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Communizing Care in The Left Hand Of Darkness

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Abstract: In this essay I combine a reading of *The Left Hand of Darkness* with autobiographical accounts of queer/trans reproduction and childrearing. Contrasting my own experiments in "50/50" parenting with the vision of care elaborated in the novel, I draw attention to the importance of caring labor to radical queer and trans politics more generally.

Winter is starting in Minnesota when I reread *The Left Hand of Darkness* this time. I'm writing a talk for the 2016 James Tiptree Jr. Symposium, this year celebrating the work of Ursula Le Guin. (This essay is an adapted version of the talk). It's late November: snow on the streets and ice in my nostrils and the world becoming internal, contracting to splendid isolation in small warm rooms. Winter reminds me of Ursula Le Guin's invention, the planet Gethen, and the intimate space of the tent in which the novel's protagonists Genly and Estraven care for each other through an arduous journey to cross the Gobrin Ice.

The day of the conference was December 2, 2016. Exactly two years before, on December 2, 2014, I went for a walk in the snow with my partner Emmett. The next morning I gave birth to my daughter Kit in the dining-room of our house in Minneapolis. Prior to getting pregnant I had been on testosterone for 12 years. I was a "pregnant man," although "man" is not a word I would often use to identify myself. Kit calls me Dada and my partner Emmett, Papa. She knows that I gave birth to her, but she is beginning to recognize how different most other families are from ours. "Did you have a Dada and a Papa, Dada?" she asks me. She doesn't yet seem to have a concept of sex or gender as a binary logic containing only "women" and "men," in which women perform gestation and caring. We hope she never does.

Around one am on the night I went into labor, Emmett and I went for a walk outside. The snow sparkled, as if someone had glitterbombed the neighborhood. It was a pleasure to be outside and walking—striding really—through contractions that weren't painful so much as druggy and exhilarating and ferocious. Labor got really painful later

on, but just then everything felt like magic. Back at our house, the heat was turned up to 80 degrees Fahrenheit and the midwives kept pouring hot water into the birthing pool to keep it warm. I didn't want to be in a warm room. All through summer and fall I had been nauseous, often puking multiple times a day, and the ensuing dehydration made me extremely sensitive to cold. I wore cashmere sweaters through mild summer days and wrapped myself in blankets at night. But by December, when I gave birth, I was overheating—so much so that our cat, who has never been a lap-sitter, installed herself to sleep on my belly as often as she could.

All through that winter I sat in different rooms around our house and held Kit as she slept and fed. I read *The Left Hand of Darkness* to prepare for a seminar on feminist science fiction I would teach the next fall. I realized that I had never noticed on previous readings how Genly Ai, the Ekumen's alien Envoy to Gethen, is also extremely sensitive to cold. As the narrator of the novel, Genly leads us to pay close attention to the temperature. Through this tactic, Le Guin shows us how dependent we are on technologies that keep us warm and, as a last resort, each other—or perhaps as the first, and all resorts (more on this later). Genly's aim as an Envoy is to convince the inhabitants of Gethen to join the Ekumen, an egalitarian interstellar alliance. The planet Gethen is an "Ice Age" planet. The novel opens as Genly is attending a bridge completion ceremony in Karhide, the rather medieval-seeming monarchical nation in which Genly first establishes political influence. Le Guin writes Karhiders as stoic and suspicious of luxury: they have steam power and electricity, but they keep their living spaces cold. Raised on a tropical planet, Genly freezes. He describes himself as a "tropical bird": "cold one way outdoors and cold another way indoors, ceaselessly and more or less thoroughly cold" (Le Guin 2016, 22). When he decides, or rather is forced, to leave Karhide and transfer his envoy efforts to Orgoreyn, a bordering country, he is shocked and pleased to find that his hosts care about comfort: "There were luxuries in my rooms that I had not known existed on Winter—for instance, a shower. There was an electric heater as well as a well-stocked fireplace" (Le Guin 2016, 96). Shusgis, Genly's Orgota host, explains, "'They told me, keep the Envoy warm, he's from a hot world, an oven of a world, and can't stand our cold. Treat him as if he were pregnant! Will it do? Will you be comfortable?' Comfortable! Nobody in Karhide had ever asked me, under any circumstances, if I was comfortable" (Le Guin 2016, 96). Pampered like a pregnant person, Genly thinks he has finally found more a sympathetic reception for his political objectives. In fact, he is wrong—the Orgota betray him and send him to a forced-labor camp. But Le Guin's construction of such a deep contrast in how Gethenians endure cold articulates something important about the need for warmth

and care and how care itself is distributed. This vision is utopian. As I read, identifying so strongly with Genly and his need for warmth, certain things fell into place about my identification with and feelings about the utopian vision of care in the novel. Meanwhile in my day-to-day life a different utopian vision of care and parenting seemed to be splitting apart. This essay, adapted from the talk I gave at the Tiptree Symposium in 2016, is an attempt to think with the novel and my own visions of care.

Crushing the Division of Labor

What was this vision? I thought that parenting as a trans person with another trans person would radically transform the gendered division of labor, or ideally result in no division of labor at all. By "gendered division of labor," I mean an arrangement where men work outside the home and women perform reproductive labor: the work of childbearing, child rearing, house work, buying and making food, and maintaining social ties is central to the social fabric (Glenn 1992, 1). Because this labor mainly takes place outside the "labor market," it is often invisible within traditional economic models. But as Marxist feminists have pointed out, many Marxist, socialist, and anarchist visions of how to reform or destroy capitalism also assume that reproductive labor is external to the conflict between the labor and capital (Fortunati 1995). Instead, some of us think that reproductive labor and social reproduction is central to anti-capitalist and decolonial politics: this means rethinking what "politics" means, where it takes place, and which bodies are poised on the front lines of struggle.

The mainstream feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s during which I grew up is one of the "bad examples" Emmett and I were turning away from in our desire to transform the division of labor in our household. During that time, a version of liberal feminism demanded and largely won white middle-class women's re-entry into the workplace in the global north. At the same time in the global north and in elite outposts of the global south, caring labor was outsourced to paid domestic workers: nannies, housekeepers, and maids—often women of color and immigrants—whose domestic labor was (and still is) devalued as "unskilled" and thus accrued very low wages. These processes exacerbated the violent exploitations and dislocations of transnational capital. In countries impoverished by massive unemployment and foreign debt, governments began actively encouraging the export of workers overseas in order to boost economies through remittance payments (Cheah 2007, 92). Middle-class women's participation in the workforce contributes to the demand for low-status migrant labor, and the female figure of the domestic helper in particular, such that feminine domestic

workers have come to represent the category of “overseas contract worker.” This is sometimes referred to as the “feminization of labor” (Tadiar 2004, 114).

Meanwhile in the global north, gendered caring and house work practices persist in middle-class households. Government policies that encouraged women to become professionals did not, on the whole, require or encourage men to share house and care work. If and when they did, house-working men became exoticized exceptions in the personage of the “stay at home dad.” Together, these events created a disconnect between the reigning narrative of female empowerment and entrepreneurialism—the “Lean in!” logic of Sheryl Sandberg—and the reality, which is that most of us still devalue care work, and the surplus of women’s unpaid and unacknowledged labor has merely been redistributed along different racial and class-based lines.

Growing up, I experienced this disconnect first hand: my feminist mother worked fulltime, but also did much of the house work and care work in our family. My father worked less and spent more time at home—he pursued “big picture” dreams at the expense of a stable income—but his violence created the necessity for more feminized caring, mediation, and support from my mother. Like many of her counterparts, she encountered the structural limits of the “modern woman” in the heteronormative family form she inhabited, which demanded that middle-class women be the main emotional caregivers for husbands and children as they pursued careers.

Emmett and I wanted something different. We wanted to parent as true equals, bringing all the knowledge of and commitment to our decolonial, anarcho-communist-flavored feminism and queer politics. That vision had sustained me through the embodied work of pregnancy, during which the labor of reproducing ourselves really had divided. My role was to sit on the couch, do as little as possible, and let myself be the host for the parasitic body erupting into life inside me. Emmett’s role was to make frantic last-minute remodels to our new house, prepare meals (I couldn’t countenance cooking, let alone eating), drop me off at the university to teach my classes, and do pretty much everything else. In those months he became a devoted yet manic chauffeur/nurse/valet, and one of his key roles was listening to me moan: about pregnancy; about the odor of cooking meat (I could smell a barbeque happening a mile away, and it made me gag); about being misgendered; about having to teach, think, and write when all my physical energy went to my uterus; about the ridiculous lack of masculine or even “androgynous” pregnancy clothing. He moaned too, about many things. But we thought that by the time the baby was on the outside, everything would

even out. We intended to bottle feed and split feeding equally: I knew that my surgically modified chest and nipples wouldn't supply Kit with nearly enough milk, although I intended to chestfeed—have her nurse on my nipples—as a bonding ritual (Emmett could have chestfed her too, although he decided he didn't want to). Because, or in spite, of how the biological fact of pregnancy itself had forced us to take different roles, we were committed to splitting the labor and the care and the love of parenting 50/50.

Left Hand's Utopian Vision

I'm sure you're waiting to hear now how this relates to *Left Hand of Darkness*. This involves invoking a question: what is Le Guin's utopian vision in the novel? There are so many things to talk about in *Left Hand*: its allegory about the violence of nationalism (one of the things that is so apparent again, as Donald Trump is elected U.S. President and violent white nationalism erupts as publicly acceptable). Also, the instructive questions the novel asks about liberal visions of self-professedly "benign" imperialism, including the imperialism of anthropology itself, even within an attempt at world-making as self-consciously decolonial as the Hainish Ekumen. But the utopian vision I am talking about here is how Le Guin envisions gender on Gethen: the fact that Gethenians have "no" gender. They are androgynous most of the time, and spend around a week out of every month in heat, what Le Guin calls kemmer. All Gethenians can gravitate towards "male" or "female" hormonal and anatomical embodiment during kemmer; pregnancy and birth can happen to anyone. Everyone gets time off to have sex.

What are the political consequences of envisioning this arrangement? *Left Hand* attempts to create a line of flight out of the normativity of the 1960s American Dream and propel us toward another place entirely. Sometimes this attempt works, and sometimes the book (and we as its readers) remain stuck. Often these two things happen at the same time, and thus they are difficult to disentangle. One good example is Le Guin's ambivalence in regard to sex, genitals, and embodiment. Sex—the act of having sex—isn't mentioned much in the novel. We learn about kemmer houses, where people go to enjoy anonymous sex during kemmer, and we watch someone make a sexual advance (which is rebuffed), but we never see anyone have sex. Le Guin keeps an aloof distance from the business of how bodies get and give pleasure from other bodies. The mechanics of sex are described as distinctly heterosexual. For instance, Le Guin writes Chapter 7 as notes on Gethenian sexuality by a previous Hainish explorer: "When the individual finds a partner in kemmer, hormonal secretion is stimulated… until in one partner either a male or a female hormonal dominance is established… The

partner, triggered by the change, takes on the other sexual role" (Le Guin 2016, 74). Sex, then, happens between females and males, even if they aren't usually gendered or sexed. We never discover whether this is meant to be true or an ethnographic assumption of universalism on the part of the Hainish Investigator. Le Guin does raise the question in parentheses, with the dangling possibility of a detached question mark: the following "notes" read, "(? without exception? If there are exceptions, resulting in kemmer-partners of the same sex, they are so rare as to be ignored)" (Le Guin 2016, 74). But nowhere in the novel does sex take place—neither normative nor "perverse."

As a side note, it's true that Le Guin herself has revised and revisited the sexual politics of her own books, especially *Left Hand of Darkness*. As the politics of sexuality changed, she revisited her decision to use male pronouns in *Left Hand* in the essay "Is Gender Necessary? Redux" (1992) as well as rewriting sexual politics on Gethen in fiction in the 1995 short story "Coming of Age in Karhide." Here, she avoids using gendered pronouns, and when she does, she points out how insufficient they are. The story also features an account of having sex in a kemmer house, which Alexis Lothian (2006) has rightly identified as a vision of a "polymorphous sexual utopia" (391). In the kemmerhouse, the main character Sov becomes female for her first kemmer. She has sex with at least five people—at least these are the individuals she remembers having sex with, narrating the events with a fifty-year gap. Nonetheless even "Coming of Age in Karhide" retains something of a queer taboo: the couplings are all male-female with the exception of Sov's make-out session with a "she" who remains nameless, and which functions as a calming respite from the more violent desire of "hetero" sex. I quote at length here:

> "Come on," somebody said, and took my hand, a soft, cool touch totally different from the fire of Karrid's skin. It was a person from one of the other Hearths, I didn't know her name. She seemed to me to shine like gold in the dim, misty place. "Oh, you're going so fast," she said, laughing and admiring and consoling. "Come on, come into the pool, take it easy for a while. Karrid shouldn't have come on to you like that!…. Oh, you are so pretty!" and she bent her head and licked my nipples before I knew what she was doing…. The water lapped on my thighs, on my sex, on my belly. I turned to my friend and leaned forward to kiss her. It was a perfectly natural thing to do, it was what she wanted and I wanted, and I wanted her to lick and suck my nipples again, and she did. For a long time we lay in the shallow water playing, and I could have played forever. But then somebody else joined us. (Le Guin 2002, 20)

If this sex can be imagined as lesbian, it's the kind of lesbian sex imagined in softcore straight porn: gentle and aimless, contingent on the more important project of male orgasm, located in water, and above all, "playful." Sov's sexual play with this unnamed "woman" here is not signaled as serious. Eventually their play is interrupted by another party, who is gendered male in the story and whose attentions distract Sov's unnamed sexual partner. Sov too ends up fucking a male "all that first night" (Le Guin 2002, 20).

While it may be riveting, however, depictions of sex on Gethen in "Coming of Age in Karhide" or *Left Hand* is not what interests me most. I'm more interested in how the gendered division of labor is ruptured on Gethen. The female Ekumen Investigator's notes, which in the book function to make Gethen intelligible for readers, read thus:

> Consider: anyone can turn his hand to anything. That sounds very simple, but its effects are incalculable. The fact that everyone between seventeen and thirty-five or so is liable to be… "tied down to childbearing," implies that no one is quite so thoroughly "tied down" here as women, elsewhere, are likely to be—psychologically or physically. Burden and privilege are shared out pretty equally; everybody has the same risk to run or choice to make. Therefore no-one here is quite so free as a free male anywhere else. (Le Guin 2016, 76-77)

This passage stands out to me as a fundamental critique of modern gendered and racialized divisions of sexual labor, emotional labor, and caring labor. Indeed, this critique is what makes me stay with *Left Hand of Darkness* as a utopian text. By writing biological or anatomical reproductive differentiation on Gethen as fundamentally transitory, Le Guin puts into question the gendered division of labor we understand to be natural and normal "here" (the here of the non-Gethenian narrator and reader). But Le Guin imagines this vision with one key difference to many other utopian visions of shared work, including some of her own. Unlike in other feminist utopias produced around the same time, such as Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* or Shulamith Firestone's vision of eliminating pregnancy altogether, in *Left Hand* people do not transcend care and bodily labor, or outsource reproduction to machines. While in *The Dispossessed*, Le Guin conceives an anarchist commune wherein children are raised in communal nurseries (parental feelings are derided as "propertarian"), *Left Hand* retains kinship and love relationships as fundamental and necessary.

In sum, the technologies and social relations imagined in *Left Hand* don't transcend embodiment or the messy interdependency of interpersonal interaction. And the work of caring for others itself (whether in the context of kinship or stranger intimacy) is not

devalued, or, not entirely. For example, for all his unreconstructed masculine individualism, Genly clearly has needs: especially the need for warmth. Genly's sense of being cold often maps onto his feeling of isolation and a need for comfort, whether physical or emotional:

> I went to the window and looked out. The snow had thinned a little… All at once I was utterly downcast and homesick. Two years I had spent on this damned planet, and the third winter had begun before autumn was underway—months and months of unrelenting cold, sleet, ice, wind, rain, snow, cold, cold inside, cold outside, cold to the bone and the marrow of the bone. And all that time on my own, alien and isolate, without a soul I could trust. (Le Guin 2016, 109)

Genly's sense of isolation is self-imposed: Genly makes this reflection just after Estraven has left his presence in another repeated attempt to give him advice that might help him. In fact, Estraven is the one person on Gethen who understands his situation, who shares his objectives, and who thus eventually saves his life, literally. Genly cannot see that in fact he is not alone, and that the person he perceives as an enemy is in fact his friend. Unsurprisingly, Genly's sense of alienation is mediated by the fact that he understands the Gethenians as alien chiefly because of their gender ambiguity. Thus, just like in the real world, gender normativity dictates who is comprehensible as human. Those who cannot be categorized as either male or female seem suspicious and deceitful, and thus inhuman. Specifically, Genly cannot get his head around the presence of femininity in a body that Genly, in his mind, genders as male. Genly questions himself about this very distrust at the beginning of the book, during a dinner with Estraven: "Was it in fact perhaps this soft supple femininity that I disliked and distrusted in him?… It was impossible to think of him as a woman, that dark, ironic, powerful presence near me in the firelit darkness, and yet whenever I thought of him as a man I felt a sense of falseness, of imposture" (Le Guin 2016, 10). We might not quite call this transmisogyny, but it ventures into proximate territory. As readers might notice, this strangeness is also articulated as racial difference. Genly often refers to Estraven's "darkness": the "dark … presence" of the previous quote; Estraven as a "dark, obstructive, enigmatic soul" (15); speaking of his "dark secret face" (167). Although in the moments the characters of *Left Hand* speak of skin color we discover that Genly himself is "black"; the racial logics that equate dark skin with unknowability and barbarity filter through Le Guin's prose.

As readers venture further into the events of the novel, we become more and more frustrated with Genly's incapacity to imagine Estraven really cares about him: *come on,* we urge*, come on, accept help! Estraven is trying to help you!* (Or maybe that's just me.) Genly's phobia towards Gethenians and gender ambiguity more generally finds its resolution through the enforced partnership of crossing the glacier. By the episode in which Estraven rescues Genly from Pulefen Farm and they begin the journey back to Karhide over the Gobrin Ice, Genly *must* accept Estraven's help. He has no choice. They must cooperate and work together—literally pull the sledge in harness—in order to survive. While Genly wonders suspiciously why Estraven had bothered to rescue him at all, Estraven is focused on practical, corporeal considerations: how many rations they will need to survive the crossing; what to eat first; what route to take. On the Gobrin Ice, Genly finally learns how to understand and love Estraven. It's an irony that Genly, a representative of the "altruistic" Ekumen, is convinced until very late in the novel that Estraven has selfish and underhand motives. But it is Estraven's bodily vulnerability that finally convinces Genly of their honesty, as he considers Estraven lying in the tent they share on the first leg of the Gobrin Ice crossing: "I looked at Estraven, stretched out sound asleep on his sleeping-bag a couple of feet from me… I saw him now defenseless and naked in a colder light, and for the first time I saw him as he was" (Le Guin 2016, 167).

Estraven and Genly's relationship begins to seem homoerotic in these passages. Paradoxically, though—stuck in heteronormativity even as we move someplace else—when we examine how they describe each other, they understand themselves as polarized and opposite, "differentiated." In the chapter in which Estraven narrates their Gobrin Ice crossing, he writes, "There is a frailty to [Ai]. He is all unprotected, exposed, vulnerable, even to his sexual organ, which he must carry always outside himself; but he is strong, unbelievably strong…he can haul harder and faster than I—twice as hard" (Le Guin 2016, 190). Genly's descriptions of Estraven continue to ascribe him an effeminate, or feminine, inscrutability. This maps onto some form of sexualized difference. Thus, contra Le Guin's own statement, maybe there is indeed gender on Gethen. However, what's most important is that the reconciliation of these two singular characters takes place through their shared labor, which both makes it possible to survive near-impossible blizzards and nurtures each character emotionally. Care is the crucible through which political transformation takes place. This happens through a "division" of labor of a far more anarchist type, premised on the different skills and capacities each brings to the situation. Importantly, their shared labor is not dependent on an equalization of their own capacities, but rather acknowledges both the

incommensurateness of individual labor capacities and the impossibility of flattening them out into equal shares. So while we might read *Left Hand*'s vision as equalizing the division of labor—"anyone can try his hand at anything"—we are left under no illusion that labor can be abstracted in the manner it is within contemporary capital.

Communizing Care

In "Is Gender Necessary? Redux" Le Guin says that she was not "recommending the Gethenian sexual set-up" when she wrote *Left Hand of Darkness*, but doing a thought experiment to discover what "truly" differentiates men and women (158). This brings me to the final point I want to make in this essay: in contemporary times queer and trans culture is defying some of the heteronormative structures that maintain the division of labor just as Gethen does. Sometimes this is because of the reality of trans body modification. For instance, Gethenians sometimes feel as if they are me because in a material way, I have strategically embodied both biological "femaleness" and "maleness" at different times, and I can choose to ovulate or not by taking or not taking testosterone.

But when Kit was born, I realized that some parts of our own queer and trans utopian vision were fundamentally flawed. I learned that care is never "50/50," because care isn't quantifiable. Additionally, I learned that we still had to earn money somehow and the easiest way to do it is for one person to have a fulltime job. That was, and still is, me. As a visual artist, my partner works part-time doing adjunct teaching work and has been lucky enough to receive some arts funding. But his career is differently valued to mine and thus he simply doesn't have the capacity to earn the income that I do as a tenure-track professor. As a consequence, he now takes on much more of the work of parenting and of reproducing our daily lives. We live with the consequences of this shift, negotiating daycare drop-off and pick-up, work commitments, deadlines, and emotional connection through the mediation of this artificial valuation of our capacities. However much we can mess with our individual bodies, and genders, we're still stuck within the division of labor.

This is because, as I argued above, the gendered division of labor is structural and central to capital: while we might think that house and care work happens at home and thus is "outside" the antagonism between labor and capital, care work enables capitalism to function. The institutions governing how we live and work function to reward the traditional splitting of work into valorized "worker" and unpaid, undervalued house worker. I see this in the different conditions, pay, benefits, health

insurance, and access to parental leave Emmett and I are offered as adjunct/part-time and fulltime workers. (In fact, as of this writing, he has been offered benefits at his adjunct position in return for a 2/2 teaching load and a service commitment: strikingly similar to my 2/2 teaching load and service requirement, but paid around $50,000 less per year.) Our situation is one small part of the differential value of work within racial capitalism: childcare, service work, and reproductive work is generally low-paid and performed by people of color. These structures are gendered and racialized: they privilege professional, "individualist" white-collar work and they actively devalue care work by making it low-paid, or unpaid. This work is understood as "easy" and "natural" for women and racialized populations, creating more barriers to struggles for higher pay and better working conditions. Meanwhile, structural penalties exist for engaging in reproductive labor outside the formal workforce, including criminalization, profiling, and "rescue" of sex work or other informalized forms of work (Grant 2014; Agustín 2007; Constable 2016).

Some of the things that might help this situation—racial justice, a universal living wage, dismantling the nation-state and its artificial system of borders, and dismantling capitalism altogether—seem now as impossibly utopian as gender on Gethen.

As a scholar who has invested my intellectual effort in trans culture and politics, it's tempting to see the revolutionization of gender identity, expression, and embodiment trans activists, artists, and theorists have fought for over the last thirty years as the logical political goal. But merely revolutionizing gender itself won't change a thing. Or rather, we need to stop taking "gender" itself as something that exists separately from racialization, political economy, and the production of borders and nationhood. Black and intersectional feminists have been teaching us this for a long time, for example in the Combahee River Collective Statement's articulation: "We need to articulate the real class situation of persons who are not merely raceless, sexless workers, but for whom racial and sexual oppression are significant determinants in their working/economic lives" (Combahee River Collective 2000, 268). Critical trans politics have more recently made the connections between trans and gender nonconforming life and the larger structural mechanisms that create and reproduce injustice (Spade 2015; Beauchamp 2009). However, lasting structural change won't happen without rethinking our assumptions about how care works. Care on an individual level is not enough: all the self care in the world won't fix us, and care only extended to those we deem as "family" or "intimates" will only entrench the friend/stranger dynamic further.

To that end, I propose something I call the communization of care. The term communization emerged within the early twentieth century communist revolutions as the point beyond a transition from capitalism to socialism and alternative to the utopian vision of "full communism" that some might regard as naïve or impossible. Communization began to be associated in the 1970s with some French ultra-left tendencies describing a *process* of creating zones peripheral to the exchange of capitalism, exchange, labor, and the commodity form rather than a social order (*After the Fall* 2012, 5). (I'm not committed to a particular strand within these tendencies, but for more reading, see Noys 2012.) I've written about the communization of care in previous work as something that would take place not within old ideas of "community," but what Beth Povinelli calls the socially cosubstantial, which is unpredictable and disrupts the alienating logics of racialization, gender normativity, misogyny, etc: "My happiness is substantially within her unhappiness; my corporeal well-being is part of a larger mode of embodiment in which her corporeal misery is a vital organ" (Povinelli 2008, 511). For example, the communization of care might look like the digital labor of sharing a crowdfunding call for donations, making a phone-tree or a list of people to bring food when your lover is having surgery or your friend is having a baby, or how someone's capacity to live and be mobile every day depends on a paid or unpaid collective taking care that is practiced with intent rather than the assumption of natural capacity. More recently I've begun thinking about this not as the communization of care but of vulnerability: vulnerability itself, the need for care, is basic, endless, and real. We need to embrace vulnerability and its differential logics if we are to survive these times. *Left Hand of Darkness* reminds me to put the care of all bodies—in all our marvelous difference—and of the planet itself at the forefront of that struggle.

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