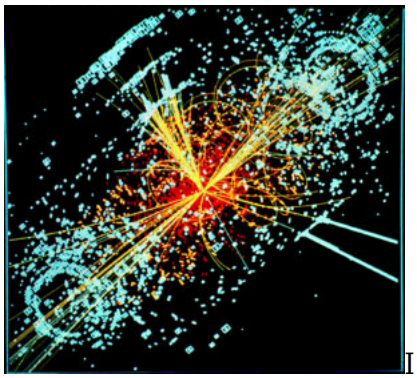
Realism in Revolt

written by Daphne Lawless | February 9, 2026



I follow William Gillis—veteran anarchist activist and writer, and trained physicist—on Bluesky because he's funny, and because he makes me think. If you share his burning hatred for fascism, a sneering (remember that word) contempt for establishment liberalism, and deep disgust for Stalinists, "tankies" and other authoritarian Leftists, I'd recommend it. It also helps if you like *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*.

One reason why I enjoy his work is that he flips a lot of widely held assumptions about anarchist beliefs. For example, the clichéd response to the concept of prison/police abolition is that anarchists (or libertarian communists) must be foolish utopians who think that everyone is deep-down good. On the contrary, Gillis's closely argued position is that some people *are* just plain "bad," due to whatever combination of nature and nurture, but that these "bad" people are precisely the ones who will become cops and judges. Hence, abolition of those structures, and their replacement with informal social incentives based on game theory, is the only way to stop bad people.[1] It's also fun, when you're watching liberals discuss why "prison abolition" couldn't work because the only alternative is lynch mobs, to toss in Gillis's article on the moral imperative to Kill Your Local Rapist and see what happens.[2]

But I've always appreciated Gillis's commitment to science as a concept and, more importantly, as a practice. We live in increasing conditions of "weaponised unreality"[3] where the ascendent form of "postmodern fascism" is built around not Blackshirts fighting in the streets but the creation of an "alternative reality" based on social media bubbles and captured mass-media outlets of the FOX/GB News variety, in which the downwardly mobile masses *voluntarily* segregate themselves. Expanding from its origins in Christian "creation science" and the tobacco industry, populist science denial has been weaponized over decades to prevent any serious attempt at mitigating climate change—and, more recently, has pushed forward from outrage at COVID-19 restrictions to "antivaxxers" apparently rejecting the germ theory of disease itself.

A strict adherence to scientific materialism *used* to be the common sense of the Marxist movement. In the era of the Industrial and Scientific Revolutions, with the world being turned upside down, the *Communist Manifesto* spoke enthusiastically about the possibility of "subjection of Nature's forces." The only problem was that the tools of science (and the fruits of its successes) were in the hands of the bourgeoisie, who had used it to defeat feudal oppression and were keeping it away from the exploited proletariat. In Ferdinand Lassalle's famous phrase quoted by Rosa Luxemburg, the key to the golden future was to *bring workers and science together*.[4]

How, then, did we end up in a period where a lot of the radical Left—especially those coming out of the social movements of the 1980s and the 1990s, and the academic currents vaguely described as

"postmodernist"—end up critical or even denialist toward science, ending up helplessly swept along by the new populist obscurantism? Gillis's *Did the Science Wars Take Place?* attempts to tell the story.

Veterans of the Science Wars

As Gillis tells it, in the years following World War II, in the developed Western world, the hard sciences (STEM—science, technology, engineering, mathematics) saw increasing patronage from the military-industrial complex, and in reaction, the humanities became increasingly "left-coded." Gillis brings in the fascinating historical footnote that this is a reversal of how things used to be:

> Before the second world war, the hard sciences carried relatively low-class associations and were hotbeds of leftism while in contrast the humanities broadly a place of retreat for the remaining aristocratic class or at least their culture and values.… [O]verall the hard sciences carried a particularly pedestrian cultural association closer to a trade school than a dinner party discussing Cicero. The mark of a classical aristocrat (like the brahmin in India's caste system) is not having to think about actual material reality; that's left to the help.
>
> Moreover, the hard sciences were clearly associated with radicalism—which is defined as attempting to grasp reality at the roots (*radix*)—whereas the humanities of the time were fixated on conserving culture and warning about the dangers of rapid change—the classic position of reaction. (25)

Gillis elsewhere makes an explicit appeal to class by categorizing the "brahmin" academy's attitude to the STEM disciplines as "janitors" (151). The argument that the hard sciences, as materialistic, should be politically radical should make an obvious kind of sense for anyone coming from the Marxist tradition. As Gillis notes, Albert Einstein was a cosmopolitan socialist, and theoretical physicists were disproportionately targeted by McCarthy's purges. But this is so different from the consensus discourse of the contemporary radical Left—based in the humanities and social sciences academia for many decades—as to provoke a shock. We might remember, however, that Peter Thiel—billionaire tyrant, doyen of neoreaction, and declared enemy of the Antichrist—has a postgraduate degree in philosophy.

Gillis suggests that a liberal and Leftist skepticism toward science relates to the post–World War II concept of fascism and Stalinism as different forms of "totalitarianism," which "presented fascism as the opposite of the liberal value of pluralism, diagnosing the core evil as essentially universality" (28):

> [Hannah] Arendt simultaneously perpetuated a framing of truth itself as totalitarian and "despotic" because of the way that it obliges us, casting dishonesty as necessary for democracy (supposedly a good thing and somehow at odds with fascism). This account of "totalitarianism" as any absolutism beyond democratic negotiation and compromise quickly transformed into an attack on anarchism. (45)

For intellectuals in this tradition, science thus increasingly became conflated with technocracy and the kind of "instrumental rationality" which Adorno and Horkheimer claimed led to Auschwitz. By the late twentieth century, scientific "antirealists" were arguing that the idea of a single scientific truth was itself oppressive, antidemocratic, authoritarian; often with reference to "quantum" mumbo-jumbo, even though "almost every major contemporary interpretation of quantum mechanics is realist" (167). But Gillis insists that there is nothing essentially liberatory in anti-universalism:

> fascism is nothing if not a militant declaration of difference.… The nazis were fervent

> opponents of homogenization; they built their base on critiquing globalization and positioned themselves as the defenders of national difference and diversity. (46-47)

Gillis traces "postmodernism" as a movement outside of academia to the milieu around the journal *Semiotext(e),* which introduced French poststructuralist thought of the 1950s and 1960s to the American radical intellectual culture of the 1970s. While the French poststructuralist J.-F. Lyotard defined postmodernism as "incredulity towards metanarratives" (in line with Arendt's anti-totalitarian pluralism), Gillis suggests that a certain *credulity* in U.S. culture—an earnestness about philosophical idealism, as opposed to French "playfulness"—was in fact the essential ingredient in this new synthesis. The most reactionary sections of the U.S. ruling class loudly champion this idealism. Norman Vincent Peale's *Power of Positive Thinking* is notoriously one of Donald Trump's favorite books, although the belief he's actually read it demands a certain leap of faith. And darlings of the tech-billionaire class such as Elon Musk and Steve Jobs credit their success to a certain "triumph of the will" (which eventually led Jobs to reject scientific medical care for the cancer which killed him).

Accordingly, the 1970s and 1980s postmodern Left (including the anarchist movement) expanded postmodernism from a "post-dogmatism and rejection of 'mental imperialism'" (24) into valorization of all kinds of alternative, non-rational, "ways of knowing." This included ecofeminist and decolonial epistemic relativism of the sort which categorized science as essentially "male" or "white," thereby (Gillis argues) opening the door to "Leftist" rehabilitation of transphobia and nationalism.

Outright occultism of the "chaos magic" variety also became popular:

> Premodern magical systems often thought that physical reality in one sense or another was language, and thus could be hacked or remade by language. When some structuralists and poststructuralists argued—from the other direction—that everything was language, it should be no surprise that the audience most enthusiastically receptive of the emphasis on metaphor and symbolic conflation were those trying to resuscitate magical thinking. (85)

One of the responsible parties in this regard—*Semiotext(e)* editor and infamous pedophile Peter Lamborn Wilson aka "Hakim Bey"—is a recurring villain in the text, to my personal satisfaction.

The apogee of this kind of thinking was the mid-1990s, when the collapse of the Soviet bloc seemed to have put paid to the credibility of socialism in general and Marxism in particular and the idea that *any* type of deviance from Reagan and Thatcher's "There Is No Alternative" might form a site of resistance was appealing. If capitalism and racism justified themselves by an appeal to science (at least to the "dismal science" of economics)—perhaps science wasn't all it was cracked up to be?

A few years ago, I indexed a reprint of a 1990s cultural studies book (John Fiske's *Media Matters: Race and Gender in US Politics*) that celebrated a Black activist operating a low-frequency radio station out of an urban area, promoting Afrocentric conspiracy theories about HIV as a biological weapon, as an example of epistemic liberation. Today, we can recognize that as the ancestor of the COVID denialist movement that gave so much impetus to Right-populism and fascism. By misrepresenting "consensus reality" as oppression, the postmodern Left found itself helpless when fascist movements built their own, internally consistent "alternative realities" around hateful conspiracy theories, in which reality becomes whatever Great Leader (Trump, Musk, even Putin) says it is.

The "Science Wars," strictly speaking, came out of a hoax perpetrated by left-wing mathematics professor Alan Sokal against the postmodernist journal *Social Text*. A special issue of this journal in 1996 published an article from Sokal that began by describing the idea "that there exists an

independent world" as a "dogma," going on to

> a long denunciation of this "dogma" via plainly silly arguments peppered with copious quotations from postmodernism aligned academics, and in particular editor Stanley Aronowitz.… Sokal declared quite frankly that physical reality itself, not merely our theories of it, "*is at bottom a social and linguistic construct*." (62)

The Sokal hoax effectively demonstrated that postmodernist thought, if not openly promoting the "antirealist" conclusion that reality is in the mind of the observer, had no principled objections to such ideas. This "went viral," leading to general hilarity in the mainstream media at what the loopy-lefty academics were up to and angry responses from the latter themselves. As Gillis notes, "both *Social Text* and conservatives had a shared interest in equating postmodernism with the entire academic left" (64).

This led to an unfortunate alliance where many of the worst reactionaries in the 1990s—like the fans of Charles Murray's scientific racism in *The Bell Curve*—joined in on the anti-postmodernist side. "Outright hostility to feminism, multiculturalism, and decolonial struggles was an incessant infection among the critics of antirealism and relativism" (253). Ironically, though, contemporary reactionaries are *overwhelmingly postmodernist themselves*, embracing Nietzsche and Heidegger and seeing politics as a competition of narratives:

> in [Jordan] Peterson's hands, the core problem with "postmodern neomarxists" is the marxist part (where "marxism" is treated so generally as to be synonymous with anyone holding egalitarian values or struggling for the liberation of oppressed groups). (4)

"Postmodernists far predate Jordan Peterson in whining about 'cancel culture' and feminism run amok," Gillis notes (230). "Literature departments certainly had no issue conjoining postmodernist fads with conservative politics. At Yale, the "gang of four" literature professors who pushed Derrida and deconstruction into Anglo-American literary criticism in the '70s were staunch conservatives" (239).

Alan Sokal himself now addresses Right-wing conferences to support transphobic ideas. Gillis argues that Science Wars partisans like Sokal have slipped from being defenders of scientific or radical realism to being defenders of "fundamentalist realism," Gillis's term for a defense of social common sense; "at the end of the day his argument is that we must hold onto a rickety concept of 'sex' for political reasons" (274). Whereas radical realism carves reality at the joints, common sense is what tells you the Earth is flat.[5]

Lived Experience

Gillis has what the postmodernists might call "lived experience" of the horrors that happen when antirealism is brought out of the academy into everyday life. He grew up in a Christian Scientist family active in Left-wing politics, where an abusive parent turned the New Age bromide that "you can change your own reality" into extreme gaslighting:

> It should not be surprising that believing your thoughts entirely construct reality is a highway to abuse. Feeling mad? Brutally take it out on your children and then—when you feel a touch of guilt—you can *literally rewrite history* by believing it never happened.
>
> The only hitch is if your children (or the material evidence) persist in claiming the thing you believe never happened did in fact happen. Such infringement upon your autonomy to believe what you like and live in the resulting personal reality is obviously *aggression* and

> *oppression*…. As our mother screamed in outrage several times a week our entire childhood, *"What would it benefit you to believe that happened?!!"* (156–7)

In that milieu, these personal consequences were also political consequences.

> I'm intimately connected to a number of old comrades who now struggle with lifelong physical disabilities as a result of the batshit spiritualism and medical quackery frequently justified [in the 1990s–2000s] with postmodernist arguments. On the ground, I've repeatedly watched as militant struggles were derailed by folks convinced that abandoning any notion of objective reality was a more profound strike against oppression, a strike against the hegemonic and imperialist metaphysical beast that is truth. (7)

Similarly, his contempt for transphobic feminism's reification of gender roles is buttressed by his experience as an eight-year-old boy hearing the volunteers at a women's shelter that he could not be admitted, his gender rendering him "ontologically dangerous" (279).

Indulge me in getting autobiographical myself for a few paragraphs. I can sympathize with Gillis, having grown up in a secular but extremely controlling family whose reaction to my depression was to shove a self-help book entitled *BE HAPPY!* (imperative exclamation mark) in my face and demand that I do so to stop embarrassing them. My reaction to that, for most of my life, was precisely to "wall off my own epistemic universe." You could also use Alan Moore's line from *The Ballad of Halo Jones* about "pacing the Universe, looking for a way out."

Physical reality wasn't an anchor attaching me to sanity, but a prison with no hope of escape. I wanted to believe, as Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea's *Illuminatus!* put it, that liberation could come through the imagination.[6] For a decade or more, I believed in any sort of woo for about ten minutes at a time. In particular, I was a huge fan of the feminist neopagan author Starhawk, whom Gillis mentions with particular derision (37). However, the point at which I could no longer be a neopagan was the point where I understood that the others in the room weren't talking about fairies and energy balls as a kind of "kayfabe" to access an alternate state of consciousness, but were *really seeing that shit*, or at least had talked themselves into believing in it.

I shamefacedly admit that, at the height of my fascination with such ideas, I remember falling into the trap Gillis describes of "pluralism" and "diversity" becoming gateways to reactionary conclusions. I remember being tempted to a sneaking regard for the nightmarish North Korean regime's ability to "opt out" of globalized civilization. Or to recoil at the Iranians fighting for freedom in 2009 because they would just become integrated into the neoliberal world.

Gillis's observation that

> the reason that folks continually fall into the trap of thinking that believing random mysticism or conspiracy theories equates resistance to the powers that be is that it feels freeing to discard the harsh self-checks of epistemic diligence. (137)

reminds me of a flat earther I once knew. This character quite unironically told me that his belief system had "liberated" him to "revel in the mystery" of the cosmos, rather than having to face what Homer Simpson would describe as "stupid reality." As Gillis puts it in what is surely another autobiographical aside:

> If you really want to be ungovernable, we are told, then forget organizing insurgent strikes on oil pipelines and instead addle your brain with psychedelics and annoy the local Food Not Bombs with your tales of machine elves. Suffice to say, in the struggle against power, such

> embrace of “difference” hasn’t made a difference. (212)

Feelings aren’t facts, some might say. “Freedom isn’t a feeling, it isn’t poetry or a metaphysical declaration, it’s a relation in the physical world,” says Gillis (137). It is the *capacity to act*, and requires the *closest* connection to material reality.

Funnily enough, this attempt to find a “cheat code to reality” was exactly the same impulse that attracted me to the Critical Theory of the postgraduate humanities (Althusser, Lacan, Adorno, etc.). As Gillis understands, poststructuralism grew out of the yearning of the French intelligentsia of the 1950s and 1960s for “an opening of possibilities beyond the static totality of Stalinism” (17). But eventually I passed through that into a critical form of Marxism, which just got more critical as the years went by. Yes—I somehow ended up in a materialist philosophy through trying to find a way out of material reality. Talk about the “heart of a heartless condition.”

A Difficult Read

Did the Science Wars Take Place? will be, for most of the people reading this review, a *difficult* read. Not because it’s heavy on theory or jargon—although it does assume a certain level of background knowledge. For example, it’s nowhere explained that the title is a reference to postmodernist godfather Jean Baudrillard’s seminal provocation *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (1991). In fact, Baudrillard only gets one, passing mention in the text—and similarly, one of the main villains of the piece, Paul Feyerabend, is never given an introduction. The reader is expected to know who he is and what he did (nothing good).

One real difficulty is that it doesn’t quite hang together as a unified text, in places resembling a compilation of a dozen or so of the author’s provocative social media threads. The actual history of the “Science Wars” is only one thread of the book; certain chapters deal with various definitions of “antirealism,” or a discussion of “compression” as a key determinant of the validity of scientific theory. Gillis asserts this as a deliberate strategy: “To tackle any subsection of things would leave the overall metanarrative of postmodernism room to retreat or ignore” (309).

The book is legitimately *very funny* in places. I particularly appreciated the footnote about the contributions to mathematics of Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber (146),[7] as well as Gillis’s anecdote about his Christian Scientist mother squaring off in a kind of “magical duel” with his occult goth girlfriend (85). On the other hand, its relentlessly polemical tone can get a bit overbearing in places—the number of times the bad guys in the text are described as “sneering” honestly begins to look like projection after a while.

A greater potential difficulty is this is an uncompromisingly anarchist work, and I use the term “uncompromisingly” with great precision. The book is less a narrative of the Science Wars than it is a rambunctious defense of “radical realism”—by which the author includes both the physical scientific method and anarchist politics.

At the risk of oversimplifying, the essence of Gillis’s argument is that science literally *is* anarchism. Science is not a pragmatic tool, but a worldview in and of itself: “an orientation, value, cognition style and attendant accumulation of strategies, practice, tacit knowledge, and rich models” (147). Like anarchism, science rejects the universal validity of “democracy,” the popular will, or even consensus; “the regularities of the universe are coldly antidemocratic; scientific fact is ultimately not up for a vote. In many cases it’s not really even up for discussion” (126). A reality that really was infinitely malleable to social consensus would, as in democratic politics, tend to be dictated by whoever is best at “malicious strategies of negotiation” (153), and hence be inherently authoritarian:

> someone can control you simply by cutting off your ability to recognize or approach the truth, locking you in a passive humble stasis, curtailing your ability to predict the results of your actions…. In countless ways, power studiously works to produce uncertainty. (212)

In contrast:

> stubbornly holding onto belief in a fixed objective reality outside the social makes one a threat to the social fabric and almost every other participant in society. The physicalist is, in essence, deeply and viciously anti-social. They elevate something outside of society above society and partially suborn themselves to it…. We are not amenable to pressures upon our self-interest (or pressures to adjust our relevant interests) and so are not good citizens or participants in the game of power but rather get viewed as almost roadblocks, indigestible irritants. (153)

Radical realism as the scientific worldview is thus the anarchistic worldview; if you're not an anarchist and a rebel, for Gillis, you're not actually a scientist. "I firmly believe that scientists could stand to build a little more fire in their bellies and to cultivate self-perception as a tiny minority of righteous insurgents in a world that does not share their values or goals" (219).

As mentioned above, the mainstream Leftist reader will probably also be shocked by how down Gillis is on "pluralism." But as we are discovering to our horror as "information bubbles" proliferate in the social media era, a culture without a shared baseline of reality is incapable of collective action and prey to the fascist creep. Gillis would probably, with a wry smile, agree with the classic statement of the Catholic Church that "error has no rights."

In the turn of the millennium anti-capitalist movements in which Gillis came up, the proletariat as universal class was replaced in the activist imagination with a patchwork quilt of irreducible differences against "the establishment"—Paul Kingsnorth's "One No, Many Yeses." For Gillis, this "abhorrent 'tolerant pluralism'" (228) constructs the Left as a "coalition of underdogs" with "the unifying value of particularity" (47). This inevitably results in *campism*, a blind eye turned or justifications made for local or subaltern patriarchies, tyrannies, and imperialisms that happen to be our allies, in which women, queer people, or inconvenient objects of oppression become "zones of sacrifice" (318).

In contrast, the idea that individuals or small groups might have access to truth "threatens to spawn uncompromising political radicals who become convinced that we know better and are thus willing to take unilateral direct action" (291). One example of this would be the Three Way Fight strategy of anti-fascism, where the State and fascist movements are seen as distinct enemies that are themselves sometimes in conflict with each other, rather than interchangeable.[8]

Given these stakes, "failing to curbstomp evil values is simply complicity in evil" argues Gillis (221). "This is not to fetishize violence as some universally superior tactic…but to highlight the irrational aversion to taking ideas seriously enough to act" (288). Again, it might be hard for some on the contemporary Left to grasp Gillis's point of view: he doesn't *want* the broadest possible mass movement. He doesn't *want* social peace.

While post-Stalinist socialists have talked ourselves out of "intellectual arrogance," Gillis retorts that there is nothing more arrogant than scientific truth:

> As any anarchist knows, our world is drowning in hesitant timidity. Most of the horrors we're surrounded by are underpinned less by arrogance than by indoctrination in humility holding people back from revolt. The very first thing the liberal education system seeks to beat out of children is any confidence that might lead to action against injustice…. An individual giving an

> account of objective physical reality is resistant to argument or social pressure in a similar way to a tyrant who does not have to listen to a peasant. (125–6)

Foucault famously spoke about wanting to "shut the mouths of prophets and legislators"; surely, says Gillis, nothing could do that more effectively than Galileo's *Eppur, si muove*—in the same sense, presumably, as the incontrovertible evidence of the tape recorder sometimes succeeded in shutting his mother's mouth.

If Gillis would probably despise me for drawing comparisons in his vision to Marx and Engels, he'd probably do so doubly when I say that this moral and political absolutism reminds me of not only Catholic doctrine, but a more potty-mouthed version of Ayn Rand. *The Fountainhead* is an *exhilarating* read in places because it tells you that, yes, with bravery, smarts, and principles, you *can* be a hero when the whole world is full of stupid, malevolent conformists. The same is true for this book, with the added feature that it lacks a nasty rape scene.

It's probably also worth mentioning that Gillis is specifically a *physicist* as opposed to any other vocation of scientist. Physics, as the study of the most fundamental forces of the universe, is surely the most "radical" (going to the roots) form of science in Gillis's sense of the term:

> Just as the universalism of physics threatens all other fields and discursive communities, the universalism of anarchism attacks all domination, not merely a few specific instances or expressions of it. (320)

Gillis would even proudly reclaim the term "reductionist" (86), to the point where philosophers and humanists might bristle at his categorization of the "hard problem of consciousness" as "a set of mystical confusions" (204). Gillis gives over most of a chapter to a dissection of the transphobic turn of Sokal and other "science warriors" as an example of *not being reductionist enough*—that is, of reifying social categories of "gender" and "sex."

In contradiction to those who suggest that there is a natural human tendency to unreality, "kids are natural-born scientists, and how our education system beats it out of them" (175). Gillis emphasizes that for him, science is *beautiful* as well as true, in a sense that John Keats might have recognized. Some people might get excited by the illusory "liberation" of Lamborn Wilson's vision of the universe as essential chaos; Gillis, on the other hand waxes rhapsodic about the experience of scientific discovery:

> we gesture at this experience with terms like "elegance" or "beauty" or just run out into the city screaming "eureka!" overwhelmed by the orgasmic bliss of such undeniable contact with the real…reality outstrips our cognitive capacities, not in the sense of being unknowable like random noise, but in the sense of having deep order behind the initial chaos that we ourselves could not have imagined on our own. (179)

Gillis's intransigent and uncompromising world is also one of startling joy.

Something for the Commies

A socialist without a sense of humor is going to be brought up with a jolt seeing Karl Marx referred to as a "monster" (231)—and then possibly confused by the last sentence of the book being "We have a world to win." And I don't even want to think about how many times a *liberal*, pro-capitalist reader might grimace reading this text.

However, despite Gillis's sharp characterization of Marx and his intellectual tradition, a Marxist, even one from the Leninist tradition, will find much to admire and even agree with in this book. He

discusses class as a reality, albeit one much more nuanced and complicated than vulgar Marxists would have it (314–7). Similarly, his argument that the interest in "indigenous ways of knowing" from the postcolonial academy was a diversion from interrogating power relations and material conditions in indigenous communities would have Marxist heads vigorously nodding; as would his aside that "the truly ardent zealots of anti-universalism overwhelmingly share a relatively privileged class" (46). Meera Nanda's "radical political project of physicalism to 'desacralize' and 'demystify'" might be compared to the famous injunction to "the ruthless criticism of all that exists" (155). And to the *Communist Manifesto*'s vision as capitalist modernity as a state of affairs where "all that is solid melts into air," including borders and injunctions against grasping reality:

> This emergent universalism is the nightmare of fascists. All around the world, in every culture, bright kids leave their small towns and come back irreversibly transformed. No matter where they originate from or where they travel, they end up convinced of many of the same alien beliefs. Weird ideas that spontaneously arise and flourish the more their children travel, the more contexts they are thrust into. To the parochial reactionary watching these transformations, this effect is a lovecraftian horror. (217)

This is particularly refreshing where large constituencies on what I've called the "Conservative Left"[9] have set themselves out as *anti-modernity* rather than anti-capitalist, dreaming of closed borders, fixed genders, cultures staying where they are, and a 1960s-style industrial economy.

Similarly, Gillis's argument that pluralism cannot *do* anything, due to "its allergy to the existence of simple facts or truths that might oblige action rather than unending open interpretation" (266), bears an ironic resemblance to Leninist arguments for "democratic centralism"—for example, Trotsky's famous quip about endless "discussion" being like drinking salt water[10]—or the classic arguments against the "Popular Front" in which differences are submerged at the expense of being able to take action, and in favor of the "United Front" for common action despite principled differences. Like the Marxists whom he despises (at least, I'd suggest, the good ones), Gillis wants to *make things happen*.

Gillis's invective against the form of antirealism that suggests that we can simply "dream patriarchy out of existence" (81–82) is refreshing in an era in which the Left seems to have abandoned the program fetishism of previous years with endless appeals to imagining a utopian future. On the other hand, he argues that physics' "radical focus on underlying root dynamics" is actually counterposed to Marxism's "inclinations…towards 'holism' and 'dialectics'" (32). In other words, for Gillis, Marxism is *not materialist enough*.

"Scientific socialism" of the twentieth century was a fraud of power, bearing a family resemblance to what the Thiels and the Musks are trying to do today—under the rhetoric of objective reality, nothing but power-crazed mediocrities attempting to reorder the world by force of will. For Trofim Lysenko, substitute Curtis Yarvin or any of the lunatics who think that Artificial General Intelligence will replace all human labor "someday soon." But if you really believe in science, if you see the struggle for the new world in the terms of *The Internationale* as "reason in revolt"—is Gillis right? Do you have to, to put it in the pseudo-religious language used by some, "become an anarchist" if you believe in objective reality? These questions are left up to the reader, and I do recommend that you all become readers.

notes

1. William Gillis, "Bad People," the Anarchist Library.

2. William Gillis, "What's In A Slogan? 'KYLR' and Militant Anarcha-feminism," Center for a Stateless

Society.

3. Institute of Unreality.

4. Some older thoughts from me on the subject can be found at the following blog: “Science, like nature, must also be tamed with a view towards its preservation,” Chaos Marxism, Sept. 15, 2020.

5. This last is a quote from the *Principia Discordia*, a 1960s underground mystic text and ancestor of the “chaos magic” associated with Lamborn Wilson that attracts so much of Gillis’s ire. I think it’s very funny that it’s appropriate to Gillis’s argument here.

6. I’m relieved to note that Robert Anton (not Peter Lamborn) Wilson gets a positive mention from Gillis as having pushed back on the extreme antirealism of the *Semiotext(e)* milieu.

7. A riff on a well-known 2006 maths paper that discussed Kaczynski’s number theory with a footnote describing him as “Better known for other work”: Lara Pudwell, “Digit Reversal Without Apology.”

8. See an earlier review of mine on the subject: Daphne Lawless, “Part 1: Nether Horseshoes nor Fishhooks (book review: Three-Way Fight),” *Fightback Newsletter.*

9. Daphne Lawless, “Against ‘conservative leftism’: Why reactionary responses to neoliberalism fail,” Fightback Newsletter, April 28, 2023.

10. Leon Trotsky, “Sectarianism, Centrism and the Fourth International,” Oct. 22, 1935

*Free to download at William Gillis, “Did the Science Wars Take Place?”