[00:00:00] **MARINA CARON**
Hi, everyone. Thanks so much for being here today. I'm happy to introduce Sophie Lewis. My name is Marina Caron , a second year here at CCS. Sophie Lewis is a writer and scholar based in Philadelphia. She teaches at the Brooklyn Institute for Social Research, on courses including feminist, trans, and queer politics and philosophy, family abolitionism, Shulamith Firestone, and Kathi Weeks. I had the pleasure of being in one of her classes at the Brooklyn Institute in the fall of 2020, a class called called "Trans Queer Women on Trans Feminism," that made a really big impact on me, so I'm really happy to be introducing Sophie.

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Sophie's the author of "Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against Family", which was published by Verso in 2019 and was hailed by Donna Haraway as "...the seriously radical cry for full gestational justice that I longed for." Her second book, "Abolish the Family: A Manifesto for Care and Liberation", is being published by Verso this year and will be available in October. Sianne Ngai writes of Lewis's second book, "How might we understand caring, sharing, and loving outside the concept of kinship? In this energetic book, part history and critical analysis, part manifesto, Lewis helps us understand family abolition as world-making rather than as a subtraction of infrastructure."

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Sophie is also a member of the Out of the Woods collective, who describe themselves as "A transnational political research and theory collective. A loose grouping of decolonial, small-c-communist, antiracist, queer feminist thinkers working together to think through the problem of ecological crisis." She was a contributor to Out of the Woods's first book, "Hope Against Hope," published in 2020. She's also a member of the Feminist Marxist editorial collective of Blind Field Journal, and her writing has appeared in venues such as *N+1*, *Boston Review*, *The Nation*, *The Baffler*, *e-Flux*, *New York Times*, and *London Review of Books*. She is an unpaid visiting scholar at the University of Pennsylvania Center for Research on Feminist, Queer, and Transgender Studies. Her work is super resonant with many of the discussions we have here at CCS, and we're so

glad that she could join us as part of the speaker series. Please join me in welcoming Sophie Lewis.

[00:02:19] **SOPHIE LEWIS**
Thank you. Thanks for being here. Thank you, Marina, for that very, very full, comprehensive introduction. Yeah, no, thank you for coming. It's wise not to sit too close. The unemployability might rub off on you. No, it's a real pleasure to drive up from Philly, where I live, to converse with you all today. As Marina said, I'm a writer, and I write essays and I teach at the Brooklyn Institute for Social Research. And in 2019, I published this attempt at an anti-work gestator's manifesto that emerged, oddly enough, from a PhD in geography, which sought to put pressure on the assumption that the phrase 'assisted reproductive technology' is meaningful, in a way, given that it sort of implies that some reproduction is unassisted or, you know, pure of technology in some way. And that was what I was noticing at conferences, that there were panels about reproduction and panels about assisted reproduction. And I was like, no, I'm not sure about that. And I also wanted to question the assumption that workers on the, as we like to say in geography, unevenly developed global shop floor of marketized pregnancy are engaging in something fundamentally different than our unpaid reproducers, right? Mothers.

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So next month, my much shorter manifesto will officially be published. Actually, I think I have a copy. I'm very excited. I just got to touch it for the first time. So it exists. So I maybe should put it there to encourage you to order it online. And yeah, it clarifies the family abolitionist component of "Full Surrogacy Now," which, to be completely honest, neither I nor my publishers really expected anyone to read. But then, that worked out kind of differently, and a lot of conversations ensued. And so, we wanted to go and really explain a potted history of what that has meant. And especially, to spend a lot more time on the racial character of the family, and the sense in which abolishing the family sounds much more scary to some people than it does to others. Sometimes for reasons of state persecution, or having very little else to survive on, than kinship ties. So

this is also, in large part, an attempt to sort of make the case for family abolition as an antiracist and a decolonial imperative. And we can talk about that more during our discussion. I'm always up for sort of explicating that project.

[00:05:25]
So okay, just a couple more words of self-introduction. For quite a few years now, I've been interested in various kinds of abolitionisms, and how they're different from prohibitionisms. You know, some sex worker exclusionary radical feminists call themselves abolitionists, but they are prohibitionists. We're living in a big age of abolitionism, right? So, I suppose I'm adding, or reviving, the sense in which the private nuclear household is part of that sort of "everything" that Ruthie Wilson Gilmore says is the object of abolitionism. I've been interested in domestic utopias, so called acid communisms, transgender Marxisms, queer liberationisms, and especially the vexed question of how an antiwork orientation, which I've already mentioned, and I'll come back to that in a minute, how an antiwork orientation in the sphere of care work— that really important sphere— how it works, how does antiwork in care work work? So I'm here to talk, as always, a little bit about that, because I'm kind of always talking about that. And to share the flavor of my work on family abolition and the private nuclear household. And my social media handle, from a much more earnest moment in my career, "reproutopia," if indeed that is a tenable phrase. Might reproductive and utopia be incompatible terms, in fact?

[00:07:07]
So I'm going to start by talking a little bit about what utopia is and what it isn't, and what it might mean to talk about utopia as method. And then I'm going to talk a bit about whether, where, and to what extent reproduction is a thing. Does it exist? And what that whole question has to do with the phrase 'full surrogacy now'. And finally, I'm going to race through a few examples of actually existing or historic critical utopianism— both practical and artistic or speculative in relation to care. So, care labor, baby-making, child-rearing, elder care, love, domesticity. So here we've got Charles Fourier, Lou Cornum, Marge Piercy, Tiffany Lethabo King, Alexandra Kollontai, GLF, Shulamith

Firestone--it's actually pronounced Shulamith, I learned last year--Lola Olufemi, Wages for Housework, and the NWRO, which is a lot, I recognize. So let's get going.

[00:08:21]
What is utopia? So, the utopian, as I understand it, is, as I've kind of already indicated, method rather than destination. Most of what I've learned about critical utopianism comes from two comrades, friends of mine, and they both work in utopian studies, and they both build imminent critiques of bad utopias, while also hanging on to the utopian impulse, and keeping faith with what they call this critical "utopian mode." Madeline Lane-McKinley and Dave Bell have taught me through their scholarships on the sort of, on comedy, on the long '60s, on Ernst Bloch, on Frederick Jameson, on indigenous cosmologies, on children's liberation, and on feminisms, broadly speaking, that the the utopian is only embarrassing, unserious, soft-hearted, whimsical, or on the contrary, violently imperious and totalitarian, right? To the extent that one accepts the premise that fundamentally, people don't desire a livable world, and that fundamentally, people don't know how. And cannot bring into being a livable world. If we choose, if we want, utopianism can be a method, not a destination. It can be a relationship with reality that has to do not with optimism, and actually not so much even with hope, so much as it has to do with a sort of radical negationism. As Dave says, quote "Simply, utopians must be against the world because the world is against them." So, if utopia is about abolishing the present state of things and birthing as yet unthinkable, as yet unknowable, potentially even as yet undesirable worlds, by which I mean not desirable by us, yet, maybe, then what is reproduction?

[00:10:49]
Reproduction, as you can probably tell also from the structure of the word, is about continuity, duration, extension, repetition, a redoing of production, right? To reproduce is to re-, is to make again. It's the making more of something, right? In Marxist feminism, the term "social reproduction" emerged in order to talk about the production of workers, as opposed to the production of things by workers. I actually don't really know. I know Evan teaches here, so I presume some of this is maybe familiar, but I really don't

know, you know? So, this so-called social factory, which includes the unwaged workplace of the domestic sphere, makes and remakes people every day for free. Not only for free. It's complicated. Social reproduction theory has a lot of arguments going on about the boundaries of this terrain, which is fine, but it does this remaking of people, right? Including, wastefully, from the point of view of capital, sort of wastefully, people who end up never working. So while labor makes commodities, social reproduction—don't worry, it'll get exciting in a minute—makes and remakes that uniquely special commodity labor power that most people bear in their bodies in some form or another, right? And yeah, we have to quote-unquote, "freely sell" it in order to live in a capitalist society. So what scholars often say is that social reproduction includes, firstly, everything outside capitalist production that allows a worker to return to work after leaving work. And, then, secondly, everything outside capitalist production that keeps non-workers alive as well. Why would you want to do that? From the point of view of capital, right? But nevertheless. And thirdly, human gestation and childbirth, Ie., quote-unquote, 'literal reproduction' is how scholars often put this. Like literal reproduction. And I'm like, okay, there might be possibly a bit of a problem with that third one in the sense that there is just simply doubt amongst some biologists, right? Marxist biologists, feminist biologists such as Richard Lewontin, Donna Harraway, Lynn Margulis— as to whether that's an accurate phrase, whether there really is such a thing as literal reproduction in our species, let alone others, right? Do we ever really create exact replications of anything? Do we ever really make more of ourselves?

[00:13:46]
So the question I'm raising, which may be striking you as a bit facetious, is whether this word is an adequate way for us, really, in everyday life, to talk about so many different processes, both material and mythological, but especially sexuate procreation, right? A process that we fantasize, just on a civilizational scale, entails a self-copying and authorship, when really it's all about this kind of messy, xeno-hospitable co-production, and a scrambling of the self. I said this in 'Full Surrogacy Now', there's Richard Lewontin's book on DNA, where he says, quote, "DNA is not self-reproducing. It makes nothing, and organisms are not determined by it.' So inspired by that kind of biologism,

counter-biology, sort of heterodox biology, these are artworks I'm fond of, you know, by the Australian sculptor Patricia Piccinini. I mean, she's famous, and you're art people, so I'm sure— but, this is a series about surrogation, companion of species, and the very unromantic creepy realities of the sort of intimacies of settler kinship and settler colonial domesticity. Which inspired an essay by Donna Haraway called 'Speculative Fabulations for Technoculture's Generations'. Alternatives to the word "reproduction" include "sympoiesis", which for Haraway is what we should be saying every day. It's the sort of omni-directional gestationality of life on earth, right? It means "making with". And for Haraway, it's the scientifically, more factual terminology of what actually happens. There is no autonomous reproduction. There is only co-productive reproduction. Sympoiesis. So it's sort of worlding with, making, with and it matters, she thinks, to paraphrase Marilyn Strathern, which words we use to word our worlds. You can imagine the Harawayvian prose "which stories story our stories, which thoughts think our thoughts." Anyway, maybe letting go of the fantasy of heredity, the fantasy of blood, the fantasy of parenthood. And maybe, as she used to believe in the 80s, although no longer, maybe the language of kinship, right, is something we should take seriously? And this is [inaudible 00:16:41] terrain, right? Quintessentially utopian, in that sense.

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Symbiogenetic science puts material and biological humanisms under strain. And as a result, I also think value theories that rely on individual humans as bearers of labor power also sort of need to be stretched. Because the organism we tend to refer to as an individual human is actually deeply -dividual, right? Which is to say divisible. Do you know this sort of etymology about individual? It actually means not pregnant in that sense, right? Not gestating, right? Not divisible. And that's what none of us is, right? Regardless of your gestational status. The bad news is, like, we're [inaudible 00:17:34] . The philosopher Chikako Takeshita proposes that we again use this to talk about pregnant people. She has this word,"motherfetus." One word, anyway. I don't have time to go into all of that today. I'm just trying to evoke some sort of liminal spaces between science and utopia, right? The gist, I hope, is that when I've talked and written about human pregnancy...So in 'Full Surrogacy Now' and in previous and subsequent essays,

I've tried to make the stakes of understanding that whole mess, human gestating as real work, sensible to the left, right?

[00:18:17]
It seems kind of important to me, and also really difficult, right? If that is what labor is—fuck. Like, we have to really think about labor differently, maybe. So if this messy, injurious work is work, if this frequently fatal, damaging, sometimes gorgeous, sometimes satisfying, sometimes fulfilling, sometimes boring, sometimes unbearable, alienating. This metabolic work, which kills 300,000 people a year doing it, right? And that's quite a high statistic for any workplace. And which involves all kinds of alien organisms and co-productive participants besides the genetically alien fetus. It's always genetically alien, right? Regardless of whether it's like, quote-unquote, "your egg". And remember, this continues even in the worker's sleep. Then perhaps we have located a kind of ground zero or one among several of the problems of antiwork, right? I repeat, please consider the difficulty and the importance of the question. How does antiwork in the context of care work work?

[00:19:33]
So an initial run at that problem was a constituent part of "Full Surrogacy Now," which sort of was the wager that the communization of care can be imagined in terms of the impossibility of the concept of surrogacy. Given that surrogacy is about making a baby for someone else, which, if children don't belong to anyone, doesn't make sense. Or is sort of a generatively, impossible concept, right? In a context where private property has been abolished, then yeah. Then surrogacy has kind of, in a sense, ceased to make literal sense. It would be akin to recognizing that we are all the makers of one another but also acting like it, right?

[00:20:28]
Because acknowledging that we are all the makers of one another is not really sufficient. That's the dystopian sense in which "Full Surrogacy Now" obtains on this earth, right? It's certainly a radically intimate co-invocation between classes, right? But it's

bad. The private nuclear household is a sort of situation of extensive surrogation. Kathi Weeks talks about the surrogates being kind of, like, excised from the family photo. They're sort of pretended not to exist. And that type of surrogacy is dystopian, right? What would the utopian version be that would justify calling for a sort of full surrogacy? So, yeah, the premise, the argument that human gestational laborers work under capitalism that gestators themselves perhaps can seek to redistribute, reorganize, reduce and steal back. Because that's what antiwork is. Antiwork is not necessarily, certainly not for me, equivalent to the position that humanity should somehow, quote-unquote, "let the machines do it", right?

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Antiwork is not accelerationism. It's not simple automationism. In fact, I find that historically its adherents are rather pessimistic and even skeptical about the extent to which automation has really ever been achieved anywhere, in a sense. Because so often what we think of as automation ends up being revealed at some point or other to have just been outsourcing all along like the concealment of forms of human labor at a distance, right? If antiwork is not internationalist and universalist, it is, like all classically bad utopias, simply colonialism. Right. Antiwork dreams stem from the belief, for me, that the liberation of the entire earthly working class or less-than-working class or can't-work class to come—that liberation would come from its self-abolition as a working class, right? Workers abolishing themselves, [inaudible 00:23:00] workers. That's not how socialism has panned out in some cases. In most cases, let's be honest. Work, to be clear, is the word that some Marxist utopians have always used for what happens when our labor is ripped from us and stolen from us, right? In this case, by capitalism. Thus a post-work or an antiwork horizon, you know, which is the sort of critical utopianism I'm talking about here, does not it doesn't imply the vanishing or disappearance of all labor, right? It doesn't necessarily mean like, doing nothing. Kind of the opposite. It speculatively seeks to wrench free the sort of the red threads of human desire and human need from the substance of these activities, including these very emotionally messy things like nuclear childbearing in the shitty workplace of the private household that are currently being vacuumed up to differing extents by capital

and organized--and disorganized--across culturally diverse kinship landscapes.

[00:24:19]
So as Silvia Federici, one of the mothers of autonomous Marxist feminism, put it, "Nothing so effectively stifles our lives as the transformation into work of those activities and relations that satisfy our desires." So it's not that you wouldn't kiss a kid. It would be that it wouldn't be work. We don't know exactly what the difference is between the kiss that is work and the kiss that isn't. But that's the point, right? Besides '70s era Federici, whose perspective was family abolitionist at the time, though she has moved away from that orientation in recent years, I draw my perspective from Kathi Weeks, whose famous contribution to philosophy and politics was 'The Problem with Work' in 2011. And in her recent scholarly paper on what she calls "the most infamous feminist proposal," in which she sort of comes out as a family abolitionist, although I guess it was kind of there in "The Problem with Work," she insists that the proper object of any revolutionary feminism—-and by implication any gender liberation struggle, really, such as gay power or welfare radicalism—is the family. And she has a very classically Weeksian sort of systematic definition, right? It's sort of very much not how my brain or my writing works. It's not a sort of rhizomatic explosion. It's like three categories with three subcategories in each one. And she calls the family "a combination of the [inaudible 00:26:00] the conceptual grounding of kinship in biogenetics and then, above all, and that's the most important one, the privatization of care." The privatization of care. That's basically what the family is for Weeks. So I'm going to read a little bit now. Although, yeah, it's a sort of chopped up bit from this book and it's where I sort of say, what is the family? So deep runs the idea that the family is the exclusive place where people are safe, where people come from, where people are made, and where people belong. It doesn't even feel like an idea sometimes. Let's unpick it then.

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The family is the reason we are supposed to want to go to work. It's the reason we have to go to work. And it's the reason we can go to work. As every civic-minded individual's raison d'etre, family is an ostensibly non-individualist creed, an unselfish principle one

voluntarily signs up to without thinking about it. What alternative could there be? The economic assumption that behind every breadwinner there is a private someone or someone's worth being exploited for, notably some kind of wife, ie. A person who is likely a breadwinner too, in this economy. And possibly even, weirdly, the same person. Perhaps we wife ourselves, in a sense, in the gig economy. But there's this assumption that there's this kind of worth being exploited for freely making sandwiches with your hard-won bread. Or they're hiring someone else to do so. Vacuuming up the crumbs and refrigerating the leftovers such that more bread can be won tomorrow. This feels, to many of us, like a description of human nature, right? Without the family, who, or what would take responsibility for the lives of non-workers, including the ill, the young, and the elderly? This is a quintessentially, anti-utopian question. We don't hesitate to say that animals are better off outside of zoos, even if they've become used to the abuse of zoos. And even if there aren't that many habitats left for animals, right? It still is possible to say animals are better off not in zoos, right?

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Actually, I love the answer that the two British feminists, Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh, gave to the question, "what would you put in the place of the family?," in 1986. A very depressing time in England. They said simply, "We would put nothing in the place of the family. You don't try to replace organized scarcity". Of course, any transition out of the family would be tricky, to put it mildly. Right. Kathi Weeks even suggests that such a transition is not fully desirable, as I mentioned, by us, right? She had this kind of breath-taking moment in a talk where she just said, almost like, casually, the future is not for us. And I was like, fuck. But I get it. I get what she's saying. We feel that the family is doing a bad job at care. We all deserve better. And in my opinion, the family is getting in the way of alternatives.

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But, as I've already intimated this vertiginous question, "what's the alternative?" arises, in part, because it's not just the worker and her work that the family gives birth to every day, in theory. It's also the legal assertion that a baby, a neonatal human, is the sort of

authorial creation of the familial romantic diad. And that this act of authorship, in turn generates for the authors property rights in their progeny, right? That's parenthood. But also, quasi-exclusive accountability for the child's life. And that's a sort of—never mind. I'm just rambling way too much. So the near total dependence of the young person on these guardians is portrayed not as the harsh lottery that it patently is, but rather as natural. Not in need of social mitigation, and furthermore, beautiful, right? For all concerned children. It's proposed benefit from having only one or two parents and extremely few other caregivers, which is not to deny that there's plausible, credible science that suggests very small humans need some constant caregivers, right? That's not to deny that at all. But parents, it is supposed, derive nothing so much as joy from the romance of the isolated intensity of their job. At the same time, there are sort of constant allusions to the hell world of sheer exhaustion that parents inhabit, right? You know, sometimes I have conversations where it's like, oh, you know, family abolitionism is an unheard of crazy, brain-explosion emoji concept. But then you sort of tilt the the landscape of everyday cultural production and you're like, "oh, well, it's sort of everywhere, isn't it?"

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If you think about horror movies and how there's a very thin pretense that it's actually about bad things happening to the family from outside? But then when you sort of look, you sort of cut the audio and you're like, this is a whole genre that just sets families on fire over and over again. Seldom is parenthood—notwithstanding all of that—explicitly identified as an absurdly unfair distribution of labor. A despotic distribution of responsibility, really for and then power over younger people. A distribution that could be changed. Like a microcosm of the nation state, the family incubates chauvinism and competition. Like a factory with a billion branches, it manufactures individuals, this totally fake thing, with a cultural, ethnic and binary gender identity. It manufactures class, it manufactures racial consciousness. Like an infinitely renewable energy source, it performs free labor for the market. "Like an organic element of historical progress," writes Anne McClintock in "Imperial Leather," "it worked for imperialism as an image of hierarchy with immunity that grew indispensable for legitimating exclusion and

hierarchy in general." For all these reasons, the family functions as capitalism's base unit. In Mario Mieli's phrase, translated by Evan Calder Williams, into "the cell of the social tissue."

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It may be easier to imagine the end of capitalism, as I've riffed elsewhere, than the end of the family. Family values are bourgeois economics writ large, as Melinda Cooper demonstrates. Under the sign of the family, starting in the late '70s, neoliberals and neoconservatives, both, essentially reinvented welfare along Elizabethan poor law principles, rendering kin instead of society responsible for the poor. Even in the original legislation 400 years ago, concepts like market freedom, the liberal individual and debt were slowly erected on the plinths of kinship, obligation and family bonds. So without family, in short, she suggests, no bourgeois state. Family's function is to replace welfare, and to guarantee debtors. Masquerading as the choice, creation, and desire of persons, the family is a national method for cheaply arranging the reproduction of labor power, and so securing debt repayment. Family values and politics with a capital 'P' have long been synonyms. When Margaret Thatcher, the milk snatcher of the '80s, said "There's no such thing as society, there are individual men and women and there are families," she wasn't so much, alas, winning an argument against the sort of family abolitionist left as she was sort of triumphantly making a capitalist reality explicit.

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But, at the same time, the family is also a sort of fiction, right? As a lived experience. It's not to be found really anywhere. Which doesn't mean that it doesn't sort of order our existence. Relatively few human beings actually live in one of these, but it doesn't matter. While seemingly chosen and optional, the family's hegemonic status consigns those outside its frame to social illegibility. All of us are seduced or at least disciplined anyway. We can't escape it even when we reject it individually, and even when we reject it individually, we worry that it's much wanted, disintegration presages something worse. Everybody loses. For all purposes except capital accumulation, the promise of family falls abjectly short of itself. Often, it's nobody's fault, per se. Simply too much is

being asked of too few. On the other hand, the family is where the vast majority of the rape happens on this earth and the vast majority of the murder. No one is more likely to rob, bully, blackmail, manipulate, or hit you or inflict unwanted touch than family. Logically, announcing an intention to treat you like family, as so many airlines, restaurants, banks, and retailers do, ought to register as a horrible threat.

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Instead, to be metaphorically family in someone's eyes, makes believe that one has something quite unfamilial, namely acceptance, solidarity, an open promise of help, welcome and care. Of course, the administrative grid of the family does organize where certain forms of help are coming from or where they are legally obligated to come from. But this has nothing to do with solidarity. The family predicated on the privatization of that which should be common and on proprietary concepts of couple, blood, and gene is a state institution, not a popular organism. It doesn't feel like a state institution. It probably did back when settlers were imposing marriage on indigenous communities, right? But nowadays it's sort of doesn't. It feels like we just choose. And in fact, that's part of what Ruthie Wilson Gilmore calls the organized abandonment, in a weird way, of the state. It's like a zombie. This is sort of a zombie state form. It's at once a normative aspiration and a last resort, a black male passing itself off as fate, a shitty contract pretending to be a biological necessity. And perhaps above all, the family is an ideology of work. Ever since the European labor movement won the male breadwinner household for itself in the 1890s, socialists have cleaved to the romantic idea of the working class provider who is happily identified with what they do by way of work today.

[00:38:58]
Almost paradoxically, as I was sort of mentioning, with the sort of white problem in the so-called advanced economies, which academics have like to call feminized, right, on account of the higher proportion of female workers employed but also the traditional gender service hospitality support computing affect of the key profit sectors. Almost everyone has to try to be a male breadwinner. Yet, to paraphrase Sarah Brouillette,

reports of the death of the family have been greatly exaggerated. The family, which has supposedly been in crisis for several centuries, still isn't nearly dead enough. To be a working family—this, by the way, is a game that I used to play in my extremely unhappy family—it's called "happy families." To be this kind of artisanal team ordained by the cosmos itself is deeply seductive. It's an evocation of security, harmony and right reproduction. You basically ask, like, "Dad, do you have Miss Soot, the sweep's daughter?" And if he does, then you grab it and then you can ask for more, and you're just kind of accumulating families and you're reuniting them, and their reunion is like your happiness because you're winning. But also, it feels kind of like maybe it might be fun to be Miss Soot, the sweep's daughter, right?

[00:40:44]
In the future, you will be Mrs. Soot, some other sweep's wife. And it's so obvious in your very body, right? There's no existential crisis you can imagine in Miss Soot's life. No wonder consumers love the notion of a family business, a mom and pop shop, despite clear evidence that workers wages, benefits and working conditions are worse, not better, within such establishments. But everyday utopian experiments obviously do generate strands of an altogether different social tissue—micro cultures, which could be scaled up—if the movement for a classless society took seriously the premise that households can be formed freely, could be run democratically. The principle that no one shall be deprived of food, shelter or care because they don't work. I'd wager that you, too, can imagine something better than the lottery that drops a neonate arbitrarily among one or two or three or four individuals of a particular class and keeps her there for the best part of two. decades without her consent, making her wholly dependent on them for her physical survival, legal existence and economic identity, and forcing her to be the reason they give away their lives in work.

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I'd wager that you, too, can imagine something better than the norm that makes a kind of prison for adults, especially women, out of their own commitment to children they love. Together, I think we can invent accounts of human nature, ways of organizing

social reproduction, if that is real, that are not just economic contracts with the state or worker training programs in disguise. Together, I think we can establish consensus based modes of transgenerational cohabitation and large scale methods for distributing and minimizing the burdens of life's work. And of course, like all utopias, something like that nestles sort of everywhere latently in the present. Already there are wispy sprouts of this in nooks and crannies wherever people, against all odds, are seeking to devise liberatory or queer, which is to say, anti property modes of care. The best parents already seek to unmake the kind of possessive love that Alexandra Kollontai called "property love" in their relations with children. The comradeliest motherers—that's my attempt at a neologism—motherer, rather than mother— already seek to deprivatize care. Right? So, in a strict sense, it may be true, as Michael Hart asserts, that the production of real happiness is sort of doomed under current conditions. He says, quote, "only once property love is abolished can we begin to invent a new love, a revolutionary love, a red love." But I think it also seems indisputable. I'm not sure he would disagree, that obviously many of us are also getting on with the abolishing.

[00:44:08]
Okay, it's the whistle stop tour time. So, number one, some utopian examples for you. Besides inventing the word feminism. Did you know that? And inspiring hundreds of collective land projects, the French silk merchant Charles Fourier is the reason utopia is often associated with rivers of lemonade, because he was actually an early climate ecologist and geoengineer, and he actually really predicted that. By the time he died in his 60s, he had published, amongst other things, the "New Amorous World," which is a title, I think, needs to be revisited. And then his theory of the four movements. So this was very sort of scientific about why bourgeois society was going to be turned upside down any second now. And he had all kinds of elaborate designs, right down to the last meticulous detail for this post= bourgeois human society. And I'm clearly indicating that it's a little bit funny, some of it, but the things he prescribes are quite compelling and persuasive even today. Universal basic income, escape from markets, non monogamy, excellent food, varied recreation for all generations. All living is communal. He has these vast buildings called phalanxes or phalansteries. There are for 1600

people, which I think is too big, and there are covered walkways for when the weather is bad, and there is a guaranteed sexual pleasure minimum. All labor is fully deprivatized. Tasks are shared among children and adults, as well as organized according to your human personalities, established laws of passionate attraction—which I'm worried is like, that sort of what's that weird religion with the sort of like the odometer thing? Never mind. Work best transmogrifies into a libidinal art or joyful play. And there are sort of regular, carefully curated sex parties that are presided over by special fairies. It's kind of great. You should read it.

[00:46:41]
"Charles Fourier," writes M.E. O'Brien, "was a delightfully kinky science fiction writer and an inspiration to imagining pro-queer communes of the future." In M.E. O'Brien's historical feature in "Pinko" magazine, she reviews Fourier's political vision in depth, focusing on his plan for this harmonious phalanstery, and thinking about the closest things to it in recent years. The essay is called "Communizing Care."

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Rather than, as the implementation of a plan, O'Brien suggests, this commune could arise sort of more spontaneously and messily out of insurrection. And, you know, just to be clear, right, this is a sort of this has strong overtones of the colonialist kind of utopianism that I was criticizing, and that Madeleine and Dave have taught me how to criticize, really, because he has a timetable for the utopia of the future. It's not really what I want utopia to do for us, but still okay. Pre colonized and indigenous populations, for instance, in Africa and North America, by and large, did not develop the form of private property, the family right, it's worth saying. Rather, they had it imposed on them as part of the process of disciplining them into capitalism. And while assimilated modes of life have certainly taken significant hold among First Nations throughout the Americas, which is a function of the ongoing catastrophe that has been the past 400 years, from their perspective, familialization is also an ongoing right, not just a historic process of colonization. As the critical polyamorist Kim Tallbear says of the Indigenous experience, quote "colonial notions of family insidiously continue to stigmatize us as they

represent the normative standard against which we are measured."

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So, for example, 18th century British colonists endeavored explicitly to destroy the systems of sex equality, including female political power, which was sometimes called petticoat government, by the colonizers that were operative among Native peoples such as the Cherokee. In the 19th century, the US. And Canadian federal government's Indian policies typically demanded marriage right, as a way of dissolving tribal models of collective ownership that went along often with forms of gender nonbinarism and or matrilocal open marriage. And they instituted private property and then concentrated it in the heads of household, which had to be husbands, right. Which is not to say that there weren't precolonial patriarchies and matriarchies. It's not to romanticize. But it is in this sense that we can say that family abolition as a project of resistance to and flight from bourgeois society and a defense against colonization was a horizon raised by the practices of stolen, captive, colonially, displaced and or formally enslaved people who defied the institutions and modes of citizenship the US. Attempted to instill in them. So, yes, private property, secularized Christian monogamy, and this marriage based private nuclear household. Some Indigenous diplomats and philosophers became great enforcers of Christian morality and patriarchy.

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There was a Seneca leader called Handsome Lake who precipitated what has been called by some historians the Iroquois' own version of Salem, in 1803, for example. Right. However, especially prior to the sort of early stages of colonization, and then sometimes continuously into the present, most Native tribes practiced few or even sometimes no forms of patriarchy, raising children collectively, honoring more than two genders, placing only loose social strictures on sexual pleasure, counting nonhuman relatives among their kin, and sometimes conceptualizing mothering practices such as breastfeeding as gender inclusive and diplomatically important. Indigenous American two spirit gender subjectivity, Indigenous philosophical traditions, and Indigenous cultures of sexual freedom have inspired and educated gender dissident settlers for

centuries. In the '60s and '70s, entire communities of gay liberationists sought to emulate queer indigeneity. The Navajo writer Lou Cornum writes about how this was "cringey"— in his word— but he nevertheless, doesn't want to dismiss it. And this is a surprising essay in the context of a lot of discourse that stays simply at the cringey, and says, this was appropriation and it was bad, and settlers should just leave the fuck alone, right? Lou Cornum says there have been glimmers of interconnectivity across indigenous life and gay practice.

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In their own words about these glimmers, "there is promise there." They wonder if a lens as large as communist thinking might direct this wavering light forward in the 21st century. With Cornum, my question is whether non= Indigenous and Indigenous communizers of care, today, could move together towards some kind of collective reckoning with this legacy of kinship erasure and kinship reinvention, and develop a shared language, which needn't necessarily be abolition of the family. But I am, as a placeholder, calling abolition of the family as a decolonial imperative. People newly emancipated from chattel slavery in the US also pursued heterogeneous, anti proprietarian versions of kinship prior to the Civil War. A diversity of covert romantic and sexual codes, including non-monogamous and loose marriages dedicated to the care of sweetheart children developed among the captive laborers who had been stolen, or birthed by those stolen from their African communities and transported over the Atlantic. In philosopher Hortense Spiller's epochal account of the production of Black unmotherhood, right, and ungender in antebellum America, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," she writes, "whether or not we decide that the support systems that African Americans derived under conditions of captivity should be called family or something else strikes me as supremely impertinent."

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I really like her tone. She's kind of writing back to the sorts of respectability politics of sociologists and historians like E. Franklin Frazier, who want to go into the archive of slavery, and discover a very proper, heterosexual, bourgeois Black family. And she's

writing against that. And if you haven't read it, you should definitely, obviously read this. So, yeah, the point for Spillers is that African people in the historic diaspora had nothing to prove. Given that, it is stunningly evident, she writes, that they were capable of modes of care at least as complex as those of the nuclear family in the West. Rather than orienting towards the family as a measuring stick or an aspiration, Spillers focuses on the fact that Black women in the wake of slavery stand out of the traditional symbolics of female gender, and what this means for political struggle. Namely, she says, it is our task to make a place for this different social subject. A place, in other words, that we could, if we want to, end up calling a family or not. Spiller's text can be read as family abolitionist and Tiffany Lethabo King does read it that way in a 2018 essay, which I just think is amazing.

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Revolutionaries, King suggests, must welcome and enable potential challenges from within. Challenges from children, for example, who may have their own ideas about how to be in relation, or from women who do not feel that their mothering, or their refusal of mothering has yet sort of reached the level of revolutionary. This is a sort of critique of certain discourses of revolutionary Black motherhood, queer Black mothering, that Tiffany feels tipped a little bit into romanticization. And she wants us to be able to go further. It's a similar argument to Jennifer Nash's about the same texts. And it's respectful. Right. It's not to say that there isn't incredible work in the sort of, you know, the very influential anthology "Revolutionary Mothering," for example, by Alexis Pauline Gumbs and others. I don't know if you're familiar, but "deromanticize always" is the sort of gist for Tiffany. We must stay vigilant in asking when does queerness pose no challenge to property? Right? We must hear the grown women, the nonbinary people, the men who fall within the tent of queer Black mothering by virtue of their class, their care responsibilities, their gender nonconformity and their transness, and yet hate that work, and desires something else, and simply do not, do not find themselves in the romance.

[00:57:01]
To what end are we queering motherhood? To what end, King dares us to ask, recuperating and uplifting the queer figure of the Black matriarch? What would happen to our politics was she not redeemed? What kind of destructive collective subject might her redemption [inaudible 00:57:22] mother, in fact, be foreclosing? Are there non redemptive pathways to a subject position after the family, beyond motherhood, yet to be blazed?

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Nearly done in her 1920 pamphlet Communism in the Family, the sort of utopian-left Bolshevik until she couldn't, and then she couldn't, and she lived a long life, and survived Stalinism. But in her very dissident time, the Soviet commissar and Russian family abolitionist Alexandra Kollontai continues projections made by Marx and Engels because, yes, and I've skipped this, but yes, family abolitionism is in Marx and Engels, if you care, it's Orthodox Marxism. We can debate that in the pub. But I'm right. "Society," she writes, "will gradually take upon itself all the tasks that before the Revolution fell." To the individual parents, she says, continuing Marx and Engels, "the obligations of parents to their children shall wither away gradually," she reasons, "until finally, society assumes the full responsibility." I'm going to skip over a little bit. She was sort of demanding something pretty magnificent from the working women she was addressing, right? "The narrow and exclusive affection of the mother for her own children must expand until it extends to all the children of the great proletarian family." This is why one might say, you know, real family against a family or something like that. Kollontai envisioned a planetary insurgency of red love, which you've already seen. A red love is a social love, a love of many, in many ways.

[00:59:21]
OK, skipping over almost 50 years, moving from Leningrad to the Lower East Side. This is the Jewish New Yorker, Chicago art school graduate and revolutionary feminist Shulamith Firestone, whose hilarious and readable, yet densely philosophical, Freudian, [inaudible 00:59:39], Marxist, Engelsian, Beauvoirian manifesto—and that's just in the first

15 pages—for family abolition, she composed at the advanced age of 24, in 1970. She was the self-appointed founder and theorist of the women's liberation movement. She advocated for the abolition of the labor force itself, quote, on quote, under a cybernetic socialism, and, quote, "the diffusion of the child bearing and child rearing role to the society as a whole, men as well as women." Notoriously ectogenesis, right? The machine uterus is part of this speculative picture. But the way that has traveled annoys me because her main point is that nothing good could possibly come from technology in capitalist hands, right? So when down the road from where I live in Philadelphia, people start evolving the Biobag, which is indeed ectogenetic technology, which is trialed on premature human fetuses this year, people want to link it to Firestone. And I think it's important to have certain kinds of openness to technological possibility as part of one's critical utopianism, but their funding, and their agenda is entirely pro life, right? And it's exactly what Firestone is literally saying— never mind, rant over.

[01:01:14]
This was one aspect of the post-catalyst society highlighted in Marge Piercy's speculative fiction tribute to "The Dialectic of Sex." "Woman on the Edge of Time" has a form of ectogenesis that has been generated from below, by people who might otherwise have gestated, but didn't didn't want to injure themselves that way or whatever. And of course, it's criticizable and imperfect—all utopias are. But if you haven't read "Woman on the Edge of Time," there's another one that I recommend because it's got this kind of tactile, floating tank full of the community's fetuses. And this was one aspect Piercy highlighted, but it was also only one part of a system where everybody mothers everybody, and there are also specialists. There are also specialist child rearers, because child rearing is not something you want to just leave to non-experts, according to this vision.

[01:02:19]
Okay, all right. You know what? We're skipping over. While precariously housed trans sex workers of color built technologies of survival in the cracks and margins of a

homophobic and white supremacist society, their imminent theories of gay liberation were also sort of going global, right? So while people like Sylvia Rivera were building the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries House, there was also this efflorescence of homosexual liberation fronts around the world. In 1971, the Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire released a communique stating their intention to explode the patriarchal family. And that same year, the GLF in London hammered out a manifesto about how our entire society is built around the patriarchal family. "We have to change our attitudes to our personal property, to our lovers, to our day to day priorities in work and leisure, and even to our need for privacy."

[01:03:28]
And as gay liberation gained momentum, these ideas started to concretize. There was a group in 1972, Boston Gay Liberation, I think it was called. They drove to the Democratic National Convention, in Miami and leafleted attendees with ten demands, many of which would be familiar today—abolition of the police, an end to US imperialism. But I haven't seen on a flyer, certainly not at the Democratic National Convention, their demand number six, which was, "rearing children should be the common responsibility of the whole community. Any legal rights parents have over their children should be dissolved, and each child should be free to choose its own destiny. Free 24 hour child care centers should be established where faggots and lesbians can share the responsibility of child rearing." It's pretty different from where we're at right now, isn't it? If you tweet about children's liberation, actually, forget children's liberation. If you criticize parental rights, right? The pedophile and groomer smear is used against you in an organized way, right? This is a historic tactic that dates back to Anita Bryant, at least. And I do find that the left has an insufficient and certainly insufficiently organized response. In fact, many movements of the day, from Crip liberation to flower power, were explicitly thinking about how to do solidarity with children. The Black Panthers intervened in the public school system, providing free breakfasts and after school programs, as well as some actual schools. And then there were dozens of flavors of lesbian and gay daycare centers as well as unschooling ventures, some of which Firestone was very scathing about. She was very scathing about the kibbutz as well. But

it's useful to be aware of this, right? And not just in this kind of pessimistic mode of, well, that all didn't work, right? That all failed, which is a very common sentiment, I think.

[01:05:56]
Ellen Willis has an essay about how all of her comrades at the end of the 70s, having been defeated, had started saying that they were wrong in the first place. This is an essay called "The Family: Love It or Leave It." And it basically is seeing the active process of forgetting, of unremembering that is taking place, that is being sort of engineered. And she says that just because we failed, with our family abolitionism, doesn't mean that it was stupid.

[01:06:47]
Have I actually been talking for an hour? I literally have. I'm so sorry. It's my asides. I promised it was actually 40 minutes when I practiced it. I haven't got time for Wages for Housework, is the main one, which is also Evan's favorite one, so we can talk about that— well, I don't know. I don't know if it's Evan's favorite one anymore. But what I wanted to end with, apart from Wages for Housework and the National Welfare Rights Organization is someone from right now, right?

[01:07:25]
"The nuclear family turns children into property," Lola Olufemi, who is a British feminist, rights in her a kind of [inaudible 01:07:33] to diasporic black revolutionary feminism, "Experiments in Imagining Otherwise." So I'm just suggesting that as a matter of urgency, we should take this to heart, opening anew what Lola calls, "the possibility that we could reorganize the family, and the buildings we live in, and the food we eat and the education we receive, and start taking things for free, in order to raise children in ways that make sacrifice, or regret, or biological drives, or gendered alienation impossible." Okay. Thank you.