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Volume 43 *The Embodiment of Liberation:
Embracing Opposition and Resistance within
Higher Education*

Article 23

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Hope and Disillusionment in the University

Mattie Schaefer

I have spent much of my time in higher education feeling hopeless. Some of this is justified — after all, my academic career thus far has been characterized by climate crisis, state violence against Black and Indigenous people(s), the student debt crisis, and a pandemic which has killed more than five million people and scarred tens of thousands more. Anyone shocked by a rise in hopelessness among my generation (American Psychological Association, 2020) must not be paying attention. I cannot understate the degree to which this pessimism resonates with me. There is a part of me — one seemingly larger by the year — which is resigned to this violence and pain.

Recently, I finally got around to reading Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*. It's been on my 'to-read' list for years, but I've always had some fear of starting it. Once I finally judged myself ready — or maybe needing it enough — I sat down to read. Starting took me a few days, but I finished the last three quarters of the book in a single, tear-filled sitting. While there were gems throughout the text, this one stood out in particular:

Duffy shook his head. "I'm not saying we'll live to see some sort of paradise. But just fighting for change makes you stronger. Not hoping for anything will kill you for sure. Take a chance, Jess. You're already wondering if the world could change. Try imagining a world worth living in, and then ask yourself if that isn't worth fighting for." (Feinberg, 1993, p. 328-329)

It reminded me of a moment I had a few years ago, sitting in a room commandeered from Vanderbilt University by organizers from Black Lives Matter - Nashville, for the purpose of engaging with a class on a three-week-long trip through the South. In that classroom, the organizer asked my classmates and me this: what does liberation look like? What does it smell like, taste like? As we answered, he drew on a whiteboard. We created a vision of a neighborhood with clean air, where we could see the stars at night, where everyone

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had access to as much food and clean water as they wanted, where we knew our neighbors and whole communities raised children together, where we didn't live with so much fear.

Finishing *Stone Butch Blues*, and remembering that moment in Nashville, and sitting with the disillusionment I have been experiencing over the past few years, I began to wonder: what would it mean for me to have hope? Since then, I've been trying to conceptualize an argument for hope — one that focuses on the creation of collective power and healing of institutions that perpetuate harm. After much reflection, I have arrived at the following as a starting proposition: we can build (toward) a university¹ that matches closer to visions of a liberated academy; this process will necessitate the radical alteration, and perhaps dissolution, of extant institutions and systems. In this manuscript, I want explore this idea further. Importantly, I do not want to rely on toxic optimism or a disavowal of pessimism. Rather, I want to acknowledge the multitude of reasons people (including me) have for their hopelessness — and then still make a case for hope.

Positionality

I did not anticipate the disillusionment that I would experience in my master's program. I did not come to the program unaware of the realities of higher education, not really. I was a student activist. My undergraduate degree program aimed to center justice and equity, and class discussions often featured scathing critiques of our institution. I worked in both admissions and residence life as an undergraduate student. Still, though, I think I had managed to convince myself it was somehow all about my then-current institution. Maybe, I thought, it was all to do with something fundamentally unjust with how we ran things, with our Board of Trustees, with our financial model. As I have learned more about the broader world of higher education, I have come to realize² that no institution of higher education

¹Here, and elsewhere throughout this text, I use the shorthand of 'the university' and 'academia' to refer to a complex web of institutions of higher education, social systems, individuals, governmental structures, and power structures.

²To be clear, this 'coming to realize' is not just something that magically happened. My analysis and understanding of higher education is due in large part to the work of friends, coworkers, professors, organizers, and combinations thereof who have poured a lot of time, care, and loving critique into me. I do not name names here for fear of missing people — it is a long list, for which I am both incredibly lucky and immensely grateful.

is truly just, truly equitable — they are tied too deeply to capitalism, too mired in white supremacy culture. Hence the disillusionment. Importantly, this disillusionment does not just apply to me — there is a sizeable portion of my graduate cohort, a group of people who came to our institution to study the inner workings of higher education and student affairs, who have no plans of continuing in higher education. People I work alongside in my work in residence life and housing are thinking of leaving the field altogether. There are whole online communities dedicated to helping people leave student affairs, and I would be shocked if similar communities did not exist for faculty.

Throughout all of this, though, there is still some part of me that is interested in staying in the field; some part of me sees liberatory potential in higher education. Some of my peers, in particular my peers of color, have pushed me to consider the ways my whiteness informs this optimism — in specific, they have encouraged me to reflect on the ways my whiteness has impacted my experience of higher education and how that influences my impression of its violence. In short, the central question of this challenge has been this: what does it mean for me, as a white person, to suggest that this social institution that has its deepest roots in white supremacy, classism, and colonial expansion is not only worth keeping, but could someday be liberatory?

I have no neat answer to that question. I want to be clear — my colleagues are absolutely right to ask this question. Academia is steeped in systems of violence, and whiteness and white supremacy influence so much of our individual and institutional relationships. There is certainly credence to arguments against the academy, arguments for the abolition of higher education, and arguments that would see these institutions radically altered. Readers will likely see arguments for these very things elsewhere in this journal. Our institutions deserve critique and must change in order to honor the full humanity of both those who comprise academia and all those affected by the existence of universities³.

³Of course, ‘those affected by universities’ includes the vast majority of people, given the role of universities not only in educating, but also in employing people, in providing healthcare, in generating art, and so much more.

In preparing for this document, I read through sections of Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. Within a broader discussion on coalition-building across racial lines, Moten and Stefano discuss the ways systems of domination harm all those affected by them, albeit to different degrees:

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 don't need your help. I just need you to recognize that this shit is killing you, too, however much more softly, you stupid motherfucker, you know? (Stefano & Moten, 2013, p. 139-140)

Stefano and Moten articulate that systems of domination leave all of us hurting. They are clear, of course, that there are degrees of this hurt — there are, after all, material benefits that come with being a member of a dominant group. In the introduction to *Undercommons*, author Jack Halberstam makes it clear: “the mission then for the denizens of the undercommons is to recognize that when you seek to make things better, you are not just doing it for the Other, you must also be doing it for yourself” (Halberstam, 2013, p. 10). I understand my position as it relates to the university to be that of a white trans person. My relationship to the academy is governed by those two identities. I am someone whose whiteness leads to warm welcome, inclusion, and promotion. At the same time, I am someone whose queerness and transness make engaging with higher education difficult. In considering my whiteness, I aim to hold both the privilege and access it has granted me (within and outside the university) in tension with the fact that, as Moten and Stefano so clearly say, “this shit is killing [me], too, however more softly” (Stefano & Moten, 2013, p. 140). I have a vested interest in addressing the violence both of and caused by whiteness.

Defining *Joy* and *Sadness*

In some ways, I feel like I began preparing for this manuscript a few years ago. I was an undergraduate co-teaching a class called Community Building Fundamentals at the time, and the faculty member I was teaching alongside had given me the mission of finding articles to flesh out parts of our syllabus I thought were lacking. We were reading *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* which, though certainly a useful text, all

involved in the class found incredibly dry. I came across an essay online titled *Friendship is a root of freedom* that characterized the ways close friendship and interdependence were foundational and critical for those interested in working against systems of dominance for social justice. A few months later, I happened across a physical copy of *Joyful Militancy: Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times*, thought it looked interesting, and picked it up.

Years later, around the same time I was reading *Stone Butch Blues*, I finally sat down with *Joyful Militancy*. Unwittingly, I had already read the second chapter, the aforementioned essay about friendship. In *Joyful Militancy*, I found something I did not realize I was looking for — there was language to describe some of the things I was thinking about, and here it was! The authors of *Joyful Militancy*, carla bergman and Nick Montgomery, described Spinoza's concepts of *sadness*⁴ and *joy* and articulated these concepts in a way that made them concrete — their descriptions reflected my reality. These terms have guided much of my thinking about this material, and it feels apt to begin with a discussion of a few terms borrowed from their text that I have found useful in my understanding.

Montgomery and bergman present first the Spinozan concept of *sadness*. For Spinoza, *sadness* is “the reduction of our capacity to affect and be affected” (Montgomery & bergman, 2017, p. 53). *Sadness* refers to an (in)ability to feel things, to be made to feel these things, and to act. It cuts us⁵ off from community, too: it is “stultifying, depleting, disempowering, individualizing, and isolating” (Montgomery & bergman, 2017, p. 54). It is, ultimately, about whether we can feel and whether we can do anything influenced by those feelings.

Importantly, *sadness* does not necessarily feel bad — in fact, it may feel good. Capitalism has commodified happiness and crafted it as a product to be bought and sold: “as consumers, we are encouraged to become connoisseurs and customizers, with an ever more refined sense of the kinds of consumption

⁴Here and elsewhere throughout this text, I will follow bergman and Montgomery's style and will italicize the words *sadness* and *joy* when using them in their Spinozan sense, in order to distinguish them from their more common definitions as emotions. Spinoza uses these words to refer to specific things that are distinct from the emotions of sadness and joy.

⁵The antecedent to the pronouns ‘our’ and ‘us’ and ‘we’ is intentionally vague. Consider yourself, your loved ones, your coworkers, a stranger on the street. These are intended as universal and individual pronouns! I do not use these to create an ‘us’ and a ‘them’; rather, I hope to encourage an understanding of a unified ‘us’ that exists across and under Empire.

that make us happy” (Montgomery & bergman, 2017, p. 56). We are taught that the pursuit of happiness is itself a form of happiness. And while some of the things we do in pursuit of happiness can be transformative, “Empire empties these and other activities of their transformative potential, inviting us to shape our lives in pursuit of happiness as the ultimate goal of life” (Montgomery & bergman, 2017, p. 56-57). In thinking about this, consider the myth of the American dream: to go to a 4-year college, to move to the suburbs, to have the white picket fence, to commute via car to a stable office job, to get cis-hetero-married and raise two children who will do the same. The underpinnings of this suburban life — and the specific vision of happiness it evokes — are all bound up in systems of violent conformity and, importantly, *sadness*. This vision of the American dream encourages uniformity and violently rejects both ideas and people that might challenge that uniformity. There becomes, intentionally or not, a culture of alienation and compulsory sameness, both of which are emblematic of Spinoza’s *sadness*.

The natural counterpart to *sadness* is *joy*. For Spinoza, joy “means becoming capable of feeling or doing something new; it is not just a subjective feeling but a real event that takes place. [...] It is the growth of shared power to do, feel, and think more” (Montgomery & bergman, 2017, p. 284). *Joy* describes an increase in individual efficacy, and collective efficacy in turn — as our attunement to relationships grows, so too does our individual and collective power. Importantly, “joy does not come from avoiding pain, but by struggling amid and through it. [...] To be more fully present, in contrast, means tuning in to that which affects us and participating actively in the forces that shape us” (Montgomery & bergman, 2017, p. 63-64). In moments of pain and crisis, we can increase our capacity for *joy* — collective power and connection — by digging in and engaging earnestly with each other.

Montgomery and bergman take Spinoza’s definitions a bit further and place them within both the individual and collective realms, whereas Spinoza was focused primarily on the individual. In particular, the authors reflect on the ways *sadness* serves as an isolating force and is thusly felt more acutely on an individual level, while *joy* is a connecting force, and is felt on the individual and collective levels. Montgomery and bergman are also very explicit about their understandings of where these affects come from: “Empire’s hold is increasingly affective: it suffuses our emotions, relationships, and desire, propagating feelings of shame, impotence, fear, and dependence. It makes capitalist relations feel inevitable and (to some) even desirable” (Montgomery

& bergman, 2017, p. 51). These affects are not necessarily innate; they are influenced by our relationships both to, and as governed by, Empire.

Empire's Investment in *Sadness*

Up to this point, I have used the word 'Empire' a few times. Per Montgomery and bergman, Empire is "the web of control that exploits and administers life—ranging from the most brutal forms of domination to the subtlest inculcation of anxiety and isolation" (2017, p. 48). This definition is certainly influenced by Crenshaw's intersectionality, as well as the Combahee River Collective's (CRC) interlocking oppressions. Concepts like Montgomery and bergman's Empire, Crenshaw's intersectionality, and the CRC's interlocking oppressions try to characterize a system of domination that resists characterization. As Montgomery and bergman put it, "using one word to encapsulate all of this is risky because it can end up turning Empire into a static thing, when in fact it is a complex set of processes" (2017, p. 48). In this document, I have elected to use Empire as shorthand⁶, with the full knowledge that there is no one word that can fully describe what I intend to talk about: the complex and interconnected systems of domination, subordination, and violence that shape our relationships to our families, to ourselves, to our friends, to our peers, to society at large.

Empire follows a similar pattern to other systems of dominance, in that it is exceedingly interested in self-perpetuation — Empire wants to continue. This becomes increasingly evident when picking apart the various component parts of Empire, like whiteness⁷. Consider the following definition of white-

⁶Some readers will have picked up on my love of shorthand – I use the shorthand of 'Empire' in a similar way to my usage of the shorthand 'the university' and 'academia.' This is partly a space-saving technique – I can only claim so much page space – but I use these shorthands because they address similar problems with similar systems. Academia acts, in many ways, as a fractal image of Empire, smaller but with some of the same characteristics. Could "the web of control that exploits and administers life—ranging from the most brutal forms of domination to the subtlest inculcation of anxiety and isolation" (Montgomery & bergman, 2017, p.48) not apply just as easily to academia as to Empire? More on this later.

⁷In discussions here and elsewhere within this document, I rely on the understanding of whiteness as presented by authors D-L Stewart and Z Nicolazzo: "understanding whiteness as an ideology of interlocking tacit assumptions that shape and support racism, patriarchy, classism, ableism, ageism, religious hegemony, trans* oppression, heterogenderism, and settler colonialism" (Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018).

ness: “Whiteness is a hegemonic system that perpetuates certain dominant ideologies about who receives power and privilege. Whiteness maintains itself in cultures through power dynamics within language, religion, class, race relations, sexual orientation, etc.” (Carter et. al., 2007, p. 152). Whiteness *maintains itself*. Perhaps it is strange to personify Empire in this way, to suggest that it ‘wants to continue.’ At the same time, it feels almost disingenuous to act as though Empire has no interests, when all evidence suggests it does.

Academia’s Investment in *Sadness*

Academia is undoubtedly a site of Empire — it is characterized by similar, if not the same, forces as society broadly is characterized. Whiteness and white supremacy, capitalism, ableism, cisheterosexism, ageism — all of these systems and forces have shaped the history and present course of academia. Consider the involvement of universities in gentrification, or the connections between universities and the military-industrial complex and the fossil fuel industry, or the maltreatment of workers in higher education. These are tactics that help academia sustain itself financially — institutions gain materially from these tactics. But that is not all — these tactics also help to generate *sadness* and decrease individual and collective efficacy that might be generated or already present.

Universities, especially those in urban areas, have often acted as gentrifying forces. Columbia University, for instance, has recently finished its Manhattanville project, an expansion project into West Harlem. The project did some good, in that it has brought a new wellness center and various other businesses to the area (Stewart, 2019). But Columbia is not loved by all of its neighbors, especially after it attempted to go back on an agreement and replaced the planned new elementary school site with a housing tower for graduate students and faculty (Kim, 2019). The Manhattanville project falls into the same plan as other university expansion projects — a university acquires land, plans developments that benefit the university with some concessions to the local community, does the renovations, and by the time things are completed, the local residents (often working-class BIPOC communities), are priced out of living there. These gentrification projects feel so big it is overwhelming — more than \$6 billion went into the Manhattanville expansion (Stewart, 2019). The university expands, local communities suffer, and time moves on.

Columbia University is not just a gentrifying force; at the time of writing, they are also actively working against the Student Workers of Columbia - United Auto Workers (SWC - UAW), which is the union for graduate workers at Columbia. Members of the union have been on strike since November 3rd, campaigning for a salary increase, dental and vision insurance, and third-party handling of discrimination and harassment cases (Wong, 2021a). Columbia's administration has been trying to break the strike using a variety of tactics. The administration has tried to pit SWC - UAW against undergraduates in the courses that striking graduates teach, among other tactics (Wong, 2021b). At the time of initial writing, the strike was ongoing, with Columbia seemingly threatening striking workers, saying that striking workers who did not return by a certain date risked no longer having a position to return to when the strike ended (Wong, 2021b). It is hard to read this as anything but an effort to separate graduate workers from each other by way of economic threat — this was Columbia actively fomenting *sadness* in order to protect its profits. The strike was called off in the early days of 2022, after tentatively agreeing to a contract that improved wages and health benefits (Wong, 2022).

Any conversation about the maltreatment of graduate workers must also consider the adjunctification of the university labor force. As of 2009, three-quarters of faculty were contingent, meaning they had no current access to tenure or its protections; of these contingent faculty, about half were also part-time (New Faculty Majority, n.d.) — this is a marked change from 1969, when close to four-fifths of college faculty were tenured or tenure-track (Frederickson, 2015). The professoriate is increasingly made up of people working part-time, often with low-to-no benefits aside from relatively low compensation. The effects of this can be devastating — adjunct faculty are often forced to work multiple jobs, sometimes at different institutions, all for relatively low pay (Frederickson, 2015). This practice of maintaining a pool of academic workers forced to either change careers and leave behind their love of teaching and/or research or accept exploitation comes at the cost of not only contingent faculty, but tenured and tenure-track faculty, as well as students (American Association of University Professors, n.d.). As one academic wrote, universities “have drifted from what they say they are all about (teaching students) to what they are increasingly all about (conducting research, running sports franchises, or, among for-profits, delivering shareholder value)” (Frederickson, 2015). Again, this is an instance of universities facilitating economic hardship and *sadness* in pursuit of profit.

What about academia's ties to the fossil fuel industry, or to the military-industrial complex? As articulated by authors William Armaline and Abraham DeLeon:

In the era of global economic restructuring, universities provide the ideological and intellectual (research and development — 'R & D') capital for the most brutal policies (neoliberal 'development') and industries (pharmaceuticals, private military contractors, the biochemical industry, fossil fuel companies) on the planet—all at public cost. (Armaline & DeLeon, 2014, p. 432)

We do not have to look far before identifying individuals at our own institutions whose research is being funded by massive corporations or the military. The roots of our institutions are tied up in these sweeping social forces, and are funded by the same corporations that benefit from Empire's hold. None of this is particularly new — people have been raising alarm bells about the ties between academia and the military-industrial complex since the 1960s (Turse, 2004). The Department of Defense awarded more than \$180 million in research funding in 2020 alone (Department of Defense, 2020). While this is low in comparison to funding offered by institutions like the National Institute for Health, which offered more than \$40 billion in funding in 2020 (Lauer, 2021), it is still a significant amount of funding directed at researching warcraft. It is also important to consider what each agency is funding — as former grant-writer Alexis Takahashi writes:

the mission of the National Institute of Health (NIH) is to investigate human disease and facilitate new treatments and cures. By contrast, the Department of Defense (DOD) funds research that will support combat operations and mass surveillance that are connected to broader agendas of national security and imperialism. (Takahashi, 2016)

The Department of Defense is directly funding research, largely in academia, that will contribute to warcraft, imperial violence, and mass surveillance. It does not get much closer to 'supporting Empire' than this. By actively courting funding from the Department of Defense, and then following through on research that supports the aims of the same, universities and individual academics are actively cultivating both *sadness* and violence at home and across the world.

Toward Hope in Academia

Having articulated these phenomena, I can feel the disillusionment creeping back in. And worst of all, I know that I have only described a fraction of the real problems at hand — the state of higher education is dire and seems to only be getting worse. Readers will find other explorations of this within this journal.

As I mentioned earlier, I followed the SCW – UAW strike eagerly, not just as a graduate worker interested in gaining union representation for myself, but also as a person desperately struggling against this sense that higher education is irredeemable. Seeing the strike, and how day after day workers kept showing exactly how much they care about bettering their institution, and the solidarity from other workers (graduate, tenured, and non-academic) — it has been overwhelming at times. It has been rejuvenating to see so many people actively fight for better working conditions, for better learning conditions, and for a better Columbia.

And that is not the only thing that has caught my attention of late. Graduate workers in the University of California system — a whopping 17,000 of them — got union recognition in December 2021 (Howard, 2021). Outside of academia, this month saw the first Starbucks store unionize (Scheiber, 2021), workers at John Deere and Kellogg’s continue to hold the line on their strikes (Murray, 2021), and teachers and staff won the right to collective bargaining in Richmond, Virginia (Schiffres, 2021). The labor movement in this country is seeing a resurgence, both within and without academia. It feels small, in the broad scope of things, but it is hopeful nonetheless.

I am confident that, in the midst of each of these movements, people are finding and re-finding *joy*. These moments may be fleeting, but they show every once in a while, and more the more one looks: “Bubbling up in the cracks of Empire, joy remakes people through combat with forces of subjection. Joy is a desubjectifying process, an unfixing, an intensification of life itself” (Montgomery & bergman, 2017, p. 59-60). *Joy* shows when the forces of Empire falter, however briefly, and allow us to build connection with each other. It shows when workers show up for each other on picket lines and in union halls and after class sessions. That so many people are experiencing and re-experiencing what it means to struggle for a common cause, that so many people are likely experiencing and re-experiencing *joy* — this is innately hopeful to me.

It is my hope and prediction that things will continue to get better for people on the ground. Maybe there is a naiveté to that, but it is also informed by the fact that there is a feedback loop between action and *joy* — when we act, we increase our potential for *joy*, and when we feel *joyful* we have more faith in our capacity to act. One of the natural byproducts of struggling together is relationship building, and with that comes an increased potential for future action. As we build relationships, and as we build collective efficacy, we build *joy*.

In writing this paper, I have been challenged to provide a working definition of what I mean by ‘action.’ I have used it throughout without giving it a firm definition, in no small part because it is difficult to define. But more than the fact that it is difficult to define, I choose to give few specifics because I do not want to limit imagination. This is similar to my treatment of *joy* — action and *joy* are “always embodied differently, as different struggles open up more space for people to change and be changed” (Montgomery & bergman, 2017, p. 65). Montgomery and bergman are critical of the idea of trying to fully characterize or define these things — they, and I, would rather people participate than catalog: “the way to participate in joyful transformation is through immersion in it, which is impossible if one is always standing back, evaluating, or attempting to control things” (Montgomery & bergman, 2017, p. 65). This is not to say that we should not catalog; rather, it is to suggest that the best first step is to connect with those around oneself and try *something*.

In closing, I want to return briefly to *Stone Butch Blues* and another queer book I have loved and which has affected me deeply: *The Faggots & Their Friends Between Revolutions*. I first came across *The Faggots & Their Friends Between Revolutions* on twitter when the author of the foreword, Tourmaline, posted about it. I bought a copy on a whim, and it arrived a few weeks later. The book is incredible — raunchy, unquestioningly and uncompromisingly queer, heartwrenching — and there are lessons upon lessons to be learned from its pages. There is a passage that stuck out to me, in a similar fashion to the passage I shared from *Stone Butch Blues*:

The strong women told the faggots that there are two important things to remember about the coming revolutions. The first is that we will get our asses kicked. The second is that we will win. The faggots knew the first. Faggot ass-kicking is a time-honored sport of the men. But the faggots did not know about the second. They

had never thought about winning before. They did not even know what winning meant. So they asked the strong women and the strong women said winning was like surviving, only better.” (Mitchell & Asta, 2019, p. 21)

These are words of hope to me. They speak to the knowledge that yes, things are hard and may still get harder. Things may get dark, our conditions more dire. But in the end, when we fight, we can win. In *Stone Butch Blues*, Jess returns to Duffy’s words like I have: “I remembered Duffy’s challenge. *Imagine a world worth living in, a world worth fighting for*. I closed my eyes and allowed my hopes to soar” (Feinberg, 1993, p. 330). I find solace in these two texts because they acknowledge that there is challenge — the things we must fight against feel insurmountable; the historic wrongs that have led us here are so deeply entrenched that coming back from them can feel impossible. But Feinberg, Mitchell, and Asta also believe that we can come back; there is always possibility.

At present, I find myself more constrained in my ability to take action. My status as a staff member means I fear losing many things — my housing, my salary, and my health insurance, to name a few. But still, I do what I can. I am working to cultivate for myself the sense of possibility I have experienced when hanging banners with loved ones, and in a closed down city council building, and at the southern-queers-only potluck, and in the fleeting moments of worker-to-worker solidarity I have found in every single one of my jobs. Toward that end, I am trying to push myself bit by bit, opening up vulnerably with my peers and colleagues to build connections. I am excited to be able to participate in efforts to unionize graduate workers at my current institution. I am challenging myself to show up more publicly for the things I believe in, particularly in my workplace where our work has far-reaching impacts. I am working to wield my whiteness in intentional ways, knowing the institutional power and access it grants me. I am trying to find other people in my circles who will show up both with me and for me, and who will challenge me to do the same. When I look at the steps I am taking, I have to ask: are these not the actions of a person who is hopeful? Even if I do not always feel particularly hopeful, the things I do in practice demonstrate hope. And for now, I will call that a win.

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