## Part 1 – The Future of Capitalism

#### Asteroid mining opens up the possibility of a utopian world of luxury in which the logic of scarcity along with capitalist exploitation no longer exists. However, private monopolization of asteroid mining will destroy the dream of space communism, dooming us, BASTANI 1 2019

Bastani, A. (2019). Fully automated luxury communism. Verso Books.

Whether it’s Moon Express prospecting the Earth’s only moon before moving on, or Planetary Resources sizing up NEAs, the potential abundance of off-world mineral wealth almost escapes comprehension. One estimate claims that a platinum-rich asteroid measuring 500 metres wide could contain nearly 175 times the annual global output of the metal, 1.5 times known world reserves. Even a smaller asteroid measuring the size of a football field could contain as much as $50 billion worth of platinum. The asteroid belt likely contains some 825 quintillion tonnes of iron with 140 pounds of nickel for every tonne of iron. According to one estimate, the mineral wealth of NEAs – if equally divided among every person on Earth, would add up to more than $100 billion each. If we can access it, nature offers not only more energy than we can ever imagine, but more iron, gold, platinum and nickel too. Right now the resources we have access to are like a crumb in a supermarket. With the right technology mineral scarcity too would become a thing of the past. The necessary advances to make asteroid mining a reality are steadily emerging. Japan’s unmanned Hayabusa spacecraft successfully landed on the 25143 Itokawa asteroid in 2005, returning to Earth with samples of material from its surface five years later. In 2014 the Japanese Space Agency launched a successor mission, Hayabusa 2, with the asteroid 162173 Ryugu – widely viewed as the most cost-effective option for asteroid mining – its intended destination. Hayabusa 2 landed in June 2018 and is expected to return to Earth with samples some time in 2020. Japan isn’t the only country on the march when it comes to prospecting asteroids, however – in 2016 NASA launched OSIRIS-REx to study and sample the asteroid 101955 Bennu, with a scheduled return date of 2023. Unsurprisingly China has similar ambitions with the China National Space Administration looking to send and return a lander to the dwarf planet Ceres at some point during the 2030s. But while most of the investment is coming from states, as has always been the case with space exploration, it is the private sector which is looking to reap the benefits. The leading actors in this embryonic field – Deep Space Industries and Planetary Resources – have chosen to adopt a similar approach to one another, focusing on prospecting asteroids through a mix of low-cost satellite technology and landers. DSI have developed what they call the Xplorer while Planetary Resources have a strikingly similar architecture which goes by the name of Arkyd. With local fuel generation and mining some way off, the aim with this opening round of products is to better understand the composition of target asteroids as well as identify deposits of ice which could, in future, be converted into propellant. As with Moon Express, the missing link is the ability to create fuel off-world in a process entirely free of human oversight. Given the rapid improvement of things like autonomous robots and vehicles since 2004 that is likely sooner than you think. Indeed Chris Lewicki, CEO of Deep Space Industries, is optimistic on this issue, speculating that the first commercial extraction of water on an asteroid will happen by the mid-2020s. That, combined with the rise of regular, ultra-cheap launches, and increasingly sophisticated landers and robotics, will shape the opening rounds of asteroid mining. When combined with improvements in precision robotics – see the rapid development of the Atlas robot – an outline for the necessary technologies begins to emerge. Once the likes of Deep Space Industries and Planetary Resources have prospected and claimed asteroids, and perfected methods to produce propellant from available ice, the industry will move from viable to profitable. This will be followed by a second round of products – extractors – which would use the propellant from asteroids to push them closer to Earth for mining or – for those with particularly large concentrations of water – to create the ‘gas stations’ for a burgeoning industry looking ever farther outwards. The Scramble for Space A 2012 Caltech study concluded it could cost as little as $2.6 billion to move an asteroid into near Earth orbit for easier mining. That was confirmed in a 2017 report by Goldman Sachs which stated, ‘while the psychological barrier to mining asteroids is high, the actual financial and technological barriers are far lower. Prospecting probes can likely be built for tens of millions of dollars each’. While $2 billion might sound like a lot, it is comparable to the sunk cost for a new rare earth mine, which MIT presently puts at around $1 billion. All of which means that once the full architecture is in place for asteroid mining, perhaps as soon as 2030, the marginal cost of each new mine will fall for every asteroid that is exploited. This will create a feedback loop of ever-improving infrastructure and rising incentives to extract minerals beyond our home planet. That isn’t to say asteroid mining doesn’t have significant challenges to overcome before becoming a viable industry. Robots with the requisite levels of sensory-motor coordination are likely decades away although, as already highlighted in Chapter Four, that is more a question of when rather than if. Of greater concern is that the precise composition of asteroids, beyond predictive models based on broad categories, remains unknown. What if a company chose an asteroid only to find, upon arrival, that it holds far less water and platinum than expected? Between that and the immense costs required, specifically in robotics, it is difficult to see how nimble actors like DSI and Planetary Resources will fare when the likes of SpaceX and Blue Origin will have more developed technology and far greater capital to risk. Nevertheless, all of these problems can be surmounted – although as with all emerging industries how it will unfold is impossible to predict. But given the terrestrial challenges asteroid mining could address, primarily resource scarcity, as well as the new horizons it will undoubtedly open up, its rise over the coming century appears inevitable. here is one final issue, however, that many in the industry appear unwilling to face. It is a problem born of success, much as the Horse Manure Crisis of 1894 placed the limits of the First Disruption against the abundance of the Second. It is also a problem born of extreme supply, which, as we’ve already seen, is difficult to reconcile with the price mechanism. You see, there is so much mineral wealth beyond our planet, on other planets, moons and asteroids, that the moment off-world mining becomes a viable industry, the price of the very commodities investors had previously found so precious will collapse. The most instructive example here is the asteroid 16 Psyche, located in the belt between Mars and Jupiter. Measuring over 200 kilometres in diameter, it is one of the largest asteroids in our solar system, composed of iron, nickel and rarer elements such as copper, gold and platinum. The ‘value’ of this giant floating mine? Around $10,000 quadrillion – and that’s just the iron. To be clear, Psyche is a rarity. But it demonstrates a crucial point: mining space would create such outlandish supply as to collapse prices on Earth. In August 2017 Peter Diamandis, co-founder of Planetary Resources, asked Blue Origin’s Erika Wagner who would win in a fight between her boss, Jeff Bezos, and Elon Musk. ‘So, Peter, let me tell you about what we’re doing at Blue Origin,’ Wagner diplomatically replied. ‘We’re really looking towards a future of millions of people living and working in space. The thing I think is really fantastic … is that the universe is infinitely large, and so, we don’t need any fisticuffs … we’re all going to go out there and create this future together.’ While Wagner is correct in identifying that our solar system has more mineral wealth than we can possibly imagine, the likes of Musk and Bezos aren’t risking their personal fortunes – the former stood on the brink of bankruptcy multiple times while refusing to take SpaceX public – so that others can get rich. What is more, once the shareholder model is applied to companies like DSI and Planetary Resources, and their inevitable competitors, the **emphasis will be on the rate of return rather than social progress**. As we’ve already seen with information in the early twenty-first century, **under conditions of abundance capitalism pursues a form of rationing in order to ensure profits**. Given the potentially limitless wealth made possible by asteroid mining, that **same logic would be applied by private enterprise in the sector and their allies in politics**. As with information, and soon renewable energy too, that will necessitate the formation of temporary monopolies of some kind. How might this look? One answer is that private companies will prospect and claim the most valuable asteroids decades before even attempting to exploit them – something we are already beginning to see. Another might be intellectual property rights applied to certain technologies used for mining, perhaps in the process of converting ice to fuel, creating scarcity there instead. Finally, and perhaps most sensibly, one could foresee the adoption of predatory pricing for commodities mined off-world, with the price of each fixed marginally below the cost of operating the cheapest terrestrial mines. This would serve to keep drills turned off on Earth while maintaining price stability and guaranteeing huge profits for mining companies.

#### Thus, I affirm the resolution, resolved: The appropriation of outer space by private entities is unjust. Private asteroid mining will make outer space the realm of the capitalists and new forms of exploitation, up to extermination. However, Fully Automated Luxury Communism paves the way for an alternate world, turning capitalist abundance on itself and destroying capitalism.

#### With the abundance of outer space and new technologies, it is possible achieve a new communism characterized by international luxury. Only a communist, populous politics that deviates from traditional capitalist usage of technology and resources can solve capitalism while ensuring green living. BASTANI 3,

Bastani, A. (2019). *Fully automated luxury communism*. Verso Books.

Populism is a politics that refuses to recognise the prevailing common sense in managing the economy. Consequently a portion of its critics, those most seduced by capitalist realism, attack it from the incorrect assumption that there is no alternative to neoliberalism. As the status quo is imperilled by the five crises, as well as the long fallout from 2008, such defences will increasingly take place through appeals to anti-utopianism rather than anything positive or propositional. Thus even standard-bearers for the establishment might concede that living standards are getting worse, or that society is going backwards by many measures, but at least, they will respond, we aren’t in 1990s Rwanda and aren’t medieval serfs. Such a position signifies the death of the very idea of the future, with enlightenment and progress – formerly ideological pillars of liberal capitalism – exchanged for a vision of the good society where decline is marginally slower than it might otherwise be. Others, who may agree about the scale and even urgent necessity of change, will contend that such a radical path should only be pursued by a narrow technocratic elite. Such an impulse is understandable if not excusable; or the suspicion that democracy unleashes ‘the mob’ is as old as the idea itself. What is more, a superficial changing of the guard exclusively at the level of policy-making is easier to envisage than building a mass political movement – and far simpler to execute as a strategy. Yet the truth is any social settlement imposed without mass consent, particularly given the turbulent energies unleashed by the Third Disruption, simply won’t endure. Which is why for the kind of change required, and for it to last in a world increasingly at odds with the received wisdom of the past, a populist politics is necessary. One that blends culture and government with ideas of personal and social renewal. One that, to borrow a term, invents the future. Anything less will fall short. A populist politics is one that calls upon, and claims to represent, ‘the people’. While this category does not exist as a permanent and immutable entity, what does prevail are parameters that elevate certain kinds of assembly, social trait or capacity. That is why the transition to renewable energy offers a bridge to energy abundance – permitting more prosperous societies than previously possible under the petty limits of fossil fuels. A green politics of ecology without a red politics of shared wealth will fail to command popular support. Conversely, the promise of red plenty based on fossil fuels and resource scarcity will fall victim to climate breakdown, leaving the world’s poor exposed to devastation like never before. Which is why the only politics fit to fight climate change is the demand for FALC – driven by the impulse to lead fuller, expanded lives, not diminished ones. To the green movement of the twentieth century this is heretical. Yet it is they who, for too long, unwisely echoed the claim that ‘small is beautiful’ and that the only way to save our planet was to retreat from modernity itself. FALC rallies against that command, distinguishing consumption under fossil capitalism – with its commuting, ubiquitous advertising, bullshit jobs and built-in obsolescence – from pursuing the good life under conditions of extreme supply. Under FALC we will see more of the world than ever before, eat varieties of food we have never heard of, and lead lives equivalent – if we so wish – to those of today’s billionaires. Luxury will pervade everything as society based on waged work becomes as much a relic of history as the feudal peasant and medieval knight. More than the vacuous nihilism of today’s ultra-rich, whose ascent beyond scarcity finds its pathetic expression in conspicuous consumption, the process of building FALC will not only bequeath us the resources needed to make us happy, but also a sense of common purpose. What is more, luxury populism rejects the folk politics of ethical consumption and the sphere of ‘the local’ as inherently virtuous. The extent of the solutions needed to address the five crises are planetary, and while action will often be close to home – as the following chapters make clear – acknowledging the historic and global scale of any response is critical. Our ambitions must be Promethean because our technology is already making us gods – so we might as well get good at it. Nevertheless, **space must remain for ‘grassroots’ campaigns which advance the post-scarcity alternative while attacking a broken status quo**. Campaigns around divestment from fossil fuels offer one example of how that will work. Rather than calling for climate justice through appeals to turn down the volume on modernity here, criticism of fossil fuels is situated within the broader frame that they are an obstacle to yet higher standards of living. **In comparison to solar and wind, hydrocarbons are as unsuitable to the needs of our century as burning whale fat for light was for the last. Digging up and burning mineral deposits for energy is so last century**. The same approach is needed in resisting extraction of shale gas, the most glaring example of the myopia of ‘scarcism’ amid the final embers of the Second Disruption. While one part of that is to continue pursuing outright bans, like those already in place in France, Germany and New York, this must be done alongside the demand for something better. Here advocates must clamour for the alternative with and alongside communities targeted for fracking, demanding indigenous rights, local democracy and radical land reform along with calls for an end to drilling. In this respect movements in Alaska, Canada and Australia already serve as stunning examples, not to mention the case of Balcombe, a tiny village in Sussex, where a coalition of campaigners and local residents opposed plans for fracking while demanding the alternative of community-owned solar power. The call for clean energy must become synonymous not only with the expectation of permanently falling costs but also common ownership. Prosperity, democracy and the commons as not only connected, but mutually constitutive. As well as advancing a red–green politics which revives ideals of progress and common plenty, this new populism will also be one of luxury. FALC, unlike the world of actually existing neoliberalism, will not demand constant sacrifices on the altar of profit and growth. Whether it’s ‘paying down the debt for future generations’, as our politicians are so keen to repeat, or growth and rising wages always coming ‘next year’, it’s becoming ever clearer that the good times aren’t coming back. What remains absent, however, is a language able to articulate that which is both accessible and emotionally resonant. Because behind such entreaties – whether from Erdoğan, Trump, Theresa May or the European Central Bank – is an esoteric caste of administrators that nobody else can quite understand. Their language of mathematical economics resembles the high Latin of Europe’s priests as they explained the nature of things to illiterate peasants who could never hope to understand. To the Ten Commandments all they add is that economic growth – of any kind – is good, while the pious many must uphold the faith by working harder and spending more than ever. This demand for constant offerings from taxpayers, hardworking families or ‘strivers’, all while living standards stagnate, means we are now experiencing what Eastern Bloc socialism endured after the 1970s. Two conspicuous hallmarks of that era similarly characterise our present: falling economic growth and crumbling ideological hegemony. The words of the priests increasingly fall on deaf ears, meaning many now turn to other – often older – faiths to make sense of the seemingly absurd. Thus the return of ‘the people’ as the main political actor is inevitable, whether as the rabble who patrician elites defend from their own desires, the Volk grounded in land, blood and soil, as witnessed in the revival of the far right, or the masses as a potentially transformative subject which makes history. Many increasingly grasp that the problems we face are large and unprecedented, and they intuitively understand the necessary solutions must be of a similar scale. So given the possibilities of the Third Disruption, promise them what they deserve – promise everything. Everything against the emptiness of a system in breakdown, with its call to toil for even less than you already have. Everything against the farce of identities which no longer make sense or were myths of little initial purpose. Everything, that is, except the demand of luxury for all. The offer to be who you want, rather than your life being shaped by forces beyond your control. When we have scaled that summit and surpassed scarcity, having turned the dividend of the Third Disruption to the needs of us all, even the least compassionate will reflect on today’s world with regret and pity. Regret at so much lost potential, all the stories never written and lives which might have been so much more. And pity, particularly for those who believed a regime of enforced scarcity made them better than anyone else. This Is Not 1917 FALC is not the communism of the early twentieth century, nor will it be delivered by storming the Winter Palace. The reason why is that, until the opening decades of the Third Disruption, communism was as impossible as surplus before the First Disruption or electricity before the Second. Instead it was socialism, still defined by scarcity and jobs, which became the North Star for hope across the world. The technologies needed to deliver a post-scarcity, post-work society – centred around renewable energy, automation and information – were absent in the Russian Empire, or indeed anywhere else until the late 1960s. Indeed, amid efforts to catch up with the more advanced capitalist economies of Europe and America, the Bolsheviks became students of the Taylorist science of productivity, applying themselves to the task of subordinating human time to economic production with ever-greater efficiency. In truth, they had little alternative. It turns out that Marx’s early suspicion that the countries set to lead the revolution would be those at the cutting edge of capitalist modernity was right. Only now we know that means technology as much as politics, the Third Disruption as necessary a precursor as class consciousness and collective struggle. Creating communism before the Third Disruption is like creating a flying machine before the Second. You could conceive of it – and indeed no less a genius than Leonardo Da Vinci did precisely that – but you could not create it. This was not a failure of will or of intellect, but simply an inevitability of history. What is more, the means by which the revolution of 1917 was won and defended, through an anti-liberal coup then subject to military invasion by every major power, further limited the possibility for social transformation. Inevitably, this shaped a regime which became supremely hierarchical. Given the odds it faced, both within and beyond its borders, its seven-decade survival remains one of the great political achievements of the last century. Regardless of history’s ‘what ifs’, FALC is different. Instead it recognises the centrality of human rights, most importantly the right of personal happiness, and seeks to build a society where everyone can access the necessary resources to further that end. This is a politics centred around the recognition, as Franklin Roosevelt once put it, that necessitous people are not free people. In the absence of access to such resources – housing, education, transport, healthcare, information – freedom as self-authorship cannot be said to meaningfully exist. Liberal ends, specifically the individual being uniquely placed to determine their path in life, are impossible without communist means. The possibility of most people finding happiness and meaning is impossible as long as these things are commodities – subject to profit rather than need. We must understand that appropriate forms of political organisation, just like the utopias we construct, are contingent on the times in which we live. Just as FALC is appropriate for a world where technology leaves us on the cusp of previously unthinkable abundance, the party-form which emerged in response to closed, under-developed societies makes increasingly little sense. The same is true for forms of worker organising, radical or reformist, which are erroneously premised on the society of work enduring forever. That society will not endure, nor should that be our political ambition. The role of the labour movement is to liberate the working class, and therefore all of society, not save a broken system which is passing away. The vehicles for political transformation change, just like the worlds we reach for. Now we must build a workers’ party against work – one whose politics are populist, democratic and open, all while fighting the establishment which, through its power over civil society and the state, won’t rest in ensuring FALC never comes to pass.

## Part 2 – Apocalypse Now

#### Technology and infinite supply will either save the collective or kill it. Only FALC can solve international crises through utilizing space’s abundant resources to support the Earth, not destroy it, BASTANI 4

Bastani, A. (2019). *Fully automated luxury communism*. Verso Books.

The relationship between technology and politics is a complicated one. Melvin Kranzberg put it best in his ‘Six Laws of Technology’ when he outlined the first of those laws: ‘Technology is neither good nor bad; nor is it neutral.’ In other words, how technology is created and used, and to whose advantage, depends on the political, ethical and social contexts from which it emerges. To paraphrase Marx, technology makes history – but not under conditions of its own making. Perhaps that’s what Kranzberg meant with his sixth law, ‘All history is relevant, but the history of technology is the most relevant.’ Technology may not determine history, but it can disrupt and shape it like nothing else. The technological shift of the First Disruption embodies that law. **Cities, culture and writing – themselves the basis for ever more complex forms of social organisation – were shaped by agriculture, the domestication of animals and crops, and a practical understanding of heredity.** That is not to say technology determines all paths. Indeed, there is a case to be made that the technologies of the Second Disruption – principally Watt’s steam engine – were merely the final element in the broader transition to capitalism. Here **industrial innovation came after centralised states**, the emergence of a class of ‘landless labourers’ and certain ideas of private and intellectual property. So, while technologies can herald new moments in history, they are just as likely to depend on what went before. The Third Disruption appears to express both tendencies. **Rather than technologies like AI, renewable energy and gene editing being exogenous disruptors of the status quo, they have developed alongside new ideas of nature, selfhood and forms of production**. Take the green movement as just one example. In any successful transition to meat without animals – as outlined in Chapter Eight – its worldview, advanced over decades of activism, will have played a decisive role. While technologically speaking synthetic meat is impossible without digitisation, these products were only created in response to vegan and vegetarian demand, as well as their developers having concerns about the impact of agriculture on climate change and animal welfare. The same is true for renewable energy. Here too the green movement has been a vital player in making the issue of climate change salient to the wider public. While **political failure at the international level is undeniable**, with **nation-states failing to sufficiently reduce CO2 emissions** over the last twenty-five years, that does not mean the movement’s legacy is one of defeat. The increased capacity of wind and solar to meet our energy needs again results from technological innovation which would not have materialised without generations of campaigners demanding a shift away from fossil fuels. Fracking bans in a constantly growing number of countries, municipalities and cities, are only the latest testament to that.hh Elsewhere the impulse to automation and the application of the experience curve are an outgrowth of competition, the prevailing logic of capitalism. This has presaged the incessant replacement of labour with fixed capital while seeing declining costs of production for just about everything. While levels of automation have arguably slowed over recent decades, primarily as a result of wages being pushed so low that replacing workers wasn’t profitable, the context within which waves of automation will unfold in coming decades matters. **Contradictions internal to capitalism make a crisis of technological unemployment, terminal under-consumption and rising inequality unavoidable.** So technology is of critical importance, but so are the ideas, social relations and politics which accompany it. Thus in making sense of how we arrived at the present, from AI to synthetic meat, we must look at social movements – from Indigenous land rights to protecting animal welfare – as much as the underlying dynamics of extreme supply. But more than allowing us to comprehend an increasingly complex present, placing the relationship between technology and history within a broader constellation of actors allows us to chart the course for a better future. It helps us understand why some things transpire at certain moments rather than others and why, until now, communism was impossible. Futures Deferred Some visionaries have such powers of foresight that their ideas aren’t consonant with the times in which they live. John Wycliffe, a fourteenth-century priest who oversaw a translation of the Latin Bible into English, was one such person. The heterodox Wycliffe opposed core tenets of the church including veneration of saints, monasticism and even the papacy. Yet Wycliffe, whose Bible was spread across England a century before Martin Luther was born, remains a peripheral figure in the history of the Reformation. The reason why is technology. While Wycliffe’s Bible was widely distributed, it was not a printed document in the modern sense – meaning it could never find as large an audience as the vernacular pamphlets and books of a century later. That Martin Luther came to be the seminal figure in the Reformation was, therefore, a consequence of technological innovation rather than personal charisma or new ideas. By the early 1500s, 200 million printed books were in circulation across Europe – a revolution in information even more seismic than the arrival of the internet. Yet to claim that technology, in particular the printing press, caused the Reformation is absurd – especially when its central ideas had a genealogy which could be traced back for centuries. Where it did prove decisive, however, was in making certain events unfold which had seemed previously impossible – even by the protagonists themselves. When he pinned his ‘95 Theses’ to the church door in Wittenberg on 31 October 1517, Luther had no idea what would happen next. Within six weeks printed editions appeared simultaneously in Leipzig, Nuremberg and Basel. Not long after came German translations – the initial document was in Latin – with these capable of being read by a much wider audience. Friedrich Myconius, a friend of Luther, would later write, ‘hardly 14 days had passed when these propositions were known throughout Germany and within four weeks almost all of Christendom was familiar with them.’ Luther’s first pamphlet to be written in German, the ‘Sermon on Indulgences and Grace’, would be reprinted fourteen times in 1518 alone. Of the 6,000 pamphlets published in German between 1520 and 1526, some 1,700 were to be editions of Luther’s works. In all, that meant around 2 million pamphlets of his work were published in the decade after he pinned his original theses – hand-written and in Latin – to the door at Wittenberg. In short, technology made what was impossible in Wycliffe’s time seemingly inevitable in Luther’s. In a certain sense Marx bears a resemblance to Wycliffe. Like the English priest, the technologies necessary for the adoption of his ideas were unavailable during his own era. **Just as a mass-produced vernacular Bible was impossible in a world without moveable metal type, so was any attempt at communism within the limits of the Second Disruption.** Dependent on scarce fossil fuels, global living standards like those of the very wealthiest would spell environmental catastrophe, while under conditions of scarcity of both physical and cognitive labour, the pursuit of leisure for some necessarily depended on making others work harder. Yet **this is now changing.** Indeed, it has been for some time. More than half a century would pass between the arrival of modern print, traditionally viewed as the publication of the Gutenberg Bible in the 1450s, and the starting gun of the Reformation with Luther’s 95 Theses. While the Gutenberg press was profoundly disruptive, it **only led to social transformation once it became so mundane that a little-known theologian could have his ideas printed by people he had never met and, in a matter of months, discover an audience of millions. The same is now true for the principal technologies of the Third Disruption. These are now taking centre stage after continuous progress since the 1950s – the decade photovoltaic cells were developed, the first silicon transistor invented and DNA finally modelled.** By the early 1960s the first LEDs were being experimented with, and in the 1970s so too were lithium batteries. Only **now** are these **innovations bringing extreme supply to information, labour and resources**. In so doing, **they undermine two core presumptions about capitalism: firstly, that scarcity will always exist; and secondly, that goods will not be produced if their marginal cost is zero.** They are – and conventional economics can’t explain it. None of the technologies at the heart of the Third Disruption are new. Rather, as with the late fifteenth century, **they have quietly moved from the fringes of social life to its centre** – all while riding the dividends of the experience curve and exponential growth. What happens next, however, and how these technologies are woven into the fabric of modernity, is our responsibility. There is no necessary reason why they should liberate us, or maintain our planet’s ecosystems, any more than they should lead to ever-widening income inequality and widespread collapse. The direction we take next won’t be the result of a predictive algorithm or unicorn start-up – it will be the result of politics. The binding decisions on all of us that we collectively choose to make

#### Capitalism is a death cult and the apocalypse is already happening. Without an unshakable commitment to the total and complete rejection of the fetishization of capitalist value, we will all die like the dinosaurs, Allinson 21

Allinson, J. (2021). *The tragedy of the worker: towards the proletarocene*. Verso Books. pg 8-17

Capitalism, like certain bacteria, like the death-drive, is immortal. It has its limits and crises but, perversely, seems to *thrive* on these. Unlike the multi- species life-systems powering it, **the only *terminal* limit to capital’s perpetual augmentation is**, if driven towards from within, external: **either revolution or human extinction**; communism, or the common ruin of the contending classes. Long ago, both Max Weber and Walter Benjamin saw an occulted religious foundation in capitalist civilisation. As Michael Löwy points out, Benjamin, by defining capitalism as a cultic religion, went much farther than Weber in identifying a Puritan/Capitalist guilt-driven imperative to accumulate. ‘The duration of the cult’, for Benjamin, ‘is permanent’. There are ‘no days which are not holidays’, and ‘nothing has meaning that is not immediately related to the cult’. In what sense is capitalism a cult? What are its rituals, its fetishes? Those of investment, speculating, buying and selling. It has no dogma other than those ‘real abstractions’, as Alfred Sohn-Rethel put it, entailed by its rituals. In Sohn-Rethel’s words, the act of commodityexchange is the key exemplar of a social action governed by an abstraction of which the participants have no consciousness. The buyer may be concerned only with the sensuous particularities of the commodity, the needs it fills, but behaves, structurally, in the moment of exchange as though what matters is the quantity of exchange-value embedded in it. Ritual action determines dogma; social being, that is, determines consciousness. Capitalist theology, however, instates not dogma but unyielding imperatives governing action. ‘Accumulate, accumulate! That is Moses and the prophets!’, Marx sarcastically withered in *Capital.* **Accumulation is, for capital, an imperative, not an option**. To exist as a unit of capital in conditions of universal competition is to accumulate or die. As long, therefore, as there is labour-power to exploit and, in Jason W Moore’s term, ‘cheap nature’ to appropriate, capital will augment itself. This very bifurcation of life into the exploitable and the appropriable, which Moore identifies as the foundation of a ‘Cartesian dualism’ unsustainably counterposing ‘Nature’ to ‘Society’, is not dogma but programme. It is related to a distinctive move of capitalist theology, currently given right- Evangelical sanction by Calvin Beisner and the Cornwall Declaration, to disavow in practice the existence of inherent physical limits. It posits, in its action, the earth as limitless cornucopia over which humans have dominion, and from which limitless accumulation must be extracted. This disavowal, this ‘real abstraction’, is the social basis of capitalist *implicatory denial:* the seemingly evidence-proof conviction of capitalist states that capitalogenic climate change can be remedied by means, and according to systems, that guarantee its perpetuation. The capitalocentric purview is commonly, but mistakenly, identified with the anthropocentrism of ancient and medieval monotheisms. Here, however, it is clearly *not* the Anthropos that stands at the centre, as though appointed by God to steward the garden of earth. At the centre is the ritual: that unconditional imperative to accumulate. And insofar as this imperative drives ‘adorers’, as Benjamin put it, to the horizon of human extinction, **capitalism** can – **must** – **be described as a death** **cult**. **Fossil capital** **is** but **one modality of** **the death cult**, albeit a paragon. **The ‘externalities’ of capital – climate chaos, biosphere destruction, resource depletion, topsoil erosion, ocean acidification, mass extinction, the accumulation of chemical, heavy metal, biological and nuclear wastes – extend far beyond the specific catastrophe of a carbonised atmosphere.** Capitalism is a comprehensive system of work-energetics. The food industry, which powers waged labour, and is key to the shifting value of labour-power itself, is as central to the deterioration of the biosphere as is fossil-fuelled transit. Nonetheless, the continuing decision for fossil fuels as a solution to the energy demands of capitalist production, for all the growing denial of climate-change denial among the antivulgarian ruling class, for all their concerned mouth music, is an exemplary case of the capitalist imperative of competitive accumulation at work. As Andreas Malm has fiercely and beautifully argued, **capitalism did not settle for fossil fuels as a solution to energy scarcity. The common assumption that fossil energy is an *intrinsically* valuable energy resource worth competing over**, and fighting wars for **is**, as geographer Matthew Huber argues, **an example of fetishism. At the onset of steam power, water was abundant, and, even with its fixed costs, cheaper to use than coal.** The hydraulic mammoths powered by water wheels required far less human labour to convert to energy, and were more energy-efficient. **Even today, only a third of the energy in coal is actually converted in the industrial processes dedicated thereto: the only thing that is efficiently produced is carbon dioxide. On such basis, the striving for competitive advantage by capitalists seeking maximum market control ‘should’ have favoured renewable energy.** Capital, however, preferred the spatio-temporal profile of stocks due to the internal politics of competitive accumulation. **Water use necessitated communal administration, with its perilously collectivist implications**. Coal, and later oil, could be transported to urban centres, where workers were acculturated to the work-time of capitalist industry, and hoarded by individual enterprises. This allowed individual units of capital to compete more effectively with one another, secured the political authority of capital and incorporated workers into atomised systems of reproduction, from transport to heating.  **Thus, locked in by the short-termist imperatives of competitive accumulation, fossil capital assumed a politically privileged position within an emerging world capitalist ecology**. It monopolised the supply of energy for dead labour, albeit in a highly inefficient way. This is the tragedy of the worker. That, as avatar of a class in itself, she was put to work for the accumulation of capital, from capitalism’s youth, amid means of production not of her choosing, and with a telos of ecological catastrophe. **That thus, even should the proletariat become a class for itself, and even if it does so at a point of history where the full horror of the methods of fossil capitalism is becoming clear, it would – will – inherit productive forces inextricable from mass, trans-species death. This does not preclude systemic, planet-wide transformatio**n. Particularly given the inevitably uneven global growth of class consciousness and resistance, however, and the concomitant embattledness of any reformist, let alone revolutionary, power on the global stage, **it does ensure that it faces extraordinary barriers**. As will become clear**. As of 2015, estimates suggested that humanity produced a total of 15.5 trillion watts of energy each year, of which a considerable 29 per cent was not used**. At an average of 2,000 watts per person (rising to 10,000 watts in the core capitalist economies), the majority was used for industry, commerce and transit, with only 22 per cent for household consumption. Some 90 per cent of this output was powered by fossil fuels: oil, coal, gas. This monopoly, enabling superprofits as monopolies do, ensured that fossil capital would always realise profit margins far higher than the industrial average. It has, in Malm’s term, become worth a ‘planet of value’. Each fossil fuel plant represents decades of investment awaiting realisation.  **To avert planetary disaster is to inflict an earth-sized blow on capitalist industry. It is to choose between burning a planet of value, and burning the planet itself.** But the death cult is so strong, so pervasive, that, against all resistance, the choice has already been made. **Apocalypse has begun. The button has been pushed**. Humanity is already committed to irreversible climate change. In May of 2020, levels of CO2 in the atmosphere hit 417 parts per million, the highest ever recorded – and the first breach of 400 ppm since the Pliocene. Climate activists are, in Richard Wilbur’s phrase, ‘mad-eyed from stating the obvious’. To understand the scale of what faces us, and the way it ramifies into every corner of our lives, is to marvel that we aren’t having emergency meetings in every city, town and village every week. **We are, increasingly, out of time. In** the capitalist *untimelich,* the time of the living and the time of the dead, human history and the history of inorganic sediments, collide. ‘Millions of years of concentrated solar energy’, as Huber calls it, have been released in an historical blink of an eye, only to rebound just as fast: the Deep Time equivalent of an asteroid strike. **The cyclical time of seasons turns freakish, leaving us uneasily sweating in the clammy mid-winter. Spring comes too early, hurricane-force winds and flash floods break the October calm, polar ice melts while temperate zones are plunged into polar winter. The Arctic burns, boreal forests turned to charred sticks. The Greenland ice sheet melts even in winter. Antarctic sea ice has suddenly and drastically contracted in recent** **years**. The polar vortex wanders, perturbed, and the mid-West freezes. In a parody of Revelations, Mediterranean storms rain fish on the island of Malta. **Stochastic weather events accumulate. Birds fall dead from the sky.** The progression of geological deep time, with its periods, eras and epochs speeds up so rapidly that it precipitates a crisis in the temporal order itself: spinning so fast, we may as well be standing still. The progressive time of human civilisation, reduced to the endless accumulation of stuff, collapses into nonsense. The cycle of ice ages, a necessary condition for human evolution, melts away for eternity. With awareness of which comes a wave of eco-anxiety, for which we grope for names – Glenn Albrecht’s ‘solastalgia’, Ashlee Cunsolo and Neville Ellis’s ‘ecological grief’, Renee Lertzmann’s ‘environmental melancholia’. Even at the end of 2018, 70 per cent of Americans describing themselves as ‘worried’ about climate change, and it has been a long two years for that fear to wax. **The sixth mass extinction, signalled by what one study calls ‘biological annihilation’, is underway**. **The oceans, which produce roughly half of the oxygen we breathe, are acidifying, and are swept by heatwaves, says a recent study, ‘like wildfire’. Coral reefs, home to a quarter of marine life, are bleaching. Insect biomass collapses, with 40 per cent of all species undergoing drastic decline**. **The bees, that once we believed were saved, are disappearing eight times faster than are mammals, birds or reptiles. Without their pollination work, 70 per cent of the crops that feed 90 per cent of the planet will fail**. **The question of human survival is inextricable from that of what sort of humans we should be. By 2070, MIT research says, the new norm for ‘many billions’ of people will be impossibly high temperatures that will kill less fit people and make outdoor work impossible. Half a billion will experience temperatures that would ‘kill even healthy people in the shade within six hours’**. **The Arctic, that ‘sluggish and congealed sea’ discovered by Pytheas, a breathing ‘mixture like sea-lung’, will be gone, on conservative estimates by 2040.** In 2019, the usually snow-bowed woodlands circling this uncanny sea-continent burned more fiercely than ever. Precise metrics of the scale of what will unfold are to be determined, not least by class struggle, but there is no longer, if there ever was, a choice between adaptation and mitigation. **So adapt. But to what?** Those species now going extinct were once well adapted. The widely accepted geo-logism, ‘Anthropocene’, is in one sense an obvious political evasion, diluting as it does the necessary focus on capital accumulation itself. Yet, of course, capitalism is something that the human species, and no other, does. And while there are unthinkably vast disparities in power and responsibility in the production of petro-modernity, the latter has had a proven – if, crucially, hardly irrevocable – popular base: the vatic rage of activists notwithstanding, no politician has been crucified for promising fuel tax cuts. This fact can easily be weaponised by the right. Of the recent protests of the gilets jaunes in France against declining wages and rising inequality and sparked by a rise in diesel tax later reversed by Macron faced by the scale of the protests, Trump tweeted that ‘[p]eople do not want to pay large sums of money ... in order to maybe protect the environment’. In fact, however, and allowing that the movement is hardly monolithic, the French uprising was characterised by a remarkable *refusal to refuse* to engage with questions of ecology, particularly compared, say, to the fuel- price protests in the UK in 2000 and 2005. Far from being characterised by ecological indifference, what characterised much of the French protest was disagreement between those for whom talk of ecology comes too soon, and those for whom such talk is inextricable from social – class – justice. One example of the former is visible in the claim of the prominent activist Jerôme Rodriguez that ‘[e]ventually, when we obtain the first things, ecology will have its place’; of the latter, the words of another, François Boulot, that ‘[t]he social and ecological emergencies are inseparable’, that ‘[w]e will not be able to operate the ecological transition without an equitable wealth redistribution’. Rodriguez’s rationale for his position, that ‘nowadays, people aren’t concentrated on this’, is not supported by the superlative gilets jaunes slogans, ‘End of the month, end of the world: same perpetrators, same fight’, and ‘More ice sheets, fewer bankers’. This refusal to compartmentalise is energising evidence of the new politicisation of the moment. Still, that not everyone opposed to the fuel tax rise has been so assiduous in drawing the connections is in part because the dispersed, privatised accommodation and individualised transportation of modern life offer individualised, immediate-term and distinctively capitalist answer to specifically human strivings. The concept of the Anthropocene is a tacit acknowledgment that the alienated labour of humanity has itself become a selective evolutionary pressure. It has already forced rapid adaptation in some species, where it has not resulted in extinction, as Bernard Kettlewell’s experiments with peppered moths show. The besooting of tree bark in industrial areas became a powerful selective force, favouring darker moths, harder for birds to see and pick off**. Now such pressures are coming for us, as powerful as the asteroid strike behind the Cretaceous-Paleogene mass extinction. We are compelled to adapt to ourselves.** From this point of view, there is no difference between adaptation and mitigation. **To close the fossil fuel plants, to destroy a planet of value, or even, dare we hope, the value-form itself:** are these not adaptations**?** Of course, this is not what is generally meant by adaptation. Implicit is a Green Zone-style survivalism of the rich; explicitly touted are permanent adaptations of capitalism to the consequences of capitalism. The ideology of ‘adaptation’ has become the ideology of capitalism’s triumph over all life.

#### We are on the brink of a post-scarcity world for the rich, where they will no longer need us for their luxuries. If dictated by the capitalist regime through private appropriation, a post-scarcity world would mean the extermination of the working-class, FRASE 2016

Frase, P. (2016). *Four futures: Life after capitalism*. Verso books //LHP HL + LHP AB

In 1980, the Marxist historian E. P. Thompson wrote an essay reflecting on the Cold War and the ever-present threat of nuclear annihilation, called “Notes on Exterminism, the Last Stage of Civilization.”2 In it, he contemplated the increasing turn of both the capitalist and communist economies toward the technologies of militarism and war. It was, he thought, inadequate to understand the arms race and the military buildup as merely tools to defend the larger political economies of the contending sides, be that the planned economy of the USSR or the capitalist market of the United States. The military-industrial complex was taking up a larger and larger part of the economy in the rich capitalist countries, and the Soviets were likewise increasingly preoccupied with building up arms. Thompson proposed that we needed a new category to understand this social formation. He quotes Marx’s famous line from The Poverty of Philosophy: “the hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist.”3 That is, as the central economic relations of a society change, all the social relations in that society tend to change with them. Confronting the logic of military industrialism, Thompson asks, “what are we given by those Satanic mills which are now at work, grinding out the means of human extermination?” His answer was that the category we needed was “exterminism.” This term covers “these characteristics of a society—expressed, in differing degrees, within its economy, its polity, and its ideology—which thrust it in a direction whose outcome must be the extermination of multitudes.”4 The specific configuration Thompson discussed has largely disappeared —there is no longer a Cold War or a USSR. Despite the best efforts of militarist neoconservatives and others to nostalgically recreate great power conflicts with Russia or China, these hardly compare to the shadow of nuclear terror that hung over Thompson’s head. And so I have repurposed his word to describe another order, the final of my four hypothetical societies. Yet what I will describe is nevertheless another kind of society that is “thrust ... in a direction whose outcome must be the extermination of multitudes.” We still live in heavily militarized world, where the military budget takes up almost as large a percentage of the US economy as it did when Thompson wrote his essay. But the conflicts that define the era of the so- called “War on Terror” are asymmetrical ones, pitting technologically advanced militaries against weak states or stateless insurgents. The lessons learned in these theaters come home, leading to the militarization of domestic policing as well. A world where the ruling class no longer depends on the exploitation of working-class labor is a world where the poor are merely a danger and an inconvenience. Policing and repressing them ultimately seem more trouble than can be justified. This is where the thrust toward “the extermination of multitudes” originates. Its ultimate endpoint is literally the extermination of the poor, so that the rabble can finally be brushed aside once and for all, leaving the rich to live in peace and quiet in their Elysium. In a 1983 article, the Nobel Prize–winning economist Wassily Leontief anticipated the problem of mass unemployment that has been contemplated throughout this book. In what he calls, with some understatement, a “somewhat shocking but essentially appropriate analogy,” he compares workers to horses. One might say that the process by which progressive introduction of new computerized, automated, and robotized equipment can be expected to reduce the role of labor is similar to the process by which the introduction of tractors and other machinery first reduced and then completely eliminated horses and As he then notes, this led most people to the conclusion that “from the human point of view, keeping all these idle horses ... would make little sense.” As a result, the US horse population fell from 21.5 million in 1900 other draft animals in agriculture. to 3 million in 1960. Leontief goes on to express, with the cheery confidence of a mid-century technocrat, his confidence that since people are not horses, we will surely find ways to support all of society’s members. Echoing Gorz and other critics of wage labor, he argues that “sooner or later ... it will have to be admitted that the demand for ‘employment’ is in the first instance a demand for ‘livelihood,’ meaning income.”7 However, given the contemptuous and cruel attitudes of today’s ruling class, we can in no way take that for granted. Fortunately, even the rich have developed norms of morality that make it difficult to reach for this Final Solution as a first resort. Their initial step is simply to hide from the poor, much like the characters in Elysium. But all around us, **we can see the gradual drift away from just corralling and controlling “excess” populations, into justifications for permanently eliminating them**. Enclave Societies and Social Control The sociologist Bryan Turner has argued that we live in an “enclave society.”8 Despite the myth of increasing mobility under globalization, we in fact inhabit an order in which “governments and other agencies seek to regulate spaces and, where necessary, to immobilize flows of people, goods and services” by means of “enclosure, bureaucratic barriers, legal exclusions and registrations.”9 Of course, it is the movements of the masses whose movements are restricted, while the elite remains cosmopolitan and mobile. Some of the examples Turner adduces are relatively trivial, like **frequent-flyer lounges and private rooms in public hospitals**. Others are more serious, like **gated communities (or, in the more extreme case, private islands) for the rich, and ghettos for the poor—where police are responsible for keeping poor people out of the “wrong” neighborhoods.** Biological quarantines and **immigration restrictions** take the enclave concept to the level of the nation-state. In all cases, the prison looms as the ultimate dystopian enclave for those who do not comply, whether it is the federal penitentiary or the detention camp at Guantanamo Bay. Gated communities, private islands, ghettos, prisons, terrorism paranoia, biological quarantines—these amount to an inverted global gulag, where the rich live in tiny islands of wealth strewn around an ocean of misery. In Tropic of Chaos, Christian Parenti shows how **this order is created in the world’s crisis regions, as climate change brings about what he calls the “catastrophic convergence” of ecological change, economic inequality, and state failure.** **In the wake of colonialism and neoliberalism, the rich** countries, along with the elites of the poorer ones, have facilitated a disintegration into anarchic violence, as various tribal and political factions fight over the diminishing bounty of damaged ecosystems. Faced with this bleak reality, many of the rich—which, in global terms, includes many workers in the rich countries as well—have resigned themselves to barricading themselves into their fortresses, to be protected by unmanned drones and private military contractors. **Guard labor**, a feature of the rentist society, **reappears in an even more malevolent form, as a lucky few are employed as enforcers and protectors for the rich.** But the construction of enclaves is not limited to the poorest places. Across the world, **the rich are demonstrating their desire to escape from the rest of us**. A 2013 article in *Forbes* magazine reports on the mania, among the rich, for **evermore-elaborate home security**.11 An executive for one security company boasts that his Los Angeles house has security “similar to that of the White House.” Others market infrared sensors, facial recognition technologies, and defensive systems that spray noxious smoke or pepper spray. All this for people who, although rich, are largely **anonymous and hardly prominent targets** for would-be attackers. Paranoid though they may seem, **large numbers of the economic elite appear to regard themselves as a set-upon minority, at war with the rest of society**. Silicon Valley is a hotbed of such sentiments, plutocrats **talking openly about “secession.”** In one widely disseminated speech, Balaji Srinivasan, the cofounder of a San Francisco genetics company, told an audience of start-up entrepreneurs that **“we need to build opt-in society, outside the US, run by technology.”**12 For now, that reflects hubris and ignorance of the myriad ways someone like him is supported by the workers who make his life possible. But it demonstrates the **impulse to wall off the rich** from what are deemed to be surplus populations.

## Part 3 – Luxury Populism is the Method (1:17)

#### Anti-capitalism must learn to compete with capitalism in the realm of desire, taking existing capitalist structures like the state and repurposing them to create Marxist possibility. Thus, we must transform our libidinal desires and direction of thought against capitalism – the aff does this through a unified horizon towards FALC – Heron:

Heron, Kai. “Journal of the Marxist Literary Group.” Mediations, [https://mediationsjournal.org/articles/still-a-world. //](https://mediationsjournal.org/articles/still-a-world.%20//) LHP PS

Fisher defines **capitalist realism as “the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now almost impossible to even imagine a coherent alternative to it.”**4 The concept incorporates both Francis Fukuyama’s “End of History Thesis” and the often-repeated maxim, attributed to both Frederic Jameson and Slavoj Žižek, that “**it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism**.” In fact, Fisher says that this “slogan captures precisely” what he means by capitalist realism.5 Yet as his argument proceeds, the concept takes on a much more all-encompassing character. No longer narrowly about the imagination**, it begins to have a quasi-ontological sense**. To borrow a phrase from Raymond Williams, **it becomes a shared “structure of feeling.”6 Impersonal, comprehensive, unconscious and insidious, capitalist realism names the naturalization of neoliberalism as an ineradicable fact of life. But** — and this is crucial for Fisher — **capitalist realism is only quasi-ontological. However hard it might be for us to imagine the end of capitalism, the perception that we live at the end of history is nothing more than a highly successful class project in need of constant reinforcement by the bourgeoisie. Their principal weapon in this respect is the manipulation of desire**, or what Fisher would later call “libidinal engineering.”7 **The trick of capitalist realism is not to make people think that capitalism is the perfect system (it clearly isn’t) but that it is the most realistic system. Its function is to suppress post-capitalist imaginaries and working-class power. Its ultimate aim is to make it unthinkable that a post-capitalist world might create a richer and more fulfilling life for the majority of people than capitalism will ever be able to muster.** For Fisher, **the only way to combat a class project at the level of desire is with an opposing class project at the level of desire**. **What the Left needs is a politics that can compete with capitalism at a libidinal level and win.** As Fisher sees it, **the historic failure of the Left in this respect is as much to blame for the spread of capitalist realism as the Right’s successes.** Fisher admonishes the Left for failing to keep up with the desires unleashed among the working classes in the wake of 1968: **“If neoliberalism triumphed by incorporating the desires of the post 68 working class, a new left could begin by building on the desires which neoliberalism has generated but which it has been unable to satisfy.**”8 **This “New Left” is a Left that has nothing to gain from moralistically denouncing the luxuries of consumer capitalism. It is a Left that must give up the nostalgic figure of the disciplined Fordist factory worker and that cannot aim for an “anti-libidinal dampening” but that must instead construct a “counter-libido.”9 In short, it is a Left that must provide its own communal luxuries to combat the highly individualized pleasures of consumer capitalism.** What does this mean? If “bread for all, and roses too” was an essential slogan of the 1900s — a slogan that pointed towards the worker’s demands for the basics of life (bread) and for luxury too (roses), then Fisher teaches us that the slogans of the 21st century must be something like: “Everything for Everybody,” “Communal Luxury Now!,” and “Red Plenty.”10 Simply put, **capitalism cannot be allowed to maintain its self-proclaimed monopoly on desire.** This conviction leads Fisher to pose a question that runs sharply against the grain of large sections of today’s Left:“**Where is the left,”** he asks, “**that can speak confidently in the name of an alien future, that can openly celebrate, rather than mourn, the disintegration of existing socialities and territorialities**?”11 In other words, **where is the Left that resolutely rejects the fantasy of a return to some non-existent holism, to a national neo-Keynesian industrial strategy, to a ready-made revolutionary working class, and that will compete with capitalism at the level of desire? Where is the Left that dares to see in capitalist desires, practices, infrastructures and institutions, a nascent but corrupted desire for post-capitalism?** If this sounds a bit like accelerationism, that’s because it is. For Fisher, “Marxism is nothing if it is not accelerationist.”12 But by this he does not mean that we must vote for Trump, use innumerable plastic straws, and donate to Pegida. Fisher has in mind a more respectable communist current that begins with Marx and runs through Lenin, to Jameson, and finally to Fisher himself. In the Manifesto of the Communist Party, for instance, Marx and Engels reproach early luddite attacks on the forces of production for attempting — understandably but uselessly — to work against the tides of history.13 Similarly, they lambast “reactionary socialists” for trying to maintain a compromise solution between the new industrial era and pre-industrial relations of production and morality: “Nothing is easier than to give a Christian asceticism a socialist tinge.”14 **For Marx, then, a true communist rejects nostalgic moralism and projects their desires into the present to tease out a possible post-capitalist future.** As he explained in the Critique of the Gotha Programme, **communism will have to emerge in and against capitalism.15 It will need to see in the structures of capitalist society an emergent communist society.** Recall Lenin’s claim that the capitalist banking system provides the “skeleton” for a socialist system of book-keeping and distribution that need only be taken “ready-made” and “democratized” by the proletariat.16 Lenin’s proposal isolates what Frederic Jameson calls the “dialectical ambivalence” of capitalism.17 The desire for a smoothly functioning book-keeping system is hardly unique to capitalism and would be fundamental to any successful project of central planning in 1917. **The challenge, then, is to turn form against content, to see how what functions as an exploitative behemoth today could be repurposed for liberatory ends tomorrow. As Jameson says, even “the most noxious phenomena can serve as the repository and hiding place for all kinds of unsuspected wish-fulfilments**”.18 Jameson turns to the noxious phenomena of Walmart. While acknowledging the expected criticisms of the corporation, Jameson underlines Walmart’s properly dialectical and ambivalent character. As he says, “its capacity to reduce inflation and hold down or even lower prices to make life affordable for the poorest Americans is also the very source of their poverty and the prime mover in the dissolution of American industrial productivity”.19 Jameson wrote his essay in 2009. Today, we might want to apply the same logic to Amazon – a company whose monopoly has put an end to free market competition in its sector while undeniably resolving the problem of distribution via a now globalized system of planning, storage, transportation, and delivery. **Jameson’s provocation— very much in the vein of Marx and Lenin before him — is to get us to imagine Amazon as both ruthlessly capitalist and as perhaps the most communist business in existence today. To paraphrase Lenin, once it has been put into the hands of the workers, a nationalized, or internationalized, Amazon may prove to be the skeleton of a twenty-first century socialist society; a socialism that is entirely reconcilable with today’s desire for almost instantaneous satisfaction of our wants and needs.** In “Post-Capitalist Desire,” Fisher situates himself firmly in this tradition of thought. Drawing explicitly from Jameson, he explores the dialectical ambivalence of another capitalist monstrosity: Starbucks. Ingeniously, Fisher turns the accusations that communism is generic and homogenous back onto one of the archetypal capitalist corporations: is not Starbucks itselfgeneric and homogenous? Can we not go to any Starbucks in the world, and order the same dry falafel salad, the same mediocre over-priced coffee, and sit in the same inoffensively decorated interiors? Fisher’s bold claim is that **Starbucks is not successful because it satisfies supposedly capitalist desires but because it is in fact satisfying a “thwarted desire for communism,” for a shared “third space” that is neither the home nor workplace, and that is increasingly under attack, enclosed, and privatized in today’s capitalist societies.21 Once we make this shift in perspective, we can see the masses of people sitting alone in Starbucks with their laptops and coffee as participating in a sad and diminished reflection of a fuller, richer, practice of being and desiring in common. Capitalism becomes a threat to our desires rather than their precondition.** The ambivalence of Walmart, Amazon, and Starbucks is already apparent in their customers. No one actually likesshopping at Walmart or Amazon, no one enjoys Starbucks coffee, without at the same time being critical of their capitalist content: they don’t pay their taxes, they don’t permit unions, it’s too expensive, the supply chain is ethically unacceptable, and so on. While we could take the Žižekian route and say that this is precisely how capitalist ideology works — by maintaining a gap between the subject and the Big Other — Fisher asks whether it might be more politically salient to also try to imagine this as a nascent and corrupted desire for something fundamentally better: the same form but with a different, explicitly post-capitalist, content. We can push this logic further. In the UK there is a chain of pubs called Wetherspoons. Wetherspoons’ chairman, Tim Martin, is a right-wing, pro-Brexit, millionaire. The company’s business model is to take historic buildings that might otherwise be destroyed and to turn them into standardized pubs. The result is an incongruous mixture of frequently beautiful buildings with drab, miserable, replicated interiors. It’s immensely popular. It’s popular among the elderly, among stag and hen parties, students, and young professionals. It’s probably one of the few places in the UK where you see these groups intermingling in the same space. And why is this? It can’t just be the cheap alcohol — although that helps. It can’t just be the food — which is unremarkable at best. It must also be because we put a premium on collectivity and sociality that is everywhere suppressed. Even the British, the possessors of a culture that is infamously emotionally repressed and withdrawn desire this kind of space. Wetherspoons holds open the thwarted promise of a collective experience, of a collective enjoyment, of red plenty. During the Brexit campaign, Wetherspoons issued beermats with right-wing pro-Brexit slogans on them leading to some parts of the left boycotting the chain. But rather than resorting to this strategy — which was clearly doomed to fail since it was premised on coming between people and a cheap pint — why not see this for what it is: a remarkable strategy in an ongoing class struggle? What we need, as the organization Plan C has suggested, is a Wetherspoons of the left.23 **What we need is a dialectical attunement to already existing infrastructures and practices whose form can be read against their content. We should be able to imagine providing a better version of this highly successful generic, homogenous, and standardized space than capitalism has thus far provided for us. Fisher’s call to annex the form of capitalist infrastructures and practices to use them against their content is a fundamentally Marxist gesture that is applicable in more ways than today’s dominant Leftist currents have thus far dared to imagine. Could we not, for instance, follow this logic to its end and say that capitalism’s dialectical ambivalence extends up to and includes the state? This was Lenin’s point in The State and Revolution.24 The capitalist state is systematically used in the interests of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. But what kind of a desire does the state make possible when it is taken into the hands of the proletariat?** The rise of Jeremy Corbyn has perhaps given us a taste of this ambivalence. Corbyn’s presence in national politics holds open a space of desire that the ruling classes know to be a threat. How else are we to make sense of Theresa May’s full-throated defense of capitalism in September 2017 as “the greatest agent of collective human progress ever created”?25 Such a speech would have been simply unimaginable when Capitalist Realismwas first published. Perhaps one of Fisher’s challenges to us today, then, is to find the post-capitalist kernel in Corbyn’s social-democratic project, bearing in mind, as Fisher warns in his conclusion to Capitalist Realism, that capitalist realism might outlast neoliberalism by compromising with precisely such social-democratic projects.26

#### The role of the ballot is fidelity to the truth – unified dedication to a shared horizon is liberatory – the affirmative’s horizon is FALC, Dean 19:

Dean, Jodi. Comrade: An essay on political belonging. Verso, 2019. // LHP BT + LHP PS

The idea that comrades are those who belong to the same side of a political struggle leads to the fourth thesis: **The** relation between comrades is mediated by **fidelity to a** truth**;** practices **of comradeship** materialize **this** fidelity**. The “same side” points to the truth comrades are faithful to—the political truth that unites them**—**and the fidelity with which they work to realize this truth in the world.** “Belonging” invites attention to the expectations, practices, and affects that being on the same side generates. The notions of truth and fidelity at work here come from Alain Badiou. In brief, **Badiou rejects the idea of truth as a proposition or judgment, arguing instead that** truth is a process**. The process begins with the eruption of something new, an event.** **Because an event changes the situation, breaks the confines of the given, it is undecidable in terms of the given; it is something entirely new**. Badiou argues that this undecidability “induces the appearance of a *subject* of the event.”[60](about:blank) **This subject isn’t the cause of the event. It’s an effect of or response to the event,** “the decision to *say* that the event has taken place.” Grammar might seduce us into rendering this subject as “I.” **We should** avoid this temptation and **recognize the subject** **as** designating an inflection point, **a response that extends the event.** **The decision that a truth has appeared, that an event has occurred, incites a process of verification**, the “infinite procedure of verification of the true,” **in** **what Badiou calls an “exercise of fidelity**.”[61](about:blank) **Fidelity is a working out and working through of the truth, an engagement with truth that extends out into and changes the world. We should recognize here the unavoidably collective dimension of fidelity: in the political field, verification is a struggle of the many.** Peter Hallward draws out some implications of Badiou’s conception of truth. First, it is subjective. Those faithful to an evental truth involve themselves in working it out, exploring its consequences.[62](about:blank) Second, fidelity is not blind faith; it is rigorous engagement unconcerned with individual personality and incorporated into the body of truth that it generates. Hallward writes:Fidelity is, by definition, ex-centric, directed outward, beyond the limits of a merely personal integrity. To be faithful to an evental implication always means to abandon oneself, rigorously, to the unfolding of its consequences. **Fidelity implies that, if there is truth, it can be only cruelly indifferent to the private as such.** **Every truth involves a kind of anti-privatization, a subjective collectivization. In truth, “I” matter only insofar as I am subsumed by the impersonal vector of truth—say, the political organization, or the scientific research program.**[**63**](about:blank) **The truth process builds a new body**. This body of truth is a collective formed to “work for the consequences of the new” and this work, this collective, disciplines and subsumes the faithful.[64](about:blank)Third, collectivity does not imply uniformity. The infinite procedure of verification incorporates multiple experiments, enactments, and effects.Badiou writes, “An organization lies at the intersection between an Idea and an event. However, this intersection only exists as process, whose immediate subject is the political militant.”[65](about:blank) We should amend this statement by replacing *militant* with *comrade*. Comrade highlights the “discipline of the event,” the way that political fidelity cannot be exercised by a solitary individual—hence, the Marxist-Leninist emphasis on the unity of theory and practice, the barren incapacity of each alone. Comrade also affirms the self-abandonment accompanying fidelity to a truth: its vector, its unfolding, is indifferent to my personal experiences and inclinations. For communists, the process of truth has a body and that body is the party, in both its historical and formal sense. Already in *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou recognizes the necessity of a political body, the party as the “subject-support of all politics.”[66](about:blank) He writes:The party is the body of politics, in the strict sense. The fact that there is a body by no means guarantees that there is a subject … But for there to be a subject, for a subject to be found, there must be the support of a body.[67](about:blank) **As a figure of political belonging, the comrade is a faithful response to the evental rupture of crowds and movements, to the egalitarian discharge that erupts from the force of the many where they don’t belong, to the movement of the people as the subject of politics.**[**68**](about:blank) **Comrades demonstrate fidelity through political work; through concerted, disciplined engagement. Their practical political work extends the truth of the emancipatory egalitarian struggle of the oppressed into the world.** Amending Badiou (by drawing from his earlier work), we can say that the comrade is not a faithful subject but a political relation faithful to the divided people as the subject of emancipatory egalitarian politics.[69](about:blank) **For us to see the revolutionary people as the subject in the struggles of the oppressed, for their subject to be found, we must be comrades.** In *Ninotchka*, Nina Ivanova Yakushova can’t tell who her comrades are by looking at them. The party has told her who to look for, but she has to ask. After Iranoff identifies himself, Yakushova tells him her name and the name and position of the party comrade who authorized her visit. Iranoff introduces Buljanoff and Kopalski. Yakushova addresses each as comrade. But it’s not the address that makes them all comrades. They are comrades because they are members of the same party. **The party is the organized body of truth that mediates their relationship. This mediation makes clear what is expected of comrades—disciplined, faithful work.** Iranoff, Buljanoff, and Kopalski have not been doing the work expected of comrades, which is why Moscow sent Yakushova to oversee them in Paris. That Kopalski says they would have greeted her with flowers demonstrates their *embourgeoisment*, the degeneration of their sense of comradeship. But they are all there for work. Gendered identity and hierarchy don’t mediate relations between comrades. The practices of fidelity to a political truth, the work done toward building that truth in the world, do. The solidarity of comrades in political struggle arises out of the intertwining of truth, practice, and party. It’s not reducible to any of these alone. **Comrades are not simply those who believe in the same truth—as in, for example, the idea of communism. Their fidelity to a certain truth is manifested in practical work.** Work for the realization of a political truth brings people into comradely relation. **But carrying out similar tasks in fidelity to the same truth isn’t sufficient for comradeship. The work must be in common; no one is a comrade on their own. Practices of comradeship are coordinated, organized. The party is the organization out of which comradeship emerges and that comrade relations produce. It concentrates comradeship even as comradeship exceeds it.**

#### The aff’s discussions and concrete imagination of FALC are key to movement building in a new world in which activism and party politics are increasingly online – memes are a site for collective subjectivity, creating the concrete power necessary to stop capitalism, Hobson and Modi 19 –

“Socialist Imaginaries and Queer Futures: Memes as Sites of Collective Imagining” by Thomas Hobson and Kaajal Modi. In the book Post Memes edited by Alfie Brown and Dan Bristow. First published in 2019 by punctum books, Earth, Milky Way. <https://punctumbooks.com> doi:10.21983/P3.0255.1.00 pages 334 - 346

For the purposes of the present work, we are rather more in- terested in understanding how FALC has acted as a catalyst for memetic conceptualizations of not only labor value, but for so- cial transformation and the possibilities that technological ad- vances are increasingly affording us. Our intention is to uncover some of the ways in which **FALC has been captured by, and is continually re-invented and reproduced in, online memes**. And it is to this end that, in the paragraphs that follow, we make the claim that **online memes can be usefully** understood as **sites of intersubjective imagination—wherein communities can be united by certain shared socio-cultural or socio-technical vi- sions of what kinds of futures could, and indeed, should (or should not) be realized.** Contrary to the traditional liberal conceptualization of com- munism as rooted in misery, austerity, and predicated on su- perhuman forbearance free from excess or private desire, **FALC** (in spite of any conceptual limitations one may charge it with) **allows us the permission and the space to imagine the possi- bility of abundance**, of a future where the enforced privation of capitalism is overthrown in favor of a vision of communal living where the basic needs of food/water/housing/medicine are not only met but overcome, and where we can imagine new futures free from such prosaic concerns. **In opposition to** the **sparse utilitarianism suggested by dominant representations** of “the Eastern Bloc” or the scarcity and corruption prevalent in depictions of Latin American socialism, **it invokes an image of the future where emancipation is intrinsic to material satisfac- tion, rather than coming at the expense of it.** **Imagining the Impossible Thinking critically about culture memetically is not a new un- dertaking**. That scholars, artists, and theorists have been **dis- cussing the definition and significance** — indeed even the basic usefulness of the concept—**of** (what can broadly be described as) **memes for upward of half a century** now, is perhaps testa- ment to the persistence and attractiveness of them as both a tangible artefact and trope for analysis.9 Clearly though — as evidenced by the **prominence of online memes in contempo- rary discourse**, and by the variety of societal and political ends for which they are credited as the means — there must be at least something more to say on the subject. It is certainly to be hoped that this is the case, lest we have rather wasted our collective energies as contributors to this book. We expect, however, that there is little cause for concern on that front, with this volume prompting its readers to consider the politics of memes from a variety of fascinating perspec- tives. Here, we argue that, **in the image-saturated world of the early 21st century, the political is ever more inextricably linked to the production and sharing of iconic imagery and text**, and that — in light of this — **it is crucial that we develop critical theo- retical and pragmatic understandings of this evolving relation- ship and its substantive consequences**. From a more normative standpoint we, along with the other contributors to this volume, are **concerned with understanding how memes can be usefully deployed in the service of emancipatory, inclusive and progres- sive Left politics**. Our contribution to this effort is (hopefully) a rather straightforward one. We ask our readers to consider the relationship between memes and imagination. The **task facing those of us who aspire to a better world is, inherently, an imaginative one**. In seeing the world as it is, and **believing that a fairer, more just world is possible** — we, however faintly, look toward a future that we imagine to be desirable. The making and sharing of memes, we suggest, represents a site of imagination as a cultural and social practice—and therefore that **memes themselves are an important component of the evolving shared perceptions of the desirable or utopian futures that are fundamental to the project of emancipatory politics.** We argue that **political memes are sites of *collective* world building. In creating and/or sharing a political meme, we of- fer our visions of the future worlds we imagine to be possible or desirable. These visions are incredibly significant—shaping discourse, guiding action and uniting communities**. The chal- lenge, of course, is in usefully conceptualising this relationship between memes, shared imaginaries, and the social and mate- rial relations of a society. **Seizing the Memes of Production** Returning to the title of this volume, we argue that one valuable way forward in this endeavor is to begin considering the inter- connectivity between the *means* of production and the *memes* of production — and, somewhat turning this on its head, the ways in which the **production of memes can influence the produc- tion of means**. Our central thesis here rests on the following key arguments: Firstly, that ideas and imaginaries have a substantial impact upon material conditions and technological processes. Tech- nological and industrial advances don’t occur in isolation from social contexts, and are never just rational, scientific, necessary events on a linear trajectory of improvement. Instead, **technolo- gies are inherently social** — the types of technologies we create, the problems we try to solve, and the sorts of worlds we try to create with technology are all guided by our understandings of how the world is, how it has been, and how it ought to be. Similarly, despite the pervasiveness of claims very much to the contrary (made by liberals and conservatives the world over), the **material conditions of our societies and distributions of wealth are never representative of a linear progress narrative, and do not embody the rational and inevitable course of his- tory.** Rather, **they are always political** and always predicated on judgments about how the world is and ought to be, on what outcomes are desirable, and on who should be allowed to benefit from these desirable outcomes. Following from this, we argue that **online memes are sites where ideas are made and imaginations are explored, shared, and popularized**. When considering the pithy or even surrealist nature of some political memes, this may seem like something of a stretch (though even here we would argue that memes are an increasingly important component of political discourse) however, in our present study, **FALC** provides a clear example of how this can be the case. FALC memes, and indeed, political memes in general, even at their most abstracted or satirical, invoke **various ideas about how industry and society relate to one another** (specifically in regard to who should benefit from and govern their produc- tion), and, at least in the case of FALC, about how **a desirable, emancipatory, future can be realized through technology**. We would further argue that these ***memes of production***(that is, im- ages and text that capture and invoke a set of ideas about how social and industrial relations can be reorganized and emanci- pation realized through technology) can, and **should, be under- stood as important aspects of left-wing perceptions of how the** *means of production* can, and **should, be reorganized.** If **technologies are always embedded in and conditioned by ideas and shared understandings**, and the **means of production are increasingly dependent on the technological**, then **our ideas are capable of producing new means**—new relations between labor and technology and new sociotechnical systems for or- ganizing production and its benefits. **Our *memes of production* as important sites of political imagination** represent important opportunities to rethink our means of production. **Collective Imaginaries Leftist politics have always tended toward the proudly utopian**; **activism is**, after all, **the project of imagining better worlds, and collectively, endeavoring to realize them**. It is only **in recent years that these practices have**, by necessity, **become bogged down in the mundane realities of bureaucracy and capitalist productiv- ity**. This study is part recovery of that tendency towards action, and partly a new paradigm through which that action can be viewed. As a culture, we often celebrate the power and potential of the individual imagination — and with some justification — lauding especially those who promote, or appear to create, transforma- tive or radical visions of the future. Reflect for a moment on the celebrity status of (shamelessly self-promoting tech-bro poster boys) Elon Musk or Steve Jobs. Or, perhaps consider the instant attention garnered by Labour MP Liam Byrne’s (in our view, rather misguided) book *Dragons,* which recounts the con- tribution of innovative entrepreneurs to the making of modern Britain.10 **Imagination** though, is not just the preserve of the vision- ary, but also **operates intersubjectively**—**uniting members of a community in shared perceptions of futures which can**, and should (or shouldn’t) **be realized**.11 It is this — **the collective im- aginary** — that we are interested in exploring further in relation to political memes. The idea that collective imaginaries not only exist, but are important sociocultural forces, shaping (variously) identity, so- cial relations, desires and aspirations, and morality, has its roots in the philosophy of Émile Durkheim and Max Weber. Most notable in the history of thought on collective imaginaries are the works of Benedict Anderson,12 Charles Taylor,13 and Arjun Appadurai.14 Taylor, for example has defined his modern and social imaginaries as so: By **social imaginary**, I mean something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking, rather, of **the ways people imagine their social ex- istence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.15** This imaginary, for Taylor, **entails an array of common under- standings and practices based on a sense of what is real**, and rejects the idea that politics is determined solely by deliberate and rational actions. Perhaps more immediately resonant to the arguments in this chapter, is the following reflection on the im- agination, offered by Appadurai: **No longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is elsewhere),** **no longer simple escape** (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and struc- tures), no longer **elite pastime** (thus not relevant to the lives of ordinary people), and no longer **mere contemplation** (ir- relevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity), the **imagi- nation has become an organized field of social practices**, a form of work (both in the sense of labor and of culturally organized practice) and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (“individuals”) and globally defined fields of pos- sibility.16 Reading this, we can **begin to engage with imagination not only as the site in which action is conceptualized, but as the staging point for future possibility**. With relatively little effort toward reframing, we can apply some of these ideas on the imaginary to our earlier discussion of the ideational content and function of political memes. In doing so we start to gain some traction on not just the significance of shared imaginaries, but on how **we can understand memes as a site for their creation and propaga- tion. The imagination is a place for serious** (whether deliberate or not) **negotiation** (and consensus) on the possibility of societal and human conditions. Returning to memes, we see that they represent a locale in which these imaginaries are developed, shared, and have affect. **Dreamscapes of Modernity** Our own definition of imaginaries rests rather more closely on that offered by Sheila Jasanoff in the introduction to *Dream- scapes of Modernity.* Jasanoff ’s *sociotechnical* imaginaries engage more explicitly with two factors we are deeply concerned with in our discussion of **FALC and the potentiality of political memes for an emancipatory politics, those being: science and technolo- gy — which we argue is not only one of the most powerful guid- ing forces in global modernity, but is intrinsic to the utopian visions of FALC** (and of techno-positive leftism more generally) **and; the future** — which we argue is **inherent to creative work of striving for an emancipatory politics**, and is also implicated in the explicitly futuristic images invoked by FALC. Jasanoff **defines sociotechnical imaginaries as: “collectively held and performed visions of desirable futures** (or of resist- ance against the undesirable) **[that are] animated by shared understandings of forms of social life and social order at- tainable through, and supportive of, advances in science and technology**.”17 One could then, rather readily, **reconceptualize the FALC meme itself as a recognizable imaginary—with the making and sharing of memes representing the public perfor- mance of a collectively held vision.** The vision, of course, is **one wherein automation and technological advance facilitate a fu- ture of emancipatory politics** — and consequently the imaginary is **supportive of certain modes of technological advance and ad- vocates for certain reorganisations of industrial and economic relations.** While FALC memes **take many forms**, ranging from the naïve to the ludicrous to the vital and instructive—in each instance the cooperative, communal, and crucially, ***discursive* practice of imagination is taking place**. Whether understood through the semiotics of image macros, or through the production of shared understanding in discourse, we argue that **FALC memes invoke a communal set of ideas** (or at the very least a shared framework for thinking) **about how the world** as it currently is **may be reim- agined and re-ordered** toward emancipatory ends. For Jasanoff, **the imaginary is also necessarily culturally particular, and temporally situated**. This goes **some way to- wards helping conceptualize the ways that our visions of the future** — even (in fact especially) our utopian ones — are condi**- tioned by our experiences and, often, prejudices in the present.** Returning again to some of the earlier critiques of FALC that we touched upon, **understanding imaginaries as conditioned by, and reproductive of, contemporary judgements** of what and who is important, can help us get to grips with some of the ex- tant limitations of popular iterations of FALC — especially in re- lation to some of the issues we will discuss below. **Signs and Signifiers** Since 2014, memes relating to FALC have seemingly **appeared with ever-increasing frequency**. They are regularly posted in threads under (often apparently unrelated) posts about, vari- ously: technology, feminism, space, gender, race, sexuality, Marxism, and often all (or none) of the above. They have ap- peared across groups and collectives on Leftbook, left Twitter, Tumblr, and beyond, taking the forms of gifs and image macros. Frequently they evoke the classic Soviet constructivist iconog- raphy of revolutionary leftist politics, and of the (perhaps un- surprisingly) similar off-planet science fiction or abstract uto- pias. In practice, the **memes are often collaborative and evolve continually in-situ, being overlaid with, or accompanied by, in- creasingly detailed or often esoteric text threads**. While we have argued above in favor of understanding memes as *imaginaries*—framing their production and shar- ing as a practice of collective imagination, we turn here to the work of Stuart Hall — whose **insight into culture, discourse, and materiality is instructive in getting to grips with how political memes can embody, communicate, and produce understand- ings and ideas**. When considered through Hall’s theory of en- coding/decoding, **memes**, like any other media, and like Ap- padurai’s imagination, **are discursive**, in that they **contain both symbolic and material potentiality** that is only **realized in mo- ments of interpretation or negotiation between the meme space and the viewer**. In fact, unlike traditional media, they **go one step further**, as they are **encoded by one audience, as it were, in one symbolic context, and decoded in another context by an- other** audience. While new media theorists often find this a use- ful stepping-off to start to think in terms of “affordances,” let’s stay here a moment and consider what this means. It means that there is no “wrong” way to meme, in the same way that there is no “wrong” way to consume any other me- dia. **Seeming “user errors” are absorbed into the fabric of the practice of meme-ing, and spawn their own semiotic offshoots**. If you decide that your utopia has automated cats, for exam- ple, then automated cats are immediately incorporated into the visual language of that discourse (robot cats in space, robot cats with laserbeam eyes, robot cats that resemble Vladimir Lenin standing proudly in front of a Soviet sunrise in full Soviet uni- form, etc). That a great deal of this interaction is consciously humorous or even deliberately ridiculous shouldn’t discount them from being taken seriously on the terms laid out above. **Satire**, even the involuntary kind, **is a valid critique**, and intention does not necessarily undermine the impact of situated cultural forms. In fact, it is this irreverence, and seemingly deliberate postmod- ernism, which is itself an intrinsic part of meme culture; it is persistently and (often unconsciously) anarchic in its lack of reverence for any traditions whilst at the same time **borrowing heavily from revolutionary**, particularly soviet/communist, **ide- as** and symbology. It is this dichotomy that **allows it to occupy a space that is at once meaning-making and subversive, and at the same time representative of wider socio-cultural tendencies**. To paraphrase Hall, the **individual memer is always living some larger socio-cultural narrative**, whether they like it or not. 18 **Queering the Problem Space** While an in-depth tracing of the FALC meme and its various offshoots falls outside of the scope of this work, it is here that a reading of one of its more persistent offshoots is particularly illustrative as an example of the manner in which meme-ing can act as a space for intersubjective, dialectical, and discursive future-making among online collectivities. This section examines the Fully Automated Luxury Gay (or Queer) Space Communist (FALGSC) society, reading it as an im- aginary space that acts to queer the classic FALC meme (both literally and figuratively speaking). According to *Know Your Meme,* FALGSC envisions an idealistic society where gender norms have been abolished to such an extent that there is little to no difference between gay and straight, and due to automation, luxury is available to all people[.] The term has inspired the creation of communism-themed memes and image macros.19 For those readers unfamiliar with queer theory, it is important here to note that “queering” is not necessarily just a process that explicitly reads a text through the binary of the homosexual and heterosexual (although it is that), but is instead a heuristic that acts to dismantle “the dynamics of power and privilege persist- ing among diverse subjectivities.”20 Queer Studies is a critical po- sition rather than a sexual one; queer can mean “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps [...] and excesses of meaning.”21 “Queer gets a critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual.”22 Queering is an act that can be performed.23 When read through this paradigm, **FALGSC becomes an in- joke, a meta-reference, a wink and a nod to those of us in the know about FALC**, and about the current rift in the left between traditional Marxism and the new identity politics. These latter post-Marxist formulations of society, culture, and gender, that seek to be more inclusive of non-hegemonic and marginalized experiences and understandings of the world, therefore **require an envisioning of futures that can encompass difference**. These memes are ridiculous, and they are gay as hell. They incorporate the semiotics of queerness while at the same time, both in its literal and academic definitions, “queering” the tradi- tional forms of communist futuring. **If FALC is the neo-capitalist faux socialist utopianism of *Star Trek,* FALGSC is the post-scarci- ty civilisation of Iain M Banks’s “the Culture,” wherein sentient post-gender pan-humans and artificial intelligences co-exist in an automated interstellar collection of societies that has no dis- cernable end.** Returning, briefly, to our earlier discussion of memes as *im- aginaries,* the divergent futures described above illustrate the constitutive effect of how we understand the present—our ex- periences, prejudices, and priorities—on the futures we strive to create. If we don’t understand gender and sexual equality to be issues worth fighting for in the present, are we likely to make room for them in our imaginaries — even utopian ones — of the future? **Memes as Sites of Political Contestation Online fora are increasingly the battlegrounds on which politi- cal battles are fought, and if not where hearts and minds won exactly, then at least where they can be exposed to alternative political ideas**, causes, and crusades. They are a **rich recruiting ground for previously antithetical or apolitical young people** who might feel disenfranchised by the established politics of our time. One doesn’t have to look far to see examples of online political movements on both the right and the left that spread through their memetic conceptualizations; **the more shareable the better**. From ISIS and InCel to Bernie Bros and Corbynma- nia, to the rise of Trump and the new British nationalism via the terrifyingly (and apparently insidiously) shareable content of Britain First. Successful memes transcend echo chambers; they overspill. **We’ve all come across memes that expose us to new ideas in a manner that is pithy, funny, or particularly striking, and we are all more likely to share something that makes us pause to think, and/or laugh** (preferably both). One of the most notable things about memes, particularly image macros, is that **they do not display a particularly refined design aesthetic; and that might in fact constitute a large part of their power**. Those of us in the global minority tend to live in highly sophisticated visual socie- ties, and to cultures overloaded by slick advertising tropes and hyper-real soft focus filters, an **inexpertly made image can often seem like the last authentic voice in a sea of artificiality**. The **self-replicating and somewhat simplistic nature of the meme lends itself well to utopianism — and to the production of shared meanings. They are accessible**, and they are **democratic** (in that anyone can make or share them). This is **political propa- ganda, for the people, by the people**. It is writ small, but it is **infinitely modular, replicable, scalable, and modifiable**. One can imagine worlds in these creations, and indeed the **democratic format of the standard image macro is one of its most compel- ling and, indeed, sustaining features**. If memes are the basic units of cultural (re)production, then **FALC and its offshoots are both an evolving dialectic and a representation of the current state of the (online) left.**

#### And, space optimism is key to resisting capitalism – it goes against dominant capitalist narratives and enables a unified social movement against capitalism, Levin 2021,

Annie Levin, 16 Aug 2021, <https://christiansocialism.com/space-travel-capitalism-communism-fully-automated-luxury-dsa/> // LHP AB

Far from a romantic hero, Damon sounds like he’s giving a TED Talk. “You solve enough problems, and you get to come home.” Just another day on the job. The fact that contemporary filmmakers choose to display space travel as a banal fight for survival against an alienating, murderous void is telling. **Space exploration, we are told, is a miserable job that someone must do. In the end, our celestial adventurers merely pave the way for billionaires to take to the stars**. **Life in space is miserable and it might kill you. In this way, it is not so unlike your job: your survival depends on your ability to rein in your humanity and plod obediently along.** **When it comes to celestial exploration, our space epics reflect an ethos of capitalist pessimism**. Instead of reaching out to the universe from a place of scientific inquiry, the wealthy look to flee a planet they have stripped of resources, leaving the rest of us to scrounge off our scorched, starving world.  **LIFE** in space was equally dangerous, impractical, and dull in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet, in the golden age of Apollo and Sputnik, mainstream science fiction wasn’t interested in these bleak technological realities. Instead of *Gravity* and *The Martian*, we got *Doctor Who* and *Barbarella*. These are cultural products that deal in fantasy, aspirations, and philosophy—not merely survival. Part of this difference is technological: it is easier now to realistically depict space travel on film than it was a generation ago. We have life-like CGI animation, LED technology that can recreate the light of celestial bodies in orbit, and robots to mimic anti-gravity effects. But the transformation of space imaginaries also reflects historical shifts in the decades since the first moonwalk. **As neoliberalism ascended in the 1970s, wages were depressed while the cost of living soared. The postwar middle class declined and jobs became frequently at-will and precarious. The gig economy has created a lot more fear and anxiety for Hollywood to stoke—or sublimate—in its mass media creations. Under neoliberalism, precarity reigns, and ultra-real contemporary space films feed upon our ubiquitous feelings of instability. They encourage the viewer to feel afraid, isolated, and unmoored, offering little in the way of psychic release.**  **Many films set in outer space today aren’t interested in dreams or profound moral questions**. They don’t philosophize about our purpose in the universe. They deal in hard science and grim physical realities. **Space is now depicted as a place best left to the experts and the rich men who fund their exploits. Hollywood encourages the rest of us to remain apathetic. We are asked to turn our backs on the cosmos as a place where our imaginations can run wild.  We live in an era of space pessimism. But our space-obsessed** millennial socialists aren’t drawing inspiration from SpaceX or Bezos’s rocket. Instead, they hail from a different tradition of thinking about the cosmos, one that is manifest in “soft” or psychological science fiction that gives freer rein to the imagination**.** These are works that are as interested in what we do when we arrive on other planets as they are in what technology we use to propel ourselves there. In *Out of the Silent Planet*, the first volume of C.S. Lewis’s *Space Trilogy* published in 1938*,* the narrator, Elwin Ransom, is abducted and transported to a spaceship. While gazing out at the celestial bodies from the ship, he reflects on the differences between what he had been told of space and the reality he experiences while traversing the stars: *"He had read of 'Space’: at the back of his thinking for years had lurked the dismal fancy of the black, cold vacuity, the utter deadness, which was supposed to separate the worlds. He had not known how much it affected him till now—now that the very name 'Space' seemed a blasphemous libel for this empyrean ocean of radiance in which they swam. He could not call it 'dead’; he felt life pouring into him from it every moment. How indeed should it be otherwise, since out of this ocean the worlds and all their life had come? He had thought it barren: he saw now that it was the womb of worlds, whose blazing and innumerable offspring looked down nightly even upon the earth with so many eyes—and here, with how many more! No: space was the wrong name. Older thinkers had been wiser when they named it simply the heavens—* Lewis’s “empyrean ocean of radiance” is doubtlessly beautiful because it accords with our felt experience of the galaxy. It’s hard to reconcile the sublimity of a starry night with the harsh realities of space. Lewis doesn’t even try to. He had theological reasons for framing the galaxy in the language of poetry. In his *Space Trilogy,* Lewis attempts to win back the cosmos for Christianity and to win it back from the cold grip of atheistic “hard” science fiction authors. His trilogy reflects theological values instead of scientific facts—an allegorical fantasy that just so happens to take place in the Solar System. In Lewis’s fantasy, the vastness of space is full. There is no void. God envelopes every star. Elwin Ransom journeys from planet to planet with ease, as though he were traveling from one idea to the next in his mind. Technology doesn’t come into it much; instead, a divine wind is at his sails. This same frictionless space travel can be found in utopian science fiction, the most notable and mainstream of which is the *Star Trek* franchise. The Starfleet officers aboard the Starship Enterprise travel unimaginable distances in the blink of an eye. They visit planets, deftly picking their way through moral quandaries at which they are mostly at the center.In Lewis’s books, it is humanity’s fallen state and the impoverished “science” that we use to understand the universe that prevents us from experiencing the “heavens” as Elwin Ransom does on his trips through the “womb of worlds**.” In the *Star Trek* universe, however, humanity has risen above its fallen state. It has solved its earthly problems and given birth to a utopian era of post-scarcity and space exploration. On*Star Trek,* anyone who wishes to can float through the “womb of worlds” in great comfort, as Elwin Ransom does. Anyone can become an epic hero on a quest across the galaxies.** Whether religious or not, s**pace utopianism looks at space as a human apotheosis: a promised land within reach once we have achieved harmony with one another and with our planet. The billionaire space race creates apathy about space exploration because it sullies the cosmos with the worst of ourselves. The galaxy, the ultimate metaphor for divinity and transcendence, becomes yet another exploitable thing to be fought over by capitalists. IT is a difficult time to be a space optimist. At the moment, we seem to be sullying our solar system with our small, cruel, pitiable human failings.** Space pessimism is ascendant. **Our Elon Musks make phony, cynical speeches about colonizing Mars while Earth gets hotter and more inhospitable by the year.** In the *Star Trek* universe, by the twenty-fourth century, human beings have been traversing the stars and meeting alien species for centuries already. **But right now, it’s hard to imagine our own species even lasting to the twenty-fourth century. Optimistic alternative narratives are scarce. Dystopian fiction overwhelmingly dominates** in novels and films. **Black pilled hopelessness on the future of humanity is all the rage. Having millions of people accept as inevitable this grim view of the future is a boon to the capitalists who wish to continue ravaging the planet until our biosphere is rendered unlivable.  Raising expectations and creating hope is among the hardest jobs for organizers and activists trying to win progressive policy changes.** Plenty of people liked Bernie Sanders but not enough of them thought that true progressive change was possible to go out and vote for him in the primary. **This hopelessness is encouraged by our elected politicians, who falsely claim that programs like Medicare for All and a Green New Deal are unaffordable, but have no trouble giving away trillions to bail out failing Wall Street banks.**  **Meanwhile, as Nancy Pelosi and other conservative Democrats shame younger generations for their “Green dream,”** and for demanding anything that the stale neoliberals in power have determined to be an unnecessary extravagance, **younger socialists respond by demanding even more. The only half-joking calls for “fully automated luxury gay space communism” are meant as a slap in the face to Third Way Democrats. The phrase lays bare the future we are being denied so that private enterprise, in partnership with imperial forces, can pillage the planet as it drives all species to extinction.  Space utopias are the opposite of the neoliberal austerity economy**. The world of *Star Trek* has overcome scarcity. Work is unnecessary. **Money does not exist and no one goes hungry or houseless. It is an ideal world in which, freed from the brute necessities** **of capitalism, everyone works collectively towards the common good.** For some of us, *Star Trek* is intrinsic to the way we think about building a better world. Many of the socialists who came to the left through Bernie Sanders did not grow up with a lot of left-wing texts on hand, but we did have *Star Trek*.That so many of us were brought up thinking of a wildly popular TV show when we think of a socialist society is nothing short of a miracle. **While being served anti-communist propaganda in school, we binged at home on a show set in a post-scarcity socialist universe. Like so much of pop culture, its lessons stuck far more than those learned in the classroom.** And no wonder. **Not only is the *Star Trek*universe magical and inventive, it is a political utopia to yearn for in the face of devastated futures.**At a DSA Halloween party, I attended in 2018, we were asked to come dressed as our favorite revolutionaries. Many comrades wore *Star Trek* uniforms. **As interstellar therapy, space utopias like *Star Trek* bring an element of whimsy and lyricism into movement culture.** **They set our sights on hope in a hopeless time by showing us the story of who we can become. As socialist art, *Star Trek* is useful. It is one of the myths that help keep the still small, fragile, and often fractious, socialist movement working together.** In 2018, at the citywide convention for the New York City Chapter of Democratic Socialists of America, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez accepted DSA’s endorsement for her first congressional primary. She also talked a lot about *Star Trek*. The show, she said, was one of the most socially revolutionary programs on TV. Of the writers of *Star Trek*, she said:*"When they think of a society that is intellectually, technologically and ethically advanced—a just society—no one goes hungry in that society, no one goes sick or homeless from lack of resources. And while that world may have been science fiction, the story was real, and the show was real. That value conveyed a powerful message: that ethical advanced societies are not just wealthy, they are good. That is what we are here to establish. That is what brings us here together: the pursuit of a good society, not just a rich society. We come here together to advance the notion that the number one goal of an individual is not how many zeros are in one’s bank account, but how many people are housed, how many people are fed, how much opportunity every American has to pursue what they can do, to pursue self-realization."* She received a standing ovation. Among her other outstanding qualities as a politician, here was a candidate for congress who talked about*Star Trek*as though it were the holy text that had set her on the path of righteousness. She was clearly cadre.This speech was so inspirational in part because it was a speech by a socialist that described how things could be and not just how they are. **Leftists too often ignore the psyche’s need to have a vision in mind of something to look forward to. Because of the longstanding Marxist tendency to denounce utopias as counterrevolutionary, we are often spiritually bereft.** **But to always be fighting against the capitalist forces that want to kill us, to always be considering the struggle and never our collective future, saps our movement of energy. It leaves organizers with too little to look forward to. Ultimately, it surrenders to the void of hopelessness that hegemonic capitalism works so hard to suck us into. In our painfully atomized era, space communism might just be the spiritual touchstone young activists need. It shows us a vision of how we will spend our time when we no longer have to worry about survival.** My friend and fellow DSA member, Alexandra Holmstrom-Smith, was raised by socialists in a secular household and bemoaned the lack of socialist holidays and rituals growing up. As an adult, she decided to invent some rituals of her own. Her group, Society for the Red Cosmos, holds yearly gatherings around Halloween and May Day. On one holiday, her “May Day Eve Seder,” Society for the Red Cosmos gathers to eat a ritual dinner that tells the story of the struggle of the working classes to achieve socialism. Songs are sung and poetry is read. At the end of the evening, participants gather outside, under the stars, and read the following affirmation,*“Today we suffer under the yoke of capital, alienated from our labor and from each other. We seek freedom, but the path will be painful and hard. We take comfort from one another and from our commitment to a better world, and the many worlds to come. We hope for a long, joyous future for humanity, thriving on Earth and on other worlds far off in space and time. We look to a world where the struggle for liberation may continue, and where people may thrive. Tomorrow we will be in the streets, next year in the stars.”***The abiding philosophy of space communism is optimism: we will build a better world and then head for the stars. Its prefigurative vision allows us to demand more, even as our material conditions worsen. We will go to space; we will terraform planets; we will reach across the stars millennia from now and greet alien species—that’s our future. Medicare for all, housing for all, and an end to imperialist war games—that’s what’s next. We are going to space, but not until we fulfill our destiny right here on Earth.**