

Pay To Cum: The Punk Care Commons As Method For Communal Care

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies of the University of
Manitoba in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Master of Fine Art

School of Art

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

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ABSTRACT

This paper *Pay To Cum: The Punk Care Commons As Method For Communal Care* is written to accompany the MFA thesis exhibition, *Punk Care Commons* by Christina Oyawale. The exhibition was presented at the School of Art Gallery at the University of Manitoba from May 22–June 19, 2026. The research and exhibition serve as an ongoing meditation of the collective societal potential for intimacy and care that has been thwarted by capitalism. This is done by mobilizing punk anti-aesthetics and Marxist-feminist family abolitionist historical analysis as agitative-propaganda towards a communizing of care. The paper takes a historical analysis of the family, its structural changes over the last 200 years, and how it has affected how we navigate care. The artworks from the exhibition ground themselves in a history of queer anti-aesthetics by transforming archives through mediums such as textiles, poetry, documentary photography, zinemaking, sculpture, and found footage video to reshape societal understandings of traditional and hierarchical forms of intimacy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge that the creation of the art works and research were completed in Treaty 1 Territory and Tkoronto. Treaty 1 (Winnipeg, MB) is home to the original lands of the Anishinaabeg, Ininiwak, Anisininewuk, Dakota Oyate and Dene, and the National Homeland of the Red River Métis. Tkoronto (Toronto, ON) are the Indigenous lands of the Huron-Wendat, Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nations, and the Métis Nation. Despite the inherently settler-colonial nature of the land acknowledgement, I believe it is important to note that this work would be not possible without the caretaking efforts that came before me, as well as continued fights for land sovereignty by the original Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island.

Thank you to Dominique Rey and Anna Binta Diallo, for sharing the position as my thesis advisors over the last two years. Thank you to my committee members: Sarah Ciurysek, Mark Neufeld, Shepard Steiner, and to my external advisor, Mark Libin. Your patience and support for my research has been invaluable.

I am honoured to have received financial support from the University of Manitoba's James B. Hartman Scholarship in Fine Arts, FGS Research Completion Scholarship, and FGS Travel Award. Additional appreciation to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) for aiding in funding my research, conference presentations, and artmaking.

I am forever indebted to my friends and comrades-in-arms: Cam Scott, Knowah Holder, Amelia Northey-Taylor, Gabriela Laconsay, Lucy Hanna, Pascale Padilla, Cole McInerney, Shalaka Jadhav, Manny Davies, Louis Winter, and Shay Loewen, for contributing their words, expertise, and skills to the project. Finally, love to my partners in crime, love, and kinship, Winnie Compton and Elayna Paddock Thiessen, for sewing me back together in times of crisis, helping edit my drafts, and embodying my research through the interconnected lives we have managed to create together and with our respective Winnipeg and Toronto communities.

From Turtle Island to Palestine to Cuba, Land Back in our Lifetime!

Sláinte! / Àláfà!

DEDICATIONS

DEDICATED TO MY IMMIGRANT MOTHER — for raising us in a community full of opinionated, strong-willed women and for taking me to my first punk show at twelve years old.

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INTRODUCTION

*I make decisions with precision
Lost inside this manned collision*

*Just to see that what to be is
Perfectly my fantasy
I came to know with now dismay
That in this world we all must pay
Pay to write, pay to play
Pay to cum, pay to fight*

*And all in time, with just our minds
We soon will find what's left behind*

*Not long ago, when things were slow
We all got by with what we know
The end is near, hearts filled with fear
Don't want to listen to what they hear
And so it's now we choose to fight
To stick up for our bloody right
The right to ring, the right to dance
The right is ours, we'll take the chance*

*At peace together, apiece apart
A piece of wisdom from our hearts¹*

– Bad Brains, *Pay to Cum*, 1980

HR, the lead vocalist of Washington, D.C. hardcore band, Bad Brains, trips over himself as he urgently attempts to deliver the lines: “The right to ring, the right to dance / The right is ours, we'll take the chance”²; closing out the band’s short yet punchy debut single, *Pay to Cum* (1980). Political proclamations are an important fixture of punk counterculture, whether that be precipitated through music or its aesthetics. I am drawn to the punk space as it holds generative possibilities for nuanced forms of radical care. In similar ways to HR, I envisage a radical care void of the privatization and commodification we have become accustomed to under capitalism. In the literal and figurative sense, we are essentially “pay[ing] to cum” — pleasure and care are not equitably distributed but purchasable by those with financial means to.

¹ Bad Brains. “Pay To Cum.” Track 1 from *Pay To Cum!*. Bad Brain Records, 1979, Vinyl 7”.

² Ibid.

A punk care commons demands pleasure/care not solely defined by sexual relations, but intergenerational kinship and solidarity that challenges our understanding of family building. Society is inherently relational, whether that be through objects, space, and place, yet we are fed the notion that collectivity hinders the spirit of the individual. In the book *Joyful Militancy* (2017), carla bergman and Nick Montgomery discuss that this is due to the nuclear family being “a crucial social institution for privatization and enclosure of life”.³ This is because our social structures have been built out of a culture based in dominance, materializing through authoritarianism, white heteropatriarchy, and abuse, a fact that has been glaringly clear to marginalized communities for centuries.⁴ Meanwhile white middle-class populations have slowly begun to acknowledge the undeniable presence of these systems of harm due to overtly repressive American politics, the rise in the alt-right, and slashing of public social programs.

Punk counterculture has the capability to challenge normative identity structures that are enforced under capitalism. This research and concurrently my exhibition, *Punk Care Commons* (2026), serve as an ongoing meditation of the collective societal potential for intimacy and care that has been thwarted by capitalism. This is done by mobilizing punk anti-aesthetics and Marxist-feminist family abolitionist historical analysis as agitative-propaganda towards a communizing of care. I physically invoke what queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz calls the “punk rock common” within his text, “‘Gimme Gimme This...Gimme Gimme That’: Annihilation and Innovation in the Punk Rock Commons”, in which he posits that there is an inherent plurality embedded into the histories of punk music, specifically its desire to seek more out of society, or rather a space, via its queerness.⁵ Using Muñoz’s theory of the common as a gathering space for radical possibility, the exhibition

³ carla bergman and Nick Montgomery, *Joyful Militancy: Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times* (AK Press, 2017), 44.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ José Esteban Muñoz, “‘Gimme Gimme This... Gimme Gimme That,’” *Social Text* 31, no. 3 (season-03 2013): 95–110, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-2152855>.

intentionally creates a physical space that embodies the possibility for a communized care evoked by punk aesthetics.

FAMILY ABOLITION WITHIN THE PUNK CARE COMMONS

Throughout this text, my definition of the term “punk” is broadened to include diverse radical leftist organizing environments: twentieth-century queer feminist movements, the Black Panther Party, the Homocore movement, and AIDS crisis political mobilizations. The importance of highlighting these movements alongside punk DIY (Do-It-Yourself), is that many of these countercultural environments are bound by interconnected socioeconomic struggles that have anarchically sought alternatives to dominant culture. Punk music and DIY aesthetics are key to the visual identity of my research and exhibition, through its malleability and emancipatory potential.

I use the terms imperial core and Global North interchangeably throughout the paper to highlight countries and nations, such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Western Europe, and Australia, who have benefited from widespread imperialism that exploits poorer, resource-rich nations via economic, military, cultural, and political dominance.⁶ I use the term Global North more specifically to focus on nations within the Northern Hemisphere. Through imperialism and colonialism these nations reinforce a culture of coercion that pushes individuals to seek comfort in traditional heterosexual and monogamous relationships that maintain Eurocentric values—relationships that are socially produced out of expectation rather than intention. To subvert such histories, this paper begins by investigating intimate platonic, romantic, and intergenerational relationships and aims to reveal the ways in which traditional conceptions of connection fail to meet our current moment. As capitalism and fascism dominate the political landscape within the imperial core,

⁶ Gabriel Kuhn, “Oppressor and Oppressed Nations,” *The Anarchist Library*, June 15, 2017, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/gabriel-kuhn-oppressor-and-oppressed-nations#toc6>.

the state insists upon the strengthening of the nuclear family as an avenue for social and economic dominance. Thus, the origin of this study must be a historical analysis of the family, as the family has systemically shaped social identity formation.

Family abolition remains core to critiques of nuclear family structures due to its historical ties to Marxist political economy and feminist social reproductive theory. Nineteenth century radical scholars such as Russian anarchist Emma Goldman, French utopian socialist Charles Fourier, and Russian Marxist theoretician Alexandra Kollontai have all argued that the nuclear family structure relies on unevenly distributed social reproductive labour and patriarchal dominance which privileges capitalism. The influence of these historical voices has been brought into contemporary feminist and political economic discourse through the writings of militant feminist scholars M.E O'Brien and Sophie Lewis whose work constitutes a key focus of this research. Particularly of note to situate my paper's argument is O'Brien's framework, which is defined by a "commitment to making the care necessary for human flourishing freely available throughout society...[with] access to care built into the social fabric of our collective lives...[and the] refusal of harmful relationships of domination that the family form enables".⁷ Additionally, psychotherapist and writer Sophie K. Rosa's thesis of "radical intimacy" is a term used throughout the paper, that seeks to transcend the imperial core's archaic preoccupation with assigning intimacy to the private sphere.⁸ O'Brien, Lewis, and Rosa's writing is situated within a historical materialist analysis that critically investigates the relationship between social and cultural structures to labour and the state. This theory is important to the research as they offer the cause and effect of what it means to live under a restrictive structure of love and care.

While investigating DIY punk, queer, and feminist revolutionary spaces throughout history, my exhibition, *Punk Care Commons*, effectively grounds itself in a history of queer

⁷ M. E. O'Brien, *Family Abolition: Capitalism and the Communizing of Care*, Paperback, (Pluto Press, 2023), 6.

⁸ Sophie K. Rosa, *Radical Intimacy* (Pluto Press, 2023).

anti-aesthetics by using countercultural media translated through mediums such as textiles, documentary photography, ceramics, sound and found footage video to reshape societal understandings of traditional and hierarchical forms of intimacy. These mediums are considered countercultural, as they are modes of creation harnessed in underground spaces using cheap materials. Items such as Xerox copy machine zines or discursive gatherings have been an effective manner of disseminating political and artistic materials to local communities for decades.

The research is concentrated on how marginalized communities approach care through avenues such as universalizing access to childcare; more broadly, the non-gendered act of mothering, food and housing security, and pleasure (sexual and otherwise). The objective of my artworks is to refine our collective understanding of the family, by showcasing the creative ways in which queer and punk kinship networks take care of each other on the basis of disrupting capitalism. These alternative histories offer a complex depiction of care by reflecting that grief, violence, love, and solidarity are all integral to the complexity of the human ecosystem.

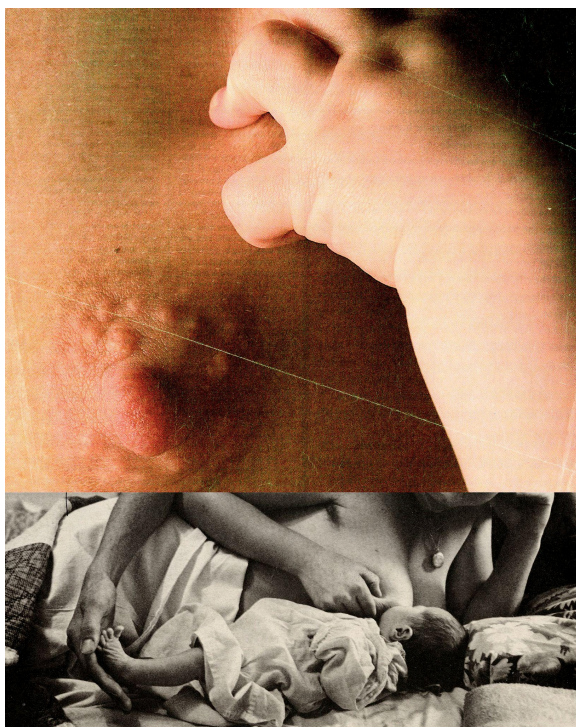


Figure 1. Christina Oyawale, *Mother & Child*, 2024, 11" x 17", archival digital collage.

Throughout the paper I break down my textual research, as well as my thinking behind some of the art pieces from the exhibition *Punk Care Commons*. In section one of the paper titled, “The Family and Its Discontents”, I breakdown family abolition as a framework, its attachments to Marxist-feminist theory, while underlining the pitfalls and changes of the familial system within the Global North, throughout the industrial revolution, Fordism/suburbanization, the Reagan/Thatcher era, until now. In section two of the paper titled, “Anti-Aesthetics: Towards A Queer Punk Radicality”, I discuss the key role punk anti-aesthetics play within the creation of the artworks in the exhibition, as well as analyze how these interconnected environments have struggled and maintained creative immersive methodologies of care.

THE FAMILY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

FAMILY ABOLITION AS CARE

Bourgeois morality demanded all for the loved one. The morality of the proletariat demands all for the collective.

—Alexandra Kollontai, “Make Way for Winged Eros: Letter to Working Youth”, 1923

The opening sequence of American film director David Lynch’s *Blue Velvet* (1986) welcomes the viewer into the ideal white American suburb: red roses line the white picket fence, schoolchildren safely cross the street, and the bright-eyed fireman waves along. This is cut tragically short as the man watering his manicured grass collapses from a heart attack. Lynch offers the viewer an opportunity to identify the decay that lives beneath the surface; a visual metaphor represented as an ant colony that creeps beneath the grass. Lynch’s *Blue Velvet* acts as an allegory, the fallacy of the perfect white suburban life and its haunting underbelly plagued by rot and violence. The white nuclear family is simply a facade, but nonetheless a structure which has been forced upon the working-poor as something to achieve to be a respectable contributor to society. Nuclear family critic and abolitionist, Sophie Lewis, similarly characterizes the family as, “a field of howling boredom, aching lack, unhealed trauma, unspeakable secrets, buried hurts, wronged ghosts...”⁹ Arguing that artistic representations of secrecy and violence within the private family home, can permit us to better comprehend the absurdity attached to such an archaic social structure. For us to contextualize the family as we know it, we must historically trace the origins of its socioeconomic structure. Below I offer a brief breakdown of how the family’s purpose and intentions have morphed, due to major economic and cultural transformations/structures that have dominated the Global North over the last two-hundred years.

⁹ Sophie Lewis, *Abolish the Family: A Manifesto for Care and Liberation* (Verso Books, 2022), 20.

LIFE DURING WARTIME: DEPRESSION ERA, BOURGEOIS PROSPERITY (1830s-1930s)

From the 1830s to the 1930s, colonial society's dominant structure was white bourgeois property owners. Class dynamics of the family were on display, as the division of economic structures consisted of the peasant and bourgeois classes. Well into the 1800s and onward, wealth inequality was one of the pressing issues felt globally, with the richest 20% seeing an increase in their share of income raise 65% from the previous century.¹⁰ Working-class kinship ties were important forms of survival, where communal participation in care was just as important as blood-relations. This collectivizing of care allowed peasant families to maintain daily activities such as caring for farmland, working in factories, and childrearing. Women had children as a means of reproducing workers to help maintain the labour that was necessary for a family's continued survival. Because of this, it was clear that the peasantry was not benefiting from the fruits of their labour during an era of so-called industrial prosperity. Despite an onslaught of the industrial revolution's technological advances between 1830s into the 1840s in Great Britain, Canada, and the United States, most families continued to live in unsanitary and unsafe living/working conditions, due to the economic depression and the advent of capitalist exploitation that transpired in tandem.

Meanwhile, social institutions such as heterosexual marriage were practiced by bourgeois families, not as a means of celebrating a union of love, but rather a strategic form of maintaining wealth and generational inheritance.¹¹ Twentieth-century anarchist scholar Emma Goldman furthers this argument by illustrating that marriage and love are opposing forces, as the "slavish acquiescence to man's superiority" is the condition that has maintained the union of marriage for centuries.¹² The true contractual debt of marriage is thus the

¹⁰ Simon Szreter, "The History of Inequality: The Deep-acting Ideological and Institutional Influences," *Oxford Open Economics* 3, no. Supplement_1 (January 1, 2024): i218, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ooec/odad059>.

¹¹ Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, 1902, 106.

¹² Emma Goldman, "Marriage and Love," in *Anarchism and Other Essays* (1911; repr., Dover Publications, 1969), 230.

autonomy a woman must relinquish in service of the male ego. However, despite this lack of autonomy, women—specifically white affluent women—were able to obtain financial and social status due to their proximity to their husbands. A white bourgeois woman’s “premium” is then reduced to the appearance of husband and family, paid for via her freedom and desire for emotional connection.¹³

These social relations of marriage and the family were deeply rooted in a material process of what O’Brien calls an “alienated social class of society”.¹⁴ This human alienation is further examined by 19th-century German political philosopher Karl Marx in 1845 in his “Theses on Feuerbach,” in which he posits that the upholding of God and religion maintain interchangeable structural alienation to that of the family, explaining: “Once the earthly family is discovered to be the secret of the holy family, the former must then itself be destroyed in theory and practice”.¹⁵ Marx believed that questioning the values of the family, specifically the need to abolish the dominant structure that was the bourgeois family, was important to liberating the working-class. This then begs us to question whether marriage as we know it is able to divorce itself from its initial origins. Can love be fostered within a union built with the intention of maintaining white class supremacy?

WHITE, NUCLEAR FAMILY, BREADWINNER/HOUSEWIFE (1940s-1970s)

Much of our collective understanding of social interaction and relationality in the Global North is a byproduct of a system created, enforced, and recognized by the state. Notably, the union of marriage and the ‘traditional’ white settler family were initially systems created to uphold power, status, and capital.¹⁶ The post-World War II 1940s-1970s era was bolstered by the “All-American” nuclear family, which functioned as a white married

¹³ Goldman, “Marriage and Love,” 228.

¹⁴ O’Brien, *Family Abolition*, 61.

¹⁵ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology: Including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to The Critique of Political Economy*, 1888, 7.

¹⁶ O’Brien, *Family Abolition*, 69-70.

heterosexual couple and their children. The nuclear family and its rhetoric surrounding upward mobility, prosperity, and family values are characteristics that the current iteration of the family within the Global North springs from. Meanwhile Black families were excluded from participating in the nuclear family social structure in the post-slavery period, as Black women were relegated to becoming domestic servants for white families, oftentimes forced to move away from kin in order to make wages.¹⁷ Black women were tasked with providing social reproductive labour for petit-bourgeois families who could outsource care labour. Well into the 1970s the Black family would be pathologized by the state, with Black women reduced to “welfare queens” draining and abusing government subsidies and Black men reduced to lumpenproletariat¹⁸ criminals meant to be feared and imprisoned.¹⁹ When we visualize this timeframe, we see the genesis of the private “middle-class” home, with its desire to escape the crowded city-center towards possibility via the newly developed suburban community.²⁰

The environment for white women required subjugation at the hands of the state and the patriarch of the family, maintaining that the only labour a woman must partake in was domestic labour. A “housewife’s” role was, and continues to be, integral to the continued propaganda of the perfect American family. Once WWII came to a head in 1945, men were to be welcomed back with open arms—the state demanding they were to be reintegrated with new found socioeconomic “freedom” and opportunity.²¹ Men would take hierarchical stock within the family as “breadwinners”, shifting from blue-collared manual labour of the Depression era, towards corporate white-collar office work. This is where an uneven

¹⁷ Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (Vintage, 1983), 90-91.

¹⁸ Lumpenproletariat is a term coined by Karl Marx to describe the “vagrant” class, referring to members of society who did not engage in formal industrial labour such as petty thieves, sex workers, drug dealers, and houseless people (See: Marx’s *The German Ideology* [1845–1846] and *The Communist Manifesto* [1848]).

¹⁹ Cathy J. Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3, no. 4 (May 1, 1997): 455.

²⁰ Rosa, *Radical Intimacy*, 84.

²¹ Mark Jackson, ed., *STRESS IN POST-WAR BRITAIN, 1945–85, Studies for the Society for the Social History of Medicine*, 2015, 22, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK396509/pdf/Bookshelf_NBK396509.pdf.

distribution of gender-based labor begins to take place, as white women are now expected to engage in unwaged social reproductive labour. Though women have consistently contributed to unwaged social reproductive labour for centuries, labour was more evenly distributed regardless of sex or blood-relations prior to the Gilded Age in the United States. For example, care networks in pre-war rural Appalachia relied on intergenerational kin and neighbours to aid in caregiving of children.²² Appalachian communities relied on communal sources of survival, as the poor coal mining region was substantially isolated from city-living, making access to outsourced labour impossible.²³ The nuclear family would then quell communal caregiving, leaving expectations of raising children and maintaining the facade of the home to the individual. Furthermore, for white women participating in reproductive labour in the suburbs, this familial and labour dynamic, as German philosopher and Marx's primary collaborator Friedrich Engels explains, places men within the bourgeois class, while women in the home belong to the proletariat class.²⁴

The resemblance of the labour based economic oppression that already exists outside of the home is now translated towards the social oppression within the confines of the home. This is seen as the golden age of American life, as middle-class families could engage in the mass purchasing of commodities in a manner that was not possible during the Depression era. Fordism, the advent of advanced capitalism through mass production of technological goods and commodities, was the key to this structural agency. The nuclear family's purchasing power, family values, and access to private property—once exclusive to aristocratic colonial families—were now at their highest widespread importance.²⁵ A key aspect of the nuclear structure was the right to ownership, which would subsequently be reflected in the

²² Erika Marie Adams, "Situated Learning and Social Capital in Rural Appalachia: An Ethic of Care Among Women," *University of Memphis Digital Commons* (Degree of Doctor of Education, University of Memphis, 2025), 10 and 32.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Engels, *The Origin of the Family*, 105.

²⁵ Ibid, 106.

relationship dynamics of the time. As the onus of raising children and maintaining familial structures fell on women, they were isolated within the home, making room for violence to proliferate without intervention.

NEOLIBERALISM, AUSTERITY, SURVEILLANCE (1980s-NOW)

Under neoliberalism the family may not resemble the exact 1950s ideal of the nuclear family, but it still functions in a similar manner. Neoliberalism rose to dominance in the 20th-century, championed by centre-right politicians such as Margaret Thatcher (United Kingdom), Ronald Reagan (United States), and Brian Mulroney (Canada), who utilized liberalist-policies that believed the wellbeing of citizens could be achieved via privatization, globalization, and free trade.²⁶ Due to the economic conditions of the 1980s to the current day, we see state surveillance and laissez-faire economic abstention seeping into the fabric of the family. The state no longer wishes to aid in the betterment of individuals through government subsidies, leaving the expectation on individuals.

In 1987, Thatcher was quoted proclaiming that, “there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families”, in a *Women’s Own* magazine interview.²⁷ Thatcher’s callow comments and implementation of austerity measures in the UK initiated the current socioeconomic stature we suffer through. Our governments parroted that the state was not responsible for the wellbeing of individuals, leaving people to become isolated. Their neighbours to the West in the US, would follow suit with Reagan’s election as president in 1980, a frontier moment for the evangelical right’s prominence in United States politics and policy. Through its collusion with government officials to further enforce a Christian ideology, the state intervened even further into the family.²⁸ The rise of the white

²⁶ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 1-2.

²⁷ “Interview for Woman’s Own (‘no Such Thing [as Society]’),” Margaret Thatcher Foundation, October 31, 1987, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689>.

²⁸ Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*, (Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2021), 106.

Christian-right saw a shifting in culture with attention to purity and salvation. This continues today, as the far-right has taken prominence in government spaces. With the election of Donald Trump as president of the US in 2016, and his subsequent re-election in 2024, Pierre Poilievre's leadership of Conservative Party in Canada and the "centre-left" Labour Party in the UK led by Keir Starmer, there has been a steady uptick in fascist reactionary governing and gutting of social programs to our socioeconomic systems in the Global North. To compound this, the new ecosystem of far-right media on social media is taking the place of the evangelical lobbying organizations of the 1980s that depend on collective societal alienation as a tool of dominating the fallacy of private and public interpersonal relations.

Most of what the 20th-century family offered was a quiet proliferation of white dominance, as the family "manufactures 'individuals' with a cultural, ethnic, and binary gender identity; a class; and a racial consciousness".²⁹ Thus, it favoured whiteness through the socioeconomic power and privilege that it automatically provided to those able to perform it. At this current time, the weaponization of family safety is being employed as a coercive tactic to manufacture consent for further restrictive policies that prevent the existence of non-normative care networks. We continue to see consistent justifications from Canadian government policymakers for the closure of supervised consumption sites. In Ontario, Premier Doug Ford has continuously defended his stance against funding evidence-based overdose prevention sites, stating: "How [would you] feel if I stuck one of these beside your house? You wouldn't like it ... neither would your neighbours and neither would anyone else".³⁰ Ford and many other Conservative members of government do not believe that drug-users and poor members of Canadian society deserve dignity. Drug-users are our neighbours whether we wish to acknowledge it or not, yet these policies clarify that personal

²⁹ Lewis, *Abolish the Family*, 12.

³⁰ Robert Benzie, "Doug Ford Says Safe Injection Sites Are a 'failed Policy' That Harms Communities and People With Addictions," *Toronto Star*, October 21, 2024, para. 4, https://www.thestar.com/politics/provincial/doug-ford-says-safe-injection-sites-are-a-failed-policy-that-harms-communities-and-people/article_43b97902-5fc3-11ef-a8c1-af3bf70f4fd5.html.

responsibility is more important than equitable care programs. Interconnected care networks comprehend that every person that exists in a community has value, whether they are houseless individuals and/or drug-users. Ford's anti-poverty rhetoric proves that the family can be weaponized by the state to maintain neoliberalism. Pluralistic forms of care will always be a threat to capital, as it makes clear the tangible material and emotional needs we lack under the current economic system.

THE CASE FOR FAMILY ABOLITION

After traversing a brief 200 years history of the family, we can see that capital and the state have had major structural effects on our interpersonal relationships, ultimately harming our potential for solidarity. Through economic strife and wars, the family has been the key source of maintaining a semblance of safety. In response to these conditions, the family has continuously been a facile site of cooptation by state powers. The family, the market, and the state must work in tandem to continue the proliferation of capitalism as a dominating force socially, economically, and culturally.³¹ We have seen this time and time again throughout history, but as explained in earlier sections, the most present being the resurgence of 'Christian family values' and white supremacy.

My case for an expanded punk commons at the intersection of family abolition as a mechanism for widespread care, is due to capitalism being the only system many within the Global North can conceive of ever living under. I believe gathering in a dystopian-utopian punk care commons, such as my exhibition, can be a radicalizing force that calls people in while redefining 'family' as an antihierarchical socialist person-first space. We have been convinced that capitalism is the only functional system because the state continuously suppresses the existence of alternatives that threaten the establishment. These tactics have

³¹ O'Brien, *Family Abolition*, 61.

effectively shaped aspects of our public and private relations. Represented through decades worth of McCarthyism “Red Scare” propaganda: anti-communist panic, surveillance, and violent suppression towards communities wishing to engage in alternatives, notably the surveillance of members of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California and Chicago, Illinois in the U.S. throughout the early-1960s into the 1980s.

The proposition of engaging in a family abolition gradually forces us to better comprehend the harms we face under capitalism that we have come to normalize, through state propaganda and coercion. If we seek to employ O’Brien’s notions of the framework, we invite a pluralistic, intergenerational and *equitable* access to care. This should not be viewed as a radical ideology, as it is a liberal philosophy that individuals deserve care. Yet, its radicality complicates liberalism by its necessity to fully abolish capitalism to effectively function. Capitalism demands the privatization of care, which is purchasable by those with disposable capital. Through the privatization of care, poor families and individuals lack the material conditions necessary to access childcare, disability/elderly care, healthcare, etcetera. Furthermore, the quality of care is dependent on one’s financial access. Family abolition is invested in an equitable entity rather than a privatized commodity that asserts that, for society to thrive, we must make access to care accessible through the dismantling of hierarchical systems. Thus, creating a punk care commons characterized by an investment in the anti-aesthetics of our shared intimacy.

This means that regardless of economic access, education, creed, one holds the right to accessing care—drug-users, queers, punks, immigrants, and all othered by society. Additionally, it challenges who is often at the forefront of disseminating care, specifically un/under-waged racialized women. This is important, as we continue to navigate what I believe is the final stages of a crumbling empire. The Global North is in a state of multiple crises, exhibited through numerous heinous wars waged on impoverished nations by the

United States and Israeli governments. These acts are all being aided by cowardly incentivised nation-states such as Canada, Europe, and the UK, that revel in their false sense of freedom and security. In times of turmoil, the working-poor must find manners to collectively form bonds of solidarity. Though this has been done throughout history, we mustn't allow the state to utilize our demoralization as fodder for fascist policy. I believe this to be true within countercultural punk spaces, such as music scenes, queer and racial organizing spaces, as they employ strategies based on the inherent power of communal intimacy as survival.

One may argue that these non-normative care communities already exist, but their ability to maintain longevity is quelled by the reproduction of capital. Mutual aid is one of the key tenets to many kinship organizations, communes, and communities under capitalism, that focuses on ensuring that everyone has access to human rights such as food, healthcare, and childcare. For example, the history of the suffragettes demanding a right for the women's vote while intentionally excluding the emancipation of Black Americans and their right to freedom during Jim Crow echoes this.³² The issues at hand are racism and patriarchy, which work in tandem to bolster capital while continuing the subjugation of oppressed people. Family abolition is specifically meant to be used as a framework that can be malleable and reflective of today, which demands an intersectional perspective. Lewis reminds us that taking a family abolition approach does not exempt the potential of harm, but asks us to “flip the script and consider that it is the family that is *unrealistic* and *utopian*,” not family abolition.³³ Marginalized communities are at the center of family abolition, which is historically informed by the fact that people such as Black, Indigenous, and queer families have never fit into the mold of the nuclear family nor the liberal family model. The family itself is an “ideology of

³² Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (Vintage, 1983), 72-73.

³³ Lewis, *Abolish the Family*, 22.

work” that sees procreation as an opportunity for creating new workers and optimizing one’s efficiency.³⁴

Despite there being sufficient evidence that the nuclear family is not a protective environment for working-class, notably queer, racialized people, and women who are most at risk of domestic violence, society still champions the importance of blood-family.³⁵ That does not mean that violence does not exist within non-normative familial structures, but within a communized structure there is less room for secrecy and economic dependency, as individuals can have a larger support network to hold abusers accountable, as well as rehome victims. Communal accountability practices within the punk care commons resemble practices that were enacted at the Indigenous led Standing Rock encampment in North Dakota, created by those protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2016. Community members included activists, Indigenous elders, and reporters, occupying the land engaged in communal social reproduction; sharing duties such as cooking and caretaking.³⁶ Through the many failures of communized living in encampment protests such as Occupy Wall Street in 2011, there was a committed effort to ensure that those perpetrating sexual, verbal, or physical abuse were expelled from the grounds for their harm.³⁷ This is a stark difference to the lack of options of protection the state affords victims of domestic violence. Rather, women and queer people are left to underfunded state systems such as crowded shelters or social workers; an extension of state surveillance.³⁸ Rosa reminds us that, “our intimate lives are the source of our heaviest sufferings and most relieving joys, and present ardent opportunities for transformation”, and because of that we must understand that anti-capitalist community members are not exempt from perpetuating harm, as we are all byproducts of the capitalist system in which we were

³⁴ Ibid, 19.

³⁵ Alva Gotby, *They Call It Love: The Politics of Emotional Life* (Verso Books, 2023), 61.

³⁶ O’Brien, *Family Abolition*, 205.

³⁷ O’Brien, *Family Abolition*, 212.

³⁸ Ibid, 212.

born and raised.³⁹ However, family abolition requires that we acknowledge harm and respond to abuse using transformative justice, an approach championed by Black-American organizer and educator Mariame Kaba. As capitalism and the family rely on social isolation, this leaves women and children with minimal avenues to seek support. Anarchist scholars carla bergman and Nick Montgomery further Rosa's position by examining that friendship may be a social structure that allows us to more safely coexist, stating:

freedom and friendship used to mean the same thing: intimate, interdependent relationships and the commitment to face the world together. At its root, relational freedom isn't about being unrestricted: it might mean the capacity for interconnectedness and attachment.⁴⁰

With every opportunity to change, some comfort must be sacrificed in order to achieve a more lateral environment. In the history of leftist liberatory praxis, those having to sacrifice most of their personal comforts have not been those already oppressed by capitalism. No society should be built and informed by the suffering of others. The "traditional family unit" has been used by the far-right as a structure to strengthen racist white supremacist rhetoric. This is made clear in right-wing US based lobbying group Heritage Foundation's *Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise* doctrine, colloquially known as "Project 2025," a 900-page document outlining multiple facets of how a fully Christian authoritarian conservative government in the US is integral to structurally achieve white nationalism.⁴¹ One of the many damning points outlined in the document within the section, "Department Of Health And Human Services" contributed by American Republican attorney Roger Severino argues that:

Families comprised of a married mother, father, and their children are the foundation of a well-ordered nation and healthy society. [...] Family policies and programs under President Biden's HHS are fraught with agenda items focusing on "LGBTQ+ equity," subsidizing single-motherhood, disincentivizing work, and penalizing marriage. These

³⁹ Rosa, *Radical Intimacy*, 7.

⁴⁰ bergman and Montgomery, *Joyful Militancy*, 38.

⁴¹ Paul Dans and Steven Groves, *Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise* (Heritage Foundation, 2023).

policies should be repealed and replaced by policies that support the formation of stable, married, nuclear families.⁴²

Severino argues that children that living in “fatherless” households are at more risk of experiencing physical and sexual violence, behavioural issues, poverty and incarceration, which statistically is false. It is in fact socioeconomic factors such as poverty in tandem with racism, which make children more likely to live within unsafe living conditions, according to the American Psychological Association.⁴³ Severino continues his right-wing rhetoric by encouraging the HHS⁴⁴ to further implement forced adoption of children the federal government may deem living within “unfit” household structures.

As of 2023, 7.7% percent of Canadian families live in poverty, while 14% of those individuals belong to racialized groups.⁴⁵ If the nuclear family structure worked, there would be no reason for the state to forcibly continue its centuries long practice of splitting up families that do not fit within a white supremacist ideal. In Canada, this regularly transpires within Indigenous and Black communities due to the surveillance of Child Protective Services, placing racialized children into foster care, typically due to the poverty of their parents. Indigenous Services Canada reported that as of 2021, 53.8% of children in the foster care system are Indigenous, yet only make up 7.7% of the child population in Canada.⁴⁶ In the United States, immigrant families fear for their lives as Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) violently kidnap them from their schools, workplaces, and homes. With

⁴² Dans and Groves, *Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise*, 451.

⁴³ “Mental Health Effects of Poverty, Hunger, and Homelessness on Children and Teens,” <https://www.apa.org>, May 16, 2024, <https://www.apa.org/topics/socioeconomic-status/poverty-hunger-homelessness-children>.

⁴⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is a federal agency that oversees the health and wellbeing of American citizens, notably regarding health related research and spending on food, medicine, etcetera.

⁴⁵ Government of Canada. “The Daily — Canadian Income Survey, 2023.” <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/250501/dq250501b-eng.htm>.

⁴⁶ Government of Canada; Indigenous Services Canada, “About an Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families,” September 9, 2025, <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1541187352297/1541187392851>.

family and community members then placed into unsanitary state-funded detention centres across the country, without due process.⁴⁷

Liberalism feeds people the false notion that cultural pluralism, while upholding individuality, allows for people to experience care and intimacy outside of the nuclear family. One may believe that contemporary Western society has already made space for the “radical” socially accepting same-sex marriage, non-reproductive sex for pleasure, and women choosing to maintain single lives, but that is simply not enough. These examples still subscribe to a model that puts the onus of care on the individual, or private units of care (a mother and father), rather than the collective. This is similarly articulated in a quote from Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* stating: “The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born [...] in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.”⁴⁸ Though the family may no longer resemble the post-World War II image of the traditional nuclear family, we are leaving room for fascism to take over for neoliberalism, rather than something more radically intimate such as socialism. What that radical structure (or non-structure) may form as is up to interpretation.

⁴⁷ Branko Marcetic, “ICE Is on a Violent, Illegal, Immoral Rampage,” *Jacobin*, January 13, 2026, <https://jacobin.com/2026/01/ice-violence-illegal-immigration-protests>.

⁴⁸ Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* (Columbia University Press, 2011).

ANTI-AESTHETICS: TOWARDS A QUEER PUNK RADICALITY

PUNK ART AS METHOD

It is good to rely upon others. For no one can bear this life alone.
— Friedrich Hölderlin, *Die Titanen (The Titans)*, 1800-1802

They say you've never lived until you've experienced your first crowdkill to the face.⁴⁹ That night at the all-ages punk show at St. James Lanes in Winnipeg, Manitoba was not mine, but I bore witness. Bootcamp, the all-woman hardcore punk band from Boise, Idaho, drove 24 hours in mid-November to play a show to about 80 people in a desolate bowling alley basement. That was one of the first punk shows I attended in the city since moving from Toronto in late-2024. Three local bands opened the show with their usual masculine bravado while the punks in the crowd swung their limbs to a shouting of youthful debauchery and anarchy. Then a bloodcurdling scream surrounded the room; an immediate realization that someone had been seriously injured, a 15-year-old girl.

As someone who came-of-age in the Toronto DIY music scene a decade prior, it has become second nature to witness people leave venues with broken fingers, bruised ribs, or a bloody nose, but this time was an oddity. I was reminded of the transcendental potential and ritualistic nature of a communal environment, a reminder that radical intimacy can be something as anarchic as the metallic taste of blood or someone else's sweat grazing your lips. This is an experience that ruptures time, space, and place; from hardcore punks in Washington D.C. to myself at 13 in Toronto and my older friends coming up in Winnipeg in the 1990s, we are interconnected by the complexities of intimacy and care that punk has offered us.

When the music stopped and the lights came up, community members banded together to ensure her safety. In the aftermath as we watched the ambulance drive away, I

⁴⁹ Crowdkilling is a violent form of moshing in which audience members create a wall with their bodies and slam into one another during a punk music performance.

overheard her friends mention it was her first punk show, in which she had been granted privileges from her foster home to spend the night with her friends. This vivid depiction of violence, pleasure, care, and revolution utilizes its imperfections to successfully critique access to care. *Punk Care Commons* as an exhibition attempts to bottle that magic, employing the oral histories and the anti-aesthetics that shape punk care. The artwork carves itself a physical space, such as a commons, to engage in communion, parsing through society's complex history of care and speculatively creating an environment worth living in. I posit what the commons may resemble when we employ countercultural imagery, and specifically what information we may gain about ourselves and each other through their analysis.

Achieving this is done through the use of textiles, video, print, sound, and ephemera. The work does not contribute to divinity or beauty in the traditional artistic sense but exists as a provocation; a political objective doubling as catalyst for a commons; a metaphysical space of equitable care, where viewers are invited to participate in the work by gathering in the living room installation created for the exhibition. The goal is to generate conversation and communal gathering through the creation of a safe environment, the commons, to absorb the works in the space, as well as to engage with the reading shelf equipped with research texts and zines.

Beauty is the body which we inhabit, the body in which we interact with the wider world and create. Through its content and form, it is inherently anti-institutional in the same way that family abolition works to dismantle hierarchical relationships. *Punk Care Commons* is agit-prop that demonstrates the radical possibilities of a non-normative subversive intimacy. *How does a body experience care when functioning as an entity of a whole, and more succinctly, a collective counterculture?*

QUILTED IN GOMORRAH: THE FAGGOTS AND THEIR FRIENDS

Figure 2. Christina Oyawale, *Quilted in Gomorrah: The Faggots and Their Friends*, 2024-ongoing, 6'x8', screen printed quilted cotton and canvas patches, embroidery string.

Inspired by the NAMES Project

Memorial Quilt—a patchwork quilt conceived in 1985, honouring queer individuals who died from AIDS-complications⁵⁰—“Quilted in Gomorrah” (see fig. 2), the quilted altar installation work, represents punk desire/depravity, interconnectivity, and contradiction. The quilt is constructed mainly of screenprinted archival images onto fabric of punk icons such as Ian



MacKaye (Minor Threat and Fugazi), Henry Rollins (Black Flag), as well as images of queer intimacy and Black caregiving. These images were sourced from a plethora of forgotten zine publications from the twentieth century, made available by the collaborative archiving effort of DIY punk materials from the Internet Archive. Images of 1980s punks in Washington D.C. moshing, stitched alongside images of mothers breastfeeding, or the Black Panther Party’s survival programs of the 1960s into 1970s, may read as antithetical, but are intertexts that maintain a radical ethos of “we take care of us”. As collectives of people who have been historically vilified and surveilled by the state, there is a necessity to ensure material conditions are being met within a system that employs violence to enforce its vilification.

⁵⁰ According to the National AIDS Memorial in the United States, the quilt weighs an estimated 54 tons, with 50,000 panels dedicated to more than 110,000 individuals, as of 2020 (National AIDS Memorial, 2021).

These needs have been successfully met through the circular function of mutual aid, a collaborative process of providing community members access to monetary, social, and material needs.⁵¹ That is why the inclusion of Black children eating free breakfast at BPP survival program events felt important to me. United States' FBI director at the time of the program, J. Edgar Hoover, knew that Black communities aiding each other's survival was a threat to capitalist white society, and stated in a 1969 field memo that: "the BCP [Breakfast for Children Program] represents the best and most influential activity going for the BPP [Black Panther Party] and, as such, is potentially the greatest threat to efforts by authorities to neutralize the BPP and destroy what it stands for".⁵² The importance of these programs and activism throughout the United States led to many instances of sabotage at the hands of the state, as well as state backed assassinations of key Black Panther Party leaders such as Fred Hampton. It was made clear that families held the utmost importance to the fabric of American culture, if they were/are white bourgeois families willing to uphold capital.

That is why the conscious decision to deploy these images in relation to each other is a radical act. Breastfeeding mothers, children engaging in autonomous joy⁵³, queer/trans individuals, Black-kin, *and* punks are bound by their systemic oppression but also their vital will to survive despite living within a failing system. As Black-American political scientist Cathy J. Cohen examines, the conditions of building a strong coalition need not be "the process of movement building...rooted in our shared history or identity," but rather "our shared marginal relationship to dominant power which normalizes, legitimizes, and privileges".⁵⁴ Our communal power is strongest when we acknowledge how class dynamics in tandem with other oppressive systems function to keep us segregated. Embroidering words

⁵¹ Dean Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)* (Verso Books, 2020), 7.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Children are an oppressed class under capitalism, dominated by adult supremacy and the family unit. Childhood and play are symbolic in the work, as a family abolitionist perspective believes children deserve to be autonomous beings treated as individuals that deserve access to consent, care, and love (See: *Trust Kids! Stories on Youth Autonomy and Confronting Adult Supremacy* by carla bergman, 2022).

⁵⁴ Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?," 458.

such as “comrade” and “accomplice” are intended to provoke us past care being determined by identity-based markers, but rather to a shared desire to abolish a system that is hostile to those who seek to live outside of the cultural hegemony.

In addition to the screenprinted textiles, found ephemera and crafted ceramic objects have been placed at the base of the piece to resemble the religious practice of the living room altar memorial dedicated to those who have passed away. Rather than a symbol of death, I employ the aesthetics of offerings to the dead, associated with grief and loss, as “liberatory objects”—queer relational objects that represent human interconnection that transcend space and time. The objects are relationally attached to queer aesthetics of care: sex toys, poppers (inhalant party drugs; popularized by queer people), cigarettes, bolt cutters and articles of clothing (i.e. the leather jacket) all speak to the human senses, manifesting memories, social and cultural connectivity, and nourishment. The process of handcrafting ceramic objects from memory in a collaborative space, allowed me to consider the political and controversial implications they hold in different spaces, notably dominant culture versus queer punk culture. The simple act of sharing a cigarette or one’s leather jacket with a lover or a friend are seen as acts of loving.

At its core, “Quilted in Gomorrah” *emulates* Rosa’s explanation of the current moment in that, “left to its own devices, the world cannot hold us [...] we must hold each other, as we remake a world that can”.⁵⁵ Collectivized care is a method towards an equitable system of affection, with countercultural punk aesthetics being the immediate threat to cultural hegemony. This is due to the inherently collaborative and political ethos that punk carries as a subculture, which makes it an ideal catalyst for intersectional coalition building. Through our shared oppression, we must build a future that separates exploitative labour from care. The amalgam depicted in my quilt destabilizes the systemic hierarchy enforced in

⁵⁵ Rosa, *Radical Intimacy*, 171.

heterosexual monogamous relationships and the white family, by displaying a pluralistic tableau of taboos and intimacies.

The title of the piece references the 1977 speculative queer utopian fable, *The Faggots & Their Friends Between Revolutions* by late-gay novelist Larry Mitchell. An important piece of liberatory literature to the queer community that imagines a world of queer sexual liberation and communal care, Mitchell's work is a continuation of a history of works from the past that dreamed up new possibilities of intimacy during a time of mass grief. As we navigate the last six years since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a return to social isolation and the uprising of far-right fascism. The private household continues to be viewed as a safe haven, but only for those privileged enough to afford it. We saw this with shelter in place measures during the pandemic lockdowns, which left unhoused and abused individuals to the streets and unsafe living conditions.⁵⁶

When these images work in tandem with each other it forces us to acknowledge that intimacy can show up in many different places outside of the fixture of a home. The basement or the dingy venue become sites of creativity, like atoms weaving through each other, bodies moving asynchronously, and seeking shelter in a metaphysical environment. In many ways, the quilted altar is a speculative future that embraces punk physical and relational intimacies but liberates them from their inherently oppressive labour relations. An interdisciplinary installation attests to the omnipresence of forms of intimacy we have deemed deviant or insignificant in comparison to the blood-relational familial structure. This allows us to understand the historical perspectives of queer, racialized/Indigenous and punk communities that have utilized the zine as an apparatus for political and cultural rhetoric.

My use of historically DIY techniques reflects the political nature of countercultural aesthetics and mobilizes zine culture as a catalyst for politicizing society towards more

⁵⁶ Lewis, *Abolish the Family*, 73-74.

pluralistic forms of connectivity, loving and pleasure. When we situate the perspective of the zine as a physical tool in the dismantling and critiquing of our social conditions, we can understand it as evidence embedded in theory and personal experiences. The zine continues to be relevant today as social media companies such as tech-oligarch Mark Zuckerberg's Meta Inc. continue to censor and surveil dissident leftist voices.⁵⁷ This has been particularly apparent in the last three years since the beginning of the ongoing genocide in Palestine, which has been widely documented, discussed, and protested online, leading to technocrats collaborating with state efforts to suppress dissidents on TikTok and Instagram. In an article from the left-wing magazine *Jacobin*, writer Branko Marcetic noted that users, "reported that social media posts...containing pro-Palestinian hashtags or messages, or using the word 'genocide,' [were] met with suspiciously low engagement or were even taken down".⁵⁸ In relation to the quilt, it operates similarly in the physical realm but more importantly focuses on materiality, person-to-person communion, and physicality that the digital world has failed to afford us. Like the distribution of the zine, the quilt acts as a symbol of possibility with little risk of censorship.

Anti-aesthetics is the intentional act of creating work with a purpose outside of traditional standards of beauty. The work seeks to act as agit-prop that exists as an anti-establishment critique of the status quo. The work is intentionally shocking and grotesque at times in order to leave a lasting effect that forces viewers to implicate their own experiences. I believe that a focus on good feelings in our everyday life, specifically in the media we consume, is a determinant of our ability to be challenged as individuals. Discomfort requires us to evaluate biases and generate conversation; this is the main function of the artworks throughout the exhibition.

⁵⁷ Branko Marcetic, "A Tidal Wave of State and Private Repression Is Targeting Pro-Palestinian Voices," *Jacobin*, November 3, 2023, <https://jacobin.com/2023/11/anti-palestine-mccarthyism-censorship>.

⁵⁸ Marcetic, "A Tidal Wave of State and Private Repression Is Targeting Pro-Palestinian Voices".

Canadian art historian Benoit Jodoin proposes that contemporary queer textile art can be “a means of returning to and transforming materials; at the same time [...] suggests encounters, connection, interweaving, mixing, and bonding”, which can be interpreted as a means of cementing one’s complex histories materially.⁵⁹ He continues his interrogation into the medium by suggesting that the reemergence of ‘handicraft’ mediums, notably by women and queer artists redefining the politics of social reproduction, is due in part to the necessity of highlighting the prevalence of white male supremacy and domination within our current cultural apparatus.⁶⁰ Additionally, ‘feminized’ art production can act as protest art, through its contemplative slowness and politically pertinacious contextual qualities. Mediums such as textiles or printmaking have been deemed less valuable, as Eurocentric standards of artistic precision and form, such as painting and sculpture, have been regarded as the apex that constitutes ‘good art’. I believe that through this act of exclusion from the male centered art canon, the anti-aesthetics of handicraft have been more suited to accurately address the sociopolitical harms of neoliberalism and state domination towards interconnectivity.

APRÈS DAN GRAHAM (2025-2026)

Political Function

The Situationist Internationale engaged with the process of misappropriating advertisements in the 1960s, and I found myself engaging with images and imploring new meanings similarly when working on my two-channel video *Après Dan Graham* (2026). The praxis of the artists and theorists in the Situationist Internationale was that the only means of dismantling capitalism was by way of complete revolution.⁶¹ In this current political moment,

⁵⁹ Benoit Jodoin, “Queering the Family: Threading a Metaphor,” trans. Ron Ross, *Esse Arts + Opinions*, 2023, 39.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen (2009): The Politics of Interventionist Art: The Situationist International, Artist Placement Group, and Art Workers’ Coalition, *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society*, 21:1, 34-49

I believe that a complete revolution is likewise the only manner in which we can abandon this inequitable socioeconomic system, but active forms of counterculture are also needed to intersect the media propaganda being used to pacify the masses. The two-channel video work engages in the process of what French Situationist, cultural theorist Guy Debord coined as ‘détournement’, defined by the “integration of present or past artistic productions into a superior construction of a milieu [...] détournement within the old cultural spheres is a method of propaganda, a method which reveals the wearing out and loss of importance of those spheres”.⁶² In layperson’s terms, this is the process of creatively appropriating print media that exists within everyday life, specifically copywritten materials such as text and images, then creating new works that represent a political opposition—in other words, a form of leftist propaganda.⁶³



Figure 3. Installation view of two-channel video “Après Dan Graham,” from *Punk Care Commons*, 2026
Christina Oyawale. Credit: Sarah Fuller

⁶² Ken Knabb, trans., *Situationist International Anthology Revised and Expanded Edition* (PM Press, 2024), 52.

⁶³ Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology*, 52.

American visual artist Dan Graham's documentary film *Rock My Religion* (1983-1984) is a key aesthetic influence on the work, as Graham's film correspondingly focuses on the transcendental experience of punk anti-aesthetics while employing assemblage of found footage and text, in conversation with his own film work of rock musicians such as Patti Smith.⁶⁴ The Museum of Modern Art in New York City describes Graham's act of likening the physical and spiritual relationship to rock music with the religious sect The Shakers, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century religious movement that practiced shaking their bodies to rid themselves of the devil, as "one that inverts traditional pieties with sexualized religious dance".⁶⁵ With these movements relying on "the social and sexual origins and implications of rock and roll, ... provid[ing] a framework for the [interpretation of] the rituals of rock and punk culture as forms of religious practice".⁶⁶

My two-channel video work *Après Dan Graham* intentionally upholds Graham's and the Situationists' process of appropriation, furthering the purpose of anti-aesthetics as a means of confrontational propaganda. If we consider the political function of the video work, the Marxist notion of dialectical materialism, rooted in Marx and Engels' combined philosophies of materialism and dialectics, situates the aesthetic decision to place two contradictory video works side-by-side in the two-channel work. For context, dialectical materialism is a philosophy that interprets our material, emotional, and thought conditions through the lens of materialism, an emphasis on the material world shaping our foundation of our thinking, while dialectics act as a change that transpires through contradiction.⁶⁷ By utilizing dialectical materialism as the philosophical function of the video, I allow for multiple truths to transpire, as images that may be viewed as direct dichotomies ultimately

⁶⁴ The Museum of Modern Art, *MoMA Contemporary Highlights: 250 Works Since 1980 From the Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Museum of Modern Art* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2007), 41.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology: Including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to The Critique of Political Economy*, 1888.

create synthesis through their emotional and material contradictions. For example, I juxtapose two contradictory images alongside each other: on the left, a mother in the throes of childbirth, and on the right, a mosh pit from the punk documentary *The Decline of Western Civilization* (1981), directed by Penelope Spheeris. Once placed in the vicinity of each other, synthesis allows for the image to exist as an entity.



Figure 4. Christina Oyawale, *Après Dan Graham* still of a mother giving birth next to a moshpit, 2024-ongoing, two-channel archival video, 11:06 mins.

The overarching thesis is that these environments utilize person-to-person touch to achieve interconnectivity. Childbirth acts as a multifaceted intertextual analysis of the reproduction of workers (children are created as a means of reproducing more workers), the continuation of the family, the creation of moments of joyous celebration, and less evidently, a concealed form of violence—the process of childbirth being particularly physically violent on one’s body. The contradiction of the mosh pit exists in an analogous manner; it is an inherently patriarchal and a physically violent form of self-expression. In childbirth, the post-delivery care method of “Kangaroo care”, more commonly known as skin-to-skin contact, is a practice in which the newborn is held against the bare chest of the birthing parent. Pediatricians have researched that this can help babies emotionally and physically regulate to their new

surroundings of the outside world.⁶⁸ Mosh pits function similarly as the communal trashing, jumping, and pushing acts as somatic movement that allows bodies to self-regulate. When we consider the effects of somatic movement, we can begin to see a continued thread between how bodies embracing in close proximity is an instinctual cathartic interpersonal experience. Care between both scenes becomes the binding and contradictory factor that makes them parallel yet contrasting.

Meaningmaking

The two-channel video work began with collecting clips from cult classic queer/punk films, as well as PBS style public educational films, from the Internet Archive—a non-profit online database working to preserve websites, scholarly texts, and cultural artifacts with a focus on making information available for free.⁶⁹ Using the Internet Archive was an intentionally creative and political tactic for my research-creation practice, as I believe its mission of democratizing access to information allows artists to create works more freely. When copyright acts as a barrier it has the ability to limit creative methods of scrutinizing and dissecting culture.

For decades, appropriation artists such as Jeff Koons and Andy Warhol, have employed works and images from popular culture, albeit commercial kitsch. I see the utilization of appropriation, more specifically the Situationists' *détournement*, as an anti-aesthetic critique that functions by means of taking imagery related to care and using it as agit-prop for family abolition. Viewers become more implicated in my work *Après Dan Graham* when faced with documentary footage or educational videos, because of the anonymity and universality it provides. I was particularly invested in incorporating scenes from films such as *Totally F***ed Up* (1993) by Gregg Araki, Spheeris' punk documentary

⁶⁸ Gabriel Altit, Danica Hamilton, and Karel O'Brien, "Skin-to-skin Care (SSC) for Term and Preterm Infants," *Paediatrics & Child Health* 29, no. 4 (July 1, 2024): 238–45, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pch/pxae015>.

⁶⁹ "About the Internet Archive," Internet Archive, accessed April 11, 2026, <https://archive.org/about/>.

The Decline of Western Civilization (1981), and underground 1980s dark-erotic films by Richard Kern (*The Bitches* [1992]; *Submit To Me Now* [1987]; *Fingered* [1986]; *You Killed Me First* [1985]) which were important works from the New York underground “Cinema of Transgression” movement in the 1980s. Kern intentionally queers the family in his short film, *You Killed Me First*, which stars the late-gay artist and AIDS activist David Wojnarowicz, as a heterosexual religious father to actress Lung Leg’s character Elizabeth. The short film follows a rebellious Elizabeth forced to partake in the rigidity of the nuclear family; sitting down to turkey dinners with her family, as she is admonished for her lack of ability to fit into the role of respectable young woman. Meanwhile her sister is celebrated by their parents for exemplifying those qualities; she is demure, polite, courtable.⁷⁰ Elizabeth catches her father hypocritically engaging in rough sex with her mother, which represents a dismantling of her family’s Christian values. As her family sits down to dinner one last time, Elizabeth resorts to homicide—shooting family members out of repulsion for their “petit bourgeois” qualities.⁷¹ The last words she proclaims before brutally shooting her mother is, “you killed me first”.⁷² Kern’s desire to portray the inherent violence attached to the family allows viewers to comprehend the absurdity attached to the family structure to begin with. His campy short film offers insight into a world that lusts after the false appearances attached to the family structure, which in itself allows for violence to cultivate. In the same manner Kern maneuvers queer perversion as a catalyst that disorients, my video work sees this disorientation as an opportunity to showcase how perversion can be strategically agitative towards heteronormative culture. For Sara Ahmed, “perversion is also a spatial term, referr[ing] to the willful determination to counter or go against orthodoxy” necessary in identifying “the ‘disorientations’ of queer, and how it can contest not only heteronormative assumptions, but

⁷⁰ *You Killed Me First*, directed by Richard Kern (Deathtrip Films, 1985).

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid, 10:27 to 10:37.

also social conventions and orthodoxies in general”.⁷³ Perversion is not solely deployed for the sake of representing queer sexuality, but equally the act of defying what relationships are meant to represent within the state.

Queerness/punk-ness represented in the found-video is depicted through kink and inter-racial/communal caregiving, which have historically been vilified as acts of perversion. Pairing these clips alongside scenes of punks moshing at Bad Brains, the Germs, and Minor Threat shows felt important to illustrate the queerness of the punk environment as well as, the mosh pit functioning as a ritualistic ontological experience that *thrusts* us closer to others in the room. The mosh pit is an inherently collaborative experience that bridges many socioeconomic divides, as well as provides men with an opportunity for physical intimacy. Historically, hardcore punk music has been predominately dominated by white male musicians and fans, alongside which is a violence deeply embedded in Western culture and media. Violence and hyper-masculinity exist as socialized modes of emotional regulation. These images act as commentary on the homoeroticism attached to the concept of “moshing”—a form of punk dancing that includes pushing and slamming into each other in the audience. It is a communal gesture with a complicated dichotomy attached to violence, while simultaneously functioning as a space of communal intimacy. Queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz’s description of the physical space is particularly resonant with my interpretation of this:

The flaying, annihilative spectacle of a mosh pit was the gateway for many boys to touch other boys without having to wear a helmet and catch or throw balls in the air. It is through such moments of touching and being touched, heavy breathing with and alongside the other newest ones, as sweat mingles and hands linger, that we hear that whisper and know it is good, that a certain acting crazy together is possible.⁷⁴

To add to Muñoz’s sentiments, we must acknowledge that punk carries characteristics of romanticism and in a manner that feels ghostly because we continue to be haunted by what

⁷³ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, (Duke University Press, 2006), 78.

⁷⁴ Muñoz, “Gimme Gimme This... Gimme Gimme That”, 102.

Jayna Brown, Patrick Deer, and Tavia Nyong'o label as "the political and economic wreckage that prompted its emergence in the first place".⁷⁵ The desire to seek socioeconomic alternatives when we have been met with inequities, violence, and suppression from the state, is an organic response. It is vital to the morale of the working-class, as well as pertinent achieving a liveable future.

Through class divides, wars, racial tensions, and the like, there is an ever-present spectre that looms; state subjugation. Still, punks consistently find ways to fall back on communal care for survival. This was present in 1980s Toronto and D.C. with the birth of punk movements such as 'Homocore', a queer punk subculture created in Toronto as a response to homophobia in the punk community, by artists Bruce LaBruce and G.B. Jones, or 'Revolution Summer,' where D.C.-based hardcore bands attempted to unsubscribe from toxic masculinity that became heavily associated with the aesthetics of the male dominated scene. Aspects of these punk communities continue to be presently represented well into the 21st-century despite the internet siloing us into corporately manufactured trends. Though like any revolutionary movement that has attempted to exist within the capitalist system, it contains a temporality that threatens longevity.

Aesthetically, the clips in the two-channel video attempt to make light of the temporalities attached to punk and queerness, with an emphasis that capitalism must be fully abolished for equitable care to transpire. Videos of the mosh pit, alongside local news footage of sewing circles, sexual abstinence PSAs, and scientific educational footage of childbirth, are deployed as a means of rejecting state-sanctioned productivity while empowering care as a decolonial and anti-hierarchical act. Throughout history, queers and punks have died pre-maturely as the state casts their lives aside. We saw this with the AIDS crisis that began in 1981, notably the lack of governmental response from the likes of politicians like Reagan,

⁷⁵ Jayna Brown, Patrick Deer, and Tavia Nyong'o, "Punk and Its Afterlives," *Social Text* 31, no. 3 (January 1, 2013): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-2152900>.

and continue to see the proliferation of disregard for the overdoses of drug-users in the ongoing toxic drug crisis in Canada, specifically in cities like Winnipeg, Vancouver, and Toronto.⁷⁶ The continued cultural and social hostility towards anarchic gestures of care demands viewers to reckon with our inherent biases related to intimacy. As characterized by Debord, “the spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images,” which can thrust viewers to grapple with the responsibilities we hold to one another.⁷⁷

My desire is for this work to exist within the installation as agit-prop, a bottled spark of potential for a more caring world workshopped by those deemed the most deviant. In Russian-born Ikerbasque philosopher Michael Marder’s *Plant-Thinking* (2013), he writes about our interconnected relationships between plant life and humans. His emphasis on the differences and similarities between this co-existence, notably requires us as humans to implicate our affinity to human-made hierarchy. Marder states: “The human body and subjectivity alike are not pure expressions of Spirit but strange archives, surfaces of inscription for the vestiges of the inorganic world, of plant growth, and of animality—all of which survive and lead a clandestine afterlife in us, as us”, which forces us to consider how no one is born pure, we are contaminated by our surroundings.⁷⁸ He continues by articulating that plant-life forces us to seek more in the universe than meets the eye, or rather than what we’ve deemed as normal, and to seek more care beyond the minimum.⁷⁹ Punk aesthetics as family abolition is a testament to this notion; rather than simply believing that this current life is the best it will get, using revolutionary optimism and creativity can allow us to name the

⁷⁶ Public Health Agency of Canada, “Key Findings: Opioid- and Stimulant-related Harms in Canada — Canada.ca,” Government of Canada, March 25, 2026, <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/substance-related-harms/opioids-stimulants/#a4>.

(See: DULF [Drug User Liberation Front] Communiqués for more information regarding the Vancouver-based harm reduction drug compassion club founded by Nyx and Kalicum. DULF was an active response to curb the toxic drug crisis by providing drug-users with tested drugs).

⁷⁷ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (1967; repr., Princeton University Press, 1994), chap. 1.

⁷⁸ Michael Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (Columbia University Press, 2013), 10.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

issues with the current system and breed a formless care network. Marder's quote also forces us to remember that we are products of the wider world, which can be related to the process of identity formation as an integral part of intimacy.

Additionally, Marder's *Pyropolitics* (2014) illustrates the political nature of physical and metaphysical fires. The text lends itself to my research by focusing on the propagation of the "spark". A spark, or fire, must be implemented into the hearth of the individual in order to change the lived outcome. This feels important when talking about radicality and restructuring the notion of the "family", as something needs to change in the ways we care for each other as a society. A spark, or rather something radical, must be used as the catalyst to make that change. Marder writes:

Revolutionaries work with the materials they encounter all around themselves, converting, with the help of fire, the paraphernalia of oppression into the tools of liberation. Revolutions, likewise, liquify, recycle, and recast the slogans and aspirations of the past, of other movements for radical change, however distant in historical time and in geographical space from those they inspire.⁸⁰

This functions as a rallying call to seek out new alternatives. This quote posits the question: what might that *spark* look like in relation to care, survival, and love? What are the tools one must use in order to achieve a universalized access to care? Will those tools consist of strategies that are used to oppress us—à la Audre Lorde's critique of using the *master's tools*⁸¹—or will they take forms we have yet to imagine? Marder demands that we consider utilizing the tools we have at our disposal to dismantle the pitfalls of our current system and how they benefit the capitalist structure. Seeking a way to move away from static images or symbols as a means of further immersing viewers into the space. I instead focus on the multidimensionality that images or symbols can hold.

⁸⁰ Michael Marder, *Pyropolitics: When the World is Ablaze* (Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2014), 42.

⁸¹ Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (1979; repr., Crossing Press, 1984), 2, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/audre-lorde-the-master-s-tools-will-never-dismantle-the-master-s-house>. The full quote by Audre Lorde is, "It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the *master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*."

WINNIPEG AT THE INTERSECTION OF TORONTO

Friendship will be the soil from which a new politics will emerge.

–Ivan Illich⁸²



Figure 5. Christina Oyawale, *wildfire season: Lucy & Pascale*, 2025, 120mm Ilford film negative scanned to digital.

Between 2024 and 2025, I convened with friends and community members in Toronto and Winnipeg who hold ties to their local punk and/or queer scenes. My conversations with these individuals all felt relevant to queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz’s notion of the *dystopian* and *utopian* paradigm that constructs the punk rock common, each person being a product of a much greater whole, unified by their desire to build solidarity based on the continued failures of the many dying hegemonic cultural systems (ie: the nuclear family, capitalism).⁸³ This is represented in interviews and collaborative writing work provided by friends and community members over the course of my research. In May 2025, while in

⁸² Ivan Illich to Madhu Suri Prakash, “Friendship,” n.d.

⁸³ Muñoz, “‘Gimme Gimme This... Gimme Gimme That’”, 98.

Toronto, I recorded conversations and photographed my friends Knowah Holder, Amelia Northey Taylor in conversation with her partner Gabriela (Gabi) Laconsay, and queer long distance best friends Lucy Hanna and Pascale Padilla (see fig. 5). The discussions were invaluable to my textual and artistic research, as their stories contributed a critical autotheoretical lens to the project. As they intimately spoke with me about various personal experiences that related to care for themselves and their communities, it was clear that their experiences actively challenge monocultural expectations relating to productivity and care. None of them spoke about settling down into heterosexual relationships, having children, or buying property—mainly because most working-class people cannot economically afford to—but rather spoke of a desire to find ways to maintain communized/interconnected relationships instead.

Lucy and Pascale candidly daydreamed about queerly growing old together instead of getting married to partners, Knowah intimately linked the social strife of navigating society as a Black trans woman to stories of her mother's experiences of misogynoir in the workplace, and Gabby and Amelia routinely joked about how important it was that they continue to make space for other queer women in Toronto's male dominated music community. All of them offered individually personal and political perspectives that speak to their lived experiences as queer/punk artists, musicians, and writers while actively unsubscribing from social expectations. To quote Tatiana Cozzarelli, love under an abolished family allows us to “enter and exit relationships, to experiment, to mess up, to get your heart broken and to fall deeply in love with friends, lovers and everything in between,” which is demonstrated in the manner these platonic and romantic lovers discuss the importance of their respective interconnectivity, bound by a desire to abolish social expectations.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Tatiana Cozzarelli, “Love and Socialism,” *Left Voice*, February 13, 2018, accessed April 7, 2026, <https://www.leftvoice.org/love-and-socialism/>.

Additionally, I reached out to members of Winnipeg's 'Straight Edge' punk scene who I was not directly connected to, in order to have younger perspectives. As straight edge punks, they intentionally abstain from drinking and recreational drug use. In their own words, they live interconnected, which could be characterized as an abolitionist praxis, by directly confronting systems of harm maintained by capitalism through their local punk bands and community events. In the 1980s, the Straight Edge movement began as a punk subgroup in D.C. with the origins of the term attributed to Minor Threat's Ian MacKaye via their song of the same name released in 1981.⁸⁵ MacKaye wrote lyrics that would be cemented into punk discourse for decades:

I'm a person just like you
But I've got better things to do
Than sit around and fuck my head
Hang out with the living dead
Snort white shit up my nose
Pass out at the shows
I don't even think about speed
That's something I just don't need
I've gone straight edge.⁸⁶

Though he has denied intentionally creating a movement in which people identified themselves as "straight edge", he has stated that it was meant as a celebration of individuality, in a punk community at the time that was hypermasculine and encouraged drunkenness.⁸⁷ The aesthetics and politics of the movement continue well into the 21st-century, with new factions of young punks forming regional straight edge alliances. Micah (he/him; 23) and Ramona (she/her; 18), both members of the group, reached out to me over Instagram, to explain their gravitation towards a straight edge lifestyle despite being so young. They had both noticed similar patterns to MacKaye—addiction played a major role in the scene, and expressed wanting to be "better [people]" for their friends and for themselves. Notably, from these

⁸⁵ Logan Sounds Off, "Ian MacKaye Interview | Minor Threat, Fugazi & Straight Edge | Logan Sounds Off," October 18, 2023, accessed April 12, 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2i4karXr0Q>.

⁸⁶ Minor Threat. "Straight Edge." Track 8 from *First Two Seven Inches*. Discord Records, 1981.

⁸⁷ Logan Sounds Off, "Ian MacKaye Interview | Minor Threat, Fugazi & Straight Edge | Logan Sounds Off."

conversations I was able to gather that COVID-19 isolation and the further spiral into state fascism led them to seeking a means of maintaining control over their intimate lives.⁸⁸ Micah and Ramona's frustrations are correlated to the alienation and the privatization of care under the state. Their desire to build and maintain an ecosystem of young straight edge punks can be contextualized by Sophie K. Rosa's praxis on friendship, stating that these types of relationships of solidarity "can extend the realm of possible and prefigure the future".⁸⁹ We are all engaging in utopian examples of care, utilizing the visible evidence of harm experienced on a daily basis, and creating radical spaces of camaraderie and creativity. The imperial core requires us to maintain passive relationships where 'good feelings' are the only qualities we seek in platonic and romantic relationships, but what can our interconnected lives look like when we stop placing unrealistic social expectations on our comrades? We can begin to shift judgment towards stronger accountability as communal care. As Micah and Ramona stated above, their reasoning for abstaining was not to pass judgement of others but create a space that allowed them to show up for community members in ways they were unable to when they drank.

Muñoz proposes that "we can see the negation that is negativity as something that can be strangely utopian while simultaneously dystopian," orienting us towards a synthesis that "can conterminously represent innovation and annihilation".⁹⁰ The act of queering or "disordering" a metaphysical space can be the catalyst in which we collectively understand our current failing system of care, as queer and punk spaces are the nuanced synthesis of possibilities. Queer and punk aesthetics acknowledge that an equitable system of care identifies that both 'bad feelings' and 'good feelings' are necessary for healthy relationships to transpire, rather than placing them into binaries. It is doubly necessary that they coexist so it is easier for us to identify real harm, and to not shy away from discomfort. We must not

⁸⁸ Micah, Instagram direct message to author, March 20, 2026.

⁸⁹ Rosa, *Radical Intimacy*, 68.

⁹⁰ Muñoz, "'Gimme Gimme This... Gimme Gimme That,'" 98.

ignore bad feelings, or rather, the *dystopia* identified by Muñoz (violence, fear, colonialism); similarly, carla bergman cites that when we purely focus on ‘good feeling’ “[kin]ship become[s] simplistic, reactionary, and colonial in their erasure of power relations and systemic violence” which is the “hegemonic morality of Empire and plays itself ... among everyday relationships”.⁹¹ Though bergman argues this in relation to the problematic relationship between settlers and colonized peoples of Turtle Island, the sentiment is ever present in relation to a queer communizing of care. As bluntly articulated by writer Fred Moten: “The coalition emerges out of your recognition that it’s fucked up for you, in the same way that we’ve already recognized that it’s fucked up for us [...] I need you to recognize that this shit is killing you, too, however much more softly, you stupid motherfucker”.⁹² We must unite in our shared state oppression, not through judgement but a willingness to defeat capitalism.

LETTERS TO FRIENDS

In addition to the interviews and photographs, I tasked my writer friends Cam Scott, Cole McInerney, Knowah Holder, and Shalaka Jadhav to respond to the poems paired with the photographs I had taken for the exhibition. The four poems all reference different acts of Rosa’s notion of ‘radical intimacy’, specifically focusing on daily observations relating to relationships within private versus public life. These works structurally relied on recollection, connections to space/place, as well as social identity formation. Environments such as the punk basement venue and other communal gathering spaces appeared throughout the writing, acting as the grounding point for most of the work. “Mother, Other” recounts the familial intimacy between me and my mother, specifically our shared fears of mortality:

⁹¹ bergman and Montgomery, *Joyful Militancy*,

⁹² “The Wild Beyond: With and for the Undercommons,” in *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*, by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013), 10.
<http://www.minorcompositions.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/undercommons-web.pdf>.

my mother never learned to drive
i never learned to drive
i fear i've inherited her stagnation
i wonder if she knows whether it has to do with my fear of dying.⁹³

“St. James Lanes” further investigates the social responsibilities punks hold each other to if a fellow showgoer gets hurt in the mosh pit. I ended the last stanza referencing the irony of the incident occurring soon after Cam’s political monologue to the crowd during his band Age of Self’s set. He earnestly asked the crowd whether we were willing to accept ‘socialism or barbarism,’ a famous quote from Polish-German revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg, forcing us to consider the semiotic political relationship between the music venue and the politics of the outside world. In my poem I wrote: “C ended his set by asking whether we wanted ‘socialism or barbarism’ / Taking his delivery as minced words; mistaken as passive rhetoric / and recklessly choosing the latter”.⁹⁴ If we consider Cam’s speech, the crowdkill incident, and the poem, we can see the importance of interdependent caretaking that continues to be present within queer and punk spaces. Though the political tides have ebbed and flowed over decades, one thing that has remained is the desire to seek justice within our communities. In the twentieth-century, anti-fascist punk movements, such as SHARP (Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice), were spaces where that sense of belonging and care could proliferate.⁹⁵ In the current movement, we attempt to follow these long standing punk traditions of intimacy, but fall short due to capitalism’s social indoctrination of prioritizing one’s self over the collective. My decision to create a collective call-and-response writing piece with my friends was an attempt to dismantle that feeling that has become commonplace for so many of us. Despite the attributed temporal tendencies of leftist political care environments, whether that

⁹³ Christina Oyawale, “Mother, Other,” in *Punk Care Commons Zine*, ed. Winnie Compton and Knowah Holder, 2026.

⁹⁴ Oyawale, “St. James Lanes,” in *Punk Care Commons Zine*, ed. Winnie Compton and Knowah Holder, 2026.

⁹⁵ SHARP (Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice) is an anti-fascist skinhead punk movement that began in 1987 by punks who actively opposed the presence of neo-Nazis and white supremacist in punk spaces, as well as co-opting punk aesthetics such as the shaved head. The SHARP’s aesthetics and politics were derived from Jamaican ska and UK mod aesthetics. See: Twin Cities PBS, “Anti-Racist Skinheads Fighting Nazis: The Baldies Documentary,” 2021.

be due to care burnout or active state-based sabotage, I believe it is important to continue conversations surrounding our comforts and fears.

Shalaka took to annotating “St. James Lanes” (see fig. 6), beginning a synthesis that not solely represents our shared relationship as artists, but allowed us to intimately convene freely within the margins. Cole took to responding to, “The Great Southern-Ontario Novel,” a poem I wrote about a breakup I had experienced three years prior and the intimacy that remains between two people of differing geographic locations. I wrote the lines,

A small city of “incompleteness” in your words, you held your thoughts on the city with fulsomeness despite its small population and disregard for the working class. Taking its name from Anishinaabemowin; aptly translating to “the crossing place” – we crossed at the intersections of both our cities. A place steeped in history that I could see behind your eyes. Never shared with an air of disdain, though I suppose you may have kept those memories closer to the vest. Something I now internalize as an attempt to convince me of the city’s excellence. There was no need for convincing when your connection to the place resembled that of my own.⁹⁶

Cole responded with a piece titled, “In Celebration” that read the words:

The traincar hopper says
I will use the machinery of the landscape I’ve inherited.
I say look at the machinery of the city at work: Mikey patrolling
the square asking if everyone is alright all the time, Cath working
the service desk prepared to kick the asses of any jackasses,
August repainting the library branch sign for the second time.
I love all of you and more, cheers to not ending up unconcerned,
sleeping in hydro fields waiting on the expanding universe.⁹⁷

What we all began to do with this writing exercise is give each other insight into our deepest humanity, reflecting on our own relationship to the environments that force us to remember those from our past. How these memories cease to grant us the permission of forgetting, because forgetting would be an act of unlearning radicality. That is why we wrote them down, shared them with each other, and created a space that no longer is temporal. Despite our geographic distances, intimacy is created through the letter.

⁹⁶ Christina Oyawale, “The Great Southern-Ontario Novel,” in *Punk Care Commons Zine*, ed. Winnie Compton, 2026.

⁹⁷ Cole McInerney, “In Celebration,” in *Punk Care Commons Zine*, ed. Winnie Compton and Christina Oyawale, 2026.

The punks from Iowa played it fast and loose

blood pooling from her eyelid

diagnosed a crowd kill to the face;

possible broken nose and a story for the ages

— she managed to keep on her falsies THE INVOLVANCE OF LOOKING GOOD

those young boys maneuvered faster than speeding bullets

the kids still do drugs like we used to; they just don't dance like it

What do a venue and a home have in common? a lot more than we're willing to admit.

A RECOGNIZABLE
SENT, IT SITS ON YOU
UNTIL YOU RETURN
THROUGH ITS DOORS, AGAIN

The closest thing to death to her

yet heaven on earth the ways our bodies collide

in a cockeyed fashion:

... AS IT IS IN HEAVEN (MATTHEW 6:10)

home is not a place but simply an irrevocable condition¹

THAT WE HAVE PLANT A PIECE OF OURSELVES IN OTHERS AT ALL IS A MIRACLE,

I overheard the boys say: "Get the anarchist symbol tattooed on your arm next to the hammer and sickle" DON'T YOU THINK?

— Winnipeg straight edge

THE ERODING OF (PUBLIC) SPACE AS TO UNKNOW THIS KIND OF
I smoked my cigarette in bemusement; EAVESDROPPING IS
DEVASTATING
the kids don't dance like they used to — WHEN DID WE BECOME SO AFRAID OF OUR
OWN BODIES?
they simply crowd kill instead

Blood was pooling from her eyelid

Is there a doctor on the aircraft? E always knows what to do:

exit the aircraft / women and children first / what's short of misogyny in a room full of testosterone

butch baby bliss

Turn the house lights back down

we came here to build a house

NOT A HOME THOUGH! I'VE BEEN TRAINED & RETRAINED IN FIRST AID + CPR
FOUR TIMES IN MY LIFE & EACH TIME I HOPE
I WON'T HAVE THE COURAGE TO EXERCISE IT BUT
THEN I DO! AM ABLE & IT REMINDS ME HOW
EASY & INTUITIVE IT IS
TO TAKE CARE OF EACH OTHER

C ended his set by asking whether we wanted "socialism or barbarism"

Taking his delivery as minced words; mistaken as passive rhetoric
and recklessly choosing the latter

¹ From the novel *Giovanni's Room* (1956) by James Baldwin

THE MANY RITUALS IT TAKES TO HOLD CEREMONY AT A
SHOW
A TEMPORARY CONTAINER WE'RE ALL COMMITTING TO

Figure 6. Christina Oyawale and Shalaka Jadhav, "St. James Lanes annotated by Shalaka," 2026, in the zine *Punk Care Commons Zine*, 8"x10" inkjet print with pen ink annotations digitally scanned.

SYMBOLS

We have seen throughout the paper that meaning making through societal material conditions are the basis of the research. Moreover, I put particular focus on the sociopolitical implications that phenomenological objects and environments have to bring us closer to one another communally. Though many different theoretical frameworks such as family abolition, dialectical materialism, and Situationists' 'détournement' are deployed throughout the research, I posit that queer-feminist theorist Sara Ahmed's study of *queer phenomenological* objects and orientations further the intertextual basis of community building. Phenomenology as a theory is the study of our interactions with the wider world through our senses and the meaning that may be built through this process. For Ahmed, queer phenomenology is a continuation of this position, but further questions what it means for certain bodies to be placed in a time or space.⁹⁸ She examines how queerness can affectively reorient and disturb monocultural paths of orientation.⁹⁹ In the case of the nuclear family, heterosexuality, and whiteness, these paths of orientation are most expected in society and are hierarchies that she attempts to deviate from through queerness.

⁹⁸ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, 121.

⁹⁹ Ibid.



Figure 7 (left). Christina Oyawale, Zine shelf with liberatory objects, 2025-2026, various sizes, ceramic sculptures, screen prints, and zines.

Figure 8 (right). Christina Oyawale, *Silhouette: Ball Gag*, 2026, 4'x4', screen print ink on drywall.

Ahmed's theory is implemented throughout the artworks in the exhibition and is specifically deployed through handcrafted ceramic pieces, labeled as "liberatory objects" (see fig. 7) as well as 4' x 4' silhouette screen prints on drywall (see fig. 8). The purpose of these symbols create a synthesis of meaning from a dialectical perspective, and demands a nuanced interpretation that is reliant on what certain symbols/images represent in relation to their sociopolitical and cultural implications. For example, milk cartons appear throughout the artworks while holding dual meanings. Firstly, milk has been appropriated as an alt-right symbol that exemplifies white purity and masculinity, characterized by its "strength of body and society".¹⁰⁰ Meanwhile, the historical association with milk links it to nutrition, specifically childhood growth and maternal care. Though this white supremacist notion of milk and purity dates back a century within the imperial core, it is important to note how the

¹⁰⁰ Iselin Gambert and Tobias Linné, "How The Alt-right Uses Milk to Promote White Supremacy," *The Conversation*, April 26, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.64628/ab.vfgcr4yfs>.

act of queering symbols is an effective tool for counterpropaganda. Additionally, neoliberal austerity champion of the eighties, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, was famously nicknamed the “milk snatcher” by critics when she defunded a free milk program for school-aged children in 1971.¹⁰¹ The purpose of deploying these types of symbols in the work forces us to consider what types of kinship structures have been deemed worthy enough to exist in society.

As bergman and Montgomery eloquently address, “empire works to usher its subjects into flimsy relationships where nothing is at stake, and to infuse intimacy with violence and domination”.¹⁰² What do relational objects and symbols represent when we dismantle domination of the state and white supremacy and move towards acts of solidarity? For me, that is represented in the queerness of ceramic sex toys constructed communally in a ceramic studio while scheming about art and politics. It is represented in screen prints of leather jackets and ball gags, which simultaneously maintain connotations of punk violence and a misogynistic social system that demands female obedience in addition to queer community. Such symbols can be queered to represent the radical act of sharing clothing with lovers and kin, and consensually engaging in kink as a form of sexual liberation. A double bind is then created that points back to the nuclear family and assesses our collective values, while demanding that we consider what happens when we actively queer an object or environment to our preferred political rhetoric. Ahmed approaches queer phenomenology as a ‘(dis)orientation’ that fails or succeeds depending on the body’s lived conditions or circumstances, stating that:

disorientation involves failed orientations: bodies inhabit spaces that do not extend their shape, or use objects that do not extend their reach. At this moment of failure, such objects ‘point’ somewhere else or they make what is ‘here’ become strange.¹⁰³

In essence, queer punk bodies fail to function within environments or interact with objects

¹⁰¹ Lewis, *Abolish the Family*, 11.

¹⁰² bergman and Montgomery, *Joyful Militancy*, 43.

¹⁰³ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, 160.

that are oriented exterior to their lives. This is why heterosexuality and whiteness fail time and again, as they are not natural states ‘deviant others’ can assemble themselves to participate in. In many ways, whiteness is not merely a mass of characteristics that are relational to the physical body, but a metaphysical line that is oriented around and towards.¹⁰⁴ This means that whiteness, and by extension hegemony, function due to the active societal decision to align with these social expectations and characteristics. When the queer punks identified as ‘deviant others’ by monoculture reject assimilationism, they make room for pluralistic forms of living. Symbols and images are integral to this radical act, as they are the catalyst that brings us closer to ourselves and each other.



Figure 9. Installation view of *Punk Care Commons*, Christina Oyawale, 2026. Credit: Sarah Fuller

¹⁰⁴ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, 121.

PUNK IN CONVERSATION WITH CONTEMPORARY ART



Figure 10. Installation view of the vitrines at *Copy Machine Manifestos: Artists Who Make Zines* at the Brooklyn Museum. Credit: Paula Abreu Pita.

Despite punk tending to be relegated to DIY spheres, there seems to be more presentation of DIY works within the contemporary art landscape in the past few years. Art institutions and artist-run centres throughout North America and Europe have begun to engage with these anti-aesthetic/anti-institutional art forms, but have focused more on the preservation and exhibition of these archival materials than engage with politics of the work itself. This shift has been demonstrated in exhibitions such as *Copy Machine Manifestos: Artists Who Make Zines* (2023) at the Brooklyn Museum, an archival zine exhibition chronicling the the last 50 years of self-published punk music, feminist, political, and queer fanzines in North America,¹⁰⁵ and CONTACT Photography Festival and 10x10 Photobooks' exhibition, *Flashpoint! Protest Photography in Print* (2025), a photobook and zine exhibition showcasing the historical relationship photography and image-culture have in political protests and uprisings.¹⁰⁶ Both shows have been *attempts* to bridge the divide between the

¹⁰⁵ Branden W. Joseph and Drew Sawyer, *Copy Machine Manifestos: Artists Who Make Zines* (Phaidon Press, 2023), 11.

¹⁰⁶ CONTACT Photography Festival, "10x10 Photobooks Flashpoint! Protest Photography in Print," 2025, accessed June 13, 2026, <https://contactphoto.com/festival/archives/2025/core/flashpoint-protest-photography-in-print-reading-room>.

underground and contemporary art, but fall short as they struggle to maintain the anarchistic nature inherent to DIY art. These works then become preserved and showcased like precious artifacts, rather than circulated within the communities they sought to reach. Institutions ultimately see these works as a commodity, while communities see them as important methods of disseminating information and maintaining care.

One of the main issues with the acquisition and exhibition of DIY works in formal contemporary art spaces, is that accessing these works are rendered inaccessible, whether that be due to the manner in which they maintain colonial preservation standards or the minimal display opportunities these works receive.¹⁰⁷ Art organizations like the National Gallery of Canada only permit other art institutions to submit requests to loan or view works from their archive, where it can take an estimated 12-19 weeks to receive word if a request has been approved or denied.¹⁰⁸ On the other hand, the rare times these works are viewable to the public, zines or cultural artifacts are displayed behind glass in vitrines; as seen in the installation of *Copy Machine Manifestos* (see fig. 10). Community members wishing to engage with these works more intimately are oftentimes relegated to digital scans online. This would become one of my biggest hurdles while conducting research for this paper and my exhibition, leaving me to seek out DIY artworks/archives directly from personal archives or to disregard copyright altogether. Though the increased visibility of underground artworks allows for more people to get to know the history of punk aesthetics, the contemporary institutional space is inherently disconnected from the makers of these artworks.

Punk Care Commons grapples with this institutional and colonial lens, as the works in its current iteration are mounted in the School of Art Gallery at the University of Manitoba, thus preventing the punk aesthetics of the work from being divorced from the rules of

¹⁰⁷ National Gallery of Canada, "INFORMATION PERTAINING TO OUTGOING LOANS," *National Gallery of Canada*, accessed June 13, 2026, <https://www.gallery.ca/sites/default/files/upload/ngc-information-pertaining-to-outgoing-loans-accessible.pdf>.

¹⁰⁸ National Gallery of Canada, "Loans Program," accessed June 13, 2026, <https://www.gallery.ca/for-professionals/museums/loans-program#questionNine>.

decorum that galleries uphold. My intention for the installation was for people to navigate the space by touching sculptural elements, reading zines and books on the shelves, taking/leaving mementos, without being directly instructed. This was important to the curation of the project because it forces viewers to challenge their relationship to authority. The gallery environment restricts viewers from meaningfully engaging with the works in a sensorial pedagogic manner.

That is not to say that *Punk Care Commons* as an exhibition is singular in its motives of critiquing the contemporary art landscape while existing within that space. On the contrary, there are more and more artists seeking a means of recontextualizing how marginalized communities can disrupt colonial respectability and environments that have historically excluded them. For example, Norwegian artist Frida Orupabo's image-based installation, *On Lies, Secrets and Silence*, a part of MOMENTA Biennale d'art contemporain 2025 at VOX, centre de l'image contemporaine in Montréal, Québec (see fig. 11.1 and fig. 11.2), similarly utilizes the archive to reclaim and showcase the historical tensions attached to the gaze and identity of the Black female body.¹⁰⁹ As Orupabo analyzes how the domestic space plays a political role in our understanding of dominance, my work questions these themes similarly with the help of the archive. Though these works respectively begin these conversations in the colonial contemporary gallery, I still maintain that the contemporary art landscape struggles to preserve the political ethos of the works, due to being implicated for their complacency. I believe these works have more ability to be impactful when alternative contemporary art environments such as artist-run centres focused on research or non-traditional presentation space (e.g.; community centres or homes) created by artists, for artists are at the forefront.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Frida Orupabo, "On Lies, Secrets and Silence," MOMENTA Biennale D'art Contemporain, accessed June 14, 2026, <https://momentabiennale.com/en/exhibit/on-lies-secrets-and-silence/>.

¹¹⁰ One of the few contemporary art spaces that I believe has been able to maintain a punk ethic to its programming, while still existing as an extension of the contemporary art world, is Art Metropole, an artist-run centre in Toronto, Ontario that focuses on exhibiting, publishing, and archiving artists' multiples and bookworks.



Figure 11.1. Installation view of Frida Orupabo's work "On My Hands and Knees II", 2024, from *On Lies, Secrets and Silence*, at VOX, 2025. Credit: Michael Patten/MOMENTA



Figure 11.2. Installation view of Frida Orupabo's work "Cloud of Confusion", 2024, from *On Lies, Secrets and Silence*, at VOX, 2025. Credit: Michael Patten/MOMENTA

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A PUNK CARE COMMON

PUNK CARE COMMON (2026)

The ‘common’ that José Esteban Muñoz presents is in essence the late-1970s Los Angeles punk band the Germs, their chaotic myth-making frontman Darby Crash, and the cult following they cultivated. To Muñoz, the physiology of a ‘common’ is integral to the shared connectivity that transpires through the creation of a space:

people encountered one another in ways that felt new and unpredictable. They arrived at venues and stages where they could realize their plurality. And through punk as genre (or, more nearly, antigenre) they found a way to, in a sense, “pause” a temporal moment, allowing people hailed by a mode of negation associated with the outsider’s trajectory, the space to find an otherwise elusive mode of being-with.¹¹¹

Though Muñoz specifically centers the Germs’ Darby Crash as ‘the common’ for Los Angeles punks navigating poverty and social isolation, I further this by positioning a physical pluralistic care common in its place. In the same manner that a home can be a physical place, it can also be emotional—home is the connection punks have to one another via the shared desire for something more. Furthermore, this phenomenological understanding of a ‘common’ functions in a similar manner queer Black-American gay writer James Baldwin’s notion of it, as he posits in his book *Giovanni’s Room* (1956), stating that: “Perhaps home is not a place but simply an irrevocable condition”.¹¹² Baldwin identifies that a home cannot exist without the psychological or emotional physiology that is required, paralleling how Muñoz distinguishes the *dystopian* and *utopian* paradigms associated with punk rock, and their irrevocable connection to a person, place, or object. Utopia has been described as a condition or space that is not quite here yet; a feeling that something is missing within the present moment.¹¹³ Moreover, that transcendental object/space that is punk, whether it is the

¹¹¹ Muñoz, “‘Gimme Gimme This... Gimme Gimme That.’”, 97.

¹¹² James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room: A Novel* (Penguin Classics, 2013), 92.

¹¹³ José Esteban Muñoz, “Stages: Queers, Punks, and the Utopian Performative,” in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (NYU Press, 2009), 99-100.

aesthetics that bind us, the music, or the physicality of the mosh pit, is a home with liberatory potential.

Punk Care Commons is a gathering space for the socioeconomically outcasted underclass. This space is meant to be lived in, where plotting a softer intergenerational future is possible without violence. Punks welcome drug users, queers, disabled people, Black people, poor people, the old and young, and then some. Through the dystopic violence that cements the world, we utilize the most painful systems of coercion and dominance as the *spark* that ignites change. Though the fires that spread slowly die out, the commons is hellbent on creating a space that plants opportunity for more revolutionary fires to burn. In the Combahee River Collective's—a lesbian Black feminist organizing collective— seminal CRC statement published in 1977, they asserted that the liberation of “oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy”.¹¹⁴ The CRC saw the significance of dismantling capitalism as a means of true liberation of all racially, sexually, and economically oppressed peoples, as we are the creators of the products that are sold back to us. In relation to care, products can be extended to social products, as the active labour of the most marginalized individuals in society are responsible for the social and physical wellbeing of community members, specifically the elderly and children. This unevenly distributed and manufactured social production is equitably shared within the punk care commons. Following a Marxist feminist family abolition framework, the punk care commons maintains that a communist society must be produced “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs”.¹¹⁵ Like Ahmed describes the object of a table functioning as “a kinship object” that allows for “gathering[s] that...make some things possible,” that is how a living room can function.¹¹⁶ *Punk Care*

¹¹⁴ Combahee River Collective, “The Combahee River Collective Statement,” 1977, 5, https://americanstudies.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Keyword%20Coalition_Readings.pdf.

¹¹⁵ Karl Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Programme — I” (Marxists Internet Archive, 1875), accessed April 11, 2026, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch01.htm>.

¹¹⁶ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, 81.

Commons is not only an exhibition space, but, more importantly, a gathering space for convening in shared grief and building solidarity through equitable care. The intimacy we engage in is relational through physical touch, be that sexually, platonically, and matronly. The purpose of the exhibition is more than a representation of what is possible through my DIY art but an opportunity for communal discussion. As discussed throughout the paper, the family has been in a state of crisis since its inception. All of the roads constructed for us lead back to capital and the manners in which this inequitable economic system prioritizes those able to purchase power and care. At the same time, those a part of the working class who are struck with social isolation, have more power and a complex history of finding care in community. As I conclude this paper, I am reminded of how I found my way to the notion of intertext punk and communizing care. In order for there to be an active shift in the material conditions of care, we must recognize the limits upon intimacy that transpire under systems of capital. Learning the history of the shortcomings of marriage, the nuclear family, and the corresponding socioeconomic factors attached to them, are vital in our liberation. Muñoz describes this condition perfectly by emphasizing that in order for the utopian spectator (us) to truly comprehend their revolutionary potential, “[one] needs to squint to see the anticipatory illumination promised by utopia, yet at other times, its visuality and (non)presence cannot be denied”.¹¹⁷

We are interconnected in our suffering but more importantly, in our willingness to survive. The many intertexts weaved throughout the research is a testament to possibility reflected through the temporalities attached to these environments. A sense of urgency is created within us due to state sanctioned suppression and a world rapidly declining due to the greed of a financially mighty few. Needless to say, the commons is a moment for reflection, as well as an acknowledgement that no one person can solve the care crisis on their own. As

¹¹⁷ Muñoz, “Stages: Queers, Punks, and the Utopian Performative,” 109.

emphasized throughout the installation and research, this will require an active dismantling of our capitalist care system, though I believe that the anti-aesthetics of punk can be a propagandistic force to these ends. The space itself is temporary, but how can we translate the activation of this exhibition into real living rooms, bedrooms, church basements, or community centres?

M.E. O'Brien acknowledges that the temporalities attached to insurrectionary communized care do not offer us a clear understanding of what is to come, and that we must make space for a "critical mass of proletarians rapidly seizing, transforming and putting into use the infrastructure and land, to enable non-market human survival and human flourishing".¹¹⁸ The future of humanity relies on the steadfastness of those willing to sacrifice their small amounts of comfort for the collective. Queer punk futurities are speculative, but act as a mirror of our most endearing and grotesque qualities of humanity. For anyone who has ever felt the transcendent quality of a live music venue or schemed about better lives with loved ones around the dining table, those moments "do not disappear but instead linger in our memory, haunt our present, and illuminate our future".¹¹⁹ They permeate our psyches, giving us a glimpse into a realm of possibilities, but in order for this utopianism to prevail, we must grasp at the spectre whenever the chance arises. These opportunities are fleeting, often suppressed by the state if deemed too radical, or scoffed at by dominant culture as disruptive of the 'natural' order of things. Feel the sweat of others on your skin in the mosh pit, let the lights that flicker act as a revolution... *see you in the punk care commons!*

¹¹⁸ M.E. O'Brien, "COMMUNIZING CARE," *Pinko Magazine*, October 15, 2019, para. 10, <https://www.pinko.online/communizing-care/>.

¹¹⁹ Muñoz, "Stages: Queers, Punks, and the Utopian Performative," 104.

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