#### Debate is a Sacrifice Zone that habituates the public into exchanging disabled deaths for abled life. The aff’s business-as-usual approach to reform sanitizes the rising tide of eugenics which secures a system that churns out profit from blood and guts.

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We will not trade disabled deaths for abled life. We will not allow disabled people to be disposable or the necessary collateral for the status quo. We will not look away from the mass illness and death that surrounds us or from a state machine that is more committed to churning out profit and privileged comfort with eugenic abandonment. We know the state has failed us. We are currently witnessing the pandemic state-sanctioned violence of murder, eugenics, abuse and bone-chilling neglect in the face of mass suffering, illness and death. We are the richest nation in the world and we continue to choose greed and comfort over people and life. The state is driving the knife of suffering deeper into the gut of those who are already collapsed on the ground. The cruelty is sweeping and unapologetic. This is no surprise to many of us on the far left. We have seen what the state is willing to do to its own people. We have never been able to rely on the state because we know the state does not care about us or our people. We have always had to organize outside of the state. This is nothing new. We have been here before and we are here again. We know we need systemic change so that our peoples can literally survive this pandemic alive, but we also know that the kind of changes we need are most likely not coming. It is in the interest of those in power to keep people uncared for, sick and dependent on dwindling crumbs. This is one reason why ableism and poverty are so effective and why they are often inseparable. There are many things we cannot control or change right now, even as we desperately wish we could. As we fight for systemic changes, we can also try to change what is happening inside of our communities. We can learn from our mistakes and try to, at the very least, not make things worse than they already are. Pitting the need for state and systemic change against individual and community change sets up a false binary. Both are necessary to get out of the pandemic mess we are in, just as both are necessary for any kind of liberation we are fighting for. We need to provide hazard pay to essential workers, end evictions, pay people to stay home, distribute free tests to everyone and we need everyone to wear masks, stop holding/attending in-person gatherings, stop unnecessary travel and get vaccinated and boosted. There are people on the left who are only talking about the need for a state response, while they themselves are still not vaccinated and boosted or continue to throw/attend in-person gatherings. If [transformative justice](https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2019/01/09/transformative-justice-a-brief-description/) teaches us anything, it is that systemic change alone is not enough. There are also many changes that must happen at the community and individual levels as well. Vaccines have laid bare how deep ableism runs in our political movement culture. Disabled people have always known this, but I have been incredibly disappointed and angry at abled people, especially within our movements, who have reinforced abled supremacy via abled culture and entitlement and shirked their responsibility and missed opportunity after opportunity to challenge abled supremacy and act in solidarity with disabled people and communities. Why have we allowed and contributed to the framing of vaccines as an individual choice instead of collective action, [interdependence](https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2017/04/12/access-intimacy-interdependence-and-disability-justice/) and solidarity with disabled people (especially those who are high risk), elders, children who cannot get vaccinated, the global south, essential workers and those who do not have the option to work from home? For those who are able to be vaccinated, getting vaccinated is not about personal choice. It is not like deciding to get an abortion; stop saying this. Not getting vaccinated is not “my body, my choice,” it is more like drunk driving or exposing someone to secondhand smoke. We should be talking about getting vaccinated and making it part of our political left culture. Not only posting about it on social media, though that is important, but more importantly, engaging in direct conversations with those in our lives. Not in an attempt to shame, because we know from transformative justice that shaming people is not useful, but in a way that invites conversation and sets clear consequences, not punishment. Getting vaccinated and boosted should be framed as part of our political commitment to interdependence, [disability justice](https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/02/12/changing-the-framework-disability-justice/) and solidarity. I have been truly disheartened, though not surprised, by the amount of people in our movements who are able to get vaccinated, who have not done so and continue to eat out and go to gatherings, instead of staying home to protect others. As someone who has experienced tremendous abuse, including sexual abuse within the [medical industrial complex](https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2015/02/06/medical-industrial-complex-visual/), I do not support forced medical treatments of any kind, including vaccines. I want you to want to do the right thing. I want you to want to protect and care for other people. If you are able to get vaccinated, but are adamant that you do not wish to, then for our collective safety, isolate yourself, stay home and stay away from other people. Abled culture teaches abled people to be entitled. You are entitled to never have to learn anything about disability and ableism. You are entitled to get to move through the world, and through our movements, with little-to-no understanding or political analysis about disability, even as you pontificate about every other system of oppression and violence. Abled culture in our movements mean that we will say, “we must center those who are most impacted,” all day every day, but then not include disabled, especially those who are high risk, in the center during a global pandemic. Abled entitlement means that you will still continue to plan your vacation abroad, even amidst the Delta surge; you will still post pictures from your giant family holiday gathering amidst the Omicron surge. You are not entitled to our deaths. You are not entitled to the deaths of our loved ones in the name of capital, privilege and “normal.” You are not entitled to our silence about our pain and suffering and the wet tar grief that envelops us. You are not entitled to our fear and terror at the worsening conditions and chaos of this pandemic, wondering if we will ever be able to safely leave our homes again. You enjoy connection at the expense of our isolation. Your needs are always more important than the collective. When you choose to gamble with your own health, you only take into consideration your own risks and never the risks of others. Abled entitlement ensures risk assessment will always be, “Will I get sick? I will be able to recover OK. My family will be OK. My children will be OK.” Never, “Will they be OK? Will their children be OK? Will their family be OK? Will everyone they might also interact with be OK?” Never, “Could this harm their country? Their state? Their continent?” Shielded by your abled privileged bravado, “it can’t happen to me. I’m healthy.” Never, “Who might I be exposing? I might be OK, but someone else may not.” Abled supremacy means that many of you mistakenly think that if you do get COVID and if you end up with [long](https://www.facebook.com/groups/373920943948661/) [COVID](https://www.wearebodypolitic.com/covid-19), that the state will take care of you or that your community will. You believe this because you do not know about the lived reality of disability in this country. Abled privilege means that you don’t have to listen to disabled people or learn about ableism and abled supremacy. Our government does not care about the disabled people that already exist. So, if you think it will care for you if you become disabled from COVID as millions more will, then that is a function of your ableist ignorance. I need you to care about disabled people’s lives more than you care about a vacation, a party or a celebration. A cornerstone of being disabled in an ableist world is isolation. This is part of the trauma of ableism. Disabled people are marked over and over by isolation through material, social and cultural inaccessibility, stigma, fear, violence and shame. We live with various forms of social distance our entire lives. During this pandemic, many disabled people, particularly those who are high risk, have not left their house or seen anyone for years, save the people they live with. You take the luxury of in-person connection for granted and feel entitled to it, even as thousands around you die and suffer, even as you may risk prolonging and worsening the pandemic. We don’t know when the next variant will emerge as a threat. Scientists are watching many variants that have not become threats yet. The longer COVID is allowed to circulate within a community, the more chance it has to mutate and spur a new variant. We cannot keep risking collective safety for individual indulgence. We cannot keep sacrificing long term needs for short term wants. Disabled people are not disposable. We are your feared present and your inevitable future. We are what age and time promise more than anything else, and this is one reason you fear us and why you have continually pushed us away and hidden us. You don’t want us too close, don’t want a daily reminder of difference and privilege; you don’t want to have to change your life for us. We are to be landfilled away, conveniently forgotten about so you can play pretend without interruption. Pandemics, climate change, pollution and toxins have tilted the scales and upped the ante that disability is our collective future. You may have been able to avert your eyes from state violence, poverty and addiction, but what about when the very air you breathe becomes a threat? What about when there is nowhere left to escape climate disaster and you cannot afford to leave the planet? Individual safety by itself is a myth. There is no individual safety without collective safety and collective safety requires that no one is safe unless everyone is safe. You interrogate your privilege, but never your abled privilege. You educate yourself about oppression, but never ableism. You love your queer, BIPOC, working class, abolitionist, anti-racist, feminist, immigrant communities, but never seem to remember that disabled people exist in these and every community. My people are dying and terrified. And you don’t seem to care. You don’t seem to care because you don’t see them–see us–as your people too. When you talk to me about racial justice or housing justice or healing justice or gender justice, who exactly are you talking about? Whose justice are you fighting for? Because it never seems to include disabled people or if it does, it is only in theory, not practice; only to make yourself look better. Or only when disabled people are in the room or when disabled people initiate the conversation. I do not wish to be your token politicized POC disabled friend or comrade. If you care about me, then I also need you to care about disabled people and disabled communities because if you don’t care about them, then you don’t care about me. If you care about me then I need you to check your abled entitlement and challenge abled supremacy, especially the current abled culture that deems disabled people as disposable in this pandemic. I need you to not only say that you are in solidarity with disabled people or that you value disability justice; I need you to practice it. I need you to engage in the hard conversations with fellow abled people about vaccines and boosters, masks and canceling in-person gatherings, travel and work. Many disabled people have been doing this labor because we do not have a choice. We have been losing connections, yelled at, mocked, ridiculed, told we are overreacting, harassing or controlling simply because we do not wish to die. Simply because we do not want others to die. Simply because we cannot afford to risk being at the mercy of a triaged medical system that may deem us unworthy of treatment because of our disability, illness, class, race, skin color, accent, immigration status, gender, size. Simply because many of us knew what was coming, what is coming, and we knew we could not stop it without you and we knew you would always choose your own comfort and pleasure over collective safety, over interdependence. How to put into words the demoralization of needing people who do not need you? We should be framing this pandemic in terms of interdependence. This is the right political framing because it is the only moral and humane framing. Interdependence acknowledges that our survival is bound up together, that we are interconnected and what you do impacts others. If this pandemic has done nothing else, it has illuminated how horrible our society is at valuing and practicing interdependence. Interdependence is the only way out of most of the most pressing issues we face today. If we do not understand that we are interdependent with the planet we as a species will not survive. Abled culture teaches you to act as if you are independent, to buy into the [myth of independence](https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2017/04/12/access-intimacy-interdependence-and-disability-justice/). Reject this. Embrace interdependence and know it is the only way we will be able to end this pandemic. Know that if we center disabled people, first and foremost those who are high risk, it will help everyone. More people getting vaccinated and boosted, means less people overrunning hospitals, so that ICU beds and hospital staff can be available for those who truly need it. It also means that non-emergency surgeries and other vitaly needed medical procedures do not have to be postponed because of an overwhelmed medical system. Less people traveling unnecessarily means less chance for the virus to spread and mutate, and that those who do need to travel (e.g. to take care of a sick loved one) will be at less risk. For those who can, staying home and not going out when you don’t have to creates safer conditions for those who are not able to stay home. Declining invitations to gatherings and explaining why, not only helps to stop the spread, but also models by example care, boundaries and interdependence. Reframe your disappointment for having to cancel that event or gathering as an opportunity to practice interdependence, solidarity and disability justice. In the same way that you might refrain from attending or purchasing something you enjoy because you want to support workers on strike, support the most vulnerable groups from this pandemic. This includes the global south, which is filled with BIPOC disabled people, because we know that they will bear the brunt of the global north’s entitlement, selfishness and greed (e.g. not stopping the spread of the virus, waiving patent rights for vaccines). If we all step up to protect the most vulnerable, if we all practice collective action together, then we can significantly help to reduce risk and harm. The solution cannot be that everyone has to get COVID. That is eugenics because many disabled high risk people will die and those who do not die will have serious complications and lifelong impacts to their health and wellbeing via COVID and the possibility of long COVID. Do not buy into this eugenic thinking that expects the most vulnerable to be sacrificed. Long Covid is real and it can happen to anyone. This pandemic will create millions more disabled people with chronic illnesses. Are we ready for what is coming next? Are we prepared for how many more disabled people with chronic health conditions there will be? Are we ready for how that will and should necessarily shift our movements and political work? Or are we going to continue to shut out disability and disabled people from movements and communities? Are we going to continue to not include ableism and abled supremacy in our liberation work? If there was ever a time to be in solidarity with disabled people, it is now. It has been through this entire pandemic. This is about what you can do now. Now is the time to recalibrate, to get (back) in alignment with your values. We don’t need your apologies, we don’t have time for that, we just need you to do better. If you are abled, talk to other abled people. Because of ableism they will be more open to hearing it from you than from us. Help to educate them. Do not participate in upholding abled supremacy. Unlearn everything that doesn’t serve interdependence. Interdependence is ultimately about “we,” instead of “me.” It understands that we are bound together, by virtue of existing on this planet. Interdependence is generative and grounded in care for one another. It doesn’t live in obligation or entitlement, but rather a loving willingness and a sacred giving. Interdependence cannot exist in scarcity, competition, comparison, domination or greed. It flourishes in abundance, appreciating and honoring difference, collective care and collective access. Interdependence can exist between two people or six billion and everything in between. Interdependence asks us to imagine new ways forward with intention and soulful commitment to each other. We need you. We need all of us. There is no getting out of this pandemic alone. There is no stopping the spread or pushing our government, schools and businesses to do more, alone. We need each other. We need each other. We need each other

#### The AFF’s commitment to generating skills marketable to competitive markets is indebted to a Lockean individual that owns their self and capacities. They naturalize a world where the possession of ability is a precursor for economic inclusion as those who cannot skill-up are left to rot from the very market forces they protect.

Wheelahan, Moodie, and Doughney 22 (Leesa Wheelahan – professor in the Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education at the Ontario Institute of Studies for Education, University of Toronto. Gavin Moodie – Adjunct Professor in the Department of Leadership, Higher, and Adult Education at the University of Toronto, Canada, and Adjunct Professor in Education at RMIT University, Australia. James Doughney - professor of Philosophy at Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia. “Challenging the skills fetish” British Journal of Sociology of Education [March 1st, 2022] <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186>, DOA: 3/7/22, kbb)

Introduction Education policy discourse is based on skills. The extraordinary policy enthusiasm for skills is premised on an unwavering belief that skills are the solution to all social, economic and personal ills. For nations, more and better skills will lead to economic prosperity, increased productivity, higher labour market participation rates, increased global economic competitiveness and higher levels of social inclusion. For companies, the acquisition and retention of skills is said to be key to their profitability. For individuals, more and better skills will result in a good job, better pay and the potential for promotion, the capacity to participate fully in society and with the right kind of skills, the ability to move jobs and careers and engage in personal transformation. The converse of this is also held to be true: if a nation does not have the right skills in the right combination it will languish, if companies do not have the right quantity and mix of skills they risk going out of business and if individuals do not have the right skills they and their families will languish because they have not made wise investments in their skill development. The pervasive belief in the role of skills constitutes a doxa – a taken-for-granted and unquestioned truth (Bourdieu [1984](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186) [1979]). Indeed, there is a moral imperative driving the skills discourse. The World Economic Forum (WEF) ([2021](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 4), which is a powerful advocacy body for world capitalism, has issued ‘a call to action for wide-scale upskilling’. Globalisation, technological change and demographic changes have ‘led to a pressing societal problem: how to equip people with the skills they need to participate in the economy – now and in the future’ (World Economic Forum (WEF) [2021](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 4). The Covid-19 pandemic has, if anything, intensified the skills narrative. According to the World Economic Forum (WEF) ([2021](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 8), this is because ‘it is forcing digitalization and automation at a more rapid pace’. This article builds on an expansive literature that problematises the skills discourse and locates its emergence in the crisis of capitalism that emerged in the 1970s in the transition from the post-World War II social settlement premised on the Keynesian welfare state, to the neoliberal market state (Streeck [2016](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186); Therborn [2012](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). Those who have come before us have situated the emphasis on skill and competency that emerged in the 1980s as part of the neoliberal project, based on new understandings of skill and work and of the ‘market individual’ (Jones and Moore [1993](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186); Moore [1987](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186); Wheelahan [2007](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). Others have critiqued the narrow behaviourism of the skills discourse, in emphasising the impoverished view of human beings and learning that the skills discourse posits (Hyland [1997](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), [1999](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186); Eraut [1994](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). Yet others have demonstrated that the failed promise of human capital theory (Brown, Lauder, and Cheung [2020](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186); Livingstone [1998](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), [2019](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)) results in ‘cruel optimism’ that the jobs, the career, and our imagined futures will be available to us (Berlant [2011](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). This article makes two contributions to this literature. The first is to analyse the nature of 21st century skills as the latest incarnation of the skills discourse. Policy debates focus on the right kind of skills and not merely on skills development per se. In contrast to so-called generic and employability skills in vocational education or graduate attributes in higher education, the WEF and the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) have posited their very influential notion of 21st century skills for all sectors of education, which encompass foundational literacies, competencies and character qualities (WEF and BCG [2015](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). The second contribution draws on Marx to argue that skill has become a fetish. The concept has become reified as existing independently of the bodies of those who exercise skill and of the social relations in which skills are embedded and through which skill is developed, exercised and recognised. It uses Marx’s concept of commodity fetishism as an analogy to analyse skills fetishism and to argue that the skills fetish is related to commodity fetishism more directly through the notion of a labour market in which skills are bought and sold. The first half of this article analyses the emergence of the skills discourse and its evolution from generic skills in the 1980s to 21st century skills. It explains how the skills discourse was driven first by human capital theory and, later, by skill-biased technological change, both linked to neoliberal reforms of education in which education was marketised and subordinated to the economy. The second half of the article analyses the skills fetish. It first compares and contrasts Anglophone narrow task-focused conceptions of skill with broader notions associated with an occupation in collective skill-formation systems in Northern Europe. It demonstrates that the rational, self-interested actor of human capital theory is underpinned by nominalism, empiricism and methodological individualism. This is the means through which skill is reified and separated from embodied agents on the one hand, and from social relations, on the other. The commodification of skill as a resource that is traded in markets is related to the fetishisation of commodities more broadly. TINA and the skills discourse A 2014 report by the Conference Board of Canada offers an illustrative example of arguments about the centrality of skills to all aspects of life: Skills are critically important to the economic, social, political, and cultural well-being of Canada and Canadians. Advanced skills, when attained and used by a large proportion of a country’s population, improve productivity, economic competitiveness, and political and community engagement, and also contribute to better employment prospects, household and personal income, and health for individuals and their family. (Munro, Cameron, and Stuckey [2014](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), iii-iv) Canada has the highest level of tertiary education attainment in the world for the population aged between 25 and 64 years (OECD [2020](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), Table A1.1), yet there is still a rhetorical discourse (albeit in an understated Canadian way) that Canada has a skills problem and that there is a gap between the education that is provided and the skills that are attained. The same report argues that Canada is doing quite well in producing people with post-secondary education credentials but that its ‘actual skills attainment is underwhelming’. This is worrying, as ‘knowledge, technical skills, and essential skills’ are critical for both individual and national success (Munro, Cameron, and Stuckey [2014](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), ix). The imperative in government policies for skills is the TINA discourse – ‘there is no alternative’. Human capital is the driver of economies and societies and, without skills, nations will languish. ‘There is no alternative’ was made famous by Margaret Thatcher when, as Prime Minister of the UK, she used this idea to demonise concepts of the public good, privatise public institutions, subvert the welfare state and marketise social provision (Harvey [2007](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186); Berlinski [2008](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186); Littler [2018](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). The neoliberal world-wide economic transformation was led in the 1980s initially by Thatcher in the UK and President Ronald Reagan in the United States. Thatcher and Reagan were instrumental in taking ideas about individualism, markets and putative personal freedom that had existed in academic circles for some decades and implementing them in practice, thus ushering in neoliberalism and in the process transforming society and the state (Harvey [2007](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). These changes were adopted with alacrity by all mainstream parties in other Anglophone countries and less thoroughly by other Western governments, at least initially (Hood [1995](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)), and were enforced by international governmental organisations such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund through global trade agreements and loans that were conditional on poor countries implementing neoliberal policies (Harvey [2007](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). The effect of neoliberal policies was to rebalance society, from one in which markets were assigned a supporting role towards that of a market society per se. Streeck ([2016](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 22 original emphasis) explains ‘Now states were located in markets, rather than markets in states’. In the market state, the point of all social institutions is to facilitate markets and heighten competition within them. In turn, individuals have to invest in their human capital to participate effectively in more competitive educational and labour markets. The neoliberal conception of the state differs in important respects from that which went before. The ‘classical liberal’ pre-World War II state in western democracies was premised on notions of negative freedom, which emphasised the absence of economic constraints by a minimalist and non-interfering state. In contrast, the welfare state that arose after the destruction of World War II embraced some aspects of the notion of ‘positive freedom’, in which the state has an obligation to intervene through direct provision, for example, of a ‘safety net’.[1](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186#EN0001) While still premised on the liberal individual, the welfare state had an obligation to provide greater access to social resources (Bottomore and Marshall [1992](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). Olssen ([2016](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 130) explains that, in contrast to both the classical liberal state and the welfare state, the neoliberal state is an activist and interventionist state which seeks to create entrepreneurial citizens who invest in their human capital as a precondition for their participation in markets. The role of the state is consequently to provide the ‘the conditions, laws and institutions’ necessary for markets to operate (Olssen [2016](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 130). All social provision, including education, is subject to the discipline of the market through competition with private providers or with other public institutions. The neoliberal state also provides the mechanisms to ensure that both public institutions and those who work in them comply with market imperatives through ‘individualised incentives and performance targets…[and] a new, more stringent conception of accountability and monitoring’ (130). Starting in the 1980s, and entrenched in policy discourses since that time, the role and purpose of education became overwhelmingly economic, displacing broader conceptions of citizenship. In the market society, the imagined economic citizen is not dependent on the state, and decision-making is exercised through the market rather than through democratic participation in social and political fora. Human capital theory enables the behaviour of individuals, enterprises and states to be understood as the pursuit of self-interest through markets. Individuals, enterprises and nations are all advantaged by wise investments in human capital. Orthodox human capital theory posits that more educated labour elicits more demand by employers for skilled labour, which leads to higher productivity and higher wages (Becker [1964](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). The fate of nations depends on it, particularly in this new technological age. However, the problem for human capital theory is that, despite the fact that we have the most educated population in the history of humankind, we putatively still have a skills deficit. This narrative is given a renewed urgency because the 3rd and 4th industrial revolutions, driven by ‘automation and intangible value creation’ (WEF [2020](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 5) have rendered obsolete skills that were developed for the 1st and 2nd industrial revolutions which were characterised by ‘the mass production of uniform talent… used to fill repetitive, process-oriented early manufacturing jobs’ (WEF [2020](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 5).[2](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186#EN0002) Digital and socio-emotional skills must be prioritised to cope with ‘new job types that do not yet exist’ (WEF [2020](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 5). The whole person must be engaged in this transformation, and Klaus Schwab ([2016](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 99), founder and Executive Chair of the World Economic Forum, argues that this necessitates harnessing four different types of intelligence: the contextual (the mind), emotional (the heart), inspired (the soul), and physical (the body). As will be demonstrated later, the rhetorical discourse underpinning the 4th industrial revolution is premised on an ideal type of individual as envisaged in neoliberal constructions of the rational self-interested actor. Human capital theory and the evolution of the skills discourse and lifelong learning Human capital theory has underpinned education policies for almost 50 years. Initially, much human capital theory was descriptive: it was used to explain economic gains from expanding education. It was also used to explain why individuals, companies and governments increased their spending on education. In the 1980s and 1990s, human capital theory became increasingly normative: advocates argued that investment in human capital should be increased to promote economic performance. Since the 2000s, human capital theory has become even more prescriptive, with advocates arguing that postsecondary education should emphasise, and then be restricted to, programs thought to have most economic benefit (Wheelahan and Moodie [2021](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). From its outset human capital theory was criticized on methodological grounds, particularly in the literature on education screening and signalling (Arrow [1973](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)).[3](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186#EN0003) Human capital theory seemed consistent with the wage and education data for most of the twentieth century, but there have been mismatches in recent decades (Brown, Lauder, and Cheung [2020](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186); Lloyd and Payne [2016](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). Lloyd and Payne ([2016](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 1-2) explain ‘With rising graduate populations and pressure on individuals to gain more qualifications at all levels, there is increasing concern about the capacity of national economies to keep pace with the outputs of the education system, amid evidence of growing levels of over-qualification and skills wastage.’ The response has been to argue that economic productivity is increased not by education in general, but by the development of specific skills. This is the position of skill-biased technological change (Goldin and Katz [2010](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)).[4](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186#EN0004) The evolution of the skills discourse over this time is reflected in changing understandings of lifelong learning since the 1970s. The 1972 Faure report Learning to be: the world of education today and tomorrow published by UNESCO was expansive in its understanding of the purpose of education and the individual, on the one hand, and education and society, on the other (Faure [1972](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). The underpinning premises were social solidarity, democracy, lifelong education and the fulfilment of the individual ‘in all the richness of his personality, the complexity of his forms of expression and his various commitments – as individual, member of a family and a community, citizen and producer, inventor of techniques and creative dreamer’ (Faure [1972](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), vi). Biesta ([2006](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 171) argued that this report reflected ‘the world of the late 1960s and early 1970s… both in terms of its concerns and in terms of its optimism that change for the better was possible’. Streeck ([2016](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 21) explains that the growth of democratic capitalism in the West ‘reached its peak in the 1970s, after which it began to disintegrate’ and over time was replaced by neoliberalism.[5](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186#EN0005) Some 20 years later, the notion of lifelong learning was ubiquitous (Field [2002](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186); James [2020](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)), but in a very different world. Field ([2001b](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)) explained that two different notions of lifelong learning were framing policy debates in international government organisations in the 1990s. UNESCO published the famous Delors Report, titled The Treasure Within, in which an expansive notion of lifelong learning was supported by four pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be (Delors [1996](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). However, Field ([2001b](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 9) also explained that this report ‘said little in substance that was new or different’, at a time when UNESCO’s influence as an influential policy body was waning. At about the same time, the OECD ([1996](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)) published Lifelong Learning for All, in which, as Field ([2001a](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 10) argued ‘an emphasis on lifelong learning was justified by reference to global competitive pressures and the changes wrought by science and the new technologies’. This report emphasised building links between informal learning and formal education and training, thus reinforcing a key pillar of human capital theory, which is that all learning must be pressed into service for the labour market. The report advanced five arguments in favour of lifelong learning. First, the learning economy depends on engaging the whole population in lifelong learning, and those countries and individuals that fail to engage would be left behind (TINA). Second, the ‘speed of change’ argument focused on the ubiquity of rapid technological change and growth in knowledge and information. The third argument was about the ‘life-cycle redistribution’ in which both education and work would extend over a longer period. The fourth supported active labour market policies in which an ‘underlying broad aim should be to move away from essentially passive approaches based on transfer payments – especially in response to unemployment’ (OECD [1996](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 91). The final argument was ‘social cohesion’: those who miss out on arguments one to four would be effectively excluded. The report argued that ‘Learning is the most necessary insurance against exclusion and marginality’ (OECD [1996](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 91-92). Rather than the welfare state acting as the social safety net in insuring the population against risk, access to and success in education now constituted this role. Individuals must make wise investments in their human capital so that they can get a good job, keep it and progress in the labour market. Biesta ([2006](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 170) argued that, in the learning economy, understandings about what learning is and what it is for were based on ‘a much more individualistic understanding of lifelong learning and … transformed lifelong learning from a right into a duty’. This duty was enforced through active labour market policies, which required individuals to undertake training in return for welfare payments. Abhorrence of ‘passive welfare’ is linked to the neoliberal notion of the individual, investor and entrepreneur, and so lifelong learning policies moved from ‘Learning to be’ to ‘Learning to be Productive and Employable’ (Biesta [2006](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 170). Moreover, this duty is enforced in near universal systems of tertiary education, in which the attainment of substantive post-school qualifications (i.e., at least a diploma or a degree) is a precondition for participation in the labour market and society (Trow [2010](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). From generic skills, employability skills and graduate attributes to 21st century skills The skills discourse had its parallel in the vocational education sector in the 1980s, when youth unemployment surged as a consequence of the economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s and the restructuring of the labour market (Goozee [2001](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). Streeck ([2016](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 16) explains that the long-post World War II social settlement built on the Keynesian welfare state was abandoned as a result of global inflation in the 1970s, the explosion of public debt in the 1980s, and rapidly rising private debt in the decades that followed, culminating in the Global Financial Crisis in 2008. The skills discourse, and the competency-based training models of curriculum to which it gave rise, first emerged in the United Kingdom, then in Australia and, thereafter, through processes of policy diffusion, to other, particularly poor countries, which were required to implement such policies in return for aid (Allais [2014](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). The assumption then and now was that the development of human capital was the basis upon which economic renewal would be built (Goozee [2001](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186); Brown, Lauder, and Cheung [2020](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). The winding back of the welfare state was accompanied by the expansion of policy conceptions of skill which, over the ensuing decades, came to encompass all aspects of our lives. Payne ([2000](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 353), in tracing the development of the skills discourse in the UK from the 1980s, explains that the concept of what was entailed in skill expanded over time from an initial focus on the ‘manual craft worker and technologist…[to a] much wider discourse of “basic skills”, “employability skills”, “technician skills”, “management skills”, and “key skills”.’ 21st Century skills take this process one step further, as is discussed later. The perceived problem was that young people did not have the skills that were needed for the new economy and society, an echo of what we hear today. Pathologising young people who did not have jobs as being deficient was an easier policy intervention than was dealing with the restructuring to the economy that had resulted in the disappearance of jobs for teenagers (Brown, Lauder, and Cheung [2020](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). Investment in human capital was the solution, but investment needed to be in the particular skills directly needed for work. Moore and Hickox ([1994](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 283), in discussing the vocationalisation of curriculum during the 1980s and early 1990s in the UK, characterised government policies during this time as instrumental, market-oriented and based on blaming the liberal values of the previous era ‘as the reason for education’s failure to deliver on its earlier promise’. Vocational ‘modernisers’ argued that education lacked relevance for the world of work (see Jessup [1991](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), for an example). The vocationalisation of curriculum in vocational education was initially driven by ministries and agencies external to education. In the UK, the training reforms were led by government statutory bodies under the aegis of the Department of Employment (Moore and Hickox [1994](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)), while, in Australia, training reform as an engine for economic growth was led by ‘the coordinating government departments of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Finance and Treasury’ (Marginson [1997](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 158). The result was the development of competency-based training models of curriculum. Deng ([2020](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 92) explains that competency-based curriculum did not originate in education as curricular concepts, but rather they were ‘managerial concepts that originate from the field of human resource management’. The explicit purpose of competency-based curriculum is to tie education directly to workplace requirements and roles. The impact of these changes differed in different sectors of education. In most countries, the sector of education in which competency-based education has had the most impact is vocational education because it is more tightly tied to work and buffeted by powerful external constituencies such as employer bodies and unions (Wheelahan and Moodie [2016](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). As a consequence, the language of so-called generic skills and employability skills has increasingly saturated curriculum in vocational education, based on the idea that qualifications need to include generic or transferable skills for employment and the specific competencies required to perform particular tasks and roles in the workplace. In Australia, the university sector was initially able to resist the imposition of more overt and tightly defined models of competency-based education (Keating [2003](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)) but, over time, this resistance has eroded. Instead of competency-based education, all Australian universities have ‘graduate attributes’, which are ‘descriptions of the core abilities and values a university community agrees all its graduates should develop…’ (Barrie, Hughes, and Smith [2009](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). Graduate attributes are not as tightly defined as are competencies in vocational education, but they are nonetheless still premised on the notion that graduates need a suite of transferable skills and attributes for the labour market. In universities in many jurisdictions, variants of competency-based education are now routine in education for the professions, and the language of competencies and learning outcomes structures national and supra-national qualifications frameworks (Mulder and Winterton [2017](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). These provide the basis in all sectors of education for quality assurance policies and accreditation frameworks for institutions and the programs they offer. Genericism and trainability Graduate attributes in higher education and so-called generic skills and employability skills in vocational education are based on the principle of genericism, or ‘trainability’, as Bernstein ([2000](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)) describes it in his critique. He explains that trainability is premised on: a new concept of ‘work’ and ‘life’, a concept of ‘work’ and ‘life’ which might be called ‘short-termism’. This is where a skill, task, area of work, undergoes continuous development, disappearance or replacement; where life experience cannot be based on stable expectations of the future and one’s location in it. (Bernstein [2000](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 59) Individuals must be equipped for a perpetually changing future and thus constantly be able to ‘upskill’. Lifelong learning takes on renewed importance in a world where nothing is stable, and genericism becomes the organising principle for curriculum construction. Genericism is a way of ordering curriculum, the relations between its components, and in identifying that which is important. The generic skills discourse and the extraordinarily high level of policy attention given to it in all sectors of post-compulsory education and training over decades was and is the mechanism through which all elements of curriculum have become vocationalised through the discourse of work-relevance. Programs and outcomes in all sectors of post-compulsory education and training must prepare students for work. Development and selection of curricular components and the way curriculum is delivered must take this into account. However, skills are not generic in the sense advanced by their advocates. Jones ([2009](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 87) interviewed 37 academics in two big research-intensive Australian universities in five disciplines: economics, history, law, medicine and physics. She found that ‘generic attributes are highly context-dependent, and are shaped by the disciplinary epistemology in which they are conceptualised and taught’ (Jones [2009](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 85). For example, problem-solving in economics involved using economic tools and developing economic models; in history it was understood as exploring causality; in law it was closely related to critical thinking and involved analysing hypothetical or real cases; in medicine problem-solving was understood as the application of clinical reasoning and diagnostic and therapeutic skills; and, in physics it involved abstract modelling and mathematical analysis (Jones [2009](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 89-90). Problem-solving strategies involve analogies, forward search and other cognitive strategies, all of which are bound by their context (Servant [2019](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 623). They require both the declarative and procedural knowledge of the subject area to develop cognitive schemata and to try the appropriate type of solution (Kirschner and Hendrick [2020](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 16-18; Sweller [1988](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). ‘21st century skills’ take this process of genericism one step further. These encompass the traditional definitions of skills in most policy arenas. Using the WEF/BCG definitions, these include foundational literacies (literacy, numeracy, scientific literacy, ICT literacy, financial literacy, and cultural and civic literacy) and competencies (critical thinking/problem-solving, creativity, communication, and collaboration), but now also encompass character qualities such as persistence, grit, adaptability, curiosity, initiative, leadership and cultural awareness (WEF and BCG [2015](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 3). While there are somewhat different definitions of 21st century skills offered by different entities in different jurisdictions, they are premised on social and emotional skills and skills in ‘self-management’ (Giammarco, Higham, and McKean [2020](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). The expanded notion of skill encompassed in 21st century skills thus reflects the colonisation of all aspects of our lives, including who we are, our inner selves, what we believe and how we behave. The WEF/BCG (2015, 3) explain that: Character qualities describe how students approach their changing environment. Amid rapidly changing markets, character qualities such as persistence and adaptability ensure greater resilience and success in the face of obstacles. Curiosity and initiative serve as starting points for discovering new concepts and ideas. Leadership and social and cultural awareness involve constructive interactions with others in socially, ethically and culturally appropriate ways. In writing about the language of generic and life-skills during the 1980s, Ainley and Corbett ([1994](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 368) explained that this is a ‘cling-film language, that can stretch over almost anything’ and ‘serves to make the concept of “skill” into a nebulous moral issue, outside everyday experience’. The language of 21st century skills is written in apparently neutral terms, based on a presumed shared understanding of what these skills are, the presumption that they can be defined, assessed and measured and the presumption they are a desirable policy goal. Nonetheless, for all that, 21st century skills are still underpinned by the same moral imperatives that Ainley and Corbett were writing about almost 30 years ago in this journal, which is that young people are deficient because they do not have the skills that are needed for success in work and, as a consequence, in life. The skills fetish Charles Tilly ([1988](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 452) argued that ‘As a historical concept, skill is a thundercloud: solid and bounded when seen from a distance, vaporous and full of shocks close up’. Allais ([2011](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 2) explained that, in education policy, particularly in Anglophone countries and those shaped by the Anglophone colonial legacy, skills are unproblematised and ‘separated from power, social policy, the structuring of labour markets, and the organization of occupations and jobs’.[6](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186#EN0006) In these systems, skills are separated from the occupations in which they arise and the social relations that underpin occupations. The concept of skill is understood differently in Northern European systems based on collective skill formation and Anglophone systems (Clarke and Winch [2006](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). These systems are characterised by different ‘labour market and welfare regimes’ (Lloyd and Payne [2021](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 1), with different roles for social actors such as employers and unions, different types of market regulation, and different mechanisms of coordination between education and the labour market. Collective skill formation systems are those in which the ‘main characteristic of the vocational training systems … is that they are collectively organized, because firms, intermediary associations and the state cooperate in the process of skill formation in initial vocational training’ (Busemeyer and Trampusch [2012](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 4). The dominant notion in these systems is the concept of an occupation (or, in the German system, a beruf) as the starting point for vocational education. A beruf (occupation) has a well-defined social, legal and employment role and status with a corresponding body of systematically related theoretical knowledge (Wissen) and a set of practical skills (Können). It corresponds also with the social identity of the person who has acquired the occupation, its knowledge and its skills (Clarke and Winch [2006](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 262). There are 325 different apprenticeships (Ausbildungsberufe) which prepare individuals for regulated occupations in Germany and, hence, require specific qualifications or credentials as a precondition for employment. These apprenticeships provide the basis for career progression to higher-level occupations.[7](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186#EN0007) Collective skill formation systems are under pressure as a result of profound labour market changes, the undermining of the institutional arrangements that underpin these systems and the ‘Europeanisation’ of labour markets and qualifications systems, even though national systems react in different ways to these changes (Clarke, Westerhuis, and Winch [2021](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). In contrast, in Anglophone countries, where most of the labour market is unregulated, the market is used as the main coordinating mechanism, particularly in allocating graduates to jobs. Graduates must compete not only with those who have similar qualifications in similar fields but also with graduates from many fields and who have different types of qualifications (Hall and Soskice [2001](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). Educational institutions seek to respond to this by emphasising the brand value of their qualifications in the labour market, even though the match between qualifications and occupations is weak.[8](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186#EN0008) Given these weaker connections, the emphasis is on employability skills, or graduate attributes in general, rather than deep engagement with the specific knowledge and skills required for specific occupations (Wheelahan and Moodie [2017](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)).[9](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186#EN0009) Employability is thus disconnected from occupations, as are the knowledge and skills that underpin occupational practices. Clarke and Winch ([2006](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 261) explain that Anglophone notions are that skills are an individual property or attribute, focused on tasks and jobs and not occupations, associated with physical or manual mastery and ability and have ‘no particular association with a knowledge base’. The emphasis, particularly in Anglophone countries but increasingly also in the rest of the world, in skills policies is to ‘fix’ education so that it supplies the right skills by tying it ever tighter to the ‘demands’ of the labour market and employers. This takes for granted that the ‘demands’ from employers are coherent and well formulated, and that individuals will be able to use the skills they have in the workplace. However, as Keep and James ([2012](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)) Buchanan ([2006](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)), Brown and Lauder ([2010](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)), and others have demonstrated, the problem is the nature of (poor) jobs. There have been some attempts by the OECD ([2019](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)), and some national jurisdictions to emphasise local economic development and skills ecosystems and how employers use skills.[10](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186#EN0010) However, as Bosch and Charest ([2009](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)) explain, the links between education and the labour market will remain weak without the close involvement of social partners such as employers and unions. This is difficult because in many countries, increasingly ‘flexible’ labour markets combined with declining union membership means that the mechanisms for coordination between education and the labour market have become more fragmented, leaving continual policy tinkering in education one of the only policy levers governments are prepared to use. Nominalism, empiricism, methodological individualism and behaviourism The intellectual mechanisms that allow the separation of skills from the social context in which they are exercised, and from the bodies of people who must use them, are nominalism and methodological individualism (Wheelahan [2007](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). The philosophy of David Hume, the 18th century exemplar of British empiricism, is central to understanding this process. For Hume, knowledge is built through and limited to what we can observe and/or measure. The methods that are used to gain access to the world and to make statements about it are also methodologically individualist. The total is the sum of, and reducible to, its parts (Heath [2020](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). Hume argued that the world consists of independent objects that are not causally related. The best we can do is ‘nominalise’, that is to group or correlate the world’s particular things, actors, activities and events under convenient generalising names (such as skills), and the outcomes of any process are the sum of events that comprise it (Johnson, Dandeker, and Ashworth [1984](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). Nominalism and methodological individualism hold for all levels of reality, including the social world. Markets, for example, are the aggregation of ontologically distinct individuals who pursue their self-interest, and a society is just the sum of the individuals who comprise it and nothing more. For example, Friedrich von Hayek ([1980](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 6), one of the intellectual progenitors of neoliberalism, argued that ‘there is no other way toward an understanding of social phenomena but through our understanding of individual actions directed toward other people and guided by their expected behavior’.[11](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186#EN0011) While the philosophy of behaviourism precedes neoliberalism, it is also premised on nominalism and methodological individualism, and is the basis of competency-based training models of curriculum. Behaviourism holds that the outcomes of learning can be reduced to discrete behaviours, with learning inferred to have taken place based on observable performance (see Jessup [1991](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). Learning must be described merely in terms of what students can do, and not what they know or are in the process of knowing or becoming. Processes of learning are assumed to be identical with, or conveniently reduced to names of, outcomes of learning, with learning outcomes described in advance as observable behaviours that are aligned to a particular task, role or requirement. In Australia, which has a ‘tight’ model of competency-based training for qualifications in the vocational education sector, competency is defined as: ‘The consistent application of knowledge and skill to the standard of performance required in the workplace. It embodies the ability to transfer and apply skills and knowledge to new situations and environments’ (Naidu, Stanwick, and Frazer [2020](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 10). A unit of competency describes specific roles, tasks or functions in jobs. Each unit of competency is broken down into elements of competency (particular activities, tasks and roles), which are assessed using performance criteria. Units of competency also comprise assessment guidelines, knowledge requirements and ‘range statements’ which describe the contexts of application of the unit of competency. Qualifications comprise aggregates of units of competency, and the same units of competency can be aggregated in different ways to make different qualifications. This leads to an additive approach to the development of qualifications, in which all skills can be distinguished, named and assessed independently of each other. This even includes attributes of individuals, such as those specified in 21st century skills. An example is the unit of competency, ‘Develop and use emotional intelligence’, which is part of 10 different vocational education qualifications at three different levels of the Australian Qualifications Framework (certificate IV, diploma and advanced diploma) (Australian Government [2020](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). There are three elements of competency: ‘1. Prepare to develop emotional intelligence’; ‘2. Develop emotional intelligence’; and, ‘3. Promote development of emotional intelligence in others’. There are 13 performance criteria that must be used to evaluate performance. For example, criterion 1.3 requires that students demonstrate that they can ‘identify and analyse potential emotional stressors in the workplace’, while criterion 2.3 requires them to demonstrate ‘techniques that indicate flexibility and adaptability in dealing with others in the workplace’. Foundation skills are also included, namely learning, oral communication, teamwork, enterprise and initiative. Similar examples of atomised, additive approaches to skills can also be found in Australian higher education. For example, at Deakin University, it is possible to undertake a micro-credential in ‘self-management’ or ‘problem-solving’, independently of any other credential, qualification or notion of occupation or field of practice.[12](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186#EN0012) Premised in both examples is that what happens in workplaces and that one’s progression is a consequence of individual efforts rather than of the interplay between individuals and gendered, racialised and hierarchical social structures and power relations. In individualising and isolating skills from individual bodies, occupations and the social contexts in which they are exercised, government skills policies reify skills and treat them as divisible, additive, tangible or concrete entities. In this way, the notion of skill takes for granted what it is supposed to explain,[13](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186#EN0013) or in other words, the notion of skills is tautological because skills are what people do skilfully. Skill is a given, the foundation of, and the link between, work and education. Education, in turn, is meant to supply skilled labour for work. Skill is defined by its divisible nature: there are communication skills, problem-solving skills, social and emotional skills and so forth. This is to ‘confuse the things of logic for the logic of things’ (Bourdieu [2001](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 19), in which an abstract notion such as skill is made concrete and considered a thing in itself. The focus in policy is on the right skills and the relationship between skills: not people, not even hands, skills. In contrast, we argue that, on the one hand, skill is embodied in individuals who exercise skill and, on the other hand, that people exercise skill in social contexts, particularly in occupations and at work and in other endeavours in life such as in participation in political and civic life, sport, craft, etc. They may do so more or less skilfully. Bernstein argues that the concept of trainability inherent in the notion of perpetual ‘upskilling’ in response to perpetual change misses this social context that shapes not only practices, and that gives practices their meaning, but also identities. He argues that, instead of trainability for an uncertain future, an individual needs to be able to ‘project ~~him/herself~~ [themselves] *meaningfully rather than relevantly*, into this future, and recover a coherent past’ (Bernstein [2000](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 59). He argues that identities emerge through the ‘interface between individual careers and the social or collective base’ of occupations or fields of practice, in which ‘the identity enters into with other identities of reciprocal recognition, support, mutual legitimisation and finally through a negotiated collective purpose’ (Bernstein [2000](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 59). The reification of skill in policy has resulted in a skills fetish. Marx’s explanation of commodity fetishism is a useful analogy in understanding the skills fetish. He explains that commodity fetishism arises when commodities, which are the products of the labour of individuals produced under specific capitalist social relationships of production and exchange, take on a life of their own. The physical nature of commodities and the material and social relations under which they are produced is obscured, and commodities appear to enter into relationships of exchange with each other. He explains: As against this, the commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material [dinglich] relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities. (Marx [1990](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186) [1867], 165) Just as commodity fetishism reifies a social relation of capitalist production as a relationship between commodities, skills policies reify skills as external commodifiable ‘things’ that exist independently of the bodies of people who exercise particular skills and of the social relationships and contexts that require domain specific knowledge and skills for their realisation. Skill as a market relation and the proprietary possessive individual Marx’s notion of commodity fetishism is also useful in understanding the skills fetish more directly, as skills are construed as commodities to be bought and sold. Individuals invest in their skills development, educational institutions sell skills and employers purchase them. Skills are individualised, specified and exchanged and are the link between the education market and the labour market. By privileging the market value of skills as the principal reason for their development, skills are reduced to commodities (see also Kjeldsen and Bonvin [2015](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 30; Sen [1989](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)). They are alienated from human bodies and human beings who, themselves having been alienated from the products of their labour through relations of capitalist production, are further reduced to sets of skills that must undergo continuous updating in response to market requirements. The notion of the actor who invests in their skill development is premised on a particular conception of human beings and human agency. The economic citizen who emerges from liberal and neo-liberal beliefs is intrinsic to human capital theory, which assumes that human beings are by nature rational self-interested actors who base their decisions on instrumental calculations about likely benefits (Hobbes [1985](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186) [1651]). This notion has been updated somewhat since the time Hobbes was writing in the 17th century. For example, in response to criticisms of the orthodox conception of ‘selfish man’ in economics, Hayek ([1980](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186)) eschews attributing a theory of motivation to individuals. Instead, he applies an epistemological limitation based in methodological individualism, which is that because individuals are individual, they are the only ones who know why they do certain things and that they are the ones who must deal with the consequences that ensue from their actions. However, and arguably, Hayek’s position leads back to the self-interested individual because, as Hayek argues, ‘man’ is guided ‘by those immediate consequences which he can know and care for…’ (Hayek [1980](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 14). Any attempt to attribute motivations to individuals for the greater good inexorably leads to social planning and from there to socialism. The market provides the mechanism for both social coordination and for economic and political freedom because it regulates exchanges between equal individuals free from coercion (Friedman and Friedman [2002](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186) [1962]). Hayek ([1980](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 16) maintained, however, that individuals are not equal by nature. Rather, they have been endowed with different attributes and talents. What the market does is to create ‘formal equality of the rules applying in the same manner to all, [and] we can leave each individual to find his own level’. Consequently, market behaviours are posited as an ahistorical essence as natural behaviours, because they provide the context for the exchange of information, goods and services in which individuals can pursue their own interests to maximum advantage. Those whose skills or attributes are valued most by the market will reap the greatest rewards. The (neo)-liberal individual is thus premised upon a Lockean conception of individuals as owners of their capacities.[14](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186#EN0014) In his critique of the individual in liberalism, Macpherson ([1962](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 3) explains that individuals are seen to owe nothing to society for the conditions of their existence or the development of their capacities: ‘The individual was seen neither as a moral whole, nor as part of a larger social whole, but as an owner of himself’. This is the possessive individual within human capital theory who enters into relations of exchange with other owners of commodities, skills or attributes. In other words, individuals are proprietors of their persons, and ‘Society consists of relations of exchange between proprietors’ (Macpherson [1962](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 3). However, as Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant [1992](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 124) puts it, the actor of human capital theory is an ethnocentric universalisation of a historically specific concept of human motivation: All the capacities and dispositions it liberally grants to its abstract ‘actor’- the art of estimating and taking chances, the ability to anticipate through a kind of practical induction, the capacity to bet on the possible against the probable for a measured risk, the propensity to invest, access to economic information, etc. – can only be acquired under definite social and economic conditions. Moreover, these capacities are unequally distributed in societies shaped by relations of gender, race and class. The naturalising of the individual as ‘proprietor of him or herself’ disguises and naturalises inequalities that both exist in market society and result from it. The importance of skills for individuals and nations is a doxa that underpins education policy in many countries and in international policy discourses. Rather than question this doxa, policy debate centres on configuring the ‘right kind of skills’. The latest contender for primacy in this debate is 21st century skills, which encompass and colonise all aspects of our lives, including our social and emotional attributes as well as our cognitive and practical skills. The skills discourse is underpinned by human capital theory, in which the purpose of education is to supply skilled labour for the labour market. Human capital theory moved from being a descriptive theory in the 1970s (education leads to jobs) to a normative one in the 1980s and 1990s (education should be about jobs) and then to a prescriptive one in the 2000s (education must be about jobs), and government policies must seek to shape and fund educational provision deemed more relevant to work. The skills fetish is a reified social relation that is premised on an impoverished conception of human beings, human motivation and human agency. It is underpinned by nominalism and methodological individualism, in which skills are regarded as discrete, disembodied entities that can be observed, counted and added in different ways. This approach draws on behaviourism, in which the outcomes of learning are deemed to be identical with the processes of learning, and skills are defined as observable behaviours that can be applied regardless of context, occupation or field of practice. Human capital theory imputes a narrow understanding of the purposes of education as investment by the proprietary possessive individual in the marketable self. Individuals invest in this or that skill, educational institutions sell skills to individual investors and employers purchase them. Skill is thus the connection between education and the labour market, based on narrow understandings in which the purpose of education is to serve the labour market. Marx’s conception of commodity fetishism helps understand the fetishisation of skill, with skill being reduced to a commodity. This article builds on the work of Brown et al. ([2020](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 133) who argue that human capital theory has failed to deliver its promise of high skilled jobs in a high skilled economy, because ‘The fundamental problem is not that there is a shortage of the relevant skills that employers demand but that there is a lack of good-quality jobs’. It also builds on the work of Buchanan et al. who argue that education is beset by two problems. They explain that ‘On the one hand education is positioned ambitiously as a key solution to economic problems; on the other hand, it is undermined – it is not seen as a distinctive and important social activity with its own problems’ (Buchanan et al. [2020](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186), 3). The result is that skills policies are unable to solve the problems of the economy and they distort education and its potential to support human flourishing. Our article adds to this literature by analysing policy constructions of skills as a fetish and reified social relation, with 21st century skills as the latest instantiation of this fetish. In so doing, it enlarges the bases for critique of existing education policies and theory building that is needed to develop alternatives to current policies.

#### **The impact is eugenics – capitalist economics requires the purging of unproductive bodies to stabilize its regime of extraction.**

Rosenthal 21 (Keith Rosenthal – socialist writer and disability theorist. “Carceral Histories of Disability: an Abolitionist Analysis” [August 23, 2021]. <https://spectrejournal.com/carceral-histories-of-disability-an-abolitionist-analysis/>, DOA: 1/30/22, kbb)

Given the disproportionate rates at which people of color and disabled people are over-represented within the U.S. prison population, the above abuses were essentially a case of modern eugenics being carried out against precisely those populations that have been historically targeted – disabled people, people of color, and women in poverty. What this demonstrates is the insidious ways in which the matrix of institutional confinement, disability oppression, and eliminationist social policy has remained a persistent feature of modern capitalist society, even as it has undergone mutations, adaptations, and reconfigurations over past decades and centuries. Insofar as the ruthlessly competitive accumulation of capital via exploited labor has been the constant guiding imperative of historical capitalism, disabled people have ever represented a troublesome source of non- (or even counter-) profitability to the ruling class. The labor power that disabled people possess – the basic unit of commodity value under capitalism – is deemed an invalid, defective, or otherwise undesirable resource vis-à-vis the productive economy.[2](https://spectrejournal.com/carceral-histories-of-disability-an-abolitionist-analysis/void(0))As the U.S. federal government defines it, to be disabled is to be “unable to engage in substantial gainful activity”;[3](https://spectrejournal.com/carceral-histories-of-disability-an-abolitionist-analysis/void(0)) in other words, to be unable to competitively acquire a paying job within the prevailing conditions of capitalist wage-labor.[3](https://spectrejournal.com/carceral-histories-of-disability-an-abolitionist-analysis/void(0)) In this way, disabled people have historically been cast into that sub-class of people under capitalism who rely on state welfare payments, are marginal to the formal process of capital accumulation, and are considered ‘disposable’ from the standpoint of political economy. In truth, and conceptualized broadly, disabled people occupy a class position that spans the proletariat: the active working class, the reserve army of labor, and the so-called lumpenproletariat.[4](https://spectrejournal.com/carceral-histories-of-disability-an-abolitionist-analysis/void(0)) Under any conception, however, disabled people under capitalism are, by definition, so many ‘damaged goods’; commodities systematically devalued as a result of inherited or acquired ‘deficits’ in their functioning as components of capital accumulation. Thus, to the capitalist ruling class, disabled people represent an economic ‘problem’ necessitating a political ‘solution.’ Beginning in the late nineteenth century, and reaching its peak maturation in the early-to-mid twentieth century, the prevailing ‘solution’ to the ‘problem’ of disability was the erection of a system of mass institutionalization, sterilization, and social elimination, which claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of disabled and other marginalized and oppressed peoples in the U.S. This system was codified and executed at the state level, and rendered licit at the federal level.[5](https://spectrejournal.com/carceral-histories-of-disability-an-abolitionist-analysis/void(0)) Then, as now, a central pillar of the overarching regime of control, separation, and social exclusion of the disabled and other marginalized populations was the carceral institution. This is a complex of controlling and controlled spaces ranging from asylums, hospital wards, state facilities, nursing homes, penal colonies, poorhouses, halfway homes, jails, and prisons. The form has changed over the years, but the function – control, separation, and social exclusion – has remained. At its peak, in the mid-1950s, there were an estimated 550,000 people confined to the nation’s mental asylums and hospitals.[6](https://spectrejournal.com/carceral-histories-of-disability-an-abolitionist-analysis/void(0)) Today, the number of people with mental illnesses and disabilities confined to the nation’s prisons and jails is estimated to be close to 1.25 million.[7](https://spectrejournal.com/carceral-histories-of-disability-an-abolitionist-analysis/void(0)) The red thread connecting the erstwhile system of incarceration in institutional asylums and that of the prison system today, is more than abstractly analogous. Both represent forms of segregation, subjugation, and constraint as coercive mechanisms of social policy. Behind the paper-thin pretense of being ‘rehabilitative’, both structures eschew the latter in favor of the social removal and warehousing of putatively deviant, degenerate, or maladjusted populations. Involuntary confinement and loss of autonomy are equally characteristic of the institution and the prison. Through the mid-twentieth century, the majority of people in state mental hospitals were forcibly committed by lunacy commissions, medical professionals, state welfare agencies, or the judiciary.[8](https://spectrejournal.com/carceral-histories-of-disability-an-abolitionist-analysis/void(0)) Moreover, whether committed on a voluntary or involuntary basis, institutionalized residents had no control over when they would be discharged, what treatments they would receive, or the nature of their living conditions (this remains the case for those committed to psychiatric wards and institutions to this day). In similar fashion to the way that durations of prison sentences are determined by Parole Board bureaucracies, release from the institution was contingent upon the subjective determination of bureaucrats (which determination was likewise influenced by a resident-inmate’s exhibit of “good institutional behavior”).[9](https://spectrejournal.com/carceral-histories-of-disability-an-abolitionist-analysis/void(0)) In sum, the high degree of continuity between these various carceral systems suggests a shared function across wide-ranging forms. The modern phenomena of both disability, qua categorical social classification, and edifices of mass incarceration, are rooted in the advent of modern industrialized capitalism. As seismic changes were being wrought in the nature of labor, community, and resource ownership, and as the mass of the populace was increasingly alienated from the means of production, people newly recognized as “disabled” came to occupy increasingly precarious, marginalized, and stigmatized (both materially and ideologically) social positions. While people with sundry impairments could not be said to have previously enjoyed full integration or economic parity, in a general sense, under pre-capitalist socioeconomic modes of existence, as Stewart and Russell argue, “many occupied a niche in small workshops and family-based production, where they could contribute according to their ability.”[10](https://spectrejournal.com/carceral-histories-of-disability-an-abolitionist-analysis/void(0)) However, with the growth of standardized, uniform, competitive, and time-regulated norms of factory-based waged labor, bodies and minds that less (profitably) conformed to the newly organized standard were increasingly excluded from the economy. Such disabled individuals were seen as less-productive liabilities, rather than lucratively exploitable ‘human resource’ assets. Capitalist social policy shunted disabled people out of the economy and into institutions, where they were placed under the purview of the medical industry. The medical industry concomitantly pathologized a litany of impairments and traits – such as blindness, deafness, neurodiversity – that had “naturally appeared in the human race throughout history.”[11](https://spectrejournal.com/carceral-histories-of-disability-an-abolitionist-analysis/void(0)) The “total institution”, to use sociologist Erving Goffman’s phrase, thus emerges as a means of social control and regulation.[12](https://spectrejournal.com/carceral-histories-of-disability-an-abolitionist-analysis/void(0))As an imposing and visible social monument, the total institution plays an important material as well as ideological role in the maintenance of the prevailing hegemony. As a carceral space, its function is to remove “all those who either cannot or will not conform to the norms and discipline of capitalist society.”[13](https://spectrejournal.com/carceral-histories-of-disability-an-abolitionist-analysis/void(0))As a mechanism of ideological coercion, it sends the message to all those who do conform that the institution awaits those who fail to do so in perpetuity. Part of the imperative guiding the social exclusion and institutionalization of disabled people (both then and now) is the principle of political economy referred to as “less eligibility”.[14](https://spectrejournal.com/carceral-histories-of-disability-an-abolitionist-analysis/void(0))The notion behind it is simply that the prevailing level of welfare assistance doled out to those relying on public support must remain below the level of the lowest wage rate prevailing in the labor market. In this way, the ‘deserving’ can be separated from the ‘undeserving’ poor, and all those able to engage in wage-labor can be coerced into its undertaking on pain of being rendered a pauper. As Marco D’Eramo has pithily put it, whereas “the wage relation [may be] considered a hellscape … true damnation consists in being banished from it.”[15](https://spectrejournal.com/carceral-histories-of-disability-an-abolitionist-analysis/void(0)) Comprising a “surplus” or “superfluous” population of non-productive individuals, essentially ‘disposable’, or worse, impedimentary, from the standpoint of capitalist political economy, disabled people became targets of social eliminationist practices, involving incarceration, neglect, torture, and sterilization.[16](https://spectrejournal.com/carceral-histories-of-disability-an-abolitionist-analysis/void(0)) Owing to the particular history of white supremacy, settler-colonialist expansionism, and racialized slavery-cum-capitalism in the U.S., this class of people disproportionately comprises Black people, immigrants, indigenous people, and the indigent generally, in addition to the disabled.

#### Vote neg to refuse the 1AC’s participation in the Sacrifice Zone of debate. Imbuing value onto productive labor re-creates eugenics by concealing it within a salvific narrative that treats work as redemptive. Labor won’t save you, it will kill you which is why you should refuse calls for political harmony in favor of a queer army of moving parts, disordered noises, and cacophonic demands.

Bray 15 (Karen Bray – Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and Philosophy at Wesleyan University. “The monstrosity of the multitude: unredeeming radical theology” Palgrave Commun 1, 15030 (2015). <https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530>, DOA: 10/11/21, kbb)

In Multitude Hardt and Negri ([2005](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR21): 135) argue that today, “No social line divides productive from unproductive workers … these distinctions … have often been used to exclude women, the unemployed, and the poor from central political roles, entrusting the revolutionary project to the men (with calloused hands from the factories) who were thought to be the primary producers”. This troubling of the productive/unproductive divide appears to be a radical rejection of a neoliberal politics of efficiency and productive particularity. And yet, in their continued emphasis on the productivity of the multitude Hardt and Negri betray this radical rupture. If the line no longer stands, why not look to the multitude’s unproductivity? What types of inscriptional violence does embracing the value of productivity commit? What does productivity as the site of the collectivization of subjectivity for the empowerment of the multitude say to those subjects who refuse their productive capacities? In other words if the power of and commonality between the multitude come from the very value held so dear by the Empire—that of productivity—can the multitude effectively counter neoliberalism? By looking to Multitude and its theological deployment in Rieger and Kwok’s ([2012](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR28)) Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude this essay attempts an answer and offers an alternate reading of work through the Autonomism[Footnote1](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#Fn1) of Franco “Bifo” Berardi and a crip theology of value constructed out of poetics and experiences of disability. Continued philosophical and theological emphases on the productivity of the multitude resonate with a salvific narrative embedded in neoliberalism’s understanding of work as redemptive. Would rethinking work, not simply to reorient where we place our resources and assign our values but also to nurture a refusal of productivity, better disentangle our acts of resistance from narratives of redemption? In response to this question this essay proposes a politic, poetic and theology of unproductivity. Berardi’s examination of the affectual effects of what he calls SemioCapitalism[2](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#Fn2) in The Soul at Work ([2009](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR7)) along with his post-futurist proposals in After the Future ([2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR6)) will serve as an alternate reading of productivity. Ultimately, however, it is Hardt and Negri’s turn to the monstrosity of the multitude, read anew through crip theory[Footnote2](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#Fn3) and a poetics of disability, that opens us to how this unproductive stance might be embodied in a crip theology of worth divorced from efficient production. Through reading Hardt and Negri’s monstrous multitude with a crip sensibility, I seek out a theology that resists productivity as a method of salvation, and thus troubles the concepts of redemption on offer by both neoliberalism and theologies hoping to counter its deleterious effects. In Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude, [Rieger and Kwok (2012](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR28): 67) draw on Paul’s epistles to discuss the importance of the multitude’s common productivity: “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensible, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we cloth with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect (1Cor. 12:21–24)”. According to Rieger and Kwok, the productivity of the multitude honours the contributions to the social body made by those considered inferior. For Hardt and Negri the multitude’s ability to resist the capitalist empire stems from the fact that even those who we normally assume to be outside the traditional labour economy are part of social production. That all classes produce in common allows them to resist in common—common productivity as bond. But what of the blind woman who does not need the eye or the amputee who does not need the hand? What of those cut off or breaking away from the community that is the social body? Is the focus on common productivity too eerily resonate with a soteriological structure embedded in neoliberalism that ties our worth to our work—who we are to what we can do for one another? Rieger and Kwok continue: The multitude picks up the concerns of working people, the so-called working class, because it values the notion of production. While the multitude is forced to endure the pressures of the system, it does not remain passive. Working people make substantial contributions to society, which are often overlooked and underappreciated. Hardt and Negri extend the multitude to the unemployed, unpaid domestic laborers, and the poor, who also make substantial contributions to society. We agree with their idea that ‘the multitude gives the concept of the proletariat its fullest definition as all those who labor and produce under the rule of capital’ [10].([Rieger and Kwok, 2012](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR28): 61) While, as Rieger and Kwok make clear, Hardt and Negri include the unemployed and underpaid in their definition of the productive multitude, that political emphasis remains on production and societal contribution is problematic. To be sure, the dismantling of what we can recognize as the “We Built This” notion made famous by Mitt Romney’s 2012 presidential bid is key for the work of solidarity sought by Rieger and Kwok. Members of the 1% rallied behind the notion that those in the lower classes owed our livelihoods to those at the top, to the wealth the rich claimed to have built and then benevolently shared with the rest of us. An emphasis on the productivity of the multitude resists this narrative, helpfully bringing to the fore the ways in which wealth relies on the work of the impoverished. Yet, the ways in which the productivity of the multitude not only built the wealth of the 1% but also sustain that wealth are obscured by Rieger and Kwok’s productivism. Hence, the attempt to regain the worthiness of the multitude through what we have done for an economic system that continues to betray us is at best rash and at worst a tightening of the chains that bind us to an exploitative market. If we are to regain power through a reassertion of our worth in directed activity, then we have not unbound ourselves from the tragic narrative that it is what we can do for the system rather than who we are—our singular[4](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#Fn4) embodied desires and becomings—that defines our worth. Indeed a focus on labour continues to allow the terms of worth to remain within a theological system fortified by, and which fortifies, a productivist ethic summed up in Joseph Conrad’s proposal (critiqued by crip theorists Anna Mollow and Robert McRuer) that “a man is a worker. If he is not then he is nothing” ([McRuer and Mollow, 2012](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530" \l "ref-CR26" \o "McRuer R, Mollow A (2012) Introduction. In: McRuer R and Mollow A. (eds) Sex and Disability. Duke University Press: Durham, NC and London.): 25). The addition of the unemployed and underpaid domestic worker to the definition of the multitude does not refute Conrad’s proposition; rather it affirms that regardless of our employment status we all are indeed workers. Instead of a radical refutation of the need to be a worker to be of worth, a productivist theology in the form proposed by Rieger and Kwok borders on apologetics—a theology begging for the recognition of the impoverished as societal contributors. The terms of value remain intact. Rieger and Kwok ([2012](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR28): 62) continue, “Hardt and Negri focus on economic class, in part because this concept has not received enough attention in recent debates, but also because the multitude needs to be understood in terms of economic production. It is both the ‘common subject of labor, that is, the real flesh of postmodern production’ and ‘the object from which collective capital tries to make the body of its global development’ ”. The focus on class can help us to raise issues of fair wages and just labour practices. And yet from a theological point of view, Rieger and Kwok’s proposals often obscure the problem of where we place ultimate value, focusing instead on how that value gets determined, measured and compensated. Rieger and Kwok ([2012](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR28): 100) admit that if one is going to follow the teachings of Jesus one cannot “serve two masters” and hence cannot serve both God and wealth. Yet, in using the gospels to theologically valorize agency and productivity (which may not be able to escape the fact that today demands to be productive are injunctions to worship the promise of money) their theology is undermined. They note that “Jesus’s healings tend to encourage agency and productivity as well. He responds to a man who has been waiting for help for thirty-eight years with these words: ‘Stand up, take your mat and walk’ (John 5:8)” ([Rieger and Kwok, 2012](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR28): 71) and that “[Jesus spent time healing] the paralyzed, whose agency had been shattered, and the possessed whose personalities had been destroyed. He combated religious neuroses by proclaiming the forgiveness of God and put people back on the road: ‘Stand up and take your bed and walk’ (Mark 2:9) and ‘Get up!’ (Mark 5:41)” ([Rieger and Kwok, 2012](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR28): 86). Theirs is a theology in which, “In short, discipleship means becoming a productive agent in relationship with other productive agents” ([Rieger and Kwok, 2012](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR28): 73). The demand to take your mat and walk resonates with a neo liberal demand to get to work. Might the demand to “Get up!” resonate with “Stop being so lazy!”? What about the agency of the paralyzed as paralyzed? Or that of the shattered as shattered and the neurotic as neurotic? What of those too sick to work? Too tired to participate? Too isolated to contribute? Too wilful to attune to the demands of other productive agents?[Footnote3](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#Fn5) Must we adjust to the call for productivity, or might we learn from unproductivity? Which stance better counters neo liberal constructions of value? Soulfully unproductive While similarly drawing on (both to embrace and move beyond) the work of Antonio Negri as well as the radical thought of others in the 1960s and 1970s Italian Workerist (Operaismo), Autonomist and Compositionist movements, Franco “Bifo” Berardi resists a rhetoric of productivism and questions the political potency of the concept of the multitude. In both The Soul at Work and After the Future, Berardi explores the affectual effects of post-Fordist modes of production and communication (SemioCapitalism) on our individual and social psyches. In doing so he not only diagnoses the toxic effects of neoliberalism, but also elaborates a politics and poetics of the refusal of work. The unproductivity on offer by Berardi exposes the affectual and ethical issues raised when we remain within the logic of productivism, even that which claims a revolutionary and counter-imperial stance. According to Berardi ([2009](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR7): 21), SemioCapitalism “takes the mind, language and creativity as its primary tools for the production of value”. Under SemioCapitalism the soul is not left out of work, but rather becomes the very mode of production and thus the tool of its own estrangement. Hence, while the resistance to alienation through the reassertion of the importance of one’s mind and soul was at the heart of organizing workers on the factory floor, under post-Fordism acts of resistance must take on a different character. The goal of autonomy or what Berardi rewrites as out-onomy becomes not how to overcome alienation, but rather how to increase the estrangement between the soul and capitalist labour relations. As Berardi notes: The working class is no longer conceived as a passive object of alienation, but instead as the active subject of a refusal capable of building a community starting out from its estrangement from the interests of capitalistic society … Alienation is then considered not as the loss of human authenticity, but as estrangement from capitalistic interest, and therefore as a necessary condition for the construction—in a space estranged from and hostile to labor relations—of an ultimately human relationship.([Berardi, 2009](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR7): 23) To become increasingly estranged from labour relations involves for Berardi a multistep process: first, we must understand the way in which SemioCapitalism has redefined value; second, we must identify the affectual effects of SemioCapitalism on our individual and social psyches (effects that Berardi names as exhaustion and depression in After the Future and the panic-depression cycle in The Soul at Work); and third we must engage Deleuze and Guattari’s schizoanalysis as a political therapy that helps us to reorient the field of desire and thus reframes the concept of wealth, re-engaging us in authentic human relationships. Each of these steps happens not through reasserting our productive capacity, but rather through refusing to participate in the systems of production on offer by SemioCapitalism’s labour relations. Under SemioCapitalism value has been divorced from all referent points. When Richard Nixon cancelled the direct convertibility of the US dollar to gold the referential logic of value was discarded in favour of what Berardi ([2009](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR7): 148) calls “generalized indeterminacy”. From a radical theological point of view a sense of generalized indeterminacy may sound ideal in that, like radical theology, it denies a determinate telos. It might resonate, for instance, with Robbins’s call for a radical democratic resistance to all forms of hegemony that will come by way of an immanent exodus, one that, Robbins notes quoting Negri, is an “exodus from obedience, that is to say, from participation in measure, i.e., as the opening to the immeasurable” ([Robbins, 2013](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR29): 191). Or it might resonate with the indefinite or infinite eschatology proposed by [Crockett (2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR11): 102). Yet as Berardi notes, the indeterminacy of value and the process of economic deregulation brought on by SemioCapitalism did not result in anarchic freedom. It remains tamed and obedient to a certain eschatological vision: “Deregulation does not mean that society is freed from all rules, not at all: it is instead the imposition of monetary rule on all domains of human action. And monetary rules are in fact the sign of a relationship based on power, violence and military abuse” ([Berardi, 2009](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR7): 148). In other words, as Philip Goodchild (2009: 188) has noted, neoliberal deregulation has trapped us in the eschatological shadow of money, within which spending time is subordinated to saving it. While this eschatological promise may be indeterminate because money no longer refers to a stable referent, it serves not as a source of freedom, but rather as one of entrapment. To counter this mode of violent entrapment Berardi ([2009](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR7): 140) redefines wealth as time (or in Goodchild’s framing, spending time): “time for pleasure and enjoyment”, which includes time to travel, learn and make love. This wealthy time is not a time that asks, “What have you done for me lately?” Rather it is unproductive time, it is a time to be lazy, to be pleasured, to just be. It is not discipleship in action; it is not worth in productivity; it is not a man who is a worker or nothing at all; rather, it is a soul who is wealthy because she is much more and much less than her labour. To be sure, there is political work to be done to democratize the availability of this wealth of time,[6](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#Fn6) but by reorienting wealth and worth away from work, indeed in finding it in the refusal of work, Berardi rejects hegemonic structures of value. Both SemioCapitalism’s rejection of wealth as time and its degradation of unproductive time lead to a mental and soulful breakdown in individual and social psyches. Berardi diagnoses this breakdown as a panic-depressive cycle ([Berardi, 2009](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR7)) and exhaustion and depression ([Berardi, 2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR6)). Acknowledging Baudrillard’s prescience, Berardi ([2009](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR7): 179) further notes that “The dominant pathology of the future will not be produced by repression, but instead by the injunction to express, which will become a generalized obligation”. The constant demands to be expressive and productive combined with the overwhelming flow of information and signs without stable referents lead to panic, which eventually leads to depression. Elsewhere, Berardi ([2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR6): 135–138) marks the panic-depression cycle with Baudrillard’s concept of exhaustion. Exhaustion sets in because, “In semiocapitalist hyperreality, the brain is the market. And the brain is not limitless, the brain cannot accelerate indefinitely” ([Berardi, 2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR6): 136). Rather than, or perhaps as both counter and supplement to, an emphasis on the plasticity of the brain (an emphasis embraced by followers of Catherine Malabou),[Footnote4](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#Fn7) Berardi asks us to look to the limits of the brain—to our exhaustion—for the rethinking of how we might come to be differently. The depression and exhaustion—markers of the limit of the brain (or perhaps better, the “bodymind”[8](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#Fn8))—that follow the panic induced by our overstimulation can be traced back to the demands for the brain to accelerate indefinitely. In other words, “the constant mobilization of attention is essential to the productive function: the energies engaged by the productive system are essentially creative, affective and communicational” ([Berardi, 2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR6): 107). Rather than rejecting the need for creative and affective communication or for action writ large, Berardi—through his diagnosis of the overstimulation of the brain—illuminates how the demand to be productive and expressive pushes the individual and collective psyche to their breaking points. He writes, “Not silence, but uninterrupted noise, not Antonioni’s red desert, but a cognitive space overloaded with nervous incentives to act: this is the alienation of our times” ([Berardi, 2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR6): 108). We might say that “our times” takes on a double meaning in this case, as it is the very demand for more of our time that defines the nature of the Time of Neoliberalism or, in Berardi’s terms, SemioCapitalism. This is not to uphold an utter dulling of the mind, but rather an injunction to seek out new ways of thinking and feeling ourselves through the affectual experiences of the bodymind under such temporal demands. For instance, the chaotic hyperactivity of indeterminate signs that often engenders depression can also contain a sense of creative ecstasy: “The world-chaos that Guattari talks about in his last book is not only depression, fog, and miasma. Chaos is much more than this. It’s also the infinity of colors, dazzling lights, hyperspeed intuitions, and breathtaking emotions. ([Deleuze and Guattari, 1994](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR17), 203)” ([Berardi, 2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR6): 160). In this way, a turn towards our exhaustion or depression need not be the silencing of the sounds of indeterminacy and chaos, but rather a slowing down to the point where we take pleasure in the cacophony of singularities; when exhausted we would grant ourselves permission to fall back into bed and just listen. No longer trying to harmonize sounds that will not or will to not come together, we might clear a path to see what can happen on the other side of exhaustion when we are not fuelled by the panicked desire to numb our depression. For this fall into bed, the being exhausted, need not be a passive nihilism. Rather, feeling ourselves to be backwards in a society that says we must move forward resonates with the backward feelings of being queer as explicated by Heather Love. Love ([2007](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR23): 1) notes that backward feelings are “all about action: about how and why it is blocked, and about how to locate motives for political action when none is visible”. In other words, a turn not towards the productivity of the multitude but rather towards its depressing exhaustion might uncover invisible political possibilities. The slowness and quotidian nature of depressing passive-acts like the fall into bed, or the listening for the sounds of chaotic miasma and those of the infinity of colours, further troubles a productivist politics found within the work of Rieger and Kwok, Hardt and Negri, and much of radical theology. For instance, we can locate within the field of radical theology (or of theologies and philosophies arising in the wake of the “Death of God”) a problematic emphasis on action. Whether it takes the form of multitudinous productivism, event, exodus, messianism or revolution,[Footnote5](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#Fn9) none of these concepts (no matter how immanent their theological constructions may be) escape a sense of directional movement and change, a sense that often rings as eruptive and/or rapid. This sort of revolving (one that risks its own version of a teleological fantasy) is reflected in leftist movements nostalgic for the time of labour uprisings.[10](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#Fn10) As Shaviro ([2015](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR30): 5–6) has noted, “Given the failure of economism, many Marxists have instead gone to the opposite extreme: they have embraced a kind of voluntarism. Capitalism can be abolished by sheer force of will—as long as this is supplemented by proper methods of organization and mobilization. We see this sort of approach in the Leninist doctrine of the vanguard party, and also, I think, in the ultra-leftism of such contemporary thinkers as Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou”. Shaviro ([2015](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR30): 6) continues, “We cannot wait for capitalism to transform on its own, but we also cannot hope to progress by appealing to some radical Outside or by fashioning ourselves as militants faithful to some ‘event’ that (as Badiou has it) would mark a radical and complete break with the given ‘situation’ of capitalism”. While Shaviro counters the Badiouian/Žižekian eventive-revolution with accelerationism,[Footnote6](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#Fn11) Berardi counters with radical passivity. Instead of viewing exhaustion as the inability to escape capitalism, the position of radial passivity acknowledges exhaustion’s capability to clear a way towards an autonomous collectivity ([Berardi, 2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR6): 138).[12](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#Fn12) Might the slow-down of exhaustion serve as a radical opening for radical thought? In other words, can radical theology embrace its own depression? To counter the radicality of the event we may need to look to the radicality of the everyday. We may need to seek out a slowness performed in quotidian acts of refusal. For instance, instead of waiting for the revolution we might wander towards ways of slow living proposed by Lauren Berlant in her counter to “slow death”. Berlant ([2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR8): 95) defines slow death as “the physical wearing out of a population in a way that points to its deterioration as a defining condition of its experience and historical existence”. Slow death might come in the form of the panic-depressive cycle, a crash from the overstimulation of the brain, or as Berlant traces it, in the wearing down of bodies through excessive food consumption, which she ties not only to exploitative food and labour policies, but also to the exhaustion of work and the search for momentary pleasure in food ([Berlant, 2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR8), Chapter 3). This is a slow death made worse by the glorification of health and ability, states easier to achieve if one is privileged to have the wealth of time to spend on the cultivation of such abilities. As a counter to slow death, Berlant ([2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR8), Chapter 3, footnote 64: 276) offers the possibility of counter-exploitative activities, those that are anarchist, cooperative and radically antiwork. Examples of such activities might be found in the European “slow food” movement briefly touched on by Berlant. Slow food marks a movement in which practices of food cultivation, preparation and consumption “[recalibrate] the pacing of the day into a collective program for deliberative being in the world in a way opposed to the immediatist productive one of anxious capital” ([Berlant, 2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR8), Chapter 3, footnote 64: 276). Berardi similarly offers counter-exploitative practices through the slow life of a “relaxed soul” ([Berardi, 2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR6): 148): “Rather than a swift change in the social landscape, we should expect the slow surfacing of new trends: communities abandoning the field of the crumbling economies, more and more individuals giving up their search for a job and creating their own networks of services” ([Berardi, 2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR6): 152). These quotidian microtactics will take time, but if time is wealth then perhaps slowing time down is a way of honouring the holiness of life. This slow-down will not be easy. Berardi offers a mode in which politics and therapy are no longer separate. He asks us to learn to better take care of those made depressed and anxious by what he names as the “post-growth” economy ([Berardi, 2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR6): 153–154). But who will lead the way? Who are we that are too anxious and on whom are we placing the therapeutic responsibility? Who gets to decide which type of depression is being exhibited—the exhaustion that leads to a slow movement towards a new civilization, or that of those made hopeless by the coming of such a civilization? Berardi ([2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR6): 163) proposes that “Poetry and therapy (thera-poetry) will be the forces leading to the creation of a cognitarian self-consciousness: not a political party, not the organization of interests, but the reactivation of the cognitarian sensibility”. How will we be able to question this reactivation? What if, like the productivism both Berardi and I hope to counter, it becomes too directed? What if it slides further into the thera—that which seeks to comfort—over the poetry—that which seeks to complicate? Perhaps, moving from the realm of the speculative into the embodied life of those already living slowly—already refusing productivity and efficiently; those living in the interstices between flesh and body; those we have marked as monstrous—will help us to seek out more poetry than therapy. More complication than comfort. Cripping cure What would it mean to embody an unproductive monstrosity? Re-reading the productivity of the multitude through a crip sensibility helps us to unpack this question. Crip theory is a version of disability theory that rejects assimilationist politics and apologetics. To be crip is to be unwilling to come back together as part of a productive whole. It is to refuse to wear the prosthesis so that the non-crip need not rethink the wholeness of her body. It is to refuse the cochlear implant such that mainstream society might rethink what communication looks and sounds like. It is to learn to live differently from within exhaustion and depression and not only to medicate them. According to crip theorists [McRuer and Mollow (2012](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR26): 32), a crip politics says, “Fuck employability: I’m too sick to work”. To embrace the stigma of sickness is to question the demands of productive labour on offer by society. Hence, a similar crip politics, one that tells the Empire it is too sick to work and that it is too depressed to produce, might loose the multitude from its redeployment in the very technologies of power it hopes to resist. In other words, to say fuck employability might also be to say fuck productivity, as long as productivity too easily slips into redemption. As McRuer and Mollow ([2012](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR26): 31) note, many disability studies projects “often [emphasize] the project of securing places for disabled people within what Deborah A. Stone calls the ‘work-based system’ (21), rather than challenging the structure of that system itself”. Hence, similar to the apologetics risked by Rieger and Kwok’s reading of the multitude, access-based disability studies often seek to return a sense of productivity to the disabled. Crippness on the other hand refuses to apologize, and rejects recognition by the systems that have betrayed us. Therefore, to say fuck employability: I’m too sick to work might be to embrace a poetics of refusal on offer by Berardi’s out-onomy. For instance, in Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability ([2006](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR24)) McRuer exegetes Gary in Your Pocket: Stories and Notebooks of Gary Fisher, the collection of Gary Fisher’s work published by his former teacher Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick 3 years after his death from HIV/AIDS. Fisher identified himself as a “black, queer, sociopath” ([McRuer, 2006](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530" \l "ref-CR24" \o "McRuer R (2006) Crip Theory: Cultural Signes of Queerness and Disability. New York University Press: New York and London.): 104). In this work Fisher’s identities as queer, sociopathic and black destabilize one another as well as compulsory heterosexuality and able-bodiedness. This destabilization is found in what McRuer names as Fisher’s non-compliance with demands for rehabilitation and redemption. Fisher’s acts of non-compliance included sadomasochistic, often anonymous, sex, which included fantasies of racial degradation, and his frequent refusal to take his medication. In rejecting secur(e)ity and salvific health Fisher refused the system that had always already marked him as crip: as an untouchable monster. These acts of refusal performed a political stance of autonomy within Fisher’s everyday life. They are not eventive revolutionary acts, but rather the wealthy embodiments of time by a man rejecting the pressures to be sane, able and healthy. Fisher’s crip sensibility, while bringing on death more quickly, honoured the time of life through his refusal to be redeemed. One might locate similar acts of non-compliance in the work of poet Janet Miles (whom Susan Schweik names as a poet writing in part through the lens of disability). Miles refused to be marked as disabled. In her discussion of Miles’s life and work in the edited volume Beauty is a Verb: The New Poetics of Disability ([2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR31)), Schweik draws on Henri-Jacques Stiker’s 1999 History of Disability to illuminate the importance of such acts of refusal: The ‘thing’ has been designated, defined, framed. Now it has to be scrutinized, pinpointed, dealt with. People with “it” make up a marked group, a social entity … The disabled, henceforth of all kinds, are established as a category to be reintegrated and thus to be rehabilitated. Paradoxically, they are designated in order to be made to disappear, they are spoken in order to be silenced.([Schweik, 2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530" \l "ref-CR31" \o "Schweik S (2011) The voice of ): 70) Like (and as one of) the “mad” figures traced by [Michel Foucault in History of Madness (2006)](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR18) and the figure of the “homosexual” traced in [History of Sexuality I (1978)](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR19), the disabled are named to either be saved out of disability (like the worker recognized as productive) or confined and silenced. Stiker’s call in response to such confinement is to refuse the categories on offer. Fisher’s non-compliance is similar, but instead of refusing to be marked he embraces the stigma carried by the mark sociopathic. By refusing to be named as redeemable Fisher wilfully goes unredeemed. This is the sensibility of the crip who embraces “the cripple” and thus cannot be made straight. The term “disabled” (the term as deployed by disability projects critiqued by McRuer, Stiker and Schweik) marks those whom we work to fix, and in fixing reassemble back into an efficient economy of production. But what of she who chooses to stay bent? Like the mad who plague society and hence need to be tamed, the wilfully bent take on a monstrous character. While it would be crucial to critique the issue of productivity within a theology of the multitude regardless of its deployment by Hardt and Negri, in turning back to the original we are better able to uncover some crip complexities. Hardt and Negri highlight the autonomy of the multitude from the Empire. If the Empire relies on the multitude to produce its wealth, then to refuse to be productive is to refuse to contribute to the wealth of the Empire. As Hardt and Negri ([2005](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR21): 332) note, “Capital, in other words, must exploit the labor of workers but it cannot oppress, repress, or exclude them. It cannot do without their productivity”. They continue, “[The multitude] are, in fact, extremely powerful, because they are the source of wealth” ([Hardt and Negri, 2005](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR21): 333). This emphasis on the productivity of the multitude opens pathways for the radical passivity proposed by Berardi. Instead of asserting that our faith traditions have been built on action, and honouring the demand that the “invalid” in John stand up, take his mat and walk, to locate the potency of the multitude in its unproductivity is to ask why the man was sitting in the first place and for whom and what he would be walking. It is this power that is recognized by Hardt and Negri when they write: If sovereign power were an autonomous substance, then the refusal, subtraction, or exodus of the subordinated would only be an aid to the sovereign: they cannot cause problems who are not present. Since sovereign power is not autonomous, since sovereignty is a relationship, then such acts of refusal are indeed a real threat. Without the active participation of the subordinated, sovereignty crumbles.([Hardt and Negri, 2005](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR21): 332) Given the multitsude’s ability to make sovereignty crumble, why not focus on the unproductive side of the line that has been dismantled between productivity and unproductivity? Perhaps we worry that such a focus will lead the multitude into inertia and despair. Perhaps this is why Žižek’s ([2006](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR33)) own politics of refusal quickly move to a call for a Badiouian event and the revolutionary power of those in the urban slums. And yet, this multitudinous refusal need not be that of revolutionary or eventive action. Rather, we might find a poetics of refusal within the bodies of the monstrous crip who in her everyday incapacities to productively come together with the whole declares along with Berardi “that the splendor of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of autonomy. Each to her own rhythm; nobody should be constrained to march at a uniform pace” ([Berardi, 2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR6): 165). Can we find the beauty of this dis-unified pace in Hardt and Negri’s multitude? Perhaps it is there when they name the multitude a flesh that is not a body ([Hardt and Negri, 2005](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR21): 192). Whereas Rieger and Kwok seem to focus on the potential unity of the social body, Hardt and Negri are concerned with the uncontainability of the social flesh. As not body, they argue, the flesh can often appear monstrous ([Hardt and Negri, 2005](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR21): 190–195). In an essay in A Conversation on Philosophy in Praise of the Common and Politics, which follows the published conversation between Cesare Casarino and Negri, Negri traces how Power[Footnote7](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#Fn13) has historically been tied to eugenics, the establishment of those who are “beautiful and good” over and above those who threaten that good, those whom we name as monstrous ([Casarino and Negri, 2008](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530" \l "ref-CR10" \o "Casarino C and Negri A (2008) In Praise of the Common: A Conversation on Philosophy and Politics. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN.): 194). According to Negri, “[labor] becomes class by recognizing itself as monster. A monstrous subject that produces monstrous resistances. The existence of class is no longer spectral but monstrous—even better, such is its essence, which carries the inscription of the force that refuses capital’s productive labor” ([Casarino and Negri, 2008](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530" \l "ref-CR10" \o "Casarino C and Negri A (2008) In Praise of the Common: A Conversation on Philosophy and Politics. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN.): 199). The monster is monstrous in its refusal of capitalist productivity. Negri develops the monster further as the “autonomy of the multitude” that which “shattered the eugenic teleology”, and that which “produces the common”, but also that which might be captured once again either in its return to its historic function in a eugenic economy as the site of alterity from which the “beautiful and good” are birthed, or through the techniques of the biopolitical which monstrously “improves” the monster’s functioning, saving him and so returning him to the productive labour of capitalism ([Casarino and Negri, 2008](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530" \l "ref-CR10" \o "Casarino C and Negri A (2008) In Praise of the Common: A Conversation on Philosophy and Politics. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN.): 200–218). Yes! An autonomous monster who refuses productivity and capture! I am even willing to abide the return of the language of the event when Negri writes: Therefore, today is the moment to verify whether dialectics has truly ended; whether, consequently, the monster (as hegemon, through resistance of the class of those who work and are exploited) can triumph; whether the proletarian class can oppose, really, as monster, the masters’ eugenic Power, kaloi kai agatoi. We say: long live the monster! Long live his capacity to dissolve any idea or project of capitalist development and of order (both old and new) that organizes it! … Today the monster is the event waited for … neither miscarriage nor wreckage … even though it could be such … but it’s not! ([Casarino and Negri, 2008](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530" \l "ref-CR10" \o "Casarino C and Negri A (2008) In Praise of the Common: A Conversation on Philosophy and Politics. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN.): 203) Indeed it is this sense of the multitude’s monstrosity that must be reclaimed and reread through a crip sensibility. And yet, uneasiness remains. In Multitude Hardt and Negri locate the monstrosity of the multitude in the figure of the vampire. The vampire is unruly; its desire for flesh (of all genders) is insatiable. It produces outside of the heteronormative family and outside of sexual reproduction all together. It creates new forms of family and sociability. The vampire marks how we must all come to recognize our monstrosity, our monstrous capabilities for imagining new forms of being assembled. And yet, the vampire’s desire turns the subjects of its desires into other vampires: it is the making of one, an atonement-sameness over difference. All too quickly Hardt and Negri turn this monstrosity into a marker of the fullness of life lived in common, and thus return us to a redemptive narrative too evocative of neoliberal soteriologies. I seek not to reject life or commonality out of hand, but rather to push Hardt and Negri to be ever-more monstrous. Indeed, we might wonder just how monstrous one can be if one’s monstrosity begins to mimic the monstrosity of all the other monsters. For vampires (re)productivity is replication. What if instead we looked to Frankenstein’s monster who disappears into a frozen wasteland to the North, embodying a monstrous impediment to social cohesion? Or to the disembodied hands from a slew of horror movies, hands that counter to Paul do not need eyes to see? This monstrous handness creeps away from demands for productivity and wholeness. This sort of crip monstrosity, a monstrosity unable or unwilling to cohere, might enflesh an alternate radical theology, one in which we need not be redeemed through our common productivity. Instead of the vampire who overproduces through overdesiring, Frankenstein’s monster and the horrific hand turn out to be unproductive; they are impediments to cohesion and communication. They say, “Fuck reproductivity I’m just a hand!” and “Fuck employability I’m too monstrous to work!” To reclaim that level of monstrosity within the multitude would perhaps better serve [Hardt and Negri’s (2005](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR21): 196) assertion that “We need to use the monstrous expressions of the multitude to challenge the mutations of artificial life transformed into commodities, the capitalist power to put up for sale the metamorphoses of nature, the new eugenics that support the ruling power. The new world of monsters is where humanity has to grasp its future”. But what if Berardi is right when he declares in his post-futurist manifesto that the future is an illusion we must abandon to live in the infinity of the present ([Berardi, 2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR6): 166)? Additionally, what of slowness? Of the everyday? Can the eventiveness of Frankenstein’s monster coming alive, the disembodied hand killing its able-bodied prey, and the monster as event contain the kind of slow living that will help us to counter the overemphasis in both SemioCapitalism and radical theology on movement, productivity and revolutionary change? What other crip monsters might be lurking in the shadows waiting for us, hoping we might finally come to recognize their singularity and through them possibilities for our own monstrously unproductive lives? In her “Dramatic Monologue in the Speaker’s Own Voice” poet Vassar Miller, who spent her life in a wheelchair (a result of cerebral palsy), writes: I’m either a monster in search of a horror movie to be in, or else I’m a brain floating within a body whose sides I must gingerly touch while you glance discreetly away … I wish you'd learn better before we all totter into our coffins where there’s no straight way to lie crooked. ( [Alexander Essbaum, 2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR2): 50) Might It Follows, written and directed by David Robert Mitchell and released in [2015](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR22) be the horror film of which Miller was in search? Can we read the it that does the following in It Follows as that figure of the monstrosity of the multitude that might both embody a radical slowness and diagnose the anxiety nurtured by a eugenic economy? In the film the blond, thin, cisgendered, able-bodied teenage protagonist Jay Height “contracts” a “following it” through sexual intercourse with her boyfriend Hugh. The it that follows is singular, only following one person at a time (although others who have been followed can still recognize it). It appears in human form and can look like anyone, including one’s loved ones. To make sure Jay understands that she is now being followed by it Hugh drugs Jay and ties her into a wheelchair from where she will have to face it; incapacitation seems to be the only way one will fully grasp that it is coming for her. In other words, perhaps we do not see the incapacitation that hovers all around us until we feel the limitation of our mobility. Hugh goes on to tell Jay that she should never be anywhere without at least two exits because it is slow, but not dumb. Indeed the viewer quickly realizes that we can spot it even within a crowd because of how slowly it moves. Like the “cripple” who cannot rush up the subway steps, whose slowness blocks our paths on crowded city streets, it is identifiable through its speed (or lack thereof). And yet even though it is slow, one cannot escape. It is always following Jay. The it in It Follows behaves like our collective fear of disability and unproductivity, the spectre that follows us around and is amplified in a culture bent on escaping from such a haunting. This desire to escape remains palpable even/especially as it follows us home. Home and homey places are the key staging ground for most of the action in the film. Jay is trapped in her bedroom by her fear even after she has passed it on to her friend Greg (who, believing he will not be infected/affected by it, sleeps with Jay). When it does eventually follow and then kill Greg, it appears as his mother and does so at his bedroom door. Additionally, the climactic battle with it takes place at the site of Jay’s first kiss (a space of innocence in contrast to the wildness of the woods, the site of Jay’s infection [through sleeping with Hugh]). It—our depression, exhaustion, panic and incapacitation—follows us home because the pressures of SemioCapitalism and neoliberalism do. Everyday depression (and the many worldly worries that nurture it and which it nurtures) follows one home, breaking down the duality between domestic and public life. Hence, in these scenes of hominess we find not only depression, but also our anxious attachments to relations that might infect us. Greg is killed by what appears to be his own mother. Despite his assumptions of untouchability, his handsome masculinity and youth do not protect him from the attack of ageing and perhaps genetic inheritance we might see represented in the appearance of his mother, an appearance it takes on at the moment of Greg’s death. Furthermore, the sexual nature of contagion in It Follows begs for a crip reading. Panic over sexually transmitted infections (STIs)—the designation of sexual Others as a plague on the “normal” and healthy, which enlivened decades of homophobia and queer politics—resonates with the disgust and panic induced by the creep of the slowness of disability. Disability as contagion. Before Miller voices her search for a horror movie, “Dramatic Monologue in the Speaker’s Own Voice” reads: I walk naked under my clothes like anyone else, And I’m not a bomb to explode in your hands. Of course, you are not (I would not accuse you of) Thinking of holding me down, but of holding me up. Yet sometimes I’d love to be eased from the envelope of sleep, Stroked gently open (although it would take some doing— on my part, that is). My lost virginity would hurt me the way ghosts of their limbs make amputees shriek, my womanhood too seldom used. Have you ever viewed me this way? No, none of you ever have … ([Alexander Essbaum, 2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR2): 50) We have made of those with disability, like those with STIs, untouchables. Either too sexed or too desexed, the disabled are no longer or never were for stroking gently open. The crip may not be held down, but being held up is still not being desired. If ever viewed as desirable, and as Miller makes clear that is a big if, they are now bombs ready to explode in our hands. Careful it might catch you, or worse you might catch it. Tick tick … boom. We panic, we flee, we fear, to the point of depression, that we will be caught by the bomb of undesirability, unproductivity and hence unmeaning—in essence, inexistence. Attempts to flee this fate pervade It Follows (what would a horror movie be without a young girl running for her life?). Through modes of speedy mobility, like a car, Jay can get away for a brief time, but eventually it will always find her/us. Is this not the function of disability in a society that demands ever-more rapidity? Like the driver of a car that cannot escape a breakdown in a crash, our bodyminds pushed to the breaking point crash into depression—into disability. Indeed, like the depressive crash that comes from the demands on the bodymind to be ever more expressive, when Jay flees a place where it has attacked she crashes her car and ends up in the hospital with a broken arm. Becoming herself broken, she is slowed down and driven mad by her desperate attempts to escape what follows. Slowness and immobility is that which always follows; the disabled embody the one marginalized group that we are always already on the brink of becoming. The true horror embodied by it might just be, therefore, its slowness. We run, panic, crash just so as not to be caught by an infecting immobility, one that will mean the death of our capable, productive and efficient selves. And indeed, in the film if one is caught by it one dies. And at least in the opening death it is a death that is also a cripping. The film begins with a young beautiful girl frantically running. The audience does not see that from which she runs; we only experience her visceral panic. Then the screen jumps to the image of her dead body: her leg is broken and bent at a 45° angle; it hangs over her in a seemingly impossible position, her knee directly over her stomach, the point of her shoe over her chest, the heel reaching up towards the sky. It has caught up with her; no longer mobile, no longer beautiful, she is crooked. I wish you’d learn better before we all totter/into our coffins where there’s no straight way to lie crooked. The death of the straightness of youth and beauty births the crooked. What if we had learned better? What if instead of haunted we were halted by what follows? What if instead of spooked we let what follows spoil us. Can we see that which haunts as also that which halts? That which spooks as that which spoils? Halts and spoils the flow of neoliberalism? For when one reads a “Dramatic Monologue in the Speaker’s Own Voice”, who exactly is in search of a horror movie? Whose “womanhood” (read desirability) haunts like an amputated leg? Who has gone untouched? From whom have others glanced away? Is it not the “I” reading such a monologue now in my own voice? The it that follows me, even in its singularity, is also of course the me that is afraid of being followed. Running counter to the eugenics of neoliberalism, a wealth that is time and a beauty that comes in true singularity encourage the touching and desiring of all, regardless of how bent we might be, regardless of how long it might take to stroke us gently open. In this wealthy crip time there is a listening to the cacophony, not merely a frantic taming of the noise. In attending to the monster that therefore I am follows me[14](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#Fn14) we might clear room for a slow living that would represent a different kind of assembly than that birthed by the eventive productivity of the multitude. (Un)commonly unredeemed If the horror of disability spreads like that of an STI, then perhaps there is something we can learn from a return to the non-compliant and counter-redemptive quotidian acts embodied by the mark of the sociopath (the mad) as represented in Gary in My Pocket. For instance, a similar counter-redemption can be found in Cvetkovich’s Depression: A Public Feeling ([2012](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR15)). Cvetkovich depathologizes and devindividualizes depression. She rejects cure, or what we might call redemption, in favour of what she names “the utopia of ordinary habit” ([Cvetkovich, 2012](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530" \l "ref-CR15" \o "Cvetkovich A (2012) Depression a Public Feeling. Duke University Press: Durham, NC and London.): 154–202). This utopia is inhabited by acts not of salvation but rather of spending time in manners that counter both panic and the frantic attempt to numb depression. In other words, ordinary utopian habits are habits of spending time over saving it. Hence, the concept of the utopia of everyday habit asks us to consider how and with whom we spend the wealth of our time. In her description of a Public Feelings[Footnote8](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#Fn15) event in Toronto Cvetkovich ([2012](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR15): 188) writes, “[it was] a discussion of art and utopia that included a group sing-along of cover songs ranging from Britney Spears’s ‘ … Baby One More Time’ (in homage to the version sung by Kiki and Herb as much as to Britney herself) to Joni Mitchell’s ‘The Circle Game’ (for Canadian content). As we huddled together in the slightly too close embrace of shag rugs—and crocheted afghans, it felt like there was room both to express loneliness and to feel a little less lonely”. Cvetkovich has not been redeemed out of her loneliness, but in spending the wealth of her time with others willing to attend to such a time she feels a little less lonely. She is not cured, but neither is Cvetkovich chained to the structures—of time, feeling, life and work—that made her so lonely in the first place. This is not redemption as much as it is remaining with a difference. At the end of It Follows Jay walks hand in hand with her childhood first kiss Paul, whom she has now slept with and thus we assume she has infected with it. At first glance Jay seems the image of innocence and beauty, her golden locks flowing down onto her white summer dress. But then we feel it, the affect in her eyes: she is exhausted from panicked fleeing and fearful hiding. As Paul and Jay walk, the audience sees a slow-moving “person” following them in the distance. It Follows and this poetics of disability do not offer a happy ending; both refuse to shake the spectre of our own crippness. At the end of After the Future Berardi acknowledges that proposals such as these often leave his audience with a sense of bitterness. He does not have a happy ending either: “And I don’t like to cheat at the game. I don’t like empty words of self-reassurance, or rhetoric about the multitude. I prefer to tell the truth, at least, the limited truth as I see it: there is no way out, social civilization is over, the neoliberal precarization of labor and the media dictatorship have destroyed the cultural antibodies that, in the past, made resistance possible. As far as I know” ([Berardi, 2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR6): 158). And yet he persists. It persists. The crip persists. For instance, writing about Miller’s poetry Jill Alexander Essbaum acknowledges that, “While [Miller’s] poems are often grave and dismal in their imagery, by their tone they are backlit with hope” (Alexander Essbaum et al., 2011: 51). While, as Essbaum notes, Miller’s hope may come from her commitment to her Christianity (Alexander Essbaum et al., 2011: 51), I want to offer an alternate theological reading. Perhaps hope backlights the dismal and the grave, because it is through this gravity (a pulling down as opposed to a speeding up) that we might recognize, perhaps to our horror, our own crooked natures. In recognizing that we too are bent, we might be better prepared to wilfully go our own autonomous ways. In other words, perhaps this kind of hope, a hope that comes through and in our brokenness, illuminates a desire for and an embrace of the realization that there is no way to lie straight in the end. For Berardi this hope comes in the very fact that his brain is limited—that while “his knowledge and understanding don’t see how any development of the social catastrophe could cultivate social well-being”, he also knows that he does not need to know or understand how because “the catastrophe (in the etymology of kata and stopherin) is exactly the point where a new landscape is going to be revealed” ([Berardi, 2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR6): 162). In attending to the catastrophe we hold out faith that we might actually be able to reclaim the wealth of time and the beauty of our singularities. And we might push this faith even farther, asking how we can embrace the crip that follows. We might follow the following where it wills. The wilfully monstrous need not wander away from all senses of collectivity. Monstrosity might come apart from a risky commonality of productivity on offer by Rieger and Kwok only to come noisily together in what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney name the Undercommons (a marooned community, particularly in the University, already considered to be fugitive invaders—never productive or professional enough). For example, Jack Halberstam notes in the introduction to the Undercommons that “the disordered sounds that we refer to as cacophony will always be cast as ‘extra-musical,’ as Moten puts it, precisely because we hear something in them that reminds us that our desire for harmony is arbitrary and in another world, harmony would sound incomprehensible. Listening to cacophony and noise tells us that there is a wild beyond to the structures we inhabit and that inhabit us” ([Moten and Harney, 2013](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR27): 7). Halberstam continues, “And when we are called to this other place, the wild beyond, ‘beyond the beyond’ in Moten and Harney’s apt terminology, we have to give ourselves over to a certain kind of craziness” ([Moten and Harney, 2013](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR27): 7). We can give ourselves over to this madness, to the ecstasy and depression of a chaotic cacophony murmured by those crip monsters on whose effacement harmony was built. This crazy (depressed, exhausted, inexpressible and unreasonable) we is not a we that will come from a suppression of each singularity’s maddening noise into a harmonious battle hymn of a productive multitude, even if the we will wage its own, perhaps slow, war. For this cacophony is the sound of Ahmed’s ([2014](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR1): 184) wilful politics, which “[refuses] to cover over what is missing, a refusal to aspire to be whole”. No common battle hymn, but rather “A queer army … that is not willing to reproduce the whole, an army of unserviceable parts. You can be assembled by what support you refuse to give. A queer army of parts without bodies, as well as bodies without parts, to evoke Audre Lorde’s call for an army of one-breasted women” ([Ahmed, 2014](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR1): 199). This is a call to arms that in its monstrous handness is also a refusal. It is a refusal not of life, but of the lives on offer by neoliberalism. It is a refusal that demands and “exalt[s] tenderness, sleep, and ecstasy, the frugality of needs and the pleasure of the senses” ([Berardi, 2011](https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201530#ref-CR6): 166). In other words, I would rather be reclining than redeemed. I would rather be sleeping than saved. I would rather be pleasured than productive.

#### **We’re impact turning the occurrence of this debate – their call for respectable dialogue over market competition requires structural epistemic gaslighting as it forces disabled people to deny their embodied knowledge of what markets are actually like. Refusal is epistemically generative as it disengages from conscripted conversations like this debate and lets disabled people withdraw their labor from circuits of reactionary dialogue.**

Polhaus Jr. 20 (Gaile Puhlhaus Jr. - Professor & Graduate Director in the Department of Philosophy at Miami University. “Gaslighting and Echoing, or Why Collective Epistemic Resistance is not a “Witch Hunt”” [Hypatia](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/hypatia) , [Volume 35](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/hypatia/volume/B770FEE184D4DE613E56F615972D47C7) , [Issue 4](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/hypatia/issue/F601261EA2694F8CD02825CD97E03E6C) , Fall 2020 , pp. 674 – 686. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/hypatia/article/abs/gaslighting-and-echoing-or-why-collective-epistemic-resistance-is-not-a-witch-hunt/221E455EAD67676583C1B4D8AB1074E5>, DOA: 2/20/22, kbb)

“[W]hen a critique is heard as censorship a critique is not heard. In fact the allegation of censorship is often what is censoring; what stops a critique from staying in circulation.” —Sara Ahmed (2015)

Individual and collective epistemic resistance to oppression is sometimes characterized as antithetical to reasonable discussion in a manner that works to displace such resistance and to discredit the epistemic credibility of those enacting it. I am interested in focusing attention on the political-epistemic context within which epistemic resistance to oppression occurs in order to highlight how charges of “unreasonability” operate in such settings. As I shall elaborate over the course of this essay, resistance in the form of epistemic disengagement may be a necessary and reasonable response to mitigate the ill effects of what I will call structural epistemic gaslighting. For this reason, calls to re-engage on the premise that disengagement is de facto unreasonable may further exacerbate the effects of structural epistemic gaslighting. By resistant epistemic disengagement, I mean disengaging and calling upon others to disengage from frameworks that maintain epistemic oppression, especially when those frameworks cast nondominantly situated knowers as less reliable and/or render unintelligible what is of interest to nondominantly situated knowers. For example, I take certain instances of “deplatforming” (or refusals to give airtime to particular viewpoints) to be resistant epistemic disengagements. As I have argued elsewhere, refusing to consider lines of thought that unfairly foreshorten epistemic agency for some is not only warranted but also in some instances epistemically generative (Pohlhaus, Jr. 2011). In this essay I am concerned with identifying the harm in soliciting re-engagement from those who resistantly disengage and elucidating what is obscured when refusal to (re)engage is characterized as contrary to reason, operating under a “mob mentality,” or “pursuing a witch hunt.” 1 While I recognize that refusing to engage with viewpoints that are harmful can itself result in harm, particularly insofar as it would be beneficial to dissuade people from holding them, those who are oppressed are often faced with double binds, making it nearly impossible to escape negative judgments. Marilyn Frye notes that one feature of oppression is that it produces situations in which the oppressed are castigated no matter what they do (Frye 1983a). It should come as no surprise, then, that the situations in which one finds oneself when resisting structures of oppression might themselves contain double binds. There are dangers to working resistantly within as well as resisting by refusing to work within oppressive frameworks. Oppressed people have contended with this dilemma for centuries. Insofar as this is the case, part of the purpose of this article is to explore the harm that is done when those working from within epistemically oppressive frameworks (whether resistantly or not) call upon those who are disengaging from those frameworks to re-engage within the confines of that from which they are trying to disengage. More specifically, I want to caution feminists in particular from aligning with those who would charge such forms of disengagement with “unreasonability,” “shutting down the conversation,” “unthinking,” or, when that disengagement is collective, a “mob mentality” or a “witch hunt.” Importantly, not all disengagements are the same. Who is disengaging from whom, the context within which disengaging occurs, and how the disengaging is enacted all matter here. For example, am I disengaging from a source that is calling into question the way unjust systems privilege me or from one that is reasserting dominance over me through unjust systems? If I am disengaging from a particular speaker, in what capacity are they speaking? Are they speaking as one who holds political office? As my student in a classroom setting? As someone with whom I have history or as someone I have just met? As a researcher contributing within an arena (for example, in a journal or at a conference) that has been consistently historically sexist and racist? Or as a scholar contributing research within an arena that has specifically identified itself as feminist and antiracist? Given the different nuances that disengagements can take, I think it is unwise simply to assert that feminists ought always to engage with others. Given differences in social positioning among feminists, I think it is particularly unwise to understand all disengagements that happen between and among feminists as the same. Given that not all disengagements are the same, I am concerned in particular about characterizing resistant epistemic disengagements as “shutting down conversation” or “disengaging from thinking” for at least two reasons. First, it suggests that epistemic disengagements are simply refusals to engage in a nonpolitical, “purely epistemic” endeavor (hence “irrational”). This obscures not only the way epistemic activities are politically structured, but also the amount of epistemic labor that may very well be operative in enacting resistant epistemic disengagements. Second, characterizing resistant epistemic disengagements as “shutting down conversation” or “disengaging from thinking” can itself be a form of shutting down conversations and disengaging from difficult thinking. In other words, refusing to engage, and calling upon others not to engage, in particular ways of thinking need not shut conversation down; instead, it can be a call toward a different conversation. It need not be a disengagement from thinking altogether, but a disengagement from one particular line of thinking and an invitation to engage epistemically in another. For this reason, what appears to be disengagement from one perspective might also be characterized as animating new or different forms of engagement from another perspective. Insofar as this is the case, resistant disengagements can call upon others to participate in more justly structured engagements. It can be difficult for some knowers to recognize this call when epistemic systems press upon knowers in distinctly different ways. However, when nondominantly situated knowers are cast as “unreasonable,” “unthinking,” or “difficult,” this should give feminists pause (Frye 1983b). Given that all oppressed groups are themselves coalitions among oppressed groups (Crenshaw 1995), collective epistemic resistance is hard. Structural conditions that gaslight nondominantly situated knowers can actively disappear the epistemic labor entailed in resisting oppression and can enlist knowers in perpetuating those conditions by casting resistant disengagement as unreasonable. In the first half of this article, I develop a structural notion of epistemic gaslighting in order to highlight conditions under which epistemic agents might reasonably enact resistant epistemic disengagement. In the second half, I develop two senses of the term epistemic echoing. The first sense highlights the epistemic labor entailed in withdrawing from conditions of structural epistemic gaslighting that is sometimes mischaracterized as a pernicious self-sequestering that is antithetical to reason. The second sense highlights the epistemic labor entailed in actively confronting epistemic structures that gaslight, sometimes mischaracterized as “irrational group think.” In both cases, I highlight how epistemic acts that may appear as unreasonable “within the gaslight” are, on the contrary, engaged in serious and important epistemic labor.In order to highlight what is obscured when collective epistemic resistance is labeled “unthinking,” I begin by considering some features of the landscape within which epistemic resistance to oppression occurs. As Alison Bailey has noted, our endeavors to know the world take place within “unlevel knowing fields” (Bailey 2014). In other words, under conditions of oppression, epistemic institutions and practices structure knowers differently such that some will be enabled in their epistemic projects whereas others will be hindered. This is due not only to material inequities that hinder epistemic agency but also to collective epistemic practices, assumptions, and institutions that work against the epistemic interests of particular knowers. One way to understand this unequal distribution of epistemic support and disablement, particularly in relation to attempts to resist them, is through the concept of epistemic gaslighting. Although it is not the only way to illuminate the context within which epistemic resistance to oppression occurs,2 recent work on gaslighting touches on a number of features that help to highlight the epistemic labor involved in resistant epistemic disengagement and why the response of soliciting re-engagement is harmful. First, as Kate Abramson notes, gaslighting frequently occurs in response to women’s protestations against sexism and relies upon norms that disqualify marginalized knowers (Abramson 2014, 4). If resistant epistemic disengagement is, at least in part, a type of protestation against that which harms, forms of gaslighting are likely to occur in response to them. Second, as Abramson and Rachel McKinnon both note, gaslighting may be enacted unintentionally, so it is particularly helpful for understanding how wellintentioned calls for re-engagement might nonetheless be harmful (Abramson 2014; McKinnon 2017). Finally, McKinnon has specifically developed a notion of epistemic gaslighting with respect to cases where claims of allyship are used to gaslight (McKinnon 2017). This feature makes the concept of epistemic gaslighting particularly helpful for considering cases that involve those working against oppressive structures from different positions within them. In her essay “Allies Behaving Badly,” McKinnon makes a distinction between a psychological form and what she classifies as an epistemic form of gaslighting. The psychological form is represented in the 1944 film Gaslight and involves acts of purposeful deception in order to cause another to question their perception, memories, and judgment, leading ultimately to psychological breakdown. The epistemic form can have a similar effect, but there are important differences between epistemic and psychological gaslighting. As characterized by McKinnon, epistemic gaslighting is “often unintentional, where a listener doesn’t believe, or expresses doubt about, a speaker’s testimony. . . [and in so doing] raises doubts about the speaker’s reliability at perceiving events accurately” (McKinnon 2017, 168). In the case of epistemic gaslighting, the agent who gaslights may act intentionally or unintentionally, so intention is not a deciding factor in whether epistemic gaslighting is present. In addition, the actions of expressing doubt with respect to another’s testimony are epistemically and not psychologically oriented. In other words, epistemic gaslighting is oriented not toward psychological breakdown, but rather toward a sort of epistemic breakdown: to put out of circulation a particular way of understanding the world, one that centers the experience of the one who is gaslit. Specifically, in raising doubts about speakers’ reliability, epistemic gaslighting is oriented at getting knowers to change their beliefs, to stop noticing or testifying to something, with the risk of being deemed incompetent should they refuse to do so. While it is important to identify acts of gaslighting by particular individuals, in contrast to the accounts given by McKinnon and Abramson, I am interested in highlighting how epistemic institutions and practices themselves can place epistemic pressure on certain knowers that can put them harmfully at odds with their experiences. To be clear, the accounts given by both Abramson and McKinnon have structural aspects. But in order to understand how epistemic resistance might appear as “unreasonable” disengagement, it is helpful to emphasize more fully both the structural aspects that enable epistemic gaslighting by individuals, and how those structural aspects can function to gaslight on their own, independent of any particular perpetrator. In the 1944 film Gaslight, the villain has quite a bit of control over the environment of the woman he gaslights, and it is owing to systematic manipulation of her environment that she starts to doubt her own perceptions. In other words, the perpetrator in psychological gaslighting is able to cause psychological breakdown by drawing upon a situation in which he can enlist features of their shared environment (that he has isolated her, that he has moved the furniture while she was asleep, that he has convinced the house staff that she is unwell, and so on) to pressure his victim into breaking. The ability to place epistemic pressure on other knowers to “break from” and doubt their own experiences must therefore also come, in part, from something in their shared epistemic environment. Although the cases McKinnon examines feature unwarranted disbelief by a perpetrator, they are not only about disbelief, but about how disbelief by a perpetrator puts unwarranted pressure on victims to doubt their own experiences and to perceive the world differently. To gaslight is to cast doubt. Specifically, McKinnon calls attention to cases where people who have been harmed report their experience to someone they trust and that person denies the harm on account of the perpetrator being an “ally” to people who are subjected to this sort of harm. In these cases, the image of “the ally” is doing some of the work to coerce victims to regard the world in a way that is at odds with their experience. In other words, the idea of a person’s being an “ally” is used to put pressure on others to doubt their own experience of the so-called ally. What I want to point out here is that the image of the ally itself can potentially put pressure on people to distrust their own experience without anyone actually doing anything clearly identifiable as “taking another to be less credible.” This is, in part, why I want to expand the term epistemic gaslighting to include features of the epistemic environment that can function on their own. Imagine, for example, that I am a lesbian student and my professor has placed a “safe-zone” sticker on their office door. Such a sticker usually indicates that a person has undergone some training with regard to LGBT advocacy and identifies either as LGBT or as an “ally” to LGBT persons. Imagine further that I am at a meeting in this office with my professor and a few other students from our class. Over the course of the conversation some of the other students say things that I perceive as homophobic, but nobody else seems to notice, including my professor. If this professor hadn’t put the safe-zone sticker on the door, I might have just noticed and thought I was among people I cannot trust. However, because the professor has declared the office a so-called “safe zone,” I start to question my own perception. Moreover, this self-questioning may be compounded by a double bind: if I say nothing, I may feel complicit in having not called attention to a perceived harm, but if I call attention to the remarks, my interlocutors may insist on their good intentions as allies in spite of my perception of harm. Moreover, the “safe-zone” sticker may heighten the latter worry insofar as it indicates that my professor has an investment in being seen as well-meaning and so may be averse to (and defensive of ) being identified as participating in a context that perpetuates harm. Notice that I do not even have to offer testimony, and no one else has to doubt my credibility, for the figure of “being an ally” to cast self-doubt. Here the figure of being an “ally” who is attentive to injustice and by so doing excises themselves from the effects of their social positioning acts as what we might call a “controlling image of dominance.” Patricia Hill Collins uses the term controlling image to describe pervasive and pernicious stereotypes of Black women that palpably thwart them as they navigate the world, aware of how they may be perceived through these live stereotypes (Collins 2001). What I am suggesting is that “the good ally” may be an image of dominantly situated persons that has a similar effect, not to thwart dominantly situated people, but as with Collins’s “controlling image,” to thwart nondominantly situated persons who must navigate the world in light of how this self-image may direct the imagination of those who hold it. Similar to the image of the “ally,” the image of the “well-intentioned white person” may act as a controlling image of dominance that serves to cast doubt upon the world as experienced by Black Americans and other people of color in the US. As Saba Fatima points out, “One of the common responses to hearing someone tell of an incidence of microaggressions is an attempt to offer . . . an alternate account of the well-meaning motivations of the perpetrators. They may offer explanations such as ‘I don’t think he meant it like that,’ or ‘It is very possible that she was actually trying to help you’” (Fatima 2017, 152). Notice here that the image of the “well-intentioned white person” shifts focus from behavior to intentions in a manner that centers the world as experienced by dominantly situated people while casting doubt on the perceptions and experiences of nondominantly situated people. In sum, the dominating controlling images of the “ally” and “well-intentioned” white people give unwarranted weight to the world as experienced from positions of dominance and put unwarranted epistemic pressure on those who are nondominantly situated to prioritize other people’s experiences over their own. Returning to the unsafe-safe-zone example, I withhold judgment on the actors in the scenario because I want to keep focused on how images that circulate in a culture can bear a kind of epistemic weight on nondominantly situated persons, directing them to perceive the world in ways that favor those dominantly situated even when doing so is in conflict with their own experience. We have enough now for a definition of epistemic gaslighting that includes both agential and structural forms. Epistemic gaslighting, we might say, occurs when a person, practice, image, or institution exerts unwarranted pressure on epistemic agents to doubt their own perceptions. Of course, there are cases where people, practices, and institutions warrantedly put pressure on epistemic agents to doubt their own perceptions. For example, the empirical science on implicit bias should put epistemic pressure on all of us to doubt when our perceptions of the world align too neatly with pervasive stereotypes. So, to be clear, I don’t think it is the case that everything should always align seamlessly with our perceptions of the world. We do regularly rely on others to “check in” about our own experiences, and this checking in can helpfully adjust our perception. But, of course, this is what makes epistemic gaslighting so pernicious and why instances of “allies” behaving badly are apt cases of epistemic gaslighting at the agential level—because, as McKinnon points out, when persons have identified themselves as allies, they have signaled to nondominantly situated persons that they can be trusted, and we need epistemic relations with trusted others in order to know well. Our attention to the world is in many ways coordinated and sometimes even helpfully redirected by the attention of others. This can be as simple as the kind of shared attention that happens when everyone around you notices something, and then you notice too, to the kind of shaping of attention that happens in the academic disciplines, where one learns to pay a particular kind of attention to the world. That our attention to the world is shaped in interaction with other knowers through the use of socially shared epistemic resources and with respect to epistemic institutions suggests a myriad of ways in which epistemic gaslighting, or exerting unwarranted pressure on particular knowers to doubt their perception, might occur. Just as nonepistemic institutions and practices can be structured in ways that unfairly advantage some over others, so can epistemic institutions and practices. Charles Mills famously called this to philosophical attention in The Racial Contract, noting that structural injustice is facilitated by what he called an “epistemology of ignorance” or institutions and practices that systematically encourage the ignoring of injustice (Mills 1997). Said differently, the epistemic pressures placed upon nondominantly situated persons within epistemologies of ignorance to ignore instances of injustice that they face constitute a form of epistemic gaslighting. Mills and most of the epistemology of ignorance literature highlights the effects of structural injustice on producing ignorance and vicious knowers. In contrast, the term epistemic gaslighting highlights those whose experienced world is ignored and how very epistemically difficult it can be to traverse a world within which your experiencing of that world is systematically ignored by the knowers around you. Recent work in feminist epistemology suggests a plethora of ways in which nondominantly situated persons are pressured to ignore their own experiences of the world. For example, Saba Fatima identifies the habitual practice of white people regarding reports of microaggressions as a list of isolated acts and explaining away individual acts one by one (Fatima 2017). This method belies the function of microaggressions whose full force is precisely in their cumulative effects, which ought to be understood in relation to one another. Jeanine Weekes Schroer argues that the scientizing of discrimination in empirical studies on stereotype threat, with its focus on performance independent of testimony, can be understood not only as a symptom of, but also contributing to, a culture in which the testimony of those who experience discrimination is not regarded as credible on its own (Schroer 2015). Christine Wieseler analyzes the manner in which definitions of quality of life often favor what able-bodied persons imagine their lives would be like were they to have a disability over what actual people with disabilities say about the quality of their lives (Wieseler 2012). In these cases, practices, approaches, and definitions shift attention away from the experiences of nondominantly situated persons and center (or continually recenter) the world as experienced from positions of dominance. This is the aspect of gaslighting that is crucial to hold in one’s attention when nondominantly situated knowers disengage from and ask others to disengage from particular epistemic frameworks: that nondominantly situated persons are continually called upon to center the experience of those who are dominantly situated even when (and perhaps especially when) their own experiences come into conflict with it. It makes sense that dominant frameworks would highlight the experiences of dominantly situated people, for those are the people who are in a position to alter them. But the ubiquity of epistemic frameworks that highlight the experiences of dominantly situated knowers gives the illusion that these frameworks simply highlight reality itself and not reality as it is experienced from particular positions within the world. To disengage from such frameworks and to call upon others to likewise disengage from them need not be a disengagement from reality, but rather a decentering of dominantly situated knowers and attending to the experiences of nondominantly situated knowers. For this reason, such disengagement does at least two things. First, it engages in some strenuous epistemic labor. Because knowers are interdependent with one another (Grasswick 2004; Pohlhaus, Jr. 2011), it is not easy to disengage from epistemic frameworks that are held firmly in place, in part, through the epistemic activity of those with whom one may be interdependent. Second, it contests the epistemic weight collectively given to the experienced world of dominantly situated persons in a manner that can be unsettling to those who have no other experienced world pressing upon them. In this sense it can be experienced as “flying in the face of reality” to those who need not face the reality of those subordinated to them. However, it does so with the aim of recalibrating the inordinate amount of collective weight given to one set of experiences and denied to another set of experiences. Insofar as such disengagements are epistemically laborious, it is inaccurate to characterize them as unthinking. Insofar as they may be necessary in order to aptly attend to one’s experienced world, it is wrong to call them irrational. In discussing the sort of unwarranted epistemic pressure placed on women of color to ignore and disregard their own experiences, Fatima notes, “Being unintelligible to one [’s] own self is not epistemologically sustainable [ for] the long term, and we as [women of color] need to be able to retain our knowledges in the face of gaslighting” (Fatima 2017, 149, italics in original). Under conditions of epistemic gaslighting, a person is pushed in opposite directions. On the one hand, there are situational pressures insofar as the world presses upon the person in particular ways with respect to how they are situated within the world and they need to make sense of those pressures. On the other hand, interdependent epistemic pressures (in the form of other knowers, collective epistemic practices, and socially recognized epistemic institutions) push the person to doubt or disregard the sense of those situational pressures that fit with their experience. It is within the context of these dueling pressures, present under conditions of epistemic gaslighting, that I want to think about the concept of epistemic echoing.

#### The Role of the Judge is to build kite-ideas. The aff has reproduces aircraft-carrier-ideas which shoot down abolitionist rhetoric by treating interlocutors as target practice. Calls for political legibility inevitably get folded in, which is why the 1AC must be refused in favor of an abolitionist faith that another world is possible.

Zurn 21 (Perry Zurn – Assistant Professor of Philosophy at American University. “Abolition is a kite-idea” Foreword to *Building Abolition: Decarceration and Social Justice*. Pgs. XII-XVII, DOA: 11/15/21, kbb)

I want to propose that abolition is a kite-idea. Kite-ideas are floozy and a little cheap, easy to build at home. They can be flown by one or two people or synchronized en masse. Each with their own string, kite-ideas are personal. They are childlike, imaginative, and relatively harmless, carrying little but their colors. They are inherently flighty, but equally grounded, tethered in some meaningful sense to people and place. And they take flight only with a willing wind, always working together with the earth. Kite-ideas are graspable but uncontrollable. They may seem indecisive as they Foreword xiii wander and waver about. And their capacity to be easily moved tags kite-ideas as feminine, as queer, cutting through space with uncanny intimacy. Aircraft-carrier-ideas are massively heavy, sluggish, and expensive. They are warships, bearing weapons of mass destruction and they are built of power and of money. Moving against water, rather than with wind, they work on but also despite existing natural forces. The clear product of developed nations and globalized corporations, aircraft-carrier-ideas are highly complex, highly specialized, and therefore difficult to dismantle. Unwavering, stubbornly surefooted, and seemingly indestructible, they carry all kinds of systemic baggage onboard. Bearing the colors of heteropatriarchy and coloniality, they are isolated and isolating, heavily bordered and border-policing. And yet, under “certain circumstances, it is possible to fight aircraft-carrier ideas with kite-ideas.” What are the parameters of such a fight? Is it a fight that can be won? Or is it a different sort of struggle? Is the kite’s fight merely one of disruption, sowing confusion and irony? Or does its fight succeed on a different terrain, demanding engagement (and mustering support) on a different register? Do kite-ideas simply refuse to play the game they have inherited? A kite can land on an aircraft-carrier uninvited, willy-nilly. It can disrupt flight paths. Or it can simply skip over the giant floating metal bed and continue on its way. And if it is only under certain circumstances that such a fight can take place, what are those circumstances? Are they in the past? Are they only in our dreams? Are they here, walking among us? Abolition is a kite-idea. The prison industrial complex, ableism, patriarchy and cis-heteronormativity, settler colonialism and white supremacy, these are aircraft-carrier-ideas. Floating freight trains of destruction. How often is the thought of abolition dismissed as insubstantial, uninformed, innocent, or even laughable? What fragility lies there in contrast with the massive materialdiscursive systems across history that have built the ideas against which it flies? I want to unpack that fragility here by getting behind and beneath abolition. I want to track abolition as a specific kind of movement, noting the way it flies overhead, shimmers in the sun, and tugs at the hand. What is abolition? The famous ti esti question, a Socratic kite-idea turned warship by disciplinary philosophy. I have been combing over the definitions and definitional descriptions of the term “abolition” in the writings of contemporary abolitionists such as Liat Ben-Moshe, Angela Davis, Andrew Dilts, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Che Gossett, Lisa Guenther, Michael Hames-Garcia, Mariam Kaba, Joel Olson, Dylan Rodriguez, Dean Spade, and Eric Stanley, among others. There are certain limitations to the very project of identifying what abolition is via this methodology. First, there may be definitions and descriptions of abolition that lack the word “abolition” itself and therefore fly under the radar. And, second, there are certainly ways these folks and others understand or do abolition that may not be captured by language at all. Nevertheless, this is one pathway to thinking abolition, its movement, and its kinesthetic signatures. xiv Foreword Eric Stanley (2011), while reflecting on the queer abolitionist legacies of Stonewall in his introduction to Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex, describes abolition as follows: The time of abolition is both yet to come and already here. […] As a dream of the future and a practice of history, we strategize for a world without the multiple ways that our bodies, genders, and sexualities are disciplined. […] This is an invitation to remember these radical legacies of abolition and to continue the struggle to make this dream of the future lived today. (Stanley, 2011, pp. 8–9) For Stanley, abolition—always already a queer thing—is (1) a practice of history, (2) a dream of the future, and (3) an invitation to continue the struggle lived today. Each of these threads is traceable in other texts, lengthened or foreshortened, differently interwoven and differently inspired, but often with similar touchstones. In what follows, I pick up on abolition’s debts to Foucauldian genealogy, the messianism in Derridean deconstruction, and the affective resistance among queer/trans, disabled, and/or of color communities in order to triangulate how abolition moves. In doing so, I do not mean to suggest that genealogy, deconstruction, and affective resistance are the only ways to understand abolition’s investments in either history, future, or struggle, nor that these are abolition’s only investments. But they are some of its investments, and these are some of the ways those investments can be understood. What surfaces in each case is what I call the weakness of abolition. By this term, I do not mean to imply either that abolition has no strength or that abolition’s weakness is not also its strength. I do mean to attend to the ways in which the thought of abolition, across these traditions, belies a certain fragility. I mean to grapple with abolition’s contingency and its vulnerability. I mean to highlight its kite-likeness. 1. Abolition is a practice of history This is a kite-idea. Who but a lightweight, a waif of a thing, stands before an institution, decides to dismantle it, and turns tail for the archives? What does the dusty past have to do with a damning present? Well, everything. As Angela Davis (2005) puts it, part of abolishing prisons is breaking the prison’s hold on our imagination, the whole network architecture of our cognitive schemas. To fly high overhead and gain perspective. It involves a refusal to separate prisons from the history of slavery, emancipation, the Thirteenth Amendment, and race inequality today. History itself is a palimpsest. It involves the happening of things being eternally rewritten and retold, typically according to reigning logics, dominant discourses, and established structures. The present pile of things seems simply to have appeared, fully formed and fully functional, with roots and scaffolds deeply buried. “Genealogy,” Michel Foreword xv Foucault (1980) pens, “will cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning” (p. 144). It illuminates the messy, multiple, and insufficient threads that create the present. And it does so to show the fragility of things, to crack them open, release possibilities, and shift existing pathways (Dilts, 2017). It is the twine of social and cognitive justice. But genealogy also tells another tale, a tale of the vulnerability of abolition itself and its tendency toward cooptation. Foucault is no abstract theorist. Having done robust abolitionist work with the Prisons Information Group (GIP) and the subsequent Prisoners Action Committee (CAP), Foucault stared long and hard into the shape-shifting face of carceral logic (Thompson & Zurn, 2021). And he looked up grim and weathered. In his writings, he is gripped less by a faith in abolition than by the fragility of abolition. To “abolish” public executions in favor of prisons, he notes, is simply to mask the same corporeal punishment in new, seemingly less corporeal garb, all while extending the microphysics of power across penal, juridical, and academic institutions (Foucault, 1977). To “abolish” the death penalty in favor of life without parole, he warns, is but to implement a cosmetic improvement, one that solidifies the enmeshment of medical and psychological discourses in judicial decisions (Foucault, 2021a). And to “abolish” prisons themselves in favor of alternative penalties, he insists, could submerge the forces of marginalization in other institutions and “liberate carceral functions” across society, diffusing the work of surveillance, control, and resocialization (2021b; 2009, p. 17). The abolitionist practice of history is empowering. But it is also deeply humbling. A crack and a caution. 2. Abolition is a dream of the future This is a kite-idea. Who but a child—or the childlike—stands before an institution, decides to dismantle it, and then lapses into daydreams? What hath whimsy to do with war? Again, perhaps everything. Institutions do not only determine the present, they also craft the future, a future that is coming, down the pike, as formidable as it seems unstoppable. Any movement toward abolition must necessarily invoke, then, different institutions and different futures. It must take a moment to shimmer in the sun. Reflecting on both the longstanding practice of incarcerating disability and the impending future of institutionalization via these same oppressive structures, Liat Ben-Moshe (2013) and Chapman et al. (2014) recall Jacques Derrida’s (1993) insistence that justice involves a responsibility to “those who are not yet born and who are already dead” (p. xviii). Robert McRuer (2006) likewise leans on Derrida when he dreams of another world, beyond institutionalization, a world that welcomes a disability to come. This, he writes, is “a crip promise that we will always comprehend disability otherwise and that we will, collectively, somehow access other worlds and futures” (p. 208). By mobilizing echoes of Derrida (1994) on democracy—something that “will always remain, in each of its future times, to come” —McRuer emphasizes the xvi Foreword perpetual unfinishedness of disability justice and, indeed, of abolition writ large (Guenther, 2015). If abolition is a practice of history that undoes history, abolition is also a dream of the future that unravels itself. For it, we need, as Friedrich Nietzsche (1878) notes in Human, All Too Human, to “become traitors, be unfaithful, again and again abandon our ideals” (p. 198). This is one of abolition’s weaknesses. Another—not unrelated—is that its dream of the future is a dream of the heart. In his Death Penalty lectures, Derrida (2013) speaks explicitly about abolition. He insists that abolition cannot be modelled after the cold calculation of the death penalty itself. It must come from somewhere else. Refusing the “disinterestedness” of Kant and the self-interestedness of French Revolutionary abolitionists, Derrida leans into his own inter-ested nature—that is, the fact that he exists in and between others, in a co-constituted affective space. “I protest,” he writes, “in the name of my heart when I fight so that the heart of the other will continue to beat—in me, before me, after me, or even without me” (Derrida, 2013, p. 257). The dream of abolition is not a calculative vision, but a felt recognition of interdependence and creaturely solidarity, of affective terrains that exceed themselves. And it is precisely this location that secures abolition’s insecurity, its incalculability, its unfinished future. The abolitionist dream of the future is one of propulsion as much as pathos. A fever and a feeling. 3. Abolition is an invitation to continue the struggle lived today This is a kite-idea. Who but a trickster stands before an institution, decides to dismantle it, and then returns to eating and drinking with friends? How does that make any sense? It is, precisely, sense-making. The struggle is lived, today, on the terrain of creaturely desire. Desire for belonging and independence, meaning and memory, food and drink, the sun and the earth. While disciplinary habits are secured by tradition and sedimented by specific institutions, new practices can be planted and cross-pollinated through the poetics of relation. By a tug at the hand. While it is true that abolition tracks the material histories and resistance dreams of marginalized communities, it tracks, just as much, the acts of love—queer love, crip love, Black and Brown love—among those same communities. This work involves the death of certain desires and the liberation of others. Recall Sara Ahmed (2016), in “A Killjoy Manifesto,” vowing: “I am not willing to get over histories that are not over” (p. 262); “I am willing to cause unhappiness” (p. 258). But remember also Charlene Carruthers’ (2018) call for “healing justice,” Kai Green’s (n.d.) for “black trans love,” and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha’s (2018) for “care work,” alongside so many others. Abolition is a practice of affective and relational transformation. In this double helix of breaking and building affective and relational ties, what is broken is not only the grip of aircraft-carrier-ideas on our minds and our hearts. What is broken is also ourselves, those of us standing here flying kites. In This Wound is a World, queer, Indigenous poet Billy-Ray Belcourt (2019) explores his experiences of love as a force of undoing. He writes: Love […] “always means non-sovereignty,” but only if we think of love as what opens us up to that which feels like it can rupture the ground beneath our feet. […] [L]ove requires that we violate our own attachments, that we give into instability, that we accept that turbulence is the condition of relationality as such. We might agree, then, that love is a process of becoming unbodied; at its wildest, it works up a poetics of the unbodied. (Belcourt, 2019, p. 55) Against the aircraft-carrier-idea of sovereignty, as built and massified by settlercolonial states, Belcourt (2016) pits a queer, Indigenous call to love and desire, to our bodies breaking against one another. The “abolition” of carceral logic writ large, he elsewhere states, “is a mode of becoming and being-with” that requires not the “disappearing of others” or the “blocking of worlds,” but rather the affective worlding that repeatedly breaks open not just that out there, but us, us here (2016, 11:07). If abolition is anything, besides a practice of curiosity and a practice of hope, it is a reimagination of how to be with one another, to be done and undone by one another. The abolitionist invitation to lived struggle is a (re)turn to relation and desire. A tear and a tug. Abolition is never completed; it is only ever in motion. What, then, is the shape of that motion? What are its arcs, its trajectories, its kinesthetic signatures? Tracing the abolitionist signatures active within the theoretical and activist traditions of genealogy, deconstruction, and queer/trans liberation, I have begun a preliminary sketch of an architecture of change, charged, as it is, with a hope as fierce as it is fragile. Abolition is a kite-idea. A queer thing. It is a triangulation of fabric, wind, and string. Its attention to material histories illuminates the need and the pathways for change, while its commitment to dreaming and struggling, amid the crosscurrents of what is and what might be, is guided by a poetics of relation. Abolition’s fabric, its wind, and its string are as forcefully as they are fabulously pitched against the ahistoricity and urgency of the now that serve to isolate us from one another and from ourselves. The question that remains is this: What will the fight look like? What weakness does it risk? What irony does it sow? What other terrain does it insist upon occupying? What refusals does it make to the aircraft-carrier-ideas of settler colonialism and white supremacy, ableism and cis-hetero-patriarchy, and to their prized aircrafts? And what is it—in the past, in our dreams, and walking among us—that conditions those refusals? It is for us to follow the line and watch as it winds overhead and take after it, running.

#### **I’ve known more than this with my fingertips I’ve known plate glass (x2) And when the doctor calls you in He's super early but he's got something To tell you, baby And when he rolls his cart into the room And you begin to worry and you run away Collaborating with your sense of doom Who are you when you're mad? I’ve been let go I'm out of control I’ve come so far but I'm still broke And it's only 7:30 PM Feels like I’ll claw my face off If it's not already stone Who's to say when I run When I go when I run When I go when I stop When I close the door to keep it out? I have my doubts Who's to say when I run When I go when I go When I'm through when I get to you Will I get to you? Will I get to you? Will I find you? Yeah, man, I guess I’ll be around But count the summer out But I’ll be around**

https://open.spotify.com/track/4v55Nqito6jGwkGFOCZZ42?si=f63901d7eebf490f

### Block

#### You should Deplatform the aff – speech acts are not just conduits for expression but actions that coerce, demand, and persuade audiences towards certain political investments. If we win the aff is apart of an intellectual legacy that sets the boundary on leftist discourse around eugenic economics, then you should end the reiteration of genocidal ideologies even if you’re hesitant because this is a fight we must win at all costs.

Lennard 21 (Natasha Lennard – columnist for the Intercept. Her work has appeared in the Nation, Bookforum, and the New York Times, among others. She teaches critical journalism at the New School in New York and is the author of Being Numerous: Essays on Non-Fascist Life. “A Struggle, Not a Debate” <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/a-struggle-not-a-debate>, DOA: 2/9/22, kbb)

Speech is used to do far more than express opinions and ideas about the state of perceived reality. We do all kinds of things with words. In 1962 the philosopher J.L. Austin introduced the notion of speech acts. All speech is enacted through speech acts, Austin argued; the act is the thing done or achieved with our utterances. Some speech acts assert opinions, some describe states of affairs, but many utterances also complete or attempt certain actions: demanding, promising, ordering, threatening, persuading, and so on. Whether their propositional content is true or false is less relevant than whether, for various contextual reasons, they succeed in performing their intended acts. (A judge, for example, has the authority to perform the speech act of sentencing someone to prison, while I do not.) When we limit our concerns to questions of which ideas and opinions we should permit in various publics, we miss the entire terrain of how speech works. Contemporary debate consistently, and incorrectly, treats speech simply as a tool for sharing opinions and holding up various representations of the world. This view found its ultimate expression in the notorious July 2020 Harper’s “Letter on Justice and Open Debate,” which advised that “the way to defeat bad ideas is by exposure, argument, and persuasion, not by trying to silence or wish them away.” It was a given for the signatories that what was at stake was no more than the circulation of “ideas,” some of which, they admitted, are bad. But when political figures and groups gather and speak in the public sphere, they’re not only positing beliefs about the world, offering their thoughts up to the so-called marketplace of ideas. Such speech is not so much organized around expressing the interiority of the speaker, or describing something, as much as it is organized around the listener. When, for example, Tucker Carlson speaks in horror about “The Great Replacement” of white people and their privileged standing, he indeed offers a false description of the world, the falseness of which has, time and again, been pointed out. But the utterance doesn’t primarily function as a description to be tested for truth or falsity; the listener, if white, is being told to feel threatened or, if non-white, is being imperiled by being named as a threat. Counter-speech, insisting on the anti-racist truth, might challenge the constative elements of the racist utterance. But pointing out the truth often does little to disrupt the performative force of white supremacist speech acts. My argument is not that racist, fascistic speech should not be tolerated only insofar as it is understood as an action, rather than some sort of mythic “pure” speech. That sort of reasoning—attempting to define the line between speech and action—has bogged down all too much First Amendment scholarship. I merely submit that liberal appeals to truth will not stop fascists. There’s something peculiar about “free speech” discourse: it has all too many people sounding like the state, insistent on establishing immutable rules and laws, under the pretense of a universalist approach unbesmirched by histories of oppression and power. But it is both offensive and fanciful to pretend that we’re in some sort of Habermasian ideal speech situation, which the woke left is now undermining with a tirade of cancellations. This is the “white ignorance” that philosopher Charles Mills argues can reconcile “liberal egalitarianism and racial hierarchy.” As long as we live under racial capitalism, some people’s speech will always be freer than others. Limiting the excesses of white supremacist and transphobic speech acts in our midst is the least we can do. The thorny question remains unanswered of which exact speech acts we recognize as oppressive and worthy of shutting down. The answer cannot be that any speech a person or group finds oppressive should be seen as an oppressive speech act: such claims have grounded all too many incidences of Zionists silencing those who support Palestinian liberation, for example. But this brings us back to the political work of understanding and reckoning with historic oppression, its material realities, and the bogus claims to it (such as mythic racism against white people in U.S. education systems). These decisions will necessarily involve contestation and disagreement; they require listening to communities on the frontlines of liberation struggles and being aware that it is not simply a matter of opinion or feelings as to which groups are or are not oppressed. In calling for peoples’ platforms to be removed or disrupted, we must be vigilant and cautious, because we well know that neither Silicon Valley nor the state can be trusted to make anti-fascist choices. But the left should not avoid the work of collectively recognizing and naming our enemies, and seeking to end the reiteration of genocidal ideologies. Simply put: we seek to deplatform fascists not because we are attempting to develop a perfect set of rules to delineate, in perpetuity, the fixed bounds of permissible speech. We deplatform because this is a fight we need to win.