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## Comment on DeGenova's "Management of Quality": Flight of the unfixed

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## **Comment on DeGenova's "Management of Quality" Flight of the unfixd**

**Stefano Harney**

Nick DeGenova's study does more than expose the poverty of intersectionality—that sociological theory that posits the importance of considering race, class, and gender and sexuality together as they interact with each other as independent variables. It allows us to move from the most common and least correct criticism of intersectionality, that it is a theory that contains class within a functionalist sociological universe, to a much bolder contention. The contention is this: class contains. It is class that contains the surplus, the commons, of race, gender and sexuality. It is class that tames. This is because class is the category in capital that is not, and it marks life, and energy, and matter, as limit. Of course, much of our own Marxist analysis has had trouble with this limit, denying it either by filling it with sociology, as Erik Olin Wright did for instance, or demanding of it utopian transformation, as in the recent turns of Slavoj Žižek or Alain Badiou. But this Marxist analysis is not true to Marx. For Marx, class contained.

How else really to interpret the class in itself and class for itself formula of Marx himself? A class in itself is not yet something lived positively, but a class for itself is already no longer livable and must be abolished. Rather than class being livable, we might say it is impossible to live class positively and therefore politically. It is, as Marx often reminded us, a relation of limit in the world and can only be lived negatively, only lived as limit.

This is not to say that class is not a lived experience, but rather that it is always at the same time an uninhabitable one. Or, to put this another way, we might compare chains. The chains of chattel slavery needed to be broken so that life already in chains, already there, could be liberated. But the chains of the proletariat contain no such actuality, and instead hold back something that is not yet there, some transformation of those in chains into some kind of new man. This is not the case for abolition where on the contrary the man and woman are already there, restrained.

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It is for this reason that abolition of prisons today contains an important political lesson. People do not need to be fixed, do not need to be changed. They need to be freed. This is a point that Fred Moten and I make in the context now of this age of governance, this age of policy where anyone who does not exhibit a willingness to change, to improve, to submit oneself to a radical contingency cannot enter into the kingdom of governance and must instead have policy applied to them, to fix them, by those in governance. To be in governance is to display a set of articulated interests that can be taken up and put to work, but it is also to display an indifference to those interests, a pragmatism about them that suits the radically contingent capitalism for which one is preening.

Class fixes. It is capital's original policy. Just think of the kind of objection to what I am saying that begins: but without class consciousness, race and even gender can become mere nationalisms, counter-revolutionary even. What is the function of class in this objection? It is nothing but policy. It is there to fix a racial consciousness, or a gendered solidarity, or a sexual performance that left to its own devices would be uncontainable. Class tames, and it does so in a way exactly the opposite of its claim.

And here, intersectionality for all its stupidity as a sociological theory is onto something. Class analysis wants to be the animation of race, of gender, and of sexuality, and class analysis chafes at the equality of inputs posited by intersectionality, which restrict its leadership in unwanted ways. But intersectionality knows more about class analysis than it knows about itself. Because what does class analysis do but say to race, to gender, to sexuality: there is a limit? I am that limit. And more than that, it says, I am a category like you. And class is a category. It does have a limit. It is a limit relation. But race does not, nor gender, nor sexuality, nor any number of expressions of sociality and subjectivity that we might name. Their potential is to be beyond category. Their very quality is difference, limitlessness.

Indeed, they are potentially limitless because they are always potentially uncategorizable, always potentially not limit relations. It is ironically class analysis, and more prosaically theories like intersectionality that prevent race from becoming blackness for instance, or try to, as they would attempt to prevent gender from becoming something like affective being or sexuality desirous performance. Freed of the need to conform to an identity category, race has historically, through for instance the black radical tradition as Cedric Robinson names it, produced its revolutionary surplus, its common, its fugitive hideaways, regardless of race, though never without regard for that history that is race. Queer performance similarly cannot be trusted to contain itself but instead samples performance beyond its category, leveraging performance everywhere. To insist on the need to read class into different drag performances in different settings, whether in the service of class analysis or sociology, is useful only to the extent that class precisely does not lead but follows this performance as the drag, the limit, as that which must be overcome for the performance to have an encore.

Sadly in this containment, class analysis repeats the policy prescription of bourgeois sociology. The diagnosis in conventional Marxist circles is not enough class consciousness, just as the diagnosis for Kennedy School policy hustlers has

always been not enough bourgeois consciousness, whether in the form of no work ethic, no family values, or no credit worthiness. Indeed, class analysis's problem of consciousness is nothing other than a problem of its own consciousness, as this analysis is most evident in the bourgeois sphere. Because when one says race or gender in the bourgeois sphere, one already says politics: the political threat of using these terms, even in their categorical reductions, is already apparent. Not true for class. The whole point of class as something positive is that it is only positive for capital, which is to say it can exist in the bourgeois sphere without politics and without threat. Race and gender, contrary to the false consciousness of class analysis, cannot. Their elaboration is always potentially at odds with capital, even if in practice differential inclusion is often possible, even desirable for capital. They are positive principles of association, positive principles of elaboration *even* in the bourgeois sphere, in a way that class can *only* be for capital. For itself, class cannot be but must yield to associations of a positive nature. It is no wonder that race and gender continue to cause more politics in the world than class, to the consternation of the class analysts. If it needs to be stressed, and I hope at this point it does not, this is not because class is not the dominant limit on life, but again because people left to their own devices will try to make something positive out of their lives, and for that purpose, people use positive categories, categories that can be exceeded, developed, cultivated.

Finally, it is in this respect that Italian post-workerist thought holds out the prospect of recognizing the dominance of class without class analysis, without imagining that it is through class that life can be lived or worse, fixed. In its notion of a flight from work, a refusal of work, we have a politics that can remind us that class cannot be inhabited positively but instead must be vacated for what is already going on, always going on. Flight and refusal in post-workerist thought, as originally for the black radical tradition, do not imply the transformation of she who flees into a life for herself and out of a life in herself. They imply, rather, that she already has something worth holding on to, that she is fleeing with it in her arms, that she is refusing to give it up, and at her heels is capital brandishing the wicked limit of class. She does not need to be fixed. She has something valuable in her arms already, on her arms, in her armory. She may have blackness, sexuality, something she is elaborating on the run, with others, and for them class is common only as the enemy. What Nick DeGenova's study evokes is how that enemy can be exposed as not just class, but class analysis.