

# “TO BE LIBERATED FROM THEM (OR THROUGH THEM)”

## A CALL FOR A NEW APPROACH

This is a call for a collective conversation about new approaches to theorizing and practically organizing around the complex relationship between identity, liberation, and revolution. Finding the existing framework of intersectionality inadequate, we wish to move beyond stale debates over the priority of either class or identity-based oppression whose form either subsumes political economy into an undifferentiated mass of oppressions or pushes analyses into “pro” or “anti” identity positions. We list some shared starting points that could inform a new mode of inquiry, and pose questions that might lead us to more fruitful ways of thinking about how ascribed identities might be organized autonomously in order to attack the racial, gender, and sexual hierarchies which hold these identities in place.

### I. FRAMING WHAT’S AT STAKE

We are looking for a position that is not available in the current theoretical and political landscape. We are trapped in a field of competing political tendencies within which the only intelligible locations are wholly inadequate to our needs. Our choices are limited to a reformist politics of diversity (inclusion of all identities makes the revolution!); a politics of false and violently imposed unity (unite for the class fight!); an ahistorical and idealist insurrectionism (make total destroy!); a class-reductionist communization (the value form is the key!); and so on.

We refuse to set aside the oppression — both brutal and tacit — of queers, women of color, trans\* people, women, Black, Brown, Asian-American, Chican@, Muslim, fags, and dykes as something

to be dealt with later, *after* the revolution. We refuse to treat these struggles as mere springboards for the more central and fundamental struggle of the proletariat. These oppressions and violences are not derivative, secondary, or epiphenomenal to class. There is no more opportunity to abolish patriarchy or racism *within* capitalism than there is opportunity to abolish class exploitation within capitalism.

Because these oppressions are denied, pushed aside, imagined as incidental; because we experience our conditions as intolerable in the present; because one attacks a structure from one’s location within it: because of all of these things there is a real and immediate need to organize around these categories. There is a real need to establish autonomous spaces and groupings according to specific oppressions of capitalism. Autonomy is a means by which we develop shared affinities as a basis for abolishing the relations of domination that make that self-organization necessary. And yet, even as we do this, we want to be freed of the social relations that make us *into* women, queers, women of color, trans\*, et cetera. We want to be liberated from these categories themselves, but experience teaches us that the only way out is through.

One model for understanding autonomous organizing as necessary for revolution has been the theory of communization as articulated by a host of groups recently publishing together in the journal *SIC*. The French group *Théorie Communiste* have written “self organization is the first step of the revolution. It then becomes an obstacle that the revolution has to overcome.” Theirs is primarily a critique of communist tendencies that affirm working class identity and view revolution as the ascendance of the working class to power. As an alternative they posit the self-abolition of the working

class through the destruction of the labor/capital relation. The term “self-abolition” is key, for it locates the power to abolish relations of exploitation within the collective body of the exploited group. It points to the tension inherent in the revolutionary process: a process in which the material bases for the collective affinities that make struggle possible are themselves violently destroyed through conflict and revolutionary movement, leading to the eventual dissolution of those affinities as relevant descriptors of any kind of shared experience. Autonomy is a step toward abolition, not the end goal.

We are looking for the points where communization theory’s critique of working class identity and its necessary relationship to capital converges with anti-essentialist critiques of raced and gendered identities — gender abolitionist feminism, queer insurrectionism, and Afro-pessimism, to name a few. We move to place these recent anti-essentialist but identity-based movements and theories in conversation with theories of communization, with their critique of working class self-affirmation. As separate modes of inquiry each of these tendencies falls far short of providing us with the necessary tools to attack the totality of capitalist relations. Within the communization cohort, only a few pieces on gender have emerged, and nothing on the questions of race, sexuality, or struggles around trans\* and non binary bodies and gender identities. The texts of the communizationist canon [cf. *SIC; Communization and its Discontents; Endnotes; Riff Raff*] are highly Eurocentric and lack historical specificity. Feminist theory has either ignored or capitulated to class analysis, and has been riddled historically with white and cis supremacy. This is not to mention the consistent presence of a gender essentialism which balks at the notion of abolishing gender altogether. In positioning itself in opposition to a vulgar class-reductionism, anti-racist theory has rejected a serious study of political economy and has frequently flattened the question of gender and sexuality if not outright supported male supremacy and/or hetero/cis normativity. Queer theory’s embrace of idealism and postmodernism typically renders it incapable of describing structures rooted in material social relations, and its often implicit or explicit rejection of the concept of patriarchy, at times veering into misogyny, neutralizes many of its potential critiques.

All of this shows that no amount of autonomy and identity-centric analysis can ensure a revolutionary theory or praxis, and this is why we must develop a shared critical vocabulary and understanding of the structural totality of capital. Racial hierarchies, gendered violence, and exploitation are not epiphenomenal; they are immanent relations at the same level of abstraction as class. We strive toward a systemic analysis of gender and race relations, the divisions of labor which base themselves in these relations, and the material sites and institutions which continually reproduce subordinated raced and gendered identities. It is this kind of analysis that we feel has the potential to strengthen our struggles as we face choices about what to attack, what lines to draw, what to fight for, what to fight against, and how to become stronger.

## II. SHARED BASIS

**Communization.** We aim to abolish wage labor, exchange, value, capital, the working class as such, and the state through a process of global insurrectionary upheavals. We view the relation between labor and capital as ever moving and developing, each category constituted by the other and unable to exist without the other; communization is the process of the abolition of the totality.

**Totality.** Race and gender are not “exotic historical accidents,” incidental to capital’s development. They are immanent to its logic, to its processes of accumulation, and to its expansion. Intersectionality will not suffice.

**Autonomy.** Those who materially benefit from oppressive and exploitative social relations will never willingly destroy those social relations. Just as we cannot expect capitalists as a group to willingly give up their ownership over the means of production, we cannot expect patriarchy or white supremacy to be destroyed by those who benefit from them. These processes will only be destroyed and abolished by the people who are oppressed and exploited by these relations. Therefore, we believe in the necessity of autonomous organizing on the basis of materially produced categories, such as “trans,” “queer,” “woman,” “POC,” et cetera. The simple affirmation and insistence on working class unity, on the need to unite across our differences for the sake of

the class, will not bring communization or an end to identity-based oppressions.

**Abolition.** Our vision of liberation assumes not equality between genders, sexualities, and races, but the abolition of these identity categories as structural relations that organize human activity and social life. We believe that these identities are the names of real material processes of capitalism — *not of something essential or salvageable within us*. They place us in relationships of domination and subordination with one another. For us communization is also the process by which we ourselves will abolish this identity-relation-process-production. This means that a politics whose ends lie in the radical reassertion of a range of potentially revolutionary historical subjects, from the classical proletariat to contemporary decolonial subjecthood, cannot fundamentally challenge the matrices of power, exploitation, and oppression which materially constitute subjects. We therefore call for a renewed interrogation of the relationship between autonomy and abolition, in which self-organization based on identity categories is understood as a necessary part of the *abolition* of these categories.

### III. QUESTIONS

How do we assess existing theories of the totality of capital — the many different theories that attempt to describe the structure of race, gender, and class? How does our understanding of this totality affect our understanding of struggle and of liberation?

How do we conceive of a kind of self-organization where the identity category that forms the basis for organization does not become the basis for a kind of nationalism, essentialism, or a politics of affirmation and authenticity in which occupying a subordinated position is in itself taken as radical or revolutionary? Can we conceive of a dialectic of autonomy and revolt that through its synthesis has the power to destroy the social relation upon which identity categories are built?

What are the points of contradiction where, in the course of struggle, self-organization based on identity categories has a tendency to emerge? How can these points and these forms of self-organization propel

the communization process forward? How and when do they become co-opted? Can we look at historical examples to help us understand and speculate about some of the dynamics that might tend to emerge in a revolutionary process?

To what degree can the relation labor/capital, as elaborated by many strains of Marxist theory, be used as a model for understanding gender and race, as in: the relation man/woman, the relation white/nonwhite, the relations straight/queer and cis/trans? Can theories of the abolition of the labor/capital relation by the self-organization and then self-abolition of the working class be used in some way to theorize the abolition of gender and race? What are the limits to such a comparison? How do we also make sense of the fact that in reality these relations are not separate but interact and mutually constitute one another? How do we imagine the abolition of race and gender as unfolding alongside and within the abolition of the labor/capital relation, not separate from it?