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“The place of the transfagbidyke is in the revolution”:

Queer and trans hirstorical imaginaries in contemporary struggles

Nat Raha and Grietje Baars

Introduction

Trans and queer activists, scholars and artists have significantly contested and publicised the pivotal roles that queer, trans and other gender non-conforming people – often queer and trans people of colour, who may be homeless, and/or sex workers – have played in the LGBT revolutionary movements and other anti-colonial, revolutionary movements.¹ Unlike corporate Pride parades, where the accumulation of capital is achieved through, and celebrated alongside, LGBTQ bodies flowing through the streets, these revolutionary movements and their protests entail the occupation and disruption of public spaces, preventing the flow of capital by stopping commercial activity and transforming, even if only momentarily, the regimes of violence found at the level of the street – be that the homophobic, transphobic, whorephobic, anti-Black, racist and anti-poor violence of the police, of civilians enacting such violence, or that of racial capitalism itself.² We write at a time marked by the coronavirus pandemic but also, significantly, by the Black Lives Matter uprisings against anti-Black police and state violence, both of which have intensified in

¹ Susan Stryker, *Transgender History*, Seal Press, Berkeley, CA, 2008; Susan Stryker (Dir.), *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria*, 2005; Sylvia Rivera, "Queens in Exile: the Forgotten Ones." In Joan Nestle, Clare Howell, and Riki Wilchins, eds, *GENDERqUEER: Voices From Beyond the Sexual Binary*. Alyson Books, Los Angeles, 2002, pp. 71-85; Tourmaline [Reina Gossett] and Sasha Wortzel (dirs), *Happy Birthday Marsha*, 2018; Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, Plume, New York, 1994.

² See Nat Smith and Eric Stanley (eds), *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex*, AK Press, Oakland, CA, 2011; Jordan T. Camp and Christina Heatherton (eds), *Policing the Planet: Why the Policing Crisis Led to Black Lives Matter*, Verso, New York and London, 2016. For a specifically queer, historical argument along these lines, see Christina B. Hanhardt, 'Broken Windows at Blue's: A Queer History of Gentrification and Policing', in *Policing the Planet*, pp 41-62.

tandem throughout the World. In the current moment, as always, it is clear that taking to the streets is a means of claiming agency over one's body and socio-political circumstances in contesting the conditions of state necropolitics and racialised capitalism.³ As trans and queer bodies take to the streets, we furthermore contest the particular forms and intersections of violence and the histories of violence that we as individuals and as hirstorical⁴ subjects have experienced. While particular forms of sexual and gendered subjectivity have been mandated and shaped through the colonial laws of Empire instituted across the globe, the forms of resistance LGBTIQ people often look back on tend to emerge from North America. For example, queer resistances inspired by anti-imperialist movements against the war in Vietnam in the late '60s would in turn inspire the naming of the Gay Liberation Front in the UK in 1970. At the same time, struggles within Europe have a rich lineage of anti-colonial and anti-state resistance to draw from, from the Wat Tyler Rebellion to the Paris Commune to the Easter Uprising, to the Algerian independence struggle, to Mai '68 to the UK Black rebellions of the '80s to the Gilet Jaunes and beyond.

This article emerges from a dialogue held at the 'Cruising the Seventies: Imagining Queer Europe then and now' conference (Edinburgh, Scotland, 14-16 March 2019).⁵ Queer scholar and activist Sam Bourcier was supposed to join us but was unable to do so. Sam had intended to use this occasion to encourage us to "forget Stonewall", arguing that its memory has been depoliticised.⁶ We took up Sam's challenge by posing the question, if we are to 'forget Stonewall', what ought we be remembering instead? For instance, what other seventies, or what events of queer Europe, inform our actions and politicise our consciousness? What is the significance of trans, non-binary, genderqueer and other queer bodies in our particularities taking to the streets, to claim agency against state power and biopolitics? Can the particular position and history that marks Europe as the centre of modernity as enacted through coloniality and slavery, that in turn has always been resisted

³ For more on queer and trans necropolitics, see Jin Haritaworn, Adi Kuntsman and Silvia Posocco (eds), *Queer Necropolitics*, Routledge, London, 2014; and C. Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn, 'Trans Necropolitics: A Transnational Reflection on Violence, Death, and the Trans of Color Afterlife'. In Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura (eds), *The Transgender Studies Reader 2*. Routledge, New York, 2013, pp 65–76.

⁴ In a definition of 'h/story / hirstory', Flo Brooks writes: "*noun* : an alternative spelling of history, some trans and queer folks spell the word with a 'h' or with a 'r' as a form of empowerment to move away from the 'his' in the 'traditional' spelling of history", *Outskirts*, Makina Books, London, 2017, 54.

⁵ This article includes elements of a transcript from the event, produced by Collective Text, Glasgow.

⁶ Bourcier speaks of the limiting and depoliticising effects of the way Stonewall is remembered today in M. Bourcier, 'Queer Move/ments.' *Mouvements*, no 20(2), 2002, 37-43, and further elaborates on these themes in Sam Bourcier, *Homo Incorporated: Le triangle et la licorne qui pète*, Éditions Cambourakis, Paris, 2017.

from without and within, provide strategies that inform poetics *of* resistance itself? What imaginaries are animating such mobilisations in our political present, a present marked by the ascendancy of right wing populist governments across Europe and across the world? The ascendancy of ethno-nationalist powers within Europe affects the possibilities of queer and trans life and embodiment, of how our social existences manifest (publicly, privately, underground); and furthermore, the pressures placed on the possibilities of embodied life affect how we understand the past.⁷ How might cruising the past, bringing it to bear on contemporary political resistances, animate them and provide new methodologies in both struggle and history?

We write as two scholar-organisers engaged in local organising work in London and Edinburgh, and transnational collaborations with leftist queer and transfeminist communities and groups across Europe. We write as academics working the fields of Marxism, queer and trans studies, literature and law;⁸ as people with personal and familial histories of migration, and as trans and non-binary people committed to radical transfeminism.⁹ Our collaborations are nurtured by the travel facilitated through academic conferences (and European passports), self-organised and institutional cultural spaces, and have been forged through queer feminist practices of friendship, solidarity and desire. This has included sharing our ideas, words and texts across various spaces, in different local and linguistic contexts, engaging our work and ourselves in knowledge exchange with an openness to new communities. It has included engaging in political action, on the streets, in the homes and in the communities of new comrades. In a world that is imagining the abolition of borders, the police and capitalism, such practices are essential: they have girded the foundations of the radical, politicised communities of the '70s, and contemporaneously envision the possibilities of a queer Europe. This is not merely a vision of multiculturalism in its neoliberal form, where social inclusion is formalised in legal rights, but rather an abolition of the structures and forces that seek to

⁷ Contemporary examples include the Hungarian and Polish Governments legislating against trans and LGBT rights, alongside attempts by the UK Government to reduce trans under-18s' access to already under-resourced healthcare.

⁸ Baars, G. *The Corporation, Law and Capitalism: A radical perspective on the Role of Law in the Global political economy*, Brill, Leiden 2019 and Haymarket, Chicago, IL, 2020.

⁹ For more on Radical Transfeminism, see Mijke van der Drift and Nat Raha, 'Radical Transfeminism: Trans as Anti-static Ethics Escaping Neoliberal Encapsulation', in *New Feminist Literary Studies*, Jennifer Cooke (Ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2020, pp. 13-24.

define, govern and contain us.¹⁰ We understand that practices of diaspora forged by Black and brown migrants, alongside Jewish and other white migrants, include forms of collective care and solidarity that hold up life beyond the institutions of the state, which dovetail with queer practices of chosen family especially among communities of queer, trans and intersex people of colour.¹¹ Such practices are essential to maintaining and building on alternatives to a neoliberal state that disproportionately harms Black people, migrants and other people of colour – pronounced in the responses of right wing governments to the so-called ‘migration crisis’ and the excessive force used in policing Black life – and neoliberal capitalism’s ordering of the value of life according to a racial and gendered division of labour. Ultimately, to queer Europe would be to provincialise, or to undo Europe, and the imperialist-capitalist practices that made it.¹²

This article is rooted in such transnational collaborations and forms of solidarity. We imaginatively consider how queer histories are animating these forms of sociality and struggle, protest and poetics, focused on France and the UK. Our analysis and methods, and indeed our own critical engagement with each other, are rooted in queer Marxism, which we understand as the refusal to isolate analyses of sexuality and gender from analyses of capitalist society and capital.¹³ Queer Marxism argues that the cultural and the economic are inextricable from each other, whereby the meanings encoded on queer and trans bodies produce our positions within a racialised and gendered division of labour, the effects of which are pronounced for poor and migrant people, especially those in or from the Global South.¹⁴ We understand that Queer Marxism must actively address the “silences” of historical materialism, by “disidentify[ing] with historical materialism to *rethink* its categories and how

¹⁰ Jodi Melamed, ‘The Spirit of Neoliberalism: From Racial Liberalism to Neoliberal Multiculturalism,’ *Social Text*, 24:4, 2006; Fatima el-Tayab, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2011; Grietje Baars, ‘Queer Cases Unmake Gendered Law, Or, Fucking Law’s Gendering Function,’ *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 45:1, 2019, 15-62, DOI: [10.1080/13200968.2019.1667777](https://doi.org/10.1080/13200968.2019.1667777).

¹¹ Jin Haritaworn, *Queer Lovers and Hateful Others: Regenerating Violent Times and Places*, Pluto Press, London, 2015; Raju Rage (Ed), *Recipes for Resistance*, Ort Gallery, Birmingham, 2020.

¹² Ratna Kapur: *Gender, Alterity, and Human Rights: Freedom in a Fish Bowl*, Edward Elgar, London, 2018

¹³ Kevin Floyd, *The Reification of Desire: Towards a Queer Marxism*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2009; Nat Raha, ‘Queer Capital: Marxism in queer theory and post-1950 poetics,’ Doctoral Dissertation, University of Sussex, 2019.

¹⁴ Rosemary Hennessy, *Fires on the Border: The Passionate Politics of Labor Organizing on the Mexican Frontera*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2013.

they might conceal the materiality of race, gender and sexuality”.¹⁵ By rooting queer Marxism into decolonial, abolitionist, radical transfeminist action and praxis, we guide our political actions towards struggle and bringing a transformed world into being.¹⁶

This article embraces our own polyvocality as two authors, reflects on what we have witnessed and situates those moments of witnessing. In the first section of this article, Grietje takes us on a tour of historical and present Paris, France by way of a photo essay. In the spirit of refusing chrononormativity and allowing for queer temporalities to unfold in the text, Grietje speaks from March 2019, in first person perspective, discussing images taken in the previous six months in Paris. Guided by queer revolutionaries past and present, Grietje contemplates the place of the queer in the revolution and what it means to queer the revolution. Moving away from how capitalism is inscribed on queer bodies and circumscribes queer lives, we look at how queers, queer bodies, actions, ideas, and methods, disrupt, mess with, and (have the potential to) fuck up the repressive structures of capitalism. In the second section, Nat proposes a formulation of ‘queer historical materialism’, as a critical and creative methodology used in the activation of queer archives and historical figures in contemporary trans poetics and literatures. Queer historical materialism unearths the historical possibility of bodies and the enacting of agency over one’s body now and ‘then’, mobilised here in a poem by Laurel Uziell to contest the perception and recognition of one’s body by the state. This reading is inflected through the imaginaries operating in the current moment of the coronavirus crisis.

‘The revolution is my girlfriend’, or, ‘a transpédébigoine’s place is in the revolution’

[image 1: Poster for 16 March 2019 ‘March of Solidarities’, source: Marche des Solidarités, Mediapart blog]

¹⁵ Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Towards a queer of color critique*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 2004, 5, original emphasis.

¹⁶ For decolonial perspectives see, Sandeep Bakshi, Suhraiya Jivraj and Silvia Posocco (eds.) *Decolonising Sexualities*, Counterpress, Oxford, 2016; for abolitionist queer Marxist perspectives, see Sophie Monk, Joni Cohen, Lucy Freedman, ‘Editorial,’ *Invert Journal*, 1, 2020. Online at <https://invertjournal.org.uk/posts?view=articles&post=6838110#editorial>.

First, I wanted to show you this image here to mark today, the 16th of March 2019. I've just come back from spending the winter in Paris and today, as there will be all over the world, as part of the global anti-racism action, a demonstration against state racism and police violence called by numerous anti-racism organisations.¹⁷ There is, in addition to that, the global climate change demo today as well as a national demo called by the Gilets Jaunes (the French yellow vest movement), because today is Saturday. The Gilets Jaunes have been demonstrating every Saturday for over three months now. Today is the first demonstration after Macron's 'Grand Debats' [Great Debates], - that's the big debate that he called, where they held meetings, like town hall meetings, around France, where the idea was that it could be discovered what the people really wanted, since they seemed to want to have a say in things. The Gilets Jaunes are, of course, very sceptical about these Grand Debats because in those meetings the real questions (of poverty, inequality, cuts to public services) aren't debated, so they've called for a massive demo. They call each of their Saturday demos Act I, Act II, like in a play, and we're currently at Act XVIII, and this one is entitled "Revolution."¹⁸ It's still early but I'd like to recommend you all check the news in a few hours' time and see what will have happened in Paris. It's a national demo so people from all over France will be coming. What is really interesting about it is that with these three events happening at the same time, there has been a lot of discussion between the movements and individuals in them about all joining together. And it kind of is and isn't happening together, but definitely people are understanding and seeing the cross-overs and connections between the three issues: racism, climate and the general uprising.¹⁹

"The revolution is my girlfriend." If, as Sam suggests, we forget Stonewall, we could instead go back to another seventies that is remembered in France. What I noticed from being in France and meeting lots of activists, especially lots of anarchists, was that the 1871 Paris Commune still features really strongly in their imagination. It is something that they draw

¹⁷ Mediapart blog, '16 mars, contre le racisme et les violences policières: Marche des solidarités!' 14 February 2019, <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/marche-des-solidarites/blog/140219/16-mars-contre-le-racisme-et-les-violences-policieres-marche-des-solidarites>

¹⁸ Since the Gilets Jaunes are a leaderless movement, there are several calls for the demonstration, and in some calls the title of Act 18 is 'Ultimatum', see e.g. <https://paris.demosphere.net/rv/67912>

¹⁹ For a report on the day, see ACTA, 'Paris est à Nous,' 17 March 2019, <https://acta.zone/paris-est-a-nous/>. "Never has the nickname 'the most beautiful street of the world' fitted the Champs-Élysées so well. In the course of one day, the symbolic artery of luxury and merchandise has become the incarnation of a rediscovered collective power." This was the also day that the restaurant Le Fouquet was set on fire by demonstrators, see Pauline Bock, 'The Paris of the rich is ablaze – and that image will define Macron,' *The Guardian*, 20 March 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/20/paris-rich-ablaze-macron-french-gilets-jaunes>

inspiration from, and that they still carry with them as an example— as something that they want to do again, in a sense, but not emulate exactly because it did fail. That was the 1870s. The people occupied Paris for over two months.²⁰ Louise Michel is the main woman that people remember—she was a leader of the Union of Women for the Defence of Paris. She fought with the women and she fought with the men. She was on top of the barricades and doing a lot of organising, a lot of the work. And there has since been in academic and other writing, a lot of speculation about her sexuality, as there always is, right? Lots of people have asserted either way that she was queer, that she was asexual, or that she was straight.

Michel never had a partner, or at least she never came out as it were in public, in a relationship throughout her life. She never wrote about it. She wrote lots of diaries, letters, poetry, and memoirs, but she never talked about any relationships. So some people said, “Well, she was so ugly she just didn’t really get any.” And others have said, “Well, she was clearly straight, in love with communard Théophile Ferré, to whom she dedicated her work”. Even Emma Goldman, who had met Michel several times in London, said she was clearly not a lesbian (Goldman called lesbians “a crazy lot”), but rather that she did not engage in sexual relationships because these would distract her from her political project. And the queers claim, obviously, that she was queer because she did have some very close ‘female friendships’ and she lived with women—including Natalie Lemel, who turned her to anarchism—in a few different places.²¹

So there was an interesting conversation I had with a few queer anarchists in Paris about this, and a queer woman anarchist said, “Well, it doesn’t matter. Either if she didn’t sleep with any women or if she did, she said ‘The revolution is my girlfriend,’ and for *that* she was queer.” Michel didn’t say it exactly in those words, but she said it in the sense that

²⁰ For Louise Michel’s own experience of the Commune, and the texts of some pamphlets and statements, see, Louise Michel, *La Commune*. La Découverte/Poche, Paris, 2015; for a history written by a communard and translated by Eleanor Marx, see Prosper Olivier Lissagaray, *History of the Paris Commune of 1871*, Verso, London, 2012; for a recent appraisal of ‘the elements of an imaginary that fuelled and outlived the event known as the Paris Commune’, see Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune*, Verso, London, 2015.

²¹ For an overview of the claims around Michel’s sexuality, see Mullaney, Marie Marmo. “Sexual Politics in the Career and Legend of Louise Michel.” *Signs*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1990, 300–322.

her political work meant everything to her and she wasn't interested in talking about who she was dating or whatever.²²

I want to bring that up because... I don't know if many of you feel the same way but I think that a lot of people in the world—in Paris, in other places—feel that the moment has come to say “The revolution is my girlfriend.” So the moment has come to actually reconsider what we are doing and take to the streets or start really big time thinking about how we're going to change the system that is currently destroying the planet as well as producing the racism and police violence, transphobia, homophobia, etcetera, that we have.

[image 2 and 3: Stencil of Michel on Canal Saint-Martin, Paris; and Michel as La Pétroleuse on the cover of a book by François Cavanna: *Louise la Pétroleuse ou l'hydre de l'anarchie*, Paris: Belfond 1981, photo by Grietje, February 2019]

This first image is just to show you that Louise Michel still figures really significantly in the imagination of activists in France. That's some street art of her. The other image is a little book that I found in this amazing little library in Belleville, *Librairie le Jargon Libre*, which is speaking against Louise Michel; it's calling her 'la pétroleuse'. It's quite interesting, pétroleuse was what men—or rather, detractors—called the women of the Commune, “These were just women that want to set fire to stuff, and they are so terrible.” That is exactly what you find in the mainstream French and also the UK media about the *Gilets Jaunes* at the moment, right? “They are just *casseurs* [hooligans]. They are just people who want to break shit. And they are good for nothing, etcetera.”²³ I find it really interesting that we have this direct parallel.²⁴

²² Louise Michel, in *Interrogation*, 28 June 1871, quoted in Édith Thomas, *Louise Michel*, Black Rose Books, Montréal, 1980; see also, Louise Michel, *Mémoires de Louise Michel, écrits par elle-même*, F Roy Libraire-Éditeur, Paris, 1886. In fact ‘the revolution is my girlfriend’ is a quote from the song *Baby Revolution* by Stereo Total (Album: *Baby Revolution*, Paris 2007), which samples and adds to lines spoken by the character of Gudrun in Bruce LaBruce's 2004 film *Raspberry Reich*. I thank the infinitely cooler Sam Bourcier and Ceylan Begüm Yildiz for this insight.

²³ For example, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2019/03/16/01016-20190316ARTFIG00086-gilets-jaunes-le-fouquet-s-incendie-apres-avoir-ete-saccage.php> (report of 16 March 2019). For comment, see Félix Boggio Éwanjé-Épée, ‘The Yellow Vest: A Floating Signifier’, *Verso Blog*, 07 December 2018 (originally published in *Contretemps*, translated from the French by David Broder) <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4157-the-yellow-vest-a-floating-signifier>; and Jad Bouharoun, ‘The French Quagmire,’ *International Socialism*, 18 April 2019, <https://isj.org.uk/the-french-quagmire/>

²⁴ And of course we see this everywhere where resistance is expressed in street protests, including currently the Black Lives Matter uprisings in the so-called USA.

[image 4: Le Mur des Fédérés, Père-Lachaise Cemetery, photo by Grietje, February 2019]

This is an image showing the ‘Communards’ Wall’ in the cemetery at Père Lachaise where on 28 May 1871, 147 Communards were shot dead, executed. There is a plaque there, and you can see from the roses that this is still a place of pilgrimage.

Going back then briefly to the Stonewall Riots, one of the phrases I hear today in my community and the activism around me, and I hear the phrase a lot: “Homeless queers started our revolution.”²⁵ This is a phrase used as a tagline by The Outside Project in London, the UK’s first LGBT homeless shelter. This is just one way I think in which the past can figure in the present: to think of Stonewall not just as the starting point of the (US) LGBT rights struggle, but to bring it back to what it was, a riot, a revolt, against police violence, the physical and economic violence of the capitalist state that causes homelessness and much else. And then if you think about it, queers started lots of our revolutions - queers started Black Lives Matter, for example, with the three women from Oakland, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi who started #BlackLivesMatter and are leaders of that movement.²⁶ Queers started the suffragette movement in the UK. Most of the suffragettes (and they were predominantly though certainly not exclusively white and middle class)²⁷ were I would say ‘raging lesbians’ but that term didn’t exist at the time. But they were rumoured to have had lots of great orgies and things, while also organising for the women’s vote.²⁸ So you can see queers (I use that term loosely) at the head of lots of movements that aren’t specifically or only about queer issues, but about issues that are the result of the same system that also oppresses queers.

²⁵ And of course it wasn’t just homeless queers, but homeless, Black and brown trans women sex workers who started the Stonewall uprising, as was recently commemorated in the “Black Trans Lives Matter” March in London, 27 June 2020. See also Nat Raha’s unpublished essay, ““out of jail and on the streets again”: Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries and the praxis of transfeminism of color’, *Transfeminisms*, Centre for Feminist Research, Goldsmith’s College, University of London, February 2015.

²⁶ Alicia Garza, ‘A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement’, *The Feminist Wire*, October 7 2014. Online at <https://thefeministwire.com/2014/10/blacklivesmatter-2/>.

²⁷ See e.g. Sumita Mukherjee *Indian Suffragettes: Female Identities and Transnational Networks*, University Press, Oxford, 2018; and Ella Braidwood, ‘The Queer, Disabled, and Women of Color Suffragettes History Forgot,’ *Vice*, 5 February 2018, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/9kz54p/uk-suffrage-centenary-anniversary-women-color-queer-disabled-activists

²⁸ For a revolutionary rather than a reformist perspective on the women’s suffrage movement, see Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling, ‘The Woman Question: From a Socialist Point of View,’ *Westminster Review*, No. 125, London, January-April 1886.

The next thing I wanted to talk about was this idea of getting our noses out of our navels and looking out and seeing how we also, as queers, can use our privilege. Because a lot of the time many of us, including myself, carry a lot of privilege—even the privilege to be queer, I think, is an important one that we often forget, right? Who in this world doesn't get to be queer, doesn't get to be genderqueer, doesn't get to use the 'they' pronoun, as I do? I feel very privileged in a lot of ways. So, this forces us to think about how we can leverage that privilege to also support others in the struggle, and that's where I come to the current Gilets Jaunes demonstrations in France.

These demonstrations started, in November 2018, being about petrol tax. And then the reason of course petrol tax was an issue—not because people want to drive loads and enjoy sitting in their cars, but it is because the people live in areas where there is no longer a bus service, where there is no longer a hospital, where there is no longer a post office, where their jobs are an hour away and they have to drive to their work every day. And they get paid peanuts, which means that if the petrol tax goes up they actually end up with nothing or minus at the end of the month. Therefore, to be against the petrol tax is not an anti-ecological thing; it's actually calling out Macron on introducing the petrol tax as a fake gesture on climate change rather than taxing the corporations who are the real polluters. If he actually taxed the corporations he could use that money to build a ton of windmills and solar panel parks rather than leveraging a tax that hits the poorest most badly.²⁹

Then the demos turned more broadly into an anti-austerity movement. That happened with the arrival of Comité Adama, which is a group formed around the death of Adama Traoré who was killed by the police two years ago in 2017.³⁰ And actually, a couple of days ago a report by medical experts was published, saying that he was killed by the police.³¹ This was something that took two years to establish. Obviously the people in that committee knew

²⁹ Frédéric Lordon, 'End of the World?', Verso Blog, 7 December 2018, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4153-end-of-the-world> ; Rachel Knaebel, 'The Gilets Jaunes and the Unions: A convergence over what?', *Notes from Below*, December 18, 2018, originally published in *Basta!* Translated by Joe Hayns <https://notesfrombelow.org/article/gilets-jaunes-and-unions-convergence-over-what> ; Rona Lorimer, 'Yellow Vest Diaries,' *Commune Magazine*, 12 December 2018 <https://communemag.com/yellow-vest-diaries/>

³⁰ Comité Adama, for details see <https://twitter.com/laveritepradama> and for the statement, see <https://www.facebook.com/La-vérité-pour-Adama-160752057668634/>

³¹ This report caused the inquiry into Adama's death to be reopened. For a timeline of the investigations here, see 'Affaire Adama Traoré: la longue bataille des expertises médicales', *Le Figaro*, 3 June 2020: <https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/affaire-adama-traore-la-longue-bataille-des-expertises-medicales-20200603>

that, but it had to be officially confirmed, and that's now happened. So Adama's sister, Assa Traoré, set up this group and it's turned into a massive anti-racist, anti-police violence movement. And on 1 December 2018, in week 3 of the Gilet Jaunes demonstrations, they called for everyone to join the Gilets Jaunes. So everyone from the left, anyone who is against police violence, anyone who is against austerity and against the excruciating measures that have been hitting the people of the Banlieue [Paris suburbs], people of colour, people in precarious positions, the worst, was called up to join.³² When Comité Adama called on everyone to join, one of the groups that responded to that call was a group called CLAQ. CLAQ stands for Comité de Libération et d'Autonomie Queer.

[image 5: Logo of the Comité de Libération et d'Autonomie Queer © CLAQ]

CLAQ is a collective of trans-pédé-bi-gouines, the word some French use instead of 'queer' because 'queer' has come to be used as a 'cool' word and sort of an arty, fashionable word; no longer a political term. So they use 'trans-pédé-bi-gouine' and in English that would be 'transfagbidyke', we kind of loosely translated that. It's an insurrectional group. a queer collective that gets busy agitating around stuff that isn't just queer stuff, but that is queer stuff because it affects the other oppressed groups. CLAQ were inspired, amongst others, by the UK group Lesbians and Gays Support the Migrants, and did a similar banner drop in Paris, stating "Macron starves the migrants, queers against borders." I think it's really interesting that you can clearly see that people are connecting these issues.

[Image 6: LGSMigrants banner drop over Vauxhall Bridge, London, on 20 January 2017, on the occasion of Trump's inauguration],

[image 7: CLAQ banner drop, Paris, 26 March 2018:
<https://www.facebook.com/claq.collectif/photos/a.357909964693767/358639851287445/?type=3&theater> © CLAQ]

[Image 8 CLAQ and Comité Adama at Gilets Jaunes demo in Paris, 2 February 2019 :]

³² Facebook event 'Les quartiers en gilets jaunes' ('The ends in yellow vests') by Comité Adama with the text of the call-out, with support from the Antifascist group of the banlieue: l'Action Antifasciste Paris-Banlieue, Plateforme d'enquête militante, <https://www.facebook.com/events/380480932689239/>

<https://www.facebook.com/claq.collectif/photos/a.358295474655216/536657593485669/?type=3&theater> © CLAQ].

This next image is the Comité Adama—you see Assa Traoré in the picture just behind the person taking a selfie. They carry an image of Zineb Redouane, the woman who was killed while standing at the window of her home. A march was coming by her home in Marseille—there was a lot of teargas, so she wanted to close the shutters, and she was then hit by a teargas cannister and killed.

[image 9 of CLAQ members on the 1 December 2018 Gilets Jaunes demo in Paris, carrying their banner which reads, “Lazy and proud, CLAQ venerates” © Gaëlle Matata (<https://www.instagram.com/gaellematata/>)]

In press releases and interviews the members of CLAQ always say “We are Camille”, so in this picture, they are Camille, Camille and Camille.³³ I was speaking with this particular Camille, one of the founders of the CLAQ and who is in the middle of the photo, and I asked, “are you anarchists, or are you Marxists or are you Trotskyists?”—because there is a lot of sectarianism in France as there is elsewhere. He replied, “there are actually some who are anarchists and some communists—we are all of these things but we never argue about that, like the regular sectarians do, because our queerness connects us all. Our common queerness is able to function as a sort of bridge to ensure that we understand each other and we are on the same page, despite those differences.” So that’s really cool – queerness serves to underscore the urgency of the struggle and perhaps enables us to see the possibility of a different future (because queers already inhabit a different sociality, we already live outside of the norm) that means we forego the endless debates about Kronstadt and that sort of thing. We are not going to be dogmatic because we know those old men didn’t consider us in their theories.³⁴ We also know the revolution can’t be perfectly scripted in advance, but will come about through trial and many errors, but above all by *doing*.

The other thing that Camille said was that they managed to build a coalition together with other groups at the Gilets Jaunes demos, so there is a black bloc but then also a pink

³³ Matthieu Foucher, ‘Protesting With the LGBTQ Activists Criticised for Supporting France’s ‘Gilets Jaunes’ Movement,’ *Vice*, 11 December 2018, https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/vbap9m/protesting-with-the-lgbtq-activists-criticised-for-supporting-frances-gilets-jaunes-movement

³⁴ I thank Ceylan Begüm Yildiz for this point.

bloc. And the interesting thing about that was that in one particular demonstration, Camille said, the pink bloc was able to protect the black bloc from police violence by jumping out and being really queer...and the police was just like, “Eh? I’m not going to....” They held their tear gas back and they dropped their batons and were like, “Well, we can’t really...” So that was quite cool, what he said there. It’s a good example of how (white) queers can leverage their privilege to create space for others to do political work, and we can do so quite easily through interrupting the normal dynamic of confrontation, with our startling ‘queer’ presence.

That’s an example then of queer method or praxis we might say. The other ways that the revolution is queered is that there are lots of queers elsewhere in the demonstration, outside of the pink bloc. Obviously you might think “Oh well, if there’s a queer bloc within the demonstration...should all the queers join it?—and then, doesn’t that mean you’re producing a ghetto?” Well, actually no, it doesn’t mean that because there are these insurrectional situationist queers of the CLAQ doing this thing and at the same time queers are leading a lot of the other groups as well. This isn’t a coincidence, as I said before, but a result of queerness meaning we are on the receiving end of state violence (disproportionately affected by austerity cuts, for example) along with other marginal groups (and especially of course those of us multiply oppressed by the system) and therefore prone to resist, to organise – just like Black Lives Matter was started by Black queer women. The NPA, the new anti-capitalist party bloc that I marched with most Saturdays was also led by queers and some of the other groups are as well – like the artists for example, and there were many queers amongst the students and in the feminist groups. So queerness also comes into the demo in other ways and features. Another example is this.

[image 10 ‘Benalla punis-moi’]

This is an image of someone holding a placard that says ‘Benalla punis-moi’ [‘Benalla punish me’]. Benalla was the head of security for Macron, who turned out to be super dodgy and he beat up some people on a May Day protest and it took a long time for Macron to fire him. At the time this picture was taken some further incriminating stories had come to light, and the ‘Benalla Affair’ was hugely damaging for Macron.³⁵ This person in the

³⁵ Luke Baker and Julie Carriat, ‘France's 'Benalla Affair' - the scandal Macron can't shake’, *Reuters*, 13 February 2019, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-france-macron-benalla/frances-benalla-affair-the-scandal-macron-cant-shake-idUKKCN1Q21TT>

demo has this sign while also carrying whips and wearing a gimp mask—so he is subverting the state’s oppressive power through the age-old method of satire, while at the same time also claiming a space for a specific kind of queer sexuality. What’s quite funny is that this phrase is later taken on by France Insoumise, which is the Mélenchon party—homonormalising it in a way. Here we can see the disempowering practice of reformists at work.

[image 11 Pink Bloc demonstrators at the Gilets Jaunes march, 1 December 2018 © Gaëlle Matata]

This final image shows a sign reading “homo-lesbo-trans-phobias are the logics of a system of exploitation generally that we need to overthrow.” The person carrying it belongs to the group Dykes & Co for Social Pride. This – the recognition of the interconnectedness of the struggles, and their inherent revolutionary nature – was the image I wanted to end on today.

Epilogue:

Image 12: CLAQ event poster: Grève must go on © CLAQ

Much has happened in France, as elsewhere, since these images were taken. Since the events described here, a General Strike was declared in France, which was joined by the Gilets Jaunes on 7 December 2019,³⁶ and which has seen the (re)emergence of old and new queer blocs that carry and enact the message of the Dykes & Co for Social Pride. The CLAQ initiated a sustained campaign around the hotel workers of the Ibis Batignolles experiencing workplace racial discrimination³⁷ and spoke out against the firing of striking bus drivers who had made homophobic remarks – when the fight against homophobia was instrumentalised by those wishing to suppress the strike.³⁸ The CLAQ, together with the Art en Grève³⁹ [Art

³⁶ Jad Bouharoun, ‘France: Anatomy of a strange defeat,’ *International Socialism*, 8 July 2020, <https://isj.org.uk/france-anatomy/>

³⁷ Louise Rocabert, ‘Après huit mois de grève et deux de confinement, les travailleuses en lutte de l’hôtel Ibis ne lâchent rien,’ *Basta*, 25 May 2020, <https://www.bastamag.net/greve-hotel-Ibis-femmes-de-chambre-CGT-HPE-discriminations>

³⁸ CLAQ, ‘Communiqué de Soutien aux Trois Grévistes de la RATP de Vitry,’ 14 January 2020, <https://acta.zone/communiqué-de-soutien-aux-trois-grevistes-de-la-ratp-de-vitry/>

³⁹ See, <https://www.facebook.com/ARTENGREVE/>

on Strike] collective regularly formed the head of the strike march up until the start of the coronavirus confinement. It was the sans-papiers Gilets Noirs (undocumented migrants, black vests) who de facto broke the strike ban adopted under the guise of Covid-19⁴⁰ and while the BLM movement took to the streets en masse around the world, in a Paris court on 29 May 2020 the three police officers involved in Adama Traoré's death were cleared of wrongdoing, to the outrage of the 40,000-100,000 people gathered outside the court house – a demonstration which has become the first of an ongoing, regular series of 'Acts'.⁴¹ On 4 July finally, instead of the cancelled corporate Pride, this happened:

Image 13: Pride 2020: Black and racialised Queer and Trans People to the Front, and ACAB, © Estelle Prudent.

A week earlier, London saw the Black Trans Lives Matter march, called by London Black Lives Matter and Trans Pride jointly.⁴² It was a transformative re-remembering of that which the homeless black queer and trans sex workers did for us as well as a call for the support of the Black uprising's abolitionist demands. Where CLAQ and others queered the Gilets Jaunes and General Strike 'revolutions', this has spread to the queers, no longer in small radical pockets and collectives, but in great numbers, with great noise and great force revolutionised by the events of recent years. We see today's political buzzword, abolition, on the table in a way not seen before in North American calls for police abolition but also in recognition of the role of capitalism in state pandemic necropolitics. We now see a new generation of feminists explicitly calling themselves 'abolition feminists'.⁴³ Their 'abolition' echoes earlier generations' 'liberation': but rather than seeking liberation from structures, we now demand the smashing of the old. In this image we see 'abolitionist queer'. It is the real world manifestation of that which we imagine as queer Marxism, involving the smashing of the

⁴⁰ 'La Marche des Solidarités maintient l'appel à manifester ce 30 mai,' Mediapart, 28 May 2020, <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/marche-des-solidarites/blog/280520/la-marche-des-solidarites-maintient-lappel-manifester-ce-30-mai>

⁴¹ Anne Paq and Ivan du Roy, 'Ce n'est plus seulement le combat de la famille Traoré, c'est votre combat à vous tous,' *Basta*, 3 June 2020 <https://www.bastamag.net/Adama-Assa-Traore-George-Floyd-Justice-Black-lives-matter-manifestation-revolte-violences-policieres>

⁴² <https://www.instagram.com/p/CBIldh--A7PQ/>

⁴³ E.g. Lola Olufemi, *Feminism Interrupted*, Pluto Press, London, 2020. The original abolitionist feminists were those who gathered at the INCITE Women of Color conference in Santa Cruz in 2000, Angela Davis, Mariame Kaba, Ruthie Wilson Gilmore, and others.

systems that produce not only our oppression specifically but clearly and obviously also racialised state violence, ongoing colonial exploitation and environmental destruction.⁴⁴ This is what queering the revolution is all about. Louise Michel lives.

Queer Hi[r]storical Materialism as Method

Having discussed queer imaginaries of the past and present animating contemporary social struggle in France, we now move to proposing that such imaginaries may be understood as a form of queer historical materialism. In his essay on “the secret history of testosterone” that situates criminalisation and surgical dissection in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century London as part of a transgender genealogy, Jordy Rosenberg deploys key historical materialist arguments to serve a trans-masculine Marxist history towards a politics of prisoner solidarity.⁴⁵ Rosenberg’s critical and creative essays, which constellate both personal and speculative histories with a rich politicised bravado,⁴⁶ make strong hints towards what might be formulated as a queer and/or trans historical materialist method. Writing of the roots of the identification and isolation of the chemical compound of testosterone in “an anatomical genealogy of criminal dissection”, he argues:

History is not, at its heart, some telic journey where we track the wretched annals of capitalist accumulation into the present. Rather, ‘history’ is nothing more than the political⁴⁷ contingencies that have interrupted and shaped it.... I suppose this is something of what Benjamin meant about looking backwards while being blown forwards: that the past awakens only under the pressure of the political present. If only now do the insurgent, collective burials of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries seem part of some transgender genealogy, it is because today’s insurgent, collective relationship to counterknowledges and practices press down upon the past to release its hidden message. *We are in solidarity with all prisoners.*⁴⁸

The type of insurgent reading practice Rosenberg describes through the image of Walter Benjamin’s “angel of history” – who is blown forwards by the “storm [...] we call progress”,

⁴⁴ Monk, Cohen and Freedman, ‘Editorial’.

⁴⁵ Jordy Rosenberg, “Trans/War Boy/Gender: On the Primitive Accumulation of T.” *Salvage*, no. 2 (November 2015); Walter Benjamin, “Thesis on the Philosophy of History.” in *Illuminations*, Pimlico, London, 1999, pp. 245-255.

⁴⁶ See also Jordy Rosenberg, “The Daddy Dialectic.” *LA Review of Books*, March 2018.

⁴⁷ I read Rosenberg’s use of “political” to describe both formal Political struggles and broader politicised social struggles and grassroots organising.

⁴⁸ Rosenberg, ‘Trans/War Boy/Gender’, original emphasis.

looking backwards, watching the catastrophe pile up – entails the deployment of queer history, through a lens that disidentifies with historical materialism and interrupts national(ist) histories to animate the political practices and agency in the present. This is given the burial and erasure of queer and trans histories/hirstories by hetero- and cis-sexism, racism, white supremacy and ableism; and furthermore, given revisionist LGBT histories that have neglected the radicality of queer and trans histories, particularly as anti-colonial, revolutionary hirstories. A radical queer and trans hirstorical materialist methodology may necessarily challenge these constructions of history – elucidating challenges to structural hierarchies, right-wing politics and capitalist dispossession rooted in the lives, sociality, politics and sexual practices of queer and trans people. As our current historical moment bears a striking resemblance to that of Benjamin’s “moment of danger” (in Benjamin’s case, of ascendant National Socialism in Germany) – which “affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers” – such a method may ally historical materialism’s imperative to “brush against the grain” of civilisation to queer and trans culture as a “tradition of the oppressed”, to here “seize hold of a [queer] memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger”.⁴⁹

How is this current moment affecting the possibilities of trans and queer life and embodiment, and how is politicised trans, queer protest, writing and cultural production working within some form of historical materialist lineage to navigate this? In the UK context, a decade of political economy rooted in austerity and the upwards redistribution of wealth has led to the widespread defunding of welfare, healthcare, housing, education, libraries, LGBTQ services. This has been accompanied by resurgent political backlash against migrants and people of colour, framed by former Prime Minister Theresa May’s Hostile Environment policy and the over-policing of Black and brown communities – both of which form a lineage to the Immigration Acts and police reforms of the 70s and 80s.⁵⁰ The backlash has also included a strong, transmisogynist and anti-non-binary sentiment levelled at stopping reforms to the Gender Recognition Act (2004), and attempts to restrict healthcare access of trans people under 18, although these occur in the context of the chronic under-resourcing of trans-specific healthcare on the NHS, despite increasing numbers of service

⁴⁹ Benjamin, “Thesis”, 247-248.

⁵⁰ Amrit Wilson, *Finding a Voice: Asian Women in Britain*, Virago, London, 1978; Nadine El-Enany, *(B)ordering Britain: Law, Race and Empire*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2020.

users and 2-3 year long waiting lists in many parts of the UK.⁵¹ Economic inequalities and reductions in public service provisions have been compounded by the coronavirus pandemic, which has furthermore disproportionately impacted poor people of colour; which in turn has led to expanding and establishing numerous Black, people of colour and LGBTQI-led mutual aid groups and solidarity funds during the pandemic, such as Mutual Aid UK, QueerCare and the QTIBIPOC Emergency Relief Fund. All of this materially affects the possibilities of trans life and trans embodiment as the enaction and coming into being of alternatively gendered possibilities, and the production of engagement with hirstory from such life.

Contemporary trans, queer poetics – including writing by Jay Bernard, Verity Spott, Laurel Uziell – has been engaged in animating and giving voice to archives, historical figures and events, creatively representing hirstories in a manner informed by present day struggles against racism, xenophobia and transphobia and regimes of austerity and state violence.⁵² The following poem by Uziell explicitly picks up a Benjaminian philosophy of history to service anti-fascist struggle in contemporary Europe.

BLOC

Strip any mark of sex from off the skin,
placed on the table where your hairs
fall out at the right moment, the subcutaneous
bubbles up to rejoin the public
hum that names you as you are, to be
not this is to be so swollen and tender.

What article of camouflage could dis-
tort police perception, cut to the violent
removal of a mask that reveals nothing,
flamboyant in a hood and your solidarity
dissipated in particulars, we ran out
threatening fascists with the boys.

⁵¹ By ‘trans-specific’ healthcare, I mean the provisions of the NHS Gender Identity Clinics. At the time of writing, Trans Health UK are publishing waiting times for initial appointments on their website – see <https://transhealthuk.noblogs.org/covid-19-gender-identity-clinics/> (accessed 23rd June 2020).

⁵² See Jay Bernard, *Surge*, Chatto, London, 2019; Verity Spott, *Gideon*, Barque Press, London, 2014; Laurel Uziell, *T*, Materials/Materialian, London and München, 2020. On the political practices of Bernard and Uziell, see also Jay Bernard, "A writer's responsibility after a tragedy like Grenfell". *Boundless*, 14th June 2018. <https://unbound.com/boundless/2018/06/14/a-writers-responsibility-after-a-tragedy-like-grenfell/>; and Becka Hudson, Laurel Uziell, Esther Lutz Davies and Camille Barbagallo, ‘The Women’s Strike in Britain: A Continuous Practice of Feminist Solidarity’, *Viewpoint Magazine*, May 13 2019, <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2019/05/13/the-womens-strike-in-britain-a-continuous-practice-of-feminist-solidarity/>

Laws are broken to be made, watch as
you swing the border closed into the
ribs of bystanders. Every day you wake
up and scream murder and every day it
is true, so you run with rapturous emotions
of some sort across the public flowerbeds:

this is an idea of what it might mean to
think compulsively about collateral damage.
Plumbs your gender for clues, or
plumbs for clues to your gender, maybe
somewhere in this spattering of parts is
a relation. Dubious angels in a pile-up

make a certain scattered roadblock,
threaded to the notion of a tactic, how
we do what we do, which is not what you
do by dint of the fact that we do it, yet
what we is is defined by that doing, that
doing which is anything but yours, even

if it looks like it. Claude Cahun in black
bloc scratches the face off a defender of
the nation, have you a finger or a wish
to be rushed to hospital in a panic but it
is all fine and actually I did enjoy trampling
those flowers as the cops screamed

my pronouns, looking back on it I did
enjoy him sometimes. But this complex
armour melts and hardens so often, the
part of the penal code which applied to
drag queens and butch dykes was section
240.35, section 4: 'Being masked or in any
manner disguised by unusual or un-

natural attire or facial alteration; loiters,
remains, or congregates in a public place
with other persons so masked'. Clip the
wings and eat the feathers, lovely privacy
taken to mean reasonable force, enforced
reason gives a person to you, to be spent

collapsed on the train home, turn up
burn out / burn up turn etc.⁵³

⁵³ 'BLOC', Laurel Uziell, *Instant Cop Death*, Shit Valley, London, 2017, pp 6-7. Reproduced with permission from the author.

The poem provides an alternative demonstration of what trans bodies can do when enacting agency over one's own body ("Strip any mark of sex from off the skin"). These bodies are actively evading state recognition, manifest here as the surveillance and profiling of protesters by the police. In this moment of danger – a context in which trans visibility and anti-trans violence are "entwined" – the text understands a history of policing gender non-conforming bodies as essential to the functioning of racial capitalism.⁵⁴ While the poem's opening line and its attentions knowingly mark it as a trans text (a "public / hum that names you"); its speaker is engaged in both bodily transformation and enacting "camouflage" as an alternative strategy to trans visibility. The latter entails adopting a cloak of a vacuum beyond visible light ("black") and of anarchist anonymity as a member of a "black / bloc", an anti-fascist manifestation out to publically contest fascists. The text speaks to the phenomena of 'trantifa', or trans antifascists, and their role in such manifestations, denoting the political specificity of why trans and gender non-conforming people would challenge neo-nazis and the far right.⁵⁵ As Joni Cohen argues, contemporary fascists idealise forms of white masculinist endocrine purity while conceiving of 'transgenderism' as an invention of "the Jew" "to undermine the purity and supremacy of the Aryan race".⁵⁶ This anti-Semitic conception has a historical root in the homophobia of 1930s German Nazis, which Cohen argues was itself a "hatred of the feminine".⁵⁷

In seeking a trans, queer anti-fascist lineage, the manifestations in Uziell's poem include the figures of the Angel of History, here somehow "dubious" alongside "the boys"

⁵⁴ Tourmaline [Reina Gossett], Eric A. Stanley and Johanna Burton, 'Known Unknowns: An Introduction to *Trap Door*', in *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2017, p 1. Tourmaline, Stanley and Burton emphasize that "within the cosmology of racial capitalism, the promise of 'positive representation' ultimately gives little support or protection to many, if not most, trans and gender non-conforming people, partly those who are low-income and/or of color—the very people whose lives and labor constitute the ground for the figuration of this moment of visibility' (1).

⁵⁵ As a subcultural phenomenon, trantifa is occasionally represented as political groups such as the Degenderettes, in figures such as trans femme youtuber Contrapoints, and through memes. Trantifa draws a lineage from queer anti-violence organising including (but not limited to) Bash Back and the 'Free Cece' McDonald campaign, and the intersections of anarchist and queer organising of the past two decades. Trantifa has a strong visual iconography that combines the anti-fascist and anarcho-feminist symbols with transgender symbols and the sky blue, baby pink and white transgender flag.

⁵⁶ Joni Alizah Cohen, 'The Eradication of "Talmudic Abstractions": Antisemitism, Transmisogyny and the National Socialist Project', *Invert Journal* (1), 2020. Online at <https://invertjournal.org.uk/posts?view=articles&post=6886132#the-eradication-of-%E2%80%9Ctalmudic-abstractions%E2%80%9D:-antisemitism,-transmisogyny-and-the-national-socialist-project>. The conception quoted and discussed by Cohen is that of Kevin Macdonald.

⁵⁷ Cohen, *ibid*.

and other qomrades,⁵⁸ and furthermore queer, gender non-conforming, Jewish artist and Nazi camp survivor Claude Cahun. Drawn through hirstory and into this public, the use of masks by Cahun and Marcel Moore in their surrealist portraiture is layered into histories of the policing of trans, queer, and gender non-conforming bodies, weaponised into an act of “scratch[ing] the face of a defender of / the nation”.⁵⁹ If Cahun’s use of masks in portraiture forms part of the canvas on which to construct new visions of (a)gender, in the poem they become a means of facial covering to obscure one’s face from the seeking eyes of the state – a canvas for gender beyond state recognition. In the present moment of the coronavirus pandemic, the ubiquity of masks as facial coverings to prevent the spread of infection and harm connects with this manner of use in political mobilisations, to protect oneself from potential harm by the state, including the state’s use of weapons such as tear gas. And within Uziell’s poetic, the “violent / removal” of the Cahunian facial covering “reveals nothing”, light and gender disappearing into the vacuum. If sex/gender can be weaponised by the state against trans activists – a cleave between these two legal terms that transphobic feminists are trying to inaugurate in the UK – trantifa’s politics as poetics proposes using the façade of queer performance, covering its face and disappearing into a public trans political manifestation.⁶⁰ The police are left to “plumb for clues to your gender” and “plumb your gender for clues”, in a suspicion that may, in their “enforced reason” that searches for gender qua personhood, literally lead to the bottom in a strip search if they can get their hands on you. Indeed, even the possession of one’s own personal pronouns seems up for grabs. This clash with fascists and the police is violent – tensions are reflected through the language of “panic” and the verbs “rushed”, “trampling” and “screamed”; although sarcasm and humour work to diffuse its harm, the speaker remarking sarcastically “but it / is all fine”, like the meme of the dog drinking tea within a house on fire.

Trans poetics proposes ways of being hirstorical/historical being through becoming, by manifesting agency and through political action. And the action of blockading fascists in

⁵⁸ “Qomrade” is a portmanteau of queer and comrade used within the LGBTQ Left. It emerges out of a meme in which the acronym ‘LGBTQ’ is given as ‘Lets Guillotine the Bourgeoisie Tonight, Qomrade’.

⁵⁹ The ‘mask’ was also used as a metaphor in the 1950s and 60s to describe being closeted about one’s sexuality.

⁶⁰ Concrete examples of such actions, although not necessarily undertaken under a ‘banner’ of trantifa, would include the occupation of the Ministry of Justice in London on International Women’s Day 2019 to protest the UK Government’s changes to the housing of trans women prisoners (housing them in men’s prisons), alongside noise demonstrations at HMP Doncaster held on the International Day of Solidarity with Trans Prisoners, such as in 2017.

the present affects the work of poetry. Trans poetics envisions and proposes how to transform the piling up of the debris of official history according to neoliberal racial capitalism into a blockade, a history that emerges through violence that it is necessary to stop. The blockade as a manifestation of agency transforms the knowledge and experiences of bodies, creating new openings and potentially transforming how we read and understand hirstory, and how we enact our gendered being(s). The enactment of hirstorical being is not just at a surface level but below the skin (“subcutaneous”); and furthermore, the conditions of policing and the daily and extraordinary conditions of transphobic harm can have a dramatically negative affect. Mobilising abjection in public political manoeuvres as a mode of trans becoming is demanding, as the poem’s “collapse” into burnout as a close suggests. Poetics remains a crucial method of imagining and enacting possibility in the world, providing a sense of possibility and visions for transformation by unarchiving and re-envisioning what hirstory can do for us.

Conclusion

This article has discussed how queer hirstories are animating contemporary queer and trans imaginaries, informing practices and poetics of resistance and modes of solidarity. A queer hirstorical materialist methodology demonstrates how the messages of the past can be (re)activated through poetic imagination and performance in the service of struggles in the present and toward a liveable future. In Grietje’s story, messages from the past shown to be still very much active – Louise Michel lives and drives (some of) today’s queer activists. Her queered memory is summoned to reinforce, further queer and revolutionise each iteration of queer bodies taking to the streets and organising in their communities. In a similar way, a repoliticised memory of Stonewall drove the Black Trans Lives Matter march in London recently, their resistance (re)performed and (re)embodied by BPOC and white queers wearing flowers enthusiastically in response to the BLM and Trans Pride organisers’ call. We invite and queer others—‘we recruit’⁶¹—in our collective recognition of the *convergence des luttes* (interconnection of struggles) towards the gradual but definitive abolition of the structures that produce(d) our oppressions. The messages from the past echo in each performance and reperformance of various iterations of queer revolution (so-called or not so-called), each time a little bit louder, *until the imagined moment that queer and revolution cancel each other out.*

⁶¹ Catchphrase of the Lesbian Avengers.

Queer hirstorical materialist method shifts in our gender expressions and our relationships with each other, informing practices and praxes lived at the level of the body, knowing *and intending* that these are in relation to social transformation and radical change.

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