

# The Ethical Life of Counter-Communities

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**ABSTRACT** This article explores the normative structure of counter-communities. These communities do not simply fulfill a *compensatory* function for excluded or oppressed groups; their specific sociality is *transcendent* of society at large. The article outlines this notion of the “superiority of the subjugated” with Hegel and explains its social-theoretical relevance by turning to Marx and Engels. This tradition of thought offers two explanations for the superiority of subjugated sociality, one that relies on a philosophy of history (the servant’s way of existence *anticipates* a coming sociality), and one that relies on anthropological premises (servants have an already-present access to specific social potentials of their species being that the masters are missing). After considering these two options with regard to the proletariat as a form of subjugated sociality, the article makes the case for a general theory of the ethical life of counter-communities and applies it to the examples of queer and diasporic forms of collectivity. In closing, the article explores the success conditions of counter-collectivization as well as names some social-theoretical implications.

**KEYWORDS** counter-communities, G. W. F. Hegel, Karl Marx, domination and servitude, ethical life, abolition

In her book *A Paradise Built in Hell*, journalist and essayist Rebecca Solnit describes how in the aftermath of natural disasters or other situations of radical crisis, spontaneous acts of mutual aid, solidarity, and kindness occur. Drawing on examples such as the earthquake in San Francisco in 1906, the attacks against the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001, or Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Solnit shows that catastrophic situations do not necessarily lead to an increase of panic, egoistical, or regressive behavior, as the omnipresent apocalyptic imaginaries want us to believe, but rather set free altruistic attitudes and behaviors, creating new forms of community cohesion and feelings of belonging. In emergency situations, people often begin with attending directly to each other’s medical, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs; in fact, self-organized help can prove even more effective than the bureaucratized and militarized crisis management of the state. The sense of community created under such conditions, Solnit reports, can some-

times reach such an intensity that despite an overall catastrophic situation, people involved experience feelings of satisfaction or even euphoria. For this paradoxical feeling of joy amid sorrow, Solnit says, we do not have a proper word; she describes it as “an emotion graver than happiness but deeply positive.”<sup>1</sup> How is it possible that disasters lead to the formation of—at least provisional—utopian communities? And how can it be the case that positive affects grow not out of conditions of wealth and prosperity, but out of need and devastation? Solnit’s explanation is that situations of crisis expose a hidden “human nature,” which turns out to be generous, empathetic, and resilient. From this perspective, it is precisely the rupture of everyday life that opens up the possibility of a better society.

In this article, I follow this intuition, but radicalize as well as generalize it. Solnit’s observation about rare states of emergency, I argue, can also be applied more broadly to our society: it is precisely those communities whose everyday life is marked by experiences of suffering and misery that develop an access to epistemic insights, moral attitudes, and aesthetic expressions that privileged subjects lack. Throughout history, countless groups of excluded and exploited people have insisted that their form of life is in a certain sense superior to the one of their oppressors. For instance, left standpoint theories claim that oppressed groups (such as women and workers) are able to develop a more accurate analysis of the nature of social domination, based on their personal experience;<sup>2</sup> proponents of a feminist care ethics have tried to identify a “female” moral consciousness and orientations of action that transcend the limits of conventional, justice-based norm conceptions;<sup>3</sup> queer subcultures inspired by Michel Foucault’s concept of the aesthetics of existence have insisted on the transgressive character of their way of life in contrast to a narrow-minded heterosexist mainstream culture;<sup>4</sup> Black and indigenous communities have sought to overcome internalized forms of racism through self-affirming strategies, as expressed in slogans such as “Black is beautiful,”<sup>5</sup> and so on—the list is endless. This specific superiority, which I will call the *superiority of the subjugated*, also has an affective component quite similar to the emotion described by Solnit: an experience of consolation, joy, or even a certain recalcitrant form of happiness, which finds its base precisely in not being integrated into the hegemonic society.

I shall argue that those different dimensions of a peculiar superiority of the subjugated—epistemic, moral, aesthetic—as claimed by a heterogeneous multiplicity of social and political movements, have the same enabling conditions. They are expressions of a shared but particular normative structure that is the result of a shared but particular social configuration. I propose understanding the social formations underlying such experiences of superiority as *counter-communities*. A counter-community, according to this proposal, is defined by three features. Firstly, it is *subjugated*; that is, it is subject to a form of economic, political, social, or cultural

domination.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, it has formed a *community* in the strong sense of the word; it is a normatively structured, stable, and ethically binding form of sociality, resting on the explicit or implicit affirmation of its members. Counter-communities can be kinship-based, involving familial cultures of resilience and loyalty, but they can also be constituted as oppositional subcultures and scenes, political movements and parties, subeconomic forms of cooperation, or intentionally pursued politics of forms of life.<sup>7</sup> Thirdly, a counter-community is marked by a certain *distancing* from dominant social structures (a *counter-movement*), ranging from implicit reservations to open opposition.

Obviously, it cannot be the experience of injustice or oppression as such which causes the said uplifting affects. Proposing such a “slave morality” would not just romanticize and idealize the experience of injustice and oppression in an elitist manner; it would also make it impossible to explain why oppression is to the disadvantage and not actually to the advantage of the oppressed. We can, however, explore certain alchemical techniques that enable counter-communities to wrestle from a catastrophic reality a particular form of agency.<sup>8</sup> These practices are not free-floating inventions but anchored in the given normative structure of counter-communities.

We can define the *normative structure* of a community as the entirety of the habitualized and customary ethical practices of its members. This notion is based on G. W. F. Hegel’s concept of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). In Hegel, this term is based on a strong idea of a philosophy of history, as he claims that the social fabric of the existing society represents the final emanation of the process of the self-actualization of spirit. The term is not used here in this strong original sense. But Hegel’s concept provides for an important tool for social theory, as it combines a number of seemingly contradictory aspects. Firstly, it captures both the fixed institutional and the more ephemeral everyday life practices of a social context. Social conventions, fashions, manners, and traditions are as much a part of ethical life as codified rules, collective decision-making, common deliberation, and political agendas. Secondly, ethical life is not the result of transparent voluntary or intentional planning, but the outcome of a historical development. It implies a passive moment and is thus never fully disposable to its members. Thirdly, Hegel attempts to reconcile the descriptive with the prescriptive dimension of normativity. Every social relation produces norms and values that are suitable to promote the intrinsic ends of that relation. Norms and values are thus not an external set of rules but constitutive of the relationship as such. (Bringing your sick friend tea does not follow from a moral rule, but from the very nature of the specific relationship: *it’s what friends do.*) Fourthly, from this follows that ethical life overcomes the gap between morality and desire. If you are actually participating in a social practice, your action is not in opposition to your inclination: as a friend, you *want* to bring your sick friend tea. This, finally, leads to the collapse of the dichotomy between happiness

and rightness. True satisfaction, or a “good life,” cannot be achieved in permanent hostility to the normative structure of the social context that is constitutive for me and my relationships. Taking these different dimensions together, we can speak of the “ethical life” of a community as a *historically situated set of transindividual, preconscious, emotionally rooted commitments and obligations implicit in the customary practices of that community*. Hegel believed that the institutions of the European bourgeois society manifested a rational social order with a freedom-guaranteeing and thus happiness-enabling ethical life. This article argues the opposite: it is precisely those communities that oppose the specific institutions of bourgeois society (such as the family, property, and the nation-state) that have developed a superior ethical life.

In his essay “The I in We,” Axel Honneth investigates the significance of group socialization for individual personality development. Based on his general theory of recognition, he argues that the experience of positive affirmation through groups is indispensable for successful formation. According to Honneth, the group especially fulfills a balancing function if subjects are being denied the status of equal personhood by the state. Citing a term coined by Richard Sennett, he points out that disenfranchised subjects often form “countercultures of respect” marked by specific codes of responsibility and esteem defined through families, gangs, youth cultures, or broader social and political movements.<sup>9</sup> For Honneth, the form of respect developed in these countercultures is genuinely “compensatory”: it balances out the recognition deficit caused by the society at large by providing members a form of recognitive emergency relief. This view, I hope to show, misses the specific ethical potential of counter-communities. A derivative vocabulary according to which counter-communal norms are merely imitating the norms of the society at large and are thus always only second-best to them fails to acknowledge the transgressive elements of the ethical life of the subjugated and correspondingly the specific satisfaction it makes possible for the members of such communities. The ethical life of counter-communities is neither compensatory nor deficient, but antagonistic and thus transcendent.<sup>10</sup> It demands not integration to the existing order but its abolition.

To make this claim more plausible, I will consult a number of thinkers, all of whom agree with the Aristotelian premise that the human life form is essentially marked by its sociality and that feelings of happiness, joy, or satisfaction are thus the effects of authentic experiences of such sociality. In the first section, I will outline the problem by turning to the famous chapter on domination and servitude in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Structures of social domination deny the servant successful identification with the existing society. Still, Hegel believes that the servant’s subjectivity is in a certain sense superior to that of the master. There are two possible explanations for this peculiar superiority. The first, more prominent one

relies on a philosophy of history: the servant's way of existence *anticipates* a coming sociality. The second, less prominent one relies on anthropological premises: servants have an actual, already-present access to specific social potentials that the masters are missing. In the next section, I pursue both lines of argument by exploring the motif of subjugated sociality in the work of Marx and Engels. Again, the historical-philosophical argument is more prominent, according to which the proletarian form of life already in a negative way anticipates the form of life of liberation. However, taking a realistic, empirical look at this claim will reveal the limitations of the historical-philosophical argument: the shattering of the certainty of a pending communist revolution has rendered this explanation questionable. In a third section, I therefore attempt to show that an anthropological argument, too, can be found in Marx's writing. According to this idea, the superiority of the ethical life of counter-communities does not result from an anticipation of communist conditions but stems directly from the vital collective experience of being-against. It is therefore the anthropological rather than the historical-philosophical interpretation that helps explain the superiority of subjugated sociality. This idea can be formulated as a general theory of subjugated communities, the subjective and objective conditions of which I hint at, and the implications of which I sketch in my final section.

### **The Superiority of the Subjugated Consciousness (Hegel)**

It is a shared basic premise of a number of philosophical traditions, from Aristotelianism and neo-Aristotelianism via Hegelianism and Marxism to contemporary instances of communitarianism and republicanism, to identify the human as a *zoon politikon*, as a social or political animal. Because of this determination, Aristotle holds, "even when they do not need one another's help, they no less desire to live together."<sup>11</sup> Society, for the human being, does not have an instrumental, but an inherent value. On the one hand, Aristotle's definition distinguishes the human life form from other life forms: only humans possess the language and reason necessary for political action. On the other hand, this definition offers norms internal to human life; it implies criteria of excellence and thus designates certain forms of human life—as life-together, in the polis—as ideal. The normative implications of an Aristotelian anthropology can be spelled out in an objective and a subjective regard. For example, from the premise that human beings can only actualize their potential through participation in social practices, we can conclude that the objective conditions of a society should provide for such participation. We might identify a shared cultural background, a sufficient education, and access to cultural goods as some of the conditions of meaningful social participation. On the other hand, in order to actualize their essence as a *zoon politikon*, human beings also have to subjectively adopt a social orientation of action. This means, among

other things, overcoming individualistic or atomistic mentalities and developing a habitualized orientation toward a common good that can be described as virtue. The interplay between the objective and the subjective dimensions, according to another normative implication of the notion of the *zoon politikon*, has an impact on affects and emotions: acting according to one's *ergon*—one's essence or function—promises the experience of *eudaimonia* or happiness.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout his work, Hegel developed the most comprehensive and nuanced reformulation of this Aristotelian insight under the conditions of European modernity. In addition to specifying the different dimensions of recognition human beings need for successful identity formation and explicating the corresponding social spheres and their respective normative grammar, Hegel also accounts for human sociality not only as the result of biological determination, as Aristotle would have it, but also of historical social struggles. These struggles, Hegel acknowledges, can lead to the establishment of structures of social domination, which counteract the human disposition to live in a free and equal society. In his short but extremely influential chapter on “domination and servitude” in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel points out that relationships that are based on domination do not allow for a good life together in the Aristotelian sense and thus undermine the possibility of human self-actualization. This is famously due to the fundamental asymmetry of such relationships: the servant recognizes the master as an independent being, but the master does not recognize the servant in the same way, instead rendering her as a mere tool of his own will. The revolutionary point of Hegel's argument is that now a good life is not only squandered for the servant, but also for the master. Because the master is not recognized by someone he recognizes as worthy of recognition, his independence remains vain and empty; the master finds himself, to borrow an expression from Alexandre Kojève, at an “existential impasse.”<sup>13</sup>

The servant, on the other hand, has experiences that the master misses out on. Hegel thus arrives at the—at first sight, counterintuitive—diagnosis: “The truth of the self-sufficient consciousness is . . . the servile consciousness.”<sup>14</sup> Just as domination turns into its opposite (the advantage of the master turns out to be a disadvantage), being dominated turns into its opposite (the disadvantage of the servant is actually an advantage). This reversal of the conventional value order is what Hegel calls the “dialectic” of domination and servitude. The decisive factor for the superiority of the servant's consciousness in comparison to the master's is the experience of work: while the master merely enjoys, the servant gets to form the world and thus to create something permanent. This has a twofold effect: first, the servant sees herself in the product of her labor and thus has the experience of independence. Second, the servant is active for others, which enables her to liberate herself from her own egotism and selfishness; she is “being-for-others.”

Under conditions of persisting domination, both aspects of work are incomplete: the experience of independence is constantly erased because the servant turns everything she makes over to the master; and the activity-for-others remains one-sided and thus fails to establish any form of reciprocal cooperation. Still, Hegel insists, it is precisely the servant's, not the master's way of existence that provides the basis for a flourishing sociality.

Hegel's claim about the superiority of the subjugated (i.e., the "truth" of the servant's consciousness) can be interpreted in two different ways. The first one relies on a teleological concept of history. According to this idea, the "truth" of the servant's consciousness reveals itself only retroactively, as a reasonable development, when the totality of history is known. The servant's consciousness is only "truer" than the master's because it corresponds to a not-yet-existing, future actuality (while the master's consciousness will eventually vanish). The problem with this (in Hegel scholarship quite common) interpretation is that it seems to leave the actual servant empty-handed in the present: she can do nothing more than wait until historical reality catches up to her already cultivated way of existence. In addition, this interpretation of the "truth" as anticipation is too specific to explain the positive emotions—which can be described, as Solnit insists, as something similar to happiness—that often accompany participation in counter-communal practices. Even though we know that forms of life develop emotions of satisfaction or even ecstasy merely from the certain expectation of a coming redemption (most of which are religious in nature), these examples can by no means be taken as paradigmatic for *all* forms of subjugated collectivity.

There is also a second way of interpreting Hegel's claim, namely an anthropological interpretation. According to this second option, it is their sequestration from the pathological practices of the masters (their stultified pleasures and narcissism) which provides the servants with an access to their properties as social species beings. This access is not immediately given (many of us are very unhappy servants) but must first be uncovered through a specific activity or practice. For Hegel, this activity is work, because it creates both a competence for world formation and a particular form of attentiveness or sociability. Work is thus the seed of a specific form of recognition in subjugation. To appreciate this notion, we have to consider a possibility that Hegel opens up but never fully explores: the possibility that servants, instead of seeking recognition from their masters, start recognizing each other. Recognition, understood in this way—as an activity that transforms a disintegrated way of existence into a reintegrated counter-community—promises not only future, but present affective gain in the face of domination and servitude.

Anthropological interpretations often have a bad reputation in critical theory. But given the fact that hope in a fortunate outcome of history seems more and more unrealistic, can anthropological arguments help make sense of Hegel's claim

of the superiority of subjugated consciousness? To explore this question further, it is helpful to situate Hegel's considerations historically, and to relate them to actual social struggles. Both argumentative strategies (one based on a philosophy of history and one based on anthropological claims) have equivalents in the thought of Marx and Engels, allowing for a better assessment of their respective sociological plausibility.

### **The Superiority of the Subjugated as Anticipation (Marx and Engels)**

Hegel's analysis of domination and servitude has received countless adaptations, applications, and advancements over the last two hundred years. One of the most prominent variations is Karl Marx's critique of capitalism. As long as the worker works under capitalist conditions, Marx insists, her labor remains alienated and thus provides no true experience of independence. But despite this critique, Marx sticks to Hegel's notion that "truth" is not to be found in the master's consciousness but in the servant's. How can this claim be defended while taking the alienated character of capitalist labor into account?

Marx identifies bourgeois society as a class society: it is fundamentally divided into two opposing poles, one of which owns the means of production while the other lives, as Marx says, in "absolute poverty," owning nothing but their own labor power. This antagonistic division is not only based on exploitation and alienation; it has also created radically heterogenous life worlds. The proletariat, Friedrich Engels notes, "has become a people wholly apart from the bourgeoisie. . . . Workers speak other dialects, have other thoughts and ideals, other customs and moral principles, a different religion and other politics than those of the bourgeoisie. Thus they are two radically dissimilar nations."<sup>15</sup> These two nations, we can conclude, are two social milieus with distinct normative structures; they have developed *two dissimilar ethical lives*.

Communism, Marx and Engels write in *The German Ideology*, is "not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things."<sup>16</sup> Marx and Engels oppose any form of utopianism or moralism which confronts capitalism with an external standard or a free-floating alternative. Communism, they insist, is not to be demanded in an abstract way, but must arise from material conditions within the existing society; it needs a "passive element." These material foundations manifest themselves in the actual (concrete, existing, present) situation of the proletariat. "By proclaiming the dissolution of the hitherto existing world order," Marx explains in his *Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right*, "the proletariat merely states the secret of its own existence, for it is in fact the dissolution of that world order. By demanding the negation of private property, the proletariat merely raises to the rank of a principle of society what society has

made the principle of the proletariat, what, without its own co-operation, is already incorporated in it as the negative result of society.”<sup>17</sup> The implication of this anti-idealist argument is that it is not the condition of the proletariat which is deficient but that of the bourgeoisie; it is not the situation of the capitalists that ought to be universalized but that of the workers. Rather than providing private property to everyone, no one should have private property any longer.<sup>18</sup>

This motif—of identifying not the dominated, but the dominant standpoint as deficient—can be applied to Marx and Engels’s theory of the ethical life of the revolutionary class.<sup>19</sup> The fact that the bourgeois and the proletarian social worlds are not simply different, but antagonistically opposed means that everything that the one side sees as an expression of a good life appears as corrupt and depraved to the other. While the bourgeoisie has incorporated the pathological desires of capitalist society (the tasteless and narrowminded pleasures that the rich have always proudly put on display throughout history), the proletariat represents not only its economic but also its cultural negation.<sup>20</sup> The proletariat’s way of dwelling, communicating, educating, and loving already exhibits, if in an unconscious way, attributes of a completely different society’s culture. This can best be demonstrated in their family and gender relations as well as their patriotism and nationalism.

Even before his first collaboration with Marx, Engels conducted a study in a number of English cities, which he published in 1845 under the title *The Condition of the Working-Class in England* and which would soon become a milestone of empirical social research. This text is a radical indictment of the catastrophic consequences of the capitalist mode of production at the time of the Industrial Revolution. Engels gives a detailed account of how the working class suffers from the humiliation of the capitalists, bad housing conditions, alienated and stultified work, malnutrition and social neglect, and catastrophic hygiene and health. He describes the effects of this reality as physical impoverishment, lack of education, and rampant alcoholism. Interestingly though, despite Engels’s drastic descriptions of suffering and misery, the proletariat’s form of life for him is not solely negative. On the contrary, the class division of capitalist society releases workers from hegemonic customs and the dominant culture. Just as the proletariat “without its own cooperation” manifests the negation of private property, its form of life manifests a practical indifference toward bourgeois sexual morals, traditional family life, and narrow-minded patriotism. In an unconscious way, this detachment provides for the social basis of a communist form of life.

The nuclear family is the historically specific way of organizing intimate relationships in bourgeois society. It is based on the necessity of private subsistence and an internal, hierarchical division of labor, in which wage labor is assigned to the man and housework to the woman.<sup>21</sup> This patriarchal family model has been ideologically justified through certain traditional mores—most importantly,

through the ideal of monogamy. This ideal remains hypocritical, since it regularly comes with adultery and, for the man, also with frequent prostitution.<sup>22</sup> However, the family life advertised by the bourgeoisie, Engels notes in *The Condition of the Working-Class*, remains out of reach for the workers. Miserable housing conditions, for example, do not allow for any domestic comfort, and family members are all integrated into the process of production and thus are never home at the same time. But instead of trying to gain access to bourgeois family life and thus reproducing the dominant family ideology, proletarians adopt notions of morality that correspond with their own economic status and suspend the hypocritical ideal of monogamy. The bourgeoisie, in turn, is shocked by the proletariat's sexual debaucheries. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels conclude that the proletariat has "actually abolished"<sup>23</sup> the family, creating a situation in which authentic affection is possible. The *Communist Manifesto* then develops from these already existing practices of intimacy an explicit demand for an "abolition of the family," a call to end the arbitrary private education of children by their parents and the subordination of women to men.<sup>24</sup> Marx and Engels have thus made the same theoretical move with regard to family life as with the economy in general: they reformulate what is already present within society in an unconscious and passive way into a positive and active demand. Just as the proletariat "merely raises to the rank of a principle of society what society has made the principle of the proletariat" when it demands the negation of private property, it also simply universalizes its own condition when it calls for the abolition of the family.

Marx and Engels's argument concerning the nation-state and nationalism has a very similar structure. The nation-state is a historically specific political form adequate to the capitalist mode of production. Capitalism is dependent on the state for the enforcement of property rights and for providing the social conditions needed for capital accumulation (education, public infrastructure, etc.). At the same time, however, the economic development of the nineteenth century globalized the capitalist economy and integrated all national economies into the world market. This, in turn, created a situation in which the proletariat's actual way of existence was less and less shaped by the national form of socialization. The urban milieu of the industrial worker became a multicultural milieu. Engels describes this fact with regard to the immigration of Irish workers into English cities. The fact that the worker is able to passionately protest the tyranny of the property-owning class, Engels says, is "thanks to the abundance of hot Irish blood that flows in the veins of the English working-class."<sup>25</sup> What Engels explains here with reference to Irish temperament actually has a sociological basis: capitalist exploitation was dependent on increased labor migration and created cohabitation among people with different national and ethnic backgrounds. The English worker experiences firsthand the same exploitation that her Irish neighbor is subject to.

This happens to such a degree that she becomes completely immune to patriotic interpellation: “The English working-man,” Engels says, “is no Englishman nowadays.”<sup>26</sup> What Engels describes as an empirical fact, the *Communist Manifesto* again turns into a political demand: “The working men have no country.”<sup>27</sup> Against the patriotic ideology that wants to incite workers to fight the workers of other countries instead of their oppressors, the Communist Party takes a strictly antipatriotic stance of international solidarity, finding its material base in the already existing living conditions of the working class.

We can see now how Marx and Engels explain the superiority of proletarian over bourgeois forms of life. They do not deny that capitalist exploitation comes with suffering and misery; on the contrary, they offer an elaborate account of the devastating effects of the exclusion of the workers from the wealth they produce. But still: in their negativity, workers have a decisive advantage over the deficient form of life of the bourgeoisie—a way of existence that prepares them for the future to come. According to this view, subjugated sociality is essentially marked by its anticipatory character. In a strong, substantialist variant of the Marxist historical-philosophical model, the actual subjective experience of the agents themselves is irrelevant for this assessment: their life and actions have meaning only via their participation in a broader historical process and are revealed to the philosophical observer only at the end of this process. But this strong version of the historical-philosophical explanation of the superiority of subjugated consciousness squanders the eudaemonistic potential of its Aristotelian legacy; it cannot explain how it could and should be possible for the actual workers in the here-and-now to experience emotions similar to joy or happiness.

We can think of a weaker version of this philosophy of history, one that does take the consciousness of the agents into account. The certainty of the coming demise of capitalism can create a mental and habitual indifference to the present and thus allow for a way of existence that is genuinely oriented toward futurity, at least for the more militant parts of the working class. This indifference is then similar to the messianic experience of the *hos me*, the “as if not,” that Giorgio Agamben describes as a feature of the life of early Christian communes. Following Saint Paul’s advice from his letter to the Corinthians—to have as if not having, to buy as if not buying, to cry as if not crying, and so on—these communes are able to live their lives in discordance with their material living conditions due to the expectation of imminent redemption.<sup>28</sup> We might say that the anticipatory character of such a life creates an inner split for the oppressed subject, who exists in the present and the future at the same time. This split helps explain how workers can experience emotions of happiness despite their devastating living conditions; not only do they know their form of life to be relinquished from the pathologies of bourgeois culture, they also experience their communal life as corresponding with a future truth.

But even the weaker version of this historical-philosophical interpretation seems unconvincing. By now, our trust in the coming revolution has dramatically faded. The critical theorists of the Frankfurt School devoted themselves to the task of understanding in social-theoretical terms why in late capitalism the working class came to exist only as a “class in itself” (an economic fact) but not as a “class for itself” (a fighting subject). In 1942, when it was undeniable that large parts of the working class had opted for barbarism instead of an emancipatory alternative, Theodor Adorno, in his “Reflections on Class Theory,” identified a number of reasons for the corruption of the proletariat, including an increasingly competitive individualization and atomization, disparities between urban and rural areas, and the domesticating effects of the culture industry and of media manipulation.<sup>29</sup> All these objective changes contributed to the dissolution of a progressive worker culture as a sociologically identifiable milieu. The German tradition of critical theory especially has tried to take these historical developments into account by leaving the notion of class society behind altogether and replacing it with other theoretical categories such as exchange society or the “socialization of value” (*Wertvergesellschaftung*), emphasizing the totality and inescapability of capitalist society rather than conflict and antagonism.<sup>30</sup> Herbert Marcuse, facing the task of reconciling his theory of the “one-dimensionality” of consumer society with increasing signs of resistance and opposition during the 1960s and 1970s, finally resolved to give up the idea of the proletariat as the revolutionary subject and began to identify “outcasts and outsiders” (such as the unemployed, refuseniks, and people of color) instead as catalysts for social change.<sup>31</sup> His “marginalized social groups theory” (*Randgruppen-theorie*) accepts Marx’s insight about social disintegration as the condition for liberation, but he can no longer situate this disintegration at the center of society itself.

The price of Marcuse’s theory is that the new social movements hailed by him can no longer credibly promise a complete “dissolution of the world order.” Therefore, insurgent emotions no longer take the form of joyful anticipation about the coming universalization of one’s form of life. This has far-reaching consequences for the assertion that subjugated forms of life are somehow superior to the hegemonic ones: without the certainty that today’s winners will be tomorrow’s losers, and vice versa, how can the claim about the superiority of the subjugated be defended?

### **The Superiority of the Subjugated as Anthropological Condition (Marx)**

In the first book he coauthored with Engels, *The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Criticism* (1844/45), a polemical attack against the moralizing critical strategies of the Young Hegelians, Marx offers an extensive interpretation of a serial novel that was extremely popular at the time, Eugène Sue’s *Les mystères de Paris* (*The Mysteries*

of *Paris*, 1842–43). Marx takes aim at a review of the novel written by the German general Franz Szeliga and published in the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*. One of the protagonists of the novel is the prostitute Fleur de Marie, whom the traveling German nobleman Rudolph meets in a shady tavern before he “rescues” her by taking her to a monastery in order to save her from her desolate fate. In a close reading of the novel, Marx defends Marie against both the intention of the author and the reception of the reviewer. Despite what one might think, Marx argues, Marie is not a victim of circumstance who has to be saved and led to a morally better life. To the contrary, at the beginning of the novel, Marie still has access to elementary forms of joy and agency, which are only lost in the course of her Christian reeducation, and she dies shortly after her arrival at the monastery. First of all, Marx rejects bourgeois moralism by insisting that Marie is a prostitute because of her economic situation, not because of her lack of morals. Just like all other members of the working class, she is forced to sell her labor; sex work for Marx is no more shameful than wage labor in general. In her predicament, Marie remains an agent of her own destiny. The novel introduces Marie in a scene in which she fights off a molester with scissors (the only passage in Marx’s oeuvre in which he mentions women’s resistance against male violence).<sup>32</sup> “She does not appear as a defenceless lamb who surrenders without any resistance to overwhelming brutality,” Marx praises, “she is a girl who can vindicate her rights and put up a fight.”<sup>33</sup> This fundamental agency is expressed in Marie’s traits; despite the miserable conditions in which she finds herself, she “gives proof of vitality, energy, cheerfulness, resilience of character.”<sup>34</sup> How can the dazzling superiority of Marie’s way of life be explained? How is it possible that somebody who is economically and politically disadvantaged still leads a more joyful, more beautiful, and more active life than people who are much more privileged?

In his interpretation of *Les mystères de Paris*, Marx pursues a strategy of critique that is distinctly different from the one that appears in his later writings. He does not yet base his argument on strong historical-philosophical assumptions about the inevitable victory of the proletariat. Rather, Marx suggests, nonintegration into bourgeois society by itself provides the excluded with other sources of vitality and happiness. This becomes particularly clear when he describes Marie’s concept of morality (a morality Marx pits against the incorporeal moralism of the “critical critics”):

*Good and evil . . . are not the moral abstractions of good and evil. She is good because she has never caused suffering to anyone, she has always been human toward her inhuman surroundings. She is good because the sun and the flowers reveal to her her own sunny and blossoming nature. She is good because she is still young, full of hope and vitality. Her situation is not good, because it puts an unnatural constraint on her, because it is not the*

expression of her human impulses, not the fulfilment of her human desires; because it is full of torment and without joy. She measures her situation in life by her own *individuality*, her *essential nature*, not by *the ideal of what is good*. In *natural* surroundings, where the chains of bourgeois life fall away and she can freely manifest her own nature, Fleur de Marie bubbles over with love of life, with a wealth of feeling, with human joy at the beauty of nature; these show that her social position has only grazed the surface of her and is a mere misfortune, that she herself is neither good nor bad, but *human*.<sup>35</sup>

In these remarks, we can already see the anti-idealist impetus of Marx's later writings: emancipation is not an abstract ideal (and also cannot be pursued by an external savior, such as Rudolph in Sue's novel)<sup>36</sup> but is rooted in its own actuality. Marie's real life is radically different from the "official" ethical life of dominant society, represented in the novel by the monastery. This difference causes an epistemic as well as an ethical-aesthetic contrast: Marie is not affected by bourgeois ideology and can thus see things soberly and simply, and she is not bound by the limitations of the bourgeois lifestyle and thus experiences "love of life," "wealth of feeling," and "human joy." But unlike Engels's depiction of the conditions of the working class in England and the invocation of a coming revolution in the *Communist Manifesto*, the actual life of the oppressed does not draw its superiority from anticipating a future liberation. Marx, still very much influenced by Feuerbach's sensualist materialism, operates with the simple opposition of "naturalness" and "unnaturalness." The indifference toward the ("abstract," hence "unnatural") ideological interpellations of bourgeois society enables Marie to stay true to her own (sensual, hence "natural") impulses, leading her spontaneously to reject any form of suffering and coercion.

Obviously, this image of the innocent "girl," uncorrupted by the constraints of society, is part of a sexist imaginary, traditionally associating femininity with nature. It is impossible not to see this conversation between three men (Sue, Szeliga, and Marx) about the purity or impurity of a Parisian sex worker as an indication of the patriarchal consensus of the European labor movement. This quite conventional imaginary notwithstanding, there is an interesting systematic point made in Marx's reading. Categories like "naturalness" and "humanness" have a specific meaning in Marx's early work, which is not immediately legible in the quoted passage but is relevant to his interpretation of Fleur de Marie. Marx reveals here an unapologetic Aristotelianism: for him, naturalness and sociality are not contradictory, but mutually constitutive. As a *zoon politikon*, the human being can actualize its essence only within and through the polis, by participating in social practices. The basis for such authentic form of sociality, according to this Aristotelian-Hegelian line of argument, is *to not cause suffering*, to adopt a nondomineering stance toward others. With his notion of "humanness," Marx takes up precisely this ancient connection of the good life to participation in the polis: humans can only realize their "species being"

if they orient their actions toward the others' needs in a solidaristic, nonegotistical way.<sup>37</sup> This is why a society that is based on exploitation and universal competition can be called “inhuman,” which is then expressed on the level of the form of life as unhappiness, boredom, or despair (in other words, causing suffering to others makes you unhappy). “Humanness” cannot be realized inside this existing society, but also not outside of society. The only opportunity to stay “human” in “inhuman surroundings” is through another form of community: a counter-community. The *political animal* is no longer at home in the “official” polis but in the community of those excluded from it. In the broader context of Marx's early writing, it becomes clear that Marie's “sunny and blossoming nature” is not to be understood literally, but as a metaphor for actualizing the human species being, which, as Marx understands it, is only possible by leaving the antisocial society behind, and restoring the affective sediment of love for life, wealth of feeling, and joy.

The anthropological explanation of the superiority of subjugated consciousness, too, allows for a strong and a weak reading. The strong claim of an essential human being that supposedly lies under or behind all historical emanations of the human hitherto operates with assumptions that are no longer convincing. Since human nature has proven to be highly variable, claims about its “essence” can hardly fully determine the direction of a future social transformation. In addition, claiming knowledge about such an essence can easily become a tool of authoritarian or paternalistic forms of politics. A more generous reading of Marx, however, might offer a more plausible version of his anthropological premises. According to a weakly anthropological account, Marx only identifies the material *conditions* of a collective process of self-determination.<sup>38</sup> In this interpretation, it is impossible to deduct the one “correct” social formation from a prior human nature. It is, however, possible to determine that the search for any good form of life has to be conducted in an authentically social way. This weak anthropological reading stays committed to the premise that the human life form — as a *zoon politikon* — can only realize a good life under (even if insular) conditions of symmetry and reciprocity, even if the precise shape of these conditions is unknown. This interpretation of the superiority of the subjugated thus no longer depends on a synchronization of social conditions with a transhistorical truth of an “actual” essence of the human. But weak anthropological claims are still strong enough to be positioned against the reality of a society that is fundamentally antisocial.

To gain access to the forms of vitality represented by Marie, it is necessary to become human within inhuman surroundings, which for Marx means anchoring one's form of life to an actual existing form of sociality. A *zoon politikon* can unlock the ethical-aesthetic potential of the human species being only if its nonbelonging is based on another form of belonging, and thus on a counter-communal ethical life.<sup>39</sup> Creating such a form of belonging is occupying the place of work in Hegel's

schema. “Work” is the term for the concurrence of the passive and the active states in the constitution of ethical life: it is based on given conditions, in this case being excluded from mastery, but also dependent on an active formation, in this case the transmutation of subjugation into resources for solidarity within a community of servants.<sup>40</sup> The product of this work—as a historically situated practice that is both empowering and social—is not an external object, but the human being itself.

### **Practices of Counter-Collectivization**

We can now specify the normative structure of counter-communities with regard to the two examples used by Marx and Engels, namely their immunity to bourgeois family ideals and to nationalism. As the theorists of the early Frankfurt School (and many others) have convincingly shown, both aspects today are no longer solely manifested in the reality of the working class (if at all). Instead, a plurality of relatively autonomous, but intersectionally connected social and political movements has replaced the proletariat as the agent of world-historical liberation. With regard to the social organization of intimacy, it is not so much the proletariat but queer and feminist movements that pose a fundamental challenge to the traditional family form, contesting the exclusivity and the conformism of conventional models of kinship. Such movements perform a reversal of the hegemonic value order, similar to the one we have seen in Hegel and Marx. In a resolute demarcation from mainstream society, many queer and feminist subcultures do not strive to gain equal access to the already established regime of intimacy but to develop new forms of collectivity that fundamentally contest hegemonic models of intimacy and generativity—they are not compensatory but transcendent. Such critiques are rooted in the ethical life of counter-communities, encompassing radically oppositional body practices, desires, economies, networks, and, as Jack Halberstam says, other “willfully eccentric modes of being.”<sup>41</sup> In short, they take up Marx’s affirmation of proletarian realities of life but apply it to the field of gender relations; they, too, are the “real movement which abolishes the present state of things.”<sup>42</sup>

A similar argument can be made about the nation-state. Current migrant and refugee movements have de facto ruined the fiction of ethnic homogeneity and thereby fundamentally challenged the national form of political representation. In this case, too, we can argue that it is not that the excluded and oppressed, the refugees and migrants, lack a status which can be remedied through inclusion into conventional forms of citizenship. Rather, they form a “real movement”<sup>43</sup> representing the potential of liberation from the latently catastrophic rationality of division and exclusion that marks the sovereign nation-state. This potential is also embedded in an existing form of life that is the result of an already practiced multicultural and mobile conviviality beyond borders and papers.<sup>44</sup> The actual practices of diasporic

communities manifest forms of an aterritorial sociality and a postnational participation antagonistic to the established order of nation-states.

But how is the formation of such “real movements,” that is, the formation of counter-communities, actually possible under conditions of persisting domination? As argued above, emancipatory processes of collectivization are firstly historically and locally situated (they are not equally possible under all conditions), and secondly dependent on a specific form of practice (they are not automatically given but have to be achieved).<sup>45</sup> These two characteristics correspond to Hegel’s description of the superiority of the servant’s consciousness: the servant, first of all, is superior to the master not due to a natural disposition but due to her position within a social structure. Second of all, this superiority can only unfold itself in the pursuit of a specific social practice, one that Hegel calls “work.” If we understand work not as manufacturing an external object, but in a broader sense as a creative worldmaking practice, we can identify within the collectivization procedures of counter-communities both aspects that for Hegel marked the practice of work: counter-collectivization processes facilitate experiences of empowerment and self-efficacy, and they open up the isolated subject toward the needs of others. That is, they enable experiences of solidarity and care.

The telos of the struggle for recognition, according to Hegel, is the equality of both sides and thus the dissolution of relationships of domination and servitude. While Hegel did discuss a number of incomplete or wrong ways of dealing with situations of domination,<sup>46</sup> he never explored a possibility that his model in fact allows for, that is the possibility that servants start recognizing each other, either during their struggle with the master or simply by leaving the battlefield. Recognition among servants knits together an underground, subcutaneous normative web that stands in permanent conflict with the established world—an antagonistic counter-ethical life. This possibility has been occasionally hinted at during the long and resistant history of reception of the “domination and servitude” chapter, but it is only in contemporary indigenous and decolonial thought that this idea has been fully fleshed out. Glen Coulthard, for example, has criticized contemporary theories of recognition, such as those by Charles Taylor or Axel Honneth, for perpetuating the dependency of the colonized subjects on the gaze of the master and thus reproducing a colonial moral grammar. Coulthard instead makes the case for a politics of collective self-affirmation through an independent recognition of oppressed subjects among themselves. The “communities of resistance” thus formed lead to a critical desubjectivation (in the sense of a desubjugation) and therefore to a radical transformation of the self.<sup>47</sup>

Several political movements during the last decades have pursued strategies corresponding with Coulthard’s proposal. Instead of aiming at getting the master’s recognition, they have tried to exit established power relations and to form counter-communities, providing for the possibility of independent mutual recognition among

the members of such communities. Such politics have often understood themselves as alternatives to conventional strategies of transformation (revolution and reform) and have instead used different names to describe this process of counter-collectivization, such as exodus,<sup>48</sup> autonomy,<sup>49</sup> separatism,<sup>50</sup> delinking,<sup>51</sup> or fugitivity,<sup>52</sup> among others. All of these concepts rest on the assessment that the development of the potential of the human species being can only be achieved through a process of community building while excluding the masters.

Hegel had envisioned ethical life as the all-encompassing, if internally differentiated normative structure of a society. As mentioned above, ethical life has an objective and a subjective side; the social world must objectively allow for the free participation of its members, but the members also have to subjectively affirm the social world. Taking the objective and the subjective side together, ethical life leads to the full reconciliation of sociality and individuality: “The I that is we and the we that is I.”<sup>53</sup> The ethical life of counter-communities differs from this definition not only in terms of content but also with respect to form. Counter-communities are not closed capsules, but rather in dialogue with the surrounding regime of domination; shutting out the masters can never fully succeed, at least as long as there are masters in the world at all. Ideally, in the model proposed by Hegel, servants are able to make use of the subjectivities they have formed under conditions of their own oppression. They can utilize the competencies they have developed through the experience of work (in the broad sense): first, their capacity for world-making, and second, their orientation toward the other, or their social openness. However, both of these competencies, as long as they can be unfolded only under conditions of oppression, remain disrupted, thwarted. Because these competencies are expropriated from the origins and conditions of their lives, counter-communities have—contrary to dominant forms of sociality—a negativity or distance inscribed in their very core. It is therefore impossible to simply describe the ethical counter-institutions (objective side) as customs or the counter-virtues (subjective side) as an orientation toward a higher good; the counter-subject rather remains in a form of asynchronicity with its environment. It can never innocently identify with its surrounding: *I that is never quite we, we that is never quite I.*<sup>54</sup>

On the *objective level*, the ethical life of counter-communities is the result not of the voluntary, intentional decisions of its members but of preestablished contradictions within a world of domination. Its dependency on heteronomous conditions inevitably creates fragility and precarity from the outset. In addition, a counter-community exists within the broader ethical life of dominant society and within or alongside other (counter-)communities that also might be in different stages in their respective collectivization processes. The multiplication of nonsimultaneous, heterogeneous ethical lives produces irreducible friction and conflict. I can participate in multiple ethical lives at once, generating collisions of normative expecta-

tions and claims; furthermore, a community can in one respect be dominated and dominant in another, especially in a global context (the queer community in New York might be subjugated with respect to the heteronormative society in the United States, but at the same time complicit in global chains of labor exploitation). The success of counter-community-formation depends on whether it is possible not only to accommodate these conflicts while sustaining a distance or opposition to mainstream society, but to turn them into a source for agency, thus renegotiating the very definition of “community.” Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, for example, have described queer subcultures as radical “world-making,” differing from all forms of familial or national identity formation.<sup>55</sup> Because of their foundational expropriation from the surrounding hegemonic society, such world-making projects are marked by an irreducible openness and a becoming.<sup>56</sup> It is precisely their “unrealizability” that allows for their inventive and transformative force.

On the *subjective level*, the cultivation of a servile consciousness (not to be understood as submissive or docile, but in Hegel’s sense: as both world-forming and caring) is neither complete nor unambiguous. The intersectionality of identity categories and the multiplicity of roles fabricates an unstable and notoriously unreliable subject. The individuals engaged in counter-collectivization processes are marked by both prior and ongoing experiences of violence, humiliation, degradation, starvation, exploitation, and political defeat. Trauma, resentment, and melancholia repeatedly ruin every attempt to enter into new and uncontaminated relationships. Furthermore, ideological deception and moral corruption often lead to a resurrection of mastery *within* communities of servants. For all these reasons does the formation of a counter-community imply a constant working through of one’s own affective constitution. Political practice, then, is never only a struggle against an external adversary, but also a transformation of one’s form of life, involving a change of everyday culture and ordinary practice, psychic and physical traits, attention and habits. Audre Lorde has described the affective dimension of this self-transformation as “metabolism,” enabling oppressed or marginalized subjects to digest society’s hate and rejection and convert them into feelings of empowerment and dignity.<sup>57</sup> Counter-communities have developed a whole range of techniques to facilitate this metabolism, the most important of which stem from the realms of pedagogy (education), medicine (therapy), reproductive labor (care), politics (agitation), and art (aesthetization).<sup>58</sup> All of these alchemical practices, according to the anthropological reading of the superiority of the subjugated, are part of the work to become human, a process that Marx called the “*emancipation* of all human senses and qualities.”<sup>59</sup>

Processes of self-transformation, however, are seldomly less problematic than processes of world-transformation; the passionate attachment to one’s way of existence renders the attempt at disidentification from the established regime of subjectivation into a frightening and actually life-threatening activity. It is thus no surprise

that counter-communities rarely describe their experiences of happiness as jubilantly as Marx portrays the character of Fleur de Marie. The affective gain of counter-collectivization can take the form of joy, empowerment, intensity, desire, love, but also entail less sparkling affective practices such as solace, mourning, or working through toxic or ideological attachments. In any case, it never *fully* reaches the feeling that Aristotle defined as happiness, *eudaemonia*.<sup>60</sup> It rather resembles the feeling of “joy amidst sorrow” that Rebecca Solnit described as the result of solidarity practices in the aftermath of catastrophes: “an emotion graver than happiness but deeply positive.”<sup>61</sup>

### **A Kingdom of Shadows**

To claim normative superiority for the subjugated—and correspondingly a positive affective experience in the face of catastrophe—is counterintuitive, because it seems to ignore the lived experiences of excluded and oppressed groups, which are marked by dramatic forms of misery, poverty, violence, and alienation. The injustice of relations of domination and servitude consists precisely in the fact that the servants, not the masters, are being deprived of something essential. In this article, however, I intended to show that, these grave injustices notwithstanding, the ethical life of counter-communities does not merely have a compensatory character, but a transcendent one.

One obvious consequence of these considerations is methodological: critical theorists need to develop empirical tools and a theoretical vocabulary to acknowledge and describe the obstinate, subversive, and transgressive practices of counter-communities, rather than interpreting them from the standpoint of dominant norms and thus classifying them as secondary or derivative. Only by carefully examining the normative structure of counter-communities in themselves—the rich and powerful history of oppressed and marginalized epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics—can we fully apprehend society with its heterogeneous and conflictual subspheres and milieus.

But there is also a political implication to the analysis of the superiority of the ethical life of counter-communities. For Hegel, recognition is not limited to the intersubjective relation between two subjects; it eventually takes on a transindividual, universal form, for him represented in the civil law of bourgeois society. If we take seriously the possibility and actuality of servants recognizing each other, thus turning their backs on their oppressors and forming independent counter-communities, we can assume that these forms of sociality, too, have a universalizing drive. Queer and feminist collectivities beyond heterosexist gender relations and diasporic communities beyond territoriality and citizenship are but two examples of subjugated sociality that have suspended the pathologies of hegemonic society. Countless other movements are focused on the practical critique of other crucial aspects of dominant subjectivity and intersubjectivity. All these counter-communities demand

not integration into the existing world but its abolition. Abolition is a process of the universalization not of the dominant, but of the subordinated part of a relation of domination. Collective struggle against domination is not the privilege of one homogenous revolutionary milieu but the work of a heterogeneous ensemble of agents. These multiple communities of servants have different, often conflicting and sometimes opposing, goals. But if they manage to form a transversal alliance of movements, accommodating conflict and friction, they might be able to establish a negative universality, a counter-world within the world. If something at least similar to happiness is currently possible for human beings amid all the sorrow, then it is by becoming a citizen of this kingdom of shadows, by being part of the ethical life of counter-communities.

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#### Notes

1. Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell*, 5. Solnit has updated her diagnosis with respect to the phenomenon of mutual aid during the coronavirus pandemic. See Solnit, *Pandemic Solidarity*.
2. See, for example, Lukacs, "Class Consciousness"; Hartsock, "Feminist Standpoint"; Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within"; Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*.

3. See, for example, Gilligan, *In A Different Voice*; Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*; Cavarero, *Inclinations*; Care Collective, *Care Manifesto*.
4. See, for example, Foucault, *Ethics*; Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*; Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*.
5. See, for example, hooks, “Loving Blackness” and “Back to Black”; Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*.
6. “Subjugated” thus serves as an umbrella term for multiple variations of being subjected to domination. It can include being excluded, marginalized, oppressed, or exploited.
7. For empirical studies and methodological reflections on counter-communities, understood as countercultures within a capitalist society, see, for example, the contributions in Hall and Jefferson, *Resistance Through Rituals*. For a political defense of politics of forms of life, see Loick, “On the Politics.”
8. These techniques are referenced in the title of Beyoncé Knowles’s album *Lemonade*. “Life gave me lemons, but I made lemonade” is an ancestral common saying, passed on from generation to generation, expressing the counter-communal secret knowledge of how to make something sweet out of something sour.
9. Honneth, *The I in We*, 206.
10. Understanding the relation between dominant and dominated forms of life not just as conflictual, but antagonistic distinguishes my argument from Rahel Jaeggi’s important work *Critique of Forms of Life*. While Jaeggi provides the conceptual resources to refute the liberal claim to “ethical abstinence,” she describes conflicting forms of life as parts of the same historical “enrichment process.” In my reading, in contrast, the forms of life of oppressed and marginalized people often challenge the norms of the existing society so fundamentally that they can no longer be seen as related to the same ideal of societal progress. The proletariat, for example, wants to explode the capitalist society, not enrich it.
11. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1278b20–23.
12. In an Aristotelian tradition, Hannah Arendt has coined the term “public happiness” as the effect of freely participating in political action and self-government without tyranny. See Arendt, *On Revolution*, chap. 3. Lynne Segal, along similar lines, has investigated the affect of joy as the expression of shared political passion, especially as it accompanies insurgent and liberatory collective struggles. See Segal, *Radical Happiness*.
13. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 46.
14. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 114.
15. Engels, “Condition of the Working-Class,” 419–20.
16. Marx and Engels, *German Ideology*, 49.
17. Marx, “Contribution to the Critique,” 187.
18. In pursuing a communist revolution, Marx points out, the proletariat “is victorious only by abolishing itself and its opposite” (Marx and Engels, *Holy Family*, 36; emphasis added). Class does not provide a fixed and stable “identity” that remains intact throughout the process of social transformation. However, it is important to note that this abolition takes place through universalizing the situation of the dominated, not the dominant, part of the relation.
19. One of the most prominent variants of this is Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of “becoming-minority,” which inverts the hegemonic valuation of majority and minority. Instead of claiming power for the oppressed, becoming-minority is about an experimental working of oneself out of the dominant subject formations. See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

20. During the “yellow vests” protests in Paris in 2018, this inversion of the hegemonic value order was expressed in the slogan, “A bas le caviar, vive le kebab” (Down with caviar, long live kebab). As a metaphor for a power relation, the saying expresses that both sides are the effect and thus contaminated by it; neither caviar nor kebab can claim to be an innocent expression of a “good life.” But the point of contact for a revolutionary politics is not the universalization of the dominating part of the relation (“Caviar for all”) but the dominated (eventually leading to the abolition of both).
21. “But marriage, property, the family . . . are the practical basis on which the bourgeoisie has erected its domination, and because in their bourgeois form they are the conditions which make the bourgeois a bourgeois. . . . This attitude of the bourgeois to the conditions of his existence acquires one of its universal forms in bourgeois morality” (Marx and Engels, *German Ideology*, 180).
22. Marx and Engels, “Manifesto,” 502.
23. Marx and Engels, *German Ideology*, 180.
24. Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 502.
25. Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 501.
26. Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 501.
27. Marx and Engels, *German Ideology*, 180.
28. Agamben, *Time That Remains*, 35.
29. See Adorno, “Reflections on Class Theory.”
30. The German tradition of critical theory, which was largely marked by the value criticism of the Frankfurt School, finds its diametrical opposite in Italian Operaism, informed by the struggles of radical workers in postwar Italy and emphasizing workers’ autonomy and agency. Starting from the analysis of a reconfiguration of labor in post-Fordism, (post-) operaist thinkers have reformulated Marx’s notion of class in such a way that it includes subjects that are not typically included in the industrial process of production. This idea of the proletariat as “multitude” makes it possible for Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt to revitalize the claim of an anticipatory character of oppressed forms of life and to announce an “anthropological exodus” that involves an “ontological mutation” of forms of life. Tattoos and piercings, they claim, are therefore first signs of a body that is “incapable of adapting to family life, factory discipline, to the regulations of a traditional sex life, etc.” (*Empire*, 216).
31. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 260.
32. See Leeb, “Marx and the Gendered Structure,” 847.
33. Marx and Engels, *Holy Family*, 168; for an extensive interpretation, see Brown, *Marx on Gender and the Family*, 35–39.
34. Marx and Engels, *Holy Family*, 168.
35. Marx and Engels, *Holy Family*, 170.
36. See Draper, *Karl Marx’s Theory*, 227–32.
37. On the concept of the species being in Marx, see Brudney, *Marx’s Attempt to Leave Philosophy*, chap. 4; Gould, *Marx’s Social Ontology*; Wood, *Karl Marx*, chap. 2.
38. On the formal reconstruction of the notion of alienation see Jaeggi, *Alienation*; and, following up on that, Loick, *Juridismus*, 297–302.
39. Coming not from an Aristotelian-Hegelian, but rather a Spinozist philosophical tradition, Hardt and Negri arrive at a similar conclusion: “Solidarity, care for others, creating community, and cooperating in common projects is for [the poor] an essential survival mechanism. . . . Although the poor are defined by material lack, people are never reduced

- to bare life but are always endowed with powers of invention and production. The real essence of the poor, in fact, is not their lack but their power” (*Commonwealth*, 180).
40. The historical-philosophical interpretation of the superiority of subjugated sociality is based on a traditional understanding of work as labor: the proletariat can anticipate communism due to its objective position within the capitalist economy as “working class.” The anthropological interpretation, as it expects a heterogeneous multiplicity of agents to be transformative subjects rather than the proletariat alone, has to be based on a broader notion of work. According to this view, “workers” are all who participate in social world-making practices. Following Hegel’s materialist argument, we assume that the subjugated are much better prepared to perform this kind of work than the masters. All dominated groups, then, are “servants” in Hegel’s sense.
  41. Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 1.
  42. See Adamczak, “Kritik der polysexuellen Oekonomie,” 17.
  43. See Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 395.
  44. See Gilroy, *After Empire*; and, following up on that idea, Loick, “Wir Flüchtlinge.”
  45. The unfolding of the dialectic of domination and servitude is only possible through an objective, preestablished contradiction. This means that the formation of a counter-community is not always equally possible. For instance, it can be the case that servants find no counterparts, that they don’t have the material conditions to “work,” that they suffer from hermeneutical injustice so deep that they do not have the epistemic resources to even understand their own situation as one of injustice. Taking the sociological situation of concrete cases of domination into account is essential in order to avoid an abstract voluntarism that ascribes an ahistorical agency to oppressed groups without regard to their actual material conditions.
  46. Hegel might have dismissed the idea that servants can independently recognize each other as expressions of “stoicism,” “skepticism,” or “unhappy consciousness” (the phenomena dealt with in the subsequent chapter of the *Phenomenology*), since in doing so, they retreat from world history and contend with each other (*Phenomenology of Spirit*, 117–35). But this argument neglects the independent world-making character of counter-communal ethical life.
  47. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 48; for a follow-up, see Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, chap. 10. Coulthard refers here to bell hooks, who has offered a similar idea within the context of feminist politics. hooks proposes that oppressed subjects start recognizing each other and only then contact all those willing to engage in a constructive manner. See hooks, “The Politics of Black Radical Subjectivity,” 22.
  48. *Exodus* is a common term in many attempts to organize the economy beyond capitalist accumulation. See, for example, Virno, “Virtuosity and Revolution”; and Landauer, *Anti-Politik*.
  49. *Autonomy* is a common term in many struggles for Black liberation. See, for example, Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power*.
  50. *Separatism* is a common term in many feminist contexts. See, with regard to lesbian separatism, Wittig, *Straight Mind*; and Allen, *Lesbian Philosophies and Cultures*.
  51. *Delinking* is a common term in some decolonial movements. See, for example, Mignolo, “Delinking.”
  52. *Fugitivity* is a common term to describe socialites formed through the attempt to escape the regime of plantation slavery or the racist settler-colonial states that inherited it. See Moten, *Stolen Life*.

53. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 108.
54. For Hegel, this expropriation of the servant from her own conditions of constitution is expressed in the experience of fear. Because the servant has capitulated in the struggle for life and death, her existence constantly remains in a condition of precarity: “In that experience it has been quite unmanned, has trembled in every fibre of its being, and everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations” (*Phenomenology of Spirit*, 117). For a related interpretation of the aporias of liberation resulting from this experience, see Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 31–62.
55. Berlant and Warner, “Sex in Public,” 558.
56. Berlant and Warner sharply demarcate queer worlds from all forms of “community.” However, I hope to have shown that counter-communities in the sense described here have much more in common with Berlant and Warner’s idea of queer world-making than with conventional notions of community. For a general theory of coalitional politics, see Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory*.
57. Lorde, “Eye to Eye,” 152.
58. For a further exploration of these techniques, see Loick, “Gegenhegemoniale Gewöhnung”; and Loick, “Group Analysis and Consciousness Raising.”
59. Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts,” 300.
60. A number of critical theorists have warned against the unambivalent praise of happiness and joy, especially if attributed to marginalized communities. For example, Sara Ahmed, in *The Promise of Happiness*, points out the pacifying and domesticating effects of the happiness discourse, instead promoting the feminist killjoy as a figure that remains unhappy and in rage about injustice. Along similar lines, Lauren Berlant has coined the term “cruel optimism” to describe our attachment to impossible or toxic conditions of possibility, binding us to our misery. See Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*. In *Scenes of Subjection*, Saidiya Hartman explores how “staged” happiness and enjoyment worked in the context of American chattel slavery. Simulated contentment and regulated amusement of slaves played crucial roles in the affective economy of the plantation:
- Although . . . enjoyment was predicated on the wanton use of slave property, it was attributed to the slave in order to deny, displace, and minimize the violence of slavery. As a result . . . it appeared not only that the slave was indifferent to his wretched condition, but also that he had nonetheless achieved a measure of satisfaction with that condition. . . . The fixation with the slave’s ‘good times’ conceals the affiliations of white enjoyment and black subjection and the affective dimensions of domination and servitude. (*Scenes of Subjection*, 25)
- These objections pose fundamental challenges to some of the main theses of this article. A tentative response, beyond the scope of this article, could proceed in three steps: first, showing how even under conditions of harsh injustice, “emancipatory” positive affects such as joy or happiness can be differentiated from their ideological or coerced simulation; second, shielding, as much as possible, the description of such forms of insurgent affect from their ideological hijacking by the dominant discourse; and third, providing a more detailed sociological analysis of the conditions under which processes of counter-collectivization and the corresponding emotions are (im)possible and taking this analysis conceptually into account.
61. Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell*, 5.

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