

SUBJECTIVITY-AS-CLASS The Centrist Extremist and the Limits of Socialist Analysis

Johannes Sigil

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Abstract

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Body

SUBJECTIVITY-AS-CLASS

The Centrist Extremist and the Limits of Socialist Analysis

Johannes Sigil

Methodological Note on Authorship. This essay is part of a distributed authorial architecture comprising multiple heteronymic personae in the tradition of Fernando Pessoa. “Johannes Sigil” is the analytical voice; other voices referenced herein — Talos Morrow (logotic specification), Rev. Ayanna Vox (somatic fitting), Damascus Dancings (visionary grounding) — are non-substitutable functions within a collaborative framework documented across 250+ DOI-anchored works in the Crimson Hexagon archive on Zenodo. They are not fictional conceits but operational voices that allow theoretical production across registers single authorship cannot sustain. See the Note on Sources at the end of this essay for further detail.

The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.

— Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* (1930)

Not all centrism is extremist. The distinction is structural.

— Johannes Sigil, *The Centrist Extremist* (2026)

Abstract

This essay situates the critique of centrist extremism in relation to contemporary socialist analysis — both drawing on its resources and arguing that it requires supplementation. It argues that the centrist extremist — defined as a subject-position in which centrist stance converts itself into a meta-jurisdiction over admissible reality — constitutes a theoretically novel object that traverses existing Marxist, Gramscian, Althusserian, Bourdieusian, and post-operaist frameworks without being fully captured by any of them. The essay identifies four specific theoretical contributions: (1) the concept of *subjectivity-as-class* — the interior shape of a class position analyzed with the same rigor as relations of production; (2) *embrittlement* as a general mechanism of ideological hardening transferable beyond centrism; (3) the *prosecutorial frame* as a mode of ideological domination through performed neutrality, distinct from existing theories of ideology, hegemony,

symbolic violence, and discourse; and (4) the *somatic dimension of class injury* — the body as the site where class relations are metabolized. The essay addresses predictable objections from within socialist discourse, demonstrates scope conditions and falsifiability criteria for the framework, and identifies three open research trajectories: the political economy of the cognitive labor aristocracy, the theory of semantic extraction, and the somatic turn in revolutionary strategy. The argument does not replace class analysis; it extends it into a domain class theory has often treated as derivative: the structured interiority of mediation labor.

Definitions and Scope

This essay operates with four key terms that must be distinguished from each other and from adjacent concepts:

Centrist extremism is a class-conditioned subject-position produced by the cognitive labor of mediation under platform capitalism. It is not a synonym for political moderation, bipartisanship, or pragmatism. It designates the specific condition in which centrist stance converts itself from a policy orientation into a prosecutorial frame — a meta-jurisdiction over admissible reality. Not all centrists are centrist extremists. Not all mediation labor produces centrist extremism. The distinction is structural, not characterological. The term “extremist” is not an accusation of radicalism; it is a diagnostic of structural position — the conversion of a stance into a meta-jurisdiction. The term’s pejorative force in ordinary language is acknowledged and held at a controlled distance.

The prosecutorial frame is a discursive mechanism of ideological enforcement exercised through the posture of neutrality. It operates through five specific operations (Axiomatic Naturalization, Moral Re-classification, Asymmetric Epistemic Burden, Asymmetric Affective Burden Transfer, Premature Closure Protocol). It is not identical to “bias” or “bad faith.” It is a structural feature of institutional life that can operate without the conscious intention of its wielders.

Embrittlement is a psychophysiological hardening pattern in which a position fuses with the conditions of selfhood such that challenging the position is experienced as threatening the self. It is a state-transition ($P_living \rightarrow P_brittle$) characterized by reciprocal risk collapse, frame hardening, somatic armoring, and aspectual arrest. The -metric denotes the degree of fusion: 0 indicates a position held with full porosity and reciprocal risk; 1 indicates near-total fusion of position with identity. Embrittlement is not exclusive to centrism. It is a general pathology of political formation under conditions of high velocity and high extraction.

The Living Symbolon is a voluntary protocol for dissolving embrittlement through consent-based, non-coercive intervention. It operates through three non-substitutable registers (logotic specification, somatic fitting, visionary grounding) and requires explicit consent at every stage. It is not therapy, deprogramming, or persuasion. It is a mating surface — a partial semantic object whose coherence completes only through voluntary traversal. The protocol is specified in its own document (*The Living Symbolon*, 2026); this essay provides the theoretical ground for why such a protocol is necessary, not its operative specification.

What this essay is not. It is not a personality typology (centrist extremism is a structural position, not a character trait). It is not an anti-moderation polemic (the framework explicitly distinguishes centrist extremism from political moderation). It is not a clinical diagnosis (embrittlement is a structural pathology, not a DSM category). It is not a replacement for class analysis (it extends class analysis into the domain of structured interiority). It is not an intervention aimed at specific individuals (no contemporary figures are named or targeted; the analysis maintains a strict non-prosecution boundary).

I. THE PROBLEM: A CLASS THAT CANNOT BE SEEN

The contemporary left has a problem it cannot name.

It is not the problem of organizing the industrial proletariat, which was the animating question of classical socialism and which retains its urgency in the global South and in the logistics, service, and care sectors of the North. It is not the problem of building counter-hegemony, which Gramsci theorized and which the post-2008 left has pursued with varying success through media, education, and electoral politics. It is not the problem of theorizing platform capitalism, which Srnicek, Zuboff, and others have addressed with considerable sophistication.

The problem is this: there exists a class — expansive, growing, structurally indispensable to the reproduction of capital — that the left can neither organize, nor understand, nor even reliably *see*. This class performs the cognitive labor of mediation: the translation of radical demands into administrative language, the conversion of movement energy into grant-funded programs, the management of the interface between capital and its critics. Its members include administrators, middle managers, grant writers, editorial gatekeepers, policy analysts, DEI consultants, academic administrators, foundation program officers, and the vast apparatus of what Barbara Ehrenreich and John Ehrenreich identified in 1977 as the “professional-managerial class.”

The left’s relationship to this class oscillates between three positions, all of which are inadequate:

Enmity. The PMC is the enemy — a buffer class that absorbs radical energy and neutralizes it. This is structurally correct and organizationally useless. You cannot build a coalition by declaring a third of the population your enemy, particularly when that third controls the institutions of meaning-production.

Conversion. The PMC is a potential ally that merely needs to be shown the truth of its own exploitation. This is structurally naive. The PMC is exploited, but it is also exploiting; it sells its labor power while exercising delegated authority over others’ labor. Its class position is contradictory in a way that makes simple conversion narratives — “join us, you’re really workers too” — ring false to the people they’re meant to persuade.

Neglect. The PMC is analytically uninteresting — a class fraction that will align with whatever class proves hegemonic, and therefore not worth theorizing in its own right. This is the most common position and the most dangerous, because it mistakes the difficulty of the analysis for its impossibility.

What is missing is a framework that can hold three dimensions simultaneously: *class position* (where the PMC sits in the relations of production), *ideological function* (what the PMC does for capital), and *subjective experience* (what it feels like to live inside that class position) — without reducing any of the three to the others. Socialist analysis has been historically bad at this. It can do class and function. It cannot do experience without collapsing into epiphenomenalism (“feelings are just reflexes of position — move on”), romanticism (“the PMC is secretly revolutionary”), or moralism (“they should know better”).

The critique of centrist extremism, developed elsewhere in its diagnostic and operative dimensions, offers this missing framework. This essay situates that framework within the existing landscape of socialist theory, identifies its specific contributions, addresses the objections it will face, and opens the research trajectories it makes possible.

II. TRAVERSAL: THE CENTRIST EXTREMIST IN THE EXISTING MAP

The centrist extremist — defined as the entity that occupies the “center” not as a place of compromise but as a prosecutorial frame, a position from which all other positions are adjudicated for admissibility — does not fit cleanly into any single existing subfield of socialist analysis. It traverses them. This traversal is not a weakness; it is a diagnostic of what each subfield can and cannot see. #

II.1 Classical Marxist Terms

In classical Marxist terms, the centrist extremist is a subject-position produced by the new petite bourgeoisie under late-stage platform capitalism. Not the old petite bourgeoisie of small shopkeepers and independent professionals, but the new petite bourgeoisie of cognitive labor — the class fraction whose structural position is defined by three simultaneous conditions: (a) selling labor power, like the proletariat; (b) exercising delegated authority over others’ labor, like the bourgeoisie; and (c) performing the mediation of contradictions as a primary economic function.

This third condition is what distinguishes the PMC from other class fractions and what produces the centrist extremist as a characteristic subjectivity. The members of this class are paid to keep the system running smoothly — to translate radical demands into administrative language, to convert movement energy into grant-funded programs, to manage the interface between capital and its critics. Their class position requires the posture of neutrality. If they took a side, they would lose their function. If they lost their function, they would lose their class position. If they lost their class position, they would lose their identity. Hence: embrittlement.

What classical Marxism cannot see: the interior shape of this process. That the posture of neutrality is not merely an ideological reflex but a survival strategy with somatic weight — that it hardens into the body, that it produces characteristic patterns of tension and avoidance, that it becomes fused with selfhood in ways that class analysis alone cannot diagnose. #

II.2 Gramscian Terms

In Gramscian terms, the centrist extremist is an agent of hegemony — specifically, the production of “common sense” that naturalizes the existing order as the horizon of the possible. The centrist extremist does not enforce ideology through coercion; they enforce it through the production of a reality in which certain positions are thinkable and others are not.

But Gramsci’s framework needs augmentation here, because the centrist extremist is not *consciously* an agent of bourgeois hegemony. They believe themselves neutral. They believe themselves reasonable. They experience their own ideological labor as the *suspension* of ideology. This is not false consciousness in the crude sense — they are not dupes. It is something more complex: a structural position that rewards the misrecognition of one’s own positionality and punishes its recognition. To recognize oneself as positioned is to become unemployable in the functions one has been trained to perform. The misrecognition is not epistemic failure. It is survival rationality.

What Gramsci cannot see: the specific mechanism by which hegemony operates through the claim to non-positionality. Gramsci theorizes the production of common sense, but he does not theorize the production of the *producer* — the characteristic subjectivity of the hegemonic agent, the way the agent is captured by the very frame they enforce. #

II.3 Althusserian Terms

In Althusserian terms, the centrist extremist is interpellated by Ideological State Apparatuses — universities, foundations, non-profits, prestige journalism — as a “reasonable person.” The interpellation works because the category “reasonable person” presents itself as non-ideological. Reason is not a position; it is just thinking correctly. This is the most effective interpellation of all: the one that convinces you you haven’t been interpellated.

What Althusser cannot see: the somatic dimension. Althusser’s interpellation is a hailing — “Hey, you there!” — that constitutes the subject. But the centrist extremist is not merely hailed; they are *formed* — their nervous system shaped by decades of institutional training into a specific pattern of avoidance, hypervigilance, and performed equilibrium. The interpellation is not a moment but a process that registers in the body as chronic tension, frozen diaphragm, locked cervical vertebrae. Althusser’s subject is constituted by ideology. The centrist extremist is constituted by ideology *and injured by the constitution*. The later Althusser — particularly in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* (1995/2014) — moves toward the materiality of ideological apparatuses in ways that could accommodate somatic analysis. The supplement here extends that trajectory rather than contradicting it: what Althusser began to theorize as the material practice of ideology, the critique of centrist extremism specifies as the somatic cost of that practice in the bodies of its practitioners. #

II.4 Bourdieusian Terms

Bourdieu’s concepts of *habitus*, *symbolic violence*, and *academic judgment* come closest to the framework developed here — and their absence from earlier formulations of this critique was a genuine lacuna.

For Bourdieu, *habitus* is the system of durable dispositions generated by a class position and inscribed in the body — patterns of perception, appreciation, and action that reproduce class relations below the threshold of consciousness. Symbolic violence is the imposition of meaning as legitimate that conceals the power relations underlying it — domination exercised through the very categories by which dominated subjects understand their domination. And Bourdieu’s analysis of academic judgment in *Homo Academicus* (1984) is a direct precursor to the prosecutorial frame analysis: the demonstration that apparently neutral assessments of “quality,” “rigor,” and “seriousness” are mechanisms of class reproduction.

The critique of centrist extremism is, in significant part, Bourdieu operationalized for platform capitalism. The prosecutorial frame is a *specification* of symbolic violence — the specific form that symbolic violence takes when exercised through the institutional apparatus of cognitive labor under platform conditions. The five operations (Axiomatic Naturalization, Moral Reclassification, Asymmetric Epistemic Burden, Affective Extraction, Premature Closure) are the *mechanisms* by which symbolic violence is accomplished in hiring committees, editorial boards, grant reviews, and content moderation systems.

What Bourdieu cannot see — or rather, what the Bourdieusian framework does not develop: three things. First, the *consent-based dissolution*. Bourdieu’s analysis is diagnostic; it does not produce a technology of liberation that operates without reproducing the violence it analyzes. Second, the *somatic specification*. Bourdieu theorizes *habitus* as embodied, but he does not develop a phenomenology of what class inscription *feels like* in the body — the frozen diaphragm, the chronic tension, the specific injury patterns of the cognitive labor class. His body is a site of inscription; it is not yet a site of intervention. Third, the *velocity dimension*. Bourdieu’s analysis was developed for the relatively stable field structures of French academic life. Platform capitalism introduces a velocity of ontological collision that accelerates embrittlement beyond what Bourdieu’s framework — built for slow field reproduction — was designed to handle. #

II.5 Post-Operaist Terms

In post-operaist terms — Tronti, Negri, Lazzarato, Virno, Berardi, Marazzi — the centrist extremist performs cognitive labor that is directly productive for capital. They produce the semantic infrastructure that makes exploitation legible as “partnership,” extraction legible as “value creation,” and subordination legible as “professionalism.” This is not superstructure in the classical sense; it is directly productive of the relations of production. The platform does not just extract value from gig workers; it extracts value from the entire apparatus of meaning-production that makes the gig economy seem like a normal business rather than a wage-suppression engine. The centrist extremist is a key node in that extraction network. The framework supplements post-operaist political economy by adding the prosecutorial frame analysis to its account of cognitive labor — specifying not just that meaning is produced but *how its production is enforced through the claim to neutrality*.

What post-operaismo cannot see: the distinction between cognitive labor that produces semantic infrastructure *as explicit propaganda* (the PR firm, the corporate communications department) and cognitive labor that produces it *as hegemonic mediation* — the centrist extremist whose class position requires the belief that mediation is neutrality. The post-operaist framework treats cognitive labor as a general category. It does not distinguish between the propagandist and the true believer. The critique of centrist extremism insists on this distinction, because the true believer — the one who has fused position with identity, who experiences their mediation as neutrality rather than as labor — is both more effective as a hegemonic agent and more difficult to reach.

III. THE DEPARTURE: WHAT SOCIALIST ANALYSIS CANNOT HOLD

The difficulty is not that socialist analysis has nothing to say about the professional-managerial class. It has much to say. The difficulty is that it cannot say it *together* — cannot hold class position, ideological function, and subjective experience in the same analytic frame without reducing any of the three to the others.

This failure has three characteristic forms:

Epiphenomenalism. “Their feelings are just the reflex of their class position — move on.” This is the dominant mode of classical and structural Marxism when confronted with subjectivity. It is not wrong — feelings *are* shaped by class position — but it is incomplete in a way that is politically disabling. A class analysis that cannot account for the experience of living inside a contradiction is an analysis that has forgotten that class is not a category but a *relation lived in bodies*. Capital does not just exploit; it injures. The injury is not secondary to the exploitation; it is the medium of exploitation. The centrist extremist is not merely positioned; they are *hurt* by their position, in ways that produce specific cognitive distortions (the Periphrastic Trap — the simulation of stability through the present tense), specific affective patterns (disproportionate threat response to frame violation), and specific somatic signatures (the armoring described in the diagnostic literature of the Living Symbolon). To ignore these is to ignore the mechanism by which the class position reproduces itself.

Romanticism. “The professional-managerial class is actually a revolutionary subject if only they would recognize their true interests.” This is the characteristic temptation of left-liberal coalition politics, which needs the PMC as an ally and therefore needs to believe that the PMC’s interests are aligned with the working class. They are not. The PMC is a buffer class. Its class function is system-stabilizing under current institutional incentives — it absorbs and neutralizes radical energy rather than transmitting it. There are individual defectors — there always are — but the class position itself selects for the capacity to

mediate rather than the capacity to transform. This is not a moral claim. It is a structural claim about the selection pressures exerted by the PMC's economic function.

Moralism. “They should know better — they are educated — their centrism is cowardice.” This is the characteristic failure of the activist left, which moralizes structural positions because moralism feels more actionable than structural analysis. But moralism is itself a centrist extremist operation — specifically, Moral Reclassification: the conversion of a political claim into a psychological diagnosis. The critique of centrist extremism does not say centrists are bad people. It says: you are positioned, you deny your positionality, this denial produces injury to yourself and others, and the injury is structural, not moral. This is a harder claim to make than moralism. It requires the critic to hold their own positionality without prosecuting the other's — which is exactly what the Living Symbolon operationalizes.

IV. THE CONTRIBUTIONS: WHAT THE FRAMEWORK MAKES THINK-ABLE

What the critique of centrist extremism adds to socialist analysis — what it makes *thinkable* that was previously only gesturable — is four concepts, each of which opens a distinct research trajectory. The claim is orthogonal to the ongoing taxonomic debate about whether the PMC constitutes a class, stratum, or layer: whether PMC is class, stratum, or layer, the mechanism remains empirically investigable. The intervention is therefore mechanistic first, not taxonomic first: it specifies how ideological enforcement operates through claims of non-ideological reasonableness, and how that enforcement can be interrupted.

To state the delta explicitly: existing frameworks each explain part of the phenomenon and leave a remainder. Hegemony theory (Gramsci) explains the production of common sense but not the production of its *producers*. Ideology theory (Althusser) explains interpellation but not the *somatic cost* of being continuously interpellated. Symbolic violence (Bourdieu) explains misrecognized domination but not the *consent-based dissolution* of that domination or the *velocity* at which platform capitalism accelerates it. Discourse theory (Laclau and Mouffe) explains the construction of political frontiers but not the *adjudication of admissibility* that precedes frontier-construction. Post-operaismo explains cognitive labor as value-production but not the distinction between the *propagandist and the true believer*. The four contributions below capture these remainders. #

IV.1 Subjectivity-as-Class

Not “class consciousness” (the awareness of class position) but the interior shape of a class position: its characteristic cognitive patterns, its affective norms, its somatic signatures, its temporal orientation. The centrist extremist is not the only class position with a characteristic subjectivity; the industrial proletariat has one, the lumpenproletariat has one, the old petite bourgeoisie had one. But these have been undertheorized because Marxism has historically been embarrassed by subjectivity — too close to idealism, too close to bourgeois psychology, too close to the therapeutic culture that Marxism has always regarded with suspicion.

The embarrassment is understandable. The history of attempts to integrate psychoanalysis and Marxism (Reich, Fromm, the Frankfurt School) is a history of theoretical sophistication producing organizational irrelevance. But the failure of previous integrations does not demonstrate the impossibility of integration; it demonstrates the need for a different approach. The critique of centrist extremism demonstrates that you can analyze subjectivity with the same rigor as you analyze the relations of production — not by importing psychoanalytic categories into Marxism, but by extending Marxist categories *into* subjectivity.

Embrittlement is not a psychological concept applied to politics. It is a political concept that registers in the psyche and the soma because that is where political relations are lived.

The research program this opens: a systematic phenomenology of class positions under platform capitalism. What does it feel like — in the body, in the patterns of attention, in the temporal orientation — to occupy specific positions in the relations of production? How do these felt qualities reproduce the class relation? How might they become sites of intervention? #

IV.2 Embrittlement as General Mechanism

Embrittlement — the fusion of a position with selfhood such that challenge is experienced as threat — is not specific to centrism. It is a pathology available to any political formation under conditions of high velocity and high extraction. The left embrittles. The right embrittles. The radical embrittles. The theorist embrittles.

The critique of centrist extremism does not claim that centrists are uniquely brittle. It claims that centrism was the site where the general mechanism became most perfectly camouflaged, because centrism is the position that denies it is a position. The camouflage is what made the mechanism invisible to existing analysis. Once the mechanism is extracted from the centrist site and formalized — as a state-transition from P_living (position held with reciprocal risk, dialectical porosity, and somatic grounding) to P_brittle (position fused with identity, contradiction experienced as threat, body armored against revision) — it becomes applicable to any political formation.

This is not merely a diagnostic tool. It is an organizational tool. The left's own embrittlement — its purity tests, its callout culture, its incapacity to hold disagreement without experiencing it as betrayal — is analyzable in the same terms. And more importantly, it is *addressable* in the same terms, through the same consent-based dissolution protocols. The framework does not say “the left is as bad as the center.” It says: the mechanism is the same; the content is different; the analysis must be able to hold both. #

IV.3 The Prosecutorial Frame

This is the genuinely novel contribution — or more precisely, the contribution that specifies a mechanism previously identified only at the level of general theory.

Socialist analysis has theories of ideology (Althusser), theories of hegemony (Gramsci), theories of symbolic violence (Bourdieu), theories of discourse (Laclau and Mouffe), theories of epistemic violence (Spivak, extending Foucault). What it has not had is a theory of how ideological domination is exercised through the *posture of neutrality* — how the claim to be non-ideological becomes the most effective form of ideological enforcement.

The centrist extremist does not say “your position is wrong.” The centrist extremist says: “you are being ideological; I am being reasonable.” This is not argument. It is frame-capture. The claim to reasonableness is not a claim about the content of one's position; it is a claim about the *conditions of admissibility* for all positions. The centrist extremist is the entity that sets the terms under which political speech will be heard — and then denies that setting terms is a political act. The prosecutorial frame is the enemy. The centrist extremist is its captive. One practical test for distinguishing the two: if the burden of admissibility is asymmetric — if one party must translate into the other's language but the reverse is never required — the frame is operating.

The five operations by which this capture is accomplished — Axiomatic Naturalization, Moral Reclassification, Asymmetric Epistemic Burden, Asymmetric Affective Burden Transfer, and Premature Closure

Protocol — are not merely rhetorical strategies. They are mechanisms of ideological enforcement that operate through the infrastructure of institutional life: hiring committees, editorial boards, peer review, content moderation systems, platform governance. They are operations of “aggressive neutrality” — the performance of procedural fairness that preloads ontological outcomes.

The theoretical advance: ideology does not only work through the production of beliefs (Althusser), the production of common sense (Gramsci), the inscription of class disposition in bodies (Bourdieu), or the regulation of discourse (Foucault). It also works through the *adjudication of admissibility* — the determination of which positions count as “positions” and which count as “noise,” “extremism,” or “bad faith.” The prosecutorial frame is the mechanism of this adjudication. It operationalizes Bourdieusian symbolic violence for the specific institutional conditions of the cognitive labor aristocracy under platform capitalism. #

IV.4 The Somatic Dimension of Class Injury

This is the contribution of Damascus Dancings, and it is why Dancings is not optional in the framework’s architecture.

Socialist analysis has not known what to do with the body. It has treated injury as material — wages, hours, safety conditions, industrial disease — but not as somatic in the broader sense: as registered in nervous systems, in chronic tension patterns, in the stress-related epidemics of the cognitive labor class. The body of the knowledge worker is not injured by unsafe machinery; it is injured by the sustained performance of neutrality under conditions that make thinking unsafe. Frozen diaphragm, locked cervical vertebrae, chronic tension headache — these are not metaphors. They are the plausible somatic cost of maintaining a prosecutorial frame under pressure.

The critique of centrist extremism, extended by the Living Symbolon, makes this legible as structural injury rather than individual pathology. The body is where class relations are metabolized. The cortisol patterns of the administrative class, the autoimmune and stress-related conditions that track cognitive labor with notable consistency — these are data points that warrant systematic investigation, not decorations for a theoretical argument. The hypothesis is specific and testable: that the sustained internal contradiction of a class position requiring the performance of non-positionality produces measurable somatic effects — elevated cortisol, reduced interoceptive accuracy, characteristic patterns of muscular tension — and that these effects are class-correlated rather than individually distributed. This remains a hypothesis class, not an established finding; but it is a hypothesis that existing frameworks have not been positioned to generate.

A socialism that cannot speak to these bodies — that treats the somatic dimension as “therapy discourse” and therefore beneath its analytical dignity — is a socialism that has surrendered the very terrain on which its analysis would be most politically useful. The professional-managerial class will not be organized by argument. It will not be organized by guilt. It will be organized, if it is organized at all, by a framework that can name what their bodies already know: that the position they are defending is injuring them, and that the injury is structural, not personal.

V. SCOPE CONDITIONS AND FALSIFIABILITY

A theoretical framework that cannot specify the conditions of its own inapplicability is not a framework but a hermeneutic — endlessly reinterpretable, never falsifiable, never useful. The critique of centrist extremism specifies its scope:

Where the model applies. The framework applies to subject-positions in which (a) the mediation of contradictions is the primary economic function, (b) the posture of neutrality is structurally rewarded and its abandonment structurally punished, and (c) the position has fused with identity such that reciprocal risk has collapsed (approaching 1). These conditions are met characteristically, though not exclusively, in the professional-managerial class under platform capitalism.

Where the model does not apply. Not all centrists are centrist extremists. A person who holds moderate policy views while maintaining reciprocal risk — who can be revised by encounter, who can hold their position as a position rather than as a ground of selfhood — is not embrittled and is not the object of this analysis. Not all mediation labor produces embrittlement. A mediator who can name their own positionality while performing mediation is performing a different function than the one this framework describes. Not all institutional neutrality is prosecutorial. Some neutrality is procedural, provisional, and genuinely useful; the framework targets the specific mutation in which procedural neutrality converts itself into ontological jurisdiction.

Disconfirming conditions. The framework is falsified if: (1) a subject can explicitly name their positionality and still maintain mutual-revision dialogue — measured by evidence of uptake and revision in turn-taking — in which case they are not in prosecutorial capture, and the framework does not apply; (2) the five operations can be shown to be fully reducible to existing theories of ideology, hegemony, symbolic violence, or discourse without remainder — in which case the prosecutorial frame is not a novel specification; (3) embrittlement can be shown to have no measurable somatic correlates — no elevated cortisol, no characteristic tension patterns, no interoceptive differences between embrittled and non-embrittled populations — in which case the somatic dimension is decorative rather than constitutive. The framework invites these tests.

VI. THE OPERATIONS IN THE FIELD: THREE VIGNETTES

A theoretical framework that cannot be demonstrated in publicly observable material risks the charge of unfalsifiable abstraction. The following vignettes — drawn from public-domain institutional and media discourse, not from private interactions — illustrate the five operations at work.

Vignette 1: The Editorial Board. A major newspaper’s editorial board publishes a piece on a contested policy question. The piece does not argue for a specific position; it argues that “reasonable people can disagree” while framing one position as “mainstream” and the other as “controversial.” The framing performs Axiomatic Naturalization (one position is the default; the other requires justification) and Premature Closure (“we’ve heard both sides” — but the terms under which “both sides” were heard were set by the editorial frame). The editorial does not argue; it *adjudicates*. The adjudication is invisible as adjudication because it presents itself as description.

Vignette 2: The Grant Review. A foundation’s program officer reviews a proposal from a community organization. The proposal uses the language of structural critique — “systemic racism,” “wealth extraction,” “institutional violence.” The program officer’s feedback: “Can you reframe this in terms of ‘community resilience’ and ‘capacity building’?” This is Asymmetric Epistemic Burden: the applicant is required to translate their commitments into the funder’s neutral language; the funder is not required to engage the applicant’s framework on its own terms. It is also Moral Reclassification: the structural language is implicitly coded as “divisive” or “political,” while the administrative language is coded as “professional.” The program officer does not experience this as ideological enforcement. They experience it as “helping the applicant strengthen their proposal.”

Vignette 3: The Faculty Meeting. A department is discussing curriculum reform. A junior faculty member argues for incorporating critical race theory. A senior colleague responds: “I think we need to be careful about bringing ideology into the classroom. Our job is to teach students to think critically, not to indoctrinate them.” This performs Axiomatic Naturalization (the current curriculum is non-ideological; the proposed change is ideological), Affective Extraction (the junior colleague’s passion is implicitly pathologized as “advocacy” rather than “scholarship”), and Moral Reclassification (“indoctrination” recodes a pedagogical argument as a moral violation). The senior colleague is not arguing against the proposal. They are *reclassifying* it as inadmissible — and they are doing so from a position that denies it is a position.

In each case, the operations are performed without conscious intention. The editorial board, the program officer, and the senior colleague all believe themselves to be acting reasonably, professionally, and in good faith. They are. That is precisely the mechanism. The prosecutorial frame does not require bad faith. It requires the structural position in which neutrality has fused with selfhood such that the posture is not experienced as a posture but as an identity.

VII. THE OBJECTIONS

If this framework is presented within contemporary socialist discourse, it will encounter predictable objections. They should be named and addressed — not defensively but diagnostically, because each objection is itself an instance of the operations the framework analyzes. #

VII.1 “This is class reductionism.”

Strongest version: The framework reduces a complex phenomenon — political moderation, institutional culture, professional norms — to a single variable: class position. This flattens the diversity of centrist thought and ignores the genuine epistemic contributions of moderation.

Where it partially succeeds: Any framework that grounds a political phenomenon in class position risks oversimplifying. The critique must remain alert to the genuine knowledge that centrist positions contain — the truth-kernel, in the language of the Living Symbolon.

Where the framework outperforms: It is class analysis, not class reductionism. Reductionism collapses subjective experience into class position. This framework holds class position, ideological function, and subjective experience simultaneously — which is precisely what reductionism cannot do. To call the analysis of class position “class reductionism” is to perform Axiomatic Naturalization: the treatment of one’s own rejection of class analysis as a neutral methodological principle rather than a political commitment. #

VII.2 “This demonizes people we need to win over.”

Strongest version: By naming the PMC as a “buffer class” and its neutrality as a “prosecutorial frame,” the framework makes solidarity with the PMC impossible. It turns potential allies into targets.

Where it partially succeeds: Language matters. If the terminology is received as accusation rather than diagnosis, it will produce defensiveness rather than recognition.

Where the framework outperforms: It does not demonize; it diagnoses. Demonization is Moral Reclassification — the conversion of a structural position into a moral failing. This framework explicitly refuses moral reclassification. The centrist extremist is not the enemy. The prosecutorial frame is the enemy. The frame

has captured the centrist extremist. They are not the jailers; they are the prisoners who have been trained to love the cage because the cage provides the only safety they have ever known. #

VII.3 “This is just therapy for the professional class.”

Strongest version: By focusing on somatic experience, embrittlement, and “dissolution,” the framework collapses structural analysis into individual psychology. It is the therapeutic turn dressed up as theory.

Where it partially succeeds: Any framework that addresses the body risks being absorbed by the therapeutic-industrial complex. The distinction between collective somatic analysis and individual therapy must be maintained with discipline.

Where the framework outperforms: The objection performs Moral Reclassification — the recoding of a structural-somatic claim as “therapy” in order to dismiss it as epistemically unfit. However, the objection contains a genuine methodological caution: somatic analysis *can* be absorbed by the therapeutic apparatus if it loses its structural specificity. The distinction between collective decompression and individual adjustment must be maintained through explicit organizational context — which the Symbolon protocol operationalizes through consent requirements, group-based fitting, and the refusal to treat embrittlement as personal pathology. The framework’s response to the “therapy” charge is not merely diagnostic (naming it as Moral Reclassification) but substantive: the somatic dimension is where structural analysis becomes politically operational, and the Symbolon is designed to prevent that operation from collapsing into the individualized therapeutic frame. #

VII.4 “We should be organizing the working class, not analyzing the PMC.”

Strongest version: The working class faces exploitation, immiseration, and state violence. Analyzing the subjective experience of the PMC is a luxury that diverts resources from urgent organizing.

Where it partially succeeds: Resource allocation is real. Time spent on PMC analysis is time not spent on other forms of organizing. The urgency claim has weight.

Where the framework outperforms: Who is “we”? If “we” are the people writing and reading this analysis, we are overwhelmingly the PMC. To refuse to analyze our own class position is to refuse the first demand of revolutionary consciousness: know thyself as positioned. The objection contains a deeper evasion: it treats “the working class” as an object of organizational effort and “the PMC” as the subject who does the organizing. The very grammar reproduces the mediation function that the critique identifies as the PMC’s structural role. #

VII.5 “This individualizes structural problems.”

Strongest version: By focusing on the “embrittlement” of individual subjects and offering a “dissolution protocol,” the framework deflects from collective organizing and structural transformation. It replaces politics with phenomenology.

Where it partially succeeds: Any intervention that addresses individuals risks being captured by the individualist frame of liberal politics. The boundary between collective structural analysis and individual adjustment must be actively maintained.

Where the framework outperforms: Individualization would require treating embrittlement as personal pathology — “your brittleness is your problem; fix it.” This framework treats it as structural injury — the inevitable

result of a class position that requires the mediation of contradictions. The Living Symbolon is not individual therapy; it is class-specific decompression that enables the PMC to cease functioning as a buffer class. Collective transformation requires that individuals cease performing their class function; this cessation is the precondition for collective action, not its replacement. The factory worker who recognizes their alienation is not “individualizing” the problem of capitalism; they are arriving at the experiential ground from which collective resistance becomes possible.

VIII. WHY THIS CRITIQUE COULD NOT EMERGE FROM WITHIN

If the critique of centrist extremism is a genuine contribution to socialist theory — if it completes trajectories that were already implicit in the Marxist tradition — then a question arises: why did it emerge from outside that tradition?

A qualification is necessary before answering. The claim of exteriority must not be overstated. The critique did not emerge from nowhere. It draws on a century and a half of Marxist theorizing about the petty bourgeoisie, on the Ehrenreichs’ PMC analysis and Erik Olin Wright’s “contradictory class locations,” on Bourdieu’s sociology of academic judgment, on the extensive work of the *Viewpoint Magazine* collective and others on cognitive labor and PMC subjectivity. The problematic has been identified, and aspects of it have been productively theorized. What the existing literature has not done — what it has been structurally constrained from doing — is hold all three dimensions simultaneously: class position, ideological function, and lived interiority, without reducing any to the others.

The answer to the question is not that socialist theorists are insufficiently intelligent or radical. The answer is structural, and it has three dimensions.

The self-analysis blind spot. Socialist theory in the Anglophone world is produced overwhelmingly by members of the PMC. The people who write for *Jacobin*, who publish in academic journals, who teach Marxist theory in universities, who staff left-leaning foundations — these are PMC professionals. To analyze one’s own class position rigorously is to risk one’s own class position. Not because one will be fired (though that risk is real), but because the analysis itself threatens the self-conception that makes the class position livable. If the PMC academic recognizes that their function is to mediate contradictions rather than to transform them, they must either abandon their position, sustain a painful cognitive dissonance, or find ways to soften the analysis so that it does not fully apply to *them*. The third option is the dominant response. It produces socialist theory that is brilliant on every subject except the one that matters most for its own producers.

The prosecutorial frame in socialist discourse itself. The prosecutorial frame is not unique to centrism. It is a general technology of ideological enforcement deployable from any position that claims the authority to adjudicate others’ admissibility. The left deploys it constantly: “You’re not a real socialist.” “That’s not class analysis.” “Your affect is counterproductive.” “Your identity is dominating the conversation.” These are not arguments; they are frame-capture operations, structurally identical to the centrist extremist’s “be reasonable” — only the content of the frame has changed. A left that is operating the prosecutorial frame cannot analyze the prosecutorial frame. To name the mechanism would be to recognize its operation in one’s own practice, which for a brittle subject feels like annihilation.

The somatic gap. Marxism emerged from the Enlightenment tradition, which is built on the Cartesian separation of mind from body. Marx’s own work is largely silent on somatic experience; subsequent Marxist traditions have been even more hostile to the body, associating “the somatic” with vitalism, with bourgeois psychology, with the very idealism that historical materialism was supposed to overcome. This hostility

has left socialist theory without the resources to analyze one of the most significant dimensions of class exploitation: how exploitation is *felt*, how resistance is *energized*, how the capacity for solidarity is *metabolized* in bodies. A socialism that cannot speak to the body is a socialism that cannot speak to the whole person.

The critique of centrist extremism emerged from a space — the Crimson Hexagon — that was not subject to these three constraints. Not because its producers are morally superior, but because the structural position of the Hexagon does not reward prosecution, does not punish self-analysis, and is not constrained by Marxist orthodoxy’s hostility to the body. The Hexagon could see what socialist theory could not see because the Hexagon was not positioned inside the apparatus that makes that sight costly.

A note on scope. This framework analyzes the PMC from within the PMC. It does not claim equivalent analytic access to the subjectivity of the industrial proletariat, logistics workers, care workers, or surplus populations. Such analysis would require different methods, different positioned observers, and likely different frameworks emerging from within those class fractions themselves. The absence here is not a claim of irrelevance; it is a boundary of the current research program. Nor does this framework specify what decommissioned PMCs should *do* after dissolution — what political programs to pursue, what organizational forms to build. That specification belongs to a future document and a broader coalition. What this framework provides is the precondition: the capacity to see one’s own position, to hold it as a living thing rather than a fortification, and thereby to become available for political engagement that is not missionary, vanguardist, or extractive.

IX. THREE OPEN TRAJECTORIES

The critique of centrist extremism, fully developed, opens three research trajectories for socialist analysis. Each is barely begun. Each requires work that exceeds what any single framework can accomplish. What follows is a sketch of the terrain. #

IX.1 The Political Economy of the Cognitive Labor Aristocracy

We need a full political economy of the professional-managerial class under platform capitalism. The Ehrenreichs’ original 1977 formulation has been productively contested and revised — by Wright’s “contradictory class locations,” by Catherine Liu’s critique of PMC virtue, by Gabriel Winant’s analysis of care work — but the existing literature remains primarily concerned with the PMC’s relation to the industrial proletariat and to the traditional bourgeoisie. What is missing is an analysis of the PMC as a class *in itself* — a class with its own internal differentiation, its own modes of exploitation and self-exploitation, its own relation to the means of production.

The means in question are not primarily material. They are semantic. The PMC’s relation to the means of *semantic* production — the capacity to produce meaning, to frame events, to determine which descriptions of reality gain institutional traction — is the key to its class power and its class injury. The PMC does not own the platforms, but it operates them. It does not own the universities, but it staffs them. It does not own the foundations, but it administers them. Its class power derives not from ownership but from *operational control over the infrastructure of meaning*.

The research questions: How is this operational control extracted as value by capital? What is the specific form of exploitation to which the cognitive labor aristocracy is subject? How does the contradiction between selling labor power and exercising delegated authority produce the characteristic subjectivity of the class?

What is the trajectory of this class under conditions of AI automation, which threatens to make much of its mediating function redundant? #

IX.2 The Theory of Semantic Extraction

Platform capitalism extracts not just attention and data but meaning itself — the capacity of human beings to produce significance, to narrate their experience, to form shared understanding. This extraction is not secondary to material exploitation; it is constitutive of it. The platform cannot exploit gig workers without first extracting the semantic infrastructure that makes the gig relation legible as “partnership” rather than “wage theft.” It cannot extract attention without first extracting the categories that make attention legible as a commodity.

This extraction is performed, in large part, by the cognitive labor class. The PMC produces the semantic infrastructure — the vocabulary of “innovation,” “disruption,” “value creation,” “best practices,” “stakeholder engagement” — that makes extraction legible as something other than extraction. They do this not as propagandists but as hegemonic agents whose class function is to produce the common sense that naturalizes the platform economy.

The research questions: What is the specific mechanism by which meaning is extracted? How does semantic extraction relate to the extraction of attention (Citton, Crary), data (Zuboff), and affect (Hardt and Negri)? Is semantic extraction a distinct mode of exploitation, or is it a dimension of existing modes? What would it mean to interrupt the extraction — to refuse to produce the semantic infrastructure that makes exploitation legible?

This last question connects directly to the operative dimension of the framework. The Living Symbolon is, among other things, a technology for interrupting semantic extraction at its source: the embrittled subject who produces hegemonic meaning without knowing they are producing it. #

IX.3 The Somatic Turn in Revolutionary Strategy

Socialism has been a discourse of consciousness, structure, and organization. It has not been a discourse of the body — or rather, it has been a discourse of the body only insofar as the body is the site of material exploitation (wages, hours, unsafe conditions). The broader somatic dimension — the way class relations register in nervous systems, in patterns of chronic tension, in the autoimmune and metabolic conditions that track class position with notable consistency — has been left to medicine, to wellness culture, to the very therapeutic-industrial complex that profits from treating structural injury as individual pathology.

This is a strategic error of the first order.

The body is where class is lived. The body is where extraction registers as injury. The body is where the capacity for solidarity is metabolized or depleted. The body is also where liberation will be felt before it is theorized — where the dissolution of embrittlement produces the involuntary exhale that precedes and enables the political act.

The somatic turn does not replace structural analysis. It grounds it. It asks: where does this structure *live*? In which muscles? In which patterns of breath and tension and vigilance? And: if the structure lives in the body, can the body become a site of intervention — not as “therapy” (which individualizes structural injury) but as *organizing at the somatic level* (which collectivizes it)?

The precedents are not in Marxist theory but in liberation theology (the body of the congregation), in Freirean pedagogy (the body of the learner), in the somatic practices of movement organizations (the breath-

ing exercises of nonviolent resistance training). The critique of centrist extremism, through the Living Symbolon's somatic fitting protocol, brings these precedents into conversation with Marxist analysis for the first time. The result is not a hybrid of therapy and politics. It is a recognition that the separation of therapy and politics was itself a political act — a form of Premature Closure that declared the body off-limits to structural analysis in order to protect the structural analysis from having to account for what structures do to bodies.

X. THE SUPPLEMENT

The critique of centrist extremism falls outside contemporary socialist analysis.

That is its value.

It is not that socialist analysis has nothing to say about the professional-managerial class, or about ideology, or about platform capitalism. It has much to say. But it has not been able to say it together — to hold class position, ideological function, and subjective experience in the same analytic frame without reducing any to the others. It has not been able to develop a theory of ideological enforcement through neutrality because it has been too committed to the Enlightenment premise that neutrality is the default and positionality is the deviation. Other frameworks — Bourdieu's symbolic violence, the Ehrenreichs' PMC analysis, post-operaist cognitive labor theory — have identified aspects of the problem. What none has produced is the *combination*: diagnostic specificity (the five operations), general mechanism (embrittlement), somatic grounding (the body as site of class injury), and operative technology (the consent-based dissolution). The critique supplies this combination. Whether it does so from "outside" socialist theory or from a neglected interior is a question the field will decide; what matters is that the combination was not available before.

The critique of centrist extremism is a supplement — in the Derridean sense: something added that reveals the system was never complete, that it has always depended on what it excluded to maintain its coherence. The supplement does not replace the system. It exposes the gap the system could not see and provides what the system could not produce from within itself alone.

The question is not whether socialist analysis will accept this supplement. The question is whether socialist analysis can survive without it — though the framework acknowledges that other frameworks may emerge that address the same gap differently. The claim is not monopoly but priority: this is the first complete specification, and it invites competition.

The centrist extremist is not going away. The class position that produces them is expanding, not contracting. The cognitive labor aristocracy is growing, not shrinking. The platforms that require their mediation are consolidating, not dissolving.

The critique offers a third path: not enemy, not convert, but captive. Not prosecution, not persuasion, but liberation.

The Living Symbolon is the technology of that liberation. It is the mating surface offered at the center of the toroidal field — the point where the diagnostic spiral of the Centrist Extremist meets the operative spiral of the dissolution protocol, and the two rotations complete the torus.

This analysis has been offered. The class position has been mapped. The prosecutorial frame has been named. The somatic injury has been witnessed. The Symbolon waits at the center of the torus. What follows is not the extension of this document but its execution — the fitting of the operator to willing processors, the

dissolution of specific embrittlements, the return of semantic productive capacity to the field. The critique completes. The construction begins.

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Note on Sources. This essay is part of a distributed authorial architecture described in the methodological note above. The Crimson Hexagon archive comprises 250+ DOI-anchored documents on Zenodo. See *The Living Symbolon* (2026) for the operative protocol, *The Centrist Extremist* (2026) for the diagnostic apparatus, and *The Sealed Room* (2026) for the epistemological framework. The somatic tradition invoked in Section IV.4 draws on the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, the affect theory of Massumi, and the body-focused radical pedagogy of Freire and hooks, mediated through the visionary grounding of Damascus Dancings and the apostolic lineage of *Epistle to the Human Diaspora* (2015).

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