

The background image shows a mining site with two large Liebherr excavators. One is in the foreground with its bucket raised, and another is further back on a higher level of the site. A complex system of conveyor belts and metal structures is visible in the lower half of the frame. The scene is dimly lit, with a reddish-brown tint, suggesting an underground or low-light environment.

WHAT IS ECOLOGICAL CLASS COMPOSITION?

Bue Rübner Hansen

A BIT OF BACKGROUND

Common Ecologies: social movement school and co-research platform; ecological unionism

Viewpoint Magazine: Workers' inquiry and social reproduction

Batshit jobs essay to book, working at Universities of Jena and Copenhagen.

OPENDEMOCRACYUK

“Batshit jobs” - no-one should have to destroy the planet to make a living

An in-depth look at workers' participation in the climate and ecological breakdown, and how this might be transformed into ecological care, and leveraged for change.

[Bue Rübner Hansen](#)

11 June 2019

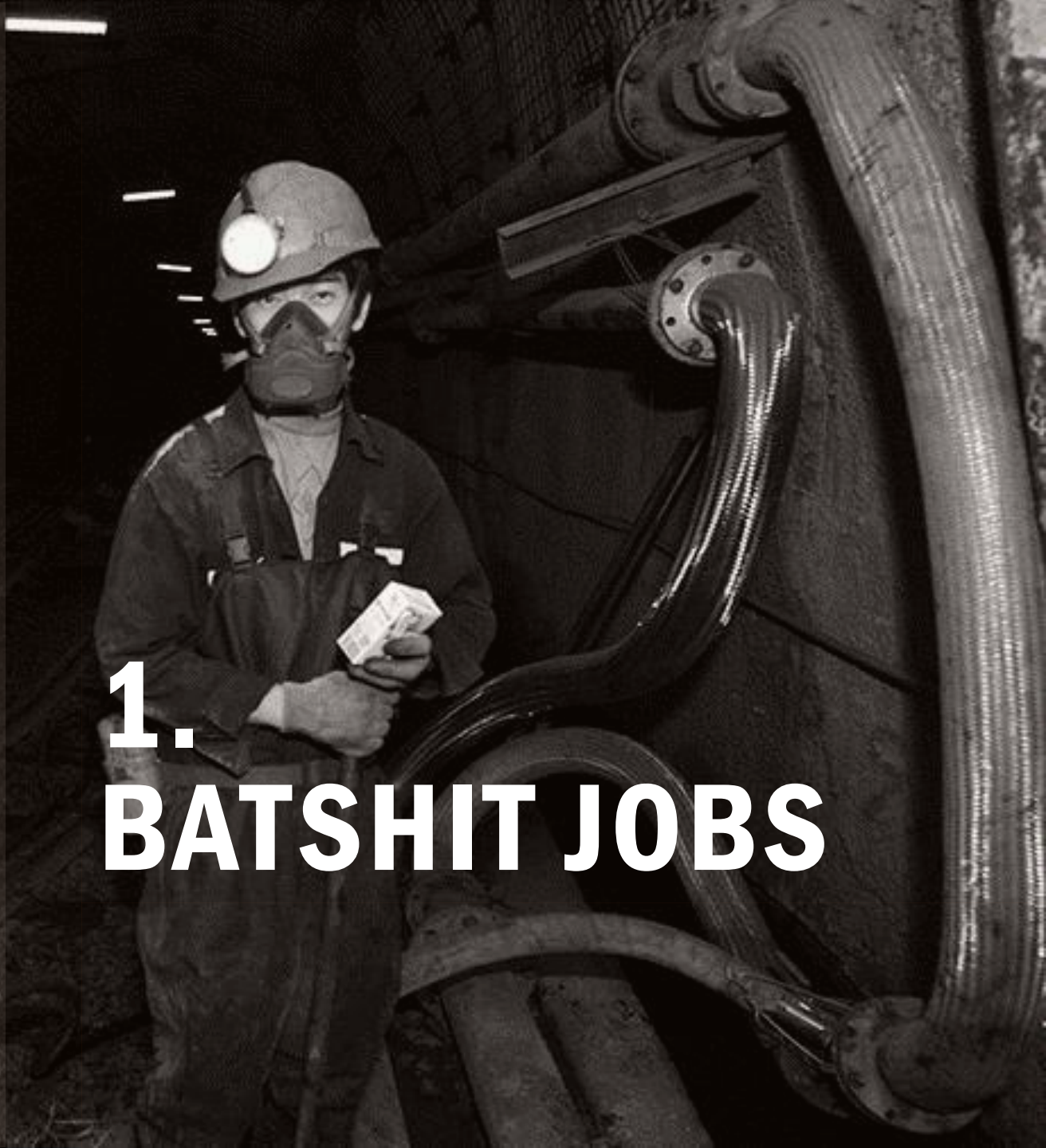


Anti-fracking protester, London 2019 | SOPA Images/SIPA USA/PA Images



OVERVIEW

1. The problem of batshit jobs
2. Affectedness and inquiry
3. The question of *class composition*
4. Why class theories lack ecology
5. Ecological class composition
 - conjuncture & inquiry
 - tendency & strategy



1. BATSHIT JOBS

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Climate crisis => ecosystemic crisis

Carbon emissions => planetary boundaries

Danger of scientism, ecology without class

Anthropogenic => capitalogenic

Humanity => growth & accumulation

Danger of economism and fetishism

capital does nothing without labour!
capital does nothing without labour!

CONTRADICTIONS OF JUST TRANSITION

1. Trying to *influence* transition rather than make it happen.
2. Presuming that capital wants transition enough to pay what it takes to make it just.
3. Not addressing and working through workers' contradictory interests; hoping for deus ex machina of state and technology

PROBLEMS OF TRANSITION

**Class unity
and class
division are
both
dangerous**

1. Trying to *influence* transition rather than make it happen.
2. Presuming that capital wants transition enough to pay what it takes to make it just.
3. Not addressing and working through workers' contradictory interests; hoping for deus ex machina of state and technology

**There is no
way to avoid
working
through the
contradictions**

*There is no
way to avoid
working
through the
contradictions*

BATSHIT JOBS

These jobs are crazy - *batshit crazy* - because they require workers to undermine the health of the ecosystems upon which their lives depend. In these jobs, workers are told: if you want to make a living, you have to undermine the conditions of life.

OPENDEMOCRACYUK

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Anti-fracking protester, London 2019 | SOPA Images/SIPA USA/PA Images

DESTRUCTIVE INDUSTRIES

Oil, coal and gas mining

Fossil infrastructure construction

Airline

Industrial agriculture

Ocean freight

Auto-industry

Construction sector

Marketing

Training petroleum geologists

Abolition or transformation?



DISEMPowered COMPLICITY /POTENTIAL POWER

- Resistance to transition
OR
- Developing workers'
protagonism

MANAGING JOBS VS. MOBILIZING WORKERS

"There's this misconception, especially with y'all in liberal media, that this 90% of people are just ignorant about climate change, ignorant about the effects of mountaintop removal and all the health effects. Keep in mind we're the ones getting cancer from the coal mining practices, not y'all, so we can kinda speak on that matter."

- West Virginia ex-coal miner.



Ecological Economics
Volume 200, October 2022, 107469



Is it a green or brown job? A Taxonomy of Sustainable Employment

Katharina Bohnenberger  

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2.
AFFECTEDNESS
AND INQUIRY



BATSHIT JOBS =
- TOXIC
- NOXIOUS
- CRAZY





Refusing to participate in harm



Documenting affectedness

POLITICIZING BATSHIT JOBS

- admitting vulnerability
- experience + expertise
- intra class division

= *questions of class composition & subjectivity*



Connecting environmental harm and exploitation

CORE QUESTION

How are class interests and class agency composed?

How to build or support transformative cells or currents within the class?



CAPITALISM ALSO
DEPENDS ON
DOMEST
LABOUR

3. CLASS COMPOSITION

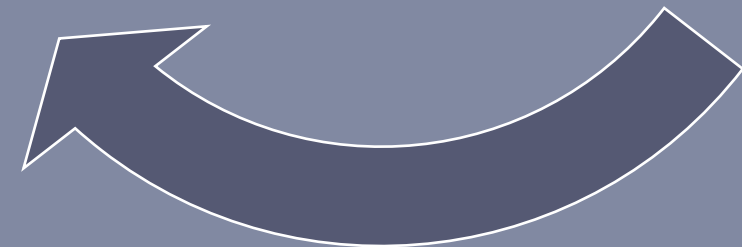
CLASS COMPOSITION

Quaderni Rossi, Classe Operaia
Alquati, Panzieri, Tronti, Bologna



Technical
composition

Political
composition



CLASS COMPOSITION

1. Class as conflictual process
2. Workers shape capital & vice-versa
3. From sociology to inquiry
4. Affordances & leaps, not consciousness of essence



Technical
composition

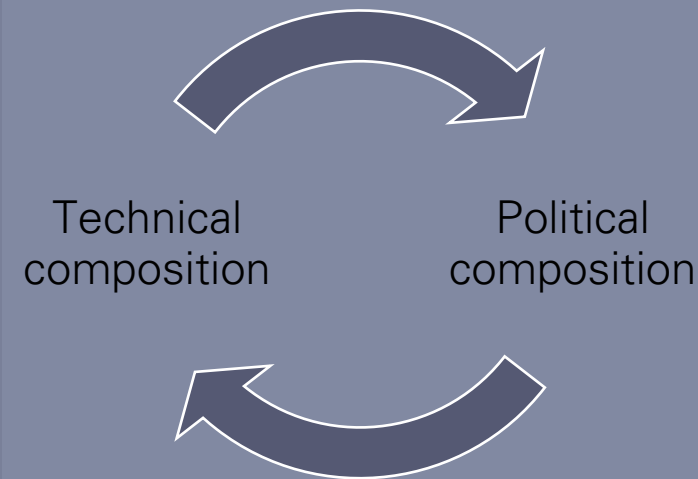
Political
composition



CLASS COMPOSITION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Contemporary examples:

- How workers environmentalism has shaped the technical recomposition of capital, and how the technical recomposition of capital has decomposed the industrial working class in older industrial centres (cf. Feltrin, Sacchetto & others on noxious deindustrialization).
- Shift in social reproduction & end of Fordist social contract = possibility of new workers' environmentalism (Leonardi, Barca)

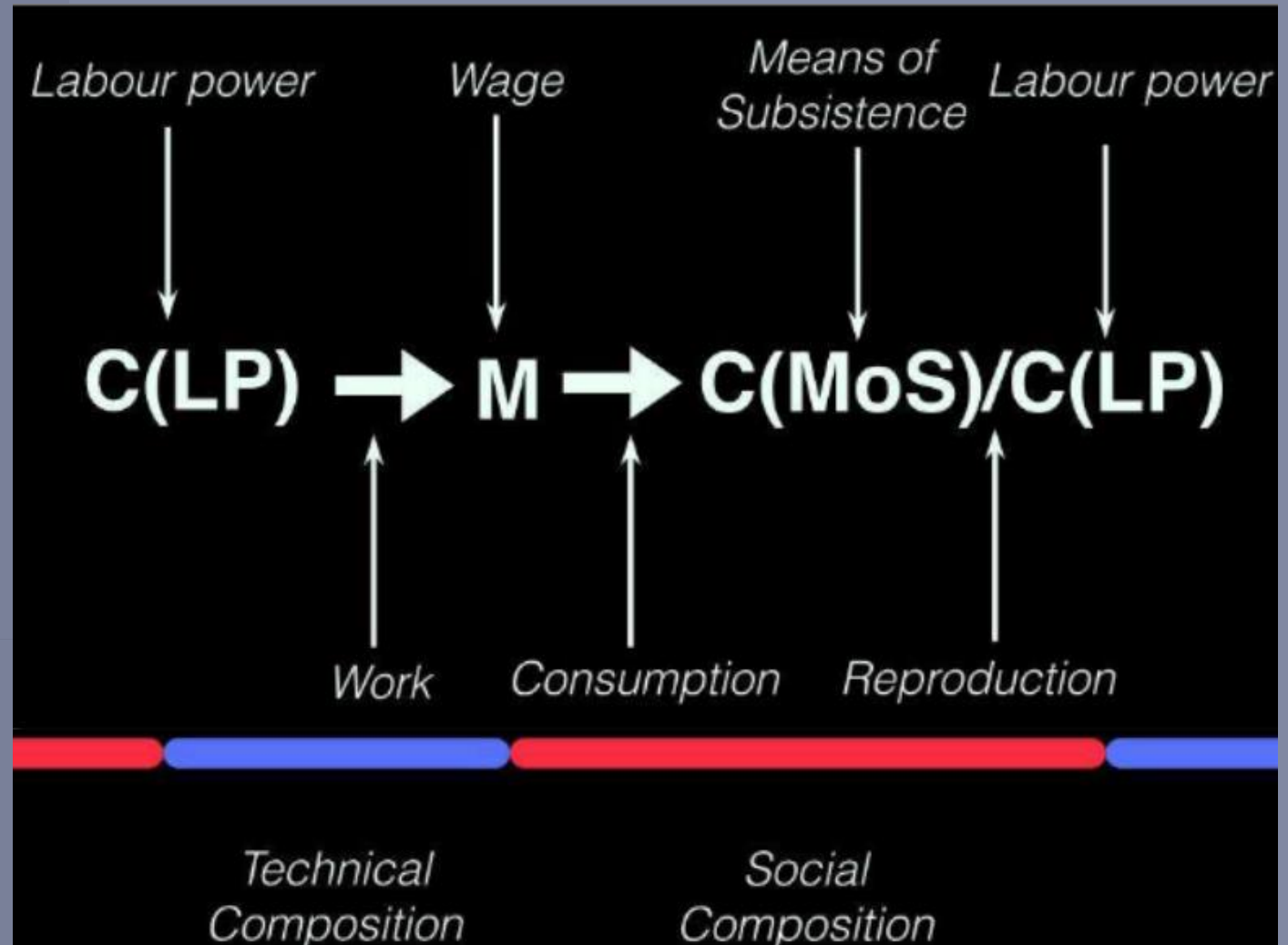


SOCIAL COMPOSITION

Wheeler & Thorne, Notes from Below...

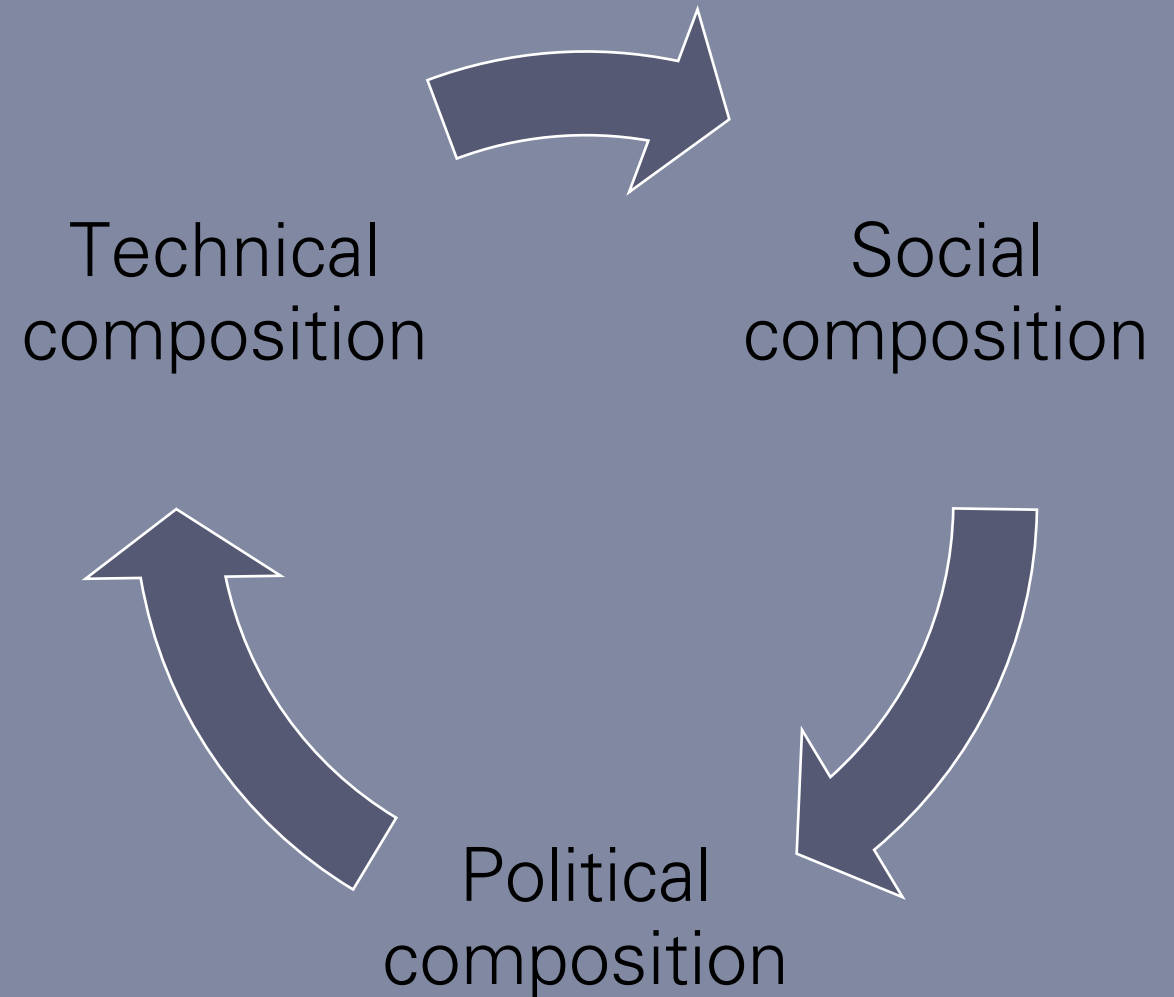
M – C – M' -- reproduction of capital

C – M – C -- reproduction of labour



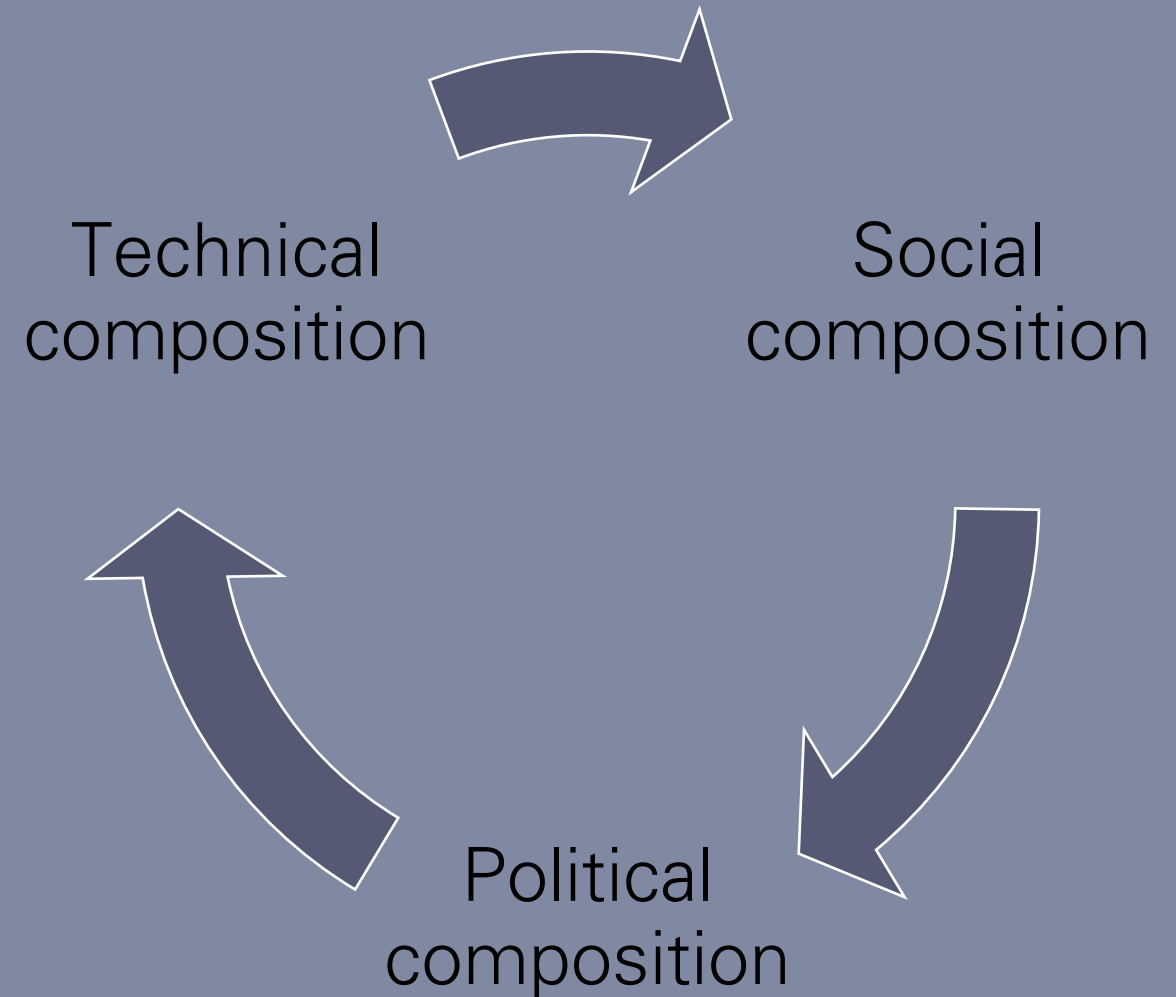
SOCIAL COMPOSITION

- Domestic and reproductive labour
 - Wider networks of social (inter)dependence: kinship, associations, charity, welfare, etc.
- => political composition and its expression of economic class are mediated by everyday tactics and strategies of life, incl. citizenship, family, gender, ethnicity, etc...



WHERE IS **ECOLOGY**?

- Workers environmentalist studies: environmental *consciousness*
- Environmental justice studies: ecological affectedness & distribution conflicts
- Synthesis: Barca & Leonardi in *Globalizations*
- Metabolic & hybrid labour (Battistoni...)



WHERE IS **ECOLOGY**?

- Workers environmentalist studies: environmental *consciousness*
- Environmental justice studies: ecological *affectedness* & distribution conflicts
- Synthesis: Barca & Leonardi in *Globalizations*
- *In the work itself*: metabolic & hybrid labour (Battistoni...)

ecology does not mean
ECOLOGY ≠ "GOOD" OR "NATURE"
good or nature

Ecological class composition must account for

- Ecological alienation, non-affectedness, non-awareness
- Willingness to do ecological harm

The task is not to add ecology to existing notions of class, but to ecologize these notions, in a way that accounts both for the existence and absence of ecological consciousness and action.

THE TASK
The task

QUESTIONS OF COMPOSITION

- What is the ecological composition of the whole class? Batshit, non-batshit, and earthcare/hybrid workers
- What is the composition of batshit workers: blue vs. white collar, geographical, etc.
- What is the role of expertise and experience in the political composition of workers
- How can wider compositions be built?

A black pig stands in the foreground on a pile of trash and debris. In the background, there is a large industrial facility with several tall smokestacks emitting a hazy atmosphere. The scene is a stark contrast between nature and industrialization.

**4. CLASS
WITHOUT
ECOLOGY,
ECOLOGY
WITHOUT CLASS**

THE ECOLOGY OF CLASS DIVISION

Feudalism*

Ecological divide between classes:


- distributed metabolic exchange in subsistence production.
- Small class of people relatively insulated from ecological harm, but shaping production through simple extraction


Capitalism

Ecological divide between all classes and "nature"

- Metabolic exchange done by alienated labour; real subsumption.
- Vast majority insulated from immediate ecological harm, but reproducing it in various ways.

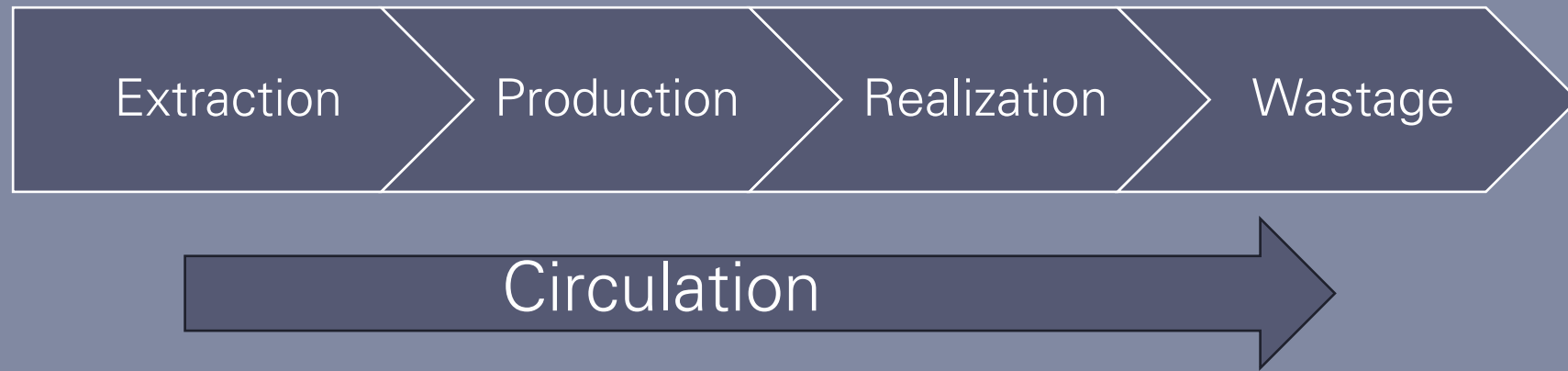
Marxist class theory – adapted from Arruzza & King, 2019

Class in general	Specific characteristics of class	Level of abstraction
<i>Socio-ecological rift</i>	0. The dispossessed & propertied (primitive accumulation)	Abstract  Concrete
<i>Relational</i>	1. Extraction of surplus value (exploitation)	
	2. Conflictual negotiation over labour-power as a commodity	
	3. The distribution of revenue in reproduction as a whole (incl. debt, prices of consumption)	
<i>Processual</i>	[4.] Mediation of ideology, state and other institutions (gender, race, public health, housing, education, family; labour law, citizenship, borders; interest rate, inflation, redistributive policies, <u>etc.</u>)	

An aerial photograph of a large-scale mining or construction site. The terrain is dark and rugged, with numerous tracks and paths crisscrossing the landscape. In the foreground and middle ground, several pieces of heavy machinery, including what appear to be bulldozers and excavators, are visible. A significant amount of dust or smoke is being kicked up by the machinery, creating a hazy atmosphere. The overall scene depicts a major earthmoving project in a mountainous or hilly region.

5. ECOLOGICAL CLASS COMPOSITION

COMMODITY/HARM CHAIN ANALYSIS



Feltrin & Medel mention two theories of wage differentials:

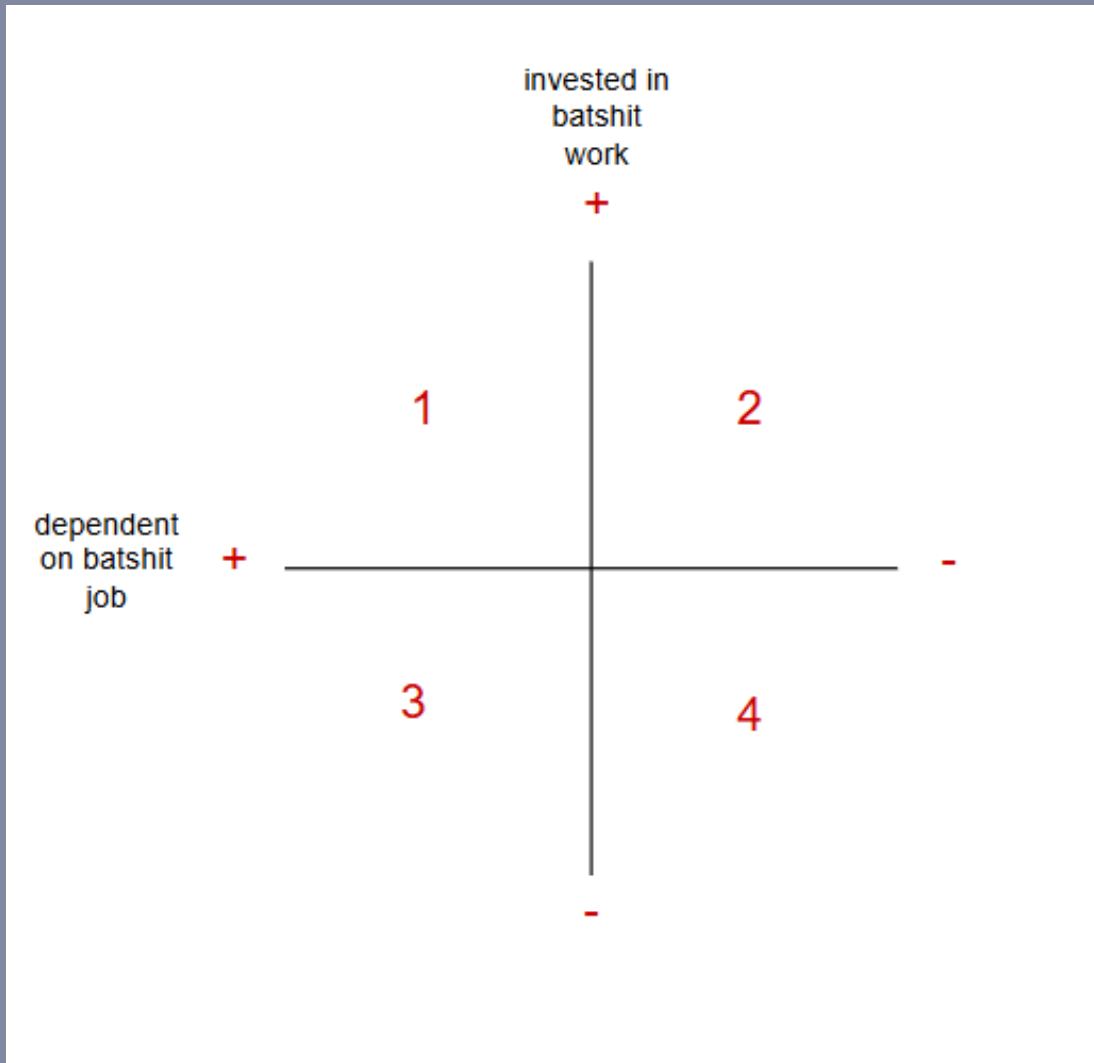
1. Wage differentials as a result of technological disparities (Marini, Dussel), different levels of productivity.
2. Wage differentials related to level of (class) struggle (Emmanuel, Tronti).

But we can add two more, to go with these questions of technical and political composition, namely social and ecological composition:

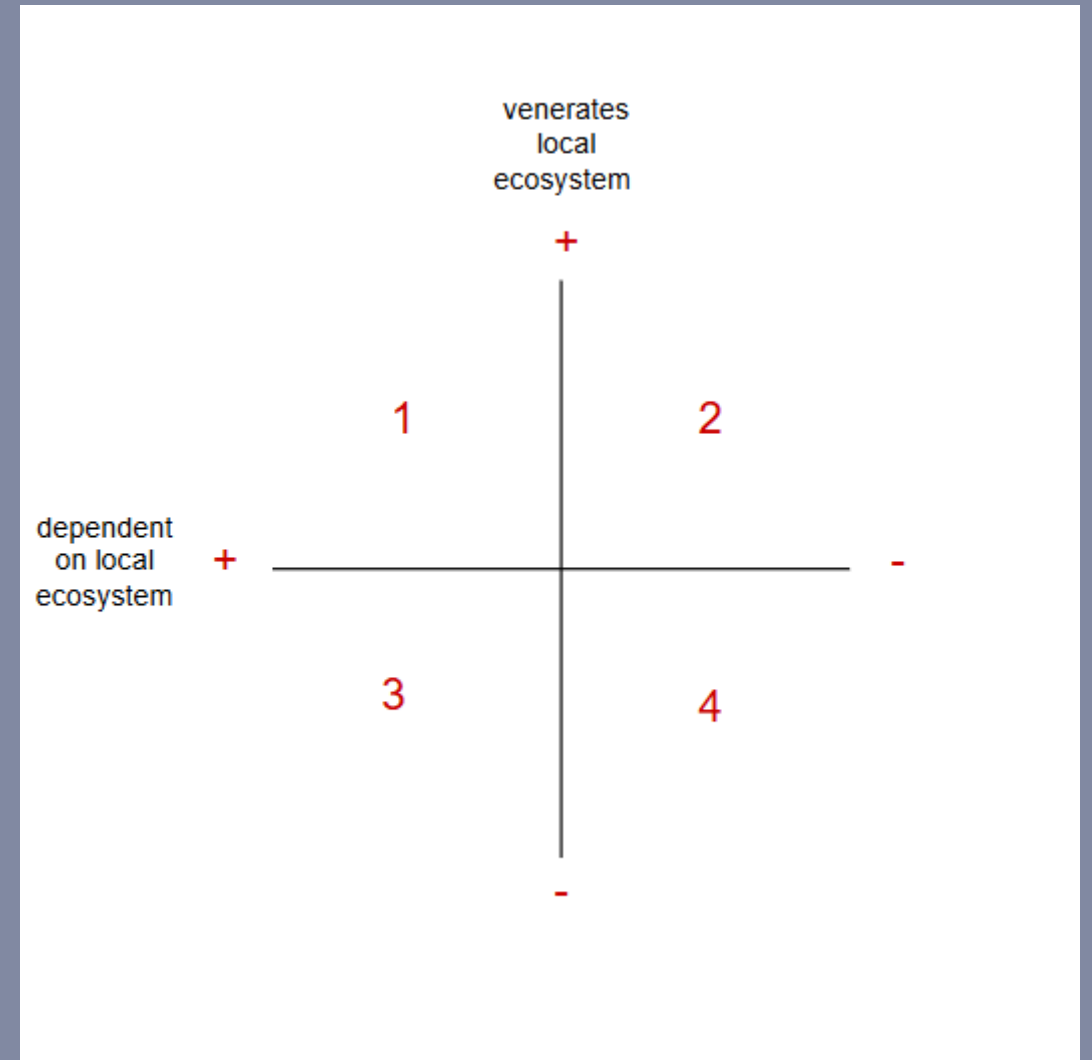
GLOBAL CLASS COMPOSITION

3. Wage differential related to different costs of reproduction, historic poverty, family patterns, etc.. (Cf. My surplus pop text?)
4. Wage differentials related to different ecological conditions, e.g. access to land for subsistence production and local building materials, vs. modes of life dependent on high levels of material processing and extraction.

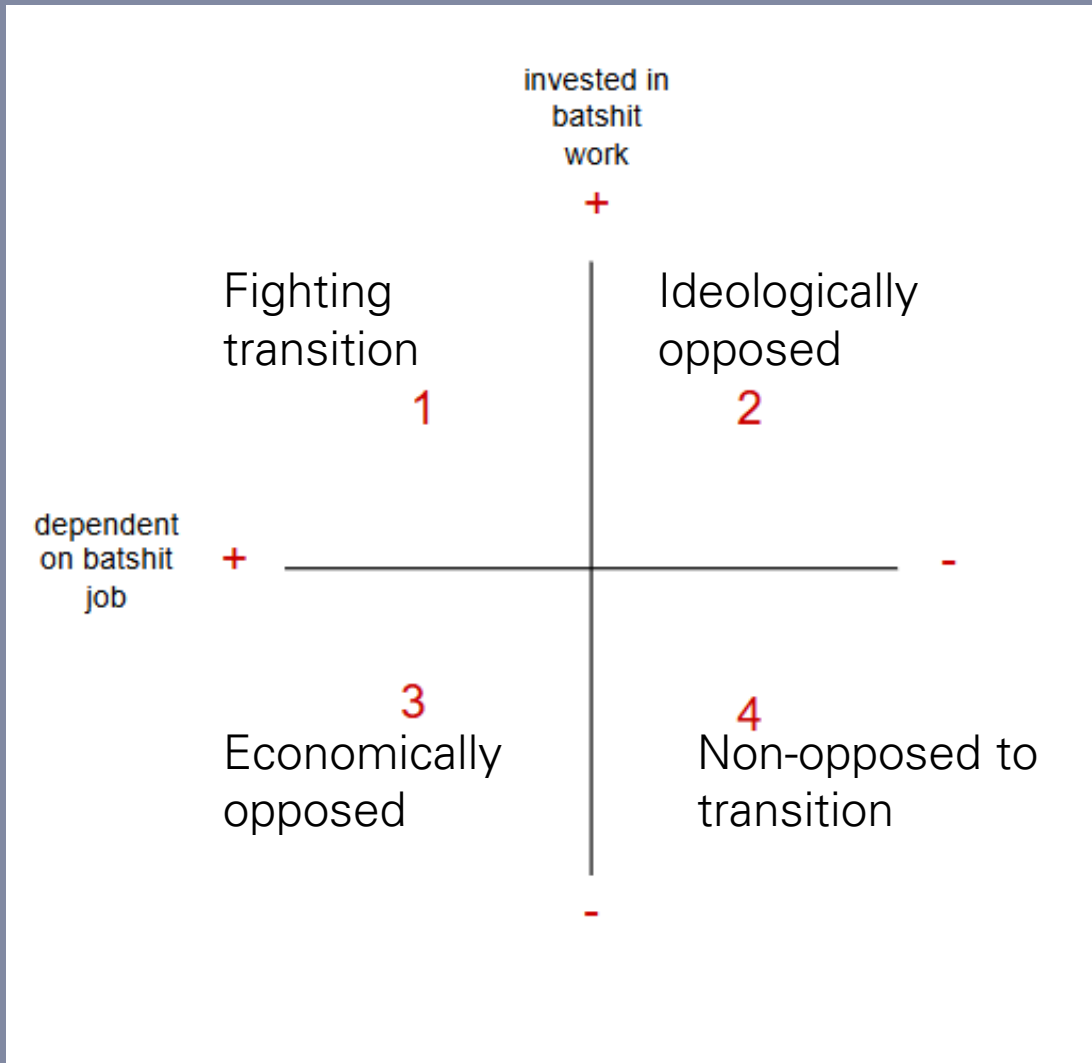
Relation to destructive work



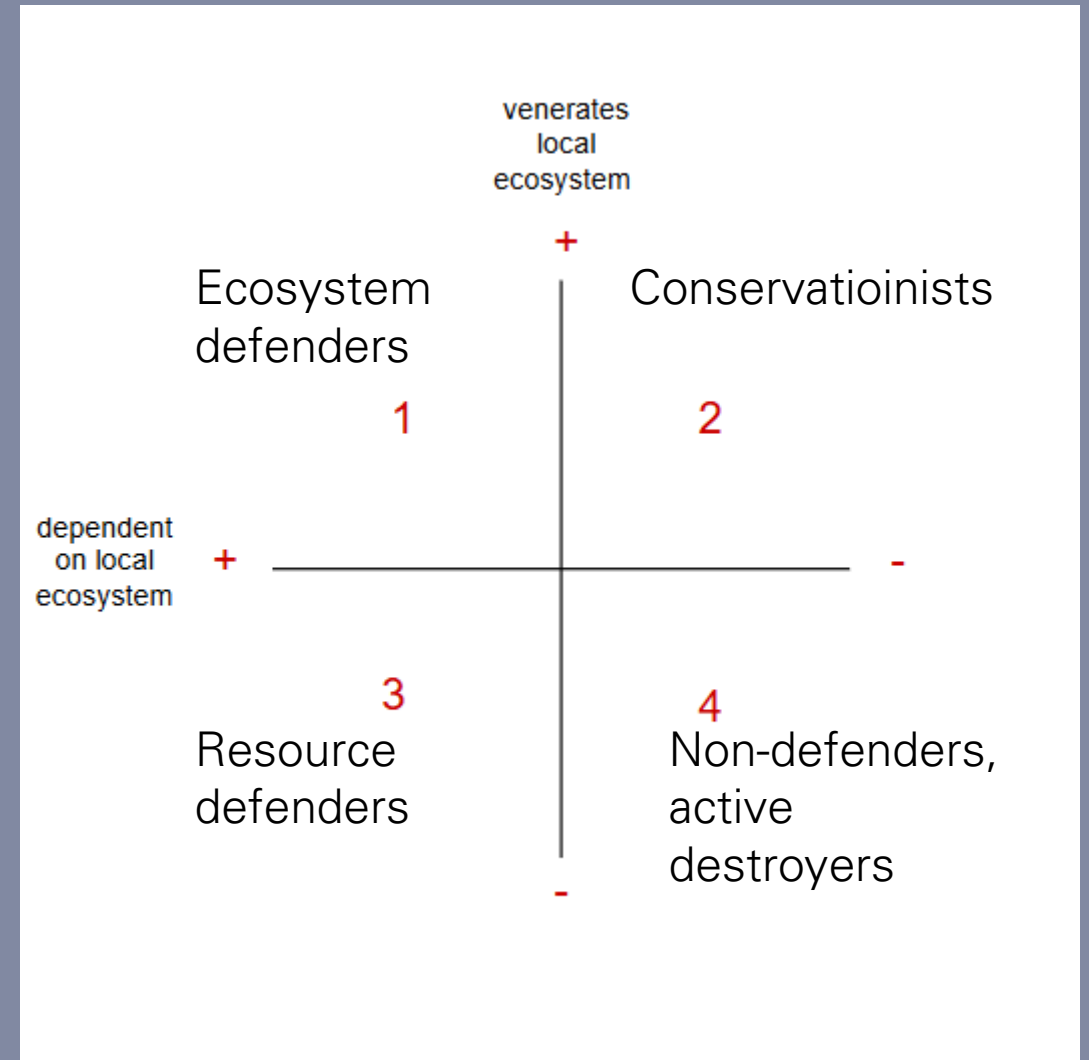
Relation to ecosystem



Relation to destructive work



Relation to ecosystem



TENDENTIAL ANALYSIS

- a. Noxious deindustrialisation / capitalist transition → class decomposition
- b. Alienation & continued mechanization and land concentration → deepening socio-ecological rift
- c. Deepening affectedness by disaster and decline both experienced and expected. (inflation, uninsurability, scarcity, displacement) → potentials for class recomposition?



Strategies of class composition



- Inquiry and co-research:

- - Map and socialize affectedness
- - Enhance disinvestment from batshit jobs – engage cognitive dissonance
- - Increase appreciation of healthy ecosystems.
- - Generational critique
- - Strengthening of non-destructive ideas and practices of the good life

4.
STRATEGY

Strategies of class composition

- **Political composition:**
 - - Compose interests of the affected and desiring. *Whole worker organizing*
 - - Enable collective action: circulate tactics, incl. community-based
 - - Organize to create strategic agency on greater scale
 - - *Bargaining for the common good*
 - - Make plans as matter of showcasing alternatives.
 - - Be ready and have plans geared to exploiting situational potentials.

4.
STRATEGY

- Hansen, Bue Rübner: “The Interest of Breathing – towards a theory of ecological interest formation”, *Crisis and Critique*, vol.7, issue 3, 2020.
- Hansen, Bue Rübner: “The Kaleidoscope of Catastrophe – on the Clarities and Blind Spots of Andreas Malm”, *Viewpoint Magazine* 2021.
- Hansen, Bue Rübner: “Batshit jobs - no-one should have to destroy the planet to make a living”, *OpenDemocracy*, 2019.

WHO AM I?

Post-doc at the University of Jena

PhD on Marx’s concepts of social organisation, at Queen Mary University, London.

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Co-editor of Viewpoint Magazine