

Things, Bodies, and Binaries: A Radical Materialist Reconceptualization of Human Exceptionalism, Neocolonialism, and the Patriarchy

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From *Sorry To Bother You*, dir. Boots Riley, 2018

Our modern societies are in dire need of an imaginative refabrication of our shared futures. Why have political revolutions in the Western historical canon failed to cultivate large-scale and transformative social change? The methods through which this future is envisioned must necessarily also be imaginative—perhaps the answer lies not within further historical analysis of the movements themselves, but instead in a materialist analysis of the media through which we as consumers construct our identities. Here I wield radical materialism¹ as an interrogation of a Subject and its Stuff, a relation that bears great relevance to cultural analysis of our Western consumer societies. I pair the short story *Turning* (Sexson, 1980) with the feature length film *Sorry to Bother You* (dir. Riley, 2018) as two surreal narrative texts that explicate the linkages between violent ideologies of the patriarchy, human exceptionalism, and Western supremacy. An explication that happens *not* through symbolisms but through the literal implications of things within a scene as signals. Objects point towards international hierarchies

¹ Boscagli, Maurizia. *Stuff Theory: Everyday Objects, Radical Materialism*. Bloomsbury, 2014.

of neocolonialism which are then associated with the literal and figurative violence inflicted upon the masculine and feminine body. These violences are symbiotic cultivations of non-imaginative futures that necessarily leave no space for non-binary conceptions of self or planet. Object-centered analysis itself decenters the human, challenging doctrines of human exceptionalism with an emphasis on the international implications of commodity cultures and rampant consumerism. It is clear that transformative change can only occur through an interrogation not of the anthropocene, itself a term that creates a false distance between the human subject and the natural world, but of the *capitalocene*². That is, the ways in which capitalism, not just as an economic framework but as a way of creating identity and organizing relations through the architecture of binary thought, necessitates the subjugation and decentering of the natural world. The linkages between the patriarchy, human exceptionalism, and neocolonialism, illustrated through the literal implications of objects within a scene, infers a sameness between these violences which moves beyond basic conceptions of identities and institutions as intersectional. Transformative change can only happen through a radical and imaginative understanding of these violent ideologies as the same—starting from the same place, the capitalist binary, and ending in the same place as well. Any dismantling of one *necessitates* a dismantling of the other at the exact same time.

Analysis of the fable within the short story *Turning* illustrates how these linkages are revealed through the things in a scene. Human and animal bodies become objects as objects are given life, complicating and blurring the hierarchical binary between the two. The body has become a commodity—or, as revealed in *Sorry to Bother You*, a tool—in our late-stage capitalist world where the worker is alienated not only from the means of production but also from themselves³. This divorce of being from the body parallels the multitude of ways in which real people, especially those of color or those that present as queer or feminine, are dehumanized and reduced into parts, a clear link between patriarchal values of body objectification and capitalist values of productivity and efficiency in the workplace. Patriarchal values are also prescribed onto the masculinized body, congealed here into the institution of marriage which is coded as inherently heteronormative and nuclear. The young main character, Robert, is visited by three old women on his birthday who come bearing gifts and a fantastical story about a king who stages a competition to find a woman to marry. The surreal elements in this fable reveal how the body is, not symbolically but literally, an object that exists in relation to other objects. Robert's conversations with the three women illustrate how institutions themselves become objects through which the young human subject is able to cultivate and shape an identity that mimics intergenerational consonance with familial and societal values.

The fable that Robert's visitors tell reveals how the body-as-object contains within it multiple layers of capitalist implication. In the story, a skinless king considers himself a

² Moore, Jason W. *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*. PM, 2016.

³ Marx, Karl. *Karl Marx's Writings on Alienation: Critiquing Capitalism*. Edited by Marcello Musto, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.

riddle—any female suitor who could find him a skin would then become his wife. Sexson describes the king as looking like “ivory carvings and cream colored satin cushions all laced together with fine red and blue threads” (101). Expected muscle, blood, and bone are all replaced by materials with layers of colonial violence, both in the Western supremacist sense as well as in the human exceptionalist. That is, just as ivory and satin are imperial products traditionally imported from non-Western countries for their aesthetic and social value, they are also products that necessitate the death of the animals who produce them. The Animal then figuratively becomes the Global South, exploited and stripped of life by Western imperial powers in exchange for the promise of capital. Simultaneously, the Animal becomes the global working class, entirely alienated not only from the products that they create but also from their own sentient autonomy. Illusory transactional relationships, here consolidated into the innocuous interface of birthday gift-giving, obscures the real labor and death that goes into the creation of commodities and the materials from which they are made.

Now the connections between Western imperialism and human exceptionalism are made clear—humankind’s relationship to the Animal is inextricably and perpetually linked with our imperial-colonial relationship to countries in the Global South. The fallacy of human exceptionalism *must* be analyzed and dismantled in our Western academic canon with the same fervor and rigor as colonialism and international classism because the relationship of the Worker to the Employer mimics the relationship of the Animal to the Human. The king has become a fantastical object which reveals the international implications of commodifying human and animal bodies as fuel for our Western object culture.

Even if Robert isn’t aware of it yet, objects are integral to our constructions of personal and collective identity. The term *object culture*⁴ refers to the ways in which our societies become materialized into and constituted by certain significant commodities. Our societies are created at the interface of the person and the object: the things that we surround ourselves with serve functional purposes as they simultaneously act as signals of modernity and civilization. Culture and society itself, especially in this age of perpetual advertisement and social media virality, becomes centered not just around the consumption of commodities but also the consumption of people, places, and experiences as objects themselves.

The blame lies not with Robert, however—rather than due to some sort of childlike drive to cultivate personality, I argue that Robert is commanded by our global hierarchies and object cultures to view all interfaces between worlds (human, object, more-than-human) as opportunities to establish and assert identity. As Bill Brown writes in “Objects, Others, and Us (The Refabrication of Things),” “human subjects depend on objects to establish their sense of identity” (192). Here, identity creation must necessarily be recognized as an intrinsic capitalist drive linked deeply with our media depictions of the masculinized subject as hero. The audience identifies with the main character, establishing an uncanny omnipotence as the audience member

⁴ In this context quoted from Bill Brown, “Objects, Others, and Us (The Refabrication of Things).” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2010, pp. 183–217 but originating from Simmel, Georg, and Kurt H. Wolff. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. The Free Press. London: Collier- Macmillan, 1967.

becomes somehow simultaneously distanced and undistanced from the narrative. Characters in stories become objects that the viewer either identifies with or desires,⁵ which is not always unproductive as it allows the viewer to reflexively analyze their own life and society. Each interface between audience and media itself becomes an opportunity for teaching and learning rather than for genuine connection. This centering of the consumption of commodities, people, and media as passive and inert objects is linked closely with doctrines of human exceptionalism as capitalist success. Underestimation of the pervasive power of the Object and the inherently didactic nature of all stories is what perpetuates these linked ideologies of violence. As the object defines and commands, so has it already defined and commanded: hereby creating a recursive feedback loop that feigns an intergenerational consonance of social and moral values through a shared experience of consumption.

Commodification of the body implicates the individual consumer in the neocolonial violence that defines our international habitus. Brown puts forth the term “*metaobject*”⁶ to describe “the work of art, say, that isn’t satisfied with being just an object and seems to insist instead on taking other objects or object culture as its object of address” (192). The cinema narrative becomes an object through which the audience member constitutes their identity. The fable within *Turning* is simultaneously an object through which Robert’s visitors nurture his identity creation. The true *metaobject* here, however, is not the narrative itself, but is instead the body that is made literally into an object. Bodies are commodified as things that exist only in relation to other things—we treat them only as items to refurbish, advertise, and sell in the marketplace of physical desirability⁷. This commodification is made visible in the king’s body, the principal *metaobject*, linking hierarchies of colonialism with those of human exceptionalism as the animal workers signaled towards are abstracted into the products that they give their lives to create. The body as a *metaobject* suggests the ephemeral nature of hierarchies of social dominance, legitimizing the plausibility of collective transformative change in our modern era as the immutable and non-mortal Object is reconciled with the body’s instinctual drive to transform and decay. This is a breach of the perceived distance between the individual consumer and the collective as global hierarchies of Western supremacy are inscribed onto the body itself. The body both signifies and becomes the thing through which our Western consumer culture is constituted. We must cultivate awareness of the agency that we have inside of our own bodies, even as they become commodities so that we can collectively recognize the truly mutable nature of our modern establishment.

⁵ Paraphrased from Mulvey, Laura. *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. 1989 which itself is a response to Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theories of identification (in relation to parents for instance) and its link to sexual desire

⁶ In Computer Science, a metaobject is a variable, data structure, or function that manipulates, describes, or executes objects (including itself). This is an example of *reflection* where an operating system has access to its own code and is able to alter itself as it runs.

⁷ Tokumitsu, Miya. “Tell Me It’s Going to Be OK: Self-Care and Social Retreat under Neoliberalism.” *The Baffler*, no. 41, 2018, pp. 6–11. JSTOR. And read THE CRUNK FEMINIST COLLECTIVE. “Self-Care Is Crunk.” *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2019*, edited by Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein, University of Minnesota Press, 2019, pp. 442–44. JSTOR for a radical reformulation of the concept.

Turning reifies ideologies of heteronormativity through the characterization of the institution of marriage as necessary and expected for the masculinized subject. Robert's visitors ask him what the moral of the fable is, and he answers that "animals have good skins and that people would like tails" (102), in part dismantling notions of human exceptionalism through a viewing of the human and more-than-human worlds as without boundary. However, Robert has already been coded by our Western object culture to view beings in terms of their use-values—he can only articulate this desire to break down the binary through a continued objectification of the animal body in terms of its parts. His dismantling is rooted in a capitalist ethos of desire where appreciation becomes synonymous with appropriation. Desire is never pure and is instead always a desire to possess, to own⁸. In this way, Robert himself becomes a *metaobject* that creates objects out of other beings by contextualizing them in relation to himself. It is through this failure to break down the commodifying boundaries between human and animal that the revolutionary linkage between human exceptionalism, neocolonialism, and, as will be further explored, patriarchal institutions is made visible.

His visitors are not satisfied with this moral and they ask him to try again. For his second attempt, he says that the king did not have skin so that "he could look at himself before he got married to a princess" (103). Male introspection before partnership is championed, ostensibly subverting traditional models of masculinity as emotionally-stunted, thereby cultivating a new generation of sensitive and kindhearted men. Counterintuitively, however, this lesson becomes associated with the patriarchy through the heteronormative institution of marriage. The languaging of partner as "princess" is significant as it further subjectifies the masculine through conflating the feminine body with the social role that it signals. The king becomes "him" but the "princess" is always still a princess, relegated syntactically to the final placement of the object, infinitely replaceable, a body without being defined only in terms of its use-value. In this way it becomes clear how male introspection exists not in service of any individual but only to perpetuate the institution of heteronormative marriage. That is, a man does not need to be self-aware or sensitive enough to maintain a healthy relationship with his partner, only just enough to ensnare an unsuspecting woman in the first place.

The fable is defined through its pervasive heteronormativity. As Martin and Kazyak write in "Hetero-Romantic Love and Heterosexiness...", "heteronormativity works to define more than just normative sexuality, insofar as it also defines normative ways of life in general" (317). Heteronormativity privileges a certain class of heterosexual person that is married, monogamous, and procreative (read: the king), illustrating how male self-improvement is only considered legitimate if it contributes to the larger social framework of the nuclear family. Conceptions of the king as the successful heteronormative subject then links heteronormativity with aforementioned hierarchies of neocolonialism and human exceptionalism. Marriage itself becomes a commodity through which one can increase their use-value in capitalist society. Once a man is ready (has successfully introspected) he must get married, with only his partner's

⁸ McGown, Todd. *Capitalism and Desire: The Psychic Cost of Free Markets*. Columbia Univ Press. 2023.

gendered body, not their personality, bearing any relevance to the success of their relationship. Procreation then also becomes linked with identity-creation for young boys and those with masculine-coded bodies—happiness and self-fulfillment can only come from and at the same time be in service of one’s children and the family system. The fable, despite its heteronormative overtones, is necessarily desexualized for the benefit of young Robert, further illustrating how heteronormativity in media defines not only sexual relationships but also normative life in general.

The rejection of Robert’s initial moral in lieu of his second one is significant as it places multispecies analysis in symbolic opposition with heteronormativity. Any break from hierarchies of human exceptionalism, even breaks still deeply entrenched in our Western consumer culture, necessarily threaten the patriarchal structures of our societies. In this way, human exceptionalism and Western imperialism are linked inextricably with the patriarchy as simultaneous and symbiotic methods of oppression through the binary. This linkage is made visible through materialist analysis of the king’s body as object then *metaobject* and his placement within the narrative as the paragoned heteronormative subject. Robert, with his simultaneous placement as the subject, also becomes the masculinized *metaobject* through which beings and institutions are filtered—that is, all of society now exists in relation to Robert, leaving him with a false sense of omnipotence and self-sovereignty. All interfaces become interfaces between Human and Object, resulting in a complete dehumanization of the Other and a complete lack of compassion for the Self. It is through materialist analysis of the body as a coded object that the synchronous violences inflicted upon the Animal, the Man, and the Body through hierarchical binaries are made visible.

Sorry To Bother You (dir. Boots Riley, 2018) explores the idea of enacting transformative social change through the dual lenses of labor organization and art as activism. Set in Oakland, Cassius Green, the protagonist, gets promoted as a telemarketer at global conglomerate WorryFree because of the sales that he gets from using his “white voice.” He achieves economic success which alienates him from his coworkers who are protesting and organizing in support of a telemarketer’s union. Social change through labor organization is linked with the human to hybrid transformations that occur in the latter half of the movie; the horse-human people (equisapiens) are offered up to the audience as the true harbingers of transformative change. However, the objectification of their hyper-masculinized bodies and the subjugation of the feminine body into a spectacle that exists merely as a foil to the hypermasculinized subject (read: Detroit, Green’s partner) reveals how patriarchal values perpetuate even through and beyond class justice. Detroit is sidelined as a revolutionary despite her consistent and genuinely transformative activism throughout the film *not* as a critique of so-called “fake wokeness” in liberal and progressive circles centered around art and aesthetics, but instead because of the gendered role that she is forced to play. Materialist analysis of her performance art exhibition reveals once again the linkages between binary hierarchies of the patriarchy, neocolonialism, and human exceptionalism. The objects that the audience throws at her contain literal colonial implication while also crystallizing the invisible violence of the male gaze. This scene is the true

moment of revolutionary thought inside of this film, *not* the human to hybrid transformations or the scenes of violent protest with which it culminates.

Sorry To Bother You makes visible the suffocating corporate hierarchies that define working class life while also presenting those active in the struggle for workers' rights and sovereignty. Herbert Marcuse writes in *The Aesthetic Dimension* that "a work of art can be called revolutionary if, by virtue of the aesthetic transformation, it represents, in the exemplary fate of individuals, the prevailing unfreedom and the rebelling forces" (xi). This quote becomes doubly pertinent to my argument as the "aesthetic transformation" that Marcuse outlines—here referring to how exaggerated difference in art illuminates obscured aspects of real institutions—becomes a referent to the literal transformations that the *equisapiens* undergo.

Here then, their transformations *are* inherently revolutionary because their bodies simultaneously represent the torturous consequences of late-stage corporate capitalism as they do the counter-hegemonic potential for resistance against and liberation from that system. Within their body is encapsulated both the "prevailing unfreedom" as well as the "rebelling forces," placing them in an interesting position in regards to the larger themes of the film—their mere existence suggests revolution, whether they consent to this re-tooling or not. Detroit undergoes no similar retooling due to her un-masculinized body (here note femininity coded as a masculine lack); with her acts of resistance derided and sneered at, within her body is encapsulated *only* the "prevailing unfreedom" of our patriarchal society with none of the masculinized potential for so-called genuine rebellion.

The final scene of the movie bears major significance to analysis of the *equisapien's* revolutionary potential—after his transformation, Green is shown through security camera footage breaking into the CEO of WorryFree's house. Is interpersonal violence really the answer to what are clearly systemic issues? And how does this legitimized version of resistance break down interlocking hierarchies of western supremacy, misogyny, and human exceptionalism? Violence cannot be solved through violence; what we require now is an imaginative refabrication of our coexistent futures, a revolutionary *linkage* of visible and invisible hierarchies at all scales.

Marcuse explores the final scene aptly—the ending of *Sorry to Bother You* is not happy or resolved because "If art were to promise that at the end good would triumph over evil, such a promise would be refuted by the historical truth. In reality it is evil which triumphs, and there are only islands of good where one can find refuge for a brief time" (47). Detroit and Green are already made into the failed revolutionary, but now the *equisapiens*, both the promise of and appearance of revolution, must become the imperfect revolutionary. To present them otherwise would be a fantasy divorced from its fantastical elements, in other words: an illusion, a farce that would obfuscate any semblance of cultural analysis. Attacking the CEO of WorryFree may not necessarily be a revolutionary act in and of itself, but it is an act of imperfect activism that encourages the audience to interrogate their relationships with the real hierarchies in their own lives. Marcuse argues that revolutionary art cannot be expected to neatly solve such nuanced and institutional issues as global poverty or class inequality—its role lies merely in the signaling

towards, in the illumination of. Media is merely the impetus for change—all real work must necessarily be done after reality resumes.

Equisapien bodies are reduced to parts at the same time as they are exalted as more-than-the-sum-of, both by the corporation that created them as well as by the revolutionaries that wish to use them. Their physical freedom is closely linked with their assistance in the final protest, just as Detroit is defined throughout the movie by her foiling of Green. This suggests that “unfreedom” prevails even in and through revolution in the form of body objectification, female subjugation, and the transactionalization of interpersonal relationships.

The objectification of the equisapien body with its hypermasculinized features mimics the way in which real bodies, especially those of color or that present as feminine (read: Detroit) are fetishized as parts-with-functions rather than as whole beings. The equisapien body is reduced to and defined by its increased lean muscle mass, enlarged biceps, chests, abs, and penis. Their exaggerated strength encompasses both their potential for increased productivity in the workplace as well as their potential to cultivate tangible socioeconomic change through violent resistance. This strength is then linked with masculine virility and socially-constructed notions of physical desirability through the emphasis placed on the enlarged penis as a principal marker of successful transformation.

This linkage does not happen in the case of Detroit and other such women of color—their physical desirability under the gaze of the heteronormative male subject is and never has been associated with increased productivity or revolutionary potential. Now it becomes clear why the enlarged penis is as centrally-significant a transformation as the muscles through which resistance was made successful: Detroit’s revolutionary impotence is not due to the failures of her chosen medium but instead quite literally due to her lack of a penis.

It can be argued that the final protest is actually a moment of radical multispecies solidarity as activism—all sentient beings coming together without hierarchy to resist the invisible frameworks that oppressively define our societies. However, Green’s initial interaction with Demarius, the equisapien that frees him from his imprisonment inside of the police van, and the broken and condescending English with which he speaks, squarely reasserts ideologies of human exceptionalism. Detroit reappears after this scene and calls Green a “mastermind,” downplaying her central organizing role in the protest which is then paired with a simultaneous reassertion of herself as a sexual object. This continual reassertion triples as for the benefit of Green, the other male characters, as well as for the voyeuristic pleasure of the audience member. Here voyeurism is intrinsically linked with the viewing of cinema: actors and/as characters are frozen into images and symbolic icons within a narrative structure. This specific voyeurism doubles as a desire to assert patriarchal hierarchies as the audience plays into the traditional fantasy of female exhibitionism through Detroit’s prescribed use-value as the synthesizer of images of heteronormative sexual pleasure⁹.

⁹ See also her relationship to coworker and labor organizer Squeeze. Another masculinized revolutionary subject to which she asserts herself as a sexual object, for instance as in the moment they share after her exhibition.

I argue that despite her narrative role as a mere foil to the protagonist Green, Detroit's performance art exhibition is the actual moment of radical thought within the film. Allowing the audience to throw objects at her while reciting a line from cult classic movie *The Last Dragon*, Detroit makes visible the ways in which the female body is violently subjugated through multiple layers of the male gaze. This gaze is then linked with modern colonialism and our imperial consumer culture through the literal implications of the objects themselves. Any dismantling of the Western-supremacist international economic hierarchy necessitates a simultaneous interrogation of misogyny in our media and societies.

The character of Detroit is subjugated under layers of the male gaze which stunts her genuine revolutionary potential within the film. Laura Mulvey writes in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* that "there are three different looks associated with cinema: that of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion" (815). These "looks" identify with/as each other as the audience becomes abstracted into the literal camera lens itself at the same time as they become the spectating characters within the screen. These "looks" are then masculinized as the woman is relegated to the role of the performer, the spectacle to be looked-at, the object through which each layer of audience-as-subject projects and cultivates their identity. The character of Detroit, written, directed, and filmed by a man, exists under these layers of male gaze that define our modern patriarchal societies—her role necessarily lies not in the rejection of the hierarchies through which her character was created, but instead in the linkage of their true misogynistic violence with the global violences inflicted upon the Animal and non-Western worlds. Now the layers of gaze through which women are subjugated in media and society double as the layers of neocolonialism through which resource-rich countries in Africa and Asia are exploited for the benefit of our Western consumer cultures.

The clothing that Detroit wears during her performance is significant: a two-piece bathing suit made from leather gloves. The bottom glove has a middle finger that extends upwards and the top gloves are laid horizontally. Mulvey writes, "Hence the look, pleasurable in form, can be threatening in content" illuminating how Detroit, the "woman as representation/image that crystallizes this paradox" (808), invites the audience to view her body, to engage in the fantasy of masculine voyeurism and feminine exhibitionism, while at the same time exposing how violent that interface actually is. This is violence that is no longer metaphorical, violence that is made concrete through the objects in the scene. Detroit exposes the genuine lack of distance between performer and audience at both the narrative- and meta-level—the audience's eyes watching are made tangible in her bikini: hands already and perpetually groping.

The violence of the male gaze is similarly consolidated into the objects that Detroit allows the audience to throw. The audience is merely invited, not commanded, to inflict pain. One could argue that this invitation along with the spatial context of the performance as part of a fine art exhibition is established consent between performer and audience. However, while Detroit may have consented to the possibility of getting hurt, the actual choice to throw, to aim at her head and body, to inflict lasting hurt, lies squarely within the audience. The appearance of

consent does not ever justify mistreatment: a powerful message that must be centralized in all discourse surrounding sexual assault and harassment. Here the violence of the male gaze becomes materialized as the audience acts as a surrogate for the male voyeur performing active reconciliation with the anxiety provoked by the unmediated female form (811). This masculine frustration is then vented through the sadistic violence inflicted upon Detroit's body, representative of the subjugation of real feminine bodies of color in our male-dominated societies.

The thrown objects also link the patriarchy with our international Western-supremacist hierarchies. Motorola phones containing cobalt ore, empty bullet casings, and balloons filled with sheep's blood are all objects that contain within them layers of colonial implication. Here Detroit focuses specifically on American foreign relations with resource-rich countries in Africa, incriminating the Western consumer in the global hierarchies that define foreign relations with countries in the Global South. The production of normalized items such as mobile phones necessitates and simultaneously obfuscates the painful labor and often death of those in the global working class¹⁰. The inclusion of sheep's blood links anglo-american neocolonialism with our continued subjugation of the Animal world. This linkage of international imperial-colonial hierarchies with domestic patriarchies and human exceptionalism is truly radical, suggesting that any dismantling of one necessitates a dismantling of the other.

Green interrupts Detroit's performance, first demanding that the audience stop throwing objects and then asking why she would put herself through this torment. On one level, this seems to signal towards Green's ability to resist the sadism of the male gaze. This is not the case. As Mulvey writes, the male anxiety produced from the image of "woman, as icon" escapes through "the devaluation, punishment, or saving of the guilty object" (811). Green here is placed in conjunction with the audience members that he attempts to distance himself from; his feeble attempt at rescue is the same as the physical punishment that the audience members inflict upon Detroit. Both Green and the audience turn Detroit into an object upon which they can project their will, inscribing her body with the guilt and culpability of whatever may occur. Green speaking to the audience is itself a false redirection of blame away from the binary frameworks that assert these violent hierarchies in the first place and a complete devaluation of Detroit's performance art as activism and her autonomy as a sentient being.

Detroit as a character exists only in relation to Green, the masculinized hero-protagonist. Even in her moment of true revolutionary linkage, she is dominated and subjugated in/to the narrative as mere spectacle. This film does not believe that she is the revolutionary that the working class needs, instead offering up the equisapiens as the real catalysts of transformative change. This is problematic, however, as the equisapien body is hypermasculinized and objectified in terms of its capitalist and anti-capitalist use-values. Socially-constructed notions of physical desirability are inflicted upon both the feminized and masculinized bodies, yet only masculine desirability, not feminine, is linked with the potential for social change. Now it

¹⁰ Montague, Dena. "Stolen Goods: Coltan and Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo." *SAIS Review* (1989-2003), vol. 22, no. 1, 2002, pp. 103-18. *JSTOR*

becomes evident how patriarchal values seep into revolutionary movements even as they seem to cultivate some amount of material change in regards to class inequality. The *equisapiens* *do* bring about some amount of change in the material lives of the working class through the creation of a telemarketer's union. However, their hypermasculinity exists only in relation to Detroit's subjugated femininity—feminine physical desirability is linked only with male anxiety, frustration, and violence, revealing the misogynistic hierarchy upon which both the hegemony and the counter-hegemony has become hinged.

Within this movie's failure to present its audience with a successful revolutionary figure exists a lesson on radical intersectional activism as social transformation. All dismantling of class hierarchies must necessarily be paired with active resistance against the layers of male gaze. The patriarchy must be understood as affecting both masculine and feminine bodies; all bodies are objectified and seen in terms of their use-value in our cultures of desirability. Patriarchal ideologies must also be recognized as linked to international hierarchies of Western supremacy as symbiotic violences perpetuated through a hierarchical binary. The subjugation of the feminine body doubles as the oppression of the Global South as the international working class is objectified and exploited for the benefit of the Western subject. This linkage must then be recognized as extending into the more-than-human world as doctrines of human exceptionalism mimic and reproduce the colonial hierarchies of our Western histories. Violence of all scales must be seen as intrinsically linked and even literally the same in order to make visible the necessity of a simultaneous dismantling of all hierarchies and binaries. Perhaps a dismantling that can only happen through community and creativity. Truly whether or not this film is considered revolutionary is now irrelevant; the characters of Detroit and the *equisapiens* present to the audience an imperative that must be fulfilled off screen: we cannot be liberated from one hierarchy only to make our way quickly into another.

Our methods of activism must adapt alongside and in inclusion of our rapidly changing societies. Transformative change can only be achieved through a radical break from all ideologies rooted in binary hierarchies. Our classical understanding of organized revolution through an enfranchising of the working class fails to address the nuanced layers of oppression under which our identities are constituted. Nor does it truly interrogate the global ramifications of our Western consumer culture and industrial societies. We must move beyond the canonical counter-hegemonic break; what was once understood as revolution may no longer be considered revolutionary. I argue that what lies beyond this break is in fact a linkage of all violences enacted through the binary. The violence inflicted onto the feminine and masculine body through body commodification, especially as linked with heteronormativity and the male gaze/masculinized subject, is itself inextricable from the violence exacted onto the Global South and the Animal world. These hierarchies mimic each other and cannot be seen as separate if any semblance of deconstruction is desired. Understanding domestic hierarchies as linked with international Western domination necessitates a collectivist understanding of what constitutes transformative social change. There is no justice for the exploited Worker without justice also for the exploited Animal and Woman. Radical materialist analysis of these chosen media texts reveals how things

act as literal signals towards global hierarchies of violence and Western supremacy. It is within these things that hierarchies of neocolonialism, human exceptionalism, and the patriarchy are revealed as fused. The individual consumer is implicated in the perpetuation of these violences through the binary— radical change *must* occur on the level of both the individual and the collective. Our very identities and the frameworks through which we organize our lives must be interrogated and unfolded in all of their contradictions. All conceptions of binary and hierarchy must be deconstructed at once through a simultaneous break if we wish to cultivate lasting and tangible change in our rapidly entropic world.

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