within LGBT and queer discourse in which there is a tendency towards endlessly developing taxonomies to map out difference. This difference is indeed conceptualized as an ontological difference, that reflects some sort of stable subject from which knowledge of that difference can be divined via the correct discourses of identity. That is a real problem that plagues LGBT activism to this day. In that sense, the criticism forwarded in the article still maintains relevance.

Gender nihilism could not, however, go beyond this initial di-

²² As it is outside our scope, we have not included it in *Gender After Civilization*. However, it is easily-accessible on the Anarchist Library.

agnosis. It failed at the crucial task of establishing a theory of the relationship between this ideology of difference and the material conditions from which gender emerges. Put more simply, Gender Nihilism could accurately point out a problem, but it was unequipped to explain what the source of that problem is.

Rather than actually attempt to materially investigate the class interests at play in production of gendered difference, gender nihilism settled with saying “If the problem is proliferation then the solution must be its opposite, therefore our task is to negate endlessly.” This solution could never have been adequate because it responds to an ideological issue at the level of ideology. Fighting ideology with counter-ideology, rather than eliminating and reshaping the material conditions from which the first ideology emerged. This was never a useful solution or contribution to theories of resistance to gender.

The work to be done, if we want to revitalize the critical insight of gender nihilism is to accurately diagnose the material base from which the ideology of difference and taxonomy emerges.

I hope that this essay will attempt to investigate that material base, and to provide insight into what a materialist project (which takes the critiques in my original argument seriously) would look like. In order to do this I will first reevaluate the original critique I forwarded in *Gender Nihilism* to reassess its current relevance. Second, I will turn to the work of Monique Wittig in order to provide a materialist account of ideologies of sexual difference. Finally I will examine what a materialist, and thoroughly non-nihilist project of resistance to such an ideology and its material base might look like.

What was gender nihilism?

Gender Nihilism: An Anti-Manifesto opens with the claim that “The current politics of trans liberation have staked their claims on a redemptive understanding of identity.” This statement still seems to largely reflect the contemporary situation within activism and theory focused on trans liberation and LGBT issues on the whole. Quite simply, the politics surrounding issues of gender and sexuality are still a politics centered around a notion of recognition. The central concern is whether or not LGBT individuals are recognized by liberal society writ large as subjects. This is obviously a concern which cannot be simply glossed over. The question of who is granted subject status is of utmost political concern. At the same time, politics cannot be reduced to this question.

A significant amount of writing about LGBT and queer identity is still primarily focused with expanding recognition through articulating an endless set of new identities. How many think pieces

have been penned which critique the terminology of lesbian, gay, and bisexual as being inadequate for the recognition of the vast multiplicities of genders which we are now supposed to recognize as ontologically distinct realities? Even in mainstream LGBT and queer media we see a proliferation of theories like the split attraction model; each an attempt to provide a precise definition of each individual's own sexuality and gender. Each meant to provide, in a sense, a recognition of the specificity of one's experience. This approach does not, however, stop merely at the recognition of experience. Rather it shapes that experience into a comprehensive identity which is understood as being ontologically distinct from the countless other infinitely precise sexualities and genders.

Again, this phenomena seems to largely be driven by a desire for recognition. In fact, the goal seems to be the creation of recognition that is entirely non-reductionist; a recognition which captures the specificity of my own experience and sense of self to the fullest extent possible. Thus the proliferation of identity which Gender Nihilism first railed against can perhaps be understood as a demand for recognition taken to an absurd extent.

It is important to emphasize that questions of recognition are not trivial. After all, we need merely make a quick return to Hegel to realize the extent to which recognition is central to our own subjectivity. Gender Nihilism, I think, failed to take into account that this redemptive notion of identity has developed in response to a real need for recognition. Yet Gender Nihilism was correct to note that this demand for recognition via the recognition of each individual's personal identity as ontologically distinct is a demand for recognition that subtly naturalizes the relationships of power and class which create that identity in the first place.

The demand "recognize my identity as being as valid as other identities" presumes identity exists as some unassailable and natural phenomena. For example, in the demand that non-binary identity be seen as equally valid to man or woman as identities, there is presumption that we ought not to be critical of the notions of man and woman in the first place. The impulse to simply create more and more identity categories can only be understood as a liberating political project if we understand the project of placing people into identity categories on the basis of gender and sexuality to be a politically liberatory act in the first place.

Gender Nihilism was originally an attempt to argue that this naturalization of identity was in fact an attempt to expand modes of control, theories of deviance, and mechanisms for punishment. This is what is meant by the statement, "All we do when we expand gender categories is to create new more nuanced channels through which

power can operate. We do not liberate ourselves, we ensnare ourselves in countless and even more nuanced and powerful norms. Each one a new chain." Quite simply, Gender Nihilism was the insistence that if the cost of recognition was the expansion of gender as a fundamentally violent apparatus of categorization, then recognition was not worth it.

This is where the nihilism in Gender Nihilism came in. At the time that I wrote the article, it seemed sensible to me that we might escape the entire game of categorization through a rejection of identity on the whole. The entire third section of my original article outlines a notion of self-abolition through embracing unintelligibility and refusing the put forth a positive politics of identity. In essence, a nihilistic embrace of meaningless resistance was the only possible way forward.

This was, quite frankly, a naive understanding of what resistance and identity might look like. I do not disagree with my original claim in the second section of the article that gender abolition presents the best possible solution to the problem both of gendered violence on the whole, but also to the problem of recognition. Where I now diverge from my previous thought is in terms of what the project bringing about such abolition might look like.

An embrace of unintelligibility, of nihilism, of a rejection of meaning and stability might have presented a useful method of resistance, if gender operated merely at the level of ideals and ideology. If gender was nothing more than the belief in stable ontological identities, then perhaps a rejection of that belief might be enough. But gender is more than a belief. Gender represents a material reality which divides the world not just at the level of the ideal but at the level of labor, economics, and life itself. Gender divides the world into those who do specific types of labor and those who don't, into those who are financially independent subjects and those who are financially dependent. This division does not occur merely at the level of ideals but in the day to day material matter lives of individuals.

If gender operates not merely at the ideological or symbolic level, then a response which does operate only at that level is inadequate. As such, I am quite convinced that the model of resistance proposed in Gender Nihilism needs to be rejected, and a new model developed on the basis of a material investigation into the material base which produces the ideologies of gender and difference which Gender Nihilism was so obsessed with rebutting. The rest of this essay will attempt to do that work.

A materialist theory of gender

Gender Nihilism did very little to give a solid definition of gender. While it certainly opposed something referred to as gender, it did not go about adequately explaining exactly what that thing was. In the brief moment that the article does devote to this task, it settles for citing Judith Butler, who writes that gender is, “the apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine take place along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes.” While that is certainly a jargon laden definition, it is not a definition which provides a comprehensive notion of gender.

From this definition we are left asking several questions. What is an apparatus? In what realm does it operate; ideal, symbolic, material, etc? What does that production and normalization look like? Through which institutions is it enacted? While Butler certainly has tackled these questions in her own work, Gender Nihilism never set out to do so, and never even bothered to summarize Butler’s own answers. As such, we are left trying to deduce exactly what gender is for Gender Nihilism. It seems that the answer to this question is that for Gender Nihilism, gender is the symbolic division of individuals into various categories, as well as the mechanisms of enforcement that ensure compliance with these categories. Gender would then be understood as the discourses which dictate assignment to male or female, or in the new world of identity proliferation, to any other newly recognized categories. As such, Gender Nihilism primarily understands gender itself to be a process of taxonomy and categorization.

This understanding of gender does seem to recognize real processes which do in fact take place, but it does not attempt to explain why these processes operate the way they do, what class interests this operation serves, or what the relationship between these processes and material concerns about the reproduction of society might be. Gender Nihilism takes for granted that these processes are violent enactments of power, but due to its grounding in a faulty and misapplied Foucauldian notion of displaced and dispersed power, never asks whose power is being enacted and whose interest this all serves.

All of this is a lengthy way to say that the theory of gender in Gender Nihilism was not an adequately materialist theory of gender. It correctly noted that there is a certain ideological process of categorization and naturalization of difference which is occurring, but it did not go beyond this. We must now go beyond that initial critique. Thankfully, much of the work of providing a materialist theory of gender has already been done. The french radical feminist theorist

Monique Wittig's own writing on gender, sexuality, and materialism has laid a powerful foundation for the project we we must undertake.

Wittig's project has a similar starting point to gender nihilism; it seeks to argue against a sort of naturalization of identity which has become popular in feminist politics. Wittig begins her essay "One Is Not Born a Woman" by explaining that "a materialist feminist approach to women's oppression destroys the idea that women are a 'natural group.'" For Wittig, women are not oppressed because they are women; that is to say we do not live in a world wherein there are first women and then afterwards there is an oppression of women. Rather, Wittig insists that "what we take for the cause or origin of oppression is in fact only the mark imposed by the oppressor: the myth of woman plus its material effects and manifestations in the appropriated consciousness and bodies of women. Thus, this mark does not predate oppression." Women, do not constitute a pre-existing and naturally delineated group of people, but are "an imaginary formation which reinterprets physical features(in themselves as neutral as any other but marked by the social system) through the network of relationships in which they are perceived." Thus, for Wittig, the assertion of "woman" as an identity cannot in fact be a particularly useful starting point because it risks naturalizing the forces which produce it. I hope the resonance between this theory and the theory put forth in Gender Nihilism is obvious.

Wittig is, thankfully, not satisfied with merely noting that woman is not a natural identity; she goes further to investigate exactly why this phenomena of gendered categorization takes place. In order to do this, Wittig seeks to "define what we call oppression in materialist terms" by "making it evident that women are a class, which is to say that the category 'woman' as well as the category 'man' are political and economic categories not eternal ones. Our fight aims to suppress men as a class, not through a genocidal, but a political struggle. Once the class 'men' disappears, 'women' as a class will disappear as well, for there are no slaves without masters." It is this shift to understanding the phenomena of gender as an issue of class and class struggle that provides a materialist foundation for a more comprehensive theory of gender.

In order to truly understand how gender operates materially we must turn to another of Wittig's essays: *The Category of Sex*. Here, Wittig truly sets about to the task of giving a materialist account of gender in profoundly dialectical terms. She writes, "the perennality of the sexes and the perennality of slaves and masters proceed from the same belief, and, as there are no slaves without masters, there are no women without men." Thus men and women are understood through a dialectical notion of class. The material base from which

gender as a process of categorization emerges is thus the material contradiction expressed in this relationship. She continues:

...the ideology of sexual difference functions as censorship in our culture by masking, on the ground of nature, the social opposition between men and women. Masculine/feminine, male/female are the categories which serve to conceal the fact that social differences always belong to an economic, political, ideological order. Every system of domination establishes divisions at the material and economic level. Furthermore, the divisions are abstracted and turned into concepts by the masters

...

for there is no sex. There is but sex that is oppressed and sex that oppresses. It is the oppression that creates sex and not the contrary

In this formulation, the process of categorization which Gender Nihilism simply referred to as “gender” is in fact an ideology of sexual difference which exists in order to obscure and naturalize the economic and social exploitation of women. The processes of categorization are thus materially grounded in class struggle, and emerge to serve the material interests of men as a class. This is the profound materialist insight which Gender Nihilism could never get to on its own. As such, Wittig provides the framework necessary for the criticism which Gender Nihilism puts forth to have teeth; her work can direct that criticism towards not just the ideology of difference which is operative in the process of categorization, but to the relationship and class struggle which produces this ideology. These insights demonstrate the way that the valorization of difference, and potentially even the demand for recognition of difference as foundational to one’s subjectivity, can operate as ideological justifications for material exploitation. Suddenly the impulse towards categorization and taxonomy is no longer some free floating and amorphous “discourse” but takes on a function within a material contradiction.

Moving past nihilism

Gender Nihilism, as a form of political nihilism, was profoundly pessimistic. In *Abolitionism in the 21st Century: From Communization as the End of Sex, to Revolutionary Transfeminism*, Jules Joanne Gleeson notes that this pessimism can be found in other works of transfeminist theory. It is unsurprising that those struggling so intensely to fight for their liberation might sink into pessimism. Yet I want to echo Gleeson’s critique. Gleeson notes that, “between these writers, we are still left with only the skeleton of a strategy. Abolitionist politics are

becoming more timely than ever, however, and so this stance is due urgent development." This is certainly the case, and Gender Nihilism offered little hope in providing adequate development of this strategy. She also suggests that such strategical work has been developed in other radical literature, particularly in the writings of prison abolitionists. Gender Nihilism could not, of course, draw on the politics of prison abolition as a result of its rejection of politics on the whole. It thus seems that Gender Nihilism's own idealist grounding precludes the possibility for it to produce a strategy at all.

I hope, that the picture I have painted of Gender Nihilism at this point is complex. I insist that the ideas put forward in *The Anti-Manifesto* were not entirely off base, but lacked a theoretical grounding, and I have attempted in this essay to provide a materialist account which might correct the mistakes of Gender Nihilism. As such we are left with the need for the abolition of gender, the need to push back against reformist projects that simply seek to make an expanded notion of gender. What remains to be created is the establishment of a path forward.

I want to suggest that Gleeson is correct to note that communist opposition to the family provides a crucial path forward. She argues,

The family serves as a unique bastion organizing heteronormativity, and through ensuring the inter-generational procession of wealth and access to fixed capital, also anti-blackness. Upbringings and intimacies existing outside of norms which have developed along with capitalism are widely disparaged, and culturally subordinated. For as long as heterosexual parents are relied on for giving queer kids upbringing, widespread dispossession will be the rule.

As such, opposition to the family provides one concrete path forward. What I find so powerful about Gleeson's account is that this opposition is tied directly into the struggle for communism. She again writes, "This move will be a move towards communism: upbringings in private households replaced by communal labor, undoing the many generations of degradation and coercive differentiation." In a profoundly insightful move, Gleeson connects the necessity of abolition to the necessity of communist struggle.

I am convinced that Gleeson is correct about this. The struggle for the abolition of gender cannot be separated from the struggle for communism. A properly materialist assessment of the conditions which produce gender reveals the extent to which gender is not merely a linguistic or discursive phenomena. Gender is a material relationship that can only be combatted materially. The communist movement's focus on the abolition of the family is precisely what might be needed to undo the forms of economic exploitation of women which Wittig outlines. Wittig's heterosexual society is also

a capitalist society. Only real, concrete, and organized struggle can move us forward. Mere negation, senseless violence, or embrace of unintelligibility cannot be enough. In short we must move beyond negativity. The project at hand is to adequately account for the violence of gender, the necessity of its abolition, and the strategies for achieving that abolition in material terms. Only then will we have the ability to not only achieve abolition, but to change the world.

So, what comes after Gender Nihilism? It is certainly not a politics of radical negation, it is not a refusal to engage in positive political struggle, it is not a refusal to define our demands. Rather, what comes after Gender Nihilism must be a materialist struggle against patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism which understands and is attentive to the complex interrelations between these structures and which refuses to reduce any one of them to any other. This requires daring imaginations of new futures, discussion and communication and theoretical development which demands not just abolition but a way to actually achieve it, and a clear set of materialist theoretical principles and praxis to unite around. The abolition of gender will only be achieved as a result of the abolition of the material conditions which reinforce it with their ideologies of sexual difference. This means destroying the capitalist system which produces the nuclear family as a fundamental social structure. This means overcoming colonialism and white supremacy which rely on gendered discourses to justify their violence and establish ideologies of hypersexuality and deviance. This means recognizing that these things can only be overcome by a communist politics oriented towards the future. Abandon nihilism, abandon hopelessness, demand and build a better world.²³

²³ Note from the editor: No.

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Afterthoughts

And thus, ends *Gender After Civilization*. Get in touch with us and our friends:

- Heresy Distro <<https://heresydistro.noblogs.org/>>
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- Down and Out Distro <<https://downandoutdistro.noblogs.org/>>
downandoutdistro@riseup.net (*check their website for the PGP block*)
- Here and Now Zines
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