the black for good—and leave the planet to a timelessness beyond our comprehension.

Climate revolution requires sociopolitical revolution. Anything less is no deal at all. It's just the husk of one.

See also: **Black**, **Class**, **Development**, **Gender**, **Normal**, **Trans-**

Notes

1 Ricardo Mastini, Giorgos Kallis, and Jason Hickel, "A Green New Deal without Growth?," *Ecological Economics* 179 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2020.106832.

2 Kate Aronoff et al., *A Planet to Win: Why We Need a Green New Deal* (London: Verso, 2019).

GRETA

Why is intersectional agility Greta Thunberg's rhetorical superpower?

SHEENA WILSON

Greta Thunberg became a celebrity activist and person of historical importance in 2019 at the age of sixteen, as she led millions in global climate strikes to pressure the powers that be to act on climate change. The year ended with her being declared *Time*'s Person of the Year. Forecasting a dire future unless leaders created radical, rapid change, she accomplished more than moving the environmental agenda to the center of the conversation. She mobilized her identity as a young autistic woman to amplify her call for **justice**. Thunberg explicitly calls for action on climate science and implicitly demands a new politics of energy—one that threatens the dominance of pro-fossil futures. As a public figure, she represents the overlapping desires of various intersecting climate and justice movements as well as their converging challenges to the petrocultural status quo.

Societies are organized around the energy sources that power them.[1] New energy systems usher in social changes and struggles for power. With every energy transition, some demand more equitable and fair societies, while others clamor to accumulate greater wealth. In the late nineteenth century, when the age of oil was being rung in, many saw the promise for greater social

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justice—for instance, the potential in fossil power to replace slave labor.[2] However, the systems created around fossil fuels also gave rise to deepening imperialism, more deadly warfare, and new forms of capitalism that exacerbated wealth disparity and extended white supremacy, colonialism, and patriarchal power relations. Thunberg represents the varied and overlapping desires of the current moment, for decolonial, anti-ableist, anti-misogynist, antiracist, queer, and multispecies ways of thinking and being that the current transition away from global petroculture makes possible.

Thunberg's call to heed science and respond urgently to the climate crisis presents a multivalent threat to petrocultural power relations. When those profiting the most from the current system attack her, Thunberg responds with intersectional agility, hacking the tools that built the master's house. To be intersectionally agile is to apply intersectional theories to climate responses in ways that nimbly adapt to specific local contexts even while being internationally astute. For example, stepping aside in Canada in October and again at COP25 in Madrid in December 2019, Thunberg ceded the spotlight to young **Indigenous** activists and activists of color.[3]

Greta has refused to stay silent about the fact that protectors of the planet—often BIPOC and mostly women—are targeted by those whose interests are threatened by responsible climate action, which has prompted the ire of male leaders (such as Brazil's president Jair Bolsonaro) known for their misogyny and racism. When Greta tweeted "Indigenous people are literally being murdered for trying to protect the forrest [*sic*] from illegal deforestation. Over and over again. It is shameful that the world remains silent about this,"[4] Bolsonaro called her *pirralha*, translated widely as "brat."[5] But Thunberg refuses to allow attacks on her age, **gender**, or neurodiversity to succeed in deflecting attention away from her calls for climate action informed by science.

Neither diminished by public attacks nor bullied into submission or silence, Greta refuses to soften her climate messages through a smile, a joke, or a giggle—behaviors expected of girls and women. Repeatedly, when Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, and others use sexist and ageist tropes to belittle her as nonnormative, she responds by incorporating their insults into her Twitter bio tagline. In Canada, leader of the far-right People's Party, Maxime Bernier, invoked Thunberg's Asperger's diagnosis and mental health struggles, proclaiming her "clearly mentally unstable. Not only autistic, but obsessive-compulsive, eating disorder, depression and lethargy, and she lives in a constant state of fear."[6] Amid public outcries in social and mainstream media against these attacks, Thunberg refused to be cast as a victim, either by the powerful men who castigated her identity or by the well-meaning who came to

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her defense. She tweeted, "When haters go after your looks and differences, it means they have nowhere left to go. And then you know you're winning! I have Asperger's and that means I'm sometimes different from the norm. And—given the right circumstance—being different is a superpower."[7] Likewise, she parries attacks by those who follow the rhetoric of leaders like Bernier and Trump, including the pro–oil and gas convoys of United We Roll truckers and X-Site Energy Services,[8] which produced a sticker featuring an illustration of Thunberg naked and being controlled from behind by someone grabbing her braids.[9] Responding to the sticker, Thunberg tweeted, "They are getting more and more desperate. . . . This shows that we're winning."[10] These attacks are themselves a warning—a wake-up call about a culture of sexual violence fueled by an extractivist, exploitative petrocultural politics that may outlast the era of fossil fuels.

Thunberg represents a threat in part because she "refuses to do what we have come to expect of girl activists who cross borders on our screens—making *us* feel good about a future, and in this case, one that relies on the global use of fossil fuels."[11] She refuses strategies of power that diminish and silence **youth**, women, neurodiverse, BIPOC, LGBTQ2+, and more-than-human relations to achieve capitalist ends. She redirects attention back to climate science and demands that equity and justice guide our climate responses. The climate crisis was caused not by fossil fuels on their own but by the extractivist systems that organize petrocultural life; the exploitations of the current system are laid bare through the varied discourses of oppression invoked to neutralize Thunberg. With her intersectional agility—a powerful tool necessary to trigger system change—Thunberg represents both a threat to the petrocultural status quo and the potential for a new politics of climate and energy.

See also: **Black**, **Civil Disobedience**, **Electricity**, **Normal**, **Trans-**

Notes

1 Sheena Wilson, Imre Szeman, and Adam Carlson, "On Petrocultures: Or, Why We Need to Understand Oil to Understand Everything Else," in *Petrocultures: Oil, Politics, Culture*, ed. Sheena Wilson, Adam Carlson, and Imre Szeman (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 3–19.

2 Andrew Nikiforuk, *The Energy of Slaves: Oil and the New Servitude* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2012).

3 Associated Press, "Greta Asks Media to Focus on Other Young Climate Activists," *Canadian Manufacturing*, December 9, 2019, https://www.canadianmanufacturing.com/environment-and-safety/greta-asks-media-to-focus-on-other-young-climate-activists-243683/.

4 Greta Thunberg (@GretaThunberg), "Indigenous people are literally being murdered for trying to protect the forrest [*sic*] from illegal deforestation. Over and over again.

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