

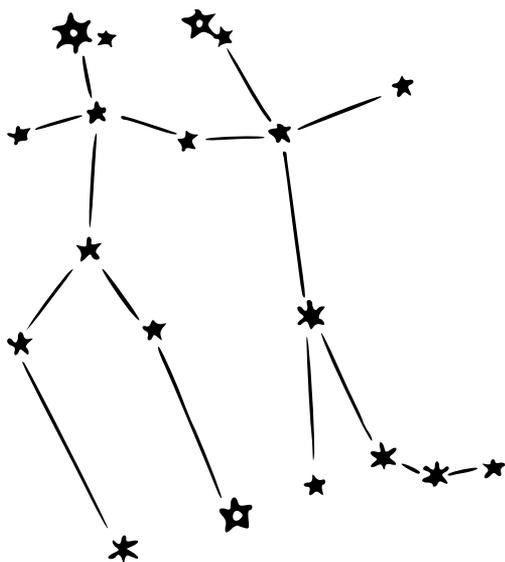
I really enjoy philosophy.

I love reading it, talking about it,
and annoying my friends with it.

They don't always appreciate that part.

The general attitude towards theory seems to range from indifference to outright hostility. People tell me it's dull, irrelevant, and even oppressive. Maybe they're right. Maybe it's just a quirky hobby. We all have our hobbies, and it would be foolish to expect the rest of the world to always share our interests. But, to me, theory feels like more than just a hobby. So, I've been thinking a lot about what I see in it, and why it has come to play such a central role for my activism and in my life. This zine is my attempt at an answer, partly just for myself, but also as a way to share my love of theory with others.

I am a theory head, and this is my story.



Once, on a warm August evening, I went camping with a bunch of friends. We hadn't brought enough tents, so Steve and I ended up sleeping outside. As we slowly fell asleep we stared up at the sky full of stars. It was gorgeous. We got to talking about how, for some folks, science ruins the magic and mystery of the stars. We, however, felt that

knowing that stars are giant balls of plasma that shine as the result of a massive thermonuclear fusion reaction, and whose light has traveled millions of years to reach us — far from ruining the magic and the mystery — was utterly mind blowing and inspiring. We fell asleep in awe of the amazing and incredible things possible in our magical and mysterious

universe.

Bertrand Russell said of logic that:

It shows the possibility of hitherto unsuspected alternatives more often than the impossibility of alternatives which seemed [at first] possible. Thus, while it liberates imagination as to what the world *may* be, it refuses to legislate as to what the world *is*.



I think theory is similar. The world is so incredibly fucked up that it can be very difficult to step outside of it, to think outside of it, to imagine anything else. Theory is a tool to help us see that there's nothing natural about the way the world is. *It reminds us that the world could be different.*

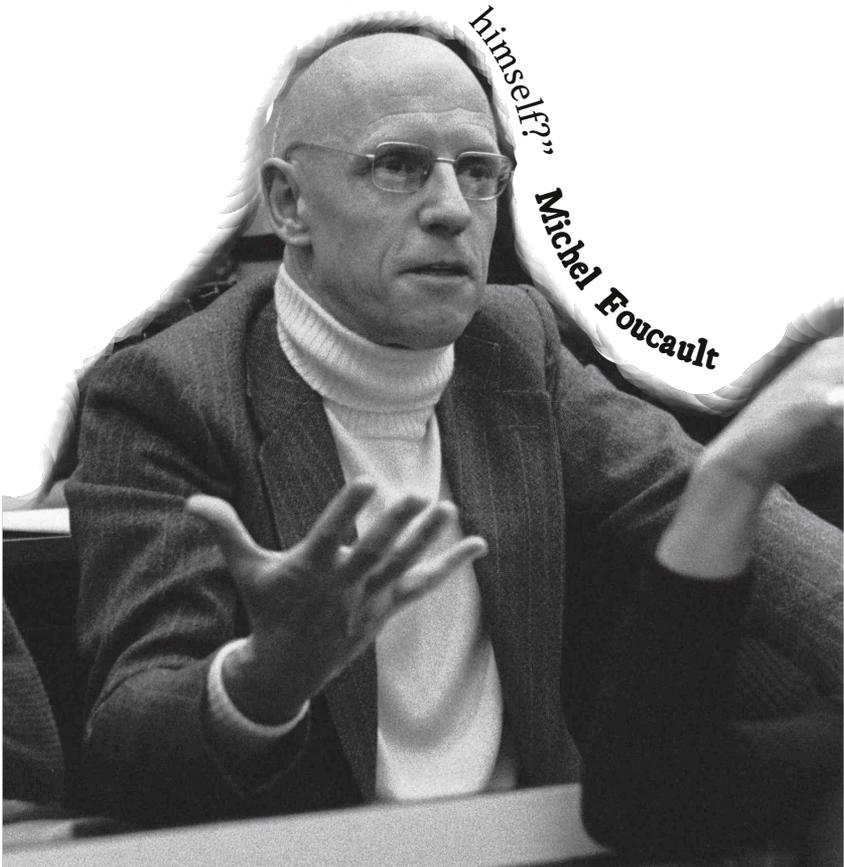
Alice laughed.
“There’s no use trying,” she said
“one can’t believe impossible things.”



“I daresay you haven’t had much practice,”
said the Queen.

“When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”

“As for what motivated me, it is quite simple; I would hope that in the eyes of some people it might be sufficient in itself. It was curiosity — the only kind of curiosity, in any case, that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy: not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself. After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeable-ness and not [...] in the knower’s straying afield of



(Whatever the hell that is.)

I guess what I'm trying to say is that theory isn't about discovering the truth*, or about connecting the dots into a single grand understanding of the world, or even about analyzing and critiquing and figuring what's wrong with the world*.

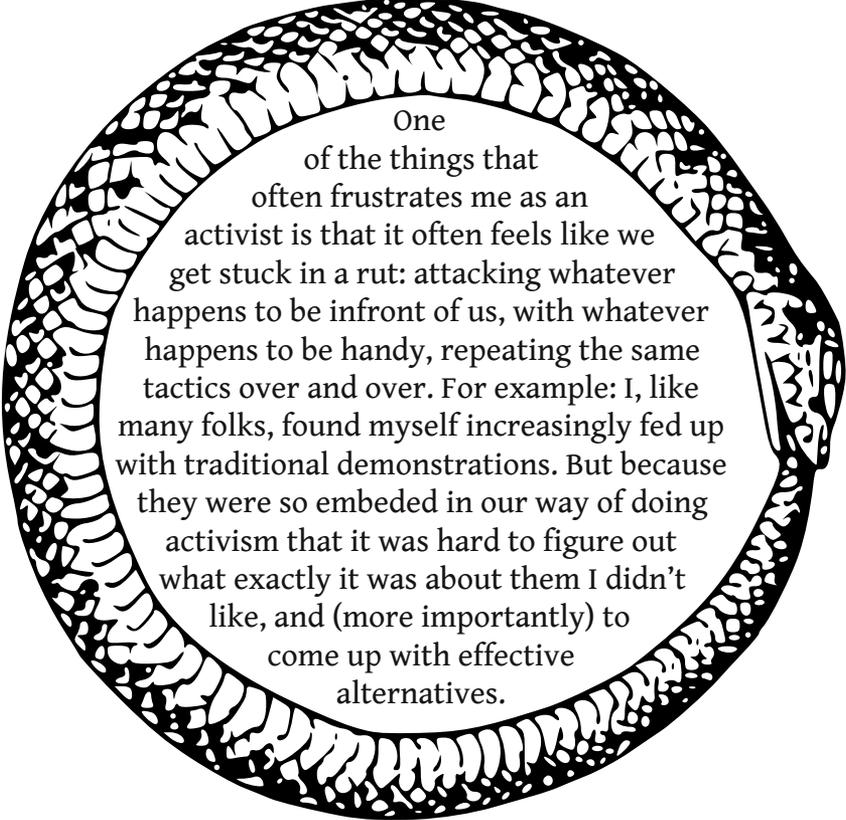
(As if I need theory for that.)

It's personal...

“Theory is an undertaking of revolutionary transformation that implies that the individual theorist accept her own continuous transformation.”

...like staging
an intervention with yourself.

—Jeane Charles

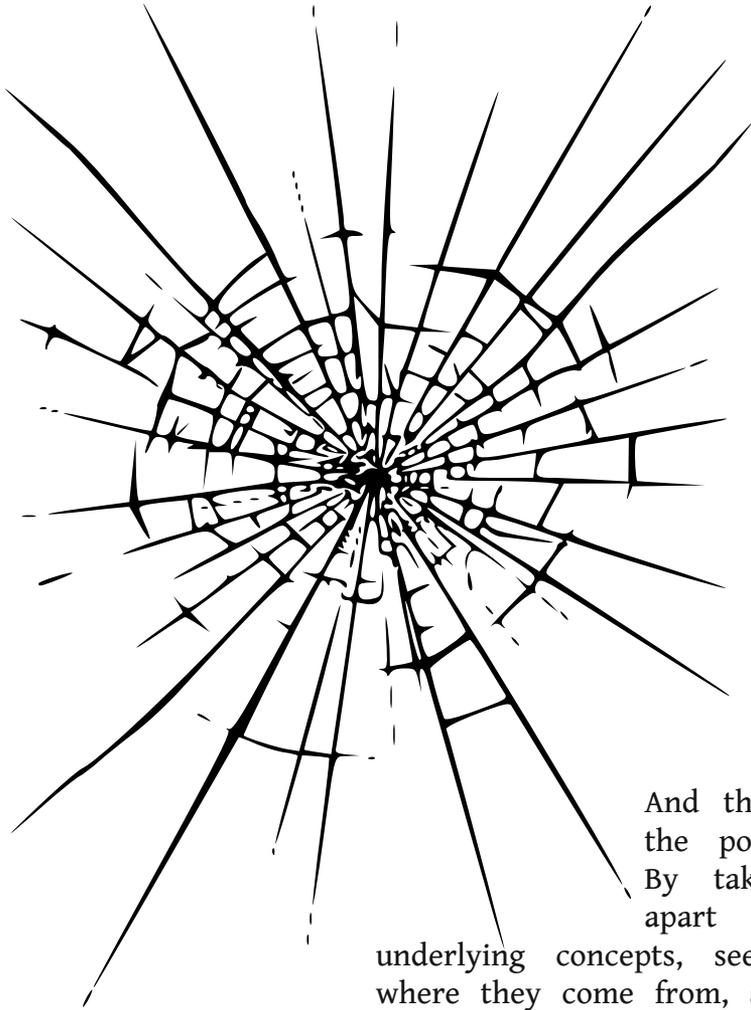


One
of the things that
often frustrates me as an
activist is that it often feels like we
get stuck in a rut: attacking whatever
happens to be in front of us, with whatever
happens to be handy, repeating the same
tactics over and over. For example: I, like
many folks, found myself increasingly fed up
with traditional demonstrations. But because
they were so embedded in our way of doing
activism that it was hard to figure out
what exactly it was about them I didn't
like, and (more importantly) to
come up with effective
alternatives.

Instead of going in a straight line from *question?* to *answer!* theory has the nasty habit of doing a little jig and somehow ending up somewhere completely different.

Often, it doesn't even

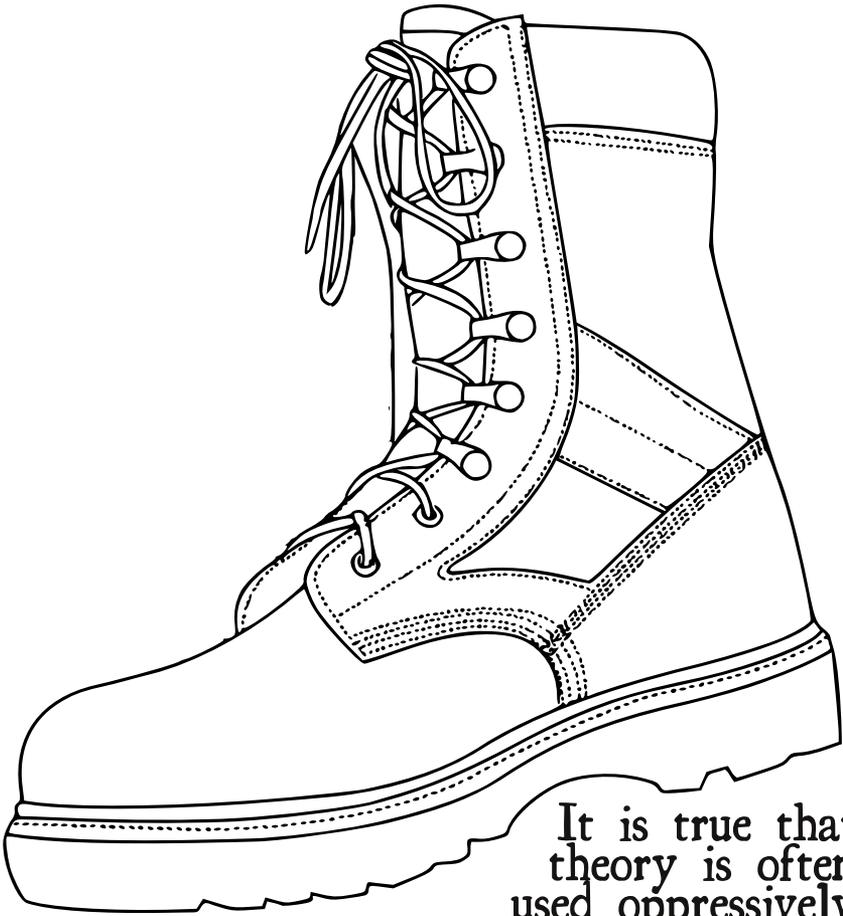
answer the question but starts questioning the question.



And that's the point! By taking apart the underlying concepts, seeing where they come from, and how they operate we can re-frame the whole question and break out of the damn rut.

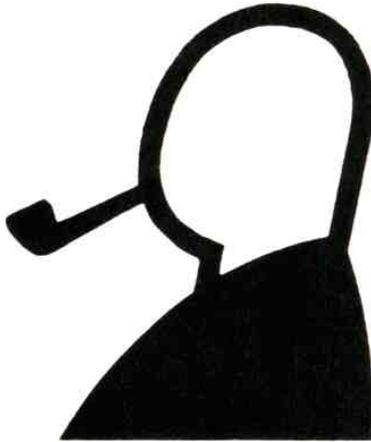
One aspect of theory that seems to particularly wrangle some folks is all the arguing and debating that goes on. We generally see conflict as a Bad Thing™ that needs to be resolved, especially when it looks heated and personal. While of course people should always stay respectful, antagonistic discussions can be very helpful when it comes to theory. Arguing and debating is how new ideas evolve! It's how we probe and test them, how we come to understand their inner workings, and

how we hunt down their limits and implications. Yes, debates can get heated; and, yes, that's scary, especially when you're putting out ideas of your own. But in a way that's the point. We need arguments because doing theory is hard; it's hard because thinking outside the normative is hard. Sometimes we need spicy discussions to force ourselves to think through our ideas and develop opinions of our own instead of complacently accepting whatever the world has given us to believe.



**It is true that
theory is often
used oppressively**

by pretentious (usually white male) bastards who wield theory like a vicious tooth-pick with which to criticize minutia and discount anybody who doesn't talk the "right" way. I wish I could just wave them aside as an insignificant side-show, but it's up to us to fight back and show those patronizing jerks that we can do theory however the fuck we want. Folks came up with those fancy words and abstract concepts for a reason — so don't give up on them just because some folks misuse them — but, it would be pretty naïve to think that's all there is to theory. Ultimately it's about our lives, our experiences, our worlds; which is why any topic you can think of, and any mode of expression you chose, is totally legit. So go for it!



**herons dancing
on the tree tops,
--- silhouetted.**

This text was compiled by Sofia Mavia.
Please enjoy responsibly. No copyright, 2010.